

Maeya

Written by Kent R. Burke

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This book is dedicated to the tribes of humanity, past or present, which have lived their lives in the spirit of, and held deep within their being, the Principles of Life.

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Kent R. Burke

Preface

Maeya is about... well, I think I'd rather have you tell me after you've read it! Your perception of your world will color your thoughts as you read this book. I would think that others would describe it as science fiction, but I think you'll find it really won't fit easily under any label. I am hoping that this book will make you laugh a little, maybe shed a tear or so, but most of all prompt you to give some thought to what takes place, and what has taken place in the world around you... before you and I arrived. I'm talking about the "big picture" of things... things that maybe you've never thought about before.

I've written this book gleaned from the many lessons learned in life. When I was young there was no way to get the big picture of life as I now see it. With decades behind me of observing the world, it's that picture that I am trying to convey to you in this book. I know all of the above comes across as being very cryptic. I just don't want to give the story line away before you read it! I'm hoping that something in the book will resonate with your consciousness. I would like to think that, after reading this short story, you would have come away with something you consider of value. Maybe it will be just a smile; a few hours of entertainment... then again, maybe you'll never look at this present world in the same way that you do now... who knows?

By the way, PLEASE resist the temptation to skip ahead of the first few chapters in reading. That WILL spoil the plot for you! The first few chapters are a bit "technical". PLEASE bear with it and just consider it part of the experience. Don't think that the rest of the book will be the same... it won't. The rest of the book is mostly "easy reading", but don't let that fool you into reading through it fast. Take your time and absorb the story. If you read quickly, you'll miss some "hidden" treasures and truths. Trust me, the first few chapters will give you NO CLUE to where this book is going! Hang in there... don't give up on it... I'm confident you'll feel rewarded!

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Chapter 1

Well, this is just great. Ninety-three degrees of humid blistering heat, and I'm stuck on this stinking patch of asphalt! Got the air conditioning on, but the digital bar display indicating engine temperature is climbing. If this backup lasts much longer, I'll have to shut the air conditioning off, lower the windows, and get a good dose of urban smog and fumes from the car ahead of me. I've had allergies since I was a kid and a few minutes of concentrated car exhaust is guaranteed to give me a days' worth of sneezing and a stuffed up nose.

Growing weary of listening to the latest news about the upcoming political elections, I change channels to the radio station giving traffic "on the eights." They're reporting that this stretch of interstate has a three-car pileup about a mile ahead of me. Just what I was looking forward to on a Friday afternoon drive home! After about ten more minutes of yelling to myself and striking the steering wheel with my fist, the line ahead starts to move slowly.

Finally getting to the site of the crash, there is little left to see, just a few pieces of trim and some broken glass off to the side of the road. Rolling my eyes, I just appreciate that at least I'm finally moving. The engine temperature indicator is falling slowly to normal levels as I breathe a sigh of relief.

I've been meaning to trade this car in for a newer model, but I've shelled out a bunch of cash on the new home a couple years back... landscaping, swimming pool, and such and thought I'd just cut corners. One way to do that was just to put off getting a newer model until next year. It's just the drive to work car, right? Well, unless I feel like getting stuck in traffic with an overheated car in an urban rush hour, I'd better start looking for another ride soon.

Oh, I forgot to mention a few of the details as they say. My names' Jim ... Jim Bosworth. I'm twenty six years old with short blond hair, standing six foot four in my stocking feet, weighing in at about one hundred and eighty pounds... (I'm on the thin side). Not trying to brag, but if I may say so, I've got a pretty good head on my shoulders. I excelled in science and math in high school... good enough to go on with a full scholarship to a well-known college in the area. As a kid, I was always involved with science related

pastimes, things like backyard telescopes and electronic circuits. Astronomy became quite a passion with me. The locations of the stars in the night skies became as familiar to me as the city streets.

Once I graduated from high school, the pressure of college studies and working part time at the research facility where I'm now employed took its toll on my hobbies. The 'scope was put away after high school, tucked back in closets ever since. Once in college, I met the girl who would become my wife... her name was Amy. We shared one class together in my sophomore year. She was quite popular at school, having involved herself in a number of the extracurricular activities on campus. Amy was "the life of the party" type, and I was surprised that she took an interest in me in the class we shared. I guess it was a case of "opposites attract", or so they say. She brought me out of the nerdy shell I acquired as a kid. It's rather difficult to develop social skills when you spend so much time in books and peering through a telescope at the night sky. She was quite attractive and outgoing, I found myself wanting to be around her during what free time I had. I found myself attending a good number of parties and other social events with her. At first, my new lifestyle was a bit uncomfortable and awkward feeling, but I gradually fit in. I made acquaintances with a few of the women at the college from time to time, but always made sure most of my free time was spent with Amy.

One thing led to another and we were married the following year. We finished college, (my major was in physics with a strong math background) and were kept quite busy with our jobs. Amy worked for a major life insurance company, in the record keeping division. I had mentioned my part time job with the research facility. That part time job was basically my foot in the door... looking forward to obtaining the required degree needed for the full time position I was going to fill. Our marriage was quite the typical dual income, no kids' lifestyle. We were going to wait to have a couple of kids a few years down the road, after Amy's job promotion came through and we had a few vacations in Mexico together. We had the money to do what we wanted, but had little time to actually plan anything that involved more than a day at a time. Her job involved a couple of "I have to work late" days during the week, and my job seemed to demand an increasing amount of time on the weekends. We had some good times together but the marriage just seemed to be fighting a losing battle. We were just too busy with our careers to make the marriage

work. Eventually, Amy got tired of too many weekends alone at the house, the weekends that I spent at the research facility. She was used to the weekend party scene and got fed up just sitting home alone.

She started going out with other lady friends in similar situations. One thing led to another and she listened to the advice of the friends from her job that persuaded her to "just dump the guy"... like they did. They also gave her the name of a couple of lawyers who would be glad to help her out... help like setting up the case in front of the right judge to relieve the other party of the maximum amount of worldly possessions. Soon afterwards, Amy filed for divorce. I went through a really rough time after hearing the news. I became introverted again, withdrawing from the social scene, even at work. Before long, we were in court and told to sell the house and divide the bank accounts. She got the majority of the household items, and the Lexus, I got a few tools and the older Chevy... the typical American divorce. Even so, I really don't have any hard feelings toward Amy. The divorce was for all the usual reasons... not having really enough in common, and spending too little time together to make for a lasting relationship.

Chapter 2

That's life they say, and life goes on. So, I'm alone again. My commute is between the research facility in the sprawling suburban area southwest of Chicago and my small apartment in Orland Park. Since the divorce, I've pretty much just wrapped up my life in my job. My job at the research facility consists of unlocking the relationship between gravity, magnetism, and electric fields. We have a pretty good budget to work with... most of it comes from "black" sources that hide behind the mantra of "National Security". I'm not privy to the greater goal of the work. These goals are on a need to know, highly compartmentalized basis. Most of the research in our department generally seems to be investigating effects that would harness sub-atomic forces to generate power on a self-sustaining basis. I'm really not at liberty to discuss the details, but I think you get the idea of what we're doing here. This job is one I actually enjoy, and one that could make some big changes in the way we do things. A breakthrough in this area of technology would be a

real benefit to the entire human race. I am of the firm belief that science has the answers to solve all the problems of mankind. If the finest minds from every discipline of science can work side-by-side, one only wonders what good could be accomplished.

Some of the practical day-to-day work in my department involves the upkeep and calibration of some physically large, high power electronic devices. Because of my electronics background, I've also been tagged with the responsibility of the care of the equipment. These devices are on the cutting edge of technology. Some of components used have not as yet been released to general industry. Most of the maintenance work is scheduled on the weekend, so that this valuable equipment can be available full time during the week. It was on this schedule that I missed so many weekends with Amy.

Actually, there is a silver lining with this weekend schedule. I'm nearly always alone in the department on weekends; the only other personnel out this way are security and the janitorial staff. Security is only concerned that the doors are locked from the outside so that no one but myself can enter. The janitorial staff arrives early in the morning and is gone by 8:00 a.m. The silver lining is the fact that I am free to spend a certain amount of time to tinker with this equipment while I calibrate and maintain it. By tinkering, I mean putting the equipment through its paces performing some of the exotic experiments I plan on my own. Nearly always, the equipment is processing experiments during the week that are devised by the small group of scientists, including myself, that make up our division. These experiments are generally the result of many months of careful and painstaking theoretical calculations. The equipment is too valuable to allow just one researcher to freelance on a whim, but like everything thing else in this physical world; the equipment needs some downtime.

To help relieve the loneliness of my single lifestyle, I spend some time most evenings after work thinking of experiments with the equipment when the weekend comes. My experiments are not necessarily along the energy agenda that the team works on at the facility. Sometimes my mind needs a break from traveling along the same line of thought that I need for the day-to-day research at the facility.

My latest diversion is a good example of breaking away from the usual experimentation at work and provides the alternate path my mind requires from time to time. The past few evenings I've been running a simulation in my mind that will consist of

combining high power radio frequency pulses with a strong rotating magnetic field. I have a hunch I can produce some very interesting phenomena! The advantage of performing this experiment at the facility is two-fold. First, there's no way I could ever hope to build or afford the sort of equipment the lab has. Second, the power levels the equipment needs to operate are far in excess of anything a backyard experimenter could muster. Someone like myself can really appreciate this sort of situation. I guess you could call it one of the perks of the job... and a good reason for me to stay with this facility.

Chapter 3

Saturday, June 17th already... the alarm clock is buzzing in my ears... reaching over, I shut it off. I'm experiencing my usual coughing, and clearing my throat routine... allergies... none of the medicines I've taken ever seem to help! The alarm clock had been set for 7:00 a.m. It would have been nice to sleep in this morning but it's the weekend to pull maintenance on the lab's equipment. Usually, this is evening work, but I was notified earlier that the lab was off-limits this weekend in the evenings. That means I'll have to get my work done in the morning this time. I'll arrive at the facility at 9:00 a.m., so that will leave time to get cleaned up, read the paper, and have a good breakfast before hitting the road. Scanning the newspaper at the breakfast table, there's the usual local articles describing the various types of violence and mayhem that we humans inflict on each other... nothing new there. The business section trumpets more mergers, consolidations, falling dollar... rising gas and home energy prices. It's the same old story... we must pay more and get less. On the world scene... endless wars in every corner of the world and chunks of glaciers breaking off from polar ice from global warming, toxic levels of mercury found in ever increasing amounts in the ocean's sea life, the loss of more species of mammals world-wide. Oh, almost forgot to mention this story... not all bad news! A study says that coffee counters cirrhosis of the liver. See, not everything is wrong in the world! ... Oh, brother...

Well ok. ... Feeling better after the typical eggs, toast, and bacon breakfast, it's time to hit the road. I grab my pc's removable drive for today's experimentation along with a

sack lunch and I'm on my way. Nice thing about going to work on a Saturday morning is that the traffic usually moves pretty well. Most folk aren't even up this early... they're still sleeping in. It's another nice morning, temperatures in the lower 60's; and it's fairly sunny outside. If it weren't for all the hazy white streaks in the sky from the aircraft, it would be a bright sunny day. Doesn't get much better than this in the Midwest this time of year! Turning on the radio just for some noise, my mind drifts to the itinerary for today... arrive at the facility about 9:00 a.m.; go through security and get locked in the lab by around 9:20. Start about 9:30 and work till I take a break for lunch at noon.

After lunch, I'll commence work again and finish up around 2:00 o' clock. Then it's... my time! I'll run my experiment, and finish up around 3:30 p.m., sounds like a plan! I'm just now turning off the main highway onto the service road toward the facility. After a stop at the guard shack to flash my ID and let the camera see my face, I proceed to the set of buildings on the southern side of the complex. Pulling into the appropriate parking space reserved for the Lab Two team, I swipe the card reader to enter the building. The building has another set of doors about ten feet after the first set, and the card must again be presented to the reader. A camera is mounted to observe anyone passing through; the image is recorded and stored at the main security office. Passing through the second set of doors, I proceed to the right down a long hallway. The hallway is brightly lit and spotless. The janitorial service here is second to none! Finally, I'm at my destination. In front of me, is a heavy steel door with no windows. Recessed in the wall immediately to the right of the door is a heavy glass panel that is backlit with a soft glowing light. Placing my palm on the glass, a bright horizontal white line emerges from the bottom of the pane and quickly proceeds upward toward the top of the pane. As the beam extinguishes into the top of the pane, a soft beep can be heard from below the pane. A latch in the heavy door clicks and the door silently slides to the left leaving about three feet of entry to proceed through. Passing through, the door closes behind me as I hear the snapping of latch locks. Now in an elevator, I must again provide a palm print to the reader. Glancing upward, I notice another camera directly above my head. After the scan, the elevator descends a couple of levels. Fortunately, security hasn't installed any cameras in the lab itself. They figured additional equipment would just be overkill at this point. At its stop, the heavy door opens and I'm finally in the lab. Heading for the refrigerator, I set my lunch inside. Well, time to

get the manuals out. They're kept in a keyed filing cabinet. I remove the manuals necessary for all the units I'll be calibrating/testing today.

My work will consist of calibrating all the units to exacting specifications. The specifications concern three areas... power, frequency, and phase shifting. All the units must meet stringent requirements to produce the sort of results that can be counted on in our experimentation. If the units can't be counted on to act exactly the same way in controlled situations, the results obtained would be meaningless. After the units are calibrated, I'll bring each one of them on-line, one at a time, and ramp them up to full power. The units will be tested at full power for the specified time... usually about a half hour. All parameters of operation previously mentioned should hold their tolerances within certain specifications listed in the manual for the half hour of full output testing.

Later ...

I've run all five units through their paces by 11:30 a.m. The only unit needing re-calibration was the REF (Rotating Electromagnetic Field) unit. Fortunately, it wasn't a hardware failure; just a simple adjustment of the unit was all that was needed. Finishing up, I put all the manuals and test equipment away. I'm getting hungry! Proceeding to the refrigerator, I take out my sack lunch. Today's cuisine is a ham and cheese sandwich on rye, some potato chips, and a coke and candy bar. Spreading out the contents of the sack on the table in front of me, it's time to pull up a chair and grab the television remote. The facility was kind enough to supply satellite television in the break room... nice large screen too! Kicking back in the chair, I place my feet up on the table with sandwich in hand. O.K., let's see what's on! Surfing through the channels provides the usual shopping networks and inane reality shows. Stopping on one of the "surviving nature" type reality shows, I watch the hapless contestants endure silly physical challenges while attempting to lie and stab each other in the back to win the big prize. Yea, that's how I want to spend my time! Since the show is the last in the series, I watch the winners eyes bulge out as his prize is announced. One million dollars they say, as he feigns humility in front of the losers. I'll bet after the IRS gets a hold of those earnings, he won't be quite as overjoyed! Don't quit your day job, I chuckle to myself!

Well, back to work. Having finished the maintenance on the equipment as well as lunch, it is time to put the equipment through its paces on my own experiments. I proceed

to power up three of the five main units, and let them come up to operating temperature. One piece of equipment I haven't mentioned before was the super computer that actually interfaced all the units. The team affectionately named the computer Ginger. To say Ginger is quite a machine is an understatement. There are only a few of these in the U.S., all of them in facilities similar to this.

The five power units are actually unable to do any real experimentation without the computer. Ginger has several dozens of miles of fiber-optic and copper wiring tied to a wide variety of sensors and power terminals in the units. Every operating parameter, every change must be precisely measured and recorded. Ginger keeps track of everything flawlessly... not only coordinating the activities of all five units simultaneously, but also providing a digital accounting of every phase of the experiment. From the moment that the start button is pushed, until we power the whole system down... every fluctuation of energy and timing in atomic clock precision is faithfully recorded. This massive amount of data is saved to a storage device in Ginger's memory.

It's time for the experiment! The program for the experiment is on my personal removable drive. I pretty much guard this drive with my life. I'm quite paranoid about the thought of having it stolen, and used by some dangerous operatives or someone who wishes to profit from my work... I guess the paranoia comes with the territory of working in such a secretive place! I'll insert my drive into a port wired directly into Ginger's temporary RAM, not into her main storage. Once she runs and completes the experiment, another program will execute to dump the temporary ram... the results will be gone forever. Another built in safeguard for the equipment is that Ginger will power everything down if the time allotted for the experimentation is exceeded. My experiment is timed for shutdown after only a fifteen minute duration. It's better to be safe than sorry with millions of dollars of equipment at stake... and I really don't want anyone to steal my experiment!

For my purposes today, I need to use only two of the five units in this lab. The first will be the RF pulse generator; the second is the REF generator. I'm planning to have the RF unit generate very high amplitude radio pulses to pass through the center of the magnetic power coils of the REF unit. The combined field output of the two units will be directed by waveguide to a special chamber. In this chamber I'm going to place crystals

doped with rare-earth compounds that will resonate with the REF and RF output in the chamber. I had grown these crystals in another part of the facility while I was working part-time in anticipation for using them in just this sort of experiment. In this experiment, I'll be looking for any anomalous effects around the crystals such as re-radiation of quantum energies or some rather interesting time-space displacements. In plain English, this means that the crystals may start "winking" in and out of our present time-space, and disappear from our present physical existence. Or possibly, the intense energy into these crystals might create what is commonly referred to as time warps for short periods of time.

I have the experiment planned to vary every component of the two units independently as the power levels ramp up to maximum. Ginger will continuously vary these levels while watching for anything anomalous. If there is anything taking place in the way of time-space warping, Ginger will zero in on that effect to maximize and enhance it.

All right! Ginger has given me the go ahead. Placing the removable drive in the port previously mentioned, Ginger speaks audibly... "Upload complete." Removing the small drive from Ginger, I place it in my pocket and tell her to proceed by voice command... (Ginger knows and recognizes all the members of the team by voice and name). Glancing down, I note the time on my watch... 12:28 p.m.

Hearing the units ramping up as Ginger is communicating with them, there is a noticeable low hum emanating from the power units as the demand for power increases. Digital bar graphs display the power levels rising. Colorful LED lighting panels are glowing all over the units indicating every status of the experiment as it is taking place. Ginger is carefully monitoring the status of all the critical functions. If a problem arises, she'll take the units offline, ramping them down carefully to prevent unit damage. Fortunately the experiment is proceeding as planned. No trouble lights or alarms!

Having satisfied myself that everything is proceeding as planned, I direct my attention to the crystals placed in the chamber. The chamber has a very thick quartz glass viewing pane, where I can watch the material being saturated by the combined output of the units. Noting the various gauges, I see that power levels have stabilized to allowable levels. At this time, Ginger is varying every parameter available in the units. The equipment can be heard, varying in pitch, along with Ginger's commands. Man, this

experiment is really an audio/visual experience! Reminds me of the old TV program that had the catch phrase... "I love it when a plan comes together"!

Hmm... Looking through the quartz glass, a pulsing blue haze seems to be forming around the crystals. If I'm not seeing things, the crystals which were opaque seem to be nearly transparent! Ginger has already detected this anomaly and is starting to "zero in" to optimize the effect. The audible varying pitch of the circuitry in the RF unit in response to Ginger's commands cease and are emitting a constant frequency tone as she has found an optimization point. The REF unit circuitry can be heard varying... ok... now it locks steady. The blue glow has intensified and is pulsing brightly. Wait... something strange is happening! The pulsing blue glow is expanding in size... morphing from just a blue light into a clearly visible sphere. Hey, the crystals have vanished, but the glow is still expanding... now extending itself outside of the chamber! What's going on? I slowly back away from the chamber... trying to distance myself from the expanding glowing sphere. As it grows in diameter, I can hear the power units humming louder as Ginger is allowing them to consume more power to maintain the anomaly. I've got to stop this somehow!

Before I can take a step... yes... the sphere has stopped expanding! It seems to be maintaining a diameter of about ten feet surrounding and centering the chamber. It's morphing again... I can make out strange wispy clouds swirling, forming on the surface of the sphere. It's becoming opaque. It's still glowing blue, but I can't see through it anymore. It's just hovering... the surface still swirling. Man, this is really weird! My curiosity is getting the best of me. I slowly approach it, hoping to get a better "handle" on what is going on. As I approach, I feel a chill... it feels like the room temperature is dropping somewhat. I stop within a couple feet of it, just standing here in amazement. I feel a strange energy field emanating from the sphere at this distance from it. Slowly, I extend my open palm toward the sphere. As I do, the surface deforms slightly... the swirly surface attempts to rise toward my hand as I place it near. I pull my hand back quickly and the surface retreats. Man, this is strange! Once more, I move my hand even closer to the surface. I feel an intense pulsing cold sensation on the palm of my hand as the surface of the sphere leaps up to meet it!

Chapter 4

Slowly waking from a deep unconsciousness... feeling totally drained of energy, I struggle to get my bearings. I'm lying flat on my belly... my first thought... where am I? I'm spitting something that tastes terrible out of my mouth. Feeling totally soaked from head to foot, I nearly jump out of my skin as I hear a sharp crack and see a blinding flash of light through closed eyelids. This sure jolts me out of the fog my brain was in! Pushing up from the prone position, I attempt to look around to get my bearings. It's so dark that I can't make out anything visually. I feel like raindrops are pelting me. From all appearances, I seem to be in a rainstorm somewhere. I find myself in mud and what feels like tall grass, and realize it's not a cold rain. The rain is rather warm; the temperature seems to feel around mid 70's... another flash of light and rumbling from a distance. This time I can see my immediate surroundings. Yes, I'm definitely in a rainstorm at night... tall grass and trees all around me are being blown about by the storm. Feeling my way around, I'm looking for shelter from the rain that seems to be pouring down in buckets. There's another flash of light, allowing me to see a thick grove of trees with a heavy canopy of foliage off in the distance. Turning toward the direction of the grove, I'm making my way as best I can through the tall grass. My shoes are totally soaked and the suction of the mud pulls them off my feet several times. I have to keep stopping along the way, groping behind me in the mud to retrieve my shoes. Slowly, I make my way towards the grove... my eyes being of no help to me. Every step takes great effort to proceed forward. Even if the flashes of light in the distance could help, the rain is coming down so hard it's getting in my eyes, blurring my vision. I trudge up a small rise where the groves of trees stand. The leafy canopy is keeping the majority of the force of the rain off of me. The ground is somewhat more stable here... at least it isn't a mud so thick that my shoes would pull off if I walked on it. I'm really not concerned about walking any further though.

The flashes of light are becoming more infrequent; the rumblings from the storm seem to be moving further away. The leafy canopy of the trees are blocking out what little light is to be had from the flashes. I'm totally alone... in nearly pitch darkness. I feel around for anything that could be used as a place to rest for a while. Between the strange unconsciousness I experienced before being jolted awake, and the physical effort it has taken to make my way to this grove, I'm feeling quite fatigued. I need a place to rest...

anywhere that will provide shelter. Stumbling and feeling my way around, I find what appears to be a raised mound of some sort that is covered with short grass (from what can be felt with my hands). I lay down on the mound on my back. The warm rain that has found its way through the thick canopy is more of a mist now than a downpour. So tired... exhausted... can't help but drift off to sleep...

Chapter 5

Morning...

Suddenly, I'm jolted awake by a feeling that something is moving upon my chest. Instinctively brushing my hand over my chest, I sweep away whatever it is. Turning on my side to see, it's some sort of small green lizard scurrying away through the dense cover of leaves on the ground. Pulling myself up to a sitting position on the mound, I notice that I'm feeling quite well compared to how I felt during the rainstorm. I notice I've picked up a few bug bites from sleeping on the mound, but otherwise I feel great.

Looking around, I seem to find myself in a warm, humid, light fog. A thought occurs to me that this must be a low-lying area. Slowly turning my head around to get my bearings, I quickly notice trees are all around me. Oh my god! Something's very odd here... I'm in a forest but it's certainly like nothing I'm familiar with! This forest looks like... I guess the word I would use would be "primeval"... ancient. The trees are very large in diameter, and also quite tall, which is a good indication of their age. This forest is dense... many varieties of ferns and mosses are growing everywhere. I continue to scan what is surrounding me... focusing my vision... first near, then far. Large and small mushrooms of many shapes and colors are growing at and around the base of the largest trees and also pushing up everywhere through the leaves of the forest floor.

The sun is low to my right. I can't see it directly through all the foliage, but its light is streaming through the trees and dancing about on the forest floor around me. While stretching every muscle to shake off the last bit of sleep, my breathing is quite effortless and really invigorating. Normally, when I wake up, I have a bit of a coughing spell and feel

somewhat in a daze for a few minutes after rising. The clarity of mind I'm now experiencing has jolted me back to my immediate circumstances. Where in the hell am I? What happened? The last thing I clearly remember was that strange sphere in the lab... immediately after that, lying in mud in a rainstorm! What's going on now at the lab? How do I get back? Maybe I was struck from behind while in the lab and carried off in the trunk of a car and dumped here. No, I feel no injury. How could a car have gotten here... in the middle of nowhere with no roads around? Where is here? Why would someone do such a thing? How could they have gotten in the lab without me knowing it? Was I drugged? ... nothing but questions, and no immediate answers. Standing up to assess my situation, I look my clothing over and find it quite stiff and caked with mud. Taking a look at my wristwatch... hmmm... also caked... totally soaked, and inoperative. Reaching into my pocket, I pull out the removable drive. It has a clear plastic case exposing a view of the circuitry inside... cracked and submerged in water and mud. Well, that's the end of the drive... and my experiment! Rather than tote around the useless items, I toss them aside. Back in the lab, it was getting quite warm from the operation of the machinery so I took off my long-sleeved shirt and just worked in my t-shirt. I was also wearing just a pair of old jeans, so here I am. Hope it doesn't turn cold soon! My shoes are muddy inside and out. Taking the shoes off, I attempt to scrape out as much of the mud as I possibly can. They're going to take a while to dry out even so. Putting them back on, I proceed to walk in a direction that seems to have the least amount of trees in my path. I don't want to go back the way I came in because I'd probably just end up in a mud patch again. It doesn't get much worse than walking in wet, muddy shoes that squish with every step you take!

Walking along, there are so many noises and creatures moving about, that I'm constantly distracted by them. What an unusually high density of animal life forms around me! Birds are continuously darting through the trees screeching or singing, small lizards are running up and down the trees, small mammals are scurrying away from me as I walk on my way. I've been in forests a couple times before out in California, but they sure didn't have the numbers and diversity of life that I'm seeing here!

Besides the many forms of animal life, I've never seen such a diversity in the plant life surrounding me. From the tiniest of sprouts at my feet, there are some really huge and strange looking varieties of plants. Some are ablaze with brilliantly colored flowering of

varied shapes and sizes. Oh, this is could be good! I'm noticing a number of smaller trees that have their own particular variety of nuts, just hanging there for the taking.

That reminds me... with all the distractions, I haven't noticed my body reminding me of its needs. I'm quite thirsty and hungry... great... no sign of a road, civilization or anything resembling a fast food chain! There's a great deal of food around me, but is it edible? I don't recognize anything familiar. I'd hate to eat something unknown and end up sick. I would sure appreciate a nice hamburger with fries about now! Plodding along the way, I finally realize that there really aren't any footpaths to follow. You'd think that the forest would have paths that people normally follow to bring them out to a road or something. There is no evidence anyone has ever been here. No beer cans, wrappers, signs, or any trace of junk that people always leave wherever they go. This place is spotless! Whoever dumped me here must have thrown me out of an airplane into the Amazon rainforest!

Well, since it appears that I won't be coming across a hamburger for a while... I've noticed vines growing on the ground along my way. The vines have a variety of what appear to be different types of vegetables growing on them that perhaps are edible. Bending down, I pull one of these elongated vegetables off of a vine. Having nothing to cut it with, I just break it open. Hmm, it seems to have a pleasant smell to it so I'll give it a try. Well... here goes! Taking a small bite at first... hmm, it tastes fine, similar to a cucumber, so I sit down for a moment and consume about half of it... not bad! At least I'm not going to starve. I see enough of these vines and nut bearing trees around to know I won't go hungry here. Carrying the rest of the vegetable with me, I eat it along the way.

After about ten more minutes of travel, I hear something in the din around me I haven't noticed before... running water! Walking on, looking around, there's a stream in front of me. Proceeding to walk to the streams edge, there are small fish swimming down the stream and some turtles resting on logs. The birds are avoiding me as I walk and they've landed about 50 yards upstream to quench their thirst and bathe. The water is like crystal... clearer than I have ever seen outdoors, the bottom of the rocky stream being quite visible. Well, I don't relish the thought of drinking from unknown streams but I can't find the usual fountains provided on forest trails, so this will have to do. As I come close to the stream, a couple of large frogs seemingly leap out of nowhere, into the water, and

nearly scare me to death! After my heart stops pounding, I bend down, resting on my knees, cupping both hands and bring the water to my mouth. I drink and think I'll never stop! Well, I may end up with dysentery, but there's no other choice... and man, this is the freshest tasting water I've ever had!

I have the brilliant idea of following this stream along the way out of here. If I follow the stream, at least I won't die of thirst along the way. Walking along, I notice that the birds are constantly swooping down to drink and bathe. There are so many different species of them... they come in all colors, sizes, and various kinds of plumage. This is really odd. Again, I've never seen so much diversity of life in one place before. Usually, you will see just a few types of birds in any given location. This place is like an aviary! After about another half hour of walking, I've also seen numerous small herds of animals making their way through the forest... but keeping their distance from me.

Pausing at the stream, I gaze about a hundred yards ahead of me. I've spotted a small herd of what appear to be deer. A gentle breeze is blowing in the direction of the animals toward me so I know that they can't get a whiff of my scent. I slowly crouch down after spotting them and continue to observe. From this distance, I'm trying to make out what type of deer they are but have no success. I can see them fairly well but the actual specie escapes me. They sort of look like deer but are somewhat different. They behave like deer, but the coloring and body structure are wrong.

Waiting until they pass, I proceed forward. Now that I'm near to where the look-alike deer were standing, I notice a few bushes at the streams' edge. The bushes have some fruit that are about the size of plums. They aren't plums and have a bright green color to them. I pull one of them off the branch and carefully look at it... hmm... it has a pleasant scent. Carefully, I take a very small bite and roll that small piece around my mouth and tongue to judge its taste. It seems to taste fine; in fact it is nice and sweet. Pulling off three more of the fruits, I put them in a pocket and proceed to eat the first. Hmm, actually quite tasty! Eating them one at a time as I walk along, I'm feeling quite proud of myself for my bravery and good fortune! After what seems to be another half hour of following the stream, I notice that the trees are becoming fewer. The sunlight is beaming through the tops of the few trees now, and the warmth of the sun sure feels great. Walking along, I

notice my clothes are nearly completely dry, (albeit quite dirty). My shoes are nearly dry also. I seem to be climbing a bit in elevation while following the stream.

Chapter 6

Finally, I reach the edge of this forest. Perhaps there'll be a road nearby where I can flag someone down and hitch a ride to the nearest town. Looking about, emerging from the forest, I'm presented with a beautiful view of a small lake about 50 yards ahead. A portion of the lake seems to be hidden to my left... like it takes a jog in that direction. Walking to the shoreline, what I can see of the lake is also totally tree lined. It's very odd that there are no homes along the lakefront, piers, and boats of any kind, or any direction signs. Guess I'll follow the shoreline to the left where the lake seems to be hidden.

Walking along, I bend down to pick up a stick on the waterfront. Using it as some sort of cane, I'll carry it along just for company, I guess. Looking in the water, I notice quite a few small fish swimming at the edge, probably hoping a fly or mosquito will land on the water providing an easy meal. Many different types of dragonflies are dashing about, some are quite large and others are so tiny that they would fit on your thumbnail. All of them are arrayed in beautiful colors... their wings have different patterns of color and configurations. I'm sure the fish here have had their share of the smaller dragonflies. Walking along, every few minutes or so, a fish jumps out of the water and enters with a splash... each time it does it startles me... I guess I'm somewhat edgy. Again, the water is amazingly clear. I can readily see bottom for a number of yards out from the shoreline. It strikes me as strange that there are no bottles, beer cans, tires, or other junk in the water. I've never been to any lake that didn't have those items thoughtlessly tossed in the water. Come to think of it, there are no beer cans, broken glass, paper wrappers on the shore or any trace of human activity. This is getting scary! Where in the world did the bad guys dump me anyway? Looking across to the other side of the lake are scores of waterfowl swimming, diving for fish, and landing in or taking off from the lake. They're too far away to identify their breed... wish I had a pair of binoculars!

Still walking on the shoreline, I'm approaching the bend where the lake was first hidden from my view. The rest of the lake can now be seen as it wraps around to the right in the distance to again meet where I first noticed it. The hidden part of the lake has revealed nothing either in the way of traces of civilization. I'm also very disappointed to find that there are no roads leading up to the lake. I haven't yet checked out every inch of the lakefront, but I should've seen some evidence of a road by now.

Something catches my eye... temporarily leaving the path of the shoreline, I proceed to walk to the edge of the forest and find plenty of bushes that appear to have some sort of berry on them. Again, I'm perplexed that I can't identify the type of berry. They are a rather bright yellow and have many facets... similar to a raspberry... but this isn't a raspberry. Again, showing caution as before, I think I'll pluck a berry off and take a small bite. Hmm... seems to taste fine, so I pick a handful and take a seat on the ground at the forest's edge. Facing the lake, I contemplate a bit while eating the berries.

