

THE  
SUN  
SHARER

*The First of the Sun Sharer Trilogy*

JACK GEORGE  
EDMUNSON

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First edition

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## *Foreword*

**T**here's a beautiful place in Catalonia called Yapanc. It has beautiful people bathed in a beautiful light reflected from the beautiful sea and is tranquilo – quiet, fresh and alive.

The local Health Service actually works, the good schools are free to all and there's very little traffic so it is easy to park in the centre of the sleepy neighbouring town called Palafrio. When you shop, you go to Palafrio's markets for your locally caught fresh fish and other produce. Simple, loose and unpackaged food that you carry around in your hand-woven basket feeling relaxed, having spent time talking to your friends and eating breakfast together sitting outside one of the little cafes in the pretty square.

Then you go home refreshed and happy, feeling at one with a simple life built around real genuine people who share that simplicity.

When the sun goes down you can stand on the hill above Yapanc by El Far – The Lighthouse and watch the sun set behind the hills to the west of Palafrio that is spread far below you, feeling at one with the real world.

In my 'home' of Yapanc I have 'Real Life' where less is truly more.

★ ★ ★

There's a place I originally thought was beautiful in Cheshire called Tettenhill.

My friends were the beautiful people but are now forgotten acquaintances, which in fact they always were.

It constantly seemed to be grey and rainy but as I was always working away from 'home', I can't be totally sure, so maybe it was just dismal in my heart and mind.

You would wait days for a doctor's appointment and then see a locum; pay twelve thousand pounds a year for your child to be in the right school for the right 'friends' and always queue in traffic on the A51 at any time of the day. These queues stretched right into the Sainsbury's car park, even when we went in early or late to miss the stampede for processed and over-packaged food, taken away in a host of plastic bags.

It was a frustrating place. Overheating with people who were preoccupied with possessions like cars and TVs. There were always things to do and so it developed into a meaningless drive to nothingness for many individuals and not just me.

So this was not 'Real Life' and therefore many people were not truly happy.

There is also a hill above Tettenhill as in Yapanç. This is reached via a stunningly beautiful footpath through a valley called Dingle Dell where the trees form a natural tunnel as they lean into the sun. If you walked up this trail you reached a window on the west where you could turn and contemplate the same sunset as in Catalonia but behind the distant Welsh Hills. You could feel at one with the world and be a Sun sharer with a loved one in Yapanç – but of course it's England and there's no time to take spiritually uplifting strolls like that.

★ ★ ★

The places in this story don't matter but the people do.

Because people make life, not places, not possessions, not things.

There is no way you can avoid the highs and lows of life but you will see that 'Real Life' needs those lows to make the highs that much higher.

It's all about what you say and do and not what you think or propose to do.

Doing changes mundane and meaningless to a reality that is exciting and important.

You have to remember that it is down to you only and therefore you cannot blame anyone else for the life that you lead.

Someone said to me at work.

"Jack, why are you going to live in Yapanc?"

This was a question said with an incredulous voice and reinforced by a quizzical look, as if Yapanc was at the end of the world.

"Because, I can," and I left it at that.

## Acknowledgements

**T**o the real Joseph, this book is dedicated to you. You can now understand that I meant what I said and I did exactly what I told you I would do. I had to leave Mummy and I had to go and write my trilogy in Spain.

I'm so sorry that you temporarily lost your Daddy at nine years old.

I vividly remember sitting on an aeroplane rushing back from Hong Kong to see your Mum in hospital and I was terribly worried about you surviving if born eight weeks too early. Whilst looking out of the scratched plastic window and staring intently at the failing sun, I talked directly to you.

I told you about life and I wished it for you and I told you how you must fight.

So it is no surprise that you have proved yourself over the last two years. How you have showed me that you are spiritually strong and that you are aware of the deeper more important things in life.

Now you will realise that we can go on together far better than before with the past fading to nothing as we have forty-six more years ahead of us.

I will always be there for you and so will Nim because I know he is inside of you waiting to be played out to a greater audience.

Love from Dad, seven times as always. x x x x x x x.

## *Acknowledgements*

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Thank you to my trial readers who gave me encouragement to change the many drafts and the confidence to carry on when all seemed impossible. You were great.

Thank you John, Neal, Lulu, Elizabeth, Kate and especially Franny who never lost faith, when others judged us wrongly from a base of their own immorality.

*Jack*

*Written by  
Jack George Edmunson.  
March 2008.*

Exactly fifty-four years after the day I was born in 1954. Everything I do and say is preparing for my death and rebirth into the Collective in 2054. That is my fate and true path and therefore it cannot be changed.





# Tettenhill

## *The beginning of the end*

**E**ach day when eight-year-old Jack arrived home from school he would squat in the window ledge of the modern semi-detached's lounge to be as far away as possible from the foot of the stairs and the ghost that haunted his imagination from somewhere above.

He would squint at any remaining sunlight, desperate to see his Mother returning from work as she strode expectantly up the road, anxious to receive a hug from her handsome little boy.

He was too young to be 'a latch key' kid living near Bewdley in Worcestershire but because of his youthful innocence he noticed things in his loneliness that adults would miss, but accepted his thoughts were never to be shared.

Sometimes, he would gather up all of his courage and quickly stamp up those seven stairs, counting upwards from zero until he leapt onto the top landing where he yelled in a panic stricken and tearful voice.

"Go away! Leave me alone whoever you are; you have no right to be in my Mummy's house!"

Was it a fantasy created by the fear of an imaginative little boy or was it the dawning of his awareness that he had a psychic gift? The fear as he felt unloved and alone needing his Mother to praise

him about the events of his day at school. The unknown gift pushed to one side like the child who needed the love.

But Nim was always there acting as his spirit guide; trying to protect him at that tender age and of course Nim never went away.

So an invisible Nim listened quietly, no matter how often a trembling Jack screamed whilst facing the closed bedroom doors, terrified in case one should open.

Then Nim would smile as he watched the mature child with the brown hair scramble back down the stairs, jumping the last few to resume his safe window perch and listen to his thumping heart.

Jack had been a sensitive and lonely child troubled by the spirit World and would experience those same feelings of insecurity when he became a man living in Catalonia and searching for his true path.

Only then would he understand the reality that knocked on his door just like his beloved Mother.

Inevitably, forty-one years later Jack George Edmunson was still watched by Nim as he pulled his silver Mercedes into the gravel drive of his home in Tettenhill.

It was a 'Cheshire Brick' cottage with a dark blue front door centralised between windows to create a smiling and symmetrical face that stared at the sun warming its south facing walls. Jack adored the mirrored smile when it regarded the summer across the most colourful cottage garden, complete with a living pond that was an inherent part of the beautiful spot.

But on a Friday evening in the winter, and after a gruelling weekly commute home, he was only watched by Nim who remained silent in Jack's mind, repulsed by those original childhood defences.

Jack stared intently to see if his six-year-old son Joseph was waiting for him, sitting in the front bedroom window, but turned away disappointed as he saw the curtains were drawn.

*Jack, listen to me again and start to believe in me.  
I still feel those same fears I sensed in 'little' Jack when  
I watched over you and they will never disappear  
until you find and follow your true path.  
It doesn't matter what you look like Centurion.  
I know your Karma and will always find you after  
every reincarnation.  
You don't remember yet but your time has come again  
and this will be your last opportunity for eternity.*

Jack opened the heavy car door and stood motionless, feeling the light westerly wind on his face carrying a distant voice that he struggled to hear. He wiped his two hands across his nearly bald pate but with his dreamy green eyes he was still handsome as he stretched his arms above him and ignored the voice of his spirit guide.

He looked and thought like a successful businessman.

A small man in a small World who didn't realise that in this Karma he was meant to be a big man in a big World.

Nim was above Jack as he strode purposefully towards the rear entrance of his home, leaving his briefcase, laptop and suitcase in the car boot in his excitement to see his son Jojo. A smiling moon shone above, closely caressed by a few bright white stars.

*I know this man who doesn't understand either his  
history or his destiny.  
Listen to me again Jack; it's been a long time since we  
spoke together.  
You were born in Catalonia sixteen hundred years  
ago and became a proud Roman Legionnaire who  
nobly died for his Sun Sharer.  
Now you must seek her out again to serve your future  
and become my instrument in delivering the  
'fifth World'.*

Jack stepped into the warm cosy kitchen and looked around for his boy.

The only person he could see was his wife Melanie setting out dinner plates on the cherry table of the conservatory. With her short square body, flat head and highlighted blonde hair she was bustling around the table in brown clothes bought that morning in the DKNY shop in Chester. She didn't even turn to face him as she summarily greeted her husband after his week working away from home.

"You're late! If you are going to shower and change you need to hurry up. Everyone is due in a quarter of an hour. Put the new Prada things on that I've left out on the bed." Jack was confused.

"Hello lovely, don't I get a kiss and a cuddle then?" He walked around the large table and received a quick peck on his left cheek as she brushed past on her way back to the cutlery drawer. He smelt the familiar 'White Linen' perfume that instantly turned on his desire but he was dismissed before he could grab and kiss her lips.

"I can't stop now; I need to get on Jack." He could only plaintively ask about his second emotional thought.

"So where's Joseph?"

"I sent him to bed early so that he didn't get overexcited by the dinner party preparations. I didn't want him late to bed."

"And what about me? What about the importance of seeing his Dad for the first time since last Sunday?"

"Precisely, he would have been overexcited by that as well. You'll see him tomorrow so he won't miss you."

"That's very convenient Melanie. Bundle your son into bed early so that it is easier to prepare things to impress your friends." Jack resented the bad welcome from his wife but more especially no loving hugs from his son.

However she didn't reply and he had no time to dwell on his emotions or argue with her, so he went outside to fetch his bags from the car before getting ready for the dinner party.

*Now I understand your circumstances Jack so all you have to do is listen to my story and follow me to relive your past and create your future in Catalonia.*

The wind had risen as he opened the car boot and made him shiver through his thin white shirt as he listened to the rustling leaves left on his neighbour's tall beech tree.

He looked up at the myriad of stars in the clear winter sky and then sadly across to his son's bedroom window.

"Night night Jojo, love you lots." Turning back to the cottage with shoulders bent he crunched his way laden with his heavy load that was more emotional than physical.

That Friday evening six friends arrived at the Edmunson cottage expecting the usual convivial dinner.

Including the hosts there were Peter and Bridget Edam, Jean and Martin Shilling and Matt Diamond with his wife Harriet. They were all long-term acquaintances who lived locally and had been collected by Melanie over the previous ten years through meeting the wives at pre-school events.

Melanie had been planning for days to ensure her 'fab' signature dish of vegetarian lasagne was perfect, but no real time had been wasted out of her busy social schedule as the ingredients had arrived via Ocado's home delivery service.

Jack was slightly tipsy when the guests arrived politely late. The need for a drunken stupor was brought on early by another nagging session shortly after the cool welcome home. This time it was about the choice of clothes he wanted to wear after his power shower in the Matki designer cubicle. Always brand names had to be used in the Cheshire set with a cheap Mira never good enough.

"You can't possibly wear that brown belt with those trousers Jack." Melanie expressed her disgust in a very clipped and exacting voice, clicking the 'ack' part of Jack off the top of her palate to emphasise he was doing wrong. Her husband was perplexed; half his clothes weren't even stored in their bedroom so as to make way for all of hers and so he was still choosing.

"Well, I thought my Mulberry shirt, Church boots and Louis Feraud jacket would look nice with this belt?" She stood with her hands on her expensively clothed hips.

“For God’s sake man. Are you colour blind? Even Joseph would do better than that.”

Her tired partner chipped back. “Okay Melanie, I’d go and ask him but he’s asleep.”

“Look,” she said, “wear a black belt and the Hugo Boss boots with the Prada jacket and you’ll look ‘fab’.”

Jack slunk away to change into exactly as instructed, thinking it was like being dressed as her Barbie Doll but not wanting another fight. They were just clothes after all. He was hoping to keep the peace until bed time to see if he could persuade her to have a quick shag before his bollocks burst with all the pent up semen in them. He quietly went downstairs, to avoid waking Joseph, defeated by his wife for the second time in half an hour. He remembered their first few months together when she was kind and sensitive as he battled with the depression caused by his first wife leaving him for his best friend. Number one had told him on Valentine’s night and left him on Good Friday with his two young children waving goodbye through the back window of her car. So Melanie was convenient. Young, slim and willing to have sex many times a day. A shoulder to cry on and a friend for socialising to avoid the loneliness, but he knew it was wrong even then. However, convenience is what most people are happy to accept in a relationship and his lack of courage and her intense desire to snare a rich husband had kept them together.

The new kitchen area looked resplendent with its oak beams and blue painted island unit. The Emma Bridgewater china at twenty-seven pounds a plate sat ready on the exorbitantly priced granite, specially selected and cut in front of Melanie somewhere in the depths of Birmingham. A small sample would never have been good enough for her to choose from and a trip to Italy would have been preferred but Jack could put his foot down in extreme cases. The stone was black but if you looked closely at the right angle you could see random blue eyes stare back at you.

The lump had changed to match her husband’s attire and

appeared dressed in black to make her look thinner. She always wore trousers since their marriage although a miniskirt would have looked grotesque.

“I see you have got yourself a beer then. Did you even think about getting a drink for me?”

Jack was admonished for the third time since arriving home and silently hurried to open a bottle of Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc as the door bell chimed.

The first arrivals were Jean and Martin.

“Mister Edmunson!” Jean stepped into the kitchen from the porch and kissed him lightly on the lips whilst staring into his eyes as a deliberate tease. Jean could be summed up in three ways. Wild hair, wild thoughts and wild clothes courtesy of the expensive Morgan shop in Chester.

Just three of Melanie’s friends addressed Jack formally. He often wondered why and had vainly concluded that it was to reinforce the physical boundaries whilst giving a sexual tease. ‘You are married keep your cock in your pants’, but each one of them would always kiss him sexily on the lips or hug him close, pushing their breasts or groin into him as a temptation, a flirt without possibilities but this was only when their husbands couldn’t see. This discreet sexual behaviour was used to reinforce their closeted need to feel sexy that is a basic ‘Britishness’ never shared by those from the Mediterranean countries, who always lived their sexuality rather than hiding it away.

However, one of the friends who called him Mister was Bridget and she was different in Jack’s mind. The hug always lingered when she manoeuvred to get ahead or behind her husband on arrival. It was a sensitive touch and was charged with electricity that made them both breathless. Then she would excitedly smile into his eyes reinforcing that theirs was more than a friendship.

Jean pulled away from him with a squeeze to his hip and an outstretched thumb resting lightly on his groin to reveal her husband Martin. He had always hidden behind his wild wife in every way since they were married. He was a typical tax inspector, boring, never leaving the telly in his spare time and never missing a game

of televised football especially if it was Man United. Martin and Jean had been introduced to them by Bridget who was a close friend of Jean since their children went to a privileged school together at the Grange. They had always accompanied each other at school functions as they represented the face of poverty in the parents at the expensive school. It was 'the' school where you sent bright children and the not so clever were always found an alternative but with a plausible excuse from their parents. Sometimes it was the child's dyslexic behaviour or their love of rugby or in fact any excuse implying that the school wasn't suitable for their 'thick' child. So the bright Shillings and Edams went to the Grange and their relatively poor parents spent their money on education and did without the rest of the pretentiousness like the Rolexes and Lexus four-wheel drives. The latter were inevitably driven by the non-working mothers, were powder blue in colour and specifically bought for the half mile of 'off-road' lane that reached to their husband's large mortgage with its ten acres and a pony.

As Jean stepped further into the kitchen to be greeted by Melanie, Jack watched her pert bottom swaying to entice him and secretly envied his best friend Peter, assuming he was having a hidden affair with Jean because of their constant and overt flirting, but as Peter constantly quoted, "A secret is only a secret if you tell it nobody." Jack took that as an affront because it even applied to sharing things with his supposed best male friend. He stopped his pondering and took Martin's proffered woollen overcoat.

"Hi Martin, what sort of a week have you had?"

"Oh you know, so so, not bad, you know." The non-assertive answer came back to kill any potential conversation but that was Martin's character. Bland and boring, a typical taxman who was excited by his figures and ecstatic at every budget.

The tall blonde figure of the beautiful Bridget suddenly appeared behind Martin and so Jack quickly pushed the quiet man towards Melanie to concentrate on the lovely Bridget. But he was too late as her husband Peter ran in through the half open door



behind them. The rough diamond pushed past his demure wife and asked coarsely.

“Hey Edmunson, how’s it hanging mate?”

“Frankly pal, it was great until you turned up.” Jack was sincere in his response as he’d only managed a quick cheek to cheek kiss with Bridget before he took all of their coats upstairs to lay them on his much sought after brand name bed from The White Company.

Doctor Matt Diamond and his wife Harriet arrived half an hour later.

He had been called into surgery at the Crewe General Hospital after yet another car smash on the A51.

Short and stocky with thick horn-rimmed glasses, you would place him as boring but Jack got on well with him, sharing his love of sports, fine wines, fast cars and hi-tech gadgets. Jack shook hands warmly.

“How are you Matt?” The consultant smiled and was happy to see his friend again.

“All the better for a glass of red, old chap, and if you want to crack open this fifteen-year-old claret we can relax into some luxury. You know I’ve had this lying offshore for so many years I thought it had gone into tax exile! Bloody good idea hey Martin?” Matt went over to shake hands with Mister Boring.

“Oh yes, you know, not bad I suppose. Less tax is good yes.” Martin sat on the fence with his reply as always. All of the three men laughed together as Matt then moved on to kiss Melanie.

Matt’s better half or in fact better eighty per cent had quietly lagged behind her husband as usual.

“Well Soul Shiner, have you had a good week too?” Jack was entranced as he greeted Harriet. She had an air about her that was soulful, and living on a higher plane compared to everyone else in their circle of friends.

“I’m fantastic Jack my poppet but did you see the news about the Pakistani earthquake – wasn’t it horrible?” She gave him a

wholesome and genuine hug. “And how are you poppet?” She stroked his right arm with her left hand lying gently on his right shoulder.

“I’m always fantastic too,” replied Jack “it’s just everyone else that’s not.” She laughed and looked with concern into his dark green eyes to read behind the bravado. She had always considered how hard it must be working away from home and the lack of reality in a hotel without his family to relax with each evening.

“Jack, I bought this fantastic print yesterday by Ray Woodard Fairchild. Have you heard of him? I can only say that the picture looks fantastic in our lounge, it’s called Santa Maria Della Salute and is a picture of a church in Venice linked with stories about the Holy Grail. It’s so fantastic! You must come down to the house tomorrow and see it poppet.”

You never knew how to reply to Harriet, whether it was the painting, the potential visit or the use of her constant and embarrassing endearment towards him but by the time Jack had floated by on her wave of soulfulness, she had moved on to Melanie and was into something else fantastic which became ‘fab’ in each of Melanie’s replies. Harriet herself was fantastic which is why he called her Soul Shiner.

She was a red-headed beauty with streaks of grey hair at forty one. Short to match her husband, she was always happy between bouts of extreme caring. Nothing meant more to her than art and the events in the World. If she saw a tragedy like the tsunami as on the previous Boxing Day, she lived and breathed it through the souls of the victims as if she were there in spirit. That was why everyone loved and respected her because she was genuine and never changed her approach with anyone no matter how badly they treated her.

