

H.L. DOWLESS

Collection of horror stories for ages 12 to 112

Tales Of An Enchanted Twelve

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THE TALES OF AN ENCHANTED TWELVE

By H.L. Dowless

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Oh Madeline

The rhythmic melody of the seductive sirens' whispering chant rode upon the midday wind. Inviting, enticing, hexing, seizing hold of mortal mind, invading the very heart, and capturing the very soul. It was a low whisper, it was at first, then it increased in it's gradual volume, until the very curiosity aroused, and one's resistance to it dulled just as gradual.

This rhythm continued in perpetuity; enticing, hexing mesmerizing, and there was no escape into the secular world about. Indeed, no matter where the physical body raced to find solitude, there was none. Be it down the street, into the cellar, into the secluded closet, behind closed doors of one's fortress walls; behold, even into deep and dark woods, there was *no escape!* The chanting rhythmic song sang on the very wind breathed into the heaving lungs, enticing, motivating, employing the brain, the legs, the arms....until there was no resistance. Yea, the desire to fight was literally vacuumed from pit of the very soul!

The legs were then forced, compelled beyond imagination, to move into a forced direction with the same compulsion that a magnet bears when near the opposing end of another. Even in-spite of the very

imagination desiring the body at a specific destination, the legs ambled forward as though going by their own free will, in absence of the mind. The hands may grasp and railings, the arms may wrap the light stands, but the allure grows with more intensity...and the eyes inform the mind of this new direction...in absence of the permission of the mind. Soon the song grows in volume and intensity until every sound that the ears behold is of an eerie haunting beckoning.

The eyes behold the sidewalk path that leads toward an ancient two story brick home that spoke of wealth and glory somewhat faded. The feet then transport the body forward to the direction in the song of the siren. Slowly they enter into the threshold, now into the foyer, and the eyes behold the large extravagant upward winding staircase. The hands feel and grasp the railing as the feet slowly...ever so slowly... slink their way upward to the rhythm of the haunting chant...that spellbinding, rhythmic chant that pulls even at the very heart and soul. Slowly....ever so gently...they walk...one foot in front of the other...until they take that last step onto the ancient heartwood floor of the hallway....

Now the force of the song, the force of the melody, was so intense, so heavy, that any resistance was out of mind, no thoughts of such any where near. The eyes beheld the door ajar in the sacred distance, and the ears could hear the melodious song, that chanting melodious rhythm that so forcefully pulled the limbs forward. The very heart raced with an intensity as though it desired to leap from it's very seat inside the breast. The mind forcefully attempted to overpower the attraction of the song, the hands seized hold of the railing pulling the body backwards, now backwards toward the staircase, but the force of the song *always* prevailed.... yes it always prevailed....until the body found itself standing before the door.....yes, that very door! The heart raced with great intensity, to the point that the breath heaved, causing the mind to feel as though it would cease and the body grow limp.

The sweating trembling hands gingerly nudged the door, and the door silently... thankfully silently....eased open, allowing the eyes to behold the specter of the nymph as she whispered her chanting song that rode forth on the heavenly wind. She sat about in a long sable satin dress upon the large lace covered feather bed mattress gazing into a bronze hand held mirror, gently caressing the solid gold crucifix that she bore on a chain of emerald and gold about her pale neck. As she spoke into the mirror, she moved her hands about the crucifix in a caressing, loving stroke of compulsion....as though she were speaking unto an unseen presence.

The eyes then beheld a vapor, a somber mist, that rose forth from the crucifix into the mirror, then moved forth from the mirror into the room surrounding. The mist, this haunting terrifying mist....then assumed the shape of an apparition whose form the eyes soon beheld, and the mind comprehended. The form....the human form...that developed to the rhythm of the chanting, hexing song of the nymph....soon bore a chilling face - a face of intrepid evil, of wisdom but for the purpose of forever incarcerating those poor weeping souls of the damned.

The heart raced harder, and faster, the hands dripped with ice cold sweat, then mind and the legs desired a magnificent swift escape....but now a strange curiosity compelled the body to simply stay put, for the eyes wished to observe in order that the mind might give divine interpretation.....

The apparition then slowly turned it's dark head until it's face met the concealed eyes at the door. It's face was of a horrid description, so dreadful that the eyes could not bear to see and flowing tears welled up to hide the face that stood before them. The baneful face had a mouth, a mouth that cracked into a smile, a smile that betrayed the fact that it had forced the body of the mortal to propel the soul forward into it's clutches. There was no escape, no where to hide, and now the body stood before that evil one, that nefarious mist of perdition, of Beelzebub and those legions of the damned.

The mouth parted, for those forces of evil had compelled the heart to love, to fall into the forces of adoration beyond all mortal knowledge and comprehension.

“Madeline,” whispered the voice from within the breast, yea that fearful trembling voice. But her ears heard not and her mind made no response to acknowledgment of the existence of the body that

stood by the door. The mouth parted once again.

“Madeline,” but still no response, just the chanting rhythm into the black stone mirror, a stone that was encased in solid brass. Her melodious chanting song still enticing the soul into her somber entwine as the mind beheld the vision of a greatly anticipated embrace.

“Madeline,” whispered the voice from the lips and the heaving breast, even though the demon of enchantment still stood before the body only to smile it's smile of successful capture, it's eternal grasp of mortal soul.

Still no response, no hint of knowledge that the nymph was aware of the body that stood concealed behind the door. That jaded nymph, that hazed damned jaded nymph, but the mind was innocent.....innocent of the judgment and the desire thrust upon it born from the might of the demon....and the lust of the flesh.

The lust of the flesh now blinded those mortal eyes and the wisdom to discern that lay within the depths of the mind. The might of scorned desire now swelled within the breast....the increased racing of the the heart, the sweating of the hands, and the tainted sweat of the arms that stained and corrupted the silk shirt of the body.....

“Madeline,” whispered the parting lips on the wind, but now with more compulsion, more desire. She rose from the bedside, her body turning toward the one that stood behind the door, her eyes now meeting those eyes, her pale face and blood red lips smiled....a smile of compelling desire. Her breath blew her enchanted whisper into the stirring wind.

“Christopher.”

Her mind knew not nor cared not about the demon who once stood before her, nor did it recall her beckoning the forces of darkness. Her pallid hands rose toward her neck as her feet seemed to glide toward the gently opening door. Softly, ever so softly, her glittering satin dress gently glided from her breasts, now gliding upon her hips, and finally onto the floor at her gentle feet. Her nude body eased it's way into the embrace of the mortal who now stood in the opened doorway.

The door now closed by itself behind him, this mortal, and his lips hungrily embraced those lipstick covered lips of that wanton angel of the damned. His heart now knew no resistance, the lure of her poison was that of the belladonna rose, the euphoria, the phantasm and thrill of the moment....in spite of the demon's presence. The eyes of the mortal gazed about, but the demon had vaporized and the mind sought to push the facts of what it so clearly beheld into the closet of deep repression. This nymph, this jaded, scorned angel of the damned, singing her mesmerizing song, compelling his feet and his heart forward into her tainted embrace.

She spoke of love, behold, she spoke of commitment; she spoke only of her soul commitment to him, her forsaking of the past and all others with it! In the mind of the mortal he knew that simply by being in that very place he was sealing his own fate, the fate of his future, the fate even of his parent's contentment and joy, that elderly joy of completion and fulfillment;.....but he could not resist the euphoria...the pleasures....the thrill that he at times so craved and never quite satisfied. Not so much the thrill of disobeying the rules of the preordained, but the thrill of experience, the thrill of just living the mortal's life in a secular world, and simply making the best out of it.

Her house was a nest of jaded angelic bliss, of nymphs uninhibited, of those of whom were damned but lived the sacred bliss of ignorance. That dreaded phantom, that angel of death, had seized up her father on the very day of her birth....or at least the one whom she was told had conspired to give her birth.

Her mother knew no limitations, had made no commitments, and contented her self in the trance of herbs and fruitless pondering. She sold the herb of the ancients, and the pleasures of the flesh for a healthy farthing of gold, or necklace of precious pearl, or ring of gem or diamond decorate'. She bore no limitations, and so those of whom had delighted in her company were compelled to repeat the

enchantment, the tingle of the crying delight.

The crash of the clear sapphire beach, the cool rise of the heavenly smokey hollows, the taste of the virgin agave, was all theirs simply by the asking; the sands of the warm island shores....all for the simple asking and with no hesitations. Yes..... the demon was a skillful trapper!

All the while she whispered of love and eternal adoration, that jaded nymph from tarnished mansion glory. All around were mesmerized, hypnotized by the power of her spell. The glitter of her gold silenced any who knew the truth, and intimidated any of whom attempted to inquire.

By the riverside we walked for hours, speaking of time well spent, of future plans. My mind attempted to chastise my heart and my poor soul, but my heart would never listen to the urgent warning.... though the demon appeared right beside us, giving us his dark blessing. Though my eyes beheld it, but only to compel my mind to push it inside the dark closet once again. When my eyes glanced up from our nebulous embrace, the apparition had vanished once again. His task was well done, our fate well secured in his clutch.

In the holy temple she spoke of saintly acts, giving chastisement unto those of whom had so blatantly violated the sacred regulations of the preordained. Her lips spoke only of acts in the name of kindness, in the sacred name of holiness, betraying no defilement in the company of secular men. Those among the holy delighted in her presence..as she hugged the children...as she spoke kind words unto the diseased elderly and those of whom humanity ignored and despised.

Behold she did give homage unto the holy cross, curtsying, bowing in humble sacrilege, kissing, caressing that most sacred of books while singing hymns of praise unto the glorious one on high. In daylight among the mortals she did praise with ardor and solemn vigor, clutching that most holy of holy books with her right hand....and with the drop of the sun, that dreaded demon of the damned in her left who gave her his own instruction for her part in his diabolical stratagem.

Our walks facing the rising sun gave limitless delight as we strolled about near sand and sea, speaking of glory found in the past, and of our pleasure in ambition toward the future. We both had our plans, and our plans were to merge as one, each benefactor unto the other, giving encouragement when there was none to be found, giving new life to perishing aims when it seemed that there was no longer hope.

As we lay face to face on those distant sands of our hearts delight, each gazing deeply into the others soul, the spirit of discovered fortune seizing the lacy boundaries of her soul... and that dreaded demon of misfortune and despair seizing mine. Oh how sly he was indeed, so sly that I was to never know until the last....that very last when all was lost to eternity.

Oh, that angelic nymph, Madeline, thou enchanting fairy of my soul, thou grasping child of perceived innocence, thou trickster unto the masses untold. Though my mind is embroiled in a colossal struggle with my body, still I try with all my might.....I cannot resist, I cannot win, my fortune is doomed to lay among those lost. Behold, there is only this fleeting moment! I hold it, and only it, in my perpetual cringing grasp. Let all the earth here me! She is mine, oh Madeline, and I have her here.....right now....!

On that blustery wind came the gifts from venerates untold. There was fine wine, splendid bourbon, silk, lace and satin. My senses tingle from the spell of frankincense, myrrh, tincture of opiates, brass, and watches of gold. Unto Madeline, thou saint of the moonlight still, only to be betrayed by the light of the day....But of thee I love all still....in-spite of thy jade.....in-spite of the demon by your bedside....that demon who seeks to plunder my life and my soul, binding me into the raging fires for all future posterity! Behold, thou Madeline, my mind knows thy secret plot, but my enchanted heart embraces thou still...never to let go, not even by a pleading mother's beckoning call.

It was on the dreary twenty third of December, I so distinctly remember, that we made our way unto that decor-ant rose covered temple. It was immaculate, the blooms of holy spring time filled the

majestic air with their life giving sweet scents. The spell was cast, the die now tossed, and my body, my dear heart and soul, knew no retreat; only my mind was left to yell. But my feet traveled anyway, my hand grasped her plush hand, graciously taking it unto my bosom as we walked down that blessed aisle.

Soon we stood before the masses, facing the majestic elder who gave us his honored blessing as we stood before the eternal spirit receiving his permission, hoping that he will only touch us as we speak the venerated vow. She wore the white of cherished purity.....she wore the coveted veil of chastity.....she gazed forth into my very eyes promising to honor her words for all eternity. She stood before the masses speaking her forlorn words of honor and total commitment, and they standing as her eternal witnesses.....

So I placed that ring upon her finger.....that eternal endless bind, only to symbolize our commitment and the pledge of our hallowed cherished oath.....She was mine, eternally mine, and we sealed our pact with that fatal kiss, that kiss of immortal commitment, both in body and in soul.

We rode away into bliss, into sanctified euphoria, into the arms of each other, across the deep blue sea into hidden lands afar. We chose a castle on a lone hillside by the sea as our abode, intending to live in endless harmony.

The days turned into nights, and the new days into weeks and months, and soon our joys were multiplied by the happy cry of our new son. He was all of my joy and my pride rolled up tightly into a single unit, my true love, my eternal life and her's alike. Yea, our joys were like no other to be told, there just is no true picture that any mortal words can describe....

Oh Madeline... it has now been seven long years, and where is your heart today? In the disgusting arms of the demon, is it he of whom has always held you in his sway? Oh my Madeline, what about our time together, our travels and our good times? What about those bad times that life is so wrought with, when we stood by each other to give strength and counsel when they came our way? What about our son, our glorious son, who bears a head of flowing gold and the wisdom of the saints?

Hark ye, now....my mind knows thy secret lusts.....I saw thy treasured gifts....the gold watch, the satin clothes, and the host of Teddy bears! Though my heart refuses my eyes, my mind can still behold the truth..Oh Madeline! Must you sell yourself to the wealthy....no? No you did not, your betrayal was in the very worst of ways! I know the filthy beggar...I beheld his repulsive sable arms in your embrace! You never knew I was there, did you? Oh Madeline, you not only betrayed my faith, but what about the faith of our son? Did you not ever consider him?

My hands opened the sacred book and my eyes beheld the honored instruction, my mind then knew just what it had to do. My feet walked up, my face now smiling it's smooth emotionless smile. My hands then seized her by her fallow throat.... from some unknown avenue sprang that cherished blade....that ever so thin a cherished blade...! Mine eyes never beheld the act, but my bare legs felt the steamy heat of her oozing blood as it ran down my right thigh, only to puddle upon the ice cold stone floor.

Oh my Madeline, what has thou now done? You have forced me to act in honored vengeance, to restore the sacred virtue of family and name, and that of our son as well. These walls have witnessed the act, behold, and the spirits bear the secret to tell. Oh Madeline, the choice that you left me was to forgo it, and the truth you'll never tell.

I drudgingly pulled her corpse into the wood, into that most secret of brush enshrouded clearings. I then proceeded to slice the flesh from the bone, then the bone from the ligaments. I completed the dreadful act in some thirty minutes, or maybe even less. Just as soon as the deed was completed the grunting pigs came a running, hungrily ravishing all of the bloody flesh and the bone, soon not even the earth itself bore no trace.

But the months passed... and I hold not Madeline, no not in honor nor disgrace. Oh Madeline, what

hast thou now done, to go from here forever in eternal dishonor and disgrace? How could you cause such pain to our son, did you not even consider how this might affect him? I now damn you into eternal flame and degradation, be consumed by your sins forever more.....!

They then came for me, my ears beheld their heavy knocks, my heart raced when they rammed in my solid oaken door. They have found me, I know not how. Did the pigs tell? Did some slight speck of blood on the forest floor? Did the spirits who witnessed the crime? Mine eyes beheld the blue of their dress, my wrists felt the clasping bite of their cuffs.... and they snatched me away into the somber mist, casting my quivering body upon the cold stone floor of my dungeon tomb.

So I stand tall here on a towering scaffold of new oak, awaiting my turn at the fall. As they placed my head into that scratching, itching loop of hemp, mine eyes beheld the demon who had engineered this diabolical scheme, and my ears beheld his heavy roaring laugh just before I fell.

Oh Madeline..... just what hast thou now done..., only to damn the flesh into the dust of the earth, and the eternal soul from heaven's radiant sun!

Magistrate's office
995 Morrison Drive
Charleston, South Carolina 29403

Incident report 505A

It was on the fifth of August, 1988, at 0900 hours, that I, Eudora Johnson, was walking along the beach by the battery park. As I walked, I came upon an oblong heap of sand, obviously some sort of heap heedlessly dug and cast aside by some child in play along the beach. The heap bore a strange oblong shape that first attracted me over to it; but what held my attention for the longest duration of time was the strange indigo aura that appeared as a slight mist, and floated just over the top of the heap. Though the mist was transparent, it behaved as if it attempted to conceal the mound from any view of the passers by.

The scent....oh, the enticing sweet scent....was of velveteen roses. Even though the mist gave the appearance, both the transparency and the smell enticed the desire for giving a much closer look.

I could not resist, though I was short on time and needed to travel back home. I then bent down and commenced to dig, first with my bare hands, then with a plastic bowl that I discovered approximately thirty yards from the mound.

I had dug down some one foot and several inches, when I suddenly struck something hard that obviously was not sand. At the same time, the grating sound made by the dragging plastic betrayed the fact that it was not concrete or stone, but subconsciously I knew it to be glass.

I dug with more passion and intensity, soon uncovering a slight blanket of sand that concealed the glass from my view, only to discover that the glass was indeed a pile of bottles, some ancient, and some very modern, but all stuffed with a corn cob for a cork, or some sort of home made stopper. At this

point, I was entranced, as though a strange hex had been placed upon my very heart and soul. I was compelled to continue my investigation.

I removed the bottles from the hole, dusting each one off very carefully as I lay them by my side. I quickly glanced around, and upon seeing no one about and myself being very alone, I continued in my labor.

In total, there were thirty bottles of a liter or so in size. As I inspected carefully, very carefully, I was shocked to discover that all were perfectly dry and very empty...except one. Inside this one there appeared to be a note of velum parchment, but I knew not if it was modern or very ancient. The lettering did not appear to be stained, or smudged, nor faded in any sort of way. I quickly pulled the cork from the opening, dumping the letter from the neck and the mouth, and into the opened palm of my right hand.

I quickly glanced around once more, upon seeing no one, my trembling right hand opened the note, and these are the astonishing words that I read:

Note to the finder of this bottle

Day one, according to my slighted reckoning:

My name is Sam Shepard. I am from Wilmington North Carolina. The date is May sixth, nineteen and eighty six. I know not the time, but I estimate that it is about 1200 hours.

I am an outdoors man and adventurer by personal choice, a teacher and freelance author by trade.

I put in via canoe just above where the Ashley river and the Cooper river converge. I chose to follow the Ashley branch as I began my journey, to an island named for the respected family, Culpepper. This family was once the proud owner of this specific island, but sold it in the due course of time, to another family who chose to raise pigs on the island instead of running a seaside supply store for any sailors who happened by. I guess this fact is the reason why the locals today simply call it *Hog island*.

According to local legend, the old plantation gentry Culpepper family traded with anyone who possessed the cash and was willing to trade, and this included both the saints and the devils of the sea. The island was even rumored to have been the sanctuary of drug runners and pirates, both old time and modern, but no one living now knows the real truth. For this reason, I set out to investigate.

In a couple of hours, my canoe came to beach on the golden sanded shore. The wind puffed in a way that pleased both the hair, the flesh, the mind and the soul. I pulled the canoe high upon the beach and out of sight behind some thick Yaupon bushes, just in case there was any beach side company that I might have to contend with later on in my absence, even though I knew that there more than likely would not be.

I began my adventure by walking through a small stand of vegetation, slightly hacking with my machete as I walked. Soon I was three or four hundred yards back from the beach. In the distance through the cover of thick vegetation, I could clearly discern the rhythmic crash of the waves. The sound was most beautiful to the ears. I felt like just sitting down and listening to the wonderful natural rhythm.

As I slightly hacked at the vegetation with my blade, I soon came to notice that the thick cud-zoo vines concealed an ancient wall constructed with what were obviously very old home made bricks. I had to investigate. I carefully continued to remove the vines with my blade, and then exposed a brick wall some four feet in height and some nine by nine in square feet.

I walked up fully expecting there to be at least two graves inside, but only discovered that the inside center had sunken in some what. I dug into my combat patrol sack, removing my folding shovel, or e-tool, as the soldiers call it. With this I then commenced to dig away at the center. Soon I exposed a heavy door of hammered iron and Catawba wood, which I knew to be one of the most rot resistant local woods.

I went into my sack again, this time removing my military scout hatchet. I then proceeded to chop away at the heavy door, right at the edge where it appeared one of the iron nipples caught into a hole in the iron on the jam, and caused the door to lock. Soon I had hacked enough away that I exposed the latch, and I could then simply take my bare hand and the handle of the hatchet, and lift or pry the latch, causing it to release.

When the door opened it exposed what appeared to be an ancient corridor and a dark stair case that went down right at my feet, and into a cold, damp, pitch black blanket of never ending darkness. In the distance I perceived the intimidating sound of heavy breathing, though I could not make out any sort of presence.

I removed my carry sack from my back, going directly to my hand held spot light; since I keep my combat duty sack very well organized, so organized that I possess the ability to lay hand upon my articles, even in a total absence of all light. I punched the button with my thumb, and instantly the light clicks on. I see the bottom of the staircase, beyond I see the corridor until it turns, but still I perceive the chilling sound of heavy breath....heavy angry breath, though I see nothing to betray it's source.