I've come to the realization that nothing in this place... not one living thing I've seen so far since waking after the storm can I identify with certainty. Hmm... curious.

Even though the vegetables, nuts and berries were tasty, I'd like some meat. Unfortunately, I have no idea how to hunt or fish. Besides, I don't have a gun or fishing gear, I tell myself (sounds like a good excuse anyway!), so I keep on walking around the shoreline. Another half hour or so of walking... I'm getting ticked off about this situation I've found myself in. I'm thinking of different scenarios that could explain my arrival in this place. I'm still leaning toward the theory that I was assaulted in the lab and dumped here. What other explanation could there be? I get so angry about this line of thought that I scream out at the top of my lungs. Ok ... This isn't funny. I know you're out there watching me! I apologize for stealing equipment time! I give up... I'm sorry, now come and get me out of here! With that outburst, dozens of birds that were about 100 yards up the shoreline noisily take off out of the water. They circle part of the lake and within less than a minute are carrying on again, business as usual.

Chapter 7

Meat... I gotta have some meat! ... I've got it! I'm going fishing. Yea, I know I have no rod or pole, or line or anything... but I've got a plan! I've noticed that this lake is chock full of fish. Noticing a rocky area on the shoreline just a bit further ahead and stepping real quiet like, I proceed to the rocky area. Once there, I move very slowly into position, finding a good rock to pounce from. Sure enough, dozens of good size victims to pick from! I choose a reasonably flat rock, crouch down and assume my hunting position... quietly waiting. Very soon, there are dozens of fish to choose from. There are so many in this lake, they come hunting bugs right up to the shore. I can see them, plain as day because the water is so clear. They're very slowly moving among the rocks waiting for a hapless bug to drop in. O.K., I spot one fish... he's my target. I'll wait until it is within arms reach. Quickly thrusting both arms into the water I strike, but in my haste, lose my balance... (the moist soles of the shoes on the smooth rock aren't helping)... slip sideways and fall in the water in a sitting position. Good thing it's only a foot deep huh? Now, I'm humiliated, angry, and most of all totally soaked again with wet shoes... (and I just got them dried out). Oh, by the way, after all that splashing, the fish are gone... Great! I need some meat... time for plan "B". Walking from the shoreline to the line of trees and bushes, I pull off my socks and shoes and put the socks on the bushes to dry out, leaving the shoes on a warm rock that is exposed to the sun. I figure by the time I finally catch and eat a fish, the socks and shoes should be dried out. Sounds like a plan to me! All right... walking barefoot down to the shoreline rocks, I again assume the position. After a five-minute wait of quietly crouched on the rocks, the fish start appearing. Once more, I get my hands ready and pick out the fish I want. I spot one about a foot long... yes, a good-looking candidate! O.K., it's slowly meandering towards my position. Here he comes! This time I strike accurately and forcefully. My hands wrap around the fish... I have it! No sooner than having that thought, the fish starts to slip from my grasp. I try to maintain my grip but it's so slippery! Rather than lose it, I manage to toss it onto the shore instead of it falling back into the water. The fish lands on the shore, just flopping around. Jumping off the rocks, I literally leap at the fish like a football player diving for a ball that's just out of his reach. I must look like a real idiot to anyone watching! Grabbing the fish again, I look around for a place to prepare it.

Quickly, I find a site on the shoreline that has a patch of grass to lay the fish on. It's pretty much quit flopping, so it's not going to flop off the grass and get dirty. Fine, uh oh, forgot something. What am I going to do with a raw fish? Cook it... with what? I have no fire here. I also have no idea how to start a fire. Rub two sticks together ... right! That wouldn't work for me in a million years. Hmm, I'm not taking a liking to the alternative... raw fish. I examine the fish closely. Well, at least it doesn't have any scales! A few minutes of careful thought and I still have no ideas on how to make a fire. O.K., no matter how unappetizing it sounds ... its Sushi tonight!

Well, first I have to cut the fish open so I'll search the immediate area for a sharp rock to use as a knife. While looking for a rock, I hear a slight rustling in the bushes nearby. Looking toward the bushes for a few moments, seeing nothing, I go back to work, looking for a suitable tool. As I'm looking, just for curiosity, I make my way down to the rocks at the shoreline where I'd caught the fish. I'd like to see if the school of fish has returned... yep, still there. Man, if I ever get out of here, I'm going to tell some of the fishermen at the facility about this place! I'll charge per head to show them the best fishin' hole in the world!

Turning around, I'm back to the business of seeing if I can find a suitable tool to slice the fish. Leaving the shoreline, looking towards the grass where the fish is, I see a furry creature, (looking like a raccoon), gorging himself on my fish! Taking off in a run towards him at full speed, I'm yelling and shaking my fist in the air. He sees me coming towards him, grabs the fish in his teeth, and takes off with it... running full speed toward the forest! I'm running after him as fast as I can, but the chase is hopeless. Stumbling on a clump of grass, I fall on my belly and watch the creature disappear with the fish into the bushes where I had heard the noise before. I can't believe what just happened! Attempting to calm my anger, I just lay my head on my hands and say to myself... Well Jim, you have just learned a hard-earned lesson in nature, you snooze... you lose! Yep... to the victor go the spoils...

Picking myself up off the ground and shaking the sand off... well, there's more than enough around me in this area to make another meal. Looking around the tree line along the shore, I simply gather more fruit and nuts from the vegetation all around me. Finishing up my "shopping", it's time to take a seat on a clump of grassy soil. By now, with

the Sun and nice breeze, I'm sure that my shoes and socks will dry soon, so I'll just let them sit where they are. I think I'll just finish my meal and watch the lake activity.

Thinking about this place... hmmm... sure would be a nice place to vacation if I could ever figure out how to get here... by road!

Thinking about... what's going on at the lab? Would Security come looking for me when they find that I didn't clock out of the facility at 3:30 p.m.?

When the kidnappers that dumped me off here are ever going to show up and take me back... or something?

The sun is starting to go down. What am I going to do come nightfall?

Making my way back down to the lake, I walk over to the rocks to crouch down and get a drink of water. The water is as crystal clear as ever, I lose my hesitation about drinking it. So far I've had no intestinal upsets... remarkable! Again, my thoughts keep returning to the pristine condition of everything I see. This just isn't normal. I can't believe NO ONE has ever been here before. Back up to my clump of grass to sit... again I'm positioned to watch the lake.

I'm relaxing... watching the bird life slowly disappearing from their lake activity to go to wherever they go to sleep. As the sun starts setting, a rise in the audio level of the insect life can be heard all around me. There are flashes of light everywhere... countless numbers of fireflies in action. As the number of flying insects increases over the lake, there are winged creatures that have made an appearance to greet them. These winged-creatures, (I really can't tell if they are bats or birds at this time), swoop down on the insects with amazing speed and acrobatic agility. I'm sure if these creatures didn't make their nightly appearance to munch on the insects, sitting on this lakeshore would be unbearable. So far, I've only had to swat away a few insects since sitting here. I forgot, I'd better get up and figure out what I'm going to do for sleeping arrangements. Turning towards the forest, I head that way. I'm looking for any good spot to lie in... preferably not on the forest floor where I'd be covered with insects or other crawly-type creatures. Looking around and spotting some heavy vines between two trees that are about eight feet apart, I walk over to them. After giving it some thought, I proceed to make it over. Removing some of the vine, I use it to tie up other strands of vine, and in roughly twenty

minutes I've fashioned a crude hammock about three feet above the forest floor. Having satisfied myself that it would hold my weight, (if I didn't toss and turn too much in my sleep), I look around for something to use as a cover. Not really seeing anything handy, I decide to take some of the smaller vines that are very leafy, tearing them from other parts of the tree, and use them as cover. Well, it's not going to be pretty, but it'll be functional. Hey, when I get back home I think I ought to appear on one of those survivor type shows. After what I've been through, I'd win the million bucks hands down!

Having made sleeping arrangements, it's time to head back towards the shoreline. Finding the same clump of grass, I again take my seat to watch the sun go down and see what else can be seen. I won't get to actually watch the sun go down at the horizon the picturesque way you see on the travel channel. The treetop level is the best it gets here. The winged creatures are starting to thin out over the lake. I'm sure they've had their fill and are looking for a roosting place. As I've mentioned before, the audio level that was increasing from the insect activity is not only continuing, but is steadily ramping up. I didn't realize it could actually get this loud around water. The fireflies are still at it. It really looks bizarre seeing that many flashes all around me. What a light show! I'm also hearing rustling in the forest area. I'm sure there are many nocturnal animals starting to stir and move around now... good thing I don't have any food around to attract them to my sleeping area. I'm sure that a bear or raccoon would pay a visit if I did! If I hear anything getting too close to my bed in the forest, the shore is only about 50 feet away. One thing I need to keep in my mind, as dark as it gets, I'd better remember which way the shore is!

The sun is no longer visible... there's just a glow above the trees where the sun was. Now that it's twilight, the lake looks quite different and very much devoid of life. It seems that it's the insects' time to perform. They're still quite noisy. Just remembered something... I'm trying to remember what phase the moon is in. Back in my grade school years, I always knew what phase the moon was in without having to look outside to see.

Earlier, while watching the sun set, I found the general direction of north... knowing the sun sets in the west. Looking at the sky now with most of the sun's light gone, I can now look at the stars before retiring to bed. With the darkening sky, I should be able to get a more precise fix on North by finding Polaris... the North Star.

Looking around at the stars... hmm... I really don't see Polaris... can't be! Unless I'm located down near the South Pole, I should be able to see the North Star! Man, there's no way the kidnapers took me that far away! This is really strange. I'm looking intently at the stars and really can't identify anything. I know I'm not that far out of practice that I can't find one familiar constellation! Turning around, I look low on the tree level to my hard right. The moon... wait that's not the moon! I'm looking at a bluish disk hanging in the sky... I stand to get a better view and move closer to the water. The disk is about the size that the moon should be... but it's the wrong color! Where in the hell am I? I feel the color draining from my face as my legs start to wobble. Before I fall, I quickly set myself down again on the clump of grass. After about ten minutes of contemplation, I notice a faint green glow appearing over the tree line directly in front of me. Waiting for another ten minutes or so, I see what obviously is another orb is coming into view. After a short time, the full disk is visible. This one is roughly half the size of the first one and is a pale green in color... two moons in the sky!

I sit back down, my head buried in my hands. What's going on? Was there something I have eaten that had some sort of psychoactive components, or am I the target of a black-op project that the CIA has crafted in some sort of bizarre experiment against me? Enough of this! I'm going to my makeshift bed and try to sleep this off. Before walking into the forest again, I take one last look at the sky to see if the moons are still there. Yes, the two moons are still there and I still can't recognize any star patterns. Turning towards the forest, I make my way to the hammock, and slowly creep in. At least now I can look up and only see the leafy canopy with the very little remaining light left. I'm trying to go to sleep, but it's difficult. The forest is alive with a plethora of life forms... all of them seemingly conspiring to make sure they make enough noise to keep me awake! Reaching around, grabbing some small leaves, I wad them up, and stick them in my ears to reduce the noise level... it helps. I slowly drift off to sleep, fatigued with the mental and physical activity of the day...

Chapter 8

Morning of the second day brings a wakeup call from the bird life... Hmm... It seems that I've unknowingly supplied some food for the insects overnight! I'm doing a bit of scratching of my face and chest. Well, things could have been worse overnight. What if I had a middle of the night wakeup from a bear or some other scary creature!

Sitting up, I'm watching dozens of colorful birds darting back and forth, in and out of the leafy canopy all screeching or singing. Some seem to be at odds with some small mammals with long tails... some kind of monkey. The monkeys have a prominent nose, rather than the usual flattened variety. The monkeys swing and leap from tree to tree, and when they get too close to bird territory the birds pursue them and the monkeys flee like they were on fire. It is really quite comical to watch! Other large birds are hammering away at the trunks of trees with their beaks making lots of racket. Large butterflies and moths can be seen opening and closing their wings, as they rest on the trunks of the trees. I see a number of different varieties... variations in wing shape as well as color schemes. One type looks like it has a pair of eyes on its wings just staring at me! Many types of lizards and other reptiles, small ground and tree mammals are on display also. The scene is truly like a large zoo only better... many more species... and without the bars.

Well, it's about time to get out of this hammock, walk to the forests edge, reclaim my shoes, (that ought to be thoroughly dry by now), and socks. Getting out of my makeshift bed, I again notice how well I can breathe... no coughing or stuffed-up nose. I've never experienced this before... two days in a row! In spite of the poor sleeping accommodations, I really feel refreshed and ready to move on. I think I'll pick a few more of those tasty yellow berries on the way to the other side of the lake. Once on that side of the lake, I'll decide what path to take.

After going through my stretching routine, I proceed toward the shoreline. Along the way, I'm looking down in front of my steps, watching the small creatures that are darting in every direction to avoid me... reptiles, small mammals, insects... you name it! Almost to the forests edge now... the lake will be on the other side of this large bush that I make my way around. Emerging from around the bush... I'm looking ahead instead of downward.

Attempting to direct my eyes toward the lake, I stop dead in my tracks... can't take another step! What in the world! ... A sudden rush of adrenaline pounds through me. My body can't decide whether to run, scream, or make any decision at all. I'm looking directly into the faces of four figures directly in front of me! I can feel my blood withdrawing from my limbs. Feeling faint with my legs wobbling, I collapse and fall backward on my butt and instinctively thrust my arms backward to prop myself up. I pull my legs toward me with the soles of my feet still on the ground and in a seated position. My palms are face down on the ground behind me as I gaze at the seemingly menacing figures. In my frightened mind, I picture a scene like this in the movies... and it never ends well!

Oh no... one of the shorter of them emerges from the others, a woman, and walks slowly toward me. She's quite tall, every bit as tall as I am. This woman is wearing some sort of woven skirt that reaches down to mid-thigh. As she gets closer, I notice that she's wearing sandals made of the same material. She's wearing nothing above her waist other than a simple choker type yellow stone necklace worn around the neck... nothing else but dark reddish colored flesh. She slowly approaches and crouches down in front of me, with both her knees on the ground directly in front of my feet. She takes her left hand as she places her palm between her breasts, looks me directly in the eyes and speaks one word... "Maeya"... (sounds like May'-ah... like the month of May). I'm looking into almond shaped eyes resembling an Asian woman... and this is really strange... her eye color is an absolutely stunning bright yellow... as yellow as the shiny stones in her necklace. I can't help but notice that her nose is small compared to a... is this woman... human? Her hair color is a light auburn, with short bangs. The hair on each side of her head is pulled back with something hidden from my present view. The rest of her hair hangs at just above shoulder length. I see a smudge of red coloring applied just past the corner of each eyelid towards the ear. I'm sure this has some sort of significance, but I can't imagine what. She removes her hand from her breast and places it on my chest while staring at me, looking for a response. I'm assuming she's asking my name, so stammering I say Ji ... Jim. She attempts to repeat my name... "zhimm" is how she pronounces it. I notice a very slight expression of a smile on her face as she says it.

Oh great! The three others left behind start talking amongst themselves and proceed to walk towards us. The woman stands up, turns away and slowly takes a position

behind the other three. Slowly, I stand to my feet, fully expecting to meet my end. As they approach, I can't help but notice the size of these people. The two women among them are roughly my height. One of the men appears at least 4 inches taller than the women; the other is probably about 10 inches taller... and all muscle!

At least they aren't carrying any weapons that I can see. As they approach, I withdraw and back up slowly... still facing them. I feel the limbs of the bush that my socks are on pressing against me in the back after just a few steps. I've run out of space to retreat! I hold up my arm and they halt in their tracks. Feeling behind my back while keeping an eye on them, I grab the socks and slip them on. The shoes are within reach also... I put them on without taking my eyes off the visitors. As I stand up, they come closer until they are within arms reach. They stop and look at me with apparent curiosity. Feeling beads of nervous sweat forming on my forehead, I stand motionless as one of the two men rubs the sleeve of my t-shirt between his fingertips and says something unintelligible to the others. They talk amongst themselves for a brief moment and the tallest one motions with his hand for me to follow them. Turning away from me, they proceed to walk along the shore, and I follow... (again... no point in running and it appears that I have escaped a beating, thank god). The tallest one looks back to see if I'm still following. I stay about three steps behind as we walk along.

It finally dawns on me... there are no kidnappers; no one accosted me in the lab. I'm here, (wherever here is) as a result of the experiment I was running in the lab. I remember that sphere... it had to be a time/space warp... a "wormhole" that my experiment opened up. I must have been pulled into it. I'm finding it difficult to remember exactly what happened, my memory of the event is still hazy. Well... I'll contemplate the rest later.

Walking just a few steps behind this group, I pick up some details about them that I hadn't noticed before, (mostly from being too afraid to notice). They have the same skin color, dark red. They all have small noses like the first woman. The men are very muscular with little body fat, practically no body or facial hair, and are wearing loincloths. The men wear their hair just at shoulder length, but it is pulled back and tied. The woman that first approached me... (her name is Maeya I guess), is somewhat more slender than the other woman. That other woman is not fat by any means, in fact she has the build of a fitness enthusiast, and is dressed like Maeya, but without the necklace. Her hair is straight, pulled

back and tied, and halfway to her waist. All have hair color either very dark brown or black, again except for Maeya. All wear clothing and sandals made of the same material. I notice they also have items around their waist, with two of them having flat pouches on a belt. I also see being worn, a cloth shaped into something resembling an elongated light bulb. Most likely it's a water pouch.

As we're walking along the shoreline, the multitudes of birds and other creatures enjoying the lakefront are flying or swimming away from us. The birds take off, then circle and land about a hundred feet or so behind us as we walk. Finally, we reach the other side of the lake... the group hesitates and turns toward me. One of the men reaches into a pouch and pulls out a flattened square of something and hands it to me. The other man removes the rounded pouch from his waist and hands that to me. I smile to say thanks... and notice something I missed before... all have dark colored eyes except Maeya... strange! Walking on, we turn towards the forest again where I notice that there is an area where there isn't much brush or as dense with foliage. I wouldn't have seen this from the other side of the lake without binoculars. Following them, I examine, then tear pieces from the square they handed me... it's food! It's some sort of dried fish and it sure tastes good! The rounded pouch holds water, and I take a couple good gulps after eating the fish. Threading the pouch onto my belt, I proceed along with the group.

We enter the forest again, but it is not as dense as usual in this area. Walking through the forest... I again note all the variety of life around me. The woman, Maeya, has been very observant of everything taking place around her on our walk, more so than the others. There's a cool breeze moving through here, I can hear creaking from the tree canopy as it gently sways and patches of direct sunlight quickly move about on the floor of the forest. We cross a few more streams along the way, none of them too large that we can't simply jump over. Looking downward, as I hop over the stream, are small fish in schools, lazily swimming downstream. After another mile or so, we encounter another creek. The group stops and takes their water pouches from their waists and fills them. They turn towards me and motion that I do the same. Traveling on, for what seems to be another couple of miles, I notice the forest thinning and the light level increasing.

Stepping out of the forest, before us seems to be a meadow... I'm not really sure. We proceed along a path, (the first one I've seen), that meanders through this area. I hesitate

for a brief moment at the scene before me and ... oh my god... this really is such a beautiful place! The variety of floral life is astounding. My senses are overcome with the scent of flowers. I see so many different insect species around me taking advantage of the flowering. Bees, butterflies, moths and hummingbirds... all are darting about everywhere... vivid patterns of colors... so many varieties of species of life everywhere. I've never seen what is taking place before me anywhere on Earth! What an incredible and beautiful sight... the movement and activity of life with so many scents, colors, shapes, and sounds. It's really overwhelming to the senses!

We're moving along... not too far away, off to our left, are what appear to be moose grazing. They lift their heads briefly as we pass nearby, and lower them again to continue feeding. Up ahead, numerous water holes can be seen on both sides of the path where ducks and other fowl are gathering... activity and motion everywhere. I glance upward, and I'm thinking that the sun has been really bright today with only a few billowing clouds on the horizon. It seems really strange to only have fluffy clouds in a very blue sky instead of all those ugly streaks of trails that the jets leave behind, and white out what otherwise would be a really blue sky. I have a gut feeling I won't be seeing any jets or any type plane again. As Dorothy said, "Toto, I don't think we're in Kansas anymore!" In the distance can be seen the forest line wrapping most of the way around this meadow. The path appears to be taking us to a break in the tree line in the distance. I'm starting to show a bit of fatigue as we have been walking for a while now. The sun is quite warm, and I'm not wearing a hat. The sun doesn't seem to bother the rest of the group though. I'd really like to just take a seat off of this path... rest and enjoy the beauty of what is taking place around me. I just still can't believe a place like this exists! Well, got to keep moving, I guess. We're coming up to the clearing in the trees... just another 100 yards or so.

Chapter 9

Passing through the clearing, we enter an area... a wooded area to be sure, but it can't be called a forest. We're following a wider path now; apparently this one has been well traveled. Looking around, I watch small mammals running up and down the trees,

chasing each other. Bluish birds similar to jays are diving at and making a raucous noise at the mammals. This area is a bit hilly, with numerous rock outgrowths. The small deer-type animals are seen darting all about, hiding from us as we approach by running around to the other side of these small hills. We pass through some steeper hills, rock formations are on both sides of us now, and we find ourselves winding around on a narrower path shaped like a serpent.

Suddenly, the narrow path opens up into space where the group stops, with me directly behind them. I'm trying to move my head around to look through or around them, and finally get a glimpse of what's on the other side. From the looks of things, I'm in a village! One of the members of my group is speaking to the small crowd that has gathered in front of them. Fortunately for me, I see smiles among the gathered crowd and friendly chatter between them. The group in front of me splits, moving to the left and right. They turn to me and motion that they wish me to advance. They point to a patch of ground between them and the gathered crowd. I believe they wish me to stand there. As I advance, the groups' eyes follow me to that spot. Facing the crowd, I would guess roughly thirty-five people are before me. Interspersed are shorter people, children of course. All their smiles turn to an expression I can best describe as awestruck. No, I don't think it's because of my good looks! One of the male members of my group moves up and stands to my left. He gestures toward me with his hand and speaks in a raised voice with a couple of words and I hear him say "zhimm." I notice that some of the small members of the crowd start giggling, then cupping their hands over their mouths. The adults quickly give them a glance and they straighten up. I wonder what that was about? Perhaps I'll find out later. Briefly looking over the crowd, these people look the same as my group, very tall, with a dark reddish colored skin and very dark hair. There are a few with the dark hair turning somewhat gray.

The crowd carefully moves forward, a few men and women with the graying hair move ahead of the crowd. They stand next to each other and face me. One of the men raises his arm, and also examines the material of my t-shirt. As he finishes the "examination", one of the fellows places his palms on my shoulders and applies a bit of pressure, gesturing that I should lower myself. I feel anxiety about this, but oblige, and kneel down on one knee. The two step aside, and motion into the small crowd. The

children make their way through the crowd and totally encircle me... smiling, laughing, and moving their hands over my face, hair, and nose for a minute. It's a bit embarrassing, but I'm not quite in the position to object!

One of the men in my group speaks up and says something to the crowd and they all start to move away, apparently back to whatever they were doing before our arrival. The two men in our group motion for me to follow them, and the women leave us. The three of us walk further into the village. Looking around while walking, one can see people busily engaged in activity. Women are hand-weaving fibers into clothing while singing to themselves... children are running, laughing and playing. A few men are working on patching a fiber net. One man is carrying in each hand cylindrical shaped containers with rope handles, filled with small round seeds the size of peas, another has containers of water. Two women are carrying various types of vegetable produce and fresh fish in pouch type containers that have been soaked in water. Passing by the main area of activity, further out are what appear to be dwellings. In just a couple minutes or so, we're at the place where some of the villagers have their homes. A few women are seated together outside of their dwellings as they nurse their infants. As we pass by them, the two men bow slightly and speak a short greeting. The women return their courtesy, saying something to us as they smile and wave as we continue on our way. It looks like the mothers are simply relaxing on this calm and peaceful day as they soak up the sunshine and the gentle breeze. I notice that the dwellings they are in front of are sort of a thatched construction, but are well made. Some dwellings stand on open ground; some are built around the trees and rocks. I see no domesticated animals around, only people attending to the affairs of life. For the first time in a couple days, I'm in the presence of others... different looking yes, and I think to myself... I'm not alone anymore.

Chapter 10

I see a path on the other side of the dwellings. I'm not sure where it leads, but a few men on that path are coming into the dwelling area. They're carrying some sort of cutting implements, and look like they've been working somewhere and are glad the workday is

done. We finally stop at one hut and the taller of the two men starts to enter the hut. Turning towards us, he motions us to come in. I step into the hut with the other man behind me. The taller man motions for us to sit. He carries some small empty bowls and utensils from a shelf on the hut wall, places them on the mat on the floor and takes his seat with us. I can hear women speaking outside... a woman calls from the outside of the hut and the two men speak as the women enter in. They bring several bowls of food inside. In the bowls I see fish, some sort of crushed seed, and some vegetables. The two women place the bowls in the middle of the mat and take their seat with us. The taller of the two men looks at me, places his hand on his massive chest and says, Giff. I say Giff, and he smiles and nods. He reaches his arm out to the other man, palm up and says Sar. That man also smiles and nods. He introduces Maeya by name and she lowers her head a bit and smiles slightly. The last woman is introduced as Terra. She has a broad smile as she hands me a cloth wrapped around food utensils. I smile back to her and nod my head. Terra passes the bowl of fish to Maeya while Sar hands the crushed seeds in a bowl to me. After we all have food in our bowls, the women strike up a conversation between themselves. The men are busy with the food before them and refrain from speaking. Every so often both men slap my shoulder and gesture to the food while saying something to me, probably "eat... eat"! Every now and then Terra would glance at me, smiling. I'm not sure if she is trying to make me feel welcome, or finds me so strange looking that she can't believe her eyes! We finish our meal, and pick up after ourselves. Giff and Sar say something to the women and Terra speaks to Giff and motions toward the entrance. The two women start towards the entrance, followed by Sar. Giff motions to me and we make our way out of the hut.

Outside, I notice that people are making their way to the main area of the village. We join those in progress and follow them. Our group ends up at the village "square" and I follow their lead as we take places, seated in a semi-circle with the other villagers. Shortly, I hear singing and the children emerge single file from a small hut nearby, carrying some sort of flowering foliage... following them is an adult female. The children stand, forming a line in front of the assembled village. The adult sits down in front of them, legs crossed, facing the children. The children hold the foliage with both hands, diagonally across their chests. At a hand gesture from the adult, the children start singing while lifting up the foliage, starting a slow dance in unison. They turn slowly around, and after completing the

circle, lower the foliage back across their chests and kneel down on one knee. They look toward the sky, still singing, and again hold the foliage upward. They lower it, and in a side-to-side motion with their arms, sway the plants from the left to the right, still singing, and again look towards the sky. After repeating this dance from the beginning again, the children embrace the foliage and lower their heads, and stand still. The adult rises and faces the children with her arms outstretched to the left and right. This signified the end of their performance, and some of the village folk shake rattles while some females make bird call sounds. It's easy to see that the crowd is pleased with the children's performance and that they are quite proud of them. The children walk to their parents and are promptly rewarded with hugs and smiles.

Apparently, the ceremony is over and we are dispersing. I figure that the plant they were dancing with has some special significance to the village and the children were giving thanks. Thinking over the show, the kids were cute, but it sure didn't take the place of a movie, or a football game for me... guess I'm just a city guy!

Giff, Sar, and Terra motion me to come with them. I follow them to a grassy area near the edge of the huts. Many of the villagers are taking their seat on the short grass, placing mats down to sit upon. We arrive at an already placed mat with a man and woman seated. The man bids us to sit with them. Terra sits down first next to them, kisses the man first on the cheek, and hugs and kisses the woman. I'm gathering that these are her parents. The two men clasp the hands of both the two already seated, shaking them warmly. Sar speaks my name, while gesturing towards me, speaking the name of the man to me... Trem. He introduces me to the woman... Leea. I clasp both of their hands, first Leea, then Trem. They're smiling while looking directly at me.

As all have taken their seats, one of the gray haired men in the crowd stands and gestures toward the sky briefly. Two women from the crowd stand up and walk toward the edge of the crowd. The elderly man takes his seat. They turn and face the crowd with smiles, bow their heads for a moment, then look straight ahead at the crowd. They outstretch their arms, with palms up, towards the crowd. At that moment, a few rattles and soft notes from a wooden flute can be heard. The two women dance slowly while smiling and gesturing with their hands, similar to the way a hula dancer moves her hands to tell a story. The dancers look up to the sky and lift their arms towards it... again; I

believe this is a ritual of thanksgiving of some sort. The dancers are quite graceful and the crowd is hushed during their dance. Only the music and an occasional bird sound from a few women are heard. After a few minutes, the dance and music stop and the women take their seat. The villagers start chatting amongst themselves. Perhaps this is a winding down period from the day's activities in the village. Our group is having a good time swapping stories. They try and include me in the conversation by hand gesturing as they speak, looking at me and smiling. It just occurred to me that the woman named Maeya isn't with us. Hmm... I wonder where she is?

Dusk is now upon us, the bluish moon can be seen brighter, high in the sky. The fireflies can be seen flashing everywhere. It's really a calm beautiful evening. I think to myself, that if this was Earth, insects would be biting us unmercifully since we are outdoors, but they aren't. As it was at the lake, I again come to the conclusion that the ecosystem is probably very well balanced and the insects are kept in check by other forms of wildlife. Getting darker now, the villagers rise from their seated positions and pick up their mats. Our group clasps hands again; Trem and Leea reach for me and both give me a hug. I smile to them and reciprocate. Terra also smiles to me and places her hand on my shoulder and pats it a couple times. She steps back, waves a bit and leaves with her parents.

The two men lead me down a path to a hut that has apparently been abandoned. The hut has a heavy cloth for a door that is folded back part way and tied off. Once we enter, the two men place some dried food they remove from their pouches onto a small table in the center of hut. They look all around with their arms extended with palms up toward me, and again motion with their arms around, looking towards me. I believe they are telling me that this will be my dwelling. I smile, and move my arms around the hut briefly also. They, while facing me, start backing out the doorway with an outstretched arm raised... I reciprocate while smiling.

Alone, I look around and notice flaps of heavy cloth that can be tied open. These are apparently windows. There are others that are placed higher up than a level that someone could easily look in. These are probably for ventilation. Noticing the doorway, there are also ties on the bottom corners that can be used to keep the door cloth closed, apparently so animals can't wander in. This hut has a frame bed, a small table that the food is set on,

and a chair with no back. The bed has a suspension made from the same fibers as everything else around me. It actually looks comfortable, as I notice it has "give" when I push on it with a bit of force. The craftsmanship of this furniture is really remarkable considering the lack of technology! Hanging on the wall are several items tied and rolled up. Taking one roll off the wall and untying it, I find a couple of blankets and a cloth that can be folded to make a pillow. In another bundle, when untied and unrolled, are thin cloths of various sizes and pouches for carrying water and food, as well as eating utensils. All items are clean and appear unused. After the last couple days of "roughing it", I'm sure grateful for this hut and its contents!

I walk over, close, and tie down the door cloth. Things are getting quieter now, as it's almost dark. The only sounds are insects and some animals in the distance howling, (probably at the two moons). Stripping down to my shorts, I grab the blankets and pillow, lay one blanket on the bed, leave the other rolled at the foot of the bed, and lay on my back with my arms folded behind my head. I'm tired but have too many thoughts running through my mind to fall asleep immediately.

My thoughts drift back to the lab. By this time, I'm a missing person. I'll bet that what's really going to confuse the personnel at the facility was my "Harry Houdini" exit! Security knew I clocked into the lab, but I never came out. They'll never know what happened in the lab. The experiment was wiped clean, the crystals are gone, and all the equipment powered down after the preset timed shutdown. Suddenly, the reality sinks into my being that everything connected with my former life has also vanished forever. The only things from my past are the clothes I wear and my memories. Sadness also... the rest of my family is probably in tears at this time... they'll never know what has happened to me. I sigh, tears form in my eyes as I realize I have no one to blame but myself... I'll never see them again... like it or not, I am now an inhabitant of this world, albeit a strange looking one! No television, movies, fast food, no technology, no diversions of any sort. How will I fit in this world? I'm an alien here; I don't know the first thing about survival on my own. I wonder what tomorrow will bring. I must get a hold of myself and not allow my sadness turn to depression. Whatever it is I might as well "get with the program". I'll probably spend the rest of my days here. Enough...time to quit thinking and sleep...

Chapter 11

Morning finds me waking to the sounds of birds and people quietly moving about outside my hut. I've had a good nights' sleep! No car alarms going off in the middle of the night, cell phones ringing, sirens from emergency vehicles, or inconsiderate people yelling across the hall of the apartment when I'm trying to sleep. I could get used to this! I get up, get dressed, walk over to the door and tie it up so it's half open. Untying the cloths that cover the windows, I look out and notice that the villagers passing by my hut are carrying garments with them as they go.

