



*The Prophet*

*Mark Crawford*



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# Preface

This book is about the intertwining of three people, a child who might be the Second Coming, a corrupt Pentecostal Preacher and a young blackgirl who might be the reincarnated Mary Magdalene.

# Chapter One

## The Grandmother

As destined, it was forecast to be the darkest night of the year, yet the old woman walked slowly from within the comfort of her small remote village, to travel up and into the mountainous hills surrounding Xichu Guanauato, Mexico, where her people had lived in harmony with nature for thousands of years.

When the first great civilization called the Mayan Empire rose into its glory, her people drifted into the midst of the vast rain forest type jungles which presented themselves so abundantly in those days, there they were able to remain undetected and unmolested by the clever Mayans.

When the warrior Aztec nation dug the fierce claws of its bloody religious philosophy into the heart of those very same jungles, her people survived the sacrificial alter only through the use of their extraordinary supernatural powers. Even so, their numbers were depleted and the inner-streams of their life cycles became sparse and desiccated to the point where the possibility of extinction swirled around them, tossing the remnants of her people like a cobweb caught in a thunder storm. Yet, survive they did.

By the year fifteen-hundred, five and twenty, the mighty Aztecs had been completely subdued by the tribes around them and the weapons of the Spanish Christians who had invaded Mexico with eyes of gold. In their absolute belief in religious manifest destiny, the Christians tortured, maimed and murdered the blood thirsty Aztecs by the tens of thousands, and enslaved the rest.

After ten years of an unspeakable inquisition imposed upon the land by the overlords serving the old frame Catholic Empire, a new way of thinking landed on the shores of the New World. As if guided by the clever hand of providence, a saintly priest from the order of the Brown Robed Monks arrived in Nuevo Espania; he was armed with a scholar's attitude blanketed by the warm heart of his Christian faith. This humble monk began to speak to the native peoples concerning their ancient medicinal practices, and seemed to be especially interested in methodology, and most assuredly their prized herbal cures.

All of his twenty long years of notes concerning these treasured wonders of a now forgotten and moribund culture were sent to the King of Spain, who then promptly decreed that this trove of knowledge should be preserved for study by the finest minds of Europe. And so, the Spanish Crown, in conjunction with the Holy Roman Empire, decided to send scholars and priests to Mexico in an effort to salvage as much as possible of the remarkable native wisdom possessed by certain remnants of their new subjects. But, upon arrival, these wisdom seekers were informed that it had been the cadre of Aztec priests who had served as the repository for this knowledge, the knowledge that the bejeweled leaders back in Europe so desperately coveted, and that, alas, the entire dark cabal of heathen priests had been put to painful death upon the orders of the Catholic Priests who had served under the Spaniard Hernan Cortez. This cleansing had taken place within days of the final victory of the Conquistadors over Montezuma.

When all seemed hopeless and the seekers from Europe were sure that very little information of any real and lasting value could be gleaned from the memories of the common people, a small clay figurine, shaped in the guise of a monkey, was unearthed by a squadron of Spanish soldiers who had been systematically looting Indian grave sites in search of gold. Disgusted at not having been rewarded by the glitter of gold after so many long hours of back breaking and laborious digging, the officer in charge of this ghoulish Task Force smashed the ten inch high monkey shaped clay figurine against a rock, and by doing so discovered hidden within it a small scroll, covered in arcane hieroglyphics. Thinking that these coded symbols might possibly be a map leading to one of the many treasure caches hidden by the Aztec priests shortly before the fall of Tenechtitlan, the Captain turned the scroll over to the higher powers that were then ruling Mexico.

Believing the possibility that they now possessed a treasure map of great value, the Spaniards searched furiously for someone who could translate the scroll from its current enigmatic form into a language that they

might comprehend. However, there was none who could perform the task. The only information that could be wrenched from the indigenous population regarding the subject was that the scroll they now held in their hands was written in the language of the “Old Ones” who lived in the farthest reaches of the deepest jungles. Convinced that these “Old Ones” were possessors of great hordes of wealth, the Spaniards immediately bent themselves on an all out quest to locate the so called “Old Ones” and conquer them just as soon and as fast as militarily possible.

As this decision was being forged into a plan by the Spaniards, the Old Ones, through occult means watched the proceedings and then gathered themselves solemnly around a midnight campfire. The High Priestess, whose name cannot now be pronounced, stood swaying in front of the fire prophesying thusly; “They are coming, and days of great sorrow await us. Though many here among us will die, we as a people will survive. And, one day we will embrace these invaders as brothers, for our future and theirs is inexplicably intertwined.”

Over the course of the next few months, the Aztlantians and the Spaniards waged war. The Spanish invaders used their grim steel blades and their black powder projectiles to stunning and grisly effect, while the Old Ones wielded their minds and an array of subjugated spirit entities who obeyed their will. It was only when the Spanish army had become severely depleted through injury and death and the Aztlantian Wizards numbered less than fifty, that a silent unspoken truce at long last blew like a cool and comforting wind throughout the land of Mexico. At this happening the Spaniards returned to the easy gold and silver of their subjugated mines, and the last of the Old Ones retraced their steps back into their peaceful jungle enhearsed stone villages.

As six hundred years of Christian domination in Mexico became the history of the land, its people grew strong in the faith of their invaders. Hatred and enmity between Conqueror and Subject dissipated and they became one people, and the humbleness of the Mexican people grew to represent that of the Christian Savior. As for her people, the Old Ones from Aztlan, they adopted many of the Christian ways and many of the more enlightened and mystical Jesuit priests learned their ways in return. Time had indeed healed the great wound that had initially divided these people one from the other.

So it was, that on this chosen day centuries later that the ruler of her people, a woman of great years, sent her into the sacred grounds of her people to gather the precious petals from a plant whose existence is still unknown to the outside world. It is however whispered among adepts of the most powerfully guarded Occult circles, that this presumably mythical plant produces a flower which is, in essence, the source of all Aztlantian power.

They say that when petals from the flowers born by this plant are mixed together with an infusion concocted from the roots of the Blue Cactus, and the resulting tea is drunk, that it induces an alternate state of consciousness, awakening in the drinker complete multiple life memory. This memory, of past life experiences, allows the aspirant to access a pool of knowledge which is vastly beyond all imagination. It is also whispered, among these same Adepts that the very seeds from which this sacred plant initially sprang, were delivered into the hands of her people at the beginning of time, by God, as a gift for serenity, But ... who knows for certain about these things.

The old woman walks with a slow and dignified gait through a place called the Path of Knowledge, towards the fields of her ancestors. Her inner-vision is at its maximum height. She cannot see her way through the inky blackness of night, and yet she can. And though the toll taken by her many years of living life has withered her skin and stripped it clean of all vestiges of her past beauty, and though her figure is emaciated and thin beneath the cloth of her humble shift, her small, almond-shaped eyes gleam with a spark of someone sixty years her junior. Truth be known, she is as lithe, as alert and as full of vitality as the panther roaming the jungle near her.

In her hand she carries a staff of medium length, which had been passed down to her through twenty different generations of Priestesses from her own bloodline. As she walks the rock strewn pathway towards the object of her quest, she uses the tip of her staff to prod the shadows through which she passes, sensing for the hissing presence of danger. But, tonight there are only the shapes of things, not the substance.

As the old woman reaches the summit of her objective she can at long last detect the faint glow of the Xuiche Flower (pronounced Weeche). This luminescent flower can only be seen in the darkest of nights by those who have been thoroughly trained in the usage of the ancient art of spiritual vision. If another less developed person were to stumble upon this field of wonders, they would see naught but stone upon stone, for the Xuiche Flower hides ever so cleverly within the smallest most cached crevices, where no light can find it.



Upon obtaining the pinnacle before her the old woman moves to the center of the field and removes her sarape, her thin cotton dress, her small clothes, and then her sandals. She unties her long iron-grey hair and lets the lanks of it fall into disarray upon her chest and shoulders. She stands in complete nakedness and she feels the fingers of a cool night air caressing her skin like a gentle lover.

She stands immobile and listens to the sound of water singing its insistent song upon the rocks somewhere in the dark middle distance. With ancient eyes she looks to the sky where she sees the playful abandon of the infinite stars that ride the black heavens above her. Though life be all about her, she knows it not, so focused is she upon her altered state of consciousness.

The old woman raises her hands high above her head and begins to chant aloud in a language far, far older than time as we know it. As she continues her supplication to forces unseen the very air itself responds, gleefully tugging her hair into a frenzy and blowing her grey locks into a many tentacle dance around her face and head. She reacts to its movement by instantly turning her body to face east towards the original home of her people, towards Aztlan.

She kneels upon the rock strewn ground, oblivious to the sharp pressure of the stones lying beneath her knees, and then folds her arms across her naked chest causing them to make a figure resembling an "X". She chants a short appreciative prayer of remembrance, in honor of her ancestors. She then rises to her feet lifting her hands once again into the frenzied air making a "Y" sign with her arms. She chants three words of holy origin, and then lowers her outstretched arms to shoulder height making a "T" sign. In one final movement she once again begins to chant as she lowers her arms to her side thereby forming the Sacred Staff of Self.

In this position she thanks her Creator for all things great and small, and then she asks for permission to pluck the petal of the sacred Xuiche Flower from the recesses of its clever hiding place.

Feeling washed from the encrustations of her waxing age, she rises, redresses herself, and begins her chores.

She casts her sense of feeling into a spot which is located directly between a human's eyebrows, and she wills her vision to be from there. After several seconds her years of practice gives consideration and her field of vision bursts open revealing in many different places the glowing luminosity of the sacred Xuiche Flower. She moves to one which seems to glow the brightest and begins to gently pull, snipping with her fingernails only the largest petals that the plant has to offer. So gentle are her motions and so natural is her presence here, in this field, that a small multi-colored lizard out of its nest on a nocturnal prowl for insects, crawls across her hand and along the length of her arm, undisturbed and unalerted.

The old woman, wise to the energetic flows of nature and its precarious balance, only removes every other petal from her selection of candidates so as not to destroy or to diminish the life of the flower itself. As she goes about her duty she sings in a richly musical language a song dedicated to the spirit of that which remains unharvested upon the dark living vine:

"Oh little flower made of the Moon's light — I love you, now and always.

"Oh, little flower I see thy bashful glow.

"Oh, little flower, because I see - I know.

"Blessed be the precious seed — for it supplies all our need.

"Oh, little flower who opens my eyes.

"Oh, little flower who silences my cries.

"Oh, little flower — forgive me!"

After several hours of kneeling on and crawling around the giant rocks, and of inspecting every dark crevice for the precious jeweled flower of her people, the old crone feels a slight shift in the fabric of the air around her. She hesitates, cocking her head to one side as if between the whispers of a quiet private conversation. She slowly rolls from her knees onto her back and stills her bated breath by closing her eyes and focusing upon her heart, thereby opening up the portals of her silent hearing in the process.

At first, she can perceive nothing outside of the ordinary. But then, as quickly as the snapping of a pair of fingers, she hears and feels a small turbulence affecting the air near her feet. Her physical ears hear her name being softly

whispered by a voice supple and slow like a kiss in the night. So utterly beautiful is the tone of the voice that it sends a strong, low, strum of harmonious vibrations coursing through her body like the trill of a harp string, causing her spirit to leap like a startled mouse.

The breeze around her stops so swiftly that a switch may as well have been flipped. With the moving of the wind the air itself becomes warm and filled with energy, like water in the moments before it begins to boil. The old one rises to a sitting position, and then to a kneeling position as she awaits the arrival of that which she senses to be coming. Slowly, a faint glow begins to wink and to weave its way through the air towards the old bruja, until finally the form of the Holy Christian Mother appears like a misty apparition resting upon the landscape of her people's sacred garden; with her came the wafting scent of freshly cut roses filling the air around her and a syrup-thick feeling of overwhelming, all consuming love embalms her spirit-being.

Although the old woman, whom most Christians would call a witch, had seen many a spirit made manifest in her presence, she had never before envisioned the Blessed Christian Mother, yet she knew her from her meditations and feared her not.

Once again, the Holy Mother's velutinous voice crooned the old woman's singsong name through the fabric of space and time. When the elderly bruja responded to the call by saying, "Speak great mother" the image in front of her became less transparent and then it grew solid, yet its brilliant opaline glow remained steady.

"A child has been born whose task it is to once again bring the gift of God's light to Earth.

"He was born into a place of disease and poverty, and it is his destiny to breathe the dank humid stench of the dying and the decaying, to experience the smoldering embers of humanities winternal existence. He will belong to those whose fate it is to experience the great riddle of human suffering, personal torture and personal hell.

"In order for him to fulfill his mission he must feel the cold iron shackles that will be forged upon him by the fat and prosperous brood of religious mediocrity, and he must endure it without the aid of your people. Do not interfere, for he is destined to become a rangy beast cast far from the litter of normalcy and destined to live life astray; a man who will find neither home, nor joy, nor peace of any sort. For his is not of this natural world.

"This strange depression, of life, which he must live will be utterly incomprehensible to him, and he will be alone among you until his time cometh. Only you will know him for who he truly is, and only you will be permitted to instruct him in the ways of spirituality.

"I will give you all that is required to perform your task." And then she was gone.

The old woman stood once again in the inky darkness of her... of our world. Strewn about her on the rocky ground at her feet lay fifty-six red roses of extraordinary size, which were left as always by the manifestation of the Holy Mother upon the land that we call Mexico; that place from where the first clay had been drawn.

The old one slowly, yet deliberately closes her eyes and focuses a part of her mental attention upon the old priestess of her village. After a few moments, the old woman's mind locks onto that of the High Priestess. She uses her thoughts to explain that she has been "called" to which the High Priestess instantaneously gives affirmation, by telling her that "the rocks were singing!" Meaning of course that God had spoken.

The old woman pledges to leave her basket and its load of Xuiche petals at the base of the pointed tree, which marked the edge of this sacred spot; and then she abruptly breaks off her communication, her mind already focused on beginning her newly assigned mission.

It was now the eve of dawn and to the East she could see a faint, yet beautiful pink-hue on the horizon. The old woman looks intently to the hillside across the valley where she concentrates on standing in a clearing at eye level, and then she was. From that point she could detect another valley approximately one mile to the north. She sees herself there, and then she is. This she continues for the count of seven days, until she can finally see her destination on the eastern edge of the United States and then she was there.

# Chapter Two

## The Prophet

He was born the night a long comet ran silently against the darkened sky of this world. When the morning sun rose above the horizon it brought with it more than light, and his mother cried for the comfort of a man she could not remember, and a large cockroach skittered across the floor beside her bed, and neighbors fought through the walls, and sirens wailed somewhere in the distance, and rain fell softly through the rising wafting putrid smell of man's prosperity.

At his eyes first opening, there were no wise men bearing him gifts, no angel inspired Shepard's smiling down upon him and no peaceful bar made hospitable by loving parents. Here, in this world, his new world, there was naught but one small room graced by the meagerest of possessions.

Beside the worn and sagging bed where he was born stood a birthing lady of ancient practice; and the room was filled with the soft hopeless mewling cries of another impoverished mother, wishing against all natural instinct that her child had not been born.

The rain continued its assault on mankind's abuse of his environment, as sirens continued their assault on man's abuse of other men, and the neighbors continued their assault upon each other. His birth... hardly an event to alter the world.

He grew from infancy to childhood in the bowels of a large Northern City, once known as Car Town. But now, this once Prosperous municipality had become a city jettisoned into poverty by those who would rob rather than work, kill rather than reason; a city of predators dressed in political colors and turf colors alike.

The decent working folks who had lived in this city began to trickle away some twenty years ago when it first became unfriendly and dangerous beyond reason. As they moved on, so too did their tax money; money the city desperately needed for its operation and maintenance. This shortfall of budget resources brought about an increase of lawlessness, and soon, businesses, which had once been the pillars upon which the city rested, were forced to follow those same working class refugees out into the suburbs, or into smaller, more civilized communities elsewhere. It was a deathblow to the city. As a result his neighborhood became a tomb within a graveyard, patrolled by the slavish minds of philistine barbarity; a complete abandonment to the primitive mentality of thumping, pounding primal music, fatherless children, and unrestrained violence.

The streets of his neighborhood had in fact become so violent that in many ways it was reminiscent of an old west township, in that they, due to the ill-fortunes of the city, were more or less governed by their own inhabitants who patrolled and protected each other, sometimes in a haphazard fashion. I suspect that many of the other neighborhoods scattered across the city were the same, though it was never reported either way in the government run media.

This type of organized citizenry was not really mere vigilantism, but was rather a form of law born from the womb of necessity, man against predator, good people looking after good people. And so it was that this neighborhood, his neighborhood, had become a tight-knit group of folks who all knew each other. A family of sorts who were statureless, folks bound together by circumstance.

Within his neighborhood there were those who partook of the bacchanalian element and those who partook of various narcotics, as well as a multitude of other things that the righteous would condemn. But none here were considered righteous and so none were criticized nor ostracized for their choices in life; so long as they harmed no one. The folks in this neighborhood knew hardship intimately and all here knew that hard times were handled differently by different people. This neighborhood was a world of its own, surrounded by a government it both feared and distrusted.

One day, at the age of seven while sitting atop a stoop across the street from his own, he noticed an elderly woman moving articles of clothing and several cardboard boxes into a run-down apartment at the end of his block. She noticed him as well, for she had watched him from afar since his birth.

He then noticed Mr. and Mrs. Malinzin helping her with her things. Once again the old woman stopped to look directly at him, this time she smiled, and then she waved. He quickly looked away as if he had not seen the woman's gesture. His mom had always told him, never be friendly with anyone outside of the neighborhood.

He surmised the old woman to be from Mexico, like the Malinzin family, and he idly wondered if she too could make the colorful sweet-breads that he so dearly loved to eat! He would investigate the matter further, later on.

He looked at the window of the apartment where he was born and saw that the shutters were now open. This was a sign that it was okay for him to return home. On his way home he passes a well dressed man on the stairs, a man who seems to be in a hurry to be somewhere other than where he is; as the man walks by he smells his mother's cheap perfume. Upon entering the door to his apartment he is met by his smiling mother, who proclaims, "Come on honey! We're eating good tonight!" She then led him hand in hand into the street where they happily walk to the end of the block, toward the place where he had seen the old woman. There, they entered into a small restaurant with three tables, twelve chairs and, "The best food this side of Tijuana," as he had so often heard said.

Sitting at one of the tables with another woman he simply knew as Chela, sat the old woman he had seen earlier with her hands folded atop the table as though praying, open eyed. They looked up as he and his mother entered the room, and they both smiled that smile. Chela motioned for them to sit with a sweep of her arms, as if there were a hundred possible choices. His mom chose a bland wooden table furthest from the door. It was the table that didn't wobble when you placed your elbows on it.

"Today we have chicken soup with rice and fresh flour tortillas. Not too spicy!" she said, with a wink in his direction. He knew that this restaurant didn't have a menu, or a selection for that fact. Here, one ate what had been prepared for the Malinzin family on that day, but none complained, because it was the "The best food this side of Tijuana" wherever that was.

After eating their fill his momma snuck two flour tortillas into her ragged purse and then pursed her lips when she saw him giving her the look. "A little snack for tonight," she murmured. And all was dismissed.

Chela came and cleared the table and then sat to talk with his mom as always, they were best friends. Chela talked about the neighborhood and about the new country also. He just listened and thought about whatever it was that happened to rise up to the surface of his mind. Then from behind a cloth-covered doorway came the old woman, who had long since disappeared into the back rooms of the house/restaurant. She was carrying a small plate containing two pink triangular shaped pieces of sweet bread, "No! No! No!" His mother protested. The old crone smiled and replied in a heavenly accented voice, "It is a gift for the nino."

Chela introduced the old woman as her Abuelita, "New to our home," she said. Being ever polite his mom asked the old woman to sit with them and she did; he scarfed down the first piece of sweet-bread without taking a breath. The women talked, and as they talked, he listened. He liked the sound of the old woman's accent, and he decided there and then, that he would go and visit Mexico, someday. Maybe he would even get the chance to taste the food on the other side of Tijuana.

The women continued their conversation and gradually the topic swung around to him. His momma told them that he was a good boy, who never complained or caused her grief; they all three looked at him while they talked, as though he were a little bird that they all fancied. The old woman patted his head, Chela smiled at him, and his momma boasted about him some more; he ate another pastry, and life was good. But deep down inside, he knew that the good life wouldn't last. He knew other things, too. For instance he knew that he was different from other people. He was quiet and wise to a scare, his mom would say.

Over the course of the next few years the boy grew to develop a relationship founded upon complete love and absolute trust for the old Mexican woman, the old Abuelita, who had by now become very much his own grandmother, a relationship that she cherished as much as he.

Daily while his mom worked her trade, he would go with his Abuelita to their secret place, which in truth was nothing more than the basement room that she had been given to live in by the Malinzin family. But to him, this place represented a hidden Mystery Temple of the sort located in forbidden lands, or in ancient realms where the

halls were filled with chanting adepts from arcane sects of unknown origins; adepts who, while robed in garments of embossed gold and white, silently worked in favor of the world by fighting the forces of evil. He liked it here in this place of fantasies, and he never told a single soul about this hidden mezzanine of knowledge, or about the power of its hidden opiate.

Within the confines of this untrammelled room of serenity, Abuelita, kept a carefully dusted array of ceramic statuary. The Virgin Mother and a wide variety of Catholic Saints to which she paid a great deal of respect occupied wall niches and stood, cheek to jowl along the table tops. There were also twelve pictures, three on each wall depicting Jesus of Nazareth, in varying stages of his nuptial dance with the music of life and death. Along the floorboards of all four walls were hundreds of glass and plastic jars filled with different herbs and plants brought from the far mountains and desert places of the old country, or so he thought. And of course, there were also innumerable candles of every size, shape and color that you could imagine. The old woman made these candles, and she used the sale of them to support herself, and to a great extent, him, for Abuelita had taken it upon herself to make sure that he ate good food, regularly, and that he had clean clothing to wear. On Sunday mornings, after she was done with her morning prayers, she made sweet-rice with raisins. This was their secret ritual of companionship.

His own mother's life seemed in marked decline. As her beauty faded, so too did her meager store of hope that things would get better in terms of economic conditions, and in terms of all of the other things that an un-wed single mother years for. Eventually she became bone-thin, haggard and pale, spending far too many hours alone, in bed, hidden away from the light. She gave herself over to drugs of crude origin and soon the smell of encroaching death began to hang around her like a madman's smile. The day of ultimate reckoning could be seen riding down upon her, swiftly, like a ghost army of nameless phantom riders.

Abuelita tried to keep him busy, as if being occupied would somehow cause him to miss his appointment with the bus of misery, which was even now making its way to his stop. But that was not possible, for he knew it all, every dark alley and every dirty needle of it; even the black hearted bug that crawled through her veins was known to him, yet, he spoke of it to none.

One Sunday morning in his sixteenth year, Abuelita came up to him on the street with a sway of revelry in her walk, a cantankerous smile of comradely on her face, and a deep well of pride in her eyes, that even a sixteen year old could recognize. "Mijo" she said, with a gesture of grand enthusiasm, "It is time for you to begin your lessons! Are you ready?" He nodded the affirmative and they both smiled like two rogue tomcats entwined together within some opulent and epochal adventure of mandarin proportions.

They had spoken often of his "lessons". And although he had seen his Abuelita mix herbs, cast stones, and actually even heal a few people, he was not exactly sure what form these "lessons" would take, or what those "lessons" would entail. But regardless, he was confident that their nature would be adventuresome! He thought about what he had heard about Spirit Flying, and about Spirit Seeing. He had heard both of these being spoken of by his feisty old grandmother, and after all what boy of sixteen wouldn't want these sorts of abilities?

They walked past the Malinzin family restaurant, and then past the place of his birth. Then they marched past the corner and out into the world where he had rarely been allowed to go. They progressed in silence and as they walked he knew that there would be no need to explain this absence later to his mom. After all, it was a Sunday morning, which followed a Saturday night; he knew that his mom would spend the day asleep, until sometime around 4:00 pm, when he would awaken her gently with a kiss on her brow and a plate containing some of Abuelita's sweet-rice.

As they ventured deeper into new terrain Abuelita began to talk to him in a low tone of voice, She spoke to him about the spiritual mysteries.

"Mijo," she said. "This place where we are going is a holy place, so when we get there I want you to remember all that I have taught you about how you must act," she counseled.

"I will make you proud, Grandmother. But isn't it dangerous for us to be out of our neighborhood alone?"

"Yes Mijo. It is very dangerous out here. But not for us, because we have many protectors all around us, watching over us. So do not be afraid."

He looked all around him, yet he didn't see anything, or anyone.



“Don’t worry,” she advised him with a smile. “I can see the beings that guard us, even if you cannot. In fact, one of the strongest and bravest of them is walking behind you even as we speak!”

He turned to quickly take a peak behind him, yet he saw nothing. “What will these protectors do if someone tries to harm us, Grandma?”

She took his hand and chided him gently. “No young one, these creatures do not act in the manner in which you are thinking. These protectors are Angelic beings. Angels of the highest order who I have already spoken too, directly. They protect us by making it so that others who might do us harm cannot see us.”

“You mean we are invisible?” The boy gasped amazedly, his eyes wide with the possibilities of such a thing.

“No Jovan. We are not invisible. But we are undetectable. The Angels who watch over us cause others not to see us, because their minds will have been told to look elsewhere. Do you understand what I am saying to you Mijo?” He did.

They walked and talked for over an hour, past dwellings and people, dogs, and kids, until they came to a gothic looking church with a pair of large brown double doors sitting neatly atop a set of concrete steps. They climbed the steps and went inside the building. “The church will be vacant for another hour,” she told him.

They took seats on a bench of sorts at the very back of the church. It was silent here, in this place, like a world of its own. A world in which the vaporous regions from whence they had just come were nonexistent; Abuelita crossed herself, and so too did he.

He felt “IT” here, although he wasn’t quite sure just what “IT” was. Still, he felt “IT” on his skin, like a cool cleansing breeze, and he shivered. After a period of time in which he was sure that she had been praying, she turned to him and said, “Mijo, this is where your first lesson must begin, because only God can open your mind to see, and your ears to hear the mysteries of the spirit. I have taught you about Jesus and about his mission here on earth. But now it is time for you to begin to learn how to fulfill your own mission, your own destiny, whatever that may be. Do you understand?”

He nodded. “Good,” said the old woman, happily. “Now, I want you to look over there at that stature, yes, that one. He is the Archangel Michael. And it is he you must learn to see, because it is he who has been given the job of spiritual warfare, and you, my young general, are to be his assistant - on this side of the battle!”

“But Grandmother! I hate violence! I would be a poor soldier. Why doesn’t God just snap his fingers and fix this, this, this spiritual war himself?”

The old woman smiled and nodded. “Well that Jovan is good thinking for one so young! The reason why God doesn’t simply ‘fix it’, as you say, is a long story! In fact, it is a story known to only a scant few and a story that is truly understood by fewer still!”

“Do you know this story Grandmother?”

“Oh yes. I know it well, but...”

“But what Grandmother? If you know this story, then tell it to me.”

“Ay dios mio, ahora Mijo?”

“Yes Grandmother, I would like to hear this great secret now!” And then he gave her his best spoiled five year old look. This always worked and today was no exception.

“Okay my young general. But you must listen very carefully, so as to not be deceived by this story. Sometimes the truth, the real truth, and not the pretend truth, is not always as you may have been led to believe.”

“I will listen carefully Grandmother. I promise!” he said, with great excitement in his voice.

She nodded and then turned to stare at the statue of the Archangel Michael, which seemed oddly alive in the dim and gentle light inside of the small Catholic Church. Then she turned away from her ward and sat quietly for a moment or two as if trying to find a starting point from which she could anchor her story. Then as if in resignation she briefly closed her eyes while smoothing out her skirt by running both of her hands down the length of her emaciated thighs. Then she began with these words.

“Billions upon billions of years ago, a beautiful entity named Lucifer, which means ‘Light-Bearer’, went into the presence of God. With great love in his heart he kissed God’s feet and lay his head upon the apron of God’s lap. In recognition of God’s infinite knowledge he asked God from whence he had come.

“God stroked Lucifer’s cheek and told him that he had come from the midst of nowhere, just as God herself had. Then God said that he, Lucifer, was in fact, one half of God herself. ‘I’, God proclaimed, ‘Am a force. An energy. Pure light to be exact. And in order for light to be able to exist, there must be darkness, for without darkness there can be no light. You, Lucifer, are the other part of me, the face I see when I am mirrored in time. You are the darkness, and without you, I, the light, cannot exist. And without me, you darkness cannot exist.’

“But if I am darkness and you are light, then why am I called Light-Bearer?”

“You are called Light-Bearer not because you are the possessor of light, but rather, because light is your burden... the thing which you must bear and endure for all eternity, for light is in direct opposition to you, just as darkness is to me.’ Then God lifted Lucifer’s face up and kissed his forehead gently. ‘You are me, Lucifer. And I am you. Together we are all that exists.’

“Lucifer looked up into the benevolent eyes of God and in a tone of pure bewilderment asked, ‘If I am darkness and you are light, then how can it be that I am in your presence? Does not light suppress the darkness?’

“God lowered her holy eyes and a tear slid down her mighty cheek; and she knew what Lucifer was thinking and with great trepidation, she answered, ‘Yes, darkness is, in truth, suppressed by light.’

“Am I not your brother, your other half? Am I not the one that you said made it possible for you to exist? And you now tell me that I am not your equal, that I am somehow less than you. How can this be? How can one be above the other?’ With those words he wailed aloud, but all that he received in response was a flash of light and then utter darkness. God was gone.

“Lucifer looked around him and for the very first time saw that he was in a place separated from the Place of Light that God had caused him to imagine, This place, where he now existed, was a dimension, a place in and of its own accord, like, yet separate from the place where God dwelt. This new place, his place, was utterly void and without form, it was black, an endless inky pit devoid of all nature. And Lucifer groaned and fell to his knees and longed to be once again with God; but God was gone.

“Millions upon millions of years past with God in her place of light and Lucifer in his place of darkness, then out of loneliness Lucifer decided to alter the darkness and give it form. With great earnestness he stretched forth his arms and gave the dark form, space. At his imagining space rolled outward, toward infinity. Then Lucifer brought forth an image within his mind and waved his hands and in doing so created stars to fill his newly created space. He then put heat into these stars giving them substance and artificial light, this he did as a tribute to his Holy Sister, who was Light’s representative. To each lighted star he gave a purpose and a position to which they must each remain forever true. When it was all finished he looked at his universe with its artificially created light and was greatly pleased with what he saw. And then he rested.

“After the passage of an incomprehensible amount of time, Lucifer once again decided that it was time to create. So he flew through the universe that he had constructed and moved in and among the stars he had created, selecting from carefully chosen ones special bodies he named planets. On these planets, he placed the seeds of life. One by one and two by two, brought he life into existence.

“This life that Lucifer had created was completely unlike the volatile energy/lifeforce that he and God possessed, but was instead a small semblance of that energy captured and encapsulated like a meager spark, in a multitude of different forms. This new life spark evolved and mutated, beginning its grand dance in the guise of small micro-organisms and then morphing through cycles of larger and more complex life forms. Lucifer watched as these life forms unfolded, and he saw that this life-essence was good. He then waved his hand and millions upon millions of years passed as if no more than a solitary breath; hence life grew and life developed. Lucifer waved his hand again and millions upon millions of more years flickered past. And then he rested.

“God, as always was in observance.... for she greatly loved her brother. One day she came into the presence of Lucifer and ask him what he was doing. Lucifer replied, ‘I am creating light! And I am birthing life!’

“God looked at Lucifer saying, ‘You can do that. Only remember, as you and I are opposite, and yet the same, so too will the light and the life that you create, have an opposite/same.’ And then God was gone.

Lucifer thought deeply about the words God had spoken, and then, as foretold, he felt a violent wrenching within himself followed by a numbing. This was a feeling that he could not understand, because it was the first time in all of eternity that he had felt this pain. And then he felt this feeling again and again and again. With one

hand clenched tightly to his breast in an effort to suppress this pain, Lucifer flew into the core of his creation searching for the source of this painful sensation, this new feeling that he was experiencing. He located the wellspring from whence flowed this new and strange and unknowable thing and willed himself to flash his essence into existence, and onto one of the planets where life dwelt. And there, in a labyrinth of chaos, he saw 'it' for the very first time and 'it' shocked him to the core of his being. How could he have not known? He had not created life.... instead, he had created death! For that which is imbued with physical life must also be imbued with physical demise as well. Lucifer wept in shadowed agony, and created no more.

"Hundreds of millions of years flickered past as Lucifer gazed in mute anguish upon his creation... a creation which now had a momentum of its own. Life multiplied and with it, death multiplied as well. Being the Father of this creation Lucifer felt each death as if it were his own, but there was naught that he could do, save watch it all happen. Then one day among billions, Lucifer felt a new and even stranger pain erupt within him and, as before, he flew off to examine the source from whence this new sensation came. He flashed himself into existence upon the surface of the small blue planet that he perceived to contain the source of this new pain, and it was there, with a profound sense of astonishment, that his eyes fell upon a creature of great and profound beauty; a figure unlike any of the other living things that had gained life in his creation. He looked upon her and the word 'Mother' formed on his lips and then rolled off his tongue echoing outward to the farthest ends of eternity. Mother, so aptly named, for she was the first to give birth to this exquisite new species of life creature that he now beheld. 'Mother' he said, and he loved her unconditionally.

"Lucifer noticed that this beautiful creature/mother did not appear to sense his presence so he watched her unseen and in this state he saw that she, the Mother, was crying. This intrigued him mightily because crying had so far been unique to him and to God alone! And yet, this new creature cried, just as he himself did! In his astonishment he walked around and around her gazing at all of the abundance of things which were unique to her person,. He saw her hair, her eyes, her skin and her hands. He watched as she sat sobbing quietly upon a stone with tears streaming down and onto the crude animal skin clothing, which protected her lithe body from the elements. And he loved her. However, even as he loved her, Lucifer knew that this creature was not the source of the pain that he had earlier felt. Although her tears pierced and stung his heart, neither her, nor those tears was the embolism that formed his pain, so he turned reluctantly away from the Mother and walked in the direction of his instinct. And there over a small rise in the land he saw the wellspring of his pain and his lips formed the word 'Man'... and he spoke it, with much anguish. 'Man'. Man, standing over man with a bloodied rock in his angry hand and an orgy of crimson gore splattered upon his person. Man, with his roguish leer divested of all purity. Man and his first crime. Lucifer looked upon this grim tableau and he felt 'It', he felt Man and his enchantment with self-destruction. He felt 'It', and he knew full well that life not only lived and died, it murdered as well.

"Lucifer turned away from this ritual of malice and cruelty and returned once again to the mother. Her tears had dried, but there was a sadness that indwelled her, a sadness at the murder that she had been witness to. Sympathetically he laid his hand upon her head and blessed her.

"At His touch she jumped in startled fright as though she had felt his presence! And, in truth, she had! In a voice composed of musical tones, in a language which has now long since been forgotten, she cried out, 'Who is there? And her words touched the very essence of Lucifer, and as they did so a baptismal exuberance washed him clean of all remembrance of man. In complete devotion to this mother creature, he replied, 'It is I. I who gave you life, daughter, fear me not.' Mother fell to her knees and tremulously put her face to the ground. From there she asked him his name. However, before he was able to answer her, the man appeared and moved to her side.

"Lucifer suddenly became aware that he, the man, was not alone, for with him were three others... two like unto the man, and one more, like unto the mother. He looked hungrily upon these newcomers the way that a father might devour a photograph of a long lost child, and, as he examined these creatures the first man strode angrily forward seeing the one that Lucifer had called mother laying prostrate upon the ground. Believing her to be grieving for the one he had just slain, the man reached down, grabbing the mother by her hair and drug her to her feet. When the mother-woman resisted, the man struck her across the face. Upon seeing this slavish and brutishly primitive endearment Lucifer burst forth and smote the man, killing him instantly.

“The others who were in attendance fell back in terror because they could not see that which had just brought death and disfigurement to their leader. But the mother/woman knew and she spoke to the others in a voice that rang with authority, saying, ‘He who gave us life did this thing, because our brother killed one of his own in anger.’

“How do you know this thing?” they asked her.

“Because He came to me and He touched me and He spoke to me.” Then the mother/woman instructed them to do as she had done. In veneration to her words the others fell to their knees and placed their faces onto the dirt of the ground in supplication.

“Lucifer saw this action and was mystified, for he did not need nor want their worship. He wanted only for life to be without death, and so he reached down to the mother/woman and placed his hand gently beneath her chin and told her to rise. And she did. This time a tear of love appeared in her eyes, it welled up and then slid slowly down her cheek onto the hand that Lucifer had yet to remove from her chin. So moved was Lucifer that he allowed this small drop of her essence to lay within his palm, and, within this teardrop which rested so solemnly in the palm of his hand, Lucifer skryed her future; it flowed before his inner-eye as if he were seeing it on a movie screen. When it was finished and he had seen the outcome, he slowly overturned his hand and allowed her tear to fall to the dust at his feet. He turned to gaze at the disfigured form of the one that he had smitten. He then moved forward and stood over the blasted ruin of the dead man like a desecrator of the temple. When he could look no more he withdrew himself and left that place.”

The Abuelita paused to wipe a tear from her own eye and to ask the boy if he wanted her to continue. He offered her his affirmation by asking her, “Grandmother, tell me about him.” As he pointed to the statued figure of the Archangel Michael, She smiled. And then she continued her story.

“After the passage of twenty-one man years Lucifer knew that what he had divined in the mother-woman’s tear, was now coming to pass. So, with a heavy heart he returned himself to the place where father and child had first met. Upon arriving on the Man/Woman planet he noticed many subtle changes; he saw that these human creatures had multiplied greatly in numbers, and that many of them now possessed crude tools and weapons, crafted from bone or stone.

“Lucifer looked about their teeming numbers, but he saw her not. He wandered among them hidden and then he saw her in the center of a large encampment surrounded by grunting, chanting others, and by symbols made from wood and reed and clay. Most prominent among these confederate items were many clay figurines shaped like Lucifer’s own hand, which one member of her tribe shook over her, and then touched lightly to her head and chin over and over mimicking his first touch. But she responded not.

“The others from her tribe huddled around the Mother, and after a few minutes picked her up and lay her emaciated torso down onto a mat of straw and hide, and with this activity he saw that the first mother closed her eyes in resignation, to her apparent fate. Lucifer looked intently upon her and saw that she was frail to the bone and that her skin sagged heavily under the weight of her age.

Moving to her side he went to one knee and laid his hand upon her as he had done at their first meeting. At this she smiled, for she knew his touch intimately. She opened her tired eyes and looked into his and for the first time her eyes she saw him in form. He was beautiful.

“All activity in her village fell into silence. The others, sensing that her eyes were resting upon something holy, rightly surmised that the hand of their creator had come. Then they heard her speak. She told her creator that she did not want to die, but he told her that death was the way of her kind and that there was an unalterable life and death cycle, over which he had no dominion. With this answer she blinked and nodded her head in resignation and then asked him to bless her people, and to love them as she herself had loved him. And he agreed, Finally she asked him to take notice of her eldest daughter and to touch the youth as he had touched her... this so that her daughter might truly believe in the reality of his existence. And then death claimed her and she left him.

“At her death Lucifer rose from her side releasing a violent, anguished howl that shook the very earth upon which this small village stood. So forceful was the energy of his emotion that it toppled their dwellings and the sky itself became darkened, and some who were faint of heart fell dead where they stood, so frightening was the depth of his sorrow.

“All who remained alive lay upon the broken ground in a tremulous embrace, fearing for their very lives. When Lucifer’s cry was spent and all was once again still, a young woman rose up from the midst of the survivors and moved to the body of the first mother and knelt there, at her side. With a voice that cracked and broke with her own pain and anguish, first daughter spoke to the corpse of the one whom she loved. ‘Mother, he came. And I know in my heart that he took you with him.’ At those words Lucifer’s own tears broke loose in abandon and ran down his cheeks, for he wished evermore that what the first daughter had said could be true, but it could not. And so with great sorrow in his heart he looked upon this young woman and then he laid his hand upon her, as promised. At this touch, his emotionally charged energetic essence boiled through the body of the first daughter causing her to let out a seraphic moan of ecstasy and all of the others who were present there, on that day, saw her rise from the ground and levitate, all the while babbling at them in some unknown tongue.

“After a time Lucifer withdrew from them and returned to his own place. And the ones he left behind prospered and flourished, independent of him. The little one whom he had touched became known as the first Priestess of her kind and her name, while secret, is still known to many followers of the Old Ways.

“And so it came to pass that a short while later Lucifer was roaming about the universe when God appeared before him in a swirling auric-light. Lucifer drew himself up and said, ‘You were right about the other side of life being death. But, even so, I think that things have worked out well.’

“God shook her head, sadly. ‘Lucifer my beloved twin, when you act, I must react. When you create here, I must create there. A universe here means that a mirror of that universe must exist there. Light, even if artificial here, requires the existence of an artificial darkness there. I call it Heaven,’ God said, in a melancholy tone. ‘It is the way that it must be, for we are energy, you and I, and any movement of energy must have an equal response as well as an equal, albeit opposite, reaction.’

“‘What are you saying sister?’”

“‘What I am saying, is that perhaps things are not as well as you might think.’”

“‘Explain yourself, sister,’ said Lucifer, a little harsher than he intended.

“‘Well,’ said God. ‘When the first human-being rose up into consciousness, on this side, its opposite rose into consciousness on the other side. I call them Angels. Children of Light. And, like you and I, these creatures, yours and mine, are two sides of the same being.’

“‘And where is the problem in that? Are you not happy to have an expanse, a Heaven, and life all about you?’

“‘No Lucifer, I am not displeased with that. But when you poured your essence into the young Priestess you empowered her with a measure of your own enigmatic energy. She obtained super-natural abilities which are not possessed by the others of her tribe. Her offspring will have these abilities as well.’

“‘Twas a gift given in love, sister. How could that not be a good and noble thing?’ asked Lucifer, somewhat mystified.

“‘Well, when you increased her abilities, you inadvertently increased the abilities of her counterpart, on the other side. And, like your young Priestess, he, her counterpart, began to teach the others how to obtain these powers, powers that the Angels call Magica. Your own children, brother, are slothful, and few among them desire the knowledge of your power sufficiently enough to labor mightily to obtain it. But alas my brother, the Children of the Light are not so dis-inclined, for they have all labored, and they have all mastered the art of Magica.’”

“‘Speak sister. Say what you came to say.’

“‘Brother, your Priestess has learned to project herself into the other side. And, by doing so she has opened up a portal... a doorway of sorts... between your realm and mine. She has actually encountered the presence of her twin, her counterpart-Angel.’

“‘And?’”

“‘And the other Angels have seen her there, and some of them have followed her back to the place from whence she came, for they too have discovered the doorway that lies between our realms. Some have crossed over into your world. And this cannot be. For light cannot co-exist with darkness. It can only destroy darkness,’ then God was gone, as abruptly as she had come.

“Lucifer contemplated God’s warning and then flashed himself into existence and into the presence of his children, the Children of Darkness. He saw scattered here and there among them the Angels spoken of by God...



The Children of the Light. It was as God said. These Angelic-beings from the other side were masquerading in the forms of men and women like unto his own children, and they had taken from among his children mates, and children were born of this union. But all seemed well. However, Lucifer would not dismiss God's warning so easily and so he decided to observe this forbidden coming together of light and dark for a period of time. And so he did.

"Over the course of the next forty years, Lucifer watched. And as he watched, he noticed that there were indeed many differences between the Children of Light and the Children of Darkness. He noted that the Angels did not age; their flesh did not perish, as did that of his own children. And, utilizing the Art of Magica the Angels created many splendors such as fire, cooking, farming, intoxicating beverages, organization, and combat. They taught his children the value of gems and caused them to deem some stones more valuable than others, thereby creating a value system and its companions, envy and greed.

"The Fallen Angels, for this is what these creatures were, had taught the women of earth to paint their faces and to make clothing which would reveal the sexuality of their bodies. They taught the men of earth to be lovers of warfare and of prosperity and of pleasure. And then the Angels perverted man and woman both, only to discard them when they aged beyond pleasantness and utility.

"These Angels were truly cruel beyond all that his children could imagine, and his children were eventually forced to serve them and to worship them and to satisfy them. Lucifer became nauseated by their baneful barbarity and he went in search of God, to protest. And God came.

"Remove your Angels from my world." Lucifer pleaded. But God did not answer. "How could such a thing happen?" Lucifer added, stoically.

"Peace, brother," God told Lucifer, tenderly. "The Angels are not my doing, but yours. When you created life, with it came death. When your life evolved into the form of a woman of the dark side, a man evolved on heaven side in unison. Because the Angel from the Light and the Man from the Dark are interrelated, they can function on either side of the divide... the Angels here, and likewise, humankind there. When the woman first crossed the corridor between the sides she did so in mind only. However, the Angels that chose to cross the threshold did so not only in mind, but in body as well. This is the problem. Because each of these two created forms must choose one side of the divide or the other where they desire to dwell, they can be born on one side of the divide, but if their desire transports them to the other side, then it is there that they must remain. Once the Angels of the Light chose to exist physically, on this dark side, they lost the ability to return to heaven. And likewise, if a human chooses to exist on the heaven side, neither can they return here.' God touched her brother's cheek and said consolingly, 'most of the Angels in existence stayed in the Light... but those who chose otherwise are now under your dominion.' And then God vanished as she had appeared.

"Lucifer returned to the planet of his children, and he knew instantly that many, many man years had slipped past during his absence, and that many horrors had befallen his children while he had been gone. Lucifer then welled up his energy/power and began to smite the Angels who had invaded his realm and contaminated his beloved children. With each powerful attack the Angels were distorted and disjointed and disfigured, transmogrified into some grotesque semblance of what they had been... but as God had indicated they could not die.

"So Lucifer gathered their now monstrously disfigured demonic forms and he took them to the edge of darkness and commanded them to return from whence they came. And, in terror, they obeyed.

"However, it was to be just as God had said, The Angels who had remained in the Light rallied behind the twin of the First Mother, an Archangel (meaning proficient at Magica) who's name was Michael. Michael's legions of warrior Angels came together in a war-footing, and using the awesome forces of Magica they overpowered and defeated the fallen ones, pushing them back out into the darkness once more.

"When Lucifer became cognizant of what had occurred he flew into a fit of violent protective rage, and he drove the malformed Angels back into the realm of light, and then he tried to follow them with a rapacious intent to thwart the Archangel Michael's defenses. But alas, it was not to be. For light will always reduce and repel and defeat darkness, and so it was that Lucifer and the fallen angels were driven from the light. And as he fled, Lucifer wept for his children.

“Much time passed, and then it passed again after the Great War between the forces of Darkness and the forces of Light. During this time the fallen angels although hideously misshapen and malformed from Lucifer’s earlier wrath, returned to the man/woman planet where they had their perverse way with the children of the dark side, and the world became a blind orgy of lawlessness and utterly heinous activity. War and murder and rape and pillage and suffering and disease were now rampant upon the earth. When Lucifer could no longer bear to watch this demonic influence running rampant he once again went in search of his female/half. And she came.

“Yes, my beloved brother, what is it you desire.”

“I wish only that the world should be as it was, prior to the arrival of the fallen angels. I desire a world without war and free from hatred. I desire a world filled with peace, and with tranquility.”

“I have told you brother, this disorder is of your doing, not of mine.”

“Yes, I know this to be true, my twin, and if I could change the havoc that I have wrought, I would. But alas, I cannot. Will you help me?”

“God felt the pain that affected her other half, and her eyes cried as her heart shared Lucifer’s anguish. In this God was stirred to reply, ‘If you and I were to create a new man and a new woman, they would contain the essential energy/nature of each of us. This creation would share our essence/spark and would therefore be more powerful than the Fallen Angels who have ruled your paradise, and, as a result could restore peace to your world. But remember this brother, any action that we take will most assuredly result in another, opposite reaction. It is the law. What say thee Lucifer my brother, to whom I hold only love?’”

“I say that no adverse reaction could be worse than the present results of my own ill-spent actions!”

“So be it,’ said God.

“In a flash of inky blackness and brilliant white light, both Lucifer and God disappeared from the place where they had been standing and reappeared in the world of man/woman... Lucifer cloaked in his dark countenance, and God robed in her spirit form, for as we all know, her light-essence form uncloaked, would have destroyed this dark dimension, utterly.

“They knelt, these two Gods, like children playing at marbles, and God said, ‘Let us make man in our image.’ And so it was. This new Man who was Darkness on the outside received a kiss from Lucifer and became flesh. Then this new Man who was Light on the inside received a kiss from God and became spirit... thereby containing the spark of vibratory movement from both the Light and the Dark. Thus, new man, possessed a dark body of flesh, and a light body of spirit. Pleased at what they had accomplished, Lucifer and God turned their attention to the creation of a new woman. And then they rested.

“God and her twin Lucifer took the new man and the new woman and they placed them into a protective space, one which resembled a garden, and there, they nurtured them and they taught them well. These two new creatures were given the flame of Magica, a flame that rests invisibly behind the human heart. And then they were carefully instructed in both the ways of the light and dark. They were taught the high art of being in the spirit, and they learned how to separate their bodies; meaning that new man and new woman could be in the flesh, here, on the dark side, while traveling in the realm of light, within their spirit-bodies. These two new humans were both angel in spirit and human in substance; therefore they were each above the angels and above the children of darkness, for they possessed the best qualities of both species. And so it was that these new ones were prepared for peace as well as war. Unlike their predecessors, they were prepared to wage battle with the fallen angels who had usurped the balance of power, here on earth.”

# Chapter Three

## Johnny Sunday

He turned eight years of age the day that an assassin's bullet found the body of then President John F. Kennedy. By this time he was already an astonishing phenomenon in his daddy's Full Spirit Pentecostal Church where he sang hymns and preached the word of God, two Sundays each month.

His father would often take him out into the surrounding communities where he would sing and preach to any congregation that would have him; as long as they were fellow Pentecostals, that is. By age ten, he had been invited to preach as far away as Tulsa, which lay one hundred and sixty miles from his own home town. And, on occasion, he had even been a guest on one or two of the big time Christian radio broadcasts that were beamed out into the world from that city. All who heard him knew that he was destined to do the Great Work, in terms of evangelizing the heathen world and bringing the sinners into the flock of the Pentecostal persuasion.

His birth name was Johnny Morning, but the wags who produced the local paper had long since dubbed him Johnny "Sunday" Morning, and the nickname fit into his daddy's image of him so well, that it stuck. From then on, the signs and banners, announcing the upcoming activities of this young religious phoneme would proclaim his birth name in big bold letters with the nickname "Sunday" embossed in crimson and superimposed between his given, like a legal middle name. In truth however, before he had even turned twelve, most of the folks who knew him had long since quit calling him Johnny and had grown accustomed to simply calling him Sunday.

Now, the Pentecostal Movement of his upbringing had sprung into being around the turn of the twentieth century and by the time of his father's birth, in 1928, this movement had burst into full bloom and was sweeping through vast segments of the southern part of the United States, at a rapid pace.

The thing that separated the Pentecostal Movement from that of the Baptist, the Methodist, or the Catholic Movements of the time was, that this new orthodoxy seemed to have somehow tapped straight into the essence of an entity that they, the Pentecostals, deemed to be the Holy Spirit of New Testament renown. Where all of the other Christian dominations believed the biblical ordination, "To be Baptized" literally to mean that a human had to be submerged or soaked or somehow sponged clean of the stain of sin with actual water, as reflected by the baptismal performances of John the Baptist, the Pentecostals believe that the only baptism worth its salt, in terms of the afterlife, was one rendered not with water as other sects did, but in the Holy Spirit, as they did. This philosophy regarding Holy Spirit Baptisms is vaguely described in the Book of Acts, where it is revealed to the reader that flames of fire appeared upon the foreheads of the faithful, and that these faithful spoke in strange tongues upon receiving this Holy Spirit Baptism into their bodies, causing some to reel and stagger about as if in a state of drunkenness.

While the rest of Christendom was content to cling to their sublime procedures, these upstart Pentecostals were in stark contrast winning converts by babbling in tongues, achieving trance-like states of ecstatically altered consciousness, performing spiritual healings, prophesying, and from time to time, even rolling about on the floor in spiritual abandon, hence, they forever more became known as "Holy Rollers."

By the mid nineteen-forties when Johnny Morning's father had begun to be a factor in the Pentecostal Movement, the state of Oklahoma from whence the Morning family hailed, had become a main pillar supporting the so called Southern Bible Belt. The likes of Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagen, and an entire wolf-pack of other famous names had begun to spread the Pentecostal message to the hungry flocks, at first preaching from the pulpits of the small churches of poor white and black America, before eventually making in-roads into the more prosperous middle and upper class congregations which had historically been firmly wedded to the much tamer and much more orthodox denominations.

Johnny's father, Joshua James Morning, happened to fall into the camp of one of the more successful of the Oklahoma based evangelists and for the most part of his ministry became a traveling evangelist himself. He was a passionate and fiery orator with a gift for reducing the complexities of the Gospel down to an understandable

language. Soon his passion and this ability to speak the Gospel in a homespun fashion won him a large measure of popularity among the very poorest share-cropper churches and backwoods congregations; churches and congregations that the other, more money conscious traveling ministers seemed content to shun. And although he publicly supported the newly formed Pentecostal Association of Churches, he quietly resented them, and was known to sometimes refer to them as “Later Comers” and “Money Grabbers.”

As the incandescent fame of the super-evangelist Oral Roberts began to spread across the landscape like a raging brush-fire, Joshua James Morning could do naught but scoff at the handsome and decidedly charismatic preacher. Privately though, he harbored secret doubts about the man’s ability to be able to continue selling his pedagogic ways to the Pentecostal flock at such an alarming and rapacious rate without stumbling over feet of clay and being brought low, like so many other bandits before him had been. However, as the fullness of time revealed Oral Roberts to be the clever steward of one of the longest lived and biggest Evangelical Pentecostal operations in the history of the world, Joshua Morning stood back in sheer amazement, finally conceding that he was after all a Godly man.

When the ministry of Kenneth Hagen began to take root and extend its influence into the farthest most sanctified corners of the Pentecostal Kingdom, Joshua Morning could barely contain his enthusiasm, because he and Kenneth Hagen had clawed their way up through the ranks of the evangelical ministry together, and he knew Kenneth Hagen’s character to be that of an honest and upright man. Even when he began to hear curious accounts of how Hagen had been near death as a child, only to be visited by an Angel from God who had healed the ailing boy, Joshua could only say that while he could not personally recall his boyhood friend having ever been bed-ridden with a serious illness, that didn’t mean that it hadn’t happened. And if Ken Hagen had attested to it, well sir, he believed it!

Years later, after both Roberts and Hagen had become colossal giants in their fields, the two men poured millions and millions of dollars into the creation of Seminary Institutions where they began to crank out divinity students by the hundreds and by the thousands. By then, Joshua James Morning had long since fallen into the same plight that afflicts many an honest country preacher, in that he was unemployed - a fate which often times confronts the minister who feeds the flock more than they want to eat, per se.

Fate, however, intervened in Joshua Morning’s life in the guise of his gifted son. And, as the rising popularity of Joshua’s son grew he eventually came to the attention of the two aforementioned seminary moguls, both of whom extended a hand to the old “Mossback” Pentecostal preacher by offering full scholarships to his boy, free, of course! But, it was too little, too late, as they say. Because by the time that he had caught the eye of both Roberts and Hagen, Sunday Morning was already a skilled and polished, highly charismatic orator. He was also blessed with a singing voice as rich and as smooth as salt-butter, and to go with it, the seraphic face of a Michelangelo sculpture. Yep, he had all of the tools, or, all of the weapons, depending upon your perspective... and he didn’t need a certificate from the old guard recognizing his gifts to make the masses come weeping and crawling to his feet.

At sixteen, Johnny Sunday Morning became a full fledged traveling Evangelical Minister. And, much to the joy of his never quite accepted father, Johnny Sunday Morning was suddenly preaching to crowds ten times the size of any that the sons of Oral Roberts or Kenneth Hagen had ever seen, both of whom were active in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sunday Morning was a true spirit filled Pentecostal Minister, someone who had succeeded in recapturing the waning, charismatic power which had once been so abundantly seen in the early Pentecostal evangelists, along with their white shirts, suspenders, straw hats and fire and brimstone messages. In truth Johnny Sunday was so extremely old school in his mannerisms and in the heat of his oration, that soon, before he was fully out of puberty, people had begun to stream in from every corner of America to hear him preach the Gospel. Yes sir, on any given day, by the time he was seventeen years old, he had the ability to fill a football stadium to capacity with the multitudinous throngs of his faithful followers. Never once did he not draw at least a hundred thousand souls to his semi-annual revivals, nor did he ever fail to meet and to exceed their every need, in terms of the things that religion can give to a person who is hungry for some measure of spirituality in their life. And, as you can well imagine the collection plates that were passed around at those revivals would go out empty and return piled high with paper money! Enough paper money to fill twenty or thirty wheel-barrows! God is good, especially when he pays this well.

By the time that Joshua James Morning's boy genius had turned thirty-one years of age it was reported that Sunday Morning Ministries was receiving something on the order of fifty million dollars each year, in donations. The Ministries archive of Salvation Records, which reflected the names of all those men and women who had been "saved" at the hands of Reverend Johnny Sunday Morning, served as irrefutable, if mute, testimony to the fact that over a million souls were led, by Sunday, to Jesus, each and every year. Henceforth the expression "Fifty dollars a soul," became the marketing buzz phrase which was so often being heard spoken from the lips of this canny misfit, upon the weary ears of honor. "Yes sir," he would chortle to the crowds of the faithful in his artificially enhanced country boy accent, "For only fifty U.S. dollars you can bring another soul home to Jesus!"

In truth, Sunday was a "Prosperity Preacher," the official title given to this brand of ignoble horror beneath the veil of a custom-cut three piece suit, Rolex watch wearing Christian representative of Jesus. In truth though, what Reverend Sunday Morning did was nothing more and nothing less than the systematic fleecing of the uneducated, the desperate, and the poor. It was a good and noble thing bled dry of every last trace of purity by maiming greed and deformed ungodliness, the sort oftentimes practiced by injurious imposters.

As the years of this maniacal musical sonata played its tune upon the landscape of humanity, Johnny Sunday's fame and fortune abounded and the prosperity of this future progeny was secured for generations to come, an assurance that was paid for by those who could least afford it.

Good folks from many a diverse background, from the poorest of the poor, to the wealthiest of the wealthy would from time to time leave their inheritances to this by now global operation; most often without strings or the need for accountability attached. These benefactors trusted Sunday, secretly convinced that by donating their monies to his organization, that they may also be softening up the almighty, just a little, perhaps just enough to convince him to give them a special afterlife pass, but, who really knows what passes through the minds of some people? All we can say for sure is that one such benefactor, an elderly man of great wealth, decided to disinherit his only child for refusing to follow the narrow, hallowed hallway of their Christian family legacy to his liking and that to avenge her as he might, donated his entire family fortune to our uncurbed anti-hero. But, do not be fooled into thinking that God is not in control of happenings like this, because, no matter how tragic an event such as this appears, in the bands of God, it would become the smoldering tool wielded by Fate to sift the wheat from a sordid field of emetic produce, and summon the velvet bud of character's libertine.

On the very same day that Reverend Sunday was to fly east and affix his signature to a set of legal documents that would in essence transfer the Johnson family fortune into the J. S. M. Ministries Inc. account, he arrived at the Tulsa, Oklahoma airport where his small Cessna 414 six passenger twin engine prop airplane had once sat, there he found in its place not one, but two brand new Cessna Citation X jets, with the J. S. M. M. logos skillfully painted upon each tail fin; a crooked shadow did they cast upon the ground of humanity for certain.

Now my readers, my friend, I cannot give you an accurate cost analysis concerning these toys of excess, because that specific figure can vary by millions of dollars depending on the sorts of bells and whistles you add when you buy your jet. However, in the spirit of passing on a good rumor, I will tell you that I have heard it said that each of these two jets cost something on the order of thirty-five million dollars apiece, cash money. Which makes me wonder if the throngs of good, decent, common folk who sent Johnny Sunday, fifty dollars, of their hard earned money as ransom payment for the salvation of some miscreant's soul, would understand how two shiny new jets were a fair and equitable trade-off for one million four hundred thousand, fifty dollar souls? But, oh well... who can say what folks think.

When he laid his eyes upon these two sleek and elegant wing-heeled beauties, Sunday smiled from ear to ear and then from shoulder to shoulder. He leaned over and gave his smiling financial director a good strong hug and three quick pats on the back, then climbed aboard the closest jet. Once seated within the confines of an exorbitant plushness of a type that not a single one of his working class flock would ever experience, he began to ponder his new and exquisitely beautiful playthings; as the one in which he was riding began to taxi towards the runway. But reality set in and frowning he became more than slightly concerned about the way that these two new jets might affect his image.



"Bob," he said to his financial director, "how are we going to justify this sort of expense to the working folks who fill our coffers with their weekly tithes?"

There was an undercurrent of worry in his voice, because Sunday was truly concerned about some of the do-gooders who had recently begun to question his accountability with - 'God's money!'

"Way ahead of you there, Big Guy," Bob replied as he lifted his expensive leather briefcase, gently placing it upon the burlwood table adjacent to him and his employer.

"The way to handle this type of appropriation is to come right out front and show the people what you've purchased with their... er, with God's money. You must explain that God has willed it to be so. Tell 'em that he came to you in a dream, or something, and ordered you to edify him, or some such nonsense." Bob then lifted his left hand where he studiously inspected his manicure before lightly tugging at his solid gold cufflink, absentmindedly.

"Tell the flock that God wants his true followers to be prosperous like Abraham. And, inform them that, as a result of your own God given prosperity, the Sunday Morning Ministries can now be doing the Lord's work in Tokyo, Japan one day and Europe the next. Tell them that with these two new super jets we can take our Jesus Teams to third world nations on short notice. And that this means that we can bring the Gospel of Jesus to the farthest reaches of the planet like never before, etc." Again he unconsciously tugged at one of his cufflinks as he made a wry face, not unlike the expression of a man whose shorts have ridden a little too high up into the Promised Land. Then he continued.

"The key here is to sell this prosperity angle to the people preemptively. Don't wait for them to notice what you are doing, and then be forced into a defensive posture of having to explain yourself afterwards. Go on the attack, right off the bat!"

"Here," he said, "look at this." Bob reached into his now opened briefcase and pulled out a yellow folder, marked 'CALENDAR'. "I've taken the liberty of printing up a new calendar for the upcoming year. We'll send one out, free of charge, to all of our monthly contributors." The financial director thumbed through the pages of the calendar that he held in his hands.

"Here, in the month of May... look at this."

Reverend Sunday leaned forward in his glove leather seat as he plucked the calendar from the clutches of his mis-creating financial wizard. He glanced at the proffered page and to his amazement saw a stunning, enhanced photo of a Cessna Citation X jet in full flight with his own smiling photograph embossed onto the bottom corner of the page; underneath were quotes from the Bible about God's goodness to those who do God's work. The icing on the cake however, was a piece of scripture taken from the Book of Isaiah, in the Old Testament, printed in bold letters underneath the streaking Citation X jet, which read:

"Delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth." Isaiah 58:14

Reverend Sunday raised his eyes to meet Bob's own flint hard stare. The two men locked gazes and then after a two or three second pause, they both simultaneously burst out laughing. Then an overtone of seriousness returned to capture these two hollow bosomed conspirators, and Sunday said with undisguised praise in his voice, "The calendar idea is brilliant, Bob!"

"How about this, Big Dog," Bob said, as he acknowledged the compliment with a slight nod of his balding head. "I've filled the rest of the calendar months with pictures of you and the members of your family surrounded by examples of God's prosperity. Everything from three-thousand dollar suits to million dollar works of art, and so forth. Then I inserted contrasting photographs of you in Asia and Africa holding children, while spreading the word of Jesus over the entire globe."

The Reverend looked closely at the various pages of the calendar as his financial director exhibited them one by one. He was pleased. After a few minutes they once again fell into silence as they each quietly speculated upon the myriad possibilities of this new "Jesus in Jewelry" direction of his ministry.

I will venture to tell you, my reader, that neither one of them gave any consideration whatsoever, to the fact, that the money they had paid for the shoes upon their feet could have easily fed one of those third-world propaganda children for an entire year. No, that kind of thinking is much too slow for anyone traveling in a brand new Cessna Citation X jet, I imagine.

One hour and twenty-eight minutes after take off, Johnny Sunday Morning and his financial director landed gently at the International Airport of a large northern city, barely enough time to finish a second cup of freshly brewed, twenty dollar a pound, imported Jamaican coffee and a low-fat muffin. 'Tis a hard life, being the vigilant servant of a prosperous God!

Waiting for him with open doors at the Cessna terminal for private aircraft was a beautiful new, black on black, Lincoln Continental Town Car. A stretched limousine would have been pressing up against the envelope, even under the umbrella of this new Prosperity Ministry, but hey, a fellow had to be humble and sacrifice himself, isn't that the sort of nonsense that Jesus really taught? Sunday smiled to himself at the thought.

As they drove towards a predetermined location deep within the tangled guts of the inner-city in which they had landed neither man took notice of the tattered and ragged army of homeless people littering the cityscape. Nor did they take notice of the sad and lean faces of the children loitering on the dirty streets and sidewalks of this real world labyrinth of cobwebbed poverty traps; for they were like you and me in both mind and action, after all, the outcast and the poor and the misfortunate were 'that way' due to flaws in their own basic design, weren't they? Else they'd lift themselves from the clutches of their own personal disaster and they'd do the work that it takes to personally prosper.

The Lincoln Town Car eventually slid to a stop in front of a posh downtown, high-rise building constructed of steel and shiny black glass, one filled to the rafters as they say, with an entire coven of attorneys who were each and everyone bent upon climbing the corporate ladder.

The sun was just now striving to reach its noonday peak and the Reverend glanced appreciatively into the cobalt blue sky as he stepped away from the passenger side of the Lincoln and onto the sidewalk.

Now, you have to realize that this entire Johnson family death-donation thing had become somewhat of a savage 'Media Darling' story up and down the length of the eastern seaboard. Specifically, the media had focused in on the now financially ruined daughter who had been disinherited by her professed mean-spirited and parsimonious father, for no other reason than that she had refused to alter her own lifestyle to conform to the morose ways of a man who had, at the extreme last stages of his life, suddenly become intent on becoming a 'good' Christian; this after a long life of capriciousness. To make matters even more interesting, this daughter who would defy her father and the status quo, was both young and beautiful, and took great delight in telling the members of the press that her father could "Take his money with him to hell, where they could burn together!" It was good media stuff, and she quickly became famous for her stance and as a result of that fame was being courted socially by some of the richest and most eligible bachelors that this world had to offer. The press, like I said, loved it!

And so it was that as Reverend Sunday stepped from the car and lowered his gaze from the vistas of the noonday brightness a storm of proffered microphones were there to greet him. The mob of reporters spat questions into his face from every angle, while others screamed at him to tell them about the money and to give an opinion about the independent minded, beautiful Johnson heir.

Reverend Sunday stood unprepared on the sidewalk and was peppered by a firestorm of lights and a barrage of hostile questions. At first, he was knocked slightly off balance by the sheer ferocity of the onslaught, but then fate intervened in the nondescript guise of a boy of medium height with dark hair and blue eyes, who happened to be passing by and gawking curiously at the scene just as Johnny Sunday emerged from the confines of his Town Car. The boy was accompanied by an old Mexican woman he called 'Grandmother'.

Instinct took over. Reverend Sunday stepped away from the media mob and without so much as single word, diffused the situation by strolling over to the boy and his escort. Sunday turned to face the cameras and giving the lenses his patented "ten-percent tithe" smile, he draped his arm around the boy's reluctant shoulder, thereby turning the media onslaught into a photo-op.

But something unexpected happened at the precise moment that Johnny Sunday Morning's arm made contact with the boy; a large and violent spark of unknown and arcane origin surged through him and time as he knew it stopped dead in its tracks. His vision went cloudy and then as if suddenly looking at life through a dense fog of purple smoke, he saw first hand, the Crucifixion of Christ as portrayed in the New Testament scriptures. He saw the tears running down the leathery cheeks of a sad and aging mother and he saw the stark horror etched into the face

of a young red-headed prostitute who knelt upon the cruel and unforgiving ground at the base of the pitiless thing, holding the pierced and battered body of the one she had loved. Then, rapidly the scene changed and Johnny Sunday now saw himself as a small child sitting on the front porch of their tiny country house, in the arms of his father. He felt the deep and boundless love that this child, that he, had at one time felt for God, and then in a flash the vision and that wondrous feeling were gone, vanished as quick and as utterly as if neither had ever happened. The whole of this startling incident occurred in less than three second's time, as measured by the instruments of man.

Sunday was disrupted from his stunned revelry by the sudden panther-like movement of the boy's grandmother/guardian who stepped forward and pulled her ward from beneath the clutches of this man of ill-cloth. Then, in the language of her indigenous tongue, which Sunday for some unknown reason understood clearly, the old woman said "You felt it! I know you did! Yes! That's right, man of man! Feel your destiny." She then turned from Sunday entirely, clutching the child's hand in hers and led the boy down the street and away from the stench of evil's foul countenance.

"He saw us, even though we were hidden!" the boy whispered in amazement to his Grandmother, as she led him quickly away. She could only nod in the affirmative for she could not understand this callow encounter, any more than the child could.

Bob the financial director, provided much the same service for his startled boss that the old woman had just provided for the boy; he stepped forward and seized Sunday's shoulder and pulled him through the crowd of reporters and into the relative calm of the marble floored lobby of the building. As he was led away, Sunday, unable to speak, felt a stage and persistent vibration race and tingle throughout his body, and a distant yet loud ringing noise resounded in both ears.

With the part of his mind that was still clear and capable of reason, he decided that his vision, though somewhat impaired by whatever the hell it was that he had just experienced, seemed to be sharpening in away and to a degree that he had never before encountered. It was as if he were suddenly dual sighted: for instance, he could see the regular physical world as he had before, through ordinary eyes. Yet, through some unknowable and alien mechanism, he was also suddenly able to peer into that which could only be described as another dimension, like, yet dissimilar, to that of this world. In the face of this discovery he could do naught but stare into the depths of this startling and anachronistic paradox in much the same way that I imagine a crushed and dying mongrel dog might gaze mutely and in bewilderment at the speeding vehicles that wiz and clatter past it on the interstate highway.

Immediately upon their arrival on the penthouse floor of the big office building they were met by a perfectly coiffed and manicured secretary who led them down a plush carpeted and luxuriously decorated hallway and into a large suite of offices, before finally escorting them up to a large and ornately hand carved door, where she tapped her knuckles lightly three times and then demurely excused herself.

Reverend Sunday Morning saw the secretary with his eyes and noted her passage down the hallway, just as any other man would have. However, in addition to the normal things that he saw and heard and smelled and sensed, he also saw and felt and sensed things at a new and super conscious level, that other, normal men could not detect. For instance, he peered into the mind of his Financial Director Bob and he saw him furtively embezzling large quantities of money from the ministry. He also saw and he knew that Bob and Sunday Morning's own wife of some fifteen years, were currently having an affair. In addition, he could feel the ugly and violently malignant cancer nestled deep within Bob's liver, and he knew that it would soon start devouring his Financial Director alive. The man's life cycle was short indeed.

Reverend Sunday was nauseated at the perfidy of Bob's true character, and his heart ached for the love that he had so obviously misplaced in the lying, cheating arms of the woman who would shortly, very shortly, no longer do more than play the public role of his wife; divorce was not an option. Angered by the enormity of the betrayal that he had just suffered, Sunday contemplated the notion of informing Bob that he knew everything, and then to tell the bastard that he had less than a year to live! But, he pushed those thoughts away. That was tomorrow's problem. What was happening to him right now was today's.

With only a brief introduction as a foundation to stand on, the Reverend Sunday somehow intuited that the two attorneys now arrayed in front of him, with voluminous legal folders splayed out on the desk in front of them, did not like him. He also knew that they considered him to be an ungodly man. And a fraud. Sunday glanced into the face of the younger man, knew him to be thirty-two years of age, from Corpus Christi, Texas, and that he adored his wife. A glance at the older man revealed him to be the founder of this law firm, wealthy beyond the imagining of anyone who knew him, a chronic alcoholic, and an abuser of both his wife and adult daughter. A true bastard.

As the two legal experts and his soon to be "ex" Financial Director, Bob, plunged into the business of the legal transaction at hand to wit, the transferal of the Johnson legacy to the Johnny Sunday Morning bank vaults, Reverend Sunday himself tried to come to some sort of terms with this remarkable thing that seemed to be happening to him. He could do little else save marvel at the titanic wellspring of power that he now felt pooling deep within the guts of his mind. From whence had this strange new power come? Why now? To what purpose? To what design? These were the sorts of questions upon which his serpentine reason dwelled. And then, as if quarried from the flanks of some mountain of knowledge his questing mind pulled forth the memory of his recent, startling encounter with the boy. That was it, wasn't it? Somehow, somehow, the boy from the streets below had triggered within him this mangle spontaneous orgy of power, intuition and insight far beyond all human contemplation. He smiled slightly to himself, as he mulled over some of the possibilities that presented themselves.

Sunday was snapped away from the dark closet of his thoughts by the repeated mention of his name. "Mr. Morning, sir - are you alright?" He looked up to see that the elder of the two attorneys was more than slightly dismayed at what he perceived to be Reverend Sunday's lack of attentiveness in regards to the proceedings at hand.

