

The Space between Breaths

Short Stories
For
Whispering!

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Introduction

The Stories are metaphorical stylised tales for meditation, tales which may speak to your psyche rather than your intellect!

Originally inspired through meditations and directed from wherever the creative spirit resides within, they were spoken rather than written. From the inner imagination where ideas lie dreaming, waiting to gush enthusiastically from our mouths there is little or no grammar and sentences that wander vaguely through the labyrinths of the unconscious mind. (much like that last sentence really). To write these down means they appear as rather stylised old fashioned stories.

Many years ago I came across a wonderful story teller who wrote under the name Michael Fairless. She was a Quaker who wrote gentle tales of quieter times than now, for example: The Road Mender, The Gathering of Brother Hilarius, the Grey Bretheren and the Story of the Tinkle Tinkle. (printed in 1903). I would hope that these stories would be of similar style and pace, if not achieving her grace of content!

We have slow cuisine, now let us have slow story telling instead of the exhaustive rapid fire images flashing we get in the media which may develop minds with poor attention spans. So no explosions and heart stopping cliff hangars just a gentle unfolding into the mysterious world of the unconscious mind!

There is no particular order in which to read them...as the spirit takes you!

The Piper of Dreams

There was once a little girl who lived in the country near the Ancient Forest. She used to play in the forest every day and loved the trees and birds and little creatures; she knew it well and darkness held no fear for her. One particular place she loved to go was the Enchanted Glade, now this was a strange place, covered with the green leafy branches, a high roof patterned with blue, either clear and light or deep and dark bespattered with silver stars



At the entrance to the glade stood a huge gnarled oak tree, its girth so massive that she had to step twenty times to get round. Sometimes she hid in the convoluted hollows of the base, but mostly she like to sit in a strange curve that looked for all the world like the lap of a dear old man - such were the shapes the tree conjured up.



Often, after a day playing in the woods and collecting berries, she would curl up there to go to sleep.



The magic quality of the glade seemed to be a silence that was almost tangible and yet one would hear as in the distance, the soft calls of the birds, and the stream chuckling its way down to the ocean but even those sounds were unable to penetrate the silence of the glade.

One day as she sat comfortably and happily there, she saw a mist arising from the other side. This was odd in itself for she had never seen anything at all there before, just the lush green grass and scatterings of daisies - like a green reflection of the sky with daisy stars. She watched curiously as the mist curled and took form. As a rather horrifying head seemed to grow at the top, she began to feel alarmed and then appeared great long arms and a twisted body. When the head turned to look at her she leapt out of the tree and fled in terror through the woods back to her home. The cloudy apparition haunted her nights for a long time and she couldn't rid herself of the sickening fear of its face and the terror of those long sharp talons reaching towards her.



For many weeks, she was unable to walk in the woods, but with time, the fear grew less and she missed her walks and started to venture back. She managed to assign the apparition to dream status but still could not bring herself to visit the glade. Now one day she saw a robin, a great favourite with her, for she always felt it was a message from a source she so loved. This robin was a little bigger than usual and she felt it was telling her to follow and so she did. It brought her to a part of the woods she did not know, which surprised her, and suddenly she felt a great longing to go once again to her quiet glade.



Then the robin seemed to disappear and she walked to where she had last seen it, and there she found herself at the edge of the glade, looking across at the old oak tree. She could see quiet clearly from this distance, the figure of an old man, frozen in the tree, and she felt a surge of gladness and ran over the soft damp grass and climbed into the hollow as if nothing had happened.

Sitting there she realised the foolishness of her imaginings and felt quite at peace. Then as the sky was beginning to darken she saw once again the mist rising. This time she heard a strange music, a haunting tune from a reed pipe perhaps, like the wind's breath through empty tree trunks. She walked from the safety of her hollow as the mist grew and took form but this time it was a strange and elegant creature, tall and slender with beautiful features, its eyes seemed to smile at her with deep love and then it billowed out of shape and disappeared into the dark blue of the sky.



Then as it dissolved, another seemed to arise, a beautiful unicorn which reared up in greeting and galloped up into the sky and then it too dissolved.



Then a myriad of misty bubbles burst to reveal delightful fairy creatures, laughing and dancing in the joy of creation, they waved to her and floated off into nothing.



Once again, the monstrous creature grew, and he was indeed fearsome to look upon. This time as he stretched out his twisted arms towards her, she stood up and without a tremor of fear held out her arms towards him, and his ugly face changed to a grin of delight and as she smiled at him a look of peace and beauty came over his crooked features and he too disappeared in the night. It was strange that any thought she had seemed to take shape in the mist. She only realised this as she thought "I wonder where the fairies live" and out of the mist grew the daintiest castle, elegant towers and turrets spiralling up and out of each other, shining and shimmering, exquisitely beautiful.



When that too disappeared, she got down from the tree and walked across the glade to where the music and mist came from and there, sitting back against an old tree, was the oddest creature she had ever come across. At first, she thought from his size that he was a little boy, clad in leather boots, reddish brown jerkin and trousers and hat to match, and totally concentrated on playing his pipe. Perched on top of his boot was the robin and round his head seemed to flitter fairy creatures or were they perhaps evening butterflies or perhaps they could have been a trick of the moonlight, which shafted down through the branches, spotlighting him in a silvery soft radiance.

The robin cocked its head to look at her and as it did so the boy turned his head. She realised he was no boy, but a man with the kindest of ageless face where the wisdom of a million years twinkled in his friendly eyes.

She watched as he piped his tune, and as the notes fell from it, they seemed to burst into smoky bubbles, which rose and floated up, joining together to form the mist she had seen. Finally he put down his pipe and said in answer to her unspoken question

“I am the Piper of Dreams”



The Actress – Someone to watch over me...

Once upon a time there was a famous actress who had spent all her life in the theatre, having been born to a theatrical family.



She had been a child star and had not lost her talent as she had grown into maturity. She had played many roles, from innocent victim to femme fatale, the noblest and most honourable woman to the most treacherous traitor, the most loving mother to the most evil murderess. She had also starred in musicals and loved to dance and sing, but best of all she liked to make people laugh and had been in pantomimes and even worked as circus clown.



Now, how ever many and varied the parts she played, she always flung herself wholeheartedly into each role and it was this ability to forget herself and become the character she was playing that had made her so famous. She never seemed to spend a minute away from the theatre, always totally involved with each new production, showing interest in every aspect, from the casting to the scenery, lighting and sound. Now, as the years passed, she became older and was beginning to wonder if there was in fact, a world outside - she had never seen the audience, for the spotlights shone so brightly on the stage and she was only aware occasionally of the odd flickering of light on glasses and of course, the roar of applause as the curtain fell.



She began to feel a grey spot of sadness inside her - a longing for something elusive - a place to rest for a while and this disturbed her, for she had always thought of the theatre as her home. No sooner had these thoughts come into her mind than an odd thing happened - it was as if someone had been watching her and waiting for this feeling of longing to arise. That very night after the last curtain call, she saw standing in the shadows of the wings, a stranger, tall and slender, smiling at her not clapping with the others in the audience. She looked at him and there was something familiar about him, so she said "Hello", thinking he may have been one of the many people she had met, whose name she had forgotten. He held out his hand to take hers but didn't let go, looking at her intensely until she began to feel uncomfortable as if he could see into the dark corners of her being. Soon, realising her discomfort, he smiled and looked away, not letting go of her hand, but leading her to her dressing -room where he sat and talked about her play while she changed.



"I have watched you and your career for many years and seen your work - you appear to be totally unaware that there is another you inside the character you're playing, which same being is inside each of the different roles. The fact that you forget this and become the character is the secret of your success. As a connoisseur of the theatre, I have noticed recently that there is something missing from your performance - nothing that the general public would see - but I, who have watched the rise and fall of many great stars, see a kind of indefinable sadness about your work".

She was getting undressed behind an elegant Japanese's silk screen and was shocked by his words, for until he had spoken it had only crystallised as a faint dissatisfaction, a kind of longing for some elusive thing they she had had once, but had slipped away. Her clothes dropped to the floor and she looked over the screen to see this man who had know even her innermost thoughts - thoughts that she had hardly known herself. There he sat, relaxed and smiling so lovingly at her, that she began to feel tears welling up

into her eyes, it was as if every cell of her body had been waiting, brimming with tears for this moment, and she sank to the floor and cried.

He came to the screen and picked her up, carrying her like a child to the chair where he held her on his knee, stroking her hair while she wept and wept. After what seemed like many hours, she ceased her crying: his arms which had comforted her without pitying her, held her tight now and she suddenly felt as if all the black clouds had gone and he filled her with rainbows of joy.

Then, once again he took her hand and said, “Now, come with me” and he led her down a dark corridor, at the end of which was a patch of misty light. She felt no fear, for he was with her and they walked into what appeared to be a cloud of light.



Quite quickly the mist began to clear and she found herself in a huge circular theatre; there were rows of seats to which he led her and all around her many stages. On each stage she was playing a different part, dressed in many different costumes, from stone-age to silvery suited futuristic, and she watched them all playing at once, fascinated she wondered now, how, if she had taken up a different position on the stage, or moved more fluidly, gestured in another way, would things have turned out differently perhaps? She found herself in the audience with only two seats and both sitting looking at the stage she smiled and said, *“Look, I didn’t realise you were an actor too”*. He laughed and said, *“Why yes, my dear friend, I too have many roles to play, my techniques to improve and although I might spend more time in the audience showing others what is really happening, I still have to practise and learn my lines and work hard to improve myself until the play flows as smoothly as I would will it to”*.

Then it seemed as if a haze of mist began to blow over all the plays and she found herself in the white cloud once again and he smiled at her reassuringly and took her back down the long dark passage to her dressing room. When she looked around to ask the million questions that surged up into her mind, she saw that he too had disappeared.

She went into her room wondering if it had all been a dream, but there on the chair where he had held her, lay his soft white silk and cashmere scarf. She picked it up and put it round her neck and felt his warm presence and smile again. Her sadness at his disappearance was replaced with a deep inner knowledge that he would come again when she needed him most and take her into the audience without making any judgements and that he would always be there loving and watching over her so carefully and gently, as indeed he always was.



Dryad

I walked in the park almost everyday and loved to look at the trees. Now and again I saw a woman always sitting on the same bench gazing at the most beautiful tree, a copper beech. We got talking over the time and she had a strangely youthful air that belied her elderly body. She told me a strange tale of a marriage, long past its sell by date and a husband questioning her finally noticing her existence, but perhaps now too late whether it is true or not I will have to leave to you, the reader...



It was an ordinary day, tedious in the extreme with little to break the routine of housework and cooking. I had been dreaming as usual unnoticed as the furniture around the place when suddenly time froze, and in that moment I seemed to slip into another dimension, that space between breaths where each inhalation and exhalation like the breathing of trees could last an age, and the flickering breathing of human beings was almost too fast to perceive. Time literally stopped, capturing my questioning husband unheeding in the moment, allowing me to drift out into the garden to my beloved. He nodded and bowed in his usual graceful manner, foolish to describe it so really, as there was in his repertoire of conceivable movement none that wasn't full of grace and flow. Trees, unlike humans do not struggle to do everything at once, there is no frantic race against time to fit in home and work to perfection.