There's a deep male voice calling... Zhimm... Zhimm! Giff is standing near the entrance of the hut. I step out to meet him... he has an extra set of clothes with him and a pair of sandals for me. Taking a look at the sandals, I really believe he's giving me a pair made for women (I don't think they make a pair of man's sandals that small). No problem, they look the same. At least there are no flowery designs on them! He hands me the clothing and sandals and motions for me to follow him. Walking alongside him, we join others along the way down this path. Judging by their smiles, everyone seems to be in a good mood. Passing the hut area, we're now on a trail descending towards a creek. There's a fork in the path; the men are taking one direction, the women another. The children are also following according to their gender. As we approach the water, we set our clean clothing on bushes or rocks. At the creek, we remove the clothing we wear and proceed to wash the items, and then hand wring them. Spreading the wet clothing down on the warm rocks, we'll let the Sun and wind dry them as much as possible while we bathe. Time to jump in the creek! Oh man, I'm not used to bathing at this cool water temperature! After a couple minutes or so, I acclimate to it.

The women took a different trail, but they are only about a couple hundred feet away from us. Neither gender pays any attention to the goings on of the other. The two genders are too busy chatting among their own group. Nudity seems to be no big deal with these people. It was the same way on Earth with so-called primitive people. Finishing up with bathing, we leave the water, dry off and put on our dry clothes. I think and laugh to myself, as I put on the breechcloth and sandals. I never would have thought I'd be wearing

this form of clothing! I gather up my still somewhat damp clothing and get ready to leave with the others. Giff turns toward me, and points back to the path to the village as we finish up. Walking back to the village, some of the women join us in the walk back. Everyone is chatting and smiling. I'm carrying my old clothing and shoes back, wondering what I'm going to do with them. They're sure out of place here.

We're having another beautiful day weather-wise. The sun is well risen and as yet, there are no clouds in the sky. To my right, the smaller of the two moons is still visible, but looks like it will be setting soon. Overhead, flocks of birds fly over in quantity... a duck hunter's paradise to be sure! For some reason, I again notice how well I feel, and that my head is clear of any allergic symptoms. Thinking about this for a moment, I form a hypothesis. You can't help but notice that what I've seen of this planet so far is the heavy forestation. If most of the landmass of this planet still has its original forests intact, and I would bet it does, it's quite likely the oxygen content is higher here than it is presently on Earth. If that's true, no wonder my head and sinuses feel so clear... (it probably also helps that I am not breathing all the airborne toxins that I was while on Earth).

Proceeding to the village, we find others are spreading out large mats in the short grass. Bowls of various sizes filled with food are carried by women. They're bringing those bowls to the mat area and placing them upon the mats. The mats are arranged so that there is ample room for one to sit around them and also to walk around. Giff and I walk back to my hut, where I enter and deposit my old clothing and shoes. Walking back to the gathering, I find people sitting down around the mats chatting and laughing. Maeya, Terra, and Sar join Giff and I. We take our places around a mat, and sit down in the grass. I'm between Giff and Sar; the two women are opposite me. Before us are a few bowls of food and what appear to be formed stone utensils and thin cloths. The knife utensils are made from sharpened stone.

Terra passes the bowls around to our group. At this time the crowd seems to hush as an elderly man with graying hair at a mat next to our group stands and looks over the gathering. As he's looking around, his arms are outstretched, as if motioning to everyone present. The crowd quiets. He speaks in a somewhat loud voice that all can hear. After about thirty seconds, he gestures with both arms toward me and the crowd chants some sort of short song. After the chant, there is again silence as the man takes his seat.

Everyone is engaged in passing around the food bowls and making conversation. Giff puts his arm around my shoulder as if he's congratulating me, and smiles. All in our group pass the food around and proceed to eat. Before us are several types of fruit and what appears to be a type of pudding. I've worked up quite an appetite by this time, and everything sure looks good!

The fruit looks very appetizing... so many different colors and varieties! Slicing it with the utensils, we eat our fill. The pudding is somewhat lumpy, but sure tastes good. It has the consistency of tapioca but tastes nutty and is only slightly sweet. It sure is filling. I can't eat very much... I'll bet its high calorie! After we no longer have our mouths full, the four chat amongst themselves. It's a bit awkward not knowing what they are saying, but that is really my problem, not theirs. Finishing their conversation, the four pick up the bowls and utensils, I do likewise. We proceed to take them to a central location. I assume there are a few people that will gather them up for cleaning and disposing the leftovers. Moving away from the bowls, Giff and Sar apparently tell the women they are going somewhere, so the women leave us to attend to their duties. The two men motion me to follow them.

Following Giff and Sar to their huts, we arrive at Giff's hut and wait outside. He emerges with food and water pouches on his waist, and what appears to be a reaping implement in his hand. Stopping at Sar's hut, Sar emerges with the same hardware plus an extra implement for me to use. He hands it to me with another slap on the back. I already had my food and water pouches when I left my hut, so I am good to go.

Walking past the dwellings of the village, we follow a path that leads away from it. Other men are following behind us, with the same cutting implements, others with baskets... likely going to the same place we are. We follow the path that branches away from the creek and toward what appears to be a tall stand of foliage. The stand is about a quarter mile in the distance. Even from this distance, I can tell that this foliage covers quite a bit of ground. Coming upon the field, the workers already there have begun to harvest the foliage. I think this harvesting has been going on for a few weeks at least, from the looks of the field. Workers have placed the long stalks in a number of tepee shaped stacks. Most likely, this is to dry the harvest before bringing it back to the village.

Giff and Sar stop at the entrance to the field. Sar extends his arms as if embracing the field, looks at me, smiles, and says "sibannac"! I do the same, and say sibannac! Sar gives me a hearty laugh! It dawns on me that this is the same foliage that the children held when they were doing their dance yesterday. From the looks of things, this must be a pretty important crop to them.

Those around me commence to cut the stalks, so after a few seconds of observation, I copy their movements and join them. Other workers are taking the stalks we have cut. These workers are cutting the glistening, flowery buds off the top of the stalks, storing them in large baskets. Others are taking the stalks from those that have removed the flowery buds and stacking them into the tepee shapes. The work is not easy for us that first cut the stalks. The stone implements we are using are making the job harder... sure wish I had a good sharp steel machete!

Some of the workers act as runners... they are responsible for carrying the baskets of the flowering tops of the stalks back to the village. Runners also carry small bundles of stalks that seem to have been harvested quite a while ago, and are now completely dried. They are bound with rope into a size that can be carried back by one person to the village.

We've put in a good mornings work so far, and are having lunch. We're sitting together with some of the others in the field. The men converse with each other while devouring their rations. Giff says something to the other workers, and pats me on the back. He speaks and gestures, pointing to the stalks that have been harvested by us.

Looking around at the wildlife in the immediate area near us, I notice birds of many species poking around where we have been harvesting. I think they are gleaning seeds that have fallen from the plants as they were placed in the baskets. It must be one of their favorite foods, as they are making a fair amount of noise while flocking to it. I'm also getting used to seeing the larger mammals around us in the distance. Some are in the nearby creek drinking. It's sure a relaxing scene, (when we're not working). Oh well, a little work never hurt anyone, eh? This work is sure different from my work at the lab. I used mostly my mind there. Now I'm using muscles I think I've never used before. I'll probably feel all this in the morning!

As far as my work, I've had to rest a number of times so far for ten minutes at a time. The others have only taken one short break besides lunch. It seems that I am quite unable to work as hard as these men do. It doesn't surprise me. All these men are quite muscular and they've probably worked liked this from day one. They've also had the benefit of this excellent nutrition all their lives. They don't hassle or chide me about my work. I know they realize I'm not capable of doing what they can do.

Continuing on after lunch...

Every now and then, some of the women come from the village and bring fresh cool water from the creek for us to drink, and some cloths to wipe the sweat away. They've also brought strips of fabric for all to use as sweat bands. I've noticed the women here work as hard as the men do. Even when they leave, the women carry baskets back with them, helping out the runners. Terra also came and brought us another change of clothing. We plan to go to the creek after working the field and bathe before returning to the village. She chatted briefly with the other men, then came up to me and smiled. She noticed the sweat running down my forehead and wiped my brow with a dry cloth. She must have thought I really looked "wiped out!"

A few hours later...

I have some unexpected relief... clouds have moved in and have made it quite overcast. The heat of the day has lessened a bit, and the wind is starting to pick up. Perhaps we're in for some rain.

A few more hours pass and the workers are calling it a day. Gathering up our items from the field, we start heading back to the village. As we walk back with the other workers, we see they're also taking the detour to the creek. We're all in good spirits, as the days' labors are done... the creek is just up ahead. Arriving at the creek, we set aside the sweaty clothes and bathe in the cool water of the creek. Man, that cool water feels good now! The workers are in a good mood... laughing and throwing water on each other. After bathing, we proceed to walk back to the village.

The overcast sky is beginning to darken. Giff and Sar look up while walking, noticing the change also. As we enter the village, we see no preparation for an outdoor

dinner. Everyone is making preparations for rain, running into huts and tying window cloths.

Giff waves to us and leaves to walk into another hut. Sar motions me to follow him into his hut. As we enter the hut, I notice we have company. Trem and Leea are seated at the table, with Terra and Maeya alongside Leea. Sar takes his seat next to Terra, and I take a seat next to Trem. Terra has already prepared everything for today's dinner. Everything set before us sure looks good! Man, I'm awful hungry. I don't think I've ever put in that kind of work all in one day before, and it has really given me an appetite. She starts passing bowls around and the rest of us follow suit. A number of varieties of vegetables, nuts, mushrooms, a couple types of fish, and hulled sibannac seeds are before us... and it all looks good! As we start eating, I notice the wind is picking up by listening to the leaves on the trees rustling. Very shortly, the gentle sound of rain can be heard on the thatching of the hut. I'm thankful that, so far, it isn't as intense as the rain was when I first arrived here. I can hear the rumbling of thunder off in the distance. I wonder if the weather front is moving away from or towards us?

I'm sure glad to be sitting here with my newfound friends, eating good food after a hard day's work in the field. As the group is chatting and laughing together, my mind drifts to my surroundings. I'm listening to a gentle rain and the joyful conversation of those that have taken me in as their own. I've worked hard today, and sitting here calmly with a full stomach has caused every muscle in my body to start relaxing. Funny, it has just occurred to me that I don't have a care in the world... anything to really worry about. I don't think it gets any better than this!

Chapter 12

And so the days and the months passed...

Judging by the Suns' position on the horizon, it's probably been about a year now since I first arrived. I've also noticed that the mean temperature here has never varied by more than ten degrees over the past year... no more Midwest winters for me! I'd wager that

the heavy forestation on this planet has a moderating effect on the weather. In other words the heavy forestation helps the planet to keep more of an even temperature, unlike Earth.

After a year or so of life in the village, I feel I have developed to my full physical capabilities. I'm able to do a full days work now, even by their standards, though I'll never have the strength these men do. I've gained about thirty more pounds... of muscle, not fat, thankfully. I'd estimate my strength now to be roughly equal to the average woman here... (ok, you can quit laughing at me now)! I can honestly say that I've never felt so good physically in my life as I do now... and mentally also. The sweating that comes from the daily physical work and the pure wholesome food over the past year has probably purged most of the toxins that had built up in my body. I can't remember the last time I had a headache, allergy problems, or an illness!

A few weeks after I first arrived in the village, other villagers persuaded me to stay for a few weeks in their company after they had talked it over with the four who first found me. That really worked out to be the best situation. I would be with each family... working in the fields, other times playing games with their children... or doing whatever was needed to help out. When the workday was over, I would leave them and return the next day. Over time, I had worked closely with everyone in the village, men and women, at one time or another, in one capacity or another, fishing, making implements, repairing housing, gathering and preparing food. I had gained their trust and likewise feel that each member of the village was a close friend to me.

In turn, each family was sharing meals with me, helping me learn their language... first by pointing to objects and saying its name, then common greetings, and later advancing to speaking a sentence while acting out a common situation like coming into a hut. Slowly, I learned the language of the people... the Sarn. That's what they call themselves.

I found that one of my favorite jobs was watching the children at play. They were always so full of energy, nearly always laughing, and seldom quarreled amongst themselves to any great degree. Speaking of the children, while watching over them one day, I was thinking back to the first day I arrived at the village. While chatting with them, I carefully maneuvered the conversation around and asked one child why they all snickered when Giff introduced me by name to them. The girl slowly lowered her head while looking

downward and went silent. I bent down a bit and spoke to her very softly and said that it was ok ... she could tell me. Cupping her hands around her mouth, she very quietly whispered in my ear that "zhimm" was the name given to the small monkey-like creature that lived in the forests with a big nose. She quickly lowered her head again and hid her face in her hands. I started laughing to tears and pulled her close, hugging her. Hearing that I was laughing, she also started laughing, and threw her arms around me. I looked her in the eyes, pointed to my nose and said "zhimm... zhimm"... laughing, and while hunching over, I scratched under my armpits and walked around acting like a monkey. All the children joined in and nearly laughed themselves into side aches. Even the adults around us were laughing to tears watching us. I sure love those kids!

By the way, I have to mention something that took a while to realize, but it is so extraordinary. It dawned on me that I hadn't seen a case of real sickness among this people in the entire time I have been with them. Some of the children have had short durations of elevated temperatures, or the sniffles for a brief time... that's about it. I've seen nearly perfect pearly white teeth in everyone except the old ones, and even their teeth were not diseased, just simply wearing out... all this, in spite of the fact that there are no real medical doctors available, dentists, or vaccination programs in place.

All but the old ones were capable of doing a hard days work... including the women. I found out that the old ones are well over one hundred years old, and still move around well and are not even totally gray headed... having nearly a full head of hair. An old one passed away during the year. She was fairly active until a few days of her passing. I think she just simply wore out, she really wasn't sick. Generally, the only physical problems I've seen here are that of trauma. You know, an occasional fall... a broken bone or some other accidental injury... the stuff that happens simply because we live in a physical world.

I seem to recall taking a college class that mentioned a doctor named Weston Price who traveled all over the world in the early twentieth century studying the level of health of native peoples before civilization got to them. At that time, those people still had not been assimilated into the practice of eating a modern diet. The doctor found remarkable health in these aboriginal peoples. They were free of the diseases we believe are just part of life and aging. When those people started eating a "modern" diet, they were beset by the same ills of civilized man. Sadly, the doctor's findings were neglected to the detriment of

human life. His findings just didn't fit into civilized life, or with the "learned" medical establishment. I think the Sarn are the typical example of his findings.

Comparing humans to the Sarn, humans seem to be their equal genetically, physically speaking, other than the Sarn's taller stature. I did find that their men are clearly much stronger than I. Even the women were physically stronger than me when I first arrived here, (a situation I found somewhat embarrassing at times). This, I attribute to their diet and the hardy physical life they've lived since day one, rather than to genetics. I grew up on the usual standard American diet, of which no doubt, hindered my body from ever reaching its full potential. By the way, it's amazing to look around this village and see women that I know are somewhat past middle age, (like Leea), that have "hour-glass" figures and are still quite physically attractive! Likewise, the men of the same age have very good muscle tone with "V" shaped torsos and lack the "pot bellies" of men on Earth.

Intellectually, I think we're equal, but I have to tell you what a difference I noticed between the Sarn children and human kids. The Sarn children are nursed longer by their mothers than human children are. Even before they are totally weaned, they have the purest, most nutritious foods available to them... (no junk foods, of course). I believe this alone gives them a jump-start on life that many human children never receive, (even in middle to upper class families). The minds of the Sarn are able to reach full intellectual capability, as well as their physical bodies.

At an early age, the children are with their parents learning and participating in every task that must be learned in order to survive in their world. They learn very quickly... and they have to. Their world can be a dangerous place, with the many different life forms present, as well as the common physical dangers of outdoor life. Their parents teach them to observe their world very carefully, to notice even the minutest of detail of what is going on around them... to use all their physical senses to their fullest potential.

If there is any one secret of the Sarn's well being, it's this; The Sarn have an affinity for a plant they call sibannac. This plant grows to heights of nearly ten feet and produces many pointed, jagged leaves along the length of its stalk. It has a beautiful glistening bud when mature that is used as medicine for body and mind... it's among the Sarn's most powerful medicinals. The plant is quite prolific and produces more than one crop per season.

Their very lives revolve around this plant... the way modern human civilization revolves around petroleum and its by-products. Sibannac produces a highly valued food source, and also provides the fiber that they use to make utensils, clothing, housing, sandals, fishnets, small things like necklace chain, bedding... nearly everything. The Sarn tend to this plant in their midst with near sacred devotion. Nearly every part of the plant is used, and that which is not is placed back in the soil to act as fertilizer for regrowth.

Something else to consider...

It seems that the Sarn try to keep their communities between thirty-five to fifty individuals. It seems to work best socially. Speaking to the issue of population, abundance of food would ordinarily lead to over-population fairly quickly. I learned that Sarn women have knowledge of, and make use of extracts from certain plants that inhibit fertility without compromising their health. They simply choose when the time is right for them to have children. Generally, the women feel that two or three children at the most is an ideal situation for them.

Naturally, limiting the number of people in any given area would not be so taxing on the eco-system, even though there is much abundance. That's one reason there is abundance. The main reason, from what I observed, is that the Sarn have got to be the best land managers that have ever been. I've noticed that they never clear land for any reason, (cutting down trees or other vegetation). They use what already is in place... rocks, or other natural formations of trees, etc. to build their huts around.

They also never over-harvest any resource, just because they can. They take only for their immediate needs, whether it is animal or plant. Here, there really isn't any good reason to do otherwise. Nothing needed is in short supply. Where I come from, people would have killed each other grabbing all this abundance. First, they would have taken ten times their actual needs, afterward taking as much extra as possible, so they could sell it somewhere else for a profit. After there was nothing left, this paradise would have looked like the Badlands in the Dakotas. Then they would have moved on and done the same to the next area. That's how we operate. That's the general pattern of "civilized" humans. I wonder where a primitive people like this received so much wisdom.

Chapter 13

I learned that Maeya and Terra are sisters, with Terra just two years older. Giff and Sar are brothers, but not related to the women. Sar is two years older, (even though shorter than Giff). The two men were from another village and came here to live in this village a few years ago. The men from one village will often leave and go to another to find a mate. Generally, if young males arrive in the village from another and begin working and living in that village, it is assumed they are "eligible".

By the way, I learned that the cosmetic color that the women wear on the corners of their eyes indicate "eligibility". Red coloring means unmarried; lavender is used for a married woman. A few years before I came to the village, Sar and Terra were married. Trem and Leea were very proud of their new son-in-law, and felt that Terra had made a good decision to choose him for a mate. Sar was a fortunate fellow to win her heart. I really grew to like Terra. She is so full of life and a very giving person. During my struggle to learn their language, I would seek her out to help me when I couldn't communicate something to a family that I was staying with. She would patiently repeat the needed phrase to me and listen to my pronunciation of it until I got it right.

Sar is quite a shy person. When I was staying with another family in the village, I was told a story about him. The man that told me the story is Shen, who married Ka-mae'. Shen said he worked alongside Sar in the fields, and while chatting during a break; they had gotten on the subject of marriage. Sar told Shen he was very fond of Terra, but didn't have the courage to tell her. Sar knew that Terra would be the perfect wife, but figured he didn't have a chance with the competition, from inside the village, but also from other men who came from other villages, like he did. Shen said Sar would ask him to put in a good word for him to Terra.

Our hut was next to Terra's family, and we spoke quite often. I did as he asked. I would steer the conversation at times with Terra about how hard Sar worked in the fields and that he would sure make a good husband for some fortunate woman someday. I knew that Terra felt he was a very good man, but she needed a little prodding to consider him as a mate. Eventually, I managed to talk Sar into being a little more aggressive by making

sure he visited the family more often and asking Terra to go for walks with him. Soon afterward, he summoned up the courage to ask her to be his mate. I'd like to think that I had a hand in bringing them together... That's the story that Shen had told me.

Giff is very fond of an attractive woman in the village named De-nay', and visits with her family often. She is the great granddaughter of the old one named Bren. Bren is quite respected in the village, having been a descendant of the first families of the Sarn to settle in this area. Giff, a tall healthy specimen, is always quite sure of himself, and not the shy type like his brother. I'm sure that he will win her heart before long. Looking around the village, I don't see much in the way of competition for him.

Maeya ... the one who seems to be the most distant, the one who is the most difficult to get close to. It's not that she's aloof... it's just that there is something about her that is... let's just say, different. I've noticed that she disappears from the village for a day or so at a time, slipping in and out without anyone hardly noticing. Those in the village never really seem too concerned about it, like it was expected.

If I could sum up Maeya's role in the village, I guess it could be best described as the "village physician". If someone has a wound, she'll make salves that will keep the injury from getting infected, and also dull the pain. If there's a start of an illness, she'll gather various types of herbs outside of the village area and make medicines from them to give the child. She always seems to know what combination of plants to use for any situation.

She's definitely a mystery, even to the villagers, but Maeya is quite compassionate and deeply cares for all in the village. No one really knows where she obtains her knowledge, but everyone is sure glad to have her around! Trem and Leea, her parents, love her as much as Terra and are proud of her because of her importance to the village, but are quite concerned about her. By that, I mean her "status" as far as suitors are concerned. Single men coming into the village, or the men within the village for that matter, don't seem to think of her as someone they would choose to be their mate. I think they consider her, using my words now, sort of "spooky". She also doesn't have the physique for work like the other women do, and really doesn't seem to be as domestically minded as they are either. I guess, with this combination, she isn't really what the average Sarn male is looking for. Maeya is just... well... Maeya.

One day, while I was harvesting sibannac with Sar, I asked him about her. He stopped his work and sat down, thinking for a moment on how best to answer me. I sat down with him to listen. In his own way, he tried to tell me that she was different from most of the Sarn people... something about a different "spirit". He said in his lifetime, he had heard of only one other woman like Maeya, and she was far away from this village. I brought up how she was the first person to meet me from the village, and that she seemed to be very curious as to my presence at the lake. He remembered that day, of course, and told me what had taken place before our encounter. A couple days before our meeting, he said, she seemed to be disturbed about something. Maeya didn't speak about it but we knew something was on her mind. Later, she felt as though she needed to travel away from the village and towards the lake. She asked us to come along with her. That sure surprised us! This was the first time she ever wanted someone to go with her, so Terra, Giff and I came along. She seemed to know exactly where to go as she led us directly to you! He suggested that I should talk to Maeya to ask her more about the day we first met. I agreed and felt that there was more to this story, and that the answer would come from Maeya herself. I knew I could talk to Sar, and that he would be open with me. He gave me a pat on the shoulder, smiled and said, well... let's get back to work.

Chapter 14

For some time now, I've been curious about the history of the Sarn in this world. The villagers had told me that the old ones are the keepers of their history, genealogies, and traditions. It's their duty to preserve knowledge and pass it down to the next generation, as they become old ones. They suggested that I go to the old one named Bren, and talk with him concerning these things. One day, before dinner, I had prepared a meal for two and took it to the hut of the family of Bren.

Bren was the man who stood up and spoke to the village when I had my first breakfast with them so long ago. I went to his hut and stood outside, calling him a couple of times to see if he was in. At this time, his family had just left for the community dinner; he hadn't left for the dinner yet. I heard him speak my name, so I asked if I could speak

with him. I also asked him if he would share dinner with me in the hut. He came to the entrance, smiled, and gave me a hug. He motioned me in and we sat down. Placing our dinner on the table, I asked him how he was doing. He told me he was getting slower in his work, but that he felt fine. Before we started to eat, I asked him if he would tell me of the history of the Sarn, and more about this world they call home. I told him to think on these things while we were eating, and he could speak to me after we were finished. As we were eating, I could tell he was in deep thought, as he looked to the sky through an open window in the hut. After we had finished our meal, he spoke and said; Zhimm, all of us in the village were somewhat perplexed when you first arrived here. We didn't know where you had come from, but since that time, we have found that you are a good man and have contributed much to our village...

(I have not told anyone of the circumstances of my arrival in this place. Earlier, I had told Bren that I came from a place very far away, and that I was the only one of my kind left in this world. All the time I have been here, I've been very careful not to mention how I really got here or anything about Earth. I didn't want to violate the "prime directive"... you know, the theory that any contact, especially technological, that a higher civilization has with a lower one will disrupt or contaminate the lower one... as they say in the popular sci-fi TV series.)

... I've seen your hard work and love for all those around you, especially our children. I'm glad that you've found your way to us. We hope you'll stay here for as long as you wish. I know I speak for all the people in the village. With that, he continued, as you were told, we old ones in the village are the keepers of knowledge for our people. To us is entrusted what we know of our beginnings, and the knowledge of what is needed to guide our people along the path of Life and not death. Death, you see, is not necessarily just your individual body dying, but death can happen to an entire people... even a world. All of us are here in this wonderful place for a relatively short time.

As you may have observed as you have lived among us, we take great care to keep our world whole and alive as we move through our individual lives, and present this world

to our young as we have received it. The old ones before us passed along the Principles of Life to us, and we pass it along to our children.

I interrupted, and asked him, I have heard the villagers talk of the Principles of Life and also about the Ancient Ones. Can you tell me more about them? He answered; you have many questions, my dear friend Zhimm. He smiled and said; I must save your questions for the next time we meet. I really should join my family now. Thank you for stopping by to chat, and please come again. I told him, Thanks very much for sharing your wisdom with me Bren, and I'll stop by again soon. With that, I clasped his hands and said goodbye to him.

Chapter 15

Today, I'm just sitting in my hut, taking a break after returning from helping a villager carry some bundles of stalks and setting them outside her hut. Hmm... I notice Maeya is walking alone past my hut, carrying a small basket. I call out to her... making my way to the entrance of my hut. She stops, waiting for me to come out. Exiting the hut, I walk up to her and ask, How are you today Maeya? Smiling just a bit, she says, Fine, how are you doing? "Fine, I was just resting... may I ask where you are going with your basket?" I'm going down to the creek to gather some cuttings. "May I walk along with you? I'd like to help and it's such a nice day for a walk!" She thinks about it for a couple seconds and simply says... Yes.

We proceed to walk through the hut area, slowly making our way to the path down to the creek where the villagers bathe. She seems occupied with her thoughts as we walk along. Her eyes glance to the horizon where flocks of birds can be seen in the distance as they make their way towards the lake. You can hear their chattering, even from this distance. The path to the creek makes for quite a nice relaxing walk, as there are a number of trees that shade the path along the way. The squirrel type creatures scamper about and run on the opposite sides of the tree as we walk by. You can hear the quiet rustling of the leaves as we pass under them. "Maeya, this is such a beautiful place to take a walk and I

find it quite relaxing just simply walking along." She looks at me, and again, smiles a bit and says; I know... I never tire of watching every living thing around us.

Walking along, she turns and says, Zhimm, do you intend to stay in our village, or do you wish to travel on to see more of the land? Before I answer her, we arrive at the creek and see that the bathing area is unoccupied at this time. I notice a large rock to the left that juts out over the creek a bit. It has a flat surface on top; one could sit on the rock comfortably and hang one's legs over the edge.

As we approach, small reptiles scamper off the rock, and off into the brush. I ask; Maeya, will you sit with me for a while? She pauses for a second, says yes, and places the basket she is carrying down on the ground next to her as we sit down together on the rock. It's so peaceful here, the water in the creek is moving beneath us slowly as we watch fish swimming by, beneath our feet. Dragonflies of all sizes and colors are darting about over the creeks' edge looking for insects. The Sun is moving lower to the horizon, as it is late afternoon now. It's painting the horizon with such a beautiful color display!

I tell her; Maeya, I'd like to stay in this village. Everyone has been kind to me and I feel quite at home here. As she gazes at the horizon in front of us, she tells me; The villagers are hoping that you will stay with us, they're all so glad that you came our way. Saying that, she looks down into the water again to watch the fish swim by.

I tell her; I'm very fortunate to have been brought to your village and I feel honored to have had everyone in the village accept me so readily. No one really knew much about me, and it couldn't have helped that I looked so different. She just smiled at that statement.

She's leaning back slightly with her palms face down on the rock on both sides of her. Placing my hand over hers, I smile while looking into her eyes. Maeya, this is my home now. My heart is here. I've grown to love everyone in the village and wish to stay.

She looks at me, smiles, and says; I have something to do now, as she picks up the basket and stands up. "Can I come with you and help?" Yes... follow me. Walking along the creek, we follow it downstream. We cut across the path that the women take to bathe and proceed to follow the creek for about another hundred yards. She stops walking along the creek ridge and says; we need to climb down nearer the water. We find a place on the ridge

that isn't so steep down to the creek, and make our way down to the waters edge by using a few rocks to walk on that act as steps for us. Many small colorful birds are surprised by our sudden appearance on this creek bed and take to flight with noisy chatter.

Walking just a bit further downstream, we make our way to a flowering bush that apparently caught her attention on a previous visit. As we approach the bush, butterflies take off from it and some multi-colored frogs leap from under the bush into the creek with a splash. It startles me for a second... there's life here everywhere! She spends a minute looking the bush over, and hands the basket to me after removing a small stone knife from it. Applying the knife, she carefully removes a few cuttings... branches and leaves from the bush and places them and the knife in the basket.

Pleased with her find, she says, we're finished here; we'll go up the same rocks that we took down here. We proceed to walk up the stone steps, and I offer to take her by the hand to help her up, making sure she doesn't lose her step while walking up the rocks. She looks me in the eyes as she smiles at me, takes my hand, as we climb back to the creeks edge. I hand her the basket now that we're walking along the creeks ridge. I ask, Maeya, what are these cuttings for? "I'll use the leaves and the inner bark of the branches as one ingredient of a drink to lessen the pain of the old ones if they have exerted themselves too much at one time". That's very kind of you Maeya to think of them. How do you know this will work for their pain? I really can't explain to you at this time how I know, but it will. She doesn't elaborate any further, and I don't press the issue. We walk on, and I can't stop thinking of her smile and the feeling of my hand holding hers coming up from the creek!

Arriving at the path of the women's bathing area, we follow it back towards the village. You know, I think that today's the first time I actually had a conversation with her that lasted over a few sentences. She's still a mystery, but she's also kind, intelligent, and a gentle woman. On the path back to the village, we walk beneath the shade trees where the squirrels are nesting. Stopping, we watch them chase each other up and down the trees. We find them quite humorous and laugh at their comical antics. Glancing over at her while she is laughing at the squirrels, I notice again that she has such a beautiful smile! Her face just seems to glow when she's laughing. Walking on, we make our way into the village, she tells me, "I have to go home now". I quickly respond to her and say; Maeya, will you ask

me to go with you the next time you need more cuttings? She pauses for a couple seconds and simply says, "Yes". She smiles, turns towards her families hut and walks away.

Making the way back to my hut, I take a seat on the bed with both elbows propped on my knees, resting my chin in the palms of my hands. I'm really at a loss of just what to think about Maeya. What was that saying about "a riddle, wrapped up in a mystery, inside an enigma"?

Chapter 16

A few days later...

In the village work area, I'm breaking some of the stalks of sibannac that others have brought in from the fields. Inside the stalk are the long fibers used for making many things here in the village, including rope used in the construction of the huts, and netting.

I think I'll take a break and have a talk with Bren if he is in. Grabbing my food and water pouches, I make my way to his hut. His family is probably out working, so this would be a good opportunity to ask him about the Ancient Ones... maybe he'll talk with me about them this time.

Standing at the door, I call out... Bren, may I speak with you? "Yes, come on in". Stepping through the doorway, Bren greets me... "Good to see you again Zhimm!"... while giving me a hug... "Please sit down". We start to chat about the children. I can tell that the welfare of all the children is very important to him. Bren, I'm amazed at how fast the children have grown, just in the short time that I have been at the village. They're beginning to make me feel old! As we continue discussing them a question comes into my mind, so I ask; Bren, what is customary when young adults seek a mate? He replies; The young men and women courting will begin to spend more time together, the young man visiting the loved ones parents in their families hut, and him working with her family. Then one day the couple will leave the village and spend two days alone together in the forests and unite as one. They will return on the third day, and the village will joyfully welcome them back in a celebration of feasting the next day.

At the feast, a wonderful food made from the flowering buds of sibannac will be prepared. It is called ganzhia. The couple will declare their love for one another in front of the assembled villagers, and each will give their mate some of the ganzhia to eat. After the couple has eaten from the bowl, the mixture is distributed to all. Ganzhia gladdens the hearts of all the people, and opens their minds to the wonder and mystery of the goodness of this land, and much love flows through all and towards the new couple in our village. The feast continues into the evening with very joyful dancing and singing.

Changing the subject, He smiles and says; I know you wish to know of our origins... of the beginnings of our life here in this place. I say; yes Bren, I have heard stories of the Ancient Ones... would you tell me more of them at this time? He thinks about it for a moment, and says; the passage of time has dimmed the memory of our beginnings. My elders have told me that the Ancient Ones came from the Land of the Waterfalls... other old ones disagree. As our people grew in numbers, they spread out and settled in lands far away. Many took up a nomadic lifestyle, not wishing to live in villages... preferring to roam the forests, mountains and meadows. At this present time, some of our people live in areas that require more clothing to survive, and have different life forms on their land than we do here. There are also lands that have warmer temperatures and also different life forms than here. All our people, no matter where they live, prosper because we obey the Principles of Life. In doing so, there are always enough of the needs of life. What else do you wish to know Zhimm? A question comes to mind so I speak up and say, How far away is the Land of the Waterfalls from here? He says, that land is four days journey from our village... in the direction of the setting sun.