Rot in hell, you drunken bastard, Sunday thought, as he smiled. "Yes, yes, I'm fine." He said with his mouth. "I'm just a little fatigued from the flight out here, I suppose."

"Well, hmmm... as I was saying, it appears that we have somehow inadvertently misplaced the signature page of this document from our files. However, not to worry, I'll have my nephew, John, bring us up another." At that the old lawyer reached across his antique desktop and jabbed a finger at the intercom button on his phone, and bawled harshly into the speaker, "John, bring me the complete Morning Ministry file! And be quick about it!" He let go of the button and winked at those present, as if he had just done something exceedingly clever.

"My nephew will be excited to meet you, Mr. Morning," the man said... with a silent undercurrent of disdain, which Sunday caught with his newly heightened powers of observation. "He is a devotee of your ministry, actually. He watches all of your evangelical broadcasts on TV, and, even has a payroll deduction program set up, so that his ten-percent tithe is taken directly from his paycheck and sent to your organization, weekly." In Sunday's mind he heard the unspoken addendum, "because he's pathetic and weak" even though the attorney hadn't said as much out loud.

After four or five minutes of near silence which was broken by the nervous coughing and shuffling of papers that Bob and the two attorneys fell back upon, as they became disoriented by the curiously flat gaze that Reverend Sunday leveled upon the whole room. Suddenly, a light knock sounded through the heavy mahogany door and then a man named John Clevedence stepped into the room.

Johnny Sunday couldn't help but notice that this new arrival relied very heavily upon two aluminum walking sticks that supported the man's weight as he plowed forward into the office, and into the untrammelled realm of his unexpected destiny. Polio, Sunday thought, as he, like the others in the room watched in unified silence the parade of anachronistic devilment that was John Clevedence's tortured advance. So this is why that old drunk winked at us. That bastard thinks that his nephew's predicament is funny, Sunday thought to himself.

He briefly considered rising from his seat to give the young man a helping hand, but then he realized that the man would resent any offer of assistance that he might offer him. He's proud in a good way, Sunday realized; he sensed him to be a man of character, the type who chose to make his own way through the fetid dungeon of his handicapped existence.

After what seemed an eternity the struggling attorney finally made his way to the front edge of his uncle's massive desk, once there he steadied himself on his aluminum sticks and then handed the file tucked into his underarm over to his uncle. His duty discharged he turned a shaky circle whereupon a seraphic smile leapt onto his

baby-esque face, transforming it into a thing of great beauty. Reverend Sunday looked at the man's face and knew that he was in the presence of a true believer, he intuitively knew that this crippled young man had a heart and mind pure and devoid of all traces of greed and egotism and malice; and though he knew not why, he loved him.

Reverend Sunday extended his hand to grasp the hand that was now being extended to him. As the hands of these two very different sorts of creatures met in that space between them, everyone in the room was startled by a loud SNAP and an electric spark a hundred times bigger and louder than the sort of static spark that can leap from your fingers after you scuff your feet across a certain type of carpet. At that snap Johnny Morning's eyes rolled back into their socket, showing nothing but white, and his body straightened and stiffened like an upright human statue. As convulsions then began to rack his limbs Sunday danced like a marionette dangling from palsied strings. In union John Clevedence's hands flew violently up into the air as if flung upwards by an explosion and then he fell to the floor where he laid twitching and jerking, as one would when seized by an agonizing paroxysm.

At this strange turn of events the others in the room leapt to their stand, yet were too stunned to lend any assistance to the participants of what they now witnessed. Then after a lull of three or four seconds they at once rushed to the side of the fallen invalid, in mind to aid, but as they reached him he stayed them quickly with a sharp and forceful, "No! Do not touch me!"

Silence held the room and slowly the darkness of their ignorant minds began to weave a tapestry contrived of negative threads and hopeless thoughts of a piteous nature. But alas, their mortal eyes would behold a thing born beyond the negativity of this world, for the young esquire squealed, "My legs! They're on fire!" Then he exhorted a wrinkled brow and a broken fingernail grimace.

As if in one movement of the marionette, those present, turned their heads casting their line of sight upon what they now saw to be movement of unknown making beneath the baggy trousers of the Clevedence man. Witnessing this event they eased backwards like children shying away from a midnight closet, and began to shake at the knees and their breath tugged hard at their chests. It would be a long time before they would once again trust their eyes.

The twitching and jerking of the young apprentice's legs returned and he resembled a dying actor in an over exaggerated black and white film. He then began to shake so violently that one of his shoes was shaken loose from his foot and the coins in his pockets vibrated themselves out and onto the floor beside him. First a quarter, then a dime and then four pennies... all heads. Then, his movement stopped as suddenly as it had begun and he lay there upon the floor soaked with sweat and utterly exhausted.

Johnny Sunday now came to himself and knew intuitively that whatever the source of the giant electrical spark which had just knocked poor John Clevedence to the floor had somehow sprung into existence and passed through his own flesh first! He shuddered from head to foot and a lone tear eased free from the corner of his eye and rolled down his cheek. Then, when it could no longer cling to his chin, the tear fell, spent and alone to the floor.

What in God's name was happening to him? From someplace deep inside him, perhaps the same place from whence the arcane spark sprang, an inner voice sounded musically, in tones that could only be described as dulcet and tinkling. And Sunday Morning knew what had just occurred.

"He's been healed," the minister said softly in a monotone voice, as he gestured towards the man that was still lying on the floor. "His affliction has been cured." The three other men in the room swung their gazes to stare at the minister. And then they cast their eyes back down at the young attorney, who had by now sat up and had begun to grope his legs in a highly spirited fashion. The others in attendance knelt next to him for their own closer inspection and each felt renewed brevity gained from John Clevedence's own placid look.

"They ARE healed!" John Clevedence gasped, and then he burst into a ragged gale of laughter and into tears all at the same time. "My legs! My legs are healed!"

John Clevedence's hands flew to the straps that held the metal braces securely to what had once been the wasted and useless flesh of his formerly withered limbs. Then he placed the palms of his hands flat upon the floor and for the first time since he was just a tiny child, he levered himself to his feet! The three non-participant observers could only stare wild-eyed and uncomprehendingly at the proceedings... proceedings which defied all sense of logic and intelligence. They then watched as the youngster named John pranced and gavotted across the hardwood flooring like a newborn gazelle; a fawn enchanted by the discovery of his own motion.



The two lawyers and the financial director then became silent observers to the moment when the healer and the healed finally stood facing one another to make eye contact, each gazing deeply into the other's eyes as if in a vampiric trance. The two men embraced, drawn together by the fact that they were each, in their own way, recipients of the same miracle. The pantomime prophet and the celestial youth clung to one another beneath the stained glass windows of a brick and mortar temple, devoted to the god extravagant commercialism.

After a flurry of congratulatory telephone calls to family members and a hushed round of conspiratorial conversations among the witnesses to this miraculous event, Bob launched into action. In doing so he slipped unnoticed by everyone in the room, save Johnny Sunday who now saw everything, and found another telephone in another office. Immediately he began contacting the offices of the media representatives who were still camped out downstairs awaiting Johnny Morning to reappear and become grist for their sensationalistic mill... but now Bob made sure that a different set of questions, entirely, would be barked out by that pack of frenzied dogs!

Despite the overwhelming incredulity that confronted him at every call, Bob spelled out in great detail what it was that had occurred. He made double sure to point out that the person who had just been "cured" was a devoted follower of Johnny Sunday Morning Ministries, the same Ministries that these news services had so recently been maligning as hypocritical in their reports to the public.

As soon as he sat the telephone receiver in its cradle he reclined at the desk that he had just appropriated; but rather than contemplate the awesome power of the God he purported to represent... which you would logically think he believed to be responsible for the miraculous transformation of John Clevedence's withered limbs into hale and whole ones, he instead pondered the millions and millions of dollars that would begin to pour into the ministries coffers, as a direct result of this crazy stroke of Basque-luck! The actual miracle itself was as meaningless to him as an insect with its wings pinned to a display board. This being the reality of aman long since moved past the point of being able to examine things consciously, and who now swam heedlessly through the deep and empty seas of an utterly dark character, without remorse.

When the lobby elevator returned him to the waiting mob of slavish media puppets whose demeanor had swung 180 degrees, from confrontation to adulation, Reverend Johnny Sunday Morning refused to be interviewed, and shunned the cameras. This was an unexpected curdling of policy for which his financial director Bob was justly furious. However, upon seeing the way that the entire episode played itself out on the evening news, unfurling equally, regardless of the network or station that ran the story as the lead item, Bob relaxed and was forced to concede that his boss was cannier than he had thought. Because, what America saw being paraded across the television screens was a grateful and tearful mother, an astonished family doctor, and then a video portrait of the man who had worked the miracle, pomaying him as being too humble and too self-effacing to even step forward into the limelight and grab acclaim for what he had accomplished. And, this days humility cast heavy doubt upon the whole of what had previously been said, and reported, about this seemingly amazing man; stories that had previously alluded to self seeking wealth and charlatanism, etc., now seemed to suggest that Reverend Sunday was something that none in America had ever seen before, the real thing. A true faith healer of Old Testament renown.

Bob smiled as he thought of all the sheep to be fleeced, and he saw himself as being among them who would do the deed. He knew that he was above the herd; over them. Greater than all of them! He felt that, and with the help of his old pal Johnny Sunday he would be like a reptilian law unto them, a law that they would now be forced to obey! Bob smiled, and his thoughts suddenly turned to a foaming double latte, dusted with cinnamon, and, of course, a large low fat muffin!

## One Year Later

Nowhere is there a building or a structure large enough to contain the enormous throngs of people who flock hungrily to see him, to hear him, to receive his blessing; to receive his healing. As a result he is required to take his un-holy circus to a place of his own somewhere along the outskirts of his home base of Tulsa, Oklahoma, some place where row after row after row of army surplus tents can serve as temporary homes for the pilgrims, someplace where kitchens can be erected and staffed, and medical facilities can be provided, and thousands of

fiberglass boxes can serve as sanitary facilities. Someplace where water can be piped-in or trucked-in free to those poverous.

On the surface one might think that such a place, outfitted in such a manner, geared towards the direction of bringing God to the masses, would be thought of as being a saintly operation of the highest order. But they would be mistaken, because God is not here... only the whoredom and misuse of "His" or "Her" or "Its" holy power, nothing more.

The crowds that find themselves here in this makeshift holy land come from all parts of the globe, some spending their paltry life savings for a desperate chance at a healing for their loved ones, or, more frantically for themselves, oftentimes waiting in the hot sun for that which will, perchance, not even happen. They come, and they suffer in the sun, singing hymns and praying ardently to their paper mache god of insipid intent, that Reverend Sunday might see them, and that he might touch them, and that by seeing them and by touching them that all suffering might cease. In truth though, they are plebeians swarming at the feet of an empty spiritual skeleton which they mistakenly think to be a heavenly soldier clad in gilded amour.

On the outskirts of his tent-city the pitiless sun had long since reached its noonday zenith and now hung like a boulevard Streetlight over a paper thin desert skyline. He stands motionless and his shadow stretches out behind him, forever; paling as it flings itself like a sharpened needle into the far-flung flank of the horizon.

He stands there, statuesque with his hands folded across the small of his back while a hot, searing Oklahoma wind sweeps past him from right to left, leaving a powdering of bone colored dust upon the shoulders of his starched white button-down collared linen shirt, but he cares not, for his mind is fixed upon the ghostly army of lost souls, which he watches milling to and fro about the barren land laid out before him like fugitives from a Christian hellfire. These phantasms are not the finely arrayed and stately looking phantoms of cinematic legend. No sir, these were the teeming, haunted spirits of religious malediction. A legion of naked horribles with fishbone ribs, sickly grey skin and hollow eyes lying dark and fearful in skull like faces; mere shadows of things once human.

It has been a little over a year since he had received the Gift... the Power... the Sight. Yes, it was then, at the mere touch of a child that he had suddenly become what he now is, a Magic Man able to see the invisible, to know the unknowable and to cure the impossibly incurable. Once renowned as just another Pentecostal Evangelist, albeit one suffused with a powerful fire and a brimstone oratory style and a remarkable penchant for amassing great piles of other people's money, he had now become something far different: he had become the Reverend Johnny Sunday Morning, the Savior of the world... the ultimate Miracle Worker. Jesus returned, some said.

His very touch now had the power to bring leaps and shouts to the flesh of even a lifelong paraplegic. His Willpower could drive demons of cancerous intent from the failing organs of even the most desperately ill of patients. He could grant legs to a man who had none, eyes to the fraternaly blind; he could even give life itself to those unfleshed. And, most importantly, with just one withering look of consternation he could bring a hundred thousand sinners to a repentant knee, awash with tears.

He no longer bothered to preach the empty shell game of religion's past. Nor did he deign to perform any overtly religious function or service; for it was no longer necessary that he should hide himself, in all of his glory, behind the tawdry crutch of hellfire fear. The crowds came to him not because he spoke to them of God, as he had so often done in the past, but, they came instead because he exhibited and manifested God Almighty in his power to heal and to perform all manner of miracles.

He stands and watches the vampiric souls of history's past and as he does so he senses the presence of another person coming towards him, long before hearing the soft footprints of the intruder moving cautiously up behind him. He does not need to look for some sort of identification, because he already knows for certain that she is coming, long before sand and shoe bespoke her arrival.

He turns to gaze upon the face of his betrothed, his wife and upon seeing her, discovers that he loves her much, much more now than he ever really did before 'The Change'. But his love is sheathed and set upon a short leash like a tethered hound after the season for hunting is long past. He turns away from her to once again face the unknown.

Though he has never confronted her concerning her indiscretions, she knows that he knows, and the truth has settled between them like a blanket of noxious clouds born from the rank and insidious infection of the loathsome

stench of her betrayal. To her credit though she has tried her very best to reclaim herself from her wanton behavior by being servile and repentant, obedient in her service to this new god that wears her husbands flesh; but he remains cold and unreceptive to her very physical advance, unable is he to rise above her past villainy.

He turns towards her slowly in Napoleonic fashion and their eyes grip together. She blushes quickly, deeply, and against her will. She averts her gaze, surprised at the way the sight of this man, who truth be told, she had once considered to be a bit too plastic, yet, who was now irresistible to her in his power and in the gracefulness of his movements. A burning urge to be possessed by him right there, right then, courses through her body, shaming her. She moves towards him, unconsciously adopting the sort of look that only a fully fledged woman can show to that very special man that she desires. He sees her look, understands it, and his own body aches to feel her touch. However, he restrains himself and holds one arm rigidly out between them like a traffic cop and wills her to be still. And she does.

His gaze penetrates her utterly, her eyes flare open to their fullest potential while her feet become glued to the sand beneath the sole's of her feet. He does something with his mind and she feels her entire body stiffening and arching upward leaving her standing upon the very tips of her toes in silent convulsion. Just at that moment when her kidneys are about to fail her, and her intestines are about to void their contents, he frees her from his mental grasp, his madman's mind, and she feels her spirit freefalling from somewhere up above herself back into the vessel of her body. She is instantly suffused with even more raw passion as a result of such rough treatment, and her need for this man explodes like a bomb inside of her sexual parts. He knows what she is experiencing and grins at her mockingly before he brushes past her and walks away leaving her standing without so much as a word of greeting to salve her remorseful wounds. He moves towards the throngs of people that he knows to be waiting for him on the far side of a nearby hill. Her own eyes, once completely desperate, then utterly inviting, now become deeply and bitterly scornful engorged with the crimson hatred born in injurious reckoning as she watches him moving away from her.

"The venom of such looks." He tosses the words over his shoulder sarcastically.

"Don't you dare quote Shakespeare to me, you pompous bastard!" she hisses with poison dripping from the tone of her voice. He moves on without bothering to acknowledge her response.

He tops the crest of the large Oklahoma hill top ridge as she scurries forward to obtain his side, and having obtained it, casts a plastic smile and tosses debutante waves down at the crowd breathlessly waiting below.

The crowd, who on this particular morning would only number some three or four thousand, became silent as soon as their multitudinous eyes fell upon the Prophet of God, Johnny Sunday Morning. Everything is in place yet he is unable to hear the large generators as they growl to duty off in the distance, nor can he hear the arcing buzzing sound of the stadium lights that illuminate the stage where he stands and orates to the masses. He can though, hear the thoughts of each and every human being whom his eyes might chance to meet; he shakes his head in disbelief.

He steps towards the gathering throng of desperate people and the tightly coiled level of their excitement springs forth to greet him silently yet feverishly; a hideous rose of anticipation blooming.

He moves into his proper place with the sure knowledge that his specially chosen ministerial workers, the men and women who act as his bodyguards and as his minions, have by now completely culled and sifted through this latest batch of worshipers, assuring that those with the ability to make large donations to Sunday Morning Ministries, were positioned close to the front where they could be certain to receive first blessings; and that those who were without the ability to pay generously, well... these were positioned far to the rear, where they could be out of everyone's way.

Reverend Sunday Morning halted his advance in front of a sectioned off area, where a large and opulent Persian Rug had been placed upon the stage and regally sits himself upon a large throne like chair which has been positioned strategically upon the rug for his convenience. He nods to the Chief of his Security Force and the first recipient of his blessings is allowed to step into his presence.

Today, the first to be healed is a seventeen year old boy, who has never before walked, never ran and never stood on his own two feet, unaided. He looks deeply into this boy's joy filled face and he instantly knows all about this child's spinal defect; he also knows about this child's family, and about their fortunes, most of which will be

gladly offered up by this same family for the blessing that this moment will bring to their lives, for the boy is much loved. He stretches forth his right hand and untold hundreds of millions of television viewers draw a breath and then hold it in rapt anticipation as they watch from the confines of their homes and from their offices, from bars and taverns, from windows of stores, from everywhere. They watch as the moment of power gathers like a storm and hovers above this lost god of enshadowed stone, awaiting his grace.

Reverend Sunday's hand mounts the flesh upon the forehead of the bedridden youth and as he touches that child's callow skin, some sort of healing is instantly evident as the boy's body turns completely ridged and his eyes bulge in their sockets, frozen in silent raptos and edged with white. The youth begins to twitch and jerk and shake, made musical by whatever arcane exchange of energy was passing from the Healer to the body of the hopeful youth. Something incredible begins to run through the flesh of the boy's body, something that seems to transform the very flesh and the sinew and the bones of that child's limbs. Then, with a newfound strength that he had never before in his life experienced, the boy clammers up from the contraption that had heretofore contained him and begins examining his fully repaired body, in amazement. Throwing his head back the boy lets go with a yelling sound born of pure and utter joy, then bolts to the side of his tearfully happy parents. As he runs to rejoin his family, the millions and millions of viewers at last release their pent up breath in a collective sigh that could almost be heard around the world, most with tear-filled eyes.

The crowd which had gathered together in the barren scrub hills of Oklahoma to witness Reverend Johnny Sunday Morning in all of his divine glory also gasped, and then began to leap and shout and laugh and stagger in an ecstatic frenzy. The youngster who had just been healed pulls himself away from the frantic hugs and kisses of his mother and father, and he too begins to leap and jump and twirl, until he stumbles and falls laughingly onto the ground; his new spine and his unused legs yet unbalanced and unwieldy.

Sunday can feel the power of his newly given gift pulse and crackle through his body. But today, he feels something new as well, for the first time he feels fatigued and drained. For the first time since receiving his power it is as though some wellspring of power previously held in reserve, is suddenly gone. He had always felt the affect of the transference of power, true, but the act of transference had usually energized and invigorated him, making him feel fully alive, not exhausted and strangely depleted, the way that he now feels. He examines his trembling right hand as the next person anxious to be the recipient of a miracle is being wheeled through the barrier that holds the hopeful, joyous crowd at bay. As he examines his hand, the first faint blush of concern begins to run its fingers through the tangled thatch of his thoughts.

He turns his gaze away from his own hand and in a movement akin to slow motion he lifts his eyes to look unsteadily upon a woman of thirty some years of age. She is heavily made up. A long curly blond wig rests precariously atop her head. Her own eyes shining in hungry anticipation as she gazes straight back into the eyes of Reverend Morning, confident that the same enormous storehouse of money that had provided her with the most expensive wheel chair in the world, would also provide her with a miraculous reprieve from her karmic affliction; a very rare and very fatal form of terminal Melanoma.

Johnny Morning stares into the woman's eyes and knows well that she is the spoiled child of a tyrannical Hollywood movie mogul. That she is the abusive mother of three children, born of three different fathers. That she is a promiscuous alcoholic. He knows that she is a force to be reckoned with in terms of the many political organizations and chaotic faculties that she supports. He knows that she was recently a twenty million dollar donor, to J.S.M.M. He lays his hand upon her and all is normal as his eyes roll back into his head.

He himself was never witness to the actual healing process as he seemed to enter into an involuntarily altered state of consciousness the instant that his hand made contact with the beneficiary recipient of his power. However, as removed as he was from the process, he still somehow knew that a healing process was taking place, because a small piece of him moved into the bodies of the ones who were being healed. As a result of this physical occupancy, this transference of mind, he knew each person that was healed intimately. He knew who was of good chore... and thus deserving of favor. And he knew many whom he instinctively disliked and who were not deserving of that which was being given. But, money talked and bullshit walked... or, well, in this instance, money walked, on newly healed limbs.

At first, when he initially embarked on the healing campaign that he was now engaged in, he would indulge himself by reveling in the antics of the newly healed. Some were downright hilarious in the excessiveness of their booting and hollering. Now though, one year after the 'Power' had first descended upon him, and after having bestowed that power upon thousands of souls from many different countries, things were beginning to change for Johnny Sunday. The fun and the excitement had long since worn completely away from the experience like the knees from a child's favorite play clothes, and he had now become disinterested and detached from the entire proceedings, blunted from all normal feelings, divorced from all normal emotion. He no longer felt joy or elation, the very things that he knew for sure that he should feel when he proffered the valuable gift that had become his to give. No longer was he glad that a transformation and healing was being given to those who were in such dire physical straights. He had become hollow and utterly empty inside, completely devoid of all spiritual substance.

He thought about his spiritual detachment, about the distance that separated him from his new position in life, and while his eyes rolled back in his head he found himself looking skyward searching for some source of freedom and release, release from the man that he had become. But he found it not. For the land about him no longer held any faint traces of attraction for him. Within the rocks he found no aged storehouse of wisdom, within the trees there was no succor and no beauty, and the wind that blew past him carried no scent that could nourish nor remove the stench of that which he had become. The breeze bore aloft no scent of virginal flowers, for the Garden of God, as he knew it, lacked all traces of the fragrance of chastity and he had not the wings of mind with which to rise up and fly away from it.

The next person and the next and the next were brought before him in their sickness and in their supplication. He knew not their number, and he cared not who came broken, nor who departed anew. He knew not the hours that had slipped past him since the moment when he first began to spread his favors upon the bended sword of egregious ransom; but he knew their numbers and the hours to be many.

As if mounted on the back of some fiery steed born of independent and willful nature he felt his mind being suddenly whisked away, leading his thoughts towards memories unbidden, of his mother and father, which only served to remind him of their godliness and goodness and his own lack thereof. He recalled how his loving father had taken full and brazen pride in his early accomplishments, and how his humble mother would sit in the front row pews and weep tears of joy whenever he perchanced to minister or to sing in front of some small backwater congregation that they had been invited to preach at. God! Those were the good times! And he missed them sorely.

But as it ever is in this world of mortal realities those good memories were most assuredly followed close to heel by bad ones and his mind once again shifted of its own accord upon its phantasmal axis, and there upon the screen of his mind's eye he relived the fateful night when his father had shouted at him and cursed him and accused him of being an ungodly hypocrite, and a false sell-out. He heard with vivid clarity his father telling him that he would go to hell if he continued to place mammon ahead of God, and the pain of that truth gripped his innards in an icy fist. The cold iron bell of guilt tolled loudly within him, ringing with absolute authority as he heard his father's last and final words to him "You've lost your soul, son! And the damned pity is, that you don't even know it!" All the power and the light that a man can possess pales before the weight of truth, and Johnny Morning knew this oh so well and he realized that to this very day he was suffering under the dark cloud of a depression that had settled over him the moment that his mother and father had removed themselves from his household, and from his ministry.

Several times over the course of the first few years of their rift he had caught a glimpse of his mother's face, there, among the multitudes that congregated at this Revival Service, or at that Revival Service. But never once did she respond to his invitation during his call for a Public Proclamation of Faith, by coming to the front for prayer. Nor did she hang around long enough to be found by his workers who had orders to bring her to him. She had become like a phantom-faced memory, an echo from another life, and in truth, he was unsure as to the veracity of what his own eyes reported to him concerning seeing her at all. One thing that he was sure of however, was that to this very day he had never once detected his father's face in any hall or church or venue where he had preached.

Oh, it should be reported that Johnny Sunday Morning had tried many a different tactic to repair the damaged relationship estranging him from his father. He often sent both his father and mother gifts for various spurious reasons, such as birthdays, but those offerings had always been returned to him, unopened. When word had reached him that his folks had fallen on desperate financial times, he sent generous amounts of money to help



ease their burden, but, alas that too would be cast back into his face without enunciation. One Christmas morning he had made his way purposefully and with much resolve to their home, only to find that neither of his parents would open the doors of their home to receive him, nor his wife.

One day news arrived that his aging father had begun to pastor a small county church with fewer than twenty farming families in the flock. And upon hearing this Johnny immediately and covertly purchased a small farm in the very same community that his father now presided and placed a family from his own organization onto the farm, instructing them to tithe excessive amounts of capital to his father's church, in an effort to bolster his father's flagging finances. Then, one gorgeous October Sunday morning, Reverend Johnny Morning appeared uninvited at his father's service only to hear his father alter his planned sermon to reflect pointedly upon Christ's teachings regarding God and money. When his father closed the service he used Christ's words to the rich man, who asked what he must do to have eternal life. The son's heart bled as his father's pleading eyes searched his face and quoted, "and Christ said, give away all your possessions and follow me." The entire church congregation hung their heads in disappointment as the young pastor rose from the worn bench where he had been seated and walked out of the building with his eyes cast downward and affixed to the tops of his shoes.

A few months after that event, the Nichols family, whom he had stationed on his farm and commissioned to do his bidding, sent him word that they had truly found God, and that they had accepted Christ at one of his father's services. Due to this conversion, they reported, that they could no longer serve as his agent, but that they would however, pray earnestly for him. Johnny Sunday Morning was filled to the brim with anger and with rage at the sheer audacity of these, these peons! These miserable subordinates who would dare to consider that they were more righteous than he! He then became that much more aggravated at this bewildering set of circumstances, for he truly admired his parents and yearned to find his way back into reconciliation with them. He wondered what they thought of him now, the Miracle Man.

His mind snapped back into the here and the now and his eyes rolled back up into his head at the touch of his hand against some new person's diseased flesh. Although he no longer fell to the ground upon contact with one of these afflicted people, his knees still buckled as though he were surprised by the specter of the revivification itself. After three or four seconds of mind-melding energy transference, his eyes returned to normal, as did his consciousness. Only then, when his wits returned to him did he realize how far his thoughts had drifted out and onto the deep and disturbing waters of boyhood memories. And though no mirror stood before him to show his reflection, he knew full well the insanity of sadness that peered out at what had become the wreckage of his entire world as seen through haunted eyes. Then, as if the power switch that connected to its power source somehow shorted out, he went limp and then crumpled to the Persian carpeted ground, attaining there a position not claimable by a person still possessed by consciousness... and then he tumbled even farther over onto his side, closer to death than life.

# Chapter Four

## The Hospital

When next he awoke, Johnny Sunday Morning found himself in the confines of a private suite within an exclusive hospital. He lifted his head from the bed upon which he now lay and looked at his surroundings with weary eyes, duly noticing the fact that the entire room was filled to ridiculous proportions with cards and flowers sent by legions of well wishers. Then his thoughts revisited the last few seconds of awareness that had been cut short by his collapse, and he intuited what had surely transpired.

He rolled his odd feeling head to take in the left side of the hospital room and his line of sight fell upon something entirely unexpected; sitting there on a chair, with tousled mane and softly purring snore was his discredited wife, looking more akin to a child than a woman. This notion brought a weak smile to his lips.

In that very instant the magic of her maternal instinct caused her to stir uncomfortably beneath the blanket that hid her Rubinesque figure, and then her eyes popped open. She stared directly into his face and without instruction his heart leapt within his chest at the beauty contained within her features. In all his years of life and in all of his travels he had never met another person who possessed her peculiar yellow eyes. She was a lioness... she was his lioness... a 'freak of nature' he had once called her, the rarest of all creatures. The thing was this though, never in all of the many thousands of times that he had seen her, did she look more splendid or more beautiful than she looked, right now!

"What happened?" he asked her in a voice far weaker than he intended.

Without answering she arose from her chair like a dancer, casting off her blanket in an unconscious gesture that was suffused with grandeur and gracefulness, like a toreador. He noticed that her movements were like ballet, the sort of fluid dance that only a woman, a special kind of woman could execute, then she moved to his side where she laid her hand atop his head and said, "You lost consciousness. The doctors say that your collapse was caused by overexertion and that you only need a little rest to be as good as new." She searched his face as she talked, to convince herself that what the doctors had told her was the truth. Then her hand moved across the top of his caressing it like one does the ear of a favorite hound.

Together they talked for an hour before she smiled at him saying, "Johnny, I almost forgot there is someone from the White House here, waiting to see you."

"What do they want from me?" he asked her with a faint trace of trepidation.

"I don't know," she shrugged. "The man said that it was a personal matter, for your ears only."

"Well, have Bob question him and get back to me with a report."

She hesitated for a few seconds and her eyes looked past him as if she had suddenly slid into a trance. Then she snapped to like a soldier and replied, "Bob's no longer with us. I fired him two days ago."

There issued forth among them a long silence while both of their minds fell upon the same basic set of thoughts, no words were spoken and her hand stopped its gentle kneading without direction. He broke the tension by asking, "How long was I unconscious?"

"Three days."

"Three days!" he exploded expending what little strength he could muster in just that one gasp. "How's that possible?"

"The doctor believes that each and every time you have a... a healing session... it bleeds you of some type of internal energy. When you do multiple healings, such as Bo... such as our organization has structured for you recently, it becomes dangerous to your health. Your body simply collapsed in rebellion to what you've been subjecting it to. This was a warning, telling you to slow down."

Their conversation was suddenly broken by the sounds of a large commotion coming from beyond the door of his room. With hand and face gestures, Johnny Morning asked his wife to explain what was happening. She proudly

explained that uncounted thousands upon thousands of people had come swarming onto the grounds of the hospital, and in many instances, even into the hospital interior and that they were holding prayer vigils for him, outside of the building. Also on top of that every news organization in the world had sent teams of reporters and camera crews as well. But not to worry, for she had personally seen to the placement of security crews around the room, nobody would slip through the corridor until he was well enough to receive visitors.

He laid back upon his bed and listened as she gave him a detailed report concerning the circus of events that had swirled around his unconscious form over the course of the past three days... but his mind wasn't on her words, it was fastened upon her, and Bob. He wanted very much to ask her why she had fired him... not that he didn't already know her thoughts, but he just wanted to hear her speak words of passion, and of love, and of devotion to him, he deeply needed to hear her say these things. When she moved on to talk about other things, he rested calm in the realization that the day would come when she would speak those words, if they were meant to be.

# Chapter Five

## The Man From Washington

On the second full day of his recovery the doctors deemed it was acceptable for him to begin receiving a few visitors. As he awaited the arrival of the important personage from Washington, D.C. he strolled cautiously to the window of his hospital suite and waited as his wife drew back the shades. When she did, all he could see from his vantage point high up in the building, was a vast sea of people spilling out across the grounds of the hospice, stretching out into the far horizons. There had to be at least a hundred thousand people out there, possibly far, far more. The swarm was too vast to be absorbed by his tired mind.

Suddenly one of the camera crews from a major news network spied him standing at the window. In a frenzy all of the cameras were focused on him and it was this flurry of activity which alerted the rest of the crowd. All eyes became riveted upon him... upon the man whom they all considered to be a Prophet, a Gift from God, a Holy Child, or some similar term of endearment.

As if by some unspoken cue someone shattered the silence by beginning to sing, and in unison, all of the gathered throng began to pick up the tune and carry it. Soon, a hundred thousand voices gave rise to an a-capello version of Amazing Grace, and the very window separating him from them began to vibrate and to resonate with the sound of their singing. The leaves of the trees in the fifty acre park that surrounded the building where the hospital was located seemed to leap to life, fluttering and dancing on their branches. Even the wind itself ceased its gentle caressing of the Earth, as if listening to their praises. The world will stop its very rotation whenever this many people exhibit love in harmony he thought as he gazed down upon them. Even if that love is misspent on such a vile and errant thing as me, his mind added, darkly.

When the singing stopped he blessed them with the best wave that his physical/emotional state would allow him to give them. And then he went to turn away from the window to retrace his way back to the bed that he suddenly, desperately needed to occupy. But at the last second he recognized a woman, there on the ground below him, as she turned and began to push her way through the crowd, away from him. He knew without a doubt because of the way that her hair fell, and because of her walk, and her mannerisms, just who she was. She, was his mother, his own dear sweet mother. And then she was gone.

A knock fell lightly upon the door. It was a security guard requesting permission to enter; Reverend Sunday waved him in with a gesture of his hand.

The security guard escorted a middle-aged man into the room. He was of average height, with a kind face and a warm smile. The renewed and rejuvenated Reverend Sunday knew instantly just why this man had traveled twelve hundred miles to see him... but, as always he kept it to himself, mind reading only had value if the person kept the fact that he had it from those around him.

"My name is Scott McMillan, Reverend Morning. You can call me Mac." The gentleman from Washington spilled his introduction out in a rapid spill of words that denoted a man who operated on a set and strict time schedule.

"I represent the President of the United States, Mr. Morning, both he and our nation need your assistance, sir."

"Of course, Mac. Anything that I can do. What do you need?" The Healer crossed his arms and waited for the answer that he already knew full well was coming.

The President's man cleared his throat fitfully and subconsciously displayed his nervousness by clenching and unclenching his fist. "The President has a daughter, as you no doubt know. But what you don't know is the fact that the girl is a drug addict. The family has been struggling to help her deal with her, ah, problem, I guess that we could say. Unfortunately, no amount of help or intervention has been able to wean the girl off of the drug. She goes to desperate lengths to obtain it, shaking off the security details that are assigned to guard her, traveling to risky areas of the city to purchase narcotics, and so forth. The truth is, she has become a major political liability to the President."

“A liability?” urged Johnny Morning, interested in hearing how this person would define the tragic set of circumstances that had befallen both the girl and her family in purely political terms.

Unmindful of the fact that he was being baited, Mr. McMillan nodded his head.

“Yes. She has become a major source of instability within the President’s life. And, what affects the President’s life, affects the Party, especially since there is a re-election drive already in full swing. The opposition would only be too happy to capitalize upon the girl’s ah, problem and use it as a wedge issue to try to defeat the President at the polls.” The man shook his head in disgust and muttered, “I tell you that we have tried everything, but nothing seems to work!”

Mr. McMillan lifted his eyes and stared straight into the face of the man who worked miracles on television for the entire world to see. “The President requests that you heal his daughter, sir. He wants you to do whatever you have to... to rid her of her terrible addiction. Will you do that, Mr. Morning? For the President?”

Sunday Morning sauntered over to a small table sitting in one corner of the room and stood statuesque, adding of course to the drama of the situation. He then picked up a pitcher that was sitting atop it and poured himself a glass of fresh squeezed orange juice before holding out the container and offering it to his visitor, silently asking him if he would join him, Mac shook his head to indicate, no.

The Miracle Man took a sip of the sweet nectar and then asked. “Does the President want his daughter healed permanently, or does he just want her cleaned up till after the election?”

To his credit, Scott McMillan stiffened in outrage. “The President wants her healed completely, permanently. I, I only made reference to the election because it is... ah, because it is forthcoming, you see. ... And, ah...” He trailed off, at a loss for words.

Johnny Sunday put the glass of juice to his mouth and drained it in one swallow and then sat the glass down on the table before turning to his guest. He smiled at the man, reassuringly. “Mr. McMillan... Mac. ..tell the President that I understand his situation. And that, yes of course, I’ll do what I can for his daughter.”

“Great!” Scott McMillan exploded. “That’s great! I... ah, I will make all the necessary arrangements. Thank you again, Reverend Morning. And... ah, I hope that you are feeling better, sir!” He then took a moment to peer narrowly at the Healing Man as if ascertaining for himself that the recent collapse and comatose state hadn’t deprived the man of his ability to complete the function that he had just committed to performing. Satisfied with what he saw he smiled again, nodded, and then turned on his heels to attend to the logistics of serving the President.

“Well, goodbye to you too!” Sunday said lightly to the door as it closed on Scott McMillan’s back.



# Chapter Six

## The Presidents Daughter

The Reverend Johnny Morning and his beautiful wife arrived in Washington, DC. via a government operated private jet, and were escorted directly to a long black limousine that was guarded by a quartet of tough looking men in black suits. "Secret Service" Sunday muttered to his wife. She nodded in casual acknowledgement. As Morning was being handed into the limousine he passed by two of the sunglass wearing agents and as he did he read their minds and he read their hearts... he knew them to be assassins, murderers in fact. These men, these security guards were men who would and who had killed innocent men, women, and children. Former C.I.A. operatives who long ago gave up their souls for something as pathetic and as empty as rank and privilege. He also knew that these men were quite prepared to kill him and his wife if someone in authority so much as told them to do so. He deeply regretted not making this journey on his own.

The limo pulled away from the airport, taking an unexpected turn south away from the White House towards Alexandria Virginia, instead. In Virginia they were wheeled directly into a protected parking area at the Pentagon.

The preacher and his wife were escorted through a bewildering maze of doors and elevators and hallways before finally, after what seemed like the better part of an entire hour, arrived at a level far beneath the ground where there were many different plush hotel style suites; their escort stopped in front of room 119. The lead agent knocked on the door and it opened and they were led inside. As soon as they were inside, they could see the opulent expanse of rooms that comprised the secret suite.

"She's in the other room," said the gentleman who had opened the mysterious door. Johnny read his mind and knew him to be a gentlemanly doctor, an extremely scared and nervous one.

"She's also high as a kite. I guess she smuggled that crap in here, stashed up her..." The doctor caught himself in mid-sentence and glanced apologetically at the Reverend and his wife. Then he coughed before continuing, "I checked on her a half hour ago and found her passed out on the bed with this lying on the floor beside her." He held up a syringe with liquid residue still polluting its insides, like feces in a sewer pipe.

"Don't think that there's much chance of her over-dosing, but I'm monitoring her just the same."

Johnny Sunday Morning nodded, then stepped forward and said "I'm Reverend Morning and this is my wife, Teresa Linda. Linda in Spanish means lovely, which is appropriate for her, wouldn't you agree." Even the hardened killers in the room smiled and nodded their heads yes; in this specific instance the appellation was properly placed.

"Oh, I'm sorry. How rude of me! I am Doctor Louis Manganielo." The young doctor extended his hand for a customary introductory handshake, but his hand fell from the empty air after a few awkward seconds of being neglected.

"If I took your hand, something, ah, unexpected might happen, doctor," Reverend Sunday said, unapologetically. All of the men in the room wondered what that something unexpected might be.

"Yes, yes, I understand completely," stammered the doctor.

"I have to admit that I've been watching you on the TV every night. That's quite a gift you have there, Mr. Morning. Let me show you to the girl ." Doctor Manganielo spun on his heels and marched towards a side room. There, Johnny saw the horribly contorted yet maniacally gleeful face of the young woman whom every person living in this great nation would recognize as the seriously troubled youngest daughter of the President of the United States of America.

Much to the young doctor's surprise, his drug-addicted ward wasn't lying comatose upon his bed as he had left her, but was instead seated on the corner of a gilded French Provincial sofa, clad only in a white tee shirt; her legs were drawn up underneath her chin, unabashedly showing her sex for all of the room to see.

“That damn dope causes her to disconnect from all morality,” the doctor told his company, clinically. “She’s not normally this way.” There was a tingle of embarrassment in his voice.

The President’s daughter seemed to be watching them, and yet not, as if the vile knaveries coursing through her blood-stream served as a kind of screening filter. Then as if for their morbid amusement she began to scratch her legs, drawing blood with her nails in a mindless frenzy of self destruction. Sunday and his wife were horrified to see that both of the girl’s legs were torn to ribbons.

“Whenever a person abuses narcotics to the extent that she does, that person’s mind becomes detached from their bodies, and, as you can see, they become oblivious to the harm they can be doing to themselves.” He hesitated, and his eyes fastened onto the young girl seeing her through the same troubled lens that the Minister and his wife were seeing her. “She’s not feeling any of that,” he added, softly.

Linda Morning turned her head in revulsion. “I, I can’t watch this Johnny. I think I’ll go stand in the other room.” She pirouetted and exited as if to stage left and her departure from the room snapped Johnny Morning back into focus; he remembered his mission here in this sinister place. Without further words being spoken he stepped away from the doctor’s side and pulled his coat off, laying it purposefully down upon an antique table next to the divan. He turned his attention once again upon the indignities which this vile narco-demon inflicted itself upon this poor girl. He wondered what she would think of herself and of the ugly display that she was making of herself, if she were to view herself from a perspective of normalcy. He moved to her side.

Reverend Sunday reached out his hand with the intention of touching the young woman on her forehead and as he reached for her she tilted her face upwards and their eyes locked, revealing to him things of unspeakable recognition. Contained within the cold confines of the egregious tragedy that was her life, he saw the true source of her horror; the years of bitter neglect heaped upon her by her cruel and unfeeling father who put his own position and power and prosperity far ahead of the needs of his youngest of two daughters. She had been killed by his neglect. And the crime was murder in the first degree!

The young woman seemed to be amused as she watched this stranger’s hand descending towards her like a three dimensional god to a two dimension cleric. A trace of fear and reluctance crept into her eyes as the hand came yet closer, but still she refrained from pulling away from his touch or from moving. Then contact occurred.

The hand of Reverend Johnny Sunday Morning caressed the fevered brow of the troubled young girl, and as he touched her flesh, things went much as expected. The snapping sound of electricity going wild filled the room. His knees sagged and he nearly lost consciousness. The doctor who thought himself quite prepared to witness a miracle was shocked and set aghast at what he in fact saw... a thing which all of his science and all of his reason counseled him to reject, utterly.

After twenty or thirty seconds of convulsing and gagging, the President’s daughter stopped shaking and opened her completely cloudless and clear eyes, then she blinked several times as if in disbelief. Then she reacted to her own disheveled state. She glanced down and recoiled in shame and horror as she realized that the skimpy t-shirt that she was wearing had ridden high up on her body, exposing her fully, she tugged at her skimpy clothing attempting to pull a certain measure of decency back into her world. Failing to achieve the desired transformation with her t-shirt, she grabbed a pillow from the couch and covered herself with that.

Johnny smiled. Because he watched the girls panicked reaction and saw in them the scared and timid little girl that she was meant to have been.

“It’s alright sweetheart. This man has healed you,” the doctor said in an awestruck tone of voice, because there was no question but that the girl had indeed just been completely cured of her incurable drug addiction. “Your father sent him here to help you... and he did.”

The girl looked back up into Reverend Sunday’s face, searching it for answers to a thousand questions. Then she cut her gaze back to the doctor. “Is my father here?” she asked him with too much hope and yearning for words to contain. When she didn’t see the answer that she wanted in the doctor’s face, she pulled her eyes back to the stranger who had just touched her.

“No sweetheart, no he isn’t,” the doctor told her from the sidelines. “He uh... he had some important issues to discuss with the Secretary of State.” This, as if the young doctor were privy to the President’s agenda for the day, and every person in the room knew him to be lying. The girls face so recently cleansed of all care and woe by the

healing touch of the Minister who performed miracles, suddenly turned to stone as she moved to stare out into the middle distance at nothing.

Johnny Morning turned to the doctor. "Send my wife back in please," he said, perfunctorily. The doctor nodded his head and stepped to obey. When she re-entered the room Reverend Morning stretched out his arms and told the men in the room, "Let's let these two women talk." Linda Morning took one look at the girl hiding behind the pillow with a blank stare and she understood what had just taken place. She encouraged the other's to leave by smiling and nodding at them as she lifted a blanket from the bed. The agents and the doctor filed out of the room as the Reverend's wife wrapped the blanket around the girl's thin shoulders. Then she sat down and took the child into her arms.

Johnny Morning and his wife were returning to the airport for their flight home. But they did not go home alone for they were now three: a false Prophet, a philandering wife and the memory of a heart broken and lonely dope fiend. But life cannot be measured by simple surface reflections of things... only by the hidden things that cannot be seen by mortal eye.

# Chapter Seven

## The Prophet

Within a year of his un-bargained-for encounter with the surly and bereft Reverend Sunday, our hero's life began its inevitable mysterious journey. For the morosely dark thing which swam its way about the sewers of his mother's veins, came like a vile fiend in the night and took away what little had been bequeathed to her. She was thirty years upon this earth.

Her funeral was held the way of all he had ever known; a simple goodbye down inside of a neighbor's basement. After that he knew nothing of where the bodies were taken.

One hot summer day after the routine of their daily work had been completed, he and his grandmother returned by walk to their protected neighborhood, a neighborhood located deep within the bowels of this island composed entirely of cement and steel, crime and fear. Before crossing the barrier of their neighborhood however, his senses snapped to full alert as crisp movement over the left side of the street caught his eye. It was there among the rubble of a condemned two-story building of brick and mortar that a dark haired man with piercing brown eyes, wearing a long black trench coat, knelt in prayer.

The boy sat his gaze upon the wear-led face of the cloaked man and hesitated ever so slightly in his gait. The one called 'Grandmother' circled her arm about the youth's waist and eased him forward. He moved reluctantly, listening as she whispered, "No Mijo, you cannot help that one, for his time has not yet come."

"Yes, Abuelita, I understand. But, he is in so much pain... and full well he knows his error. Is that not enough?"

"For all other things, yes, it is sufficient. But not for the one they call the Wandering Jew." She hesitated and a tear tried unsuccessfully to spring into existence in her eye. But, alas it was not to be set free for she stiffened her jowls and steeled her gaze and looked coldly down the street as an age old drama played itself out before her.

# Chapter Eight

## Christian Hell

He peered all about him only to see nothing but darkness littered with the phantom faces of them that be in utter turmoil. He noted the distorted, exaggerated expressions upon their faces and he knew them to be far beyond all normal reason. Men, women, and children saw he in equal spill and in equal pain. Around each of these unfortunates stood grotesque winged oppressors, though well adorned in vestment garb comprised of precious stones and of gold dug from the depths of many and many a man's grave, they were misshapen figures casting utter darkness unto their own.

The stench of excrement and rotting flesh filled his nostrils with the liquor of human failure, and his mind was led back to the spectacle which played out its gristly tune in front of him. And he was saddened.

He watched these monsters from his hovering place and as he watched them they took note of his presence as well and began to squeal and hiss and gibber amongst themselves. But they took not to flight; neither towards nor in retreat thereof, but stood fast upon the wretched and tormented sands that lay at their feet, watching him from their place, as he did so them, from his.

The anguish in his hybrid heart imploded as he saw there before him, in the crowd, a young boy of about ten years of age racing towards him, gesturing for his help in a manner of absolute despair. He looked upon the lad and their eyes locked together becoming as one. In a spontaneous heartfelt gesture he fell to his knees upon the harsh stone flooring of this pitiless hell and when he did so pain jugged through him causing him to breath in a hard gulp. In an instant his mind became that of the child and the child's mind became like unto his own. He felt as the boy felt and likewise knew that which the boy knew. Then the boy was gone, whisked back into the quivering river of human flesh before him, swept away by the beastly guardians of the nether-world. The boy was one he knew from his own earthly neighborhood.

The multitudes continued to pass before him like a slow flowing river made of flesh and skin and bone. It was as if he himself were an unloving god watching the procession of those condemned to a Christian reckoning. His stomach wrenched and twisted at the sight that unfolded all around him as the young and old alike shuffled past him in their frail and flaccid forms, each and every single one seemingly turning to look at him with tormented and begloomed eyes, eyes embedded deep within fragile husks of brimstone-hued skin. 'Twas a madman's vision, to be sure.

Those consigned to this living hell watched him as feverishly as he watched them. And as they gazed upon him he knew full well each and every one of the observers and he knew all of the misdeeds that were attached, like stains, to the souls that indwelled each watcher; sins of envy, anger, covetousness, gluttony, lust, pride, and slothfulness in all of their guises. The clear water of goodness perverted and polluted by the machinations and murky rubbish of the winged demons who purposefully miscalculate their dosages of fermentation and narcotics. Demons whose bent purpose it is to enslave and to defile that which was designed to be emeritus and full of good purpose... to rule those incapable of ruling themselves.

As the vast naked snake of humanity convulsed and slithered onward, toward a destiny of unknown origins, he caught a glimpse of yet another familiar face from among the teeming multitudes. It was the face of his own sweet mother, held prisoner in the bowls of this gross beast, she, there, before her own son, revealed in all of her shame and nakedness.

At the sight of her his mind went numb and his chest became a prison for a swirling and heavy heart. He tried to move toward her and lend her aid, but it was not to be, for between them stood something unseen yet solid in its makeup; a barrier that was too powerful for him to penetrate. His mother looked at him and he at her, and in the misery of that instant the feathered wings of hope rose up and escaped him, flying irretrievably far away from him, for this truly was a place of endless and uncountable sorrows, sorrows without surcease.



One of the vile beasts that kept sway in this place saw that this woman, his mother, had fallen away from the masses and it sprang forth to encounter her. The demon beast grabbed at her shoulders and threw her to the ground, quickly mounting her in the manner of the foul cur that he was. When it had spilled its noxious seed into her belly it slung her back into the mass of lost and tortured souls as if she were nothing but an animal to be used and then discarded.

From his place he could only watch with hateful eyes as this woman whom he loved was beaten and scratched and bitten and violated by this beastly creature which he knew to be devoid of soul and empty of all virtue. He looked upon the pool of congealing yellowish green semen gathered on the ground where it had spilled from his mother's womb and the elixir of his rage overpowered him and once again he attempted to breach the barrier that separated him from the violator, but alas, it was not to be.

He pounded his fists against the invisible iron which restrained him, and he cursed, and he hated, but in the end he could only fall away from the wall of hopelessness landing prone upon his face like a prostrated sinner in supplication before his justiciary.

A tapping suddenly came upon his shoulder shocking him once again back into the consciousness of his human form. He instinctively rose to a seated position and looked into the face of the woman who had touched him.

"Young Master, come. There has been a terrible accident and a young boy has been trapped. They need all of the men to help dig, because the boy cannot survive for very long, buried beneath the rubble of that old building."

Though he knew the boy had departed from his lifeless body he none the less discarded his bedwrap and followed his grandmother up the stairs which led from the basement room out and into the winking sunlight of early morning. She pointed in the direction of the crowd which had amassed in front of an old building that had finally given way due to old age and neglect. He could easily discern that the top floors had fallen through to the bottom, for ruin was evident everywhere and a thick pall of dust lay upon the ground like the soft white light of a pale moon, or a funeral shroud disturbed here and there by alien footprints of a lost and damned legion marching in all directions, yet progressing in none.

His neighbors dug throughout the day and long into the dark hours of evening before finally locating the battered and blood-ridden body of the boy. The disease of anger gripped tightly at the innards of all who were present as final reality reared its repulsive and scowling head.

In this time and place of mismatched fortune there were no stout hearted fireman no valiant rescue workers, not were there those whose job it was to manage the dead. So it was, on this very night that it would be past the hour when a corpse could be taken for disposal and that this young boy's body would lay cold and still upon an old table made of chrome and metal, sitting silently in the basement of a friend. Only he and he alone, knew of the boy's unforgettable final destiny.

# Chapter Nine

## The Grandmother

He arose at three o'clock in the morning slipping silently from his bed, yet not so silently as to escape her notice.

"Where are you going Mijo?"

"To bring the boy back."

At the sound of those words a deathly silence wafted through the tiny room they shared, lingering there for a handful of seconds. Then like a tangible thing the old one rose up from the hard floor pallet that she had constructed so that she could be close to the boy, even when he was sleeping. She went to her young apprentice who by now had become frightfully proficient in the Magica of her people and the art of the Fallen Angels. She stepped to him and she hugged him fiercely to her chest, holding him tightly with a degree of compassion neither one of them had before felt or expressed.

"You have learned so much, Young Master, but this thing that you intend cannot be. All of us are assigned a life to live and a death to experience commiserate with that life. For you to use Magica to subvert the nuptial dance of the holies, would be harmful and wrong, not only for you, but for the soul of the child as well. I know Mijo, how much you grieve over what you see and hear in this world. But you must take solace in the realization that things are as they are supposed to be."

The boy put his hands upon the thin shoulders of the old woman and he gently pried open a space between them. He gazed into the pools of arcane knowledge which lie, like wells, behind the covering lens of her eyes and he replied, "Grandmother, he was so young! He had yet to meet his mate, to fall in love, to marry, to see the faces of his children. Tell me, where is there justice in that? How can it be proper for this one to perish, while other creatures with a lesser spirits are given long life?"

"Mijo. My son, listen to me. Western Religion is wrong about death. A person does not live one solitary life, only to be given the finality of an unredeemable death and Eternal Judgment. This boy was a vessel, fashioned from the clay of flesh. And that vessel contained a soul that will return to another fleshly vessel. He will be reborn, and he will live life anew, and, perhaps, next time he will have the chance to taste the sorts of experiences that you are saddened by the lack of in his last life."

The boy shook his head. "No, Grandmother. You are wrong about this one. He was a Christian. He was taught that he will experience but this one life, and that he would then confront a Day of Judgment so fiendish in design that none who believe in it are powerful enough to overcome it or to bypass it. Because of this mind-set the boy will not return, but will instead be caught, like an ambered insect, inside of a Hellish realm that was constructed by his beliefs. He will experience that which he was taught to believe... that which his thoughts have created."

"This is not so, Young Master! All have salvation from perdition. It is a gift, from Jesus the Christ. And it is because of his sacrifice that a person's soul is allowed to live and then to relive multiple life-experiences here in this world. It is you who are wrong concerning this boy!"

She patted him lightly on his cheek and then turned away from him to walk to the farthest side of their small room where she knelt and lighted a large white candle which was sitting shadowy beneath an ornately wrought crucifix. She returned her gaze to her now sixteen year old apprentice and was deeply shocked to see that he had begun to glow.

The luminescence of her young ward was completely unlike that which is seen by those who perceive auras; which is the penumbra of light/energy surrounding the periphery of the human body. This glow however came from deep within the boy, making his body semi-transparent.

"I have taught you the Magica of my race. I have taught you to heal, and to see, and to alter the warp and woof and the texture of reality. But I did not teach you this. From whence has it come?" Her voice decreased in volume with each word that she uttered until at the end of the sentence she spoke in a profoundly amazed whisper.

The boy dismissed his beloved Abuelita's astonishment with a wave of his hand. "Sit, Grandmother." He commanded her. "For I have something to say to you." She obeyed.

"Do you remember telling me about the dual nature of God and about the nature of Creation?" The old woman could only nod her head tremulously, mesmerized as she was by the bright light that now blazed from within the figure of this boy who was beginning to appear much, much older than she knew him to be.

"You were correct in your summary... that is up until the time when Lucifer and God conspired to create a New Man and a New Woman. From that point forward, your accounting is skewed... not by any fault of your own; the fault lies within the history that you were taught to believe, the history that all people have been taught to believe." He paused to marshal his thoughts as she nodded once again, for only then did she fully comprehend the complete and true meaning of the words that had been spoken to her by the Holy Mother of Christ, on a hillside, so very long ago.

"In truth," the boy continued, "the first humans, who sprang into existence on this planet due to the evolutionary spark of life brought to fruition by the god of darkness, were deeply flawed creatures. These creatures were composed of the same genetic makeup of the Fallen Angels; thereby creating between the two species the possibility of children who contained both human characteristics and Angelic characteristics, in combination.

"At first, nothing strikingly abnormal other than the size and a markedly increased capacity of intellect appeared in the offspring of this unholy union between the humans and the Fallen Angels. However, as time unfurled, these mutant children began to show signs of serious physical and mental defects, especially in the way that these Human/Angelic hybrids seemed to become psychotically cruel and wicked whenever they had to socially relate with the other inhabitants of this planet.

"Aided by their superior intellects and enhanced abilities these bedlarmite heirs began to wrestle their way into positions of authority over the humans. Having attained positions of authority, these mutated creatures, began to inflict foul play upon ancient man in such large measures that even unto today the human-spirit has never encountered such cruelty.

"This was the time when God and her twin brother enjoined to create the first New Woman and the first New Man. These new humans were like the first earlier humans in all outward appearances, but not alike on the inside, in that these new creatures were composed of an altered genetic makeup.

"They had a DNA-structure that made it impossible for them to reproduce with the Fallen Angels.

"The purpose of the New Man and the New Woman was to terminate the Old Humans, thereby eliminating any potential offspring from the unhallowed mating of Old Human and Fallen Angel. This genocide would eventually bring an end to the despotic cruelty which had been bred into the hybrid-get of that wicked and savage pairing, thus returning Earth to balance and transforming it into a place of natural selection.

"Due to the large numbers of Old Humans who by the time of this New Creation had over-run the planet and populated it thoroughly, God decided to assist New Man and Woman by bringing a flood of gigantic proportion to scrub Old Man and Woman off the face of the earth. However, all is not as history tells it, for the Great Flood did not completely cover the planet as it is taught today. What in fact happened was that only certain areas of land where large populations of Old Humans lived were indeed flooded, thereby killing them. But, in the less populated areas there was no flood. This fact can be ascertained by anyone who chooses to open up a Biblical Concordance and look up the words Earth and World. Those scholars will discover that those two words, in some places in the Bible, are interchangeable and actually only mean the geographic region of the planet that we now know as Palestine and Israel, a common linguistic circumstance, where parochial people's viewed their own small slice of the world of being the most important place in the world, and, in time, as being ALL of the world. So in short, when the Bible states that the world was covered with water, what is truly being said is that the world known to that particular scribe was covered in water. This is how the Mighty Men who are spoken of in the Sixth Chapter of Genesis survived the Great Flood, to be spoken of much later in the Book of Kings.

"After the Great Flood receded much of Old Man was expunged from the planet. And a period of relative calm and tranquility reigned on earth as New Man and New Woman began to reproduce and by doing so, began to erect their own civilizations. But, there still remained the remnants of old humanity, and, although they were much

reduced and slim in numbers, the Fallen Angels seized hold of them and began to breed with them in their haste to reproduce and reclaim their own perverted balance of power.

“As previously mentioned, these hybrids were large and powerful in stature, much like their Angelic parentage. This enormous size, along with its attendant strength and their sharpened mental acuity served to make the children of Old Man and Fallen Angel, formidable warriors, Jesus refers to this fact in the New Testament Book of Luke, when he states, ‘The sons of this world are more astute than the sons of light.’

“Despite their intellectual superiority, the Mighty Men were easy to locate, they literally stood out in a crowd and New Man had little trouble locating the hybrids and overwhelming them by sheer strength and numbers. The resulting massacres are amply recorded throughout the text of the Old Testament.

“Faced with the prospect of losing the only breeding stock left to them, the Fallen Angels devised a plan to protect their ill-gotten ilk from the dark abyss of extinction. The first phase of the scheme involved gathering together all of their offspring and secreting them away in obscure locations far away from prying eyes of the New Humans... then the second step of their nefarious scheme... was to use the powers of Magica to alter the way that the New Humans fed themselves. Specifically, they used their Dark Arts to secretly convey to a select few humans the knowledge of crop cultivation, irrigation, and crop rotation. This new knowledge gave the New Humans the ability to feed their population far in excess of all previous methods. The purpose of passing on this knowledge was simply to trigger an evolutionary increase in both height and weight among New Humans... thereby closing the gap between the size of the average New Human and the size of the average Mighty Man Hybrid.

“Naturally, such a wide-ranging plan took thousands of years to unfurl. But, alas, in these modern times the Mighty Ones are free to walk among us unnoticed, because the average New Human Being is commonly able to grow over six feet tall.” The youth paused in his narration to give his beloved Abuelita a chance to make any comments that she might be inclined to make, but the old woman seemed content to simply sit and stare up into his face with an open and receptive expression of countenance. He smiled at her, and continued talking.

“Average humans grew to a height of five feet one inch in those days, while hybrids grew to an average of six-foot two inches.

“The presence of Mighty Man hybrids among us, here, today, is fodder for another story, on another day. But you do need to understand that the Fallen Angels had a vested interest in keeping their hidden children protected and safe from the genocidal ravages of the marauding New Humans, who were instinctively programmed to hate

hybrids on sight. However, as the centuries flowed past, and as New Man’s population levels grew explosively ever larger and larger, the Fallen Angels were finding it increasingly more difficult to find safe havens for their ill-spawned offspring... who by now had become the Fallen Angels sole source of sexual gratification.

“After much deliberation the Fallen Angels concluded that the safest place on earth to hide their scions was literally under the protective noses of the humans themselves! To accomplish this slight of hand feat, they decided that they would need to use Magica to make their hybrid offspring, too valuable for New Man to kill. In order to do this, the earthbound Angels, began to educate their progeny utilizing all of their superior intellect to train them beyond normal human abilities.

“With their Magica, the Fallen Angels began to create, through their hybrid half-human, half-angelic offspring, inventions of great importance: tools for hunting, tools for farming and tools for war, these were among the gifts which were given by the Angels, to a small cadre of New Humans. These inventions, of course, exalted and magnified the possessors over other New Humans, who were not the beneficiaries of such largess, and this artificial demarcation zone between the “Have’s (the possessors of Angelic Technology) and the Have Not’s,” pushed the possessors into alliance with the Fallen Angels. These allied New Humans agreed to protect and to shelter the Mighty Man hybrids, in exchange for continued access to angelic technology and privilege. The New Humans who aligned themselves with these demonic allegiances were aided by Mighty Man wisdom and intuition, and, in time, they were able to leverage themselves into dynastic positions of dominance, becoming conquerors and rulers over the earliest new human civilizations. This being the best possible and the intended outcome of the initial design laid forth by the Angelics.

“However, contrary to all design and purpose a man named Jacob was born in an obscure land, to a nomadic tribesman and his wife. This man Jacob was a man of notoriously ill-repute, a con-man extraordinaire. At a young age he deceived his dying father and stole his own brother’s inheritance. He then ran away from his family, who despite all of his machinations still loved him, taking his brother’s wealth with him.

“Now, you might think that the Almighty God would have no place for such a liar and such a cheat. That the older of the two brothers, the one who was wronged by the younger brother, and who was magnanimous enough to forgive the younger brother for the wrong that had been done to him, would be the far better selection for any of the Lord’s work that needed to be done. But God Almighty does not pay the slightest bit of attention to the piddling quirks of this person or that person - instead, She/He/It searches for signs and symptoms of the BOLD, and the very rare characteristic known as Willpower. And, so it was in this specific case, having identified the traits that suited her purpose, God reached for and wielded the tool that suited her best.

God observed the cleverness of the Fallen Angels who endeavored to thwart any attempt to prevent cross breeding with humans, by giving power as a reward tactic to those New Humans who would place the arm of protection around the hybrids, representing the last remnants of the old bloodlines. And God realized that she would need to counter this Angelic scheming. With the help of her twin-self, God devised a plan to destroy those Kingdoms and Principalities which had harbored the gigantics... those New Human population centers where an unholy alliance had been struck. But first, before her plan could unfold, God needed a champion among champions. She had to find someone ruthless in nature, yet good at heart. And she found the qualities that she sought, in the body of a rascal named Jacob.

In order for God to empower this man, Jacob, with that which would be needed to accomplish the task of annihilating the giant allied kingdoms, God delivered unto Jacob a secret which was much, much more powerful than mere Magica. It was a name: Israel.

“What made this name so powerful was the fact that it was a potent syllabication composed of the three most holy names ever uttered. The first two letters in the name Israel are, ‘IS’. This was taken from the name of the first mother who’s name was Isis. The second two letters are, ‘RA’. This is the holy name of the creator of life itself, God’s brother Lucifer... or RA as his name is pronounced in the ancient proto-language from which all the modern linguistic constructions of today extend. Finally, the two letter sequence ‘EL’ was taken from the holy name Elohim and added to the word structure by God. When this new word, comprised of three sacred names is vocally vibrated it will neutralize the dark Magica of the Fallen Angels. EL, of course, is the vibratory resonate sound of the holy name of God herself, the Creator of Light.

“The value of the word, the name Israel, was not simply a question of its structural makeup, Isis, Ra and El. Its true power lies in the fact that when it is spoken with proper emphasis on its vibrational properties, the name Israel becomes an effective counter foil against the powers of Angelic Alchemy.

“With the power of this new name, Israel, the chosen champion of God began to conquer the neighboring kingdoms which were under the evil influence of the earthly Angelics and their foul get. However, God’s plan was much grander in scope than merely the wielding of one man, no matter how powerful his new name might be. And, so it was that Israel (Jacob) was gifted with twelve warrior sons. Their names were: Ruben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issacher, Zebulon, Joseph, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher.

“The Fallen Angels watched as the power of the man now named Israel grew upon the lands and upon the New Humans and they became fearful, for God had put a conquering spirit into these men of IS-RA-EL. After many seasons of council, the Fallen Ones contrived a plan whereby they would divide and subsequently control the sons of IS-RA-EL. Through clever manipulation of New Man’s superstitious nature, and in their bounding desire for power, a trait which infected nearly all of the New Humans, the Fallen Angels found the Achilles Heel of the New Man... Superstition.

“Now, in those days spoken of, the land of IS-RA-EL had pressed the edges of its borders, encompassing and overrunning many a foreign principality. This land which they had gained mastery of over, through the course of many a generation, had become an empire unto itself. In fact, this Empire of the Israelites was so vast that it came



to be divided up into twelve sections; each piece, or state actually, being ruled by the descendants of the original twelve sons of Is-Ra-El; said descendants now residing in tribal masses within the boundaries of each parcel of the kingdom. It was within these divisions that the Fallen Angels saw their opportunity.

“The Fallen Ones well remembered how the first humans had dwelt upon the special ‘Touch’ which had befallen the first woman by the hand of her creator. And remembering this superstition, the Angelics found the device that they needed to shatter the potent unity of the Israelites.

“The Angelics disguised their grotesque appearance by use of Magica and began to make themselves known to certain pre-selected Israelites. They showed their veiled-selves to certain New Men who had long been studied, and chosen for their psychic and emotional imbalances. The hidden Angelics purported, to these New Human messengers, to carry communication from the creator of life, to them, his children. With each carefully orchestrated apparition the Fallen Angels began to instruct their chosen ‘Prophets’, and through them, the people of Is-Ra-El, in the ways and mannerisms of proper worship; worship towards the false god that they, the fallen schemers represented. They employed judicious usage of Magica to stage fraudulent examples of power, power they claimed was from God.

“The descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel were so completely taken in by the Angelic ruse that they begin to see themselves as the ‘Chosen Ones’ of the ‘True God’. However, amidst this success arose a counter-balancing logic championed by the women of Israel, who began to cast doubt upon the validity of this god that many of the so called truths which were being disseminated concerning the One God of the Prophets, simply didn’t ring true... especially since it would be markedly unlike the True Creator to be so hateful and so mean spirited and so jealous. These rebellious women believed that the true God would never love one clan or one sect of people above another. And as to the commandment of animal sacrifice, the women of the tribes disputed the words of a god who would forgive the ruthless, the perverted and the selfish, merely because they added the slaughter of animals to their list of doings. It is foolish and childish to believe that God can be appeased with blood and death, they argued.

“The Fallen Angels watched from a distance as these great debates raged on between men of stature and women of authority. And some, concerned that their grand master plan might be thwarted by the gentle senses, took once more to their clever guise.

“And so it was that once again the Fallen Angels became the suppliant masqueraders of purported piety. This time however they explained to the male leaders of the tribes that god was unhappy with them for allowing the women to be their equals. That this transgression had resulted in allowing the women their confederate position, as unbelievers. The new command from god was that woman was to be subservient to the man, and any that resisted this mandate, was to be considered a saboteur and a plague which must be laid to waste.

“Although some of the men reviled and despised these messages, they were fearful to disobey, for this new god was a god of wrath and vengeance. And so it was, that woman - who had long been regarded as every bit the equal to man was removed from the counsels and banished to a place of malediction, cast out by the deformed and fraudulent words of injurious imposters. The balance of New Humanity (of all humanity) had been toppled by the gristled semblance of piety, and in her ashes woman lies buried... for man’s religion had been birthed.

“This new beast, called religion, signaled the arrival of a licentious wickedness that lay heavily upon the yoked shoulders of its followers. For religion has long since proved itself to be a cruel and ungrateful segregator; a vicious savage creature; and a damnable enterprise built upon flesh and flames in equal measure.

“The children of Israel were quickly taught a barbarous industry called faith, fueled by blood sacrifice. And they were taught and taught well, not to intermingle with those New Humans who were possessed of other beliefs or ideologies. This segregation of people; and by extension, of faiths, kept one side or group from discovering the ruse of the other. And in the name of their religion, which had been gifted to them by an act of deception, the Israelites wrought destruction across the width and breadth of their plane of existence. But, they were not alone in taking flight upon this grim-winged lamenter, for the Angels of Darkness followed up their stunning success with the tribes of Is-Ra-El by traveling to every far flung comer of the planet, meting out ill-spawned and libelous religion, after religion, to all New Men and Women who were receptive to such false solace. And, in time, all men and all women of all nations became bedazzled and bloodied and blinded by the consumption of this false and foul fruit.

“And yet, the cool wind of God’s grace blew over the putrid smell of this villainy, and soon enough, Angels of Light began to appear to the minds of men and women alike, bearing a new and true message to aid New Man and New Woman in their struggle against the Fallen Angels. Acting upon explicit instructions from the Twin God, these Angels of Light made themselves manifest in the minds of key individuals and made a valiant effort to bring the truth concerning God to New Man. Alas, in the end though, the best that they could do was to garner enough adherents to keep the Flame of Truth alive and burning, and, by doing so, obtain a divide among the twelve tribes of Israel... with believers of the truth dwelling in small numbers on one side, and the multitudes of deluded non-believers, dwelling on the other side. At best, it would be fair to say that battle lines had been drawn.

“Now, the lead proponent of the Fallen Angel inspired religion among the Israelites was a direct descendant of the Patriarch named Judah. This scion, too, was also named, Judah. And so powerful and so persuasive was this man Judah that forever more the religion that he promulgated would carry his name.

“However, gifted as his oratorical skills were, Judah was unable to convince all of the Israelites to follow him in his religion. And so it was that those members of the other tribes who did accept Judah’s religion divorced themselves from their respective tribes and migrated into his, while those members of the Tribe of Judah who did not share Judah’s belief system abdicated their own tribe and joined one of the others. Those who followed the Religion of Judah became known as Jews.

“And, Grandmother, unknown to most of the Jews who are alive today is the fact that contained within their own Holy Scriptures is the proof of this aspect of my story.”

“What do you mean Mijo?” the old woman asked her ward in the soft-toned accented voice that was indicative of her native language.

“Well,” the boy continued, with an undercurrent of intrigue suddenly slicing through the language that he himself was using. “Did you know that the very first time that the distinctive word ‘Jews’ is used within the context of the Old Testament, it is in the sixteenth chapter of Second Kings. And, in that chapter is a description of how the Tribes of Israel were at war with the Jews over practices which were deemed unworthy of God! In truth, it was a war over religion” the boy said with a slight nod of his head.

“In the end though, religion and the creators of it, the Fallen Angels, won the bloody struggle. And verity in its pristine and alabaster hued nakedness was spitted and lifted high upon the pikes of ignorance and dysfunction.”

The boy gleamed brighter, and smiled down upon his Abuelita, then continued “However, before all hope was wrenched away from reach, the Twin God, caused the Kingdom of Babylon to rise up and into power.

“With the help of the God Twin, the Babylonian Empire rose up from the dust of the Fertile Crescent and became the conqueror of all twelve of the tribes of the Israelites, including the miscreant religionists. As a result of this conquest the Is-Ra-El-ites were carted away into slavery, thereby quelling for a time the raging fires of their religion. But, it must be said that the Jews have always been possessed of an utterly uncurbed morality, and though misled, they remained firmly fettered to the hollow bosom of their belief in religion. An admirable quality and a pervasive one. Thus with swift wings, certain of the more charismatic Jews clambered their way up to positions of prominence in Babylonian society, even up from the depths of the slave-pits.

“In order to spur the steed of spiritual warfare to the next level of conflict, the Fallen Daemons who were once Angels, caused by way of Magica, the Babylonian king to become sympathetic to the religious arguments of the religionists.

“Under the now sympathetic ruler, the religionists, the believers in the thing called religion, were released from captivity and were allowed to return to their ancestral homelands... where they soon fell to the task of building a stone and mortar temple crafted in the Babylonian style, which they dedicated to their god called religion.

“The Babylonians offered solace to any of the Is-Ra-El-ites who would assist with this multitudinous adventure, but only the descendants of the patriarch Benjamin chose the slavish bondage of worship over the actual bondage of physical servitude and joined the Judaic’s. The tribes were now split this way: Two tribes for religion; these were set free. Ten tribes of non-subscribers; who were retained in captivity by the Babylonians.

“As God can in no way be conjugal with the wiles of deception, another kingdom was given life and charged with the duty of destroying the Babylonian Empire, thereby physically releasing the surviving members of the original ten tribes of Is-Ra-El from captivity.

“Faced with fulminous numbers a decision had to be made: one, to return to their homelands and face sure death at the hands of the capricious religionists. Or two, seek a new homeland somewhere far from the tyranny of religion. They chose the second option and began to move westward, as the Sun goes.