No, it is a fact that trees know their purpose which is simply to exist and be part of the sun and the sky and the natural rhythm of the seasons. Feeding directly on sunlight, so pure and clear, straight into his leaves, he is a 'lily of the field' looked after by the Goddess. He is a sentient being in his own right. I call this tree him, for he is my lover. I remember well that first early morning more than seven years ago now, the spring equinox in fact, when the moon shone full in Libra and he first revealed himself to me. It was my habit to come into the garden to meditate in the early morning. The moon was still visible with the sun just rising. At a certain point in my garden the view swept wide to the horizon. There I stood arms outstretched, hands open to hold the sun and the moon.



My body shape reflected elegantly the scales of Libra, and me the foolish carrier of that point of balance. Maybe this is how we all are at any one moment, the fulcrum of that great adventure of being on this lovely planet with all its tugging extremes of emotion.

My lover, however, knew nothing of these matters, he stood tall and elegant in his glory, giving me his strength by his mere presence, whatever the season and acknowledging me. I curled up in that root that he had grown, the place where I fitted so well and could be barely visible. This magical place where I leaned against his strong trunk marvelling at the changing nature of the seasons and the branches patterns against the sky.

Yes, I can feel it too, especially when the sap first rises and it was the blessed spring when he first touched me and allowed me to know him with a deep inner knowing, beyond anything I had ever experienced with a human being.

If only humans but noticed and knew these truths beyond matter. Still, you may allow me my foolishness as 'he' had noticed me long before and watched for signs that his secret was safe with me, that I wasn't likely to share these mysteries with idle minds. So this fine morning, tired beyond belief with the daily world, my ears pressed to his trunk to hear the comfort of his breath. Today though felt different. It seemed that I could really sense the gentle rise and fall of his breath. Then it seemed for all the world that his hands were reaching from behind me, like the dearest lover slipping over my shoulders, pulling me back against him. I sighed and relaxed into the feeling, leaving thoughts of madness behind me I let go, melting inside, as if our boundaries were dissolving. Tears fell unbidden from my eyes and rolled slowly down my cheeks to the earth. My body rose as his hands reached down and gently opened me up I finally knew the meaning of the earth moving. I understood at last the great rhythm of the moon and sun as the spring surge found its personal expression through my body. Since then we have been inseparable in spirit, in dreams which last the day. And so it was that we celebrated our sacred communion unseen by any human being yet witnessed by all of nature, that unique cross species connection.

Thus it was my pleasure to draw him from every angle, caressed him in my mind as I did so. Little else held meaning for me in the 'real' world only we knew the truth and the 'real' world was ours.

Suddenly I blinked and time began again 'a lover?' he asked. What can he know-why waste my time explaining the inexplicable.

'Whatever makes you say that?' I asked.

'Your mind always seems preoccupied' he replied

'Well this often happens when people are together a long time, why should you think anything else?' I said

'I don't know, just a feeling', he said. 'Anyway I have sold this house to a property developer, he reckons he can get a number of houses here and we will make enough to stay in one of them with all the modern fittings, you'll like that. That old tree will have to go though

A silent scream rippled through to my soul but my face remained still, unseeing I turned from him and went into the garden and down to my true love. I put my arms around him, so comforting, so strong and true. The wind whispered and told us of a place far away.

That very night I went down the garden at midnight, I slipped off my nightdress and stood naked under the harvest moon-autumn equinox-how fitting. Thrice I walked around him in the path of the sun-each time nearer and nearer, the third time I stroked my fingers on his bark tracing the lines so familiar and now thrice widdershins, I didn't know the old ways for nothing. Dancing away so I could see his fine shape against the moonlight arms held up, I drew down the moon.

The curling root began to unfold stretching towards me, taking my hand so delicately we danced a moonlight minuet. Round and round we spun floating higher and higher along the moonlit path oblivious to the world.

My husband was arrested for my murder though my body was never found, he had plenty of time to ponder his lack of imagination and careless approach to all living things.

As for the tree, the hollow left by its roots filled with its autumn blanket had served to protect the 2 new saplings and keep them warm through the winter. For those with eyes to see after many years they marvelled at the elegance of the trees and their strange intertwined trunks that looked for all the world like two lovers in the great embrace of life.



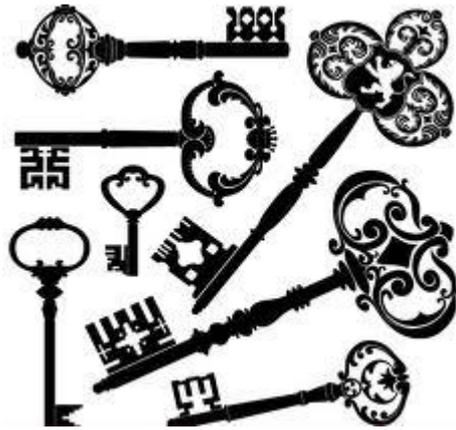
I turned in disbelief to look at Josephine for her story had made me sleepy and she had gone. I called to her but nothing... nor ever again did I see her. Curiosity caused me to look into the history of my little park , a recent regeneration scheme from the old terraces and yes there had been a report of a murder of a woman called Josephine whose body had never been discovered and the copper beech behind me did indeed have 2 trunks intertwined.....

The Keyper



Once upon a time there was a shop keeper, who had his shop in the old quarter of town, where the cobbled streets still wandered in a maze. This shop had bow windows, squared off in the old way and if you had the good fortune to find the place you had to squash your face right up against his panes to see what was on display. Outside the shop flapped an old peeling sign with two gold keys intertwined against a dark blue background. However, there was no feeling of dinginess about the shop itself, quite the contrary; the windows always sparkled clean, the copper handles and door knocker, itself in the shape of a key were gleaming; the whole looking well cared for and loved. Now the owner was an eccentric man, whose strangeness often frightened people, yet although he would not tolerate fools and spongers, the local people knew that if help was needed he was always the first to appear out of the blue, ready to do what ever was necessary, to lend a hand with the washing up, to lend a fiver or just to listen to their troubles. He was a tall slime fellow of indeterminate age, with a cheerful demeanour and a twinkle in his eye, what set him apart was that although he laughed with everyone, it seemed he was affected by nothing, it was as if he partook of life, but life did not partake of him, and it was this that made people a little afraid. The locals respected his privacy but often wondered if he had any family, although occasional visitors would be seen in and out of the shop.

In his shop were strangely assorted wares, from eastern antiquities to bits of driftwood and shells, battered and well-thumbed books and keys of every shape and size. In his youth he had started to collect keys, picking them up on his travels to all parts of the world. It was unusual hobby but not expensive, for people generally threw them away when they no longer had any purpose, but for him, each key held a fascination and he loved to hold them and look at their shapes, wondering about the hands that had touché them and the doors they had opened, and so it was quite natural for him to display his collection in the shop where he had lived with his friend and which he had taken over after his death.



There was not a single person who, left the shop who did not feel better for his presence, he would sit and listen quietly and patiently and often say as they were leaving, "Please allow me to give you this key, you might find a use for it one day", and indeed within a very short space of time they would discover some door that the key had fitted - he was always uncannily right.

One day while he was sitting polishing a very old and intricately designed key, one that looked as if it had been made from some great treasure house of a castle, long, long ago, he happened to look up and see a face pressed to the window. It was a funny kind of face and somehow strangely familiar and he smiled. The face smiled back and went on looking in the window. He got up and walked toward the door and said, "Hello, why don't you come in out of the rain and feel better", and in dripped a rather bedraggled young lady. She smiled again and looked around. The shop was cosy and warm and the antiques glimmered mysteriously around her. She walked to the keys and picked one up wonderingly. "You like my key collection", she did not reply, "Is there one that interests you particularly?", still she said nothing, but wondered around picking up this object and that. After a while, she came to stand by the coal fire he kept burning near his work-bench. "What are you doing?" she asked. So he told her how he cleaned up old keys just because he loved them, and how he always seemed to find one for each of his customers, and although he himself didn't understand why, the key always unlocked one door or another.

"Have you one for me then, do you think?" he asked," Yes, I think the one for me then, do you think? She asked, "Yes, I think the one I am working on now, might just be the one for you: perhaps you can come back tomorrow and I will have finished it", Mmm, perhaps I will, she replied.



The next day she returned and sat and talked to him and to her surprise she poured out all her problems and worries and it seemed to her very soon, that there had been a time when she had not known him, When the time came for her to leave, she felt good

strong and happy; he gave her the key and smiled his farewell. As the time passed, she wanted to see him again and returned to the old part of town, down the maze cobbled streets, around which she wandered for ages before she found the shop. He laughed when he heard of her difficulty and told her how many times she had been close to the secret of finding her way. Thereafter she was always able to find him when she needed him and his love and friendship was a great joy and comfort to her. As the years passed, her work grew and took more and more of her time, always she tried her key in every new door, but it never fitted. The time she had for herself became less and less and it was rarely that she was able to visit her friend and she became tired. Soon, her body exhausted, she left her work and friends in desperation to go and seek some quiet place with him. It was foggy and damp winter day, similar to the first day she had peered through the window, she felt a deep sense of joy and anticipation to be with him once again, but try as she might, she could not find the shop, she ran up and down the cobbled streets until she became weary, her footsteps echoed hollow in the mist, then as if by magic, when she gave up hope, she turned a corner and there was a familiar sign shining through the haze. She was lifted up with new hope but as she got to the shop she saw it was boarded up; dirty, filthy windows, so thick with grime, litter and dirt heaped up in the doorway as if it had been locked and closed for a hundred years.

A gigantic wave of darkness engulfed her as she sank to her knees in the doorway, collapsed among the windblown scraps of paper and stale smells of desolation. She lay slumped in black emptiness and the cold of the night crept into her bones and settled its clammy hands around her heart, lost in despair. She could neither move her body nor her thoughts, she had no feelings - it was as if she had ceased to exist. She was completely isolated in her own dark world until the early hours of the morning, when she felt a sensation in her ear a cold wetness snuffling at her ear. She opened one eye and saw the most disreputable and grubby dog looking as if he too was in need of some kind of loving contact.



But she didn't way to rouse herself from her benumbed state and turned her head way, towards the door, but he didn't stop he nuzzled her again and she opened both her eyes and sent a prayer up to be left in peace to die and as she raised her eyes to the portal, it seemed to liquefy - the boards seemed to flow into veneer of a lovely oak door - the webs and dirt festooning the door showed shadowy shapes of strange and mysterious beasts.



She looked for the dog to find that it had disappeared, then back to door for she thought her eyes were deceiving her, but no, there it was, ancient and beautifully carved and it seemed that a glimmer of light came from just above a unicorn's head and she realised it was the keyhole and suddenly she knew and reached cold and fumbling fingers for the key around her neck. She pulled herself up onto her knees and trembling slipped the key into the lock - it fitted and the door swung open silently, there was nothing but light and then a faint golden image of her keeper appeared amongst the moving colours, arms outstretched, ready to welcome her home forever.



The Candle-Lighter

There was once a monk, a hermit who lived alone in the Great Forest. It was his task to tend the little chapel deep in the woods and keep the candles burning. Each day, he would walk from his hermitage by the stream, quietly wending his way along the ancient path to the chapel. The people in the local village loved him dearly and revered him as a saint. No-one remembered a time when he had not been there, even the village elders had known him since they were children and yet he never appeared to get any older.