The smoked salmon starters were consumed with a glass of Moet et Chandon to many ‘fantastics’, ‘fabs’, ‘so so’ and ‘not too bads’ and the generalities of children, schools and work. These day to day issues were always essential to digest before the main

course when polite niceties could give way to more relaxed fun. Melanie's vegetarian lasagne was hefted to the table in its giant Bridgewater dish full of enough pasta to feed the party twice over. The very concept of a signature dish which was renowned far and wide in Cheshire worried Jack. It was a delight but he always asked himself why you can't enjoy your friends for friendship and eat normally rather than trying to out do or in this case out 'sign' everyone invited?

Even the new kitchen looked perfect with no sign of any cooking remaining.

The boys were feeling argumentative after a few glasses of claret and as always the girls seemed happy to drive home, although Peter and Bridget only needed to stagger around the corner.

The first personal salvo came from Melanie and continued the cold welcome home. She felt that she had cleaned up behind Jack since his arrival in 'her house' where he was disturbing her routine.

"Bridget. I don't know about you but sometimes I wonder whether it's just Jack or is it all men? They seem incapable of putting the toilet seat down, don't they?"

"Yeah yeah yeah," Jack intoned. She carried on remorselessly as Bridget remained politely quiet.

"Bridget, is it all men who in the dead of every single night seem to miss the toilet completely and pee on the tiled floor?" Melanie was smiling sadistically but Jack couldn't let that one go.

"Well who put white tiles on the new ensuite floor for goodness sake? It's asking for trouble. At least the carpet used to soak it all up before. Anyway, I'm usually so drunk I have to stagger in and sit on the sodding toilet before I fall over and so it must be your fault for standing on the seat and pretending to be a man." The other boys laughed seeing Melanie as a touch manly in her aggressive ways.

"You must find going to the bog a bit wearing Edmunson," chimed in Peter. "Let's face it at your age you are so incontinent you must go ten times a night." Jack smirked.

“That’s not incontinence mate that’s cystitis from having too much sex.”

“In your ‘effing’ dreams,” said Melanie laughing with her girl friends. Jack tantalised her.

“Well, just think, at least you don’t have to put up with me much longer Melanie. Do you realise that statistically speaking I only have sixteen years left to live and you have got thirty-two? That means sixteen more years of hard graft for me and one hundred and ninety two shags.” Peter, his straight man, dived in.

“If you are lucky wanker.” It didn’t matter whether it was him or Jack who used the expletive as they just alternated it randomly with ‘tosser’ as a friendly greeting. Jack continued drunkenly.

“That means just five more shags when I’m on top. That’s sad hey boys! If I’m lucky, Melanie will die first so I can be buried last and have the pleasure of sharing her grave but at least I would be on top forever.”

Melanie wasn’t laughing as she responded but everyone else thought it was funny.

“Well, Jack I need to change my will and make sure I am cremated then.”

The girl boy verbal tennis had barely started. It was the pattern of most nights when they all sat with excess food, booze and the same friends in the dining conservatory next to the new kitchen.

“All men need is a hole to fill,” said Jean as an aside to Bridget. Jack overheard and looked over at Bridget and questioned whether she was his Soul Mate, his true love out of the two point eight billion women on the Earth. He couldn’t resist Jean’s jibe and had to respond.

“Some men have got in touch with their feminine side and are not as insensitive as you make out Jean. Men might need a hole to put their dick into but what they really need is a woman who will pretend that they love their man and appreciate their dick rather than pour scorn on it. A man needs to feel wanted occasionally whereas women need true love all of the time. They want pink clouds and they have a need that only other women can interpret.

That's the emotional difference. But of course I am extremely well in touch with my feminine side."

She leaned back in amazement at his tirade before commenting. "Well that's nice to know Jack. I am almost impressed but why do you feel you are so in touch with it?"

"Well, when I am reincarnated I have told God that I want to come back to Earth as a woman."

"Really?" Jean was amazed and gullible at the same time.

"Yes Jean and then I can spend all day feeling my tits." Jean smiled thinly and put him in his place.

"Trust me that is just your age Jack."

"Oh God Edmunson," Peter slapped the wooden table top "that is so bad but of course you also know there is another symptom of getting old."

"Is that right tosser, what's that then?" Jack was also a good straight man.

"It's when your sperms lose their wiggles wanker."

"Is that right mate? So how do you know that?"

"Well Jack, I tend to find that it makes her less likely to throw up."

A leftover piece of ciabatta flew from Bridget's hand towards her husband's head as she tossed a comment to go with it.

"That day will never come in our house!" Peter skilfully ducked the flying bread before replying.

"Well, perhaps I will have to make do with anal sex whilst you're asleep then Bridget." She wagged her third finger to admonish him.

"In that case I will start to sleep on my back!"

Jack's flippancy couldn't be stopped by the spectre of Melanie bringing in some original Cartmel sticky toffee pudding brought from Bridget's farm shop earlier that day. As she placed it on the table he said, "Well, you know me boys. I don't want to be controversial, but girls are completely useless at sex without one hundred per cent emotional involvement. On top of that, they are

so physically driven by their hormones that all blokes may as well understand the facts of the matter right now.”

The boys stared expectantly at Jack as he continued and then glanced uncomfortably at their partners.

“They take one week of their cycle building up to their period, one week building down from the period, one week on the period and that leaves just one week where they are interested in sex. In that one week that they are interested, you have to catch them on that one day that they are voracious and demanding, avoiding the two days that they have a headache and leaving five days you can’t have sex because they are ‘tired’. Are you with me boys?”

“No Jack,” they all responded except Martin who corrected him.

“Four days not five, I think, you know, possibly.”

“Right Martin,” he carried on “remember in those four days,” he glanced at Martin and got a nod back “when they are ‘tired’, you are bound to be away on business one night and she’s bound to be out with the girls on another. That leaves just two days left. On one of them, you have gotten up at five in the morning to go to a systems meeting in Glasgow and then driven a further five hours to get back at eight in the evening and are therefore so knackered you can barely blow your nose never mind blow your woman!”

The boys were all choking back their laughter by now as it was so true in their own lives but behind closed doors and never discussed even with their mates.

“That means you only have one day a month when you can have average sex and one day when it’s excellent, that’s provided the kids aren’t ill!”

“Hah bloody hah!” Melanie wasn’t impressed as she spooned out the ice cream and attacked the weakest member of the group.

“It’s a bit like your financial periods then Martin isn’t it? All action over just two days and pure drudgery in between. You know we could use your expertise to save us some money at the moment. Jack and I have a joint account you know, he puts it in and I take it out.”

Thirty all in the verbal tennis match. The spin on the serve was increased by her next comment.

“Or looking at it another way, what is mine is my own and what is his, is mine as well.”

Forty thirty to the girls. Jack vainly tried to mitigate the attack.

“I agree wholeheartedly that if I put it in, you keep taking it out and that applies to my dick as well as my money.”

Martin always perked up when listening in to any conversation about sex because he only had intercourse three times a year at most.

“I seriously believe you know, that girls dress up for each other and not for other blokes. It’s just a competition to keep their man and prove to the other girls at any function that they can retain their hunter gatherer. Just basic animal instincts dressed up to woo and kill. Man is the hunter gatherer and is out there obtaining the money, riding round looking at the other hunters and comparing weapons whilst the woman looks after the cave. Metaphorically, that means we chaps look around at the size and type of our opponent’s car. So for example, a sharp dagger is a Golf GTI and a sword is a Jaguar XK.”

Matt interrupted. “Well that explains why women drive GTI’s and why they keep running into the back of my ‘Jag’.”

Deuce. As the night passed towards midnight and the ‘Taylors’ thirty-year-old port was handed around the table the conversation became more extreme, provoked by the host.

“I don’t want to be controversial but! I have a theory called ‘why men can’t listen and why women can’t read maps’ that’s by me of course.” Jack slurred as he spoke. “Or men are from Mars and women are from Venus by John Gray, that’s not by me, that’s by a woman calling himself a man. What the hell did his Mother do to him to make him demean men so much?” The boys nodded sagely without comment as they were confused by the genders thrown at them by the drunk who slurred on. “Quite frankly, we don’t need a guide to relationships and communicating with the different species called women, you just get a Cray computer and some coloured lights like in the film ‘Close Encounters of the Third Kind’. If you can successfully talk to aliens well then you might have a chance with women. Men and women are different and will always abuse each other through these differences no matter how

many women read that frigging book. Women seem to accept it as a comic, joking at their man's expense. If we all buy crap like that and think the book is logical and sane then you would have to conclude that Osama Bin Laden is a great leader of men."

"Maybe he is Jack," suggested Matt, "but believe everything and believe nothing about him when reading a newspaper. They can't even find him now, never mind know what he is thinking. It's all a pile of made up crap regurgitated from one paper to another but usually slipped a couple of days forward. Absolute, unbelievable crap." Matt believed there was a Government conspiracy theory on all major events and that 'the people' never got more than five per cent of the truth, especially from the *Daily Mail* that sold exceedingly well to the ladies of the Cheshire set sat around the table. Morose Matt emptied the fourth bottle of red wine and quietly pondered his supposed truths about 'Al Qaeda' which he read in his daily *Times*.

Martin filled in the gap in the conversation. He had a friend at work, just the one, who sometimes helped him back into 'Real Life' from his constant taxing misery by sharing an odd joke. He butted in whilst staring at Soul Shiner to obtain her reaction.

"Did you see the news yesterday about that dreadful earthquake in Pakistan?" Soul Shiner looked horrified.

"Yes Martin, wasn't it terrible?"

"Awful, Harriet," Martin said in mock revulsion and horror. "You know despite all of that devastation, I hear that IKEA are opening a new store in Islamabad shortly."

"Really? That doesn't seem right," she said innocently.

"Yes, it specialises in flat pak furniture."

All the boys and the boys alone laughed at the racist joke as they belonged to the white county of Cheshire where it was deemed acceptable. Martin was happy with his single borrowed and rehearsed joke and the kudos would satisfy his non-assuming character for the rest of the year. More importantly he had gained 'street cred' from the boys by standing up to the girls but none of them raised any concerns about racism which was endemic in the Cheshire set. Matt was determined to be the funniest though.



“Melanie, I walked into a pet shop in Knutsford the other day and saw a ‘fab’ parrot with no feet or legs. I said, Jesus what ever happened to you? ‘I was born this way, I’m a defective parrot’.

What? You understood me?

‘Yes and before you ask I use Mister Wiggly to hang onto the perch’.

Wow, you would be good fun to have as a bit of one-upmanship at dinner parties.

‘But sir, I can also speak Spanish and English, am an expert in philosophy, politics and the premier league and would be a great companion rather than an object to show off to your friends.’

Too true parrot and with that I bought him. You know Melanie, I spent weeks talking to that bird until one day when I got home it said to me in its squawky voice.

‘I don’t know whether I should tell you this but it’s about your wife Harriet and the Ocado delivery man.’

What are you talking about parrot? Needless to say, I was shocked Melanie!

‘When the delivery man came today your wife greeted him at the door in a sheer black nightie.’”

Matt hesitated and Melanie couldn’t resist the stupid question.

“What happened then?”

He continued in a parrot squawk, almost a parrot phrase.

“‘Well, the delivery man came into the hall and lifted her nightie and started sucking her nipples.’

Oh no parrot what happened then?

‘I’ve got no idea,’ said the parrot ‘I got a hard on and fell off the perch.’”

Game set and match to the boys.

“Yes!” Jack and Peter shouted raising their arms in unison.

“That was fucking hilarious.”

“We need to go I’m afraid Melanie my love.” Bridget apologised as they hit one in the morning.

“My Mother is house sitting to make sure the girls don’t trash the place in our absence.”

Jack asked Peter how he got on with his mother-in-law who lived close and was in their home ten times a day.

“You know Jack, I can’t keep her out but I think it causes Bridget more problems than me.”

Jack consoled him. “Peter, your mother-in-law in comparison to mine is a positive angel mate.”

“You are joking?” Peter looked surprised.

“Of course not. Yours is an angel but I’m not so lucky because my mine is still alive.”

Not quite the thing to say at the end of an evening as he knew he would face the wrath of her daughter later.

“Who cares,” he thought.

As the dinner party died a natural death, they all felt vindicated in their positions. The girls never took any of it seriously, the boys got seriously drunk and it was only Jack who took everything in and analysed what was said between the different couples.

As they milled around the kitchen he demanded an answer but was ignored because of the impending departures.

“The most important thing in life is to feel emotional about something and not to go through life and avoid any commitment. It doesn’t matter about the subject. It can be your wife, following your football team or stuff you might see as boring like stamp collecting. You should never judge people based on your own values, ideals and interests it’s just not fair.” Jack was on his pet subject, maybe on a high horse, maybe it was the truth. He repeated Peter’s often used refrain in a sad drunken tone. “Life’s a bitch and then you die or maybe you just marry one.”

The odd assembly quickly dispersed to return to their own private battlegrounds whilst Jack’s was spilling out into every successive dinner party.

The friends never told their friends the whole truth, leaving drunken Jack to contemplate his own pile of shit over a final glass of red.

★ ★ ★

Melanie was waiting for him upstairs as the unwitting fly staggered into her trap.

Sitting patiently on the side of the bed, she was still wearing her new DKNY clothes and had not started taking her makeup off. She stood and walked across to him as he entered the creamy coloured satin bedroom.

“Do you fancy a cuddle then?”

It wasn't subtle but as she started to kiss him and undo the buttons on his grey Mulberry shirt his cock became instantly erect. Apart from one guilty and unsatisfying wank he had not had sex for over a week. He didn't fancy her but as Jean had said earlier, men just need a hole to fill. Jack pulled her blouse over her head and fumbled with her bra.

“Let me do that.” She took over and her small droopy tits dropped onto her chest.

As he leant forward and started to suck them, he thought the only good thing about them were the large brown nipples which were now erect and requiring delicate licking. He quickly shoved his hand into the crotch of her black trousers and moved it around before sliding it upwards and fumbling for the belt.

“Let me do that.” Again she took control and slid her trousers down her chunky muscled legs.

Jack shoved his hand under the lace panties and felt her wet cunt, sliding two fingers deep inside and using his thumb to rub her proud clitoris. Melanie moaned slightly.

“Do you want to do this as well Melanie or should I just carry on my way?”

“God that's 'fab'” and she dragged his face up to hers to shove her tongue into his mouth.

As she swirled her hot tongue around his, she undid his flies and put both hands on his dick. Manipulating it with her left hand by pulling the foreskin gently up and down she used the other to fondle his bollocks. She turned him towards the bed and pushed him back. Pulling down his trousers together with his pants she fed them over his ankles and dropped them on the best Berber before placing both hands on his strong thighs and starting to

suck his hot red cock, holding it upright and away from his body to increase his pleasure.

“Jesus.” Jack exclaimed in frustration.

It was too long to go without; he needed sex every day now and felt his sexual appetite was as great as in his late teens and early twenties. Melanie stopped sucking as she tasted a tiny leak of spunk. There was no way she would or had ever sucked him off and taken his spunk into her mouth as he came. Jack momentarily thought about that rejection as she pulled off her own pants and sat astride him using her fingers to locate and then shove his cock up her.

“Back off a bit Melanie, I’m nearly coming. It’s too risky hey?” Jack worried about babies.

“Does it matter?” she said disingenuously as she started to ride him.

“Of course it does!” Jack panted as he thrust upwards and pulled her arse towards him to feel his prick bump into the top of her vagina and his heavy balls hit the cheeks of her arse as they slapped in a fast rhythm. Melanie was breathing quickly as she reached over to the side table and took out a Durex in an orange packet.

“Put this on, I just need the loo.” She dropped the packet on his chest and heaved herself off him to thump away across the floor.

“Fuck,” he thought, “every fucking time we make love she has to go to the fucking toilet.”

By the time she came back into the bedroom from the white tiled ensuite, he was leaning against the pillows mounted against the headboard but his prick was limp. She started to suck and manipulate him again and it took Jack another five minutes to get his cock erect. He rolled the Durex on whilst she glanced at the alarm clock impatient to go to sleep. Her demeanour reduced some of his stiffness as did putting the ‘johnny’ on. It didn’t boost his manliness as she sat on top of him again and started to move quickly rubbing hard with her pubic hair and clitoris against the base of his dick.

“Hold my arse,” she moaned. “Oh God that’s ‘fab’,” and thrust again and again until she shuddered with her orgasm.

Smiling she rolled off him and lay on her back, opening her legs and manipulating his body and mind.

“Come on, your turn now.”

Jack pulled himself on top of her and pushed his hard prick inside. She closed her legs and thighs together as he started to thrust up and down and tucked his head into her neck. Bringing his face to hers he stuck his tongue in her mouth and moved it in and out to the rhythm of his cock. Every time they made love now he kept his eyes closed and thought he was kissing Bridget. That’s why the orgasm was delayed despite his desperate need to come quickly. It was pure guilt but he climaxed eventually and shuddered, arching his back by pushing both arms straight either side of her head on the pillow. His eyes remained closed and carefully watched by the predatory spider he rolled off and took his prick out. They had long gone past multiple orgasms and keeping his prick inside her to make her feel loved. The animal in both of them was satisfied even if their spirits weren’t and so Jack rolled off the bed and went into the ensuite to dump the Durex down the toilet and quickly wash his balls, which were smarting from her acidic juices. Looking into the mirror above the washbasin he stared at himself and felt dirty and used. He washed the outside of his mouth and chin with soap and boiling water as hot as he could bear to avoid little white spots around his mouth in the morning.

The bedside lamps were both already darkened when he closed the ensuite door, flicking the light off with the external switch but still leaving him naked and vulnerable.

He felt his way to his side of the bed in the absolute darkness and jumping in he immediately turned his back to her as they both welcomed their mattress edges as far apart as they could possibly be.

No goodnights were lovingly spoken nor were any gentle kisses exchanged and so they both drifted off to sleep with their personal and unshared thoughts.

h  
There must be  
more to life?

**J**ack Edmunson had been a bubbly boy at eight years old who radiated tremendous warmth through his personality and lived every day with an open and enquiring honesty that people loved.

At night in his bed he had two reasons to hide his head under the thin flannelette covers. The most practical was to avoid the biting cold, as few homes had central heating in those days. The second reason, which was much worse than the physical cold, was the dread but freezing fear of someone imagined at the bottom of the bed, waiting to pounce on him.

He always pictured a blue 'U' on his forehead shaped like a horseshoe to protect him from the Evil that threatened to come into his bedroom. He was positive that this would work as his Dad had explained graphically how Dennis Wheatley's heroes had used the symbol in the book 'When the Devil Rides Out' and he trusted his Dad without question.

In the last few minutes before slipping into sleep he would peek out from under the quilted sheets. On the ceiling he could see his Crusader's sword which was also in a safe spiritual blue and created by the outside light slanting in through the gap in the blue curtains. Protected by a magical sword and the power of the 'U' he would keep his head above the covers and in a last sleepy moment he knew he would pass the night without harm, accepting

Nim who stood at the bottom of the bed because that's what eight-year-olds can do.

Now forty-nine years old he remembered those nights as he woke early on the Saturday morning after the party.

He blinked his hangover at the sword on the ceiling, caused by the slight chink of light working its way between the curtains of the cottage in Tettenhill. The village was in a pretty part of Cheshire with his local pub The Pheasant Inn just behind his rear garden and all nestling at the foot of the secret valley called Dingle Dell. It was only six am and he was already alert and unable to relax in the matrimonial bed. A dark mass stirred beside him and settled on her back, emitting a stinking fart at the same time. His wife started to snore loudly through her wide open mouth, irritating him to the core.