I carefully walk down the staircase, going with caution toward the bend in the wall to the right, approximately some thirty paces from the stairs. I have always heard rumors of treasure on this island, but for some strange reason, all of the locals, even those who would otherwise appear rough and brave, seemed intimidated to venture in and inspect. That sole thought pushed me forward.

As I neared the bend, I distinctly perceived the sound of movement...of a slow easing movement in consortium. A pulsating mass of slow movement that gave me the feel of predation...yes...., that of being prey to some evil pursuing villain! I cautiously moved forward, snapping off my light with my thumb, so as not to give the predator the advantage of attack in the light, and to give myself the advantage in concealment by the darkness .

The volume increased with every forward step that I took . The heavy breathing....the heavy angry breathing, continued, growing somewhat in intensity. I eased forward in the darkness. Upon reaching the bend and the forward stretch of the corridor, I heard the now intense, but slow, seemingly mass movement just above my head and to my right side, but about three yards out. The forthcoming attack was surly eminent! My heart began to race with an increasing tempo....Would I live, or would I die?

I quickly snapped on my flashlight, and to my sudden astonishment, I beheld a mass of water moccasins some few feet from my head. I estimated that there were probably thirty at least, that many were some six feet in length, or even somewhat more. They were slowly, but with increasing speed.... heading my way!

I made the turn at the corridor, but raced backward, keeping my face on the serpents. I slowed enough so that one would suddenly rush out, then I chopped off his head with my machete in a single heavy swipe! Each one I disposed of in this manner, simply one at a time. I destroyed all of them, figuring that I would have to pass back by them on my way out. I might as well get them now before they get me later, I reasoned with myself.

I breathed a sigh of relief, wiping the heavy beaded sweat from my brow. But the heavy rhythmic breathing...; in the distance my ears could still perceive it, it's threatening forward movement, but my light exposed nothing but brick walls as far as the eyes could see into the thick darkness.

I continued to move forward, with my light guiding the way, and my pistol now ready by my side. I walked onward for what seemed like hours, my cell phone clock now stopping as though the battery had lost it's charge. It was well charged and it should be going strong, but for some strange reason beyond explanation, it ceased. I wonder as to why, I thought as I moved along through the corridor?

I have lost all track of time. It seems as though several days have passed, but maybe I am still in the first day only. I do not know if it is the light of day, or the pitch black of midnight...maybe it is? Still there is a slight wind that I feel bears this heavy, angry, rhythmic breath, that I know not of it's source,

nor if it be friend or dangerous foe. The breathing never stops, never weakens, obviously the being from which it is born, never sleeps. My heart races with the spice of fear, but my mind is persuaded to pursue the thought of gold and outstanding glory. Maybe this be a craft of some demon or spectral apparition to lure me into a trap, or some monstrous man eating being simply hungry for new flesh! The answer to these questions I know not, nor do I have any indications as to the correct answer.

I am exhausted, my limbs are very weary, my heart hammers out of an absence of sleep, and no longer from the forces of fear. Though I still hear the heavy, blood curdling breath, I no longer care...I am just way too tired to even care.

Ahead I round the next bend to discover a deep cleft in the brick wall that formed a corner some six feet deep in the left wall. Here I cleaned a spot on the floor and pitched my tent. I carefully unrolled my bag and climbed in. My eyes closing all on their own in spite of the heavy, soul piercing breath that rode upon the wind and echoed in the distance. Just a little sleep, I ask, just a little closure of the eyes for strength.....

My eyes suddenly are awakened by a great collapsing crash behind me, from the direction that I came in. I know not how long that they have been now closed. The thunder roared for what seemed like five minutes or more, but above it all....above it all my ears still perceived that heaving, angry sound of breath....but it appeared to be closer, even much closer than before....

I snapped on my light with my right thumb, but saw nothing, not even any dust from the crash...I only heard....heard the crash and heard that evil pursuing breath in the distance, but not as much distance as before...it's source appeared to move closer, even surrounding me in from all sides!

Is this evil source a single source, or multiple? Is it of the secular and of the flesh, or is it of the spirit? Oh...how dreadful the thought...how is the flesh to do battle with the spirit? Is it real, or is it just an imagined figment of my tormented mind? I cannot allow this situation to get the best of me, I must move forward with my intention.

I closed my eyes again for some time, I know not how long. I was now completely refreshed. I eased my right hand into my combat supply sack, carefully taking out a packet of instant grits and some multi vitamins. In my front pocket I removed my small folding stove and an army canteen filled with water. I dropped in my burning tablets and soon commenced to boil the water in the stainless steel cooking set. I stirred in the buttered grits, and it made a wonderfully thick and filling porridge. I popped in the vitamin tablet for insurance, and my meal was complete.

Since I still had some burn left in my heat tablet, I carefully poured in some more water, brought it into a boil, and mixed in a teaspoon full of instant coffee. Even in this apparently hostile environment, I could still relax backward and make the best of everything that was before me. Yes, I do agree, just a little grits are always good for the soul!

I repack my tent and supply's, and move on. I continue on for what seems like hours beyond my ability to count. I round nine bends ahead, and soon come into a chamber...yes an elaborate chamber! In the center of this chamber is a dusty box of tamarack that sits still in the center of a cypress table. The box is not locked, so I carefully open it, exposing a detailed map hand drawn on a sheet of parchment. Obviously this was created some time ago, but I do not know how long. I could clearly see that the map was one of the corridors.

As I studied the map, my eyes beheld the glorious site....the chest....the gold and emerald necklaces...the silver chalice....there it was, marked right there on the map so clearly..Behold all eyes....and it shall surely be all mine, all mine for the taking!

Here was the chamber that I was standing in right there on the map. I had carefully logged the turns and their directions on a note page, so that I would have an idea of the form and shape in the corridor, and of my direction from whence I entered in. My drawing nearly matched the map perfectly! Right there was the chamber that I was presently standing in on the map....and two more down was the

treasure....! I am so excited that I can hardly write, nor even speak if you, dear reader, were here with me!

I quickly make my way, I come to a left turn some ninety paces down, and a chamber just as it clearly shows on the parchment map, and then a right turn and a chamber....The next right turn and the following chamber....would be the glorious treasure....and it will be mine, yes....all mine for the taking!

No more labor, no more lay offs and being fired with no real facts to support that decision, no more dirty tax from some pigs' meager choice in paid wages..! Yes, behold dear ones....no more denial of opportunity when I am qualified for the job...damn all of the conspicuous bastards! It is mine, I tell you, and I am the one that will make the decisions and hold the controls....!

My breath heaves and my heart races with overwhelming excitement. I race around the next right turn and into the next chamber, just as the map clearly shows. My breath picks up even more, my heart quickens it's pace, my mouth goes dry, my hands do tremble.....

I glance down at the map, and there it is...just ninety paces more ahead ...is the room, oh...that hallowed glorious chamber that all dear hearts dream of for the duration of their pitiful mortal lives, but only a small few will ever obtain and experience.....

But wait just a minute, what is this? What is this figure standing painted beside the treasure chamber on the map? I shine my light on the parchment, and I clearly see it...a cherubim, lo an angel, a guardian angel I do suppose, bearing a sword of fire and glowing sapphire light in her left hand! In her right hand she bears a skull scepter of smoky incense, like that of the belladonna rose...., and a set of scales before her feet! Behold her appearance is horrid...why did I not notice her figure before now?

I hear the breath...oh the terrible horrible dreadful breathing rhythm that wrecks at.... even at my very soul, my very being! Much closer it is now, much much closer, even at my very back! I quickly snap on the light, but my eyes discern nothing....., only emptiness, only endless winding corridor and the damp ice cold brick of the walls!

Immediately behind me I hear a massive collapsing thundering crash that lasts for what seems like three minutes or more. I have only one choice now, and that is to move forward...only forward. I move with quickened steps toward the treasure chamber...but behind me in the distance I hear the haunting breath, and now the gradual heavy footsteps.....

I reach the chamber, oh...finally that chamber of the heart's desire! My foot crosses the threshold...my eyes now behold that most glorious of sights! In the center of the room sits a three by four foot chest of cedar, some three feet in height. This chest is sitting open, overflowing with gold, necklaces of amber, and jewels of every sort! Mine eyes behold venerated charms of alabaster and emerald rings. I see golden chalice and silver dippers! Not only is this chest of gold and golden coin sitting filled to overflowing, the riches are poured out upon the floor surrounding it. Yes....., 'tis a most glorious sight to behold!

But...but I hear the evil breath.....I hear the footsteps approaching....now I hear a low thundering rumbling roar. Behold, what shall I do? The chamber is the end of the corridor! What shall I do? The only exit is back...toward the beast or demon who approaches, who now roars with anticipation of it's forthcoming gratification!

Hark now....I perceive liter sized bottles filled with strong rum, oh what shall I now do, what action shall I now take? I quickly seize up one of the bottles by the neck, uncorking it with my left hand, and pouring out the contents upon the floor with my right. I will have an additional weapon, I suppose.

I hear the approaching roar....but I also hear the coaxing rhythm of the sea near by, yes, very near the solid wall behind me! I take my hatchet from my bag and began to hammer upon the brick behind me with the flat of the back side opposite of the blade. In some ten minutes or so, I hammer a hole through, but alas, then it hits solid concrete stone, and I cannot make my way to enlarge the hole. The light of day shining through the hole gives me joy and hope on the inside, and I perceive the tinkle... yes, the

glorious trickle, of some creek or stream nearby....yes, right here at my back side!

I hammer with great ferocity, my arms know not the feel of weakness or that of being tired. But the stomps are getting much closer, yes the roar is getting louder, the breath....oh that dreadful sound of the breath...is growing with more intensity. Now..., oh how dreadful...I can hear the slobbering smacking lips.....!

I can only fold up this note and heave it into the ancient bottle. I shall continue this awful hammering with the slight hope that the hole will widen, and I just might...., yes....just might make it through! With cork in place I shall heave the bottle through the head sized opening..... But that evil stone....that stone base in the wall prevents me from enlarging the hole.....!Lo, the beast now draws so much nearer....ever so much closer....help, please, oh please help me, if indeed any one can!

If Only To Forsake The Truth

The man of the house was an honored man, a man venerated by all of the surrounding community. He was a rare find among men indeed. An outstanding success among those of whom dare to venture. A breeder of livestock for meat and milk, a grower of plant stock for both the best of food and the very best of fuel and product.

Though he had inherited two hundred acres from his much revered forefathers, he had accumulated some eight hundred more from his own devices, labor, and dutiful enterprise. He spoke not a tainted word, no matter how much oppressed he became in his daily undertaking, or general misfortune. Seldom did he ever raise his voice...he merely spoke the command, and all around bore ears, and all without were soon to discover the command, and give their dutiful execution without exception nor complaint.

His Sabbath was spent in the local temple, where he did bow toward and venerate the sacred cross. He sang praises to the one on high, he knelt before the holy communion, yea, he was the chosen assistant to the sanctified elder in distribution of the divine chalice and the hallowed wine!

His sabbath evenings were spent reading the evening news, puffing confidently into the air from his daily bowl. Even the smoke swirled about his head, taking on more the form of a cherished halo, than that of the unorganized swell of a common smoke cloud. Many of whom observed were astonished at the spectacle, declaring aloud that his righteousness demanded the honor, and beyond that there was never a doubt among men.

His arms bore the strength of endeavor and industriousness, his head bore the gray wisdom of the years in experience. Many sought his council in time of need, and greatly trusted his sanctified words, knowing that his words were just as true as the fletched arrow flies straight.

Behold, his children were the born examples of youth so righteously raised. Each held their way into resourcefulness and enterprise, walking directly into success as the consequence of positive endeavor. His daughter was the thriving model of chastity... and his son the walking image of he himself. No people could have ever been more contented in their earthy position, thought the wondering whining masses without.

His job from the fields was to lead other agriculturist, giving wise council for them to achieve success. His employment was with the local lord of the county boundary, his salary born from the coffers of the compelled multitudes...and indeed it was a healthy salary; but if one dared to ask, he would always declare his own need and abject poverty.

His dear wife...oh, his precious dear wife... bore a kind heart of gold, but her poor head bore the pains of a hexed vixen somewhat vexed. Many asked but only few could deduce the answer, none even dared ask the man the reason as to *why*. Only the wisest opened the eyes and the ears, bearing the question aloud in the court of mind, then deducing the answer amid the silence of mental voice.

In the fields of golden hay he labored, even his daughter employed herself at his assistance, most of the time to drive the hauling vessel. His son and his son's *assistant* remained in the trailer, one running tossing the hay, and the other carefully stacking the straw blocks in their proper place.

Behold his son appeared... as *his* exact likeness, even his movements, his speech, his endeavors with the hay and fields. Yea....behold his son's assistant, even though some five years older....., appeared ever more *so much in his likeness*... his movements, his speech, and his endeavors with the hay and fields. His movements, his mannerisms, behold his motions at work and play, were all exact duplicates in two, both apparently born from the one.....!

His cherished sanctity for hallowed law was steadfast...his devotion true and unfailing. To bend into the weakness of those among the forlorn masses, of the heathen and the unrighteous, he could never do.

“There is no other woman,” spoke the voices in the wind, carried high by those omniscient ghosts of the saints. Those mortal minds around deleted the question, and the mouths spoke not the detested words, and so the forlorn secret was to hold on for infinity indeed.

Behold the angels in heaven knew well the deleted truth, and how those with eyes refused to see. With the wise in their presence the seraphim held council in private, betraying to those inquisitive mortal eyes the hidden truth.

“There is no other woman,” she said as she wept, covering her face with both of her age spotted hands....

In her mind she recalled the ring of the phone, who suddenly silenced upon her greeting response. Her cheerful husband then going into the back room to lift the ear piece, laughing with a child like jubilee.

“Tis only a business associate,” he would say. “Tis only more wealth in the make, dear darling, never fear.”

The abhorrent picture unfolded now before her, carefully putting those shattered pieces into a single horrid sheet.... She recalled the intoxicating flowers so frequently... and the new elegant mink fur coat... and the scornful manner in which the hallowed seraphim did request *his* need for repentance amid the security of her midnight slumber....

“There is no other woman,” she screamed as she wept!

She repeated her cry.... as she recalled that most magnificent cruise to Europe.... and the month in Paris, the elegant dinners among the glittering corporate elites.

“But there is no other woman,” she repeated in the depths of her mind, with her face buried in her hands, and covered in streaming tears!

“There is no other woman!”

“There is no other woman!”

“But... there is no other woman.....!”

She recalled vividly the brand new car as a sudden surprise, the new thousand dollar Gucci Italian leather hand bag...

“But, there is no other woman.....!”

She recalled the rising eyebrows of her dear husbands' associates... and oh, those phone calls...the enchanting gifts.....the young man who appeared in the exact likeness of himself, standing right there *beside their* son, before her very tear filled bedazzled eyes.

“But there is no other woman!”

She continued to weep bitterly, taking a step from her weathered screen door....collapsing down the stair way and tumbling face down flat onto the concrete beneath the shelter of the auto haven, her face buried inside the bend of her left arm, screaming unto the angels on high.....

“There is no other woman!”

“There is no other woman!”

“But....but, there is no other woman...! Oh Dear God, just how can this be?”

The Pursuit

Silently....ever so silently...I move through those hallowed oaken groves. The beasts lash out from behind concealing bushes - the foul swoop down from vast heights in pursuit....of my warm flesh? In the distance, I perceive the low pitched growl of a crouching panther....or a demon traveling on the wind without?

My feet increase in speed on their own accord as those three intrepid villains bear down in pursuit. Do they desire my capture for some personal gain? Is it the coin that I failed to hand over due to some sudden loss of employment? Are they mortal entities, or some evil vaporous spectral entity conjured up by their hooded saint of that clear crystal orb? These answers I know not, but my soul knows that it must find perfect sanctuary...or all is forever lost, yes all will be forever lost.

I hear voices....yes, heavy coarse voices! I perceive them to be spectral voices from those eternal souls of the damned. They appear beside me, from immediately behind me, blowing the foul wind of their breath into my face, chilling my body as they speak into my ears beside me. I fear they may originate from the very pit of the flaming lake itself!

I leap into the canal before me, still I feel them just above - I glance upward and behold....nothing! They whisper their foul dark words into my ears. They cause misfortune to torment my body and mind. They speak of evil instruction....but I refuse to lend ear or obey.

Behold, they instruct me to destroy the woods by raging flame, destroy the mortals who once surrounded me...yea, even to destroy myself.. but I delight in disobeying their demands! I run to escape their pursuit, and I as of yet, have failed to find it!

Hark now! Lo I perceive their crunching footsteps; Yes, their near silent slow pursuing footsteps! A gust of wind puffs, and I now choose to move away...but I detect *their* movement simultaneously. I halt with the silence of the wind, and the pursuing footsteps halt in their deadly pursuit!

My intellect... yes my delightful splendid intellect and imagination...conceives an intricate trap! I shall swing out in a wide loop, silently doubling back, only to halt at an opening in the wood stand that allows me to view the trail from whence I came. Then I shall get a glimpse of my pursuing villain! I shall then throw my hatchet, destroying this creature for all eternity; then and only then I shall be master of the dreaded moment, and he shall come to know it and curse the moment of his very birth!

I perceive the approaching footsteps, the gentle crunch of that so horrible a master of evil intentions; oh yes, they continue to crunch ever closer to my line of sight! Will my eyes close to conceal the horror? Will my mind refuse to accept the yon view that stands so dreadfully before me? My heart races in nervous anticipation, it's beat increasing in tempo until I hear it's loud pounding in my ears. Yes...all that I hear is it's repressive pounding in my tormented ears!

Those trifling footsteps, yes those evil repressive footsteps, now cease at my line of sight! Yes they cease on the immediate edge of my line of sight to conceal the figure from my anticipated view! Does

he wish to toy with my soul? Does he fear the strike of my blade? Does he know of my defensive intentions! Hark! Now I know fear with an intensity like that of which I have never before known! Is this villain man, or some beast unknown to science or human perception? Is it demonic or sanctified spectrum, wishing only to redeem my poor wretched soul from the endless torment of the flaming pit?

I must flee and take no chances. I must hope for some break in that hallowed horrible thicket, staying only on the streets where the evil fear to venture. There the beast will know not how to travel without exposing his hidden figure to my tearful eyes, or his body to the barrel of those mortal weapons of men.

Ahead I see the glorious light...behold I see the golden rays of light through the trees of the deep midnight forest! My feet move faster, my heart hammers ever more with increasing intensity....Yes my poor aching heart hammers with more ferocious intensity! My throat swells with the blood of absolute anticipation, my limbs tremble with abstract trepidation, my lungs heave even to the point that I fear collapse...but I do make it.... yes, I do make it to the forest edge!

Before me run those asphalt streets....yes those wonderful gritty asphalt streets, and those passing cars with the voices of men; Yes the wonderful warm feel of the sunshine, and the coaxing voices of mortal men. Quickly I step from the wood stand and into the center of the street. The footsteps race to the forest edge..and halt... yes they halt out of the fear of exposing their dreadful being!

My heart now slows in the rhythm of it's beat, the pain in it's center gently fades away. Yes the pain in the center of my breast gradually subsides, and the throbbing hammer in my swelling neck and throat. Quickly I move down the center of those sand covered streets, the warm wind gently puffing my hair to soothe my poor tormented soul.

But now those voices....those evil deviling horrifying voices.... they begin to whisper their dark instructions into my vulnerable ears. Their demonic voices are jumbled, imperceptible at the onset for there are many sources, just how many, I know not. Then they gradually merge into a single monotone; yes they merge into a rhythmic single destructive monotone, only to thrust their eternal pain and gnashing contempt into the very heart of my wretched soul.

I must find solace, I must find relief....hark! I must find security from this diabolical beast or terrible being! There it is....oh yes...there it stands in the precious distance...behold! Oh the proud majestic towers of the magnificent crystal cathedral; there the spirits of saints shall surround me. Yes the venerated elder shall give me salvation from all evil....yes perfect salvation from all mortal evil or evil from those dark angelic hosts!

I near the fortress of the massive crystal cathedral for inspection...Yes, I behold the opened welcome of it's gracious doors! My tearful eyes perceive the beauty of it's sacred isles, and the lavishness of it's lengthy seats. Hark! The seats are all empty, but still I feel a warm presence about, though I see not nor do I hear any mortal presence.

I smell the sweet mystical smell of holy incense, I feel the warmth of its fumes on my cheeks, though I see no mortal view of it's source. On a slight wind within rides the sweet song of sanctified cherubs singing:

“Come, come oh thou persecuted among all mortals, do come!”

The warm beat of my now enraptured heart employs my legs to move forward, forward into the glow of the angelic voice without. Behold I kneel before the sacred alter at the railing....yes, I now kneel at the honored space. That venerated elder materializes before me...I hear the rhythm of his breath and throbbing heart, behold, I even see the movement of his silken garments! I see the golden chalice appear at my breast! I hear that cherished whispering voice saying,

“Take now..., yes take ye from the blood of the suffering lamb.”