“Today, these ten ‘lost’ tribes can be found dwelling in modern day Europe and in the Americas, where they have since dissipated.

“The Religion of the Jews remained in the Middle East and grew, becoming increasingly more and more powerful eventually over spilling its boundaries and transforming itself into other religions such as Christianity and Islam. Regardless of what it has grown to be called though, one thing is still as true today as it was in the days when religion first seized hold of New Humanity: it is involved in the practice of control and segregation, and is ever ready to lift to its blood-besmirched lips the ragged horn of war.

“And though most religionists themselves are men and women of good intention, and are completely innocent of the wrong doings that lay at the feet of the Beast that they worship, this cleanliness in no way exonerates them, for God is all seeing. And so the question alas arises: how to wrestle victory from the grasp of malefaction?

“After much contemplation, the God Twin concluded that the only way to win victory was to appeal themselves unto our senses by coming to earth and speaking the truth concerning creation for all of New Humanity to hear. But how can Light be in the presence of Darkness without destroying it? This is the question at hand.” Thus spake the ancient form now standing in front of the old Abuelita hidden in the guise of the illuminated shell of a sixteen year old boy.

“He... he came as a man?” The old woman said with tremulous uncertainty. The boy nodded.

“Can you imagine a room totally devoid of light, Grandmother? Well, if you wanted to bring a lighted candle into such a room, without disturbing the darkness what would you do?”

“I... I don’t know, Mijito. It would seem to be impossible.”

“Yes, Grandmother, you are right. It would seem impossible... unless you first enclosed that light within the confines of a seamless, solid, absolutely opaque container. And that is exactly what God did. She placed a part of her own essence into the body of a human being and she came to earth as the man we have grown to call Jesus. But do you know why God came to earth, Grandmother?”

The old woman shrugged her shoulders in response to the question, and then she answered, “To bring salvation to the world.”

“No Grandmother. Salvation is life. And life is a freely given gift of creation; it is an automatic reaction to the action of love. And, all of humanity will continue to partake from the table of God’s love, be he vile in nature or virtuous in deed... for God so loved the world.

“In truth grandmother, God came to earth in the body of a man called Jesus not to bring that which is already freely given, but to thwart religion. If you were to read the four Gospels which contain the recorded life and words of Jesus, it would be plain to see his intentions, for his deeds and actions were all designed to proclaim the viperous ways of religion false, for all to see.

“Jesus ferociously attacked the religious system by teaching an alternative message, one of eternal and universal love. He attacked the tradition of oppressing women by treating women as equals. And, in his parable of the Good Samaritan, he proclaimed that New Humans of mixed nationality were every single bit as righteous in the eyes of God as the religionist was.

“Though the Romans were usurpers of his people never once did he condemn them, only religion did he find favor to attack. For Jesus knew that the fleshed soldier with steeled sinew, was no threat, compared to the crooked figure of a religion which dealt in famine, sword and fire. He knew full well the dangerous hounds lying pavilioned in the contagious dust of piety. This falsity alone he found objectionable.

“Jesus spoke of truth and of honesty. He taught that God was not to be found in golden temples erected upon the backs of men, but that God could be found WITHIN. To Jesus, knowing the truth about ‘self-realization’ was a nobler asset than mere might and compassion. He taught that if one desired to please God, they must first place to the side all of the thoughts and the ways of this world, of this religious world, and that they must follow him by sharing his example, which was to love thy God unconditionally.

"Twas a humble message, grandmother," the boy said with a sigh of disappointment. "But, in the end, all that this God-Man could do was watch with idle hands as those who were in league with religion nailed him to wood amidst the horrid stench of their hallucinatory righteousness. And, as he hanged there, on that wood, with ribs showing like fish bones and eyes horrid like cracked red clay plates, never once did he call down vengeance and ruin upon the spiritual dwarves who had brought about his demise. No grandmother. With flies walking across his face uncontested, with pain flushing his body clean of all other feelings, he looked down upon the emptiness contained within the eyes of those who were gathered there before him, and he loved them in spite of their blood-stained alter stones. And because he loved the unlovable, his teachings are still here with us today... although they are not always found where one might expect."

The old woman sitting on the floor at his feet suddenly looked her age as the candle-light danced agilely upon her face. But, in her eyes, one could see the love and the marvel that she held in her heart as she responded to the pleasant and gently uncurbed plainness, with which the boy told her this story. She saw very clearly the sheathed saber of utter truth as it came to her from this young ghost of a god standing there, before her.

Finally, when he had completed his tale, she asked him "Who are you?"

"Whom do you say I am?" He replied.

She hesitated as though afraid to answer, and then she stated firmly, "I think that you are the Messiah, the Christ... God incarnate."

A slow smile walked across the lips of his mouth unbidden. And then he nodded a simple affirmative. "This knowledge did not come to you of your own accord, grandmother, but from the Holy Spirit, which shadows all those with an abundance of love in their hearts. Because of this, I acknowledge that you know me, that the Angels of Light speak through you. And I will reward you with the Keys to the Kingdom." At that he knelt quickly and touched his Abuelita lightly on the spot where her heart hid. An explosion erupted in front of her eyes and silent lightning spent its energy sheetwise through her body. A gathering darkness formed in lieu of her vision, and a cool breeze set her hair to lashing.

Now formed land and sea; and creature; and crawling thing; this she witnessed with whatever sense of sight now made itself available to her. She stood upon a vast plain where there walked no soul before her and she gazed upon the undisturbed beauty and tranquility of a sunrise looming beyond an expanse of thin, black, spine-shaped mountains. Without warning, a woman and then a man arose from the dirt that lay at her feet, and she knew this to be the creation of the New Humans.

With transgressor eyes and haunted face she watched as the Spiritual War between Good and Evil raged throughout the length and the breadth of histories past. She watched the bitter struggle as false truth is told to Man by the fallen creatures, and how this evil impacted itself mightily upon the landscape and she saw how, in the end, recorded history had been misshapened and altered, transformed into something altogether different from reality, by the corrosive influence of demonic mis-truths. And she felt the agonies of the uncounted billions of oppressed and tormented souls whose lives were mangled and destroyed by deception. The old woman felt a dread within her soul and her lips twitched and her body jerked in sympathetic reaction.

She observed the entire life and death of the Christ, and then she witnessed the cult of personality that the Fallen Angels caused to be erected upon his death, and she saw how another edifice of empty religion was erected upon his name. Door upon door upon door stood open in front of her and all knowledge flowed into her in a one second span of mankind's time. Then she slumped where she sat and died the death of a Saint, for her life-wish had been utterly fulfilled.

The young god incarnate began to laugh and in his laughter there was the sensation of pure joy, for he knew well the pleasures of the afterlife that awaited his beloved Abuelita. And he raised his arms high into the air and commanded, "Take this one with you!"

As if obedient to his voice a light suddenly appeared from the North, and from the South and from the East, and from the West converging upon the space occupied by the withered body of the old woman. The corpse then began to shift and to move in place beneath the skin like a kitten scurrying beneath a blanket.

As if pulled to its feet by arcane strings, the body of the old woman rose to stand before him, however the body was not now as it was before; Abuelita was completely transformed, changed into the young and beautiful woman

she had once been when she had lived in her prime. In a gesture born of love, the once old, now young woman, once dead, now alive creature, touched her heart and then reached out to touch his. Then she was gone and the tiny room was once again lighted by nothing more than just a single white candle.

He stood silent and still for a few minutes as he contemplated the small room that encompassed him. Then he turned and began to climb the small set of stairs leading to the streets, with purposeful eyes. He stopped at the top step and turned one more time to view the room which had been his home, and his school, and the place that he had loved for so many years. And he was saddened by the knowledge that he would not again see it.

As he entered the house where the body of the young boy he had witnessed in Purgatory lay cold, he was confronted by the boy's grieving mother. She looked to him with a curious sadness; he looked upon her with a sorrowful knowing.

"Do not worry little mother... The boy only sleeps," he said this to her with such conviction that she could in no way object as he made his way across the room to the table where the boy's battered and mangled corpse lay, stiffening. The mother of the dead child watched as this other boy - a child of sixteen - clothed in hand-me-down jeans and worn shoes raised his hands into the air and gave thanks to God. And she watched as he walked calmly to the body of the child, taking the child's left hand into his own saying "Arise, young squire. Thy mother awaits thee." And she wept as the her son obeyed.



# Book Two

## The Judas Chronicles



# Chapter One

In the language of the indigenous peoples who inhabited the area around it, it was called "The Press." However, it was called "The Garden" by those who worked and lived in the olive groves surrounding this small, tranquil piece of open ground near the Kidron Valley.

This garden was a common gathering place for a small but very active confederacy of men and women who practiced a form of God worship very much frowned upon by the leaders of the religious hierarchy of the day. So misunderstood was this group, that their followers and adherents were ridiculed and ostracized for the choices they made concerning God, and history will show that within a few short years of this very night, that these same men and women would be hunted like wild dogs; beaten, tortured and treated like the vilest sorts of criminals, for those beliefs. In many instances these men and women would be subjected to murder in the most heinous of ways that the morbid minds of man could conceive in their zeal to force these spiritualists to confess to the sin of loving God in a style, and in a manner which was deemed to be objectionable to the prevalent religion of the day.

On this particular evening however, it was pleasantly cool in The Garden. A brisk southern breeze fluttered the leaves of the local palm tree's, keeping the always annoying flies at bay; which was a relief, as they were a plague throughout this bountiful land, and a source of constant irritation to the dwellers of this ancient and otherwise beautiful place.

As if to forever identify a night in which destiny would bare her long fierce fangs, the moon stood close to the edge of the far horizon waxed to absolute fullness, engorged blood-red, and seemingly bigger than anyone could ever have remembered seeing. 'Twas a rare sight indeed, befitting this rarest of nights.

As the thirty-nine gathered, an observer would be quick to note, that all but thirteen of these outcast and outlawed worshippers were women... who ranged in age from their early teens, to crones so old as to barely be mobile. Though most of those gathered would, under normal circumstances, be fast asleep at this 'The Witching Hour', tonight was so exceptional, that even the most aged among them was far too excited to even begin thinking about something as mundane as sleep... because, tonight was chosen for initiation; a night destined for deep etching into the high stones of eternity.

The thirty-nine, formed a large circle, whereupon, their two leaders entered the center accompanied by the one chosen for initiation, he stood between them.

The second in command of this outlaw band, was a woman of middle age, dressed in a slight shift common of the times, beige in color which showed the fullness of her figure in ghostly hue and feminine enchantment. The Master himself was of prime age, handsome of face and solid of body. His features revealed a deep-seated storehouse of wisdom, which spoke volumes to any who per chanced to meet him, even if no words were exchanged. However, tonight's gathering was not about them, but about the other, for he was about to be initiated into the coven, becoming a full member of the congregation. A congregation that would, upon accepting the Initiate into its ranks, finally number forty strong, signaling the beginning of the most brutal, and the most telling war this planet would ever experience: The long foretold war between Light and Darkness.

The woman in the center of the circle began to sing in a soft angelic voice a song older than time as we know it, signaling to the others present that night, that the ceremony had begun, a signal for them to adjoin their minds together with her own, and to concentrate fully upon the task at hand.

When all was silent save the rustling of the palm-fronds and the trembling leaves in the olive trees, the Master lifted his hands up from his sides where he then crossed his arms against his chest, making the sign of an "X". He then raised his arms skyward to form a "Y" sign. Then he lower his arms to shoulder height making a "T" sign, before dropping them once again to his sides. With a voice that rolled majestically from him like thunder, he then broke the silence and invoked the Holy Spirit of God almighty.

Instantly, at his call, the air above the thirty-nine began to stir, to churn, to swirl and to encircle them, as if the wind itself were intent upon touching and caressing each member of the group in turn.

A small, incandescent flashing comprised of tiny motes and beams of light winked on and off, and then grew steady above the group. Soft, glowing lights appeared seemingly from out of nowhere and began to twirl in a solar-wise direction in complete unison with the living, thinking, already active spirit of the air.

The Master looked skyward and into the eye of the bluish-white light which continued to blaze and to intensify in the atmosphere just above their assembled heads. As he looked upward, the rest of the congregation did exactly the opposite by dropping their heads and pressing their chins to their chests, together they began to intone an ancient phrase, which is unpronounced and utterly untranslatable into any of today's modern languages.

Acknowledging his cue, the young man inside of the now rhythmically chanting circle rose to his feet, as he did so, he let slip from his slender torso his robe, and it fell in a pool around his ankles revealing him naked.

The young man crossed his arms and began to repeat the same X, Y, T, motions that his Master had earlier traced into the air, all the while repeating the holy name that was appropriate for each esoteric gesture. With a voice that seemed to resonate with the sweet honey-dripping sound of humility, which is the surest sign of one who stands in the presence of God, the young man seemed to almost sing, almost cry, as he lifted his voice heavenward and shouted. "Father, see me as I am... increase my love for thee, that I might better serve thee day to day. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, oh lord, my strength and my redeemer."

That which had been evoked increased in presence, and as they felt it's presence increase, the men and women, enjoined in the circle, began to sing an ancient song of praise in a chanting, yet lilting unified voice that flowed out and into the night in a resonant harmony like the buzzing of bee's. "Hue... Hue... Hue... Hue."

At this synchronizing of tonal-vibration and the lifting skyward of the holy names, the wind swirling above them stopped moving instantly, as though responding to a command. The light however, which had illumed them from above, continued to swirl about and to circle above them, turning in ever tightening spirals, until finally stopping above the head of the young initiate, where it came together in a brilliant white point. This point then plunged downward, leaping into the young man like the tip of a spear, illuminating his entire body seemingly from the inside out. At this before seen miracle, the vocal worship ceased and the midnight darkness reclaimed its dominance, except for the three small fires that had been set at the one hundred and twenty degree points around the circle.

After a brief silence the Master smiled and looking at the young man said, "Mark, what you have seen and experienced so far tonight, cannot be told to others. Yet, I tell you now, that you will write our story, and the story you will write shall be known throughout the world for generations upon generations.

"In this book, the only thing that can be recorded of what you have learned, and seen, will be those things that the infants and small children in God can digest. The other things you have been taught cannot be written but must instead be taught individually, from adept to adept, on a one on one personal basis, lest the secret of these powers fall into the hands of our enemies. Do not cry over what will happen here tonight, for my Father, who lives in the heaven within us, preordains it. As I will it, so shall it be." Silence descended upon this small gathering after the Masters words were spoken, save for the sound of the universe moving.

The Master stretched out his arms at shoulder height and spoke to the whole of his followers. "Let us give thanks to our Lord." At his instruction, the forty assembled there closed their eyes and rolled their orbs upwards in their sockets, to that place where all vision exists, between the eyebrows, and began once again to hum and chant "huum, huuum, huuuuuuum.

This elongated sound was just that, a sound, with no word value attached to it, its value lay in the vibratory frequency at which the sound is resonated, and in the way that that vibratory frequency is felt within the spirit of each individual practitioner.

The vibratory link was now forged, connecting the adapts with all other Godly things... with the rocks and tree's and sky and universe. In response, the Masters face took on the appearance of someone in the throws of pure ecstasy, like a Bernini sculpture, as that contact with the Holy Spirit consumed him. Then as if by some surreptitious force of foresight, a thing supernatural and super-horrible made itself known via the body of the master. With arms outstretched, the Master's body became rigid and immobilized, then frozen into that position. An unimaginably sharp pain burned itself into the palms of his outstretched hands, first one hand and then the

other. Blood leapt from the palms of both hands and splattered onto the ground, marking out two Aramaic numeral sixes, one to the left of him and one to the right of him.

With startled eye's the Master looked down upon the blood-shaped sign of his destiny laying there in prophetic wickedness upon the sand covered ground making up the floor of the Garden beneath his feet. The monstrous implication of the sign numbed his mind, leaving him slack jawed, thereby allowing a stream of spittle to make its way from his contorted mouth, where it then hung from the strands of his beard, making him look mindless.

The others gathered there that fateful day stood and watched in horror with shock frozen stares, like witnesses to some calamity carved from mute stone.

The moon's red hue peeked over the top of the nearby tree's seemingly matching the crimson spill of the Master's blood as it lay upon the ground before him, and an eerie dance of rose-tinted light began to flicker and shimmy in the space separating him from them. As the red light danced, the Master's eyes wrinkled and drew up beneath the incessant pain, like the flesh of someone martyred by fire.

He, The Master, stood frozen before his disciples like a puppet imitating the future crucifixion. Pain moved from his bleeding palms onto his back where a series of welts the thickness of a man's thumb appeared criss-cross there, resembling wounds from a bull whip as blood welled up to the surface of his skin, staining his garment. So painful and so incongruous was the new strappado that it temporarily blinded his vision, yet it went unobserved by all save one female within the circle.

The forty, frozen in terror with eye's affixed, startled in unison as their Master's voice found its way up from the cavern of his throat and croaked in a terrified plea to heaven's unknown. "O Father! I beg of you, please! Take this cup from me." Unknown to the others, their Master had only just then received the complete knowledge of the circumstances concerning his future demise, only then did he understand the full enormity of the suffering that was in store for him. And even though this knowledge staggered his spirit, he quickly regained his composure and the tone of his voice became transformed into one of willing resignation, he lowered his face and cried out, "Not my will, but thine, Lord." At these words a final spear like lance of pain thrust itself upward and through the flesh of his feet causing a rope of blood to erupt from these new wounds, splashing out onto the indifferent ground, forming the third numeral six in the dust between the other two... completing a misunderstood prophesy that was more than four thousand years old.

At the end of this stigmatic display, his pain and his wounds left him as though having never existed, and his arms abruptly thawed falling enviably downward to his sides. At that exact moment came the muffled sounds of weapons clanking, and of footsteps thudding on the dry ground of the Garden.

The Masters voice now renewed, suffused with wisdom and with a new understanding of his destiny, stated flatly, "It is finished." As soon as he uttered those words, soldiers bearing arms appeared from out of the darkness stained with the sickening colors of malignant intent.

After witnessing the strange vampiric theater that had been played out before them, and then being startled by the anachronistic appearance of such grim faced men obviously in the service of fiends, many of the men and women gathered there that night lost their courage and bolted in hurried and panicked fashion, abandoning their Master and fulfilling another part of the prophesy. The young man of recent exaltation also ran from that place naked, with the exception of a small swath of cloth that girded his loins. Only eleven were stalwart and these stood fast, surrounding their Master and his Priestess willingly, even should they encounter death.

The two opposing sides stood with but a narrow waste of empty ground separating them. One man stepped forward through the ranks of soldiers and crossed the empty ground, moving to confront the man they called Master. This other man stopped within arms reach of the one he loved, and leaning forward gathered the Master close to him in a fierce embrace. With obvious affection, he kissed the man that he loved fully upon his lips.

"Must you betray me with a kiss?" the Master whispered, sadly. At the sound of those words one of the disciples, who had remained steadfast, reached into the secret confines of his cloak producing from there a short, sharp sword. With a yell and a leap, he flung himself onto the person of the demonic religionist who oversaw this fell party of cruelty. However, the man's sword was unpracticed and his aim was diverted by anxiety and fear. As a result he missed his intended deathblow, succeeding only in lapping off the man's ear, barely wounding him who had come to do evil's rancid beckoning.

Seeing this disobedience to a divine purpose that his follower could not be expected to comprehend, the Master, cast his thoughts out into the ether - and with his mind only, caused time as we know it to hang suspended within the Garden. Everything stopped, all of the participants in this epic drama became suspended in their tracks, completely; even to the point that the severed car which his disciple had just hacked from its tethers, hung motionless in thin air. The Master alone was unaffected by this suspension of time and using this freedom, he turned his attention once more to his betrayer and returned his brotherly kiss, then whispered into the ear of the man who still held him in his arms. "The path you have chosen is a difficult one. May God guide you and be with you."

The Master then stepped from the grasp of his friend and moved directly into arms reach of the injured soldier. He gazed into the face of the old soldier and without condemnation, placed his hand upon the man's wound, returning the savaged flesh to its pristine condition.

He next moved to confront the face of his errant follower, whom he called Peter. Flexing his willpower he released his hold on time, however, before any of them could react, he stilled their minds, causing them all to become docile. He then instructed Peter to sheath his weapon, and he did. Then the one called Jesus was arrested without incident and led from that place.

After the Nazarene's arrest those who loved him the most, followed him and his captors to the place of the High Council. Trailing behind at an undetectable distance was Judas, The Betrayer.

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The Nazarene was taken into the city of Jerusalem to receive his courtroom destiny. As he progressed forward, toward that foul destiny, Judas worked his own way as close to the inner-sanctum as a man of his stature was able to get, that being the last wall before the inner chamber, which was reserved only for the council priests.

The soldiers led his Master into the center area of the council chambers, a place that allowed Judas to view the entire procedure from his desperate vantage point. Suddenly Judas cackled and began to laugh like a raving madman, so certain was he that the Messiah would swiftly tire of this hypocrisy and well-up his supernatural powers and smite the entire evil brood. However, to his shock and horror, Judas soon came to realize that he would not.

After much discussion Jesus was pushed, pummeled, and kicked away from the clutches of the Religious Council, where he was taken into the audience of the Fifth Roman Governor of Judea, a man named Pontius Pilate.

As Jesus was led away to the court of Pilate, Judas again followed, convinced now more than ever that the unbridled wrath of his Master would soon find existence, here, within the clutches of the tyrannous Roman invaders. This made perfect sense to him, now that he thought about it. Here in this Roman stronghold was the perfect place for his Master to reveal himself in all his power and glory. In fact, in one single wave of his hand he could destroy the enemies of God and cast from his people the yoke of oppression. Then the inspired populace would rise up and declare his beloved Master, Jesus bar Joseph - King of all Israel.

However, much to his chagrin, the Roman soldiers took his bearded Master from the confines of the Governor's Palace and out into the courtyard, where they beat him, scourged him, and spat upon him. They cursed him, and mocked him and laughed at him. As Judas watched with utter horror his hopes all but faded away, and his mind became weary and lost within the shadowed darkness of his own agony.

Pushed into madness by the terrible weight of the realization of that which he had brought like hailstones down upon his Master, Judas took flight, desperately racing back and into the presence of the seventy Jewish Elders, the same one's who had sent his Master to the Roman Curate.

These were known as the Sanhedrin and they ruled Jewish society, in part, by claiming to be representatives of God on earth. These men, for no women were allowed, were proud of the ritualistic way in which they lived their lives, and rightfully so, because for the most part they were men of honor, doing, as in the case of Jesus the

professed Son of God, what they thought was the right thing. However, as we all know, the road to misery is oftentimes paved with the stones of good intentions.

As Judas ran to the place where the seventy sat debating the way they had handled the newest Messiah claimant, a leather pouch which hung from his waist bounced and twisted against his side, heavy with 'thirty pieces' bruising his thigh in it's bouncing. This bruise would remain visible throughout the entirety of Judas' life, this as a constant reminder of his imprudence this day.

Arriving at his destination Judas quickly demanded and gained an audience with his conspiratory confrere, who were still at assembly within the great hall; it was as if they were awaiting the arrival of some message of utmost importance.

Judas took note of the brazen attitudes of the normally pruneish and dour countenances of many of those assembled there that night. It was then, at that moment, that Judas realized the full true extent of the misdeeds played out that night, for those gathered upon his entrance turned their ice-cold stares onto him in one gesture as if all in attendance were of one mind and tethered together in action. Their eyes rested squarely upon the agitated apostle and his own frantic eyes met theirs; an impartial observer would have sensed the interplay of forces far greater and far more important than any in that room could have, at that time, understood.

As the eyes of Judas met theirs they were filled with the warm tears of sadness and remorse. The eyes of the Seventy however, showed nothing, eyes of dead men they were and Judas was appalled at this withered litter of defilers.

"What do you want Judas?" demanded the one above the others in a voice redolent with scorn and distaste at the mere mention of Judas' name.

In that moment when Judas heard the way that his name tasted, like filth upon the tongue of the man who spoke it, the full weight of reality reached out to slap him in the face. He realized that these men who sat circled around him regarded him as being the lowest form of humanity, and that they looked down upon him as one would look down upon an informant... down upon someone who, for his own callous gain had brought doom down upon his own master and his own friend. It was then at that moment, that Judas realized that he wanted to die. First, however, he must attempt to repair this past night's deeds. First, he must try to help his Master.

"I want the persecution of my Master to stop!" he demanded. "They are killing him!"

A small priest, who appeared somewhat divided on the issue, stroked his long beard, then replied to Judas' statement by saying, "Is this not what you craved, Judas? Is that not the reason why you willingly offered him up to us? Or did you only want the thirty pieces of silver that the law required us to give you for your service?"

"He has unbelievable powers," Judas desperately stated, dazed by the enormity of the negative forces that he seemed to have unleashed.

"Well, he's going to need them," added someone from behind him in a sarcastic voice.

"I thought that he would use those powers to destroy the Roman oppressors." Then his confused and agitated mind trailed off as he contemplated the words "I thought."

After a brief silence a swell of anger rose up and burst forth like a malignant bubble within the breast of Judas Iscariot. Violent ribbons of rage and hatred unfurled themselves, streaming like crimson rivers throughout his body, causing him to shake and tremble and to dry heave, something akin to an epileptic fit.

A vision welled up in Judas' mind and he saw himself pulling a dagger hidden in the folds of his robe. He saw himself leaping without abandon upon this entire dark cabal of spiritual miscreants, plunging the sharp metal of his weapon time after time into their ranks, killing as many of them as he could before their guards brought him low. However, just as his hand inclined ever so slightly in the direction of the hilt he knew to be lurking close by, another vision appeared. In this new vision he saw his Master sitting atop a stone, lecturing to the multitudes.

"Beloved," said his Master. "I know that you have been taught that it is lawful to take an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you that this is a religious law, not Gods law. If you wish to follow Gods humble servant, then you must put aside this false teaching. For I tell you, if a man slaps you on the face, tell him that he is forgiven and offer him the other cheek as well."

At those words the vision of his Master disappeared, but not before the face of that same Master, had somehow turned his eye's to his right, impossibly gazing beyond the veil of time, and into the very soul of his betrayer as if speaking to him directly.

The knee's of the miscreant disciple buckled beneath the awful encumbrance of his Masters woeful countenance, and his stomach shuddered miserably before releasing a splattering of greenish bile down the front of his robe and then onto the stones of the floor that stood between him and the gathering of his conspiratory comrades.

The Sanhedrin as a whole watched with stony and indifferent expressions on their faces... all, save the closest, who recoiled backwards and away from Judas, lest the internal brew from the stomach of the Betrayer touch him.

Judas himself felt revolted by his actions, for that which had just been ejected from his body seemed a thing alive as it began to squirm, wiggle, and roil there upon the flooring, as if it were possessed of some alien mind with intentions of its own. Then it died.

Swift as if born aloft upon the wings of purpose, Judas regained his senses. He felt clear-headed and renewed. His mind snapped into clarity and a focus that belied his recent state of agitation came to him. As he regained his faculties, he was burdened once again with the shock and horror that was due him as he revisited, in totality, that which he had done. With his thoughts at last clear, the fiery gates of utter agony became absorbed within the inner-streams of present reality, and he in that moment, knew what was required of him.

The hand of Judas fell upon the hilt of his cloaked dagger, then slid past the weapon, abandoning the penance he so desperately wished to lay visit there, instead progressing downward to the brown leather purse that hung from his waist like a gallows-hung child. With a practiced tug, he jerked the bag loose from its fastening, and in one motion poured its contents out and onto the bile splattered floor. Several of the pieces bounced and rolled to the feet of the Sanhedrin, who recoiled from them as vehemently as they had at the prospect of being begrimed by the uncanny, vomitus substance which had recently reached it's arcane tendrils towards their person. Judas then turned and left that place without seeing the outcome of his action.



# Chapter Two

## Via De La Rosa

The night found its way into morning and Judas found himself gathered together with a large crowd of commoners. Word had it that the Roman Governor, Pilate, would be releasing a prisoner in observation of the Passover tradition.

The crowd stood placidly in the dusty plaza until signs of movement occurred on the portico of the palace. Soon, Pontius Pilate himself stood aloft before the crowd, followed by a small contingency of soldiers manhandling not one, but two disheveled and bloody prisoners.

Judas pushed and elbowed his way forward, until he stood at the front of the crowd with an unobstructed view. His weary eyes noted that one of the two men detained by the soldiers was his Master. He also saw that their captors had roughly handled both his Master and the other man. He broke down and wept aloud at the sight of the blood and the bruises that violated the face of the God-Son.

Judas could not help but to notice the features of the other man as well, pausing only long enough to register the fact that the second prisoner was sullen-faced, brazenly staring out in defiance at the Governor and the crowd. In addition, he could not help but to notice that this other man had a look of stark meanness about him, and that his scowl and pop-eyed reptilian stare were all that he conceded to the world, fear it appeared had no acquaintance with him.

As if speaking down from the heights of heaven itself, the voice of Pilate, boomed down from the balcony and all who heard it fell silent. For an endless moment no sound except the buzzing of flies filled the courtyard. Pilate then lifted his hand in a gesture of exaltation above the beggarly crowd and said, "It is the custom of the glorious Roman Empire to acknowledge the rites and customs of the diverse peoples whom it oversees." Pilate then lowered his hands resting them on his hips in the manner of someone of authority, and then continued. "I have been informed that it is a Jewish tradition to examine the holds of the prisons and to release unconditionally, one of its occupants. In honor of the Feast of Passover, I too, intend to uphold and to honor your traditions. Behold, Jerusalem! I offer you two candidates from which to choose. Say yes, and that one will be released. Say no, and that one will be lifted high this very day on the wood of sorrow."

The crowd roared, delighted not only that Pilate would grant liberty to one of their fellow Hebrews, but that he should make a game out of it by giving them a choice.

While they cheered, Pilate made a grand gesture and pivoted to his right. Then he silenced the crowd with a wave of his arm. "Here," he shouted as he pointed to Judas' Master, "we have an interesting case, to say the least. He is a humble man in whom I find no blame, and whose only flaw seems to be his choice of friends. He is a carpenter from the lake country. A humble but unfortunate man. I present to you, Jesus the son of Joseph, or as you say in your language, Jesus Bar Joseph."

Pilate turned to look into the face of Jesus the Christ for a second as if he were somehow puzzled by something he saw reflected there. Then he shook his head the way a man does when shaking out the proverbial cobwebs, and turned to confront the second prisoner.

With a revived sweeping gesture of his hand he indicated to the crowd the brute standing opposite the Christ; his arm moving fluidly, more like the limb of a woman than that of a man. "And, here we have another Jesus! What a positively charming coincidence! Two Jesus' standing condemned to die, at your command, on the same bitter morning!" He again shook his head as though overwhelmed by the congruence of history that had somehow woven itself together, there, on his porch that day. Then he continued. "Jesus Bar Abbas!" Pilate barked. "This one slit the throat of one of my soldiers less than a week ago. He claims to be a proud member of a secret society called The Zealoty."

Pilate hesitated as he contemplated the possibility that the crowd would chose this monster over the carpenter, finally deciding the impossibility of that, since the Sanhedrin, who controlled this crowd hated the Rebels as much as did the empire. No he thought, they hate this carpenter, but they fear the Zealot's who would, if they had the chance, put them all to the sword for cooperating with the Romans, then convinced he continued. "Well" he sniffed. "Who shall it be? Whom shall I set free? Jesus Bar Joseph, who has done no wrong. Or Jesus Bar Abbas who is amurderer of innocent woman and children?"

It was here on that fateful morning, in that dusty fly cursed place, that Time and Destiny turned upon a pivot. It was there and it was then that the entire history of humankind and religion became forevermore destined to dance, entwined within the same ring of fire. For you see my reader, my friend, in the language of these people, at this place and this time, the word "Bar", when placed between two names, as was the case of Jesus Bar Joseph and Jesus Bar Abbas, literally means "son of". Couple that with the understanding that the name Abbas, in the same language mean's father, in reference to God, the full true portent of what took place there, that day, comes into focus. For both men brought before the crowd that day were named Jesus. Even the one's who had been there to help the Prophet named Jesus, who had rushed to this very place for that purpose, were fooled... because the majority of these good-intentioned people, had never seen the Christ in person, or if they had, they had never seen him close at hand, nor beaten beyond recognition. So, when the choice was proffered to them, when Pilate yelled out "Do you claim Jesus the son of Joseph? Or Jesus the son of God?" the majority naturally responded to save the son of God. Which is exactly how the man, history has taught us to call Barabbas (Bar Abbas), was set free from the clutches of captivity, and the humble carpenter's son, the man who walked on water, was sent to the cross in his place.

It is of some interest to know that over the next six-hundred years, those from the dark side, would use this event to twist and to manipulate hatred and enmity until defiling the honor of not one, but two of the major religions of the world. The first of these two religious modalities adhere to the position that the Son of God went to his death on the roman cross, only to arise once more to life. The second model believes that the Son of God was spared his appointment with the cross, and that another took his place that day. Of course, since Jesus Bar Abass- the son of God- was witnessed by many different peoples over the next few years, long after crucifixion of the carpenter's son, believers in both camps technically would be correct on the issue. However, neither of these leather bound religions, Christianity or Islam, will admit to the possibility of another alternative, neither will they, to this day, admit that a simple twisting of names is the tool that has been used to divide them on this critical theological position. As a result, these two great religions have done little save claim war as their banner. For over the centuries, both religions, of their own accord, would war amongst themselves, upon each other, upon the truth of the Messiah, and finally upon God as prophesized in their own teachings. 'Tis a doomed and damned thing this ghost hidden beneath the covers of a book.

Upon hearing the fateful decision concerning his master, Judas fell to the ground and wept, for only he could see with clarity the spiritual conspiracy within which he had become so unwittingly embroiled. This realization brought him no relief and no succor, for he had left the path of pleasure completely and forevermore behind him, he now trod upon the stony path of unrelenting pain and sorrow.

After his Master had been lead away from the palace that day to kiss the brutal timbers of death, Judas ran like a frenzied and enwildened child to a place he knew to be the route taken by the condemned, and their captors, on the way to greet hammer and nail.

As he arrived there at that place he noticed that the street was packed with people; the curios onlookers and the grieving well-wishers alike. Judas threw his elbows blindly, forcing his way to the front of the crowd where he positioned himself in a place near where his Master was sure to pass. He stood there, filled with great trepidation, and his guilty eyes stung as he discovered some of 'The Forty' scattered throughout the crush of the crowd. He saw Peter, John, and the Master's brother James, to name just a few. However, none of these seemed to notice Judas save the greatest among them all... the Magdalena.

Sorrow at his betrayal struck through the heart of Judas and he dropped his eyes to avoid the sad, solemn glare emanating from the High Priestess. It was then that a murmur began to ripple and grow in and amongst the gathered throng; a sure sign that the procession of the days condemned were approaching. Judas silently thanked his Master for this distraction, sparing him the thoughts and the eyes of the Magdalena.

He stood stoically as he waited with a heavy heart for the first glimpse of his Master since the palace portico. After a few seconds of anticipation he noticed the strange and artful play of the sunlight as it fell upon the shapes of the persons who were gathered together on the opposite side of the street from where he was standing. No person of learning could have explained the phenomenon seen that day, because, against all logic and in defiance of all science, the shadows being cast upon the ground on that calamitous and unholy day weren't black nor gray as you might think... they were red, blood red. As a result of this unusual spectacle, when all men's shadows fell incarnadine upon the ground, that day when the Savior met his fate became known as 'the day of blood' among the keepers of the higher mysteries, of which I, the teller of this tale, am one. In addition, to that fact, the pathway trodden by Christ on his way to the completion of his destiny has been preserved, by The Church, and named 'Via de la Rosa' though few are they who know the full truth behind the actual naming.

The Master approached the junction where his betrayer stood hollow-bosomed and aching on the one side, and the saintly and sorrowful Magdalena on the other. As he passed that junction, the expected happened. Without thought to her own safety, the Magdalena rushed forward and flung her tearful arms around the neck of this man whose features were beaten, bloodied and broken beyond human recognition. She then planted a kiss upon his cheek.

As though rejuvenated by her kiss, the Master, bent and labored beneath the weight of the plank strapped across his shoulders, straightened as though suddenly suffused with the strength of ten men, and he cast a bloodied and bruised smile upon the person he loved most. All who witnessed the encounter between the condemned man and the weeping woman are certain that some arcane unspoken message had passed back and forth between them... a message, while unspoken, must have been one of great importance, for the Magdalena, having received said message, relaxed, regaining her goddess like composure and returned to the side of the pathway. She did not however remain there; she calmly sifted through the press of the crowd, before disappearing as though she had never been there at all.

Judas watched in anticipation as his Master inhumanly rose-up beneath the demonic yoke of the persecution that had befallen him, showing unbelievable strength and resolve, the type only a conqueror could display. At this exhibition Judas's heart leapt to the forefront of his chest like a fish leaping above the surface of the sea, and in unison with his heart his own feet found wings. Buoyed by a sudden wellspring of hope, and without thought he ran and positioned himself in front of his Master, just as the Magdalena had done only moments before.

"Now Master! Now! Show these fools your power! Strike them down, smite them, and rescue your people! You are the Messiah! Kill them all!" he added as he swept his hand all around him, indicating not only the soldiers who guided this stark procession of death towards its inevitable and final conclusion, but with that sweeping gesture, indicating what he considered to be the tyranny of Rome as well. In spite of his plea, his hope, his belief in the sanctity of his Master, the only response he received was to see the man, the Christ, bend once more beneath the cruel weight of the punitive timber as if suddenly deprived of all strength and in a fleeting moment aging a thousand years.

Those same soldiers whose task it was to deliver the unfortunate over to his cruel fate, became much angered by the foolhardy actions and brash statements of this creature who had further stalled their forward momentum. In response to his accusations they beat Judas with fist and sword-pommel, relenting in their beating of him only after tiring. Using their whip-hands to drive their prisoner onward once more, they left the crushed and bleeding body of Judas Iscariot laying in the dust, fettered to the earth not by his injurious wounds, wounds that would surely kill any man, but by something else entirely.

As Judas regained consciousness he became aware that the once crowded street was now completely deserted. He also concluded from the sun's position in the sky that many hours had passed, unbeknownst to him. He cried out as he struggled to his feet with the greatest of effort, then staggered off towards the hill called 'The Place of Skulls' a place where ill-fortuned visitors were greeted with humiliation unto death.

He crested a hilltop between the aforementioned place of skulls and the city gates. Once there, much to his consternation, he saw that three of the places where they crucified men, were occupied. The middle of these, he noted, had several kneeling and prostrate people surrounding it. Even at a great distance Judas knew in his heart that the figure hanging on that instrument of torture was the body of his beloved Master. And it was so.

Judas staggered and stumbled to the top of Golgotha, finally flinging himself to the dirt at the foot of castigation. The three women, who were already gathered, turned to look at Judas with unbridled disgust. Maryim, the mother of his Master, began to curse him into eternity as any grieving mother would have done. Nevertheless, the Magdalena intervened with a gesture, adding to it, "Peace Maryim. The Master wished him no ill will."

"B-but... he is to blame for this!" she wailed. The little mother then broke down and wept flesh tears, as she gestured towards the body of her eldest child naked and cold in its apparent lifelessness behind her.

"No Maryim, blame thee not this one. He is but an instrument whose strings were used to create the song of our Master's destiny, an instrument used to help him fulfill his mission." The Magdalena gathered the mother of Christ in her arms, half-restraining her, half hugging her. "You are blessed among women. For it was you who were chosen to birth the Messiah. I am blessed, because he chose to love me. And this one..." she turned to indicate Judas by gently laying her hand upon his shoulder. "this one is blessed because he, of all Jesus' followers, had enough belief in the Master's message to see him for who he was. He accepted without reservation the divinity, which was our Masters patrimony. In truth, all he is guilty of is having misjudged the true nature of our Masters mission here on earth."

"No!" screamed another of the women present on that day, a woman we have yet to speak of; a woman who in her misspent and ill-chosen youth, just a scant three years earlier, indolently demanded that the head of the Baptizer be brought to her in obedience to her mothers whim.

"The others were there also," she continued. "They all saw him lead the soldiers and the priests to him."

"The others!" roared the Magdalena. "The others! And where are those others, now? Where is their comfort for this grieving mother? Where are they now that we need them to help remove the Master's body from this tree? I will tell you where they are! They are hiding! They tremble in fear, lest they be accused of knowing him! They are all scattered like vermin fleeing from the talons of a hawk, now that the real work needs to be done. Some disciples they are. At least this one is here with us... unafraid of being seen at the foot of a condemned man's feet. So silence your words Salome! I won't hear another word."

It was then that the small congregation of grievors heard a sound behind them. Turning they saw an old man climbing the pathway, accompanied by two helpers burdened with a ladder and tools. "Let us take him down for burial," the old man said softly to the grieving mother. And they did.

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After the Magdalena had prepared the body of her beloved Master for burial, she left the place where his body lay and watched as the servants of Nicodemus sealed the mouth of the tomb with a large stone, as was the custom of the times.

Throughout that same night Judas had watched the proceedings from behind a series of stones piled near the burial place where the Christ was entombed. In the morning he watched as the rays of dawn's first light met the darkness and he marveled at its auric beauty; it was the first time he could remember seeing it so. He then stood, stretched himself awake and walked slowly away from that place and into an orchard nearby. Seeing a tree of goodly height, the betrayer of Christ fumbled at his waist, removing his rope belt. Gripping it in his teeth, he climbed up and into the tree, pulling himself toward a large overhanging branch. Having obtained his destination, Judas tied one end of his belt to the branch, and affixed the other around his own neck. "I am sorry Master," he sobbed. Then flung himself from the branch. The fall broke his neck, killing him instantly.

# Chapter Three

## The Magdalena

As she had done for the last three days in succession, the Magdalena, went early in the morning to place flowers at the tomb of her Master, each time passing through the orchard where the corpse of Judas Iscariot hung, undisturbed.

She did not know why she had ordered her followers to leave the corpse hanging from its limb, or why no one else had bothered to remove it. She did not even understand her own curious lack of emotions concerning it. She did know however, that these events were an integral part of some riddle being played out upon the higher realms. She also knew that knowledge such as this was to be milked from within the depth of a person's psyche, and so it was that the words spoken to her by her Master on the Via de la Rosa kept floating to the surface of her mind, and in doing so somehow balanced her sanity the way that a life preserver balances a shipwrecked person between life and death.

"Things are as they were designed to be. Do not react to what is happening. Instead, I implore you to meditate upon what is to come. Contemplate these events; know how they affect you. Learn from them by gleaning what you are meant to glean. Know that everything is exactly as it was designed to be. This is the key to understanding all things past, present and future."

She listened anew to the words he had spoken to her on the way to his death, and she cherished them the way another would a valuable gem. Perhaps, she thought, these words were the underlying factor determining her indifference to the body of Judas Iscariot which even now hung from its limb like dark, bitter fruit. She somehow understood that he also was, for reasons beyond her comprehension, exactly where he was meant to be.

The same underlying factor colored her view of Judas's betrayal of the Christ, and her own life, too; a life from which seven demons had been exorcized with violent wrenching of primitive ecstasy. Then, as she contemplated her own thoughts, she suddenly knew the full truth concerning her Master's crucifixion: he had allowed it to happen! This revelation hit her like a hammer-blow to the pit of her stomach - he had known! He could have prevented it; yet, he chose not to alter that which he thought was meant to be!

She stopped in mid stride, numb with anger. He had chosen to embrace death, instead of choosing to embrace her. He had chosen the bitter kiss of wood and nails over the kisses of his followers, over the kiss of life. At first, she recoiled away from any thought which might divert her from a path of anger and self-pity. Then, in the end, she found the seeds of awareness sprouting from within the garden of her mind; the kind that ultimately bloom into the rarest of flowers, seeds which, unlike any other, can only germinate within the soil of sorrow.

Yes, she admitted to herself, I am different. I am an outcast. A sinner. Yet because of him, I am a saint as well. She finally understood the occult meaning beneath her master's words. "Things are as they are supposed to be!" Her life was exactly as it was supposed to be in order for her to be able to gain maximum spirituality. It became clear. It had been in her best interest that she had been born a woman, an outsider, a possessor of demons, a priestess... and a follower of Jesus. She accepted that these things had to happen and that each event in her life had been designed by the lords of destiny to teach her a certain, very specific lesson. She intuited that as long as she understood each phase of her life and understood the lessons of that particular phase she would progress, spiritually. The other side to it all was that if she ignored her higher self and allowed those same lessons to make her embittered and angry, insensitive to life's poetry, that she would fall into nothingness until in her own dust she lay unknown and unrecognizable.

So deep in thought was she while walking that she covered the entire distance to the tomb of her Master and stood at the mouth of it before realizing that the tomb had been disturbed. When she finally realized that the stone had been rolled away from the opening she was so startled that she dropped the flowers onto the ground in front of her; when they landed it was in the design of a cross, a Rose Cross.

Upon regaining her absent breath she leapt forward and into the narrow confines of the tomb itself, expecting to see the body of her master violated and tumbled to the ground in disrespectful disarray. However, much to her surprise, what she discovered inside of the small burial chamber was not her master, but an Angel of Light cloaked in the form of an adolescent child seated upon the shelf where her master's body had lain.

"Where is my Master!" she demanded, half-angry, half in awe.

"He is not here. He has become alive. Even now he is treading the road to your town." With that the Angel began to twinkle like stars seen from afar, then faded until completely gone and the tomb was once again a darkened place of empty stone with but one single beam of early morning sunlight peeping lazily in through the low-slung entrance, causing the floating mites of dust that hung suspended there to appear as luminescent planets moving about a distant galaxy, one where folks don't kill other folks.

The Magdalena excitedly began to re-trace her steps by running through the woods that separated the burying place from town, there she came upon the body of Judas Iscariot. This time however, he was not hanging dead bodied from the tree as before, but rather standing upon the pathway directly in front of her, casting a confused and frightening shadow.

The two apostles stood confronting one another in a petrified stupor as if frozen in stone by the passing of ten million years. Then, slowly conscious thought began to slip past the moats and walls surrounding the fortress of past memory and a reality that wore a thousand shapes of horror wove its way into the minds of both the Magdalena and Judas the betrayer of Christ.

"I... I was dead!" Judas stammered as he looked around himself in a blinking daze. "I... hung myself and I died!" He turned to stare at the cruel limb that had held his lifeless corpse for the past three days. As he talked, half to her and half to himself, he stared upward and toward the limb above him but his eyes betrayed his confusion by darting here and there, back and forth like some wind-up doll created by a paranoiac.

Before the Magdalena could think to respond to Judas with any sort of explanation, the betrayer of Christ turned and bolted away from her, running into a nearby thicket as though the fiendish hounds of hell were intent upon devouring his very soul. As he ran the Magdalena shouted after him trying to convey the Good News about their risen Master, but her words were not heard, the ears of that one had withered shut under the red-hot flames of his own guilt.

The Magdalena, although awed and frightened by this morning's events, regained her composure. Serenity found its way once more into the deep and tender recesses of her heart and she began to walk, and soon, very soon, as if scripted by the spirit of all things good, there in the road ahead of her stood the majestic lambkin of humanity... the Master himself.

She hesitated not, but instead broke into a frenzied all-out sprint to reach him, so great was her joy. As she closed to within twenty hands-breadths of him an arcane force met her and stalled her advance, at that, his voice... his lovely, lilting voice, as tender and downy as a springtime bud reached into her mind, saying, "Hello my love! I have missed you!"

"M... Master," she stammered. "Is it truly you?"

"Yes, beloved. It is I. Nevertheless, you cannot at this time touch me, for I am not of fleshy substance. I wanted you to be the first to see me and I want you to announce what you have seen this day to all you chance to meet, so that future generations will know that it was you I honored most. Go thee now and tell the others that I have risen! Tell them that surely here is a sign that there is victory in righteousness, even over death. Tell them that there is victory over the Hell that false-religion has constructed." At that, he smiled, then he laughed, and then he stuck a finger in each corner of his mouth and then pulled outward as he rolled his eye's upward making a face like every six-year-old child on the planet is wont to do. Then he faded from her view, dissolving into the lazy, hazy yawning of morning's light. He had always made faces at them when they seemed troubled, it was his way of letting them know that all was well. Great was her joy.

Now the disciples of Jesus, known as The Twelve, had found fear at the possibility that persecution's tooth would pierce their own flesh, and so it was that they went into hiding, with the exception of Judas the betrayer of Christ. And so it was that the Magdalena was required to approach their safe-house in a stealthy manner. When at



last able to relate her experiences, first with the Angel of Light, and then of her meeting with the Master, several of the Disciples refused to believe her, calling her false - so fantastic was the story that she conveyed to them. Some though, argued in her favor, but most did not, believing that had the Master truly returned, he would have presented himself to them, instead of an outsider. Amazingly, they were ignorant to the most basic tenets of the Master's teachings and utterly unlearned in matters spiritual.

\* \* \*

One morning, not long after Jesus first appeared to the Magdalena the women were exiting through the city gates on their way to perform chores; upon doing so they heard a scuffling sound from atop the wall encircling the city. Maryim the mother of Jesus, Salome, the Magdalena and certain others whose names are not recorded attended that morning.

In response to the unusual sounds coming from above them the women looked up and there they saw Judas standing high atop the parapets located near the topmost part of that lofty structure. The women saw that he was balanced precariously while gazing upwards towards an empty sky. Great was Judas's pain and suffering over the death of his Master... for he was ignorant to the fact that his beloved Master had been resurrected. Suddenly, without warning, he flung himself down to the ground from his perch on that high place in another effort to end his life.

Judas struck the hardpan bursting apart like an over-ripe melon upon the ragged stones, and his innards spilled from the ruptured sack of his body with all its foul-smelling accompaniments. This was the second death of Judas Iscariot, as recorded in the New Testament books.

\* \* \*

A few weeks later Jesus appeared to several of his disciples as they walked a lonely stretch of land outside the city gates. These ones walked in tandem with their Master and listened to him as he spoke concerning the occult and hidden mysteries of God. One of them, named Simon Peter, turned to look behind the group and there beheld the one they called 'The Betrayer' following along behind them, in a furtive manner. Being highly disturbed at seeing the one whom he blamed for all their problems so close at hand, Peter grabbed the arm of his Master and pointed towards Judas in the manner of a tattletale kid, saying, "And what about him?" Being the Christ, Jesus knew that Judas had regained life after death... twice. He also knew that this re-animated creature was behind them, following his beloved Master at that same distance, all of these days. Likewise, he knew that each man and each woman had a destiny, a destiny which must be fulfilled, a destiny which could never be fulfilled, were he, Jesus, to intervene. So, in a voice stern and authoritative, Christ said to Peter, "What is it to you if I let him live till I return again? You Peter, you John and the others need to do that which you are required to do, and stop being concerned with what you consider to be the faults of others!" Peter hung his head in shame, because he knew that the words spoken were true.

So it was that the man known as the Betrayer of Christ became immortal in body and in duty. His Master had deemed it well that he should not die, but that he should live on perpetually upon the earth until the day that he, his Master, found suit for a second coming, a re-birth into the world of humans.

Though the wisest among us know that the fate of man rests upon the shoulders of the female, the complete story of Judas must still be told, for his is one of unparalleled faith. And so it is.

# Chapter Four

## Judas A.D. 44

Judas had stood for several hours in the shadow of the north wall, awaiting his contact. He raised his head in the manner of a small mongrel dog sniffing the nighttime air, gathering in as he did the scent of wood burning in the far-off distance. He loved this smell and greedily drew another whiff of it into his nostrils, rhapsodized was he in the dark, sweet wafting of the smokes strong perfume. Then a vagrant current swirled and eddied, carrying with it all traces of his ecstasy.

He glanced up into the brooding moonless nighttime sky, and guessed it to be a little after mid-night. "Any time now," he said to himself.

The city sprawled around him was still and deathly quiet with the scattered exception of a few rustling, murmuring night-things and the bark of a skittering dog, a dog perhaps, which sensed that a vortex of arcane energy was whirling above the land this night.

Then she appeared.

Stepping around a darkened corner she walked out and onto the cobbling stones of the haunted street, directly in front of him; she seemed to materialize out of nowhere like a succubus emerging from mist and shadow. Here was the kind of thing that grown men dream about when they twist, turn and mumble on their lonely beds, fantasizing about the sensuality of the female creature. Here was the beauty of dreams, of poems yet written, wars yet fought, a goddess materialized. The milk white faun of Tennyson.

She drew ever closer to Judas, and as she progressed he felt himself becoming slightly unnerved by the sheer wanton beauty of her pale-moon colored skin, skin which seemed to draw some faint luminescence from the gathered darkness, glowing invitingly, calling out to him, begging to be kissed and touched and handled passionately. Her hips and breasts pressed against the thin fabric of the short shift she wore, threatening, or perhaps, merely promising to burst free from the flimsy confines of the fabric which contained her womanly secrets.

His saintly eyes danced hungrily up and down her body as she closed the last traces of the distance that separated them one from the other. Deep down in some sub-conscious level of his being he knew that hers was flesh that had not seen the wholesome healthy light of the sun for a very long period. Also, he could not help but notice that she was dressed in the provocative fashion of the Roman harlots instead of being cloaked and veiled like decent Hebrew women were supposed to be.

In her Judas saw a vision of heaven, or possibly a hell, one which most men would gladly forsake everything to include family, friends, money and reputation to partake. In his opinion, no man could resist loving this creature. Nor could they resist giving her anything and everything that her wicked heart might desire. For beauty was her power and her art and both had flowered, blooming into things of such sultry allure that for a man to do less than to give her everything that he possessed, would be unimaginable. And well she knew it.

The whore planted herself in front of Judas and a seductive smile creased her crimson lips. Her smile grew wider as Judas's gaze lingered upon the full, ripe, honeyed melons of her breasts. She made some small practiced move; a slight dip and rise of one shoulder causing her breasts to jiggle back and forth ever so subtly, like objects that Magicians wave in front of people at the markets, capturing their attention and beguiling them to do foolish things for the amusement of the crowd.

"If you look any closer, you'll owe me silver!" she said softly with a faint trace of amused and mocking laughter rippling like an under-current beneath her words. Her boldness shamed Judas and caused his cheeks to flame red... although the nighttime darkness hid this fact from the world.

"I - I am sorry" he stammered. "In truth I must tell you, that never in my life have my eyes seen a woman of such extraordinary beauty, as that which you possess. Please, accept my apology for staring at you so openly."

The whore, taken aback by the courtesy of his response, of his innocent flattery and the ease with which he had delivered it lost some of her cynicism. Both of them averted their eyes one from the other in a moment of awkward resignation. The woman looked back first.

“Are you the one they call Judas?” she whispered.

“Yes,” the dark figure nodded. “I am he.” The hungry eyes of Judas regained their composure and began to search the woman’s face; this time however, the meat he craved was not made of flesh. “Did you bring it?” he hissed. “Do you have the scroll?”

The woman lifted her chin, defiantly. “Yes, I have it.” She then patted the pouch hidden beneath her tunic, indicating that it was readily available to the right person.

Judas lifted his hand in what could have been perceived as a gesture of greed. “Let me see it,” he insisted, a little too aggressively for any sort of proper bargaining position to be taken later. She smiled.

“Not so fast, boy! I want five pieces of silver for it!”

“Five?” Judas barked, “Are you insane? That’s too much money and you know it to be so. Besides, I don’t even know if the scroll has any value, to my studies.” “Oh, it has value, you can rest assured of that. Besides, a friend of mine knows words and he says that the scree mentions your Master directly by name.”

The heart of Judas thumped at her words and in an unconscious gesture he looked to one side and then the other while contemplating what this woman had just told him. As he silently meditated on the possible usefulness of the scroll in the whore’s possession he once again grew calm. With this sense of focus he returned his gaze to the face of the whore in front of him with only one intent, that being to capture the eyes of the brazen young woman with his super-conscious mind... no girl, he corrected himself, he was not the same man who had been momentarily knocked off balance by the lusts of a flesh that no longer mattered to him. With his newfound sixth sense he probed the harlot’s eyes, extracting useful information from their hardened and flinty depths like the wet and inexorable fingers of the sea, reaching out and pulling something to it from the land.

“Tell me young goddess, from whence did you receive this scroll?”

His new power and demeanor pushed into her mind relentlessly and her hard eyes lost their edge and fell like meteorites onto the stony ground at her feet. Her shoulders lost their defiant lift and sagged, as if pressed down by unseen weights, and she gave up the ground her haughty beauty and raw sexuality had previously won her.

“I - I am from the village of Hege, on the flat lands. I was fourteen years old and only recently betrothed to a wonderful boy named Samuel... he - he was a herder.” Her voice was small and wounded, almost too soft to hear, yet in it Judas could detect the buds of truth blossoming through the firmament of sorrowful grounding. She had loved the Sheppard boy that was apparent.

“One day,” she continued, “just as the morning sun was beginning to break itself free from the belly of the land, I stepped outside of my families dwelling so that I might see Samuel as he drove the flock home from the place where he tended them during the night.”

The child then paused in the midst of her narrative as if painfully reliving the events that she was describing. “After a bit I sensed something amiss, because, Samuel did not return. I knew that he had not passed by our home before I went outside because he would not press the flock forward until I appeared, and gave him my smile. He - he told me so, many times! He would wait for me. He always did.”

Her eyes flickered up from the ground to land on Judas’s as if she were begging him to believe that once she had loved a boy, who had loved her so clearly that he would not take himself home to sleep without first gazing upon her smile. Seeing that Judas believed her, she continued. “That’s when they burst down upon my village. They came in great force kicking into all the homes and slaughtering nearly everyone inside, be they man, woman, or child.”

Although he knew her answer, he asked it anyway, wanting her to say it. “Who are you speaking of daughter? Who did this thing?”

“The Romans!” she hissed in a voice filled with bitter venom. “The Roman’s did it. Within the time that it took for me to run thirty paces all of the people in my village were dead, except for about twenty five people who were herded together and sequestered near the well located in the center of the village market place.

“The survivors were lined up in a single file with soldiers posted all around us, their bloody weapons held at the ready. An older soldier appeared and walked amongst the others as if he held authority over them. He approached the rank of prisoners and looked at each of us, as if he were determining the value of wheat standing in a field. In a way, I suppose that that was exactly what he was doing, for he ordered seven of the women, of which I was one, to be removed from the group. We were lashed together.

“Then, the old soldier called forth another man, a Jew, someone who could speak to us in our own language. This man told us that the village of Hege had conspired against Rome by harboring insurgents and criminals who had committed acts of terrorism against the lawful authority of the Roman Empire. He went on to say that the whole village was guilty of participating in the murder of six Roman soldiers; soldiers who had been kidnapped in surrounding villages and then brought there to Hege, where they were tortured and killed.

“The Jew who spoke for these men said that they knew full well that not all who lived in Hege were responsible for that which happened, but that this innocence mattered not, for the penalty of ignorance concerning the murder of Roman soldiers, under the law of Rome, was the same as it was for treason... death.”

The girl-child hesitated and Judas watched her closely knowing that she was returning to the scene of something horrible, because he could clearly see the way that the flesh of her face sagged and grew old before his eyes. He waited.

“The old soldier pulled a young girl from the huddled group of villagers who had not been selected for separation. She was just a child, years away from flowering into the first blush of her moon flow.

“The gristle gray-beard gripped the little girl roughly by her arm, dragging her toward the well-head. In one swift movement he ripped her tunic from her exposing her slim child body to the morning air. The child burst into tears, tears that turned into ragged gales of indignation as the Roman soldier began to push his fingers into her private parts and rub the palm of his calloused hands over the place where her breasts would someday grow. An old woman, the child’s grandmother, stepped forward calling out for the soldier to stop his actions, only to be silenced by the abrupt placement of another soldier’s iron sword handle into her mouth; her teeth flew from her jaw like thrown-stones and she collapsed into a pile on the ground. The child was shocked into a dazed silence by what had just happened to her grandmother, perhaps feeling that her cries had caused her beloved amma to be treated so badly. The girl fell silent... enduring the violations to her body without further sound.”

The story-teller looked past Judas and into the night-shrouded distance, but this time it was with anger in her eyes.

“The soldiers that were guarding us turned their backs away from us so that they did not have to witness the old soldier exposing his manhood from beneath his battle-tunic. He was forcing the bewildered little girl to lean towards it by gripping her neck and pushing her head down towards his waist. Just then, another soldier, one on a horse, suddenly rode into the village square. This new arrival was dressed far better than the others and I knew that he was the leader of the men in our village. As he reigned in his winded and lathered steed to a pawing halt before us, I could see him taking in the entire scene, the shattered village, the two groups of prisoners, the bloody soldiers and the grinning veteran with the small girl-child near the well.

“The old soldier stiffened, altering his posture to some semblance of attention and grinned up at the horse soldier like a feral wolf, this as he continued to press the confused child against his engorged flesh. It was clear that she had no idea what was expected from her.

“The horse soldier scowled. ‘Marcellus, your taste in women seems to run in the direction of your smallest daughter. How does your wife feel about that?’ The other soldiers howled in laughter. The one called Marcellus leered at them, and then glanced down at the child as if to blame her for the way he had suddenly been transformed into an object of derision. With that, he lifted his fist and hammered it down on top of her skull, breaking it. She collapsed into the same sort of silent pile that had claimed her amma moments before.

“The horse soldier turned his face away from the old soldier to assess the rest of the situation. He glanced at the seven of us who were lashed together apart from the others, and then he looked at the others. He made a swift dismissive gesture and the soldiers fell on the villagers and hacked them with their swords until dead. Satisfied, the horse soldier lifted some sort of manuscript from a leather bag hanging from his horse’s flank. He knelt the horse and it walked over to the wellhead. With a practiced motion, the horse soldier, leaned over and used the pommel of

his sword to nail the thing to the wooden well riser. He made another gesture and the Jew translator stepped forward in a brisk and efficient manner... as if well practiced and familiar with the ritual. He cleared his throat and read aloud the terms of the document: 'The Roman Empire is ruled by law. The law of Rome rules these lands. All who occupy these lands are subject to Roman law. The penalty for breaking the law of Rome by acts of treason, sedition or wanton criminality, etc. is evident here in this place. Look well upon the wrath of Rome. Guard yourself well, lest this same fate befall your own village.'

The whore-woman-child-daughter glanced around nervously, as if to assure herself that no one lurked about eavesdropping on their conversation. She knew full well that the same Roman Empire that had slew her family, maintained informants everywhere among her people. Her face took on the look of marked regret as she confronted the reality that far more than one translator, had been corrupted by the imposition of occupation upon her land. She then picked up the thread of her story at the point where she had left it dangling.

"The village of Hege was set ablaze, the soldiers marched us back to the base camp which had been set up nearby as a staging point. They forced us to enter a large tent located in the center of the compound. The tent smelled badly and some of the older, more experienced women reacted to the smell by trying to turn around and force their way out of the tent. Our captors laughed at these panicked women, slapping and beating them back into the tent. I - I was too young and naive to know what had spooked the other women..." she stopped and drew along and sorrowful breath, crossed one foot over the other, then matched the move with her hands the way a woman does when trying to hide her nakedness.

"The soldiers who had participated in the raid on our village were each given three small tokens. Other soldiers in the camp, those who had not participated, were given one token. Each of these tokens could be... exchanged I guess you could say, at any time, by the person who possessed it." She stared at Judas with a flat expression on her face. "The coin was worth one of two things: pay in silver, or, one trip to the tent per token, where the presenter of the token was then allowed to rape any of the women found within. I, myself, was raped sixty-two times over the first three day period that I was there." She reached into her pouch and extracted a small bronze token that she handed to Judas for his inspection.

"Fifteen men crowded into that tent on the first night to claim me as their bonus pay, including that pig Marcellus, who finished by using me the way that he had wanted to use the young child from my village. By the time that the sun lifted the following day, I was torn and bleeding, and my private parts were numb. I had never before lain with a man, not even Samuel.

"My last night in captivity I could not find rest. I lay there, sweltering in the heat and aching throughout my body. I could smell the tent and I then knew the smell of that place for what it was- the smell of sex, amplified and distilled and condensed into a bitter, pungent, overpoweringly repulsive perfume. I became sick to my stomach.

"My stomach rebelled against the stench of that place; I lifted myself up and ran to the front of the tent where I released the contents of my belly. I retched and gagged on my knees until I thought I would die. One of the soldiers saw me and walked over to the tent opening and stood over me, I thought that he was going to hit me and order me back into the tent, but he raped me instead while I knelt in the dirt amidst a puddle of my own sickness.

"While the soldier was using me a commotion broke out in a back area of the compound. When this came to the soldier's attention he pushed me into the dirt while going to investigate the commotion. I was still too sick and dazed to comprehend much of anything, but I thought that I saw men, Hebrew men with swords, grappling with some of the Romans. I heard these men shouting 'Death to Rome' before the confusion of battle drew them away from me.

"I was frightened and in this I rose to my feet intending to return to the tent, where I hoped to find sanctuary. However, before I could go there an apparition appeared in front of me, emerging from the dust and sounds of battle. It was a Jew. It was the man who had translated for the Romans when they destroyed my village. He had been stabbed in his belly and was staggering, both of his hands were pressed tightly to his abdomen; he was holding the contents of his guts inside, with the palms of his hands.

"He lurched straight up to me and removed a leather pouch from his waist-belt. He threw the purse at my feet. 'Here daughter,' he gasped. 'Take the scroll in this purse to Geserat. Do that and the money inside is yours to keep, use it to find a new life somewhere.'

"I looked at the leather purse... it bulged fat with coin, and the rolled up stem of a scroll peeked from the mouth of the bag.

"I am Yousef." he added. "All who live in Geseret know me, and they will guide you to my wife.' With that, he turned to stagger away from me. I reacted by grabbing his arm, causing him much pain. Fool! I shouted. I am a prisoner here. How do you expect me to leave this place and find Geseret?"

"He grimaced, but then looked at me the way my own father had often looked at me, an expression that contained both love and pride for the person I had become. 'Child', the Jew called Yousef said. 'To these men you are no prisoner. You are but a woman, a vessel into which they can spill their seed. As soon as they tire of you they will release you. When they do, remember your mission. That scroll is important to my family. They must know that the Messiah lives. Do it girl. Perform your duty. Do it for God almighty!' Then he pulled away from me and was gone.

"His words changed everything for me. I would survive my ordeal. These pigs would release me. With this revelation my thoughts raced away from the sounds and sights of battle, which were beginning to wane and grow dim as the overwhelming might and fury of the Romans bested and then destroyed the rag-tag group of men who had invaded the compound.

"I stared at the bag at my feet. If I were to be set free, I would need money to survive... now that I was alone.

"I glanced around and was alarmed to see the guard who had raped me returning. Without hesitation I scooped up the purse and fled back into the confines of the where's tent. I went to the place where the men raped me and I dug a hole in the soft dirt near my pallet, burying Yousef's pouch. Just as I finished, the guard tossed open the door flap and stepped inside, beckoning to me." The girl lowered her eyes, hesitated, then continued.

"Early in the morning of the seventh day of our confinement, after the soldiers had redeemed all their tokens, we seven were awakened and then taken outside of the compound where we were each given five copper coins and a day's supply of food rations, plus a small skin filled with water. I noticed that the soldiers were dismantling their encampment. Most were so busy preparing for whatever it was that they were doing that they did not notice us, but others did, they made rude gestures and rude comments causing our cheeks to flame and burn with shame.

"In my anger I stooped and seized a fist-sized rock and threw it at a small group of taunters, heedless to whatever the consequences for my actions might be... so furious was I at these beasts who had used us and hurt us and then laughed at us. The soldiers sidestepped my throw, guffawing at my display of spirit.

"When they had moved to avoid the stone I had thrown, I saw what had previously been concealed from my view by their interfering presence: I saw the body of Yousef the Jew, which had been staked out spread-eagle upon the ground. His corpse had been badly mutilated... as if his tormentors had been especially angry with him and had cruelly misused his flesh in an effort to expend their rage. As I looked at his body and their treatment of it, I knew that he had in some way been responsible for the raid on the compound several days earlier.

"The soldiers escorted us out of the compound where they instructed us to walk away from the craggy hilltop temporarily holding their camp. 'Go whore yourself in Jerusalem,' one of the men advised us. He turned to me and added, 'You'll earn your bread there for sure.' His companions laughed and then pushed us away from them.

"My cousin Sara, one of the seven, sobbed loudly then screamed. I watched her race to a nearby precipice and without looking back towards any of us, flung herself over the ledge. I shuddered when I heard the sound her body made when it struck the stones below.

"Rebecca, another of the seven, sought to wrap her arms around me and lead me down the pathway from the fort, but I pulled away from her and ran over to a mound of boulders that overlooked the encampment. Rebecca and the others tried to call out to me, and urged me to come away from that place and to leave with them. I hushed them and waved them away from me. Thinking me mad from the abuse, they abandoned me to my fate and staggered off down the road."

"You waited until the soldiers decamped, then you went back to retrieve the purse; am I right, daughter?" Judas asked her kindly. She nodded.

"Yes," she added, then followed with a brief silence of resignation. "I watched them breaking down the tents and I marked the place in my mind where the whore's tent had stood. Several hours later, when the last of those bastards had left, I crept from behind the rocks and returned to the camp. I dug up the pouch that Yousef had given me and I left that place, resolved to reach Geserat and do that which I had been paid to do."



Again, she stopped her narrative, this time at the bark of a dog somewhere in the mid-distance, seemingly reluctant to continue. Judas touched her arm and then touched her lightly upon the shoulder. "Tell me what happened then," he said to her.

At that, she lifted her face back to him, on it was a hard and bitter expression. "I made my way to Geserat. I discovered that the Romans had arrived there before me; Yousef's family had been slaughtered, and their crucified bodies were lifted upon wooden poles in front of their house. Yousef's wife was one of nine who were dead. Even a suckling child did not escape their wrath; she was nailed to a pole by the pounding of a spike through her head."

Judas felt her sorrow most assuredly, but he felt something else as well, he felt her rage. She continued, "I went mad for awhile, I guess. I do not remember much of what happened after I ran away from Geserat. I know that I almost died wandering in the desert, and that from time to time, people met me and were kind to me, while others were cruel. Eventually, I reclaimed my senses and walked here to Jerusalem.

"I had coin and I was a good Jewish woman, but none of these so called, good Jews, would take me into their homes, or employ me, because somehow word had passed that I had whored myself to the Romans. It did not matter that I had not done so freely, that I had been raped, under the laws of religion I was considered unclean," she spat, then continued, "my own people are no better than the others."

"I survived. I rented a place. I tried to build a life," she laughed, then added. "I met a man who helped me spend all my coin, he was pretty, but he would not work. I eventually run him off. Since then, I have earned my bread as the Romans predicted," she wrapped her arms around herself, giving herself a hug.

"It's hard to believe that five years have passed since the morning that my village was burned," she said softly.

"And all of this time you have kept the scroll safe."

She nodded. "I knew what the scroll said because a customer of mine reads well and once while he was in his cups, I made him translate the words for me. Something, some voice inside of me told me to keep it, no matter what happened. Then recently, I heard some fellow companions of the night whispering about you... about how you were a strange but good person, and that you were keenly interested in any information regarding your Master, the one they call Jesus the Messiah. That's how I knew that you would be interested in seeing it."

"And that voice inside you, the one that told you to safeguard the scroll, what does it tell you now?"

"It says 'to trust Judas'," she said without hesitation.

"Then show me the scroll."

The prostitute reached into her purse and extracted a single object. It was a hands length long, and two fingers wide, a common scribe's scroll. Judas seized it hungrily, and unfurled it, instantly.

Even though the night sky was pitch black, Judas was easily able to scan the contents of the parchment. He smiled and then re-rolled the scroll. He looked back at the woman and said, outright, "I'll buy it."

She nodded, then watched him reach for his pouch and with eyes as hungry as his had been when he devoured the contents of the scroll, she awaited her pay. Her eyes flew open wide when Judas dropped three gold coins into her hand, instead of the silver she expected. "Here child. Why ask for silver when you are worth gold." With that he turned and started to walk away from her, but after four or five paces he stopped and turned back to face her once again.

"That token you showed me, the rape coin. How did you come by it? I mean, the l soldiers didn't exchange them by giving them to you, did they?"

She stared at Judas for along moment, then lifted her chin slightly upwards and shook her head defiantly. "No they did not."

Judas retraced his steps until standing close to her once more. "Tell me about the token." he urged her.

She laughed the laugh of one close to madness. "Why not! I will tell you. About a year after my coin ran out, I spotted him. He was staggering from drink. He was scouring the streets looking for a hungry child who might be desperate enough to crave the few coppers he was willing to spend. I approached him and he remembered me not. I was sixteen, but small for my age. I made him think I was only twelve. Into the ally he led and I followed..." she looked over her shoulder and pointed to a nearby street. "It's right over there. When I got him in there, I stabbed him in his belly until he fell. Then I slit his manhood off. The funny thing was that he squealed and whimpered and screamed... like a child before he died. Not at all what you'd expect."

“Not what you would expect from an old soldier, eh,” Judas added. She smiled and shook her head. “I’ve killed fifteen more, since then.” “Romans?” She shrugged. “Mostly. But, not always. A pig doesn’t need to be a citizen of Rome.” “Peace be with you, child.” Judas told her, softly. Then he turned and walked from that place.

\* \* \*

After about an hour’s time Judas arrived at a small stone and mud hut, standing completely isolated in the center of a beautiful field. The small one room cabin he called home was a mean ugly sight, as out of place in this flawless valley as a weed in a flowerbed. Yet, to Judas, it was paradise on earth.