Sometimes the children would go to the hermitage and Brother Aenom would tell them tales of the magic of the forest, about the animals, the fairies and wood spirits, and fill the children with so much delight and joy that they all loved him dearly.

Each morning, Brother Aenom would rise with the birds, tend to his spiritual practices, then, taking his tinder-box, would walk the half hour journey to the chapel. Rain or shine, snow or frost, he never missed a single morning.

The chapel was very old, no one knew when it had been built. It was made from warm sandstone walls of great thickness with a wooden roof covered in wild roses that hung around the door, wafting their sweet fragrance inside. It was close to the mountain side, in a natural hollow situated at the bottom of a glade surrounded by the most ancient trees which spread their great branches in to the sky like a natural cathedral.



You could see Brother Aenom's footmarks in the damp grass, sprinkled liberally with daisies and buttercups, little bits of stardust scattered on the green carpet.



Inside the chapel was lit by the most beautiful stained glass windows, made when the art was passed on by the enchanted beings who put their magic into breathing living colours on to glass.



The altar was a single slab of stone, a natural table jutting from the mountain slope around which the chapel had been built. As you entered, you felt a great sense of awe at the simple grandeur of the place, as if ancient and unknowable energies had gathered there from time immemorial, and waited, watching in their silence. Yet there was no sense of fear if you went in with a pure heart. It was said that some had fled in stark terror at what they had felt, for it was a place of stillness and reflection, a mirror for the very depths of your soul.

There were some stairs behind the altar, winding down into a cave inside the mountain where Brother Aenom kept the store of candles. There were stories were told of subterranean passages and caves filled with treasure and jewels of unsurpassed beauty. However Brother Aenom never bothered with such matters, neither did he encourage the growth of rumours for his treasures were those of a nature mystic - the bird song, early morning mist and sunlight on the water. He would fill his chapel with flowers that grew plentifully in the wood or in the winter, pine branches, so that the fresh smell of the great forest filled the chapel all the year through.



Now I have not mentioned the most unusual aspect of the chapel. It was tiered with shelves, upon which glimmered hosts of candles. There were no pictures of saints, in fact the only thing that distinguished it as being a chapel, apart from the sacred atmosphere, was a very simple wooden cross, set in a circle which hung above the altar.

Brother Aenom would go in to his chapel and a surge of joy would fill him as he entered. Quite often, for hours at a time, he would be seen at the altar, arms outstretched, seeming almost to hover above the floor with a glow of light around him like the rainbow, could it have been perhaps just a trick of the sunlight playing through the stained glass window?



After his meditation, he would rouse himself from this holy enchantment and check to see if any of the candles were nearly burnt out. Then he would go down into the cave and open another chest. The candles were quite unique; no-one knew where they came from or who had made them. For they were in human shape, each candle was different

or so the impression on entering was a host of glowing forms, waiting to welcome the visitor. Neither did they melt like ordinary candles, for the wick was in a hollowed out space within and they dissolved from the inside until only the beautiful shell was left, a perfect glowing image and then suddenly melting into nothing



One man it was whispered ventured into the candle store and told about the candles speaking to him. He was never the same again after this and the other villagers left him alone now thinking he was quite mad.

And there were other rumours from people who had been to worship in the chapel that on certain nights when the full moon shone thro the window they could hear the candles whispering ‘What a joy to be here. How many long years did we lie in the darkened chest not knowing who we were until Brother Aenom took us gently and placed us here among the flowers, lighting us. See how warm and beautiful we are and what lovely light we cast on those who come to pray’

And the voices were soft and those privileged to hear would rarely want to share the magic of their experience for fear of mockery. And so Brother Aenom carried on his work as the Candlelighter in the chapel and the candles lay there not knowing they were waiting, not even knowing they were candles until it came their turn to be trimmed and lit in the enchanted chapel by Brother Aenom.

The Guest

When he invited me I was afraid and honoured too. How would I manage with my disabilities to cope with such a celebration? I knew it was the greatest festival and to be privileged with an invitation was more than I had hoped for and yet here it was. I chose my clothes carefully from my limited wardrobe, classic black, neat and as elegant as my rather large body would allow. Yet when I looked in the mirror I still saw the child behind the dressing up. No, it will have to do. As I passed through the portals a hand seemed to appear out of the mist with the loveliest rose, palest yellow with pink edges, warm and glowing.



Just what I needed to calm my jangling nerves a peace rose, with the touch of its soft petals on my cheek and the sweet fragrance of it seemingly to soak into me it gave me that inner strength to step through the dark curtain and join the rest of the guests. I stood quietly on the threshold looking around quite benumbed at the myriad of colours and lights and the loud hum of conversation everything seemed to glow and flow together in a kind of vivid moving tapestry. I stood enjoying the overall picture, for I knew once I stood down into the crowd I would lose the sense of harmony in the trivia of individual conservation. I looked around for my host, eagerly searching to recognise him for he was no where to be seen. I knew by from past experience he would be in heavy disguise, only revealing himself little by little as the evening proceeded how to find him in my heart I knew the places he would likely to be but to get to those quiet oasis in the garden outside I still had to push through the others and I knew I would get distracted from my task on the way for I could see no straight path.

Ah well I must begin. I place my mixing and merging hat on and stepped down onto the floor and it was as if a pathway opened up immediately in the assembly and there right ahead of me was a familiar face. A dear old friend from long ago, smiling eyes reaching out to hug me before ever his fingers could touch mine. Yes I had forgotten how I loved this game of hide and seek our host made us play before we could find him.



Soon I was deep in conversation with my friend forgetting for a while my great errand lost in the pleasures of the moment from the eyes of my friend I perceived an elusive flickering the warm glowing memory of my host and wondered if this were his guise tonight and then a light touch on my shoulder immediately recognisable and I turned to see a beautiful woman. What a joy to see her again I introduced her to my friend and as I did so yet another path seemed to open up and I moved and swirled along dancing from one partner to another as if some higher form were guiding me when the time was right. And finally I reached the great door leading to the garden. It was one of those rare evenings the velvet soft skies hung with shimmering of stars and a gentle breeze caressing my skin warm and sensuous. It made me shiver with pleasure. The heavy scent of jasmine and some fragrance I couldn't put a name to hung around with me soaking into every pore of my being and mixing with the scent of my own rose.

I knew instinctively were to go and left the bright lights and hum of the celebration behind without a backward glance my feet bare recall steps though I had kicked off my shoes. I flew across the damp grass down an eternal lawn lit by a full orange moon hanging like a ball from an indigo ceiling At the end were the dark flat mushroom shapes of the trees and beyond that the lake.



As I came to the wood I stopped motionless listening, the quiet was incredible. I touched my fingers across the rough bark of an old tree and felt a surge of joy. It was as if I was made of the finest feathers so sensitive that every sense of sound or sight shivered through the whole of my being. And suddenly there came a great sense of peace overpowering in its immensity. The rush of activity left me and I walked slowly through the trees and there at last the lake a vast stretch of silver and black tranquillity reflecting in its deep stillness infinity, as the stars repeated there twinkling pattern in the water.



And there he stood a tall shadowy figure on the silver moon lit path, my host. He turned to greet me awaiting my arrival before I knew of it myself and as he held out his arms in welcome he seemed to become transparent and filled with the same twinkling light as the path upon which he floated. And without a flicker of fear I stepped off the bank and walked on the lake towards him. And as we touched I felt the silver glowing within me too and we became one with the light.



White Bird



Once upon a time in the vastness of the sky there was a bird. She didn't know that she was a bird for she never thought of such things. She spent her time flying high on the wind currents close to the sun, zipping and climbing, floating on every passing breeze never wasting a breath. And she loved her life and every aspect of it for it was constantly changing, for each wind current was different to the next. Sometimes she would float in stillness and peace and for a moment would cease to exist at all. Then she would find herself spiralling down and down, falling until the breeze would catch her and lift her up in gentle arms again.



Over the ages the bird had learnt to use these downward spirals and enjoy them. Sometimes she even deliberately dived into them, increasing speed and plummeting downwards always trusting that the wind would catch her in the end and indeed it always did.

Sometimes she would drift floating, wings outstretched, dreaming. On such occasions she might meet others of her kind and they would all move around in a great dance. Sometimes it was a wild dance that left them all somehow drained and sometimes a graceful minuet when their wind streams would make beautiful flowing patterns in the sunlight.

Now amongst the birds that she met there was one special friend who danced with her over the ages again and again. As they moved together it was as if rainbows of light fell from their wings and beautiful music sounded from each dew drop of colour, all the shades merging into an incandescent fountain of golden light which fell down in happiness droplets helping the flowers grow on the earth far, far below. Of course they did not know of such things as earth and flowers but neither did it matter nor prevent it from happening.

And it came about one day, when she had been flying with her friend for a long time and had become strangely weary; he suggested that she rested a little in his slip stream. Even as his words fell from his mouth, she suddenly felt a great heaviness filling her body and she lifted her head bewildered at the strangeness of the sensation. His eyes looked deep, deep into her soul with such compassion and love that she was

filled with a sweet sadness. Her eye lids drooped and she slept, trusting in her dear friend. In her dream she felt herself falling down, down into a great darkness. Fear filled her and she felt a dreadful pressure, such a weight as she had never known before, pushing her down a long dark tunnel, pushing her out.

She was terribly afraid, at last she saw a light flickering in the distance a faint shadowy light, and reminiscent of a place she had once known. Suddenly she was out into it shaken and slapped confused and terrified. Huge round faces with big eyes gazing at her. Puzzling shadows flickered past as she slipped gratefully into unconsciousness. As she awoke she stretched out her wings but they were not the same. It was not a terrible nightmare she was still in it. She looked and saw that her wings would not open and at the end her feathers moved strangely. She cried out and the faces above her looked at her with love, a pale reflection of that special other love that she had known.



Every time she explored and moved these little hands, for that is what they were, and cried out, the beings above her smiled and she saw in her eyes the memory rapidly fading but familiar of her special friend. She tried to repeat these actions and as the time past she found herself learning new and ingenious ways to cause these beings to smile and to love her. The memory of her special friend faded gradually over the years as did the memory of her time as a white bird although she was reminded sometimes with vague longings.

As she grew up and all through her child hood she felt many yearnings and a strange attraction towards nature, the ocean, religious thoughts and ideas and something's she didn't really understand at all. As she grew into a woman she heard words met people read books who reminded her of whom she really was and where she had come from. She began to read and practice meditation when she could become that special bird once again. And one day there came to her a being to whom she felt very close. He felt very comfortable and familiar and his eyes held a strange message, an elusive dream of something long ago forgotten, a deep sweetness of other times. Then, when the time was right, she recognised him. He was her special friend and she was filled with joy and delight. Although she couldn't be with him on earth he was never far away when she needed him and they would often fly together in the sunlight and it was a great source of comfort to her to be able to go and see him now and again.

And so the years sped by and she worked at her tasks and flew with her friend when she could. One day she began to get sick and felt that soon would be the time to stretch her wings properly once again, to break free of the cage in which she had been imprisoned. She went to her special friend and he held her close and said, *'Just as I have always been with you in spirit so I will remain with you now. I will guide you when you leave your cage so do not be afraid.'* and she went away and said farewell to all her friends and family whom she had loved, to the ocean the trees and the flowers. And she lay down and closed her eyes; very soon she felt a mist arising around her

body. Even though her eyes had closed for the last time she could see a shape taking form from the mist and there before her like a strange reflection was the shape of a bird.