“What the fuck am I doing here?” he said inwardly as he slid out of bed and grabbed his dressing gown to go downstairs. As he quietly closed their bedroom door he met Joseph on the landing at the top of the stairs. His blond son, tall for his six years, was standing still and looking guiltily at his Dad for getting up earlier than commanded by the lump. Jack signed for him to remain silent with a single forefinger in front of his lips and the pair crept downstairs to happily and secretly share the early morning alone.

So on that Saturday morning there was a regulation family of three, part of the Cheshire set, living not too far from Tarporley, that is pronounced as ‘Tar poor lee’ when one moves in the right circles of middle class Cheshire.

After a quick hug and a whispered good morning Joseph sped off to watch TV in the day room, but as always Jack paused by the lounge door in trepidation. He felt someone or something was lurking inside whenever he was at home and when the door had been closed for the night he could always see in his mind an old man sitting on the sofa at the far end of the room.

“Don’t be stupid.” Jack talked to himself a lot these days, “just go in. Nothing can hurt you.”

He fearfully pushed open the door and forced himself to look at the empty sofa. There was never anyone there but as he walked towards it he felt the cold in the centrally heated room and assumed it was because of the large inglenook chimney letting the warm air escape. Quickly, he turned to walk out but he shivered, feeling someone looking at his back as he quickly closed the panelled pine door.

*Good morning Jack.*

*You can see and talk to me if you try.*

*You have the power and the knowledge but need to lose your fear of the unknown and embrace your past.*

*It is your time once again and you know you cannot deny me.*

It was only the previous weekend he had sat with his Mother on the same sofa talking about spiritualism after a family lunch. He couldn’t remember why she had brought the subject up but she had been in that very spot. The cottage had been spiritually health checked by dowsing when they had moved in by their new ‘friend’ from down the road, who successfully practised expensive dowsing, acupuncture and herbal remedies on the rich of the area. The exact place where the imagined man supposedly sat showed a deep trough in the Earth’s magnetic field due to the opposing forces of two local ley lines. No matter what magical magnetometer machines were plugged in and left in that place they would not budge the negative energy field, and so it remained, a black stream caused by the rocks deep beneath the cottage or juxtaposition in the invisible magnetic field. The theories about ley lines were endless and all unproven. They reputedly followed straight paths and many cultures around the world also presumed that spirits or ghosts could only travel in a straight direction. This place on the sofa was predicted to affect one’s health if sat in for long periods and was therefore studiously avoided by Jack and



actively disbelieved by Melanie, although Jet the black cat seemed to lie there all the time.

“Your Grandma George was a spiritualist Jack,” Mother shakily got the words out of her mouth. She seemed more fragile every time they saw her and always more forgetful about recent events. Gone were the days of the strong beautiful woman who managed two jobs, the house, her two sons and Dad.

“She used to have a giant poster of a Navajo Indian Chief above her bed and called him her spirit guide.”

“A Navajo Indian Man or Nim for short then Mum,” replied Jack with an uncomfortable laugh.

He ignorantly believed in spirits, spooks and the afterlife but knew nothing about any of it and until recently had avoided anything to do with it. He felt so worried about the unknown that he could never face watching films about black magic or Evil in case he became possessed. He knew it was stupid believing in Good versus Bad spirits at nearly fifty years old but his mind had started to gravitate towards learning more about this grey area over the last few weeks, as if pushed by an unknown mentor.

Saturday was the in-between day.

In between Friday night when Joseph usually welcomed him home from his working week away and Sunday afternoon by which time Jack felt at home, loved and wanted by his family again; that is until the evening when mentally and physically he prepared for his next week away in a hotel.

Joseph sat on his Dad’s lap in a pretty flower-patterned armchair with Jack’s arms clutched around him. As Joseph watched a repeat of Blue Peter on the television Jack went through his mental list voiced by Melanie the evening before.

“The kitchen tap won’t stop dripping, the seeds I bought need planting, my car needs cleaning, can you go and buy yourself some meat as I don’t eat meat and anyway I haven’t got time as I have to prepare our food.”

The list was never-ending and the tone always relentless.

There was never a please or a thank you. Never a warm cuddle or a light touch to share and dissolve the stress from the week's work. Just a constant me on me deluge of jobs driven by his wife Melanie's agenda. On most weekends he felt like a stranger walking into his own house, the house he paid for and maintained with his hard work. The expected love not being given anymore as she lived life in La La land with her Cheshire set friends doing lunch, coffee, gym, shopping or any equally unproductive thing that cost money whilst putting less effort into any form of work but worse still into maintaining their married life.

She pretended that her values had changed and that their shared marital ethics as a couple who 'worked hard and played hard' were not vital anymore, but she had just got lazy and too comfortable in the one-sided relationship and togetherness was now a forgotten trait. Whenever Jack dared to broach this subject of changed values and her lack of action, there was always a reason why something had not been done and the reason was always somebody else's fault.

"Yes, well I know I didn't take that cheque to the bank but your Mother called and the school car park was a nightmare so I lost a lot of time on the way to the gym. Anyway, what does a week matter?"

"It matters a lot Melanie. A five thousand pound cheque matters when it stops our joint account going into the red. It matters that I asked you to do one thing this week whilst I was away and you couldn't be bothered in the five days you had to do it."

Jack always seemed to be pissed off with her and this was increasing every week he returned to Tettenhill as he felt homeless and less loved.

"Well, I may be able take it to the bank on Monday and put myself out for you. It's not my fault that things happen." A lame reply and a symptom of the lack of respect she exhibited more and more when their paths crossed at the weekends. Even these two brief days she deemed hers after her 'hard week' and so Jack was given all the responsibilities for their son so that she could relax. He happily took on the task but didn't enjoy everything to her

agenda as he was made to fit into her life as a temporary visitor to be tolerated.

She was losing the respect that he knew was essential to maintain in a good marriage, no matter how difficult it becomes.

Joseph squirmed on his lap and he hugged him tighter. His boy was sensitive and caring with a warm personality that immediately attracted friends in his peers and praise from adults. However, he had part of his personality, a deep place that Jack knew his boy never shared, that aligned him with his father and that worried his Dad because of the strange and consistent pressures that were building inside of him.

Jack's prick got hard thinking about his lack of sex and the poor attempt made the night before and so to cover his embarrassment from his boy he got up to make coffee from his automatic Miele machine. Another waste of money and a further complication in his life but 'names, names, names', always expensive and fashionable brand names ruled their lives. The Miele coffee machine whirred to grind the fresh beans until an error message came up: 'Please clean the main filter.'

"For fuck's sake," he said under his breath so Joseph couldn't hear. "You've had your stupid friends round to talk about curtain fabrics or paint colours, drunk your cappuccinos and can't even be bothered to clean up after yourself, you lazy fucking cow."

Every little thing seemed hard work today, partly because of the Friday night wine but also because of the release of tension after his work. He had spent all week grafting on a big IT project in Rosset, Bedfordshire for putting together a new system for the buyers and he felt good about what he had achieved. He knew he would be contracting there for a year or two and had settled into the routine of being away from home all week and commuting down to Rosset at five in the morning on Mondays and then returning by eight on a Friday evening. Plans had moved on and people were responding to him and so he felt confident in himself.

That was Jack, always responsible and motivated by his achievements.

He took a swig of cool coffee to stir his mind as the machine never made it hot. He sighed as he stared out of the kitchen window at his beloved garden and yearned for the spring.

“I don’t know,” he sighed loudly again, “am I happy with all of this? Ask a sane man and you may get a realistic and positive response. Ask a fifty-year-old going on forty the same question and you would end up writing a book. Maybe that’s what I should do.”

“‘Fifty is the new forty: bollocks’ – the working title of a novel by Jack George Edmunson.”

He went into his study and turned on the PC. With a wry smile, he entered into the Google search engine ‘Navajo Indians’ as he thought he might find out about the non-existent Nim who was watching him from above.

“If Grandma George had Nim as a spirit guide maybe the same one can help me too. Unless he’s dead of course!” He laughed at his little joke and so did Nim, who was happy that another step was being taken towards their meeting.

Google always worked but it took ten minutes to get what he needed. He likened it to wanting a drink of water and holding a glass under Niagara Falls. You always got too much and don’t have the capacity to handle it. The screen blinked and settled.

‘Native Americans believed in the fifth World but we currently inhabit the fourth World which will end at the winter solstice in 2012. The fifth World will arrive following a cycle in nature which affects our Solar system. Our Earth will bear an egg which then moves up within our space to reach its crowning place. Earth will then be raised to its perfected eternal form. This is the point of purification when time actually changes and we must choose between natural time i.e. that we have now on Earth with its opportunity to reach the fifth World and unnatural time which takes us away from nature. You have to choose. The fifth World on

our Earth or the oblivion of the alternative removing us from this planet. But ultimately this path to the fifth World will frighten most people as it is the end of now and holds the terror of the unknown.’

*You will understand and create the fifth World in your  
new life in Catalonia when all will become clear.*

“Like my contract job,” he thought whilst dismissing words he couldn’t quite hear from the TV. “Change is too hard to contemplate for most people at work but even more so at home. Hence the convenience of marriage. You never meet your Soul Mate; you just shack up with someone from the office or a girl you met at school. I suppose that most marriages are convenient and not true love. We are just weak human beings. Animals most of the time, dog eat dog. We want a structure to feel wanted and needed, believing we have a daily part to play as the bigger picture is too scary.”

Melanie walked past the door. “Are you on that computer again? You are always on it for hours.”

Jack grimaced. “Just doing my accounts lovely. It’s my job and makes us money remember; I won’t be too long.”

He immediately switched to Liverpool Football Club’s website until she went back upstairs to flop heavily onto the matrimonial bed, with a thump that reverberated down to the study below.

“So where are you from Nim?” Nim talked back through his Google search on the flickering screen.

*We were created in Dinetah when a holy supreme  
wind swirled the mists of light into the darkness.*

*These gave purpose to my holy people who are  
supernatural and sacred in the three different lower  
Worlds of air, water and Earth.*

*We lay inside creation and although we can take on  
human forms we prefer to reside inside natural forces  
creating nature itself.*

*We were proud to live with each other and we fought*

*for supremacy until God told us to leave and live in  
the fourth World.*

*The first Man and Woman were formed from the  
ears of yellow and white maize and lived separately  
not understanding each other's contributions to life  
and this allowed monsters to develop that will start  
to kill people off through the length and breadth of  
the next World.*

*Eventually man and woman shared their attributes  
by joining in physical love and creating new life.  
Two hero twins are our saviours, Monster Slayer and  
the Child of the Waters and they protect us here in the  
fourth World.*

Jack was intrigued but scared by a disembodied spirit that didn't exist telling him so much about something he had never heard of and so he wondered if it could be a hidden memory given to him by his Grandmother.

“Tell me more Nim.”

*We believe in iinaa ji the life or beauty way.*

“Almost the same word as energy Nim?” enquired Jack politely.

*Yes but this means to live a long life through  
happiness and so energy must help this.  
It is family orientated, shaping a person for life and a  
way of keeping creation and destruction balanced and  
in harmony.*

“That's why marriage is a convenient structure then. What is your Navajo name Nim?”

*Johonaa ei or the sun bearer.  
I carry the sun across the sky on my back and store it  
in the west every night.*

*My power animates principle and purpose that resides  
in the sun and gives life to all creation on the Earth.*

“So if you exist where do you live Nim?”

*I live in a Hogan with four posts representing the four  
sacred mountains.*

*The floor is Mother Earth; the dome-like roof is  
Father Sky.*

*We have four sacred objects and four sacred colours  
representing your four cardinal directions.  
To the east is the white morning sky symbolised by a  
white shell.*

*To the south is blue and turquoise.  
To the west is yellow symbolised by Abalone and to the  
north is black and the stone you call Jet.*

*There is a place in the World in which you will soon  
live and there are four sacred mountains.*

*This place you have already seen and you will be  
drawn back very shortly.*

“What?” Jack hadn’t read that bit. He glanced around him searching for the voice that seemed to invade his space more often recently. “What does Navajo mean Nim?”

*It comes from the phrase Tewa Navahu meaning  
highly cultivated lands.*

*We are not an old people on your Earth but we belong  
here from the start of creation and lived in many  
places in your World.*

*When the Almighty created this World he was a  
formless existence seen as powerful through the sun.  
This World is infinite and when you die you will have  
a new existence in another part of the Almighty’s  
Universe, so do not be afraid of life or death Jack as  
you have been chosen.*

*Just live every day as if it is the only day and your  
best day.*

Jack clicked the shut down button on the screen. He was interested in what he had read, but scared about what he thought he had heard from the fictitious Nim, but decided that the previous night's claret was clouding his brain.

Slumped in a chair next to Joseph, who remained entranced by the TV, he rang his daughter Edima.

She lived near Meaux, east of Paris which was growing into an expensive commuter area for the capital now that the new rail links, including the one to Euro Disney, were up and running. She had always been a handful for Jack but at thirty she seemed to have settled down. The marriage break up to wife number one had affected her more than his eldest son Rodney. A tall slim blonde with eleven GCSEs, she had walked out of her A levels somewhat diverted by her circle of friends and had followed her Dad down to London to train as a physiotherapist. He could never understand and was never close enough to know why this bright slim girl managed to start lap dancing, take cocaine and borrow money from loan sharks to feed the habit. As her Dad left her to move to Manchester on a new contract, she proceeded to fail at her second year exams, lose the plot completely by working in pubs to provide free booze and quickly put on eight stones in weight. Eventually in a mess she had reverted back to her Auntie's home to seek some sanity in her life.

But that was Jack's problem, he was too far away and too detached from his only daughter and always felt guilty about it, using the excuse of being too busy to see or talk to her. The reality was they had drifted apart after the divorce to number one because Jack as usual had thrown himself at his work to be perpetually busy.

Always busy and always trying to be successful to offset the failure of his first marriage and now he was doing the same in his



second. When he was busy he didn't think, as thinking was too hard as his memories stretched into a past that he wasn't prepared to discover.

"This wedding, Edima. Are we having roast potatoes on the menu or not? All blokes care about is the food. Not the place, not the hotel reception room or colour of the bridesmaids' dresses or even the music to be played by the DJ. Just the food lovely."

"Dad, stop joking with me," his daughter was smiling at the other end of the line. "Do you really want roasties then?"

"Anything you want lovely" Jack smiled back. "Anything to make it your special day. But I am definitely interested in the seating arrangements, so as to avoid wife number one or wife number one's husband and my ex best friend!" Edima laughed.

"Don't worry, all that mess was years ago, just relax and chill Dad."

"I am always chilled Edima, it's everybody else who isn't. For example, have I ever complained that you are marrying a Frenchman who wears green and pink stripy shirts, eats snails and has a better national football team than England?"

"Dad! You get worse you know. Is it anything to do with your age or is it the battleaxe?"

The wedding was planned to take place in Meaux about two weeks after Jack's fiftieth birthday and although he was dreading it because of a retreat into his old life, he also wanted to be there for his beloved daughter.

"Is that Edima?" Melanie the battleaxe appeared on cue in her misshapen dressing gown hiding a body built of walnuts and ready to split the pink material in half like the Hulk. She always interrupted every telephone conversation and put the handset on loudspeaker or listened in on a spare one. Edima whispered down the telephone avoiding the controlling female at Jack's end.

"Good timing hey but I know it's both. Poor you Dad, fifty and married to that woman." His daughter spat out the word 'that' as Melanie interrupted again.

“Ask her if she can reserve us a ‘fab’ suite in the hotel for the wedding and get it confirmed in writing and then she can fax it to you at work. Tell her we want a separate but adjoining bedroom for Joseph and not close to the disco so that we can get some sleep. Have you told her that?” Everyone was expected to run after Melanie and cost didn’t come into any of her decisions. She was a good organiser and had grown into this demanding style over the last twenty years but not everyone liked the approach, especially Jack who felt like he was six years old rather than fifty on the next weekend.

Melanie shrieked from a few feet behind Jack’s ear causing him to wince. “Did you get that Edima?” Jack and Edima sighed together.

“Yes, Dad just say yes to her. Speak soon, love you lots, bye!” A slightly deaf husband turned to face the blancmange oozing into his sacred study.

“Melanie, I’m going for a quick jog, okay?” Jack was preparing to slide past her to sprint up the stairs and put his kit on.

“You need to pop into Chester for me first,” came the reply. “I need some food from M and S for tonight.”

“What? Why didn’t you get it yesterday when you shopped there?”

Jack was annoyed but Melanie remonstrated. “I can’t think of everything and anyway it will be fresher today. Whilst you are there you may as well get some nice bread rolls and I also think we have run out of toilet paper.” Melanie’s list continued without a please or thank you as Jack quickly grabbed his wallet and car keys before peering around the day room corner at his son.

“Joseph, when I get home do you fancy a game of soccer in the garden mate?” Joseph rolled off his bean bag and briefly took his eyes away from the television.

“Please Dad!” He returned his gaze to the TV.

“Okay, so go upstairs, get dressed and read a book and then when I get back in an hour we can play. Okay?” Jack reinforced

it by pulling Joseph off the bean bag, turning him over and tickling him before turning the TV off.

“See you soon mate, be ready!” Jack briefly stared at his son who was still slumped on the best Wilton and pledged to spend more time with him before it was too late. Joseph was putting on too much weight, allowed by his Mum to chill rather than play in the garden with his Dad or friends. Jack ruffled his boy’s hair and rushed off, leaving Joseph to contemplate whether to turn the TV back on or do as requested. Melanie’s strident voice cut short his simplistic childhood thoughts.

“Joseph, get upstairs now! I’ve told you twice to go for a wash and you also need to tidy your room today as it is Saturday. When your Dad gets back he can do your homework with you,” and Melanie carried on ordering the household around.

Joseph was tall for his age with a short Cromwell-style haircut, a mere fifteen pounds a time at Jacob’s Finesse, his Mum’s hairdresser in Chester. He was an intelligent child and because he understood the game of Mum all week and Dad at weekends he had decided at this early age to push them both to their limits at all times.

“Can I just watch TV a bit longer Mum as Dad said so; it’s halfway through the programme about blind dogs?”

“Guide dogs Joseph, for the blind, and the answer is upstairs now!” Melanie growled at her son who slowly raised his body but consoled himself by pressing Sky record for later viewing and the fact that soccer was a good substitute if his Dad got his way. He knew when to acquiesce to his Mum and wandered slowly upstairs.

“Brainless boys Joseph,” shrieked Melanie. “Girls are so much easier to handle. My friend Bridget never has these problems and she has four of them.”

Brainless boys and clever girls.

You can see it at a very early age and the boys carry on being brainless even as they become men and then old men when they revert to being boys again.

★ ★ ★

A rugged face at the front door peered through the glass panels at a still unwashed Joseph, now dressed in his favourite Man United kit and sliding on his bottom down the steep central staircase.

“Nice kit mate. Far better than that rubbish team of your Dad’s.” Joseph smiled back before shouting towards the kitchen and then turned and ascended the stairs. “It’s Peter, Mum.”

Peter Edam kicked his muddy boots off at the back door and walked into the pristine blue and oak coloured kitchen. He was everything but pristine but vaguely had the same colour scheme in his clothes. He was always dirty, with his jeans torn on one knee and the top of his three layers looking as if they had been dragged through a field. Even travelling in his old grey diesel car was like sitting on the ground.