He stepped from the meager light of a starlit nighttime sky and into the absolute darkness that existed within the interior of his small hut. He moved to the farthest corner of his one room dwelling where he knelt with the purpose of one practiced at doing a thing. He reached unerringly for the steel and striker, sparks flew and in a moment’s time he had a small fire burning inside his makeshift fire-grate. Soon the wood ignited and flames mounted.

In less than a couple of minutes the inside of his hut was lit and warmed by the fires cheery glow, and its warmth made his one room dwelling habitable. He scratched his chin and for a moment considered bringing his animal indoors; his small foul-tempered donkey with its bald patches. However, he reflected on the fact that it was not cold enough outside to cause the old critter any harm, and the sun would be rising in a few hours time, with that he decided to leave the beast outside.

Judas lit a twig from the hearth fire and moved to his rude wooden table where he used it to light a short fat candle. Scratching around in his pack he came up with the scroll that he had just purchased from the whore in Jerusalem. He spread the scroll out atop the surface of the table and began to read the thing in its entirety.

### What Judas Read

I, Yousef the scribe swear by the one true God, that the following is a true, factual, personally witnessed account. The Romans think they own me. They think me Yousef, a traitor to his people.

They think me bought and sold for silver. What they do not know is that I am Zealotim, and that my people have told me: Yousef, go to the Romans. Work your way into their confidence. Be our eyes and ears inside their camp. Where I am instructed to go, I go.

I presented myself to Garthius Maximus, the atavistic Centurion of the Eleventh Legion, dispatched by Rome to pacify Aremiea at the behest of the depraved Tribune Pilate and his lap dog Herod, who has traded his birthright and his immortal soul in exchange for crumbs from the Roman table.

I made my services as a scribe available to Garthius. When he asked me why I was for sale, like this I wrung my hands together, as if a pious Sanhedrin, and muttered things about the silver that my family needed to prosper. He saw in me the Jew I expected him to see, and he believed me base enough to sellout Aremiea for mere profit.

Ah! Yehova knows that my life inside the enemy’s ranks has been bitter. What I have been forced to witness could force a lesser man to forget his mission and reach for his sword.

I swear by the faith of my father that I wept a thousand times as I followed these beasts from place to place, observing the way they sew the seeds of suffering in heavy-handed fistfuls across the land of my people. But, I, hold back my tears, and I stay my dagger, and I watch and I make my reports to my brethren.

Here then is my story:

After four days of hard and forced marching, driven on by the implacable will of Garthius Maximus, our effort brought our entire compliment of soldiers to the place we now are, a place near a small village known to the local

people as Hege. This village was named for a great a Jewess named Lelia Hege who fought along side the Macabees. This village is also Zealotim.

Being only midday, the soldiers were surprised and delighted when given rest at such an early hour. Their delight soon turned to grumbles when Garthius commanded the Legion to create a semi-permanent fortified encampment, instead of a way-stop camp.

I communicated my fears to the scouts assigned the dangerous job of trailing behind the Legionnaires and I left a note in the proper place, and when I passed that place the next day I saw their response. Message received. Good! At least my comrades knew that the ravagers were in this area to exact destruction, though at that time I did not know how.

The second morning at the encampment, Garthius sent word that one-quarter of the Century was to arm itself and equip itself with fleet-rations. This meant that twenty-five soldiers would be laden with water and food for a one days march. Moreover, that they would be wielding hand weapons.

We left the camp before dawn and marched at double paces for five hours. Then we fell upon the small village named after the Jewess, where it was said a small contingent of criminals resided. The officer who led this quick-strike force told us that some of the men from this village had kidnapped six Roman soldiers from brothels in the region, and had taken these invaders to Hege where they tortured them unto death.

My role was to be the interpreter for the Romans. I would stand to the side and watch helplessly as the enraged soldiers laid waste to yet another village. Then, when all save a few blameless women were left undead, I would read the posted notice aloud to the empty wind: proclaiming that here, was proof, that Rome was our master.

I stood and I watched as Hege died.

The screams, cries and wails rose up to greet the morning sun. The blood pooled, spilled, ran, and splattered. Until, finally, in the end, all that remained from what Hege had once been was just a sad chain of women whom the Romans would drag back to their encampment and defile. My tears rained down upon my heart and I wailed inside, along with the daughters of Israel.

We returned to the stockade from the sack of Hege and I discovered that another, smaller contingency of soldiers had left camp bent on a similar mission as ours. It was not until the next morning that these soldiers returned with three prisoners, all men.

My job as translator includes interrogations as well as the reading of official documents. I was commanded to step into the torture-tent, to help the Romans question the three men captured by the second party. I abhorred this part of my duty more than any other, because these poor victims never knew that I, Yousef, was not the traitor that I appeared to be. I could not tell them that I was Zealotirn and that I had marked well their suffering, and that I would report to the people how bravely they had died. Instead, I told them exactly what the Romans instructed. With hatred in their hearts they cursed me as they bled and as they died.

What I saw inside the torture-tent that night however shock me to the foundations of my soul! For there in chains, seated with two of his compatriots, sat Jesus the Messiah! I recognized him, having seen him a few years before in the town of Sycher with my youngest son, Ephrarn.

The lad and I were thirsty after a long day of travel, so we pressed through the small crowd surrounding the well where he spoke. He was instructing the crowd concerning the issue of women and prostitution.

I listened as Jesus spoke on the plight of women who were for one reason or the other, abandoned by husband and family. His words rang with sincerity and tears gave a mist to his eyes as he said. "If a man sells his labor for coin, which he then redeems for strong drink, is he more righteous in the eyes of God than a woman, who is forced by ill fortune to sell her body for food? I think not.

"And if a father, through bitter neglect, causes his child to wander the streets in promiscuity, who must pay for that sin? Do you not know the answer? Then I shall answer it for you. I assure you that in the eyes of God, the young delinquent and the hungry woman are both innocent! But... the neglectful parent and the indifferent world, they will be held accountable by the dogs of retribution."

His words sang through me like Holy Scriptures and my heart moved within me. I fell to my knees before him with tears streaming. He pulled water from the well and poured it over not only my head, but also that of many

others present that day as well. He told us that our sins were forgiven us. So, how could I not recognize him now? I could not for it was he, the Messiah, and I knew by his eyes that he remembered me as well.

I noted that Jesus sat between two of his companions, on the floor of the tent. The only light that lit the interior of that grim place was the angry red glow of the brazier that one young soldier forced with a bellows. That white-hot fire was to heat the cruel iron-implements that these jackals would soon use, to rip, sear, and pierce the flesh of these men.

One of the companions of Jesus was but a young boy, with no more than sixteen years. He sat there with a sickly stare on his white ashen face, completely frozen with fear.

The other companion was much older than the other two, a gray beard, easily past fifty years of age. This one held his head high as I entered the tent, and the expression on it was very different from the one staining the face of the youth. In fact, the old veteran snarled at me and hissed, "Judas" as I stood before him. He framed me a betrayer.

Judas recoiled away from the offending scroll. His stomach knotted and he felt himself becoming ill, so stunned was he to hear that his very name had somehow become synonymous with the act of betrayal. Sorrow overwhelmed him and it was several long moments before he could steel himself to return to his perusal of the scroll before him.

Composing himself, he read the remains of the scroll.

My mind refrained from thinking about the old man who had cursed me. I focused instead upon the task I suddenly knew to be at hand. My days of espionage were over. My duty to the Zealotirn was over and my duty to the Messiah took priority. I knew that I had to assist the Holy Man of God, at all costs.

Frantic to find a means to discharge my new duty I searched the tent with my eyes, seeing only the prisoners, the three soldiers and the grisly instruments rudely spread atop the table. The realization that there was nothing, nor no one to help with my mission caused the blunt fingers of despair to dig into my belly, telling me that all hope was futile. That was when inspiration struck me like a bolt of lightning from heaven.

"Silence your mouth, dog!" I roared, as if suddenly overcome at the remark that the old man had hurled at me. The soldiers snickered and grinned as I stepped forward and slapped the graybeard full across the face.

I gripped his long silver hair in my fist and yanked his head forward. Then I leaned over, putting my face close to his and in pretended fury whispered, "Mark me well. I am Yousef, Zealotim." His eyes flew open wide, even wider when I continued.

"You ACT boldly! If you are truly brave, then here my words. I will cause these soldiers to go to work on you first. You must hold on long enough to tire them. Do that, old man. Hold out. I will send word to the brothers who lie outside this camp. I will give the command to attack this fortification. I will open the gates, the brothers will come, and in the confusion of the attack, I will free these two. Old father, tell me now. Are you brave?" I gripped his hair fighter and shook his head violently for appearances sake, as if making some point of fact with my hapless victim. The soldiers had now stopped to see what we were about.

The old man looked upwards and into my eyes. He searched my own, examining them for truth, or falsehood. Finally, a tear welled up in his tired old eyes and he let loose a single sigh of resignation... for he had at last confronted the full weight of the awful request that I was asking of him. Then his eyes turned to steel and he barked out, "Death to Rome!" in the language of the oppressors. "God grant me strength" he added, in our own language.

"Fool!" I roared, and struck him again, this time with my closed fist.

I spun to face the torturer. "Arcius Sceptimus! This man is in possession of much information. I recommend that you apply all due diligence upon him, first. You might be able to save the lives of some kidnapped soldiers." Arcius Sceptimus smiled, for he was angry at the graybeards curse against Rome. The message that flashed back to me from beneath his hooded eyes, assured me that the old-one would have a long and terrible evening ahead of him.

The torturer turned his attention to the old man... who at that gesture shouted at me. "Hebrew dog, tell your masters this: they are living proof that their mothers mated with barnyard pigs!" I translated his words exactly.

I lurked inside the tent for an hour or so, before making excuses to Arcius about having to depart for a short while. He was trying to revive the graybeard so that they could continue.

Slipping from the tent, I made my way to the edge of the encampment and then beyond it. I stole down the hillside to a place where I knew myself to be watched by the brothers. I left the sign to attack now! Then I retraced my steps and re-entered the camp.

This is the end of my report. I stand in the dimly lit interior of my own tent and write these words in haste. I await the Zealotim. They will come tonight. They will fall upon this encampment like an avenging storm. When they come, I shall finally lift my dagger, and use it to free the Messiah and his young companion from the clutches of these animals.

Word that Jesus lives and that the Zealotim have freed him, must be taken from this place to Geserat - so that his followers will know of his fate and our part in it. I will trust this scroll into the hands of one of the women who seems to be stronger than the others. If God wills it, she will be successful.

### Yousef bar Yousef, Gevorah Atah Ulah LeOlam

Judas finished reading the accounting of Yousef the Jew, then sat inside his thatched hut contemplating all that the young girl had said to him when selling him the scroll on this strange night. She was not lying to him about any of what she had said, of this he was sure.

Judas allowed his thoughts to stray, loosely contemplating the grand play of life and how all of humanity seemed to unwittingly in some way or another fulfill their own destiny. He thought about the young girl who chose a short life of revenge, over a long life of peace. He thought of the loving husband and father, who chose to spend the coin of his life rescuing a man whom he had chanced to meet, but once, long ago. He thought of an old man who accepted unwarranted torture as his duty to others. Of God, who had allowed evil to murder the family of the man who gave his life to rescue his Messiah, and finally of himself, he, who had betrayed his Master for false idealism... misunderstood ideology. He contemplated how it seemed as though they were each inexplicably bound together, one to the other, by the laughing gods of some ethereal freak show. Fate, he finally conceded, but fate bound to what ultimate end he could not comprehend.

Can a man, or a woman, recognize through the power of their own mind, the true course of their own destiny? And, if so, if they could recognize an uncomfortable path - could they then alter its direction? On the other hand, would that opposite direction merely be the self-same destiny only disguised? Can one endeavor to force a new destiny to arise, only to find the same reckoning awaiting him at the appointed time? The Master had said, that the path I had chosen would be difficult. "Chosen," that is the word he had used, "chosen."

Judas pondered his own fate and wondered if there was a difference between Fate and Destiny, after all, destiny sounded noble, while fate sounded ominous. Was this path his Fate or his Destiny? And had he, in fact, chosen this rocky course upon which he traveled with the full knowledge of the hardships that would be in store for him along the way, thereby decreeing it so? In addition, was that young girl raped by fate and circumstances; or was she raped according to some higher pre-ordained knowledge of her own making? Am I delusional for even contemplating that? He knew it was so.

Judas wished for little in his life, but as he paced his floor, he wished for a window where he could watch the stars while enjoying the comfort of his hearth. It was on nights like this one when he contemplated the greater mysteries that a window and stars could be fully appreciated, he then said to himself someday, someday...

His thoughts continued to fall across the skies of his mind like stars falling toward some destiny of their own. Again he dwelt upon the wrecker of his own existence, and of the strange equanimity of Fire and Water, Earth and Air... Love and Hate... Choice and Destiny. Without conscious awareness he gave way to fatigue and lay atop his mat of straw and skin, where he drifted into darkness. One by one he ascended the stairs into the dark place where nothingness dwells, until, at last, he began to see the glimmering light from the footpath of that place where all things are known, but nothing remembered.

He awoke the next morning much later in the day than was his custom and went to his clay basin where he washed himself according to the ways of folks, in those days. When finished he moved to the fire pit and rekindled the fire that had burned itself down in the early hours of the morning. With little movement, he produced an iron pot that held a vegetable stew waxed thick with grease and speckled with spots of blue velvet growing upon the skin of its contents, a pot, which he then hung above the now frothing flames. As he awaited the warming of the two-day-old stew, he returned his attention once more to the Yousef scroll.

So, the evil forces looming behind the panorama of life had pulled a fast one, hadn't they, Judas shook his head at these silent thoughts. Pilate, the grinning puppet of indifference, continued his thoughts, had obeyed the crowd and set free, Jesus Bar Abbas (Jesus the son of God). While my Master was murdered. After his reprieve Jesus Bar Abbas, for reasons known only to himself, became somewhat of a moralist and a teacher. He roamed the land spewing his half-baked theories and philosophies... as if they were actually buoyed up by serious spiritual underpinning. And stranger still was that people had actually listened, many in fact believing Bar Abbas to be the Messiah... not realizing that the true Messiah was his Master, and that he had been killed, yet risen, the way a true Messiah was supposed to be.

Judas himself had been fooled by the reports of the so-called Jesus sightings that had occurred for the first few years after the Resurrection. He had actually chased hundreds of these sightings before conceding that they were not his Master, that he had been chasing a chimera, an illusion, an imposter and not his Master at all. To give himself some dose of sanity, after realizing his folly, instead of running off and chasing every Jesus sighting he heard about, he began instead, to gather all documented accounts of these sightings, drawing them together into one collective archive, so that he could differentiate between the resurrected sightings of his Master, which he believed still happened, and those of the other Jesus.

Rare though they were, his Master did on occasion reveal himself, such as that time on the road to Damascus, but even that story did not ring entirely true in his mind. However, he did prove that Bar Abbas had been far away in Jerusalem on that day, so he categorized it as a true sighting until proven otherwise. He believed that his Master was out there somewhere, walking and talking and spreading the Good News. He also believed that all he had to do was study the facts to establish which sightings were false and which were true. He then hoped against all odds that one of these sightings would lead him back into the arms of his Master, the Christ, who would then embrace him and forgive him for his betrayal. And this brought him to the point of the Yousef scroll, a report by an eye witness to a pre-crucifixion encounter and a post crucifixion encounter, making this report the most important he had come upon. He believed without doubt that this transcript would lead him to the Christ; he needed only to decipher it.

Judas rubbed his fingers against the strange appellation that had been affixed to the end of the missive. "Yousef bar Yousef, Gevorah Atah Ulah LeOlam." It made absolutely no sense at all.

Judas leaned over the table once more with his arms behind his back in a scholarly manner. He pursed his lips together as he lifted his gaze into the middle distance, as if the answers to this mystery were located there. "Why" he contemplated, would Yousef, a proud and defiant man, choose to sign off his most important work with such an illiterate phrase as the one he left? The answer is, of course, that he would not. Therefore, it must be a coded phrase to the Zealotim.

Judas scowled, paced, and thought for the next ten hours, pausing only long enough to eat his stew, and to step outside to relieve himself. Sometime in the night, he stopped pacing and lay gazing up into the darkness from his pallet, where he at some point surrendered himself back into sleep. When next he awoke he did so with a start, realizing that he had foolishly allowed his fire to burn itself out without conserving coals to re-ignite it. He knew that a person, in this day and age, who did not tend their fire, could easily die in the wilderness. Then he laughed at his own thoughts, thoughts that death might strike him in his carelessness. For he knew all too well that death was no longer a fate that lay in wait for the likes of him. Cursed by his Master he had been condemned to walk the earth in sorrow, eternally. He had been condemned to life as Judas the Betrayer, a man so despised that none would dare to, forever, name their child after him, so synonymous to evil was his name. Tonight it seemed as though honor, death and restful sleep spurned him equally.



Without bothering to re-start his fire Judas dressed himself and mounted his donkey. He knew now that he needed to hurry and return to Jerusalem in search of the young woman who had sold him the Yousef scroll. Maybe, now that he had read the scroll in its entirety, he could glean from her the mystery Yousef had left, and maybe that mystery would lead him to his beloved Master.

# Chapter Five

## Judas

Judas rode through the gates of the city and went directly to the same section of town that he had been to only a few nights past. He had many contacts there and now that he knew her, he was sure that his contacts could produce her again. However, bad news awaited him there. For the vengeful young prostitute had been caught red-handed in the act of murdering a Roman soldier, and had been condemned to a torturous death on that self-same day at sunrise.

Upon hearing of the girl's fate, Judas, being haunted by forces larger than him, felt destiny once again swirling about him like the clouds of a darkened storm, and in order to thwart it he hastened to seek out the girl before her grim sentence could be, carried out. When he found her, she was chained to a post and guarded by a young soldier.

As he looked at her he noted that she moved not at all, but only stared off into the darkness confronting her through bruised and broken eyes, eyes that glinted with the light of certain madness. She had been beaten past the point of recovery; her body was twisted and broken, bent at an impossible angle and destined to unbearable pain before surrendering itself to dust and darkness. She was ruined and destroyed; all that remained was the final blow. Judas, grimaced as he approached her Roman captor.

The soldier gripped his sword pommel, but quickly released it when he caught sight of Judas' silver. Coins passed from palm to palm and this allowed him to approach the prisoner, the last visit of a family member.

He knelt beside the figure of the battered and broken girl. Her insane eyes glared darts of fire at him and her burst lips spewed curses, at all men.

As she cursed, watery blood dribbled from her mouth onto the ground between them. A tear welled itself in Judas' own eye's, rolling down his cheek until it too dropped onto the dust of the ground between them. The girl saw his compassion and a little of the madness left her gaze and a moment of near clarity returned... enough to allow Judas' mind to slip past the young woman's mental defenses and directly into her thoughts. At this probing the girl only stared past him, saying nothing. Judas then lifted his hand and placed a tender palm along the side of her bruised and blackened face.

As a consolation of sorts, after experiencing death, not once, but twice, Judas had been gifted with an unexplainable ability to control his mind in such a manner that he could suspend some of nature's most fundamental laws, one of those was that he could, if given the slightest opening, read the thoughts of those around him. This was such a time.

"Peace, daughter." he told her silently. "Allow me to read your memories." The girl stiffened momentarily, and then she relaxed. Judas probed her mind looking for the events that had occurred at the Roman encampment when Yousef had given her the scroll. He sifted through her memories, swiftly arriving at those that interested him, pertaining as they did to the events of his Master. He closed his eye's to watch and to listen to her memories like a raider of thoughts, a pirate of the mind.

After a few minutes the mind of Judas abruptly filled with the stench of the rape tent, and the suffering sobs of desperate woman. He felt himself cloaked in the form of the young girl's body as it leapt up to void the contents of his/her stomach outside the flap of the tent. Soon he/her was on their knees retching and vomiting. Then a soldier was in front of them shoving his erect flesh into them. He felt the girls mind go numb to every sound and sensation that was happening to her until a fog of dust, shouts and the ragged screams of dying men pierced the veil of his/her consciousness. Judas, watched as the soldier pulled away from them, responding to the chaos.

He/she, knelt there dazed and tired, oh so tired. Then from the swirling fog of confusion stepped the badly wounded Yousef, just as she had described him. HATE/RAGE/ ANGER! In her thoughts, he felt the full weight of the

girls desire to rip and tear and hurt this man, whom she projected all of the blame and responsibility for her plight upon.

Yousef was talking. HATE/RAGE!!! His/her mind watched the Jew traitor's mouth move, not comprehending the words. HATE!!! The translator was gut stabbed and bleeding. GOOD!!! Judas watched as Yousef reached towards his waist belt jerking a fat, bulging coin purse from it. "Take this daughter! Here is enough money to buy a new life." CONFUSION! HATE! CONFUSION!!! "Take the scroll to my wife in Geserat, and all of this money is yours. My wife is a good woman. She will treat your flesh, and she will help you to heal the wounds that have been inflicted upon your mind as well. She too, suffered rape when she was young. Go to Geserat, she will help you."

CONFUSION!!! HATE/HOPE — PLEASE, HELP ME!!! "Daughter, listen to me!

Go to Geserat and deliver the scroll. It tells of the Christ! He was here! And we have freed him! Also, remember these words; tell my wife that the Messiah says to follow him West. Tell her, if I survive my wounding, I will go West with him!"

The girls mind seemed to focus slightly as she seized the garland of hope that the Jew traitor had held out to her. His wife could help her. She herself had suffered this shame, she knew how to survive! Judas experienced, as no man ever had, the shame and the degradation felt by the female when her innocence is ripped from her. In addition, he understood the fear of hopelessness imposed upon the female by a male society and its laws built upon the need to subjugate her. How foolish we are.

In his mind he watched the girl grab the sack of money, and he listened to her thoughts as her mind filled with only one thought, Go to Geserat!

Judas felt pity wash over him like a wave taking him from the shoreline of that place which represented all he had been. "Poor daughter! How she must have lost her hold upon sanity when after so much struggle, she had obtained the town of Geserat, only to discover that the person in whom she strived to reach in order to find the solace that she so desperately needed was dead, her corpse nailed to wood. Oh, this poor girl."

As he was about to release his hold upon the shattered mind of the young girl, Judas injected a pulse of awareness into her brain. In that intrusion he gave her a vision of the afterlife. He shared with her the warmth of God's infinite love which hung above, within and throughout the spirit world like the rays of the sun. "Be at peace, daughter. You are sinless," he told her.

The girl moaned and the glint of madness that had previously consumed her face fell away from her. She looked into his eyes and knew beyond doubt that all he had shown her were true. Then in a rushing flood her physical pain reclaimed her, filling her with unbearable pain and anguish. Mercifully, Judas gripped a blood vessel inside her brain with a mental fist. "I'm sending you home now," he told her. Squeezing the vessel through which her blood passed, causing her grip on this life to release its coils and lift itself out of her flesh, where it would be free to fly about the heavens like an angelic sparrow, until such time as it went to reseed the future.

Judas briefly remained at the young woman's side, softly chanting the "Hu" tone, using its power to carry the girl's spirit upward on its journey home. When he was finished, he smiled, for he knew that the mystery had been resolved. Yousef had used the appellation attached to the end of his scroll to reinforce the message that the Messiah had intended to take his message westward, to a place called Gaul. "G" the first letter in Gevorah. "A" the first letter in Atah. "U" the first letter in Ulah and "L" the first letter in Le Olarn. All Hebrew words, though misspelled, used for praising God as great. It was an old Cabalistic practice to take the first letter of holy words and combine them making new, more powerful ones. He should have recognized it right off, after all, his Master had himself studied the Cabala, they all had.

Retracing his steps to the side of the young soldier Judas once again produced silver; the soldier stiffened to attend to his new needs. The betrayer of Christ leaned close to the soldier, companionly. "The girl just died, her wounds overcame her. Looks like there will be less work for your hammers, later." The soldier cast a disinterested glance back at the confinement post; he cared little who lived or died. "Tell me," Judas continued. "Do you know of a far away place, called Gaul?"

The soldier sneered because he was a true Roman, city born; he was not some unlearned and ill-informed peasant, turned to a life of soldiering out of lack at any other opportunity. And of course he knew of Gaul. Who

didn't. "Gaul is a province directly west of Rome," he answered. "Gaul itself is vast, and to its far extremities lays an ocean filled with serpents that thrive and devour all who dare venture in its waters!"

Judas nodded his head in gratitude, and then moved to mount his donkey. The beast started moving towards the City Gate of its own accord, while its master sat unmindful of the steps that his donkey took, so lost in contemplation was he as his mind played a tune across the myriad strings of possibilities. In the end, he stiffened on the back of his animal suddenly filled with resolve, filled with the sense that his destiny lay westward, in the barbaric lands of a place named Gaul... for that was where all the signal fires pointed, as the place where he would find his Master.

Feeling the wheel turning and moving him far too strongly to ignore, he resigned to the reality that Fate was compelling him to re-trace the steps of his Master to a new land. He felt that the Christ was casting a magnetic pull upon his soul, drawing him into some new adventure of fantastic spiritual significance. And, he obeyed, directing his donkey's head towards the fierce unknown without weapons, without provisions... without remorse.

# Chapter Six

A.D. 63

It had been nineteen very difficult years since he had set his donkey's footsteps upon the trail westward to find his Master. Based upon a thesaurus of sightings made by the common-folk of his native land, Judas had been convinced beyond doubt that his Master had, in fact, not departed from the earth as the scattered remnants of Jesus' inner core of disciples were wont to report. He believed instead that he still walked the land in occult fashion, exhibiting the powers of God through diverse covert acts of selective philanthropy. It had always been his nature to do things this way. Now, when Judas factored into the equation the Yousef scroll, which had been written by an actual eyewitness to his Master, an eyewitness who stated that his Master had left his homelands for the serenity of the barbarian lands known as Gaul, it seemed to all make sense that he should follow. Had not the Master always disavowed such paltry things as kingdoms of men, and money and power? Hadn't all he truly ever yearned for, been solitude and peace? Perhaps he intended to find that which he had craved in Gaul, even if such a life in such a barbaric place as Gaul, to his way of thinking, was a tragic waste of the Master's time and talents.

The search that Judas himself waged had been a whole lot more than the enchanted search that one perhaps, might, endeavor to read into this story. In fact, his actions had been carried out in utter extremis; his search growing ever more desperate as all traces of his Master proved to be more and more evanescent. That was until two short moons past, when the ever searching and forever wandering mendicant disciple suddenly and unexpectedly came upon a piece of information that he believed would ultimately lead him might into the loving arms of the wandering Jewel of Israel.

It had been a cold, bone chilling morning, in the time of the year when one could see the first flowers of burgeoning spring, yet still feel the icy grip of winter's harsh hands upon the flesh. Judas had found himself in a position where he was totally out of provisions, and as such was pressed into a kind of headlong flight that led him into the confines of a small nameless village that he had accidentally come upon as a result.

After a short period of time Judas found his way to the livery stables, a place where long and bitter experience had proved to him, that a man willing to work, could always find a day's wage, humble though the labor for those wages might prove itself to be. A deal was struck and as Judas worked he thought idly about the cantankerous old burro with the split hooves and mangy coat riddled with bald spots, Judas smiled, the way that anyone would, whenever suddenly remembering a good companion long since lost to this world.

The first bad winter storm they had encountered that first year, when he and his donkey had taken the headlong plunge along this path in search of the Christ, had actually killed them both, but Judas had been recast upon the shores of the living, his companion had not been. It was his third time dying. He shook his head and chuckled at the thought.

All things were progressing normally for the shoveler of unspeakable things, when just outside the barn where he was working he heard a group of children, seraphic in sound. Because he held a great love in his heart for the truly innocent, and because he felt the need to take a short break from his labors and breathe a little fresh air, Judas stepped outside to watch the children. He quickly noted that they had all been beckoned to silence by the sparse figure of a middle-aged woman who was only just now beginning the telling of a tale; a tale so engrossing that it held each child wide-eyed and phantom faced. He chuckled again to himself, for he had seen the likes of this same scene in every country and every culture that his wanderings had taken him, for the Story Teller was the only true form of entertainment that a person of humble means could experience in those dark and troubled days.

"And his eye's were black, like the wings of the fluttering bloodsuckers that fly at midnight." said the woman to her rapt audience with exaggerated fervor. At these words the children gasped in unison, taken aback by the imagery they were being presented. Judas lowered his eyes and smiled, shaking his head as he repeated the words "blood suckers" to himself. The Story Teller went on.

“One evening as the sun set,” continued the woman, “I chanced to follow this group of supplicants down into a rather large dark hole in the ground. They followed a pathway that sloped in such a way that you could walk its decline with ease like a mountain trail. After trudging so far downward that I felt as if I must be deep within the bowels of the earth itself... maybe as far down as the center... we came upon a large cavern, one which required no torches to light, because it was already lit by the glow of a yellow and green growth. This growth seemed to ooze from the stones by magic, like the great monsters of the near-by hills which walk the land on the full moons and seep through door-cracks devouring small children who haven’t performed their chores.” The Story Teller hesitated as she scanned the faces of the assembled children, as if to ascertain whether any who had gathered there before her were in danger of the coming full-moon. Those who themselves were unsure lowered their eyes and vowed silently to alter their slothful ways. The Story Teller went on.

“In the middle of the cavern, sitting in near darkness, were flat stones piled one atop the other, making an altar... where no doubts many and many a child had been foully sacrificed, for there was much blood to be seen on the floor around it.”

The woman carried on with her story, but Judas decided that the faces of the nearly mortified children would give him sufficient humor for the remainder of his task, so he returned to spade and spit without hearing the conclusion of the woman’s tale.

At days end Judas washed himself in the watering trough for the horses, collected his coppers and made his way to the noisiest place in the village, hoping to buy wine and bread, maybe a stew.

He entered a place named “The Pig and Spirit” where he found an empty seat near the center of the room, a table where three burley farmers already sat. The few coppers he’d been able to earn did not go far towards a night of promise. However, in the case of much ale and friendship, one of the farmers who was celebrating something or other and did not want to do his celebrating in the company of strangers... well, strangers who were stranger than those sharing his table, paid the tab and the row of ale-mugs were ner-ending. That is when the talking began.

Judas listened to the swirling and often bawdy conversation as he fell into a gifted mug of ale like a blind man falling into the sea. After many a drink and many a laugh, Judas had neared his limit, feeling much refreshed.

However, just as he was about to rise and bid his fare-thee-wells to the freespending farmer, that same farmer slapped himself on the leg and then as though deeply amused with himself, let out a loud bellowing laugh. “Ya’ wanna’ hear a good one?” he said. They all nodded to the affirmative, except for Judas, who was still concentrating, albeit with difficulty on the task of extinguishing a final mug of ale.

“I heard this Story Teller talking earlier today... she was telling a story about a man who smelled of roses. She swore on the Tree God that it was a true story.” Those at the table laughed, with the exception of Judas who sat bolt upright suddenly filled with curious apprehension regarding the words that he had just heard. Questioning himself as if he were two separate persons, hoping beyond hope, that at least one of him was sober enough to make sense out of what he thought that he had just heard. Did this fool say that he heard telling of a man who smelled like roses? Although thoroughly inebriated, he was just about to answer himself when the farmer stopped his bellowing laughter long enough to continue his story.

“Yeah,” laughed the farmer, “Now there’s a guy who’s welcome to use my chamber pot!” Again, they burst into laughter.

One of the other farmers seated at a nearby table chimed in. “I’ll bet he’s good for a few free ale’s!” They were laughing uncontrollably when Judas finally reclaimed his senses enough to interrogate the farmer who had brought the subject up in the first place.

“Was the Story Teller that you speak of middle aged, with green eyes and yellow hair... wide at the hips?”

The laughter was nearing its end as the farmer nodded his head while reaching for his mug. “Yeah” he confirmed. “Did you hear the same story?” asked the farmer as he lifted his mug to his lips, chuckling all the while.

“No. I did not.” Judas answered. “However, I heard her telling a different tale to a group of small children, near the stables. Do you know where I might find her, now?”

The mood at the table suddenly took on a more somber tone. The farmer squared his vision then answered. “She stays with the Sorceress, outside of town. Why do you ask?”



Judas rose from the table pushing his chair back with his legs as he did so. "I knew a man like that, once." he said as he turned and left the tavern, Instantly he headed out of town on the north trail, towards where he had earlier been told was the way to the house of a witch.

As he walked upon this dark path, at this unknown hour, he pushed himself forward with hasty quickness, hoping, but not daring to allow himself to believe the swirling conspiracy of circumstances that had conspired to place him at that very table, this very night. He laughed aloud, disbelieving his fortunes. Lifting his eyes skyward he said allowed, "Surely there cannot be another." This of course referring to the man who smelled of roses.

Finally, after a short trek through the heavily forested area, Judas came upon a small dwelling built of stone and mortar. Being that the windows were heavily shuttered, Judas was unable to tell if the inhabitants therein were awake or asleep. What to do? If he made the choice to leave and return in the morning light, he might miss the Story Teller, should she decide to depart before he returned. In the end, he decided to risk the wrath of the occupants by making his presence known.

Approaching cautiously, intending to knock, hoping beforehand to hear some level of noise emanating from within to signal if the women were awake, he proceeded towards the hut. As he closed to within ten paces of the door, it burst open and a small framed woman with snow-white hair appeared in the opening.

"May I help you, young man?" she said with a degree of pleasantness that took him by surprise.

"Well... I... I. my name is Judas. I have traveled from far in the East, in search of my Master... my teacher. I... I recently was given information that leads me to believe that your guest, the woman who tells stories, might have knowledge concerning my Master's whereabouts. If it would not be too much of an inconvenience, I should like to ask her a few questions, now, this very night." As he spoke Judas could feel this powerful and Godly woman probing his mind with the fingers of her own. Then she replied. "Yes. Certainly. Enter my friend. We have been expecting you!"

# Chapter Seven

## Immortality

Judas had found contained within the memories of the Story Teller the miracle of all miracles. Not only had she relayed to him the details concerning his Master sufficiently enough for him to become convinced that she had, indeed, met a man of high spiritual consciousness, who's bodily fragrance had come to reflect that of one perfected, moreover, she had also added that this Godly saint had originated in a land far to the east! All of this information had set his heart to thundering, but none of that information could match the biggest piece of evidence that he could have asked for. Not only did this saint of a man carry with him the scent of roses, as did his beloved Master, and not only was this man a great healer, as was his Master, and not only was this man from the far east, as was Jesus, but this man had arrived and settled down with a woman he called, "wife!"

At first, this news of a wife caused Judas concern, because his Master had never once shown the slightest inclination towards being married. In fact, such worldly customs had been laughably beneath him. He was married to God, he said numerous times. However, when the Story Teller placed a name to the wife, calling her sister Magdalena, Judas knew beyond every shadow of doubt, that the married man she spoke of could be none other than his Master! He was Jesus, The Galilean! The Prophet! The carpenter's son! The only true Son of God! Judas marveled at his sudden reversal of fortune. His heart rejoiced, trilling out a song of anticipation.

After spending many hours in conversation with The Story Teller, Judas, finally extracted from her the approximate location of the village where his Master and the Magdalena could be found. It would be a difficult and arduous journey to reach his destination, because the land between where he was and where he needed to go was wild and yet to be mapped. He was however, thanks to the Story Teller, in possession of accurate directions: go west into the setting sun, past the Dragon River, then south towards the caves of Mendeloch. From there follow the first stream you find until you arrive at the Twin Lakes. There, at the edge of the two lakes you will find the village you seek. Truth be told, for that day and age, and compared to the directions usually given, these particular instruction would have been considered very thorough in nature.

The following morning he left that place filled with confidence, confidence that he would be able to follow this lead to the place where the precious fruit of absolution could be found. His intention was to beg his Master's forgiveness. He also intended to ask his Master to release him from the clutches of immortality, for he had been its rube since the day that he had surrendered Jesus over to his tormentors.

Most folk's would think immortality a blessing and a gift far more valuable than any other. However, to the possessor of it, to Judas Iscariot, it was a hellish curse. He equated it to the inability to sleep.

If you have ever endured a sleepless night or two, or three, then you can begin to understand, albeit in the smallest of ways, how stressful lack of rest can be. It is during one's time of sleep that a human being is replenished physically and revived emotionally. It is during this much misunderstood and often taken for granted period of one's existence, their time asleep, which allows a person to become renewed and reinvigorated. Without sleep, and a full measure of it, the mind will begin to lose its hold on sanity until complete madness overcomes it.

After many years of living life we humans begin to grow weary, spiritually. This is clearly demonstrated in the elderly who often times become fully reconciled with the riddle of their impending demise, often welcoming it, as if anticipating the rest, where as, in their youth, these same people would have regarded death as being the vilest and most unwelcome of fiends. This acceptance of death by the elderly happens because of that particular person having lived a satisfactory life, a life fulfilled and a life of spiritual progress. However, more often than not we see those who cling to life rapaciously, fearing death, which is a result of their inability, or more precisely their unwillingness, to advance spiritually during their current life cycle. Regardless of a persons progress, or lack thereof, a person desires either consciously or subconsciously to move on to a newer fresher life experience, in hopes that the next life/death cycle will be more spiritually educational than the last one. However, when a person cannot die,

such as was the case of Judas, life's great burdens become even greater, for even though the spirit has said, "I am tired. Please release me for awhile." Or, "I have learned much from this life experience and must now move on to a new body, etc." it cannot. That tired spirit cannot rest or progress because it has been confined to one existence. For instance, maybe in this life the spirit has learned humility as an invalid and desires a new body to express that humility. Alternatively, perhaps this spirit has a body of great beauty or great physical prowess, one that does not afford the gift of humility, therefore necessitating a lesser one so that that lesson can be learned. But without death, without a release from its present embodiment this type of spiritual progress cannot happen.

The wisdom of this reality is beyond the knowledge of the masses, once again demonstrating the need for death and its experience, which helps us to learn, to improve, to for a time bask in the presence of the Holy Spirit and recharge our batteries in the manner of a good night's sleep. Such was the case of Judas Iscariot, whose spirit was being held in captivity as surely as any prisoner being held behind the tallest wall or firmest set of bars. He was in possession of an old man's tired spirit, held captive in a young man's undying form.

Other drawbacks to immortality can also be ironic, such as, how would you like to be frozen deep within the confines of an avalanche until you are dead, only to discover that you are miraculously reanimated and back upon the path of life, only to suffer and die again and again and again every few days until the springtime sun sufficiently ripens and melts your frightful grave! Such was his fate, once.

Every few years after he had ceased trying to end his own life, it seemed that some unforeseen event would kill him. Often his demise was painful, such as a debilitating disease, infection, or accident where his agony would stop the suffering for a blissful moment, then, he would awaken only to discover that he was alive again. Once, he starved to death on a barren hillside; naturally, he came back to life, but his body, still lacking sustenance, starved to death again on that same hillside. This happened several more times until some travelers gloriously found him and nursed him back to health.

Yes, my child, it seems romantic this idea of immortality, but it is a childish dream based on a lack of understanding the spiritual significance of death. Just ask this man Judas, who knew well the burden of life immortal.

Judas feared those things about his fate which were beyond his control; greater still was his fear of that which he did not understand. For all of these reasons and more, he left searching for the village purported to be the home of his Master, because deep inside he knew that only the wisdom and intercession of his beloved teacher could provide the answers and solutions to his dilemma. And so it was that this line of thinking drove him towards his date with destiny... sometimes hoping to be able to hold onto certain beneficial aspects of his immortality and other times not, but always hoping that his Master would forgive him with a kiss. True immortality is a righteous quest... that is for certain.

# Chapter Eight

## The Magdalena

It was a late night full moon when Judas came upon a covered cave suitable for the night's habitation. After putting down his small bag of possessions he went about the chore of sparking to life a fire so that he could warm his hands and feet, maybe even heat a little water, which assisted his bowels, who of late seemed to be as conflicted and as confused about this life/death problem as he himself was.

After taking care of his nightly business, he settled into a pile of large leaves that he had gathered together forming a mat to keep the cold ground from sapping his body heat. With that done he lie awake staring through the caves opening out and into the rich canopy of stars, which seemed to lie atop the declining darkness like a cunningly placed artsy covering.

Pleased at the beautiful weather he smiled, because he new well how harsh and unforgiving this land could be... it had killed him more than once. Yes sir, this land was no place for a warm weather savant.

Relaxing he returned his focus to the star spent sky until his mind assured him that the morning would without doubt bring him, at long last, back into the presence of his lost Master. There his mind stayed.

With those thoughts and anticipations Judas tossed and turned until finally his mind surrendered itself over to the astral, a place where little boys can fly and little girls are their equal.

Judas sat upon the east most bank of his long sought after destination, and even in his extreme excitement, he could not overlook the sheer beauty of the place where he now stood.

Surrounding the lake before him rose three large hills, hills covered with deeply forested trees of the darkest green that anyone could possibly imagine. Running into the far north side of this same lake was a rapid flowing, two-man wide, stream. On this budding springtime day, flowers that were scattered all around the edges of the lakes themselves had begun to stretch their petals heavenward in an almost, worshipful way. These flowers gave the lake rings of gold, and rose, and blue, and pink. This vast parade of colors seemed to bleed over into the water looking very much like a watercolor wash, making one believe that the waters were actually the final soft stroke of the brush from which the whole scene had been painted. This contrast added greatly to the beauty of separation between dark forest and multi-colored oasis.

Along the edge of the stream and abutting the lake was a small picturesque village of thatched stone houses. What intrigued him the most about this place was the fact that it appeared built with absolutely no concern given to fortification. There were no walls, no berms, nothing defensible about it. It was exactly as he imagined it would be, for it appeared to be a place of utter harmony and serenity lying amid a world of strife and turmoil.

In this time that later historians would call the beginning of the Dark Ages, in a place called Gaul by its Roman overlords, most of this land was underdeveloped and under populated. The inhabitants of this land survived as hunters and farmers living together in various kiths and clans. Since hunting for an entire village was harder by far than hunting for a solitary family many a clan became adamant, to a point of violence, about protecting lands they deemed were needed to support their own. As a result of the ever-increasing population that this area was of late experiencing, territorial clansmanship had long since become an overly protective and often violent proposition. Because of these new pressures and problems, every other village and town that Judas had so far encountered were all surrounded with some form of fortification. This village however, which the Story Teller had called Sangreal, interpreted as Royal Blood in the language of this writer, had none. How curious this would have seemed to a person unfamiliar with the awesome power of the great Master.

Walking to the edge of the lake Judas sat himself comfortably down upon a large stone overlooking the village. He closed his eyes and began a silent chant designed to maximize the effect of the breath on the mind. Then he fell into silent prayer.

“He’s here, Red.” Said Jesus, to his wife of many years.

“I know. I sense him too, beloved,” replied the Magdalena. “I’ll take the grandchildren to sister Kirah, then go and meet him. ‘Twill be a reunion to remember.

# Chapter Nine

## The Magdalena

Judas was snatched from the mellow contentment of mindlessness by the roaring sound of children's laughter echoing off the mirror still waters of Twin Lake. As he blinked himself back into physical consciousness he smiled pleasantly, for nothing in either world was as Godly as the unabashed laughter of children. Looking across the lake towards the serenity of the village he caught sight of two children running and laughing, they were playing a local variety of a worldwide game his people called Steeple. Memories of his own playful childhood washed over him, giving him a sensation of utter peace and tranquility, tranquility equal to that of his regaining consciousness after prayer.

Suddenly, as Judas scanned his eyes across the length of the village his attention was captured by the sight of an elderly woman seated upon a log at the edge of the lakeshore, with eyes affixed squarely upon him. Momentarily he was taken aback, not only by the fact that he was being scrutinized by a stranger, but more so because of the rich aura of arcane light which formed a canopy around the old crone.

Now all humans are in possession of auras, and those auras are usually composed of mundane looking blues and greens with traces of white. However, the aura of this old woman was constructed of flowing crystalline whites, suffused through and through with shards of purest gold, signifying great spiritual power. In the entirety of his life Judas had known but one person in possession of that high degree of purity. In an unconscious whisper that fell softly from his lips like the wind blown petals of a rose, Judas mumbled, "The Magdalena!"

As Judas rounded the flower-shawled shore of the lake standing between himself and his long sought Queen, his eyes left her only when the stumbling, hasty, necessities of his running, leaping passage demanded they must. Several times in his awed and utterly mesmerized condition he did lose his balance the way someone does when trying to walk with their eyes cast upward into the farthest reaches of heaven. Even so, his eyes continually steered back to the magnet of his obsession, to the person he loved and admired above all others save but one, "The Magdalena" he whispered again.

In closing the distance between them he noted that she had aged considerably since their last meeting... a time he estimated to be more than thirty years ago. Her aging surprised him, and he chided himself for not having considered this inevitability before.

Standing motionless she awaited the arrival of her visitor. As she waited she unconsciously straightened her shoulders and brushed back her hair with the tips of her fingers, the way only a woman can, as if responding to his very thoughts concerning her aging. Judas caught the movement and his eyes misted over at her confrontation with the ravages of the same mortality that he himself yearned for.

Interestingly enough, Judas also noted that she, as always, still did not cover her hair as the laws of the east demanded of any woman who was not a prostitute or an infidel. And in the soft breeze of that day her trusses blew about her in elegant abandon, and the wisps that played around the gentle curve of her face accented the handsomeness of her matronly features. The thing time had not blurred was the deep flowing redness of her thick mane.

Even at her advanced age the woman from Magdala stood tall and strong of limb with thin hips and broad shoulders. This woman was remarkable, leaving no doubt in anyone's mind that here was a person who still possessed more than her fair share of the over-powering beauty that she had enjoyed throughout the years of her youth. As he drew close, Judas could not help but wonder what she must have thought concerning his own preternatural youth... for he had not aged, outwardly, a single day since The Christ had been handed over to the cross.



When Judas had stumbled within arms reach of the Magdalena he dropped to his knees and said, "Bless me Mother, for I am in dire need of comfort. Forgive me of my transgressions Holy Mother, because I have perpetrated betrayal upon those who trusted me."

Awaiting her response seemed like an eternity for Judas, but after a slight pause, The Magdalena spoke to him in an angelic voice while reaching down with her left hand and placing that hand squarely on the upper crown portion of his head. "Peace, brother. It is not my place to neither give nor accept forgiveness. You must only forgive yourself. This is the common thread of misunderstanding that has been woven into the tapestry of the minds of humanity... that thread being, the notion, that one needs forgiveness from a higher source, for their ill actions. The truth however is that God forgives unconditionally, even before the stone of sin has rippled the waters in the sea of indiscretion. Since God has already forgiven you, forgiveness by me is not necessary. It has... automatically been given. As for the man you betrayed... he loved you Judas and that has not changed. Yes, he was disappointed in you, but did he not tell you to do what you had to do? Yes, he did. Therefore, I assure you that you are forgiven in his eyes.

"However," she continued. "If one feels guilty about an event or an action, and if this guilt rises beyond their ability to reconcile it within their own inner-being, then that action or that event begins to acquire a falsely created existence of its own and grows into a negative thing. That thing which your own sense of guilt has constructed has nothing whatsoever to do with God, Judas. He did not create it. You did. Therefore, God cannot UN-create it. This you alone must do."

Without levering himself up from his kneeling position, Judas, raised his tearful eyes skyward until they rested upon the face of the holy woman. Considering her words, he replied, "Mother, are you telling me that there are no consequences for our sins?"

The Magdalena looked deeply into the weeping face of the sorrowful man kneeling before her and answered. "No my child, that is not at all what I am saying. Of course there are unavoidable consequences flowing outward, like ripples in a pond, from every act, deed and intention that we create... regardless of whether or not those thoughts and actions were positive or negative, or simply neutral and ambivalent ones. If you break the laws of humankind, or run afoul of a social taboo, then the chances are good that your unlawfulness will bring you retribution in the court system. The tightly knit web of karmic response will ensure that a toll be extracted for any and all actions. But who among us determines what is lawful and what is unlawful?" she asked as she pulled him to his feet and guided him to a seat on the log where she herself had previously been seated. It is mankind who determines what is lawful and what is not. God is not the author of these regulations."

In her teacher mode The Magdalena continued. "When the Creator smote the first man for striking the first mother, was that an act of sin? No my child it was what it was... merely an action, nothing more."

"Does not the scripture renounce murder, saying 'Thou shalt not kill?'"

"Of course they do, my son. But the scriptures are misunderstood; tell me how you interpret that specific commandment."

"Well... that it is forbidden for one person to kill another," Judas replied.

"No, that is not at all what that particular commandment intends. It says, 'Thou shalt not kill,' but kill what? It does not say. Humanity assumes that the object, the thing that we are forbidden to kill, is another person. Why? The answer to that question is, that man profits when he conspires to kill a tree, or a herd of cattle, etc. Therefore, because it benefits man, the assumption has been that this kind of killing is acceptable. However, humanity does not openly profit by the random killing of another person, he only profits in the killing of the multitudes, such as in war. In addition, a rogue killer of men, meaning one not sanctioned by the authorities, might grow so bold as to turn his hand against those who govern him. Therefore, the murder of humans, outside of government sanctioning, is deemed unacceptable to humankind... never mind the fact that the moment men in power deem it profitable for men to kill other men, it becomes acceptable. For when men of power declare that war is justified, they will preach it from every pulpit, saying that God has decreed it fit that the enemy should be murdered. Forget the truth, that every war ever fought was formulated, on one side or the others, desire to rob and steal from the other. There is no innocent side in war. All are culpable, either in the "initiation or the participation."

The Magdalena changed her tone of voice saying, "How do you think God feels about it all?"

"I don't think God wants us to be killing each other," he replied dryly. The Madonna smiled, for in truth, she had greatly missed the challenge of entering into debate with a sharpened intellect such as the one her old student possessed. "And why should it matter to God, one way or the other, what we do?"

Judas was taken aback at what his Priestess seemed to be saying. What was the merit of this lesson he wondered. "Forgive me, my love, but I do not understand! Are you blaspheming?"

"Then I will spare you further sparring, my son. Allow me to explain myself clearly to you." With that, she hesitated, took a deep breath as if inhaling some pleasant fragrance, then while exhaling she ran her hands across her knees smoothing out her clothing. She looked deeply into his eyes and continued.

"We are the spirit-entity which animates and propels, powers if you will, the earthly clay of a physical vehicle. Our spirit-entity activates and directs the physical machine which houses it through its control of the brain. The Soul is superior to the Spirit, the Spirit is superior to the Mind, the Mind is superior to the Brain and the Brain is superior to the Body. We control the Body by imposing our will on the Brain. We are separate from the Brain and its Body. With that knowledge understand this; when the physical body dies, even if it is murdered, the indwelling spirit that animates it, us, lives on. It, we, do not die. Therefore, how is it correct to say that someone is ever really killed? They, in reality are not killed. The clay is extinguished, this is true, but that is all. The spirit and soul are still alive and that same spirit/soul will be reborn to live again and again and again. Therefore, it would be correct to say that one person cannot kill another person, not with axe, nor sword, nor stone."

"Then what is the purpose of the Law of Moses, instructing us to refrain from killing?"

"The commandment is sound my child. If you kill the clay you will be punished under the laws of man, but we were debating God's position and how HIS commandment is not pertaining to the killing of men. This answer can only be comprehended, when viewed through a lens, where humankind is not the entity we see reflected in the water of reality.

"Where the commandment becomes clear is in our understanding of the spirit. When we understand what spirit is, and what the flesh is not, we begin to appreciate just what it is that can and cannot be killed. If a person cannot truly be killed by cutting the cord of physical existence, then how is death possible at all?" She hesitated, giving Judas "a moment to consider her question, yet not enough time to answer. Then she continued.

"The killing that God's law is referring to, is, of course the killing of the spirit. That is why God did not differentiate within the body of this particular proclamation. After all, did not our Lord make certain that it was explicitly clear that one should refrain from coveting his neighbor's wife? Or his goods? Think you not, that if the meaning of the commandment in question was as simple as, thou shalt not kill thy neighbor, or thou shalt not kill another human being, that it would have said specifically that, as it did in the other commandments which are very specific?"

Being that he was unsure of his own opinion on the issue, Judas nodded pensively. The Magdalena smiled, and then pressed forward with her lesson, "The truth is that God is simply not concerned with the life or death of the flesh. For God knows full well that physical existence is but a learning tool to be experienced by the indwelling spirit, and then discarded when that lesson has been learned or rejected."

The Magdalena lifted her arms luxuriantly and motioned towards the sky, the water, the flowers and the trees. "This life, here, on this earth, within this clay is a school. In addition, each time we experience a physical life, and each time we lose it, we grow spiritually. Therefore, like that precious heirloom that was lost yet returned to us, we become increasingly more and more appreciative of the precious gift that God has given to us, when he returns it back to us. Death, be it by accident, or by disease, or by murder, or by aging of the flesh, oftentimes wounds the hearts of those who love us and who are left behind, but that same death serves to benefit the recipient of it in ways that are impossible for the unenlightened to imagine." She then smiled, laying her hand gently atop the crown of Judas' head.

"It is a difficult lesson to understand, my child. Yet, it is true."

"My lady, I... I still do not understand the commandment not to kill."

"Think well, my son. If it is not the killing of the body referred to in that scripture, then it is the spirit. That being the case, how does one kill the spirit?"

Judas's answer required no thought and he barked it straight out. "By separating it from God!"

“Yes. Exactly. By separating it from God. And separation from God, this killing, is accomplished through the application of false and misleading doctrine... doctrine which leads the spirit away from communion with God.” Judas, nodded in agreement.

The two of them sat quietly for a few moments, each gazing out across the cloud dappled surface of the early morning lake. A fish jumped somewhere, and a bird sang somewhere else.

“False religion is the tool that evil wields to pry us away from God, to separate our spirits from God, to kill our spirits...” Her mouth grew thin and she straightened herself atop the log. “I have seen the future, it has been revealed to me.” The woman known as the Magdalena took on a far away look, then in a monotone voice akin to one in a trance continued. “Darkness is coming. Our people will be despised, hated and divided.

“We have claimed this land as our new home and we shall build it into the greatest civilization humanity has ever known, greater even than Rome. Our people will be the creators of the future. We will bring medicine and science, technology and agriculture to savage lands where the people sacrifice their own children to false gods; we will drag this land out of the stone ages and into the future. We will teach other peoples to the true spiritual path, they who obey will fly, we will save them from annihilation, from disease, from starvation, but in the end they will hate us in spite of all that we have created, all that we have given them. These others will turn away from the one true God, they will attack us and overcome us through sheer numbers, for we are but eleven percent of this planets population. They will falsely believe that they no longer need our people, that all has been created, that all has built. Believing this they will feel that it is safe to overcome us as the prophets of old said they would. They will take our land, they will fill our children with false ideas and false religion and they will destroy all that we as a people stood for.

“How could this happen to God's people, the answer is that the looters will use religion to weaken our resolve, to make us feel guilty for having had so much, while they have nothing. They will use the words of our Master against us; they will twist them and use them to weaken us. They will teach our children that we are warmongers, destroyers, slavers and greedy, that it is because of our bloodline that the world has suffered, and weak religious leaders will support these ideals and compromise the integrity of our lineage. We, who created it all will be forced to work and support those who do not work, and if we complain we will be branded as hate mongers, supremacists and our children will be publicly shamed. Near the end of time when our children have been robbed of their identity they will out of ignorance begin to act like the savage, they will forget their blood; they will forget that they are of Is-Ra-El. This will be a time of great sorrow for our people, because we will have lost our identity.”

The Prophetess raised her chin in defiance, “The Lord our God, will turn away from us. As a thief is shamed when caught, so shall the house of Is-Ra-El be shamed before the truth of our sinful indifference.

“Our cities shall be taken from us, our women shall be defiled and our children shall become slaves to ignorance. The lion and the eagle, the boar and the bull shall be brought low. Beware, O’ house of Is-Ra-El, sayeth the Lord. Because you have forgotten your God, and defiled your blood. I have given power over you to a people whose language you know not, whose speech you cannot understand. They will devour your harvest and they will take your possessions from you. They will take your sons and breed with your daughters. They will beat flat with the sword of travesty your civilization, and return it to jungle from whence it was wrestled.

“The Lord your God wanted you to have paradise, but your sins O’ Is-Ra-El prevented this from happening, your sins have turned back this blessing. The house of Is-Ra-El is full of criminals; like fowlers, they set traps; but it is men they catch. Their houses are full of treachery; therefore, they grow powerful and rich, fat and sleek. They go their wicked ways, and justice they do not defend. On a nation such as this the Lord shall take vengeance.”

The Magdalena wept as she prophesied, and Judas hung his head as if to stave off the truth of her words. “A shocking, horrible thing has happened to the blood of Is-Ra-El. The prophets prophesy falsely and the religious teach as they wish, they do not recognize the scepter, the red cord they have forgotten. They ready their tongues like a drawn bow, and slay their own with lies. Be on guard, everyone will be against his neighbor, evil abounds and the Fallen Ones use the people of the mud lands to destroy our bloodline, the house of Is-Ra-EL.”

The Magdalena returned from her prophetic trance, wiped the tears from her eyes then in a voice devoid of trance-like rhythm said to Judas, “In the future, which I have seen, religion will be over run with the good-hearted. It will be comprised of those who have pure spirits, but they will have been duped into servitude. Through fear,

religion will create many different facets so that it can appeal to the broadest number of cultures possible. Then each separate organization, each separate sect will artificially construct all sorts of conditions and terms that people must follow to earn God's blessing of eternal life." The Magdalena shook her head in disbelief, and then added, "As if a father would destroy his child because he turned out to be a fisherman rather than a carpenter. Or a mother would condemn her daughters to death if they failed to be as graceful or as beautiful as the mother required them to be. All of which comes about by the misunderstanding of life and death, of misunderstanding the difference between physical death and spiritual death."

The Madonna looked knowingly at Judas whose eye held her intently, and said, "Religion will divide itself and disguise itself in the garb of many tongues and schools of thought. It will control the masses by convincing them that God will forsake them if they do not perform a certain way, wear their hair a certain way, dress a certain way, or believe a certain way. Out of blind fear of the wolf, the sheep, sleep with the jackal by falling at the feet of false religion, and unknowingly worship the beast of religion instead of God. .

"When those placed in positions of authority, often times without even knowing it as so, have gained sufficient technological knowledge, they will no longer be in need of religion as their yoke, and they will set it down... utilizing their science to enslave and to dominate, to control the children of the Light. Yes, in the future man will arrive at a place where they realize that religion is no longer useful, and then machines which fly through the sky like giant birds, will land upon the surface of the earth and proclaim themselves as visitors from the stars. These visitors will claim to be in possession of knowledge far beyond human comprehension, knowledge that will put an end to all suffering, all warfare and all hunger. Nevertheless, it is a lie, for they are only the inventions of the Fallen Ones, inventions of men under their instruction.

"So my immortal love, when you see these things transpiring in the world around you, be of good cheer, for it is then that the day cometh when God redeems his people, the people of Is-Ra-El."

Running his fingers through his hair Judas smiled a sad smile, for this vision of the future touched his heart and waxed heavily upon him.

Shortly thereafter, The Magdalena rose, beckoning Judas to stand by a slight pull on his shoulder and a head gesture. He did. She then opened her arms wide and he fell into them like a child into the arms of a mother. They hugged and kissed one another as if no history stood between them save one of love. Then laughter overcame them and they held hands. An observer from afar might have concluded them to be teenagers.

After much joy, to include a few steps from a dance born in their distant homeland, Judas took the Magdalena by the hand and with a piercing look inquired, "When will the Master see me?"

# Chapter Ten

## Jesus

The Madonna of Magdala stood silently and looked into Judas's hopeful face. Her expression softened, and then sadly she replied, "My son, your Master is not here. Why would you even think it so?"

"I have tracked him halfway across the earth, Maryium. I have seen with my own eyes miracles performed by his hand. The blind see where he has been. The lame are made whole. Were those not his very words? I have proof that he is here." Judas struggled to retrieve from his Possibles Bag a logbook of sorts, containing his laboriously documented trail of miracles... A trail leading from the massacre at Hage through the vast landscape of the Roman Empire, across the forests of Gaul and finally here, to this very lake, where it is known a great spiritual Master lives. "This master has occult powers," he added, "and exhibits the arcane gift of perfection, he smells like the nectar of flowers." He went to hand the book to the Magdalena, anticipating her interest, yet her eyes told him she was not.

His Priestess responded by lowering her gaze. Then she softly spoke these words. "O, poor, poor Judas, my lost child. Do you truly believe that his words 'The blind see and the lame walk' is about faith healing? Any righteous person can cause the lame to walk. Any truly spiritual person can cause the blind to see. The Master's words were spoken to describe the spiritually blind who see wisdom and truth and God through the eyes which have been provided to them by the touch of his words, not by the touch of his hands."

At that she reached forward and gripped Judas tightly by his elbow, and said, "Come with me." Then she led him toward a small, simple dwelling near the center of the tiny village of Sangreal. After ducking through a low-slung doorway covered by a brown animal hide, Judas stood upright inside the humble hut belonging to the wife of Jesus.

It was dark and Smokey inside of the dwelling, like the center of a hallucinatory void. As his vision unfolded, becoming accustomed to the lack of lighting inside the simple hut, Judas noted that the only illumination within the hut emanated from a small fire neatly contained within a rock hearth, near the center of the room. A sparse and feeble glow was all that indicated that the fire was active.

The one room home where he now stood, was meager in its furnishings, yet appeared comfortable and obviously scrupulously cleaned. The floor was of the typical washed and hardened mud, which he noted was free of dust and debris. Overall, it was well made and very livable.

The eyes of the hopeful betrayer began adjusting to the near darkness until at last he could make out the figure of an old man obscured from him by the dim firelight situated directly between them. The old man was lying beneath a heavy furred cover; so frail was his figure that it appeared as if his frame were pinned beneath the weight of the hide blanket. Death was as near to this one, as destiny was to the other.

Affixing his entire focus onto the face of the old man, Judas concluded that this man was long with age, equal to that of his Master. The old man watched him with equal interest.

Suddenly, before he could react in any other way, with the reaction of a hound catching the scent of its prey, Judas lifted his face slightly upwards, inhaling deeply. The sweet smell of fresh roses poured outward from the man beneath the thick blanket mixing ever so slightly with the smell of burnt wood. The heart of Judas leapt and fluttered with joy. He stepped forward in anticipation as his mind formed the words, "My Master." However, remembering what The Madonna had said in response to his quest, the words themselves never formed on his lips.

Judas quickly stepped around the perimeter of the room, until directly confronting the face, which peered out from beneath the covering. He stared deeply into the man's eyes... concluding that he did not recognize him, so great was the toll he had paid to the harsh ravages of passing time. Then disappointment leapt out and onto him from the grim shadows of reality, for this man's aura did not match the aura of his Master. In disbelief, he sniffed the old man's flowered fragrance once more.

Upon admitting to himself that this man was not his Master, Judas began backing away from the bedside of the stranger, acting as if it were plagued. As he retraced his steps to the doorway in effort to flee the bitterness of disappointment, The Magdalena intercepted him and led him gently over to the wooden benched table, sitting near the fireplace. She seated him there, then turned and stoked the fire back to life.

Returning herself to the table she sat opposite the crestfallen and anachronistic apostle. Placing her hands atop his she spoke. "Your disappointment hangs about you like the test-sack of a false gallows." After hesitating she then continuing. "Judas, know ye that the Master fulfilled his mission, then he left this earth, nearly thirty years ago. That was his destiny, he accomplished it, and then he went to The Father."

Upon hearing those words from the mouth of his Priestess the thoughts that were birthed in the fevered mind of Judas sprouted wings, finding harsher words than he intended. "Then why are you here? And who is this man who dares to imitate the Master?"

"He is my husband!" replied The Magdalena with fire in her eyes. A long silence ensued between them.

Breaking the silence, The Magdala said softly as she returned her eyes to the face of her visitor. "He has been bed ridden for two moons now. He says that he will leave this world before the next full moon rises. That occurs tomorrow, Judas."

The words of the obviously lamenting wife brought with them a calming affect. After another brief pause, the pair of them turned to look at the old man Judas now understood to be the husband of The Magdalena. The old man returned their attention in like fashion, resembling nothing so much as a sacrificial victim awaiting the moment when death would finally bring him some greatly anticipated reward. She went on. "Do you recognize him, Judas?"

Strengthening his gaze, scanning the man's face more intently than he previously had, he shook his head, no.

"He is the one who was spared the tree instead of our Master!"

"Judas, looked back at the man, trying as best he could to see the face of a man he had previously seen but once. Finally, with great effort, the image was drawn forth from some deep crevice of his mind. There he conjured up the memory of the leering, bug-eyed killer who stood beside his martyred teacher when Pilate placated the crowd with the gift of a released prisoner. He snapped!

"How could you marry this murderer?" he hissed, so taken back by what he was experiencing that he forgot the role that he himself had played in the same conspiracy.

At his insult the old eyes in front of him looked back and flickered with an old fire, letting Judas know with certainty that he had been understood.

"How can you ask me that? Do you think me incapable of rational thought?" snapped the woman, who then hesitated, obviously trying to control her own anger. After a spell she continued. "Do you remember the day that you leapt from the wall of the temple gate, killing yourself, the second time?"

Judas nodded angrily. "What does that have to do with any of this?" he spewed while pointing accusingly at her husband.

"Well, for your information, it was I who pulled your sorry carcass together. It was I who placed your foul smelling innards back inside you. It was I, understanding your immortality who tore her clothing, making bindings which I then used to keep your body intact. I, who paid men to carry your body into the orchards nearby. So, do not dare you, to question my actions! For I have cared for you when all others laughed and lifted their mugs to your demise!"

After a long silence in which both teacher and student released their anger, she reached out to reclaim his hand. "I knew that you would regain life, so I hired men to transport you to a secluded cave where your body would go unmolested by animals. No one understood why I did not wrap your body for burial; they assumed that I considered you unworthy. I let them think what they would.

"On the very next day, our Master, still walking this earth, gave one of his lessons to a crowd north of Galilee." She hesitated as her eyes glazed over in distant memory. "It was the most beautiful lesson that he had ever given, it was on the subject of love. Then, he spoke of you." She said this as her eyes reclaimed their focus upon the present, then she turned those green eyes onto Judas gauging the effect that her words were having upon the recipient.



“He told the thirty-nine that you had loved him more than any other. That, although you had committed a wrongful act under the laws of man, that that act had been committed out of love. He explained that your deed had been perpetrated in service to something above and beyond you. A thing, which you understood not. Then the Master raised both of his hands skyward and said allowed, ‘Judas, I am sorry.’ It was at that very moment, as if being pulled from the earth like a feather caught in a soft breeze, he began to float above us. He then flickered twice, rapidly, and after a short span of time he flickered a third time, then, in a vacuum strong enough to attract our hair and clothing towards it, was consumed and disappeared. He has not been seen in physical form since.

“From that day forward the thirty-nine dispersed, then eleven of the men formed their own group and began to teach their own interpretations of the Master's words. They changed, segregating themselves from us as if under a madman's spell. Claiming their status as the original followers of Jesus, they elevated themselves above the other followers. You, of course, also being one of the original members were despised by them, so much so that they refused to even mention your name. It was as if they had never heard The Master's words at all... and perhaps they had not, for The Master's words were incased in magic. Previously he had stated that all received from his words that which they were intended to receive. I believe it so concerning you.

“Anyway, after the transfiguration of the Master into the spirit realm, the eleven decided that you were to be replaced, in order that they might keep their number set at twelve. They brought in two candidates of like thinking, one of whom would be chosen to replace you. Though neither the Master, nor the Master's mother ordained this action, they proceeded with their plan.

“In the past, whenever the Master or I had requested assistance with an important decision, we went to God for the answer. Not these ones. What they did was to cast bone lots upon the ground in the manner of the olden sorcerers, who themselves had learned their dark craft from the Fallen Angels. I was aghast at what I was witnessing, for they acted as though they were possessed by netherworld spirits, complete with maniacal eyes and a lunatic grimace. I left them there that moment, never to return to Jerusalem, I feared my life, “As I fled, I thought of those from the original coven who still resided near the ancient grove, so I went to them, asking for shelter. It was given freely. Over the next few months I received word that the twelve had banished all women from places of authority and that they had formed a new church of their own design... a religion built upon the resurrection of The Master's name. These ones began to call themselves Christ-ians.

“I became exceedingly fearful of what I was witnessing, and so I left that place and fled to a small village, one named after an old Jewess, Lelia Hage, a saint of some kind to those who knew of her.” At the mention of the village named Hage, the breath of Judas caught within his chest until he thought that he might lose consciousness over it. The Magdalena did not appear to notice and proceeded to tell the remainder of her story.

“In that outcast village there were many zealots; a ghost army bent upon ridding the homeland of Roman oppression. At the head of this notorious band of monomaniacs was him, of course.” She pointed to the old man lying on the mat with a gesture comprised entirely of eyes and chin.

“Jesus Bar Abbas! The son of God!” she shook her head in disbelief. “How ironic that I should be confronted with the likes of him. But, of course I was.

“The meeting between us occurred immediately upon my arrival in the village, as I was brought before the Zealots who feared exposure by infiltration. It was their custom to watch all newcomers. They were a suspicious group, especially when it came to women. In that place a woman could be won or lost in a simple game of chance.

“Among these untrusting souls it was common for them to order all newly arrived women to be placed into the custody of one of their own soldiers. This practice had a two-fold purpose: first, they could watch and monitor each newcomer, searching for signs of loyalty or lack thereof. Second: it was a useful way to provide free labor to members of the sect who were in good standing. However, I would not serve as such. This I told them.

“After learning that my craft was that of a Dispeller of Darkness and Healer, it was decided that my teachings and healings were of value. They wanted me to stay, so they agreed that I was to be a servant to none, yet a healer to those in need. I agreed. They agreed.

“At first I was much aggrieved by my fate. I bemoaned the fact that I had chosen this wretched village as my refuge. Just as I was on the verge of exercising my option of leaving this place, I remembered the Master's words

concerning the synchronicity of things. I contemplated that, and based on it, I, stayed in the afore mentioned capacity.

“One morning I left the village at sunrise, searching for a bitter root which is used to absolve stomach cramps in women. As I knelt to dig from the earth this medicinal root, I heard footsteps rapidly approaching from the village. I thought little of it until I turned and saw Jesus, here, standing before me in a strange yet humble stance. An unusual posture for this man, to be sure! After a few moments of silence, he spoke to me, saying that of late he had been experiencing difficulties with his sleep. He said that it was the result of reoccurring nightmares. He asked me to provide herbal relief for his problem.

“I knew that with a simple directing of my own mind, or with one of my potions, I could put him underneath sleep’s soft caress for days on end. However, I also knew that if I did only those superficial things that I would accomplish very little, in terms of addressing the underlying condition. I knew from experience that this sort of problem does not take wing until one addresses the root cause of the problem. I explained as much to him. After a few moments of considering my advice, I could tell that my Zealot had reached a decision, because his face reconfigured itself into something that expressed relief. Then he told me the most amazing story I had ever heard.” At those words, The Magdalena shook her head as if in disbelief, and a sob broke free from her beautiful mouth in spite of the control she had learned to exert over herself.

A small green insect lighted itself atop the table between them, giving Judas a much needed alternative to look at, while awaiting her to compose herself. Then after he was sure that she was once again composed he asked, “What story mother?”

After another brief interval, she raised her head once again making eye contact. “It is not my story to tell, it is his.” They both understood whom she meant, turning simultaneously to look at Bar Abbas. Weak though he was, he smiled.

The Magdalena looking once again into the face of Judas, said this. “ My husband is too weak to share this story with you, but, I think you need to hear it exactly as I heard it that day so long ago, in that faraway field near the village of Hage. Therefore, I will take control of your mind, causing it to relive that event as I myself did.” Judas nodded to the affirmative, he too had this gift.

With his approval The Magdalena looked deeply into his eyes, piercing them completely until grasping hold of his very mind. Then the images came, and Judas watched as the scenes of her experiences began scrolling past the screen of his own altered vision.

Watching, feeling, speaking and hearing as The Magdalena he was suddenly propelled with her to that day as she knelt in the field when Jesus Bar Abbas approached her, and as they talked.

Judas heard Bar Abbas complain of being unable to sleep. He heard the Magdalena explain to him, that what he needed was not medicine, but therapy in the form of open communication. He watched as Jesus Bar Abbas contemplated her words, then as he resigned to tell her why he was having nightmares. This is what Judas saw and heard.

“I once met a man,” Bar Abbas said as he and the Magdalena both took a seat in the field of grass, “and he haunts my soul in ways you cannot even imagine.” Darkness overcame his expression and fear shown through the lines of his face.

“Did you wrong this man?” she asked him.

“No! Yes... I don’t know.” He hesitated then ran one hand through the tangled thatch of his hair. “It seems so long ago... but it has only been a few years. Anyway, the Romans, for drunkenness, arrested me. However, just as the soldiers were about to bind me I slipped a dagger from my tunic and killed two of their numbers. However, on that night, they would be three, and the third one knocked me unconscious with a rock. He was lucky, because I would have killed him as well... thereby making good my escape. Fate however, or something like it, would not let it be so.

“I regained consciousness in a fit of pain unlike anything I had previously felt, and trust me, I have felt pain. My body told me that I had been beaten and kicked beyond remembrance. After many days a Roman soldier came to the door of the dungeon where I was being held, promising me that I would soon experience the exquisite painfulness of the cross, rather than a soldier’s quick death.

"I know not how long I lay as such, in the filth of that place, but it seemed an eternity.

"One morning, and I say morning only because I was given a sup of bread and a cup of water, once each day. In my mind, I called that time of food-delivery, morning, though in truth, it could have just as easily been the middle of the night because there were no windows through which I could track the rise and fall of the sun. Anyway, one day at an undetermined hour, I heard the door of my prison cell being opened. A torch was brought in piercing the darkness of my cave-like cell blinding me, for my eyes had become accustomed only to utter blackness.