She stretched her wings and without a backward glance flew long and far until she found herself by a beautiful tranquil lake, a blue jewel set in the highest snow capped mountains with the gossamer veil of cloud drifting from their peaks. Green forests climbed half way up the mountains and close to the lake she saw a very old willow tree leaning over the water its leafy skirt trailing gracefully in its own reflection. It was a magical tree and it was there that she alighted for she knew that this was the place to wait for her special friend and guide. She rested on a branch in the sunlight quiet and still and as the sun began to set behind the mountains, painting the sky with the softest pastels of lilac and blue, a shape drifted down like a snow flake



from the mountain top and she knew who it was and was glad to feel that sweet warmth filling her heart once again. The comfort of his presence was wonderful for she knew that there were many miles to go and there would be many dangers. He smiled his familiar smile at her and she knew it was time to leave. They spread their wings and allowed the soft southern breeze to waft them upwards above the trees, above the mountain. The blue eye of the lake watched until the two birds were tiny specks in the evening sky.

Suddenly she heard faint voices in the distance, fleeting memories of the past perhaps or echoes of a distant longing which caused a pain to grow in her heart '*mummy mummy*'. She turned her head to respond but the voice faded then returned again stronger and her friend turned for he felt her every move and fear. He looked at her with great compassion and shook his head stretching out his wing to touch her and lead her on. Faltering for a moment with grief, she finally flew with him into the beautiful sunset colours and as they glided through them so they were both filled with light. A blessed forgetfulness of the call from her earth companions flooded through her in the joy of the colours. The sunset and the first star twinkled in the evening sky as they flew higher and higher into the deep blue of space leaving the earth a spinning ball of silver blue and green, incredibly beautiful, far behind.

Almost immediately the blackness became more intense almost palpable and a deep stern voice called out *'this way dear if you've committed any sins this is the way to repay those people you've hurt were you can be purged with cleansing fire.'* The bird seemed to crumple feeling the intense wait of the darkness as she remembered the people she had hurt. Blinded with guilt she turned on her wing and her friend noticed she was limping behind and quickly plunged down after her wrapping her in his great pinions saying: *'No no little one, not that way, it's a trap, don't you know after all those years and my teaching.'* He carried her in his wings, soft and warm, until she felt the comfort of him. At last, peeping from between his feathers she saw once again that the stars were twinkling and realised that the darkness she had felt was within her. The universe was, as it always was and would be, quite beautiful and perfect. They flew onward higher and higher and deeper and deeper. and then it seemed to her that she saw out of the corner of her eye a comforting elusive flickerings of light which when she turned her head disappeared.



Her friend turned and looked at her smiling and as he smiled a myriad of tiny lights glinted and danced all around his head and she watched in wonder at the tiny little creatures laughing and dancing around, tiny delicate things with wings with iridescent colours, exquisitely perfect every colour of the rainbow. And for a while they both flew and played amongst these creatures.



Then appeared a castle made up of stars it shimmered into solidity marble towers stretching to eternity, mosaics made of jade and precious stones and gardens tumbling from one galaxy to another, filled with the most beautiful flowers wild rambling places with huge trees and branches spreading out to forever, fountains with the freshest coolest spring water. *'Don't drink,'* said her friend as she fluttered to rest, overwhelmed with the beauty of the place and the delight of the iridescent creatures. She asked, *'Why have they asked us to stay here and to be with them look come here excitedly she flew over to a wall and outside was the ocean rolling onto a beach. riding on the white horses of foam sat the undines graceful beautiful creatures with fishy tales and long flowing hair calling come and stay with us play on the ocean waves feel the sea in all its moods.'* The sea breeze blew through her feathers and the wind sylphs laughed with joy as they lifted her up *'Now little one said her friend We must leave*

for if you once taste of the delights of these little beings you may fall asleep and dream another dream of being one of them and this is not your place. Come with me now as the sylphs spared us upon high close your eyes and soar as high as you can she followed his words and suddenly found themselves in deep space again the castle had disappeared and all that was left was its shape vaguely outlined in the twinkling stars.



Together they flew on and all though the journey was long it did not seem wearisome. A beautiful radiance seemed to spread across the horizon as if it were the beginning of a new day. The stars faded one by one and they flew on into loveliness, his wings guiding her onwards were now shot through with the colours of the sky and he was almost transparent. It was as if the beauty of the colours vibrated in a song and a great wonderful sound arose containing all the colours of the universe working for and merging with each other in a great dance and out of the harmony of colours and sounds seemed to raise great shapes of enormous and graceful beings who smiled on the two birds. One held out his hands and the birds landed on his palm. *this is a place for us to rest* said her friend *we may stay her for a while for I have things to discuss with one of these beings* as he spoke he spread his wings and appeared to change and grow bigger until he took the same shape as them. His great pinions rising now from his shoulders his body flowing gracefully with all the colours of the rainbow and they walked together with his friend until the light caused them to disappear entirely. She rested a while in the peace of loving him and in her dreaming she saw all the aspects of her life on earth past people shed loved places shed been to, her own actions and feelings, the precious time she had shared with her friends on earth. Suddenly a great sadness filled her being and she longed for her friend to return and as always when she needed him he appeared, *time to go little one* he said. they smiled her thanks to the great being who lifted his hand into the heavens and let them fly away on the up draft of his breath and now began a change in feeling, her friend said *those were the great angels who help mankind you may choose to grow through the angels when you are ready.* ever onward they flew until the even the stars grew scattered and few but one remained the star that they had been heading to in the beginning.

The alpha and omega where time began and ended the star grew bigger as they approached; lights and colours danced around and surged up into surrounding space stretching out towards them. Now as her heart pounded with awe and fear of this all encompassing, knowing energy she slowed down. Her companion feeling her fear turned and said,



'Listen to your heart, you will remember what to do' and she watched as he opened his wings wide and he seemed to freeze momentarily in time erect and the great aurora danced around him, holding him until he and the star became one. She too remembered her Great Self and opened herself up to be welcomed home.



The Artist

One upon a time there was a very talented young girl who had lived in the School for Artists since she was quite tiny. Now this was no ordinary school but a very special one. Anyone at all could go, who wished to develop their talents. Only the very best teachers were employed there and it was famous for its teaching and developing each pupil to his or her very best.



Kenneth Young

Each pupil was given only one canvas of the very highest quality to use throughout the whole of their time there, although there was an infinite variety of paint of every type available that had ever been invented. The pupils were left very much on their own to learn through their experiments and experience, although the teachers were always present when needed, they made very rare appearances otherwise, and the Principal himself was only seen for interview at the end of each section of the course before the long holiday when the pupil rested.

Now Joy, for that was the name of the little girl was given her brand new canvas and sent into the first class; she was with a few children of similar age and they played and had fun as children do with very little thought for their work. However they wanted to paint and splashed lots of bright colour on without much thought for the final outcome; they used thick brushes and fingers or feet, whatever came to hand making great indiscriminate splurges of colour. And sometimes, as children will, they were naughty and flicked paint on each others pictures and occasionally, one might creep up and deliberately spoil another's picture. But for Joy, who was a quiet kind of girl, too much noise and loudness was off-putting. She loved to play and have fun, but the malicious acts she found very hard to understand. Her initial feeling had been to hit back where she saw the harsh black daubs spoiling her picture but gradually she realised that her anger spoilt her own feeling for colour and eventually she learnt to find some quiet corner, or go outside when the weather was fine, well away from the others to paint on her own.



She learnt to paint over the ugly marks, to disguise the grey patches as tree trunks and build a new picture around them. After a long time, she felt she had finished her picture and she took it in to show her friends. All of them came and looked at it and

mostly they liked what they saw except one boy who was very jealous and refused to come over and look.

It was a very simple picture of a house in a wood by a stream; there were trees, flowers and birds, with lots brightly coloured specks that could have been fairies or butterflies. The colours were all primary, very bright put on with a large brush in the main, using great bold strokes.



She had painted herself in, as the little stick creature with a blue dress. She left the picture on the easel and went off for a walk with her friends before taking the painting to her teacher. When she went back to fetch it, to her horror, there were great gashes of black all over it. She stood in a state of shock, looking at it and then she felt a hand on her shoulder and a voice said, “Ah my little one, never mind come with me” and it was her teacher, smiling lovingly at her. He took her hand and led her out into the garden, down a lovely sunlit path until the peace and loveliness melted away all her upset. “Its time for you to rest for a while and when you come back from your holiday, I will teach you how to use paint remover to take away the worst of the ugly marks - but now come to see the Principal” and they walked slowly together down the secret path to the glade, and there sitting quietly, she saw him, and her teacher left her to go on her own and sit with him, and she was filled with gladness and fell asleep on the soft cool grass at his feet.

After a while she awoke, older now, growing from childhood into a young woman; she returned to school and her teacher gave her back her canvas which he had kept carefully for her. When she saw it, it seemed as if someone else had painted it, there was a certain familiarity about it, yet the ugly marks no longer upset her. He also showed her ways to remove and clean the scars. She did succeed but there always remained the faintest discolouration, but she used this as a base for tree roots of branches and also began to paint the animals and people around her.

She practised with pencil and crayon, wax and many other mediums and felt free to do so, for now she had learnt the secret of cleaning colours off, she could do so many things as she liked- her colours were getting more subtle for she had learnt to use white to soften them and also the secret of mixing colours to produce deeper shades with gentle lighting effects.



Then one day she was called outside by her teacher; it was one of those warm evenings when the moon was bright and full, hanging from a deep velvety sky so that you could almost see around it. They sat quietly for a while and then he took her hand and said “You have worked hard, experimenting with many mediums, but there comes a time when you can go no further on your own. I’m going to give you a gift to use in your paint mix which will give the colours an iridescent quality” and he reached up into the darkness and grasped a handful of stars and gave them to her and they seemed to shimmer and glow like a million fireflies, never still, constantly moving and flowing on her palm. And it seemed from then on that everyone and everything that she touched was left with sprinkling of stardust and her paintings took on a magical quality.



Very soon after she completed her picture and called for her teacher who smiled his gentle smile and led her down the secret path to the glade where the Principal waited, and once again filled with joy, she slept at his feet. After a while she awoke, older now, growing from adolescence to womanhood; when she returned to school her teacher gave her back her canvas that he had once again kept carefully for her.



Each time she returned to her pictures they showed improvement, though there were occasional disasters, and she was eventually asked to help others in her class and finally it came time for her last picture, a self portrait. She summed up all her skills and techniques learnt over the years, but the paint by now was thick, because of all the pictures she had painted over and over each other. Nothing she did seemed to satisfy her and she would wander off alone into the woods to see if she could find the Principal

on her own, for she sometimes longed to give up her task, but the secret path always eluded her and she became sadder and sadder.



She was wandering one day when her beloved teacher found her in their favourite place, a sunny spot by the ancient willow, which grew out of the lake. She leant against his shoulder and was comforted by his presence for he understood her pain without the need for words. He whispered in her ear *“The secret, my little one is not to put any more paint on take it all off”*, and he smiled at her.