As he finishes speaking, my thoughts shift to Maeya. Bren, I have another question... Maeya seems to be so different from the rest of you. Can you tell me about her, about her appearance and her different demeanor? He pauses for a few seconds and replies... It seems that there is more than a physical difference between the rest of the Sarn and Maeya. Women like her seem to have an additional personality besides the Sarnian one. The other personality is of the living spirit of this world. I didn't really understand, so I asked him for a clearer explanation. He pauses for a second as if in deep thought and says; there is a hidden part of her being that is connected in a deep spiritual way with the very Life Force of this world. She connects to this world the way the animals and plant life

do. I was starting to see this a bit clearer and told him to continue. He added this; here is something quite strange. The old ones before us said that several generations after the Ancient Ones came to the Land of the Waterfalls, they noticed something different in a few of their female offspring. They eventually realized that the Life Force of this world, through some method we don't understand, has physically altered us in some manner.

Ever since that time, our women everywhere give birth to some children in every generation like Maeya. Besides the difference in physical appearance, they tend to be less sociable than others and often wander away at times to be alone in the forests. These women tend carefully to the natural life of this world. They instruct the people on the care of this world, and in return for the care the people give, the gift of the knowledge of the healing arts move through these women to the people. It's a wonderful relationship... (on Earth, this is called a symbiotic relationship, I thought to myself)... These special women are the bridge between the Life Force of this world and the Sarn. Maeya and the other women like her have a difficult time attempting to live in two worlds. It's not easy for her to have a close relationship with us because she also feels the pull within her from this Life Force. She will leave us for a day or so, every now and then, and return to the forests where she will live among its creatures alone. When she comes back to us, we simply tell her we are glad to see her again, smile, and give her a hug. She is very important to our life here. We all feel quite fortunate to have her living among us... other villages nearby send their women to learn from her.

He pauses for a moment to take a drink of water, so I take the opportunity to pose one last question. Bren, you mentioned that the Ancient Ones came from the land of the waterfalls... Before I can finish my statement, he smiles broadly and says, I cannot help you any further Zhimm, but I'll direct you to one who can. With that, he stands up from his seated position and thinks for a moment, looks me in the eyes and says; you will find the answers you seek through Maeya.

My jaw drops... Maeya again. I should have known! I take in a deep breath, and let it out slowly. I smile to myself, and stand up facing Bren. I clasp his hands warmly and shake them. Bren, I sincerely appreciate the trust and faith you have placed in me. Thank you again for sharing your wisdom and friendship with me.

Well, another mystery! I shake my head slightly to the left and right... attempting to sort things out. I tell Bren, "I'll return to speak with you." Placing his hand on my shoulder, he says, Zhimm, may you find the answers that you seek, but always remember... the love you have for the people, the love they return to you and this land that sustains your being are what matter most in this life. With that, he smiles and waves as I leave the hut. I'm careful to remember those parting words of Bren. I've learned that he never speaks empty words. He's very wise, in spite of having no formal education.

Chapter 17

Looks like the village is going to have a marriage celebration feast today! This marriage celebration will be a first for me. The last one was for Sar and Terra. I had learned from the people in the village earlier what to expect on the celebration day. Everyone had noticed that Giff and De-nay' were absent from the village a couple of mornings ago. Of course, everyone in the village knew that the two were very serious about each other. Giff was spending quite a bit of free time at the hut of De-nay's family, and he could usually be found working alongside the family in their daily tasks. De-nay' is an attractive and solidly built woman, roughly six foot seven in height, with long braided dark hair nearly to her waist.

She's also quite the artist with her clothing. Her skirts and sandals have intricate stitching of colorful birds, and flowers woven on them. She can often be seen in the village, seated outside her parents hut while embroidering clothing with colorful fibers using a quill from a porcupine-type animal.

Everyone is busily moving about the village... some are making decorations for the ceremony and others are tending to the preparation of the food. The ceremony will precede the feasting by about a half hour. An old one of the village will officiate the ceremony. This particular ceremony will, of course, be led by Bren himself since it involves his great grand-daughter De-nay'. It is a great and joyous day for Bren since he dearly loves De-nay' and also because he feels Giff will be the perfect mate for her. Giff is

probably the most able-bodied man in the village. He is quite skilled in all the crafts needed in a husband. Besides having strength for long hours in the fields, he is also quite good at making quick work of fabricating and repairing dwellings when the need arises.

Before the food can be prepared, some women have to be sent out to gather bird eggs and pick fresh vegetables, fruit, herbs, nuts, and mushrooms. Some men are going to the stream to carry buckets of water back; others are gathering, hulling and grinding the sibannac seeds for the women to use in any number of different dishes.

Besides the food preparation, there are details such as the placing of the mats the bowls of food will set on, the utensils for eating, cloth napkins, etc. Some of the older children will take on these duties. Children also make good runners, communicating the needs from the adult coordinators to others across the village. The children have seemingly boundless energy for running and enjoy helping out.

As far as the ceremony is concerned, there are decorations to be placed, and items to be made for use in the ceremony. A couple men have gone into the sibannac fields and have brought back several bundles of freshly cut whole plants. These are carefully stacked into the same shape they were in the fields. They still have the flowering heads on them. These two arrangements will stand to the left and right of Bren, as he officiates for the new couple. A decorative mat large enough for the couple to kneel on will be placed in front of Bren. I'd bet the mat that is going to be used in this ceremony was probably made by De-nay' herself some time ago.

Three wreaths will be woven this day, made from the leaves of sibannac, two of which will be placed on the heads of the couple, and one for Bren. De-nay's closest female friend will fashion a bouquet made from the flowering head of the sibannac plant, with a wreath of colorful flowers woven around the base of the flowering head. De-nay' will be given this bouquet in her hut so she can carry it out with her.

Maeya's part in the festivities is the preparation of the sacred mixture called ganzhia. It is made from the glistening raw ingredients of the flowering head of the sibannac plant, prepared in a special manner, and to this preparation is added a tasty herbal oil, and honey. Ganzhia has a delightful taste. She'll have this mixture made in time for the celebration.

I notice that there are quite a few other people present... not from our village. I guess it's an example of "good news travels fast." Some of them are probably from Giff's home village, his friends and relatives. Everyone has gathered near the hut of De-nay's family, singing songs, playing the flute and beating the drum softly. At last, the door of her families hut opens and Bren can be seen wearing a sibannac leaf wreath on his head. He is carrying a basket with a handle in both hands at chest level. He is smiling and looking straight ahead with his head held high. Behind Bren, follows all his clan in descending order of age... his immediate offspring and spouses, their children and spouses and so forth. All are wearing colorful clothing, embroidered at one time or another by De-nay' for these occasions.

At last, Giff and De-nay' emerge, arm in arm. De-nay' looks even more beautiful than ever, wearing strands of brightly colored stone jewelry on the wrists, ankles, and around the neck with flowers in her hair. Giff is standing tall at his seven-foot plus height, strong and proud. The villagers gather behind the family, leaving a space between themselves and the couple, and follow them. Bren leads the way to the ceremonial area, as he has done many times in his life with other couples.

He makes his way to the consecrated place between the stacked bundles of sibannac on either side of him and turns toward the crowd. Giff and De-nay' proceed past the family and stand with Bren, on each side of him. Bren is still holding the basket as before, while looking straight ahead. There is roughly fifteen foot of space between Bren and the feasting area. Beforehand, mats have been placed throughout the area with room between them for seating. Utensils, cloths, and empty plates are on each mat. Bren nods and the family takes their seats, and as soon as they are seated the rest of the people do likewise. Bren again nods, and a birdcall is heard. Four children emerge from a nearby small hut with colorful clothing and shortened sibannac stalks with the flowering tops. The children walk in front of Bren and the couple and dance with the stalks to music as I've seen them do before. The children finish their dance, and they place the sibannac stalks they carry with the ceremonial stalks. The villagers verbally acknowledge them and the children smile gleefully as they return to the hut. After another birdcall, two children again emerge from the hut, with the decorative kneeling mat in their hands. They carefully walk with it

towards Bren and place it in front of him. They quickly depart back to the hut. After a brief moment of silence, Bren speaks and says...

Today is a wonderful day in the life of our village. We celebrate with much joy, the union of our beloved Giff and De-nay'. Both of them have contributed much to our lives in many different ways in our village. We are blessed to have them with us. Now we bless them in their union together, and we will love and cherish them always. The couple leaves Bren's side and both of them bend down and kneel on the ceremonial mat, holding each other's hand. Bren reaches into the basket he is carrying and takes the wreaths out, placing the basket beside him. He places a wreath on their heads saying...

Creator of All Things, as we lovingly obey the Principles of Life, look and smile upon us and continue to prosper our people and land. We thank you for bringing Giff and De-nay' into our lives, and I ask that you bless their union with children that will bring joy to their hearts and to our village. Bren places both his hands on the shoulders of the couple and smiles. The villagers respond with their music and birdcalls very joyously.

Bren takes his hands from the couple's shoulders and outstretches his arms saying, It is time for the sacred bowl of Ganzhia to be brought to our new couple! As he is speaking, I see Maeya coming out of the small hut where the children are. She's carrying a large bowl and wearing a beautiful tiara of woven wildflowers. All the villagers' eyes are upon her as she brings the bowl and presents it to Bren. He holds it in front of his chest and waits. After handing the large bowl to Bren, she picks up the basket he had set down and holds it in front of her, standing on the right side of Bren. Maeya takes a spoon out of the basket and gives it to Giff. She takes another spoon and gives it to De-nay'. Bren kneels down in front of the couple and holds the bowl in front of them. Giff takes his spoon and dips it into the Ganzhia and holds it to the mouth of De-nay'. She eats the mixture from the spoon he is holding. De-nay' places her spoon into the mixture and Giff eats from the spoon she is holding. The couple gives their spoons to Maeya. She places them in the basket she holds. Bren and the couple rise to their feet. Giff and De-nay' hold hands and smile at everyone. Bren again holds the bowl of ganzhia to his chest and smiles at the couple. Giff and De-nay' turn towards each other and kiss. Bren raises the bowl above his head and says; everyone, take from the sacred bowl of ganzhia and let the feasting begin!

With that proclamation, the entire village cheers with much music and vocals. Maeya places the basket down and takes the large bowl of ganzhia from Bren. I see women are bringing bowls of all types of foods... fishes, eggs, vegetables, mushrooms, nuts, and fruits. The variety and colors of the food look very appetizing, and I've worked up quite an appetite! Maeya, with the large bowl of ganzhia, and with a large spoon, makes her way around all the villagers, filling every bowl provided for that purpose at each families mat. I'm seated with Sar and Terra's parents, but keep an empty seat next to me. She's coming by with her bowl to fill ours. I look her in the eyes and tell her, Maeya, you look so beautiful! Will you sit next to me when you are through serving? Smiling, she simply says... "Yes".

So every family in the village has begun the celebration feast for Giff and De-nay'. It's late afternoon, the temperature is perfect with a nice cool breeze. There are six at our mat present... Terra's parents and Maeya, Sar and myself. Even though Sar is Giff's brother, it is customary for the man marrying into the bride's family to sit without his relatives or friends with the bride's family at the beginning of the feast. Once everyone has eaten the celebration meal, the man can have all his relatives come and sit down with the bride's family also.

Our conversation starts with comments about the happy couple. Terra says, I'm so glad that Giff finally made up his mind to ask De-nay' to be his mate. Everyone in the village knew they were perfect for each other. I don't think you could find a couple with so much in common! Sar says; knowing my brother, I knew he was going to take too long deciding if he should marry. I kept trying to tell him he'd better get moving, because De-nay' may choose a husband from one of the other villages. He adds, He finally came to his senses, (laughing as he says it).

Trem says, "You know, Giff and De-nay' remind me of Leea and I, so many years ago. Our feast was also at this very part of the village back then". I notice that Leea has tears rolling down her cheeks... she's trying to hide her face on Trem's shoulder. Trem puts him arm around her and says, I'm so glad you still love me, Leea, but this is a happy occasion, so try to think about Giff and De-nay' now. Leea picks up a napkin cloth and dries her tears with it. She looks at Trem and just smiles.

As we're all eating, Maeya says, Make sure all of you complete our celebration and share the bowl of ganzhia with each other. She adds; this mixture of ganzhia turned out quite well. All the ingredients, including the Sibannac oil, are at their peak of flavor and potency. Zhimm, will you try it first? "Will do, Maeya"! I take a spoonful and roll the mixture around my mouth to get the full taste. After swallowing it I tell her, Maeya, it's absolutely delicious! Not too sweet, I can taste the herb oil... and the honey is just right! Her smile is just beaming from her! I pass a few spoons around, and the others take their portion. Terra comments; Zhimm, you're right... this mixture of Ganzhia really is exceptional! As we finish our meal, we chat about the guests who have come in from other villages. Trem and Leea tell us who some of the older friends of the family are, and Sar tells us of those who are related to Giff and himself.

Sar speaks up and says, I think I'll walk over to the bride's area with Terra and congratulate my brother. Trem and Leea say they are going to mix with some of the older friends that have come in from the other villages, and then congratulate the couple. I tell them, I think I'll wait until the crowd thins out around Giff and De-nay', then I'll congratulate him also. The four of them get up and walk towards the direction of the new couple... that left Maeya and I to plan what we would do for the rest of the evening.

Maeya... would you like to walk with me and chat with some of the villagers while we make our way toward Giff and De-nay? "Yes, I'd like to". Taking her by the hand, we slowly make our way in the direction of the couple, stopping along the way to speak with those whom we share our lives with. I see the children are sure having fun... running around together and laughing. A couple of them run toward us and wrap their arms around our waists; they look up at us and say... We love you Maeya... We love you Zhimm! As we hug them, they're still looking up at us... their smiles are just beaming! They take off as fast as they came, and are quickly hugging others at the feast. We look at each other and just smile.

Walking up to Giff and De-nay', they see us coming and reach out for us. Giff gives me a big hug, (it feels like my ribs are going to break!), as Maeya hugs De-nay'. I tell him; Giff, I'm very happy for you and De-nay'. I wish you many happy years together. You're a lucky man to have found such a beautiful and talented wife! With that he stands tall and proud, smiling from ear to ear. De-nay' has also heard me and casts her eyes downward a

bit and smiles as she is hugging Maeya. Giff, do you remember the first time we met at the lake? Sure I do Zhimm... at that time you looked like you could sure use a friend. "And a good friend you have been to me since then, Giff" ... we clasp hands firmly. Maeya tells De-nay', you look so beautiful! ... I smile and nod in agreement. Maeya says to her, May you both live long and have children so blessed as you are. "Thank you Maeya! ... will you please try to be with me when the time comes for my child to arrive"? "I will." De-nay' hugs her again, and I notice she has tears of joy welling up in her eyes.

I'm again reminded how much Maeya means to the village generally, and especially how fortunate the women feel that she lives with them in this village. The women really draw comfort from her presence during childbirth. There are, of course, others in the village capable of delivering children, but the women here know she possesses an uncanny knowledge of herbal medicinals that will greatly ease the pain of their childbirth. Besides that, any woman that she attends to when the "time" comes always seems to have a successful healthy birth. Maeya gives Giff a hug, and I hug De-nay'. I say; we had better move along now and let someone else share their happiness with you. We'll see you later! They smile and wave to us as we leave.

Chapter 18

With the sun moving lower on the horizon, I ask Maeya, Would you walk around the village with me and just observe everyone celebrating? She smiles and simply says... "yes". I take her by the hand... we walk for a while, observing all the happiness around us. Hmm... I'm feeling a bit unusual now as we're walking. I seem to have every one of my five senses heightened... I find myself examining details of the life forms around me in a new, fascinating light. The birds' songs seem to be so beautiful. I seem to notice every subtle shade of color in the flowers as we walk past them... they seem to just leap out at me! Maeya's hand feels so warm in mine; it's such a pleasurable feeling... I really can't describe it!

Turning to look at her, I ask; Maeya, will you stop walking for a moment and turn towards me? She stops, and looks my way. I let go of her hand and place my palms on both sides of her face, as I look into her eyes. I tell her... Maeya, you have the most beautiful eyes I've ever seen. I don't know why I've never told you that before! She stares at me for a few seconds, doesn't speak a word, and places the palms of her hands over my ears... pulling me closer to her until our noses just touch. She thinks about that for a moment, and starts to giggle. "Do you think my nose is funny looking Maeya?" She starts to giggle again; her eyes close tightly as she backs away. Facing me, she cups both her hands over her mouth. Her eyes are now wide open looking at me, and I can see tears streaming down her face. She is laughing so hard she can't stand up straight... she bends over a bit, placing her hands on her knees. "O.K. Maeya, that's it... come here"! With that, I thrust my arms out, while taking a step towards her. She turns and tries to run away from me. She's still laughing so hard, she can't move very fast! I take a couple more quick steps, but she darts to the right in a sideways motion, bumping into me, and makes us both spin into a half turn and fall down in the grass next to each other.

We're laughing so hard we can't speak! I'm lying on my side looking at her. Her eyes are still closed as she laughs, and the tears are streaming down her face. "Maeya, look at me!" She opens her eyes briefly and I tell her; hey, you know those fine ingredients you told me that you used to make the ganzhia? Well Maeya ... you have certainly outdone yourself this time! She bursts out laughing again, closes her eyes, and her tears just flow!

She's still lying on her side turned towards me. She lifts her arm and places her palm on the side of my face. She stops laughing for a moment and just stares into my eyes. What is she seeing? I can only wonder what thoughts and images are streaming through the mind of this absolutely fascinating woman! A strange feeling is coming over me... I feel that time is standing still around us, and I'm getting lost just looking into her eyes.

Hmm... looking deep into her eyes, it seems like I'm being drawn into them... like slowly but surely spiraling downward into a vortex. Oh ... something really weird... images of the thousands of life forms around me are blazing through my mind in a dizzying and dazzling array of color and motion. I see and experience the life cycles of the flora and fauna around me passing in an endless procession of birth and death... lives passing and giving life to the next generation... the eternal unending circle of life. I have an

overwhelming sense of an overarching benevolent presence in all of this, expressing endless love for all that is taking place within my consciousness. All is as it should be and all that is ... is brought forth from love! ...

Hey... what has happened? ... It seems that only a few minutes have passed since Maeya and I were walking, but it's already getting dark! Where did the time go? Was I dreaming? It was so strange and profound!

Gathering my thoughts, I lay on my right side facing Maeya; she's looking into my eyes as she rests quietly on her side. I say; let's lie on our backs and look up at the sky. As I turn onto my back, she moves from her side onto her back. She moves to her left, up against me, and I place my arm under her head as a pillow. Looking up, my mind is captivated with the beauty of this sky at night. Maeya... Look at all those stars! It is an incredible sight. With not a bit of artificial light around to spoil the view, everything in the heavens is absolutely brilliant.

For the first time I notice numerous faint smudges of light that I know are distant galaxies. Perhaps, one of them is Earth's Milky Way! There is just no way to tell where I am. Is this planet in another galaxy, or a parallel universe? Well, it really doesn't matter anyway. Maeya, have you ever just looked up at the stars at night and wonder what they are? She thinks for a moment and replies, "The lights are so beautiful. Tonight, everything up there seems so much brighter. At times I wonder what those lights are. They must be fireflies that are so very far away". I smile to myself about the beautiful simplicity of these things in her comprehension.

Pointing at the stars, I tell her, perhaps there are other people out there that travel about going from one light to another light. She has a puzzled look on her face and thinks about that for a moment, bursting out in another round of giggles. I move my head to the right against hers and say, what's so funny? Still giggling, she says; tell me how those people have made their hut fly through the air Zhimm! I start laughing myself until tears are also streaming down my face. That sets off more giggles from her and I tell her; Yes Maeya... that was sure a silly thought, wasn't it!

She turns on her side and presses up against me; laying her head on my shoulder, her forehead up against the side of my face, and lays her arm across my chest with her

hand on my left shoulder. She says, Zhimm... I'm tired. With her laying up against my side, I can both feel and hear her breathing as I lay on my back, very still. A few moments pass and I'm noticing that her breathing is becoming shallower. In just a few minutes, I realize she's sound asleep. I lay here on my back looking up at the stars. There is only one moon visible now... the smaller green one. I lay here still amazed at the brilliance of so many stars upon the contrasting deep velvety blackness of the sky at night.

The sounds from the village are much quieter now, and the noises from the night insects are becoming dominant. I'm laughing to myself... thinking about the children running up to Maeya and I with such exuberance. I'd be willing to bet that they "tapped" the ganzhia bowl... before it was passed out at the feast! As I look up at the sky, with her asleep in my arms, I think about my love for this people, and this place. I wouldn't trade this night with any other in my life. Growing weary myself, I slowly turn my head and gently kiss her on the forehead. I raise my right forearm, placing my palm around her shoulder. She moves very slightly with my touch, pressing her face just a bit more into my shoulder. I close my eyes, and drift off to sleep...

Chapter 19

Morning finds me waking to the usual screeching of the birds, and the bustle of people moving about in the feasting area. I'm flat on my back looking up at the blue sky. That sure was quite a party last night! I turn my head to the right to ask Maeya... she's gone! I was with her last night... right? I sit up for a moment looking around me and see the people going about their normal morning activities. I have an odd thought for a moment. If this were the typical party that I attended on Earth, right about now I'd have a splitting headache. Actually, I feel great! I'm quite rested now, and feel like moving about. Where's Maeya? ... I'm thinking, as I stand to my feet looking around. Oh well, I'll walk back toward the feast area where all the activity is.

A number of the villagers are cleaning up, carrying utensils, all the dishware, mats, etc. I join in helping out the others, carrying the bowls and dishes to a central location

where everything will be washed and stored away. Some of the people that traveled here from other villages are walking through the hut area to the different paths that will take them out of this village. They are waving to all as they are exiting.

Making my way back to my hut, I decide that I'll help out by working in the fields today. Gathering up some food and tools, I head out, making my way to the fields. I spend all day working while swapping stories with the rest of the workers.

Later...

We finish our workday and proceed straight to the bathing area. It's been rather hot today, so the coolness of the water feels great, not to mention washing off all the sweat and dirt! I think I'll just head back to my hut and kick back for a while. Sitting in my hut with the door open, eating dinner, I'm just watching the everyday activities of the villagers around me. It seems I never tire of that. Things are so different here, as compared to Earth. Everyone just gets along with everyone else. People are free just to live out their lives without some "authority" telling, (or forcing), them to do something... I just can't get over it!

I think I'll just spend the rest of the evening here by myself and think about yesterday's celebration. Man, was that a good time... and Maeya was certainly enjoying it! I've never seen her "let go" like that before! Hey, was she really making fun of my nose, or was that just my imagination? Everyone at the celebration had such a good time! Life with these people is so real and honest... it's just great being around them. I just remembered... that dream... was it a dream, what did it all mean? Anyway... darkness is falling around me now... I'm bushed! That's all for today... no more thinking... time to get some sleep.

Chapter 20

A couple days later...

I've come back from the morning trip to the creek and I'm in my hut getting ready for a day's work in the fields. Looking out the window facing the path to the creek, I see Maeya walking by. Quickly making my way out the hut to talk with her, I wave and say,

Good morning Maeya! She pauses and turns my way as I say; I really enjoyed spending time with you at the ceremony. I hope we can be with each other again at the next one! Do you have time to talk before you leave?

She says, I had a wonderful time at the celebration Zhimm, and I'm glad that we spent time together afterward. What do you wish to say to me? "It would take a bit too much time to ask you now. Could you meet me after my workday on the path under the shade trees where the squirrels live? After I leave the fields, I'll head to the bathing area. When I'm finished, I can join you under the shade trees, ok?" Fine, when I see you at the shade trees, I'll join you there. "Thanks Maeya". She smiles and goes on her way.

I watch her leave and wonder what she'll be doing today. You know, I can't seem to get her out of my thoughts since we were together at the feast. She sure was a lot of fun to be with. I never would have guessed that she could be so outgoing, she seems to be normally quite "reserved". I still can't get over her laughing with tears flowing at the same time! I think of her lying next to me as we looked into the night sky, and how she fell asleep as I held her... well, guess I'd better head back into my hut.

While gathering up the usual cutting tools, I also take time to pack a lunch. Leaving the hut, I make my way down the path to the fields. Along the path, I take a look up and see that it will most likely be a partly sunny day... a good start to a workday. Making my way past the creek, I chat with fellow workers heading toward the fields.

Arriving at the field, Sar and I take up our implements and proceed to cut the stalks. We don't do much talking while we cut the stalks, to conserve energy. This gives me plenty of time to think. I'm thinking how much my life has changed since that day in the lab. Man, I could have never guessed, or even dreamed, what would take place that day. I guess I should be thankful that I didn't end up on some frozen planet, or even floating somewhere in space! This is a good life I've found, but every now and then I think of my family back on Earth and get depressed. I try not to do that. It does no good to punish myself for something I didn't intend to do and cannot reverse. This is just the way it is, and I must go forward from here.

Lunchtime is here... Sar and I take a well-deserved rest. We chat about the weather while sharing some fish. He's been a good friend to me. I couldn't ask for better. As we

finish our lunch, he says; Hey Zhimm, it looks like we're pretty well caught up on cutting. I think we should gather stalk bundles and take them into the village instead of cutting. Sure, Sar... no problem. The rest of the workday we made a number of trips between the fields and the village, delivering the previously dried bundles to the area where the women weave cloth.

Later...

Well, it's been a long day's work in the fields, so it's time to head over to the bathing area to cool off and chat with some of the other men from the village. We gather up all of our tools and make our way down to the creek. The men disrobe and quickly make their way into the water. Man, after a day in the fields under the Sun, this is so refreshing! After washing the dirt away we all just sort of linger in the water and just "chill out".

After bathing, I gather up my belongings and head for the shade trees. Waiting about five minutes, I see Maeya coming from the village, down the path towards me. She's carrying a basket with her. She stops in front of me and says, Hi Zhimm... I'm going into the forest to gather some plant cuttings, so why don't you come with me and we can talk. "Sounds like a good idea to me... lead the way!" I set my belongings down at the base of one of the trees and follow her; I'll pick them up later.

We proceed to walk along a path that leads to one of the forested areas. We enter the forest and about fifteen minutes later, she stops and looks around for a minute, and spots some small blue flowering plants that are growing in a cluster... apparently just what she is looking for. She carefully cuts just a few leaves off each plant and places them in her basket. We sit down on a couple logs opposite each other and she places her basket beside her. While reaching for my water pouch to take a drink, she looks at me and says, you said you wanted to speak to me about something... what's on your mind? Well Maeya, I've had conversations with Bren concerning your people. He said that I should speak to you if I wished to know more about the Ancient Ones. He said that they came from the Land of the Waterfalls, but couldn't tell me anymore about them. Also, I've noticed how carefully your people interact with the natural world around them. Bren mentioned the Principles of Life in his conversation with me. Are these the principles the guide your people? I wish to know of them. Sighing deeply... she gathers her thoughts for a moment. "You've always been the curious one Zhimm! Concerning the subject of the Ancients, you wish to know that which

is obscure, even to the old ones. I can see many things, but much is beyond my understanding. Bren has told you that I have the answers you seek, but I can't give you this knowledge. I'll take you to the path that leads there, but you'll have to walk the path yourself".

Maeya, I don't understand what you mean that I have to walk this path myself, and without you with me. "You'll understand soon enough, but first I have to ask you a question. Are you really sure you wish to know these things, and that you'll trust me to guide you to that knowledge?" Yes Maeya... and I do trust you. Zhimm, no matter where that knowledge may take you, you will ultimately realize that love and the land we live our lives out on, are all that really matter, and this is the fulfillment of The Principles of Life.

Since you wish to know of these things... she stands, looks around for a moment and says to me; wait here. She walks over to a fallen tree that is about thirty feet from us, removes something from the base of the tree, and brings it back with her. She says, let's have a seat. She sits down on the ground, facing me. Holding her hands open in her lap, she looks downward. I see two small yellow flowers. She hands me the flowers and says, Chew these slowly and completely before swallowing them. I hold the flowers up to my nose... they have a strong and very sweet pleasant scent. I do as she asks while looking into her eyes. She's not speaking or blinking her eyes at all... just looking steadily into mine. I start to tell her how sweet the flowers taste after I've swallowed them but she gently places the tips of her fingers over my lips and tells me not to speak. She tells me to calm my thoughts and just sit quietly. After a couple minutes or so I have an eerie feeling coming on...

Whooooaaaaa, what's happening to me! Looking into her eyes, the yellow coloring appears to take on a soft hazy glow. Everything all around her is fading from view, slowly becoming pitch black. The sounds of the forest are also fading away into complete silence. Now, it's as if she is all that is in front of me, and nothing else can be seen around her. She's still in the sitting position, but seems to be suspended, still in front of me. Her hair color is turning from her light auburn to a pure shimmering snowy white, right in front of my eyes! Still looking into her eyes, the soft glow has sharpened to the dazzling brilliance of yellow diamonds. Her entire body has a radiant yellow glow around it that shimmers like the aurora borealis. Seeing this, I start to panic, but she speaks and says "Jim"...

Maeya? ... Is it you? I asked. She speaks again and says, "You're no longer speaking with Maeya... I am, what you would say in your language, the unseen Life Force of this world. Maeya is one whom I have chosen to speak and move through, manifesting my ethereal being into the physical world that your life force is interacting with in this moment of time". I'm struck speechless, and don't quite know what to say! She speaks again, never taking her eyes off of me. You wish to know, among other things, of the Principles of Life. Yes, I do... I interjected, and what name do you wish me to call you by? Simply Life Force will do... as she begins...

The Creator of All Things spoke this world into existence. When this sphere you call a planet took physical form, my life force came into being. All that you see in the physical realm before you was created in an instant of time, fully functional, flora and fauna... a completely balanced living system. My life is its life, an inseparable union. I have taken great pleasure over untold millennia, observing the innumerable life forms interacting... living their lives, inhabiting this physical plane of my ethereal existence. I have led Maeya to guide you to an encounter with my consciousness through the life form created for that purpose. The Life Force pauses for a brief moment then speaks, Jim, do you now wish to learn of the Principles of Life? Yes, I very much do, please proceed...

The Life Force begins...

First...

Love the unseen Creator of All Things, and likewise, love all the people of whom you share life's journey with.

Second...

Care for this world as you would your own body, for your body is sustained by this world. Jim, if you give it some thought, love and life are inseparable. The first Principle deals with the love of the Creator who lovingly placed everything around you into existence, and also the love for all those around you. The second Principle still operates in love because you are demonstrating with your actions that you love those around you. When you care for, do no harm, but sustain the living systems supporting their physical being, you truly love them in practice, and not in word only.

The Life Force continues, I will explain in detail the second principle by breaking it down into components. Never damage the life systems of this world. Place your dwellings and conduct your lives so as to minimize the disturbance to the life around you. The continuity of all life forms depend on the people of every generation preserving the living systems of this world as they've received it, or all life here will degrade and ultimately end.

Life Force, I bring up the first point of the Second Principle. In keeping the life systems intact, do you mean not clearing the land of its present life forms? Yes, clearing the land of the existing life systems is the first physical step in setting in motion the loss of life, present and future. Clearing the land violates the life force of every life form on the planet. It diminishes the nourishing potential of the world in direct proportion to the amount of land cleared. This is a trespass against nature as well as to every man, woman and child whose very lives depend on these life systems, as well as those of future generations. Physical beings have very little comprehension of the complex chain of negative events that are set into motion when the land is cleared of its original life sustaining systems.

Never take more than your immediate needs from the world so that all life may continue in abundance. The predator life forms around you never kill more than they intend to eat. You must do the same. In a matter of speaking, you are predators here also.

I interject; Life Force, this point is simply good common sense and really should need no explanation. Yes, this is true, the Life Force replies... greed slowly but surely leads to the loss of the quality of all life.

Make good use of the readily renewable plants such as sibbanac and bamboo, for this will greatly lighten the burden of your presence here on the living systems of this world, thus assuring abundance for all living things, and ultimately yourselves and your future generations.

Life Force, I've noticed that sibannac is highly prized and cared for by the Sarn. They use it to make nearly everything they have need of. Yes Jim... because the Sarn make extensive use of Sibannac, this indirectly contributes to the abundance and diversity of life you have seen around you because they are not damaging the life around them that isn't so readily renewable. Plants such as bamboo and sibbanac provide most of the raw material

for their physical needs, and in addition, Sibannac is also a very powerful medicine for the body, as well as mind and spirit.

The Life Force continues...

The entire world belongs to all. Its entire surface... the life and substance in it and upon it must never be allowed to be claimed or owned, for any reason, by anyone.

The Life Force continues... The animal life forms around you are always to remain wild, and not captive. Their lives will be diminished, and all life will become unhealthy if you make captives of them.

The Life Force continues...

Freely you have been given all you see around you; freely you will give to others.

She pauses briefly...

Jim, these simple Principles are the foundation for a long and happy life here, not just for this present generation, but that life will continue throughout time for all future generations that live according to these Principles.

Life Force, I must say that, so far, all I see around me is evidence that these Principles are guiding these people and I see nothing but happiness and love of life in their midst.

Yes, that's true Jim. I ask you to continue observing all around you as you make your way through your life here. You'll see firsthand that a people following Life's Principles will make everyone's life experience here the best that a physical being can have.

Well Jim, it's been very nice to meet you and It's been a pleasure conversing with you. We'll have another conversation at a later time, enjoy your new life here.

Life Force, I thank you for speaking and meeting with me. You've given me much to consider. I'll take your advice to watch and learn what's taking place all around me. Goodbye for now.

After those words, the Life Force ceases speaking and closes her eyes.