I drink all of the sacred offering. I eat of that honored toast. I hear of the cherished blessing, I speak those words of the sacred oath. Into the sky I whisper those deep words of passion, yes, and into the

depths those instructed words of woe. Yes..into those horrible depths I spoke those instructed words of eternal woe.

I felt the warmth of his right hand upon my trembling shoulder. I felt the wind of his breath upon my flushed crimson cheek. I heard the whisper of his holy voice saying, *“Come, come thy tormented soul among the persecuted meek, thou do come.”*

I followed into the sanctity of the deepest chamber weeping, weeping with a joy that my words will never be able to give picture for the mortal to clearly perceive. Upon my nude body I placed that sacred robe of blood crimson silk. In the gentle wind of the saints I heard his soothing voice whisper:

“Come. Come thou, as we shall now walk among the saints.”

Before me now sits a majestic cesspool of holy water, yes, a blessed cesspool born from those cherished spirits of the saints. My nose detects the mesmerizing aroma of the precious incense, and I hear the whisper of his voice on the ghostly breeze within gently saying,

“Come thou, oh thou among the persecuted mortals of flesh and men.”

My feet do rise to pace upon each step, now gently, oh how gently do each one take it's proper place. I near the summit of the sacred stairway, taking my stand before the cesspool of the saints. In it's midst I behold the perfect vision of the being beside me, and the majesty of the crystal cathedral without....yes...the gracious majesty of the crystal cathedral without!

As I step into the cesspool to shatter the crowning reflection, the water draws me into it's loving midst... yes, the sacred water draws me into the warmth of it's exalting midst. The might of the liquid holds me....to receive the honored blessing.... *I cannot move!* The force from above weighs heavily upon my wincing shoulders....I hear the voice on the wind now saying:

“Behold, in the name of the venerated one of the ancients, we do now commend this most tormented among mortal souls...Yes, we now commend the flesh of his conscious body ,yea, and the sanctity in spirit of his passing soul.”

Above my head he swings the vile of aromatic incense, and the vapor of it's aroma entraps me amid the euphoria of it's holy rose... behold.... a euphoria as that of the *belladonna* rose!

Upon my trembling shoulders I feel the ice of his right hand.. yes, I feel the cold of his gradual mutating touch! My eyes perceive the repulsive clove in his feet beneath his silken robe. My ears detect the rasp of his morphing multi voice saying:

“Submit thou, oh one of many hearts and faces. Oh thou one now of that tarnished midnight place.”

Though I now struggle to free myself from the grip of the baneful tainted waters... *I cannot!* I cannot squirm free from the weight of his solid grasp....I behold those freezing cold emerald hands of wrinkled flesh now upon my shoulders, alas, I feel the weight of their force from above. Yes...I feel the weight of their solid force from above! From this subjugating situation now, indeed now, there can be no resolve.

Beneath me now sag my trembling knees that are so weakly, my poor body going in now so weeping and sleepy. Into his emerald wrinkled abominable face I place my gaze... as I slowly sink down beneath the might of his hands; hark, I now go down into those unmeasured depths untold! Deep down into the cesspool my now weakened body slowly sinks, and that voice that I hear from above bids me new welcome; yes welcome into those depths of freezing cold and flame....welcome for all eternity into our blame-full name.

King Of Cat'

In the month of April, when the leaves begin to spring from their wooden sepulchers, and the rains fall from the loft of high heaven above, so geared the mighty warrior, Sebastian Oswald, for mortal combat. It had been four long days since the heavy white glove of his adversary had struck him across his face, which was frozen in shock. It had been four long days now since he had sworn the sacred oath, that he would die for his honors' sake.

There was not a man alive who should strike the mighty Oswald and walk away without a fight. So he told the man to meet him by the fork at Katsle Creek, and it was agreed that they should publicize a decree in the town of Catlerbury, so that the multitudes should have the opportunity to witness the great battle for honors' sake. Not only should it be posted upon the eve of every public building, as it was agreed upon, but at high noon the voice of the town crier should carry the glorious news to every lusting ear.

For four long days every lip had whispered the great news, and that news had been spread into three adjacent towns, and by the eve of the second day had been carried throughout simultaneously by their criers as well, and on farther still. For four long days now Sebastian had neither shown his face in public nor seen but a shimmering glimpse of the light of day.

On the very day of the challenge he had entered deep into the forests' heart to seek the wisdom of the prophet, Ziegle, who dwelt in the belly of the great mount, Froid. By all mortal men he had been utterly despised, so that no mortal man knew of his wisdom but a small chosen few. The great prophet even called them "one in two" for they had endured the same jeering remarks in regard to their bodily contortions, but the masses had underestimated the wealth of power stored within the faith of their minds, and in that of their fathers as well.

When he had entered into the sacred cave, the old man hugged him, saying repeatedly: "My dear brother, behold I have heard! Is it true that you have vowed to die in your honor's sake, oh one of such a young mind and rash a heart?"

"It is true, oh chosen one, 'tis true, and I shall die if I need, but I have an unwavering faith in my skill with the sword and knife, and likewise in the power of prayer."

The old man reached upward with a tawny, shriveled, trembling hand, placing it upon the hot cheek of the great warrior.

"So your decree shall be, young one. So your words have been sworn to oath."

The old man slowly bowed before the great warrior.

"I am truly honored that you have chosen me to be your mentor."

The old man then stood, saying:

"Come now, we shall plead to the Almighty for his assistance."

Down a well trodden footpath the two traveled, and upon the outer edge of the forest which sloped upward into the jagged edge of a cliff, stood an ancient castle cut from the very stones below by unknown hands. It was here that the clouds above hung perpetually low, so low that they touched the very summit of the cliff, causing moisture to continually bead upon the smooth stone walls of the old fort. Such climate allowed huge swells of undergrowth to consume the castle to such an extent that it was concealed from view at a distance, either on

land or by sea. Even so, any mortal who entered into the area over which the somber clouds hung was consumed by mounting, inexplicable fear, and it mattered not whether it was by land or by sea. So endlessly dark was the place, that for ages men had forbidden unto all mortal to enter out of respect for the spirits who dwelt therein.

It was here that the two chosen ones had entered and they walked into the weapon chamber, where a great store of weapons lay for use by any wise enough to seek their knowledge.

The old man placed his trembling right hand upon the shoulder of the youth.

"It was here, so I have been told by the Almighty, that the great Terralazel came to pray before slaying the black dragon that the evil magician, Ozzymoddor, released from the earth's belly, to slay the sons of men. Behold, the seraphim have shown me proof that the Almighty's words were true, my son, for in the chamber where ye shall reside until that fateful day, lay the bones of the dragon's head and the sword upon the wall that he used to slay the evil beast. Now which weapon shall ye use to manifest your endeavors, my son?"

The mighty warrior neither spoke nor signaled by bodily motion as to which weapon he sought to use, but the old man stood patient and silent until the hours had passed and the warrior's pledge of allegiance had been spoken.

"I pledge my allegiance to the sword of the great Terralazel, my lord."

The old man neither spoke nor moved, but gazed upon the wall of weapons as though consumed in a hexing trance.

"Very well then, my brother, but you must know that the great Terralazel was also a great judge in the knowledge of good and evil, and upon his very death his spirit chose to dwell amid the iron of his weapon, so that it might charm and bedazzle the sons of men for all eternity."

"I believe the words that you have spoken are true, my lord, but since he was a great warrior and so am I, then why should not truly great warriors adhere to the same bond of power?"

The old man hugged the young man, then gazed upward into his eyes saying:

"You have chosen your words well my son. Such words betray a wisdom of which the great Terralazel would have been proud. Allow me to retrieve the weapon of choice!"

So the old man disappeared, and in an hour he returned with the sacred weapon of choice, and when the candles had been lit the orange light danced a gay sparkling dance upon the shrouded blade, and the dance made the young man's heart race in a rythematical fashion that caused him to neither fear pain nor even death himself.

"My son, the Almighty has given this weapon to you, and I have cast the rune stones following my prayer over the weapon, and the runes have spelled K-I-N-G-O-F-C-A-T. I shall cast them again to see if the Almighty holds true to his word."

The old man suddenly cast the stones high into the air, and when they had fallen they held true to their word. The young man neither gasped nor betrayed any emotion, for he knew that he had been predestined by Almighty God at the very foundation of the earth's formation.

So the old man seized him upon his left arm, leading him deep into the belly of the ancient castle, until they came to a room at the base of a narrow cylindrical tower which appeared seven fathoms high, ending at a window positioned from the direction that the sound of sea came in. The walls of the room were two fathoms high, and upon the floor near the side facing the sea sat the skull of the black dragon. So great was the dragon's skull that the young man stepped inside where he lay the sword across the dragon's jaw, praying to the Almighty for strength and wisdom to make the prophesy manifest into unswerving reality.

So for four long days now he had fasted and prayed continuously, and suddenly he had

noticed that the perpetual darkness of the tower had transformed into the shining light of day. He fell upon the stones in thanks to the Almighty for filling the place with his glory. For three more days he continued to fast and pray, and upon the dawn of the seventh he ceased his prayer and arose. For it was upon this day that the interior of the tower shown *brighter* than the light of day, and the great warrior was filled with joy that the Almighty had heard his prayer.

So he arose, walking back into the chamber of weapons where a huge banquet feast had been prepared for him in his honor. When he was fully nourished he arose from his seat, standing solid as granite while the old man retrieved his armor, piece by glorious piece, saying a prayer over each one as he placed it upon him from the head down. When he had been fully donned, the old man led him into the foyer of the ancient castle where a white stallion had been saddled for him. He was filled with the joy of Almighty God as he took his place upon the stallion's back.

And away he rode through the forest toward the fork of Katsle Creek, and when he arrived a huge murmuring multitude had gathered in glorious tribunal honor to his *adversary*. It was upon this mount that the entire nation had gathered to bear witness to the great battle for honor's sake. He paused a single league from his armored adversary, and when he paused the entire multitude rang out in great waves of laughter, pointing to him as they cried:

"Death to the peasant rogue who dares to fight with weapons that greatly show the weight of the ages, and he is so slow in wit that he neither has the ambition to wash the grit nor pick the burrs from his broken pony's back!"

His statue remained solid as a mountain of granite, and he spoke not nor faltered in spirit.

His adversary cast back his head, wailing with laughter, pointing to him yelling:

"Halt ye now, thou stupid rogue, before I render thy useless body to the dust of the earth, and thy soul into the belly of hell!"

The wailing cry of the multitudes rose so loud that every ear upon the face of the entire earth beheld it's jeer, and many among the masses mocked him in the manner in which he managed to move himself forward, screaming:

"Death to the duck man! Death to the duck man! Death to the duck man!"

Still he stood even more solid, until he became more solid than the high granite mountains. Some warriors even said that he became so solid that the very stars above revolved around him instead of the earth itself.

"Speak now in thy defense, ye fool, if indeed ye possess the wit to do so," screamed his pointing adversary!

He remained silent, both he and his stallion remained motionless, poised for eternal combat or death.

"Let them, hail the victor," screamed his adversary, holding high a crimson cloth!

"All hail the King! All hail the king! Hail the King," chanted the multitudes!

And the sound of their chant rose higher than any hail that ever poured forth from the lips of men. The beasts of the field fled the scene, for the power in the voice of the multitudes pushed them into the ends of all the earth.

So they fell before his adversary, caressing his armor with their lips, and great hosts of women pledged their bodies unto him when the blanket of the night saw him victorious. Every one, both great and small, cast their life's wealth of jewels upon his adversary as they chanted their hail to his almighty greatness.

Still Sebastian remained steadfast in his poise, and neither grew wane in his faith nor did he falter in spirit, but continued to solidify in the grace of God Almighty.

The overseers then came forth, donned in hooded sable robes, each with crossbows in

hand, and each taking his stance behind each of the dueling men. Then the master chairman came forth, raising his hands high.

“I hereby declare that the commencement has now honorably begun, with great multitudes and representatives from every nation upon the face of the entire earth to bear witness! Do we have any comment from the multitudes?”

Four men then stepped forward, each with a trembling robed girl by his side.

“We wish to pledge our virgin daughters and our entire life savings to the honor of the king,” they publicly stated.

And they cast great hoards of jewels at the feet of the king, and they removed the waist bands of their daughter's robes so that the robes fell in such a way to expose the nude bodies of the girls for the king's present taking, if he so desired.

And as the king indulged in his gifts of precious gems and blushing flesh, the chanting cheers of the multitude rose higher and higher, until the crowd declared him to be greater than any god in heaven or on earth. The multitude receded from the king, and after he had repositioned himself upon his midnight stallion, the Master Chairman again raised his hands high.

“Do we have any further comments from the multitude?”

And the multitude screamed:

“Death to the duck man! Death to the duck man! Death to the duck man!”

Upon him they cast forth rotten eggs and the half rotten bodies of rats and mice, and the dung of both man and beast, until the great stench below caused huge buzzards to circle high above. Again the Master Chairman raised high his hands.

“Do we have any comment from the king?”

“I neither prayed nor fasted, for such is a wasted effort on such a vanity as the duck man, so insufficiently poised yonder,” spoke the king! “I challenge him to even dream of pitting a flea's effort against such a great lion as I! Re crown the victor king of all Catlerbury!”

“All hail the victorious king! All hail the victorious king! All hail the victorious king,” chanted the multitude!

Again the Master Chairman raised high his hands.

The multitude then grew silent as the dead.

“Do we have any comment from the adversary?”

His countenance remained solid as granite as his mouth spoke the sacred words.

“I wish to dedicate my effort to the honor of my greatest supporters and my worst enemy, for both shall lead me into infinite glory!”

And the crowd booed, casting forth great quantities of vile substances upon his person, screaming:

“Death to the duck man! Death to the duck man!”

Again the Master Chairman raised high his hands, saying:

“Officially let the commencement now begin! The first of whom shall be thrown from his mount, then his adversary shall meet him on equal terms.”

Great drum rolls raised high the ebb of anticipation.....

“.....and the fight shall be....'till death!”

Sebastian drew the sacred sword of Terralazel, raising it high until a single beam of sunlight pierced the dark hanging clouds above, glinting, blinding the sons of men who gathered about to witness the duel.

In accordance to the decree, the king drew his sword, rushing forward to the hailing cheers of the multitude, toward the now charging Sebastian. The swords clashed, the multitudes

screamed amid the ringing crash of the sacred steel.

“Kill the duck man! Kill the duck man! Kill the duck man!”

Quickly as a racing buck Sebastian reared his charging stallion again, rushing the king from behind, then punching him with an iron plated fist from his midnight stallion's back, causing him to fall upon the damp earth below. There the king lay still upon his side, and when the mighty Sebastian approached him, he struck forth with his sword, casting the sword of Terralazel from the hands of Sebastian.

But from high heaven above protruded that single glint of glorious light, streaming forth from the polished metal of his face plate, and into the eyes of the king. The great Sebastian now lay hands upon the hilt of his sword, driving the now staggering king backward into the midst of the multitude. The pair halted, then the king swung to the right side. Sebastian suddenly blocked and forced him to move to the left side, then he suddenly struck like a flash of lightening to the right side, slashing the armor of the king and severing the king's head from it's resting place upon the neck.

Sebastian then reached down, seizing the severed head by the flowing golden hair, casting it high into the great multitude who now rushed backward in consuming terror. Many among the multitude took their own lives upon that very spot. The very earth beneath their feet commenced to tremble, breaking open and spewing huge shafts of fire from it's belly.

The great and mighty Sebastian Oswald strode proudly forward, now donned in the king's royal array, now taking his rightful seat upon the throne of Catlerbury, with the queen of his bosom and her honor fully restored, now seating herself by his side.

“What message have ye, oh Majesty, for the new kingdom at thy command,” spoke his bowing personal servitor?

He gazed blankly upon the fleeing multitude below through his portestal window from whence he now sat, his eyes neither blinking nor his mouth trembling. In the shimmering distance he envisioned deep rivers of flowing blood. His ears beheld the voice of Almighty God commanding him to purge the land of all evil inhabitants, populating the land instead with righteous men. His nose beheld the sweet stench of burning flesh as high leaping flames consumed the corpses of hundreds and thousands of thousands. As the smoke settled amid the loft of high heaven above, both he and Almighty God eased backward in their throne, relaxed now that his great achievement had climaxed in the name of all that is holy.

“Let the will of the Almighty be done,” spoke he unto his servitor. “All evil shall pass on this day, and the land shall flow with righteousness hence forth for evermore. Carry this word even into the very ends of the earth.”

The Sacred Garden

The gently surging clear blue waves lapped in a relaxing slap upon a tropical palm canopy that enshrouded a golden sanded beach. It was on this certain beach that a young man in search of himself came to find something that he could truly call his own.

It had indeed been a long drudging search, yes, somewhat of a humiliating search. He had felt like some sort of beggar, pleading for that certain opportunity that he knew would fit himself and his personality just perfect, like a warm velvet glove does on that certain special hand, and no other. Somehow though, it all seemed like wasted effort. It was not supposed to, but still it did so. What else

could he do but just trudge on and try again? Like some sort of prospector of old, searching for the one special vein that he knew would carry the right payload, and his hope for a glorious future with it.

In fact, to be quite honest, he had obtained temporary success. Sometimes it lasted for two, or even three, and on one occasion, four years; but still it would run its course and then he always found himself with nothing, and what felt as if on many occasions, no way in which to ever have anything at all.

He knew that in his home town now, far far away, people were beginning to laugh at his misfortune. Even some of whom were in his own family; behold his own flesh and blood, took some sort of sick pleasure in his lack of success! He had noticed, however, that when he did reach that point of what appeared to be a new found success, these same wretched individuals gritted their teeth in a smug kind of anger...as if they even prayed for his sudden return of misfortune. Then he was forced to sit among them in the place of prayer, listening to them chastise the entire world around them and speak aloud of their own sainthood.

So he packed his bags and rode away to seek his fortune. He moved to a new town some fifty miles to the northeast. There his fortunes did not change much, so a year, or two years, maybe even three years later, he moved again. First he moved from town to town, then from state to state. Yes he had many personal adventures, but had still failed to meet his primary goal, and that was to find his fortune in gold.

Actually his life had not been all that bad, as far as his life outside of work was concerned. He had loved his share of women, and had many risque adventures much too graphic to speak about. He had hunted until the woods around seemed way too empty of their game. He had fished just as much, and had loved every minute of the experience. He had spent his share of time out of doors, which was just where *the place* was that he loved to be. He fantasized about living out of doors, and had actually done so on a number of occasions. He had traveled his share, covering nearly every state, seeing many sights, and he had been to a large number of foreign lands. There were people eighty years old who had not lived even a fourth as much as he had in the course of his short life thus far, but still something was missing...something was just not right.

So he drifted along in search of it, and his misplaced fortune, until he had landed on this heavenly tropical paradise here just off the Venezuelan coastline. The locals here about called the place, "*isla de paradiso*," and it certainly was a sanctified paradise right here on secular earth.

Upward from the beach as he walked there were mountains which bore a strange emerald colored stone all over, seeming to be mixed in with the very soil itself.. These mountains were blanketed with a thick tropical leafy vegetation that bloomed year round in jubilant reds, indigo, and calcimine just like the sweet scented carnations back home. Then there were those wonderful orange lilies that seemed to speak of a certain heavenly contentment that was sure to come his way.

Amid these heavenly blossoms arose a canopy of coconut palm, palmetto palm down low beneath, and various tropical shrubs that gave haven to a large number of brilliant parrots and parrakeets. Along the earth before him, right where the edge of the mountains met the beach, raced a number of medium sized Iguana that simply lay very still, observing his presence as he slowly ambled passed.

From high in the mountains came the hexing spell of the gentle waterfall which fell from a glorious height, right down into a crystal clear cesspool. This sound, and the aromas in the air about him, placed him in a euphoric trance like state as he ambled along the beach, reenforcing the feeling that now truly he had found a welcoming home.

As he walked along the beach, soon he came to a certain open air lounge constructed of bamboo and teak wood. The roof bore a heavy thatch of palm leaf. Inside, the bar was hand constructed of native teak, and those elaborate hand cut waves appeared to be a natural part of the very wood itself that grew into a phantasm of rolling waves and swirls. The young man instantly knew this to be an example of an outstanding craftsmanship.

At this bar sat a certain young lady that his eyes instantly recognized as being born from the berth of the very angels in heaven. Her hair was waist length, and black as coal fresh from the Virginia mountains. Her eyes were like the gem of Onyx, yet glowing with a shine that betrays an undying vibrancy in outstanding health. Upon her sculptured body was placed a dress hand constructed from a coarse native cotton fiber, or so it seemed. It's decoration was of light sapphire palm rose, and the green leaf of the palms. Her scent... her mesmerizing scent... was that of the magnolia lemon. Her aura was that of a precious nymph, born from among the cherubs in paradise with the saints in the sacred court of the angels. He was frozen by her spell, like a deer in the light of the huntsman.

She nodded unto the bartender, who promptly placed a rose colored drink before her. Her plush lips of ruby gingerly drew from the straw. Her eyes roamed about...then they came to rest upon his frozen figure.