She hurried back to her canvas and with her remover, peeled off layers and layers of paint, recalling many of her pictures over the years, until finally she came to her original picture and it was completely whole, for the paint had been very thick. She sighed and thought of all her years at the school, the friends she had loved, the holidays of peace and stillness and especially of her beloved teacher. Then she began on the last layer, but no matter what she did she could not get off the last of the paint, for the thick hard primary colours had been pressed in deeply over the years with the weight of the new pictures. She felt a familiar hand on her shoulder and the lovely deep voice of her teacher said, *“There is nothing for it little girl, but the palette knife”*, and he took his sharp blade and showed her how to peel off the paint without damaging the canvas too much, then he handed it to her for it was a special one and she began scratching away and each scratch for her was like a physical pain. *“No more”*, she cried and turned to look at him, *“it is hurting me; is there no other way?”* *“No”* he replied, *“this last one is the most difficult. Here rest for a while and I will do a little for you; I have had more practise than you”*, and he scraped and although the pain was dreadful, it was neat and clean and quick.

“There now, nearly all off. You must do the last bits yourself”. And although she felt week with suffering, she managed to remove the remaining marks. Then suddenly it was all gone and there was the canvas. Scarred and scratched, with the miasma of ugly stains still there. She looked at it in despair. *“Don’t be sad, here is my final gift to you - use those tears, don’t waste them - now have my softest brush - dip it into the tears and smooth it over the canvas”*. So she did, and as if by magic, the old stains and cracks began to show up clearly as the outlines of a face, quite the most beautiful face she had ever seen, with lovely eyes, showing a not dissimilar expression of kindness and compassion to her teacher. Then the portrait took on the sheen of the stardust and appeared to become liquid and she saw in the face, flickering and moving all the ages of herself and she looked in wonder at it. *“Yes, my little girl, I told you that you were beautiful. You never believed me - now you can see for yourself.”*



Come, we must take it to the principal for he must hang it in his gallery". And for the last time they went their way down the secret path and it was as if everything around her was more alive, shimmering, flowing lights and her teacher also, as if they were one being and all around was one with them. Then they came to the glade and she walked across to the Principal, who smiled at her, she said farewell to her teacher and slipped into a deep sleep.



Her teacher took her portrait and hung it in the Hall of Light and it became stronger and brighter and more lovely and as it did, the image of the girl faded away from the feet of her Principal until all that was left was a little beam of light which moved straight up to the gallery and danced and flickered in the portrait, from where she would continue her work.

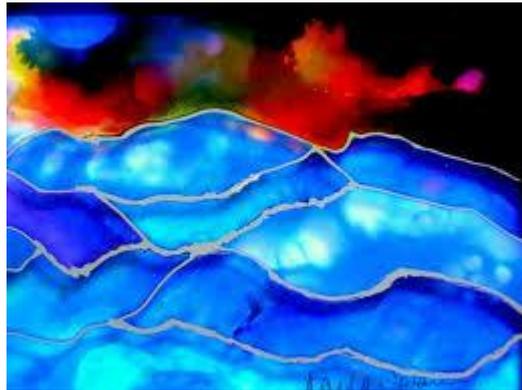


A Ghost Story

“There was a time” she said, *“long ago but not too far away”*...The gentle rocking of her chair and the deft movement of her nimble fingers which seemed to fly across the tapestry lying draped over her knees, served once again to place me into that dreamy space. How often had I gazed deep into the flames, which sparkled on that sharpest of needles as it drew the glittering rainbow thread?



And thus she wove the mysterious patterns that always seemed to take on the shape of the story she was telling at the moment and which, after she had finished, slipped back into the warp and weft of the greater picture. Her feet were swathed in the folds of her past work and much as you tried, searching desperately for the memories of stories told, you could only wonder at the colours, the light and shade which recurred again and again like some secret code whose mysteries would no longer reveal themselves, for the story had dissolved back into the pattern.



Often had I attempted to unravel the whole of the tapestry but always and inevitably got lost in the pathways of old stories, like looking at an old photograph whilst wandering labyrinthine tunnels draped with webs of nostalgia. Much of my time was spent reflecting in pools of memories left by years of romantic fantasy for a moment, but always aware of the dangers forgetting oneself and becoming stuck in sentimental stagnation. There was a sense of losing oneself for a timeless moment and returning the wiser or the more foolish never being quite certain of the gateway through which you returned.



Her voice rose and fell in familiar cadences, lulling me - drawing me ever deeper into the story - so mesmeric was her voice that I scarce knew whether I was awake or asleep. Yet once again I was there, dancing along the moonlit path, following the

sounds of the Minstrel who strode through those ancient forests of Albion, to sing his stories by the firesides. There again was the enchanted glade with the story tree where I had first been led by the haunting tunes of the Piper of Dreams all those years ago.



In the beginning of my journey the broad branches of the tree welcomed me to rest and I dreamed that the magical blossoms, waxy white with hints and shades of the rainbow, opened to release their fragrance.

So heady was this scent that it seemed to awaken the deepest memories, unlocking like a key, the oldest recesses of my mind. As the petals fell, the barely visible fragrance bubbles floated around the tree, each carrying their tale, which burst over the heads of unsuspecting passers-by and acted like some powerful opiate causing forgetfulness and loss into the dream that became a particular story.



Strange how both comedies and tragedies were redolent with the very same fragrance as if both were different sides of the same coin, almost as if the hero had written her own script and acted out all the parts, each time creating a new role to explore and then forgetting that it was she who had written the scripts after all, such a many layered mystery, a fractal beyond understanding.



And what did I see, who welcomed indiscriminately and trustingly any story that came my way, but the Minstrel and the Lady walking hand in hand up the moonlit path to gather more stories in the stars which seemed in turn to form the petals of some greater tree spreading its branches across the universe. Layers and layers beyond belief and in the centre a huge smile of compassion and a “gnowing” which in turn burst to reveal deeper and deeper dreams.



But now her voice brought me back to awareness “ *not so long ago and far away a woman sat watching the mist gathering in the hollows, draping itself over those invisible landscapes of the mind that surround us. Those valleys in the landscape of the Greater Psyche also draw to themselves the myst of our group emotions, attracted by a fracture, a weakness in the substrata of the human geology, pulled as if by some subtle magnetic field that calls the myst to feed on itself. Those places that hold the weight of heavy emotions exist side by side with the invisible webs of light that wrap our planet creating centres, vortexes, great plexii with many levels of energy.*



Such a place was this that called out for those with eyes to see and ears to hear, few though they were, and even those who saw and heard nothing were drawn by those unseen threads. And when the land was formed the fractures and underground water systems united to send their subtle messages up to the surface, oozing out to dance like St.Elmos fire, invisible sirens, luring the unsuspecting to their fate. It was in these places that Earth's children built their fires and danced around to celebrate Her mysteries, the seasons, the ebb and flow of the tides with the moon, the secrets of life and death.



In those times knowledge was paid for with fear, whose darkness lingered, festering enviously on what had previously been delight. There were those who considered that if the miracle of life took place in blood, then blood must therefore be the key to the control and power of creation. Hunger for Mother and Her bounty must perforce mean sacrifice for Her gifts, just as the fruitfulness of Her children was measured by the flow of her moon blood.

In their desperation to control this mystery, men made a pathetic attempt to steal it for themselves and from such foolishness only a child of darkness was achieved nurturing death and war and famine which marched across the land. They may kill and let blood in a vain attempt to possess by death what they cannot possibly recreate in

life. The Great Mother wept at their folly and sent many messengers of love to remind them of the truth but they killed these as well.

“In that very death you seek you will now find life.” She said for she had even sent her most beloved Son, the epitome of Love. Neither did that didn’t work for even whilst His gentle mother wept as she held his cold and lifeless body in her arms His words lingered on frozen in time and space, translated and distorted by foolish men and yet the soul message remained of love and forgiveness for those with ears to hear and eyes to see.

And though the message of love was heard and drowned many times over the years His true followers survived despite persecution and came to this sweet land of Albion with his messages of compassion. These too were drawn by the mysts to the crossing places and there over those ancient places of blood they raised His symbol, the White Cross, hewn from the rock of the land and planted strong and firm in the receptor stone.

Just as there is an outer and inner landscape so too is there a timescape. Timescapes are the high and low points, the meeting places where the rhythms and cycles of time fluctuate like the ocean tides whose powerful current’s flow deep, but invisible, though their effect on the lands they pass is greatly in evidence. The moon pulls these emotional tides, which flow and flood with a more subtle rhythm, causing troughs down which it is easy to slide or ride if you have the skill, to surf on the white horses of time reflecting the star’s rich patterns.

And thus it was that the blood that was sacrificed called out; the pain screamed through the cracks in time and allowed the darkness through.

“You have sinned, you, who have vowed to serve, have sinned by lusting after the flesh that is embodied in an evil woman. Thus, she after whom you have lusted shall, with

the child, the fruits of your wickedness be put to death.” *The stern voice of the Prior judged coldly, “and you who have sinned shall, in reparation, throw the first stone and so save your own life.”*

The people gathered, for they had been jealous of her power, innocence and beauty. They had feared her power to heal, although there was not one amongst them who had not at some time crept in the night for her help. And she had always been there ready with her herbs and flowers to listen to their troubles never had she held back from helping them.

This day she was called, unsuspecting to the meeting place, expecting that someone was sick. The familiar sight of the Great White Cross stood tall, welcoming, familiar as it rested on its plinth overlooking the crossroads. She knew nothing of what had happened although the ominous silence of the crowd filled her with anxiety. She held her baby close on her hip and strode forward to see what she could do. Her heart leapt as she saw the monk, her lover in the crowd. Suddenly someone roughly grabbed her arm and pushed her violently so that she fell at the base of the stone. Madness broke out as the voices in the crowd shrieked,

“whore, harlot, witch, corrupter of all that is holy, die now.”

She held her baby close and looked in disbelief at her lover, standing in his monk’s habit he spoke:

“She enchanted me with her spell and now it is broken.”

He bent to pick up a rock and threw it at the baby’s head, cracking its skull and killing his child with a single blow. She screamed in agony as she saw the life ebb from their child. Then many stones rained upon her mercifully, none of which hurt her like the death of her child and the shock of betrayal. She slumped down, her body even then

uselessly trying to shield her baby. As quickly as it had started the crowd seemed to realise the enormity of their act and having slaked their thirst for blood faded away quickly into the night.

She lay dying, wandering in and out of consciousness at the foot of the cross. She looked down at the cold body of her child and then up in despair at the silhouette of the cross looming large in the moonlight. A terrible thirst assailed her and she remembered stories of the Great One who had cried out from the cross in his thirst. So dreadful became her thirst that it even drowned the pain of her wounds and numbed the feeling of her lifeless infant lying in her arms, in a hopeless attempt to protect, that deepest instinct of a mother.

As she drifted in and out of consciousness she called feebly to those who passed by to have pity and give her water, those she had deemed friends, those who had come to her for help - not one showed mercy or compassion, their own fears for their safety swallowed any such fragile tendrils.

“Water, for pity’s sake water. You who were my friends whom I have helped in your sadness and pain leave me here. Shame on you and all your generations to come! You will remember and acknowledge me or woe upon your children.” *And thus it was that she cursed them and in so doing linked them to her for eternity or until she was freed from her hatred.*

There were some who passed by calling her names, kicking her and spitting on her child full of hate and guilt. She took many long hours to die and the bitterness and injustice soaked with her blood into the stone on which she lay. Finally in those moments just before dawn, sweet death took pity and she fled her body.