He was part-owner of a small family business, the local Edams Garden Centre on the main A51 Chester road. His brother and his wife Bridget ran the farm shop and the retail side of the Garden Centre whilst he concentrated on the production of their plants. Every time he passed the Edmunson cottage at the weekends he would call in for tea or coffee and any spare cake, biscuits or lunch as and when available.

As Jack’s best mate he was the person to go for a few beers with at The Pheasant Inn, which was handy for Peter’s large cottage adjacent to the Edam greenhouses where Dingle Dell met the River Dee plain.

“Is Edmunson around gorgeous?” Peter was always happy in his life no matter what was thrown at him and beamed her a wide smile.

“He will be shortly,” replied Melanie. “I sent him off to do my errands.”

“Nothing new there then!” Peter grinned more widely. “Is the kettle on or can I have one of those fancy coffees?” He calculated the time that Jack would be away from home whilst slipping his hand down her back to rest on her bottom which he squeezed enticingly.

“No Peter, we haven’t got that amount of time you terrible man and anyway Joseph could walk in.” She quickly pecked him on the lips leaving her hand on his strong chest to avoid an inevitable response.

“We can always go into the downstairs loo if you want to and lock the door. You know it’s only you who makes a noise Mel.”

“I said no! Playing around is okay but playing for keeps is a different matter.”

The thought of a marriage break up cooled his ardour and so he chatted to her whilst still openly lusting; looking her up and down and remembering their last sex session.

“How is your marriage me darlin’? Are you still bored by the old moaner when he gets home at weekends or can you muddle through until he clears off again?”

“He is such a perfectionist Peter and even though the house is immaculate, I always feel he needs to complain about some trivial thing to assert that his money and his cleverness provides for me. I can’t stand his sanctimonious shit sometimes. Believe me if it wasn’t for Joseph I would leave him.”

“Jesus Mel. I didn’t realise you were that uptight about things. I thought you were just sexually frustrated.”

“If only you knew what goes on behind closed doors, if only you knew.” As Peter moved closer they heard the back door creak open and he immediately stepped further away.

“Hey tosser! Are you chatting my wife up again?” Jack walked in the rear entrance to see Peter close to his woman. He was jealous even though he didn’t love her.

“How are you doing wanker?” Peter replied, grinning at his mate, “how’s it hanging?” Melanie walked off disgusted with the pair of them.

“Alright mate, big week, lots achieved. What about you?”

“You know Jack, same shit, different day.” Peter never had a brilliant day at work; the success of his days was ruled by the weather.

“Sodding winter pansies have got sodding mildew now. We only make about three pence a plant so we will have to rely on the bedding season to make some money this year.” Peter was always optimistic about the next growing season because years of practice meant the weather, plant prices or numbers of customers would cycle up and down and eventually over a few years things went on much the same.

“Mañana – Peter, no worries, that’s life, work hard and play hard.” Jack supported Peter in everything and vice versa.

“Yes Jack, life’s a bitch and then you marry one!” They both giggled like school boys but only because Melanie and Bridget weren’t around.

Bridget also ruled the roost like Melanie but in an entirely different way. Peter always did what he wanted, when he wanted and was so self-assertive about his life that he rarely listened to her. So she did the same. She crammed and organised their simple lives into a big cottage with a gorgeous view of the Welsh mountains across the Dee valley. It was full of four teenage girls, the girls’ endless stream of friends plus their dogs and cats and a procession of business or Edam family visitors. Their joint world totally revolved around the family and the Garden Centre.

However, Bridget’s world centred on the girls and their happiness, not her husband’s, and she spent many hours a week ferrying them between music lessons, their friends’ houses and the shops when without Peter around she was always happy. Her contentment was in a simple family life and although everything was bought on the cheap nothing was ever disposable. This philosophy was reflected in the shared outlook to life with Peter and had pushed them together as teenagers. A joy of anything to do with nature, a privileged look at the sunrise or sunset whilst barbecuing their tea. Leaning out of the bedroom window in the morning watching the heron take their koi out their pond – until it had taken too many and Peter shot it dead. The carcass swiftly buried to avoid any middle-class neighbours reporting him to the police. He didn’t care about the protection of the species but he was worried about losing his unlicensed gun that gave him hours of fun shooting rabbits near the greenhouses. Simple meant caring for the hens running free in the garden so that the pretty blue eggs would be available in the farm shop.

Just simple, non-expensive and down to Earth just like the dirt on their old work clothes – not that they had more than three sets of clothes each because they didn’t need anymore.

“Lo there! I saw your cars boys so you can’t escape that easily.”

Bridget Edam was tall, slim and blonde with rimless glasses and always looked naturally beautiful.

A lot of the shop trade was from Cheshire husbands doing errands for the Cheshire set wives and taking the opportunity to chat her up unsuccessfully. She used her natural beauty to woo the punters; a casual undoing of a top button on her cheap cheesecloth blouse would keep the clients entranced. A sun-reddened chest had large but pert breasts pushing into a cheap unglamorous white bra. Like Peter she never used suntan lotion and because of her white pale complexion, she suffered every summer from a rash of freckles that made her brown under the redness. Peter was the opposite, he was red turning brown from the first week of the English summer and then stayed mahogany for the rest of it. Jack constantly chided him about the dangers of skin cancer to which Peter always replied. "We're only on this Earth once and I'm not going to worry."

Jack disagreed. "Apart from when we go up and down on a plane a few times of course."

"Ah but you can't get sunburned in the stratosphere, wanker."

"Of course you can, tosser."

"No you can't wanker, you would be dead from the lack of oxygen before burning mate."

And that was why they were best mates, always egging each other on and avoiding being serious.

Bridget dragged Peter away as she needed extra bacon for the shop before the rush at lunchtime and the pair sped off to make most of their income for that week.

The Garden Centre farm shop looked after the needs of the Cheshire set and charged three pounds for a specialist Warburton loaf of bread, that still sold like crazy even at this exorbitant price. Bottles of Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc at twenty-seven pounds went within a few days of their arrival, mainly to Melanie who thought it was 'fab', as it was short supplied to keep the brand a 'must have' name since 1990. 'Names, names, names' made Cheshire tick but strangely you would never find Cheshire cheese at a dinner party and so it was never stocked in the farm shop.

Names counted around Tettenhill, for clothes, cars, schools and food and the Edam family used the Garden Centre to manipulate this myopic cachet to great effect thus maximising their profits. Sticky toffee pudding brought in direct from Cartmel in the Lake District as eaten by Madonna and at a mere twelve pounds thank you. Any extra information to improve the sales and edge the profit margin upwards.

After a day of soccer, homework, jogging and car washing the football results took precedence as Joseph and his Dad argued the merits of Jojo's Man United versus his Dad's Liverpool team. The husband and wife went to bed about ten that night with Jack still exhausted from the working week and the late dinner party the night before. After half a bottle of Campo Viejo Rioja he was falling asleep in front of Jonathan Ross on the TV and made the early move. He dumped his clothes on the floor of the bedroom and jumped into bed turning off his sidelight that Melanie had deliberately put on earlier instead of hers. It was always his light that was turned on and never hers as part of a strange mind game that he couldn't work out.

She came into the bedroom from the brightly lit en suite and aggressively demanded, "Why do you always turn your light off?" She turned hers on in a frump and jumped into bed, picking up an old *Hello* magazine to read with a satisfied yawn. Jack had his back to her, his eyes were firmly closed and his teeth were still gritted following the aggression in her voice.

"Why do you always turn my light on? What's the big deal about a fucking light?" He thought this but daren't say it and challenge her when he just wanted a quiet life. After a week away any normal husband would positively demand and do anything to have a shag. In fact most men would want to make love to their wives but his mind was so screwed up by her lack of respect that he couldn't contemplate sex never mind love.

"You need to pick those clothes up and put them away before you go to sleep." She nudged him in the back and so he wearily



got out of bed and transferred them to his wardrobe in the spare bedroom, dumping them on the floor behind the oak doors.

After a few minutes he was drifting into sleep when she leaned over him. She was heavy on his right shoulder with her small floppy breast shoved into his back.

“Do you fancy a cuddle then?” She put her hand on his crotch and started to finger him gently. No love all day, no conversation about things that mattered like feelings and thoughts. Just pointless issues raised by her pointless friends as she never thought for herself. He half raised his weary head and glanced at her before lowering it again.

“Why, do you always do that?” he asked. “Every time, you wait until I’m half asleep, you read some crap magazine and then expect me to respond. Every fucking time it’s the same.” His anger seemed to come to a head much quicker nowadays. Melanie was apologetic but her voice was hard.

“I only thought you would want a cuddle; don’t take it out on me. If you don’t want one, then I can do without it. I was only thinking of you!”

“You know how untrue that is Melanie. You know it all has to be to your agenda. I’m knackered, you don’t care and you don’t really want me, you just think it’s your duty to try and keep me happy so you can drift on in your life.” Jack curled his embryonic body tighter in his anger, seething with the perceived manipulation of it all and knowing he didn’t love his wife but without consciously admitting it. Frankly she probably knew and was going through the motions as duly accused. Melanie turned the light off and turned her back on him with a final riposte.

“I wish I had stayed downstairs now, Jonathan Ross was ‘fab’.”

Jack clenched his teeth tighter, slipped from beneath the duvet, threw his Gant dressing gown on and stormed out of the bedroom door, slamming it shut behind him. As he watched the end of Jonathan Ross and then the late film until one in the morning he felt the enormity of the situation.

A demanding job and a wife whom he had started to hate.

All of it was too much to comprehend and so the remaining

half a bottle of Rioja was drunk before he grudgingly slipped back to the matrimonial bed, taking great care not to wake the snoring lump.

So a typical Saturday in Tettenhill, Cheshire.

Miserable weather, a chat and coffee with your best friends.

A son busy enjoying his own company.

Objectives set by Jack never achieved in sharp contrast to his working week.

The women of the area predominant and clever at using their husbands' money and assertive about their own lifestyles and friends.

All to their agenda.

It was early on Sunday afternoon following the morning chores on a cold and wet February day in 2004. Jack had intended going into the garden that morning just to turn over some of the flower beds and get some frost into the clods of earth to break it up into a fine tilth for the spring. He did go out between showers but just to be outside and away from Melanie and so he made his way out again, leaving his son happily entertained in front of the TV and his wife upstairs on the phone to a girlfriend.

He was always happy outside as a free spirit talking to nature. After three or four half-hearted attempts at turning over the wet soil, he dug in his spade thinking he would have to return indoors and find some other diversionary work when a shooting pain shot up the right side of his back.

"Oh fucking hell," he gasped as he bent forward. "Not a... fucking ...gain." He had constant back problems now and the consultant had told him he would need surgery on his discs worn out from years of jogging.

"Fuck me; this is just fucking old age." He slowly moved to the front door crouched double and wincing at every tottering step. Leaning against the door he pressed the bell. Joseph arrived first.

"What's the matter Dad?" he yelled through a glass panel with his mouth pressed close to it. Jack gasped in pain.

“It’s my back again. Get your Mum quick.” Melanie slowly walked down the stairs whilst saying goodbye to her friend before handing the phone to Joseph and unlocking the door so he could crawl inside the lobby. She roughly pulled his boots off whilst his legs were half stuck outside to make sure he didn’t dirty the carpet.

“Take your jacket off Jack, it’s muddy too for goodness sake.”

He replied tight lipped, “You could help me then rather than standing with a disapproving look.” On all fours a frustrated Jack pulled himself into the lounge watched by a concerned Joseph and collapsed onto the floor demanding painkillers and his TENS machine through clenched teeth.

“I told you not to garden today you silly man.” Sympathy didn’t come easily to Melanie and in Jack’s case ever. “What do you think you were doing? Now you’ve ruined my plans for you to take Joseph swimming later. I can’t believe you did that!” She stood with arms crossed as he lay sprawled on the new Axminster carpet.

Jack lay in agony face down, trying not to throw up due to the pain and calming his breathing to stop the spasms running across his lower back. He might have summoned the energy to tell her to fuck off but Joseph was holding his hand and asking if he was okay.

“Don’t worry mate, it will ease off soon. Sorry I won’t be able to swim hey?”

“That’s okay Dad, Mum can take me.”

Melanie left the room. She had no intention of swimming having spent ninety pounds on her new ‘fab’ hairstyle and colouring for the dinner party on Friday night. On her return she dropped the TENS machine next to his right hand and a packet of Co-codamol generously donated to him in bucket loads by Matt.

“Joseph, you need to do your piano practice now.” She dragged her son away and left Jack to sort himself out. As the strained tones of ‘Walking in the Air’ drifted through to him, Jack felt very alone and unloved. His day was fucked completely now and he could only hope to stabilise the pain so he was ready for the commute to work at Rosset early the next morning.

“Another exciting weekend,” he thought “and then a five am start. Fucking great eh!”

Strained, out of tune music continued to waft through the air to him. Peter had a theory and had told him the previous summer. “Children are made to be what their Mums want them to be in Melanie’s clique of friends, tosser. To be what they think they should be, rather than what they are. The kids are not allowed to develop and grow into their own persons. Whether they are put through the pain of keyboard, saxophone or swimming etcetera, it’s the Mum’s choice and not theirs. Let Joseph grow up to be himself Jack.”

Lying still, Jack listened to the badly played music and could only agree with Peter’s sentiments.

As he was semi-comatose it helped him to think about his life and the others round him. If you looked in through the small panes of the cottage window, he seemed to be talking to someone else in the room who was sitting on the sofa.

“Nim, I can’t remember the first time I looked at my wife and thought God I hate you or even I don’t want sex with you. Sex has become a burden. Every night I lie in bed with my back to her and when she makes an approach like ‘Do you fancy a cuddle?’ I know I don’t really want her. Then it takes ten minutes of sucking my cock just to get me enthusiastic. That’s only because I need sex, I am just an animal, Nim. That’s why I know there is something desperately wrong in my life.”

*Keep talking to me Jack and start to accept the  
answers by listening through the ether.  
She is not the one you need to fulfil your life and enter  
the fifth World.  
Open your mind and listen as I am sending guides to  
help you understand.*

He drifted into a drugged sleep to be woken by Peter staring down at him.

“What the hell are you doing down there?”

Jack lifted his head slightly. “I think God has got a bone to pick with me. Maybe I went too far in my comments about Melanie on

Friday night and this is his punishment.” Jack was out of pain now unless he moved of course. He slowly and gently turned over and lay on his back trying to relax and avoid the back spasms which had subsided by using the TENS machine. Peter picked up the Co-codamol packet.

“I noticed you didn’t seem to be happy bunnies together.”

Jack rolled his eyes. “Two shit nights after you all went, tosser. Same shit, different day and tomorrow back to work for a different sort of shit for five days on the trot.” And then he smiled. “But next weekend I am fifty on Saturday, so we are taking Joseph and staying in Dartmouth. A nice hotel by the estuary, a highly recommended gourmet restaurant and hopefully some nice weather.”

“That sounds great, wanker, apart from the cost and the fact that having driven hundreds of miles for your work you are going to knacker yourself further by driving twelve hours down to Devon and back.”

Jack grunted before his reply. “The problem is Peter, fifty is a big thing to me and things like a bad back make it more of a milestone towards being considered as old. Everyone keeps telling me that fifty is the new forty. What bollocks. But I can’t get my head around it. I keep telling myself fifty down and fifty to go.”

“In your dreams mate, you’ll be lucky to make sixty, wanker.” Peter was never supportive and he carried on giving Jack some home truths. “You know what will happen next weekend, as soon as you get to the M6 at Stoke, she’ll want the toilet and then again every thirty or forty miles whilst you are driving. How come a woman can hold piss in her bladder for five hours when shopping but as soon as she gets on the motorway with her husband she needs the loo every twenty minutes? Tell me that! But if she was driving and the roles were reversed you would ask her to stop and she would keep passing those service areas until you need to find a bottle and try and fill it crouched in the foot well.” They both smiled as it was so true.

Peter perched his dirty jeans on the arm of the pristine gold-coloured armchair and continued. “I noticed Melanie had new clothes on again at dinner, tosser.” He was all heart in Jack’s time

of greatest need and just wanted to exacerbate Melanie's faults for his own perverse reasons.

"Yes. Again is the right word, wanker, she doesn't understand how hard it is to make money and how easy it is to spend it. I wish I had married someone like your Bridget, who never seems to spend anything."

Peter declined to comment as it was all relative. Earn less and spend less but it seems as much. Jack closed his eyes momentarily but it was not because of the pain, instead it was to cover the pang of guilt that crossed his mind about Bridget as he contemplated how much he wanted his best friend's wife. To break the perceived pregnant pause Jack commented as if a third party analyst on 'Match of the Day'.

"The latest DKNY gear bought in Chester of course. DKNY is a short abbreviation describing her husband: Doesn't Know Nothing Yet. The wife in question was heard to comment before the match, I have had these for ages. Ages, meaning more than two weeks having lain hidden in the wardrobe. At the end of the game she went on to say. I saved you one hundred and ten pounds and only spent three hundred and thirty. A true saving then!"

"Well mate," Peter responded. "There is no way I could be married to Melanie; I will just have to stick with shagging her. I only popped in to say I can't come swimming this afternoon. Actually, I'm too tired from shagging your wife this morning. She told me she had got a sore fanny so I had to give her one up the arse instead." They both laughed but it could have been true.

Melanie was doing more homework with Joseph and poked her head around the door. "How long is ten inches in centimetres?"

Peter helped out. "About as long as my willy, Mel. Do you need a hand to measure it or maybe you might need two!" He turned as he left the pretty lounge decked in reds and golds. "See you in a couple of weeks then mate." And he disappeared into the kitchen to chat to Melanie about how 'fab' she looked in her new clothes the other night. Jack heard the clatter of the diesel engine as his old grey Peugeot 507 pulled away.

"Thanks mate. Hope you're better." Jack sighed having

reminded himself how selfish Peter was. Melanie shouted at him but didn't bother coming into the room.

"Did I hear you Jack? Do you need anything?" But she just left him prone on the best carpet from Brintons Limited. 'Names, names, names'.

Jack forced himself upstairs before seven that evening to say goodnight to Joseph as his son made his way slowly to his homage to 'Man U' bedroom, finding lots of distractions from squeezing the whole tube of toothpaste into the washbasin to having a giant poo as every night before bedtime.

Jack lay on the floor of the bathroom trying not to breathe in too deeply whilst watching Joseph sitting on the throne. Through the leaf patterned window they could see the sun setting in the west over the Welsh mountains.

"You see that sun?"

"Yes Dad."

"Well, if I am away from you and you from me just look at the sun okay? When we both look at the sun we share our love for each other no matter where we are. Being a Sun Sharer is so special; just remember that, you may only find one or two people in your life that are Sun Sharers."

Jack loved his son so deeply he was always upset on Sunday nights before the early Monday commute. He questioned the logic of working hard and missing out on the important parts of life but usually contented himself with the fact that eight hundred pounds a day as an IT contractor kept Joseph and Melanie in a nice standard of living, with nice friends, in a nice area. The alternative would be to move house again and he had agreed six years earlier to stay in one place for Joseph's sake but also so that Melanie could be at home with him rather than work. All for little Joseph.

"Dad, who made the sun?" Joseph was wiggling his legs back and forth perched on the toilet and not doing much else.

"Well, that's a very good question and I am not sure anyone can ever answer it even your Dad. The scientists think that when

the universe began it was no bigger than a pin head and it suddenly exploded and started to expand and grow so fast it is now billions of miles wide and still growing.”