“Oh Chris,” she gasped as she waved! “I was hoping that you would come around. I am so surprised to see you!”

He gasped as he walked near her, seeming as if not knowing exactly as to what to say. His eyes were hexed by her bronze complexion. To him she was surly blessed by the sacred aura of the saints on high.

“Angelina, it is so nice that I have come to meet you here. I would have never guessed that you would have been here so far out on this tropical beach oasis.”

“Yea, well...I had the day off and just decided to do something different. What brings you here?”

“Well you know that the academy does not work one Thursday out of the month, so I just decided to take a happy stroll out on the beach. As you know, there is just not a better beach any where than this one.”

“Yea, you are so right about that,” she spoke with her native island, but very well educated accent. Her eyes then caught his with a glitter.

“Lets take a walk out on the beach after we have a drink. You have some time for it?”

So the young man sat down at the bar with the lady, and they both enjoyed a glass of flower nectar combined with very strong rum, it was a local favorite. As he spoke to her, and she breathed her sweet breath, he came to gaze into her eyes, noticing that she seemed to indicate by the glitter in her face, that she felt the same feelings for him as he did for her; but both of them tried at great lengths to conceal the truth from the other.

On finishing their drink, they arose from the seat, slowly ambling out onto the beach back toward the waterfall from which the young man had just came. As they moved near the cesspool into which the gentle cascading falls plunged, to the left was a large table sized flat rock that sat just above knee high on the lady. Both soon eased down here to take their relaxing seat.

“I love this sacred place. It's like a grove that seems to just place one in a spell of some sort,” she said as she glanced up toward him.

“Yes, and I do feel the same way,” he said as he gazed into her sparkling eyes.

From the very edge of the flat boulder, each placed their bared feet into the clear cool cesspool beneath . The gentle pull of the water felt as though it were gently tugging, not just at the feet to beckon them inside, but even unto their very soul.

They sat for what seemed like hours, speaking in gentle tones about flowers, home, the birds, food, and interesting places that they had traveled. As they spoke their eyes became more enraptured by each other, and both their souls now began to feel as if it would draw the other deep inside the others' gently throbbing breast.

The young mans hands gingerly eased into the soft hands of the tender lady. She did not resist, but motion of her body betrayed a desire all of her own, a deep desire that yearned for a new passion. She gazed deeply into his eyes, then came to relax.

“Come follow me. I know where there is a better place to relax, a place that is more spiritual than this one,” she said with a glitter in her eyes.

So he followed the lady around the rise in the mountain until they came to a certain well worn foot path. The footpath wound up a crotch in the two hills, then back down into what felt like a hidden valley that just lay on the other side. On both sides of the trail stood the same landscape of blooming aromatic flowers sheltered in majestic palm. In the distance the ears could detect the enchanting tinkle to the flowing creek, and a new fall.

Soon they arrived at the cesspool, which was a cesspool surrounded by an oasis of tropical lilies, blossoms of chrysanthemum, roses of the type that he knew not, but they appeared just as the large strawberry rose of Virginia, and with that same spellbinding hexing aroma.

They walked barefooted through the majestic blooms, coming to stop beside that clear magnificent cesspool. Into it's midst they placed their gaze...until the combination of the trance induced from the reflection of the water and the aroma of the hexing flowers, together induced an intoxicating euphoria, like that of which neither had ever experienced before.

About their bodies they placed their arms, each coming to gaze into the eyes of the other, speaking soft words of an unspoken adoration.

“It has been said that the natives called this place *The eternal place of the nymph*, and few people ever come here, Christopher.

“Why not,” asked the young man?

“It has been said that the waters beckon all who enter inside into a new world, a world of fantastic paradise, like that of which no mortal has ever known or will know. It is said that if two lovers should stand on the ledge underneath the gentle falls, then the hexing forces of the trance from the water, and the intoxicating aroma of the flowers, will then be more enhanced in combination, inducing them both into the magic pool of the fairies. Then the two lovers will surly dwell therein for all eternity in the sacred eternal paradise....it only takes a single swim,” she whispered as she kissed his trembling lips.

Her hands slowly arose to release the button behind her bronze neck. Her dress gingerly glided upon her hips, and then upon the smooth stones beneath their feet. With a new heated passion he kissed her warm moist lips, as her hands and his, removed his thin cotton flower decorated shirt, then his swimming shorts. Beside the pool they both stood nude, embracing as they slowly melted down upon the flat surface of the smooth stone surrounding it.

He felt the pulsating moist warmth of her body beneath that of his own, he breathed in the intoxicating aroma of her sweet breath. Her lips were like a velveteen glove and his body like that of the perfect fit. His hands passed through her flowing hair, and the heat inside their breasts rose until both their bodies glittered like jewels covered with honey dew nectar 'neath the rising morning sun.

A time passed that seemed like hours, the two then arose to walk back out toward the sound of the surging waves.

“Tell me about the history of the island, and about the native people,” asked the young man.

“Well, the natives here have always lived in an eternal joy and contentment with life, each other, and the world without. But a strange cool wind blew in once long ago, and that chilling wind caused the death of numberless multitudes. The elders declared that it was a curse placed upon us for not giving enough of our best fish in the holy sacrifice.”

“A curse? You really think so,” laughed the youth?

“Yes,” she firmly replied as she glared into his eyes! “And Chris, the chief elder had a vision recently, and said that he was told that the evil wind would return to bring horrible death again once more.”

“Well I certainly hope not,” replied the young man. “Don't sound like any breeze I want to ever feel,” laughed the young man.

Both figures walked along the beach, smiling, laughing, speaking of heaven and the angels, of bird and beaver back home in Virginia, and multi colored butterflies there among the flowers about them. The days turned into weeks, and the weeks into months, and soon more than two years had passed. By now they both had met hundreds of times beside the cesspool, to love amid the seraphim, and the intoxicating euphoria from the surrounding herbs throughout.

But one day Christopher returned to the cherished cesspool oasis, only to discover his precious angel laying face down upon a flat table stone, weeping as though tomorrow would surely never return.

“Angelina, what is wrong,” asked the young man in a loud commanding voice?

The gentle lady struggled to breath as she spoke in reply.

“Did you not step out of the house last night? Did you not feel the chill of the wind? I had a deep hacking cough as did everyone in the house as well. This is it Christopher....this is it, my love. I only have nine days left. You will see, the elders will go first.”

The days passed and the honored elders were buried one by one. It was now the eighth day, and the dear angel was very weak, so weak that she could just barely move.

“My love, you have not forsaken me,” she trembled as she whispered.

“Angelina,” he screamed!

His trembling hands seized her by her bed robe. He wept bitterly into the moist fevered clothing upon her trembling breast.

“I don't want to live without you. My life has no meaning without you a part of it! Oh my precious love, please don't go!”

He deeply kissed the fevered lips, tasting the salty sweat from deep inside her tortured soul. She gazed up into his face with a blank glazed stare.

“Take me just one more time back to the cesspool, my love. Just one more time is all that it will take,” she whispered as she struggled to breathe.

So the young man arose with the angel in his arms, staggering back out upon the beach. He struggled along that well worn trail, until finally he at last stood before the glorious crystal pool with the now still waters, that shown with a mirror like view. Into the sanctified reflection the two gazed, beholding a view of the emerald palms surrounding the melodious cascading water, and of the unseen spirits surrounding the two. Both breathed in deeply to inhale that intoxicating aroma born from the illuminate flowers and the enticing trance of the water as it flowed along in the creek.

“Stand with me beneath the gently tumbling water..... and we can be with the gods and each other for all eternity,” she strained as she whispered on a gradual fading breath.

The young man wept bitterly as he gazed into her warm beckoning face.

“I never want to be without you. No not ever, never, never,” he yelled as he wept!

“Come,” she sighed. “Then come with me..and today we can be together for all eternity.”

So they both arose, their robes gliding from their bodies by the hands of saintly spirits. They walked forth, coming to pause upon the smooth ledge beneath the falls. She struggled as she came to pause.

“Inhale deeply the intoxicating aroma of the blooms. Allow your eyes to behold the bliss in the mirror of the hallowed cesspool. See the spirits of the ancients beckoning to us, motioning unto us... do come?”

“I do,” he whispered.

They both inhaled deeply...very deeply.. arousing a feeling of consuming euphoria, a euphoria born from the gates of heaven itself. The moving reflection of the water in the cesspool combined, generating a captivating trance born from the spirits within. The youth gazed into the water again, beholding their spiritual robbed figures motioning for them, and saying; “Come.”

The gentle cascade of the water consumed their bodies as they both merged with the rhythm of the

falls, becoming not as two, but now as one with both the melodious sound and the water. Into the transparent waters, yea, deep into the magic cesspool their souls now did glide. Their eyes beholding the splendor and radiant glory of flowers and herbs untold. Their exhilarating eyes beheld that most cherished vision of the spirits and the saints, and all of the elders as they both ambled hand in hand toward a most radiant glowing light, walking into the songs of the angles and into the blessed euphoria of the sacred tropical island garden. On the wind the angels sang their precious songs of exalted welcome, singing:

“Come thou, and fear not. Now dwell in our sacred garden with us, free from all sorrows, for the duration of all eternity.....”

And there they made their eternal pact to abide and thrive as a single adoring unit, now free from all sickness, pain, sin, and those mortal curses of all mankind...., forever and ever more.

The Tarnished Enigma

Yes the year was 1973, probably one of the best in my entire life. The school year had went very well in that happy little one room building right beside the main building. That is where we had the first and the second grades back then. My teacher was named Mrs McNeil, and she had to be the very best teacher in the entire school system. She was a medium sized gray haired lady who had a warm, caring personality, but at the same time, could be firm and really strict. She also had her own method of handling discipline, and later on I was to admire her very much for that.

For example, there was one time that I can remember well, that a fellow student named Darrel got in an argument with me about the type of game that we were to play, and he threatened to attack me for disagreeing with him. So I told her about this threat, and she simply said to me; “Well, you need to handle your own situations, since in real life you will be forced to deal with other much more serious situations.”

So I did so, I followed her advice. When he tried to force me into a particular game with him, I protested and held true to my own direction in spite of his forceful demands, and he eventually attacked me for doing so.

We fell by the bushes in the middle of the play ground right beside the nursery building. I will never forget it. We wrestled furiously right there by the bushes, where no one could ever hope to see us punching the lights out of each other from any direction that they so desired to look. Before long he sat on top of me, saying through tightly clenched teeth; “Now white boy, what are you going to do? I am *your* master, and I am going to tell *you* what *you* will do, and you will do just what I tell you to do, or else! Do you have that? Do you understand?”

I turned my head to the right side, closing my eyes tightly, fully expecting to take a solid punch right into the side of the head.

What *am* I going to do now, I thought, as I lay pinned into the earth with this fat black pig sitting on top of my stomach? I prayed silently with my eyes closed very tight. Please Lord, get me out of this mess. I opened my eyes, and behold, the answer to my prayer now sat right before me, but tucked away just enough inside a small bunch of green grass. But it was a very strange answer. It was a foil pie pan with a large snakelike pile of human fecal waste wound right into the very center.

The idea struck me just like a sword of light from the sky. Just as soon as I had the thought, I acted on it. It was like my limbs moved with out my mental control, and I suddenly grabbed the front of his shirt with my left hand, shaking him violently, then reached over with my right hand, smashing Darrel right in the face with the loaded pan, just as he turned to see what was coming at him. I rubbed the pan hard right into the mouth and nose of his face. Darrel collapsed from his perch upon the center of my breast, rolling onto the ground, screaming, spitting, gagging, and crying. I jumped up immediately and backed off, so as not to give him the opportunity to retaliate against me. He then raced to the teacher, screaming with disgust and sheer rage.

“Look what he has done to me! Just look what that white boy has done to me,” Darrel screamed to the teacher!

“Now now,” spoke Mrs McNeil with gentleness in her voice. “Lets just go back to the school room and get cleaned up, and I will call your mother, if you want. Do you want that?”

“Yes,” Darrel sniveled.

“Who did this to you,” asked Mrs McNeil in a gentle voice?

“He did,” replied Darrel, pointing in my direction. “That white boy yonder did this to me!”

“Well, go on back to the room and I will be there very soon.”

As Darrel made his way back, she walked over to me standing in the distance watching the events that unfolded before me.

“Did you do this, boy,” she asked?

“Yea,” I replied. “I did it. He deserved it. He was on top of me trying to beat me up. Any way, I handled my situation myself. I seriously doubt that I will ever have anymore problems with him ever again. Don't you think?”

Mrs McNeil then stuck her nose up in the air and huffed, stomping off toward the old school room that sat in the distance.

Later on the entire class returned back into the school room. Class had been going on for an hour or so, and I saw Darrel's mother appear at the door asking for him. “What happened,” she asked?

“Well Darrel had a little accident,” replied Mrs McNeil with a warm patient smile. “Get him to tell you all about it on the way home.”

So the two made their way out the door and into his mother's big blue 1973 Marquis Mercury. I did not see him any more for at least a week.

My ride home on the big yellow bus was a very happy ride. We made our way through the sleepy May-vile town settlement deep in the wood. We then slowly made our way down the old Twisted Oak road toward the brick ranch style home where I lived at the time.

As the bus made it's exit from the May-vile city limits, a slender girl with shoulder length dark brown, almost black hair that always appeared to be wet, made her way toward me as I sat alone in the bus seat. She was not particularly much to look at, but she had a very pleasant warm personality. She always held to the happy positive side of life, even when every thing else seemed to be going wrong around her. Joy seemed to bubble over within her, no matter what the weather was doing or what the circumstances around her. She was twelve at the time, and was a grown woman old enough to be my mother as far as I was concerned. The very sight of me always seemed to bring out a certain special happiness from deep inside her, it always seemed to me.

“Well hello there, you good looking thing,” she would always say as she eased into the seat beside me. “Are you my little boy friend?”

I would smile broadly as I felt the heat move up through my face. I felt as though I wanted to melt into the very seat that I sat in, but wanted to stand up tall at the same time. It was a very strange feeling to me. I nodded my head up and down, feeling like my face was glowing bright red.

“Yea, I thought so. I got you a nice present,” said she, as she handed me a piece of thin clear wrapped plastic with the chocolate cake bound tightly inside. “You like that,” said she as she gently kissed my blushing cheek? “See how nice it is to be my boy friend? See the good things that I can do for you,” she whispered into my ear? She kissed my cheek right beside my ear where she knew no body would ever see her doing so. I could not help but to smile very broadly.

She sat up tight beside me. “Well, how is school going now for you,” she would ask?

“Going well,” I replied.

“Oh really, you haven't gotten into any trouble, now have you?”

“Well, sort of, but not really, it all ended well, it seemed to me. So it must all be well, as far as I can tell.

“Well what happened,” she asked with a smile and a laugh?

So I proceeded to tell her about the incident with Darrel. I told her about me hitting him right smack dab in the face with the pie pan full of poo. She fell out into floor of the bus with laughter, well almost, but she still seemed to laugh about it all for what seemed like an hour.

“I cannot believe that you did that to him. How could you be so mean? What did your teacher, Mrs McNeil, do,” she asked?

“Nothing, just sent him to the room to get cleaned up and called his mother.”

“That's so funny. I have never heard of such a thing before,” she laughed as she replied.

“What will your mama say?”

“Nothing, just as long as I won the fight. Had I lost she would have beat me for sure then,” I lied jokingly.

Sonya continued to laugh as the bus soon neared her stopping point. The mail box at the end of a long dirt road soon came into view. The brakes of the bus squeaked as it slowed into a stop. Deep inside, my heart sank as it did so, and I wished to take her home with me, but knew that I never would be able to. She was such a warm jolly person that no body could help but to be over come by her presence.

“Well now, love, I guess I gotta go. You'll still be mine in the morning, won't you?”

I smiled broadly, feeling my face burn with heat as I nodded my head up and down. I silently hated the fact that she did not whisper those words into my ear, and instead spoke them aloud so that everyone else on the bus could hear. I think that she intended for them all to hear.

“Bye now,” I said with a shy wave.

She exited the bus with her tight cut off jeans hugging her slender thighs, dancing away as she walked. I gazed down the dirt road as she walked. I wondered where her house was as the road ahead went straight off into the distance for a hundred yards or so into the thick woods, then curved sharply to the right, disappearing into the timber.

Every morning that year she was to sit with me on the bus. I sometimes pretended not to want her to sit with me, but in secret, I really wanted her there.

“Yea, you'll pledge your self to me one day. I will win ya over,” she would say. I would shake my head from side to side rapidly. “Yea you will! Yea you will! You'll see! You'll see,” she would say.

For many days we laughed and talked about animals, situations with parents, situations at school and with our friends. Soon days turned into weeks and weeks into months. Now I sat beside her and was not afraid of being picked on by the other kids on the bus. I really did not even care what they thought.

“What are you doing today at lunch recess,” she would whisper into my ear?

“Nothing,” I replied.

“Can you meet me behind your classroom? You'll not see me until you step into the edge of the woods. Don't let any body see you, ya hear now,” she whispered into my ear?

“Yea, sure, don't worry, I'll be there.”

My heart would race in anticipation, and it seemed like lunch time would never get there. I could hardly sit still in my seat. I went into the lunch cafeteria and pretended to eat, eating only some small portions of my food, then giving the remainder to a classmate named Marvin who was very overweight and always hungry.

I slowly walked through the huge double glass doors into the outside, trying to appear as though I was not heading anywhere in particular. I turned right, then I made my way passed the old physical ed supply room, and then around the corner. In the distance I saw the old wood framed classroom, sitting quietly beside the baseball field in the edge of the woods. Looking at it felt strange with no people moving around there. I glanced over my shoulder both ways and then before me both ways, and no body was paying any attention to me, it seemed. So I slowly made my way toward the old one room classroom.

As I neared the building there appeared no sign of activity at all, but I remembered her words, whispering as she told me to step into the edge of the woods. I glanced around again, and no one had noticed me I reassured myself, so I gingerly stepped into the woods edge, and on still farther in. I neared a huge live oak tree ahead that appeared to be some four feet in diameter with massive drooping limbs, and as I eased around it, this slink vixen eased from around it in my direction, grasping me with her arms and kissing me warmly in my ears.

“So I see that you did not deny me after all. You'll be glad that you did not. You know what I mean?”

“No,” I shook my head from side to side.

“You ever been kissed,” she purred.

“Here, let me show you.” Her warm lips gently caressed mine. I felt that warm surge of heat move from the pit of my stomach up into my face.

“It's like this,” she said as she kissed me again. “I'll christen you yet. The other boys will be jealous and will not know what to think if they knew. You will have tasted the red wine, and they only be able to imagine what it is like.”

“I'll never tell”

“Not even to your best friend Fish?”

“No, not even to my best friend Fish.”

“What about to your best friend C.L.,” she asked as she kissed my lips gently but much deeper and with much more passion?

“No, not even to C.L.,” I struggled to say in between her heavy panting, kissing embraces.

Gently she took my left hand and led me a few yards up on the other side of the huge oak tree. We eased into an area that had thick bushes on either side and behind it. On the other side was the huge oak with the great outspreading limbs. In the empty space I saw a six by six blue baby blanket laying flatly on the ground.

“Come here,” she whispered. “I fixed a place.”

She embraced me again, kissing me passionately and very deeply. My heart raced with excitement and some fear, but not as much as some might think. We gingerly eased down in our embrace, making our way upon the blanket.

“Let me be the one,” she whispered while continuing to kiss me warmly.

Gingerly her right hand eased upward, gently unbuttoning the top most button of her dress. Finally her small breasts were exposed. She did not wear any bra, and I was to never know the difference until many years later.

“Do you like what you see? Now what you are supposed to do is to kiss them, if you want to be a real lover now.”

So I did so, very slowly, just like she told me to, being very careful to caress each tender nipple with my hot tongue.

“That's right...yea... that feels so good. I love it when you do that,” she would purr as we embraced.

She gingerly seized my left hand, placing it between her thighs.

“Rub gently, but firmly, like this,” she said, as she moved my hand up and down while still in the firm grasp of her own. “Yea, that's right... That's right...”

Then I felt her hand move slowly toward the center of my thighs, and it caused those surges of heat and excitement to rise until I felt as though it would explode.

“Yea, I can see that you want me, but you learn fast. You learn so very fast.”

Her hands then moved, slowly pulling down her silken underwear.

“Do you like that? Let me show you,” she said as she eased my own cotton briefs down. I struggled to get them over my brogans, but somehow I managed to do so.

“Yea,” she whispered. “That's right, now take my hands. Come here, to me, here...”

I eased on top of her feeling her warm body beneath mine, feeling her warm breath in my face.

“That's right,” she would whisper. “Just allow everything to fall into place on it's own. That's right... oh... that's right... ooooooh... that's right now..... You've got it....just go with the feeling now.”

Well the months had turned into a year, and it was October, and nearing Christmas of 1973 going into 1974. I couldn't have loved Sonya more that year, and I looked forward to seeing her on the bus. We had spent many hundreds of times behind the old oak tree by now. She said that I loved like an old hand, and she pronounced me an expert in the field of love, a master of the craft. She was funny, pretending to want to stick me with the needle that she used to give herself insulin. It scared me. I

trusted her, but did not dare push my luck.