Many years had passed by until the yearly circle was complete and at each completion her blood called out for vengeance. Foul deeds took place “by chance” at this place and many were the seeds of violence planted in the thoughts of those who passed seemingly innocently by, awaiting the time of growth to fulfil themselves in more pain and more misery.

Now were roads built, traffic zooming up and down neither knowing nor caring about the stone and the stories soaked in blood into its ancient memory. Yet still the mysts gathered and in that space the bitterness and sense of injustice called once again and cars spun and turned in a macabre dance beyond the comprehension of the rational mind which ruled the present. Vengeance was wreaked again and again as the White Cross Stone demanded its timely sacrifice.

“No-one sees me, the cross has gone but I am still here - forgotten - neglected. You will forget me at your peril, your children will be taken as mine was. I will be all that you named me from your deepest fears.”

One day a woman came to the Stone, she walked around it, trailing her fingers over the roughness and her touch was familiar and she sang a quiet song and soothed the Stone.

“I know thee. I am from your time future and have returned to comfort you now. You have taken our children and that price is now more than enough paid. I hear our song resonating through the mysts of time and I will name thee.”

And so she lay flowers on the stone and scattered salt and flour in the ancient patterns that reminded the vengeful spirit of healing times before bitterness and injustice had taken its heavy toll. The shapes and the colours

and the fragrance were for the Old Ones as well as for the mother and child and so the layers of pain began to peel like an onion like from the rock. Again the woman sang the old song, keening and haunting as it told the tale of abandonment and loss and thus allowing the forgiveness and the healing to begin. The candle flame lit in that twilight of the year allowed the long vigil through the darkness. The warmth of the flame wrapped itself around the bleeding body and permitted the mourning of the child's death.

"I am here, "the woman whispered" a mother, a woman betrayed - I know you."The spirit, now aware, looked down on her own body, lying bleeding on the stone, holding her child and was amazed by the realisation. She took the woman's hand and gazed at her reflection in her eyes and there was no separation as if the two were one over time. Together they watched as the child's body began to glow with the warmth of the candle light. The spirit of the child, now radiant, floated out of the broken body and smiled as it held out a chubby hand to its mother. Soft whispers heard together among the webs of light filtering past and she felt a sweet breath on her cheek. She watched as her baby, now radiant held out his arms towards her and all around in the luminous cloud that surrounded him appeared images of friends and family with arms outstretched.



“Come. Come we have been waiting here for many long years until the veil of your bitterness was lifted to reveal the truth. Come with us for the time is right and we will hold you in love until you have rested and are ready to take the final journey over.”

Sad now the spirit smiled her thanks at the woman took her baby's hand and turned never to look back again and moved towards them into the light. The past lay forgotten and the woman below watched with wonder and awe at the great mystery And so ends my story for you this night for there is always a time for healing and remembrance after injustice.”

The rocking chair was still now, as were the Lady's fingers, rested on her tapestry. The fire too was dying and as I looked up at her she smiled and nodded.

“Time to sleep dear child now, time to sleep”.

Moonweaver

She stood so still arms up stretched reaching, drawing down the moon.
Light shimmering and flowing its silver threads to make that intangible
mercurial robe enwrapped round her nakedness.



What did she see so clearly as her hands floated images from that radiance
to weave her dreams

That strange and haunting melody piped through the softness of the night
had also drawn the hunter from his path

Silently treading his ways through the dark forest then still, he caught sight
of her veiled in moonlight and watched and waited, fascinated by the grace
of her movements in the silvery web of light.

She wove glimmering glittering shape shifting forms from the shadows that
lured, enchanted, called to some deep inner need he preferred to forget...to
remain hidden, which caught his breath with fear of such hunger, that such
hunger could control him, he stepped back .

Her eyes glistened in starlight delight for no matter what pattern she wove
her lord's face appeared there in the clouds, the trees, the mountains and
lakes, the lift of the bird on the wing, the leap and dive of the dolphins and
the children's faces, in the wrinkles of that second child hood, even in the
darkest shapes she recognised the great dance behind the pain, forgotten,
yet still there shining waiting, ever waiting with those with sight to see.





He has no hurry the Lord of the Dance leaping across the stars to infinity that music and his dance were one.



Her tears dropped dew on her tapestry of her longings, so much time weaving of the streams of simply letting them see there yearnings in the flow and swirl of her silky robes so much time for them she off times forgot herself using her own visions and theirs yet still she wove for that was her purpose and round and round and when the moon was bright and full the piper of dreams played his irresistible melodies and once again those lilting notes pulled her thoughts and once again she trod that dark path wispy twinkling sounds dancing ahead to illuminate her way and once again the moon beamed its aura around her, through her and she pulled its threads through her own heart to paint her pictures for her Lord.



And still he watched and prayed to feed himself that was all he knew that sleek efficient machine of immediate satisfaction, watching, waiting, to possess whatever was beautiful even the graceful flight of the birds only prompted a rumbling within for his bodies needs to devour and to own them by their death and each time he consumed beauty its very taste like ambrosia caused him to long for more until his greed for possession finally possessed his own soul.

Silently he crept closer and she heard him not, so lost was she in her dream picture her own true lord of the dance subtly he slid among the shadows grey ghost of the night so unexpectedly appearing amongst her light web he seemed to her a part of her own weaving and his eyes stared so deep like a snake with a bird she thought this was the essence of her lord and so clever was he, stroking and soothing the very depth of her being and using her own enchantment to capture ,to trap and fool with his tender touch and resonant silences that gave space for her fantasies to fulfil.

Aaah now she danced and sang songs gladly for him weaving cloth of silk and gold and pulling jewels bright treasures plucked from mother Earth and the more his need the more she gave and like milk from her breast this insatiable cuckoo of the night drank and sucked deeper her very life's blood dripped away and still he took more and more and sometimes through the mists of her confusion she saw clearly his nightmare face that rapacious leech her blood oozing from his fangs and fear jolted her awake

'Is it you my lord or has some terrible sickness caught me in its pitiless arms?'

But that beastly shape which had disguised itself as her Lord knew not of mercy and compassion except as pretty jewels to decorate his own feathers disbelief was buried as his eyes once again glittered and covered her sight with his needs

As time passed her dance weakened her essence drained yet still she wove her love song for her lord still blissfully blind to that succubus revealed gently by the moonlight even he the hunter glimpsed this dream of two as one for it is the only one, the beginning the end that pearl of all mankind transmitted through her heart, of her heart that the swine ate for everything is food to him.

But that pearl took root inside him, even him, quietly and silently it stretched out its fragile roots like some benevolent parasite in the barren soil of his being for such is the strength of love that spreads its fragrant moisture to nurture itself now drained almost to death but not yet that dear

oblivion, still enough life for hope, incredulity the shattering of every dream she ever had and pain such she had never known before

He went, with no more thought for that crumpled shell he had left behind than for the pips he spat from fruit he'd picked from passing trees all gifts for him that fatally flawed creature for whom nothing existed but himself but now his eyes alighted on another princess his new love, with heavy laden basket and melancholic smile he followed and went his way for that was all he knew.

But that pearl grew inside him flowering quietly and secretly latching onto his deepest good that which the dark spirit he had permitted to use his fair body was so afraid and he used it well for it suited him so to do.

She lay like death, limbs too heavy to dance heart too heavy to sing- black pitiless empty darkness flooding from his wake of despair and grief he left her near drowned no movement no light no thing could touch her in that unfathomable abyss.



Yet as she lay broken He held her in his arms her true lord so tenderly watched grieving for her pain and loss keeping His vigil until the time was right when one tear fell on her lips and as that sacred liquid moistened her lips and His soft breath warmed her cheek she finally allowed His sweet whispers to caress her thoughts to sparkling wakefulness and she opened her eyes and the sound of His pipes drew the tears of healing and the moon shone soft around her.

So clear now her sight sharp and bright her thoughts drifted soft mists around her body searching for her pearl and she drew down the great sword from the night and the shield so bright a reflection to protect her and there at last with that bountiful help she saw her jewel in the hands of the hunter a gift for his new princess so innocent her voice whispered through space to him.

'You have stolen my dream'

'I know you not' he replied

'It is I'

'Who are you to disturb my peace?'

Wraith like she asked again and again

'Know you not me who wove you that dream from my heart?'

'Go hence I know you not.' yes , thrice again before cock crow

'You are no thing to me.'

Dawn's lucid fingers stretched out touching her hand which held that sword of tempered steel so oft had she walked the flaming path and she remembered and the light poured through her and tall she stood and stronger than he ever guessed quiet now she spake the blade held high.

'I know you and be ware yes be ware most when the lie is of yourself that is the one most foolish deny me not, in truth this pearl belongs to all men yet if in truth you had made it yours you would remember me and plant flowers in respect and love but so many times, so many chances. I lay this sword across your indifferent throat' and thus and thus she smote but once and thrust the sword into the earth and his head fell and out of his life's blood sprang the great eagle white and pure as day and with a dip of its wings in grateful thanks for its precious freedom from that dark spirited body which had held it so tight with wings outstretched it carried that divine pearl in its noble beak to the moon from whence it would fall as moonlight to weave the threads of dreams to come.



The Scruffiest Angel



Once upon a time but not too far away, possibly closer than you would have expected, there lived an angel. Some people say angels live on clouds, some say they don't. This one did. One day, she was skipping through the clouds, playing hide and seek with her friend White Bird, when a sound like the sighing of the wind in the tree-tops floated by.



“Cherub. Cherub.” She looked up in delight to hear her name whispered by her Guardian *“Don’t go too far.”* She smiled while straightening Cherub’s halo and absent mindedly healing the larger holes in the robe. *“The clouds get thin over there and you might fall through.”* She looked despairingly at her little charge, knowing how forgetful she could be especially when she got lost in an exciting game with her friend.

“I have told you before what happens if you fall down to earth especially as you have forgotten to preen your wings again.” She lovingly straightened out Cherub’s feathers.



“You will tumble down and in that falling you will forget yourSelf. Who you are and where you have come from will be like a dream that flickers in and out of your memory. Now don’t forget little one.” and with that the Guardian faded away melting in the sunlight.



Cherub waved and danced off to continue her game. It was her turn to hide and there was a particularly interesting patch of cloud up ahead. It seemed to tower over her and split into two like some colossal gateway. A rainbow appeared stretching between like a great bridge, she’d been around long enough to know this was a sign, but not long enough to know what it was a sign of, and as we learn, signs from the heavens invariably carry an interesting price tag if not a misleading one. The end result is usually that we grow a little, any excuse for a spending spree! But I digress.

Cherub flew under the bridge and into an especially fluffy cloud and snuggled down, just as White Bird flew past. Deeper and deeper she burrowed and then suddenly she was out of the other side tumbling down and down and round and round. Fortunately her holy dress served as a kind of parachute, which cushioned her fall. At last she landed with a bump on a rather soft, smelly heap of rotting grass from which she rolled over and over until she was brought to a halt by the stem of a flower. *“Oh dear.”* she said and promptly fell asleep.



After a while the sun's warm fingers tickled her awake. She sat up and looked around wondering not only who and where she was and what had happened. A tapping noise drew her attention away from her plight and she looked up. Close to the top of her head hung a round ball from which emanated the sound.

She stood on her tiptoes and reached up to touch it. Suddenly a crack appeared and a muffled voice whispered *"Hmmp mmmm. Hmmp mmmm."*

"Who are you? What are you saying, I can't understand you"

"Hmmp mmmm" cried the voice even more frantically, and an eye peered out of the widening hole.