“That’s impossible Dad,” came the all knowing six-year-old reply.

“Not impossible, just difficult to understand.” Jack smiled at Joseph’s young naivety.

“But Dad, who made it explode then? Was it Al Qaeda like with the twin towers?” Joseph was mature and clever at six going on eight. He read avariciously and always questioned everything he saw on the TV news.

“No one knows because no one can prove it Jojo. Some people just find it easier to call the person who started it all ‘God.’ You can’t see God so he exists or maybe he doesn’t hey? So you could say it was the giant spaghetti eater that started it and no one can ever prove you wrong son.”

A thoughtful Joseph started folding toilet paper into strange shapes as he replied, “In that case I think Kai out of my ‘Yu Gi Oh’ programme was there on the first day and he is the master of the Universe.”

“Good, now get off that toilet and please don’t use so much paper or you’ll block the drains up!”

After a kiss and a cuddle Jack went and lay on his own bed for a last lonely hour of thought before he started to pack his suitcase. Then he struggled downstairs with it, sliding it down the steps to take the strain off his back and awkwardly slung it into the boot of the car that was parked in the garage. He wandered into the day room and saw Melanie was entranced by ‘Top Gear’ which is why no help had been offered as TV came first. It was always this time that was the worse for him. Saying goodnight to Melanie was harder than with Joseph. He felt so lost in their relationship and she didn’t seem to give a damn. She disturbed his equilibrium.

If her week was full and she had Joseph and her friends around her, he felt that she had all she needed. He looked at her sadly, resigned to his fate.



“Night then. I am going to bed.” He used to like Sundays when he felt warm and happy with his family and he even enjoyed the ‘Top Gear’ programme especially when it was more like a car programme rather than light entertainment with an odd car thrown in. Sometimes he would mute the TV and watch the presenter’s actions and realised it had all become a bit anal. Ploughing matches, burning or exploding caravans, making cars into boats and generally crashing into things. He wasn’t a snob and enjoyed light fun but it was in keeping with seeing more of daily life becoming dumb and dumber. More crap presented in different ways and with far less to seriously think about. It must be my age he thought.

“Are you talking to me Melanie?” Jack was stressed.

“Yes of course but I just love this programme.” She deigned to respond properly before adding. “Why can’t you get a job like Jeremy Clarkson? He looks about your age and we could use all those ‘fab’ cars.” Jack wasn’t sure if she said this in jest or just to twist the knife. Maybe she was just being insensitive but it had been another shit weekend.

“Do you know how hard I work? I am in work at seven in the morning before you even get up and leave at seven at night to go to a grotty hotel with no friends. That is all day, every day and every week.” Melanie looked across from the screen towards him.

“Stop complaining Jack, other people’s husbands do the same, stop being such a martyr. You never stop to look what you have got.”

Jack was incensed. “I have got nothing. I have had nothing for the last four shitty years whilst you gallivant around with your friends wasting my hard earned money. Who do you know who does the same as me?”

“Well, there’s John from Preston who you used to work with at BAE.”

“Wrong Melanie. He stopped doing that last year and has got himself a job at a fifth of the wage but based locally so that he can see his wife and kids before his marriage fails.”

She glanced at him before turning back to ‘Top Gear’. “Oh, I didn’t know that. What about your friend in Andersen Consulting who lives in Wrexham?”

Jack thought of Ashley before replying. “He works from home now but spends most of his time on a mountain bike in the Welsh hills.”

Melanie felt justified. “There you go then, he’s in the same industry so why not you as well?”

Sighing deeply a very stressed Jack gave the honest answer. “His wife works. She owns a fashion mail order business and runs it from home. That’s the difference, his wife works.” He spat the words out at her.

“Well, it’s not my fault she’s intelligent and not as busy as me. I have to do so much for Joseph you can’t believe how busy I am all week.”

“Yes,” said Jack. “Busy going to the gym for three half days a week. Busy shopping with your friends and doing lunch in the Number Six coffee shop in ‘Tar poor lee’. Really fucking busy, not.”

He went to storm upstairs in a frump without saying goodnight but the problem with his bad back meant that the body language failed miserably. She just laughed quietly at his slow departure. In bed with the light off he thought more about her.

“She will never change; it’s all getting out of hand Nim. Just taking the piss more and pushing me to my limits as she knows I won’t do anything about it.”

His tiredness replaced his anger and he was soon asleep and didn’t wake until the early alarm at five. Creeping out without putting the light on, he quickly shaved downstairs and threw water on his face before grabbing his laptop and briefcase to jump in the car. He had been forbidden to disturb her and so ten minutes after the alarm he was gone and on his way to Rosset.

The small market town straddles the River Beane and sits near the A1 in Hertfordshire. On the left bank are the old dock buildings partly ripped down and rebuilt into new shopping

parks, or if alongside the river they had been converted into smart apartments. On the right bank is the castle where King John died and also the heart of the old town with its pretty speciality shops including many full of antiques. This is the heart of the UK's antiques exchange as the town hosted six massive fairs every year at the local World War Two aerodrome. The old town had a pretty church, a wide expanse of cobbled market square and a series of small roads known as gates based on the major compass points similar to those of Chester and Newark on Trent. It must have been fashionable at the time. Rosset of course is an anagram of tosser, which is marginally less rude than an anagram of Newark. At least the local people didn't suggest that the best thing about Rosset was the A1 leading out of it, unlike those in Newark.

As he drove to work, he thought about the anagrams of the town names and how Peter and his mutual greeting of tosser and wanker had started but eventually decided it wasn't linked. He hated Monday mornings and knew by the evening he would collapse in the hotel exhausted and not even bothered about food.

His old silver SLK Mercedes purred along despite over a hundred and fifty thousand miles on the clock. He often thought of painting it with bright orange flowers and yellow smiley faces to buck reality. As usual he was driving with the sun-visor up, blinded by the early morning light as he had persuaded himself that if he could maximise his sunlight he would avoid depression caused by the SAD syndrome. In fact it was Melanie and his lifestyle that were the real cause of him being down all the time.

Watching the fields covered in frost and the sun glinting through the trees, he thought about his dream for 'Real Life' full of nice people without prejudices. Getting a 'Real Life' whatever that meant was his new ambition and the reality was becoming pressing.

"Nim, have you ever thought how boring we are, how many millions of Ford Focuses are on the road. That somehow if metallic they are better because the paint makes all the difference to our

personas? How sad is that?” Jack pulled himself up for talking out loud to an imaginary person.

He was sat in a traffic queue thinking about how people are so boring.

“Why accept such non-identity. Surely to God there’s something better we can aspire to?”

*You have to listen to life to aspire.*

*You have to aspire to life to listen.*

*You will then assume your true identity.*

He hadn’t heard a word.

“Yes Nim, I understand the economics about mass production of cars but for God’s sake there must be more to life, somehow and somewhere? It can’t just be me thinking this, surely not? There is some intelligent life left on Earth isn’t there? We sit here in our queues and accept being nonentities. We accept sitting in a fucking queue with the same car in front as the same fucking car behind. As well as the ones opposite that are going nowhere as well. We are all truly crazy. We have these turgid nondescript cars and then we go and personalise them through a number plate as if it makes difference and that’s a sure sign that we have lost the plot.”

Jack was tired and in a foul mood. He stopped himself from putting his dry bogies into his top pocket as he drove along, just because he couldn’t get to his hankie in his pocket. He used to wipe them on the floor mat until he had new car mats. Wet ones had to be wiped off the back of your finger, dry ones could be flicked off out of the window.

“There are fifteen cars in front of me and nine behind, eight am between Shefford and Rosset on the A507. Thirty miles per hour again. Modern life is pathetic Nim.”

He was desperately trying to avoid refuelling as he knew it would waste another ten minutes as everyone went into the next Shell garage to buy their milk, bread, paper, lunch, bag of logs and cup of coffee and precisely everything except fuel.

“Maybe Nim they should have bright orange ‘Easy’ garages as the place to buy petrol and nothing else. Buy more petrol get a lower price. Buy less and get a higher price. It’s got to be good if you are short of time and of course everyone is.” His thoughts rambled on as he got more frustrated and built up the adrenaline ready for work. “Fuck me Nim, I’m even talking to you and you don’t exist, fucking hell.”

He sat at his desk at exactly eight thirty am as per each Monday morning and he was ready to work. But of course he did think back to the weekend, having boiled up his frustrations whilst sat in the car. He was sexually frustrated, frustrated with the heavy traffic when no one could do right and knowing the whole thing would brew through the week until he went home again on Friday evening.

“Well, Nim if you exist. I need to get this off my chest and see what the reaction is or I can’t work properly.”

*At last you recognise I exist Jack.*

*Believe and listen now.*

*The time is right and this is not your ‘Real Life’.*

He quickly tapped the keys on his computer and dialled into his hotmail account. He started to type an email to Melanie.

“I was very upset with your attitude last night and throughout the whole weekend. I don’t think I deserve it when I am under enormous pressure and working seventy hours a week away from home.

I had seen my son to bed and then packed which was an emotional time.

I had not achieved any of my jobs all weekend as you dominated my time and set everything to your agenda.

You insist that I creep out on a Monday morning like a leper in my own home.

All weekend, you were demanding things of me but did not check any of my circumstances or respond to my needs.

I had my bad back again which is extremely wearing as it stops my life.

I am fed up of being the only one who tries and puts himself out to make things happen.

You seemed to take affront that I couldn't look after Joseph. At the weekends you want me to take all the responsibilities as you want time off. I see it in the opposite way. I have slaved away all week and then have a lot to do at the weekends for the benefit of you both and need your support so I can make it 'work to live', as opposed to now when it is all, 'live to work.'

It's all you, or you and Joseph, or you and your parents, or your endless chain of friends and you.

You also made it plain this weekend that you are not going back to work...twice. Did I say full time? And you are on holiday for three weeks in the next five and are so totally relaxed that you don't complete anything anymore.

You fill in your day with everything important to you only and not even important within the greater scheme of our lives. You make time to fill in time but never to achieve anything and never anything to help me anymore. So you spend your time enjoying life, keeping fit and playing with your 'fab' rich friends and taking advantage of your privileged position. All the time you are taking the piss, you are demanding more of me and not taking time to get things done.

Anyone can spend money Melanie but not everyone can make it but I do.

So again you have totally lost respect for me, for what I achieve, for what I provide.

Frankly, I don't think you love me anymore, never mind respect me.

So why should I bother? You are taking the piss more often and feel comfortable enough to do so. Why is that?

More than a lack of respect? That's what I am wondering about. Whether you have someone else.

Is it lack of love, being fed up with the same person for twenty years? Bored and wanting someone with different values who is more exciting?

I don't know but I am not going to do everything I do and be as nice as I am and take a load of crap.

I have a life too and at the moment none of it is devoted to me at all. Either you are a partner or tell me why not.

You constantly judge before asking and even when you are totally ignorant about the subject.

You think that everything in life is 'nice'!

Being dynamic and making things happen is as important as being nice. It's just different.

You know it truly is 'dog eat dog' out here but you never get outside of La La land to find out.

You are closeted away in a lifestyle you have created and seem happy at any cost to stay there.

And there was no real communication this weekend.

You live in Melanie World and have forgotten how ninety five per cent of the population truly lives.

Many people are out there grafting to make enough money to pay a mortgage for a crap house and rarely going out and sixty per cent don't even have holidays! That is a fact!

Things we did this weekend are periphery to life itself.

So the important things in life are neglected. These are free and incontrovertible: nature, love and humanity. These are the things you have forgotten exist or at least with me.

I respect you as a Mother, for what you do for the home and my son.

I respect you as an individual and do not tie down what you do or who with as it's your life and you only live once. Unlike Peter and Bridget, you have your own life and lifestyle without restrictions.

You are very, very lucky; they are in a rut and grafting every day so you should consider yourself lucky – because I don't think you do!"

Strangely, the email relieved the pressure and allowed him to get on with being the IT consultancy guru.

End of hotmail. Send.

She rang him that night and said she understood.

She said she didn't realise the stress he was under and how he felt about everything.

She said let's start afresh on Friday when we travel to Dartmouth and use the celebration of his fiftieth with her and Joseph to rethink and restart the relationship.

She said all the right things and Jack got on with his business earning his eight hundred pounds a day and putting it all in their joint account.

The conversation lanced the boil and the work provided the anaesthetic.

The big man, the hunter gatherer, did his job and felt powerful and wanted in his world. His wife had succumbed to his power and apologised so he was the main man again and felt good about that. Good knowing he had the power and the control because what he had made he knew he could take away.

"I am the creator Nim therefore I am the destroyer too. I have to destroy to create, therefore I am."

He was sure there was something Biblical and Armageddon-like about it all but didn't have the time to find out and wasn't ready to pursue the action anyway.

That left one other person to cause him pain during the week and that was his Mother.

Dad had died a year before and she naturally seemed to get closer to Jack immediately afterwards. Mother and her youngest son were very much alike. They looked the same, they thought in the same way and they loved each other, but they never seemed to find time to meet up. In between Jack's work and socialising they had only managed about four weekends together in a year and these had been biased towards the time of death and therefore the time of their joint need. They both missed his Dad when he had gone but Jack felt guilt rather than a loss. He was never close to his parents and was always too busy to get close to them. Frankly he didn't know them well at all. Ever since his days as a latch key kid they had continuously worked. His parents were always busy



themselves and when they had retired they found that their son had adopted the same approach to life.

After the death, Jack remembered sitting outside the crematorium high above Leicester. He had wandered away from the pack of loving but rarely seen relatives and was thinking about all the things he had never said to his Dad. He made a mental list to ask his Mum some questions about her life but he never quite remembered to ask.

1. What is your favourite food?
2. What is your favourite song?
3. Do you remember your dead Mum often?
4. What makes you cry?
5. What makes you angry?
6. Do you believe in true love?
7. What is the most important thing in your life?
8. Are you scared of death?
9. What's the best advice you can give me?
10. Tell her you love her.

Number ten was the worst of course because he had never said this to his Dad.

He had never said "I love you Dad" and that made him want to cry because now he never could tell him.

It was Monday night and he was feeling guilty about his lack of contact with Mother as he lay on his hotel bed and so he speed dialled her on his mobile. She had moved out of her house two months earlier and had gone to live with his brother, which was strange because for years she had no time or good words for him. Maybe she said the same things to him and ran Jack down in direct contrast.

She had seemed desperately ill four months ago and looked frail and old for the first time as he and his brother took turns to look after her in her small bungalow. She told them continuously

that she was dying. It was as if she wanted to die and had decided to give up now her husband was gone. They both felt hopeless, but as always children have to learn what to do and how to react as their parents get more infirm. She had beaten cancer three times and was a tough person but it seemed like she had given up and her 'bad' sons hadn't noticed. Eventually she became completely deranged and didn't recognise either of them. She would regale them with fictitious stories about having sex on her bed with the visiting doctor and the nurse asking her to be a bridesmaid at her wedding. But no, she wouldn't go there as they all belonged to a religious sect and they had orgies all the time.

Watching her mental pain and anguish tormented Jack.

He felt guilty about his Dad and now his Mum was going to die. However, after a couple of weeks of real food and proper care she pulled round and started to talk more normally. She had advanced dementia and the death of her beloved husband had triggered an early degeneration. In retrospect she had gone downhill since Dad had died and stopped talking to people or eating properly. So she had moved into Jack's brother's house in Leicester and seemed content to sit in a window seat and watch the world go by. Watch the lorries trundle into the factory opposite and never complain when his brother's dog sat by her and constantly farted the deadliest smell imaginable.

"Hi Mum, how are you today?"

"Is that Jack my lovely boy?"

"Yes Mum, how are you feeling?"

"Your brother is on the same tablets as me you know. They're the ones you know, they're... small and plastic and you know they're for your stomach. It's because he eats a lot of takeaways." The non-stop tirade had started and seemed worse at every call.

"His wife's lazy, she's always been lazy so she doesn't bother to cook you know. I haven't been invited to eat there for three years." She said this whilst sat in his brother's lounge.

"I haven't seen that grandson for years... I think. No one bothers with me you know."

"That's because you are so miserable," thought Jack.

“He’s walking now and I haven’t seen him.” She was well looked after and saw her grandson every week but it made no impression now.

Jack tried to calm her down and told her about his last birthday presents and in particular the cost. He said he hoped the coming weekend was going to be more realistic. Many an old adage came out in these conversations.

She said in an old tired voice. “Money was made round to go round.” A year later and it would not be said as the Alzheimer’s kicked in properly. “Since I’ve been taking those stomach tablets, I can’t taste a thing but Missus F from the Friday club says I should drink some ginger wine. So I have drunk a bottle of it this week and my taste buds are definitely coming back. It’s very strong you know.”

Jack turned the TV volume up a bit more.

“Really?” he intoned.

“Guess who I’ve just heard from? I bet you can’t guess.” She only knew four people in her world but she desperately wanted him to guess.

“Ay it’s Tugdual, you know your old pen friend.” It was in fact his brother’s.

“He’s been on holiday you know, in France.”

“He is French Mother,” as Jack watched the start of ‘Spooks’, his favourite programme.

“Is there anything else lovely?” Jack was keen to watch the TV.

“He sent me a card, it’s a lovely card, it’s in an envelope, it’s a lovely card.”

“Where was he on holiday Mother?” asked Jack.

“Oh I don’t know, hang on I’ll go and find out.”

There was a two minute pause so Jack turned the TV volume back up to normal.

“Urm.... Airberget on de Musee, or something like that. Hello? Hello? Can you hear me?”

“Yes Mother,” sighed Jack, “where?”

“Oh Jack, my knee hurts today but I can’t get a hip replacement you know. He was with Jean Claude and Antoinette you know.”

Jack doubted this as Tugdual had left Antoinette and his four

children after deciding he was gay and moved in with the beautiful Jean Claude. Antoinette and he weren't talking anymore after she exacted her revenge by telling him he wasn't the father of any of her children.

"Only in France," he thought.

"You know I'm a lot more settled, I don't think I want to move now."

As if she could. Jack was scared by how quickly she was losing her faculties.

"I'm not having a hip replacement; I couldn't stand it. I don't know why but I've just been to sleep," she was laughing and couldn't stop. "I keep falling asleep," she chuckled on.

"Lucky you," said Jack with great sincerity, feeling absolutely knackered.

"I've been lying down but I need to see the doctor about my hip. It's Joseph's birthday next week isn't it? He's thirty isn't he?"

"No, Mum you are getting confused with my eldest son Rodney and he's twenty-three Mother." Jack sighed more deeply than ever. Mother was changing tack again.

"I haven't heard from him for ages since his last birthday when I sent him some money. I never hear from him unless I give him money. Your brother's not here if that's why you rang? He's changing his job you know. Did you know I might need a new hip?"

Jack had to end the conversation as he felt uncomfortable and then immediately guilty.

"Yes, yes you told me last week and I just spoke to my brother. You were given the telephone by him so don't worry Mother. Bye lovey... love you lots ...bye!"

He lay thinking instead of concentrating on the 'Spooks' programme. Mother had given him her neighbours' telephone numbers two years ago in case she had a problem and he couldn't raise her. Once he tried to get through and he found out that she used to leave the telephone off the hook deliberately because she couldn't be bothered to answer it. So Jack rang the two numbers.

The first neighbour said she had not seen Mother for three years and it was because Mother had fallen out with her. Mother's version was different and wrong.