Something's happening... I can see changes taking place in Maeya's appearance... they're beginning to reverse themselves. I'm starting to see and hear the forest... it's slowly

appearing again... as it was before. I'm looking at Maeya now... the flesh and blood Maeya. Man, what a bizarre experience I've just had! That small flower must have a powerful psychoactive compound in it. I know she really didn't change in appearance, but my perception sure did!

I feel quite drained of energy at this time. Lowering my head, I place my face in the palms of my hands for a minute just to gather my thoughts. Looking up, I see Maeya's head bowed down with her eyes closed, and she's sitting very still. After a brief moment, she lifts her head and her eyes open. She speaks softly and asks, have you found what you were looking for Zhimm? Maeya, for now I'll simply say thank you for being my guide, and I appreciate you taking the time to be with me.

As we stand, she picks up her basket saying, "It's time for me to go back to the village". Ok Maeya, I'm feeling quite drained and would like to get back to the village myself and just rest and think about some things. "I understand Zhimm. By the way, I'm going to take us back to the village a different way than we came". That's fine with me. I take her by the hand as we walk along. As we walk, we're enjoying the antics of the small primates chasing each other through the trees. They seem as animated as the squirrels are near the village, and they sure make a whole lot more noise!

As we're walking through an area of the forest that has rock formations, I observe from the corner of my eye that we're walking under a large black cat-like creature quietly perched on a rock above us to the left. Feeling a quick surge of panic, I don't want to make any abrupt moves, so I just keep walking. When I first noticed it, Maeya already had her eyes on the cat... watching it also. As we pass by the big cat, it just turns its head and looks away. I'm wondering to myself if her presence had anything to do with the actions of that cat... just staying put and not leaping on me. I really can't think of any other reason that it wouldn't pounce... very strange!

Walking along she says; Zhimm, is there anything more you wish to mention about of the experience you had with the yellow flower? Well Maeya, that encounter sure took me by surprise. Perhaps you should have given me a bit more warning! ... (smiling at her as I tell her that). "There was no way to prepare you for what you experienced. I'm glad that you trusted me to guide you". I trust you and understand what you are saying Maeya. One thing that I've learned from the experience is that I now know where the wisdom

came from to guide your people in the care of this world. I have so much to learn, but I feel I'm on the right path now.

As I speak those words, she gives me such a beautiful smile as we walk along! Coming to the forest's edge, the sun is just starting to peek out from behind a large billowing cloud. The village is up ahead in the distance, and I can just make out the fields of sibannac alongside of it. A thought occurs to me, so I ask; Maeya, have you ever felt like traveling far away from the village and seeing more of this land? "I've been to a couple of the neighboring villages, but I haven't really traveled any farther. I've stayed close to our village because my family is here and I feel the need of the people around me. To answer your question, yes, I'd like to travel for maybe a week or two and see what lies beyond this part of the land". Maeya, I feel how much you love those of our village, but I also think that you would gain from new experiences outside of what you have become used to. She thinks about my statement for just a moment and replies; "Perhaps you're right".

We're at the path near the bathing area and follow it up towards the village. As we're walking under the shade of the trees along the path, again, the squirrels are chasing each other around. She turns to look at me, squeezing my hand a bit with a smile. Walking through the hut area she says, I have to return home now. I'll see you later. Turning towards her, I give her a hug and say, Thanks so much for taking time to be with me, I've really enjoyed being with you. You've helped me make some important decisions today. "I'm so glad". She smiles again and says; I'll see you later Zhimm, as she walks away.

After making my way back to the hut, I'm sitting on the bed just thinking of all that has happened to me in the past few days. You know, I'm flooded with so many emotions, not only towards this people and their world, but also about Maeya. If I should live a thousand years, I don't believe I'd ever find someone as right for me as her. Hey, something has just occurred to me. Now I believe I know where that dream I had a few days ago came from. I'd be willing to bet that it was sort of a "calling card" sent my way by the Life Force... knowing (and undoubtedly arranging) our meeting through Maeya!

Chapter 21

A month has passed... and I've been seeing Maeya on a fairly regular basis, with the exception of her leaving the village occasionally for a day or so at a time. I've been drawn to her, not just because I find her quite physically attractive, but also because of something more intangible... something I just can't quite express into words. When I'm with her, I feel so "alive"... I have a wonderful world to live in and such a remarkable woman to share my life with! Walking along with her in this world, just holding her hand as we share thoughts and converse about what is taking place all around us ... I simply can't express all that I feel for her.

Sometimes we walk down to the creek by the bathing area during mid-day when no one is there. We sit on the flat rock overlooking the creek and just watch the many creatures going about their lives and talk about the beauty of the world around us, and our day to day interactions with the other villagers. Sometimes I tag along on her field trips... carrying her basket, and just chat with her about the plants she tends to.

Occasionally, while walking, we pick a grassy spot under the shade of a small tree, and lie on our backs next to each other looking up into a partially cloudy sky. I made a game with her about asking what she saw in a particular small cloud... you know, what the clouds shape reminded her of. I love to listen to her describe in detail the clouds I ask her to "picture" for me. She has such a vivid imagination! Sometimes, in the middle of our chatting about what she sees in the clouds, she just quits speaking and turns her head toward me, still holding my hand. She smiles so beautifully at me, and just looks into my eyes... my god, what that does to me!

Thinking back... not so very long ago... I realize that Maeya has really come out of her "shell" towards me. I remember that she seemed very uncomfortable interacting with me when I first started to show attention towards her. I'm of the opinion that part of the reason that she has been somewhat of a loner, not only towards me, but also others, is that she has always felt different from those around her and had sensed that others were treating her differently. After talking with Bren and Trem, as well as recounting my own experiences in life, I think I can understand some of her inner feelings and loneliness. It must have been difficult for her to go through life with the unusual gifts that she has and

also look somewhat different from those around her. I can see why she might have withdrawn from full participation in her society and have had reservations when someone tried to get close.

When I was younger, I was called the "nerd" because of my scientific aptitude in school and was shunned by those that were more into the social scene. That caused me to further withdraw into my own world to escape the pain of rejection. I withdrew into my world of science. It really took quite a while for me to venture out of my shell because of this. I guess when my marriage fell apart; I felt so insecure again that I fled back to the safety of my former world... science. In some ways, I think that Maeya and I are really kindred spirits!

Besides the time I have spent walking and conversing with Maeya around the village, I've also been spending more of the free time that I have visiting Trem and Leea's household. They are such a wonderful couple. It was rare to see a couple back on Earth so much in love for as many years as Trem and Leea have been together. They're so happy and full of life.

I've been working with Trem in the fields, and also helping him with the usual repairs that have to be made to their hut to keep the rain and wind out. It's a lot easier to make those repairs with two people, rather than one. While working with Trem, we talked about many things. He spoke about his childhood and life in the village when he was young.

After a few weeks, he felt we were good enough friends to ask me about myself. I knew he felt uncomfortable about bringing the subject up and perhaps that he would offend me. I smiled at him, and let him know I was not the least bit offended that he asked. He had asked me about my life before I came to the village. I just told him that it was a very sad story, and that it was best not talked about. He carefully brought up the fact that everyone in the village had wondered why I looked so different than all the rest of the people. I told him that I traveled from very far away and that I was the only one of my kind left in this world. I think he felt sorry for me.

He talked to me at length about Terra and Maeya when they were young. He said; Terra was our firstborn, the perfect beautiful baby girl that Leea was hoping for. Ka-mae',

our neighbor, acted as mid-wife and helped Leea give birth to Terra. Ka-mae' stayed with Leea for a few hours after Terra's birth. They were taking turns holding Terra and talking about all the happiness and joy she'll bring to their lives, and to the village.

As she grew, Terra became a very outgoing child, so full of energy, running and playing with the other children in the village. She was also a "take charge" child, a natural leader, but not in the dominating sense. When she played games with the other children, she would suggest the rules of the game and the other children would follow along. When she was quite young, she wanted to be mom's helper and learned how to prepare many different types of foods for the family. She helped Leea clean around the hut with miniature tools that I made her. By her teen-age years, Terra had already established her place in the village with her skills in food preparation and organization at the various feasts. The older women were quite impressed with those skills from someone so young, and Leea and I were quite proud of her. Terra entered womanhood physically strong and quite attractive. She had everything that a young man would look for in a mate.

The conversation eventually came around to Maeya...

I was looking for Leea to bring a healthy male child into our family since we already had a beautiful little girl. Maeya... (Trem stopped speaking for a few seconds while he gathered his thoughts, then resumed)... early in Leea's pregnancy, she said she felt different physically and also in her spirit when she was carrying Maeya. It was just one of those things that you couldn't quite explain. She would often sit quietly in the hut and would just look out the window watching the leaves on the trees swaying about in the wind. I often wondered what was going through her mind at that time. I tried to talk with her about it, but it just upset her, so I would drop the subject. When the time came for birth, we had Ka-mae' help as mid-wife again. When Maeya was born, we found that the feelings Leea had during her pregnancy were an indication that something was going to be different with this birth. When we held her for the first time, we noticed that she didn't have quite the weight that a baby girl should have, and we couldn't help but notice that her hair color was so much lighter than ours. When she opened her eyes for the first time after crying, we then knew somewhat of our circumstances.

At that time, Ka-mae' gently lowered her into Leea's arms. Leea held her to her breast, looked into her eyes and said; "Her name is Maeya... for her eyes are as of the

berries on the bushes that grow near the lake". Leea gave her that name because that was the name our people have given those yellow berries... "maeya".

After this, Ka-mae' told us that she must be on her way and left rather shortly after delivering Maeya... she really didn't say much at all other than, "You have a healthy baby girl, Leea!" That was rather unlike her. She kissed and hugged Leea, and made her way home.

The word of her birth spread quickly in our village, and even to the surrounding villages. The very next day after her birth, we had a visit from Bren. We were very surprised to see him. It was unheard of for an old one to come to the home of a new mother that has given birth. Usually, an old one will not see the newborn child until around a week later when the parents will take the child to them. Bren called out to us from outside our hut, and we let him in. After entering with his greetings, he congratulated us on our new child, and asked if he could hold her. We wrapped Maeya in a small blanket and gave her to him to hold. He held her in his arms and said nothing for the longest time... he just looked into her eyes. Looking up, he said; I have heard of children such as Maeya from conversing with the old ones from other villages, but neither they nor I have seen these children with our own eyes. Rest now Leea, and be happy for your family and for our village. With that, he clasped my hands, said his goodbyes', and left our hut.

She seemed much like any other child for the first few years of her life. She was happy and played with her sister in and around our hut until she was old enough to play with the other children in the village. The other children quickly noticed that Maeya was physically different from them. The children never said anything about the difference to her, but I think she sensed they treated her somewhat different. We noticed that she withdrew from playing with the children at times, and would wander away from them outside the perimeter of the village by herself. Leea became quite concerned because she had to keep an extra close watch on her continually because of the natural dangers such as predator animals and water holes that she could fall into.

Later, we would notice some rather odd behavior by the wildlife around her. For example, if no one else was near her, she could walk up to birds sitting in a small bush, and they wouldn't fly away. She could actually reach out and touch them and they would sit still.

Maeya had a personality much different from Terra. Where Terra helped Leea at an early age around the home, Maeya really didn't have much interest in learning those skills. She would rather be outdoors carefully studying everything around her. Leea and I became quite concerned, and at times Leea would lose sleep thinking about her. When Maeya was around nine years old she would quietly leave the village and stay away for hours. No one would know where she would go. Leea became quite distraught and would often interrupt my work, telling me to go and find her. When I found her, I'd tell her that she was worrying us when she left the village like this, but she was quite strong-willed. She would quit her "disappearances" for a little while, and then go back to her ways again. As she entered her later teen years, the disappearances became a day or so at a time. We realized that we just had to give up and stop worrying about her. By that time, she was mature enough to take care of herself anyway.

Other girls her age had all the skills necessary to raise a family and manage a household when that time came. They also had the attention of the young men in the village, as well as those coming from outside the village. Maeya lacked those skills, and also the social skills girls develop by being around young men and women her age. She would feel awkward when attending social situations such as feasts and ceremonial observations where there would be young people her age to socialize. We felt so bad for her when young men would come and go through the village during these events, and they would pass her over for the other girls. Maeya would be left sitting alone, with the other girls around her having young men to laugh and talk with. Her mother, observing this, would quietly leave the festivities at that time, and would return to our hut and cry.

Maeya went on with her life anyway. Even before she was out of her teens, we noticed that she would start bringing things home that she gathered from all around us and use them to make medicinals. When she found out that a child was feeling a bit ill, someone was wounded, or one of the old ones had pain, she would go to them with the medicinals she had made and bring relief to that one. She quickly gained the love and appreciation from the families of those that she helped. When we asked her how she knew what to do with these plants, we never got an answer from her that we could understand. All that really mattered was that Maeya had found her place in the village, and we were happy for her.

After Trem had told me these things about Terra and Maeya, he stopped working for a moment and looked me in the eyes. He said, Zhimm, I'm so glad that you have become such a good friend of Maeya. She seems happier now than she has ever been, and you have been such a great help to us since you have been visiting this past month. I told him, I'm so glad to hear that about Maeya! Thank you Trem, I enjoy being with your family.

Chapter 22

The following morning...

Maeya and I have taken a long walk from the village to the lake where we first met. It's such a beautiful day! There's a gentle cool breeze coming off the lake, it feels so refreshing. The small clouds are so white and billowy, casting shadows that move across the surface of the lake as they drift overhead. We're slowly walking along the shore of the lake and I'm showing her where I first went fishing, and telling her how I fell in trying to grab the fish with my hands. Following that story with the one about the raccoon, I'm thinking that she will laugh to tears! She tells me, I sure wish I could have arrived earlier in the day to watch you!

I find a raised grassy mound to sit on near the shore. She sits directly in front of me and removes the tie that keeps her hair pulled back. She leans backward, resting her head and body against my chest and places her hands on my knees. Wrapping my arms around her shoulders, I place my chin lightly on the top of her head and pull her close. We don't speak at all for a few minutes; we just take in every precious moment of time that we have together, watching the panorama of life around us. I'm feeling so many emotions stirring in me as I hold her so close!

She speaks and directs my attention to a particular life form and points out something about it that no one would ever casually notice. I think to myself that she probably knows enough about the life around us to fill an entire biological encyclopedia!

... I can't hold back my feelings for her any longer!

... The words just seem to flow effortlessly from my inner being... I whisper in her ear...

"Maeya, I love you with all of my heart and I wish to spend every day of the rest of my life with you in your world".

She's sitting so very still for a moment now, and I sense that tears are welling up in her eyes and are now running down her cheeks. I feel her body trembling slightly while I hold her close. She takes her hands from my knees and gently removes my arms from her shoulders. She stands up facing the lake, then turns around toward me. Standing up also, I wrap my arms around her above her waist. She wraps her arms around my neck, pulling herself towards me so that her entire body is pressing against mine. Our lips meet ever so softly. At this moment, it seems more than just a coincidence that every form of wildlife around us is suddenly stirring about, and is making so much noise!

After a few minutes our lips part and she tells me, while looking deep into my eyes... Zhimm, I do love you so very much... I've been waiting to hear those words from you. Placing my palms on her face, with my thumbs, I wipe the tears away from her eyes. I gently kiss her again. I smile, and say, Maeya, I'm so happy that you love me! Your love means more to me than you'll ever know. Standing on the shore, we embrace.

She quietly says, Let's head back to the village now. She takes the tie she had removed, pulls her hair back, and places it in her hair again. I smile to her and hold out my hand. Taking my hand, she rests her head against mine while we walk back along the shore. I am so overwhelmed by what has come to pass in my life. The most beautiful and fascinating woman I have ever known just said she loves me!

Chapter 23

The following morning...

I've woke up to the sound of a gentle rain on my thatched roof, as well as some

rumbling of distant thunder. Guess there'll be no work in the fields today. Just as well... I didn't get a full night's sleep last night. It took me a while to fall asleep because I couldn't stop thinking about Maeya, and the walk we took to the lake. I finally told her how I felt! I wanted to tell her long before then, but was just too nervous. Afterward, I felt like I was just floating on air as we were walking back. You can't imagine how relieved I feel knowing that Maeya feels the same towards me! I love her so much.

I'm going to just stay inside today. Most likely, Maeya and her family will do the same. Hmm... I'm not sure if Maeya will mention anything about her and I to her family. She may feel that it would be best if we were both together when we did. The next time we're with each other, I'll have to ask her if she told them, or if she's waiting on me to be with her at a later time so we can both tell them.

As I've mentioned before, this new life I have has given me plenty of time to think. The daily manual labor is fairly repetitive, so I can think about other things and still get the job done. While I've been working in the fields, I've thought a lot about my encounter with the Life Force, and her dissertation on the Principles of Life. I must confess that, at first, they seemed quite "foreign" because my only reference was observing how things were done on Earth. I had never questioned the "why's" of the way things were the way they were on Earth. I guess I didn't because no one else I knew did either, and as the saying goes about how things are done, most people just shrug their shoulders and say; "That's just the way it is".

While I was in the fields working, I took the Principles and analyzed each one in my mind. I set aside all preconceived ideas from Earth and tried to look at each one from a logical point of view.

The Principle about not clearing the land...

Well, the first thing that came to mind about that was something that made perfect sense. Obviously, when the land is cleared, every living thing on that surface and above perishes under the axe and the plow. Every living creature that doesn't or can't flee during the razing... dies. It's that simple. That's one parcel of land that is no longer available for the other species to live. Then that same process happens over and over for decades,

centuries, millennia. No wonder things on Earth are so out of biological balance... why so many species have gone extinct... plants as well as the higher forms of life.

The Principle concerning making use of easily renewable materials...

The Sarn have their old-growth ancient forests intact, because they wisely use other materials for their existence that grow easily, plentifully, and quickly. I don't think even modern science knows all the negative effects that have happened to our home planet since the removal of the vast forests we had millennia ago. Things like extreme weather temperatures and climate changes, oxygen depletion, loss of good top soils running off into the oceans, good land turning into deserts, untold numbers of species driven to extinction that dwelled exclusively in forests... I'm sure people more knowledgeable than I on this subject could add much to this list.

The Principle about animal captivity...

Things start to get controversial with this and the next couple Principles. People on Earth would think this was crazy, but I see why this works. It really ties in with the Principle concerning clearing land. If you take one specie, subjugate it, and breed them till they multiply well out of proportion to what existed in nature, not only do you create a biological imbalance, but you create another large problem. You have to end up razing land to feed them all, growing what you believe they need to eat and to feed yourself. You're right back into a downward spiral of loss of habitat and biological imbalance.

The Principle of freely giving as we've freely received...

Oh, that's another one that's sounds really naive until you consider the bigger picture of what the illusion of money creation has done to human society. I'm sure you've heard of the modern "Golden Rule"? Goes something like this... "He who has the Gold makes the Rules" and that's exactly what's happened on planet Earth. Human society has been around for millennia consisting of "Haves and Have nots"... a lot of have-nots. I don't think anyone disputes that. The few at the top owning the money system rule... the rest serve them. That monster called "Commerce" came to life the moment we as a people decided that we needed to get "gain" over our neighbor rather than share with him what was available. I know, you'll say that's a "human nature" thing, and that's just how things work. Then I'll say, yes, that's how it is now but regardless, that's what created that beast

that has all in its grip. Commerce is also responsible for stripping Earth's lands and oceans of its resources in the insatiable quest for turning a profit. It'll be around forever, generating human misery... until that Principle is followed.

The Principle of no land ownership...

Another "hot button". Critics would immediately scream "Socialism"! However, try to imagine yourself living your life in world intact and whole, like the Sarn's. Ask yourself... honestly... why would you feel you had to own anything? It's really that simple.

Besides, the moment that land ownership is established, you then need a system to oversee it, with the legal machinery that keeps track of it all. Of course, eventually the "powerful" end up with the "lions share" of the ownership, and the rest of humanity become renters, owing taxes... having to pay and work for someone to merely exist.

So I guess all the thinking I've done while I've been on this planet with the Sarn has led me to agree wholeheartedly with the Life Force. Those Principles are the only way to have and keep this wonderful way of life that I'm living with the Sarn... from this present generation to forever.

Someone from Earth would argue with me saying that how things are presently done is reality, and things just have to be the way they are... and there's no going back. The Principles are just the stuff of "dreamers" with no basis in reality, so why even waste time talking or even thinking about it.

To me, here's the point. Living here on this planet has shown me that the path we humans took on our planet was a big mistake. I guess we were just too blind to see that "fouling our own nest" was just dumb, and we should've known that eventually we'd have to pay the price. Well, it didn't take long for the bill to become due. On the present Earth, there are more than one "doomsday scenarios" within striking distance that could lead to tragic consequences for millions of beings, and you don't have to do much research to learn about any of them.

From what I can see there's only one way out...

Harness the latent creativity of all mankind into one goal...

Turning the Earth back into a Garden... (talk about a dreamer!)

Yea, I know, you can think of a million reasons why it can't happen or won't happen. You're too late. I already know the all the reasons. Too bad, because we really could do it. The first problem is that... how many people you know even thought of it? How many people would really want it? How many "powerful" people would not want it, and would see to it that it never happens.

But we could do it. If we just had the collective will to do it... and therein lies the "rub" (as that old saying goes).

Besides what the Life Force spoke about in my conversation with her...

While having lots of leisure time on my hands, I've also had time to consider another very different distinction between life on Earth and life here. From the time I first arrived in this Sarn village and started my new life... learning how things "operated", and how I should fit in to it, I noticed that something felt "different". It wasn't anything having to do with their society being so primitive compared to ours. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, and it took a few weeks to finally dawn on me what it was. I literally "couldn't see the forest from the trees", because my life on Earth programmed me not to see what I now see as obvious. I know this sounds cryptic, so I'll get to the point:

Here, the Sarn society has no Authority... no one is "in charge". No Chief, Mayor, Politician, President... whatever. I couldn't believe how long it took me to see that. On Earth we take it as something that is just so basic that it doesn't even enter the mind to question. There MUST be someone in charge, some "authority" we can go to... someone that directs the show and sets the Rules. We have to have rules, and someone we can appeal to of higher Authority when the rules are broken. Someone must pay and be punished! Every society on Earth is based on HEIRARCHY, that is unquestioned, and the principle itself is unquestioned.

Someone from Earth would say, you must have a Hierarchical system to maintain "order". Nothing will get done if there is no direction, lawbreakers will run amuck... on a terror streak. Human nature is basically "bad" and if we have no authority, rules and punishment by the authorities, then we'll all just go berserk and civilization will end... there will be total anarchy in the streets!

So, the question is... why does not having “authority” work for the Sarn, and not work for Earth? That took some thinking, but I may have come up with a few answers. It’s a complicated question, so there isn’t just one answer. When people live an impersonal “big city” life, relationships between our family and “others” become sort of “us against them”, every man for himself, situation. We tolerate those around us, but never really get too involved with them. They’re just “others”. We have no attachments to them or their problems. Things between others are generally civil until there’s a misunderstanding. If things don’t work out between the “parties”, tempers can flare and if things escalate, the authorities are called to settle the dispute... police, courts, law, prisons or monetary fines. Everything is made easy for us by the authorities, so as not to have to deal directly with the “other” to come to a real solution between ourselves. We really don’t want to have to deal with the other anyway.

When a society takes the technological path, life gets really complex fast. There’s very little time left from satisfying the systems demands on our lives. What little is left, is usually spent trying to recover from the days demands and the last thing thought about is what the neighbor has to face in life. Today, most people don’t want to interact with their neighbor at all, and if they did, it would probably be thought by them as intrusive and suspicious. No wonder things are the way they are in most urban societies... crime, substance abuse, poverty... the list goes on. Television and other media “amplify” the crime that exists, both through the “news” and also through the flood of police/crime/government scripted dramas that give viewers the impression that there’s always some deviant hiding around every corner and under every rock, just waiting to get them. Of course, the moral of the story is that the authorities are always there to protect you, catch the “bad guy”, and bring him to justice. As a result of this daily barrage of “programming”, people become afraid of dealing with the other. We mistrust everyone and their motives. All this works out well for the authorities, who use every excuse to enlarge their kingdom, as we furnish them with all the tools they desire, to keep us “safe”... from the other.

In a small tribal society, people need to depend on each other and work closely together. They develop bonds of friendship and get to know each other very well. In this

way of life, those around you don't become just "another", they have a real personal relationship with you.

Well again, the critic will say "so what"... that tribal society is dead and gone, so why bother bringing up another pointless argument. I would then say; yes, the clock most likely won't be turned back, and now it is what it is. I would also say again that we really don't have to keep travelling this path if we collectively don't want to. It's up to us, it's always been up to us. The situation concerning our society is pretty much the same as the decision to keep walking the technological path that leads to an uninhabitable planet. The decision to keep looking to "authorities" to lead the way and solve our problems, instead of working things out with each other, will end up in a predictable manner, and it won't end well for you. They "solve" problems by passing ever more restrictive laws, raising taxes, building more prisons, enlarging police forces, installing more surveillance cameras, etc. Technology is their "Holy Grail", as they are ever on the lookout to use any newly developed technology to maintain their "law and order" over the populace. As time marches on, the "space" in which you're allowed to live your life becomes smaller and smaller, and they'll consume an ever increasing amount of everyone's life force... money and labor, to maintain their dominance. George Orwell really did get it right.

So, to sum it all up, collectively, when humanity walked away from the Principles and took the path of agriculture and technology, life got a whole lot tougher. The Earth's produce was now only obtained by the "sweat of the brow", and technology, among its many other negatives, created the means to set up and maintain a complex system of illusion... money, power and hierarchy. That artificial system constructed long ago by the clever malevolent among us has, for all intents and purposes made us, the vast majority, their servants. That system is now so well entrenched and secure, that it would literally take a natural or made-made disaster of "biblical" proportions to bring it down. Unfortunately, for the masses of humanity, at that point it would be a very hollow "victory" indeed, if it should ever happen.

Well... I'm not sure why I'm just sitting here, thinking to myself, having a conversation in my mind, pretending I'm speaking to someone from my former home. I guess it's just what I would say about the Life Forces' Principles, as well as the differences between the Sarnian and Earth societies, if somehow I was back on Earth (not that I'd ever

want to return). Well, that was an interesting mental diversion to pass the time on this rainy day!

Time to pick myself up from this chair and tidy up this place. Standing up, I look around to check for water drips that have gotten past the roof thatching. Nope... everything looks good so far. I made a few repairs the last time that it rained and everything seems to be holding well. I had an “apprenticeship” on house repair while working with Giff... not too long after I arrived in this village. That guy is really good at home maintenance... or should I say hut maintenance.

I’ve made a rake out of a bamboo-type plant... bound the tines with some fibers from the sibbanac stalks. Works pretty good to clean up the small dry thatch particles that fall from the ceiling. In just a little time, I’ll have this hard dirt floor looking pretty good.

Later...

Well, it’s getting to be twilight. I’ve straightened the place up. Got to admit, it looks nice. The gentle rain quit a few hours ago, so I opened up the main hut entrance and placed my chair so I could look out and watch the birds and squirrels doing their thing. There wasn’t much going on in the village today. People pretty much just stayed indoors because of the rain. Now it’s time to get ready for bed. I should get to sleep faster tonight. I still have Maeya on my mind, but I’m not as “keyed up” emotionally as I was yesterday. I’ll get with her tomorrow and I’ll see how to proceed as far as her parents are concerned. Enough thinking... time for bed.

Chapter 24

It’s early in the morning, and I’ve met Maeya near the path that exits the village. I ask her; can we take a walk into the forest? I’d like to discuss a couple things with you. She smiles and gives me her hand as we walk past the hut area toward the creek. The villagers we pass and say hello to are barely hiding their smiles at us. We know what they’re thinking and we just laugh to ourselves!

We make our way past the creek's bathing area and walk until we enter the forest. She looks around carefully as we enter, as she always does. Finding an old log, we take a seat. She's curious as to what I want to talk to her about and says, Zhimm, what do you

want to ask me? “First, did you mention anything about us to your mom and dad?” No, I haven’t. I didn’t expect you to know this, but it’s customary for a young man that has “confessed” his love to his would-be mate, and of course assuming that she accepts, to let her parents know that they wish to be married, and to ask for their blessing. I respond; “well Maeya, then that’s what we’ll do as soon as we have an opportunity.” She wraps her arms around me, kisses me, and says; oh, I can't wait to tell them about us! Mom will be so excited! She added; leave the details to me... I have a plan.

Now, what else was there that you wanted to tell me about? “Maeya, I'd like to know if you would travel with me to the Land of the Waterfalls. I've heard from others that have traveled through our village that it's the most beautiful land in this entire part of the world.” She tells me; since you first mentioned it, I didn’t really know if I should or not, but now I feel that it would be something we could do together and would remember for the rest of our lives. Yes... I would love to travel to the Land of the Waterfalls with you as my mate! Her arms around me squeeze tight... looking at me with those eyes and that beautiful smile... my god, she just makes my heart melt!

A couple days later...

I've been invited to dinner at Trem and Leea's home. I'm in my hut sort of nervously straightening up things that have been left lying around, while waiting for Maeya to come by. She said that she'd let me know when everything was prepared for dinner. About twenty minutes later, she calls from outside the hut, Zhimm... Zhimm! Everything is ready! Stepping outside with her, I notice that it looks like we're going have some rain. The sky is overcast and gray, but not threatening. Smiling at me, she takes me by the hand as we walk to her hut. Maeya, still holding my hand, steps through first and leads me through the doorway into the hut. Giving greetings to Leea and Trem, I clasp his hands and give Leea a gentle hug. We're all sitting down with Trem and Leea on one side, and Maeya and I on the other. Sar and Terra are curiously absent this time from the dinner.

The overcast sky has now released a soft gentle rain that can barely be heard on the thatched roof over our heads. We start chatting about the rain, that it has arrived in time to renew the growth in the fields that were getting a bit dry. As we are eating, Trem says, what were you working at today Zhimm? I tell him, I've been taking the dried bundles of stalks and breaking them open for the women making the clothing. He says, that's a job

the women really appreciate the men doing. Making the clothing from the stalk material is very tedious and time consuming without the added burden of breaking the stalks first.

Leea says; Maeya, you sure seem to be in such a happy mood the past few days! Maeya just smiles at her, then glances in my direction. Clearing my throat to speak up, while looking at her parents, I slowly say, Trem... Leea, I love your daughter Maeya so very much, and I ask you both for your blessings to be her mate. I wish so much to be with her for the rest of our lives and to be part of your family.

Leea's utensils drop from her hand on to the table upon hearing my statement and she just stares for a second at Maeya. She screams out... "Maeya"! I'll bet the whole village heard her! She jumps to her feet and just shakes her arms close to her chest... she can't speak! Trem just sits for a moment and smiles broadly at me. Trem, Maeya, and I stand up. Trem reaches over to give me a hug, shakes my hands, and gives me a pat on the shoulder. Leea grabs Maeya in a bear hug and says, Oh, Maeya... I'm so happy for you, I just can't stand it! The tears are flowing down her face and she is just shaking! Leea lets go of her, grabbing me as she did her. She hugs me tight and cries tears of joy on my shoulder while patting my back. Looking at me, she says, Zhimm, I'm so happy for the both of you! We welcome you into our family, and yes, we give you our blessings to be Maeya's mate! Oh, I'm so happy... what a wonderful day! Trem speaks up and says, Zhimm, You are such a fine young man. I would be proud to have you take Maeya as your mate, and I welcome you into our family with all my heart. With that, we all sit back down again and finish eating our meal... but Leea can hardly contain herself!

Chapter 25

A couple days later...

It's early evening now. Today was quite a tiring day for me physically. We were in the fields for a couple hours early in the morning when we noticed that the sky was growing very dark toward the east. We saw distant lightning flashes in that direction and I thought to myself that the village to the east of us was probably having a rough time of it!

Knowing the storm could get worse here, we quickly left the fields as the wind started picking up around us, hurrying back to the village to help everyone prepare for the storm also.

By noon, it was getting darker over our village and strong winds began to blow through our area. It seems that we were on the edge of the storm front because we missed getting the lightning and the heavy rain. After the winds started blowing, there was some light rain but the winds really increased in strength and blew steadily for about an hour without letting up. Even though the rain was light, the wind tore some of the thatching off of a number of huts and the rain came in making things uncomfortable for the families affected. As soon as the rain started to let up, all of the men gathered thatching, rope, bamboo and sibbanac stalks that were kept dry inside an unused hut set aside for that purpose. We went from hut to hut and repaired what was damaged or missing.

After a couple hours of making the repairs, we finished up and took a needed break from our labors. Even though all of us were quite tired, we had the good feeling of having accomplished something that was appreciated by all in the village... especially the women. They feel somewhat distressed when rain comes into the hut and furnishings get wet. They take great care in making the huts comfortable for their families, and when rain water comes inside and soaks things... well, it just isn't a very pleasant situation!

My hut seemed to have survived the storm this time without losing any thatching. When I came in, I noticed that I did have some rain on the floor under my "windows". I didn't have the heavy window flaps tied down tight enough, and the winds blew the rain past the flap. It ran down the wall and made the flooring a bit wet... no problem, I just dried the walls with a cloth, and I'll avoid stepping on that part of the ground until it dries out!

Later in the day, a couple women that had housing damaged in the storm, got together and prepared some food for me. They came to my hut with a fish and vegetable dish that was similar to a salad. The salad had been marinated in an herb and mushroom mixture... it was really tasty! It's amazing what these women can do with their food preparation skills. I thanked them for their thoughtfulness as they left the hut to return to their families. I know they really appreciated the quick work we had done in repairing their homes.