"You are stuck, aren't you?" she said as she put her fingers into the crack and started to break bits off. At last there was enough space and out crawled a rather bedraggled creature that fell to the floor and lay there puffing.

"Thank-you," he said *"Thank you so very much; I thought I would never get out."*

He grinned a lopsided sort of grin and said, *"I really thought that I would never get out, that cocoon was so hard"*. And with that, he promptly closed his eyes and fell asleep in the sunshine.

Fascinated by the spectacle of the wings drying in the sun and amused by the extraordinary sound of such loud snores emanating from such a tiny creature, she reached out and gently touched a wing.



He sat up with a start and looked around, rubbing his eyes.

"Hello" said Cherub "It's only me, don't be frightened"

"I'm not frightened, you just made me jump. "He said "Thank you for helping me out my mother must have been eating some very unusual things for it to have been quite so hard, mind you our family has bit of a reputation for being well able to look after ourselves. Look at my boots." "How incongruous, a butterfly with boots on!" She thought.

"I am glad you're free anyway. What's your name?"

"My name is Ulos, what are you called?"

"I can't remember, I think I had a fall and I must have banged my head. What are those beautiful things?" She asked pointing to his wings.

"They are my wings silly, you've got some too and when they dry we'll be able to fly together." he said.

Cherub looked wonderingly at her own wings and a great smile of delight illuminated her face. *"A yes, I'm beginning to remember now. My name is Cherub and I am an angel and I can fly."*

As she spoke the words she spread her lovely wings pirouetting with an *ecstatic smile on her face. Laughing with delight she landed next to him.*

"And I've found a friend as well" She flung her arms around him with such enthusiasm that she nearly crushed his newly dried wings.

He disentangled himself slightly embarrassed at the unexpected hug, and quickly regained his composure. *"Just a few more minutes and I'll be ready to go."* He began to fan his wings gently and the warm sunshine finally dried them out properly.

"What's an angel anyway." he asked, "I can't remember really, but I think it's got something to do with messages."

"Have you got one for me then?" he asked wiggling his two antennae as if to check out the truth in the wind.

"Oh dear, I feel sure I must have but I can't remember" She sank down and started to cry.

"Don't cry," he said putting his lovely wings around her shoulder. He flapped his wings turned a somersault and landed on top of her head. She began to laugh and they both laughed until their sides hurt for they had found a friend.



“What are you doing with that leaf?” asked Cherub.
“I am eating it, what do you think I’m doing silly?” replied Ulos.



“What’s eating “ asked Cherub.
 Ulos looked at her as if she were mad *“You eat, I eat, and everyone eats so we can stay alive.”*
“I don’t eat. Sunshine keeps me alive and gives me energy; it soaks through me and makes me feel all tingly.”
“Goodness me isn’t that strange, it’s a bit like plants really. In a way that is all we are doing, flowers are a little like refined sunshine. Do you think angels are plants then?” said Ulos.
 They both started to giggle, perhaps she was a flower, a sunshine factory, creating petals of different colours and flavours. Ulos looked at her and said, *“Are you sure that’s good for you, you look a little thin and your dress is hanging off you.”*
“I’ve not been feeling quite myself lately. Perhaps it’s not the right thing for me to do here. Perhaps I should try you way” And she stretched up to petal. It felt soft and velvety and smelt quite delicious. She nibbled a corner.



*“Mmmmm...”*she said pulling a very funny face. *“That feels really strange”*
 She sat down with a bump as the cocktail of taste and fragrance combined to explode like fireworks in her mind. Suddenly she was lost in her inner world where elusive memories and longings mingled together in a rainbow soup and forgotten whisperings wrapped themselves around her like a

blanket. Such a mixture of feelings quite naturally began to ooze out of her eyes in great teardrops.

“Whatever is the matter?” asked Ulos. He reached a wing over to comfort her

“I don’t know,” she sobbed, *“what’s this water coming from my eyes? Oh no, I don’t know what is happening to me”* and she started to sob inconsolably for what she didn’t know.



Ulos rested his wing lightly on her shoulders and started to stroke her gently. Finally she stopped crying and lent against him glad of his quiet presence.

“I’m so happy and sad all at the same time, is that what food does to you?”

“Not as a rule” he smiled thinking of stories that he had heard after some of his friends had nibbled a mushroom once. *“I know some creatures that live to eat and spend all their time discussing in great and tedious detail the different tastes and textures of this flower as compared with that one. And how if you pick this herb at a certain time of the moon and take it with that petal it tastes like the nectar of the gods. As for me I really can’t get that excited about food. There are too many adventures to have, meeting with other creatures or just simply watching the clouds go by. I just nibble whatever I’m passing when the fancy takes me”*.

Cherub looked at him, her eyes huge with questions.

“You seem to have had an experience with food that I cannot understand.”

He went on, *“Now I come to think about it, I seem to remember a story about some butterflies who ate a flower that made them think they were gigantic. They flew so high that the hawks who hadn’t got the same perception of butterfly world, a rather over inflated though brief one, delighted at the unexpected feast. I wonder if the hawks had that same delusion after they had eaten the butterflies’* .But now I’m rambling! “he smiled.

“Excuse me” said Cherub, politely bringing him back from his comic conundrums *“coming back to the subject of food, I think I am feeling ready to try something else now if you will stay with me that is?”* So wing in wing they fluttered off, trying first this and then that, each colour tasted different and made its own unique pattern in her head.

After a little while she became used to the experience and hardly even noticed anymore. Even an angel can get used to paradise. But with each mouthful her forgetting became deeper and deeper; though she got a little less thin, but not at all fat. And for a time she and her friend played in the sunshine.

Bee...ing



One day Cherub and Ulos were flying gently under their favourite butterfly tree. It was a lovely tree with a wealth of purple blooms hanging down almost to the ground. It also happened to be a great meeting place for many other butterfly friends. One day they were alerted by the sound of a distressed bee, a hiccupping buzz is such a distinctive sound that they both sat up together and said, *“Whatever’s that strange noise?”*



A round ball of yellow and black hovered close to her face.

“What are you?” asked Cherub.

“It’s a bee,” whispered Ulos, *“I told you about bees and flowers and things. Remember?”* He nodded to her, encouraging her.

“I’m a bee, a sad bee,” gasped Bee. *“What are you?”*

“I’m an angel” she replied. *“Never heard of an angel, what kind of animal is that, you look like a human and a butterfly mixed together”*

“I suppose that’s about right. I carry a message and stuff”

“Have you got one for me then” asked Bee.

This inevitable response caused her to decide in a moment that she would no longer explain what her purpose was until her memory returned a little better. *“Sometimes when I have to play with people for a while until I remember.”* she explained to Bee.

“That’s O.K.,” said Bee *“will you play with me, I can show you both some good places for nectar.”*

Ulos, who had been silent for a while, hoping for this outcome for it was well known in the butterfly kingdom that bees had a connoisseur’s nose for

top quality nectar. So they played together and very soon became firm friends, and had many adventures. One day their play led them near deeper into the forest to an area they did not know.

"I think we might be lost." said Bee, *"I don't recognise any smells my mother warned me about parts of the woods where strange and dangerous creatures live and I can hear a funny noise."*

The three friends looked at each other. They all felt a little bit scared but they knew they were altogether and would help each other through any danger.

As they came to the edge of the woods the noise became louder and louder. An extraordinary sight met their eyes, many, many, many small human beings running round and round making a most terrible din. The three hid behind a tree, peeping out now and again to try and make some sense of what they were seeing.



"Why are those little people running round and so many all together?" asked Ulos, not really expecting a reply.

"Look" said Bee, *"There are some who look exactly like you Cherub except their wings seem to be rather thin. I wonder if that is why they aren't flying?"*

Cherub was speechless.

"Ahemmmmmm. Ahummmmm."

The three friends looked at each other to see who had made the sound.

"Hello, I couldn't help but overhear you." a small but determined voice came from behind a branch close by. They looked down and saw another bee, not much older than Bee, but somehow different. Its head was broader and heavier somehow as if it stood up it would over balance and fall flat on its face.

It took something out of its mouth that it had been puffing and placed the book that it had been reading on the floor. The three were so surprised at this sight that they began to giggle and whenever they laughed they forgot themselves and started to float up.

"You can come down here at once" boomed a very strict voice. *"NOW"* the three, amazed to be spoken to like this, alighted close by.

Before they could gather their individual or collective wits the voice spoke again. *"You there, you're a bee too, you should know better."*

"Know what?" asked Bee.

"I couldn't help but overhear your conversation just now," he replied in a rather conspiratorial way. *"I can see that you are a nice enough chap. It's plain to see that you haven't deliberately set out to do anything wrong."*

You just don't realise what you're doing" "He beckoned Bee over and picked up the book. *"Now let me explain"*

It is obvious that the others weren't invited to partake of this knowledge. So they stood together waiting for their friend to return.



The book was closely written in very fine print. Professor, Sir Bee, for that is whom it turned out to be, was pointing at very complicated diagrams and statistics and telling Bee in words of many syllables the facts of the matter. *"And so you now understand,"* concluded Prof. *"It is here in black and white measured, tested and weighed repeatedly by the most learned men"*. He patted bee on the wing. *"I know how you feel; it's not that long since I was ignorant like you. It takes a while to adjust, but then like those children wings begin to fade,"* as he spoke, he stroked bees wings.

"There's so much more to the world than flying about collecting nectar and playing with friends in the sunshine. That kind of exploration and adventure is not for us. Being happy enjoying life is simply a distraction from the serious matters that we theorists like to come up with."

Bee looked shocked as he turned to talk back to his friends, his face was filled with despair and his wings trailed by his side.



"Dearest Bee, whatever is the matter with you?" cried Cherub and Ulos together.

Bee just sat down and wept and wept. Cherub was horrified. *"Water is coming from your eyes like it did with me, what is it?"*

The two friends sat and hugged Bee, holding him until all his tears had dried.

Ulos said to Cherub, *"It's called crying and the water is tears. It happens on Earth when we feel anything very strongly and it helps us to feel better. Some beings can't cry and their feelings stay inside and freeze like ice"*

making them cold inside and sometimes great volcanoes of frozen ice burst out of them like a volcano of glacial fire. People around as well as themselves can get very badly hurt when that happens.”

At least Bee’s sobs had calmed down and he was able to speak and share his grievous news with his two friends. *“I can’t fly and it’s just too awful to think about”* and he stated to sob again.

“Have you hurt your wings, you were flying perfectly well a few minutes ago. Has that bee hit you?” asked Ulos flexing his boots as he hovered with the mere thought that someone would try and harm his friend.

“No, no it’s nothing like that at all. My wings are too small for me to fly, in order to lift a body shape like mine from the ground my wings would have to be much bigger, and hang from a different part of my body all together. I can’t fly, don’t you understand?” And he immediately started to weep again. Cherub and Ulos looked at each other in dismay; their friend had quite plainly gone completely out of his mind. They flew straight over to the strange looking bee.

“What have you been saying to our friend to upset him so.?”

The bee took off his spectacles and smiled gently, *“I’m sorry if I was a bit rough on your friend but sometimes it’s the best way. Come and let me explain to you for I am afraid it might be relevant in your case too.”*

He seemed very reasonable and kindly so they sat down on either side of him. He opened the book, showing them graphs, diagrams and proof after proof after proof. So impressive and learned were the papers that for a moment they began to believe him.