"She's not interested in me; she never invites me round so I don't bother with her."

The second number he rang didn't work because they had gone ex-directory. It showed what a state Mother had got into. No friends, no daily structure, poor diet and no relatives close or loving enough to help her.

A sad indictment on society but an even sadder indictment on her two sons.

On the TV the 'Spooks' story line was too unbelievable so he couldn't concentrate on it. He thought about conversations with Mother and how he should have seen the warning signs, how she would repeat minor things three times within a ten minute conversation.

Whenever Jack spoke to his oldest son Rodney he would joke about his Mother's conversations.

"Rodney, if I start repeating myself like your Grandma take me out and shoot me." After a few minutes chat about their shared love of Liverpool FC he would say, "Rodney, if I start repeating myself like your Grandma take me out and shoot me."

They always laughed at the joke but Jack was serious. He didn't want Rodney to feel guilty about neglecting him too.

Of course the conversations with Mother dragged on. He sometimes pulled himself up with a start as he began to wish that his Mother was dead to get her money and buy a new car to replace the ageing SLK, and then as always he realised the absurdity of it and felt guilty. But he did wonder whether he alone had these thoughts or whether at a specific time in your parents' life you do look at them as a get-out clause, a private bank account.

But she was his Mum and he loved her unconditionally. Despite her dementia she sent Jack a wonderful letter just after his forty-ninth birthday. It was neatly written when she was having a rational day and was headed: LOVE. Jack pencilled in a note on the top of it – Mum's letter at age eighty.

*I love your Dad but I don't always agree with him.*

*I love to be alone but not all the time.*

*I love beauty; it's always there if you look for it.*

*I love my family but I found out I cannot live their lives for them.*

*I love life because I don't want to die.*

*I have loved my work but never believed I was indispensable. I find I can leave it now for somebody else to do a bit.*

*Love is difficult to define. It's like breathing, smelling and tasting; it's good and bad all at the same time.*

*I love each new day as I know it will be different from yesterday.*

*If I'm not happy or something isn't suiting me, I ask myself what am I going to do about it. If I can't do anything, then I put it to one side as tomorrow is another day.*

At the bottom of the letter, Jack had written on it: Believe your Mum, Mums are always right.

The rest of the working week was busy as always with non-stop meetings between eight am and seven pm with odd dinners with his bosses, an hour or two in the hotel catching up on his emails and the constant demands for his views which meant shouldering the client's responsibilities.

He was glad to drive home early that Friday afternoon to collect Melanie and Joseph and head south towards Devon.

Nim finally surfaced on March the fifth, 2004. The day that Jack turned fifty.

The Edmunson family had driven down to Dartmouth on the Friday night and booked in at the Old Quay House Hotel in the centre of the quaint town but still right on the seashore. Melanie had chosen it for its chic décor, reputedly excellent service and the chef Ben Bass winning a Remy Martin prize the year before.

But the hotel was special because it belonged to the rock that kept the estuary at bay with its gardens blending into the shore as if a natural extension to it. A beautiful and spiritual place to greet the midpoint in your life. On the Saturday morning Jack was awake early as always and left Melanie and Joseph asleep in the huge family room with its large Georgian windows and stunning sea views waiting to be revealed when the heavy drapes were pulled back. He went in search of his daily espresso to kick-start him into his birthday weekend but all was quiet within and so he wandered into the garden desperate to find some ‘Real Life’.

He stood motionless adjacent to the estuary and leaning with arms outstretched on the granite wall he felt incredibly alive as he breathed in both the beauty and the salty smells wafting through the hidden ozone. Staring down into the still and transparent sea he could see dozens of fish meandering gently between the fronds of seaweed and glints of sun, but between them all was a stranger staring back at him.

A pure reflection, unsullied by clouds, a clarity of person.

He talked to his reflection made from the sun that bounced from his physical form to the flowing water and thence back to his spiritual self.

“So, young man, fifty years down and fifty left to go. What’s wrong with being fifty in such a perfect place on a perfect day? Why not put your age into perspective rather than worrying about it? You’re not dead yet you old codger.” He carried on, emotionally enlightened by everything he sensed in the tranquillity surrounding him.

“You have everything in life a man could want. A cottage in the country, an apartment in Spain if the builders ever finish it. A wife and a dependent loving child, lots of friends and a fantastic social life. You go skiing twice a year and you just need to keep

the peace with Melanie and maybe get a girlfriend to have some decent sex.”

*But you are not happy Jack, you are not happy in the slightest.*

*You are a lost soul and therefore you have nothing.  
You have dreams that you want to become a reality  
and you must wake to achieve them.*

Jack shivered and pushing back on his forearms he stretched upright, moving his eyes away from his manifestation. You see, it wasn't what he had thought. He had thought: “Nice place, nice food and a possible shag tonight, life can't be too bad.”

He stared across the estuary and focused on the rusting hull of a small trawler under repair. Breathing deeply, he looked back over the sea wall and saw nothing now. No reflection and no fish, just seaweed anchored to the dark rocks which limply responded to the turning tide beneath the clear water.

“Shit, what the fuck is going on” he said to the seagulls. Looking around and back towards the hotel he still saw no one.

“I must really have lost the plot now.” He quickly swept around in a full circle as he clearly heard the voice again.

*No, you haven't lost the plot Jack, you are about to find it but you must listen and believe.*

*I'm Nim, your spirit guide for more than a thousand years.*

*You don't accept me yet but you must in this Karma.  
I am here to help you search for and find your true path.*

The reply came from directly above him this time and as Jack looked skywards he realised the absurdity of his search. But the stunning beauty of the day was suddenly clouded by his irrational fear. He turned and walked purposefully up the worn granite steps to the rear entrance of the hotel, pausing only to look at the garden



and seashore from his higher vantage point and verify that there was definitely no one there.

He was puzzled now rather than scared and focused on a small freighter moving past with its load of china clay ready for the processing plant further upstream.

“It was nothing really,” he said to himself as he turned to go inside but he looked back again.

“Nothing real.” That was the most important part of his weekend.

He was calm but excited back in their bedroom with the brocade curtains pulled back and the bright yellow sunlight streaming in. Jumping onto his son’s bed he waited eagerly for his presents. Joseph handed him an orange envelope with a receipt inside for a ‘Specialised’ mountain bike at eight hundred and seventy pounds.

“Just what I wanted Joseph, thank you so much. Maybe we can go cycling in Delamere forest next weekend. What do you think mate?”

His son was also excited by the thought but not the deed and immediately proffered the small box in gold wrapping that was Melanie’s gift. Jack tore the paper apart chided by his wife.

“I could have kept that to save some money Jack.” A green Rolex box emerged and inside an Oyster Perpetual shone in the early morning sun.

“You have always said you wanted one you know so I thought why not, it’s ‘fab’, and you deserve it.”

“Thank you.” Jack flipped open the authenticity certificate and found the receipt for three thousand three hundred and fifty pounds. It was a figure he never forgot.

“It’s very beautiful and luxurious Melanie. I won’t feel out of place at Cheshire set dinner parties now,” he said slowly and deliberately. “How did you buy it?” Jack knew the answer before it was uttered. She got heavily out of bed to go to the loo.

“I used our Visa of course.” He gulped silently and took a few steadying breaths before replying.

“Really?”

“Yes of course! I knew you would like it, it will look ‘fab’ when we go out together.”

Jack sat watching Joseph on their balcony who was entranced by the simplicity of the passing boats carrying more constituents to make clay and the raucous swooping seagulls. They shared the sun as it rose higher in the clear spring sky and Jack congratulated himself on how generous he had become in his dotage. He also questioned whether a Rolex was meant to make him or her look good.

A mountain bike that he wanted and a Rolex that he thought was ostentatious and a waste of money.

The Rolex bought to adorn Melanie as a statement to her friends rather than truly for her husband.

He had been given nothing with love and halfway through his life that was the missing emotion.

‘Her’ weekend with a Rolex, fresh lobster and a famous chef as bragging rights with her friends and his acquaintances rather than a special celebration of half a life reinforcing their love and happiness.

### 3 *Looking back*

**T**wo weeks later and they would share another weekend away as it was nearly his daughter's wedding but in the mean time they had to brave another one at home in Tettenhill.

Friday night started badly when Jack arrived home far later than normal at nine in the evening feeling hassled and tired. Melanie coldly welcomed him home.

"Where have you been then? I haven't prepared you any food as you are so late."

Her enquiry had a jealous questioning tone which was a bad way to reconvene. Jack patiently explained.

"The budget had to be ready for Monday so the boss and I stayed on until it was finished or the Board could slaughter us." She never commented on his work and kept her head down reading a magazine.

Jack went and sat next to her to say hello properly but he only received a perfunctory kiss with no eye contact. He stared at the crap TV programme wondering why it was on as she was reading *Cheshire Life*. He tried to engage with his wife.

"Did you have a good day?"

"It was okay." She carried on reading.

He tried again. "What did you do?"

There was a vague reply. "Oh, you know. Gym, Sainsbury's

and then it was time to collect Joseph.”

The magazine took precedence and the details about her day were not for him to bother with. She couldn't be bothered to tell him and was equally ambivalent about her husband's life. He sank into his chair and focused on the TV with its 'C' list celebrities living rough on an island and felt the same isolation.

At about eleven they both went upstairs to bed. Jack lay propped up on his pillows waiting for her to finish in the bathroom. A loud fart floated out of the en suite. It wasn't that he was really horny but he was slightly hard in anticipation despite the visions associated with the noise.

She came back into the bedroom with just her pants on and as she went to lower herself into bed Jack grimaced as he surveyed her body.

“So why have you let yourself go then, Melanie?” He couldn't resist it and knew it was rude and therefore he understood the lack of response. Jack looked at his wife as she blew her nose loudly, wobbling the thin pair of old black knickers. The best pairs were reserved for going out with the girls and purposely to make her feel good. He looked again and felt revulsion before turning over and turning his sidelight off. The memory of her oozing out of her body remained in his mind. Her fat restrained in odd places by the muscles put on at the gym three times a week, a living corset.

“Forget it,” he thought and presumed sex was off the agenda. No goodnights were said as she lay reading *OK* magazine. He stayed curled up like an embryo and still pointing away from her he quietly asked, “Do you have to read? I am absolutely knackered and there is no way I can sleep with your light on.”

“Jack, you always say that and within a few minutes you always fall asleep. I need to relax a little before I can doze off.” The same reply given as always to the same question. He sighed towards the wall.

“You have just spent two hours reading downstairs and drunk three glasses of wine so I don't understand your logic about relaxing at all.”

He shuffled further down the bed and pulled the duvet closer around his head. Ten minutes later and the inevitable happened. Jack was lightly dozing and shuddered alert as a heavy weight pressed on his right shoulder and pubic hair was rubbed against his arse.

“Do you fancy a cuddle then?” Deliberate and manipulative, Melanie played the game and knew the answer would suit her.

“Fuck off,” he moaned in a tired voice.

Saturday morning dawned bright and clear and Jack made an early escape to start washing his car. The salt and grime had completely covered the number plates and rear lights in a black soot-like coating. It was that horrible time of the year when winter seemed endlessly grey in every aspect and the cottage garden was only thinking about bursting into life again but at least it was the first clear sky in weeks.

He washed furiously, working off some of his frustrations and thought about his W.I.F.E.

“With Infinite Fucking Energy” to do anything she wanted.

“Will Ideally Feel Erotic” and give him a blow job.

“When Idle Frequently Expend” and does so constantly.

It was a stupid and silly mind game showing his lack of respect for her.

Mister Wiggly was stiff in his pants as he thought of how much he missed sex in the week. He wanked of course but that seemed to be getting harder to get any pleasure. Now he had to use baby oil for lubrication which helped increase the sensation as his mind flitted across several sexual fantasies from blow jobs to anal sex. Usually he settled on Bridget coming into his study one Saturday morning when everyone else was out and the gentle peck on the cheek became a rancid sex session leaving spunk on his groin but more terrifyingly soiling the new natural and ‘in’ coir floor to be discovered by his wife.

“Shit.” His frustration was worse than ever as he spurted acid onto the wheel trims to get rid of the black brake dust, pumping

the trigger hard several times. Peter pulled up in the old Peugeot and walked towards the suddenly guilty Jack.

“Tosser,” he called out loudly from the road. “How are you this week?” He was bouncy this morning as he was busy ferrying supplies to the farm shop and didn’t have to think too hard but just do it. Peter’s happy way of life was just doing and not thinking.

“Hiya wanker. I’m fine. Same shit, different Saturday.”

“That’s good then if things are so stable mate.” Peter always replied positively as he never looked on the pessimistic side of life.

Jack continued as he stood to face his friend. “I was reading Joseph a story this morning about the Famous Five and decided they must really be the Secret Seven but two had got killed whilst climbing into their tree house. What do you think mate?”

“I think you need to make me a Miele coffee and stop thinking about conspiracy theories. You’ll be telling me next that Princess Diana is still alive and living on a remote Indian island with her doctor friend, which of course will be the first thing that you and Melanie have agreed on in a whole year!” They laughed at the stupidity of it as they turned towards the house. A few minutes later they sat drinking coffee and eating chocolate biscuits on an old pig bench placed in the garden but on a south-facing wall. It was warm and sheltered on the crisp March day, reminding them that spring wasn’t far away. Jack looked skywards.

“You know Peter, all I do is work and when I’m not working well Melanie just bitches to me about what I should be doing. I’ve got an endless list again this morning. Do you find the same mate?” Peter smiled at Jack.

“You are kidding aren’t you? I never have lists off Bridget and she has to ask me loads of times and over many months before she gets things done. You’re not assertive about your life Jack. In fact you don’t seem to have a life anymore. Where have you gone wrong over the last five years?” Jack didn’t know and admitted it.

“I suppose working away hasn’t helped. Chasing the money to spend more and all the time on useless fripperies.” Peter laughed at his sad friend’s predicament. “I suppose now you’ve got your girlfriend in Rosset you’re not wanking as much?”

Jack smiled back. "Only in the mornings."

His best mate queried that. "What do you mean only in the mornings? Is that to just to keep your hand in?" They both laughed together.

"If only I had a girlfriend mate it might make it easier." Jack meant this seriously but Peter took it in jest. Jack continued looking for some answers to his life as a few clouds scudded across the bright sky.

"Melanie's become frumpy, lumpy and dumpy and she can't be arsed to do something about it. I keep telling her to go to the doctors as she might be menopausal but of course she just bites my head off which basically fucking proves it hey!" Peter wouldn't comment as he liked Melanie too much and probably more than Jack if truth be told.

"Maybe she just likes a lot of chocolate Jack. They say it's a substitute for sex you know."

"Very funny, wanker. At least she might lose weight if she had more sex as opposed to putting it on by eating chocolate!"

Peter was only mildly amused, remembering how many times he had shagged his friend's wife.

"Right, back to business mate. These one hundred beech trees to line the edge of your back garden. The price is five hundred and fifty quid and I'll bring them tomorrow okay?" Peter's kind offer had increased by fifty per cent since they had started talking about it back in November. The timing was perfect, any later would be too late to plant the bare root trees that season. So Jack had no option except to take the kind, belated and expensive offer. He did wonder whether his best friend was too clever for him and had deliberately left it so late.

Peter went inside to the toilet and Jack stared at the multiplying clouds again.

"So who do you trust Nim? No one? That is the correct answer. You know the Israelis have had a philosophy since 1967, after their occupation of the Arab territories, which roughly translated means believe only the facts on the ground. Build a fence to keep the bombers out. If someone kills an Israeli, kill two

of them in retaliation. It is a prevailing attitude of the Jewish state, as David Ben Gurion said; it doesn't matter what the Gentiles say; what is important is what the Jews do. You could apply that to my life hey?"

Nim was silent considering this was a great philosophy on life, as he had been there in 1967 and seen the hate between the races.

Jack's issue was his lack of trust in anybody anymore and he wondered if it was because he didn't trust himself. In this case because he wanted to fuck his best friend's wife who might be fucking his? Deciding all of this was too complicated for a Saturday morning he stood up, collecting Peter's cup, and started to walk to the back door of the cottage. Turning towards the relieved Peter he smiled. "See you in the morning and I'll bang the trees in before it's too late."

"Whilst watching your bad back you old git!" Peter jumped into the incredibly soiled Peugeot and sped off leaving Jack slightly perplexed about the whole matter and with a bad taste in his mouth.

The postman walked up to Jack, crunching across the pretty pink pebbles outlined by the red brown pavers. Jack had ordered a book on Islam from Amazon.com to meet some missing deep spiritual need and to obtain a view on the current crisis in the Middle East. *Understanding Islam* by Matthew S Gordon was handed over by the postman with a pleasant 'Good morning'.

Jack quickly walked inside his house and, slipping his dirty shoes off in the back hall, he furtively disappeared into the study to start reading the book. Melanie was still in bed and Joseph was playing on his PS2 upstairs so he had a bit of time to himself for a change. Time for his spiritual self and deeper needs to develop.

*Time to contact me and start moving down your  
true path.  
You are wasting too much time Jack, your future in  
Spain is calling you.*



He started to speed read.

Allah is the term for God in the Quran, the sacred text where his presence is made clear.

‘God bears witness that there is no God but He, as do the angels and those possessing knowledge. He acts but with justice.’  
Nim was with him in the room as he read.

*You have hidden knowledge Jack so learn and  
develop using this research.  
Question everything.  
Believe nothing.*

‘The three connections between Muslims and their God are:

The unity of God:

Utterly and inevitably One, unique unto himself.

Believing in the awesome justice of the divine.

Living a pious and attentive life.

Prophecy:

How God offers guidance to the World.

Believe in the prophets and their messages. This includes the Torah of Moses and the Gospel of Jesus.

Muhammad had a special role as the seal of prophecy. He was summoned by the angel Gabriel to go on a miraculous journey from Mecca to Jerusalem on a winged beast and there to lead Adam and Jesus in prayer before he ascended through the seven heavens, visited hell and paradise and alone entered the divine presence.’

“There is no God but God (Allah) and Muhammad is His messenger.” ‘To convert to Islam you only have to say this and therefore it is traditionally whispered into the ears of a newborn child.’

Jack made a note on a yellow Post-it note to look up the seven heavens on the internet. He constantly read items linked to spiritual improvement utilising the number seven and was becoming obsessive about the number but didn’t know why.

*Seven is a Good number Jack and fights Evil.  
Know the reasons as you will need them in your new  
life in Catalonia.*

‘The return:

The concept of the last days when all God’s creations will ultimately return to their divine source after the final judgement when we will all be assessed on our response to the prophetic summons.’

“Well Nim, it doesn’t look like I qualify to meet God on any count based on the three principles!”

There was no reply.

“That last bit is like your fourth and fifth Worlds isn’t it?”

The imaginary guide was bored and silently sat on the window ledge as he had seen and heard all of this before over many centuries. Jack was happy because of his research into something better than his humdrum routine life. He carried on flicking through the pages.

“So there are many points of similarity with Christian beliefs Nim. The Islamic Temple of the Mount in Jerusalem sits above the Temple of Solomon and is the core of the conflict between Muslim Palestinians and Jews. No wonder they can’t agree on anything.”

A few years earlier he and Melanie had visited Jerusalem two days after President Rabin had been assassinated. There had been a genuine time of reconciliation between the Jewish and Muslim communities. The ‘people’ wanted to bring some peace to their world which was in turmoil yet again. Rabin’s assassination had seemed to be a catalyst for peace over a few brief weeks of mourning before it all fell apart, leaving his legacy in religious tatters. A battle of rights looking back at history instead of positively looking forward to a shared future.