"In response to the shock of light I lowered my face and covered my eyes with my hands, as I did so a Roman came at me and began cursing me and kicking me. I would have killed him the moment I recovered my sight, but by then he had finished abusing me and had stepped back out of my range. The chains you see, they prevented me from reaching the place where he was standing.

"My vision became somewhat adjusted to the light being cast by the torch, I saw two more soldiers dragging another man into my dungeon. This other man had been badly treated. His flesh had been brutally kissed by the Cat-O-Nine-Tails. This scourging had left an oozing, weeping portrait of pain etched deeply upon the canvas of his flesh. Never had I seen a man live after such a thrashing, it was horrible to behold, even to a soldier like me.

"The soldiers laughed aloud as they roughly tossed the man on the filthy straw floor. One of the warders told the others not to bother placing this man in chains, as he and I would both be nailed aloft before the sun attained its zenith.

"Shutting the cell door they plunged the cell once again into total darkness. I had intended to speak some words of consolation to the poor unfortunate who now shared my fate, however, as I turned my face in his direction, I was startled into mute astonishment by what I saw. I could not accept what my eyes were telling me, so I diverted my face from him and closed my eyes to clear my vision. When I reopened them they looked upon the impossible, and for the first time in ages, I felt fear and fought against my own panic, the way I now fight for the proper words to describe what I saw." The man Bar Abbas hesitated, looked dazed, then confused, then blurted out, "I swear on all that I love that this man was glowing; it was like he was lit-up from within by a soft flame of sorts. His entire body emanated a faint soft glow somewhere between a river-green and a starlight-gold!"

As she listened to the soldier telling his story Judas felt the stern grip of torment as it wrenched inside the stomach of the Magdalena, causing her to experience great discomfort. Heavy beads of perspiration found the surface of her forehead and sweat pooled around the collar of her robe. As impossible as it was, she had suddenly realized that this man spoke of her Master. Though Judas knew that she had heard spoken the name of the man before her, it was not until that moment that she began to comprehend the stitch that the threads of destiny were weaving into the tapestry of her life. For here in front of her, was the second Jesus, the one who was spared instead of her Master. She fought back tears as Jesus The Other unknowingly continued his story.

"As I sat in that cell, in my own filth, heavy with chains, I watched in utter silence the glowing apparition lying on the floor in front of me. Slowly my cellmate lifted himself up and into a seated position with his back against the wall. By the glow of the curious light which flowed from the very pores of his skin, I could see that this man's face, although bruised, battered and covered in blood, was beautiful. His face had an "aquiline nose which presented him as powerful yet humble. His hair was luxuriant and long. His beard closely trimmed."

As a therapist of sorts, The Magdalena and Judas by extension, noticed in the lines that etched the face of Jesus Bar Abbas, traces of compassion. For the first time she saw a spark of righteousness and of profound goodness illuminating the interior of his soul. She sensed that that spark could be flamed into a bright fire, one strong enough to burn away the dark shroud that veiled his one heart. She watched him closely as he resumed his narration.

"I sat still and watched as my new cellie struggled to maintain his hold on consciousness, this despite the pitiless ravages of his wounds; most men die from that type of scourging. None ever lift themselves up from the floor to rest against the wall afterwards, but he did. Even so, the beating that he had suffered was too great a burden for any man to bear, even this one. And soon I heard his breath growing tattered, ragged and short.

"I am a warrior by trade, I am used to hearing this same type of respiratory inconsistencies befalling those who have been wounded to the point of imminent death. The man wore no tunic, so I could easily see the many lashes from the bitter Cat that encircled his torso. I saw that those wounds had begun to ripen and fester, a result of the

filth upon which he had been thrown. I sniffed the air to see if I could detect traces of THAT smell, the one which introduces itself into the air when death is calling upon a man's door."

Jesus Bar Abass dropped his eyes and rubbed them. "Rats you see," he said in a low voice. "I was afraid that the rats would catch the scent of death and swarm into our cell to feast upon his flesh, and then mine."

The man, the warrior, the murderer then raised his face and looked upon the horrified woman seated before him. The mist which had shown within his eyes suddenly lifted as if blown away by the gusting winds of hardened regret, a regret that seemed to rise up from within him like a shield. With steel in his eye's he did not reduce the intensity of his stare as he looked at her, and as her own gaze matched his, both she and Judas realized that there was no trace of malice nor ill-intention in his eyes. Then in an abrupt burst, he continued talking. "Suddenly, this man whom I was certain must be dying, opened his eyes, completely capturing me.

"I was frozen by a fear which impaled me like the thrust of a spear, for never in my life had I seen eye's such as his. They blazed out from their sockets like those of a lunatic. With those eye's he looked into me and knew me for all I was. Nothing could be kept hidden from them.

"I sat frozen in time... or so it seemed. Then just when I feared that I was about to slip my hold upon reason and faint into unconsciousness, his eyes released me. We looked at each other briefly, as normal people do, then he smiled. Ahhh! the smile that he gave me. Then in a voice of poetry he spoke his first words to me, saying "Take care of The Magdalena."

At those words The Magdalena released her hold on Judas' mind, snapping him back into the present. After a brief repose, she rose swiftly from her seat and knelt beside her bed-ridden husband where she leaned over him and planted a tender kiss upon the bridge of his nose, between where his eyes watched her. After that she ran a caressing hand through his thinning hair in an obvious gesture of the love she felt for him. "This man," she told Judas, "spent hours with our Master on the night before he was murdered. In fact, it was he, Jesus Bar Abbas who should have, by all that is right, met death that day instead of The Master. However, for whatever reason, it was not destined to be so. Instead of being kissed by the lips of death, Bar Abbas, was spared while a blameless man was sent to the wood instead." She hesitated slightly then continued. "The irony of all this is the fact that the innocent man who was hoisted up to die, was the one who ultimately attained victory over death! And this one, a man who only met The Master once, and that in a prison cell, became his most devout servant."

"Servant? What do you mean by that?" Judas asked.

"Well, after that day in the fields, when my husband relayed to me the great love that The Master expressed towards me, a love I know to be brotherly, not the love of a mortal man for a woman, I was saddened. However, upon realizing that my Master had thought highly enough of me to turn from his own pains and commission this one to care for me, I understood the meaning of true love." This she said with a nonchalant gesture of her chin, indicating of course Bar Abbas.

"That day in the field I took his hand and cured his sleepless nights. I relieved his headaches, became his spiritual advisor, then his wife and the mother of his four children," this she said with obvious pride.

"After Bar Abbas and I fell in love his life seemed to take a series of miraculous turns. In time, he became virtually the same sort of saint that our Master was. He began to develop and exhibit all of the signs and manifestations of our Master's holiness. His physical touch became the caress of a healer and his passion for truth consumed him.

"One evening, when the locals in our village were celebrating that time of the year when day and night become equal in length, my husband and I, after consuming a lot of wine, decided to leave the village and walk along the pathway through the forest to the place of Three Stones. This was a favorite place for Bar Abbas to pray. He always believed that those three stones carried some highly spiritual significance, he felt pulled to go there daily and meditate.

"As I said, we had both consumed a lot of wine, more so than was our normal want. While Bar Abbas meditated, I leaned my back against one of the three effigies where I eventually fell deeply into the arms of sleep. I was startled awake by the moaning of my husband. I looked to where he was seated and discovered him uncharacteristically kneeling with his hands clasped together in front of his chest. In addition, I saw that he had been wounded in both of his hands and that a great quantity of blood was cascading down from those wounds.

“I ran to his side with the intention of helping him, but he stopped me with a grimace, telling me that his wounds were a gift from God. I later learned that while I was sleeping and he meditating, that an Angel of Light appeared to him and pierced his hands, feet and side with a spear constructed of bright light. The Angelic Being explained that for reasons beyond his comprehension, that my husband had been spared his karmic obligations and debt. The Angel said that Bar Abbas’ changed way of thinking had negated the need for further expressions of punitive karma, which, had it been left uncorrected would surely have extracted his death as its payment. Continuing, the Angel told him that since he had overcome the bestiality of his nature and now strove to become perfected, that God was willing that he should be blessed. That is when the Angel ran a Spear of Light through his flesh in the places that I already mentioned.”

The old Priestess turned towards her ailing lover and pulled one of his hands free from the fur coverings. As if on cue Judas looked at the man’s hand and could clearly see that it was heavily bandaged with blood soaked wrappings. From that bloody hand came an overpoweringly sweet scent which overpowered the earthly smells of hatred, anger, greed and the villainous stench of man’s licentiousness. In fact, so overpowering was it, that it invoked the mind, heart and soul with a great yearning for communion with the Holy Spirit.

“These wounds were a precious gift,” added The Magdalena. “For they are identical to those which were sustained by our Master when he was nailed to the tree. They are a much greater gift than anything that was given to me, but, in return these gifts bring about great suffering to the possessor.”

“It is an exotic thing my love.” Judas mumbled. “But it seems so painful to bear. How can such pain as those wounds give, be considered a gift? I assure you that the suffering that has entered into my own life is not a gift, it is a curse.”

The Magdalena shook her head, sadly. “You are thinking as a man thinketh. Suffering is the greatest tool available to the spiritual ones charged with the task of repairing the broken seals of mankind’s perjurious existence. I assure you that every wrong action ever committed was somehow justified in the mind of the perpetrator. But who among us has wings with which to fly above truth? None I assure you. So it is that the gift of suffering is sent down upon us regardless of how we see our reality. For suffering illuminates the mind of a sinful person through negative consequences, consequences that cause pain and suffering. Thus, suffering improves that person, by revealing to them, the reality that each and every action has an unavoidable reaction.

“In the case where the suffering person is kind of heart and spiritual, suffering becomes an even greater tool. How you ask? The answer my friend is, that when a person is swimming in the waters of great spiritual advancement, and when that person has cleared away the snares of mortality from the field of their life, that seeker then encounters the greatest snare of them all: the flesh. Who among us has not experienced the love of family and friends? In addition, who, having experienced these joys could willingly desire death, the sequestration from kith and kin? This dependency upon the flesh, upon wife, husband, child and friend, causes a person to yearn to remain trapped within this vessel of clay. This is why God has ordained that all people must age, so that people would slide into infirmity and weakness and in the end grow so tired of existence that they would willingly embrace death. So it is that the gift of suffering, which was showered down upon my husband, has helped transform him from a mean-spirited person, to a love-spirited person. As he changed he became more pleasing in the sight of God, who then blessed him for making such a stunning transformation by awarding him with the Stigmata. This gift increased the rate at which my husband was able to attain spirituality. It was the Stigmata that brought him the reward of greater humility through greater adversity. Such suffering as he received severed his ties to this world by forcing him to desire to shed the cloak of this lifetime, and willingly desire the balm of the next heavenly existence. Bar Abbas, has craved to be in the spirit with greater fervor than most because he suffers in the flesh greater than most. In this way his suffering yields much spiritual growth.

“Judas, I know that you do not understand this philosophy. However, my words are true, but only the person who has overcome great adversity, can recognize true enlightenment when it comes knocking at the door. Only he who has been put to the test... only he who has been pressed to the utmost limits of endurance can ever come to know them. Only the person who knows the parameters of their inner selves, their weaknesses, can know their true character. Only the person who has been passed through the fires of suffering can grow to unabashedly identify their faults and thereby improve them.”

She smiled. "Yes, young Judas, suffering is an enviable gift." The Magdalena shifted her position beside her husband and studied Judas closely. "Let me tell you a parable." She continued.

"There were once two men who were given the same punishment. Both men were sent to the same dark and dangerous prison. The first man found friends and companions within this place of confinement. He found laughter and camaraderie in the various games of chance, and of sport played by the men who had been cast into that lot. This first man adjusted his thinking and his way of looking at the world to reflect that of those around him. He became like the other prisoners. He feared in that place, and so he aligned himself with those gruff and evil men in positions of power who could be the most danger to him, even though he secretly despised them. Then after a short time he was released to return to the life he had before.

"Now the second man found only loneliness in his confinement. He could discover little, if anything, that he shared in common with the majority of the men who dwelled alongside him... for they were complacent with their past choices and felt no compulsion to alter their thinking. He refused to think as they did, he felt no camaraderie, no respite in sports, nor games, nor rough humor. The second man became depressed and found solace only in those rare moments when he could be alone.

"He thought only of his wife and children. He reflected on all the reasons why he had done the things that he had done, the things that caused him to be thrust into this dark place. Caring deeply for his family he deemed that some higher power must have conspired to bring him to this vile accounting. He contemplated his fate and he suffered. Because he suffered, he eventually overcame the trivial concerns of the flesh. He no longer concerned himself with danger... he had long since grown weary of this life as it now was, and it mattered not to him if he were harmed or killed. In fact, he dreamed of death, of what it might bring as its reward. And one day he found out, for he died behind bars.

"So... which of these two men were blessed. No, it was not the one who returned to his former life and his former shortcomings, because he was not called. It was the second man who lost everything, yet, refused to adapt to a lifestyle beneath him and as a result found the gift of self-discovery.

"In the case of my own beloved husband, his suffering has caused him to examine the consequences of his early-life actions. It also taught him to accept that which he cannot control, Yes... suffering. It is one of the very greatest of spiritual gifts."

She stopped speaking for a spell as her eye's locked onto some distant horizon that only she could see. "Soon after receiving the gift of Stigmata," she continued, "Bar Abbas and I began to travel and to teach after the example of our Master. People would flock to hear him, so hungry are they to see a miracle. Recognizing this he fed their hungry souls with a wellspring of truth, then threw in an occasional healing to keep their attention. It was the saddest time of my life."

Bewildered, Judas asked her how that could be so. She told him that it ate at her soul to know that her husband had the gift of healing, yet understanding the gift of suffering, he could only use it sparingly. Because to see a child suffering and to know that it is somehow part of that child's spiritual development and therefore in their best interest, is greatest burden to the holder of truth. She cried when she spoke of how their sad eyes begged for a miracle, one that was within the power of her husband to grant, yet would not. Miracles are rare she said, not because of some lack of ability on God's part, but because, those saints who are Godly enough to channel the Holy Spirit, understand what only they can, that suffering is a tool... a cruel tool but a tool none the less.

"After traveling our homeland and spreading the words of the Master as the bee spreads pollen from the fruit trees, the wounds of Bar Abbas took on the aroma of heavenly flowers. His suffering increased and the pain of the Stigmata, which he later learned was a creation of his own mind, overwhelmed him. It was then that I received prophecy; it told me that Bar Abbas' mission to the people of Is-Ra-El had been fulfilled, and that he was to move west. I did not at the time understand my dream and for this reason did not heed it.

"One morning, after Bar Abbas went into the forest to pray, I myself went into the fields in search of herbs. I remember that it was a cool and exceptionally bright morning with just a hint of winter's frost lying lightly atop the ground like magical shards of glass upon the ethereal.



“As the sun began to rise fingers of blood-red light began peeking out from behind the hills on the eastern side of the valley, but with that beautiful sunrise I caught the scent of burnt wood. At first I assumed it a campfire somewhere in the distance, but after a while, to my horror, I caught another scent as well... that of charred flesh.

“I ran as fast as my feet could carry me to the nearest ridge, where my heart fell from my chest and burst onto the ground like a felled melon. For off in the distance I saw that the village of Hage had been razed.”

With a pursing of her lips, she went on. “When I arrived back at the village, I found only the villainy of death and destruction. They were all dead, slain and mutilated by blade and fire in equal portion.

“I became frantic not knowing if my own husband had returned in time to become one of the lamentable victims. In a state of anguish I searched diligently, but so many of the bodies had been burnt beyond recognition that I could not be sure if he had been one of them or not. My frantic efforts fell hopelessly upon the blood stained earth, the same earth where woman lay torn and defiled while their children lay silently with flies walking on the lenses of their sightless eye’s as though in a trance.

“I forgot my knowledge and gave way to anger. Though the sun was high and the time improper, I began a Summoning which would bring to me a Spirit of Revenge.

“Having no tools to work with, I knelt upon the blood soaked ground, and using only my fingers I traced out a bloodied circle in the dirt. I added to it the five points, then the six. I stood upright within the center where I disrobed. I held my arms wide holding nothing in my hands save my herb knife. Using the knife I carved into the air at the appropriate places the sigil of my desire. So desperate was in sorrow, and so angry in hatred was I, that I brought the tip of the blade to my own breast, bringing forth my own blood to mix with that of the villagers.

“Just as I was about to bring forth one of the dark spirits, The Master himself appeared to me.” She smiled at that, “What are you doing, my love?” He asked me softly.

“My jaw dropped and my anger took wing. I became aware of my vengeance and I felt ashamed at my plan to alter destiny. I sought to hide my face from my Lord.

“Your man lives,” he said as though we were sitting along the seashore of a perfect world. “He will remain alive until his mission here on earth is accomplished; a mission which includes people and events you cannot at this time imagine. One day, all of this, and these people will come together to bring salvation to the world. As for these others who died here today... fret not for them, because in the way that Elijah lived again as John, The Baptist, so too will they also live again. Now, return to the fields and gather your herbs. Await thy husband who cometh with the new risen sun. Then he smiled at me and left that place.”

Judas took note of the excitement dancing within her eyes as she told this part of her story.

“I dressed myself with haste. I was excited to have seen my Master, but happier still to learn that I would be reunited with my husband.” She turned to smile at Bar Abbas, and then added, “The old bandit!” Then patted him affectionately on the arm.

“I rushed into the woods which skirted a nearby hillside and hid there fearing the prospect that the Romans might find cause to return to Hage. After finding refuge in the deepest part of the nearby woods, I sought out the sacred spot where my coven performed our rituals. For the second time that day, I cast the circle, but this time it’s only purpose was to shield me as I sank into my seated position for meditation. After a time I rose and banished it, then went to a nearby cave where I reposed myself to await the return of my husband.

“The next morning I was awakened by the shrill sound of a bone flute trilling out its melody. Knowing this to be what it was, a signal between Zealotim, I scurried to the cave opening where my eyes befell a sight most pleasing to me; my husband sitting atop a donkey with a smile equal to all the handsomeness upon the earth. I ran to him.

“We left that same morning after Bar Abbas told me of his rescue from the Romans and his vision concerning the coming destruction of Jerusalem. By that time he was receiving many visions, for the hand of God lay heavy upon him.

“After two years of traveling we came upon this place. I told my husband that this was our destination... I have visions, also. There were thirty of us on that journey. The others were all manner of craftsmen and their families. All had been Zealots, now they would become farmers and settlers.

“During our second winter here we began accepting outsiders who were willing to work for their keep. We were at that time more than sixty strong.

“One morning very early, we were summoned to the coast by one of our newcomers, a man who fished for our village, named Vordolf.

“Upon our arrival at the coast we discovered three Northman fishing boats struggling against the tides, endeavoring as it was to stay off the rocks which line the shoreline near our village. Those rocks are instant death to any hapless enough to be swept up against them. We were informed by Vordolf that all three boats had been thus wise all morning and most of the night. He told us that the currents that ran to the shore and then crosswise into the rocks were vicious traps and that no vessel could tear itself free and sail back out to sea, from that spot. He explained to us that these Northman sailors had probably misjudged their situation during the hours of darkness. Now they were captured in a deadly struggle for survival... a struggle they would never win.

“You should know that these men are greatly feared in this region. Though primarily fishermen, they have been known to plunder. Therefore, the local people who had joined themselves to us were loath to see these boats make landfall.

“We stood helpless upon the cliffs overlooking the shoreline, watching the drama unfold. By mid afternoon the inevitable occurred. First one boat, then the second and finally the third found destruction upon the pitiless rocks. All but six of the stout men who manned those hapless vessels met death on that coastline. Against the will of the locals among us, Bar Abbas, demanded that the survivors be rescued. They were spared a bludgeoning death and taken back to our village to recuperate.

“The fishermen were grateful to be alive and by the end of winter, they were desirous of returning to the land of their own people. They were exceedingly polite and respectful to us.

“They greeted the spring by beginning to construct a small boat at the cove of Kilaroch. This was the only place near to where we lived where a boat could be launched and safely reach deep water.

“Seven days into their labors a terrible accident happened, a felled tree landed wrong and struck one of their numbers. He was a large man named Sven. The others bore him back to the village where they laid him down, showing him great concern.

“I ran to find Bar Abbas and asked him to quickly lay hands upon the man, Sven. When he arrived at the place where he had been laid out, his companions were sorrowful, for they recognized the spear of death hovering ever so close above him.

“Bar Abbas knelt beside the fisherman; who smiled weakly at him, despite the terrible pain that wracked his shattered body and began to pray. When he finished with his prayers he traced some Cabalistic symbols into the ether at specific points above the mans prostrate body. Then after finishing them, he laid his hands on Sven’s crushed and wounded sternum. Instantly the big angler jerked and stiffened as if struck by lightning. When he stopped shaking he rose to his feet, stretched both of his arms outward and let loose a fierce howl that frightened the rest of us to death. Then his astonished companions did likewise.

“That evening around the center-fire, the fishermen and the villagers drank heavily. We had a grand feast. Shortly thereafter, the fishermen finished their boat and sailed away. Things returned to normal and our little village prospered.

“In the Fall of that same year we received word from another of our fisher folk, that some thirty fishing boats were entering our hidden cove with war shields showing. Great arguments ensued and most blamed Vordolf for showing the first fishermen the safe passageway in. Those same persons believed that the purpose of these northern fishermen was one of plunder. I myself did not believe this. I gathered two other women, who were the leaders of our village, and we took ourselves to the coast. The others stayed behind in the village to argue over defense strategies.

“Upon our arrival at the shoreline we three encountered a great number of north men, seemingly fishermen, all. My eyes fell upon a face I knew well, Sven! When he saw me, this giant of a man threw up his arms in pure joy and ran towards me. A smile creased his face from ear to ear. He grabbed me around the waist and pulled me to him in a powerful hug, lifting me high off my feet, shaking his huge beard in my face; knowing as he did that all women adore that. We laughed.

“Sven quickly consented to tell me that once back in their homeland they explained to their Jarl, their tribal leader, about their recent adventures. Sven had told of his injuries and of how he had arrived at the halls of

Valhalla, but how as he was being led through the gates he had been snatched back to this life. He told them of his healing at the hands of the southerner named Swejus (which is how the northern tongue pronounces Jesus).

“Early that previous spring the youngest child of the Jarl fell ill. It did not take long before the north men recognized the illness, which had laid waste to, and killed her mother. The north tribes call this particular disease The Horrid, for those who contract it begin to lose weight until they die a lingering, painful death, looking more like skeletons when they pass than human beings.

“Upon hearing of my husband's gift of healing, the Jarl gathered his tribal leaders together and commissioned them to appear before us requesting a healing for his only daughter. So it was that they now arrived on our shores.

“After listening to his story I agreed to bring my husband before them, but made no promises concerning the proposed healing. The decision was his and his alone to make.

“I returned to the seacoast that very evening with my husband and eldest son Joseph, who had seventeen winters. He is tall and red of hair like his mother,” she said boldly. Her mind seemed to wander, to drift for a moment as she returned to that far-gone day, reliving her memories the way that old ones often do.

“When we returned to the coast, the stalwart fisher folk from the north had already constructed a defensive perimeter around their camp, they feared an attack by the Gaul's who populate this land and who hold no love for them.

“We were led through the construction by Sven until reaching a bermed area dug out of the earth the depth of a tall man's knees, and about as wide across as three tall men stretched end to end. In the center of this redoubt was a naked fire, one not designed for cooking. Seated to the north-most side of the circle, seated on the ledge of the berm itself, sat a large man with reddish gray hair and beard; I noticed that he had the fiercest set of eyes ever carved into the frame of a human face.

“I focused my mental acuties and directed them to probe the mind of this Jarl. I wanted to ascertain his motives. However, try as I might, they could not be read, a most unusual and rare occurrence I assure you.

“As Bar Abass and I stepped down into the middle of the circle and rounded the fire, the Jarl rose from his earthen throne to greet us. As he did so I was completely taken aback, for never in my life had I seen a man so tall. I estimated that he stood three hands above my own tall son. The most striking feature about this giant of a man was not his size though, it was his eyes. Where others have blue or green his was a stunning yellowish gold, more like cats eyes than a human. They were also slightly larger than a normal persons are... making him strikingly handsome to look upon.

“After the formalities were attended to we were given robust mead of sorts, and instructed to sit to the left of where the Jarl was seated. The situation concerning the Jarl's daughter and her illness was discussed and my husband agreed to heal her, believing it her karmic destiny. This was when a beautiful young maiden of sixteen summers was led into the presence of her father from the tent where she lay ill.

“The girl hid her face behind her dark wine-red hair in a gesture that I recognized as one of respect for her elders, and not one born of subservience. I could tell from her facial features that her mother had been a dark-haired beauty, perhaps from the southlands. However, one could tell by her height and her yellow-gold eyes that she carried her father's blood strongly in her veins.

“It had been explained to us that the Jarl' love for his lost mate was exceeded only by his love for this young flower of a daughter, whom he called, 'one who is the essence of all things sweet,' or, Sweetness for short. All who knew the Jarl understood that if illness took the life of this beautiful young girl, that it would completely destroy her father's sanity. Many were the men who feared should that occur.

“Bar Abbas walked over to where the young girl stood, and a crowd gathered around the fellowship pit. As I looked into the faces of those gathered to witness what was to occur, I saw how the firelight danced upon their faces like a living thing, highlighting each persons emotions to vulgar exaggeration. In that moment I saw the future of their people entwined with my own. Destiny had once again chosen us. Sadness overcame the mother in me.

“Bar Abbas raised his hands high into the air above his head and recited a prayer to the Creator in our language. Then he brought his hands swiftly down upon the emaciated shoulders of the young princess, causing a sharp snapping sound to resonate loudly throughout the breathless air. The tall girl buckled at the knees but maintained her balance without falling to the ground. After a few short moments, the young woman let out a low moan of

ecstasy, while at the same time allowing her head to fall backwards resembling someone looking up in wonderment at a star spent sky. Then it was over, and my husband removed his hands from her. Turning to her father he told him that it was done, that she, his beloved daughter was cured.

“The Jarl, swimming the seas of excitement, moved swiftly to the side of his daughter where he lifted her hands to inspect them. He turned back to Bar Abbas and shouted the news that the spots on the back of his daughter’s hands were gone. These spots we were told presaged impending death. He then gathered his daughter to his chest in a great hug.

“My husband explained to them that the girl’s ailment was caused by an abnormality hidden deep within the blood of her ancestors. However, because of the power of the one and true God, the seeds of this thing that indwelled the girl had been uprooted and cast away from her.

“Being that the spots on the girls hands were now vanquished, the Jarl and his kinsmen were believers in the power of our Lord. You could say that doubt was exorcized from their minds. Even so, the Jarl was a pragmatic person. A cure tonight might not last into the future. So the Jarl informed us that he and his people would set sail at dawn’s light for their homeland. He told how appreciative he was for the healing his daughter had received and that if his daughter remained healthy that they would return and give payment, to any demand made upon them by my husband.

“We returned to our village and them to their own land. All was normal, except for our son Joseph that is, for he was stricken through the heart with love for the Jarl’s yellow-eyed daughter.

“In the springtime the north men again voyaged to our shores. We welcomed them as friends and we invited them into our homes. Great was the joy of our people at the extravagance of gifts brought us by the north men.

“When at last we gazed upon the Jarl’s daughter, her beauty showed more bright than any reason of maturity could define. It was obvious to all who saw her that the healing had been fruitful.

“The Jarl was all smiles as he placed his meaty paw upon the shoulder of my husband when they greeted one another. Without further preamble the Jarl growled out for all to hear that a great gift had been given, and that a great gift must be returned. Then the voice of that giant told my husband to make a demand... adding that if it could be given, it would be. My mother’s heart fell, then gladdened, for I had been shown it all.

“Without hesitation Bar Abbas turned his attention to the young girl that had been healed through him. In a clear and proud voice, and much to the surprise of our son, asked for her hand in marriage to him our eldest son.

“To say that the Jarl was surprised would be an understatement, for he stood in silent surprise for what seemed like an eternity. Then his eyes fell upon our sons eyes, catching a hold of them as if to peer into Joseph’s soul. Turnning that same stare at my husband he told us that in his lands the women were not chattel property, but equals. They are not owned. Therefore, we do not choose the men they are to mate. So, it is not within my power to grant your request... only she has that power.

“All eyes turned to stare at the young woman and to her credit, she never faltered in her stature, nor did she shy away from the attention being shoved upon her. In fact, she seemed to be aware that a matter of honor was being measured out, here, in our village.

“With a voice that showcased her royal lineage the girl raised her chin and told us that she did not owe her life, nor anything else, to those who laid hands upon her. She made it clear that only the Creator could give life. She believed that if the gods had healed her, they did so of their own free will. However, she also said that she understood that her father had given his word, and that since it was his oath that was in question, here. ‘I stand ready to honor my father’s oath’. Then she consented to the marriage with our son.

“The Jarl smiled sadly, for he had anticipated his daughters answer. She was as proud and as honorable as any of the male members of his clan. He also sensed that this marriage would bring greater distance to his relationship with his beloved daughter, for she would remain here, with her husband, while he would return home to the north. He was greatly saddened. However, at that very moment Joseph interrupted them by stepping boldly forward and into the center of things. With his head held high he gazed longingly.

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Bar Abbas passed away from this world peacefully that same evening. The village people constructed a tomb fashioned from one of the many small caves in that area, honoring his wishes to be buried according to the customs of his forefathers.

The Magdalena, the first witness to the Resurrection, was heartbroken beyond all normality at the lose of her companion. It is said that she wandered from that village after the burial of her husband, never to return. It is also said that hunters discovered her skeletal remains some twenty years later; it is told that they found her sitting peacefully beneath the bower of an ancient tree, her hands folded in supplication and a smile on her lips. To this day, the locals have a yearly festival in her name; they tell her story and parade her bones for all to see, such was the power of this giant of a woman.

I suppose that you would naturally assume The Magdalena to be a topic of much discussion, having had such an important role in the life of Christ and all. But a lot of mistruths have been brought forward concerning her and her misunderstood relationship with the two Jesus'. Of those I cannot speak, but of these that I have written about I can, for she and I have the same blood in our veins, of that I am extremely proud and F.Y I., this author is honored to say that he was born on the day the Catholic Church has designated as Saint Mary Magdalene day.

As for the marriage of her son to the Jarl's daughter, that union would shepherd a friendship between two peoples which would remain solid for more than seven hundred years. That bond would eventually be shattered when those same north men (Norsemen), would sail their Longboats back to these shores under the war banner of Vikings, unmindful of the history shared by the two people.

Years later one of Josephs direct descendants, a man who carried The Magdalena's red hair, would sail his own Longboats westward where he landed on the shores of the unnamed Americas, bringing the bloodline of The Magdalena and her husband Jesus Bar Abbas to a new continent.

It should be noted that the rebel leader, who carried the first stigmata, and his mystical wife Mary Magdalene who is celebrated in all four Gospels, had two other sons and a daughter of remarkable beauty. Their names however have not been revealed to me, and appear to be lost in the mists of time. However, it is said that their bloodline runs like a tiny yet unstoppable river through the veins of Gaul, long after it became transformed into another name and the Pax Romana gave way to modern Europe. This blood, the blood of The Magdalena and Bar Abbas, would prosper, flowing into the veins of ancient Kings and Queens alike, thereby gracing the gene pool of the families that came to rule over all of Europe. In fact, unbeknownst to those who wrote history, this same bloodline became synonymous with the "Royal Bloodline" of the entire Western World.

After the events recorded here, Judas, The Betrayer of Christ, stayed put at the village beside the Twin Lakes where he lived quietly for many years. He left that place only after his agelessness began to cause suspicion and concern among the inhabitants who lived their. Some unlikely reports suggest that he died soon after leaving that village by the lakes, but even were it so... you now know that death for some is different from the death of others.



# Book Three

## The Black Madonna



# Chapter One

The dark warp of nightfall spun overhead in a grandiose arch of time, while star spent galaxies hung their auric twinkles above the dire-conditioned Community Hospital like a blinking curtain; as if all indeed was well in creation.

However, in this devonian imbalance where athletes earned tens of millions of dollars for their abilities to pass a ball back and forth while educators earned scant tens of thousands of dollars for the thankless task of trying to instill logic and values into the children of our nation; an age where insufferable laws made frightened and degraded informants out the people; an age where it was hip to act like a sexual deviant and un-hip to be moral; an age where children preferred to look and act like convicts over engineers and firemen; an age where a large segment of the population stood around with it's hand out expecting others to support their slothfulness; an age where no one accepted responsibility for their own choices in life; an age where families were a minority, was the moment when she came to earth. And come to earth she did, in the guise of a newborn baby girl. And when she came, The Watchers who stood patiently in their sacred place were suffused with glee, for she had been prophesied and long had they awaited her arrival.

She was born to a woman whose name she would never know, and to a father who had been taken away by one of the many substance abuse laws, one that he was too weak-willed to obey.

She was born prematurely and addicted to the same drug that had enslaved the girl who had birthed her. And so it was that this piteous little girl-child was thrust into our world, small, weak and in constant pain from the agonies of an addiction she did not ask for. Such was the coming together of this ever important congruence between opposite forces, far beyond my ability as a channel-writer to express or comprehend.

The child she had now become lived only by the mercy of God, but was none-the-less tortured by the agonies which beset her. And so she cried, in fact she cried day and night; she cried past reason. She cried and cried from the pain of her addiction but still she clung to life as if drawn to it by the willpower of the entire angelic forces of heaven. "A natural born fighter" said the overworked nurses whose task it was to care for this unfortunate "pre-me" with all of the equanimity they could muster. And at last she won her battle to survive and grew to a size where her hold on life was no longer questioned, a natural born fighter, she indeed would be.

Though this tiny infant miracle was still a sad and bedraggled sight when held in comparison to some of the more rosy-cheeked full-term babies that passed through that Maternity Ward, she was still a very pretty baby, at least this was the consensus and opinion of the nurses who staffed the ward, even though she was, "frightfully small," they would all add like some disclaimer.

In time her weeks of continuous crying, while passing though the merciless waters of a suffering passed to her as a kind of birthright faded from memory, and she grew into a quiet smiling infant. She was always smiling in fact, as though she had in no way been slighted by life, nor its circumstances... as if she had not dodged the death-blow of an evil hammer wielded by a merciless entity that did not intend for her to survive. Yes, she smiled and she laughed delightedly at anything that caught her eye. However, were one to look deeply enough into those same laughing baby eyes they would encounter something unusual down in the sparkling blue waters of her windowed orbs. Maybe, if wise in those things, that person would detect a pool of cosmic wisdom impossible for a normal baby girl to possess; or, maybe something very different if they be less sage-wise.

This miracle child would soon be adopted by a family of solid proportions, a family that hailed from one of the middle income sections of the city in which she was born.

She was six months old when she was delivered into the embracing arms of the woman who would be her new mother, as the doting father tucked the edges of her blanket snugly around her. They were nice people, people who believed in the value of helping others. They worked hard and they went to church. She liked it there, with them. And they loved her in return. This was a stable family and a stable home, a blessing for any child.

Her new father was a school teacher at one of the local schools, a kind and gentle soul. Her new mother was an advocate for the poor, a woman who performed voluntary work for a local branch of her Catholic Church, a woman bent upon helping un-wed mothers. It was through her work with the Social Agencies that she first became aware of the poor, drug addicted little girl birthed at one of the charity hospitals.

This saintly woman had hovered over her through the first horrendous weeks of her life and had silently willed for her to survive. "Live," the woman had said to herself. "And if you live, I will take you home." She had lived, and the woman upheld her end of the silent bargain and her husband had readily agreed, because he too was impressed with the little girl who had defied the odds by clinging to life ever so tenaciously. And, so it was that the Black Madonna went home.

In her new home she had her own room, with her own crib, one which was overhung with all of the dangling bells and whistles that a baby-girl could ever want. In her new home she was held and cuddled and showered with all of the tender loving hugs and kisses that any baby could ever hope to have. All was good in her new home with her new family... until one of the poor that her mother had spent her life trying to help strolled into the fast-food restaurant where her Mommy and Daddy were eating, and, for no reason at all, shot them dead. Alone again she was.

At one year and three months she was once again placed into a home by her wards. As before, it too was filled with nice people. The lady of the house was a funny, jolly little bird-like blonde with brown eyes, and the husband, well, he too was perfect with his kind smile and Santa-esque figure. He loved to watch football and work around the house and he would hold her on his lap and bounce her and tickle her and pamper her something fierce, a little girls dream come true. He was one of those rare men who adored his wife and his newfound daughter, unconditionally.

In their care she grew and she began to walk and then she became a little girl full of frills and shrills, shoes and dresses, smiles and kisses. Here happiness was bountiful. Then, when she was seven, the perky little blonde decided that her life had been empty and unfulfilled, she then revealed to her husband that she was moving in with some artist she had met... and that he could keep the child.

The little girl and her daddy sat hand in hand and cried; him for a lost love, and her for him. Soon there-after he began to drink and then drink more. The powers that be took notice of the situation and in their infinite wisdom deemed it improper for a single, drunken man to raise a girl-child, not of his own blood. So they took her away. Her daddy, once so full of life and love ended his sorrow one lonely night in a drunken stupor by piercing his brain with a bullet of his own design. The blond woman shrugged it off when she heard, as if completely uninvolved with the drama.

At the age of nine she was once again, "placed" this time her new parents were an older couple, well past childbearing age. These, her new guardians, were interested only in being civic-minded, rather than building a family. But, that was okay though not at all ideal, and not overly warm, but her new folks were pleasant and decent people despite their shortcomings.

When she turned eleven her surrogate father's brother showed up at their home, supposedly, "just for a little while". Her new uncle took an immediate notice of her and her of him; in fact he became her closest friend. He bought her things, things a girl liked, not just things she needed. They went to movies, alone, together. He walked with her on the beach and talked to her as if she were a real person... not just some kid. He was always a gentleman around her though and at thirteen she knew that she was in love with him and she ached to be able to prove that love to him. So one day she tried to kiss him the way a woman would try to kiss a man. He resisted her. He told her that he was thirty years older than her and that he liked her, a lot, but that it was wrong for him to try and translate those feelings for her into something physical. But, the flesh is weak and the next few days found him suddenly looking at her differently, until one evening his resolved failed him completely, and he went to her room, and he knew her.

This romance, her first, went on for six months. She loved him madly and he loved her beyond all thoughts of reason.

She would laugh away his concerns about the discrepancy of their ages, and about the wrongness of what they were doing by telling him that some girls were simply mature beyond their years, and that in the olden days, all

women her age had been married and were child-bearers. He listened to her talking and in his mind he justified it all away. Then one hard-raining evening when they thought themselves alone, they were not, and her destiny once again boiled to the surface of her cauldron life, undeniable.

In the horror of that night he was thrown out and she was soon there-after returned to the state like some damaged gift. In response the Child Welfare people filed a mountain of reports concerning the incident, and he was arrested. In distress she snuck from the Orphanage and tried to see him, but he refused her, saying only that what they... no, what he had done was wrong. Her uncle, her first love, was sentenced to prison for loving her when she was too young to be loved, like that. And he died there in that prison, gasping in pain while clutching the crude delivery of a jailhouse vigilante who had cussed, "his damned baby-raping ass". And as he died he cried bemoaning the fact that what he had done was once socially acceptable. Times however change, and that which he had done was now forbidden, even by the lowest and most wretched among us, especially if they themselves have a young daughter.

In telling you this story I will not take sides on the issue at hand, it's not my place, I am only the teller of this and of that. I will say however that I believe it possible for there to be true love in this type of situation; however, I am ever mindful of the sickness of these, my companions here, who brag about the young girls they have strung out on drugs and subjected to all forms of perversion, even to animals. So... as far as I'm concerned, I'd rather let God sort 'em out.

As for our young girl, well she would not return to her assigned place. Instead, she walked away from it and disappeared, surrendering herself into the arms of a fate which had long awaited her. She became out of necessity, a "Street Walker."

As this young woman learned to walk the streets of this Hollywood Babylon selling that which was her most prized possession, some would say it was a cruel fate, but her fate was also her unavoidable destiny.

Now life for some is hard, of this there is no disagreement, and our young girl was no exception, but there are varying degrees of hard, and some have it the hardest of all, and so it was that before even reaching the age of fifteen she had fallen into the clutches of a cunning street-level predator, already in the business of selling two other women. It needs to be said that these two other women were older than her, and resented her for it, to violent recompense.

Lionel, her pimp, rented her body to any and all comers. He kept the money. In return she had a roof over her head, a bed, food and clothing. It seemed to her that life as she knew it had been reduced to a sad and desperate ritual of blood and flesh, diluted only by millions and millions of her little-girl tears.

Here she was, a child, born into the midst of and living in a horror that most adults could simply not imagine. A life so distorted and so perverted that she was required to provide sexual services to any twisted mind which found its pleasure in children. A thing which had once been beautiful, when performed in love, had now become something repugnant and hideous and dangerous.

She imagined how other girls her age lived their normal lives, and yes, she thought about having a husband, a child, a family of her own. She thought about normal things like having a little house with a yard and a cat she could love, yes dear reader, she very much wanted to alter the dark frozen architecture of her ill-formed existence. Who wouldn't? But how?

Were she to seek help, the authorities would only return her to the violent insanity of some gladiator-type Reform School, after all what she had done had been bad... hadn't it? Everyone said so. Hadn't he died as a result of her love? Wouldn't she? After all it was her fault, she made him do it! And if not Reform School, then some other equally insufferable place where she would be treated with the same enmity as she was here.

Just last week she had encountered a church lady passing out little pamphlets about Jesus. She had hoped that maybe, just maybe, this Jesus lady would help her. But, alas she knew it would not happen; it is an easy thing to pass out literature, but oh so difficult indeed to actually do the hard work that it takes to in fact make a difference... like take a child home with you, for reasons other than movie star publicity.

They parted ways her and the Jesus lady, whose last words were that she would go straight to a burning hell if she didn't drop to her knees and repent her iniquitous ways; like she had some choice in the matter. And, oh yes, what about the cops? Couldn't they help her if she appealed to them for assistance? Somewhere else, perhaps, in

some other place far from here, but not in this particular patch of the city where she lived. Here the policemen who patrolled this part of the city, were the same ones who told her, "Do the right thing for me and my partner here, and we won't run you in." No, the cops were no help to anyone except themselves.

She understood full well their true intent, all of them. They were adamant and evil, every single one of them. The people who abused her and the people who stood back and watched it all happen, and everyone who brushed past her on the street too busy to see the wrongs being done were counted in the same number, according to her. Yes, they were all just facets of the same lasciviousness, the dross and the dregs of a declining social-system and she nothing more than a useable object which could be passed from hand to hand. Hers was a world being overseen by a straw-god who had been created by a race of moral degenerates whose very origins, and whose very destiny was born from dust and nothingness.

From her lonely street corner she could see the world in which she lived without its plastic mask, a view that few in today's society cared enough about to see. She however was not like most others, much less, most others her age. In fact most kids her age saw the goodness of things first and only encountered the true nature of evil later in life, after they grew more sophisticated in the ways of the world. But for her, life had been inverted. In fact she had yet to see the goodness which would serve as the counterbalance to all of the evil which pervaded and permeated her tiny street corner world.

Today however had a different feel to it and as she stood on that corner she contemplated the series of small mean things which had forged the life that she had inherited, a life seemingly filled with broken promises and the shards of shattered dreams. A life-scape littered with mean-spirited entities who expected her to sacrifice her most precious commodity to strangers of the lowest human order, strangers she despised, because to her they were the earnings of evil thought, spent in faceless bairn perversion, utterly. A species living in a world with gods whose proselytes sodomize the sacrificial animals, even when those animals are children.

Breathing deeply she contended that these things were beyond her control and that all she herself could do was to close her strained and bruised eyes and allow that which was a darkling thing to be what it will. For what could a little girl or even a woman if you will, do except perform the will of their subjugator.

It was a new-moon night and she looked at her surroundings and then at the skies above her in equal portion. Looking at a star spent sky was one of her little girl memories; she had even chosen a star of her own long ago, she had named it, tonight she looked for it, but saw only a thick and inky blackness punctuated by the rude sickly glow of the man-made stars which hung like phosphorescent ticks from the ends of metal poles, far to often for her liking. Though she finally accepted the fact that the city lights had obliterated any chance at stargazing, she could however see clearly a slim, pale crescent moon riding high above the grim cement mountains of her tiny world. As this scenery played itself upon the strings of her subconscious thought, she looked into the nighttime sky and dreamed of romance, of flowers, of proms, of dances, of laughter, of innocence and of love.

With great inner strength she pulled her eyes away from the beauty of the moon above and once again cast them towards the ground at her feet. Her life was not of those other things, but of these things; she raised her eyes and scanned the passing cars for signs of tonight's wages. Yes, my reader, my friend, she was both child and woman... saint and sinner. However, do not forget that above all that, she was a fighter.

# Chapter Two

## The Magdalena

Being that it was mid July it was a hot humid evening, one very normal for this place and this time of year. The unusual thing however, was that it was so hot and so humid at this late hour of the evening. A person would normally think that once the sun went down that the temperature would drop with it, and usually it did, but for some reason, on this night, the heat hung to this cement city like fire to Dante's Inferno.

Most folks on a night like this would find somewhere cool to hang out, preferably somewhere air conditioned; I did say most folks, but not all. Some folks simply do not have that option, for Hollywood slavery demands that they continually pick the cotton, no matter the weather because the new Slave Master, or Slave-Pimp is more ruthless and cold-blooded than any Slave Master before him.

So it was that one such slave stood on the street corner of this L.A. ghetto, displaying her wares the way she had been taught. She was young, only fifteen, just turned. She was black, yet something in her genetic makeup had given her sharp blue eyes, a rare combination, making her more than just beautiful, but exotic to an extreme.

In front of this young girl prostitute pulled a car, this was not unusual either, what was unusual were its occupants, because it was filled with young teenaged girls. Seeing this she steeled herself to face the verbal abuse and harassment that this type usually threw at her. Instead, with doors locked and one window slightly cracked, one adventuresome young girl with yellow eyes called out to her asking her for directions.

The Black Madonna noted that the girls in the car were pretty, and mischievous, and... slightly afraid. Without answering she assessed each of them openly; they were analyzing her as well. As the young girls in the car looked at her, she could tell from their expressions that they passed no judgment on her and this surprised her. Yes, she was surprised at this, but she was also aware that even so, these girls were different from her, they were innocent, alien in a way that she herself could not comprehend or even imagine.

In the brief moment of silence that fell upon all concerned she at last felt uncomfortable and as a result broke eye contact with them, stoically looking to the ground at her feet. It was then and in that moment that she saw her shoes, just as she imagined they saw them, and she knew, maybe for the first time, that her shoes were too high. Also she noticed for the first time the worn toes and the faded imitation red leather material from which her shoes were crafted, and she knew then that her own face resembled that same faded red, in that it was painted beyond anything reasonable and served only to display the fact that she had something to sell, cheap. Her cheeks flushed with shame. Well I guess you CAN make a whore blush, she thought to herself.

She looked to the right and with her chin slightly downcast she straightened her arm and pointed towards a corner two blocks down. She told them to turn left there, and that the place they were searching for was about a half mile down.

As Fate is fickle and as Destiny must be met, the cute teenaged girl in the front passenger seat with the yellowish colored eyes, the one who had asked for directions smiled and told her thanks. Then that same girl, for reasons unknown said to the young prostitute, "We're going for a burger. Would you like to come with us?"

The other girls in the car began to chatter amongst themselves at this new development. The cute girl, riding shotgun, silenced them with an upraised hand.

The Black Madonna was stunned at this proposition. Yes! She wanted very much to go... but she couldn't. She told them so, however, the atmosphere shifted and the girls who had only moments before been aghast at the idea that she should join them, could not be dissuaded. In fact they were insistent; and the Prince of Fiends laughed aloud while casting a crooked shadow upon the ground of a damned enterprise.

Against all that she knew and understood concerning her plight in life, and against every argument that she used to try and dissuade herself from joining them, she consented and slid into the front seat next to the cute girl, who was now wearing a floppy black beret. She, the girl in the beret, was the obvious leader of this little band of

preppy girls; girls bent on riding a thrill by eating a burger on the wrong side of town. And, so it was that the dogs of fate trapped their prey in licentious wickedness... or, in majestic resplendence, depending on your perception of things unspoken. With a chirp of the tires a car full of carefree girls sped away in anticipation of a night filled with burgers and gossip. An outsider would have seen nothing other than a car full of girls, giggling and laughing, as all little girls should; little could they have known how the wheel was turning.

Though not recorded here, a separate book could be written about each of these girls and how this chance encounter altered the course their lives in ways beyond the insight of the average person, beyond even their own recognition. 'Tis a mortal tale told by me at campfires only, so you will not find it here, yet, perhaps, someday, I shall tell you about my witness to it all, but not now, so, let us proceed as we must.

The girls introduced themselves each to the other and then in anticipation of a storied answer they asked the young prostitute her age. She smiled at them, and then told them that she was twenty-one. This was such an obvious fib that they all broke out in roaring laughter, then added that they were twenty-one as well. In mere moments they were chatting away like friends of long history, past. Among them she felt completely comfortable; you could even say that she felt accepted by these girls from the other side of town, so much so that she no longer regretted her decision to go with them and for a while, life for her, seemed to be as a little girls life was meant to be.

After a few blocks of typically careless adolescent driving they arrived at the fast food joint in question and trooped inside. There they found a booth next to a window and staked their claim. Around them sat envy, opportunity, wickedness and perversion.

She took her place along side the other girls as they crowded into the booth that this hamburger joint provided its customers. Then after a brief silence she shocked them by telling them that her parents had been murdered inside of this same restaurant, years and years ago. Then she answered her wide-eyed companions by saying, "No. I really don't think about it, so it doesn't bother me to come in here. I was just a baby when it happened. So I really don't have any memories of them."

The other girls countered her startling admission by telling her all about high school, about their boyfriends and about the many, many unbearable rules imposed upon them by their cruel and unfeeling parents, and about smoking pot, which they assured her they did, daily. On and on they went, and she listened, fascinated by what she was hearing and as she listened she laughed and laughed and laughed. Soon she forgot about her plight in life and a curious, contented happiness, something she had not felt in a long time, came over her. She felt as if her wish had come true, because she now had friends of her own.

As she listened to her new friends she found herself longing for a normal boyfriend, like each of these girls had, someone who would act childish if SHE spoke to another boy, someone to tell her that she was pretty, someone to love her. Also, she listened as they talked about their families and the kind of environment that they had grown up in, and she wished for the chance at a normal life, even if that normal life came with a set of parents who would impose unfair rules and curfews on her, like they did on her friends. To her credit though, she was neither jealous nor depressed by the good fortune of her friends. She saw the introduction of these new friends into her life as good fortune enough, and felt privileged just to sit and listen to their silly schoolgirl dramas. Most of all, she enjoyed hearing their female laughter, even if, at times, it turned a little catty. Eventually, when the conversation slowed and the burgers went the way of all good burgers, and the girl wearing the black beret and now wearing a thick gloss of newly applied black lipstick, swatted a fly and then with no preamble asked, "So, are you a hooker or what?" her voice falling several decibels into the tell-me-a-secret range as soon as she said the word "So".

The table became quite and all eyes fell upon her partly filled with dread for the answer that they knew they might receive, and partly filled with the thrill of receiving the answer that they devilishly anticipated.

The Black Madonna was momentarily stunned, because, surrounded by her clutch of new friends, she had almost forgotten who and what she was.

She looked into the face of her bold and questioning companion and searched it for traces of malice, the way a priest might weigh the words of a confessor by looking for traces of sincerity. Finally she broke eye contact and locked around at her surroundings. She took note of the bone colored walls, the wobbling ceiling fans, the remnants of the food that littered their table and the drunk in the corner. She looked out the plate-glass window and took note of the transient people who were walking past this place, past this space in time, and smiled.



Her smile relieved the tension which had begun to build as a result of her thoughtful hesitation. Then in a little girl voice intended for her companions alone to hear, she replied, "Yeah. I'm a whore!"

After a silent few seconds they all began to giggle fiendishly, as if she had just admitted to stealing makeup from Wal-Mart or something of that nature.

With this admission the others quickly bombarded her with questions, the type typical of this time and of this situation, such as, "Have you ever done anybody famous?" and "Aren't you afraid you'll catch A.I.D.S.?" and "How much money do you make, each time you do it?" and "What's it like?" and of course, "Do you like it?"

Even though she was the youngest person sitting at this table of wanna-be misfits, she was by far-n-away the wisest person there. She knew that being totally ignorant to the harsh realities of life on the streets that these girls wanted to romanticize her lifestyle and her profession. She wanted very much to go along with their ill-considered rebelliousness, and she wanted very much for them to like her, but she could not, she would not lie to them about her life, she was a lot of things, but a liar was not one of them.

With her decision made, she leaned back and calmly told them about the beatings routinely administered to her by her pimp. She told them of the ugly, often unwashed men who paid to paw her body. She told them about the way they treated her and of men so old and so wrinkled as to appear inhuman. She talked to them about the perverse things they did to her body and her words were brutal and honest and terrible to hear. The stories she told were uncompromising and onerous. To her, they were only too real, yet she shed no tears and she refused their sympathy and their pity. She did not need those things, what she did need was for these wanna-be's to know matter-of-factly how blessed they were, in spite of their little girl troubles.

When she had finished relaying her story the girls sat silently repulsed by the ugly reality that their new-found friend had to deal with, on a daily basis. The truth she had spoken had burned some of the flesh away from the body of their innocence. Her words made them feel as if they too had just been bitten and scratched and violated by some drug addicted beast in a dark and dirty alleyway, and their eyes told on them, one and all. A silence ensued as each fell into their own melancholy thoughts reflecting upon their own protected lives and their own silliness.

The youngsters looked at her with new eyes and she looked back at them without a trace of embarrassment or shame. Then, as if to break the grip of that which held them, the girl with the black beret whistled softly and said, "Damn girl, that ain't nothin' like B.E.T. shows it! Hell, I thought hooken' meant limo's, expensive clothes, parties and lots of bling!" She said this jokingly, but even the most naive of them knew her words to mean something more.

After another hour of girl talk they picked up their meal trash, hugged each other and retraced their steps to daddy's gray sedan.

The girls drove silently and returned her to her dingy street corner touching her and kissing her as she departed the vehicle, and promising to pick her up the following week for another girl's night out.

While watching the taillights of her new friend's car turn the corner she became fabulously excited by what had just happened to her. She openly smiled as she thought of having friends her own age, or nearly her own age. It was nice to feel and to think like a little girl for a change, but, it would not be long before reality would creep quietly up behind her to steal those things away from her. And standing there on that street corner awaiting her come-uppance she looked a little like a tarnished bronze statue of some long forgotten saint, a saint adhering to a sect who worshipped perversion... in worn shoes, with heels too high for a child to wear.

A slight breeze blew unnoticed by her as her mind spun in circles like a whirling dervish, and she contemplated what she wrongly assumed as good fortune.

Her new friends and the night's events and all of next weeks possibilities flew like songbirds around and inside of her mind. Her eyes lit-up and twinkled with anticipation of what might be. Already she was thinking about what she would wear, next Friday, when she went out with her new friends. Then she frowned slightly because she knew that all of her clothing was really only good for whoring, but then she smiled, dismissing her concerns with the realization that she would figure something out. As her mind raced she came upon the stunning possibility that her new-found friends might be able to help her escape this present nightmare. Maybe even, one of them would let her move in with them. Maybe she could get a job, maybe go back to school! No, school was out of the question, but a

job wasn't. And if she worked hard and saved her money, maybe later she could get her own apartment. A car. Oh, yes, a car. She dreamed of a future that most folks took for granted. She dreamed for a chance to lead a normal life. A normal life, she whispered to herself almost like a prayer. "Just a chance at a normal life," she said aloud.

Several vehicles eased past her with anticipatory glances, but not tonight she said to herself. Tonight was for celebration. Find some other flesh-toy you can break without consequences, she told them silently.

Suddenly, she heard her name being called above the din of surrounding noises, and her mind snapped to attention in military fashion. Turning in the direction of the voice, she saw her pimp standing in front of an alleyway a half-a-block up the street. He called her name again, and then hollered impatiently. "Bitch, bring yo' ho ass down here right now!"

She knew by the tone of his voice that he was high and angry. Not the smooth herbal high of weed, or the "out of it" high of heroin, but the maniacal high of some other chemical... and she feared greatly for her well being. She wanted to run, but she feared this man too much to disobey. She thought briefly about her scheduled date with her friends, and as she turned to go to him she found herself hoping that he wouldn't mark her up too bad.

Lionel, her pimp, wasn't a big man, but he was a mean one. Every one knew it. The tales of how he had taken a club to this one, or a knife to that one, or had beaten another to death with his bare hands were all common knowledge in this neighborhood. It was even rumored that he had murdered a ten year old boy whose father had ripped him off in a drug deal and then fled the city. All who knew him knew he was an animal, one who scratched out a good living from the underground drug economy created by the Government's prohibition of them.

She had personally seen Lionel beat women unconscious, without reason, herself included. She knew he was a mean man, but what could she do? Nothing was the answer, because society had already provided him with every excuse he needed to remain unaccountable.

An outside observer having watched her going to meet her pimp would have concluded that she went to him almost sideways, like a whipped mutt being ordered into the clutches of a cruel master with eyes reluctant and terrified, yet to afraid to disobey.

Walking towards him in abeyance to his command she heard only her shoes clipclipping on the sidewalk. A voice in her head sounded an alarm telling her to turn and run. Perhaps a more mature woman would have known that help was available, but a scared girl did not know enough about the world to trust that inner-voice. For that reason she walked into the maw of evil and simply hoped for the best. After all, she had done nothing wrong... right? No she hadn't she concluded optimistically by the time she arrived at the entrance to the alley, where that monster of a man stood.

"Got any money fo' me, bitch?"

"Nothing L., it's been real slow," she replied.

"Where ya' been?" he demanded.

"On the corner, like you told me."

Lionel hit her squarely in the face with his right fist.

With that blow her lip split violently and as she fell to the ground her head slammed against the sidewalk making her unaware that she had lost her two front teeth from that first punch. Lying there completely unconscious her blood flowed freely, spilling out and onto the dirty, stained pavement forming a red pool with odd shaped tentacles fluidly spreading outward as if reaching for a sanctuary unavailable to its previous holder.

"Bitch! I'll teach yo' ass not ta' lie ta' me!" Then he began to kick her repeatedly not even concerned with dragging her into the alley and out of sight of potential witnesses. In this neighborhood, this was business as usual. Here, no one cared unless caring came with a government check.

He kicked and kicked and kicked, face, body, body, face, face, face, head. Her youth and her beauty lay shattered, broken and smeared unclaimable upon the sidewalk, and the dreams of a little girl flew away oh so reluctantly like a feather on a spring breeze.

# Chapter Three

## Jonny Sunday

Johnny Sunday Morning arose from the comfortable depths of his custom bed fully relaxed and clear of all apprehension. He stretched luxuriantly like a cat, his arms extended outwards to their utmost limits. He felt an arcane pulsation of power rippling and throbbing throughout every part of his body... a current of occult energy which knew no natural source for its existence. Yet, for all of that, he paused. Something was wrong. Something felt different. Frowning he probed his inner-self, trying to ascertain just what was ailing him, if anything. He could identify nothing amiss.

Instinctively he tuned to gaze down upon the supine figure of his wife who lay sleeping upon their giant bed in the pleasantness of faraway dreams. Her chest rose and fell softly and her gentle snore sounded almost exactly like the contented purring of a well satisfied cat. His stare was magnetically drawn to the sight of her left breast, which lay loose and full upon her gown, exposed by some shift of her arm during her repose.

Although he was privy to the sight of his wife's nude form, this moment was different than most. In it he felt like a naughty little boy viewing the flesh of his every desire for the very first time. Or, more accurately, he felt the thrill of the peek, the way that a man does when he is blessed with a flash of white beneath the sitting skirt of a stranger. Most of all he felt the burning, pulling, aching need for sexual gratification, the need for sexual relief from this woman whom he could now credit with personally altering his destiny. Yes, he loved this woman, worshipped her even.

The Reverend stood gazing down at the figure of his wife, and he smiled. "How like a woman," he thought to himself. "So quick and so intent upon concealing her wares, yet so manipulative about exposing them at the most enticing of moments to the person most deserving of her pleasure." He shook his head and sighed in idle wonder. "They are so much more in control of their lives than we men are. In fact, she probably pulled that blanket down and positioned herself like that to inflame me. She would know that I would awaken and catch sight of her lovely flesh, thereby ensuring that my thoughts were haunted throughout the day with desire for her."

He thought all of these things while standing comfortably and watching as the rise and fall of her breath lifted her breast poetically. He appreciated Gods gift to this world.

His mind, of its own accord, leapt backwards in time to those occasions where he remembered seeing her sitting on the couch in their living room, when she would suddenly turn for a book or something allowing her knees to fall slightly apart flashing a quick small glimpse of the color of her undergarments. This would thrill him to the core, because he desired her greatly and loved her in spite of her past indiscretions.

The wily and fallacious minister reflected back upon those times when his wife would carelessly leave the bathroom door open just a little, while she took her afternoon shower, maneuvering herself into just the right position so he would be able to catch a glimpse of her naked flesh while she toweled herself off, or tended to her hair, or shaved her long and lovely legs. Yes, he mused, this one certainly knows how to harness her female powers and use them to cloud the thoughts of her man, I am not so easily fooled though, he said to himself, and with suspicion he inched over her, examining her face and her breath for sign's that she was indeed awake. He concluded that she was not faking sleep and a small pulse of shame coursed through his veins and he was embarrassed that he had thought her a tease.

Before leaving their bedroom to go into his dressing room he took one last hungry look at his exposed wife, sighed then left. Yeah, he'd think about her all day that was for sure.

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She opened one lovely eye and watched him as he left their bedroom to get dressed for the day. A sly, happy little smile creased the corners of her lips as she reached down to tug at her nightgown strap, repositioning herself inside of it. Pulling the covers up to her neck she rolled over onto her side, making sure that the blanket now rode high on her body. She smiled as her breathing took on the gentle rhythm of deep restful sleep, for she was a master at keeping her man interested.

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As he scrutinized his reflection in the gilded mirror that was set in one wall of their opulent bathroom he felt “it,” what “it” was he could not say, but inside he felt that some undetectable thing was wrong, that something about himself was askew. Try as he might though, he could not detect any sort of change in his appearance. His figure cast the same appearance that it always had. No, he saw no sign of change, yet he knew for certain that something was wrong.

He went about the task of performing his morning duties and then stepped from his lavatory and into a large dressing room containing his clothing. He selected a fine dark blue suit that had been handcrafted for him in Italy. Putting it on he stood in front of the mirror once more. He then selected a red tie to go with his white shirt, tied it in a Windsor and gave himself a wink. Today was a big day for him. Today, his team of accountants would publicly declare him the world’s newest billionaire. Johnny Sunday Morning, The Miracle Working Billionaire, it had a nice ring to it. Cover of Time Magazine - again, he chortled to his reflection. It dawned on him as he turned to leave that he and his reflection made a strikingly handsome pair, indeed.

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Arriving at the downtown office complex which served as the headquarters for the Sunday Morning Ministries he was met by the usual crowd of screaming, shouting, demanding reporters. This mass of news hungry vultures were fleshed out in front of a hoard of grasping, needy, miracle seekers followed next by a congregation of wellwishers from various nationwide church groups who stood sobbing, crying and shouting, “Johnny! Johnny! Johnny!” with Bibles raised high in the air for all the world to see that they regarded him, “The Man Who Performed Miracles,” to be the proof that their particular slant on religion was the one true way as ordained by God Almighty.

On a typical day he would move quickly past the gathered masses with nothing more than a quick wave of his hand. Today though, was not a typical day, it was the day that the entire world would be forced to see just who Johnny Sunday Morning truly was. They would see his power, his wealth and his position of authority not only in the eyes of God, but in the entire world of finance as well. On this auspicious day, he would grant these groveling peons a boon: he would grant these mentally impoverished, financially impaired information hounds an impromptu interview; making their pathetic little lives a bit brighter. That would be HIS miracle to them.

Stepping from his shining new limousine behind the smiles of both his chauffeur and his two bodyguards he looked more like a Rock Star than a Shepherd of good works. No sooner than he planted both of his feet upon the sidewalk outside of his office building, questions began pouring in like rain. In unison with the shouted inquiries of the attending reporters he heard the wails and the lamentations of the miracle beggars, the mothers and the fathers with their afflicted children, the husbands and wives, the downtrodden, the desperate. Then as if cued in by the cacophony of those seeking a miracle the Bible clutchers began sounding out an a-capello rendition of Amazing Grace, which had become something of a theme song for him and his legion of faithful followers. Nothing new here he thought, except that on this day he would bless them all by making an unforgettable statement for the cameras to broadcast worldwide. It was the least he could do. No, it really was.

With this intention in mind he walked towards the center of an area that had been cleared for him by the armed security personnel whose job it was to maintain a safe perimeter at these types of appearances to insure his personal safety. “Wouldn’t want to do a John Lennon here,” he always said. This, even though he had silently wondered if God would resurrect him if something like that did happen, he kinda’ thought so... but he wasn’t absolutely sure.

Stepping on his prearranged spot with a diminutive lowing of his chin, Johnny Sunday Morning, stood with his head cocked as though he were tuned-in and receiving a special message being sent down to him, and him alone, from some higher source... such as God, perhaps.

The screaming, the shouting, the begging, the imploring singing crowd fell silent, awed as they were by the magical powers of this holy healer, this mighty arm of the lord, because they knew from his actions that something wonderful was about to occur.

In a grand gesture designed to wring the maximum amount of pomp and ceremony out of the situation, Johnny turned to stare at a small boy sitting quietly in a wheel chair at the crowd’s edge. With a wave of his hand he beckoned to his minions demanding that they quickly admit this boy into his presence, with this a rush of anticipation rose from the spirit of the crowd; the child’s mother quietly fell to her knees in prayer, sobbing uncontrollably. As if on cue to the boy’s thankful mother a low rumbling sound rippled through the crowd as ten-thousand persons whispered to themselves or to their neighbor, “He’s going to heal the child.” Or, “He’ll make him walk.” Or “He’ll cure him! Praise God. Praise Sunday Morning.”

The chair bound child was positioned squarely in front of the wily healer and to a romantic heart it could easily have been a moment choreographed in some long lost Shakespearean play, but, alas I’m not Shakespeare and Johnny Sunday Morning was not quite Mephistopheles’.

The wayward Prophet raised his right hand heavenward and struck a pose resembling something that could have been painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, holding it there momentarily before bringing it down upon the trembling head of the chaired youngster. As Reverend Morning’s hand went skyward the boys troubled mother cried out thanking God that her son, little Roland Gonzalez, had been chosen out of this crowd of thousands for the divine gift of healing. Others in the crowd joined in and uplifted her cry on wings of their own full-throated voices, followed by a long sigh of anticipation in unison with the falling hand of Johnny Sunday Morning. However, at that exact moment, when the man who the entire world called “Healer” placed his hand atop the infirmed child’s head, at the same instant that little Roland Gonzalez’s mother cried out to heaven, at the precise instant the crowd was awed, as if by some form of divine sorcery born far from man’s reckoning, the City of Angels was struck by a medium sized trembler.

The ground shook, cars rocked and buildings danced a jig. All who bore witness that morning accredited the earthquake to the power of the prophet... all that is, except one.

In a place far removed from these proceedings, the evil ones grimaced.

# Chapter Four

## Jonny Sunday

At the first sign of trouble his handlers whisked Johnny Sunday Morning away to safety, literally pulling his hand from the brow of the disabled child; they placed him firmly into his limousine where he sat in utter silence as the vehicle sped away from where the crowd was gathered. To the naked eye The Reverend's exit would have brought to mind a President in danger but Reverend Morning could not help but to feel more like a criminal departing the scene of some great crime, than someone fleeing danger.

"Are you ok, Mr. Sunday?" his aid asked solicitously. This was the man hired to follow him daily, making notes of his every action; his historian, as it were.

Sunday Morning nodded his head absently, but the thin figure of reason watched while his own skeletal thoughts danced and gibbered at him from within like a raggedy, blasphemous heckler. "Charlatan! Fraud! Wicked and pernicious evildoer!" mocked his troubled soul.

The weary eyes of Sunday Morning were focused on nothing in particular as they stared seemingly unconcerned through the window of his limousine, masking his own panicky thoughts. Internally though, he was fighting a battle with his own raging emotions, trying if you will to regain some semblance of control over himself. "Nothing happened. Nothing happened when I touched that kid," he kept saying to himself, over and over. Then with sinuous toil his mind revealed to him the unstoppable truth which slammed into his consciousness with the force of a raging flood; for the first time in almost a year he could not hear the thoughts of those people around him. The brief immortality of injurious imposters.

Panicked only within himself, he regained his composure in case any had noticed, silently reassuring them that all was fine in "Johnny World," that nothing out of the ordinary had happened. Inside his mind though he was searching for reason, "How could I have not noticed this before?" he quizzed himself. "When was it that I stopped hearing them?" he contemplated. The truth though, was that he had long since stopped listening or paying attention, choosing instead to tune out those voices like an unwanted radio station. In the final analyses, he decided that this complacent attitude had probably been the engine of his undoing,

As the limousine rolled through the rod-iron gates of his palatial estate the foul smelling stench of mountebank fear and of something altogether different became cloying and unbearable within the car, but he no longer noticed it, for his mind was engaged elsewhere... perhaps upon the vexing realization that his remarkable powers had fled from him like hounds in the night. He needed solitude, time to think, time to figure this all out.

On entering his mansion he spoke not a single word to anyone, going directly into his lavishly provisioned study where he shut the doors firmly behind him. There he twisted the lever thereby locking himself inside where he gave himself over to sorrowful license. He subsequently fell upon his knees and began to pray earnestly and aloud to the only God he knew... as if, somehow, this suppliant act would erase all that was foul, dirtencrusted and wrong about his own nature. Perhaps, he thought, this glistening semblance of piety would warrant a lightening bolt of redemption, and, along with it, the resumption of his lost powers.

However, at three-thirty on that fateful afternoon a crestfallen and highly disenchanted Johnny Morning picked up his phone and asked his secretary to find his wife and to send her to him. She did.

Lamentfully he explained to his significant other that "it," his powers, his ability to heal was now lost to him. And, that he did not think that they would be returning. With abundant sorrow they fell into each others arms and cried aloud, bemoaning the loss of that which had enriched them both, albeit in different ways. He cried at the loss of that which had made him the most admired, envied and powerful man on the planet. She cried because it had been this gift of healing that had been the driving force in reinstating a measure of love back into their marriage, a thing she now believed a godsend. Yes they both cried that day... along with one bitterly disappointed young mother who wailed in pain at her son's, almost, miracle.



# Chapter Five

## The Black Madonna

As the mortally beaten young female lay broken and bleeding upon the hard indifferent sidewalk she existed in a curious, yet, not quite conscious state of awareness, she was there, yet not there. She could feel some slight pain stemming from certain injuries that she had sustained during the crazed beating that her pimp had meted out to her. Yet she was oblivious to certain other injuries.... it was like her senses were muted, mercifully, by some mechanism which seemed to comprehend without needing to be told, what she could endure and what she could not endure. For instance, she could clearly detect the small, slight pricking of a tiny pebble that was lodged between her cheek and the sidewalk upon which her cheek rested. She could feel that small pebble, yet she could not feel the splintered rib bone which had pierced her lung. Nor could she feel the snapped bones in her back... and yet, strangely enough she could feel every subtle nuance of her scraped and bruised left elbow.

Another interesting element of her condition was the fact that her mind seemed completely intact. For instance, she could remember, in excruciatingly clear detail, the evening that she had just spent with her beautiful new friends. She was also mindful of the exact sequence of the beating her pimp had just given her. She remembered it, but chose not to dwell on it - instead her mind appeared intent upon operating on its own narrow agenda... focusing instead on the arcane, clicking and assessing and noting one awareness to the next like some avaral file-clerk in the reception room of a lower-world perdition: My lower half is surprisingly warm.... My upper half is cold... Loss of blood! Is the drama of my life finished?... Am I dying?... Yes, I am dying... What a strange life this has been... Evil has overwhelmed me and destroyed me completely... I am ruined... I cannot feel my feet... I feel warm blood on my cheek... Is there a God?... Ha, what a foolish question, of course there's a God... How could it be otherwise... I owe Sarah, five dollars... I hope she doesn't get mad at me, she really needed that money... What was it I was meant to learn from this lifetime?

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The night air fluttered around him like the soft wings of spectral butterflies and the stars above him seemed to respond to his presence with a delighted, twinkling awe. Like a ships Captain bound tightly to the wheel while guiding a vessel through violent and turbulent waters, he held firmly to his course by keeping himself centered and focused upon his purpose, letting not the fierce winds and stormy seas of life alter his course.

As he moved fluidly around and onto the same street corner where the girl lie dying, he thought not one whit of the desperate and racist meanness contained within the red-rimmed hunkering eyes of the feral brutes watching him from shadowy places. Nor did he fear any of the other dangers that a neighborhood such as this one often held in store for strangers, who were unwelcome here. He feared not, for he was pure of mind and therefore an impetus far beyond them.

He looked to his left at a passing car; a young girl in a black beret looked at him unknowingly.