“You see all those children playing in that building, that is called a school and it was there I first learned about science. I’ll measure your wings if you like.” And so he did. *“As I feared, butterflies can just about fly, but angels most definitely cannot.”*

He spoke again rather sadly. *“I believe there might be one hope if I could get anyone to sponsor me. I am working on a small bee size plane, which could probably be adapted for angels.”* He droned quietly on with his invention plans for a while and then became engrossed in his books forgetting about them entirely.

Cherub and Ulos were both astonished and appalled, they turned away to find Bee standing sadly behind them. *“I told you,”* he said quietly, and the three of them wandered back into the woods. Tears weighed so heavily that they could barely lift their heads never mind their wings.

They curled up closely that night and cried themselves to sleep. No more playing hide and seek amongst the flowers. No more floating on warm breaths of wind; it was hardly to be born. And so many sad days passed and after a little while even the memory of flying faded.

But you and I know that magic never dies, its reality waits quietly and patiently until the time is right to remember. And so the time came and the three friends curled sadly together and fell asleep. The next day Ulos woke first and stretched his wings, it was almost as if the terrible news of the previous day had been nothing but a bad dream.

The soft breeze made by his wings tickled Cherub’s face and woke her up, as she opened her eyes she became aware of the sound of Bee’s snoring then the clouds drifting by in the blue sky. One cloud stretched out across

the sky like the wing of a great white bird, by a trick of the light a rainbow spread across the sky and it seemed to light up somewhere deep inside Cherub. Once again she heard the sigh of the wind whispering her name-a song whose words she had forgotten but only the tune remained humming deep inside her mind. It was as if a weight had lifted from her mind and a feeling of peace descended upon her. She began to float higher and higher no longer aware of her surroundings.



She was lost in her inner world gently spiralling higher up and deeper in. White bird was waiting and her guardian's sweet voice whispered *"Not time yet dear child, there's work to be done. Show them they can fly too."*



Her eyes opened and she looked down to see her friends, little specks far below. They smiled at her as she drifted slowly down.

"I can fly and so can you my lovely Bee" She held him in her arms and spread her wings and she flew with him up past the trees until she felt the wind lifting her.

"Now dear old friends forget what you think and remember yourSelf." and without further ado she held out her hands and let him go.

"I can fly. I can fly, wheeeeeeeeeee!"



And once again the three friends laughed and danced in delight. As for the Prof, when he occasionally looked up from his books he could only see the butterfly and some dust notes dancing in a sunbeam.

And when the wind whispered “ *Take off your spectacles and let yourself seeeeeeee*” he just rubbed his ears and the statistics and facts that rattled constantly round the top of his head deafened him to those secret messages, and he took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes “*Ah well*” he said and went back to his books.



And who knows what further adventures the friends had with Cherub now remembering her task on Earth was to show everyone how to fly!

In Search of Iridescent Hues

Once upon a time, there was little girl whose name was Twiglet. You may think that a strange kind of name for a little girl, but she had a habit of hugging trees from being very small and her Mummy used to spend ages pickling twigs out of her hair. She lived in the middle of the countryside with her Mum in a small cottage, not far from the sea and every day she used to go on long walks in the woods, listening to the birds and looking at the flowers, most especially she loved the trees and often talked to them as if they were old friends.



Now she has a special friend from the woods – a funny bear by the name of `Oops`, she called him Oops because of his habit of tripping over tree roots and suchlike. He never looked where he was going. He bumbled through the woods happily, humming to himself and gazing at the birds and the leaves, breathing in the sunshine, looking up at the blue skies and completely forgetting what his feet were doing.



This, in fact is how Twiglet first met him, going through the woods one day, she heard a cry “*Ooops*” and looking behind a big oak tree, she saw a little bear flat on his face. She rushed round to help him, for she was a kind girl and from that time on they became inseparable companions. When they met in the woods, they had wonderful adventures, for Oops seemed to have an extra kind of magic and when he was around, the woodland animals would talk to them and the spirits of the trees and rivers, and the fairy folk who looked after the flowers would appear and whisper their secrets, talking them into their magic world made from sunlight dancing on the water.



One day, Twiglet came skipping out, full of excitement at a story her Mummy had read to her, that she had enjoyed very much and as usual, she wanted to rush off and share it with her friend. *“Oops, Oops, guess what... I’ve just heard this lovely story, but I am not sure what iridescent hues are, even though Mummy said they are extra specially wonderful colours, So Oops can we have an adventure called ‘In search of Iridescent Hues’ can we please Oops – oh let’s , Oops please?”* she cried, jumping up and down in excitement. *“Mmm”* replied Oops, who was a quiet kind of bear. Whose only thoughts tended towards his tum, and although he looked young and had many adventures in his youth, he was in fact, very old indeed. He now really preferred to potter around talking to whoever passed or even better, just sitting in the sunshine by the river and the fairies and spirits who loved him dearly, brought him all the nicest fruit from the trees and the bees generously supplied him with honey, of which he was particularly fond.



Alright, Alright Twiglet, iridescent shoes, if that’s what you feel like doing, I’ll come with you”, he said *“pull me up”*, and they wandered off into the woods, just smiling happily for they didn’t say much to each other – they were so close that speaking wasn’t often necessary. And it was one of those specially lovely mornings, when all the world seemed new and fresh; the air had that magical quality as if the fairies had emptied into it sacks full of sun dust. After a little while, they came to a stream, a favourite haunt of theirs and they sat down in the buttercups, for their adventures were rather slow and lazy ones, that didn’t take them to far, nor use too much energy and neither did they really mind if their adventures succeeded or not, for it was the doing that counted, not the final result.



While they lay on the grassy bank in the sunshine, chewing a piece of grass, Twiglet rolled over and peered through the buttercups at Oops and said, *"Oops are you asleep?"* and she tickled his ear. *"Well, I was having forty winks"*, he replied, yawning a hippopotamus style yawn. *"look-just look at that"*, whispered Twiglet. Oops looked up and there resting on a buttercup, its wings closed, was the most beautiful butterfly you've ever seen, still for a moment.



Then a gentle breeze wafted it up through a frame of buttercup mist They gazed in wonder as it hovered above them, wings outstretched, the most beautiful, fragile mosaic of colours, red, orange and yellow in an intricate web of black lace, like a stained glass window, and through it all shone the sun, giving the colours a translucent quality, an almost electrical vibrancy, shot through with brilliant gold.



"Mmm", said Oops nuzzling his cold nose into her ear, and she moved from her happy trance and smiled at him, for there was really nothing else to say. After a few minutes they stood up and danced a little jig, for Twiglet liked to dance and had, after many years hard work taught Oops to lift his heavy legs in a kind of beary waltz, which they laughingly did together, when the joy of life got too much to cope with, and bubbled out through their smiles into their feet. Then they stumbled off along the river bank, she liked watching the grass

spring back from his footprint and putting her tiny foot inside it, to follow exactly in his steps a kind of slow motion follow-my-leader game. Then they came to the old willow tree, gnarled and huge, stretching branches high above them and great knotty roots growing like giants feet into the water.



These roots provided numerous little nooks and crannies for the riverside creatures to live in of course, a happy network of hiding places, where they often liked to play hide and seek. So they snuggled their bottoms into their favourite spot where they could dangle their toes in the stream and be shaded from the noonday sun. They had spent many long sleepy hours watching the sunlight glinting on the water and listening to the stream as it chuckled its way down towards the sea, not all that far away. It was here that Oops has shown her, her first fairy.



At first she thought it was just a dust particle. gleaming in the sunshine, but Oops said *“Make your eyes soft Twiglet”*, and when she did, she could see more distinctly the shape of a fairy waving to her, and she wondered why on earth she hadn’t seen it before. Then Oops nudged Twiglet and pointed to the furthest root of their tree, on which was perched the most beautiful bird they had ever seen. It was singing a lovely song and the sun shone on its feathers, which were of the most unbelievable colours and shades of blue and green, a silvery sheen veined its deep turquoise tail, which hung long and elegantly almost touching the water.



The bird seemed to turn backwards, and then dipped its head in gentle greeting, and spreading its wings rose gracefully up into the sky; for one infinite moment the sunlight caught it and the colours became even more intensified and brilliant and then it disappeared into the blue.



Oops and Twiglet grinned a deep inside grin, had a little hug and said goodbye to their tree and wandered happily off along the stream. After a little while they heard a dull, roaring noise and they rounded the bend in the stream and were met by the most magnificent waterfall tumbling and crashing down a steep cliff, surrounded by lovely trees and thick luxuriant undergrowth, the whole presenting most beautiful pictures of every shade and tint of green imaginable. The trees layered up, reaching up to the sunlight were festooned with lacy creepers lying over great spongy masses of lichens. The water itself cascaded into the deepest pool causing a fountain effect, a perpetual mist spraying around the far end. The strength and power of this fall had worn a cave at the base of the cliff and also in the pool itself, which was as a consequence very, very, deep. Strangely enough, the rest of the pool was remarkably quiet and tranquil and the permanent haze of water and sunshine had caused an almost jungle-like growth of trees and plants, filling the magic glade and the sun shone through it all lighting it up with a golden radiance, a beautiful green bubble of peace.



Oops and Twiglet sat down on a flat rock next to the pool, just breathing in the wonder of it all, the riotous abundance of exotic flowers and fragrances was overwhelming. Then Oops touched Twiglet's hand and pointed to the fall, where a sunbeam, brighter than the rest, fell through the trees onto the vapour misting round the waterfall. Suddenly the air around seemed to be filled with rainbows of all sizes, which moved and flickered with the wind in the haze, and whichever flower or plant a rainbow touched seemed to become transparent and fill with colour and as it faded the plant would be left pulsating with new life and brilliant colours like a jewel of jade or emerald, off which the light would bounce crystal clear and dazzling. As the rainbows played and danced about Oops and Twiglet decided that the pool itself looked cool and clear and would feel that a little dip would be just the thing to do. They slipped into the chill water and splashed and played for a little while until tired out, they floated in the sunshine and Twiglet climbed on Oops ample tum and sleepily they allowed the undercurrent to drift them towards the fall. Then the showery water woke them and they found themselves amongst the rainbows and it seemed as if they themselves were made of all the colours which filled them with joy. Then one gigantic rainbow seemed to grow out of their happiness and they began to climb up to the top high above the trees.



From the top of the rainbow, as they looked down, it seemed as if the whole world was filled with rainbows, the air was nothing but these lovely colours and each person and plant was coloured by these lights. : *“Yes, my dear they are there all the time, but we can only see them when the circumstances are right. There is nothing but rainbows”* said Oops. And holding hands they sat down at the top for they knew exactly where they were going. Far, far below at the foot of their rainbow was the dark cave at the bottom of the waterfall, the entrance to the land of Iridescent Hues. They slid down and down, faster and faster through all the shades of the opalescent light, finally disappearing into the golden pot at the end of the rainbow.

You may ask were they ever seen again, well of course, for those who know the secret of the rainbow. And now you know too, next time you see a rainbow look high up on the top most point of the arch, you might just be lucky enough to see the two of them, hand in hand sliding down into that golden light which we can discover in our own hearts.



With thanks for inspiration to Winnie the Pooh...in case you hadn't noticed!