“You're the best. You know that, don't you? Several men visit me from time to time, but none have the up on you, cause I trained you right. I got you *broke* now, boy. You ain't just the little boy down the road any more. Please don't be mad now. There is no reason for you to fear.”

Well September came and went, moving right into October. October was now half over with, and the rains had begun to pour. I still had to ride that big yellow bus to school, Mama saw to it that I did so. Monday morning rolled around, like it always does after Sunday. I was excited on the inside about seeing Sonya that morning. When the bus stopped at the mail box by the road, the other girls, Faye, Brenda, and Chrystal got on, but there was no Sonya.

“Where is Sonya,” I asked?

“ We don't know. Maybe she is sick, or just did not feel like coming to school,” they said. “Why, why are you so anxious to see her?”

They all then looked at each other and laughed heartily.

Monday turned into Tuesday, and Tuesday turned into Wednesday, then Friday finally came, but no Sonya at all.

“Where is Sonya,” I inquired?

“We don't know, but that is strange for her to be out like that. We will walk down to her house after school and let you know, come Monday again. Ya hear? Can you wait that long?”

They all laughed out loud as they made their exit from the bus.

All weekend long I sat and worried. Finally Monday came, but no Sonya.

“The whole community is worried about that girl, and we are all searching,” the girls told me. “But we don't know anything as of yet.”

When the week ended, I rode the bus home that day and felt as though I was all alone. My mother approached me when I walked through the door of the house, and asked me; “Have you heard the news about that little girl up the road? She is lost and the police are looking for her. She has been gone about two weeks now, and they still can't find her.”

A few days passed, then she said to me... and I will never forget her words.

“Well, they found that poor little girl today. She was dead in a tobacco barn at the first bend in the dirt road over there where she lived. She was severely diabetic, you know. They done a test on her... and found out that she was seven months pregnant! The parents didn't even know it. Can you believe that? This girl was only thirteen years old, and pregnant! My oh my, just what in heavens name is this world coming to? The pregnancy caused her to go into a diabetic comma.

They don't even know who the daddy of the baby is. Is that just not a shame? They first thought that it was some body in the family, but that turned up negative. They thought then, that it just might be somebody from the black community a half mile or so up the road from her, but that proved negative as well. Now they think that it may be some body from the old center road community, an hours walk from where she lived.

They have found a trail leading to the barn through a thick cover of woods, but they have no suspects. The trail just divided about a third of the way from the center roads community, and then dead ended at the creek. The profile was an unemployed man around twenty or so. Several that fit the profile in the area were questioned, but none were a match up. So the book on the case, for now, is closed. I hope they catch this older man. Goodness knows, he knew better than to take advantage of a little girl like that.... meeting her in a tobacco barn, for crying out loud.....!”

Today the rain is pounding the window pane where I now sit, thinking deep inside my self. It has been well over thirty years, and even though the pain has long since fled from my heart, deep inside my mind she still holds a place all of her on. Even though all of those of whom had once questioned things

are now dead, I still cannot bring myself to tell the story. I just cannot bring myself to tell this story, even though all of those who ever cared have long since gone. So, I will just keep it to myself and sit here forever, watching my tears pour down in the reflection on the glass pane...., and just a little bit of my very soul pours from the glass pane onto the ground with each drop of the rain.

In The Name Of Free Enterprise: The Fabulous Trio

The gentle breeze blew warmly through the lush verdant valley, so I decided that I would just move on quietly through. I saddled up the good horse, *Little Lottie Dottie*, and rode my way on quietly through the warm valley of the *Hollie Doolie Waddie* tribe, right strait on through until I arrived at the mansion door of the famous adventurer, Captain Charles Dololly.

I gently knocked upon his heavy hard wood door, and ever so slowly opened that moaning heavy door, appearing then the grizzled sun browned face of good Captain Charles Dololly.

“Well hello there, dear son,” said the Captain. “How have you been doing these days? So very well, I do trust?”

“Yes indeed,” said I with a kind smile. “Just thought that I would ride with the likes of you for a while, since there was nothing else to do. Work has all temped out, so there are no career opportunities left in the world any more.

These corporate pigs just want all out of a person that they can get, and we only have nearly nothing in return for a days' honest labor. I honestly have nothing to lose sir, but my life; so what about it?”

“Well.. sure, son,” said the Captain, clearing his throat repeatedly, and speaking in a low authoritative monotone.

“I could always make use of a little more skilled help. Come on in here, dear son, and sign up. We'll have adventure galore!”

So I then just walked on in, and signed the paper contract. It was not a complicated contract, nor an extremely long contract, indeed it was really straight to the point and very direct. The wording was simple, and not some wording that only the most gifted attorney could understand. In all of any criticism that could ever be given, and there was much, still the possibility for real honest adventure was there, and even some much lesser possibility for some hard golden riches. So, needless to say, I signed on with his crew.

That being said, however, I did have *my criticism*. According to the contract, any and all work was to be compensated for, only upon completion of the adventure journey, and only then at the complete satisfaction of the Captain. Otherwise, *he owned no one anything at all*.

Likewise, if real gold or gem was discovered, we the employees of company *BipNbop*, would only be entitled to twelve percent of the total take, even if it were us who made the discovery! Termination of the said contract, would only be at the Captain's fancy whim, and for any reason deemed applicable only to the Captain. We would also be responsible for our own transportation and accommodations back home.

All of that being said, still there existed a slight chance that I just might have the opportunity of striking it *big* with *BipNbop*. Besides all of that, I was not beyond palming a few more pieces of eight, if the opportunity presented itself, especially since the good Captain had not given any one any incentive to be honest about golden discoveries.

Most others among the crew felt just the same as I did, but very few had the fortitude to admit to this truth, and were always looking for the chance to expose someone else's weaknesses to the Captain, in hopes of making themselves look good at the expense of their coworker. On that note, any words spoken aloud were always to the glory of the Captain and company BipNbop, since no one really knew what the true intentions of his coworker really were. Many would approach, making critical announcements, just to hear *their target* agree, then go back to the Captain claiming that the *target* was certainly the guilty to speak these foul words!

The Captain, though being a man of whom I greatly respected, was not a man gifted with analytical skills and in depth thinking abilities. Upon being presented with any negative claims coming from two or three select individuals, he would simply just terminate those persons whom the claims were directed toward, on the face value of those claims alone. The targeted person never even had the opportunity to respond, he was just out of work, and that was that.

For this reason many objectives of the company were never obtained, since corrective measures were placed at incorrect positions. As a matter of fact, according to the words on the street, company BipNbop was actually in serious financial trouble, and all of us must honestly make a real guess as to why!

True success shall surely come one day into the future, since the Captain, though an ignoramus he surely was, was still a good man at heart; according to what his church master always said aloud during the sabbath services. Never mind the fact that the good Captain always placed the *largest* tax deductible contribution into the Sunday silver plate that went around. Everyone was always so careful to smile in the Captain's presence on the Sabbath morning, shaking his hand, telling him what a nice suit of clothes it was that he had chosen to wear.

What was really amusing was when the very people whom he had terminated sat right in the pews behind him, only smiling, shaking his hand or speaking as though he and they had been the very best of friends for all of eternity.

Others of whom had bothered to shake his hand every Sabbath morning, were those who were certifiably qualified to work with his company, had plenty of experience, had been interviewed and told how wonderful it was to have them interested in the company, and then his claim at calling them in two or three days never followed through on. Later on they would discover that he had already hired someone else, but had only went through the interview process as a matter of procedure...to legitimize his actions.

But the Captain was a good church going man just the same, and all of us should respect him for that...never mind his choice of actions towards employees when it comes to *his* personal enterprise endeavors!

Besides that, he has a right to run his business *any way* that he so desires to, and he can do *anything* that he wants to, and we, the people and employees, have *no right* to criticize any action that he may choose to take. We are just supposed to labor without *question or comment* say the people aloud, and somehow all will just turn out alright by itself...at least, if this rule applies to someone else other than the one doing the speaking along those lines!

The types of people who speak in such a manner always seem to become very *angry* when the tables are turned, and it is suddenly *them* who are forced to eat skunk and smile about it! What a marvel, imagine all of that! I do honestly wonder as to why? But these people are all good church going people, so let's not speak about them in such disrespectful overtones, because it is them who are the business cornerstones of the community, and us basic employees should just simply move on with our lives. Isn't that such a warm whitewash on the foulest of dirt, ever so pleasant and nice?

Though the system always pays out the lowest bottom wages possible, to live within that wage is such a foul disgrace to the community, so say the locals. What community, I truly know not and could

never figure out. The people selling homes and real estate maybe? The merchants selling appliances and automobiles?

I reason this since when people live within their economic means based on the totals payed out by the economy, those merchant types are the people who always lose out, with local people buying used appliances and automobiles, and multiple families living in single family ready built homes that tend to be forty years old, or even more. These local people may then put their money together, thereby splitting the bills and living quite nicely in the process. When people live like this, only the merchants and extortionist banks right along with the corrupt extortionist governments, lose out.

No, according to the spineless weak locals, what we are supposed to do is to go into deep debt and be ready, able, and willing to dutifully labor at three dead end jobs to pay for it all... and just barely break even. Then and only then, will everyone be good honest wholesome people!

So, we are supposed to live like we are making a six figure salary because we have banks to go into debt with to accomplish that end, and be ready, able, and willing to work without any complaints or criticism what so ever, and just take what ever junk that the company dishes out to us. Then and only then, will we ever become good decent hardworking honest people!

What a life! Any one of whom does not behave in this manner simply does not want to labor, is greedy, a complainer, and someone who is not a productive asset to the community at large....In other words, this pattern of brainwashing is a corporations' dream come true! But so it is, it is what it is and that is what it always and forever will be! You can all mark my words on that note. Surly even our great grand children, a hundred years from now, will live to witness the reality in that statement!

So in the name of all free thinkers, as I myself am proud to be one of; I say, *just let the slaves be the slaves* because I have better things to engage my time with. My activities are productive, as far as I myself am concerned with, because I owe my allegiance to no one other than to that of my own benefit. To survive this job however, it is my duty unto myself to pretend to be otherwise, since I was not born into wealth and have no other options. I will seize my own gain when the opportunity presents itself.... damn the selfish greedy exploitative company.....!

So all of us some three days after signing the contract, gathered about at the captains' elaborate mansion, all in good cheer, to saddle up the pack animals, pack the supplies, and begin to make our way into our journey adventure. I could not have been more delighted, even to the point of excited euphoria, as seemingly were all of the others.

Away we all rode into the verdant valley wilderness divide, all for the purpose of discovering a gainful career path. Maybe this was it, eh? Many among our ranks came for the excitement in adventure. That being so, many more came for the purpose of seeking their fortune, including I myself, which is a great sin among the locals who only exist deep inside those cursed bowels from which we have now just dared to venture out of.

Our pack animals plodded along on a small woodland foot path for hours. Very little was said among ourselves, until evening came and it was time to pitch camp.

“Well it's getting about that time,” said man next to me who gazed at the sun on the distant horizon, being careful to line the sun up with his fingers from the tree line up.

“The sun is three fingers high above the tree line now. It's time to pitch camp in the dying light or else do so in the dark of night. I had much rather do so in the light myself. I just don't know about the rest of you?”

“Well then, lets find a place,” said the rider who followed behind. All others pretty much agreed.

Just off the path in the slight distance, our ears could barely hear the tinkle of fast flowing water. Most of the best camp sites were always near flowing water, or so it always seemed to all of us. Our small pack caravan of adventurers soon rode up trail for a hundred yards or so, then bore off to the right in the direction of the flowing water. Soon on a hill over looking the creek our trained eyes spotted a

natural two acre spot of scattered timber and very little undergrowth. What made the area so attractive was the seemingly large amount of deadwood dry timber that lay scattered all about. This meant that fodder for the fire would be easy pickings.

All of us headed right into that direction without a single word being spoken between any of us. The work at hand was paramount, and no other concern at the moment.

All of us went into the tent pack, which was a large eight man bakers' tent. Like robots working from programmed instinct all of us moved, placing our hands in every perfect spot, then moving the parts into their proper places, all by themselves. In some five or six minutes we had the entire tent set up and were in the process of siting up our tarp for an open air shelter.

Next one of us went about gathering the deadwood for fire fodder and piling it near the open face of the tent, and near the open air shelter. Another went about stacking the light-wood kindling into a tepee shape up against the center of one of the deadwood logs. The log was about eight inches in diameter, and some twelve feet long. It would burn in two much easier than cutting it. Soon the teepee was lit and the fire was going. More small logs were added into the flame until the large log caught. We then felt that it was time to open up our folding camp chairs, and begin to rustle up some good trail grub.

Tonight rations were going to be biscuits, beans, and salted bacon. Another log of approximately the same diameter was placed along side the one already down in such a manner that the flames could lick their way right through the center. On top of these two logs, just above the flame, was where the skillet was to be set. I went about pouring in the canned pinto beans, and mixing up the flour for the biscuits. I then added the bacon into the beans, carefully stirring them in until they blended well together. Another comrade then went about finding and passing out the mess kits.

“Boy this sure smells good. What we got for drink,” spoke the eldest with the hard sun dried face? His name was Ted, and was the most determined in what he was doing.

“Not much, Hoss, just the same, old coffee again,” replied the cook, who had a young face and was around thirty or so.

“Damn, coffee again?”

“Afraid so, 'less you want water...just plain old water,” replied the cook.

“I believe that I'll take water over coffee this late in the evening. I need to sleep some time tonight,” replied Ted.

“By the way,” smiled Ted as he turned to look at me. “Just forgot to mention it. But, why did you not help with putting the kitchen up, and the cooking?”

“What are you talking about,” I asked? “I was right there, doing the labor with all of the others.”

“What about the cooking,” he continued to ask with a slight smirk?

“What's it too you,” I snapped? “You got a long nose, or something?”

“Don't make this personal,” snapped Ted. “I am just asking...,” he replied with a long whine and that same loathsome smirk.

After a while the beans and bacon were spooned out into the mess tins, and of course, the coffee poured freely from the tin pot. I chose to drink water, however. I hate stimulants after twelve hundred hours.

We stayed up for several hours following our healthy meal. We all took pride in telling our stories, with our embellished tales and everything. We spoke of virgin women that we had soiled, duels that we had won, and far away adventures that we had enjoyed, and all in good company for the evening. After some time, all of us made our way back into the tent, carefully unrolling our bed bags, and each taking his rightful place in the tent.

Morning came swiftly. I arose first, carefully making my way toward the tin coffee pot on the fire logs. I stirred about in the coals with a stick, relighting the crackling fire. I then tossed on some dry wood, soon bringing a small blaze to rise. I poured in some measured amounts of water, bringing it to a

boil. I then removed the pot from the flame, carefully adding in the teaspoon fulls of the aromatic coffee. As I placed on the tin cap, I felt a stiff hand on my shoulder. I snapped around.

“Jack, you and me need to talk a bit before we start out,” I heard the voice of the Captain say in hard tones.

“Yea, sure, what about,” I asked?

“Well, I get reports that you are just riding the company., and as you know, I despise that type of activity. I pay every employee that I have an honest wholesome wage, but in return I expect everybody to do their fair share. Do you hear me, Jack? I will tell you right now, any son of a bitch that wants to belly ache about that, can just hit the road rite now!”

“Look now,” I snapped! “Just what are you talking about? Who's blowing smoke up your ass....? I will tell you that I bust my ass for this company everyday, and if a son of a bitch has a problem with that, then he needs to be man enough to tell me about it to my face!”

“Now Jack.....I am warning you....just lay off of it!”

“Well who has the problem around here? Maybe you should watch him, or ask him to verify his position. Where is the verification,” I asked?

“Now Jack, enough is enough.....just can it. I don't want to hear any of this any more! You got that?”

“Yea,” I said as I glared. “Sure....I got it alright.”

I sat about sipping my cup of coffee, deep down I knew who the guilty culprit was. I reasoned to just let it all lay for a while, until I saw the right opportunity, then at the moment I choose, all would know where I stood with them and would come to realize by force and shock or surprise, that they had blundered badly.

I soon opened two cans of beans, being very careful to stir in the salted bacon. I placed two mess tin skillets together, carefully making use of one to heat up the beans and bacon in, and the other to stir in the biscuit batter. I removed the batter, placing it on a board, and poured some grease into the the empty mess tin. I then took my large spoon that I used to stir the beans with and dropped the biscuit batter into the pan. This way we could all enjoy some extraordinary biscuits with the beans and coffee, one of our favorite choices for breakfast.

As the meal cooked the others were beginning to stir about. Without a single word they began to break down the tent and pack it up, while another commenced to roll up all of our beds. In a short matter of minutes all of the gear had been packed and placed on the backs of the pack horses. Soon all of us were gathered about underneath the tarp shelter for some really good coffee, beans and biscuits.

The meal was soon finished and all was pleasant and well. Everyone appeared to enjoy the others company. The only bag that was now opened was the bag with all of the maps. Carefully I withdrew a map, opening it and studying the course for the day. I glanced over to Wesley Jr. who was still eating his breakfast.

“We're headed north east, according to this map. You've been out there. What a you think?”

“Well,” he replied with his mouth full. “I think that it's rough country, but wrought with lots of potential for opportunity.”

“Like what kind of opportunity,” I asked?

He smiled a sly smile upon his young sun browned face.

“You never heard of Old Man Hornibond's Lost mine? Hell, I thought every body has heard about that,” he laughed as he continued to eat.

“What about it? Tell me, I want to know,” I replied with a serious inquiry.

“Well...it's like this. There once was this old miner back in the thirties. Some claimed that he had been searching since the eighteen seventies, or so. Well he had been searching for his entire life, obviously, and had always came up empty handed. He had vowed, when anybody dared to ask him, that he knew where a serious crevice filled with treasure was, and it was nearby. So he swore that he would

either find it, or die trying.

Well, his lucky day finally arrived, and the old man came a running into town showing all of the shop keepers and townspeople about, all of the alabaster amulets, emerald necklaces, and gold coins that their poor glazed eyes could handle. He was so happy all that he could do was scream as to just how rich he was, and he proceeded to tell every body off that he felt like needed telling off. The only problem was that there was only one of him, and he had tons of treasure to carry off. Who was he to trust?

So, this man was old as you remember, and one day he got sick, real sick, and was laying on his death bed. Many people came in to try and prod him into telling them where the gold was, but failed to get him to talk.....that is, all but one. This one man had been a true friend to old Hornibond.

As the story is told, Hornibond drew out a map on a sheet of parchment, right there, just as pretty as can be, for all the world to see....but no body has yet been able to discover the place of the treasure crevice. Many have looked, but none have succeeded. Hornibond had said that when the right one came by, his ghost would show the way...but none have found the place thus far.”

“Yea, and it would be like old Dololly here to know about this and be on the chase for it,” I replied with a sigh.

“Well.....he sure is motivated right to the point of being ridiculous. His greed is showing through his thick calloused hide, don't you think?”

“How well do you know this area,” I asked?

“Let's just say that I know it better than the map he is using, but I do not say anything, I just let him go on...until he rides right by the right spot. I just haven't made up my mind as to how I am going to react when we near the spot and he shrugs me off.”

“This is interesting, but I think that we are about to ride off. Lets do go before we get left, I say,” I responded with a laugh and a smile.

Soon we all were back on the horses and riding the trail again. Again few spoke a word. There was too much to think about to do much talking, and we had many hours to travel before we could settle down again. Most of us simply contented ourselves by taking a chew of tobacco as we rode along. The extra energy burst always seemed to carry us right along though the day, and if we felt hunger, with the chew those feelings would always subside. Finally we pause, and I found Wesley Jr and myself off to the side a bit.

“Have you seen the map,” I asked before taking a black spit upon the white sand of the trail?

“Can't rightly say that I have,” but I have seen every inch of this trail....except one.”

“and what do you make of it,” I asked?

“Well we'll just have to see....we'll just have to see how old Dololly here behaves. Is he going to be a clear thinking man about it? Or is he going to just let his ass go out the top of his head for all of us to see?... Does he want gold, or does he want to just ride around all day stewing over an old, maybe not even original, paper? That is the question.”

Wesley looked at me with a hard, but determined stare as he completed his statement. Though I never gave a reply, both of us knew the answer deep down in our gut. Soon we were moving out again.

We rode hard for many hours, with very little words again spoken between any of us. This time it appeared that we were headed in a more westerly direction than before. From what we could gather from Wesley, it appeared that the foot trail divided and went around the stony point of a hill a mile or so up ahead, but Dololly would have never told us the truth, even if the map did show it. We just kind of followed along, letting him lead the way.

There he stood paused upon his horse, appearing now very ridged, hard, and without any compassion for anyone or anything but the goal locked away in the depths of his mind.

“Are you two going to continue to lag and drag the rest of us down? Are you both going to continue

to slack off on your duties? I have about had it with you two! I have heard so many negative reports....I should fire the both of you right now...Why if I was not such a good person, I'd fire-"

The sun browned face of Wesley suddenly transformed into a flaming red, and he clinched his teeth so hard I feared that they just might shatter.