They had visited the cemetery three days after the burial and stood in silence with hundreds of others at two in the morning, staring at the tens of thousands of candles that adorned Rabin’s grave. Jack could feel the spirituality in people that night. He could see their pain without looking at their faces and hear the emotion in their hearts. He had thought deeply, standing in that flickering candlelight.

“If only the world could capture the essence of this energy and use it to rebuild the relationships between countries, forcing the politicians to agree rather than posture in their power and avoid listening to their people.”

The street corners in all the towns had youngsters standing around their own candle-lit shrines with their hopeful thoughts for a better future. Now they were older of course and still awaiting the leadership from their leaders who were immersed in their political battles.

“What is this terrible conflict we have in our leaders Nim? The power and corruption, the democracy that is not real and the free press that tells lies which are then amplified and reinvented in other newspapers during the week? Just regurgitated tripe.” Nim happily listened to Jack now as he had started to understand principles on his true path.

They had also visited Solomon’s Temple and as they stood opposite the Wailing Wall an orthodox Jew walked up to the couple. He placed a kindly hand on Jack’s shoulder.

“Come with me my friend, I will give you paper and a pencil to write your message and place it in the cracks of the wall as per tradition.”

Jack walked behind the sincere man dressed in black religious-looking robes and ducked into a small cave at right angles to the wall. As he became used to the dim light he noticed his sincere friend’s companion move his chair and station his legs across the entrance as if to block Jack’s exit.

“Your pen and paper my son.” They were duly handed him. “And my friend, would you like to give fifty dollars to the poor and needy that we help in the City every day?”

The Jew moved closer to Jack and seemed to threaten now instead of help.

“Not really,” said Jack as he turned and lightly jumped over the outstretched legs and walked into the light and towards the wall. On the paper he neatly wrote: Trust no one except your God. He thrust it into a crack as he crossed himself and turned to guide Melanie across the wooden bridge and past the machine gun toting

guards and into the area on top of the Temple and immediately behind the wall.

This was the Muslim area with virtually no visitors at that time of strife. It was reflective, genuine and only disturbed by the pleasant and happy laughter of four Arab boys playing football.

Jerusalem was a trip worth making but only to make it obvious that the route to crucifixion and the birthplace in Bethlehem were so absorbed into the political and material worlds that the truth had died somewhere a long time ago.

Jack skimmed through the book, a reflection on how he wanted to cram as much knowledge into as little time as possible.

*The opening of the Quran:  
'In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate.  
Praise be to God, the Lord of all being.  
The Merciful, the Compassionate.  
Master of the Day of Judgement.  
It is You alone we serve,  
It is only from You that we seek aid.  
Guide us on the straight path.  
The path of those whom You have blessed.  
Not of those with whom You are displeased,  
Nor of those who go astray.'*

“A powerful religion but I don’t believe in God, so it’s just words isn’t it Nim?” He paused his reading and swung backwards in his chair hesitating in his beliefs and receiving no reply before carrying on.

‘Islam means submission and reflects a Muslim’s decision to submit to the divine will and to its consequence which is peace.’ He blew out a despairing breath.

“So why Nim is there no peace and everywhere people are in conflict with each other. Explain why? See you don’t exist as you have not replied to me.”

*Listen and learn and remember when you fought and  
why you fought Centurion.  
You believed in Zeus and Jesus without  
questioning either.  
You just believed and they gave you the will to live.*

Jack shifted uncomfortably feeling someone near.

‘God is served by a host of angels, mysterious beings known as jinn, from which we get genie.’

“So does that mean all angels are like you, Nim the jinn and you all have to obey us humans?”

*We obey a higher power but it is you I am interested  
in helping Jack.*

Jack heard nothing except the sigh of the wind through the bare cherry tree branches outside the study window.

He carefully hid the book high on the bookcase so that Melanie couldn’t see it and pour scorn on him for being intelligent or spiritual. He sat and considered.

“How does a seemingly peaceful religion like Islam create the hate for people to be permanently at war with the ‘West’ almost like the new Crusades? Islam versus Christianity?” He felt the book would help him understand the turgid and biased TV coverage on the ‘Beeb’ although no one seemed to object to the programmes.

“Maybe, it’s the Christians who are bigoted and can’t see that a religion practised daily by millions can still give an individual a spiritual structure to their life. That’s probably true. We are intent on avoiding religion and the bureaucracies of Churches and can’t even practise basic goodwill in life but others live and breathe it and can practise their religion at any time and in any place. One thing is definite; thirty nine billion pounds worth of oil rights given to US oil companies in Iraq might well explain how power and money started the latest Iraq war rather than seeing it as a crusade against the infidels.

Power, money and sex Nim. The deadly trio. Three things that inevitably rule the World.”

Jack stopped thinking and left his spiritual sanctuary to go and cuddle his son for some ‘Real Life’ and real love on a Saturday morning. Joseph was all love and all religions combined, too young to be corrupted by the deadly trio. Jack smiled at the innocence of a six-year-old and the unflinching one hundred per cent trust that children have in their parents who can create a new individual as a ray of hope in the over-complicated and material world.

The rest of the day was spent on the boring and turgid chores leaving behind his life on a higher plane.

Melanie and Jack sat in front of the Saturday night rubbish on TV. They were reasonably sober, not too tired and on normal speaking terms for the first time in two months.

“Melanie,” Jack whined slightly, “can I get my porn video out from last year and watch it with you darling?” Mellow Melanie politely declined.

“Please can I? You know it turns me on.”

“If you must but don’t expect me to enjoy it!” came the slightly disgusted reply. But it was a good time to ask as she was at that one day in her cycle when she was gagging for sex, providing he didn’t screw things up by arguing. The video duly rolled. He glanced at his wife who still had her head in her magazine. In the first scene the girl led the horse across to the stable and started to groom it, watched by a hidden man who just happened to have his shirt off already as it was hot stacking hay in the barn. Feeling like a piss, she languidly pulled up her skirt revealing no pants and a shaved crotch. Fondling herself in ecstasy with her eyes closed, she pissed for what seemed ages to Jack whilst Melanie continued to glance at the magazine but occasionally at the TV. Meanwhile, the man started to play with himself at the thought of shagging the girl and accidentally making a noise in his hiding place he got caught out and somehow starts to kiss and fondle her all in a couple of minutes. Melanie’s magazine continued to be the focus of her

attention as Jack put his hand on her crotch.

“I don’t know how you can watch this crap Jack,” but she had been glancing at it more frequently and was thinking of sex now.

As the man licked the girl’s cunt and slid his prick into her, Melanie started to slide her hand inside Jack’s jeans and fondle Mister Wiggly. Jack was transfixed by the video as the girl moaned with the man sliding his prick into her arse. White juices dripped down the actress’s thighs as Melanie started to suck Mister Wiggly and Jack imagined fucking Melanie’s arse. He had started fingering it a few months ago and by pushing his fingers from the inside of her arse and cunt at the rear he had found a spot that really turned her on. As the girl sucked the man’s cock there was the inevitable finale of his spunk spurting into her mouth as Jack pulled Melanie to her feet to push her upstairs to their bedroom.

They were both ready for sex now and as they tongued each other, he slid her pants down and roughly shoved himself up her. Twisting her onto her hands and knees he rubbed her clitoris with his right hand and thrust his prick deep inside again. Melanie was hot and wet, positively ovulating all over him. At one point she groaned and he felt hot juices spurt inside her and warm the length of his prick, with the juices being sucked out and still warm dripping onto his bollocks. Jack reached into the side table drawer and pulled out some KY jelly normally used with the rabbit vibrator that was popular with the Cheshire set. He put some cold gel on his left forefinger and as he manipulated her clitoris and bumped his prick against the top of her vagina he gently eased his finger into her arse and pressed against the head of his hot prick.

“Jesus wept Jack that is so good.” Melanie was ecstatic for the first time in months grinding on him so hard it turned Jack on even more and made him bigger. “Put Mister Wiggly in it if you want but be gentle.” He slopped more KY jelly onto his hot prick as he shoved four fingers into her blood-engorged cunt. Slowly, he eased the head of his cock past her sphincter as she gasped but after

that point he shoved it in harder and felt it with his fingers from inside of her. Whatever it did to Melanie, she was totally entranced; gasping and pushing back harder and exciting Jack to his limits. One final gasp and almighty thrust brought deep throated shouts of “shit oh shit” from both of them as they orgasmed together for the first time that year. Jack eased out and lay on his back with Melanie quickly straddling him. Smiling, she wiped his cock with the bed sheet before using her hand to slide him inside of her. She started to thrust her pubic hair hard onto his groin and he pinched her nipples before pushing her arse on to him with both hands that made her convulse again and again as she orgasmed for the second time. Collapsing satisfied onto his hairy chest she half complained.

“My knees are hurting terribly and that’s all your fault big boy. That was ‘fab’,” and she slid heavily off to the side allowing Jack to go to the en suite to wash his still large cock, vaguely wondering about germs and arseholes.

“Goodnight.” Jack felt happy and stopped worrying for once.

“Goodnight.” Melanie was satiated and they turned their side lamps off in unison.

A dull night with no arguments but it had culminated in good, happy and erotic sex.

The next morning she amicably turned towards him as he got out of bed.

“Jack, do you realise that at fifty you have become a nymphomaniac just like that previous girlfriend you use to brag about?”

“Too true and long may it continue, fifty down and fifty to go and I mean that. Just think of how many people will die in Britain today. Do you know the answer Melanie? Is it tens, hundreds or thousands?” He had dressed quickly as he talked and was leaving the bedroom but turned to look at her. She was ugly and fat and identified with nothing he wanted to achieve in his life. She was the antithesis of everything he spiritually required. “It’s not a rehearsal you know, you need to make the most of it.”



“That’s too serious for a Sunday morning,” she replied without any argument, “but I suppose that’s you.”

She turned over contentedly to go back to sleep, emitting a large fart as he left the room.

About an hour later, Bridget pulled up outside with an open topped pick-up full of beech trees. She sounded her horn demanding his attention.

Jack quickly walked outside to be ahead of Melanie and strode up to Bridget to kiss her right cheek. She was radiant and interested in him, exuding sexual tension behind the wide and constant smile.

“Lo there Jack. Where do you want them my love?” She smiled more widely.

“Wherever you can meet me during the week Bridget.”

“Really, Jack Edmunson. I expect you would run a mile wouldn’t you?” She was definitely interested and so he pushed his luck.

“Well, maybe you could text me this week to tell me if you can get away with a secret meeting then? What do you think?” It was at that point, with that question, that their affair started.

“Well, maybe I will think about that and maybe I will or maybe I won’t my love!” She laughed at him and shook her head backwards with her long natural bloneness glinting in the sun and taking his breath away. It compared to the multi-coloured, multi-layered and man-made coiffure of Melanie who now belatedly arrived. He stared at her and compared his dull wife to Bridget.

“It must be peer group pressure that makes her do that with her hair.” That’s where Bridget was different as she always did what she wanted and had no inclination to copy her friends and compete in anyway. He loved her assertiveness about leading a simple life as much as he loved her hair, smile and conversation. He was still standing close to her and he breathed in deeply, sucking in her natural essence.

Jack was happy to see Bridget but wanted to be alone with

her. He pushed aside his reverie and started unloading the overly expensive beech.

Joseph and his Father walked to the edge of their large garden where the three foot tall beech stems sat in a peripheral sequence ready to be dropped into the newly dug holes. In the distance they could see the Edam greenhouses sparkling through some blue wood smoke curling up from the red bricked stack of The Pheasant Inn. It was a beautiful setting. Last summer they had sat with the Edams downwind of a badger's sett just a few hundred yards away from where they now stood, and as the sun fell behind the distant hills, they watched entranced as two badgers emerged to eat the ears of corn they had left near their hole. Snuffling around and looking up for any predators they toured around the sett giving a few minutes' joy to those watching before purposefully setting off on their lonely evening pathways.

They had all been sitting on a blanket drinking Rioja, bathed in the red light of the setting sun as Jack remarked to Peter. "That was so good. It was better than sailing, sex, football and beer."

"Have you got your priorities in order mate?" Peter needed to get this straight. "Surely you mean football, beer and sex only and in that order!" He laughed with Jack.

"No," responded his mate, "I really believe watching badgers in the setting sun is better than anything else and is far more spiritual." Bridget had leant across and patted him twice on his heart.

"You know Jack, that is a beautiful thing to say and I agree wholeheartedly."

But that was when life was more stable and as the winter's day closed in on the boys they finished the planting and wearily trooped back to the house under a grey and dreary sky. His Dad tightly clutched his little boy's hand.

"Joseph, I always said to your brother and sister 'work hard and play hard' because that will help you have a lovely life. So remember that after today my boy." Joseph looked at his Dad with love.

“Work hard and play hard,” he repeated as Jack put his arm round his shoulders and they walked step by muddy step back to the welcoming cottage with its yellowed lights turned on to beat the gloom.

Melanie watched her husband and her beloved son from the bedroom window of the pretty cottage and smiled sadly as she spoke on the phone to her best friend Harriet.

“Yes Jack is still away during the week but that makes life easier now.”

“Are things more difficult Melanie? I thought everything had settled down after Joseph had started school? You said you enjoyed the extra time to yourself.”

“I did and of course I do. You know how it feels as you always encourage me to meet you for lunch! The problem is Jack who seems to resent me having that spare time and keeps leaving me jobs to do that I have no interest in.”

Harriet sighed down the telephone, recalling her husband Matt’s instructions that morning to clean her car. “What sort of jobs?”

“Man jobs Harriet. Checking the oil level of my car when I haven’t got a clue what to do. Or power jetting the flagstones outside even if it’s raining.”

Harriet laughed loudly. “Tell me about it! But that’s men for you my friend.”

“True but Jack seems so vindictive about it as if he is taking the stress from his job and insisting on my sharing it. He is such a moaner Harriet and I believe it’s because he’s ten years older than me. He is always complaining and always moaning which drives me mad.”

Harriet was thoughtful in her reply. “So why did you marry him if age is such an issue for you?”

“Come off it Harriet. You know why. A nice lifestyle, money to burn and occasional sex.”

Harriet was shocked. “You aren’t serious are you?”

“Of course not. Anyway darling, I have got to go as the boys are coming in now. Speak soon. Bye!”

Harriet replaced her handset on the cradle and walked into her conservatory to stare at the giant cedars in her garden. She was thinking about Jack. She liked him a lot and felt sorry for him as she knew that Melanie had just told her the truth.

Bridget and Peter called in to see the Edmunsons for a cup of tea but ended up staying several hours including for supper.

Jack had showered and was upstairs looking in the mirror but didn't like what he saw. He looked down and away and felt the true 'him' inside and felt good, happy and young. Definitely, a lot younger. When he looked up again he saw an old man with lines and creases but the person who stared back wasn't him. It was shocking. He realised that being old was a creeping disease and it was affecting his marriage. He wondered if stopping having sex occurred overnight. Would he sit down with his wife and say, "That's it; on February the twenty third in 2009 we will have our last sex session."

Would he do that? Or would his wife corner him one day and say she's not getting any pleasure from it anymore or that the penetration hurt. Perhaps it would be a more devastating cerebral comment.

"At your age you should know better." That would be the biggest turn off of course, the end of his time as a hunter gatherer.

Whichever way it happened, he could guarantee that she would instigate the last sex in his life.

He pondered about a call to prostitution being the only solution. It was undoubtedly more fun with a prostitute anyway. The surreptitious idling around the Chester railway station or down by the weir on the river. The furtive eye contact, the whispered how much? How long? Will you take your blouse off for that amount? Can I kiss you? And then following the 'pro' to the seedy hotel for a quick but fantastic orgasm with a woman who for the first time ever didn't want to be in love with him or make him belong to her like an old pair of her many shoes.

Fantastic, as Harriet kept saying. What a fantastic word as a euphemism to have for a sexual climax. Better expressed maybe

as ‘Urrrgghhh, Oh shit, Oh my God, Urrrggghhhh’ and the huge expansion of breath at the shuddering end. Jack felt horny just thinking about the possibility but it would be followed by the headlong panic to get out of the room, then out of Chester and finally onto the A51 yet again. Finally reaching home hoping that no one noticed any difference in him or the lateness of his arrival due to the endless traffic.

Pure pleasure and pure hell offsetting each other in some mad passion-dripping moments. The coming and the going, so to speak, but what guilt feelings would follow? Never mind the thoughts about Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea, VD and Aids.

He looked in the mirror again at the old man staring forlornly at him and decided he now felt older inside too.

Fifty is not the new forty – bollocks.

It’s when you realise you need to get your life in shape and do what you want to do before you die.

The four best friends sat around the kitchen table with cheeses, pickles, hams and salad. The latter especially for the girls on their regimes although it would make little difference to chunky Melanie. Red Rioja wine and Speckled Hen beer were laid out on the brown cherry table top. Warbies most expensive bread had been duly donated by the farm shop rather than left to go stale and be given to the hens. Jack started the conversation in his usual style.

“I don’t want to be controversial but! I’ve bought a book on Islam Bridget and it’s incredible how strong a religion it is; almost a way of life.”

“I remember listening to a Radio Four programme recently,” replied Bridget. “It was on October the twelfth, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The whole programme was about the Jews and their conflict with the Palestinians. On this day God makes a decision on who will live and who will die and the Jews ask him to allocate them another year. Did you know that Jack? Imagine truly believing in your faith and asking for another year of life. The Jewish faith is as strong as Islam you know.”

Jack replied, nodding in agreement, “I think there is something out there that you can’t touch or understand and I don’t think you have to match it up to a religion but just believe it exists.”

*So why aren't you talking to me Jack.  
You keep talking as if I exist but denounce your  
inheritance.*

Jack was drawing Bridget into his spiritual search whilst the other two grunted and shook their heads in disbelief.

“That’s lovely Jack.” Bridget was entranced. “Have you ever experienced anything strange that has influenced you?”

“Yes, I’ve had a few weird moments. We were in Tintagel on the way back from Dartmouth the other week and we all stood in the old ruins on the headland. As Joseph and Melanie wandered away from the ancient communal hall I could hear women singing to me. You know, as if the song was for me alone and I shivered as if something was energising me.” Jack considered whether he had shared too deep a secret.

Peter couldn’t resist it. “I really think you have lost the plot mate, next you’ll tell us about some ghost you’ve seen.”

“Well I know you don’t believe these sort of things but Melanie will back me up on this one. I have felt a ghost last year but I have never seen one.”

Jack was smiling at the disbelieving Peter who said. “Prove it!” Peter really wanted to know more even though he didn’t believe in anything that wasn’t practical.

Jack began. “We went with some friends to visit a new house they had bought and hadn’t moved into as it was being renovated. It’s near Ludlow Castle in Worcestershire. A very old house dating from Elizabeth the First times, set in a beautiful valley by a stream and under a small hill. Apparently the Queen used to visit the village to go hunting. Well, we went around this place full of old oak beams and wattle and daub and saw the devastation caused by the builders. It was as if they were ripping the soul out of the place. You know ‘OTT’ and far too drastic. As we came outside I

said I needed the loo and went back in on my own. I stood in the toilet with the door ajar and could see across to the open door of the cellar which was a room cut into the sandstone beneath. It was a weird place when we had gone into it earlier. Cold and damp with a nasty feeling that made you want to get out quickly. As I pissed I kept looking over my shoulder and the hairs on my neck sat up on end and I felt cold. I knew there was something there but couldn't see anything. So I zipped up and walked out backwards so that I was still facing the cellar door until I was outside and only then did I turn around and run. I told Melanie all about it but not the friends as I didn't want to upset them. I specifically said that the house was evil and that something bad was going to happen because of it. Anyway, after they had moved in we found out that the woman was having an affair and shagging this bloke in the new house and blow me down but a few months after she had finished the affair, the guy was so gutted he hung himself from one of the roof beams inside of it." Jack turned to his wife for affirmation. "A true story or not Melanie?"