So now, I'm just taking it easy after eating that wonderful meal, (and feeling rather exhausted from the storm repairs), sitting here with the door open and looking out into the village. Shortly before the women came by with the food, I looked around the village for Maeya. I asked a few of the villagers if they had seen her, they said no. After asking De-nay', she said that she saw her walking on one of the trails into the forests about an hour after the storm was over. A thought came to me that perhaps she just felt the need to get away and sort things out in her life before we set out on our way to the Land of the Waterfalls. Most likely, she's having some anxiety about leaving her family for the number of days we'll be gone. I'll bet she's also thinking about what it's going to be like traveling such a distance... with me as her mate! I couldn't blame her if all this is on her mind... so much change in her life in such a relatively short time! I know that my relationship with her has added some complication to her life. I know she loves me, but she also has to balance that love with the nature of the inner being she was born with. I'm sure it isn't easy for her. I've learned to give her the "space" she needs in her life to be what she must be. I accept her just the way she is and let her follow wherever her inner being leads her. Sometimes that means spending some time by myself as I am now. I love her so much... being alone for such a short time every now and then is a small price to pay to be part of her life!

The following morning...

Maeya has arranged for us to talk with her parents about us traveling. After we had decided how we would bring up the subject to her parents, we enter the hut and not only Trem and Leea are there, but also Sar and Terra. Terra has tears in her eyes as she walks over and hugs Maeya. Sar puts his arm around me and says, "I am so happy for you and Maeya. Everyone in the village is so happy for you also." Leea is still so excited she can hardly speak! Trem speaks up and says; let's take a seat now because Zhimm and Maeya wish to speak to us.

After everyone has taken a seat I say, Trem ... Leea... Maeya and I wish to tell you that we have a desire to travel to the Land of the Waterfalls as each other's mate. After that statement, you could have heard a pin drop! Leea and Trem don't know quite what to say! Sar and Terra are quiet also. They all just look at each other, Trem looks at Leea, and they both look at us and smile. Trem says; our protective parenting skills are coming into play

for Maeya, because she has never been too far away from us. As you know, the village also depends so much on her for all the help she gives us when problems arise... (Trem pauses and looks around at all of us as he considers his next statement)... however, we have to realize that Maeya has her own life to live and that we have to let go. We also know that you love her so very much Zhimm, and will keep watch over her in your travels. I wish you the best, and as her father, I give my blessing to you, as she becomes your mate while you are on your way. May the love you have for each other and for our world grow stronger on your journey.

Terra looks over at Maeya and says; I think that the both of you traveling to the Land of the Waterfalls is such a wonderful idea! Leea, wiping away the tears in her eyes says, I'll miss you so much Maeya, but I know that Zhimm will be beside you always. Sar speaks up and says; Zhimm, you and Maeya will really be glad you made the journey. The villagers near that land have told me that it is breathtaking!

It's late afternoon now, and Terra is helping Maeya with the backpack that she will be taking on the trip. She'll carry extra clothing, sandals, a blanket, and extra pouches for food and water. Sar gives me a backpack to use for the journey, and I'll be carrying the same items plus a few more. "Maeya, I'm going to leave now, and go back to my hut. I'll take this backpack that Sar has given me and finish up the evening preparing it for the journey." Trem, Leea, Sar, thank you for all your help and I'll be back in the morning to meet all of you here at your hut. All of them wave and Trem says; see you in the morning Zhimm... get a good night's sleep! Maeya gives me a hug and kisses me goodbye. They all wave again as I walk off toward my hut.

Entering my hut, I put the backpack on the small table and proceed to put in my extra clothing, sandals, blanket, and the food and water pouches. Oh, almost forgot, I'll bring a couple stone knives also. Hanging the backpack up on the wall of the hut, I walk just outside my hut. Taking a look up at the sky, I don't see any threat of storms. I think I'll relax a bit and just stand here and watch the people of the village as they prepare for the evening.

I've sure grown accustomed to the easy pace of life in our village... the memory of the frenetic pace of my old life is pretty much a distant memory now. I'm not sure if I could cope with it if I had to return to that life! Thankfully, I doubt that the option to return will

ever be presented to me. I guess I'm spoiled now. Looking around, I see children so full of energy and life, playing and laughing. Young couples like Giff and De-nay' are walking hand in hand, looking at each other lovingly. People here love and respect each other and the land they live their lives on... what a wonderful place to live!

As darkness draws upon our village, I'm trying to mentally prepare for a good night's sleep. I hope I can turn my mind off and try to put the trip out of my mind so that I can get a good nights' sleep. I'm rather excited about going on this journey with Maeya. Besides the fact that I wish to share the experience of seeing more of this world with her, I know I can also count on her instincts and knowledge of this world to really make this a memorable time in our lives. I think I'm up to the physical side of this journey. I've been working hard around the village for well over a year now, and know I'm in the best physical shape I've ever been in my life. Well, enough of thinking. It's time to go to bed. Lying on my back, I close my eyes and try to think of nothing at all... hmm, is everything packed? Will I oversleep and leave Maeya standing there at her hut? Turning on my side I slowly close my eyes...

Chapter 26

Waking to the usual sounds of morning in the village, sunlight is streaming through my windows and lighting up the interior of my hut. Sitting up in the bed for a moment, I swing my legs over and place them on the ground. I'm just gathering my thoughts now, making last minute mental preparations. Time to get up and get dressed! Looking out the door, I watch the activities of the villagers as they prepare for their day... hey, I'd better get moving! Well, I think I'll leave my backpack here and pick it up on the way out of the village when we leave. Stepping out the hut I'm on the way to Trem and Leea's home.

As I arrive, Sar comes up to greet me and grasps both of my hands warmly. Well brother, did you get a good nights' sleep? "Yes, it took some time to fall asleep but after that I slept very sound." He says, let's go in the hut and have some breakfast. We enter and find that Leea and Terra have made a breakfast for us of fruit and sibannac pudding. Trem

says, Good morning Zhimm! I respond; Good morning all... looks like we have another nice day weather-wise. I appreciate you taking the time to prepare a good breakfast for us! I hug Leea, Terra and Maeya and we all take a seat. Sar says as we are eating; I do think you'll have a good first day of travel. Before nightfall, you should be able to make your way to the first village. That village is where Giff and I grew up. We have family there. When you enter the village, ask for a man named Romm. He's my father. Greet him, and tell him that Sar has sent you to him. Ask him if he will let you and Maeya use my old hut for the night.

"That sounds like that will work out fine for us Sar. I'll tell your father that you and Giff are still doing fine here in the village and that you send your love." Trem says; I know you and Maeya will have a wonderful time, and have many things to tell us when you get back. Zhimm, I helped Maeya finish packing her backpack this morning, putting some dried fish in the food pouches. Of course, you will find plenty to eat along the way. I tell him, Good! So Maeya's pack is ready ... my backpack is near ready and in my hut.

Finishing our breakfast, I help the women clean up. Leea walks over to Maeya and hugs her for a minute or so, not saying anything, but I notice tears are in her eyes. Trem and Sar take turns clasping my hands and patting me on the back. After Leea finishes hugging Maeya, Terra hugs Maeya for a minute and says, Sis, I'm so happy for you and I know you'll have a great time! I love you so much! Trem gives me Maeya's backpack and I carry it by the straps in my hand out the door. Stepping outside the hut, they watch as we make the first steps toward my hut. We turn towards them and wave. They wave back smiling. I can see Leea wiping her eyes with a cloth while Trem has his arm around her shoulder.

I really feel sorry for Leea, knowing how she must feel that her "baby" daughter is leaving her for longer than she's ever been away in her life. Maeya again waves back to them and smiles. We make our way to my hut, and as we look around, others in the village are smiling and waving to us. Most likely, word of our leaving the village has traveled around and they're wishing us well along our way.

Entering my hut, we finish packing some dried fish into food pouches in the backpack. "Well Maeya, we're packed except for the water." She smiles while wrapping her

arms around my neck and kisses me. Hugging for a moment, we grab the packs by the straps and head out for the path to the creek.

We make our way down the path that leads to the fields. Looking around at the sky as we walk, everything still looks like a fine day is ahead. At the creek, we set the packs down and take a water pouch out. We each fill one up and place it around our waist, and the other two we leave dry in the backpacks for now. Placing our packs on our backs, we're on our way! I don't think we'll have a problem with water, from what I've seen of the land so far, but as they say in the scouts... "Be prepared".

We have the sun to our backs this morning as we travel along. She says; I've been to the village ahead of us with my dad about seven years ago. We'll be traveling mostly through the forests, but there will be grassy area like you see when you travel from our village to the lake. We look about and see some of the villagers already in the fields working. We're walking alongside of the field, roughly several hundred feet away from it, and we'll keep walking past it as we enter the forest.

Upon entering the forest, we can feel the temperature drop slightly, and the breeze moving slowly past us is really refreshing. The conditions in the forest will sure make the journey much easier on us along our way. She's looking around, taking everything in. I watch her take a deep breath, closing her eyes; she lets her breath out slowly. I know she feels as at home here as a fish does in water. I'll carefully observe what is going on around me to keep my bearings, but I know that she's been here before and we won't have a problem with getting lost.

Later in the day...

During our travels, we have crossed over several creeks and refilled our water pouches. We took a few breaks where we spent a bit of time chatting and just sat down side-by-side, watching the wildlife around us. At times we watched the small primates, (my namesakes), and often see deer and other similar species of mammals traveling in small herds. We stop and eat some vegetables that we gather as well as tree nuts, and some of our fish.

Walking along, she says, there's a break in the forest up ahead. The break will lead into the grassy area that I told you about, we'll be there soon. About five minutes later,

sure enough, we see the forest thinning and the sunlight increasing. The sun is in our eyes now since we are following in the direction that it's setting while traveling; besides it's getting later in the afternoon and getting lower on the horizon. She's right about the grassy area. It's much like the one near our village... so much beauty in the many varieties of flowers! There are a number of large and small mammals inhabiting this area. They tend to gather near the numerous water holes around. Flocks of birds making all sorts of noise are flying in and out of the water. Sometimes the large mammals take off in a run on the waters edge and the birds have to scatter for their lives!

We are following a path, probably used when the villagers up ahead travel between our village and theirs during special occasions. So far, we have met no one else on our way.

We must have traveled about five miles now, and the forest can be seen up ahead. The sun is dropping ever lower on the horizon, and I'm getting worried that we won't make the village by nightfall. "Maeya, how much further does this forest go on before we reach the village?" She stops, takes a quick look at our surroundings and says; the village is far enough away that we won't make it by nightfall. We must have taken more time than we should have on our breaks. It really isn't a problem anyway. We can just spread out the hammock and sleep here in the forest.

She was right... We have gone as far as we can, darkness is closing in fast and the village is not in sight. Looking around her, she says; "Let's move away from this path somewhat and set up camp while we still have some light. We're near the village, but it's getting too dark to go on further. Besides, we would arrive while the villagers were going to sleep". I agree, and we detour from the path by about a hundred steps to the right. I pick a site that has trees growing close to each other. Opening up our packs, I take out a hammock made for two people. This one is made with four rope cords, one on each corner, to tie off to multiple points. Taking the hammock, I secure the four cords to different tree trunks. We'll sleep comfortably about four foot off the forest floor. After securing the hammock, we take a drink of our water while we can still see the pouches. We're not really hungry, since we have eaten our fill of some nuts that we had gathered on the way as a snack. Maeya says; wait here... I'll be right back. I watch her walk, maybe ten or twenty feet away from the hammock. She's looking closely at the vegetation around us as she walks. I see that something has her attention as she bends over and removes leaves from

what appears to be just a weed. She brings those leaves back with her and hands me half of them. She takes her leaves and rolls them up while twisting them. A clear liquid is expelled from the leaves as a delicate scent fills the air. She discards the leaves, and with moist hands, applies the extract to exposed skin. She takes on the faint scent of the leaves, not objectionable at all. She says; your turn! Maeya; what are the leaves for? "Well, this application will keep the insects away from us as we sleep". I'm all for that Maeya! ... doing the same as her with my leaves. I wish I had known about this when I spent my previous nights in the forest!

With that out of the way, we tie the backpacks on the branches of a tree about six feet off the ground, and place a rolled up blanket along the foot of our bed. Disrobing, she unties her hair and we stretch out on the hammock. Lying on my back looking up... she turns on her side to face me, her head on my shoulder with her arm resting on my chest. It's nearly totally dark now, and all we can hear is the noise of the insects around us. After a few moments pass, she whispers in my ear... "Zhimm, there are no stars visible here in the forest, the canopy of leaves is too thick to see them." I detect a bit of humor in her voice as she says that. I only wish I can see the look on her face! She says; Will you turn towards me? I start to laugh just a little while I turn towards her and say, Maeya, I was just... as I turn towards her, she wraps her arm around me, places her hand behind my head and kisses me. I put my arm around her and pull her close. We become as one...

Chapter 27

The many life forms in the forest awaken very early in the morning. The sunlight is starting to stream through the forest canopy and dance about in patterns around us. Hey, just thought of something... Maeya's insect repellent worked... no bites! After that thought, I quickly turn my head to see if... yes, Maeya is still with me. She's sleeping on her side facing me. She is so beautiful... turning on my side towards her, I slowly place my left arm around her and just watch her as she sleeps. It seems that I have all the time in the world to just lie here with her.

A couple birds start screeching nearby and her eyes slowly open and meet mine. She doesn't speak a word, but reaches behind my head and pulls me towards her... our lips meet. She gently kisses me and we just look into each other's eyes. I have the same feeling now that I did when I was with her at the feast for Giff and De-nay'. I can really get lost looking into her eyes!

I'd really like to stay here lying with her... holding her so close to me, but hesitatingly I say; well Maeya... I guess we'd better get moving along towards the village. We can bathe there and eat breakfast. "Yes... we really should... We'll see if we can find Sar's father also. We won't need to use the hut, but we can say hello to him for Sar". She steps out of and away from the hammock, finds and places the tie that pulls her hair back, then puts her skirt, then sandals on. She reaches into her backpack, takes out a cloth and a small container of some sort and says, "I'll be back shortly". I finish getting dressed while she walks about fifty feet away. She finds a small amount of ground water near some sort of flowering bushes.

Assuming she has to attend to "needs", I just start rolling the blankets up and taking the hammock down to place in the backpacks. Soon, she returns and I notice that her face looks a bit different. It takes me just a few seconds, but I realize that the red coloring that she has always worn on the corner of her eyes is gone. In its place is a lavender color. I smile, pull her close to me, kiss her, and say... Maeya, you look so beautiful in lavender! She gives me such a beautiful smile!

Strapping our backpacks on, we proceed to walk back to the path towards the village. After about a mile of walking, the path empties into the perimeter of the village. We walk through an area of huts and walk along with other villagers making their way to its main area. Some of the villagers give me the "double-take", but are courteous and friendly. I'm reminded that most of them have never seen me before, even though they have heard about me through their "grapevine." Some of these villagers were undoubtedly at Giff and De-nay's celebration feast.

As we pass through the village, she's carefully looking at the faces of those around us for Sar's father. "I don't see him yet". Maeya, why don't you just lead us to the bathing area, and we'll see if we can find him later. She says; follow me and leads the way as we

walk alongside others that are headed in the same direction... they have their clean clothing with them.

Following the path, we head back into a forested area. A creek can be seen up ahead and the path diverges. She says; you'll take the path to the left; mine will veer to the right. I'll meet you back here. Sure enough, the women part from the men at the dividing of the path. I make my way down to the creek with the other men. This bathing area is a bit further away from the edge where you start to descend. It's quite rocky and one must walk carefully down to the water. We're downstream from the women by about a couple hundred feet. I take off my backpack and set it down on a dry rock. Removing my clothing, I proceed down to the creek and wash it, then wring it out. I go back to the backpack and spread out the washed garment on another dry rock.

Well... back to the water for bathing. There were two other men already there at the time; three of us are just now entering the water. One of two already in the water says, Hello friend! My name is Devun. You must be new here... welcome! "Thanks for your welcome! My name is Zhimm, and yes, I just came to your village only a short while ago. I came from the village to the east of yours." Upon hearing that, the other man next to him says, Zhimm? I knew that had to be your name! I remember hearing about you in the talk around the village. I laugh and say, I hope it was good talk! He says, sure, you are a friend of Sar, and his father lives in this village. "Yes, and I'm looking for him." Well Zhimm. You have found him, he says as he smiles. "Romm"? Yes, Zhimm, I'm Sar's father. I'm very pleased to meet you Romm. I must have missed you somehow at your son Giff's celebration feast. Romm says; I'm surprised that we didn't get introduced, but there were a lot of people at the feast. That sure was a beautiful event! I'm so proud of Giff, and my new daughter, De-nay! "They make a very lovely couple", I tell Romm. By the way, your son Sar and Terra send their love to you. Well, thank you for passing that along Zhimm. Sar also has a very fine mate in Terra. I wish that Sar and Terra would move back here so I could have one of my son's families here with me. You know how it is though; the women they mate with want to stay with their own families! "Yes, your right, and you see who wins out!" The men bathing laughed heartily at my statement.

"Romm... Sar told me to ask you about using his old hut when we came through your village. We'll not need it today, but might on our trip back." "We"? He asked. Oh, (my

face turned red as I realized my omission), I'm traveling with my mate, Maeya, I added. Maeya! , he shouted out. Maeya is your mate? Oh, why didn't you tell me... we're related now! Where is she? Is she here? "Yes, in fact she's bathing now, up the creek from us!" I'm going to finish bathing, he says. I'll meet you and Maeya in the village. With that, he leaves the creek and gathers his clothing. I chat with the other men as I finish up.

Getting ready to leave, I tell Devun and the other fellows it was nice meeting them, and that I'll probably see them later in the village. I leave the creek, get dressed and make my way to the divide in the path... she's not here. Apparently Maeya is still down at the creek. If she mentioned anything at all about her and I, she'll probably be detained a bit. If she knew anyone bathing with her from previous visits, her change in "status" would literally be quite visible to those around her. I'm sure they'll be liberally congratulating her!

Sure enough, she's coming up the trail with several women with her! They're quite excited, and are chatting non-stop with her as she approaches. Maeya stops walking and introduces me to the women. They are friends of hers that she would get to see occasionally, when her parents would travel to their village. One of them says, Zhimm, we have heard so much about you. Now, we finally get to meet you on such a happy occasion! We are so glad Maeya has such a fine mate! "Thank you for your kind words. I love Maeya very much and I'll take very good care of your friend!" With that, the women smile and proceed to walk in front of us towards the village.

In the village, we meet up with Romm who has been waiting for us. He walks up to Maeya, hugs her and says, Maeya, It's so good to see you again! I share your happiness with you! I've been talking with Zhimm down at the creek. He's such a good man and I'm glad he is your mate. Is there anything I can do for you while you're here? Do you plan on staying with us a while? Maeya says, we can't stay in the village too long now, but we'd like to have breakfast with you before we move on! "Breakfast sounds like a great idea. I'm awful hungry myself. Follow me"!

Romm leads the way, with Maeya and I following close behind. Romm leads us to his hut, looks in the door, and motions us in. We enter in as he motions to his wife and says, Kara, look who's here! Kara's face lights up upon seeing her and she runs toward Maeya and gives her a good hug. "Maeya, it's seems like it's been so long since you've been

to our village! I'll bet you were only about sixteen. You know, I caught just a couple glimpses of you when we were at my son's wedding" ... Kara stops speaking and takes a few steps back with her arms folded and her hand on her chin to get a good look at her. In a few seconds she says; you were on the thin side your last visit here, but I see you now have quite the figure of a lovely young woman! I quickly glance at Maeya and can tell that she is embarrassed with Kara's truthful comment (only because it was said in my presence I'm sure), but she just smiles!

Maeya answers her saying; thank you Kara, I'm doing fine. Mom and dad are also doing well, as are Terra, Giff and Sar. I'm sorry we didn't get to speak with you at Giff's celebration, but at least we're together now. Kara says, well, everything has worked out anyway. Romm proceeds to set the placemats and utensils for all as Kara sets the food down that she has finished preparing. "Ok, breakfast is in front of you. Eat as much as you wish".

The four of us begin eating. I can tell Kara is used to preparing food... everything looks and tastes as good as it does at one of the feasts. I'd be willing to bet she is one of the main women involved in the feasts here in this village. Romm speaks up and says, what was it that you needed me to help with Zhimm? "Well, we wanted to stay in a hut here in the village, but circumstances have changed and we really don't need a hut now." He says, so you are not staying, right? Right... we are going to travel on soon after we finish with breakfast. Kara says, so soon? Yes, we are already behind schedule and shouldn't delay any further. Maeya's family would be concerned if we were late returning to our village, as we are going to be gone a number of days anyway.

Romm says; If I may ask, where are you traveling to? "Maeya and I are traveling to the Land of Waterfalls." Romm sits back a bit and says, Oh, that's an ambitious trip! ... it's three more days from here and somewhat of a climb. Fortunately, you can rest at the next village to the west of us before you have to start the climb upward. "That will help", I tell him. We can gather more supplies before we go further up into that land. Maeya and I wish to go because we've heard it's very beautiful up there. Romm says; I've never been there. Most of us in this village haven't either. There really isn't much in the way of sustaining a village there I've been told... it's pretty rocky, but I hope you and Maeya have a wonderful time as you travel there. I guess we'll see you on your return trip. If you need a

hut, we'll prepare one for you to rest in. "Thank you very much Romm. Perhaps we'll take you up on your offer." With that, we finish eating and help Kara clean up.

Kara and Romm follow us outside their hut and Maeya hugs and kisses both of them. I tell them; I'm very glad to have met the both of you. I'll be sure to tell your sons that you send your love to them. We strap on our backpacks and wave to both of them as we make our way from their hut. Romm shouts out, we'll see you again as you come back this way!

We take the path out of this village that will lead to the next village. We're in forest again. She says; I've never been this far away from our village. All this will be new to me.

Later in the day...

Today was pretty much uneventful traveling. Hmm... a thought just occurred to me. Perhaps I'm getting a little "jaded." By that, I mean I'm getting used to seeing so much diversity in the wildlife around me, as well as the incredible display of floral varieties as I move from one location to another. This world is a paradise by any definition of the word, and I've started to become accustomed to its beauty. It's strange how quickly a human gets used to living in a paradise once accustomed to it. It's so easy to take this all for granted. I'm very fortunate to live in surroundings such as this. I have to remind myself that what surrounds me is very rare on Earth, and even what little is left is rapidly disappearing.

You know, maybe that was part of the problem that the human race faced ages ago. They got so used to paradise that it was just taken for granted. When some humans first conceived the idea of individual land ownership and started tearing the land up to suit themselves... clearing the land, it seemed to be of no consequence. There was still more than plenty of paradise left. Gradually, whatever mankind did to the land became just seemed part of "the way it is". Those born into whatever condition the land happened to be at the time, just thought that's the way it has always been. Generations later, the land would never again be the same as it was. Those later generations never saw the beauty and the diversity of life that I'm seeing now all around me. No human, or even multiple generations of humans could see the inevitable changes slowly taking place. It was just too gradual for any one generation to notice that the quality of everything around them was ever so slowly degrading.

As we walk along, something off the path catches Maeya's eye and she says; stop here Zhimm. I want you to observe something. Just off the path about ten feet, she directs my attention to a plant. We detour off the path to the plant she's noticed. On this plant are a number of orange vegetables looking similar to a tomato. We walk over to it and she says; Look closely at the plant and tell me what you see. "I see a plant growing orange vegetables". Look closer Zhimm. I study the plant up and down carefully and tell her; oh, now I see three worms on the plant chewing up its leaves. They were so hard to see the first time because they blend in so well with the plants color. "Yes, nature has provided a good defense for them so they can be hidden from the birds that would eat them. Those worms are actually creatures that will turn into the beautiful large moths that you can see around us". I say, but if they are so well hidden from the birds, perhaps these creatures will destroy all these types of plants until there are none left. She says, look closer again at the creatures. I take a closer look and say; I see that two of them have things that look like tiny grains of rice attached to them. The grains are so very small that I didn't notice them at first. She says; those tiny grains are the larvae of a wasp that lives here in the forest. The wasp attaches its eggs directly on those creatures, and when the eggs hatch, the larvae will feed upon the creature until it dies. If you look close, the creatures that have the larvae attached are really not doing much eating of the plant at all now. They have lost too much life force to continue chewing up the plant.

There is a delicate "dance of balance" between these life forms. We need the vegetables, but we need the moths and the wasps also. Every creature and specie of plant around us has a function in maintaining the life force of every other life form. I tell her, Amazing! I never would have noticed any of this on my own. "This is a lesson for you to remember. Think about the complexity of the interactions between all the life forms around us, and its delicate balance. There are interactions between the living things going on around you right now that are so much more complex than the simple example I just gave you. You have no idea of the damage to these systems, and ultimately ourselves that would occur if we should thoughtlessly harm the habitat around us. Sometime, remind me to tell you a story of the trees around us". I will Maeya; I'd love to hear it.

We proceed onward...

It's becoming darker now. We have traveled through forest only, so far. There hasn't been an interruption of forest area such as grasslands or lakes. I tell her, I don't see any sign of the village up ahead. I think that since we had a late start this morning, we'll probably not reach this village either before darkness closes in on us. "I agree, let's move a bit off the path and set up camp".

Moving off of the path, we set up the hammock behind a short growth of bushes. We eat just a little from our provisions, and have some water to drink. We secure the backpacks again and hang them up on the bushes. Reclining on the hammock, I ask her; do you miss everyone back at the village Maeya? "It does seem unusual not to have the rest of my family around. I feel at home in the forest here, but it's a new experience to have someone with me now. My life has changed since we have become mates Zhimm. I mean that in a positive way, of course... but it is different".

Maeya, I want you to know that I don't want to change who you are. I've grown to love you for who you were when I first started taking walks with you, and I love you the way you are now. When we get back home, if you wish to spend a couple days every now and then in the forests by yourself, that's all right with me. I'll really miss you, but you can make it up to me when you return... ok? She gives me such a beautiful smile, wraps her arms around me, pulling me against her as we lay...

Chapter 28

Morning finds her asleep on my shoulder while I'm looking up at the tree canopy above us. I wonder how much farther it is to the last village, and assume that it's not too far away. We made pretty good time yesterday. I whisper in her ear... Maeya... time to wake up! She opens her eyes, and I say "Good morning" as I pull her close and squeeze lightly. Stretching a bit, I sit up in the hammock, next to her. She sits up also, smiles at me, and just looks around and yawns. I tell her, "Up you go... sleepy head!" as I take her by the arm, lifting it up, and pulling as if to lift her up. She quickly jerks her arm back and throws her shoulder against me. She knocks me off balance, and to avoid falling, I grab her by the

arm but it's too late... the motion of us on the hammock causes one of the tie-points to give way, dumping both of us on the forest floor! She lands on top of me laughing, so I take her by the arms and roll over with her, straddling her. I start laughing also and say; so you want to play rough eh?

I proceed to tickle her on her sides until she can hardly speak, she's laughing so hard! She tries to say, "stop", but I say; No, you started it! After a few seconds, I stop tickling and lean over her as I look into her eyes, and give her a kiss. She wraps her arms around me as I lay my head alongside hers... I love her so much! ... "Well Maeya, I guess we ought to be moving along"... I help her get up, we get dressed, and I take down the hammock. We pack everything into the backpacks and carry them in our hands by the straps as we walk back to the path.

Walking on, we find a creek up ahead. I suggest; "Let's see if we can bathe here instead of waiting till we get to the village." Walking up to it, we see it's deep enough for bathing. Making our way down to the creek bed, we set our backpacks aside. We disrobe and make our way into the water. We spend about ten minutes in the water washing up. Stepping out of the water, drip-drying in the breeze, we chat for about five minutes. Getting into her backpack, she applies her makeup. We get dressed and move on.

Walking along for another half hour, we finally see the end of this part of the forest... a clearing is before us. She says; maybe the village is just up ahead! Soon we emerge from the forest into the perimeter of another village. We observe that the hut area is on the opposite side from us. There are just a few people around now. Most likely everyone is bathing or eating breakfast in their huts. She says; I don't really expect to see anyone I know. Perhaps we can stop someone and ask for directions. "Good idea, I reply; there maybe more than one path going westward, but only one may be the one we're looking for."

Walking to the other side of the village, we see a woman standing outside her hut. As we walk up to her, Maeya says; "Good morning, my name is Maeya, and this is my mate, Zhimm". Would you tell us which path to take to the Land of the Waterfalls? The woman replies, Nice to meet you Maeya! My name's Shura. I've heard of you and Zhimm here in this village, but I didn't think we would ever meet! I also didn't know you were each other's mate. Maeya says, we have been together only a couple days now, and are traveling

to the Land of Waterfalls. We could sure use some help with directions. Shura says; come step inside my hut and I'll give the both of you something to eat. "Sure"... and we follow her in. She motions us to sit... places a mat in front of us and gives us each a bowl of sibannac pudding. "This will fill you up for the journey ahead"! We eat and chat with Shura for about twenty minutes or so.

Afterward, she offers us some fish, and other dried foodstuffs, which we gladly accept, since ours ran out earlier. Opening our backpacks, I tell her; Thanks very much for your hospitality Shura! Maeya and I appreciate the fish. It'll be a tasty and filling meal for us as we travel to the waterfalls. "Oh you're quite welcome and by the way, be sure to take the middle path on this side of the village. That path will lead you to where you're going. After several miles on that path, you'll start noticing that the forest is thinning... gradually you'll realize that you're traveling at an incline. Just keep following the setting sun and you'll arrive there. You'll know when you're there". Maeya says, thank you so much Shura for everything! Is there something we can do for you before we leave? "No, my mate will be along shortly to help me, but thanks for asking!" We strap the backpacks on and wave to her as we leave. As she said, we take the middle path and enter the forest again. We're well fed now, and should be able to travel a good distance.

Later in the day...

We've noticed that the forest is starting to thin, and the sunlight is getting brighter on the forest floor. Instead of the blanket of plant matter on the floor of the forest we're used to, the covering of the leaves are getting thinner and I notice that the soil content appears to be changing. I'm not seeing the rich deep black soil I'm used to; instead it's becoming more clayish and a bit sandy. We arrive at a small creek, and I say to her, Let's fill all the water pouches. I don't know if water will be plentiful the further we go. Taking our backpacks off, we grab the spare water pouches, filling them from the stream. While filling my pouch, I notice some small yellow flowers growing at the base of a fallen tree nearby me. After filling my pouch, I walk over to the tree and pull off a couple of the small flowers and place them in an unused food pouch in the backpack.

We continue on...

Of course, Shura was correct. After several hours of walking, we can feel and also see that we are climbing in altitude. Looking behind us, we can see the top of the forests' trees for several miles. Before us is what I would call hilly terrain, somewhat rocky, but not devoid of trees or plant life. In fact, there are still many small mammals running about and occasionally we spot deer-like creatures and bears with small cubs. She says; let's stop and take a break. We take a seat and open the backpacks...eating a small amount of fish, and some of the nuts and fruit that Shura had given us for our journey. So far, I don't think we'll go hungry, as I have spotted nuts, vegetables and fruit growing all along the way.

Just thinking about our earlier conversation, I ask her, Maeya, would you tell me about the trees now? "Sure, this situation will teach the same lesson that the vegetable plant did, but cannot be seen with your eyes. It demonstrates a higher level of interaction beyond that first simple illustration.

There is a constant struggle between the tree life and insect life. The insects want to use the insides of the trees for food and shelter and the trees wish to survive. The insects use secretions from their bodies to communicate to others of their kind and direct them to the trees that are weak and can be used for food. The trees respond as they are attacked and give off substances that carry through the air to alert the other trees of their kind around them. Those other trees will produce foul tasting substances that make them unappealing to the insects.

Again, it's a continual dance of balance between the needs of the life forms involved. This sort of activity also takes place in thousands of similar life forms that must interact with each other... again, all in a delicate balance between life and death. If we carelessly disturb this balance we'll be overrun with one specie to the detriment of other life forms, and ultimately ourselves. We'll lose the wide diversity of life forms that support even our own lives in ways we have yet to comprehend. Even this example of the trees that I have told you is still so very simple.

There are many more levels of interaction, each one so much more complex than the next. At this time, I can't comprehend levels of interaction very much higher than my example of the trees, but I do know they exist". How do you know these things Maeya? "The Life Force that moves upon and through every living thing in this world places this knowledge within my inner being". Maeya, I don't know what to say other than I am awed

and humbled at the complexity of what is taking place around us. We are but as children in this world. She added, that's why we should tread as lightly upon this world as we possibly can as our lives pass through it. Because we understand so little of the complexity of the interconnected life systems here, we dare not harm them. To do so would be to harm future generations and ourselves. Our children deserve nothing less than what we have enjoyed while we've had our temporary physical existence here.

As dusk is approaching, we decide to make camp. This time, we just stretch out a blanket, sit and chat, and watch the sun go down. There's a beautiful view of the sunset before us, as we can see nearly down to the horizon. We're captivated watching large flocks of different types of birds flying over the tree levels as they disappear into what are undoubtedly several scattered lakes. It's starting to get dark, so I get out the other blanket and roll it up at our feet. Lying on our backs, we watch the darkness descend around us. She says; this is really a wonderful place to spend the night. I've never seen the land from this perspective before. I tell her; Yes, it is quite a beautiful view but we're still climbing in altitude. We should reach the Land of the Waterfalls by tomorrow. I think that this view will pale in comparison to what you will see tomorrow. She smiles and says, Yes, I'm sure you're right!