"You wanna fire us? Well why don't you just fire away? Just fire awayand be damned! That's what you can do...and take all of these other suck ass punks right into hell with you!"

"Yea? Oh yea? Is that how you want it? You want to be fired? O.K. Then,...you're fired! And you can take old Jerry there with you as well! Didn't I see you associating with him the other evening by the fire. Since you enjoyed his company so much...then you can keep it! I don't like him anyway!"

"We never associated with him," spouted Wesley! "What are you talking about? Why do you have to fire him like that? You have no reason! I know why though, right? You have suddenly decided that you don't want to give him his raise, do you? You owe him for his first three months of employment with you. You know that you don't want to employ him because you are near the end of something that you feel is going to profit you, and your little punks, don't you?"

The captain turned his back and began riding off, yelling as he rode away.

"You think what you want. I just don't care what any of you think! I just don't want anything to do with any of you! That is all that I know, so have a happy life!"

Now all three of us simply just stood there and watched all of the other five ride off ahead on down the trail.

"And don't forget....I'll be taking rent for the horses by the day from the pay that I owe all of you. I will take pay for the supplies from the saddle bags that you carry as well. So have a nice trip back now," Captain Dololly yelled from a distance as they rode away!

Wesley stood still with a slight smile on his face, watching the crowd as they rode off. He never spoke or said a word to us. I asked him what we were going to do now, but he never even bothered to look, let alone speak.

I asked with a deep sigh. "So what are we going to do? What's on your mind?"

Wesley continued to smile, then he finally turned to me as said.

"You two just come on with me. I am not ready to leave this place just yet. We have work to do. Welcome to company X, we Xpect a lot, so we shall get a lot! Is that not what the both of you say? So follow me, and off to work we shall go. I knew that he was going to do that. I just knew it! When he thinks that he is near the big take, he always gets rid of half his crew.....And he is right, he is near the big take..., and oh just how near he is....!"

We plodded along behind him, right at his horse's heels. We doubled back, to go back around the stone knob of a point that we had just traveled around. Soon we stood at the trail on the ridge overlooking a large slow flowing creek that was almost a small river.

"See boys, we are at the creek's head here. What old Dololly doesn't know, and never will from that old map, is that this is the head of the creek. He also will never know about the large cave right beside this creek in the hill here that we now stand on."

"So what are you thinking," interrupted Jerry, the youngster now in our company?

"Well, what I am thinking is that as large as they claim this haul is, that it must have been floated down this creek, and stashed inside this cave. The cave is large, but the mouth sits behind boulders in such a way that most people would walk right on passed it if they were not looking closely. So lets go down and take a look."

Their horses struggled to walk in a zigzagged fashion down the hill side. The pull of the centrifugal forces felt as if they were headed downward on a ninety degree incline of some sort, but all of the riders knew better. All of them but Wesley, struggled just to stay on the horse's backs. Wesley seemed to know exactly how to move with the shifting of the horses' back. Soon they were all riding on much more level

ground and nearing the slow moving creek in the narrow ravine.

“See, now we shall move upstream here, and right into the crotch of this hill saddle underneath the trail that we were just standing on,” smiled Wesley with a cold sly grin.

“Old damned Charley will learn the lesson of basing his business decisions on hard facts and true knowledge, rather than baseless claims and assumptions. But then again, it takes a real intelligent business mind to realize this small detail, and few ever do, even after they fail. How many adventures has old Dololly failed in now... three, I think? He'll never learn...but he will this time.. and in the hard way, if my instincts serve me right.”

All three of them continued to converse as they plodded along. Soon they were nearing the V point where two mountains sagged, and then joined up. Just then, the line where the mountain slope joined the creek side suddenly broke.

“It's right here now boys, if my memory serves me right this time! Do save your cheers now, if my instincts serve me well. There will be plenty of time for cheering and celebrating later on, I can promise you that. We want to remain silent... 'cause remember, old Dololly is still on the prowl...and surly he would be enraged at our new found success.”

The trio then plodded along right into the break in the stone line and the creek bank...and to their astonished beholding eyes, there sat a somewhat small, but obvious cave, just large enough for them to ride into the mouth of. All of them paused there in the mouth of the cave, while I raced back down toward the creek side to heave a tie log into the standing area where the horses were positioned. I was nearly out of breath, but I made it back promptly.

Cautiously we made our way down a narrowing darkened corridor, and then rounded a turn that led us for about a hundred yards, and into a huge gaping chamber of hanging stalactites, and huge boulders that glowed with a strange emerald aura. The chamber seemed to emit its own light spontaneously. Few alive have ever bore witness to anything exactly like it. The light seemed to be born of an eerie emerald green and sapphire blue, both combined with a touch of golden light from some concealed source. We could see perfectly, as though the gods in the heavens had preordained it.

Up ahead sat a huge boulder some thirty feet broad and twenty feet high. Slowly we eased our way around it...and unto our beholding eyes, there it sat! Lord above, please bless our shocked astonished eyes now watering with ecstatic exhilaration!

There sat the precious box some three by four feet in area, and some four feet high. It seemed to be constructed of a strange translucent gold and midnight black metal. What was most exhilarating was the fact that this box was overflowing with precious alabaster and virgin amber jewelry of all sorts, golden charms and necklaces of seemingly every size and shape. Diamonds, some cut and much more uncut seemingly, and freshly dug from the good earth itself. Then there was coin...golden coin in overflowing stacks and heaps that flowed both inside the box and out onto the floor of the chamber room. Words just cannot describe the joy that flowed in our mortal veins as we beheld this most glorious sight!

“Well, here's to our new found success, company X,” stated Wesley with a calm confident smile. “Save your cheers for later, boys, cause now our real work begins. Let's load as much of this up into our saddle bags and transport it back to a base camp half way down the trail near where we camped the other day. We must act fast, I don't want to meet the others along the way. We will have to come back and get the rest of this after we pack what we load up.”

So we did as he instructed. We loaded about a third of the treasure into our saddle bags after dumping all of our supplies, except our basic survival kits. All of us then rode for a day until we neared the camp site of our former stay. To the left of the camp we rode out some two hundred yards, half way between the hillside and the creek, until we found an area surrounded by six large natural boulders. In the center of the boulders we then buried the treasure, carefully wrapped in four llama hair ponchos. We then hurriedly camouflaged the area and headed back to the treasure as quickly as we could.

We loaded it up again and raced back down the trail and to the boulders again, making another stash, then rode out for the last haul. Before we exited that cave for good, I saw Wesley pick up a jagged piece of weathered lumber some two by four feet long. A section of two inch by five feet scrap was laying near by, so he picked up that as well. Carefully he drove the five foot strip into the ground, and then tacked the piece of lumber across the strip with a hammer and some nails from the supply's left aside. He took a can of brilliantly red paint and painted these words on the side of the lumber that faced the stone boulder behind which the treasure was discovered:

Sorry Charley, but you just never learn, do you? Maybe this will teach you some business ethics and general manners!

We three then rode out from the treasure cave forever. When we made it back into the base camp, we rested for a day, then loaded a third up and headed back out toward Wesley's four wheel drive pickup at the Captains mansion home. We made the other two trips back to the base camp and loaded all of the treasure into the bed of Wesley's truck. We then dumped all of the remaining gear that the captain owned next to the pump house, and then tied the horses on a lamp post that stood right beside the Captain's back door. Wesley then looked around a bit, and discovered an old piece of wood scrap paneling in the Captain's yard laying in front of his back door. He picked this up, and while laying it on the tail gate of his truck, he painted these words in the same red paint:

Dear Captain,

Here are your horses, and your tools and such. You are free to keep our wages for using your materials and supply's. We will no longer be needing any of it. We truly wish you all the very best.

Sincerely

Wesley, Jack, and Jerry

Your jaded but fabulous trio

This message he carefully tied onto the side of the horse that he had ridden in on, in such a manner that the message could easily be read on the horses' side facing the back door of the mansion house.

The remaining weeks and months the three of us spent traveling the country selling all of our wares to the antique dealers. We used fake identification to peddle most of our wares for cash money...and we sure turned a real magnificent fortune, to be sure about it. No body never asked any real hard questions, to my shock and surprise. They all seemed to be happy to get what we had to give. I figured that they must be getting it at a real deal, but that's o.k...., 'cause we sure got ours as well.

The last bit of jewelry and coin left, we decided to donate to a museum three states over from where we found it. We told them that we had inherited the stash from our great grandfathers, who had found it in a general location in the area where we had actually discovered the loot. We did not like it much, but the news papers published an account of our donation that made the news around the entire country. I just hated all of the publicity.

Some six years have elapsed now since the actual day of the fabulous discovery. We never heard what happened to the old captain, but some claimed that he had rode into a hidden cave, just knowing of a huge loot laying there in waiting. Instead he found a sign that he swore was speaking directly to him. He flew into a rage and refused to allow anybody else to read it, then smashed it all into bits against the rocks. According to the ones telling the story, he just hung his head, weeping, then screamed out, telling all of his crew to go on back home and leave him there to think to himself for a while. No body has not seen nor heard from him again ever since that fateful day.

What a sad day that is now upon us, declares his church and community, since all of them have lost such an honored and cherished asset to the area they fear, so says all of the local news and town talk..... Well, I certainly hope that they keep on looking.... , and we'll keep our eyes and ears open as we live our new lives three states over and some four cities away. ... Surly he must be out there in this

cold cruel world.....somewhere.

The Clear Crystal Chalice

Mine eyes beheld her delicate charm, my heart...oh my poor shredded heart....felt the tug of her soul as she heaved my body of weakened flesh along. I lusted for the pleasure of her wine entwined by the force of her opiates. I savored the sweet euphoria generated by her warm moist oral gratification. The much relished moment seemed as though it would never end as my mind and very soul was consumed within the heavy sweaty mist of her magic potion.

She poured the clear crystal chalice half full, then full upon my sagging smile, then laughing the harlots laugh as I smiled broadly once more again. I gazed deeply into the clear indigo orb created by the transparent crystal and the wine. She clicked the lights off, then lit candles which cast a golden light that danced a gay dance upon the blank darkness of the palace walls. Along either side were placed three candles, and I continued my entrancing gaze whilst the harlot lay nude upon the indigo sheepskin blanket beside my left side.

She never made a single sound, yea, she never dared to move a single move, she was just gratified to lay there and observe my sacred ritual. Never an eye did blink, never my stare did break as I continued to gaze forward into the midst of the venerated orb created by the filled glass and the blood intoxicating wine. I envisioned my gaze penetrating into the midst of the orb, not just staring upon the surface of a glass full of red wine.

First, in the very midst of the orb, I beheld a swirling mist, then the mist cleared as the light cast it's dancing display into the very heart of the crystal chalice. Yea, the effects of the wine, the effects of the opiate tinctures, the euphoria induced by the pleasure of her most delicate art, all of that in combination caused the cloudy mist to now clear, and my eyes beheld the venerated vision as it unfolded before my lusting, but tearful eyes.

I heard the voices of men outside requesting both a revelation and interpretation of the sacred vision – no they demanded to have knowledge of the future and their place in it! So I breathed those words so desired by their hearts and minds, I told them but they angered at the harshness of the vision and the vivid descriptive nature of my words. As the cloudy mist divided, then separated, I saw the vision and I told them exactly what I saw:

“Lo, I behold a brilliant rising sun on the distant horizon. I see the angel of death bearing the flaming sword of the ancients, saying as he gazed into my tearful bedazzled eyes:

Come, and behold, oh thou one of blood and flesh. Now tell me what ye see before you.

So I gasped for breath out of sheer terror, but continued to force my wanting eyes to gaze forward into the tumbling mist in the glass. The mist then parted and I beheld the vision again.

“Sir, oh holy one of saintly divine, I see a rising sun on the distant horizon, just as before.

Oh one of flesh and blood, tell me what ye see now, asked the robed angel bearing the flaming sword of woe?

“I behold a huge leaping column of smoke that rises into the highest heights of heaven itself. I see a brilliant flash of searing light. I hear the roar of a rolling thunder greater than any ever heard by mortal

ears on earth or in any universe throughout. “

What do you see now, oh one of blood and flesh?

“I behold the crying screams of multitudes. My nose smells the sick sweet vapor of burning flesh, and I see huge mountains of half burned corpses. Never has the eyes of men in any time ever witnessed a more terrible horror!”

I wept as I beheld the vision in the midnight crystal chalice. I wished to run and hide myself from this wretched dreadful horror, but mighty forces beyond my control now compelled me to stay and continue to bear this horrible witness unto all man kind.

So tell me, oh one of flesh and blood, who are the victims and who are the perpetrators of these things to come?

“ I now cast my gaze into the heavens, oh dear sir, and my body lifts from the earth amid these horrors, and as I gaze down upon the smoldering earth below, I see these victims as they lay upon a map of the earth. I see that this most horrible of horrors began with a war by the Persians against the holy land of Zion. It was them who first attacked the land of vulnerable peaceful villages, burning every village and town into complete ash in a matter of sheer minutes. But holy Zion gave a much more horrible response; so those of Persia, of whom are possessed by those dark dreadful forces of Apollyon, then attacked the sacred city of Rome, completely reducing the venerated cathedral, yea the entire city of mortal men, into smoldering rubble and ruin. Thus ended the rule of their sanctified Kings who sat on their holy throne for nearly two millennium.”

“ I shudder with fear and dread as my eyes continue to bear witness to the horror before me, sir. Must I continue to sit and give review?”

Give witness unto the venerated vision, oh one of blood and flesh.

As I continued to gaze forward into the swirling mist of the chalice, I beheld those lords of the West responding unto those most evil lords of the East, gathering about with the holy land of Zion in their midst. My ears then beheld the cries of men unto the Lord of hosts, begging him to save them from those forces of darkness and midnight vanity.

Tell us what ye now see, oh one of blood and flesh, demanded the angel who stood before me.

“Sir, I see the light of the sun shining more brilliantly than even ten suns, yea, even more so than a hundred suns! And from the sky ascends the radiant venerated one so cherished by untold masses for millennium. By his very hands all sickness is instantly cured, all tears instantly dried. I see the ground break and the ghosts of those once dead now arise, going forward into the opened embrace of his outstretched arms. Lo I behold those of his own multitude going forward toward a magnificent temple of translucent gold that sits in the heart of that most glorious city of cities in holy Zion. There it is with him that they shall dwell in this city of gold for a single millennium, and all the earth shall know only love, peace, and joy fulfillment in the glory of his name forever more.”

As the vision concluded the robbed angel smiled warmly, then vanished, and I heard a voice that spoke on the wind saying:

“Now arise and go forth, oh one of flesh and blood, among all men, spreading the good news into those ears that hear not, and show signs unto those eyes that see not.”

So I stood up from the crystal chalice, I glanced to my right side and the harlot was there no more, yea, and neither lay her sheepskin blanket by my left side . I clothed my nude body and walked from the room among the mortals of the earth, telling them of the good news in my sanctified vision, and of their brilliant savior and redeemer born in from high heaven above. Behold all mankind, It is he who is the true owner of all the earth, and it is by his hand that those poisoned lands shall be made pure as on the day of creation, and those of whom made war on the saints and destroyed the earth shall be condemned into the flaming dungeon... for ever more.

The Tale of Gringo El Loco: A Christmas Saga

Though his body felt young on the inside, his mind knew deep in the inner most depths of it's midst that he was growing older. On the outside his arms grew tired and his feet ached to the point that he felt that he could not complete his journey forward, even though it was a journey that he had traveled continuously for well over twenty years now. The pits in the shattered sidewalks seemed to grab up at him now, even though he managed to step broadly over them, just as he always had. A sight caught his eye on the left side, he tuned to glance, his eyes beholding a snarling angry face.

“Stay out of my way, old man! What's de matter wid ya? You forgot where ya going,”spouted an angry figure that shook his fist as he spoke so loud?

It seemed like today was the first time that he had ever received words like that from anyone, and it was the third time today that he had endured those types of profane greetings.

“Yea, ya punk kid there! Nothin' is wrong with me! You had just better watch where ya going,” he shouted back through tightly clenched teeth!

As he strained ahead, his eyes felt as though they were slightly more clouded today than ever at any other time that he could recall. He continued forward just as he had done for so many thankless years now. What else could he do, but continue forward? Up ahead for what appeared to be kilometers, he saw his destination; Senior Greko Barbarossa's wood carving shop.

The stress of the walk seemed to bear even more heavily upon him now than it had even in the past few minutes, and his feet hurt deep inside the center of their soles with ever more growing intensity, so it seemed to him. In his mind he never once doubted himself, he was determined to make that round no matter what fate had in store for his body or soul. Way too many people were depending on him to complete the sacred journey.

Soon as he strained to take his next step, he saw the sign of the wood carver's shop sitting just outside the opened door along with several of his wares that were on display. An old man struggled to walk toward him, a man even much more older than himself.

“Santiago, my dear precious friend, mucho gusto mi Amigo! I am so glad that you are here. I know that this is the season for orders, so I shall assume that is what you came for? You know that you are always welcome here. You are family.”

El Greco hugged the man, clapping him solidly upon his shoulders as he did so, and lovingly kissing his right cheek.

“It's so good to see you again. I heard that you had been very sick, sir.”

Santiago smiled a warm smile, his sun hardened face suddenly shattering as he did so.

“And surly it is so good to be here. Yes, I had been somewhat sick, but I am here now....and stronger than ever, I shall say!”

“Bravo! Bravo! That is so good to hear! I hope that I never hear that you are sick again, and again, welcome back! I can never say that enough. You just do not know how much I mean those words, my friend!”

The shop wasn't much to behold. Basically it was just a concrete hole among many others on this narrow street of unpainted asphalt and more concrete that rose and fell up and down the hills. Beside him sat the pinata shop, before him was the shoe smith, all of these businesses owned by the same people whom he felt as if were his family. In fact, *they were* the only family that he had remaining in

the entire world. Once they were gone, there would be no more, or so it felt to him at the present time. Across the road from him was the *helado* shop, and the *licoria* shop was just after that. All of the people walked forward to hug him and wish him a fine welcome back.

“Oh Santiago, we are sure glad to see you back again,” they greeted him with smiles as they spoke the words.

“Well it's that time of year again, I guess,” asked Senior Greko?

“Indeed it is, my dear friend,” replied Santiago. “Make it the same as the year before, please Senior.”

“That I shall do, good Sir.”

“Just add ten more of each to the portion, please,” smiled the relaxed Santiago.

“Oh Santiago, dear Santiago....how do you do it? Certainly the dear children shall adore you for it. This is so much trouble...I know it is! Let me offer you a cheerful discount...please do.”

“No, no, no,” warmly smiled Santiago. “You must make a living. I cannot take advantage of your generosity like that. We have been good friends for way too long, Sir Greko. I do what I do and live where I live, just so I can make these rounds every year. I love it and would not have it any other way. This is the real me, and this is what I live for ever since I arrived here in Otavolo, now over twenty years ago.”

El Greko smiled warmly again toward Santiago, shaking his head from side to side, then embraced him once more, as did all of the others standing in the concrete room.

“Oh dear Santiago, may God in heaven truly bless you for what you are doing.”

As they all took turns embracing him, tears formed in their eyes. The ladies began to even weep, hugging him as though they never wanted to let go. The lady who owned the *helado* shop then smiled warmly at him.

“Dear Santiago, then please allow me to get you a mango shake and a plate of *Seiko-de-chewa*. I promise it will not take long, nor will it be much trouble to me.”

Santiago then pointed his index finger toward the sky above, shaking it to give emphasis to his words about to be spoken.

“Now that, ladies and gentleman, is an offer that no real man could ever refuse!”

Everyone burst out in laughs and cheers, clapping as if to celebrate the fact that Santiago had accepted the offer. After thirty minutes or so, amid many smiles, laughs, and lots of warm conversation, the lady finally returned. Her and her teenaged daughter carrying the plate, the shake, and a large bottle of Pilsener Beer, carefully placing it before Santiago as he cheered with the others.

As the time passed and the hours waned, soon the ladies disappeared, and appeared later on with more beer and mixed rum drinks called *agua de loco*. The hours passed with more singing and more celebrating, and the celebrations were for the coming of the *Epiphany* season, but also for the goodness in fellowship and just being healthy and alive.

“We live,” they all shouted! “Salutations,” as they placed their glasses together both while standing up and sitting at the tables!

Soon the hours waned and Santiago knew that he must begin his long walk back from the wood shop and into the dwelling in which he now lived. He did not want to go back. He would have loved to just sit and stay with all of his family right here among them, and they would have gladly received him, but he knew that he must go because he had a cherished undertaking to engage very soon. So with the sun now drawing down toward the tree lined horizon, he said his goodbyes, and then began his journey back toward his home place.

He felt fine in a clear headed sort of way as he casually ambled down the sidewalk passed the concrete shops and the overloaded tiendas. Many of these small shops had pulled their steel doors down or pulled their heavy wooden doors shut, and across their front the once opened welcoming entrance ways were now replaced with heavy iron cages all painted black. Instead of happy people

sitting out front with greeting smiles, most were sitting comfortably behind those caged doors, laughing and talking with their next of kin. It seemed that all of them were now closing just as he was walking passed, one right after another. The warm smiles of the owners now being replaced by frightful snarling frowns and glares.