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Suddenly, as if contained within the Near Death Experience that enabled her to understand her purpose upon this earth, the dying girl understood a revelation that levered open the hands of her soul, leaving her thoroughly enraptured. In tandem with this sensation of suddenly becoming illuminated, discernment descended upon her as

though felled from the Tree of Life and somehow she instinctively knew that her spirit would not spill itself from the jar of her body, leaving it empty, not on this day, anyway. No, not today, in fact, she somehow knew that she would not die, here, on this litter strewn sidewalk under the observation of the spiritually unwashed.

In this realization calm grew in her mind, Comforted as it was by this revelation of athanasia it began, as before, to take a swift and meticulous mental audit of her circumstances. I was beaten to the point where living is not possible. Yet, I somehow know that I will not meet death, today. It is not my appointed time. This I know to be true, yet, I am here on this concrete city sidewalk securely in the hands of death. I cannot move. My bones are broken. My spine is crushed. The blood of my ancestors has fled from me. Vital organs have been pierced. I hear a buzzing sound and I know that my spirit wants to rise up and leave this shattered body... yet it does not. How do I know these things?... My vision is clearing!

Though still unable to move her limbs due to the paralytic nature of her injuries, her eyes were not bound immobile and began to dart and blink within their sockets, uncontrollably. Then they stopped.

In the way that a camera lens draws to it a clear and perfectly focused picture, so too did the eyes of the young Madonna attain clarity. At first she saw only the blood spattered stretch of the sidewalk upon which her shattered face lie. Now however, in an unexplainable way, she forced her vision to expand and to rise slowly up from the sidewalk view at eye level. To her surprise when she did so she saw a pair of feet directly in front of her line of sight. Her mind sorted through all of the possibilities, and then it seemed to somehow settle comfortably upon the realization that the owner of those feet meant her no further malice or harm. She noted that those same feet were shoeless, yet not at all dirty or unkempt like the vagabonds she had previously seen normally frequenting this neighborhood. In fact, the feet in front of her seemed to be made of porcelain, doll like. She felt compelled to reach out and touch them, as one might be compelled to touch the cheek of an adorable child.

What an odd thing for such beautiful feet to be shoeless. In truth, she thought it would be shameful to cover them up with the skin of a less perfect creature. She was enamored by them and wanted only to touch them, to wash them in her tears, to dry them with the locks of her hair.

The badly beaten young virgin prostitute desired greatly to lift her head so that she might gain a better vantage point, thereby allowing her a sight-angled view of the person in possession of those wonderful feet. This however did not happen. In spite of this inability to lever her head, she had no fear, for somewhere within a deeply spirited part of herself she knew that the life she now held was destined by forces too great to be denied, to be right here, right now, in this place, at this time, in this same state of declination, awaiting the arrival of something, of someone miraculous. She intuited that it was upon the swift sharp sword of this illumination of her sudden and complete understanding of the Impassioned Mysteries, that all of her fears had been slain and her concerns extinguished. For the demoniacal weed of wrath has its roots kept moist by the foul waters of fear and no part of that soiled emotion remained alive within her; the moment she, even when facing death, sincerely asked her purpose in life, she had been perfected, perfected unto love. It is the secret of existence which overcomes all other lower states of emotion.

Then as if to complete her thoughts, her day, her life, she, through misty eyes saw a hand descending down from above her, reaching towards her as if to caress her forehead. Instinctively she knew that this hand belonged to the same body as that of the lovely feet before her; joy consumed her.

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As he approached the beaten, battered, nearly cadaverous body of the youngster lying on the sidewalk, he knowingly concluded her to be near death. He knew that she would soon surrender her share of the ghost and thereby send it spiraling upwards on its return journey back home. He suppressed a shudder as he drew close to her, for he was repulsed by the ungodly, inhumane way that she had been beaten. Upon closer examination of the poor girls wrecked body a curse sparked to life within the confines of his perfect being. Quickly however, he restrained the brine of this demonic thought by looking past the physical dysfunction of the girls abused form and

peering into the Holy Ghost laden terrain of her true spiritual self. It was this vision, this glimpse of the real creature lying before him which brought him a smile, for she was a wondrous and joy filled soul.

“Magdalena. Maggie,” whispered the Prophet as he squat down beside the torn and broken figure of the young prostitute. “It is I, beloved. Remember,” he commanded.

At the sound of her name the Prophet noticed a distinct reaction in the form of a twitching brow and the rapid blinking of her eyes. These were strong indicators, however it was the sudden intensity spewing forth from the girl’s eyes like a million bats pouring forth from a cave at sunset, that the Prophet regarded as being the most significant sign of recognition, for he understood this to mean that her ghost had heard him and was hearkening his call.

Where mere seconds before his queen’s new body was resigning itself to permanent sleep, she now seemed to be struggling to re-stitch the tattered and torn tapestry of her physical form, furiously doubling and redoubling her grip upon consciousness.

From his squatting position he took great delight in watching her re-awakening, he was pleased at how her willpower drove the fog from her eyes, regaining sharp focus and awareness. He was enchanted as he observed her struggle to raise her face up from the sidewalk where it lay, so that she might glean the totality of his figure. He knew however, that it was an impossible task for someone with a shattered spine to accomplish, yet he smiled in spite of her struggle. Then he raised his face skyward and laughed aloud, because this hard headed fighter could be none other than the rebirth of the Priestess holding the magical bloodline of Isis, Ra and Elohim.

The Prophet examined the Magdalena’s figure leisurely, digesting the physical beauty with which she had been blessed before her ruin. Without willing it to do so his mind fell backwards in time where it plucked from the tree of his memory that small morsel of reckoning regarding her former embodiment. His perpetual smile widened as he remembered the fire in her then red hair, and the brazen confidence of her eyes. Yes, those were the things about her which had so gustily fanned the flames of his burning desire for her. He laughed aloud as he recalled his very first encounter with her, and he remembered the seven demons which she had allowed to infest her flesh. Of course he had cast them out of her, only to fall on the ground and act as if those same demons had jumped into him as a result. Yes, he fell to the ground and kicked his leg like an old Hollywood actor, then played dead, much to the horror of the Magdalena. It had been a magical moment when she realized that he was only faking, one which linked them emotionally and supernaturally as well. Others who saw them together could not help but believe them lovers, so fierce had their passion been, one for the other. And, in truth, he had desired her in a purely carnal way, yet he had known that she had been destined for another... another Jesus if you will. So, without her as his mate, he had accepted celibacy as his own destiny.

Returning his thoughts to the present he focused his attention on that which was left of her beautiful dark face, a face which continued to be motionless save for the ceaseless blinking and semaphoring of her blue eyes. Blue eyes, a most unusual embellishment for someone of negro blood.

The young hippy-looking prophet focused his mind on the crown portion of the young girls head and began to read the events of the young girl’s present existence. Autovisually he scanned through her entire storehouse of memories and as he did, he saw great misfortune and he felt the tragedies of her young life as if they were his own. A bit of sorrow tempered his now faded smile. Life on this planet had not been easy for either of them this time around the wheel.

As he looked deeply into the spiritual matrix of the lady from Magdala, he remembered that the one short-coming concerning his beloved queen’s spiritual education had been her marked inability to recognize the various tools used by the Angels of Light to forge the lives of the New Humans into creatures strong enough to carry out the mission for which they were created; a mission which demanded they fall not into the trap of compassion, but remain steadfast in their duty to bring light into the world, by extinguishing the darkness of Lucifer’s tainted creation.

Although, as the Messiah named Jesus he had tried many times with steadfast diligence to enlighten his Priestess to the verity of their sacred mission, she had remained in denial to the reality of the war between Light and Dark. Her ignorance was not a result of a lack of intelligence, but due instead to the fact that her heart was too sensitive to the enemies of her race. Though a thoroughly admirable quality on the surface of things, this heightened emotional sensitivity was one of the many variegated tools of the Fallen Ones to weaken the bloodline.

Compassion towards the Olden Ones made one susceptible to interbreeding with them. In contrast, those possessed of the knowledge of their bloodline understand that one must couple compassion with a more profound understanding of the underlying lessons being taught; even when and if that lesson is enhearsed in bestial cruelty.

He had used a trifling of his Messianic powers to quell the physical pains felt by this new-bodied Magdalena the instant he had seen her. Now however, it was time to raise her: he stretched forth his hand and laid it upon her.

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From one corner of her peripheral vision she saw a hand reaching out to her. Though she knew not the character of the person behind that hand, there was no trace of fear within her. Something deep within her own soul recognized its true and undeniable lover and she yearned for his touch, and her ghost fluttered and strained to achieve contact, much like an impassioned heart upon receiving an I love you, for the first time.

As the wraith-like hand of the Prophet found its mark on the young girl's brow, the light of ten-thousand suns burst forth inside her skull blinding her from inside out, while eidolic fingers temporarily paralyzed her mind against any and all thought or feeling.

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A small crowd had gathered, gaining courage to do so by virtue of the quiescent presence of the bare-footed stranger who dared attend to the young prostitute. At first the gathering consisted only of men, denizens of the dank and fetid alley's of a failed "no fault" society from whose ghetto they emerged. Then, like moths to the flame; like lost souls to the light of virtue, women and then children began to assemble, standing around the young prostitute in silence as if awaiting the delivery of something of great importance. They gathered and they stood transfixed watching in abject subjugation as the stranger began to trace arcane symbols into the air above the body of the prostitute.

When he finished performing his mystic disquisition the young stranger closed his eyes and began to chant and to hum, almost in private, though he was not. Those in attendance were immediately moved to the furthest extremes of emotion by a force completely foreign to them. Some burst into tears. Some laughed uncontrollably. Some yelped and babbled in tongues never before heard by any of the gathered congregation. Others simply without conscious reason fell to their knees and lowered their heads in prayer.

An outside observer, unaffected by the Prophet's machinations, would have marveled greatly at the new found piety being displayed by the motley crew gathered there on that day. Theirs had been a dope-fiend existence. Theirs had been the life of a drunkard, and the sex addict, and the thief, and in truth, up until this encounter with the young Prophet, these persons would have scoffed and denied the possibility. Now however, that had all changed because even in their present state of slothful slavery the light of Godliness which lies deep within us all recognized the divinity within this barefooted Prophet who seemed to have appeared before them from nowhere. And they were completely powerless in their desire to be in his presence.

Abruptly the Prophet stopped his chanting and with an air of undeniable gentleness he lifted his face heavenward and spoke the words, "Thank you Father." Then he turned his attention to the young girl lying prostrate on the ground in front of him in a bed constructed from a skein of her own blood; blood being explored by man and nighttime pest alike.

The tearful and repentant crowd became frozen in anticipation all the while marveling at the serenity of the stranger as he seemingly addressed a being of greater authority, a being that existed somewhere far above and far beyond the range of their own vision. They watched with awe and with fascination as this unknown saint stretched forth his hand and lay it upon the body of the prostitute.

At the precise moment of contact between the hand of the young prophet and the flesh of the battered and bloody prostitute, the City of Angels was hit with a sizable tremor causing those there that day to panic. Most I should say. For some of those were so engrossed in the spirit that they attributed it to the magic of the young holy man. Yes, it was here, on this street of narco-slaves, where none aspire towards a life outside of crime, and where most find their only positive accomplishment in death, the thieves, the predators, the junkies and the children of whores stood fast and feared not the trembling earth beneath their feet, for they were moved body and soul to simplistic revival at the sight of the young prostitute rising to her feet without so much as a small cut or bruise to blemish her radiant figure.

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It was nearly four o'clock in the morning and the traffic which had plagued this street, this putrid monument to the degradation of our children, had long since subsided. Those distractions had been replaced by about twenty earthly souls sitting around on the curbing and on the stoops and on the trashcans. They were a sore eyed and ragged lot comprised of a broad spectral array of the downtrodden that this city had to offer. There sat an unwashed homeless man, and there perched a gold-toothed purveyor of narcotics. Was that an old woman who before now was terrified to leave her apartment? Over there, weren't those two women prostitutes, not by circumstances, but by choice? Yes, that is all true, and the one thing that each of those desperate persons shared in common was the way that they each sat listening intently like dark proselytes of some new world order as the early morning harmony brought them the greatest of all gifts, the gift of a man unwilling to make excuses for their choices in life, a man sitting in the center of them atop a wooden box with a small child fast asleep in his lap.

For them, it was the first time in their sad and unproductive lives that they were able to rise above their own racism and admit the truth about the consuming scrim of ghetto mindset. And so they listened.

"I know that the world about you has labeled you as sinners," said the prophet to those with him that night, "and you are, but not for the reasons you have been told," he added.

"In the smallness of theosophy, indeed, we are all sinners. However, that does not necessarily make it so in the eyes of God, or of the 'All' as I prefer to say; the All who sees us without the blinders of human condemnation." The Prophet paused and looked skyward as if gleaning notes written upon the blackboard of stars winking above him, then continued. "But we cannot hate those less advanced than ourselves for the way they believe, because a person can only believe that which their present spirituality can absorb. Therefore, in their limited understanding, the world is doing exactly what it is able, for the world sees and thinks like the little children that they are, spiritually. And did I not say to let the little children come to me and be comforted? Yes, but my intent in saying this was only in part referring to this sleeping child and wholly to mean the spiritually adolescent. So judge not, lest you be judged. In fact, it is the very act of condemnation which is the greater sin. Do not pass judgment about things you do not understand."

Then spoke a man from the shadows of a nearby alleyway, in a voice of defiance. "But you are a white man. Of course you don't want us to judge. What you are really saying is that you don't want us to judge the blue-eyed devil. The truth is however, that your kind, stole us from the shores of our own land and brought us here and then made slaves out of us; we're still slaves to the white man, just look around and tell me it ain't so!"

Those were the true feelings of some of those gathered around him on this night, he had known it long before he had arrived here. With sadness supreme, the young prophet lifted his eyes skyward once again the way that a sailor might when endeavoring to judge the coming weather mindful of the gathering storm, and a moment of shadowed prophecy saddened his countenance. Then his determination returned and he lowered his face to confront the hungry eyes of the racism he knew to be the destroyer of these people. With a fierce cold look he stilled their breath while turning silently towards each of them as if to look directly into the eyes of every one gathered there that fateful night. This look served them notice that his next pronouncement was to be carefully

attended and not a soul among them stirred, not a foot, not a hand, not even a hair upon their heads moved, so powerful was his presence upon them. When his blazing eyes had seen into each of them in turn, he began.

“You my child,” he began with a pointing of his pious finger, “are filled with hatred, not the hatred sometimes brought about by knowledge, but the hatred brought about by ignorance of the truth. Yes, your people were slaves in this country, but they were slaves before they came here, too. Do you think that white people sent armies to Africa to gather slaves? No, merchants went to Africa and traded goods to the already existing, very ancient, slave trade there. In truth slavery existed for thousands of years before the first European ever set foot on the continent. Egypt, for instance was built on the backs of slaves.

“Slavery has existed since the beginning of time, in fact it was invented BY the black man, for he was the first on the planet and he was the first to enslave his brother. By contrast the first white man appeared on this planet a mere six-thousand years ago, the stories have been recorded from Sumer to the Bible; it is an old story. The first mixing of the races came shortly afterward, when Cain killed Abel and was banished from his people.

“Believe me brother, I feel your pain, but it is your fault that your life is the way it is. It is not the fault of the white man or the yellow man or the brown man. Be a man and blame none but yourself for your failures. You chose to be a modern day slave to your vices; just look at yourself and honestly tell me that the dope in your veins was put their by someone else, that you are a rapist because someone else caused it. Tell me that your exploitation of your own people is a result of the fact that someone in your family was disadvantaged. Go ahead, tell this young girl, the one you beat to death, that it wasn't your fault, that you only exploited her, raped her and murdered her, because some other race made you do it. Truth is, that dog won't hunt. You are what you are, by your own choice, We all are.”

A long silence occurred as those gathered around contemplated the verity of the Prophets words. Then one of the Drug Dealers spoke up and said, “Teacher tell us about sin.” This by one who before this day had never before considered God, nor the karmic consequences of the powdered death festering in his pocket, nor the need for the pistol in his coat pocket, nor the future of his own vile addictions.

The Prophet smiled at the youth and then in a voice entirely different from before he answered. “You have been taught to believe that sin is consuming alcohol, smoking tobacco and having sex,” he laughed aloud. “All the fun stuff... right!” Those around him laughed as well and the mood lightened. “Well, I tell you that none of these things in and of themselves are sinful. These things are only facets of human enjoyment, not evil and certainly not against God. They are nothing but pleasures of the flesh, like electricity or automobiles, or salt, or clothing and pleasures are given unto you so that you might experience them, and by experiencing them, that you might derive the whole of what life intends. Even in the Garden God gave them the pleasure of food, fire, water and air, and all manner of other comfort and pleasure, to include sex organs. So, life's pleasures are gifts from God. However, if a man abuses alcohol to an excess whereby he physically, mentally, spiritually or financially abuses his family or another, then verily I say unto you, that that man has turned pleasure into sin. Not because he consumed a portion of alcohol, for there is no sin in that, but because he became a slave to that alcohol, a slave to the point that it caused him to do things that he would, under normal circumstances, not do, such as, being compelled to commit violence.”

“You said that there is no sin in smoking tobacco, but my sister say's there is. What is the truth here?”

The Prophet turned his eyes onto the person who spoke up, saying to her. “Good lady, I see within you the gathering clouds of a habit... that is all. It is true that the smoke that you have put into your lungs has done harm to them. In recognition of that fact, there will be some folks who will be quick to say that your tobacco usage is a sin, since it has obviously harmed you. However, I will remind them that on this earth, nearly every single thing we consume is harmful to us. Everything that we purchase from the Supermarket harms our body, one way or the other. Look at what cookies and soda's do to the body. To not exercise for an hour a day, is to harm ourselves, it is a proven fact that, like inhaling smoke, that lack of exercise shortens our life span. To drink the water provided us by our municipalities causes us harm. Even the polluted air hovering over the surface of every major city in the world is harmful to the body. So, a philosophy that singles out one thing which causes bodily harm, while neglecting all others is laughable. I tell you to quit smoking not because to do so is a sin, but because I love you and would prefer to see you suffer less. To those who condemn the actions of others and think themselves pious, I say to them that they are wrong for thinking that Willpower equals Righteousness. For all persons are unqualified to define sin.



“Beloved, the correct definition of sin is not acts perpetrated by the flesh, but acts committed by the mind. Sin is the conscious intent to act irresponsibly. Sin is something which offends God, not something which offends man.

“Tell me, why would God be offended if people engage in pleasure? Is God not our Father and our Mother? And what Father or what Mother would be angry at their child for enjoying life?”

As the young prophet contemplated the best way to illustrate his point about sin, another spoke up and ask, “Teacher, what about sex?”

“Ahh, yes, sex,” replied the teacher. “That is a much debated topic.

“In reference to that subject I ask; did God not create humans with the capacity to enjoy sex? Yes. Therefore, who is man-made opinion to say differently? How dare anyone tell you that what two people freely choose to do with the bodies that God gave them, is sin? Or even one person enjoying their own body, how can that be a sin? Are we not above the animals who partake of the sex-act solely because of chemicals produced within them like pollen, which compels them to procreate on a set timetable? Of course we are. If it were not so, then the woman would go into estrus, into heat at set cycles producing pheromones that would compel the males around her to compete in combat for the right to mount her. But that is not the human way, if it were, we would be on the level of the alley cat or the mongrel cur, mere beasts who reproduce by action, not by choice. That is the answer to your question, we differ from the animal because we have not only the gift of pleasure, but because we have a freedom of choice. Know this: sex is the twin sister of love, and love is the complete essence of God.

“However, if a person becomes addicted to sex, it becomes a repulsive habit, but as long as it harms no other, then it is only disgusting, not sin. Now, if a person utilizes the sex act to abuse other people, to dominate, manipulate or demean them, then we have sin. The worst of the sex related actions is by far rape. The sin in rape is the violence; sex is simply the tool that the rapist uses to assault his or her victim.”

At these words the eyes of the prophet fell once again upon a now shadowed figure standing within a darkened doorway, wearing a trench coat, a wide brimmed hat and hands stained with blood from this very night's misdeeds.

“And there are many different ways to commit the sin of rape. For instance, if you use intimidation to compel another person to submit to your lustful desires, that is rape in the eyes of God. If you use your maturity and your intellect to manipulate a younger, less articulate person to do you will against theirs, you are a rapist. If you use your strength and brutality to force another to earn a living for you, then you are not only a slaver, but a rapist as well. In the eyes of God the sin of rape is especially odious and offensive, for it destroys not only the flesh but the spirit as well. And is not the development of the spirit the entirety of God's plan for humanity. Therefore those who arrest the development of another's spirit, thwarts God's plan and has much to make recompense for.”

When finished the eyes of the Prophet moved past the man in the trench coat yet he saw him completely, and the man dropped his eyes in shame, for he knew well that it was he to whom the Prophet had been referring. He wept.

“You see my brothers and my sisters, when you drink to excess, gamble yourself into poverty, whore yourself, you are not sinners, only a failure in the sense that you have failed the test of life. If you were spiritually diligent, instead of physically slothful, you would have recognized the fact that this lifetime is but a trial, a test to see if you are a Master or a Slave. Addictions of any kind are but chains and lashes to which you have willingly submitted. If you were the Masters of Self you would be aware of the person that you could be if possessed of personal discipline. You would see the father, the mother, the teacher, the successful person hidden within the matrix of your own possibilities. Instead of seeing this truth however, your own failures have condemned you to the only hell which in truth exists... that being the hell of bitter experience, the hell of being cast into prison, the hell of living in this ghetto, the hell of watching your children grow into their own failed existence, the hell of prostitution, the hell of whoredom without love, the hell of a junkies life, the hell of knowing yourself to be unproductive, the hell of hating those better than you, and the hell of separation from the Holy Spirit.” A silence followed.

The prophet was moved to tears at the words he had spoken for he knew, for the most part, that these people were slaves to the flesh and were unwilling to change. He then tearfully added, “Remember this much if you take nothing else from the sup that I feed you: the bitter fruit tree of failure has its roots kept moist by the stagnant waters of your own addictions.”

As the first rays of the new rising sun began to peek over the rim of that cities concrete and steel horizon some began to wonder from that place, street vampires; lives lived in the darkness. But that did not deter him and with a smile and a nod of his head he gave them the benefit of his final words, then blessed them each and all with a touch of his blessed hands. Some fell to the pavement, some broke into uncontrollable sobs of repentance, and some spoke in strange tongues, angelic languages as it were.

As the Prophet turned to leave the man in the trench coat and the wide brimmed hat stepped from his place of concealment and came into the light of the Prophet. With a voice that sounded as if it were made of shattered clay, clay broken upon the rocks of contrition, he cried, "Forgive me Lord, for I am a sinner!"

The Prophet was moved by the actions of this hard and callous man, and he replied, "It is not my place to forgive you brother, it is your task... and hers." As he said this he lifted his arm and pointed behind him at the young girl who stood timidly at the edge of the sidewalk, wearing shoes that were too red and too high and too uncomfortable.

At his gesture the girl moved into the space directly in front of both men. The man in the trench coat covered his face with his hands and fell to his knees at the feet of the young girl. She leaned over and took his hands in hers and looked him deeply in the eyes and the spirit of forgiveness overcame her just as surely as the spirit of repentance had overcome him.

With the countenance of the saint he would become the trench coat man pulled back his right hand leaving his left outstretched and in hers. Using his right hand he removed his ridiculous looking hat and let it fall from his head and onto the sidewalk at the girl's feet. He then rose to his own feet where he used both hands to remove his gold chains, his earrings and his finger rings which he let fall to the concrete and roll away from him. In one final gesture of repentance he let his coat fall from him, then he asked the girl to not only forgive him for what he had done to her, but by extension, what he had done to others like her. She did.

The Prophet walked over to them and the trio embraced. When they separated he laid his hand upon the shoulder of the drug addicted, murdering pimp, and said, "You are a rock, and upon your shoulders I will build my church."

As the sun broke from its cover, the Prophet and two others had the courage to leave that place.

# Chapter Six

## Judas

Judas watched with travel weary eyes as the first one arrived, a woman of perhaps thirty years of age, with her she had a child of about ten who had been born with Downs Syndrome. He glanced at his watch... five-thirty a.m. Judas, admiring this mother's obvious love for her child wondered how that poor woman would keep her child occupied for the next handful of hours.

Soon others began to arrive and the sidewalk out in front of the Morning Tower building became congested with all sorts of suffering people, medical conditions of all types were represented. By mid morning the panorama had become a landscape of wheelchairs, breathing apparatuses and mobile hospital beds. All the eye could see were the supplicants who had come here, to this inhospitable place, casting everything on the dice of hope, the hope that the miracle man, the Reverend Johnny Sunday Morning would see them and having seen them would deign to touch them with his hands. Some had mortgaged their homes, their parent's homes, all they had to travel half the country, half the world for this chance. Utterly unbelievable.

The mid-morning air rang with tension filled as it was with the unrestrained cries of small children who could not understand why they had to stand shoulder to shoulder with strangers, or why they had to stand so still, or why they could not go eat, or play and so forth.

Judas wondered silently if this faith healer appreciated the myriad of untold hardships that these people who placed so much unfettered faith and hope in him had to endure in order to position themselves in such a way as to stand any chance at all of feeling his healing touch.

Looking to his left he picked up on the conversation of a woman and her young son, a child living a wheelchair existence. She spoke saying, "The reason that God does not heal these people himself, is because nobody really believes in God anymore, at least not the way that God wants people too, anyway. Their faith is only strong enough to receive healing at the hands of a human deliverer. People are only strong enough to receive a miracle from someone they can see, and hear, and touch. That's why God uses the visible bodies of certain special people like this man, Mr. Morning. It's God's way of giving us what we need to help build our faith. And as our capacity to know faith grows, so too does our love for God."

The woman standing on the other side of the woman speaking to her son nodded her head, as if digesting what the first woman had been saying. She then chimed in, saying, "But, people go to church. Doesn't that prove that most people really do believe in God?"

"No my dear, it does not. My experience tells me that people go to church either out of habit, out of a sense of duty to their family... like trying to set the 'right example' for their kids, or because their position in their community requires that they keep up a collection of proper appearances. For some, they go to church out of fear, fear of the unknown, or fear of death, of supernatural dread, etc." She sniffled and then added. "Although precious few ever become wise enough to see the true reason why they themselves go to church. Rare indeed is the person who attends church solely out of love for God." The woman turned towards her companion and lifted her hands as if to ward off any hurt or blame.

"I'm not saying that people who go to church for these other, lesser reasons are somehow wrong for being compelled to go to church for something other than love. After all, it's hard to believe completely in something that you cannot see... and church buildings and priests are just like the miracle worker that we all came here this morning to see, they're things that can be seen and touched and felt and talked to. God on the other hand, seems intent upon remaining aloof and invisible. And, you know, maybe that's the whole idea of faith in a nutshell, although it always struck me as being kind of foolish to think that God Almighty would somehow need our miserable halfhearted faith. But, then again, who knows what God wants or needs." The woman's voice trailed off as though she had spoken the last sentence to herself and not to the woman beside her.

After listening to the exchange the forgotten child asked, “Do you believe in God, mamma?”

The child’s mother smiled down into his eyes and patted him on the shoulder tenderly. “I don’t know for certain what I believe, honey.”

Judas listened as the woman had freely given her opinion and intuited that she had a hard and desperately unhappy time living life thus far. His heart went out to this single mother, burdened as she was with the care of a child whose body was ravaged and shattered. He felt tears watering the soil of his eyes as he contemplated this woman's plight in life. In truth, he admired her honesty and her wisdom about things most folks gave little thought to, and though he longed to ask for God's healing in the cause of her son, he did not, for he painfully recognized that her son’s affliction had been the catalyst upon which her wisdom had been birthed. Knowledge is a cruel tenant.

# Chapter Seven

## Judas

The morning began to wax and then wane under the creeping weight of time's inexorable caress. The building that hove into the sky behind Judas Iscariot mirrored each and every passing moment as the light of a midday sun crept down the length of its cement walls before eventually gaining a slow moving toe-hold upon the sidewalk itself. It was a modern sundial accurately portraying a coming benediction at the brimstone smelling hands of a wolf robed in sheep's clothing... but the sheep cared not, so great was their thirst for just one solitary drop of the miracle drink.

Judas watched with avid interest as group after group of the religious began arriving; each ensconced in the midst of their own respective groups or sects or cadre.

However divided these pious groups might be in terms of their ideas and opinions concerning the theological basis for their belief systems, there existed among them a harmonic joy of such strength, that Judas was enthralled by it. He noted that the massive up swelling of goodness that rose within these people, misguided though they may be, was overpowering to behold. Only God had the ability to ring goodness from ignorance.

He lifted his face and studied the pale blue sky; it was unmarked except for the hole where a savage yellow sun blazed through. He scanned the crowd now gathered and felt sympathy for this swath of beggars, but then, it has always been this way, even in his Master's time. Had not his Master chided him more than once on this very subject. "The poor will always be with us." In those days he could not understand the seemingly cruelty of it, but now he understood it as nothing more than a tool used for teaching. He hung his head, for though he understood the purpose of hardship he felt it a cruel ministry for a God who could have a perfect creation with nothing save a thought, and in his heart he held that against him.

Suddenly a low rumble arose at the far end of the street and all heads present that day snapped at the sound as if hinged upon a single neck and every eye strained in that direction. This was the sign that they had all waited for, the arrival of Johnny Sunday Morning.

From the far corner of the street, signs, pictures, posters, arms, Bibles and gurgling babies could be seen being lifted into the air and waved to and fro by the army of frenzied faithful. One could easily question the sanity, or lack thereof, of those so desperately seeking any sign or portent whatsoever that God was indeed an unquestionable reality, and that He, She, It cared for His, Her or Its miscreant children. Then again, who can criticize humanity, it's not like God lives at City Hall where any and all could go to complain, or to seek a helping hand. Besides who among us can truly claim sanity in the midst of this insane world.

Through the hedging, pressing crowd Judas saw a long black limo appear moving slowly as if it were a float in a parade. Though the windows of the limo were blackened, each person whom the car passed felt in turn as though they had personally met and been blessed by its occupant, even if it weren't true.

Judas pulled his hands from his pockets and calmly waited out those final moments before the arrival of the man many considered to be the modern Messiah to arrive, and as he bided that time, the thoughts that ran through his head drifted back into the dim misty recesses of his memory, back to the time that marked the beginning of his long and seemingly never ending quest.

The mind of Judas sorted through the endless gallery of faces that marked the memory of those other persons who had claimed, or been proclaimed to be the Messiah returned. First were those from his own homeland, then across the Far East and now, here, in the America's. This he supposed was fitting, for had not the Master once said privately, that the first clay had been drawn from the soil of what is now known as Mexico, and that the original people of that land were the decedents of the twelve; same as his ancestors. Yes, but Judas knew that the world was not yet mature enough to know the truth of the creation, so I withhold it here.

His mind reflected yet again upon the countenance of his Master. Then, as a man selects one piece of fruit from a tree of many, his mind settled upon the memory of the very first encounter with the man he would later call Master. A smile found a home on his face and his eyes grew distant as the film of that event began to roll.

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At the time when Judas first met Jesus, Judas was himself the eldest son of a highly successful merchant from Keriath, in Judea, a man named Simon. He had been sent by his father on a business mission to the town of Cana, in Galilee. His purpose was to evaluate the possibilities of purchasing, at a fair price, the harvest of local olive oils, which were that particular town's staple crop. However, immediately upon his arrival in Cana he discovered that the late frost which had damaged the crops of his families own lands, had been equally harsh on the groves of Galilee.

After several fruitless days of traversing the town in an attempt to secure some sort of profitable transaction, he finally made the decision to abort his quest and move in a more southerly direction and into Samaria. He hoped that the devastating deep freeze of the past winter hadn't blown its chilling, frosty breath upon the crops of that land, as it had on these. At the core of this was his desire to prove to his father that he could not only persevere when things looked bleak, but that he could bring to the family a much needed profit in a season when few others were enjoying such a boon. Quitting was not an option. If there was a profit to be made he vowed to find it.

However, before he could pack up his belongings and depart from Cana, the Inn Keeper at the place where he had been staying, a man with curious yellow cat eyes, invited him to tarry awhile longer, inviting him to attend a local wedding feast which was scheduled to begin that very afternoon. Judas pondered the proposition, and in the end, his great love for wine and song took sway as he decided that one or two more days of idleness in Cana couldn't hurt anything. He swore an oath to himself not to stay another day longer than that, knowing as he did that these local weddings could, and often did, turn into parties that could last a solid week or longer after the vows had been given.

In those times and in that culture, a wedding was considered the grandest event that most of the poorer folk would ever experience. Since the people who populated the small villages and towns were generally all harvesters, weddings were always scheduled to take place during those times when the spring planting had been completed, but before the harsh summer heat over-rode all activity. Because this was relatively idle times for farmer folk, no one concerned themselves with strict timelines, though most wedding feasts would typically last two days or perhaps three; few lasted longer than that due to the prohibiting cost of providing food, drink and entertainment. Judas knew full well, from his own personal experience at imbibing massive quantities of wine just how expensive a wedding could be on the bride's family. As a result of the afore mentioned facts, a wedding was generally not judged as being a failure or a success merely upon the prospects for happiness relative to those being wed, but rather, on the duration of the wedding feast. Oftentimes, the families of those being wed would go to extremes in an effort to compete with other families hosting weddings, with a prize being awarded to whoever was able to throw the longest and most obscenely drunken event. This always meant that the wealthiest families were recipients of the happiest marriages... in theory, of course.

Judas ventured to the wedding feast accompanied by his Inn-Keeper acquaintance, a man named Azor. He stood quietly beside the Inn-Keeper while being introduced to the parents of the seemingly happy couple and concluded that they were pleasant enough, in a rural sort of way. It was the groom's mother however, who garnered most of his attention; she was gorgeous and not much older than Judas himself. After a bit she caught him checking her out, so he gave her a wink and a smile. She shook her head as if appalled and walked away. You never know till you try, he thought.

On the second day of the feast Judas refilled his wine cup, took a swig and frowned deeply. Being a discerning man of culture and experience, Judas was dismayed to discover that the wine that he had just been served was already being watered down. This was very untimely, because, even though he had vowed to leave the party after



the second day, it meant that this particular wedding feast was nearing its end. The reason for his concern was... well it was a guy thing. You see, he had caught the attention of a busty young cutie and although smiles had past back and forth between them, he knew that he would have to muster all of his resources if he hoped to complete the conquest, that he, had in mind. After all, these Galilean girls were a notoriously tough nut to crack and watered down wine was not going to help the situation any at all. Of this he was absolutely sure.

After giving careful consideration to the problem of the anemic wine, and the likely impact that it would have on the chesty young farm girl, he slapped his thigh and concluded that the only path for him to take would be that of a resolute man, he himself would seek a solution. With his decision firmly in hand he slipped away from the wedding feast, intent upon locating some merchant who could arm him with a skin of undiluted wine. Surely after the delicious little morsel back at the party realized that HE had good wine to share, she would be more inclined to accept an invitation to sit with him, and, from there... well, "Who knows where the wild goose goes!" He chuckled to himself as he staggered off in search of strong drink, amused at the cleverness of that particular little rhyme. "Wild Goose!" Ha, he laughed again at the way that certain words leapt and danced and played into each other, and he wondered who thought these delightful analogies up to begin with.

He moved towards the center of the village where the merchant shops and stalls were lined up one after the other. Once there he embarked upon his chosen task with a fevered determination, but what awaited him there was not at all what he had expected. Merchant after merchant conveyed to him the same depressing story, "There is no wine to be purchased anywhere in Cana."

It appeared that the recent unexpected late freeze had destroyed the buds of the early crops from which the spring wine was to have been pressed. As for any reserves that may be held within the cellars of the town, well this season's crop of wedding feasts had purchased all of the wine that anyone had to offer. Yes, of course, there were those who had quantities of wine tucked away, but that stock was just enough to get their own families through the drought and could not be purchased for anything less than a ruinous sum of coin.

Finding himself in a quandary Judas was a little perturbed at the idea of having to return to the feast without fresh wine. He toyed with the idea of mounting his donkey and riding into the next town, or the next in hopes of finding that which he desired. He mused that were he to have success he could possibly purchase a wholesome quantity and return with it to Cana where he could sell it for a nice profit. Then the reality of the afore mentioned deep freeze hit him, and he knew that the chances were good that it had reeked its havoc on the entire area of Galilee.

Filled with consternation he began retracing his steps back to the feast. He would return there and be resigned to giving the big breasted lass a healthy dose of his wit and wisdom, then he would throw in copious amounts of his own obvious charm as well. After all, he WAS an educated merchant, one thoroughly skilled in the arcane art of the ledger. That would impress her, certainly none of the countrified rubes of her acquaintance could boast that they even knew how to count past the number of fingers and toes in their possession; a number that stood every chance of being less than the full complement that he, or any other city-breed folk could proffer. With those thoughts he once again gave vent to a smile and redoubled his step, buoyed as he was at the prospect of de-flowering the top-heavy young farm maiden.

Heading back in the direction of the place where the feast was being held, Judas came upon a small band of men and women seated congenially around the bough of a large lightning struck tree. This group of travelers were eating a meal of salted fish and swilling it down with what appeared to be large quantities of WINE! He couldn't believe his eyes. Surely, he said to himself as he urged his gait forward, these swain ruralists must be too ignorant to know that a veritable wine shortage was plaguing this area, then, who knew for sure with this kind.

Sometimes these sorts displayed a rough kind of bucolic cunning that could put the most devious city-breed merchant to shame. Then again some of the time this sort of rabble didn't even worship the one true God. I guess none of that matters here and now he thought, then said to himself "Opportunity affords the bold," as he stepped into their midst.

Introductions and polite murmured pleasantries were offered up by Judas as both sides introduced themselves. While this was all taking place Judas noticed that the entire group looked as if they had just wandered in off some

island, possessed as they were with nothing but muddy feet, unkempt hair and no idea about what a civilized people regarded as basic hygiene. Savages no doubt, thought Judas as he queried them about who they were.

Soon enough Judas learned that this troupe were the followers of a “Great Galilean Prophet,” now there’s an oxymoron, he thought to himself.

He was told that this prophet, a man named Jesus, was at that very moment out in the nearby orchards saying his prayers. They confided in Judas that most of them had met and then decided to follow this Jesus but a mere week or so earlier, and, that before then, only a scant handful of their members had ever even heard of him. How desperately quaint, Judas mused silently but with a sardonic smile creasing his lips.

After winning the group over to his side by simply standing in their midst and listening to them telling stories about their lives as fisher folk upon the waters along the coastline around the Sea of Galilee, Judas, began peppering them with cleverly disguised questions that soon solicited the knowledge that none of them were aware that Cana was currently suffering a severe wine shortage. Secretively he queried them as to the possibility of, perhaps, being able to acquire one of their several skins of the full-bodied drink, for coin that is. To this they laughed, telling him that it had been freely given to them by a fisherman who abides on the southern end of the Galilean coastline. They told him that it would therefore be unfair for them to charge coin for what had been received, gratis. They then gave him a skin and told him to enjoy its contents.

After giving the common courtesies Judas turned from the strange group and walked away thinking what a shrewd fellow he was for having obtained the object of search with no monetary outlay. He was definitely full of himself as he, at last, made his way back to the party feeling as he did the heft and weight of a large goat skinned parcel bulging with wine. Ha! What rubes, he happily thought. Chuckling aloud and thinking to himself that the night would be filled with his cheers, followed on the morrow by the farm girls tears.

Once arriving back at the wedding feast Judas set about the task of locating the girl with the big lungs, and, after several unsuccessful circuits of the surrounding farm he at last found her in the stables, holding the hand of a broad shouldered youth with a face like a donkey. He took one look at the scene and decided that the girl was obviously an under-achiever. Retracing his steps back to the party he contemplated the possibility of meeting another girl, one sophisticated enough to appreciate a man of standing, such as himself.

After trolling for an hour or so he realized that the day was at a loss. Deciding not to waste a skin of good wine, he decided that it would be best if he were to go ahead and enjoy it for himself. With that thought in mind he walked over and sat down with his back pressed against a comfortable stone wall. There he luxuriated in both the shade it cast, and the glow cast by the high quality wine he had been given.

Although the feast wine was being served with water, it was being done at a time of the day when none of the revelers seemed to notice. Oddly enough, Judas realized that rather than thinning out, the crowd of well-wishers and merry-makers was actually on the increase. Then, much to his curiosity he watched as the same group of rustic fisher folk, who had gifted him with the wine, arrived at the feast by strolling into the courtyard as if they owned it. Thank goodness they took a moment to bathe, he chortled to himself as he watched the newcomers begin to mingle with the rest of the guests.

It was then that he noticed a tall bearded man with long curly hair walking among the others. He wore a modest frock girdled by a rope belt, nothing more. Judas couldn’t suppress a smile when he noted the so called Prophet’s fierce eyes, this was standard issue among the religious zealots who so thickly peopled the landscape of his homeland in these troubled times.

At first he thought that the man might possibly be intoxicated, for his eyes, though hard and probing were smoky in appearance. However, upon closer inspection he decided that this man was not in fact inebriated, but instead simply possessed the far away stare of the insane, or of soldiers who have seen too much battle. With gathering curiosity he watched the Prophet of the Galilean fisher people move across the courtyard, pausing to murmur a word here and there; he was obviously known in Cana.

Watching the man others thought a prophet; it suddenly became aware to Judas that the man was also barefooted. Now, walking unshod was not in and of itself an entirely uncommon occurrence, many common folk tied the ankle straps of their sandals together and draped them around their necks for easy access, should they determine that it was time to put them back on. This man however, had nothing around his neck and carried no

pack where he might have hidden his sandals. Judas could easily conclude from this, that the man was shoeless. This was so typical of these self proclaimed prophets. And the people did love that whole barefooted, starving aesthetic image. Judas scoffed.

Enjoying the sun and the wine Judas continued to watch the man called Jesus and was forced to concede that there was something about the man, which seemed to separate him from every other person at the feast. Some quality that he, personally, had never detected in any other religionist that he could remember encountering. He couldn't quite identify it, but whatever it was he knew that it was compelling him to continue his observation... he could not keep his eyes off the man!

Handsome was not the way to describe this professed augur, in reality, only the word beautiful could accurately paint his portrait. His face was joyous in its purity of "The Chosen" bloodline. His chestnut hair naturally curled, his eyes were light and wise in spite of their intensity, his skin a soft pinkish-bronze. Here was a man who could bend the will of others for good, or for evil, depending on his purpose or his desires.

He noticed that few, outside of the females at the feast seemed to even take notice of the so-called Prophet in their midst. No one treated him as though he were an exceptionally gifted or God-chosen, anything. In fact, the other men there that day treated him with marked indifference, as if he were merely one more guest who arrived to sample free food and drink. Either they did not know that he was a supposed prophet, or they do not believe it is so, was his final analysis of the indifference in which the prophet man was treated. Judas took another tote from his wine skin as he continued to regard the prophet man, with a now renewed and somewhat suspicious attitude.

The man called Jesus, after making his cursory introductions, at last separated himself from his small contingency of followers. He walked over to one of the stone walls that lined the courtyard, placed his hands atop the wall and with a little hop, levered himself into a seated position on it. No one else at the party chose to seat themselves thusly, most preferring to sit on the ground, as Judas had done, using the wall as a source of shade against the late afternoon sun.

Continuing to sip his cool wine Judas watched the people gathered at the party as they played this game, or that game. Of course his hope was that another dark-eyed cutie might find him interesting enough to investigate. He especially liked the mother of the groom, but every time he winked at her she'd throw her hand to her mouth in shock and look away. Of course that was fuel to the fire, because he then began to simulate that she should pull her tunic up and show him a little of her leg. Of course she nearly fainted at the gesture, giving him the best laugh he'd had in years.

No he wasn't a handsome man, but he was a man who possessed an air of confidence in his mannerisms, giving him a certain attraction that had served him well with the ladies, in the past.

After letting his mind happily wander unrestrained about things unmentionable here in a book which might possibly be read by the gentler sex, and after swatting and cursing a thousand flies, Judas had his attention snapped back into reality by an uncomfortable feeling deep within himself. He had the feeling that people often get when they sense someone is watching them, and with the feral instinct of a merchant who oftentimes was forced to travel with large sums of money on his person, he scanned the crowd until his eyes lighted upon the face of the Prophet of Galilee. It startled him slightly to discover that the man was definitely eyeing him, like someone did when they thought that they knew you from someplace, but couldn't quite remember where.

As the wastrel merchant held the stare of the prophet he felt the soft loving touch of a mother's tender caress in his inner-most self. "How strange this feels!" he thought to himself, unsure of its origin.

His mind fluttered through the obvious possibilities, including that he had imbibed a bit too much wine. No, that was not the cause of what he was feeling, this he was certain, because he was a great and steady consumer of spirits. No. He was not drunk, at least not to the point of experiencing unnatural phenomenon. Yet, he knew that something strange and alien to his mind was moving around in his thoughts. He intuited that he was being probed and searched for information, the way that a fisherman might drop a weighted rope into the sea, to gauge its depth. "FISHERMAN!" He said aloud. Then he understood. It was the Prophet. Judas snapped to attention and studied the Prophet, who even now continued to stare at him. He was very much aware of the continued buzzing, tingling sensation inside his head.

He could not decide if he was angry or impressed. As if reading Judas's thoughts for real, the shoeless Prophet hopped down from atop the wall and without diverting his eyes one whit, walked briskly over to where Judas was seated and stood directly in front of him, staring straight down into his face. "Mind if I sit with you?" he asked.

Judas shrugged. "Not at all. But you'll get no donation from me regardless of your mind tricks."

"I am in need of nothing belonging to this world," exclaimed the prophet as he lowered himself to the ground beside Judas.

The two men sat with their backs pressed comfortably up to the stone wall, idly watching the antics of a small bee that tarried blissfully around a wildflower spouting from the ground near them.

After a time Judas felt an unexplained calm overwhelm him, I guess I should have said, a peacefulness came over him. Even though neither of them had spoken since they had uttered their first words, he had to admit that he was, for some reason, comfortable in the presence of this stranger. In fact he began to feel inordinately guilty for the harshness with which he had earlier addressed the man.

"My name is Judas. I am an itinerant merchant, who has recently arrived here in Cana, hoping to procure some olive oil for my fathers business. I have since learned that the winter freeze has damaged all of the early crops. A most unfortunate occurrence, I assure you."

The Prophet said nor did anything to acknowledge that he had heard even a single word that Judas had just said to him. In fact, he seemed to be in his own very distant place; a place of happiness or a place of sorrow, Judas could not tell for sure.

"Why is it, that you despise the religious?" the Prophet asked Judas bluntly and without pre-amble.

Judas hesitated, then raised his wine skin high above his head and gulped down a long pull of the crimson fluid before wiping some errant fluid from the corners of his mouth and beard. He then passed over the wine-skin, looked his companion in the eyes and told the truth of it. "I'm sick to death of those who speak of peace as though God prefers slaves to the company of stalwart men.

"I'm sick of the relentless tyranny brought down upon the heads of our people by those claiming to be God's representatives. A pack of jackal dogs is what they are... demanding payment or demanding loyalty, it's always the same. They get and we give."

A quick glance at the man gave Judas the impression that he was actually listening intently to every word that he was speaking. So, feeling emboldened by the dint of an audience, he continued. "If you listen to the so-called prophets, be they from the olden times or be they modern, it's always the same old tired song. They all purport to be carrying messages from heaven, telling us that God is angry with us, that God expects us to alter the path that we currently tread, or face dire consequences." He shook his head in apparent disgust. "In order for a man to believe the mutterings of these fools, he would be forced to believe that God is a vengeful, mean-spirited, disciplinarian who gives no concern to squashing his own chosen people the way that a careless man might crush a bug on a foot path. To me, that is an utterly absurd concept. In truth, if that is how God operates... then I have no need of him."

Another moment of silence descended between them, a moment when both men seemed to be reflecting not only upon the words just spoken, but on something larger as well, something of much greater weight and importance.

Finally the Prophet nodded his head in agreement and spoke. "You speak wisdom, my blood-brother. It says much about your spiritual development that you can comprehend that such things as anger, harsh rules and conditional salvation have no place within the mind of a true God. It is brave of you to see the yoke and whip of religions agenda. Though I would prefer you find the good contained within it, rather than dwelling simply on the negative.

"As for your stance on stalwart men versus slavery, I must disagree. For I tell you now that no man is a slave to any other man, or to anything, save the chains and fetters of his own thoughts and habits. Because even a man in the throws of bondage, is free to liberate his mind as surely as a supposedly successful master can wear the iron collar of addiction. "Consider the Romans who currently occupy our land. Who are they but other men. Should we then rise up and kill them, like the Zealots do?"

Judas peered narrowly at the man who seemed to be questioning him about something other than what his words defined. The man named Jesus smiled, then went on. "If we act as the Zealotim do, and purge the Romans

from our nation, others just like them would surely follow; it is the way of the world. The wolf eats the sheep. The sheep trample the little bird living in the grass and the bird eats the worm that harms none.

"Trust me when I tell you, things are as they are meant to be, Judas."

Again, a drapery of silence fell over the shoulders of both men as they each took a long tot from Judas's wine skin.

"To be a wolf, is a much nobler position to occupy in this world. I say to you that if a man is like unto the bird or the sheep or the worm, it is because the man himself has allowed it to be so. Even still, if all the sheep of this land would band together, like the Zealotim, they could quickly drive the Roman wolves out past the gate!" Judas said this last part forcefully.

Jesus laughed. "You speak as though the sheep of Israel were born as wolf cubs, and somehow became sheep. In truth, the wolves of Israel died out long, long ago. And the sheep have replaced them."

Judas shook his head. "You sound as if you regard that as being a good and proper thing, Prophet."

"Have you noticed the flocks in the fields, brother?" Jesus waved his arms to indicate all of the flocks, in all of the fields of Israel. "Have you noticed that even though the wolves kill sheep daily, that there are still many more sheep in the world than wolves? How can this be, if the wolf that you regard so highly is mightier, more fierce and therefore more worthy than the sheep? How is it that the sheep which is lacking in great size, lacking in muscle, lacking in fang or claw and lacking any other means of defense, continues to thrive, while the wolf becomes increasingly more and more endangered?"

The Prophet paused to allow Judas a chance to digest what he had just told him. Then continued. "It is because the wolf is a creature of violence, and, being a creature of violence, a being inhabited by violent thoughts and a violent nature, the wolf suspects and fears everything else... the wolf assumes that all other creatures are likeminded. This fear and suspicion makes the wolf a loner, a creature that cannot find peace. Even when it slumbers in the ranks of its own pack, the wolf shivers with fear, fear that at any moment his pack brothers might think him weak, and pull him down, or that the hunter might drop him with his bow, or the vengeful herder with his sling. Listen to me Judas, because of what he is, the wolf knows no peace and therefore has no time for the tranquility of a family life.

"The sheep on the other hand, he does not have a violent nature. He does not live a violent life, so his days are happy ones. The sheep fears not his companions while asleep, for he knows them to be sheep as well, therefore he knows that they will not prey on him should he become weakened with illness or old age. When the sheep reproduces, he can watch his offspring grow and prosper into adulthood. I tell you now that the day of the predator will slip into extinction and the day of the sheep will be transcendent, for it is destined to be so. The meek will inherit the earth."

Judas stared at the Prophet in open-mouthed incredulity. "Are you saying that God prefers us to be slaves... sheep to be driven before the wolf, to be taken down at his pleasure?" gasped Judas.

"God?" answered the Prophet. "And what does God have to do with whether or not a person is a slave or a master?"

"You say that you are a prophet... yet you ask me a question such as this? Did not your study of the scriptures impart upon you the knowledge that God is in control of all man's activities... that he monitors the deeds of man and that he then judges them accordingly?"

The Prophet slapped his knee in delight and broke into a deep rolling laughter, which drew the attention of nearly every person attending the feast. Just at the point when he appeared to reclaim his composure, he glance anew at Judas and lost all control once again, bursting into a more vociferous laughter than before.

At first Judas was taken aback and offended at being laughed at in such a manner. However, after watching the Prophet give sway to such unbridled mirth, the spell became contagious and he himself became infected with laughter. This joining in the fellowship of laughter seemed to increase the merriment that both were experiencing, soon both men were literally rolling around in the ground. It has been said that too much laughter can become a form of torture and so it was with the Prophet and his new companion. Their guffaws turned into grimaces as belly pains began to tear through both of their abdomens, quickly bringing the fun to an end.

After the mirth had subsided both men rubbed their eyes and shook their heads, snickering just a little as they both staved off the tendency for laughter to erupt again. Finally, after several moments had passed, the Prophet responded.

"Yes brother, I have read the scriptures. I quote them daily in the synagogues. I tell you now though, that I have also read another kind of scripture and that that scripture is written in the stars, and in the veins of the leaves which paint the forest with life. I have also read the gleam of truth and wisdom concealed within a newborn baby's smile, and these other scriptures do not always tell me the same things as do the scriptures which are written in the languages of man.

"What the, Scriptures of Existence, tell me is that God is complete, that God is perfect in every single way. If God then is perfection, how then can God be judgmental, or vindictive, or conditional as man and his religions would have you believe? I tell you that He/She cannot. And as to the question of whether God prefers the slave or the master, the answer is this: God is entirely unconcerned with your station in life. Be thee king or pauper, God simply does not care. Those cares and worries are merely the temporal concerns of mankind. All that God is concerned with is that you progress spiritually. In truth my brother, the slave in this lifetime will often become the slave-driver in the next. Many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first. Therefore God does not care two roman coppers about your status, because God knows that before the pathway of existence has been entirely walked, all will experience all."

Judas was completely taken aback by what he was hearing. This man that some called a Prophet, professed some unusual sentiments, indeed. He spoke strange words as he rebuked the Scriptures and promoted the concept of life after death ... many, many lives in fact. As much as his own childhood religious training argued against what this wild-eyed and barefooted teacher was teaching, Judas felt himself becoming inexorably drawn towards the man the way that the oceans are drawn up towards the moon. He then realized that he wanted to know more about the man's thoughts, so he asked "Teacher, are you saying that the scriptures are false? And are you saying that a man dies, only to be reborn again into another physical body? Born again into other sets of circumstances and different social conditions? If this is so, then everything taught in the Torah is false."

"False? no, Judas, not at all. Misunderstood... yes.

"When enlightenment comes to a person, that person feels compelled by the wondrous nature of that experience, to share that experience with others. Especially with others who that newly enlightened person cares about, his kith, kin and those of his bloodline. It is at this point where the distortion begins. For even those who have received true revelation are still bound by the five senses of the carnal body. Good-intentioned, the enlightened scribe wants to accurately recreate his spiritual experience, but he has only a human language with which to do it. As you can imagine, this is an impossible task. At any rate our visionary feels compelled, in spite of the impossibility, to document his experience, hoping that the spirit senses of the listener, or the reader, will be awakened into a higher state of consciousness by his experience, just as his own was.

"But as surely as farmed crops spring forth from the earth in ordered rows, so too do the ideas and opinions of those receiving the message, who have only physical experiences from which to comprehend supernatural experiences. And, those opinions and ideas are hypothesized within the narrow confinement and the limitations of human consideration, until the once pure experience of the supernatural, is transformed and cultivated into a crop of mankind's own consumption.

"The law of truth however is constant, it does not wander nor waver. It is not one way for the Jew and another for the Is-ra-elite gentile. Truth is not one thing for the religious and another for the so called infidel. It does not bend in one direction for a man and another for a woman. The laws concerning good and evil do not need to be written into Holy Books, in order to be activated. Nor do they require that some sort of religious order stand as their representative. For the very truth of these laws are ingrained deep within the minds and hearts of every person given life. Therefore, whenever a person hears the truth of that which I speak, if it is their time, that person is awakened, just as surely as the sound of a swiftly flowing brook awakens the sleeping valley.

"These laws are simple in nature, Judas. I tell you now, that they are as simple as this: You will not feel the yoke of slavery being clamped down upon your shoulders, unless you yourself have denied freedom and justice to others. You will not experience loneliness, unless you have inflicted loneliness upon others. You will not exist in



darkness, unless you your self have denied another that which they needed to become enlightened. You will not fear death, unless you have denied life to someone else.

“In summation, what goes around comes around.” .

“To see the truth of these simple laws all one must do is to pray for it: Seek and you shall find, ask and you shall receive. That is how one gains spiritual knowledge, you just have to want it bad enough to ask for it. Judas, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. That is the whole of the law.”

Two laughing children ran past them playing a game of tag. Women danced merrily throughout the courtyard and men stood in drunken groups bragging and lying.

Birds chirped and the sun moved and another long uninterrupted period of silence descended between them, and whatever their thoughts were they were suddenly interrupted by a woman who approached them with a brisk purposeful stride. She stopped directly in front of the Prophet, put her hands on her hips and said, “Yehoshua, there is no more wine!”

“Mother. You know I love you with all my heart. But, what business is that of mine?”

“The bride is your sister. And I am responsible for food and drink. Do you want your sister’s wedding to be remembered only because it ended early, for lack of wine?”

The Prophet smiled at his mother who in turn smiled back at him, mischievously. Then she lovingly kicked him on the sole of one of his feet and continued. “Don’t make me tell EVERYONE here, the story of the mule and the figs!”

The Prophet knew that he had been bested, because underneath the dignified structure of every man, lies a little boy story that he does not want to hear being repeated.

“Ok! Ok! Mother, you win! Have my companions fill those six empty jugs with water.”

At those words, the Prophets mother gave a victory wink to Judas, turned quickly and called out to her son’s followers, instructing them as she made her way to the well.

Judas watched the Prophets mother and her antics with bewilderment. He saw how several burly men in Jesus’ cadre leapt forward to wrestle the six giant clay cisterns over to the lip of the drinking well. The women in the Prophets group started dipping the buckets down into the mouth of the well, and then went about transferring the dripping contents into the clay jugs.

It took quite a while to fill all six of the clay pots and as the others labored, Judas silently wondered what those jars filled with water could possibly have to do with the afore mentioned shortage of wine.

While the others attended to their task the Prophet continued speaking as if nothing unusual or out of the ordinary was taking place. “Yes, my friend... true spiritual wisdom knows no religious boundaries, it is constant throughout time and is beholding to no one culture. Man is powerless to alter the nature of Truth, despite his rules, regulations, opinions and conditions. He cannot alter Truth with his words anymore than he can use his senses to taste love, or smell courage.

“Know this, Judas. All who are here upon this earth are traveling towards wisdom, and someday, all will obtain it. When they reach this pinnacle of existence where they can at last recognize verity, they will find that they have returned home to the original garden, a place where all wounds will be healed, where all sight will be regained, where all men and women are equals. A place where prisoner and executioner stand arm in arm.

“This garden however, cannot be reached before each of us passes through many, many different skins and philosophies, strengths and weaknesses. For all people shall be all people.” Jesus looked Judas squarely in the eyes, and continued. “That is why to deny God, is no greater a blasphemy than to try and define him.”

Judas listened intently to the words of the Prophet and as he did, a sense of wisdom came to him and he knew that what he had heard was false. How he knew this, he could not say, but he knew. “Prophet, all men are not equal, nor will they ever be. This is the right of free will. Some are lazy, others are not. Some are perverted, others choose not to be. This is what makes us individuals. It is the right of a person to think and the right to choose based on those thoughts. You want everyone to be sheep. I do not mind sheep being sheep, but I myself prefer the skin of that wolf you so hardily condemn.”

The Prophet did not turn or acknowledge that he had even heard what Judas had said. Then from nowhere he answered him. “You are correct, of course. Though I cannot at this time explain my reasons, I assure you, that I have

come into this time, and this place to bring the message of compassion. I have come to bring the good news to mankind; the good news being that God loves all of humanity equally and that the salvation of mankind is at hand.

“Judas, I know that you do not agree with my message, but it is the message that must be taught, today. What I am about to tell you is one of the many secrets that are hidden from the masses, but if I do not tell it to you, then you will not comprehend my mission on earth. Listen well my friend, for what I am going to tell you is one of the greatest of all the mysteries.”

At those words the two men turned to look into the face of the other as two people are wont to do when speaking of things profound. “What is this great secret you speak of?” asked Judas in a serious tone of voice.

The Prophet ran his hands through his beard, licked his lips and spoke. “When creation came into existence it did so as a perpetual machine, a thing which operates itself based on certain principles. Those principles are simple things like; if you throw a rock into the air it will automatically fall on its own returning from whence it came. It does not require divine intervention; God does not need to tell it to fall back to earth. It is the same with the sun and the moon and the stars, they all do what they were designed to do, on their own. The secret that I speak of is like that, it happens without God’s assistance.” He hesitated as if unsure how to continue.

“Just say it, Prophet. Just spit it out. I’ll either understand it, or I won’t.”

“Ok, here goes. First however, I want you to swear an oath of silence, because what I am about to tell you cannot be repeated for another two-thousand years. Agreed?”

“I swear,” answered Judas.

“Here goes.

“The mind, Judas, is a creator. It was the mind of the All, the Light and the Dark, which created this reality. In this reality is the human being, us. When we, the new humans, were created, we were given a parcel of the Godhead in the form of a spirit entity. This entity lives inside of us. This spirit entity is God. Being that we have God within us our minds possess powerful creative possibilities, the same in fact, as those of the whole mind of God. Therefore what we humans think within the realm of our mind, we create in the realm of our existence. That though, is not the secret that I spoke of, that information I give so that you might better understand what I am about to tell you. Here is the great secret one which will either astound you or confound you, depending on your willingness to be rational.”

The Prophet hung his head and sighed looking as though what he was about to say was an uncomfortable admission. Then he began to tell the secret of all ages.

“The Jew and the Israelite,” he began, “have created the belief in a place of punishment they know of as Hell. This belief has grown to have such a following, that it has become a reality to those who believe in it. Their creative-spirit-power has constructed the existence of this Hell, and because of their innocent but misguided faith, they, upon death, are not able to move into the Light.”

“What do you mean by that?” asked Judas in a confused voice.

“Exactly what I said Judas. These people have created, by their belief in it, a place of torment. As a result, when they die they ‘believe’ themselves into that very same Hell matrix. In death they are living in the very Hell that their own mind created, they in reality are torturing themselves.”

“I’m not sure that I understand this secret Prophet, and even if I did, what does it have to do with me? I’m not a practitioner of religion.”

“It is why I am here brother. I am here to rescue them from this Hell of theirs.”

The day was steadily growing hotter, but neither man noticed, because Destiny held them firmly within its net.

“I will walk among these people for three years; I will show them such powers that they will come to believe that I am God. They will murder me, and I will let them. Then after three days, I will come back to life showing them that there is victory over Hell. I will tell them that they too, can have victory over Hell, all they need to do is to call my name, and believe in me, and they will be spared the tortures of this Gehenna.

“What I am in reality doing, is replacing their belief in a Hell of their own thinking, with a new belief, one which allows them to escape the trap of their own mind. Or as they will say in the future, ‘I am re-programming them.’”

Judas looked dumbfounded at hearing the words of this man he had just met. As he tried to wrap his mind around this, secret, as the man had called it, he could not help the feeling that he, for some unknown reason liked

him. With a slight sarcasm he said, “Well, you got one thing right. They're definitely going to kill you!” They both laughed at the ominous words they had spoken, but deep inside they were apprehensive, at what, only one of them could say.

The face of the Prophet took on a far away aspect, as if dwelling on the lessons inherent within his own creative thoughts and words. Judas too was held silent, caught somewhere between the admirations that he felt for the strange words of this curious Prophet, and the confusion that he felt at the spectacle of the others who seemed bent upon their task of filling the earthen-pots full of water. He was snapped back to the present as Jesus began to speak once more.

“Judas, do you think that God is sitting up there, in the sky, on a mighty throne, looking down upon the wretched sorrows of each and every human being on the planet? Do you think he/she/it, alters as the fancy suits him, an event here, an event there? Do you think that God is actively involved with preventing a catastrophe for this one, while consciously allowing destruction, for another? Praising one, while condemning another? Lifting up this one and trampling underneath his mighty heel the other? No my friend, because, if it were that way, then God would be no giver of life at all! He/she/it cannot prefer the Jew, while hating another; nor can he grant eternal life to those who follow one path, while condemning those who follow another. If he did these things, then God would be unjust, and, I tell you that God cannot be unjust.”

Both men were once again drawn back into their present reality by a voice that called out, “Yehoshua, the jars are full!”

Looking up they found that the Prophet's mother had approached without their notice. The Prophet cleared his throat, then smiled at his mother, closed his eyes for a moment, then said, “Mother, draw a cup from one of the jars and present it to the Master of the house, with my compliments.”

At those words Judas became utterly stupefied. He thought to himself that both man and mother were insane. Why would he instruct her to take a cup of water to the Master of the house, when it was wine that was so desperately needed? And why would his fool of a mother simply nod her head and scurry off to obey such a ridiculous command? For that matter, why would his followers be so complacent in the whole charade? Judas shook the invisible cob-webs out of his thoughts. “This must be a madhouse!” he thought to himself.

As the Prophet's mother approached the water urns she unceremoniously snatched a cup from a nearby table. She raised it chest high and with a giggle she shook it at the rest of Jesus' disciples who were standing around the jugs. The beguiled fools broke into wide grins; some wrung their hands in anticipation. Judas gaped at their antics in absolute disbelief. He was about to express his feelings but a still small voice commanded him to be silent. He did.

The Prophet's mother confronted one of the large clay cisterns, now full of water. She reached out with her cup and immersed it in the contents of the closest clay urn. Without pausing to taste or smell what she had just lifted up from the pot, she turned and strode directly over to where the Master of the house sat talking to some visitors he seemed to know quite well. The Prophet's mother presented the cup to the man; Judas then witnessed a strange and utterly unexplainable event. With a smile, the Master of the house, put the cup to his lips and drank thereof... and drank... and drank!

Rivulets of crimson fluid streamed down the sides of his mouth and painted his beard. When the cup was completely empty the Master slammed it down onto the top of the table and grinned at the mother. “The bride's family has waited until the second day to provide us with the finest wine in all of Israel!” He turned to address the revelers there that day saying, “Drink your fill!” Then he bowed to the mother, acknowledging the gift.

“Fresh wine!” marveled one old man to a friend as they walked past the place where Judas was seated, drinking from their wooden cups.

“This is the best wine I've ever tasted!” exclaimed another, and so on.

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Yes, he remembered well that very first encounter with his Master. “That was two-thousand years ago,” he said under his breath. Such a long time ago. He saddened at the thought.

As he awaited the arrival of the miracle man he knew as, The Reverend Sunday Morning, he could not help but to be excited; could this be his Master returning to usher in the Second Coming! He admitted to himself that he had had his doubts, but then again he had his hopes as well. He thought that he would be able to recognize him even after all this time... but he wasn't absolutely sure of the fact. Oh for certain he had seen photo's of this modern-day prophet and, no, he looked nothing like his Master, but then why would he? After all, according to his Masters own teachings that all returned from one life to the next, this would be a different body than his last. Hadn't he made that point clear when he taught that John the Baptizer was the re-embodiment of the Prophet Elijah, even using the words that others would not recognize him as such?

Besides, who but his Master could execute the thousands upon thousands of healings that this man had no doubt bestowed upon the needy? None he decided. Yes, this man had to be the one Judas had endeavored to find. This HAD to be his Master returned, returning to earth with his message of Peace through Socialism.

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Though two hours behind schedule, Sunday Morning's limousine at last arrived pulling to a stop directly in front of the place where Judas and the other early arrivers stood with anticipation thick as maple syrup. Instinctively Judas knew exactly how the others were feeling, because his own heart pumped and pounded with the same kind of excitement and energetic anticipation as the others in attendance. He told himself that he had waited for over two-thousand years for the return of this man and that today was the day; this possibility buckled his knees and he found himself struggling to suppress the affects of nausea as his stomach tightened ready to spill its contents. His left hand began to shake and tremble like the palsied limb of a very old man. He then took in the sight of those who had come here needing a miracle, and he felt shamed at the depths of his own selfishness.

The limo sat with the doors closed for what seemed an eternity. The crowd and Judas alike stared in complete silence; he began to feel a sense of apprehension and dread. Whether this ill-felling was born from some well of occult knowledge, or simply a case of nerves, he could not say. Finally the shotgun-rider stepped from the car where he then moved to the rear-door of the limo and opened it in the manner of all chauffeurs. Johnny Sunday Morning stepped onto the sidewalk in grand fashion.

Upon seeing him, the heart of the errant apostle fell into an irregular beat, then it missed a beat, then it caught once more where it danced a drunken reel as the spiritual eye of Judas found that the aura possessed by this so-called miracle worker in no way matched that of his late Master. In fact, this man's aura was fraught with un-healthy colors and as a result he felt his innards contract as if his bowels were going to release themselves, then whatever emotion had caused that discomfort left him totally. He lowered his head in sorrow.

As the preacher stepped into full view, Judas returned his attention to him, with less hungry eyes. His curiosity piqued as he wondered how a man with such a negative aura could be the recipient, a channel, per se, for the Holy Spirit.

He noted that this “Healer” had a face that, while handsome, was dominated by two shining, arrogant eyes... eyes that gave him the supercilious appearance of a military madman, someone who could order the death of a thousand troop's merely to win control over some insignificant hill-top, only to abandon it the following week.

He also noticed that, although not overly tall, this man had a body which projected an air of power, a dangerous body... a cruel body, one endowed with enormous possibilities, one you would expect of a lifer-convict, not a man of religion. In truth he looked nothing like what Judas had seen on TV, nothing like the average soft and pampered religious types. This man, Judas concluded, was a man made dangerous by his own willpower and his own design.

Suddenly, the Preacher with the miracle hands halted in mid-stride and looked heavenward. In response to his actions, all who were present, including Judas, looked heavenward as well, possibly thinking that a whole host of harp carrying angels might appear up there, somewhere... or maybe just out of a reflex born of human curiosity,

who knows. None however, except maybe the Preacher himself saw anything, because he alone seemed to be receiving important instructions from up high, or so it appeared anyway.

Judas stood silently among the good folk who had come hoping to receive a divine healing, watching and waiting. After a few moments of pause, the Preacher acted as though the heavenly inspiration that he had sought had been granted him. He lowered his face and moved directly in front of a small wheelchair bound child sitting next to Judas; the one who's mother had had the earlier conversation about God. With a wave of his hand, Sunday Morning motioned for the child to be pushed forward away from the press of the crowd. At this the crowd gasped in unison, convinced that they were about to witness a miracle.

Upon seeing that her son had been chosen for a healing the boy's mother lifted her face towards heaven and shouted "Thank you, God! Praise God! Praise God!" so happy was she that the Preacher man had selected her child from within the midst of all the others to cure. Tears streamed down her face and her eyes blazed with the light of repentance.

A total hush seized hold of the crowd... if not the whole city. Anticipation swirled, admiration awed, love abound, but it was unwarranted, for like Odysseus, and like this writer, the Reverend Sunday Morning had been blown far off course.

The Preacher held his right hand aloft and looked hazily at it, seeming to indicate that the awesome power that he was about to wield was not his own, but belonged instead to God, UP THERE, somewhere.

The Healers lofted hand began to shake and to tremble as if receiving some obscure power inside it. The crowd held its collective inward-breath as the mighty healing hand of the Preacher dropped from the sky in the swift arcing manner reminiscent of a falling star. When the hand of the healer landed atop the head of the cripple-boy who at that exact moment closed his eyes as if unsure if this was to be a painful experience or not. All did not happen as expected though, because rather than delivering a snapping, crackling burst of ascetic healing energy into the material substance of the boy, at the exact moment that the Reverend Sunday Morning's hand landed upon the child's brow, the ground itself shuddered and heaved upward as a powerful earthquake gripped the city and shook it violently.

The reverential crowd fell into a frenzied panic as the earth beneath their feet began to shake haphazardly. It was as though the God they had been worshipping only moments before, had for reasons unknown, abandoned them like convict children left to bear the weight of their fathers sins.

Judas though surprised, stood his ground, transfixed as he was upon the events taking place. Though all seemed chaotic he was unafraid as he watched the faithful scatter like butterflies in a hail-storm, searching for a refuge which did not exist. Also he watched as the Preacher was whisked away by his handlers and thrown quickly into the back of his car, which then sped from the scene even as the earth bucked and quaked, injuring in the process two of the faithful.

Left alone save for the sobbing woman whose son had not received the anticipated miracle healing, Judas felt tears well up inside of his eyes. So much misplaced faith! So much suffering and no one to remedy or relieve it.

"Father," she sobbed. "What more can I do? What have we done to deserve this fate? I implore you to heal my son. He's a good boy. Please, God! I beg you to help him. I beg you in the name of your own precious son, Jesus!"

The heart within Judas's chest ached to the point of breaking as he listened to the distraught woman mouthing her powerless prayer and empty benediction. He continued to eavesdrop on her as she continued her liturgical babble praising the Preacher to the cold air and begging the wind for another opportunity for her son.

When he could no longer abide her torment, Judas lifted his own eyes skyward and said, "By the power given to all children by the father who created us, I command you to be healed and made whole!" The boy stood up, and the mother fell down.

Judas slipped away unnoticed by the suffering crowd.

# Chapter Eight

## The Hired Man

The rain had started to fall around two o'clock in the afternoon. At first, it drifted to the ground in a mist of gentle droplets, a typical spring-time shower designed by nature's architect to wet the colorful palette of God's canvas. However, shortly thereafter, great rafts of mean dark-colored clouds began to float across the coastline, bringing with them a torrential sheet-wise rain which drenched and flooded the entire city with a savage fury. It was a totally unexpected "one-hundred year" rain.

Due to the simple fact that six inches of rain had fallen in a one hour period of time, the entire city of Los Angeles was brought completely to heel, everything came to a sudden and absolute standstill. It was truthfully said that the weather had become unusual and harsh, during these days. A soothsayer's revelation, a doomsday prophet's dream.