We watch the stars start to appear as the reddish glow from the sun quickly disappears beneath the horizon. I can hear the sounds of what could possibly be owls stirring, preparing themselves for a night of hunting. After watching the stars for a while, we're so sleepy, so we kiss and turn in for the night...

Chapter 29

Waking up, I realize that we're covered with a blanket. It did feel a bit cool during the night, as there was a gentle breeze blowing. Maeya must have felt chilled and covered us. Sitting up and just looking around, I watch the sun rising in the direction we came from. She senses me stirring and opens her eyes. I tell her, Good morning beautiful! ... Well, today's the day! She says; "Yes, I've enjoyed the journey so far, but it will be nice to

get where we're going and just relax for a couple days and not travel. We've been on the go for three days now, and I'd like to spend some time just taking it all in". Sounds good to me... I feel exactly the same way.

We get into the backpacks and eat breakfast watching the sunrise. There are just a few large puffy clouds on the horizon in a beautiful sky. The sun is already above them, and we can feel its rays warming the land around us. Finishing breakfast, we put on the backpacks and start off again.

Several hours later...

We've passed some pretty amazing landscapes this morning. We've traveled a short distance through a fairly narrow gorge, walking along its path, up against the mountainside. We carefully walked hand in hand on this path, noting the swiftly flowing narrow river far beneath us. One wouldn't want to try to navigate this in inclement weather... one slip and... well, you know. Once we were through the gorge, the view opened up nicely and the trail was a lot wider, much to our relief. Gazing at this more open view, we saw sheer rock canyon walls that just beautifully radiated color from the reflected sunlight. Looking downward, at the base of the cliffs, and near the river, we saw dozens of animals in motion that reminded me of bison. They stopped at a place along the river that had pooled because of large boulders at the rivers bank. Here the water wasn't swift at all and the animals with their young could safely bathe and drink without danger of being swept downstream.

We're climbing ever higher. We're really starting to notice that the incline and altitude is taking a bit of a toll on our energy levels, but at least it isn't hazardous traveling. I was just thinking, in spite of Maeya not having the physical strength and build of most of the Sarn women, I can tell she's in excellent physical condition. She has no trouble at all keeping up with me. In fact, sometimes she is so eager to see what's up ahead that often she moves ahead of me without realizing that I'm more than just a few steps behind, and I have to play "catch up"!

The trees are thinning now, and the way is becoming more rugged looking. We stop to take a break and fill our water pouches in a small creek running along the mountainside with swiftly flowing cold water. Man, does this hit the spot! Looking around us, we take a

rest after finding trees that have some tasty nuts on them and vegetables growing near the creek's bank that we pick and eat.

As we're seated, out of the corner of my eye, a fleeting shadow on the ground darts quickly past me. Instinctively, I look up in the sky, and see several very large birds soaring on the air currents making wide graceful arcs high above us. I've never seen this type of bird from our village perspective. I'm sort of laughing to myself because they resemble those ancient birds that I've seen in those old black and white "cave man and dinosaur" movies! I guess it must make its home here at this higher altitude than we are from. While we rest here and chat, I glance up often at them. Observing them for at least five minutes, they haven't had to flap their large wings even once. Talk about freedom! They can see for miles and are soaring effortlessly on the updraft. Watching them, it occurs to me that the sky is such an intense blue. It's really breathtaking! As Maeya is seated next to me, she takes my right hand, covers it with her hands, and places my hand in her lap. She turns her head to look me in the eyes and just smiles. She doesn't have to say a thing. I respond by resting my head on her shoulder. She presses her shoulder up against me to get closer and kisses me on the cheek. In return I kiss her, then whisper in her ear and tell her jokingly; you know, if we keep this up we'll never make it to our destination tonight. Without skipping a beat, she lets go of my hand and wraps both her arms around me. She smiles again, tightens her hold on me, while whispering in my ear; "I know". With that statement, both of us start laughing so hard our tears just flow! She's still hugging me tightly with her head on my shoulder as she laughs. I just can't tell you how much I love this woman... and her sense of humor! In a minute or so, I take her by the hand as we both stand, grab our gear, and proceed onward.

After a few more miles of travel, by now, it's getting late in the afternoon. We notice the sun is making its way toward the horizon. We still have daylight left but realize that we should pick up the pace and not take another break before we arrive at our destination.

There really isn't any shelter here at this altitude. We look around and see just a few trees on this rocky incline. As we make our way, we notice what appear to be a small herd of mountain goats perched on some pretty narrow ledges. They're standing motionless just watching us make our way up their territory. Before I can take another step, Maeya abruptly stops dead in her tracks and says; do you hear that? Listen! What do you hear? ...

Do you hear that low rumbling noise? Listening carefully, holding my breath for a few moments... "Yes, I hear it now." She says, let's keep moving on and see if the noise changes. It seems as if every few steps we take up the incline, the sound becomes more distinct, and not difficult at all to hear. "We must be very close to Land of the Waterfalls"! I think so too Maeya! Even though we've not traveled a full day, we're really starting to get weary because of the climb. We're quite excited though, because we sense that our destination is so near.

Picking up the pace somewhat, we can just make out what seems to be a clearing that levels off between the rock formations up ahead. Being weary, we can only slowly jog up the incline even though we want to run. The noise we've been hearing is still getting louder as we approach the clearing. I take her by the hand for the last few yards and we finally reach the clearing where the ground is now level.

We're entering what seems to be a winding passage that is about fifteen feet wide of smooth dark rock. The noise we're hearing seems to reverberate around the rocky formation around us and seems to have no defined point of origin. Maeya's hair is being blown wildly about by a refreshing blast of cool moist air as we're walking through this passage. Man... that cool air sure feels good after all this traveling under a sunny sky!

Making our way through the passage, we finally reach the end of it. Whoa, take a look at this! We're standing speechless as we look around us! To the left of us is a waterfall cascading into the lake only about fifty feet away. The mist from this fall is what was cooling us as we came through the passage. Looking straight ahead, I see an absolutely beautiful deep blue lake that seems to be sitting within the rim of what could have been a meteor crater or volcano eons ago. All along the left side of this mountainous rim are many small waterfalls emptying into the lake from different elevations.

Near the center of this lake is a large island that is completely covered with tree growth. Flocks of birds can be seen flying low across the lake; some of them are swimming just off the shore of the island. I assume that there are probably fissures under the lake that slowly release the water down this entire elevated area into creeks that eventually end up feeding the forested areas down below.

To our right, the lake has a wide shoreline that isn't quite level and it rises slowly to meet the opposite side of the rim from us. This shoreline meets the mountainous rim with no waterfalls on that side. From this vantage point, you can't see the surrounding land... only the lake and the rim that extends all around it. I can just barely make out what appears to be a raised clearing at the end of the shoreline at the other side of the lake. We'll have to find out what can be seen from there.

Looking to the left, I see that we can walk on a short path that that would take us to the edge of the small waterfall. I turn to look at Maeya as she says, "I can't believe how beautiful this place is. I don't think I could have imagined it if I tried. Look how blue the water is! Look at all the small rainbows around the falls"! She is really overcome with the beauty here. I can hardly believe it myself! "Let's take this short path to the left first", she says.

Taking her hand, we carefully walk our way around until we're alongside the fall. We watch the cascading water flow down the rim, and empty in to the lake creating a large pool of white swirling water. It feels great standing here because we're cooling off in a fine mist from the fall. We just stand still for a few minutes and let the mist continue to cool us off from the climb. After we feel refreshed from the mist, we walk back from this fall toward the entrance as I say to her; Look over here. Let's check this out! I notice a small hollowed out area of the rim that has caught some of the cascading water.

As we walk over to the hollow, I see that it is only about five foot deep. She says, Let's jump in! "Ok Maeya"! We take off our backpacks, set them aside, and disrobe. She jumps in first, and as soon as I jump in she immediately puts her hands together and sharply pushes the surface of the water with her palms toward me. She splashes me right in the face, then ducks her head under the water to avoid retaliation. Diving under the water, I wrap my arms around her waist tightly and lift her partway out of the water. "Maeya... now what are you going to do"? She is laughing so hard she can't speak! She wraps her legs around me, and throws herself backward by pushing off against my shoulders, pulling us under the water again. Under the water, I manage to wrap my arms around hers, pinning them alongside her body. Standing up with her in the water, I release my grip a bit. I place my head alongside hers and just stand still for a moment. She lifts her arms to wrap them around me. "I'm so happy to be with you here in this place Maeya! I'm

glad we have made the journey here". She wraps her arms tighter around me... pulling me closer to her for a few minutes. We don't speak at all, we just embrace each other.

We're excited to see what else awaits us, so we climb out of the pool and dry off. After getting dressed, we pick up the backpacks and take the path back past where we first entered this place and start to walk along the shoreline. "Are you hungry Maeya? Should we stop here to eat?" Yes, I'd like to eat something now. I'm really hungry. I think all the exertion of getting here is finally catching up with me!

Walking in the direction of the lake, we find a place to rest, and sit down on the shore. There are a good number of trees providing shade, and the spot we've picked is under one of them. While eating, we watch flocks of large birds fly circles around the lake, landing, and taking off after they had their fill of fish or plant life.

We spot some striped antelope-like creatures further from us under the trees near the end of the shoreline by the raised clearing. They look right at us but seem to be unconcerned of our presence here.

Maeya is in awe at the view all around us. She's been a bit quiet since we've arrived here. I just think that she is so overwhelmed from what is going on around us that she is at a loss for words. I'm looking at the small waterfalls... the mists that they create when the water splashes down the rocky face of the rim just take the sunshine and produce such beautiful rainbow colors around them. We notice an occasional splash in the lake; no doubt some large fish catching a meal that was flying overhead. After eating, she sits close to me and places her hand over mine as we watch the waterfalls. She seems to be so captivated by them. I just smile at her, and let her take it all in. I'm in no hurry to disturb her enjoyment of this land.

Chapter 30

Well, after taking in some of the sights here and relaxing after a long day, it's getting late in the evening, the sun is barely above the crater's rim, and total darkness is fast approaching. We decide to take out our hammock and tie it up on trees that are near the

lakeshore. Already the birds over the lake have called it a day and we notice the nighttime insects are making their presence audibly known. Having the hammock in place, we take a few more moments to sit and watch the firefly show over the lake. After only five minutes or so, the mesmerizing effect of both the firefly show and the calming sound of the falls has taken its toll on us. Maeya and I both are nodding off and closing our eyes, just on the edge of sleep. We were getting tired before we came to the falls, and most likely have been running on adrenaline ever since. Our bodies say “this is enough”, so I put my arm around her shoulder and tell her it’s time for bed... and she offers no argument. We both just crawl into the hammock and pull the blanket over us. Maeya makes one turn in the hammock, up against me and doesn’t make another move or a sound... as the old saying goes, “she’s out like a light”. I listen for just a minute or so to the calming effect of the waterfalls and just drift off to sleep.

Morning...

My eyes slowly open to the brightness and heat of a sun that has well past risen over the rocky walls of the falls. It’s already mid-morning. Both of us must have been just dead-exhausted to have slept in so long. I nudge Maeya with a gentle elbow. She places her arm around me with closed eyes and lies still again. I just smile and let her rest against me for a while longer. I lay still and just take in the gentle cascading of the falls down the side of the rock walls. I can hear the cries of the large shore birds as they swoop over the lake in search of a meal. The sun is peeking through the tree leaf covering as a gentle breeze blows the leaves around. It makes for a shifting pattern of light and shadow on Maeya’s face, so she tries to cover her face to stay asleep. It finally gets the best of her, so she slowly opens her eyes and smiles at me. “Hey beautiful, did you get a good night’s sleep”, I tell her. She smiles again and says; I don’t even remember falling asleep, and now it’s already morning! She slowly sits up in the hammock, yawns for a few moments, wiping her eyes. I carefully exit the hammock and walk to the other side to help her. Standing alongside her, I reach around her as she lifts her legs and lowers them to the ground. I take her by the hands and she stands up tall. She lets go of my hands, then places her hands over her mouth as she yawns again. “Well Maeya, are you rested enough to eat something and then see what lies ahead for us?” Sure am! Let’s get into our backpacks and we’ll eat a bit before we go. We take a seat at the shoreline and just eat a bit from our supplies. As we’re eating, we spot

other nearby trees not very far away, so we proceed to supplement our breakfast with produce from these trees... both nuts and fruits of different varieties than what we have in our backpacks.

After we have our fill of foodstuffs, we think we'll just relax a bit on the shore... just to let our food digest a while before we start on our way. It feels great just to soak up the sun while feeling the cool breeze coming off of the lake as we take in the view of the rainbow falls.

After a half hour or so, she says; "Let's walk further along the shore, and see where the end of the incline past the lake takes us!" Picking up the backpacks, we slowly walk along the shoreline. Since the path we wish to take is on a gradual incline, we'll eventually leave the lake below us as we climb.

As we're making our way along the lakeshore, we watch small striped rodents in the trees gathering nuts and running on the ground between the trees. A number of varieties of multi-colored birds are also in the trees, occasionally diving at the rodents and causing some angry chatter between them.

We're just holding hands, walking along, taking in as much as we can of all that is taking place around us. There are so many varieties of flowers growing to the right of us along this path. They grow nearly all the way to the rim on this side of the lake. Maeya stops, bends down on her knees to look closer at a few of them and says; "Zhimm... look! ... I've never seen some of these flowers before! They must grow only at this altitude".

For several hours more, we hunt around and find a number of other species of plants, and even some animals that she's never seen before. I sense the amazement she is experiencing seeing these life forms that are new to her. She's examining them in such detail! I'm really glad we've come to this place. Just seeing the look of amazement, and sense of wonder on her face, has made me feel that all the effort to get here has been worth it all. This is one facet of what love is about... participating in the joy of life that the one I love is experiencing!

After she finishes looking at the flowers, we'll be making our way up the last leg of the incline to the mesa. She stands to her feet, takes a few steps, but abruptly stops. She has such a puzzled look on her face as she takes a long distance view of everything around

us. She takes a few more steps, pauses on our way up the incline, turns to me and says; you know, ever since we've arrived here, I've felt such a strong connection to this place! It's like I've been here before, so very long ago, but of course I've never been too far from our village. It's really such a strange feeling! I tell her, There is a mystery about this land, isn't there? The old ones talk about it, and some of them say it is the place of beginnings.

After about fifteen more minutes of walking, we arrive at the end of the incline and take our first step onto the mesa. Walking out across the flat rock area, we're met with an astounding view of the land we couldn't see from where we were before. We proceed further across this mesa to get closer to the edge. Coming within about fifty feet of the edge, we take off our backpacks and set them down.

We're here gazing across hundreds of square miles of densely forested areas dotted by small lakes. I've never seen so much of her world at one time as I am seeing now. Maeya is standing speechless, with a view of her world before us that she has never seen. We've a view extending almost one hundred and eighty degrees around us. The air is, of course, crystal clear and we can literally see for so many miles right down to the tree line of the forests in the distance. Who knows how many villages are in the midst of those forests?

It's a deep sea of green... the canopy of the forests all around us, dotted with the beautiful blue lakes, and also some areas that we know are grasslands or meadows. We see so many different species of flocks of large birds flying in different directions and at different altitudes over the dense canopy, each flock having several hundreds of birds. We experience the warmth of the sun at the same time a cool gentle breeze blows over us. The snow-white billowing clouds cling to the horizon in the distance. My god... it just doesn't get any better than this! She says, would you take a blanket out of your backpack and set it out for us to sit down on? "Sure, great idea!"

Getting into the backpack, we lay the blanket down, and I take her by the hand as she sits. I place both backpacks on the edge of the blanket beside me and sit next to her, facing the view before us. She turns to look at me and says, almost in a whisper, "Zhimm, I would like to just look out around me for a while and not speak. Would you mind very much"? No Maeya, I don't mind at all. We're in no hurry to go anywhere.

Turning to get my backpack, I open it up and take out the small flowers I had placed in there previously. Setting the backpack alongside me again, I sit alongside her, holding the flowers in my hand. Turning to look at her, her eyes are welling up with tears. She isn't moving a muscle... she's so still. My first impulse is to hold and comfort her, but I hold back and don't speak. I don't want to disturb her at this time... she seems to be in deep concentration. I'm not sure she really even knows I'm with her!

Taking the flowers in my hand, I place them in my mouth, chewing them slowly as before and swallowing them. I think to myself, I'd better hold on! A couple minutes pass and it seems that nothing is happening... hmmm... Wait... a strange feeling is coming over me. I feel as if I'm starting to move upward, like I'm in an elevator! Hey, somehow my consciousness is leaving my body behind! Wooaaa! I'm looking down at myself as I'm rising. My body's just sitting down there... motionless. Now, I'm somehow present, hovering above the mesa, but not in my body! Looking down at the blanket, Maeya is lying flat on her back, eyes closed. I can see in all directions around me but I'm not in a body... I just seem to be... spirit! Am I dead? This is really weird... I should be afraid of falling, but I'm not...

Something else...

I've just concentrated my gaze at a point on the horizon, and I'm there! I mean, like instantaneously! I'm looking below me. I see a wide river flowing... swiftly moving... foaming white as it passes over and around huge rocks in the riverbed. Large fish leap out of the water and enter again with a frothy splash. I see hundreds of snow white birds gracefully gliding over the river and many are making their way into nests built into the cliffs along the river. I can make out the perimeter of a village near the rivers' edge. Concentrating my gaze, I notice two large flat rocks jutting out from the shore... into the river with women lying on their backs, sunbathing on it ... what a great place to relax!

I have an idea... in my mind I pick out a direction, look towards it and... whoa! ... I seem to be moving rapidly over the treetops of this land. It's like I'm flying! I'm not trying to concentrate on any one part of the land now, but just trying to take in a larger view of this planet. As I do, I seem to be climbing rapidly in altitude. The river is becoming just a thin meandering line of blue. I seem to be picking up speed as I fly higher over this world! Below me, I see wide areas of green grassy plains that have literally hundreds of large

animals moving in herds, probably in a migration and seeking the next watering hole. Proceeding onward, the land alternates between large forests, meadows, rivers feeding lakes... more grassy plains with herds numbering in the hundreds and some in the thousands... different species grazing and resting. Now I'm so high up I can see a slight curvature of the horizon. I've seen views like this while in a jet, but what I'm seeing below me sure isn't Earth. Man, this is one beautiful life-bearing globe! Now I'm passing over long strings of snow-capped mountain ranges running through the forests, but there are also many deep blue lakes and meadows within the forested areas.

I'm watching cloud formations moving beneath me as I move along. Some clouded areas are dark, with lighting flashing from cloud to cloud. By the way, while traveling by jet on Earth, I was used to seeing the deforested patchwork on the ground from agriculture go on for untold miles... not here... Most everything is emerald green! Moving along at a very rapid pace, I leave this continent behind and see ocean beneath me. Again concentrating my gaze, I can see numerous dark shapes just under the surface traveling together. I assume these are whale pods... so many of them!

Continuing on over the ocean, I notice many island land masses as I move along. Some of these islands are quite large and have high mountainous regions that are also forested at the base with snow capped peaks. Are they inhabited? I wonder. I'm way above the cloud level... nothing above me but the brilliance of the Sun warming me as I speed along at this altitude. This is so beautiful... I wish I could capture it all with a good video camera!

Out of nowhere, I hear a voice speak ... "Jim". I respond, who is this? The female voice says; you know me Jim! Life Force! I should have known. Hey, this is absolutely amazing! I assume you planned this? Yes, I did. I wanted you to see this planet from an entirely different perspective than you had by traveling its surface. What do you think? Well Life Force, what first comes to my mind is that I'm seeing an example of what my home planet must have looked like a million or so years ago. It depresses me to think what has happened to my world...

She speaks, saying, "this is exactly what I wanted you to experience... the contrast of this world and yours, both visually and from deep within your inner being... something that no living inhabitant from your world has ever seen or experienced".

Well, now it's time for you to return...

In a blur of motion, I'm again looking down at the mesa at the Land of the Waterfalls. I notice Maeya is still lying flat on her back, very still. I ask, what's happening to Maeya? Is she all right? "Yes, don't worry, she's fine. I am presently conversing with her at the same time I am talking with you. I'm taking Maeya to a deeper level of comprehension of the life around her than she has known."

Jim, I wish to tell you that I'm delighted that you've brought Maeya to this beautiful place of beginnings, and I'm so glad that you have followed your heart and chose her to be your mate! You have brought such joy and love into that part of her that needs physical companionship to be a complete and whole being. I never intended for Maeya to travel alone, as she made her way through life. There's plenty of room in her being for both of us to love her at the same time... each loving her in our own way. I love you both so much.

Life Force, I thank you for your love towards Maeya and I, and I also thank you so much for this experience I've just had. This planet is incredibly beautiful, and so full of life of every form imaginable. I love this world and everything about it. If you remember, in our last meeting, you told me to observe all that takes place around me and learn, and I did as you asked. You know, after living day to day with these people, I've learned that I need nothing but to love, and to receive the love of all of the people around me, and to respect and care for all the other lifeforms around us. I know that as long as we embrace the Principles of Life, this life of joy and plenty will continue for countless generations to come.

Let me add this Life Force; thinking back to my mental state when I first arrived, I recall the boredom I experienced in the evenings for a couple months or so. The villagers seemed quite content, in their spare time, to listen and watch the children sing, to visit with each other after dinner, or simply walk with each other in the early evening to observe the natural world around them. I was very fidgety, and needed some sort of distraction to occupy my mind. In my world, there were so many distractions to keep me from really thinking about these simple things... the things of reality and of real love. To me, the things that the Sarn were concerned with seemed dull and boring, and I craved my technological toys and the pursuit of everything else everyone in our modern civilization chases after. I needed something to fill the hollowness that was the real me.

As time moved on, here in this world, I began to really live my life in reality instead of illusion; my old world faded away, and with it the need for all that kind of artificial mental stimulus. I finally realized that on Earth, I had lived in a mental construct created by people who become incredibly wealthy driving everyone to the next distraction that is just as empty as the one before it.

Life Force, I am so fortunate to have been given a second chance at life, here in this world. I've seen what life can really be like, and what it was meant to be for every living being. I'm so happy here I can't even imagine ever returning to Earth again. Here I've drank water, ate food, traveled wherever and whenever I wished, and had shelter without having to pay anyone or ask permission from some "authority".

Jim, you've experienced what's called spiritual growth. So many of your fellow beings on Earth are simply "unconscious"... there's nothing more to their lives other than what is pumped into them by the dead media culture around them. If you would remove the distractions from their minds for as little time as one minute, say for instance in solitary thought, they can't handle it and have to find something... anything to fill the void. They simply are incapable of even contemplating their existence, their world around them, or even thinking an independent thought.

Well, let's move on to something I know you've been wondering about for quite a while now. Yes, Bren's old ones were correct. It all started here! I'm going to give you the last piece of the puzzle for which you have been seeking... you're ready for it. It's time for you to learn of...

Beginnings...

Jim, you will see, in spirit, what transpired so long ago... just as it happened...

Hey... something strange is taking place... everything visible around me seems like it is "rippling"! It's just like you would see when you are trying to look at the road up ahead that's hot from the summer sun while driving... wait... the rippling is gone. I quickly glance at the mesa and see that Maeya and I, and our belongings have vanished. I guess I'm seeing this planet as it existed long ago! I see very little that has changed, not only in this Land of Waterfalls, but also in everything around me. The only changes that have taken place are obviously what has been changed by nature itself...

A shadow over me... My god! ... What's that above me? ... I see a large silvery triangular shaped craft descending through the clouds... slowly... silently... now it's hovering over the mesa. The craft has no windows of any kind; its surface is just seamless gleaming metal. Around the craft is a glow of energy... pulsing blue hazy light. Hmm... sort of reminds me of that strange blue sphere in my final moments in the lab... coincidence?

There's downward movement again and the craft is gently setting down on the mesa. The energy field around the craft slowly dims and extinguishes. Seams in the craft appear, and a ramp lowers to the mesa... men and women exiting slowly... they're looking all around them carefully. I can hardly believe my eyes! ... Yes... the crew is Sarn, but they're dressed in modern looking clothing! Wait... something odd... the crew doesn't seem to have the same physical stature, as well as the build of the villagers here on this planet. In fact, they're very similar to humans in their physical size. I can only assume that centuries of existence on this planet with the richer oxygen atmosphere, pure foods and pristine environment have allowed the Sarn to reach their full genetic potential.

I can see the look of astonishment on their faces, all of them are pointing at everything around them to the others. I'd bet they are experiencing the same emotions we had when Maeya and I first saw this place! Some of them are standing near the edge of the mesa, where Maeya and I will be so many centuries and generations later, looking at the far horizon. Others are making their way down the incline towards the shore of the lake. I'm amazed at this vision of the Sarn. It's like being in a time machine! I can see that the members of the crew that have made their way down the incline are pointing to the waterfowl that are swimming near the center island in the lake.

Some of them are reaching into the trees, gathering nuts, and a couple of them notice the vegetable plants around the trees. The Sarn that were looking out over the mesa are joining the others, having walked down to the lake path. Now, all of them have seated themselves under the trees and are just talking and taking in the view of the waterfalls. Looking at the expressions on their faces, they can't believe the beauty around them as they point to the waterfalls and see the many rainbows formed in the mists that the falls create.

So, these beings are Maeya's Ancient Ones... her ancestors... this is incredible! The Sarn originally came from another planet! The ripples again ... the scene before me blurs...

the Sarn are gone. I assume that I am now viewing the present... yes... Maeya and I are again on the mesa.

The Life Force speaks ...

Yes Jim, the very mesa that you and Maeya are seated was where the Sarn first set their craft down when they came to this world two thousand years ago. As you saw, this Land of the Waterfalls has not changed much since then. The Sarn left all as it was, and spread out from here to the surrounding lands.

You now know the secret that was hid from the second generation of Sarn to the present...

The Sarn are not native to this world's physical existence. The Sarn came from a distant world, like you have. Their world was dying. Sarnia's planet followed the path of technology after forsaking the Principles of Life millennia ago.

Sarnia's inhabitants, as well as the animal and plant life suffered for several centuries following an industrial period that placed financial profits above all. The ecosystem was pushed passed the breaking point by the toxins generated from technological processes around the planet that made their way into the air, farmlands, and water supplies. Later, deadly contaminants from nuclear materials entered into that world's oceans. Numerous wars spread the same contaminants over land masses. The inhabitants suffered from these calamities, as well as from a medical system that simply couldn't keep up with the many deadly diseases that seemingly sprung from nowhere. The inhabitants didn't realize that the toxin levels, as well as the level of radioactivity in the environment was just too high for their bodies to maintain life. Besides the inhabitants, the higher forms of mammalian life went extinct due to the die-off of lower forms of animals in their food chain. The larger creatures in the oceans died off as well as the radiation and other forms of pollution killed off the plankton that the smaller fish lived on. Time was running out for the Sarn.

A very small group of the Sarn had secretly built a craft that would carry them beyond the confines of their world. The craft also had the capability of traversing time and space. Even though this small group was technologically minded, they did have a very

rudimentary understanding of the Principles of Life, and despised everything that their world's system had done to their planet. This group numbered twenty-five beings.

After escaping the gravitational pull of their planet, they used most of the remaining power that the craft had available to generate the time-space vortex that ultimately brought them here... many millions of light-years from their home planet. Soon after their craft emerged from the vortex, they noticed this world within the range of their instrumentation. They directed their craft to hover and observe this world. They scanned it and found that there were no higher life forms such as themselves. They decided that it was exactly what they were looking for to start a new life.

I remember them standing for the first time on this soil in awe, looking in every direction at that which was before them. I saw their exhilaration as they drew their first breaths of the pure air this world provided them. They were moved to tears when they beheld the natural beauty of this world. They saw a planet teeming with an uncountable number of species... so many diverse life forms... shapes and colors... never before seen by any of them. They were amazed with the abundance of nutritious foods available, just within a short walking distance of their craft.

I watched over them as they explored this world in awe and humility, carefully treading wherever they went as to not disturb the existing systems of life. I watched them when they first discovered the sweet yellow flower that provides the path to my consciousness. I purposely made that life form very attractive to the physical senses so that I could commune with any higher life forms that may find it. As you did, they partook of the flower, and I made myself known to them... as I am making myself known to you now. I taught them the ways of Sibannac.

I embraced them in love and taught them all in much greater detail of the Principles of Life. I carefully explained to them the errors that their race of people had fallen victim to... the errors that ultimately led to the destruction of their entire world. Not only with their words, but deep in their hearts, they forsook all that would lead to Death, and embraced Life.

Shortly after their arrival, they made a pact between them to forsake all inclinations to technology and science... to never allow the fate that befell their home world to ever

occur here. They realized this world had everything that they would ever need, so in a few days came to a unanimous decision to forever sever the bridge to their former world, and its way of life... (really death). They devised a plan to carry out their wishes. They would program their craft to lift off this planet unmanned and escape its gravitational pull. Once it was well beyond the moons of this planet, it would intentionally self-destruct. They set their plan in motion and watched as the craft rose silently and quickly into the heavens, out of their sight, then completely vaporize in a tiny bright flash of white light. They had nothing left from their world other than their memories and the clothing they wore.

I told them all...

Everything before you is yours. You will have all you will ever need for a long, happy and healthy life. Your descendants will prosper for millennia to come... if you embrace the Principles of Life.

I left them with a warning...

If your descendants do not choose Life, but instead follow the path of Death, they will all perish as those in your former world are now presently perishing.

And so they heeded my teaching, prospered, and spread their kind over the surface of this planet, taking with them in their hearts, the Principles of Life. You are, of course, living among their descendents at this present time.

Life Force... I hardly know what to say! I never would have guessed that the people that I now live amongst had such a profound beginning in this world!

Changing the topic, I say; now I see why Maeya and Bren couldn't tell me what I needed to know about the Sarn origins. Maeya, being from a completely native culture and mindset cannot fathom or understand the things pertaining to a technological world. "Yes, you are quite correct, and conversely there are many things that she understands about the life forms here and it's interconnection to my Life Force that you are incapable of understanding. Her mind is at least and probably more intellectually developed than yours. I can converse with her in as deep a level as I do with you. The difference between the two of you is that her mind operates in the natural realm... and yours is in the technical abstract realm.

Well Jim, it has been a pleasure talking with you. Again, you have come a long way from where you were in your life. I am so pleased with you! I wish I had better news to give you concerning your old home. I'd suggest you just move on now, forget your old dying world, and enjoy the rest of your life here.

Life Force, I thank you so much for your love of Maeya and I, and also for your wisdom! I have really enjoyed our conversation. Goodbye... for now.

With that, I hear no more words from the Life Force.

Well, I finally have the complete picture! From this land, the Sarn became a tribe of people that forsook so-called civilization and a technical lifestyle, spread out into their new world, and lived out their lives in a purely natural existence. The Sarn found the path to the Life Force that allowed them to learn and follow the path of Life.

The original twenty-five Ancient Ones kept the memory of their former way of life locked away, and never communicated that "life" to the children they bore. They let the knowledge of the path of Death die with them. They were wise enough to know that any communication of their former life to their offspring would end up contaminating this world also... eventually leading to the same results as before... the very same results that they were fleeing from.

Their complete repudiation of their former technological life gave their race a new lease on life in this new world. Their old ones in every generation would make known and pass on to the next generation the Principles of Life. They carefully taught their children to listen to those women like Maeya that the Life Force would make herself known to. Their descendants were blessed with all that this new world had to offer... a pristine environment that would allow them to achieve the maximum potential of their species... mentally, physically, and most important... spiritually. Their kind would thrive from birth to a long and healthy life filled with joy and true freedom. A physical existence here just couldn't be any better anywhere else. They lack for nothing!

One wonders, if someday in the future, that this people will forsake the Principles of Life and start the process towards destruction. Who knows? I really don't want to dwell on that idea. It's too painful for me to even consider. I know that I'll never be the one to set

that process in motion. I'll carry the memories and actions of my former life to my grave. That's where they belong.

I direct my vision to the mesa and see Maeya and I, and our belongings. Hey... what's happening? ... I can feel my being starting to descend. The mesa is slowly moving up towards me. I'm moving towards my body. Oh! ... all of a sudden I feel a jolt... I am sitting next to her again, and in my body. Being back in my body now feels so very strange! Sitting here, I close my eyes for just a minute and let things settle down. Looking over at Maeya, she's flat on her back, her eyes are closed, and she's lying very still. I'll just let her be while I enjoy the view. What an incredible experience!

Just being here in this "Garden of Eden" with the one I love is fantastic, but also having another encounter with the Life Force showing me "beginnings" was over the top! My god, my life is wonderful! ... I can hear a change in her breathing... she's moving a bit... I can tell that she's waking. She whispers... "Zhimm"... I take her by the arm and slowly help her sit up. Putting her arm around me, she lays her head against mine, and says nothing for a couple of minutes, probably gathering her thoughts as I was. She gently turns my face toward hers and kisses me. "Maeya, just rest and sit with me for a while." She just smiles and rests her head against mine.