“What do ya want, old man,” they snarled as he paused momentarily to gaze into their loaded store fronts. “We are closing up now, so just keep on walking. We will open tomorrow around nine hundred hours, or so.”

So he kept on walking, only continuing to pause just here and there just to peek. He was not old. He could walk this long walk, and not half of them of whom were only half his age could do that. Why, they were all so lazy and indifferent, most would not work just because they felt they were way to good to do the types of work that were most available; and this even though they wore rags and appeared to have been without a bath or food for three days. Just look at these poor wretches, he thought as he walked passed. These people appeared to live in houses, or *chicken coops* as he called them, each one appearing as if it might just collapse at any moment....and just think, these people feel that they are way to good to carry vegetables or luggage for some one in need? He just shook his head as he continued to walk passed, not knowing exactly what to make of it as he watched them all sitting around with wide staring eyes at the close of an entire day, wallowing in wasteful idleness.

He continued to walk and think to himself. He was extremely healthy most of the time. While it was true that he had been sick some time back, it was the first time in many many years. It had been some three years since he had even had the sniffles. I will bet these young people cannot beat that figure, he thought as he reflected on the frequency of their sickness as he observed. He was not old. Being old meant bent over and using a cane to get around. Why, here he was still standing and walking with swinging arms!

He rounded a corner that had a tienda tucked away in such a manner that it appeared one could just jump once and be right there inside the wide opened store. The owner and his family were all outside loading rice bags, and vegetables, and yellow plastic cartons filled with half liter bottles of Pilsener Beer inside the store. As he walked passed, the owner and his son pulled the slide door down and began picking up the paper and trash that was scattered all about.

Up ahead in the distance he saw the narrow dirt walkway that led into the area in which he lived. The footpath may lie some three or four hundred meters in front of him.

“Hola amigos, ven aquie,” he heard a young male voice scream from behind! He snapped around and his eyes fell upon a thin, but toned young boy about thirteen or so. Soon up ran five or six more.

“Esta Gringo El loco! Sal de aqui loco! No nos gusta Tu aqui,” they screamed as they threw mud and small stones upon him! He raised his right arm to shield his eyes as he continued to walk along. Many among them spit, skillfully attempting to aim at his face, but became angry when they could only hit the forearm that so artfully shielded him from their abuse. He attempted to run through them because there was no other choice.

This was a daily routine that he was forced to experience. He was not angry, but only deeply saddened by their ignorance and the fact that he knew that their future would only hold a continual perpetual poverty for them, and their children as well.

They followed with their cat calls and jeers. Soon they grew weary of their harassment and scattered out, each seemingly racing down a different alley, like they thought that he just might take the time to pursue them. The harassment that he endured had it's benefits, it seemed to him; before he knew it he found himself walking through the bamboo gate that closed off the narrow foot path leading to his home down in the tropical wood. That threat sure caused his pace to quicken!

“Santiago! Santiago! I can see that they have been at it again,” screamed a young voice behind him. Santiago turned and saw his one and only friend, ten year old Pedro who stood by pleading with him.

“I will fix all of them for this evil. I know the lord of the M79th Amigos, and all that I will have to do is agree to carry some tiny boxes for him, and he will take care of this matter for us!”

“No, mi ninos, porfavor, no! We must learn to forgive and endure. Time will change them, if it is not way too late for them to see by then. But maybe they can know enough to tell their children by our example, and then their children will know enough to be better people. It is us who should always strive to do our part to make the world a better place. I am so sorry, my dear Pedro, but this means us forgiving all of those who should do us harm,” said Santiago with a warm understanding smile.

Pedro hung his head, not knowing exactly how to reply.

“Cheer up, my young friend, tomorrow will be another day. Hasta luago mi amigo. In the manana!”

“In the manana,” sighed Pedro as he slowly turned and headed back down the side walk from where Santiago had just walked.

Santiago then turned and walked down the narrow foot path. The path rounded several sharp turns and then finally ended at a small box made of split bamboo with a gable top on it. This was the place that he had called home now for some twenty years or more . It was not much, by his standards back home, but it was home never the less.

Carefully he tugged the latch string and gently swung the wired bamboo door open, exposing an interior that consisted of a hammock strung from diagonal corner to corner. In the corner to his right was a one foot square of soap stone sitting proudly upon a hand woven split bamboo table that had it's center carved out so that it formed a hole. This was his stove. He made use of the stove simply by pouring homemade charcoal into the hole, lighting it, then placing a grill over the opening and allowing it to rest upon the thick edges. On this grill top he could bake, boil, and fry. It was much easier and efficient to boil, so this was how he cooked a majority of the time.

Few people ever came to visit, other than Pedro, so he did not have to worry much about how he appeared to others, except when he went into town to work. For this reason he kept a well cleaned and pressed double breasted suit. He also had five dress pants and five very professional dress shirts that he kept for use at work. Most of the time he just wore old worn out rags, since he would be working in the garden or walking in the woods checking his traps.

Back onto the busy side walk where the dirt foot path began, for a kilometer and a half in the opposite direction, was an English academy called *Espirito Santos*. On the outside the academy building appeared very small and insignificant, but on the inside this school was indeed a huge campus structure containing a grammar school, high school, and the university, one for males and the other for females. This was where he worked as an English instructor, sometimes just for a short stint, other times for a long contract.

As far as he knew, no one ever knew anything about him working there. He tried to keep this fact a carefully hidden secret. He maintained his secret by catching a taxi cab before daylight in the morning, and riding out to the school yard where he simply hung out until the doors opened at o eight hundred hours. At work he was a very well cleaned and professional appearing person, so no one ever knew the truth about him, either at home or at work. No one important ever questioned him concerning the place or area where he lived. The students would question him from time to time, but he could always lie his way out of it by telling them that he stayed with friends and never in the same place. Or tell them that he stayed in Sanborodon, which was one of the most wealthy residential districts in all of Otovololo. The ruse always worked better when he simply carried on with his lesson as quickly as possible, just as though they had never even bothered to ask in the first place.

On the weekends and evenings he made his way out into the center of town where he lived out his passion, his dream concerning his preordained purpose in life. Six bamboo poles he pushed into the earth, spacing them some twelve feet apart. The two center poles were some four feet taller than the other two. Across these two was tightly tied a green parachute chord. Across this cord was pulled an

olive green tarp of the type used by the military, that was tied down on the opposite two poles which spanned on either side. This made a very nice shady shelter that was really comfortable to sit underneath.

In the center of this shelter stood a very large three feet diameter black spider legged boiling pot, that sit atop a fire which he constantly kept feeding with dried bamboo at the base. Into that pot he poured the finest that all of his meager wages could buy, for his happiness was not determined by what he accumulated, but by the once sad, but now happy faces of the children who lined up in long rows just to savor his next serving. Many times adults arrived to take an easy inexpensive meal, but he did not have a problem with that. Seeing all of them happy made him happy, and that was all that mattered to him most of all. As they arrived inside the tent, he would stand and address them with opened arms:

“Come my weak, destitute starving ones, for your salvation surly is now at hand. In the name of holy Christ, the son of Mary, the virgin, I commend you to come forward and receive the sacred blessing. For behold, it was the Lord himself who said: *suffer the little ones in my name, and they shall be given nurture. Feed the hungry in my holy name, and they shall be given bread. Now hear this, what so ever ye shall do in my name, so shall it be done.*”

He would fill this pot many times each after noon and day with the very best of meats and vegetables that his meager wages could buy, but only when the very last one had taken his fill, would he then reach down inside with the large stainless ladle, and retrieve his own for the day. To the right corner of the shelter sat a large plastic water keg with a pouring spout near the bottom. This he kept filled with the very best tamarindo juice, or guavanana juice, that his money could buy. He walked over to draw his portion for drink. Sometimes it would be there, but most times it would not be, even when he tilted the keg.

When the day had ended he would pull up the bamboo poles and roll up the canvas, carefully hiding it in the edge of the palm forest as he made his way back toward the narrow foot path that led to his home in the distance. The pot was simply left standing where it now sat. Somehow it was always there on the next day that he returned to fill it. As he made his way home he heard the young harsh voices again.

“Come here, my amigos. What have we here? Oh...if it's not the crazy old gringo from somewhere way up in Seratogo, or is it Chicago? Is that where it is, old man?”

Santiago simply just kept walking on, pretending to ignore them, but quickening his step at the same time.

“What? You mean that you are just going to walk on when I am talking to you, old man? You see, my name is Ricardo El Malo, I am the leader of the C73rd street gang. I don't like you ignoring me and my gang like that. See? We demand that you give us respect! Or else *this* will happen, except that it will be much worse next time!”

Ricardo then raced up behind the old man, tossing a old bed sheet over his head. All of them laughed and jumped on him, beating him until he collapsed upon the street.

“Oh,” he cried. “What did I do? Help! You cannot do this to me!”

“Ricardo,” screamed a shrill voice that the old man recognized as his friend Pedro! “Stop that, right now! He has not done anything to any of you!”

“And tell us, please, who is he to you? Your dear friend,” snapped Ricardo?

They continued to beat him as they jeered.

“As your brother I demand that you stop it, right now, “ screamed Pedro! “He just might be my friend!”

Pedro rushed up and seized his brother, Ricardo, by his right arm.

“Stop it, now!”

“Hey, you kids leave that man alone there,” yelled a harsh low voice. The kids looked up and saw four policemen running toward them.

“Look out mi muchachos, here come the policia,” yelled a shrill voice. All of the boys scattered and ran. The police paused to help the old man back onto his feet. He slowly pulled the sheet from over his head, gasping for breath.

“My dear Senior, are you alright,” the officers warmly asked?

“Sure, I might be old but I am very tough,” replied Santiago as he struggled for breath.

“We sure hope so. We could not help but come to your aide.”

“I know one of them,” said Pedro with a smile. “He is my brother, but he is never at home.”

“Yea, well we'll be there. We have been after them for awhile anyway,” replied the police.

Pedro sighed. He did not say anything, but deep down he knew that they would never pursue the thugs. He really wished that they would do so, even if one of them was his brother.

The old man struggled to make it back home. This was the second time in a week that that he had been attacked, but no time in the past was this violent. It seemed to him that the intensity of the attacks was increasing, just because they knew that they could do it, and neither he nor the authorities could or would do anything about it. Maybe his good friend Pedro was right. Maybe he should go to the god father of the local top gang and ask for vindication. It would be worth it if all that he had to do it was to transport a few small packages.

With that thought ringing in his mind he trudged on toward the narrow footpath that led back to his home. His bones ached even more now than they did before the beating had taken place. He decided that the walking would be good for him in the end, since he could walk the soreness out if he just pressed onward. He sighed deeply, glancing up and seeing the footpath up ahead fifty meters or so.

As he continued to walk the wind puffed in hard puffs that dried his skin even more as the beating sun seemed to brown it, causing the many creases in his forehead to stand out with much more definition. He struggled to make it back into his bamboo box of a house, pulling on the latch string and nudging the door open. Soon as he entered he came to rest on the hammock that was suspended diagonally from corner to corner. It was an ornate hand stitched hammock given to him by a wife of a dear friend. It sure felt good to just lay here, gently swinging, relaxing himself until his eyes closed all by themselves in what seemed no time at all.

When his eyes opened it was when the light of dawn cracked just before the sun arose. Another day had rolled by, and the hallowed season of epiphany was now upon the land. He must make it back to the wood cutter's shop in the next two days to pick up his annual order. Soon the season for the *ano veijo* would be at hand. That was a glorious time when great pinatas would stand in salutation on the edge of the city street, and all of the children and adults would write down all of their misfortunes from the previous year onto some small snippet of paper, each placing it inside of the giant pinatas. These pinatas would then be set afire, and as they burned so would the spirits of their misfortune. Doing this would assure good luck for the following year, if accompanied by a prayer of request to the virgin, mother of holy Christ.

Santiago made his own prayer of request, to both Christ and his holy mother. On that spectacular night many from his neighborhood would gaze as they watched him write his words onto the sacred shred of paper, only to place it inside one of the great pinatas that stood tall by the street side. There would be cheers and salutations with both drink and fireworks on the occasion of that night. Everywhere great elation and euphoria would surly fill the air. People running to and fro. The fire works would burst into blossoms of multicolor, only to be obscured by the gray smoke left behind. Yes, he would surly celebrate while he thought of his duty to play a part unto the spirit of the event. People were counting on him, especially the children.

He arose from the hammock, making his way to the soapstone stove, and casually pouring in the charcoal from the rectangle thin wooden box that sat beside it. He lit the charcoal, and when the fire was burning bright and strong he placed the grill on top of the soapstone, and the pot on top of that. He

poured the water into the pot in a measured amount that he knew by heart without putting any thought into it. He carefully poured in the corn meal to make a favorite from the home of his origin, only he could not afford the molasses or the nutmeg.

He called it *hasty pudding* back home, and it felt warm going down and tasted very good to his mouth. He ate until he could not eat any longer, then washed the pot out at the water jug. He drank his morning cup of coffee, and out the door he went.

He often thought of home as he walked along during this time of year. Home had been in a land far far away from where he was now. Jobs were non-existent where he was from. A profession such as a teacher was out of the question, since computers had long since replaced the person as a teacher.

As a matter of fact, computers or robots had just about replaced everybody who ever had a job or needed a job. The situation had become so terrible for the people in the developed lands to the north, that the unemployment figures had reached seventy percent. The government continued to lie about everything, even when people were losing their homes and living in tents on the dismal drug-torn street corners. Then came the mass protests, and the burning and looting. Things became so bad that the government began sending foreign troops into the towns and the cities, rounding up the people and forcing them into buses and trains, even vans, and shipping them off to Lord only knows where. Some had said into the liquidation camps, because no one ever heard from any of them again. These words were never to be spoken aloud, however.

He knew something bad was going to go down soon when the government outlawed private ownership of firearms, then all weapons from bows and arrows to swords. That was when he decided to hide his own and go on the run. He tried to convince his family and friends to come along, but none would listen to him. They all felt that the system would never deteriorate to *that* point, that it would right itself back up. That was the way of his country, he was told by them.

So he purchased a plane ticket first to Columbia, where he forged his documentation. Then he purchased a ticket to Ecuador under his new false identity. This would surely throw them off his track, if they ever decided to follow. He was sure that they would, since he had cashed his retirement account in and then sold everything that he owned. He had a small fortune. He had opened up a Paypal account on his computer, dropped in all but nine thousand dollars, then he hopped the plane and was gone. When he arrived in Columbia, he opened a new bank account, plugged in the numbers to his new account, and simply transferred his money. He then opened up another account in Ecuador under his new name, transferred the money via Paypal again...., and boom, there he was with lots of cash to stash! It was really so simple to do that it was shocking to him that he had pulled it all off without a single hitch.

Now he had this money, but what was he to do with it? Before too long he saw his personal calling, so he decided to answer unto this most unique beckoning, as only he knew how to do. He smiled to himself as he continued to trudge along, knowing that he had surely made the right choice. He had not stopped for over twenty years, and he was not about to look back now.

Soon he rounded the corner and ran straight into the opened pull door of the wood carver's shop.

"Santiago, there you are. I was surely expecting you," said the low gruff voice of the wood carver, El Greko! "Please come on inside! Welcome, welcome, please make yourself at home with us. My house is your house anytime!"

"I see, I see, my friend. I now see the bag in the corner," replied Santiago.

"Why yes, and I have packed your things in it to order, just for you to go with. "

Santiago handed him the cash in a tight bundle. El Greko quickly counted it out.

"Make yourself at home here, with us, please," he said pointing to a chair.

The wife of El Greko quickly brought out the food, the wine, and following the meal, the tequila. Soon the friends from the surrounding stores came by to sit, drink, and socialize, just as they always did. Before he knew it, the sun was drawing down nearer to the tree-lined horizon. He always felt sad

when it came time to go, but he just knew that it was something that he had to do. They offered their place to him, so that he could stay for the night. He could not, so he soon stepped out the door and onto the sidewalk, and began that long arduous walk back toward his home, except this time he would be carrying a huge army green sack full of surprises.

He struggled, soon gasping for breath even though he had not traveled but a few dozen meters. He would pause, resting the sack upon the pavement until his panting breath eased back into its normal rate. He would continue on in this manner until he finally reached the door of his home some time well after midnight. He was lucky that the thugs were not out. Maybe they were asleep this late at night, and they would have never suspected an old man being out so late and carrying such a heavy bag this early in the morning. Every pain always has its benefits, he was always told by the elders.

When he finally trudged back into his home, he crashed into his hammock, swinging gently until he closed his eyes. When he opened them again a new day had arrived in all of its brilliant fullness. This was it, that day had finally arrived, the day before the night of the *ano viejo*.

The old man awoke, yawning and stretching while standing in the door frame to a door that opened into the lush tropical landscape. Today was the big day just before the great celebration. Later on this evening everyone, both young and old, would be out in the streets, playing their part to a wonderful celebration. Even the thieves who reside in *the calle de los ladrones*, would cast aside their forlorn calling just for this wonderful majestic air of hallowed celebration. Many had great fear about walking down this certain street all throughout the year, and that fear still held true, even on this sacred evening.

Already the streets were buzzing, the shops were opening to set up for the evening's eventful celebration. As Santiago ambled about slowly, taking note of it all, he drew in a deep breath, savoring the wonderful aromatic scent of tropical spices and herbs that were being cooked along with the roasting meat that turned on a stainless rotisserie. He saw the drinks being poured and the happy smiling faces of gentle ladies dressed in long colorful traditional styled Spanish dresses as they placed the drinks on the bar before the many shops. Laughing, playing children raced about through it all, just like life was a happy eternal paradise.

Santiago smiled broadly as he slowly passed, the sights were a wonderful sight that made his heart assume a warm comfortable glow deep on the inside. A feeling of happiness arose from the very pit of his breast that caused him to feel as if he could relate to the children and their eternal elated joy. He never wanted to leave, he only wanted to add unto their joy by doing his part in the name of the good Lord above, and the holy mother, Mary.

From time to time, his mind did drift and he came to think on those thoughts of his family back home, but it had been way too many years into the future now, and their lack of contact had caused him to accept the obvious, and simply move on with his life. Those dear thoughts always entered into his mind at this time of the year, but he would shake them off by focusing his mind on the surroundings that lay before him at the moment, and he always just assumed that everyone had perished amid the persecutions that he was sure had overtaken them.

"My dear Santiago, salutations mi amigo! Felici anos," spoke a warm but hard voice from behind. He snapped around, there stood the weather beaten face of a gray headed man with long hair, named Gonzales, who always seemed to greet him every time that he passed him by. Every time that he passed, the old man would offer drinks and good blessings, and Santiago never refused.

"Holo, mi amigo. Como Estas? Buanos dias," replied Santiago!

Santiago turned and waked underneath the bamboo shelter where Gonzales sat at a bench on a picnic table. There he would sit with him, taking tequila shots even though it was only one thousand hours in the morning. This was out of character for him to do so, but he did it just the same, only because his old friend, Gonzales, wanted him to.

Time seemed to zip along, and Santiago seemingly awoke from a pleasant dream, only to begin his

walk once again. The crowds of people were already flocking into the streets, children running here and there, the air filled with cheer and kind pleasant words, and calls of “salutations mi amigos and amigas! Felicitaciones!”

Santiago walked along, pausing to speak, smiling and taking drinks as they were offered. The numbers of the people multiplied and the crowds swelled, signaling that the blessed hour was nearing. Somehow Santiago had managed to make it back into his house to retrieve the army green bag, he just could not remember when or how he did so. Though he struggled underneath the weight of the bag, the euphoria that he had discovered over the years in doing so blanketed the dull throbbing pain that was now upon his frail body as the weight of the bag bore down mercilessly upon him.

“Papa Noel,” cried the children as they pointed! “Aquí! Aquí!”

Quickly he turned and rounded the same old corner that always seemed to throw them off of his trail for some mysterious reason. He did not know *how* it was that he had always managed to do so, only that he *did*. He continued to walk and struggle for some two kilometers, before he entered into the street of the thieves.

As the mid night hour approached, all of the streets filled with the flaming paper mache' effigies of innumerable figures, and massive throngs of cheering people yelling, “Hosanna on high! Happy new year and peace on earth!”

Clouds of blazing fire works popped and zipped through the air by the multitudes. Soon the great cathedral bells rang throughout the entire city of Otovolo in what seemed to be the joyous unending simultaneous ringing of thousands upon thousands, to announce the arrival of that most sacred of hours. A flowing feeling of exhalation ran through the air that seemed to give Santiago a new found strength to continue on.

So he ambled on, deep down into the residential district area. The houses were like chicken coops back home that were about to collapse. Many of the homes were simply hastily constructed cinder block boxes with tops on them, some gabled, some flat, some just slanted. In each doorway he paused momentarily and placed an elaborately carved teak wood toy car, or a carved handmade doll of some revered figure, or some other figure that he had heard children speak of in the distance during the course of the year; such as the saint of miracles, the good saint, Anthony, since many of the children had family who suffered terrible illnesses that no doctor anywhere could cure. Or he just might leave a magnificently hand carved mahogany figure of the *santo de emplao*, the good saint, Cajetan, since a parent may have been unemployed for months, or even many years.