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He stood silhouetted in the dark shadowed doorway of an old abandoned building with a faded blue sign hung over it which read, "Joe's Liquor Store" where he awaited their meeting. The man glanced briefly toward the glowering skies as if to say "Ok! Enough is enough, already!" then in a hurried fashion he readjusts the collar on his knee length rain coat. After doing so he thrusts his hands back into his coat pockets where he feels the reassuring handle of a silenced Walther PPK semi-automatic pistol that he kept in one of them. With his hand on his pistol he feels a curious wave of security wash over him, whereby his mind forgets his concerned thoughts on the city's latest downpour. He knows well the reputation of the neighborhood in which he now stands... he knows that it annually produces the lion's share of this violent city's homicides. In spite of this fact, there is no trace of fear in him, because if the cold and brutal truth were known, he had more bodies stacked up than any ten men from this gutter ghetto put together, he smiles.

As the empty hours rolled by he maintained his position, keeping a firm grip on his patience. It was all a part of the job, a job he loved. He noticed that the rain had finally begun to slowdown. Good, the streets of this mendicant enclave were already flooded.

His mind shifted slowly as he returned his attention back to the memories of his meeting with his current employer, the famed miracle worker, Johnny Sunday Morning and his lovely wife... "Now there's a hundred year set of legs!" he said to himself with a wry chuckle.

In truth, he had instantly decided that he didn't much like the man. He also didn't know why he had been hired to gather information on this Prophet guy; wasn't he supposedly a man of God, as well? Hypocrites, the whole damned bunch of 'em. But hey, money was money, and this Sunday Morning fella, well, he was loaded.

After his initial preliminary investigations, he had concluded and relayed his conclusions to his new employer that the reason why the media had been so limited in obtaining their own information on this Prophet character, was because he was so absolutely spontaneous in his appearances. He didn't broadcast the fact that he would be at such and such a place, at such and such a time, doing so and so. In fact, as a result of this spontaneity, the only way for anyone to locate him and gather sufficient information concerning him, would be to practically live on the streets themselves. After having explained this to his employer he had been given Carte Blanche per se... and that was a good thing, because the UNSPOKEN had been conveyed between them.



In his line of work one had to know the rules, the language of the rules, the UNSPOKEN requirements. The simple secret known by only a few was his ace in the hole, because word filtered around in certain circles that he was the go-to-man, the man who could help with... problems.

For the ultra-rich, life is lived with much more caution than it is with other folks, because the rich fear losing that which they have worked hard to accumulate. This is why the ultra-rich hire professional drivers, professional pilots, and even professional nutritionists. They simply want to survive and live full and happy lives. Also, the need for a guy like him is further illuminated by the stories, which are oftentimes told over cigars and cognac, about those poor fools, once on top, who lose their lives through recklessness, or who get caught-up in some senseless scandal and end up eating plates of rice and beans in a prison someplace. Oh yeah, the smart ones are very, very cautious.

In the case of the preacher Johnny Morning, one found a perfect example of someone who had lots of everything to lose. He had lots of money, lots of power, lots of prestige and lots position, he smiled to himself at his next thought. Did this affluent Preacher really only want to gather information about a potential miracle working rival? If that were really the case he would have hired the services of any one of a hundred different Private Instigator's in the city, for a couple hundred bucks an hour. Or, if he had merely wanted a killer, five-thousand would have purchased a bad one, fifty G's would have shaken a competent one out of the woodwork. The fact that he had hired neither, spoke volumes to a man whose ear was finely tuned into the subtle nuances of what lie beneath a man's words. In both of the other scenarios however, words would have had to have been spoken, uncomfortable words, words the ultra-rich could ill-afford to speak. Those unspoken words, unspoken yet well understood, were the reason why the ultra-rich called him. For word had passed around among the elite that he was a discreet man who understood and who appreciated their needs and concerns, perhaps even better than they themselves did. That is why they chose to call upon him, the ex-FBI agent, when their soft and cushioned lives were threatened by outside forces. Then again, when a person demands twenty thousand a day in wages, it goes without saying; gather the information needed and then kill the mark. A perfectly unspoken agreement.

Finally, after several hours, the rain slowed down to a faint drizzle and then it stopped, completely. The rainwater eventually ran off the streets and into the gaping maws of the cities overworked drainage system, leaving the streets of this impoverished section of town looking as romantic as the streets of ancient Rome with its freshly washed hue. The city street lights came on and added their reflection to the scene causing it to take on the wet glow of an Impressionist Painting, and the air, damp with moisture, had the clean smell of a Mississippi magnolia tree. And God's creation was once again, if only for a fleeting moment, a garden of possibilities.

Slowly, he watched as the neighborhood's unsightly night life began to reclaim the beauty of God's garden for itself. It didn't take long for the creators of hell to once again turn something fresh and clean into the lone waterhole of perversion. The dealers and the buyers, the thugs and the victims, the hookers and the johns, the meek and the freak. They all came out.

For hours he quietly observed the activity taking place around him, but his focus was on two little boys playing a game of tag up and down the sidewalk in front of him. He pulled his hand from his coat pocket and checked the time; twelve-thirty in the morning. "Where the hell is their mother? Or father for that matter, it's a school night. Poor kids don't have a snowball's chance in hell of being successful in life!" He shook his head in disgust at the injustice being done to these two youngsters by their careless parents. "Parents," he mumbled aloud. "These kids MIGHT know who their mother is, but I'd be willing to bet they don't EVEN know who their father is! These people don't get married, and they don't take care of their kids," he added, then felt a little guilty for saying it.

At two o'clock in the morning his attention was finally drawn to a figure moving cautiously towards him. The Hired Man stood deathly still, and as the other man approached he thumbed back the hammer on his pistol.

The second man moved to within arms reach of the Hired Man and stuck out his hand, as if expecting a friendly shake. In a quiet voice he said, "You can call me, Mo."

The Hired Man, unwilling to remove his hand from the grip of his weapon to shake the hand of the other, did nothing. After a few seconds the second man shook his head and dropped his hand saying, "I heard you was smart. Not smart enough though to put your piece in the other pocket... or so it would seem." Then he smirked and broke his eye contact, giving the Hired Man a chance to regain his composure.

“Names and handshakes are unimportant,” said the Hired Man. “When we spoke on the phone I told you what I needed... You got anything for me?”

The second man hesitated as though his thoughts were elsewhere, and then responded, “Yeah Mister, I got plenty. What you got?”

The Hired Man pulled an envelope from the depths of his off-hand pocket and handed it over to the second man.

The second man promptly flipped it open and counted its contents without emptying it, then gave the Hired Man a toothy smile as he put the envelope into his own left hand pocket. “They move around an awful lot,” he then said. “They call no place home and they seldom stay in the same place two nights running. It may surprise you, but these people aren’t even quartered within the city. They’re staying somewhere in the hills, near Grapevine Pass. They travel by means of an old school bus; about fifteen of ‘em. All indications are that they have left the city for good and are heading north, towards Frisco. As of this time, I do not have a plate number for the vehicle... but I will, soon! Once that happens I can easily find ‘em, anywhere.

The second man smiled. “I actually have a little bonus for ya’,” he reached into his pocket and extracted another envelope which he handed to the Hired Man. “Open it” he instructed.

The Hired Man looked over the shoulder of the second man and then took a quick glance up and down the street in both directions, as if whatever the envelope contained might somehow compromise his mission. Then, with his curiosity aroused he took his right hand from his pocket and opened the envelope and pulled from it a five by seven, black and white photo. It was a clear snapshot of two men and a young girl of extraordinary beauty.

“That’s your man right there, the one in the middle. That’s the one they call The Prophet.”

“He’s just a kid!” exclaimed the Hired Man. Somewhat taken aback by the fact. “Yeah. Hell of a deal, right! I got him pegged for sixteen or seventeen - eighteen tops.”

“How can you be so sure that he’s my guy? I mean, he sure as hell don’t fit the mental picture that I had of him.”

“Don’t worry, he’s your guy. He’s the one.”

Both men paused instinctively as they watched a four year old “Beamer” cruise by; its occupants obviously watching the both of them. Finally, when the car had passed the second man continued, “I have somebody on the inside. One of his followers is a customer of mine. She’s a junkie... and on top of that she’s hiding out. But you can trust me on this,” he flicked a finger at the photo in the Hired Man’s hand. “He’s your man.”

The Hired Man nodded his head in satisfaction as he returned the photo to its envelope and then stuffed it into his pocket. With this done, he turned and began to walk away.

The second man turned in the opposite direction where he too walked briskly away from the meeting place as though it were set to explode. As he walked, he shoved both of his hands into his coat pockets and gave a little shudder, looking as though only now realizing how chilly the night air was. He only made several steps before a low disembodied whisper of a voice flew over his shoulder in the night wind. “I need a location, Detective.”

“You’ll have it no later than tomorrow,” replied the second man.

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Johnny Morning was indeed pleased that his Hired Man had so quickly come up with information concerning this so-called prophet. Truthfully, he was absolutely frustrated with the way those damned newspapers kept comparing, in breathless details, the healing powers of this young healer to his own; for Christ’s sake he was a world famous healer!

Only yesterday the story had broken that he had mysteriously lost his ability to perform miracles. Unnamed sources in the J.S.M.M. organization had evidently told “The Times,” that he was near a total nervous breakdown and had been in hiding since learning of his lost abilities.

Since the breaking of the story there had not been even one moment of rest for his entire staff. The phones were ringing twenty-four hours a day; people were trying to crash the gates of his walled compound. Church groups were lining the streets of his lavish mansion. All was pandemonium.

He had had a plan to combat this unfortunate new development. He had planned on going public and telling the world that God had bestowed on him these wonderful gifts, because he had been chosen to bring forth an important message about the salvation of humanity. He would tell them that God had, for a time, bestowed upon him the ability to perform miracles, so that all of humanity would know that he was the "Anointed One." He would have told them that the first part of his mission had come to an end and that there would be no more healings... nor would the power of God be on display like a cheap gimmick in the hands of a stage magician. He would have told them that they must once again rely upon their faith concerning the healing power of The Almighty, and that his new mission was to bring them the word of God, as only he knew it. He would explain that God was dissatisfied with the splintered morass of Christianity's countless denominations and secular differences. He would have proclaimed that to adhere to any other belief system than his own, would be considered out of communion with God. He knew that he could have gotten away with his plan, because, the world had seen the power that he had wielded in his hands, and they adored him for it.

His declaration on the subject would have been sufficient to convert most of the planets Christians over to his denomination, and he would have been the newly appointed leader. He would have become more powerful than any Pope or President who ever lived.

It had been a perfect plan, so perfect that even the leak to the Press about his loss of endowment would have fallen into it without doing too much damage. Now however, it was all ruined! How could he admit to having lost his own powers, when some upstart was running all over the state doing everything except walking on water? Something had to be done about this dilettante, and quickly.

He entered his office only to find his wife already present, along with the man he had hired. Stepping past them he silently moved to the room's large window overlooking the front entranceway. Before either of them could think to speak, Sunday Morning turned to them both and barked, "Did you see that carnival set up outside the gates?" Not waiting for any sort of answer, he continued. "This is all a direct result of that damned fraud that people are calling The Prophet." Glaring straight into the face of the Hired Man he blurted, "I'm paying you good money, mister. I want something done about this guy... NOW!" At first he had sounded angry and belligerent, but by the time he was finished talking his words were coming out wrong and he sounded like a petulant child pleading for a treat.

The Hired Man stood his ground as he reached into his silk jacket and pulled out a single five inch, by seven inch photograph. He considered handing it to his boss, but, for some unexplained reason he didn't. "I have him under surveillance, Boss. I also have an informant within his troop, so I now have the ability to find him any time I want. I suspect that this, ah, little problem of yours can be resolved to your satisfaction in a few days. Unless of course you have need for additional information."

All was quiet between the three of them because all three understood his meaning; he would kill this man within the next few days, unless Sunday Morning chose to give him different instructions.

The Preacher turned back to the window without another word, in essence dismissing the Hired Man with a wave of his hand. The hired man shrugged his shoulders and walked toward the ornate door contemplating the envelope containing the photograph of the kid that rested in the palm of his hand; thinking it no longer mattered who the kid was he slipped it once more into his pocket and walked out.

# Chapter Nine

## The Prophet

Over the course of the past few months the entire western hemisphere had fallen beneath the lash of extreme and unusual weather. In Canada and in the northeastern part of the U.S., record heat-waves were broiling the parched and thirsty earth. Conversely, in the southern tier of the United States, they were experiencing unprecedented snap freezes that obliterated the harvests of every variety of fruit and vegetables grown there. Hurricanes normally confined to the warmer waters of the southern Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico were lifted up into the higher latitudes repeatedly savaging the East Coast where a force five storm had slammed into New York City, causing tens of thousands of deaths and untold billions of dollars worth of damages. In California, things were no less catastrophic, because the entire West Coast had been struck time and time again by devastating earthquakes that split the groaning planet along every major fault line known to science and along many, many others that had previously gone unrecognized from Northern Mexico into British Columbia. In the deserts of Western New Mexico, all across Arizona and into Southern California, torrential rains came pouring down every ninth day as if on a celestial timer, unleashing flash floods that washed entire towns and communities away. So heavy were these downpours that the once arid landscapes of these desert places now bloomed into riotous canvasses of wildflowers and grasses so rich with color that one could believe themselves in an Irish countryside and not the Mojave Desert they were in reality seeing.

Due to the incessant hammer-blows of these and other catastrophes, the entire world economy was collapsing in on itself like a flimsy house of cards. Individuals, cities, counties, states and nations which had long thought of themselves as being safe and financially sound, in large part due to the fact that as one natural disaster followed closely on the heels of the other, the thin paper trails of the world's false economic underpinnings began to show true.

Insurance companies, of which there are many, were discovered to have been nothing more than front companies with falsified portfolios built on shell game accounting systems. Now as disaster claim after disaster claim was presented for payout, these companies sank into the mire of bankruptcy, unable of course, to provide recompense for even a scant fraction of their premium paying claimants. Re-insurance companies who were supposed to play the critical role of back-up insurers for the front-line companies were found to be too shallow in assets due to corporate mismanagement and greed to shoulder the burden when the first rank insurers failed, and those companies such as Lloyds of London, simply closed their doors and refused to honor policies and commitments, leaving investors whose families had supported the company for a hundred years out in the cold, holding worthless stock certificates.

Due to these upper-tier business failures, everybody from the average Joe to the most prosperous entrepreneur, to entire governments were left bereft of assistance in monetary matters. Civil unrest became commonplace as those who had previously fed from the troughs of the Welfare and other Social Programs began to rob, loot and steal anything and everything that they could lift or carry. They justified their every crime even up to and including murder, by believing that society somehow owed them that which they were unwilling to work for. They invaded the homes of the working class exacting all manner of beastly perversions upon their women, their children and taking from them what little was afforded the working family. In desperation, searching for a system of law and order no longer being provided by the fallen law-enforcement agencies, the working class men began to, at first defend their homes, then later to hunt down and kill those they deemed as freeloaders; war ran rampant in the streets of every city in America. The stench of death hung in the air and though a valiant effort was put forth by the common folk, in the end, the workers of America were forced to abdicate the inner-cities and urban centers to the violent looter types who had for the last half century congregated there on the taxpayer's dollar.

The Prophet and his band of followers seemed to have sensed the impending collapse of civil order in the cities, because as the first rains came he and his troop had loaded up their meager possessions into the baggage-bays and onto the roof of an antique 1937 International diesel-motor bus, and begun moving away from the urban centers. They traveled in easy stages, at first by spending time near the Grapevine Pass area of Southern California, and then by moving north and towards the coastline. They camped for several days on the rugged Ventura coast section, then moved up past Lompoc towards the far distant Big Sur shoreline where they set up camp for almost two weeks before moving past Santa Cruz, up into San Francisco... which had been destroyed by a massive earthquake mere hours after the bus carrying the Prophet and his disciples passed across its bridges onto the Marin Peninsula.

The Prophet and his band of followers continued to drive North past Navato and Santa Rosa, then pointed their old bus down the length of the Russian river following its twisty turning path to Bodaga Bay, from there they pressed upward and along the Mendocino coastline towards Fort Bragg and Shelter Cove before turning inland towards Garberville, where they captured the thread of old Highway 101, now christened The Avenue of the Giants, so named for the redwoods which lined its narrow two-lane blacktop pathway. Near Fortuna, they once again jinked towards the ocean following the Blue Slide towards Capitola and Petrolia, before finally traversing the length of a pea-gravel road that deposited them on the beach at the base of a series of cliffs, somewhere on the fabled 'Lost Coast' of Humboldt County.

The twenty some-odd people aboard the Prophets curiously painted blue, green and purple bus, emblazoned with stylized flowers and a sofa tied securely on the roof, so that those who elected to do so, could sit on it and feel the wind in their faces as the old bus plodded through the airspace above the roadway, arrived at their destination in good spirits. As they toiled slowly along the gravel road and towards their destiny they hungrily surveyed their surroundings and saw that they were not the only ones who had sought to leave the crumbling infra-structure of California for the refuge and safety of Cape Mendocino and its environs. There before them were many other vehicles and makeshift campgrounds dotting the rolling, mountainous scenery which greeted them as the bus rolled down towards the sea.

Because of where this Lost Coast was, and because of the type of persons who had historically been drawn to this desolate landscape, the vast majority of those they encountered along this out of the way place were all pretty much cut from the same basic cloth. There were New Agers, Neo-Hippies, Back to the Landers and Primitives. Rainbow Tribes, Deadheads and freaks. Gentle souls all, with none of the desperate, asocial, violent types that they had passed further south along the major highways and arteries. Tie-died cloth and hempen clothing was the norm here, nothing like the Gangsta'-ism of the Mad Maxian scene further inland. Here was a place of tranquility and repose, a garden of hope in a desert of chaos.

The locals who lived here, the cattle ranchers and the dope growers were already passing amongst the newly arrived visitors, organizing and advising and sorting them out in various categories. One of the Rainbow families, the tribe that called itself the Quetzalcoatl Family, had already established the famous "yellow kitchen" area on a large empty meadow a mile up from the beach and the kitchen minions were busy developing the infrastructure for the food distribution.

Another large group called the Hogfarm Collective was also busy helping to organize the new arrivals while imposing its "food not bombs" ideals on any willing to stop and listen. A-camp type "dog-soldiers" had also banded themselves together into rule-enforcement brigades long before the Prophet and his bus-load of disciples arrived at the beach.

In what seemed like no time at all, people who felt deeply about helping and serving the higher ideals of humanity, had done the work that it took to feed and cloth and shelter and clean up after everyone who was arriving.

The Prophets people were busily offloading their gear and setting up a campsite when a small band of smiling young men approached them seemingly intent on nothing more than helping the new arrivals to get situated, in truth however, they were assessing them and attempting to categorize them, with an eye towards, a.) Labeling them, in terms of the threat/non threat that they represented to the gathering collective that was burgeoning, here

on the Lost Coast. And b.) Figuring out what contributions the new arrivals could make, for the collective - ie, were they feeders, clothiers, shelterers, cleaner uppers etc.

The Prophet stepped from the bus giving the A-campers a huge friendly smile. He dutifully reached out to grasp the hand of the dominant figure of the group, assuring him that both he and his busload of friends would prove themselves to be good, contributing members of the small society that had gathered itself together, on that wind swept and desolate section of Northern California coastline.

While he talked to the Dog Soldiers, the Madonna, as she was now called, and the rest worked swiftly nearby, pulling tents and camping gear from the baggage-bays of the bus. One small group busied itself with the off-loading and setting up a medium-sized electric generator... of the sort that is oftentimes used to create the power needed to run a "Rave"... to power its lights, P.A. systems, amplifiers and such.

As soon as the men who took it upon themselves to enforce the rules that even a primitive society must have, saw the generator and the sound equipment being offloaded from the bus they relaxed and grew more friendly, automatically assuming that the Prophet and his crew were a wandering gypsy band of musicians; hence, a contributor rather than a consumer.

The dominant leader of the group that had come to inspect the recently arrived newcomers gripped the Prophets hand in a soul brother handshake, then turned and with his men left, satisfied that they were not a band of predators come to rape, rob and pillage, or to otherwise destroy the tranquility of those interested in a peaceful progressive society.

The rest of the morning was spent establishing their campsite and then later, wandering amongst their neighbors, sharing herbs, homemade wines and stories about what they had seen and witnessed on the roads that led them all here. It was a small slice of solitude in a world gone mad.

The weather on this one stretch of coastline was, in marked contrast to the weather being experienced throughout the rest of the state, relatively benign. Storm clouds had threatened to bring forth a deluge here and there, but as afternoon faded into early evening, the clouds actually dispersed and the air grew warm.

People who were camped higher up on the cliffs and further inland on the cattle lands of the upper surface of the blunt cape, seemed to be mysteriously drawn to the waters edge by the unseasonably beautiful weather and by stars that filled the horizon like fistfuls of fireflies and sparkling jewels. It was how they imagined the heavens had looked to our ancient ancestors, before the lights of humanity had faded their brilliance down like the colors of an old mans garment.

Great bonfires sprang up like sentinels up and down the beach front. The sound of a hundred drum-circles pulsed and throbbed and began to fill the air as the laughter of little children faded into the dreams of nocturnal games and candies.

As the evening advanced the mood of those on the beach became festive as the gatherers came together talking, dancing, singing and telling stories together, in defiance of the hopelessness of the calamitous things that seemed to be going wrong with the rest of the world.

Back at the Prophets campsite, something curious was happening. Large public address speakers had been erected at the base of one section of a near-by cliff-face and a general busyness was about its way.

In ancient times when the waters of the Pacific Ocean had obviously come much further inland than they did now erosion had hollowed out a large, shell shaped, natural amphitheater at the base of the cliff. A row of undulating sand dunes covered with linden bracken and alder bushes rolled seawards back away from the amphitheater, providing places for many more thousands of people than were actually gathered to sit and to listen to whatever sounds might come forth from the P.A. system's speakers.

Lights had also been strewn along the edge of the shell shaped depression, illuminating whoever stood within its cave like confines. One member of the Prophets cartel was busy flicking switches that caused lights to turn off and on, then to pulse and to dance, hypnotically. A sound woman bent over her mixing board, pushing buttons that fed electronic signals to the various speakers. Strange tones and blips began to leap from the amplifiers calling out to the night, telling the entire world that here - HERE! HERE! HERE! - was something entertaining commencing to happen.



The Madonna oversaw the construction of three large bonfires. Near each blazing pyre she instructed that large barrels filled with shrimp, prawns and other delicious sea food delicacies were to be placed for common consumption. None of the Prophet's followers questioned the sudden appearance of the food or the barrels... for they knew that their beloved leader could, with the wave of his hand, feed the world... were he so inclined.

In addition to the seafood, crates of fresh multi-grained breads, wheels of cheese and tubs of rich frothy ale appeared from within the confines of the bus. Also, baskets of seedless combustible herbs appeared; these too were positioned near the great fires for the people to consume.

When darkness was just past twilight and the Prophet was satisfied that all of the arrangements were completed, he smiled at two men and one woman in his entourage and nodded. Those three lifted up drumsticks and an electric bass guitar and entered into the shell-shaped space with their instruments. Microphone stands had already been positioned to capture the sounds of the drums and the bassist's cord was waiting for him to plug into his guitar. When his band was ready, the Prophet reached into the bus and extracted his own guitar from just inside the folding doorway. His guitar, his pride and joy, was a white Gibson SG a custom deluxe from the 1961 model run with a stock Bigsby tremolo arm affixed to the base of the body. He strummed an experimental chord as he walked lazily towards the mouth of the amphitheater establishing the fact that the instrument was already perfectly tuned.

The Prophet quickly reached down to grasp the plug end of his own guitar cord. He fitted it into the receptacle jack on his instrument and then stepped over to twist two knobs on the front of his Fender Twin reverb amplifier. He pressed his foot down on top of a pedal located beside the amp and struck another cord, this one exploded like a cannon shot from the P.A. system's speakers, rolling up and down the beach lifting every head and causing every foot to come running.

The women began to pat and to pound and to caress the skins of their drums. One played a conga. It muttered and barked out its urgent message into the velvet night "COME!" it roared. "GATHER!" it shouted. Her sister played a smaller drum called a Dumbek. It was voiced higher than the conga and it shouted out a much higher pitched, but just as incessant message to the night, "COME!" it yelled. "GATHER, NOW!" The bassist captured the rhythmic figure that his sisters were playing and entwined his sinewy deep throated lines in, through and around the drums in the ancient art of weaving that only true musicians know how to practice.

The sound system pumped the music of the drums and the bass out into the air, and the people responded. They strolled and stumbled up the beach and down the cliff side paths and many more walked in from the peagravel road. They came from the meadow and from the cove; they came and came and came.

The lights blinked off and on focusing the attention of those who had answered the musician's call, drawing them close, like a moth hypnotized by the radiance of a thing unknown. They came and they found seats on the rolling dunes that faced the amphitheater. They came and they stood clustered around the bonfires. They came in their tens, then their hundreds. As they came the Prophet simply stood with his guitar cradled gently, like a baby, in his arms. He stood motionless while the women drummed and the bassist churned out his fluid, liquid, rhythms into the night. He stood and all eyes were riveted to his white-robed figure, which seemed to glow even in the midst of the night's lighting. He stood motionless except for his long curly red hair, which swayed softly in the night air.

When the masses were gathered, the Prophet began to play his guitar. The sounds that he pulled from its six metal strings cut through to the heart and the soul of each person who was gathered there. He played lines that sang with angel voices and he struck minor-toned barre-chords that caused every heart to flood with melancholy. Along with him the drums throbbed and barked and stuttered and the bass moaned and slithered. The Prophet then lowered his head and began to play complete progressions. At first the music that he coaxed from his instrument was saturated with nostalgia and longing for times long since forgotten; the notes he played did not sound like loneliness, they were loneliness, and homesickness and unrequited love for things only now remembered. Every person within ear-shot sat or stood riveted, focused intently on the slim young man in the white robe and the music he played.

So powerful were his sounds that even the ocean seemed to cease its endless restless muttering to pay heed to what this man was playing on his guitar. Only the new Magdalena thought to look out past the rolling dunes to where the sea flung itself ashore at the coastline; only she saw that the water there lay flat and still as a pane of glass. Only she knew that the very water of that vast ocean listened as the Prophet plucked his silver strings pulling

cascades of sobbing arpeggios, lyric trills, haunting scalar runs and ghostly wisps of chords out of the SG with his fingertips. Only the new Magdalena chanced to glance into the heavens where her eyes told her that something there was amiss as well. It took a long moment for her mind to wrap around the nature of what was so unusual, and then it clicked into place: they didn't twinkle! The stars did not twinkle as they are wont to do through our atmosphere, instead they cast a steady, almost eerie light as if held in animated suspension. Combined with the motionless ocean this heavenly spectacle was majestic like a masterful painting, which captures one moment, one event for all eternity to enjoy.

Back on earth, the Prophet nodded to his players and in response they altered the course of their music; sadness fled and gladness rushed in to fill the void. A smile creased the face of every person who attended to the music and feet began to tap and heads began to nod. The Prophet leaned into the microphone where he too smiled. "Welcome friends," he called out to the gathering throng. "It's good to be here, with you on this night," he added, applause and polite calls from the darkness answered him, in kind.

With a new set of cords and a new melody the Prophet began to sing into his microphone. The words of his song seemed to be addressed to each and every single person in attendance, to that person and that person alone; later if you were to ask each person in attendance to describe the song and to tell you what the words were, you'd be surprised to discover that each person had heard a different song. The interesting thing was though, that regardless of the words that each person had heard, the theme of the song was the same for everyone: I love you. God loves you. You are a beloved child of the Universe. Peace! Rejoice! Harmony!

When the first song had run its course the Prophet leaned back into his microphone and said, "We have food and drink and herbs for you to smoke! My people will pass among you and they will feed you! If there are any Yellow Kitchen Crewmembers here who would like to help hand out what we are feeding, please, just step over to one of those three big fires and join my friends!" He waved his hand at the night and yelled, "Are you hungry out there?" A roar came back to tell him "Yes!" "Good! Take freely of my food! Eat! Drink! Smoke! Enjoy the show!" And then the concert began in earnest.

One song flowed gracefully together with the next. They were songs Celtic yet not, Hyperborean melodies woven together like threads in a tapestry holding the crowd spell-bound. The enraptured audience barely noticed as the others passed to and fro among them handing out mugs of ale, cups of wine, heaping platefuls of shrimp, hunks of cheese and pipe-bowls filled with aromatic herbs to smoke. Every person was served no matter how far back from the shell-shaped stage they sat or stood, and every person was given exactly enough of everything that they desired to sup, sip or smoke. All were satisfied and none were left wanting. At the end of the feasting, the same workers walked back through the crowd, collecting the plates, cups and trash. Prophetically, the leftovers from the feast filled every trash bag and barrel that the workers could muster.

As the eating and drinking and smoking tapered away to quiet satisfaction, the young Prophet unplugged his guitar and leaned it against his amplifier. When he returned to his microphone, the gal running the lights pulled the faders almost all the way back and the lights grew dim... barely illuminating the faintly glowing form of the Prophet.

"Beloved," he told them gently. "This beachfront that we rest on with the ocean at our backs, and the full moon hanging above us like the watchful eye of God, are all material objects. They are things, things which we humans can realize and rationalize with our five senses. We can feel the tingling of sand's coarse structure as it slips through our fingers. We can hear the waves of the ocean singing to the music of nature's wind. And we can watch as the waxing moon becomes completed, beckoning to the tides and commanding them to rise and pay homage. Great though all of these things be... they are not the things that I have come here tonight to speak of. Instead, I came here to talk to you about another material thing, a thing as real and substantive as the moon," at those words he swept his arm into a wide arc indicating the fat lazy moon overhead. "The sand," he continued as he lowered his hand and pointed to the ground beneath his bare feet, "and the ocean," he said as he spread his arms wide to illustrate the mighty ocean's great size. "This thing of which I have come to speak to you about is called Self-Realization." With these words his voice trailed off and both of his hands came together in front of his chest resting on his heart. After a small hesitation, he continued.

"All of the things that you see, feel, taste, hear and smell with your corporal body are but different manifestations of the same basic substance, that substance is atomic matter. The sciences recognize this fact... yet

they are at a loss as to what causes this base material, this atomic matter, to combine itself together into specific forms. They cannot explain why some Atomic Matter forms itself into great stones, while other Atomic Matter takes on the form of a child, or an apple, or a tree, an ocean, or a planet. To the Natural scientist these are amazing mysteries, but to the Spiritual Scientist they are no mystery at all. Because, the Spiritual Scientist knows that the sand and the oceans and the moon and the physical body of the human-being, is nothing but the materialized thoughts of a higher intelligence, a super computer, which directs the atomic structure of the universe to take the form of that which it is instructed. That super computer which controls the development of matter is the unknowable entity we refer to as God. All of the things that we can identify with our sense matrix are the manifested thoughts and desires of a Direct Cause, they are not an accident. To understand this is to put one's self into perspective. The reason I tell you this is to cause you to wonder, to imagine, to question and to be amazed at whatever this God thing is, this super computer, this super intelligence; this super energy, or whatever the case may be." The Prophet hesitated for a few seconds as one does when they think that their name has been called, then his face took on a sadness which had not been there only moments before and he let his head nod forward. No one knew why.

During this short session where the Prophet gave the gathered array the brief explanation on the subject of Atomic Matter and its endless forms, a man moved into a position of vantage, a man dressed in faded denim jeans, hiking boots and a wife beater t-shirt which was covered by a well-worn military field-jacket. This man in the faded jeans moved behind the crowd, apparently listening to the young Prophet as he spoke. He casually put both hands into the large bottom-pockets of his jacket where his right hand came to rest on the grip of a fully silenced Walther PPK semi-automatic pistol. He eased the hammer back, knowing as he did that an unspent shell already rested within the firing chamber.

"But, this is only half of the truth I came to share with you, tonight," the Prophet said as he raised his eyes to once again look at the gathered crowd.

The man in the faded jeans and the military jacket scowled and eased the hammer back down on the pistol, saying to himself, "Jesus! Why are all these preachers so long winded!"

"The other half of what I wanted to discuss with you this evening is almost as amazing as the first!" continued the Prophet to the low grumbling of the disenchanted crowd. "You see my children, when the forces of God, the ALL, came together in order to create the first human beings from the dust of the earth; a special gift was given unto this new creature. To the new human was given the Breath of Life. This was not the ability to breathe air in the manner of the lesser creatures, but an added breath, a breath of spirit, a spirit of breath, unique to this creature in that it was denied to all other living things. This special gift of God's own breath, God's own spirit, separated the new human from all other life-forms on the earth... making the New Creatures above all things which came before them."

The Prophet looked piercingly out into the dark night beyond the parameter of the lights, and then continued. "Because we humans are endowed with the divinity of God's own spirit-breath, we as a direct result have the ability to conceive ideas and to bring them forward into reality with the creative ability of the very Creator which shared with us this ability.

"However, due to a set of unfortunate circumstances, which have resulted in a situation where the New Man has been dumbed down and taught to think in a negative and therefore destructive fashion, as opposed to a positive and therefore constructive fashion, the truth of our inherent power has been denied to us. Instead of our religious leaders teaching us HOW to access the power of that which was given us, religion instead teaches us that we are wretched, undeserving, sinful creatures, unworthy save by the grace of God. They tell us that the perfection spoken of by Jesus, Buddha, Mani and Mohammed, is beyond our abilities. And I tell you now, that if you tell a child often enough that he is bad... well, in the end, he will be all of that and more." He then lowered his head and shook it slowly to indicate his inability to comprehend such a philosophy. He then lifted his eyes at the confused crowd as someone from the back yelled for him to stop talking and play some music.

Ignoring the cat calls he continued, "Because of these negative teachings, the imaginative powers of the human mind have been obstructed and are not very strong. However, if humanity were to alter their thinking processes

and make a conscious effort to develop these creative skills, they could create and form material things and objects here on earth just as the ALL does, albeit on a smaller scale.

“If though, we are to reclaim these abilities we must first recognize the possibilities and lay claim to them through the acceptance of the fact that we, as children of God, have the genetic possibility of our parent. This recognition is called Self-Realization and it is a universally recognized truth. “Without this Self-Realization it will be impossible for humanity to materialize the mental capabilities which have been bestowed upon them. So, my children, it is imperative that I should come into this world bringing forth this message of truth, which I hope will excite your mind into taking root by asking this question of your comprehension of God: how do I go about reclaiming the Birthright, the Scepter of Authority which has been eluded to and spoken of by all of the great prophets from Enoch to Milarepa, from Jesus to the Dali Lama, from Kenneth Hagen to Elisabeth Clair Prophet, from Norman Vincent Peale to Gurumayi. Ask, and you shall receive.”

The crowd which had been grumbling now became belligerent and with curses and disrespectful gestures many now rose from their seats and left that place.

The Prophet’s heart bled as he watched with sadness as the ones who fled from the truth of his words skulked off into the night with hatred, misunderstood. His soul yearned to call out to them, to say something that would cause them to understand the importance of his mission, but he knew that to each his own destiny and not that of another, was the law of the Spirit. He would not interfere with their choices, no-matter how ill-chosen they might be; maniacs of a dead reckoning. He returned his attention to those who had chosen to stay, and he smiled.

“Yes beloved, all possibilities are yours for the receiving, yet it has eluded you. It does not have to be this way, yet it is so, this because this transcendental knowledge, like riches to the beggar, escapes those who are not the masters of their own minds. For as surely as the lion and the calf cannot drink from the same pool at the same time, spiritual slothfulness and Self-Realization cannot lie together in the same bed of mind... for one must surely destroy the other.

“And so it is and forever will be the gospel of truth, that if the aspirant desires to find the stairway to their greatest possibilities, they must put off the slavery to all physical addictions caused by a weakened constitution. They must then put aside the negative emotions brought about by negative thinking, and then, and only then can the aspirant gain command over his or her highest faculties.”

The Prophet without preamble began once more to produce the silk thread of a vocal melody and his band picked it up and wove it into music. The song he sang was an ancient melody of the sort sung by our ancestors in times of great veneration. Those remaining fell under the spell of the young Prophet who seemed able to stimulate not only their minds with his words, but their emotions with his music.

He drifted from the first song into an old Celtic tune that told the tale of a man who chose war as his destiny, only to fall beneath the English cannons... leaving his dying thoughts wondering how different his destiny would have been had he chosen to stay at home with his lovely bride. It was a sad yet wonderful tune even with modern instruments. Then he stopped singing abruptly as he had begun and addressed them once again. “As I look out at each of you, I know that it is neither an accident nor a coincidence that we are here together. No, my friends, it is Destiny which has brought us together, your destiny and mine. However, like the young lad in the song who learned that ones destiny can be altered by one’s own decisions, you too will be required to make a decision based upon your own thoughts hopes and desires; and it is your choice to make and no one else’s. But, if you are to become that which you were intended to become, I assure you that it will require great sacrifice and great discipline on your part.

“To illustrate this point I will tell you a story that resonates with far echoing footsteps.” The Prophet never hesitated in his narrative lending an extra element of truth to his words.

“Once upon a time, a very long time ago, when people as we know them were new to this world, there were two brothers, one was named Cain and the other Able, Cain being the eldest.” The Prophet smiled, pausing momentarily. “Yes, I know,” he told the crowd “Most of you are familiar with this little story. Yet, I’ll wager that the true meaning of this story, you have not heard. For this is not a story about God choosing the gift of one brother over the other, as is commonly taught. It is a story which runs much deeper than that. After all, how could God reject a gift simply because it was not as pleasing to him as was the gift of another? Would not that occurrence be

exceedingly strange and un-God like? And would you yourself not be considered mean spirited if you scorned or complained upon receiving a pair of shoes from a friend, because another proffered a horse? Should not all which is given with good intent be graciously accepted, so that the giver might benefit from the good act of giving?

“Yes, my children... think, and do not fear to question your Creator about such things. For if you do not question... you will not hear an answer. And what loving parent would punish their child for questioning the mysteries of existence in pursuit of understanding?” The Prophet reached down from his vantage point within the shell-shaped amphitheater to accept a cup of wine from the hand of the Magdalena. He smiled at her and nodded his head in gratitude. Talking and singing was thirsty work! He took a long pull then sat the cup down beside him and stood looking at the moon for a moment, allowing her to reclaim her seat. Then he continued.

“In the fullness of time, it came to pass that Cain was assigned the task of harvesting the fruits of the ground, a job that was strenuous and requiring much backbreaking labor, for there was at that time no knowledge of ox-drawn tillers nor any form of plow not operated by the sweat of a man’s brow.

“The younger brother Abel was charged with the task of watching the firstlings of the animals and the fat thereof. This job was given the younger child because it required less size and strength than working in the fields.

“Being that both brothers had direct knowledge of their Creator, they both decided to offer a sacrifice unto the ALL, to show their veneration. Because Cain was a harvester of the land, he gathered together the finest examples of the various crops that he tended. Likewise, Abel selected from within his flocks the most perfect and unblemished young firstling he could find. The two brothers then carried their gifts to a high place known to them as, ‘the High Place Where God Dwells’. There in that spot, Cain being the eldest took his harvested gift and laid it upon the highest rock, which they knew to be an altar. Following his older brother’s example, Abel pulled from the folds of his tunic a sharpened stone knife, which he used to cut the tender throat of the young goat. He then placed its carcass atop the stone altar next to the fruits and seeds representing his brother’s labors.

“Both brothers knelt there upon the rock strewn ground and offered up their reverent supplications to their Creator, in gratitude for all that they had been given.

“As the story is told, the Creator, looked down upon the gifts presented by the two proselyte brothers, whereby he accepted the offering rendered unto him by Abel, while likewise rejecting that which had been offered unto him, by Cain. As a result of this rejection, Cain became much aggrieved. Seeing Cain’s vexation, the Creator sought to comfort Cain by explaining to him that if he would consent to offer the proper sacrifice, then it, too, would be acceptable, and Cain, like Abel, would be sovereign over all that was around him. But Cain could not comprehend the truth hidden within the message, and so it was that that which he could not overcome with his sacrifice, overcame him instead... causing him to blame his brother for his rejection. With the result being that, in a fit of jealous rage, Cain slew his brother.

“At first glance, this story certainly does cause one to become vexed... for as I have said, it would appear on the surface that God was a co-conspirator in this heinous crime. Yet, we know that this simply cannot be so, for we know that God is infallible. Being the case, there must be another solution to this puzzle.

“If we desire to explore this alternative possibility we must first start where all journey into knowledge must begin... at the asking of questions. For the truth of this story and many others like it, are uncomfortable, when one begins to look closely at the content. Yet, I tell you that this story is so significant that it single handedly inspired the birth of three great religions; Judaism, Christianity and by extension of the first two, Islam. Yet, not one of these religions understands the true meaning buried at the heart of this little metaphor any more than infamous Cain did! As a result of this lack of understanding, each of these religions has perpetrated wars one upon the other, since the day of their inception.

“I do not want you to believe that I hate religion, it is not so. I tell you these things so that you will think for yourself and not believe blindly what others believe. In this, the Cain and Abel story, there are two autonomous truths that I want you to see without the blinders of religious ideology: the first is that the gift of Abel, the sacrifice of flesh was accepted by the ALL; let’s talk about that from religions point of view.

“The Jew understood this point explicitly... however, they misunderstood the deeper meaning, believing the Cain and Abel story to be literal. Therefore they constructed a religion built upon the foundation of animal sacrifice.



As a result of this misunderstanding they have slaughtered cow, sheep, bird and every other animal they thought might please God to atone for their sins.

“The Christian too believes that a sacrifice of flesh and blood is demanded by God as atonement for sin. However, they believe that the Jew has erred in their position regarding animal sacrifice as taught in the Cain and Abel story, believing instead, that the story was naught but a metaphor pointing toward another type of blood sacrifice... that being the blood sacrifice of the man/God whom they call Jesus, upon the cross. However, the misunderstanding of the Cain and Abel story is ever present in this position as well. In truth, the Flesh sacrifice that God found acceptable in the Cain and Abel story, the proverbial lamb is a metaphor for the lambs of Jesus, and the lambs of Jesus are who? Why you and I of course. Therefore the sacrifice found acceptable to God was the sacrifice of self. In other words, we are all responsible to sacrifice a part of our self as atonement for sin. No amount of animal sacrifice or any murder of God incarnate can relieve an individual of their responsibility to act virtuously. Truth is my friends; no action is so dark and so depraved that it requires the appropriation of death, man or animal to obliterate it. Nor is God in the business of bargaining blood for forgiveness.

“Let us return to the Cain and Abel story so that we might better understand it.” At these words a few more of those who had gathered began to leave, disillusioned as they were with talk of God, but The Prophet carried on as though he did not notice. “As I stated earlier, the first truth of this story is the fact that God, indeed, does find animal sacrifice and blood to be sufficient restitution for recompense, for repentance. However the animal which is required for this sacrifice is not some four legged beast, nor is it the life of another, the true sacrificial lamb is the flesh of one’s own self. For a person to become acceptable to God, that person must achieve their highest personal potential, or if you will, they must overcome/sacrifice anything that stands in the way of them achieving their highest potential.

“For example: The animal nature within us cries out for us to satisfy the desires of the body, over the desires of the spirit. It cries out to us to abuse alcohol, because our animal self likes the feeling of drunkenness. Yet, our spirit self counsels us against excessive drunkenness, reminding us that when we drink to excess, we tend to abuse our spouses, our children or neglect our duties.

“The animal within cries out for us to stick that needle into our arm, or to otherwise take those unnatural chemicals into our bodies, yet our higher potential self, the person we could be, debates the wisdom of these choices by reminding us that these chemicals ate killing us and robbing us of true happiness and prosperity.

“The animal self tells you that it wants to do a multitude of things which impede your progress, and in that, in this decision, to either accept or lay aside that which prevents you from your highest possibility, is the meaning of sacrifice. The question is: do you have the fortitude to be all that you can be?

“The second truth contained within the Cain and Abel metaphor is the interesting phrase where God tells Cain not to be upset that his sacrifice was not acceptable, because all he had to do to be accepted, was to offer the proper sacrifice in order to rule over all that was sinful in his reality. If you meditate on this second point you will find enlightenment there, in that you will understand the Savior aspect of Christianity.”

At this point the Prophet raked his gaze across those who had remained, they were few. “It is time to separate the wheat from the chaff!” He then raised his arms skyward while leaving his chin upon his chest. When next he looked to the crowd his eyes had changed, he was no longer the kind young teacher, but something else.

He lowered his arms and began. “I have looked at you and I see you for who you are, what you have allowed yourselves to become. I see women whose very souls have become wasted and withered by the burning fire of sexual addictions, addictions which they can never satisfy, nor quench no matter how desperately they try. These bitter husks have put the desires of their holes above love and happiness; they are wretched creatures who despise those, their sisters, who have through personal discipline committed to the love and honor of family. They are skeletal females reduced to empty sacks of sensual flesh, women who breed in the sewers of indignation, women who give their bodies to the lowest of men... for a drug... finding what pleasure they can in being used and abused.... their once glorious bodies violated and prostituted... hood-rat-whores in thought and hood-rat-whores in action. I see you, she-cats, back alley queens... see you being mounted and bitten by the loveless Toms of your own choosing, Shame!”



The crowd gasped, some in anger, some in shame, all unrepentant. He continued. "I see men consumed with violence and with hatred and with scorn. Men too pathetic to accept their own failures. I see Black Men who blame the White Man for their every shortcoming. I see White Men who blame the Jew. I see the Jew who blames the Arab, the Arab who blames other religions. I see men so weak and deplorable that their psychotic minds can justify robbing their own mothers, or whoring their own wives for the drugs they are slaves to. Men who have placed the love of self over the love of their own children. Men whose bodies are no longer their servants, but their oppressors. I see you and your whole third world culture being forced onto the backs and into minds of my people. But the time is at hand; my people shall rise up and destroy you. We shall gather you up and send you to perdition. The time for revolution is now! Be thee warned!"

Many who were gathered there could no longer bear the fire of his words, many stood and shouted obscenities and heaped other abuses and threw stones and bits of wood at the Prophet. "Who are you to say these things?" they screamed.

The Prophet stood his ground and flinched not beneath the hail of objects peppering his torso. Finally, those unwilling to face their own part in the cultural degradation of Self-Realization stormed away from that place, leaving only the few who had the ability to admit the truth of his words.

Near the beach a man in an olive green military field jacket saw the ensuing confusion and turmoil as it began, and in that moment recognized his chance to execute his plan. With a cold heart and a steady hand he pulled his handgun from the jacket pocket of his coat while thumbing back its hammer. His pulse beat calmly as he lifted up the weapon and pointed it at... nothing! He quickly lowered it and blinked rapidly as he once again concealed it. He was confused. The young preacher... how could he have simply disappeared? Try as he might to locate him, he could not.

The man in the faded jeans and military jacket re-pocketed the weapon and faded back into the darkness unsure as to what his next move might be. Around him now were the angry as they exited the scene; as soon as their exodus died down the Prophet appeared to him once again. The gunman rubbed his eyes, because standing exactly where he had been only moments before, stood the slim young Prophet.

"What manner of man is this?" said the Hired Man to himself as he pressed forward trying to gain another vantage point nearer his intended victim. "How did he do that?" he added. The murderer shuddered involuntarily and muttered "Maria Zanella!" This, an unconscious gesture of warding off evil. He found solace in the belief that he would soon get another opportunity to complete his business ere the night was over.

"My children," intoned the Prophet as he began pacing in the small space at the front of the amphitheater. "Great is your reward in the next life, for only you, out of the entirety of those who came here tonight are capable of overcoming that which binds you. Those others are lost to their addictions."

He broke eye contact with the few who had remained and looked sideways into the empty space and remained silent for an uncomfortable period of time. When he was ready, he looked once more at the crowd and began his, Sermon on the Beach.

"Blessed are they who find their Higher-Self which dwells within them; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are they that mourn, yet understand the cycle of re-birth; for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are they who have become humble in spirit; for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are they who question the religions of men; for they shall find truth.

"Blessed are they who show mercy; for they shall obtain mercy in return.

"Blessed are the pure of mind, the autistic; for they shall see God.

"Blessed are they who do not fall prey to patriotic wars; for they shall be called the children on God.

"Blessed are those in prisons who are falsely persecuted; for they shall find redemption.

"Blessed are you, when men revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

"Rejoice O' you my brothers and my sisters and be exceedingly glad; for great is your reward in the next life, but woe unto thee in this life, for has not the masses always destroyed and murdered those who choose to think for themselves!

"But I tell you now not to fret; for you who prefer God above the creations of man, you are the light of the world.

“You have heard it said, ‘Thou shalt not kill’ but I say to you now that a person kills not only with the hand but also with the mind. So guard your thoughts lest they spawn actions of negativity; for negativity quenches the prophet’s fire.

“You have heard it said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’, this is the way of the Jew and the Mohammedan, it is also my way.

“You have been taught to refrain from violence, and should a man strike you on the right cheek, that you are to offer him the other. But this was the way of the Christ, in times past, and it will not work in this day and time. For mankind no longer possesses the same sort of morals as did our ancestors. Today, people are being raised without a family structure, without love and subsequently without remorse or compassion. So I tell you now that if a man is violent and you turn the other cheek, he will strike you there as well. I tell you now that if you allow a man to take your cloak, he will follow you home and violate your wife as well. So, be ye humble, yet be ye prepared to defend not only yourself but your family and your beliefs as well.

“If a man should ask your forgiveness, give it to him freely. But if a man asks your forgiveness and then treats you as before, he must be punished.

“And if an accuser likewise lies or abuses their position or power to wrongfully convict another, then that person in turn should be meted out the same penalty as the one that they tried to impose unjust consequences upon.

“Judge not that which is done by another. If a woman sells her body to obtain food for herself or her family, in the eyes of man this woman is considered to have broken the law, yet in the eyes of God she has broken no law whatsoever.

“If you are a follower of religion, this is a fine thing so long as God is foremost in your practice. However, do not criticize the pagan who worships differently than you.

“Do not become judgmental concerning the sexual practices of adults; but instead be thee indifferent to that which is not of your liking.

“Do not subjugate the woman; for she is your equal in the eyes of God.

“Do not force the direction of your children’s futures; but instead support them in the direction they chose.

“Love your children openly, and they will not stray far down the pathway of disappointment.”

And it came to pass that when the Prophet had ended his teachings the people were astonished at his doctrine, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the politicians who fear to speak their own convictions lest they lose their positions of power.

As the night wound to an end the crowd disbanded and began to move joyfully towards their set places and campsites. As they did this the man in the military jacket moved to a rock formation at the base of the amphitheater cliff, a place his reconnaissance had assured him would be a place that his mark, would pass on his way back to his bus.

When the first purple fingers of a new day’s dawning began to show themselves over the edge of the horizon, the birds that frequented that area seemed to spring to life. Small flocks of tiny black shore birds began to flit and flutter this way and that like children at play. As the man in the faded jeans watched them his mind reflected back upon the words of the young Prophet.

Suddenly he was startled by voices coming towards him near the waters edge, he knew his man was near. He gripped his weapon the way a man of experience does and eased back the hammer, while releasing the guns safety-switch. Stretching his arm forward he rested it on his covering stone, using the large rock as a steadying point, his finger eased itself onto the trigger.

The first person passing directly in front of him was a lovely dark-skinned woman with laughing eyes. Then another, and another, and then a crowd, but his man was not with them. The gunman frowned and rubbed his eyes with his free hand, thinking that fatigue might have misled him, but when he opened his eyes again, all was as before... his mark was not with those who passed.

Then with an air of hope he realized that his man had stayed behind and could even now be alone for the taking. Jogging back towards the shell-shaped amphitheater in a brisk military style trot, he made his way to the place where the youngster had given his concert. Upon arriving there he saw only a small band of hippies picking

up the last vestiges of trash, restoring the site to its natural state. The gunman approached one of these and asked, "The young man they call the Prophet, the one who sang and played the guitar here last night, is he still here?"

"Nope," replied the worker. "He left here with his friends not long ago. He stays in that bus over there. You would've had to pass him on the way over here."

Without bothering to reply the Hired Man turned to re-trace his steps, once again moving at double-time. He determined that he would find this guy and kill him, now!

As he moved back toward the multi-colored bus the sun made its first full appearance of the day, blinking full above the horizon. He glanced at his watch, it read 6:30 a.m. He ran directly to the bus belonging to the kid and there he saw them... saw him... standing beside it, the bus, stowing gear from the past night's performance back into the bays that held their equipment. He slowed his approach saying to himself, "I'll walk right up to him and blast him on the spot. I'll drop the gun to the ground and turn and walk away. I'll then break into a run until I hit that tree line over there. I'll stick to the trees and work my way back to where my mountain bike is hidden. I'll ride my bike to the paved road, and then I'm gone. Simple as one, two, three." He always had a contingency plan and now was the time. Nothing could stop him now.

The killer stepped to within twenty feet of where the Prophet stood and reached for his pistol. Then something went wrong! The Prophet looked up, stared straight into his eyes and smiled. He then stepped forward as if to greet the killer.

The Hired Man swallowed his uncertainty and tried to pull the Walther from his coat pocket, but his arm was frozen, it would not, could not move. The man he intended to kill walked right to within arms reach of him and cocked his head slightly to the left as if pondering his next move.

He was a professional and there was no panic in his repertoire. He tried nonchalantly to pull the pistol, but once again his arm would not obey his command. He tried to turn and walk away but found he could not. His mind clicked through a series of possibilities and options to include his dying right there on the spot. He still did not panic; instead he waited to see what would happen next.

The Prophet watched him with interest, hearing his thoughts and admiring his fearlessness concerning the possibility of his own death. His smile widened which seemed to at last un-nerve the man. Then he spoke. "There is a woman standing next to you. She is wearing braces on her legs. She has beautiful eyes... and she says that she is from Genoa, in Italy. She says that her name is Maria Virginia Zanella... and that she is your mother." The Hired Man was definitely disturbed now, because his mother had died twenty-five years ago, and the Prophet had described her exactly; impossible. "She wants me to tell you that she does not want you to do what you came to do," the Prophet added.

He then turned on his heels and walked back towards the bus, unmindful of the assassin at his back.

The Hired Man watched as the young man walked away from him, and he felt himself regain control over his bodily movements and he knew that he could, if he so desired, pull his weapon, yet he didn't. For he knew not the origins of this man, yet his heart told him that he was a far better man than the one he worked for. Thoughts of his mother made him smile as he turned and walked from that place.

He turned to take one last look at the man called the Prophet and as he did, the youngster threw up his left hand in the universal gesture of Peace. He then stepped up and into the bus and the doors closed behind him.

Between the two men the swirling winds of destiny began to blow as one man left, and the other never would.

# Chapter Ten

## The Hired Man

The Hired Man put his hands in his pockets and strolled casually around the interior of the large opulent office, taking time to admire the man's ostentatious display of wealth.

He stopped in front of a large "Beck" bronze, taking his right hand out of his pocket where he ran it up and down the smooth surface of the beautiful female body captured there. Stepping away he walked slowly around the room admiring the display of antique furniture employed there. Remembering how his grandmother's house had always had this same "lived in" look, he smiled. Suddenly his eyes fell upon an exquisite painting of a woman in a floppy hat, carrying a basket of flowers. The young woman or adolescent girl looked absolutely alluring the way her head was cast downward causing her to appear shy. He absolutely fell in love with it, and while his mind considered its beauty, in an unconscious act, he reached around to his backside to give himself a quick pick in the right spot, which was exactly when he heard a thin dry voice behind him, say, "Digging for gold!" Damn! He really did hate this guy.

"Uh, no... I ahh... was just admiring this painting," the Hired Man responded as he quickly stuffed both hands back into his pockets.

Johnny Morning slid into the field of the Hired Man's vision, looking elegantly coiffed, attired as he was in a navy-blue yachting jacket and thinly stripped paints. He held a snifter of fine Cognac in one of his perfectly manicured hands, with the other he pointed at the much admired painting. "Guys name is Royo, hails out of Majorca, I think. Not to be confused with the fella who does that fantasy stuff. Presently, he's all the rage in the art world. In my opinion he's the finest painter on the planet." The reverend lifted his snifter and took a small sip.

"Well you sure have some nice stuff here, Preacher."

"Cut the crap! Are you finished? Is the job done?"

"Well, uhm," the Hired Man stuttered uncomfortably. "Actually, the job is not done. There are loose ends to tie up. Quite frankly, Mr. Morning... I came here to tell you that I do not think that I'm the right man for the job." On the surface he had an expression of I'm sorry on his face, but underneath that expression, one could definitely discern that he wasn't really sorry at all.

The preacher was stunned into momentary silence by this unexpected turn of events. He checked his emotions however; ever the shrewd business mind who maintained the upper hand by not revealing his thoughts. Quickly he sculled across the waters of his options, at last coming to the conclusion that what the Hired Man had said was unacceptable... if for no other reason than that it would be too risky to try and hire someone else. With that in mind he decided to play the nice guy routine, believing that he could yet persuade the man to finish what he had started.

"Tell me what the problem is, then. Surely it can't be monetary? After all, we have met your every need... and frankly speaking, I think you will admit that we have been more than generous, correct?" The Reverend peered narrowly into the Hired Man's face as he gripped him by the shoulder and led him over to a couple of high-backed chairs separated by a beautiful dark brown mahogany coffee table, which formed a small sitting area in corner of the room.

The two men took their seats, then the Hired Man, with a wave of his hand, replied, "No, Mr. Morning, it's not about money, at all. And yes, your organization has met, even exceeded my every need."

"Then just what the hell is the problem?" Morning snapped, a little angrier than he would have liked. He tried to cover up his waspish tone by appearing bewildered.

"Well, it's... it's... it's really hard to tell. There's just something about this guy, that gives me the willies, I guess."

The Preacher rolled his eyes in disbelief and then blurted out, "For Christ's sake! You're not going soft on me, are you?"

“No, no, it’s not that. It’s just... there’s something about this guy that just isn’t normal. I mean... he asks for no money, shuns publicity, and his words, well, they go straight to a man’s heart. And, if he can do the things the papers claim he can, well, perhaps you should reconsider your position concerning him... because, truthfully, I find no fault in him.”

At those words the unholy Reverend nearly lost his composure, only at the last second gathering his wits enough to suppress the tirade of profanities that he wanted to throw into the face of this ridiculous fool sitting in front of him.

With three deep breaths the Reverend composed himself, knowing the importance of completing what had been started. So he put on his best concerned father face, and replied. “Come, come now,” he shook his head, as though that could somehow negate everything that the other man had just told him.

“Let’s start at the beginning. I’m sure that there is a logical solution for whatever it is that’s making you feel so uncomfortable.” The Preacher lowered his head and looked across his brow as though he were peering over the rims of an imaginary pair of reading glasses: “It’s ok. Just tell me what the problem is... and I’ll be more than delighted to resolve it for you.”

The Hired Man rubbed his chin, thoughtfully, then turned his head to the left, looking at nothing in particular, obviously trying to decide in terms of just what to say and what not to say. Then, decisively he snapped his head back around in a gesture of defiance, and replied. “So, you wanna hear it! Okay, then. Here it is!

“On Friday night, I received information that the man known to the media as ‘The Prophet,’ would be holed up on the Lost Coast area of Humboldt County. I was informed that he intended to stay there for a few weeks and preach to those gathered there as a result of the inner-city chaos.

“The Lost Coast is a lawless place at the best of times, now in the face of all hell breaking loose, it has turned into a gathering-ground for half the damned hippies and potheads in California,” he shook his head, then started again.

“Based upon the information that I had received, I figured that the Lost Coast would be the ideal spot for me to... gather the final piece of information that you required.” At those words, both men broke their eye contact and turned their heads simultaneously in opposite directions, appearing conspiratorial in spite of their efforts to the contrary.

“So I formulated a plan, and I headed off to execute it.

“Upon my arrival I indeed did come across the old bus used by the Prophet and his people. They were setting up for a concert and a feast of sorts; damndest feast you ever laid eyes on. Where they got all that food, I have no idea. I figure they fed fivethousand or so folks that night.

“Anyway, after everything was set up, this Prophet guy, and a few of his followers plug in their instruments and begin to play and sing. Needless to say, it wasn’t long before he had a crowd gathered around him, eating, drinking, smoking and generally having one hell of a good time. That’s when the kid... the Prophet... stops playing his guitar and begins to speak to the crowd.”

“What’d he say?” the Reverend asked in spite of himself.

The Hired Man shrugged his shoulders. “It was the damndest thing! He basically gave a spiel about his philosophies concerning all sorts of different subjects. I couldn’t tell you exactly what he said, but I can tell you that an awful lot of what he said made a lot of sense to me... real sense.”

The Hired Man pulled a stick of gum from his pocket, offered a piece to the Reverend, put a stick in his own mouth, and then exhaled a long breath. Silence ensued.

Obviously irritated and also curious as to what his antagonist had to say the Reverend Morning sarcastically broke the silence. “Let me get this straight. You hear this guy play a little music and talk; you are so moved by his words that you now want to void our contract, and, what... run off and get baptized? Well, praise the Lord!”

The Hired Man shook his head in disbelief at what he considered to be the words of an obnoxious hypocrite. He really did hate this guy. “No sir, not exactly. I just mean, that this kids a decent man. He’s not a fake.” The obvious barb was not overlooked by the Preacher who refused to break eye contact; not intimidated at all by what the other man had to say. Continuing on the Hired Man added, “After the kid had spoken to the crowd for quite some time, he said some things which set the crowd off: angered the hell out of ‘em.”

The Preacher suddenly leaned forward in his seat, intently interested in what he was hearing. “Set the crowd off you say? In what way! What'd he say?”

“Like I said, I don't remember the exact words that were spoken, but I do know that the Prophet was asking the people in the crowd to take a good look at themselves, at who they were, at what sort of people they had allowed themselves to become, and it infuriated most of the folks who were there. They began throwing rocks and bottles, all kinds a stuff. Others cursed at him; it was intense, that's for sure. But, and this is the real kicker. That kid didn't even flinch, he stood his ground. Even when one of the bottles hit him in the face he didn't move. He bled like a stuck hog, but he didn't move. After a few minutes of rage the majority of the crowd burnt-off. Some, stayed though.... apparently not offended by his statements.”

“Did he, heal himself?” whispered the Preacher. “From the bottle... from the cut on his face? Did he close the wound? Or, what did he do, later after the crowd left?”

“No, he didn't do anything like that. This good-looking black chick came and washed his face with a towel. I remember that, for certain.”

“Did he heal anybody?” demanded the Preacher.

“No. I didn't see any of those sorts of things. Anyway, like I was saying, a melee broke out and I thought it the perfect time to complete my mission. So, I moved to get closer to him... and, he just disappeared.”

“Disappeared!” gasped the Preacher in disbelief. “What the hell do you mean disappeared?”

“Okay. Okay. I'm not exactly sure if he disappeared or... or what happened. But, something strange did happen, because one second he was right in front of me and the next, poof, he was gone. What was weird about the whole ordeal was, that, I seemed to be the only one who noticed him missing.”

“Jesus jumping Mary! What the hell are you saying? Are you telling me that this guy is like Harry Potter? That's it, he probably has one of those invisibility capes; yeah, that must be it, he can disappear and reappear at will... he did reappear, right?”

“Yes, he reappeared alright. Or he allowed me to see him again, which is what I'm beginning to think the case was. Anyway, with the confusion dying down I decided that my window of opportunity had passed, so I went to plan “B”. Plan “B” was to wait for him on the pathway back to his bus, which I did. However, again he made it past me, somehow. There's no way he could have slipped past me, but he did.

“Thinking that the kid must have somehow slipped around me, I ran back to his bus, where I found him, almost waiting on me. As soon as our eyes met, I steeled myself to complete my mission. I walked straight towards him, but I was frozen, well my right arm was frozen and I couldn't pull... I couldn't do what I needed to do. Anyway, I tried to pull out my piece and blast this guy, but I couldn't; not didn't want to, couldn't, unable, disabled is the word. I was paralyzed. And the nerve of this kid, he walks right up to me and tells me that my mother is at my side and wants him to tell me that she doesn't want me to whack him. That's what really got to me, she's been dead near twenty-five years now.”

“He told you that your mom didn't want you to do your job?” The Hired Man nodded.

“For Christ's sake man. Get a damn grip on yourself” roared the Preacher. “That's a parlor trick! It's been used by every charlatan who's ever lived. Hell, I could say the same damn thing right now... and you wouldn't know if I was telling you the truth or not. It's a trick I tell you!”

“No, Mr. Morning, you don't understand. He described her to me, right down to her leg-braces. He even knew her name. How's that possible, you tell me that. No Preach', he saw her and he knew what I was there for.”

The conversation between the two men continued for another half an hour or so, then reluctantly, the Preacher admitted to himself that the Hired Man could no longer be of service. They parted company amicably with the Hired Man producing a refund check.

With the mission still at hand, the Preacher, sat for a few moments before a smile took to his lips... because he suddenly realized that he possessed a weapon immensely more dangerous than any hired gun... He possessed the faithful.



# Book Four

The End

“Ah, who shall hinder me to wail and weep, to chide my fortune and torment myself?  
I'll join with black despair against my soul and to myself become an enemy.”  
Shakespeare, Richard III

# Chapter One

Johnny Morning called a meeting with a group of his followers he had dubbed, “The Most Faithful.” Without exception these men and women were his most devout followers. They each drew their loyalty from the fact that he had either personally healed them, or had healed someone they loved. To these he was more than a man, to them he was a holy emissary sent directly from God to bring forth the truth of salvation to the last of the non-believers, before the advent of Armageddon. Thirty-three was their number and they would do whatever he asked of them, without question. They loved him, believed in him... they owed him, if not for their own life, then for that of a loved one. They were his to command. Thirty-three they were, and thirty-three they stood before him at rapt attention, listening with rapt intensity to the words of their Master.

“We have a crisis in our midst,” said the perfidious preacher to his followers. “The reason that I turn to you with this problem, this blasphemy, this sacrilegious affront to God, is because you, out of the millions who have been blessed by the divine healing power of God Almighty... through me, his chosen vessel...” in this slight hesitation the Preacher placed his hand on his chest and slightly lowered his head, before barking, “... HAVE NOT forgotten your gratitude! You have not forgotten your faith!” his shout rang from the rafters and resounded off the plaster walls. “And you and only you have remembered to pay homage to God by remaining loyal to me! To your church! To your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!”

His voice dropped back into the calm range again and he smiled at them, at each of them. “For your devotion, for your loyalty, I personally want to thank you. Each and every one of you needs to know, without question, that I lift each of you up to God in prayer daily, where I tell Him of your unquenched faith.

“The problem that I lay at your feet today, is truly immense in its scope, and is fraught with many dark and evil possibilities.” The preacher paused for dramatic affect, carefully weighing and measuring his words and timbre. With trepidation in his voice he continued. “The Antichrist has come! He has begun his campaign to try and dethrone Jesus as the Master of this world.” A collective gasp of horror rose up from the lips of the thirty-three. “Make no mistake when I tell you that the dark hour of prophecy is at hand. Now is the time when all true Christians must make their stand!”

He searched the faces of his disciples, looking for signs that some of these were unprepared to make a stand, he saw none. He continued “The Antichrist has sent a minion from the very bowels of hell to masquerade as a man of God!” He shook his head in obvious disbelief at the perfidy of this hell-spawned demon.

“This fiend is even now posing as a prophet and posturing as a healer. IT, professes to be, THE SON OF GOD!” These words he roared into their faces. “But that’s not the worst of it. This noxious beast claims to be the REINCARNATED JEEESSUS CHRIST HIMSELF!” The sound of his voice burst at his revelation to the thirty-three and as he spoke he paced to and fro lifting his hands towards the sky, beseeching if you will, for God above to send bolts of fury down upon this iniquity. The thirty-three moaned and swayed.

“However, do not fear this demon-spawn. For what power does hell have against the righteousness of the risen God?” He lowered his voice as if to confide a secret to his assembled crew. “Last night, my brothers and sisters, I received word from God himself, that this demonic imposter should be confronted... and that he should be PUT DOWN!” Again his voice roared at exactly the precise moment to give his words the maximum effect.

“God has given me explicit directions, revealing to me where this bewitcher can be found. I was ordered, by God, to gather you, the Most Faithful. To instruct you to in turn to each gather ten additional trusted followers, whereby this army of Christian soldiers will go and confront the afore mentioned demon, and destroy him before he can pave the way for the Antichrist to enter the world!” Spittle flew from the lips of the defrocked healer and his eyes bulged from their sockets like a madman as he waged his propagandizing assault upon the fevered minds of his hand picked minions.

“We must take the battle, TOOOO Satan!” The chosen responded to his challenge with enthusiasm, it was the least they could do out of gratitude for that which they had received.

# Chapter Two

## The Prophet

The Angel stood evanescent like a highland fog, yet brightly illumed like the moon. The Prophet fell to his knees before him and covered his eyes, striking a pose resembling that of a Renaissance painting. “The time has come. The end is near” said the doe-eyed angel.

The Prophet snapped awake in a fright and bolted upright, waking the new-Magdalena with his sudden movement. Without thought she pulled his head to her breast and rocked him, gently. “Shhh” she said soothingly. After a few minutes she lowered his head onto her lap and ran her fingers through his hair like a mother comforting a frightened child. They remained that way for several minutes, neither one speaking. It was not the first time that the horrors of the night had robbed him of his sleep.

She watched him rise from their bed and her expression became horrified as he entered into a shaft of moonlight drifting through the window of their make-shift shelter, illuminating him. He appeared to have aged twenty years in one solitary night.

He stood shirtless before her as he buckled a black leather belt around his waist and fastened it with a metal American Flag buckle. His body had become so rail thin of late that he looked anorexic. Black circles beneath his eyes gave him a restless, haunted appearance and his sunken cheek bones seemed to sit sharply above dark shadows traced by his indrawn cheeks. The bones of his wrists looked brittle and skeletal and his eyes had the glow of a fever burning inside of his orbs, but what horrified her the most was the sight of his frail shoulder bones, which showed themselves sharp underneath his skin, reminiscent of a third world prisoner, and though not old in years the pitiless talons of responsibility had clawed away all traces and vestiges of his youth, leaving him thinly drawn like a man being consumed by the demon of cancer.

“He has not eaten for forty days and forty nights,” she said to herself and she feared for his life, wondering how much longer he intended to remain on this brutal fast; this fast for knowledge he called it.

# Chapter Three

The young Prophet stumbled from the confines of their tent as though in possession of just enough strength for movement, but not enough for balance. He stood erect and drew deep into his lungs a shuddering wind-fresh gulp of air, then pulled on a thick woolen Lumber-Jack type shirt... for there was a chill in the air as the sun had yet to rise.

He walked past his own bus and then past others that were parked nearby. He pressed forward through a heavily tented area, then through a wooded space between the cliffs and the meadow. After about a thirty minute hike into the woods he found a spot that spoke to him. There he fell down upon his knees and began to speak aloud to the All. Then from nowhere in particular, yet all around him, a purposeful thick mist rose up from the ground enveloping him and obscuring his vision... the mist would mask his sorrows as surely as it hid him from any early riser who might be passing by.

After a few minutes of heartfelt prayer he shifted his body into a full lotus prayer position. Sitting cross-legged he began to silence his fevered mind so that no errant thoughts of a physical nature could avail themselves of his attention, thereby breaking his concentration. For this purpose he chanted the word "Hu" into the chilly air.

After a sufficient time he abandoned his meditative prayer and in a voice consumed with sorrowful delirium he cried out, "Take this cup from me! I don't want to die! My mission has only just begun. I could heal the world of all disease. I could teach humanity to manifest all their own needs, and I could teach them about you, Father. And about you, Mother." Tears took his face and his voice collapsed in upon itself and silence grew long as he came to his senses and apologized to the heavens for whatever he might have said in his moment of hysteria.

"And if God gave you the power to do all of those things, and even greater things, what would it benefit them?" this question was asked by the tall shirtless Angel suddenly standing before him, clad only in a pair of denim jeans.

The Prophet looked up from his place of sorrow and his eyes fell upon the Angel of the Lord. His eyes momentarily cleared, and he responded, "J\*\*\*\*\*, I thought you had forsaken me."

"I am with you always, though you see me not," replied the Angel kindly as he walked closer and knelt in front of the wild haired youth. Softly he continued. "It is neither my purpose... nor yours to alter the design of the world. And even were we to combine our spirits to rid the world of all famine and all pestilence and all suffering, we would not be doing humanity a great service. It is through much suffering and much hardship that each individual is perfected. If we rob them of the fire which purifies them, this constructive force that builds them, you would only succeed in interfering with their life plan; you would be stunting their spiritual development. It is sad to say that the Gambler must ultimately learn the discipline of restraint through total financial devastation, and that the dope-fiend must learn the reality of his true nature when faced with the decision to either rob his loved ones, or to kick his habit. It is the way of the universe that the one who chooses whoredom over love must one day become old so that she can experience the loneliness of her choices, and as hard as it is to see, it is this loneliness, which will ultimately bring her into communion with her Creator. And it is equally true that the bed-ridden cripple who today cries for the touch of a healer, is experiencing that useless body, so that in the next life they will understand the fragile nature of things physical and therefore put them aside for things spiritual.

"Yes my beloved, you could rise from here and do all of the things that you desire to do and make humanity infinitely more comfortable, for the power is yours to command. Or, you could simply get up and walk away from here, from your Destiny, that power is also yours to command. You could walk away and live to a ripe old age; all these things are yours for the asking."

At those words the Prophet lowered his head for a few seconds, and then raised it back up. He looked deeply into the blue eyes of the Angel that stood over him and as he did so two tears welled up in his eyes, then spilled down his cheeks. "J\*\*\*\*\*" he stopped himself and choked back any further words, for none were needed.