So we enjoy the rest of the evening... strolling along the lake, just watching all the life forms going about the activities of their lives. I have never felt as relaxed and at peace as I do now.

Chapter 31

A few hours later...

Darkness will soon be closing in fast, so we roll out our blanket on the mesa and sit and watch the sun setting over the forest canopy. We're just watching the large flocks of birds thinning out as they seek places to roost for the night. The sunset is so beautiful from this vantage point... it looks like a painting!

The sun is but a glow over the horizon with brilliant yellow and red colors tinting the clouds. We can feel coolness in the breeze, now that the sun has dipped below the tree line. "Zhimm, will you get the extra blanket out? I think we'll need it tonight". Taking the blanket from the backpack, I leave it rolled up at our feet. As the darkness deepens, we lie on our backs and look at the stars.

We hear the rustling of the wings of nocturnal birds occasionally, as well as the lonesome calls of wolf creatures. Those creatures really seem to get her attention. When they howl, she listens very intently to them. One would almost think that she knew what they were communicating... no... does she?

Again, I'm just amazed at the clarity of the dark sky here in this world. I know I am looking into the vastness of millions of light-years distance from here! My old astronomy buddies would give their left arm to see a sky as deep as what is above me! She says; I've never seen so much of the sky at night as I'm seeing now... there is nothing blocking the view and it's so beautiful! Yes, Maeya... this is something I know I'll never forget! She reaches over to the rolled up blanket, and unrolls it over us. She turns toward me and says; Hold me close to you. I turn towards her and pull her against me. I lay my head gently on hers and feel her breathe with me... her heart beating next to mine. She has no more words to say, she just wants my arms around her. We fall asleep...

Morning...

After waking, walking along the lakeshore we make our way to the entrance of this land to bathe in the pool alongside the first waterfall. Before we get out of the pool, we just stand in the water for a while with our elbows propped on the edge of the pool, looking out over the lake. We're just watching the birds at the island in the lake going about their activities. Looking over to the other side of the mountainous rim, a breeze is blowing the flowers along the path back and forth in waves. There are so many different colors in motion; it looks like I'm looking into a kaleidoscope! The beauty here is astounding... I just can't get over it!

After our bath, we walk along the lakeshore and decide to sit down and eat breakfast under the shade of the trees. As we are eating, she seems unusually quiet... I can tell something is on her mind...

Finishing up our meal, she says, something happened to me while we were on the mesa yesterday that I'm really having a difficult time putting into words. I was sitting with you, looking out over this land, and found my inner being flooded with images and information in a manner that I've never experienced before. Since that happened, I now have so much more of an understanding of what is taking place around me. I'm seeing relationships between the life forms here in a far deeper manner than I have understood previously. I'm seeing species of plant life in my mind that exist here that are of benefit to our well being that I haven't noticed before... and Zhimm... there is something else...

She stops speaking for a few seconds, gathers her thoughts and says; Please turn towards me and come closer. I turn and face her, looking her in the eyes. She gently places her hands on my face and says, May I ask that you trust me again? "Yes Maeya... always." Close your eyes. I do as she asks. She says; I want you to clear your mind and just sit calmly. I do as she says, not thinking at all and ... Whoa! ... I see an image slowly forming in my mind... what is it? ... It's slowly getting clearer now... it's Maeya! She's standing with her arms outstretched to me, and there is a bright yellow aura shimmering all around her... I can see nothing else. My being seems to be slowly moving towards her image... it's so strange. I'm feeling like I did while I was hovering over the mesa... out of body. My being is nearly in her arms... Her arms start to wrap around me and pull me tightly against her. Whooooo! What's happening! This is so strange... my consciousness... is starting to merge into hers! I attempt to pull back... "Maeya!"... I can hear her thoughts clearly speaking to my inner being... Zhimm... don't be afraid! ... I love you... trust me! Hearing her words, I just... let go.

My entire consciousness immerses itself into the image that is now embracing me. At this instant, I am completely overwhelmed with the thoughts she is thinking and emotions that she is presently experiencing. We are one being! How is this... my god, I can't believe this is happening... this is awesome! I am experiencing everything that she is feeling at this time... her love is so intense for me! I can feel her emotional being responding so intensely to my love for her! This is so far beyond words! What is happening to us now is so far beyond even the physical intimacy of our relationship... this is incredible! My words seem meaningless to describe what is happening... There is presently nothing else but the powerful energy of love flowing into us, through us ... we are one... we

are one! This is so ... how can I describe this... like we are embracing in the midst of a waterfall that is cascading down upon us... rivers of love from her being are pouring out upon me. I know and feel every response from her innermost being as my love for her flows over her... She knows and feels my every thought and emotion... and I hers... everything in my innermost being that I feel for her... She knows!!

Wait... no...

Maeya! ... no!... Slowly... I feel my being starting to withdraw from hers... I'm moving away ... her arms still reach out for me as I'm moving slowly but steadily away from her image... no ... not now!

... no longer immersed within her embrace... her image is fading into blackness in my mind.

I am again opposite her... and I feel so alone! I slowly open my eyes and see her still sitting as she was... now with eyes closed and tears streaming down her face. I speak softly... Maeya? It takes a few seconds for her to respond, but she slowly opens her eyes as I wrap my arms around her and gently lay her down on her side, facing me. We look into each other's eyes and tears just flow from mine... Maeya, my god, I'm... She can hardly speak... she softly whispers; Zhimm... there are... no words to say... just hold me... don't let go. We just lay here and let time move on...

Later...

We gather our belongings and take one last walk to the mesa. We stand and embrace... just taking in all we can of the view before heading back. I'm still so overwhelmed by what took place earlier... I have to ask her; "Maeya, while we were under the shade trees, how did you"... she interrupts saying, what we've shared was a gift to me from the Life Force. I'll cherish what we've experienced here for the rest of my life. Looking into her eyes, I simply say, Maeya, you know I feel the same way.

Turning towards the lake, we slowly walk down from the mesa without speaking. I think the experiences we've shared in this place are still overwhelming us. Now that we're alongside the lake, I lead Maeya from the path and down to the shore of the lake. Standing at the shoreline, we kick our sandals off. Both of us take a seat on the sandy shore facing the island in the lake with our feet in the water. At this time, the sky is partly cloudy,

allowing us to see into the water a short distance past our feet. We sit very still and watch a school of fish swimming close to us. They detect even a very small movement of my feet and very quickly vanish from view. You know, I still can't get over the peacefulness of this place. Even the sound of the water cascading down the rim on the other side of the lake has such a calming effect on us!

Hmmm... our eyes meet without speaking a word... it seems Maeya has the same idea at the same time that I do! We turn towards each other and embrace with a kiss. As our lips meet, she closes her eyes and we recline right here on the shoreline. Lying here with her in this beautiful place... it seems like there is nothing else to think... much less worry about at this time... nothing in this entire universe to do other than embrace this woman I love...

Later...

We make our way back to the path on the shore. Again, we refrain from speaking as we are on the path walking; we just walk slowly hand in hand. As we approach the entrance to this land, I say; Maeya, it's going to be so difficult to leave this beautiful place, but I think we should start heading back to our village... back to our people. "Yes... we should... I feel like I could stay here for the rest of my life with you, but we have loved ones that are also a part of our lives. You know, I'm so glad that you brought me here with you!" I wouldn't have dreamed of coming here without you Maeya... well... let's start heading back! We strap on our backpacks, and approaching the entrance, we stop and turn around towards the lake... taking our last look. Tears well up in her eyes as she says, Will we return to this place someday? Yes Maeya, I would love to return here someday with you! She smiles and takes my hand as we turn toward the entrance again and walk away from the Land of the Waterfalls.

On our way home...

I've noticed something different about Maeya as we're traveling through the forests since leaving the waterfalls. She seems to be more distracted by our surroundings. Stopping, I say to her; Maeya, you seem to be preoccupied with something... what's going on? "Remember that I told you that my encounter back at the falls had left me with a greater awareness of the life forms around me"? Yes. "Well, I'm seeing quite a number of

things in the forest around me that I've never noticed before and I'm making mental notes for later. I know that we'll be real busy for the first couple of weeks of our new life together in the village. We'll have our celebration to look forward to, and we'll have to spend some time preparing our hut for our life together. Maybe in a few weeks after we get back I can follow up on some of the things I've been shown and put them to good use". I tell her; Maeya, I'd like to be at your side as you do if you don't mind. She stops walking, looks me in the eyes and smiles as she wraps her arms around my neck pulling me close and says; I was hoping you'd say that!

Walking along, I have time to really think about my life here...

My life has changed so much since I've been in this world, and especially since I've entered into this relationship with Maeya. This world is a wild, wonderful, beautiful place to live, but I never would have fully appreciated what is all around me, had we never met. When I first started to talk with her, I was attracted to her, not only physically, but also because of the quiet "mystery" about her. Now, I still appreciate her physical beauty, but because of her I see this world... everything around me, with new eyes. Talking with her, on the many walks we have taken through the forests and the grasslands of this world, has been an extraordinary experience.

When I first arrived in this world, I immediately noticed the many varied life forms that were interacting all around me. It was quite a change from Earth, where nearly everything around me was non-living... concrete, asphalt, steel and glass. There, real nature was practically non-existent. Even when I was away from the cities, in the rural areas of Earth, the land was just a pale shadow of what surrounds me in this world.

Since I've been with Maeya, I've learned to be observant of what takes place around me. As we spent time together, she would point out even the simplest form of life to me and was able to draw my attention to things that would display the complexity and wonder of wild nature. Since then, I've grown to love being among all the flying, crawling, swimming, running creatures that surround me... birds, mammals, fish, reptiles... all of so many varying species. Besides the animal life all around us... the incredible diversity of the plant life ... the many medicinal plants for our well-being, as well as the uncountable species of beautiful flowering plants all around us that support the insect life. Insect life that supports the pollination of all the fruit and vegetable plants to make for such a varied

and wholesome diet for all the animals here... and us! Nature's microbial, as well as mycelial life... the fungi, acting as the almost unseen "recyclers" to take that which has experienced death in the forest and reclaim it... turning it into rich soil to bring forth and nourish life again... to make (and keep) this world such a beautiful and abundant place to live. It's all about balance... the incredibly complex and delicate balance that intelligence far greater than ours has set in motion.

Trying to think back... to my old life... I fully realize the meager existence that my fellow humans and I lived under... a world where the natural beauty and wonder of wild nature had been crushed underfoot and paved over with asphalt and concrete. We were all too blind to see that we were so much the poorer as an artificial soul-less man-made system relentlessly destroyed and replaced that which was so wonderfully placed into existence by the Creator of All Things. I believe that if only we all could somehow see a "vision" of our Earth, like what I saw of this planet while at the Waterfalls, before the human race began to tear nature apart, we would finally comprehend the incredible stupidity of our actions.

After seeing this vision, we would finally turn inward... looking into ourselves as we ask the question... is what we see all around us now... was it worth the loss of paradise? We now have a ravaged, sick and dying world... and we find ourselves completely dominated by those that only see Earth as an economic opportunity for themselves... at the expense of everyone and everything else.

As I'm thinking these thoughts as we're walking along, I take Maeya by the hand and just smile at her. She looks me in the eyes and her face just seems to glow as she smiles at me. It seems she knows the thoughts I'm thinking of her world at this time... I believe she does! My love and appreciation for her is just something I can't put into words!

Later...

It began to rain as we were nearing the village closest to the land of the waterfalls. When we came into the village, we stopped at Shura's hut. She promptly rounded up some of her neighbors and they were kind enough to prepare a vacant hut for us to spend the night in. Come morning, Maeya and I thanked all for their hospitality after having breakfast with them.

Late in the morning of the next day...

Entering Sar and Giff's former village, Romm and Kara saw us coming up the path to the entrance and ran out to greet us. We all gave each other a big hug. They wanted to know how the journey went, so we spent some time in their hut with them. After chatting for a while, we attended one of the villages outdoor "get-togethers" and had a good time socializing with their friends and neighbors. We stayed the night... sleeping in the hut that Sar had mentioned to us. We made sure we got up and got going early the following morning in order to get a good start on the last leg of our journey.

The next day...

We've made sure as we traveled today that we didn't take too much time when we stopped to eat and take rest breaks. We want to make sure we arrive home before nightfall. We're starting to fatigue but we know we're so close to home!

Later in the afternoon ...

We'll be exiting the forest very soon... we're probably about a mile from our village now. It sure has been a long and physically demanding journey! We're still so overwhelmed by our experiences at the Land of the Waterfalls, as well as the many natural wonders of the places we have seen between the villages, but now we're tired and just want to be home with loved ones.

Emerging from the forest, we make our way past the sibannac fields. There's no one working there now as we walk past. In the distance, we see our village. As we quicken our steps, Maeya's face is glowing with the expectation of seeing our loved ones and just being home with them again. We see people moving about the village!

As we make our way under the shade trees where the squirrels chase each other, she says, Look! We see a few villagers running towards the hut areas and they seem to be saying something to the others up there. We're jogging up the path into the hut areas. While we jog, we slip off our backpacks and just cast them alongside my hut. She spots Trem and Leea and takes off in a run. I'm falling behind... I can't keep up with her!

She cries out... Mom! ... Dad! Looking around, I see the entire village gathering around Trem and Leea's hut. Maeya gets there first and throws her arms around her parents... her tears just streaming down her face. I finally catch up... reaching out; I wrap

my arms around all of them. Leea says, Oh Maeya, I'm so glad to see the both of you again! We've missed you so much! Leea places the palms of her hands on the sides of Maeya's face; looks into her eyes, and her tears just flow like water. She takes her fingertips and places them on the lavender coloring on the corners of her eyes and cries, Oh Maeya... I'm so happy for you! She pulls Maeya against her, resting her head on her shoulder... embracing, still weeping.

Trem, with a big smile on his face, hugs me and says, Welcome home son! "I'm so glad to be home, Trem!" After he hugs me, he turns to Leea and says, Leea, may I give our daughter a hug? Leea reluctantly lets go of her and takes a step back, wiping her tears away. Trem wraps his arms around his daughter and gives her a big hug. Maeya says, Oh dad, I missed you all so much! She buries her head in her dad's shoulder for a few seconds and cries. Reaching up, she gives him a kiss on the cheek. Trem places the palms of his hands on Maeya's face and looks at her closely. Tears well up in his eyes and he says, Maeya... my precious girl... I love you so much! He pulls her close to him and places his hand on the back of her head, and gently pulls her head against his shoulder.

Sar and Terra are right alongside, waiting to greet us. Trem lets go of Maeya as Terra steps up with tears in her eyes and pulls Maeya with both of her arms towards her. "Sis, I am so happy to see you again. You look so beautiful!" Sar grabs me and gives me a big hug and we clasp hands. He says, Congratulations Zhimm... and it's great to have you back! "It's great to be back Sar!"

After greeting the family, we speak briefly with all the villagers who are here to welcome us home. It's such a great feeling to see this outpouring of love from all of them! After we chat briefly with everyone, they wish us well and leave so that we can be with our family. Trem, Leea, Sar and Terra are alone with Maeya and I, in front of Trem's hut. Sar speaks up and says, Zhimm, Maeya, we have something to show you! "Ok, we'll follow you." Sar and Terra lead the way, with Trem and Leea behind them. Maeya and I hold hands, following behind them. They walk us over to my hut and they all stand to the side of the entrance. Sar says; why don't you take Maeya in your hut now? "Ok." I take her by the hand as I step through the entrance and help her through.

Now inside, we look around. For a minute, I thought I was in the wrong hut! Everything inside is new! There are all sorts of rolled up items on the wall, a new table, two

new chairs, and a brand new bed that is made for two! Even the cloth coverings for ventilation and windows have been replaced! Maeya is speechless and so happy at the sight of it all! We run out of the hut and hug them all again. Sar says; so many in the village thought that you could use some new items in the hut. They said they wished to contribute their time and make you these fine things. "Sar, this gift to Maeya and I was so thoughtful. I thank you, and I will thank the villagers."

With that, Trem says; let's let Maeya and Zhimm rest after their long journey, in their new home, and we'll see them tomorrow. We wave goodbye to them as they make their way back to their huts. We enter our hut and look all around at the new furnishings that the villagers have made us. She tells me; this was so very kind of them. They love us so much! "You're right. It's great to be home among loved ones, isn't it"? Yes, I'm so happy to be back home... and so tired! "I know. Let's just have a small meal and go to bed". She says; Sounds good to me!

I notice the villagers have left some fruit and nuts in a couple bowls on the table for us, so we just eat a little from that. We're really more tired than hungry or thirsty but we need to eat and drink something before going to bed. We hadn't eaten in the forest as we were nearing home because we wanted to save the time and make sure we got home before dark. We're not talking much while eating; we're just too tired!

After eating, we just crawl into bed... it's not even totally dark yet. Maeya curls up against me, and is asleep in less than a minute! I just take a few glances around the hut... looking at all the new things and fall asleep...

Chapter 32

I awake to find that Maeya is still lying against me in the same position she was when she fell asleep! She must have been so tired that she didn't even move during the night. She is still sound asleep so I just lay here with my eyes open, listening to the villagers moving about as they start out their day.

I'm just thinking... the noisy morning "wake ups" that I had in my old apartment back on Earth are just a dim memory now. Here, it's just the sounds of nature and people quietly going about their business knowing others may be still asleep. Maeya stirs and I feel her pulling herself close to me again. She whispers a quiet "I love you" in my ear and kisses me on the neck. I tell her, Good morning beautiful! ... turning around towards her as I pull her close again.

Looking into her eyes, I whisper... and how was your first night in our new home? "I can't believe how well I slept Zhimm. I must have been more tired than I realized. It seems that I'm still dreaming... lying here with you in our home with new furnishings!" I know how you feel Maeya... part of my dream seems to be waking in the morning with you in my arms! She smiles at me, closes her eyes and kisses me as she pulls herself against me. We embrace for a few minutes and attempt to build up enough ambition to get up and start our day...

Getting out of bed, we slowly gather up some fresh clothing for a trip down to the bathing area. We're making our way down the path with our clothing and part ways as the paths diverge at the creek. Entering that cool water...this is really waking me up! The men bathing in the creek are in a happy mood, joking with each other. They're telling me how happy they were for us when they first heard about Maeya and I, and our journey. I'm sure Maeya is getting the same attention at her bathing area.

We return from bathing and make our way back to the hut to eat. Terra calls from outside our hut and says, Zhimm, Maeya... would you come to our hut and eat with us? "Sure, we haven't yet prepared anything to eat." Following Terra to our families hut, we enter and sit down with her parents, along with Sar and Terra. They're all so happy that we have stopped in for breakfast. We sit down and pass all that good food around! While eating, Leea says, we were surprised to see you coming into the village yesterday! We really didn't know what day we would see you come back. Leea, I understand. That was such a long way to travel for us to keep to a schedule. We really didn't know when we would get back either.

Finishing our meal, the four want to know all about our journey. Sitting with them in the hut, we tell them about the things we saw all along the way, and also the people we

met. We tell Sar about meeting his parents, and that they send their love to him. They're especially interested to hear us as we describe the Land of the Waterfalls.

After we tell them about the beauty of the Waterfalls, I say; well all, Maeya and I are still tired from our travel and we'd like to just take it easy for the rest of the day. Do you mind? Leea smiles and says, "We understand... but remember... you have a big day ahead of you tomorrow", so we hug them all and leave the hut.

Later...

Maeya and I spend the day just walking around the village. We talk for the first time about the merging of our inner beings that we had shared together at the Land of the Waterfalls. She stops walking, turns toward me, wraps her arms around me and says; Zhimm, I believe that the gift from the Life Force that we experienced back in that land has drawn us closer together than two people could ever be in this life. There are no more words to express how I know... really know... the love you have for me!

I can't speak anymore... I just embrace her as we stand... I have tears in my eyes just thinking about her love that poured out upon my innermost being at the falls. She's not speaking either... her arms wrap tightly around me. I feel her warm tears falling upon and running down my chest...

Later...

Walking along... we chat briefly with many of the villagers who ask about our journey. Afterward, Maeya and I leave them and we proceed to walk down to the flat rock near the bathing area. We take a seat and just spend some time talking with each other. We talk of the experiences of our journey while watching the sun go down. Our journey was wonderful, but it's sure great to be home!

As it is getting dark, we walk back to our hut and get ready for bed. We know we'll be quite busy tomorrow! We climb in bed, and kiss each other good night. Maeya curls up against me and falls asleep so quickly! I really have too much on my mind, I guess, to fall right to sleep. I'm thinking about my last chat with the Life Force, and my life here since I first arrived.

Are the Sarn inherently different from humans? There is no violence here, no wars, everyone seems to respect and love one another. I think the worst case of violence I'd ever

see here would be a squabble between two men over a potential mate! There really isn't much else to fight over! Could it be that the obeying of the Principles has brought so much abundance to this people that there is so little to fight about? Or could it be, since their life is so uncomplicated by the lack of technology, that there is a lot of "space" left inside their being to develop a spiritual, loving nature?

On Earth, our lives have to be so complicated to comply with all the demands upon us of everyday life by the system itself, not to mention our desire of possessions... baubles that we think will make us happy, that there is very little space left in us to develop any kind of spiritual life. Other people just become an annoyance to us because they want space in our lives that we just don't have any more of. We get frustrated, angry, and sometimes lash out at those around us because we just have too much stuff in our lives to handle. We turn to... television, alcohol, Hollywood... anything that will dull the senses so that we can turn off the world around us that increasingly demands more than we can supply. Multiply all this stress by the number of people crammed into a given location, and what do you think the result will be?

What has all of this complication done for us? Why do we think we need it? Hasn't this path of technology just taken us away from where we really should be?

Why am I laying here, losing sleep, still dwelling on Earth's problems? I should take the Life Force's advice... and just get on with my life. That old life is over... gone forever, I live here now. The problems that I've had there are over for me... thank god! I've got to quit thinking and get some sleep...

Chapter 33

Morning finds us waking to the sounds of a village in preparation for a celebration! Time to get moving down to the bathing area. Getting dressed, we grab some clean clothing and head out. Down at the bathing area, everyone is in a festive mood and all are looking forward to the day's activities.

Walking back from the bathing area, we place our damp clothing out to dry, and head over to Trem and Leea's hut. Yesterday, Leea told us to come for breakfast again. Noticing that preparations are being made in the feast area, some of the men are placing the stalks of sibannac on either side of altar. The women are placing mats down in the area where we'll be sitting.

Arriving at the hut, I call out to her and she says, come in! We enter as Leea clasps her hands and says, Oh, this is such a wonderful day! Come and sit down so we can eat breakfast. The four of us sit, pass the food around and begin eating. Terra is with us; Sar and Trem are out taking care of details for the feast. Among other things, they're probably talking with Bren about officiating the ceremony for Maeya and I.

While we're eating, Terra speaks up and says, Zhimm, we women are going to be very busy today making preparations in this hut for the celebration. I would like you to leave Maeya with us after we eat breakfast, and you can go and help Sar and Trem, if you would. "Sure, I don't think I'd be as helpful to you women anyway as I would helping Sar." Terra says; Thanks Zhimm. While you are gone, I think that Leea and I will work on making some of the decorations and food. I'm also going to visit some of the other women in the village and see what foods they will be making. I'll make sure that we all make something different so that there will be a nice variety of foods for all.

She turns to Maeya and asks, "I know you will be so busy, but will you please find time to make the ganzhia for this feast? The ganzhia that you made at Giff's and De-nay's celebration... Wow! ... Absolutely delightful! "Sure Sis, I'm so glad you liked it!"

I finish eating and say, Well, I think I'll go and find Sar. There's plenty to do around the village, and I'd better get going. See you all later! Giving Maeya a kiss, I turn and leave the hut. On my way, I happen to look back towards the hut and notice De-nay' entering, carrying what seems to be a large purse or something. Most likely she is bringing Leea decorations for the feast area. I finally find Sar. He's gathering containers to bring some water from the creek. "Sar, give me two of those and we'll both walk down to the creek." He says; Sure, take these, as we walk down to the creek and fill our containers.

While walking back, I tell Sar; you know, Terra ran me out of the hut and told me to make myself useful and go help you! Sar just about died laughing and says, "I know what

you mean, and she tells me just about the same thing quite often"! We know that we're just kidding, but we also know Terra has her own way of taking care of things that need to get done.

Sar and I give the water to the women that were waiting for it near the feast area. We catch up with Trem and he says, I've been to see Bren. I gave him the leaves to make the sibannac wreaths for you and Maeya, and for himself. He'll leave his hut and walk to ours when he gets word from one of the children that we will send to him. I tell him; well then, that detail is taken care of. Sar, I think I'm going to stay in the feast area and just help the women here that need someone to carry all the utensils and cloths to the mat areas where people will be sitting. "Fine, I'll make sure that there are shortened sibannac stalks for the children to dance with". Trem says, I'm going to inquire about the ceremonial mat that you and Maeya will kneel on. I tell them, Ok, sounds like we all have our jobs. I'll see you later men!

So we were all quite busy the entire morning and into the afternoon, other than for a few short breaks, and for lunch. A couple times I walked to the hut to check on Maeya, but Terra saw me coming, came out the hut (blocking the entrance) and promptly shooed me away before I could enter! She said, Maeya is much too busy to be distracted, Zhimm. She has so many things to do! I could tell that she didn't mean it in an unkind way, she smiled the whole time she said it... (But she did mean business!).

Mid-afternoon...

Everything is in place for our ceremony at last! Sar and I are finishing up the last of the jobs that need to be taken care of for the women at the feast area. We notice that the villagers have their heads turned and are looking past the hut area to the path that leads to the bathing area.

We turn to look to see what the attraction is. Up the path and into the hut area are so many people coming in from the other villages! I've never seen so many people coming in to our village at one time! I see Romm and Kara... also Devun, and Maeya's three friends... others that I don't know their names. Sar says, I'm seeing a number of people also coming in from the village to the east of us. These people all had backpacks, and were

also carrying food with them that they have probably gathered before arriving here. What a turnout!

Sar and I make our way to Trem and Leea's hut. Leea comes out to meet us, smiling, and says; No farther Zhimm ... you wait right here! I simply say, "Yes Leea"... and I just stand by the door. She adds; "We've already sent one of the children to tell Bren that it's time to walk down to our hut". She turns and goes back into the hut. As I look around us, many villagers have assembled themselves around our hut. The rest of the crowd is gathered near, but not at the feast area... they stay behind the mats that are placed there.

I hear someone say; Shhh, here comes Bren now! He approaches our hut slowly, smiling with his head held high. He stops about fifteen feet in front of the doorway and turns his back towards it, standing tall. Trem and Leea exit their hut and stand side by side behind him. Terra steps out of the hut and Sar, who was standing next to me, joins her and they both stand behind Trem and Leea. Terra has a flower that looks like an orchid pinned in her hair. She looks so beautiful and her face just radiates joy as she smiles. I'm next... and where's Maeya?

I see De-nay' exit the hut. She's standing alongside the doorway and pulls the heavy cloth back and holds it open. Everyone in the crowd is watching the hut as Maeya steps out... Wow! ... I've never seen her look like this before! Her hair has been put up in a lovely style with a tiara woven from small yellow flowers. Strings of yellow stones are around her ankles, wrists and neck. She's wearing a beautifully embroidered, layered skirt and belt with matching sandals. What intricate designs! Now I know why De-nay' went to the hut this morning. She's given Maeya these things as a ceremonial gift. What a beautiful gift! She's holding a bouquet made from the sibannac flowering top with yellow orchids in a ring around the base of the plant. Now I know why I kept getting shooed away from the hut! Terra and Leea wanted me to be so surprised when I would see Maeya dressed for the ceremony... and believe me... I am! Stepping alongside of her, she offers me her arm and looks at me with such a beautiful smile. She is simply gorgeous! Smiling to her, I take her by the arm, and the entire party starts moving along with Bren leading.

As we proceed ahead, the villagers start gathering behind, walking with us toward the ceremonial area. As Bren nears the area, Trem and Leea, Sar and Terra step aside and

allow us to follow directly behind Bren. Taking his place between the sibannac stalks, we turn towards the crowd and stand alongside him.

Turning towards the feast area, he stands still, with the basket at his chest. Bren nods and our family takes their seat near the altar. As they are seated, the villagers take their seats. As the villagers sit, the children come from the small hut nearby with their stalks. Music can be heard, starting in a low volume. The children dance with the stalks but this time they stop afterward and bend down on one knee with one end of the stalk on the ground, the flowered end resting on their shoulder. They move their arms and hands to the sound of the drum and the soft flute.

After the dance, the children place the stalks back with the others and go back to the hut. The villagers acknowledge them with cheer. Two of the children come from the hut, bring the ceremonial mat to us, place it in front of Bren, then leave. Bren pauses just a moment, arms uplifted, for the crowd to quiet and says:

Today is such a wonderful day in the life of our village. Let us celebrate with much joy, the union of our beloved Maeya and Zhimm. I need not remind you of what Maeya has meant to our village. Her love for us is so very special, and we now return that love to her.

We are so blessed that the Creator of All Things has seen fit to give her to our humble village.

He motions for Maeya and I to leave his side and kneel at the ceremonial mat, facing him. We kneel, as I hold her hand and look up at him. He reaches into the basket and takes the wreaths made from the sibannac leaves and places them on our heads. He speaks:

"Oh Creator of All Things, as we lovingly obey the Principles of Life, smile upon us and continue to prosper our people and our land. Thank you for bringing Maeya and Zhimm into our lives and bless their union with children that will bring joy to their hearts and to our village.

Zhimm, you have demonstrated your love for our people in so many different ways. We are so proud to have you as one of our own. We love you, as we do our own flesh and blood.

Maeya, you are so blessed to have such a fine mate as Zhimm. May you cherish him all the days of your life, with all your love.

Zhimm, you have our beloved Maeya as your mate. May you always love her with all your heart. May you cherish her, and always be at her side".

He pauses briefly, and says; "It is time for the sacred bowl of Ganzhia to be brought to our new couple!" As he finishes, we see De-nay' emerging from the nearby hut. The villagers' eyes are upon her as she brings the bowl and presents it to Bren. He holds it in front of his chest and waits. After handing the large bowl to Bren, she picks up the basket he had set down and holds it in front of her, standing on the right side of Bren. De-nay' takes one spoon out of the basket and gives it to me. She takes another spoon from the basket and smiles as she gives it to Maeya. Bren kneels down, holding the bowl in front of us. Taking my spoon, I dip it into the ganzhia and hold it up to her mouth. She eats the mixture from my spoon. Maeya places her spoon into the mixture, and I eat from her spoon. De-nay' takes both spoons from us and places them in the basket, standing alongside Bren.

We rise to our feet, holding hands. Bren again holds the bowl of ganzhia to his chest and smiles at us. Taking Maeya into my arms, we kiss. The crowd cheers as we embrace. We turn and face the crowd, waving to them. Bren whispers to me, Do you wish to speak to the people now?

"Yes, I do Bren."

Bren speaks in a loud voice and says, Our dear brother Zhimm wishes to speak to everyone in our village. The crowd hushes...

I say...

"To our people from every village present here, I want you to know I love you all so very much! I came to your land from far away, a stranger, with no one to share life's journey with.

Even though I must have appeared so different from you, from the very beginning of my arrival in your village you have welcomed me into your heart and into your homes. You have treated me with love, and as you would your own flesh and blood. I thank you so much for all of your love!

My life is so blessed to have Maeya as my mate, and all of you as my family! I want you to know that Maeya and I were so surprised to see what you had done for us when we returned home from our journey! We appreciate your gifts for our home that you so lovingly gave. Thank you so much for coming to celebrate the love that Maeya and I have for each other! This is the happiest day of our lives!" I put my arm around her, and we wave again to everyone. The people respond with such a great cheer and music for us... they love us so very much!

Bren raises the bowl of ganzhia above his head and says, everyone, take from the sacred bowl of ganzhia and let the feasting begin! So we sit with our family and celebrate our union. We eat our fill of all the wonderful food prepared by the women of the village.

Afterward, we pass the bowl of ganzhia between us to complete our ceremony. After we eat, everyone in the village is coming to congratulate us. The women hug Maeya and recount the times that she helped their loved ones with her medicinals. They hug me and say that they are so grateful for my help when I was getting to know them in their homes.

A couple hours later...

I'm watching Terra and Leea dancing with each other. Their dance appears to be sort of a mixture of Irish jig and... I'm not sure what! Both of them had their hair up in a lovely hairstyle, but have long since shaken it all down! Sar and Trem are watching the two women and are laughing so hard they can hardly stand up. While I'm watching Terra and Leea, I glance over to see that Maeya and De-nay' are also dancing together to the music... both of them are moving their hands like hula dancers and swaying their hips around. Neither of them has ever danced that style before, so their dance really looks awkward... I can't help but cover my face and laugh!

As I look around, people are simply having a wonderful time celebrating life and love. Children are hugging those around them. Couples, young and old are embracing one another or dancing. Everywhere, I see people enjoying their lives in complete freedom... the freedom that all of us were meant to live our lives in. The freedom from control and domination of others that are merely our equals and not our masters... freedom to be ourselves, and accountable only to the Creator of All Things.

A few minutes ago, Maeya had left Denay', and came over to sit with me. Without speaking a word, she wraps her arm around me and smiles. I kiss her, then she whispers in my ear... Zhimm, I love you. I wrap my arm around her as I look in her eyes saying; Maeya, I love your world, my life, and you know I love you so very much!

The End