The people were all out in the streets celebrating and would never see him as he ambled along, pausing at the doorways, and leaving his gifts that he pulled with trembling hands from the army green bag. Even if they did see him, they could never recognize him dressed in his fake long beard, black high boots, and blood crimson shirt and long pants. Sometimes though, as before, some children would catch a glimpse of him as he walked along, but he always seemed to evade them, as if the unseen hands of spirits called up by the continuous ringing chime of the cathedral bells labored to conceal his presence from prying eyes.

On each elaborately carved gift he would place a note of torn paper, carefully notating the name of each resident of the home, and telling them that this gift is for this person, or that gift was for that person, happy new year and salutations, from the spirit of good Saint Nicholas.

The continual ring of the chimes numbed the pain of his struggle in the labor. He did not like to admit it, but the weight of the ages was now bearing down upon him. He gasped for breath, his arms ached, his eyes narrowed in their blurring vision. He forced himself to continue in his labor, now his breast hurt with a strange swelling pain that felt if some great pressure bore down upon him from above.

He found the strength to continue on in the ringing of the bells, those sacred drumming chimes of the many cathedral bells. He could not explain it to anyone, but the ringing of the bells gave him a hope that

continued on just as long as they continued to ring, and they would do so until o three hundred hours, according to the ancient tradition.

So he ambled along, pausing at the doorways of each and every house. No matter if the kids or the adults were the most evil of people in the entire neighborhood. Not even if the kids were among those of whom attacked him, beating him up and making him weep. These he placed gifts to as well. Matter of fact, he placed the very best gifts in the entire bag that he carried upon his slumping shoulders upon the door steps of those whom had done him the most wrong. In this act, this most basic of simple actions, he found his eternal joy...., his reason for being.

Slowly he made his way back toward the foot path that led to his home; now on the occasion of his travel back, the army green bag was empty. Though his journey was easier to make, the pain that lay in his breast was still with him. He gasped for breath, pausing, then forcing himself to move on. As the chiming bells rang out their last chime he entered into the door way of his home, coming to rest once again in the swinging hand stitched hammock. He closed his eyes, dreaming of home in a far away place from long long ago. As his eyes came to a gradual close while he lay, he then came to see the outstretched hands of his dear mother, mi Mamia Glendora, beckoning him to come with her.

“Please come to me, my dear Benny,” she would repeat to him over and over. “Come home with me now, it has been way too long for us to have been apart like this.”

His eyes beheld a glowing radiant light surrounding her that burned with more intensity than even the sun itself. He arose from within himself to follow.....to go on that most pleasant of celestial journeys.....

Late the next morning a crowd of kids raced into his simple bamboo home with happy cheers, to tell him of their new morning discovery that the consecrated spirit of the good Saint, Nicholas, had left for them. At the rear of the crowd of elated kids spoke the ringing voices of both Pedro and his brother Ricardo, who now wished to beg of his unhesitating forgiveness:

“Santiago! Santiago! Look what we have found this morning! He is real, as the elders say! The good Saint Nicholas is real! Look.... he lives.....!”

The buzzing mob of kids rounded the corner of Santiago's bamboo door jam holding their treasures high, finding him still laying in the perfectly stationary hammock, deep in the slumber of his hallowed rest, smiling a smile of perfect contentment that seemed to wish the entire world all the joy in eternal peace, and merciful good will unto all men. The old man was truly home now, for behold, now he was no longer old but as though very young once again...., and home was sure to be his amid the perfect pleasure of infinite surrounding cherished company, and the sanctified euphoria of elated radiant golden bliss.....for just as long as time moves forward and the waves of the clear blue sea continue to roll into shore.

The Legend Of The Man Who Wrote

A man lived once named *Benjamin Fry*, who lived only to write, and write he did by the light in his mind while viewing a crystal clear mental portrait as it painted itself out right before his beholding eyes. Those of whom knew him were aware that he had been writing since his earliest childhood, endlessly telling his tales of cotton candy trees, and powder puff clouds high above trees with happy faces that spoke to him as he flew above on a green dragon's back, toward a warm smiling radiant sun.

He had lived his entire life for the adventure found only in a child's world, exploring wood and dale, plundering around in vine enshrouded barns that no human had set foot in for fifty, or seventy five, or even a hundred years.

As he wrote he would recall vivid memories from those most cherished of times. Like the time he and his best friend, Fish, decided to run away from school and go deep into the wood stand behind that small one room building where first and second grades were way back then. The both of them raced into the woods, taking their cover behind thick wax myrtle bushes and old half rotten fallen logs, to escape a thorough search led by a rough ex combat soldier turned teacher, who had vowed aloud that no student on the campus grounds could ever escape his pursuit.

In his mind's eye he could still see the both of them as they fell down flat behind an old fallen live oak tree, and he could still see the legs of that teacher walking here and there, kicking the bushes as he and some twenty students searched diligently for the forlorn two. He could still see them both near explosion with laughter as the mob finally gave up and moved on back toward class following the teacher's raging failure to discover the two.

So they followed old man Baker's winding creek through the rolling leaf strewn woods. Soon they were arriving behind the falls on a large beaver dam. When they walked around the edge of the pond, it seemed that in no time at all they were on the back side of Fish's father's fields. In the center of these fields enshrouded by trees that grew in thick bunches, was a small round fishing pond, and it was here that the two would spend their day inside this majestic fairytale oasis. Here the fish always seemed to bite, and there was never an evil glance or foul word spoken, no, only the warm contented feeling of a truly perfect child's paradise.

Then there was the other time that Fish and Ben hid way up inside the attic of the church during services, only to walk while straddling the wooden two by four rafters, coming to pause near where the chandelier was hanging inside the study room. As they both gazed through the gap between the edges of the flange that supported the light, and the edge of the wooden hole cut to receive the flange of the light, they saw the preacher filling his pockets with the coins and bills from the offering plate. When they told their parents both received a vicious belt lashing from their fathers. While there was pain in the recalling of these events, experiencing the pain built a strong character that often leads the young into future greatness.

Deep inside his mind and his heart he longed for those times now lost forever to the ages, those times that exist only in the hallowed treasure chest of venerated memories. For many years now he had lived in the city, and his bleating heart and yearning mind had become polluted by a foul lack of cherished friendship, that warm cozy kind of friendship where all people seem as close family, even though no blood relation ever existed at all. He grew weary of the heated bodily congestion, weary of the traffic, weary of those intimidating blank stares on empty featureless faces, and so he began to search for a way out of his despair.

So for those reasons he continued to write, day in and day out. He could always write when there was nothing else to do. He wrote of the good times and the bad, the slow times and the fast, and those crazy happy times with all of the unique personalities that he had come to know. Most important to him,

however, was the fact that he wrote to escape into a world of his own making, a world in which he had the power to control all events, a world in which he could create the scenery, making it bloom into life completely on his own terms.

As he wrote along, the more that he continued to write, the more that his pen of mere ink and plastic assumed the nature of an enchanted paint brush, rather than that of a simple pen and ink. With words written in simple black ink he could paint a brilliant living breathing picture portrait, a portrait that would literally come alive with the breath of angels amid the radiant smiling light of a high golden orb, if that was what he chose for it to do. Here he could roam about in a limitless wilderness teeming with wild animals that humanity had never heard of, or experience surprises that no mortal had ever before experienced.

Here his spirit was free to roam about as he chose for it to. There were no forlorn restraints, and if any did emerge, then he had the liberty to combat the oppression by the genius of his own creative intellect. Here inside his world he was free to explore deep into the innermost desires of his heart's precious contentment. Here he was free to discover those delights hidden deep inside his own personality and subconscious imaginative mind; such as lost treasure in long forgotten caves, or new lands hidden in thick jungle cover filled with the ruins of a proud, majestic, though unknown culture, and their strange but sometimes bloody customs.

During the course of the day, however, he was forced by the powers of necessity to labor in the dusty fields and on the blistering rooftops of such shallow, greedy, self centered minds. Though he was really good at what he did, he despised the crying, complaining, antagonistic nature of those among whom he was forced to share company with for such long hours every day. He detested their narrow minds and their disregard for creativity and individual independence. Just as soon as he could make it back inside the empty comforts of his lone apartment, he would write with a completely open mind, for only to lose himself deep within his own words, and deep inside the woods and fields of his limitless imaginative paradise island oasis...a world in which all things were designed according to his own secret innermost desires.

So he wrote or thought about what he was going to write all through the course of each and every passing day, until his sole desire for life itself was to write, creating worlds and scenery like no other to be found anywhere else, on the printed page or off into the secular world without. He wrote for himself but he also wrote for his children that he foresaw himself having one day in the future, and their children, and even their children's children. He wrote for the stranger who just might come upon some long lost and forgotten page. He wrote for the doctor, or the scholar in search of new knowledge or relaxing entertainment. Most of all, though, he simply wrote for the pleasure that he found in writing, and for the ease of dark pain both in his shattered body and poor vexed soul.

As he wrote he soon discovered himself becoming more drawn into the very words that he penned. He was now not just penning words but living a life within the portrait formed by his own mind. This life was like an addiction, a powerful magnetic attraction for him to envelope himself with the words of his own imagination. He was losing concern for the world around him, since his only concern now was for the world of his own creation deep inside his mind.

He could no longer function in the world around him. His bills came due but he never even bothered to open the envelopes. The power went out in the apartment. The heavy knocking of the sheriff upon his front door heralded the force that soon found him living on the streets. In the early morning he found himself standing before a local church only to knock upon those tall thick oaken doors for what ever crumbs that the parish could afford to give. The streets were dark and very cold, but he had only one simple motivating force that kept him alive. That motivating force was the desire to write, only to lose himself deep inside the words and worlds of his pen and mind.

As if everything had suddenly happened, he was placed on temporary layoff status from his job. All

that he was concerned with presently was to get back to his to the screen of his monitor and into the local library to write. He could think of nothing else but to write, and the portrait that lay deep inside his mind now stood before him, and was a world that he designed by the power in his own pen. At first his material losses concerned him, but as time went on, he grew to no longer give any of those his energy in their concern. He now only wanted to live for the sole purpose of creating new worlds and events.

When his wretched coworkers spoke, he heard not. Events surrounding him just passed him by. Loss, he felt not, he only searched for food when the pain of hunger provoked it. All surrounding him his eyes beheld not, but only the world that lay deep inside his mind and living on the page of his pen.

One day rolled into the next, but in his own world night may become day or day could become night, and he cared not as to whether it was or was not outside of that. Soon he found himself running through rolling forests, wading in rushing creeks with jolly green elves and talkative fluttering fairies. Many times the creatures that he encountered had no known names, but took on a life all of their own and their names would then develop spontaneously from events in their own lives as they occurred.

He was now elated to discover new adventures that would surly rival even those of his own active childhood. He could now become small as a mouse, and ride upon the backs of mice, while speaking and playing with mice in scissor tailed coats and wearing tall black hats. Or he could become tall as a Tyrannosaurus Rex, now engaging in some fierce battle with Triceratops, or pursuing the Brontosaurus through some ancient pristine cretaceous marsh.

No matter how far it was that he pushed into the interior of this fantasy world that was now gradually transforming into a tangible reality, he could always turn his gaze behind him and behold a distant brilliant star that would beacon his return back into the world of the mortal, this secular world of flesh and blood. Upon returning, he would then suddenly find himself at labor among those destitute robots of the flesh, who so hatefully resented their poor pitiful station in life but could only conceive of lashing out upon the innocents surrounding them, especially those that had absolutely nothing to do with any of their forlorn losses and misery. He could only shake his head at their intellectual shallowness and void.

Through it all, he could always find comfort and gratification in his writing, which had now become a compulsive addiction far beyond his ability to control. The clear pages laying before him, or the computer monitor screen, was now more of an orb, like that ancient orb of transparent crystal so venerated by the gypsy fortune tellers. Not only could the portrait materialize within the center of the crystal orb or upon the face of lined paper, but now it was manifesting itself into a tangible reality surrounding him, replacing the dark and dreary secular world with that of the venerated spiritual; behold, a living breathing verdant tropical paradise!

Now, my dear children, Benjamin no longer desired the dull drudgery of the secular world of the common mortal, but desired with a burning lust greater than any that the most powerful compulsive desire of the flesh could ever provoke, to be totally immersed into the world of the divine spiritual oasis that he had already experienced via his imagination.

So he continued to write, he wrote minute upon minute, hour upon hour, day upon day, week upon week, he hesitated to halt even when the calls of nature demanded that he do so. Yea, he wrote until his very words began to pull upon him, first upon his booted feet, then his lanky legs, then even at the pit of his body, then finally his words consumed his head...until he was finally locked deep inside his own enchanted world. Though the heavenly star burned behind him ever so bright, he never motivated himself to cast his gaze backward but only to push forward, running with laughing bunnies and kind caring green elves, flying high with purple dragons, if his heart so desired; following rushing streams of pure honey and basking in roaring falls of euphoric whiskey delight. Surly he had now found the gates of his own illustrious paradise, and was never to look backward, never again to desire the dreadful poor dull and difficult, and the often perilous secular realm of mortal existence.....

Some three days passed and the local bishop and his assistants arrived at the door of his newly parish

donated city apartment, with its entryway now so tightly closed. They all took their turns knocking, but received no answer, so they turned the knob and gingerly walked inside. They searched diligently only to find an empty room and cleared desk, with the last page and paragraph of his final story sitting by itself on the desktop. The last paragraph then read as follows:

And so Benjamin Fry enjoyed the company of fluttering fairies and winged flying dragons, whilst he roamed about in the midst of a verdant tropical island paradise sampling coconut rum soaked delights that he had discovered underneath cotton candy trees. Surrounding him was his very best friend, Fish, and the warm kind friend, C.L., whom he had not seen in some fifty years or more. Even his Grandparents, the bodies of whom had long since turned into dust, were there now cheering him on as he raced about upon multicolored springtime Easter grass. He had ignored the bright beckoning star to the point that it had vanished from his view. So there he was, only to remain eternally free to explore forever as he pleased deep in the heart of a paradise oasis underneath a purple velvet marmalade sky, whilst the Great Father in divine heaven smiled warmly down upon him in radiant golden glory.

The Blighted Madonna

There was a lady once, an extremely attractive lady, who appeared as to hold the beauty of the holy cherubs in her warm pleasant face and upon her delicate fragile body. Her hair was black as coal fresh from the Pennsylvania hills, gliding down her neck and showering her shoulders and hips; her eyes dark as new onyx, her skin clear and fair as newly fallen snow. When she spoke her voice was perfectly free of any rasp or stuttering stumble.

Any of those who's eyes fell upon her were immediately hypnotized by her beauty, her delicate mannerisms, the form and motion of her body. Her mind was blessed with the intellect of omniscient angels, and her vivid imagination knew no limitations.

Behold, she was an instructor by trade, and a contracted artist by choice. She excelled in both areas of endeavor. The wealthiest individuals always sought out her artistic ability, employing her to paint fantastic and imaginative wall paper murals. On the walls of those splendid mansions she painted scenes of angelic battles, of blessed nymphs corrupting weak men for the purpose of military conquest, of lovers in the lush green grass by the riverside, all to the spellbound delight of her employers. Just having the chance to gaze upon her as she labored, to behold the flow of the paint pouring from her brush, then moving as if by its own motivation to form the most majestic of portraits, was surely a gift from the high angels above that labored diligently to please hexed, bedazzled eyes.

Her return from her labors found her entering a rambling magnificent mansion that sat tucked away in the midst of a hundred acre wooded estate. Her husband was surely blessed and delighted by the spell of her charm, and the success in her endeavors. As she rode throughout the wooded estate upon her healthy shining stallion's back, all the men of the surrounding community ceased their labors whilst in the dusty fields without, just to gaze forward with wide opened bedazzled eyes. Surely her dear husband had found the blessing from the angels on high that he had prayed so intensely for, they said. "Oh how we do envy him," they spoke among themselves in private!

I soon was taken by her enchanted spell, mesmerized by the motion of her gait and the skill in her artistic talent. My eyes were frozen upon the wooden door of the classroom as my racing heart anticipated the time of her emergence through. Upon her entrance all the male children did gasp, and the

females studied her habits out of a desire to emulate her ways. All of the kids were eager to please her, each of the boys desiring that she find favor with them, and them alone.

I performed at my best in her class, holding a secret desire that she would praise the quality of my work above all others in the class. When she approached my place as I sat cross legged upon the floor, she would look down smiling upon me as though she greatly approved, and my eyes were simply frozen by the fact that her gentle face was now gazing deeply into mine.

The years passed and she only grew into a more mesmerizing dazzling beauty, raising three wonderful girls just as beautiful as her self. By now I had long since moved on, my mind only drifting back to occasionally reflect upon her face frozen into my vivid memory. My car came to pause by the roadside, seemingly as though by it's own spontaneous motivation. I eased through the wood stand until I came into clear view of the concealed mansion that she still dwelt in.

Behold, I saw her when she walked as though her feet never touched the floor, in and out of the doorway. I saw her as she glided into the horse stable, racing around the pasture sitting proudly upon the back of her majestic shinning midnight stallion.

For days I was frozen into my hiding place, my eyes and my heart refusing to allow me to move on. I subsisted on bleach treated ditch water and pemmican. I could not move but only was contented to observe the hexing captivating angel that I was much to young to hold.

Behold, I saw her as she stepped out of the back door and into the wood stand, meeting the dreadful demon as he handed her that beckoning hexing herb that bore a compulsion far greater than the power of mortal will to refuse. She raised the crystal herb up to her blood red lips, she slowly placed it upon her delicate tongue. The euphoria that it brought her pleased her beyond that of any other experience in her entire background. She would cease in her taking of the herb, only to be compelled into a greater need for it. Through that increased need the demon seized her heart and ruled her mind, and her every future action or endeavor.

I saw her as she fell upon her knees, pleading unto the sable demon for more herb, her and the demon falling into the lush grass, her giving any pleasure of his demand until he soon had his fill. Now the demon refused her gifts of the flesh, and only demanded gold in exchange for the venerated crystal herb of Mephistopheles. I saw her fall as she wept, pleading unto a merciful generosity within him that she so intensely longed for, but one that he so greatly lacked.

Behold, I saw her as she ripped the pristine exotic wood from the walls of her most elegant mansion. I saw her as she traded ancient valuable tables, and those extremely cherished charms from far away lands, for any pittance offered forth by her forlorn neighbors, who only saw in her the chance to take an advantage. I saw her trade her horses for some small gift, but a small gift that allowed her to receive her share of the vexing cursed herb.

I saw her as she traded all of the majestic trees from her now decaying estate. I saw her as she traded the pleasures of the flesh to her neighbors, who soon only tired of her favors. I saw her as she stole gold from her dear father who was bowed and heavy laden with the ages, then her husband whilst he was away at labor. My eyes were with her as she roamed the streets in search of the opportunity to seize more gold from those of whom were unsuspecting, or trade her flesh for just another small share.

Her most abhorrent action was when she traded her precious daughters to the wicked demon for only another insignificant measure. The demon then seized the daughters up, taking them deep into his lair, only to trade them repeatedly until his supply of crystal herb replenished, and his solicitors tired of the favors that he forced from the weeping trio.

But the spirits in the woodland witnessed her depraved transgressions, as did the angels in high heaven. Her accusers then met with the omniscient Lord Of All The Universe, whose sacred council convened her trial by court in the heavens above. Due to her crimes, especially those crimes committed upon her daughters, she was declared guilty and condemned into the filthy hands of Apollyon, who was

then allowed to do with her as he pleased.

Behold, her hair of radiant flowing charm fell from its seat upon her head. Her immaculate teeth fell from their seat within her once most delicate mouth. Her flesh dried until only the skin remained upon her ragged bones; but she still lived only to suffer horribly, and was very much alive all of the way. Her artistic talents fled from her grasp.

Her husband, her warm once caring adoring husband, understandably fled from her presence. An oozing foul yellow pestilence crept from deep within her eyes, and poured forth from within her ears. A strange hacking cough caused her to double over as she gasped for breath. A brilliant crimson rash covered and consumed her quivering body; no physician held the urgent cure, and the Lord of the heavens above heard not her cries for relief, nor her begging prayers for his unhesitating mercy.

I saw her as her once most majestic magnificent mansion was wrested from her grasp by the demon, and she was forever cast forth into the outer void, condemned to walk the street sides begging for solace, shelter, and nourishment. Her precious daughters were soon saved by holy cherubs, forever keeping them from her jaded hazed eyes.

I finally sickened of the sights before me and ambled through the wood stand, making my way back toward my car as it sat waiting by the roadside. As I drove down that lone road deep inside the soaring timber, I ride passed her ragged skeleton figure clothed in her foul horrid corrupted flesh, glancing into my rear view mirror only to see her tarnished shriveled figure vanish as I made my way around the sharp curb ahead.