A silence prevailed, then the Angel broke it by saying, "If you choose to meet your destiny, you will die before the next sunrise" as quickly as he had appeared, the Angel was gone.

The young Prophet fell into a heart felt prayer but this time his focus was centered and when next he broke his concentration the first light of a new day was opening the horizon to the reality of a divinity some chose to ignore.

Birds flew over, near and around him and at last he found contentment while sitting cross-legged upon the woodland soil as though nothing in his life was amiss. He watched the eastern sky as it lost its darkness to a cascade of unbelievable colors; a truly glorious dawn broke over the mountains. Then, with a slight smile on his face, he nodded his head and peered up into the heavens. "Alright. Ok," he said as he lifted his hands in a friendly act of surrender and added, "not my will, but thine."

After a period he rose to his feet and brushed the earth from his pants. And as he began retracing his steps back towards his campsite he seemed to have arrived at a turning point of some kind within himself, a place where he found a rejuvenated vigor. With a voice that was spoken maybe aloud, maybe not, he encouraged himself in much the same way that an athlete might by saying, "Well, so what; I had seventeen years, some folks don't even get that. This is a test. I know it is. Yes, I see it clearly now. Abraham was not tested so that God could weigh his faith. No, he was tested so that he might know his own character, his own nature. He failed; selfish. If he had said 'Take me instead' he would have been a better man for it. And that's exactly what is required of me, right now; that I not place myself above others." In this way did the Prophet of his people talk to himself as he made his way back to his shelter.

At the campsite the new-Magdalena sat worriedly waiting for him to return. She was boiling coffee over a fire and her heart leapt joyfully as she saw him break the tree line. Her keen eyes scanned him for any changes in his condition, and in the swinging of his arms and the jauntiness of his step she saw her prayers answered, and she smiled. It was obvious to her that the monstrous weight of that which had, for reasons unknown to her, pressed down upon his shoulders had at last taken wing. He looked young again as his wild hair blew in all directions.

"Can a cracker get something to eat around here?" he said teasingly.

The Magdalena blinked in momentary surprise, and then replied, "What, you think this is a Denny's or something!" They both smiled.

# Chapter Four

After they had eaten he spoke to her privately of many things, most of that which he told her has never been written in any book out side of the Book of Knowledge. And when the others had risen he ate with them, drank coffee with them and then called them to him. And he taught them.

“Master, teach us to pray,” one of them asked.

He nodded his approval of the question and spoke. “Prayer is not at all what most folks think it is. Listen carefully: if God knows the number of hairs on your head, and if God knows the very instant that a sparrow draws its last breath, then God must also know every other thing that can be known... to include whatever reason or motivation compels you to pray to him. So, do not be fooled into believing that prayer is a task performed only when you want it to be. Nor should you be fooled into believing that prayer is a task performed only with words,” he then hesitated to make sure that he was not being misunderstood, then continued “because the truth of the matter is, that your every thought is a prayer, and your every thought/prayer is heard by God. So do not waste your time with vain, worldly prayer. Do not waste your time asking God for this thing or for that thing, because just as surely as there will be air for you to breath, God already knows your desires long before you even act upon your own thoughts by asking for them. Therefore, you must be ever aware of what you allow yourself to think, Yes, that’s right, you must be careful what you think, because if your thoughts are focused upon perversions, then those perverted thoughts become your prayer, to God. And if your thoughts are on violence and anger and hatred, then know that this also is a prayer created by your own mind, which you have sent winged towards God. And if your thoughts are otherwise focused upon something negative in substance, then expect your ‘negative thought generated prayer power’ to go out from you and into the world and create that negativity for you. It is only common sense to assume that God will hear you at all times... not only those times when you wish it to be so.

“Therefore my child, do not be fooled into believing that prayer is a method of communicating with God, which is somehow under your control like a switch that you can turn off and on whenever it pleases you to do so. For the PC/mind of humanity is linked directly to the Server/brain of God. To teach you how to pray requires that I teach you how to think, and that my friend, I strive to do with every word I speak to you.”

“Master... I... have a question,” said a voice softly from the back.

“Yes, sister. Ask it aloud, so that these others might hear.”

“Well. When I told one of the families down on the beach, that you were... that you were Jesus... they became angry. They insisted that if you were the Second Coming as I professed, that you would have selected as your followers people like Billy Graham, Gurumayi, the Pope or Johnny Morning; not some rag-tag bunch of social outcasts, like us. Is this true?”

The Prophet looked into the soul of this humble woman and he smiled, for he saw in her heart the triumph of Self-Realization. He asked, “And who do you say that I am?”

With a bowed head and a quiet but sure voice, she instantly replied, “You are the Christ reborn. You are the second coming as spoken of in the scriptures!”

The young Prophet nodded his head and pursed his lips. And he spoke the truth unto them.

On that day many secrets were revealed unto the followers of the man who was “The Voice in the Wilderness.” Great were his words and great were his actions. He took water from the ocean and he put it on them and said, “I am anointing you with water”, and he began to cry, for the truth of all he had been taught suddenly came upon him in waves of nausea. “The end is near! The winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

While the Prophet sat in communion with his disciples not one save him knew that at that very moment a convoy of eleven buses had arrived on the Lost Coast, carrying the army of the Most Faithful, led by the unholy preacher Johnny Sunday Morning.



# Chapter Five

## Johnny Sunday

As they arrived, they began to congregate in one area of the meadow, a scant few miles from where the Prophet's own bus was parked.

Upon recognizing that the new arrival buses bore banners and streamers marked with various logos from a conglomeration of different Christian Churches, a delegation of Rainbow-Tribe Dog Soldiers were dispatched by the Quetzalcoatl Family hierarchy, to assess the intentions thereof. Concer of course arose because of their great number, but on top of all that, no one wanted a bunch of fanatical Christians running around disturbing the balance of tranquility that had been maintained there. It was bad enough that they had to deal with that damn Prophet kid and his bus-load of guilt tripping freaks.

Johnny Morning was at the head of the small coalition that greeted the Dog Soldier emissaries; he smiled and gripped the hand of the leader, tightly. "Welcome," he told the man, who in fact had been there two years longer than he had. "Glad you could join us" he added. The Dog Soldier blinked in confusion as Johnny Morning steered him away from the others and up into the interior of the first bus. Once inside the bus they closeted inside it for nearly a half an hour. In that period of time, it was decided that he would have a one on one sit-down meeting with the leader of the Rainbow Family and at the end of that time Johnny Morning left with them while the Most Faithful waited patiently for their leader to return.

As he was led away towards his meeting he rehearsed the speech that he needed to make when he came face to face with the hippy leader of this rag-tag group of outcast gypsies, then he glanced at his Rolex, two pm, he frowned, concerned about the time. This matter would need to be resolved tonight; his people were not provisioned for an overnight excursion. He chuckled to himself as he conceded the point, mentally, that if need be, he had the resources to have an entire hotel air lifted into this godforsaken place. It was good to be rich and powerful.

After what seemed forever they arrived at the place where the Rainbow Tribe called home and he was pleasantly surprised to find himself at the center of a fairly large array of wooden cabins. As he glanced around he saw ahead of them the only cabin with a large radio antenna protruding from the roof, "Command Center" he thought. Once again he went over the highlights of his speech, then smiled to himself and thought, "What person could say no to that?" then chuckled out loud at his cleverness.

As they neared the doorway a large bearded man wearing a roughly sewn pair of denim overalls stepped out of the opening, regarding his visitor, warily.

"My name is Johnny Morning" said the preacher as he stuck out his hand. "I'm sure you've heard of me!"

The big man ignored the outstretched hand. "I've heard of you alright. What can I do for you?"

Morning smiled and lowered his hand with an air of indifference. "Well, for starters, I guess you could be polite enough to give me your name, friend, since I've already given you mine."

The big man shrugged. "Name's Tree," he stated flatly.

"Tree, is it." He made a show of looking the big man up and down. "I can see why they call you that. You must be about six-ten, right?"

The big man nodded. "Six-nine, actually."

It was Reverend Morning's turn to nod and as he did so he stepped close to the Rainbow leader and said softly, "Tree, I need to talk to you about a matter of great importance... a matter that, will prove itself to be extremely, ah, shall we say... profitable to both of us." The big man glanced at the people loitering around in earshot, then turned back to the preacher and ushered him inside.

The two men entered a room made cheerful by the warm, crackling presence of an afternoon fire. They took seats in front of it, then as an after-thought Johnny Morning leaned forward and wrestled a wallet from his trouser

pocket. He flipped it open and fished from it a cream colored business card with gold-leaf-embossed lettering on it. He presented it to the other man with a flourish. The big man set it to one side without even looking at it.

“Like I said preacher man, I know who you are, and that phony Christian jive that you’re in the business of selling to the suckers, doesn’t cut it around here. You’re in pagan country, mister. This ain’t the kinda place where a Pentecostal Christian can fill up a collection plate, you can believe that!”

Morning nodded and smiled. This one knew more about him than he let on; the casual dropping of the Pentecostal moniker had proven that. He was mulling over his next move when a tall, plain looking woman sauntered into the room. She stared at the visitor with a, frankly, disapproving expression on her face then turned to smile down at the big man seated in the other chair.

“Want somethin’ to drink, Tree?” she asked with a throaty purr in her voice.

“Yeah, grab us a couple a beers, babe, and then come back and join us. Preacher man here has a spiel that he wants to run by me.”

The girl left and Johnny Morning frowned. However, before he could vocalize his objections to having another person sitting in on his private conversation the big man smiled. “Don’t like the idea of a woman being around when important matters are being discussed do you, you parochial bastard.”

Johnny Morning stared levelly at the man who called himself Tree. Perceptive son-of-a-bitch, he thought. “Actually, no, not at all. I have a wife who stands beside me and who guides me on every sort of decision great or small. So, that’s not it Tree. I just think that when a man like me, gets in touch with a man like you, it stands to reason that the things which need to be discussed might be of a sensitive nature; best kept to ourselves.” The man called Tree gave him a cold stare.

The woman returned carrying three bottles of micro-brewery beer by the necks of the bottles. She handed two to the big man then sat on the arm of his chair and took a swig from the third. She stared owl-eyed at Johnny Morning.

“Preacher man here is on a secret mission.” Tree said to his women, as he tilted his bottle and took a drink. He wiped his mouth, then added, “Says he wants to talk in private, so there’s probably some law he wants to break.”

The woman snickered then took a pull from her own bottle, swatted her lovers arm and replied, “I’ve got better things to do than to listen to you two hatching up some scheme, Tree. I’ve got some potions to brew and some hexes to cast, and my flyin’ broom needs a cleanin’, so if you’ll excuse me, I’ll go on about my business, then.” She grinned at the preacher and moved towards the door.

“Okay, babe” Tree said as he watched her leave the room. He leaned forward and at the same time tugged at his crotch like a man does when he’s ready to talk business. “So, we’re alone. What’s on your mind?”

Without preamble the Preacher stated his case. “I’m looking for somebody who calls himself The Prophet. My sources tell me that he and about twenty of his followers arrived here about a while back. I’m told that he and his band played down on the beach the other night. They gave out food and drinks. Sound familiar to you?”

The big man finished his beer, silently. When he finished he said, “Yeah, I know the guy. What’s your business with him?”

It took a half an hour for the Reverend Morning and the Rainbow leader to arrive at the crux of the unholy deal. A cashier check exchanged hands and the Rainbow leader agreed that none of his people would go near the beach for the next twelve hours.

# Chapter Six

## Johnny Sunday

That evening, the Reverend Johnny Sunday Morning gathered his thirty-three captains around him and explained to them what he had learned concerning the noisome Warlock that they sought. More importantly, he told them what he expected them to do, or, what God Almighty expected them to do.

At eight pm that same evening the thirty-three each in turn gathered his own cadre of ten and amassed them together into one large assembly, in front of them, atop one of the buses stood Johnny Morning. “My brothers and sisters” he shouted. “If you look around you, you will see before you the very heart of Babylon, herself. This place is called the Lost Coast for good reason. For it is truly that. It is peopled with nothing but homosexuals, drug addicts, thieves, anarchists, adulterers and oh yeah, there are witches, here. Pot smoking liberals of every stripe!” The crowd began to grumble.

“Worse than all that though is their leader, a demon plucked straight up from the bowels of hell itself. A demon. A known worshipper of Satan!” Again the misguided crowd grumbled and for the first time since he began his speech a snake of fear slithered through the crowd.

“I have information that this devil worshipping fiend who dares call himself ‘The Prophet’ was ordained by Satan himself! In exchange for his immortal soul, Satan has given this man the illusion of power, satanic power. But he is a dark disciple who preys on young girls between the ages of eight and fourteen, girls he uses for rituals, sexrituals.” The earlier moment of anger intensified.

“This must be stopped! This must not be allowed to continue! This hell spawned creature cannot be allowed to terrorize Christian homes and pervert our nation. And sodomize our children!” Johnny Morning pumped his fist in the air and his mislead army burst into a thunder of voices as they shook their Bibles in the night.

# Chapter Seven

## The Prophet

The Prophet sat quietly atop a log and watched as nightfall completed itself to become a panorama of lights twinkling against the inky darkness of space.

“Oh, baby, look, a falling star!” exclaimed an excited new-Magdalena, unaware of her prophetic words. He lowered his eyes and prayed silently within himself for courage.

He stood and faced his disciples who were even now lounging around nature’s living room awaiting the nights promised concert. “Friends... please, friends.” They stopped immediately to give him their full attention. “Tonight there will be no need to prepare food, nor will there be music, Tonight I fulfill the purpose for which I have been born!”

Confusion, “What are you saying Master?”

“What I’m saying is that I want you to forget the equipment sitting on the beach, and to climb into the bus and leave this place, right now! There isn’t much time!”

Confusion. “My love! What is this? What are you saying?” this from the suddenly frightened Magdalena.

With an upraised hand that signaled for silence the barefooted youth said, “At this moment there are more than three hundred misguided souls marching down the pathway towards this clearing. This very night I will meet death at their hands.” A roar of disbelief went up from his disciples. He ignored their disclaimer. “If you leave now you’ll be able to avoid them.”

His followers implored him to get on the bus with them and to flee; they reasoned that if they could avoid them, then so could he.

“Have you heard nothing that I taught you in our time together?” he chided them gently. “Have you not learned that all things which happen are as they are meant to be? And have you not appreciated the fact that there is life after death... so, why should my death concern you at all.

“Concern yourself not with me. Instead know thyself... and you will know God. Control your thoughts as a mother sheep controls her lamb, lest the wolf consume it. I love you. If you love me in return, then do as I ask.”

The Magdalena once again the adolescent teen cried, “No. I will not leave you here to die!” At her own words the full weight of what was taking place fell upon her and consumed her completely. “NO! NO! NO!” she shouted and cast herself to her knees upon the ground, as if that could somehow alter destiny. “You are the greatest man alive!” she shouted, hopefully. Then added, “If you show them your power... I mean, if you show them how you heal the sick and manifest food from thin air, and everything else that you do, they will see you for who you are. They will know that you are a man of God! And they will not harm you!”

The Prophet knelt beside the hopefully distraught girl and placed his hand atop her head. “You speak from the heart, beloved. But, in truth, they would not see me as you do, nor would they spare me. They too, are destined to do what they must. As you will do as you must. And I will do as I must. Now go, for they are near!” This he shouted at his followers.

Reluctantly, the disciples of the man called Prophet, forcefully restrained the new-Magdalena and loaded themselves into the bus as instructed.

After they were all loaded into the vehicle, the young Prophet stepped up and into the stairwell of the bus and smiled into the faces of his beloved friends. Then he laughed with childish delight and said, “You guys look like someone just stole your puppy!”

Despite themselves many of them smiled.

One of those with him asked, “What shall we do without you, Master?”

He thought for a second and then nodded his head, looking as though something had only just then occurred to him. He scanned the faces there and answered. “There will come one after me whom you will recognize by his

words. He will heal the afflicted. He will cause the blind to see. He has been ordained by God to usher in a new way to govern humanity... a way many will find hard, yet, it is the only way that humanity can survive into the future. For without this new way, civilization will fall into lawlessness, financial ruin and moral decay. Chaos will run rampant and all thoughts of God and spirituality will vanish from the minds of men.

“It is your mission to carry forth with the message of personal accountability. It is your mission to teach Self-Realization and Self-Responsibility to the masses. It is your mission to follow him.”

All was quiet as they considered his words, save the sobbing of one little girl. “But Master, with the storms and confusion, where will we go from here to find safety?”

“The storms and disasters of which you speak are over... their purpose has been served.” His eyes hardened, then a smile bit his lips, “Now be about your business, as I will be about mine.” Without further acknowledgement he stepped from the bus and strode towards the beach and his final destiny.

# Chapter Eight

The Prophet made his way to the shell-shaped cove where he had spent the last few nights of his life making the music he so dearly loved. He stood near his guitar and thought about telling those who were coming to destroy him the spiritual truths of life that were woven like ancient melodies across the surface of his heart, then he changed his mind and crossed himself in the simple sign of those who sought life... and those who sought death, his.

After only a few minutes he began to hear the tramping footfalls of the army that bore down upon him, he could see the glow emanating from the many battery powered flashlights and torches they carried. Soon beams of light began to poke and finger the rock formations at the base of the cliff.

Without fear, he lifted up his gaze into the star dappled nighttime sky and stared... not as one does when searching for God, but as one does when taking a last look at something truly loved.

He lowered his eyes and studied the empty beach. It was devoid of any signs of life, gone were the many blazing campfires that had previously dotted the entire expanse of coastline. Then they arrived.

He leaned to his left and flipped the switch that fired up the generator. The generator roared to life, startling the slowly advancing army of the faithful. Then he turned to the boar that controlled the lighting. His hand brushed several switches and the shell-shaped amphitheater burst into incandescent illumination with him as its focus. Next he stepped to his beloved Mesa-Roadking amplifier and stabbed the power switch. Lifting his guitar he stepped purposefully over to the single microphone-stand that stood at the center of the stage-like area. He thumbed the power switch on the microphone and it came crackling to life. The faithful army flowed into the gap between the stage area and the water.

“Welcome brothers and sisters!” said the prophet to the entire cabal of visitors. “Welcome! In the name of the one true God, I bid thee welcome!”

A short stocky arrogant man named Tex Moses made it known that he was the leader of this congregation by shoving his way to the front and calling out, saying, “And which God would that be, blasphemer!” The crowd surged closer emboldened by his words.

“Why, the God that sent you to murder me, of course!” The crowd fell back slightly at the blatant out-in-the-open acknowledgement of what needed to be kept in the dark and secret silence.

“We are the servants of a risen savior!” barked the man Moses as he crossed his arms in front of him.

The Prophet leaned back on his heels and studied the man named Moses for a moment, as if assessing something that needed to be weighed and measured carefully. Then he looked down at his guitar and thoughtfully fingered an idle cord. He shook his head. “Christians” he muttered as if to himself. “I’ve heard of you.” He fingered another cord. “However, I don’t recall ever meeting one. Am I meeting one now?”

The Moses man spat angrily upon the ground and pointed a finger straight at the Prophets heart. “I accuse you of Witchcraft!” he bellowed. The crowd surged forward. “I accuse you of being in league with Satan! How do you plead?”

The Prophet lowered his head and began playing his guitar, adding an eerie strum to the already heightened tension. When his licks had ended he lifted his head high and stared straight into the eyes of his accuser. “I don’t plead before the likes of you, at all. But, if you are accusing me of being anti-religious, well, I would have to say that I am guilty as charged. With that admission, let me ask you one thing: what good is a preacher, priest, temple or an entire religion if they are powerless to alleviate the world of war, hunger or hatred. In what way do those things benefit mankind? Oh, be sure that they do, but religion cannot explain it to you.

“I concede the point that most religionists are good hearted people, trying only to help humanity as best they know how,” at those words his voice trailed away and his words became like the many clawing, desperate hands of humanity, grasping and reaching for help and he suddenly felt the grief and the pain and the need for salvation.



“I must apologize to you Mr. Moses. I am criticizing religion because religion, like you, turned your back on me in my darkest hour of need. Where were you Mr. Moses, when I needed you, when my family needed you? I'll tell you where Mr. Moses, you were no where to be found!

“Religion, I suppose is a good thing, It was created out of ignorance by the first humans. Later though, the Fallen Angels bastardized it to keep humanity ignorant. But, God would not be outwitted and sent his Angels to create a church which would stand as a bulkhead against the demonic pursuits.

“In truth though, the time has come for a new way. A way in which all churches and all religions will be welded together of the same mind and the same purpose. A time when one does not question or criticize the other... a time of personal accountability.”

“What are you saying, witch? And what devilry are you using to cloud our minds and confuse us?” This from the man named Moses, first to the Prophet and then to the army of faithful. “The Devil is cunning, Brethren! Do not be deceived by his words!”

The crowd began to stir like a pot of stew put to the flames, but the Prophet stilled them with a powerful chord. “You will hear all that I have to say,” he told them softly, and for reasons far beyond their ability to comprehend, they became still.

“This great nation was founded to be a light unto the rest of the world. But it has become corrupted and has fallen into the hands of weak minded men and women who have allowed it to run adrift from its intended course, and as a result it is floundering upon the winds of injustice.

“We have become a nation of freeloaders, looters, people who feed endlessly at the troughs filled by the produce of other people’s labor. Slothful pigs feeding on the backs of the working class. We have become a nation divided into two distinct classes: those who will work, and those who will not work. Producers and non-producers. Those who contribute something positive to the social equation, and those who do not.

“This non-producer attitude,” he continued “is infecting the working class families whose children are being taught to be ashamed to work for a living, ashamed of what their history is, of who their people are. The working class values are under attack. The working class family structure is being ridiculed into oblivion, and as a result of this lose of family values, eighty or ninety percent of our nations crimes are being committed by the anti-work segment of our society.

“The wealthy-class, who controls the entertainment industry, waxes fat by promulgating and perpetuating and glamorizing the negative-people and their negative-lifestyle and they consistently cause racial hatred by altering historical facts, thereby causing one race to have enmity against another.

“Our President and our Congress lie to the Working Class because they are beholden to the Wealthy Class, who profits from turning the Working Class into a slave. He does this by destroying our moral values, our family values and by turning us, the Working Class, into looters. And when we are all freeloaders the economy will collapse, and chaos will abound. When the Working Class becomes a savage, then you will see Marshal Law. When you see Marshal Law, your freedoms are history, for then you will all be slaves. And do you know who is at the forefront of this slavery? Religion. Religion, that encourages the ‘Poor Me’ socialist attitude of the looters. Religion, that makes excuses for these slackers. Religion, who has sold out the Working Class.

“I know that the things I say are harsh, but it is the only way. The workers must revolt while we still have the numbers to affect legislative change. I know that you do not as of yet know what needs to be done, but do not fret, for one is coming, not to bring peace to this world, but to divide it with the sword. He will set one man at variance against his father, and daughter against mother.

“Woe unto thee Christians and unto thee Mohammedans and unto thee Buddhists and unto thee Pagans! For if the mighty works which were unto you were shown unto Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

“But I say unto you that it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the Day of Judgment than for you as Religionists if you do not alter your policies.

“And to you Americans, although exalted unto the heavens, you shall be brought down by your slothful people if a new way is not adopted. If you allow this to happen, then I tell you now, that on the Day of Judgment it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for thee. Repent!”

# Chapter Nine

## Johnny Sunday

After walking through some very rough and rocky terrain, Johnny Morning arrived at the perfect spot from which to observe the shell-shaped amphitheater. He made himself comfortable and hoisted a pair of very expensive German-made binoculars to his eyes.

After leaning closely against the boulder that shielded him from view, and after swatting some devil-bug from the nape of his neck, the Reverend adjusted the mechanisms that focused the lens in his hands. He was amazed at the quality of his binoculars as he scanned the area around him but was unable in the dark to see much. He focused his attention on the area where the lights now blazed, and there he saw for the first time the young man who had become his nemesis, with... with a damned guitar in his hands! He blinked, and then shifted his hands and the binoculars swept across his army of faithful, now standing directly in front of the Prophet fellow.

At first, due to the angle of his cover-stone all that he could see of the young kid was his side profile, not a full view of his face. Then as if in response to his thoughts, the young man turned and appeared to look directly into the lens of Johnny Morning's glasses.

He was surprised with the degree of clarity with which he could see the youth's features, it was uncanny. But, then, that surprise took on a strange sense of... of... recognition! He knew this kid! "But, from where?" he asked himself.

Without breaking eye contact, the Preacher watched as the youth turned his back to him and confronted the crowd, yet his mind never stopped flipping through the program of his memory, trying to churn up any remembrance of the kid. Then in the way that a drunkard would fall into a jug of ale, he heard the echoing voice of his own memory as it halted on the information he had been searching for. There before his minds-eye flashed the memory of the Prophet as a young boy, with an old woman as his companion far from this place, on the East Coast.

He threw down his field-glasses as though they were hot embers straight from hell's fire. He threw his hands to his eyes and rubbed his lids furiously to clarify the picture, or possibly to erase it. But, the truth came ever forward like a morning tide until he could no longer deny it. He saw himself dressed in a suit, pulling the young boy to him for a photo-op. He watched himself arcing ridged as a flash of light flooded into his body from above, igniting him, and renewing him. And then he understood how it had all happened. He knew that this same young Prophet... was without a doubt the same youngster who had somehow given him the gift of healing, a gift that he had squandered. He knew... suddenly, completely, that this kid was the real thing, that he was indeed a Prophet of the likes that the world had not seen in thousands of years. He was mortified.

"Oh, God! What have I done?" exclaimed the Preacher while looking heavenward for answers and unconsciously pulling at his hair. Tears flowed down both his cheeks like liquid ropes and in his troubled mind he felt the hellish flames of his own making.

As if to further punish himself, his mind began to scroll through the storehouse of memories contained within his mind. He relived his youth as his mind rested time and time again on the purity and the piety of his own father and mother. He saw mental images of the three of them kneeling beside his boyhood bed, in nightly attempts at prayer. He remembered his father's weekly visits where he sat with the elderly and the invalids, where he read to them and comforted them and prayed with them. He watched as his own mind somehow became connected to that of the Universal Mind, and how that entity revealed to him a scene where his own parents wept tears of blood over the hope of his salvation. He saw Jesus. He saw Light.

Then in a cruel progression the gears of his mind shifted and his present life was revealed to him in all of its foulness. He saw himself taking off the mantle of decency placed upon him by his parents. He saw himself rejecting morality, and he saw the ignoble and polluted manipulator that he had become. He was sickened and repulsed by what he was seeing, but this repentance in no way curbed the onslaught of his reckoning.

Lastly he watched as he manipulated the Faithful and arranged for the destruction of the kid he now realized to be a Godly Prophet... he grabbed his stomach as the sharp pain of realization bit into his entrails... and he feared greatly for his soul.

Suddenly the hope of one possibility leapt upon him; maybe, just maybe he could stop that which he had commissioned! He leapt to his feet like an excited child and groped the ground at his feet and grabbed his binoculars, then exhaled exorbitantly as the possibility of halting his greatest sin caused his heart to take wing. The young prophet still lived!

In a complete frenzy he climbed atop the boulder nearest the summit and began to shout and wave his arms madly like a man trying to be rescued from someplace. He thought to capture the attention of his Most Faithful. But, alas it was not to be, for the wind was blowing in from the water and the distance was far too great; The Chosen, could not hear him.

He stood atop the boulder and watched through harrowd lens as the Moses man threw a fierce right hand punch, dropping the youth to his knees. "NO!" he shouted. None heard.

Just as he was about to drop the binoculars and make a frantic attempt to run the distance between them he caught sight of a small, dark form rushing into the area illuminated by the generator lights. He refocused the lenses hoping against all other options that this new entry might be able to stop the terrible engine of his own construction. T'was a fine thought, but it was not to be, for it was but a young girl-child, a black one, who fell sobbing defensively atop the prostrate body of the man she loved; the way only a woman can do.

To his horror he then watched as the Most Faithful gathered around the fallen pair like a dark storm and bludgeoned them with stones in the manner of Steven.

Running like a man with no coordination and crying like a heart broken teen, he did his best to find the shortest path to where the Prophet confronted his destiny. But in his distraught frame of mind he seemed to lose his way and became disoriented among the boulders living there on the Lost Coast of Humboldt County.

In the way that a badly defeated runner crosses the finish line long after the race has been won, Johnny Morning entered the area in front of the shell-shaped amphitheater. He stumbled forward through the tightly gathered mass of his hand-picked followers until he stood over the badly disfigured bodies of the two young lovers; one an orphaned girl trying to protect the only right thing in her otherwise misshapen life, the other, just a young boy of seventeen.

Without shedding another tear and with no trace of emotion visible, the fallen Preacher walked from that place — headed in no certain direction.

# Book Five

The End Is Always The Beginning

# Chapter One

## Three Days Later

The fierce storms and inclement weather that had ravaged every corner of the globe died down as suddenly as they had begun and three straight days of glorious sunshine had blessed the denizens of the Angel City.

Judas the Betrayer of Christ looked at the clock atop the high bank tower and saw that it was a little after nine pm. He retraced his step back into one of the cities many alleyways where he stopped to rearrange a large cardboard box, which had served as his sleeping quarters over the last several nights.

He felt a cooling chill in the air that was enhanced and made potent by a breeze which seemed to whip itself down the length of the alley as if that between buildings corridor were a wind tunnel. Judas crawled into the box and pulled down the end-flaps before covering himself with his long and thread-bare overcoat.

As he lay there on the hard unyielding surface of box and asphalt, he reflected backwards upon this past days many accomplishments. His anticipation swelled with hope for the morrow; he felt positive that he was close to tracking down his beloved Master.

He rolled over and tossed and turned and thought feverishly. He thought about the many thousands upon thousands of people that he had encountered during the long arduous years of his restless wandering, then he contrasted all of those against the ones he had recently met, people who had received his Master's healing touch. He shook his head in awe as he contemplated God's strange way of doing things and remembered just how stunned he was to discover that, contained within the auric emanation streaming from those who had been healed, was his Masters unmistakable and undeniable fingerprint: A gold tinting, which gave the receiver a cleansing purity of color. It was as if his beloved Master's touch had not only healed them, but had somehow healed their souls as well. Again he shook his head in disbelief, because even in the olden days, when they had walked together in communion and in fellowship, his Master's touch had not produced this startling effect upon the soul of others. It was a sign and he recognized it as such, His Master had returned and was fulfilling the Prophecy of Ages. "He is close to me. I can feel it!" he whispered to himself, his voice echoed off the inside of his squalid cardboard shelter, "very close," he added.

After finally landing on his back, he chuckled to himself as he thought about the fools chase which had culminated in his following that Johnny Morning character, and how by that coincidence, he had been drawn to the very city where his Master now walked. "God does move in mysterious ways!" he mused to himself.

Slowly and peacefully like a ship adrift at sea, the Wandering Jew slipped into a deep and undisturbed sleep.

Sometime later that evening he began to dream; at first about his mother. He could see her brightly shinning eyes and her rich dark hair which fell from her scalp like a waterfall. She was smiling at him and beckoning him to come to her. Then the dream shifted and he began to see other people as well, first his father, and then a girl he had loved years past. Finally his dreamscape became altered to reflect a tall man with white skin and large almond eyes. He noted that the man was unfamiliar to him and that for some reason he was afraid of him, though the dream figure in no way exhibited hostility or malice towards him. After finding no place within this dream where he could hide or flee, he resigned himself to the fate of the large man who now stood overlooking him as one would a child in bed. "How odd" he said in his dream conscious as he took note that the man wore no shoes or shirt... only denim jeans, like a man of these times is want to do.

More and more his dream became lucid, allowing him to interact with his thinking processes, within the frame of this most unusual dream.

The tall man inside his dream began to speak, but he spoke in a sing-song language utterly incomprehensible to him, save for the soothing effect of its mellifluous ringing tones on the inside of his ears. As if in recognition of the fact that Judas was unable to understand his words, the dream man tapped him on the chest and shouted a single



word that blasted like a loud explosion inside of the slumbering man's mind. It was a name which I, the teller of this story am unable to repeat.

Next, the tall man held out his hands and in one of them appeared a small circlet crown adored with twelve precious stones. This artifact he laid at the feet of Judas Iscariot. Then he was gone. The dream was gone also.

He was abruptly awakened with his startled heart thumping like a small bird's. He recalled every facet of this curious dream with stark clarity and could not help but wonder at its significance, if indeed it had any. The name he had been told continued to sound inside of his head as if he himself were reciting it.

He felt a sharp pain in his hip and realized that he was now lying on his left side with his back wedged against the hard and unforgiving wall of the building, in whose lee the cardboard box was sheltered.

Shifting himself once more onto his back in an effort to find some meager comfort a quarter fell from his pocket, tails. Then, as if to toll the sound of destiny he heard off in the distance the deep throated bell of some unknown church ringing the twelfth hour. His eyes told him that it was unusually dark outside of his box, which lent its own mystery to the night's happenings.

Deciding to investigate this misplaced darkness, he back-crawled from the confines of his box and stood beside it in the ink black alley... it was as he had guessed... absolute darkness. "A blackout" he thought.

Looking skyward he saw a bountiful span of stars dappling the wide arc of heaven; they had not changed even a fraction in two thousand years, he marveled.

Slowly his eyes became accustomed to the pitch-black night and he was eventually able to make out the shapes of things. Using his improving night vision he looked down the course of the alleyway and could trace the edges of the buildings, and the shapeless huddled figure of another homeless man who shared his alley, looking much like a pile of discarded garbage.

Amazingly, his eyesight became so acutely adjusted to the lack of artificial light that he actually spotted a small vermin scurrying about the base of a nearby dumpster. With a wave of undesired perplexity, he felt a deep sorrow enveloping him as he pondered the vagaries of the physical world... and of the things of human construction. Silently he wondered why he felt the way he was feeling concerning life... it was akin to losing a good and trusted friend.

For the first time since crawling from his box, he noticed that nothing else was moving as far as he could see or hear. There were no automobile sounds, no flying plane sounds and no human sounds what-so-ever. And, curiously enough, there was no moonlight to create the multitude of shadows needed to define this three dimensional twisted and savage world.

He glanced curiously at the fingers of his right hand and saw them not as expected, not cloaked in dark shadow, but, rather, shrouded inside of a golden net! Yet, he knew himself to be awake. How strange. He inhaled a deep breath as if to test the taste of life... he was conscious and he was alive!

Suddenly, the narrow alleyway was flooded with bright light... yet nothing else in the alley stirred or responded to the illumination, it seemed that he and he alone was privy to its existence. On and on came the eerie pulsing light, moving in waves and pulsing rhythms. He stood transfixed and watched as it advanced closer and closer; he felt an immense pressure blossoming within his chest; a spathe enveloped him completely. Then it was gone and once again he stood in the darkness.

He could hear the undisturbed breathing of the old man curled up sleeping nearby. For reasons unknown he felt the need to pray, but before he could finish with his first Hail Mary he heard footfalls, and with eyes closed he listened and waited for the night's mysteries to play themselves out.

He opened his eyes just as a man turned the corner, entering the alleyway and walking towards him. He could see the man's outline but could he not make out his features, the most disturbing thing about it was, that the man walking towards him had no aura. It was as though he were a dead man walking, yet somehow he knew that that was not the case, here, tonight. Judas shuddered and involuntarily reached up and made the sign of the cross over his chest, right to left. In two-thousand years of restless wandering he had never encountered such a creature as this.

Eventually the figure approached him until he became illuminated by the soft ethereal glow of the man's body. The anti-ghost stood at arms length from him and Judas looked questioningly into the face that now confronted



him and then in a flash of recognition he dropped to his knees and kissed the man's bare feet. "Master!" was all he could think to say.

"Arise, my old friend," said the Master.

Judas rose slowly and once again gazed into the eyes of the man he knew as Jesus, eyes that reflected starlight, magical eyes that gripped his very soul. Cavernous eyes, eyes so deep and so vast that Judas could look into them and see the moon, the earth and fields of blooming flowers, all at the same time. Eyes so powerful that they held not only the universe within them, but Judas as well. Then they smiled.

"Judas, you didn't tell anyone the Donkey and Fig story did you?"

Released from his inertia by his Master's ever present humor, he chuckled and replied, "No Master. That story is safe with me."

The two old friends smiled, embraced... and then they were gone.

# Chapter Two

## Three Years Later: Somewhere in Oklahoma

A tall, exotically beautiful woman with yellowish eyes walks down the old creaking steps of the garage apartment where she lives. Although in the prime of her life, she wears no jewelry and just a faint trace of makeup... to highlight the natural color of her lips, and to add a faint touch of blush to her cheeks. Her plain dress is the type which can be purchased at any discount clothing store, yet, on her it looks regal. In her left hand she carries a heavily used plastic jug by its handle. The plastic container is filled with lemonade made with her own hands. In her other hand she carries a paper sack filled with two sandwiches and an apple.

She walks two miles down a lonely Oklahoma two-lane black-top road that stretches straight as an arrow flies, through rolling fields. As she walks she smiles up at the sun and luxuriates in its warmth... humming softly to herself as she ambles along. As she walks, she watches the ground that passes beneath her feet and subsequently is able to step around an ant she might have otherwise not seen. She hears the music of serenity as it is produced by birds at play, and she hears the sound of the gentle breeze as it glides across the surface of the earth. She also hears the distinctive sound of the universe grinding out its movement.

The woman stops momentarily and she squats down to admire a small purple wild-flower growing through a crack in the asphalt at the side of the road. As she does so, a wooden crucifix falls from her dress and dangles on a length of hempen string, like the shield of some mighty warrior. She whispers something to the little flower and then rises to her feet to resume her journey.

After another mile the woman tops a hill and stops to admire the savage beauty of the earth in front of her, only then do her eyes land upon her destination, the whitewashed walls of an old wood framed, single room church; the light of the sun makes the church appear as if it were sculpted from a single beam of light. She allows her eyes to rise in supplication towards the church steeple, atop which sits another modest wooden cross, albeit this one larger than the one hanging around her neck. The cross on top of the church is painted solid white... a beacon to all who might see it and seek hope.

After pausing to make another sign of the cross over her breast, from left to right, she smiles and then re-focuses herself on her mission. She must now decide her options: Should she stay on the black-top, or should she cut across the cow pasture that stands between her and her destination? She glances down at her thrift-store wristwatch and decides to save herself a half mile of walking by cutting through the field.

Leaving the rural two-lane roadway she steps to the barbed-wire fence where she skillfully maneuvers herself through each of its three strands like a girl one fourth her age.

Halfway across the field she encounters a sun-bathing rattlesnake. Startled by her sudden encroachment the rattler coils and instinctively shakes the rattles of its naked constitution. She stands quietly in the pathway that cuts through the field and watches as the viper unwinds itself and pushes past her feet in wingless flight. Her eyes beam with unbent reverence for the bond which ties her to all things - even to her brother, the serpent.

In her stillness a bee lands undisturbed upon her cheek and a butterfly floats past her face, gliding first this way and then that... as if it were tacking upon an ocean of wind.

As the woman casually resumes her journey she shifts the heavy plastic jug filled with sweet yet tart lemonade into a better position beneath the crook of her elbow and changes hands with bag and jug. The yellow-eyed woman begins to hum aloud, the tune is recognizable as an old-time Gospel song, one popular fifty or sixty years ago; perhaps she learned it from someone when just a small child. The wind continues to blow softly and coolly, the sun is warm and inviting... "A nice day for a swim in the creek" she thinks to herself.

She now maneuvers herself through the far side of the barbed-wire fence, crosses the black-top road before proceeding up the gravel driveway of the small country church where one Joshua James Morning preaches three

times a week. The front door stands open and she enters, seeing evidence of fresh paint scrapings lying in piles near the door.

In the churches open worship area she passes down a center aisle looking and listening past twelve rows of pews on each side. What she did not hear were the sounds of more paint being scraped, no sound of machinery being used to prune the grass, no sound of hammering, no sound at all save her lovely bare feet moving in ballet steps across the wooden flooring: Beautiful feet.

At the back of the church, behind the pulpit and to the left of the Baptismal Font was a door which served no real purpose, other than to meet the requirements of some bureaucratic paperwork come about long after this old church had been built. She moves towards that door and opens it. As she opens the back door of the old church building she sees off in the distance a large oak tree with a man sitting beneath it. She walks towards it and sees, him, sitting with his knees drawn up to serve as a backboard for the notebook that he is feverishly writing in. He does not seem to notice her as she approaches and drops silently to her knees beside him.

“Did you have those dreams, again?” asks the woman, concern showing in her voice and etched across the surface of her face.

The man stops his scribbling, but does not look up to meet the woman’s intense gaze, in fact he seems to turn his face slightly away from her resembling a small child shying away from an abuser. The woman responds by laying her hand upon his shoulder in an attempt to lend comfort to something that she truly does not understand. She moves her hand to the chin of her husband’s bearded face and pulls it gently towards her, gently, yet inexorably, until his weary and wounded eyes meet her own.

The woman peers deeply into the fatigued eyes that gaze back at her and she is deeply moved by what she sees in them. She grabs him lovingly by both ears and shakes him, just a little, “Don’t you quit on me,” she says sternly. She takes the man’s head into her arms and pulls it down to her chest. She runs her long elegant fingers through the tangled thatch of his long hair and lovingly rocks him in her arms. He permits this, closes his eyes and relaxes.

The woman begins to sing a song that is dear to both him and her; it’s their song. There is strength in her arms and resolve in her voice. Women are just stronger that way.

When the woman senses that the time is appropriate she releases her hold upon the man, then pulls from the pocket of her sundress a small folding plastic hairbrush. With this brush she proceeds to unravel the knots from his windblown hair, and then brushes his locks to a sheen. In turn she does the same to his long beard, before refolding the brush and slipping it back into her pocket.

“Let me cut your hair and beard. I promise not to cut it too short... just a little off the ends.” She speaks these words as if talking to a small child. “It’ll make it grow faster and fuller!” but the tenseness in his body says “No.”

“Okay, sweetie, I won’t cut it until you tell me to. But, I think you look much more handsome with your hair short and your beard shaved, or at least trimmed up.” The man shuddered as if the last thing in this world that he desired was to be considered handsome.

Smiling sadly the woman brushes a stray lock of hair from the man’s forehead, then takes him by the hand and pulls him to his feet. The notebook upon which he had been writing slips to the ground unattended. Neither of them speak as the gentle summer breeze brushes against their flesh like an adoring kitten craving attention. The woman glances down at the fallen notebook, always the same she thinks to herself, something resembling a flying horse. Something like fear tugs at her heart and she pulls her husband close to her, wrapping her arms around him in a fierce embrace, like a mother holding a dying child.

“Your father says that there is a Revival Team coming to town next weekend honey,” she tells him. Then adds, “So, we need to get the church ready and the grass cut... clean out to there!” she says pointing to a spot about fifty yards out past the normal culture line of the churches broad expanse of lawn. “He wants to put up a large tent right over there, to the left of the church,” she hesitates, then adds “pop says that the windowsills and the door jams need paintin’, and he wants a fresh coat of white put on that steeple, but don’t you worry none ‘bout that, ‘cause some other folks are comin’ to do that.”

“And out front...” she continues as she leads the man by the arm, giving him the complete run down concerning the Revival plans... which was the biggest thing to happen in these neck of the woods in quite a while, and excitement was present in her voice.

# Chapter Three

## Joshua Morning

The days rolled endlessly along, as they always do, and the following Saturday afternoon found Reverend Joshua James Morning and his stunningly beautiful wife J. Thompson Morning, milling nervously about their little church, as if inspecting it prior to a visit from the Pope, Billy Graham or the Dali Lama for that fact,

J. Thompson Morning, known to all as Johnnie, was a strong willed woman of rare beauty. The two had been married now for... well, since she doesn't want you to know her true age, I'll just say a long time, but don't let that fool ya', 'cause she can still, "stop a clock" as her husband is want to say.

The country preacher walks over to one of the churches three east-facing windows and starts to lift it open, then hesitates, calling his wife to his side. With a pointing gesture of his chin and a raising of his eyebrows, he draws her attention out through the window to where their only child sits beneath the Planters Oak, reading his Bible. The old preacher lays his arm over his wife's shoulder and says, "I don't know what happened to that boy J.T., but on top of not speakin' he spends hours underneath that tree."

His wife shrugged. "Better like this than the way he was before."

"Yeah, I know. But I wish he'd at least talk a little... tell us what happened."

"Baby, I'm not sure I want to know," she answered.

The two continued to watch in silence as their daughter-in-law approached their son with a glass of milk in hand.

"That gals a keeper," the preacher said, flatly.

"Yeah... 'spose your right about that, though I'd of never believed it to be the case. She gave up everything to care for 'im. Not many woulda' done that. God bless her for it too."

The Preacher opened the window and then husband and wife went about the business of putting a fresh coat of oil on the wooden pews, a weekly event for them.

# Chapter Four

## J.T. Morning

That evening, Joshua Morning and his frisky wife J.T. returned to their church as expected where they saw parked to the rear of the building a couple old school buses, all painted with flowers and crosses, peace signs, doves etc. Off to the left of where the buses were parked, in an area marked off with stakes and orange flags, a group of about twenty people hurried about the task of raising a large revival style tent in a practiced order. The couple stood watching the activities for a few moments, and then the old man spoke. "They say that whole crew is made up of ex-prostitutes, junkies, thieves and murderers."

"Praise the Lord!" extolled J.T. while nodding her head.

From within the fabric of the tent being erected emerged a black man of average height, who, upon seeing the couple broke into a wide gold toothed grin. "I'm Lionel" he said as he stuck out his hand. "Thanks for havin' us."

"I'm Joshua Morning, and this pretty little thing here is my wife, Johnnie. Welcome!" The couple and the traveling evangelist shook hands and then hugged, and as if by script other members of the traveling group came over and did the same.

Off in the distant sat a long haired observer watching from his perch beneath an old oak tree. He scrutinized the activity from his far away spot marveling at the efficiency of the workers as they went about the business mobilizing their program. He watches as his mother helps to carry folding chairs and then tables. "What a woman!" he thinks to himself. He watches it all.

Later that same evening, just before the falling cloak of darkness his woman approaches, "Sweetie" she says. "I've been worried about you... come on home now! I have your supper ready... Come on," she reiterates.

He rises to her command, then stops short of further movement and looks her in the eyes. "I was afraid you'd leave me."

She shook her head at the first words he'd spoken in over three years, then said after a moment of hesitation, "It took the loss of everything for me to realize that love is the only thing in life that's important." This she said as she grabbed the front of his biboveralls, pulling him up against her. "I love you. And I always will. And I'm never going to leave you! Don't you worry 'bout that none. Now come on. We got a long walk ahead of us. Let's take the black-top, 'cause the fields full of trip-holes, I don't like ta' walk it at night.

# Chapter Five

## The Revival

The revival was scheduled to start at eleven am, but that didn't keep the church folk from arriving as much as two hours early. So many in fact came early that there were already cars parked on both sides of the narrow asphalt ribbon which fronted the small country church for what seemed like a half mile or so, before the first hymn was even sung.

This Revival was more than just a religious event, it had also turned into a grand ol' country festival, the likes of which had not been seen around these parts for quite some time. The men came dressed almost identical one to the other in their new overalls, white shirts and straw hats. But the women, now that was another thing all together, they came garbed in a stunning variety of colorful summer dresses complete with widebrimmed sun hats adding an old fashioned beauty to the whole scene, much the way that a flock of brightly plumed birds enlivens the stunning panorama of a lush green jungle.

The children, now they had their own groupings, running this way and that, playing games and laughing to beat all. I might add that more than a few dogs had joined in the fray, loving the rough-house chasing and playing as much if not more than the kids did themselves.

Most, if not all the women folk, and the older girls of course, brought some sort of food item with 'em, everything from meats to sweets, from elaborately decorated cakes to homemade pies and breads. There were frosty jugs of lemonade, cider and sweet tea, sweetened with more than just real sugar, they were sweetened with love as well. All of these things and more were set on tables, separated by food group; meats here, sweets there, salads and vegetables on the other side. And every delicacy that had been brought would surely be eaten after the morning service... and woe unto the husband or sweetheart caught eating the specialty of another cook before that of their own wife or girlfriend.

"You wouldn't see any of that in L A." said the Evangelist named Lionel to one of his team members. "Nope!" he continued. "These people are the backbone of this great nation! They built it! They fight to maintain and preserve it. And it will be on their shoulders that the Master's new world will rest. They're the salt of the earth" he said, the man standing next to him nodded, in affirmation.

"If all people were like these," Lionel said, waving his hand to indicate the folks in fellowship around him, "can you imagine how beautiful the world would be? This is the true Working Class of America. They aren't on welfare, or lined up to get a free ride. They don't spend five hours a day watching near-nude women jumping and pumping to violent music on the TV. They just work, build and take care of their families. Families Rick... families. That's what they're all about. And that's what the Master taught us; honor in self, pride in families. And the love of Truth, as well. That, my friend is the whole of the message, which is now our message." Both men were silent for a spell as they watched the people milling about.

"We can't make people change, Lionel. They have to want ta' change, else all we got ta' say will fall on deaf ears."

"No, Rick, you're wrong about that, With some folks you just have to force them to change, because on their own, they are unable. I don't mean that we should go Edi Amin on 'em, because the last thing we need is a police state. What I mean is that if you remove the crutch... then they'll learn to walk... or they'll die. And given THAT option, believe me - they will walk. You simply cannot allow the free-loader mentality to flourish, because it breeds violence, slothfulness, criminal mentality and unspiritual thought. The Master spoke of it... personal accountability, he told us. All people treated equally."

"These people, Lionel, they'll receive the message because they were brought up with those values, but when we take our message into the inner-cities, they'll kill us for it!"



Lionel shrugged. “You may be right about that, Rick. However, I believe that the majority of city folks are decent and hardworking, just like these here. I think that the knuckleheads are the minority, not the other way around. And if I’m wrong, whose fault is it? I’ll tell ya’, its a society that breeds a mentality where a man doesn’t have to accept responsibility. Trust me, the decent people in the cities will receive our message in the same way as these rural families. Working men and women don’t like the idea of supporting freeloaders... it doesn’t matter where they live, what religion they practice, or what racial background they come from. A working family is a working family and once those families are convinced that the elderly will be taken care of, properly... they’ll support a philosophy of personal accountability. At first it’ll be hard, but in ten years every one in the country will be grateful to those who had the courage to stand up and change things. And...”

“Lionel, we’re ready for you,” interrupted a small-framed woman with a turnedup nose and a mousey face.

# Chapter Six

Johnny Sunday Morning sat contentedly with his head pressed up against the tough and knobby bark of the Planters Oak. It was a sleepy peaceful Sunday morning, and the pancakes and Black Strap molasses that he had had for breakfast was just now beginning to settle in his belly. He too, watched the comings and goings of the family like atmosphere outside of his father's church; he especially enjoyed watching the happy antics of the children as they laughed and shrieked and ran around the lawn in a spirit of uninhibited playfulness, among them, the children of the Revival Team members. He watched as the leaping, laughing children were finally corralled and led docilely into the revival tent by their respective parents and he could not help but to smile.

He watched his wife and mother, both of whom busied themselves with the arduous chores of being radiant hostesses. Then he watched as a hundred folding chairs took hold of occupants.

He watched as his wife and mother positioned themselves so as to guard the groaning tables of food from the hungry dogs, and he watched as the world slowly turned towards its impending and unalterable design.

# Chapter Seven

## Testimony of Faith

The soft sun reclaimed the earth from the morning cloud cover with beaming rays that sang in long streamers of light, illuminating the darkened leaves and giving life unto their shadowed brides.

Without thought he raises one of his hands and rubs the scar tissue running the breadth of his neck, the remains of a failed attempt to unseal the wine of death and pour forth its measure. He leans back against the trunk of his faithful tree and closes his eyes. He sits and listens to the ringing in his ears then presses past the sound, moving inward. After a time, the sounds of the outside world reasserts themselves upon his drowsy consciousness, taking on the shape of an old-time hymn booming out from the folds of the revival tent nearby. He hears the clapping of the faithful and he hears singing voices rising up into a stunning crescendo as the emotions of the Revivalists became whipped into a frenzy, anticipating a visit from the Holy Ghost. It would not be long before they would be whirling like dervishes and speaking in tongues.

Abruptly the music slams to a halt. After a moment of silence he hears his father's voice leading the congregation in prayer. Without his initiative a spiritual fire begins to burn deep down inside of him and his hands knead and stroke the grass without direction.

At the end of his father's prayer, Johnny Morning, opens up his eyes and hears a quick thumping on the microphone before a strange voice comes booming through the sound system. "Greetings" booms the voice. "My name is Brother Lionel. And these good folks behind me are my family!" A thunderous round of applause erupted from inside the tent.

"Thank you! Thank you! We are happy to have the opportunity to worship with all of you hear today, and for the rest of the week, as well!" More vociferous applause followed.

"Before we get things started by sharing with you the first of this week's message, entitled 'Personal Accountability: God's Religion,' I would like to invite sister Gracious to take the podium and give us the blessing of her testimony." A slight hesitation ensued and the man under the tree seized the opportunity to once again close his eyes and lean back while enjoying the solid comfort being lent him by his old friend, the oak.

"Hello," said a soft well spoken female voice through the speakers. "My name is... well it is unimportant. My mother is a good and decent person who cares deeply for me, her youngest child. My father was a very important man.

"When I was fifteen, I was on top of the world. I was popular at school and considered very pretty. My life was as good as any teen could hope for. But, at the age of seventeen, I went to a house party with some of my friends... an innocent 'teen' party, or so I thought. Much to my amazement, one of the girls I had gone with produced a small clear packet containing cocaine." The voice hesitated and then continued.

"At that moment, right there at that party, I, a young girl from a good family, with a decent background, arrived at the place where I had a very important life-altering decision to make... though at the time, I did not recognize it as such." Hesitation.

"I guess that each and every single one of us can look back and pinpoint one or two decisions that we made which ultimately altered the entire course of our lives. For me it was that night, and the decision that I made that night would knock the balance of my life off-quilter and cause me to spiral into a pit of misery and destruction. A future of unthinkable actions was the choice I unwittingly chose that night. I said 'yes', instead of 'no'. I made the wrong choice. I took the wrong path in the forking crossroads of life. I chose the wrong door."

Johnny Morning found himself in tears at the heartfelt words of this unseen young woman that he remembered briefly knowing, and the obvious sincerity with which she delivered her story. As a result of her testimony he contemplated a few of his own bad decisions before his mind came to rest on a single moment in his life where, as a child, he had stolen money from a church collection plate to buy a baseball glove. Instinctively, he knew that to

be the moment, the action, which charted the course for all that had come after, and he wondered why - why did he do it? Why had that larcenist opportunity present itself to him? Did that type of temptation happen to others, as well? He wondered if it had all been some pre-ordained set of circumstances designed to ultimately bring him to this exact point in time, this exact train of thought.

"It no longer mattered to me how much my family loved me," said the voice over the microphone as he refocused himself to the woman's testimony. "In fact, it never occurred to me at all... I took it all for granted. I thought only of myself. So, without the slightest regard for the consequences, I stood with my friends and snorted that first line of cocaine.

"At first, I have to tell you it was great. I felt as if I were super-human. I could stay awake for long periods of time, and in my mind, I thought I was acting normal... but it was only a facade... because, what I could not bring myself to see was the fact that had become addicted.

"One afternoon I was desperate to get high, so I went to my dealer's house and asked her for a dime bag. My dealer shook her head and told me that she no longer sold powdered cocaine, but was instead selling rock cocaine... it was still cocaine, but you smoked it instead of snorting it. She offered to let me try some, and of course I did.

"Over the next six months I continued to smoke crack. Little did I know that as a result of this, my life had become flawed and my thinking process distorted and inhibited. My walk changed and I was too high most of the time to even care about my personal hygiene. I became rail thin and the features of my face became hard and drawn as my weight loss took its toll. Slowly, this darkness began to weave its way through my soul and I could feel its dark and bony fingers beginning to squeeze the very life from my body, but I didn't care. I just wanted to get high! Though I still knew right from wrong, I could not muster up the strength to resist doing the wrong thing; I lied and I began to steal, from my family!

"One Friday night I went into my mom's room and I stole the money she had in her purse and went to my supplier's house, intending to buy dope. Much to my dismay, my dealer informed me that she did not have anything to sell, but, that if I wanted to take a ride with her over to her old neighborhood that she would buy something for me from an old friend of hers.

"My mind and my instinct tried to warn me that her old neighborhood was the most dangerous place in the city, and that I should not go there," the woman paused like one does when they are about to admit something unpleasant.

"I knew better than to go there, with her. But, once again... I chose drugs over what I knew to be right. I justified it by telling myself that as long as I was with my dealer friend, I was going to be ok. I went with her.

"We drove across town into a place I had never in my life gone before. We pulled up to this fairly normal looking house and my supplier informed me that I needed to go inside with her because it wasn't safe for a girl from my side of town to be seen alone in that neighborhood. Once again, against my better judgment, I agreed. The pull of my addiction was heavy.

"Once inside the house, I was told to sit down on the couch and wait while she and her friend took care of a little business in the other room. After a few minutes my friend returned and told me that everything was good, and that she had to run out to the car and get her purse... for me to stay put. As she walked out the door a strange feeling, a sixth-sense of impending doom tried to alert me to danger, but I was not in tune with my spiritual self, so I ignored the warning. Then I heard my drug dealing friend start the engine of her car.

"Startled, I leapt to my feet and moved quickly towards the door... however, just as I was about to take hold of the front doorknob, the man who owned the house where I had been left, abandoned, grabbed me by the hair and pulled me away from the door.

"I screamed of course, but he slapped me across the face several times and told me that if I didn't shut up and do as I was told, that he'd kill me. The way he grinned as he said it, made me believe that he meant what he was saying. Then he told me that I had been traded for a dope debt.

"I was brutally raped, repeatedly..." At the sound of these words the woman's voice trailed off and she began to weep, so did many of those in attendance. After a spell, the woman regained her composure and continued.

“I couldn’t even go to the police, ‘cause I was buying drugs! After that night my life took another downward turn, because even though I tried to right myself, I couldn’t. Something inside of me had become bent and broken.

“After being traded for dope, and raped, I quickly mustered up enough strength to quit the drugs, but in doing so I replaced them with alcohol. I tried to find love, but I no longer trusted men, and because of my experience I could not have a normal relationship. Over the next several years I went through a hundred different men... maybe more; I don’t know, for me it was always the same, I was unhappy. My life, as I knew it, had become a series of ups and downs.

“Then one day I did meet a man I could trust, a man very different from all of the other men I had known, save one. A man who chastised me and taught me personal discipline regarding the perils of alcohol, drug and sex abuse. A man who gave me something that no man had ever given me... he gave me confidence. He believed in my intelligence, and my abilities. We would spend hours at night talking about all sorts of different things, ranging from the spiritual all the way to world economics. He believed in me, when all of the others only believed in using me.” Johnny Morning wasn’t in a position to see her do it, but at this point the woman looked over her audience and smiled, then she continued.

“He used to tell me these stories, parables he called them, about a beautiful flower standing alone in the middle of a vast field -me. About how this farmer -him, had found the little flower standing alone in his path as he was plowing a field. Rather than to allow the flower to be destroyed by the plow, the farmer stopped his work and dug the little flower up and replanted it in his own garden, the garden of possibilities, the garden of self confidence.” Her voice smiled as she recounted the story with fond memories.

“Of course, I did not at the time understand, but later, when that man was murdered, and later, after I had once again wallowed in the mire of bad decisions, the deeper meaning of my encounter with him rang true. What I now know is that he just wanted me to achieve my highest potential. He was the only man I ever met who saw me as something other than an easy piece of... well you know what I mean.

“I now understand that everything that happens to me, be they positive things, or be they negative things, is the direct result of my own choices. That I am the one that creates my own successes, or my own failures by virtue of my own thoughts and actions. And... that the tragedies of my early life, were caused by my own negative decisions.”

The woman lowered her head as if looking directly at the microphone positioned in front of her, then looked fiercely into the crowded tent. “The man, who pulled me from the field of failed thinking, was indeed a special man, a man who salvaged and helped every single person in our troupe. And, over the course of the next week you will hear their stories, and their testimonies concerning the events of their own lives, and, believe me, some of their stories are far more disturbing than mine. I assure you of that! And... over the next week you will hear many tales concerning the special man I just spoke about... and you will come to know him as we did, then you will appreciate WHY we all called him the Prophet!”

Johnny Morning’s attention was once again snapped straight forward. His mind, which had been comfortably at rest through the later part of the woman’s story, suddenly became troubled and unsure of what it had just heard.

“What did she say?” he asked himself aloud.

“And,” continued the woman, “you will also hear the story of how our special friend spent the last few hours of his life on a windswept section of the West Coast, where he and his mate greeted their deaths in the service of both a love for each other and a love for God.”

At the sound of those words Johnny Morning felt as though he had just been stabbed in the guts by the rapier of guilt. It became intently clear to him now. This Revival Team! They had been the Disciples of the Prophet! They had been the followers of the man he had murdered! Quickly he rose from that place and began to stagger slowly towards his small apartment, sobbing as he went, so great and so heavy was his burden of sorrow.

# Chapter Eight

## The Revival

Over the course of the next week he faithfully sat at a distance and listened to the Revival Team deliver their messages. Many was the time that he was moved to tears, other times to laughter as one by one the former acolytes of the Prophet stepped up to the podium and shared their testimonies with the congregation from this small rural neck of Oklahoma. The testimonies that were given traced the various trajectories of their lives, lives that were lived in city or country, in wealth or poverty, in ease or in hard labor, divergent lives that converged to one central point: each life had been set upon a new and better path by the man that they called “Teacher” or “Master” or simply, “the Prophet.” A man who had entered each of their lives and had shown them the awesome power of their own thoughts and of their own minds. He had taken each of these people by the hand and had lifted them up from the mire of addiction, violence, despair and the many facets of failure and had set them on a new path of Self-Awareness.

Sitting beneath the shady bower of his tree he listened as one team-member made a case for the legalization of narcotics to a crowd ignorant of the facts concerning the reality of the issue. He told them that they had to leave their emotions out of the equation and see the destruction created by the underground economy created by the Drug Laws. How that underground economy was single handedly responsible for the gang problems in our country, how this underground windfall of profits created by this criminal economy distorts and perverts and destroys the moral fiber of our nation, far worse than any drug addiction. Furthermore, he made an undeniable case as to how that underground economy was lavishly sustained by the inflated prices of the narcotics it controls. He told of the horrors of young girls who have become the toys of its perversion, and of the children who murder and die at its beckoning. The man under the tree listened and he wept.



# Chapter Nine

## The Vision

It was the evening on the final day of the Revival Meeting and he found himself once again resting against the reassuring bulk of the old Planter's Oak. The Revival at the Full Spirit Pentecostal Church was in the final throes of winding down, but, as usual, the Revival Team had saved the best of their program for last.

Johnny Morning listened to the sounds of the music, the clapping hands, the singing and there was no doubt about it, the Holy Spirit was present. Suddenly he felt someone near him, thinking it to be his wife he opened his eyes, but, it was not his wife.

Before him stood a man clothed in a garment of white that flowed from his shoulders to his ankles. Around his waist was a belt of gold. His head and his hair were white like wool and his eyes were as a flame of fire. His feet shone as though they were made of brass still in the furnace. In his right hand he held seven stars which turned and rotated in a widdershins direction. When he spoke, his voice had the sound of many waters and his words were sharp and decisive like a two-edged sword. When he saw him Johnny Morning fell to the figure's feet, as though dead. But the figure of the spirit man laid his finger upon him and spoke. "Fear not: I am the first and I am the last.

"I am he that liveth and was dead: and behold, I am alive for evermore. Look at me and see!"

Slowly, Johnny Morning raised himself up into a kneeling position and looked once more upon the face of time before and time after. As he did so his spirit-self loosened itself from the confines of his body and flew into the heavens. That spirit, the spirit of Johnny Morning, came to a stop and beheld a great door - it was open, and to go through it lead into another dimension, Heaven.

He heard a voice that sounded like a trumpet saying, "Come hither, and I will show you things which must be hereafter." Immediately, the sojourning spirit of the fallen Faith Healer was whisked away until it came to a throne in one of the seven heavens.

Upon this throne sat One. And It that sat upon the throne was All. In Him was Her and in Them was Light and Darkness, for all is All. Around the throne were four and twenty seats. Upon these seats were four and twenty elders: twelve from the race of the old ones, and twelve from the race of the new ones. Across from them sat four and twenty Angels. Where there was a female on one side, there sat a male on the other. Where there was a male on this side, there sat a female on the other.

In the right hand of Him/Her that sat upon the throne was a book, and another, and another, and many more.

One of the Angels, a male of fierce countenance, and one of the first humans, a female with peaceful eyes, both stood and proclaimed, "Who is worthy to open the books, and loose the seals thereof?" And no man, nor woman, nor angel on earth, nor heaven, nor under the earth was able to open the books; neither could they look upon them. And Johnny Morning wept much because no one was found worthy to open the books and expose them to the Light of Truth.

Then one of the Elders - a young/old grandmother, sayeth unto the Fallen Healer, "Weep not: Behold the Lamb of God!" In the center of the Circle of Elders there stood a figure which continually changed its form from that of one body to another and another. Eleven was the total number of its likenesses.

He watched as the Lamb of God reached up and took the first book from the hand of the All. It was a book that Johnny Morning recognized. Then the figure took the other books one by one, until they all lie in a pile standing erect in his open palm.

The Lamb of God then slammed his palms together, smashing the books contained therein, with that action came a sound like unto thunder and there appeared immediately a white horse and he who sat upon the white horse had a bow. One of the Elders rose to his feet and gave to the rider of the white horse a crown. When the rider placed the crown upon his head blood poured forth and covered his tunic, front and back.

Then came a second rider, seated upon a red horse. One of the Angels arose and gave the rider of the red horse a sword, saying "Take the peace from the earth and cause wars to begin. Religion against religion, until the blood of the innocent children swells the seas."

Then came a third rider, mounted upon a black horse, and in his hand he held a pair of scales. One of the New Human Elders arose and saith, "Go and balance the thoughts of each man and each woman and each child. Let their own thoughts be weighed as being positive or negative, then let the consequences be as they may."

Then there came a fourth rider who sat upon a pale horse, a horse the color of human flesh. Upon the horse sat a rider who was death and hell. One of the Angels rose slowly and with tearful eyes and a grieving voice said, "Go forth, oh you rider of empathy and do what you do!"

Suddenly the place where Johnny Morning had been standing became a vast panorama allowing him to see to the ends of the universe, then to see the earth and all its parts at the same time; things as Heaven sees them.

With gathering horror the spirit of Johnny Morning saw the history of the world, he watched as the Fallen Angels came to earth and gleefully perverted the first humans. He saw their foul offspring with their yellow eyes and he saw humanity enslaved and mutilated and perverted. Then he watched as the rider mounted on the white horse arrived on earth and began to smite the Fallen Angels and their human cohorts. Great was the destruction, but the blood which flowed from his crown was impure and in the end it overcame the rider on the white horse until he fell upon the ground where his body was devoured and eaten by the unholy off-spring of they that were and still are.

Then the scene shifted and the Fallen Healer watched as the second rider appeared astride a red horse. He watched as the All came to earth in Light and Darkness, causing the first woman and then a man to be lifted from the clay of the earth. He watched as the breath of the All became separated from the All and then enter into the new woman and the new man. He watched as the New Humans, along with the rider on the red horse began to multiply and then declare war upon the old ones. He watched as men and women were slain and he watched as the Fallen Ones forged religion and used it as a tool to divide the New Humans and to subjugate them. He watched as the rider on the red horse caused religious wars to burst upon the planet like raging wildfires; the rider on the red horse used these wars as a distraction to keep the Fallen Angels from being able to consolidate their control over the New Humans by wielding a unified World Religion. And ultimately he watched as the Lords of Religion fell upon the rider of the red horse and tore him from his mount crushing him beneath their combined weight where they beat his corpse with rods and staffs of scarlet and gold, emerald green and white.

Then appeared the rider who sat upon the black horse, the one who held the scales in his hand. The Fallen Healer watched as the rider on the black horse removed a speck of light from one side of the balance and cast it upon the ground where it left a mark resembling a rose and a cross. Next, the rider removed another small speck of Light from the other side of the balance and threw it likewise upon the ground where it left a mark resembling a five-pointed star. The Healer watched as the rider astride the black horse repeated this action time and time again - until there were many hidden symbols marked upon the earth.

These "hidden" symbols began to dispel the Darkness, which was on the earth at that time, with Light, causing one of the great beasts of religion to spew from its mouth an infant. The infant which had spewed forth from the mouth of religion was Johnny Morning, and in his hands he held a set of scales like unto the rider of the black horse.

Then came the rider who sat upon the horse of human flesh. The rider's face which had once been another face morphed into that of the fallen healer; Johnny Morning recoiled in shock and disgust at the realization that he was the Demon of Desolation - the fifth columnist! He watched as the power of his reckoning word brought familial conflict, Civil War, Religious War and World War to the planet. He watched with trepidation as the slaving dogs of judgment caused a forth part of the human population to fall into death.

After witnessing this mass destruction of human life he watched as the souls of the dead rose up towards the ethereal realm with much wailing and gnashing of spectral teeth. He saw that upon the head of each soul was written a single word in flames of fire. The word written on their foreheads was in the language of the Ancient Ones, it read "XHEXCTL" meaning, "Non-Productive".

He beheld a great earthquake and the Sun became black as a sackcloth of hair and the moon became the color of blood, like the hair of the Nephilim. The stars of heaven fell unto the earth and great destruction issued forth as

the mushroom clouds rose and spewed their foul venom upon the earth. Every mountain and every island were moved out of their place and the Kings of the Earth and every man, every woman, and every child wailed and cried to heaven for mercy. But there was none to be received, for he, the Fallen Healer shouted at the masses, demanding "Personal Accountability"... and from the back of his fleshy steed he brought death with every thought, and misery with every accusatory look of his fierce eyes. The Sun was lost to human sight and could not be seen from any part of the earth, so great was the destruction. Then he saw as more souls left the earth and rose heavenward, but these had another word etched in flames upon their foreheads, it read "TEXHACTL" meaning, "Religion ahead of God".

After the great slaughter of accountability there was a silence and Johnny Morning saw himself once more as he stepped from the flanks of The Pale Horse and set his feet upon the earth. At a waving of his left hand the Angels guarding the four corners of the earth released the Four Winds of Redemption and the Sun shone down upon them that had survived.

After this ruinous mile of destruction the Fallen Healer saw his own figure standing in front of an earthly throne and before him stood a great multitude which no one could number. They were of all nations, of all kindred, of all peoples and of all tongues. What they previously wore was in an instant changed and they all were given garments of white to wear. They were the workers of the world that had been and now were again.

Then he saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. He saw new cities being built; in these cities all were productive. A new civilization ruled by the Producers of the world... for all of the wastrels and all of the freeloaders were gone. In this new world there was no crime, for people understood that anger and violence and slothfulness had led to the destruction of the old world. Neither were there laws, for all people were now aware of the universal laws of cause and action.

No religion was necessary. No patriotism was necessary. No wealth was necessary beyond that of spiritual wealth. No prisons.

Then the scene vanished from his view and he, Johnny Morning, found himself once again inside his own body, still kneeling. When his eyes regained their clarity he saw that before him stood the figure of a man in the white garment, the figure said, "You cannot find the enlightenment that you seek sitting beneath the limb of a tree. Nor can you achieve sainthood by hiding yourself away from the world in a cave or a monastery. For that is not your destiny. To claim victory you must overcome... not withdraw."

Johnny Morning hung his head in shame and replied "I have committed many vile acts. I have been faithless, I have been deceitful, I have been violent. I am a liar, cheat, thief, adulterer and a murderer. What could I possibly have in common with enlightenment?"

The figure stroked his chin and smiled. "Yep, you are definitely all of those things and more. But only someone who has wallowed in the mud-pits of debasement and degradation can truly appreciate the purifying bath of true spiritual cleansing. And he who has fallen the furthest, has seen the most, and he who has seen the most, knows the most."

The figure drew him to his feet where both men looked squarely into the face of the other. Then one spoke.

"Do you love me, Johnny Morning?" When the Fallen Healer did not respond, the figure added "Feed my sheep."

"Do you love me, Johnny Morning?" the figure asked a second time. Again The Fallen Healer made no answer, this time the figure demanded "Feed my sheep!"

"Do you love me, Johnny Morning?"

"No!" came the shouted answer. "Hasn't my whole life been a testimony that I don't love anyone except myself?"

The man/figure smiled at the Fallen Healer then lifted his hand and pressed it to Johnny Morning's chest where it penetrated his body and gripped his heart. "You have learned the lesson of truth, my child. That above all other qualities is to be cherished. Upon your shoulders will the new kingdom be built. Be that which you are, and meet your destiny. Feed my sheep." The man/figure spoke these last words and then he was gone.

He stood for a time and stared into the empty space where the figure had stood, he then turned to look at the revival tent. The meeting was coming to a climax culminating with an ecstatic array of singing and clapping. He was moved to meet his destiny.

The Planters Oak stood a silent sentinel to the events that birthed a new religion, one that was destined to sweep every religious stoop in the world. One that would teach the greater principles of Self-Realization as it relates to a Risen Savior.

The ancient tree was deaf to his words that night, but if had had ears, it would have heard the startled silence that befell the occupants inside the revival tent when the gaunt and bearded figure of Johnny Sunday Morning walked up the aisle between the rows of chairs and took the pulpit and said, “ I killed God!” And then began to teach them.

The ex-Presidents daughter cried.

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