"A true story and a very sad one Jack," she concurred. "Change the subject please!"

Melanie refilled the wine glasses and Peter opened his fourth bottle of Speckled Hen before asking.

"Anyway, Edmunson when are you going to get the snip?" This was a recurring theme in all of their conversations over the last year since they had confided in their best friends that Melanie was pregnant and had decided to go for an abortion.

"I like Johnnies mate; I have got a thing for burning rubber." Jack responded positively but actually he hated using them. Between putting on a Durex and Melanie going to the loo in every sex session it totally ruined his perception of making love. You couldn't just do it anywhere at any time. You couldn't move around and change position much as it slid up and nearly off. It always got put on at the same planned point after the licking and sucking before finally fucking. He had bought special ones with

mini electric blankets built in but they were too hot. He had tried those with special 'excite' lubrication but they were also too hot.

"It's burning," she had said. He had even bought the raised dimpled ones but they created too much friction and therefore were also too hot. He had always thought getting hot in the groin was the whole fucking point of sex!

The abortion day had screwed his mind up completely. There was no other way of describing it. The place seemed to be full of young white-faced girls with acne and Melanie was therefore outside the norm. She was quiet all the time they were there as if totally detaching herself from the whole thing, whilst he had felt like he was killing somebody rather than a tiny nothing, a nobody. When they drove home Jack burst into tears and sobbed his heart out thinking about Briony, the tiny being who had just died and for months after it plagued his mind. Melanie sat in the car and said nothing. No details, no remorse, nothing.

Now they were all ganging up on him about the snip and Jack felt remorse even a year later.

"You go and get done then! Go to Doctor Jones and get the snip; they do it on a Saturday morning in the cottage hospital." Melanie was laughing as she said it. "It only hurts if your balls swell up and even that has an advantage."

"What advantage?" Jack replied without smiling.

"No sex with your husband for three weeks, what a relief!"

"Nothing new there then Jack!" Peter joined in the chiding and only Bridget sat and carefully watched the body language, worried about her male best friend.

Jack tried to take the heat off himself. "You know, I married a thin, dark and short-haired woman, three stones lighter than now and have never asked her to change her body."

Peter commented, "Yes, but I don't suppose you think Melanie can tell any difference in you Jack over all these years. For instance she can't tell whether she is kissing your arse or your bald head. Both are rounded and both hairy but thinning." Everyone laughed



even Jack. It was true he had very little left on top and had resorted to a number two trim all over. He did suppose that there was probably more hair on his arse or even his back than on his head.

“Women have to multitask all the time,” laughed Melanie, “kissing heads and arses is easy for us.”

“That’s not multitasking, it’s because you have a split personality,” replied Jack, smirking in retaliation. He continued. “Anyway I avoid ‘Tar poor lee’, the money no object town and the doctor’s, especially since the nurse took a fancy to me. I only went for a health check and she was all over me stroking my arm to get a vein up. I tell you she succeeded – but it was the wrong vein!”

Melanie was also on form. “I made him go for a check up. You know, just to see how many more years I might have to suffer!”

“Very funny, hah bloody hah as you say.” Jack was unimpressed.

She added. “And if my husband dies my son will still make me smile.”

Peter joined in with glee. “If your husband dies, it will certainly be hard to wipe the smile off your face.”

Jack was miffed. “Why is everyone picking on me today?”

Peter gave the honest answer. “Because you always pick on everyone else mate!”

“Okay but seriously having a health check isn’t worth it as you are going to die anyway. The nurse told me, ‘You have to lose nine pounds Mister Edmunson as your BMI is saying you are overweight, it’s just over twenty-five.’ What’s the BMI? I asked. ‘Body Mass Index,’ she replied. ‘The calculation looks at your weight and height and if below twenty-two you are okay.’ So you are telling me to lose about five per cent of my weight to meet some statistical analysis based on the average unfit fatties around in the UK when I am fifty and can still swim half a mile or walk up Snowdon. Give me a break nurse; my Bloody Minded Ingredient is probably high because I’ve got so much muscle not fat!” Peter was distinctly unimpressed.

“Jack, let’s face it you’re old and over the hill so stop kidding yourself mate. If you came and worked in my greenhouses for a day you would be absolutely trashed.”

“That’s because you are too mean to invest in some decent high tech equipment, wanker.” A defensive Jack then told the others about his testicular cancer conversation with the nurse and the booklet she slowly and painstakingly showed him including the graphic pictures.

‘You have to check yourself out weekly Mister Edmunson, the faster you catch it the better chance you have of beating it. The blood test we have just done is not foolproof. You need to be physically checked by me now.’ The nurse told him to pull his trousers and pants down to his ankles and stand up. She knelt in front of him as if about to give him a blow job and started manipulating his bollocks in her hot hands.

“No way Mister Edmunson that can’t be true, can it?” Bridget didn’t know what to believe.

“No of course not but my reverie was broken when she said. ‘Right, Mister Edmunson you can pull your trousers up now as you are all clear apart from a few genital warts.’”

“You haven’t have you?” Bridget was now worried about having extra-marital sex with Jack.

He didn’t answer the question, leaving her thinking about it as he changed the subject. “I hurriedly pulled up my pants as fast as possible to cover my growing erection. That was the most embarrassing thing I have ever had done at the doctor’s in my life.”

Peter asked, “What was the nurse’s reaction?”

“She just changed the subject quickly to cover her own embarrassment and started talking about the purity of Buddhism. I suppose they get used to situations like that.”

“You live in a strange world, wanker. Sometimes I think you are on a different planet mate.” Neither Peter nor Melanie believed in spiritual things but Bridget was more encouraging.

“I sometimes think there is a parallel world but then I dismiss it from my mind and concentrate on selling pansies.”

Jack was pleased to have some support no matter how lightweight. “Is it because we are all in need of something to cling on to Bridget or do we really know there is something very different out there? A bit like the ‘X files’, you either believe or you don’t

but if you half believe, then it's more worrying because you are apathetic like most of the population."

The concept was eating away at him and he shared it with them all in a more simplistic way.

"I have a problem. The body of a seventy year old that's falling apart, the mind of a twenty year old especially concerning sex but the spirit of a five thousand year old although I can't see back more than my fifty years. I have this terrible urge to change myself but don't know why or how. Sometimes, I wonder who knows what is actually true in life."

*You need to lose half a stone.  
Don't blame going off to Dartmouth for a weekend  
and stuffing your face.  
You may be fifty but you have spiralled out of control  
and that's your problem.  
Greed pure greed, you don't know when to stop.  
You are totally lacking in discipline with no focus just  
like most of the population.  
Stop blaming circumstances and blame yourself or  
you will never get the right Karmic balance.  
That's the real answer, you are not at peace with  
yourself, you are sandwiched between the mediocrity  
of day to day modern life and seeing others around  
you give up and so you join in with them.  
Well stop.  
It's mindless and stupid and you have much to do on  
your path.*

Jack looked up in the air and silently said, "Nim, I thank you for your kind advice, now just fuck off." He cut himself a large piece of brie and spread it onto his Warbie bread as he had thought he had clearly heard Nim giving him a bollocking. He told the others. "Did you know every few years when you are fifty plus, you start to lose muscle fibre and can't replace it, so you get weaker with thinner limbs?"

“That’s ‘fab’. When I get as old as you I will also get lighter,” laughed Melanie.

Jack continued, “I also read in the *Daily Mail* that women are proven to look for one key attribute in men as they get older.”

“Money?” said Peter.

“No, that’s a genetic fact and can never be changed. They actually look at the size of your waist. So stay thin Peter and get laid more often!”

“Well you can forget sex then wanker as you are so overweight.”

“I already have tosser, I already have.” Jack glanced at his wife who deliberately turned away and so he stared at Bridget and hoped she would text him in the coming week as Melanie also quoted from her favourite newspaper.

“Did you read in the *Daily Mail* about necrophilia in our hospitals? That’s a skin disease, that creeping thing that eats you alive.”

Jack groaned and threw his head into his hands, wondering if shagging a dead body would be better than his wife. Her general ignorance and unwillingness to work really bugged him. Over the last few years she had given up on learning and had decided La La land with the baby was an acceptable way to live.

As the evening drew to a close, Jack started to think about the week ahead.

“It’s not a rat race anymore Peter, it’s gone way beyond that. We all need to get out of the technology race. The constant battle to do everything faster and better. There’s more choice, more junk food, more cars on the road, more texts and emails. Did you know every year there are an extra two million cars going on the road and only half a million coming off? That’s on top of the twenty-seven million so you get earlier and earlier going down the A51 to beat the queues.”

Bridget was the only one interested in his Monday morning blues.

“Jack, on that depressing note we must go.” They all kissed

politely and wished each other luck for the week ahead but only Jack wasn't looking forward to it as he felt he was living outside of their real world.

'Top Gear' was on the TV which signalled the end of the weekend again. Jack sat looking at Melanie eating chocolate on the sofa opposite him.

"Maybe Melanie is getting fat because I don't know her anymore and I am not offering her enough attention to make her feel good about herself? So she's given up and she's turned into a fumble bum." He stirred before asking nastily.

"Why are you eating chocolate fumble bum?"

"Why are you calling me fumble bum?" she replied looking across at him rather than at Jeremy Clarkson. "Come over here and bend over and I'll show you." Jack thought it was funny but the comment was met with a stony silence and so he broke it.

"Marriage is what you put into it you know Melanie. A bit of fun, a bit of repartee. A lot of truth as well so that you can keep communicating." He tried this new approach and failed again.

"It is what you put into it!" he repeated jokingly, taken by Jack as his dick into her vagina of course.

At least she laughed and replied. "It certainly is and also how much you wiggle it about!"

"Maybe that's why we had under-floor heating Melanie, it's the only time a woman wants to go on the bottom." He carried on thinking as Clarkson took her attention away again. "Nim, women reach about forty and change their whole attitude to men and us blokes think it's hormonal but in fact they take control and it's all in the mind. Husbands have to fit in with their life and if working away, they just have to come home and be told what to do like a child. Kept in place like my son." He stood to look out of the window at the roosting birds.

"Do you believe in spirits and ghosts Melanie?" Jack was thinking back to the earlier conversations.

"No, of course not," she replied. "That suicide was just coincidental, you didn't see or feel anything, it's the work of your over-active imagination."

“So what about that time when I was coming to see you at your parents’ house? When I got to that corner in the lane and I felt that someone was sitting in the rear of my car but couldn’t stop and couldn’t look back because I was scared. When I told your Dad, he said that was where a young girl was murdered twenty years ago and lots of people had reported sightings over the years. So I suppose I made that up when I didn’t even know about it? I think I have a gift and I do see and hear supernatural things.”

He didn’t tell her about Nim as she would have thought him completely mad but on more days now he talked to Nim in an obtuse way as a pretend friend.

Jack didn’t truly believe in Nim but he knew he could accidentally access the paranormal.

“What about that dinner party in Burdesley last year where I saw a ghost? Surely you can’t say that was my imagination too?”

Melanie squirmed but said nothing.

They had been with twelve friends in a four hundred-year-old cottage built into sandstone on a hill just below the Desperate Cavalier pub. They were shown around the house and when in the utility room that was sunk into the rock, Jack had felt cold and uncomfortable as at Ludlow. The parents had mentioned during dinner that they were having problems with their two-year-old daughter who woke four or five times a night screaming at someone who was seemingly in her room. Halfway through the dinner, Jack had gone to the toilet above the utility room and couldn’t stop looking down the length of the bathroom towards the door as he pissed. He had felt cold again and as he walked out of the bathroom door something white had flashed by him and gone into the baby girl’s room opposite. Jack was in shock as he had recounted the story to the dinner party downstairs. However, the parents told them all that after moving in they had both seen black shapes of men with tall hats walking past the windows and had chased outside to find no one there. Eventually, after many independent sightings, they had confided in each other and realised they were seeing exactly the same strange things but had felt uncomfortable about sharing the crazy notions with each other.

A week after the dinner party they had the house exorcised by an Anglican priest. The child had been moved into a different room and had slept perfectly well ever since. Even Peter Edam knew the house and said as a youth they had attended weird parties there when Ouija boards had flown into the air. He also said a previous owner reportedly carried out magic rituals at the full moon. All local myth but for a hundred years it had been renowned as Black Hatch, a place you kept away from especially at night.

“I remember your story Jack,” said Melanie, “but your imagination far outweighs any facts. You should write a book.”

He was dismissed and decided on an early night rather than trying to compete with the TV and her lack of respect. His last words before walking out were valid and unimagined. “Melanie, why don’t you get off your arse and stop meandering into middle age?”

He stamped out without saying goodnight. “If you are listening Nim, my marriage is so shit.”

*I can see that Jack; you need to sort it out as it is  
affecting your chosen future.*

Another horrible Monday and the ‘Merc’ cruised at a painful thirty on the M6 as Jack said his daily plea.

“Oh Lord hear my prayer” then he thought of others in trouble in the world and wished them well with whoever else was choosing to do so on this miserable morning. At the end he crossed himself in unison intoning out loud “the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.” He always asked ‘God’ or something to hear him seven times as seven is mythical, seven is lucky. This ritual had started recently and spontaneously and he couldn’t remember where and why but Nim could. It was when he found Jack again on the night in the driveway when his son was safely in bed instead of staring out of a window waiting for his Dad.

Jack remembered how he had bought Melanie a lucky bracelet with seven charms. It was when he had started working away from home and thought she was having an affair. So his way of coping

was to give her more material possessions.

That probably started the marital rot because she had love on the one hand and money on the other.

The problem being she had then chosen his money and given up on love and left them with nothing as a married couple.

It was just convenient to be with him now.

His mind drifted thinking about the dullness of the marital weekend. His wife avoided doing anything which was hard because she could dump those problems on her husband. She wasn't willing to take on a challenge anymore. When they discussed it, she turned the argument and avoided listening to the logic, always preferring to pick holes instead. Melanie's character constantly denied any blame for anything. She never admitted to being in the wrong and just turned the conversation back on him.

"You don't take responsibility by just saying no, Melanie." Jack constantly argued about this negativity. "You work from a position of ignorance. It's not logical, you revert to disagreeing with some small part of a previous argument usually from years ago and very biased towards the self i.e. yourself."

He always ended up angry as he said this as it showed the level of her ignorance, of frankly being a bit thick and further eroding any love left between them.

Building up the barriers, day by day, week by week, year by year.

The walls between them were getting higher as each one sank into their own dark hole inside, higher walls and a deeper hole aggregating together to make a massive divide that they were irrevocably building.

The journey to work today was physically more painful than ever. A lot of rain had fallen in the night and although only drizzling now it seemed to glue everything together so the traffic couldn't move properly. He grumped further.

"Where have I gone wrong Nim? I never get any support. Who supports me? Who do I turn to when things go wrong? I make it happen but no one asks me how I feel about anything."



*You haven't gone wrong Jack and you are not going  
crazy talking to your spirit guide.  
Remember, I know and don't need to ask and I am the  
only one who knows.  
You need to get all these thoughts out of your mind  
and move on in your path to find your true self.  
Look at your day, your week, your year.  
You just exist and don't live anymore.*

“Thanks Nim, I appreciate it. It's no use talking about yourself at work, they are only interested in you taking care of their pain and making life easy for them. After all you earn the big bucks and therefore you take the shit every day. There's certainly no one at home to bother about me. End of story.”

He hadn't noticed that he had replied to a fictitious spirit guide.

“People talk such fucking bollocks,” he thought, “just talk and dream. If only they tried to get out of their comfort zone Nim, they could do anything they want and be inspired or inspire others. But not many people want to take a chance, to take a risk.”

Even his best friend, Peter Edam, was forever missing opportunities in stark contrast to other similar garden centres around Chester that changed and literally bloomed with new ideas. His pal had it made. No mortgage, no loans, always pleading poverty although on paper he was probably worth a few million pounds.

He thought about the people in The Pheasant Inn last Friday night. Looking around the pub he seemed to be the only one witnessing that most couples sat there in their convenient relationships. Many couples feeling safe to have someone around but willing to surreptitiously and secretly look around for more. He included Jean in this respect, eyeing up Peter and seeing them lark about together and exclude their partners. He thought maybe they were Soul Mates, or was it just illicit sex and fun going on somewhere in the background behind closed doors? The joy of illicit shagging which was far more exciting than the turgid weekly attempt at home. Melanie wouldn't go to the pub with him as it was too smoky.

“Go and see your ‘pubby’ friends Jack.” An instruction to get out of her way and a chiding about who these friends were i.e. not good enough to mingle with and not Cheshire set. This was followed by the inevitable bollocking when he got home because his clothes were smoky and his breath stank of beer.

He flicked Radio Four on: An interview about the start of the Universe. Thirteen point eight billion years ago it grew from a singularity, a point of zero volume. The Professor asked: ‘Are we created by a science student in another world as an alien experiment? Our universe sits like a page in a giant book and you can pass from one page i.e. one universe to another page or universe through a singularity from inside a black hole.’

*This is a clever man Jack and that is true.*

‘The universe consists of three things: Matter, anti matter and black matter.’

“And I don’t matter mate.” The morose Jack chimed in and then listened intently for a gem of wisdom.

‘We don’t know anything about eighty per cent of our universe. You have to ask yourself, what is on the other side or in effect the outer cover of the book? In a hundred billion years, we will reduce back to a singularity, and in just seven billion the sun will have expanded so much that it will have swallowed up the Earth.’ Jack smiled and said out loud to the slow moving traffic queue.

“Not long to live you bastards hey! Then the traffic will move okay.” He carried on wondering about the world as the traffic crawled down the A507.

“Perhaps dream sequences could become reality? Is it déjà vu, passing through the pages of the universal book? I thought it was caused by a momentary slip of the brainwaves over a fraction of a millisecond? But reality can also become a dream, so maybe I am just an existentialist? I am not here so I can do anything I want.” He sounded his horn with a jab of his fist.

“Fuck off and get out of the way you twat!” Existentialist Jack came back into the real world for two seconds to vent his anger at a timid woman driver trying to ease her way out of a school entrance. Patience wasn’t his strong point.

As Jack drove to work Bridget was also driving her girls to the Grange before going on to John Lewis at Cheadle Hulme for some retail therapy. Melanie was already home and waiting in the kitchen in a mini skirt and low cut blouse as Peter walked in through the back door and straight up to her. Without speaking he picked her up by the waist and sat her on the blue-eyed worktop that stared at her naked arse. They had sex for a mad ten minutes before he started to pull his trousers up to return to work.

“It’s always so quick Peter; can’t we make time to be together for a whole night?”

“Don’t you think that would complicate things? It was bad enough when you had to get rid of my baby wasn’t it?” Melanie kissed him.

“Yes but I coped. If you had said, I would have left Jack and had your baby, you know that don’t you?”

“I know that but then I would have lost my girls instead of an underdeveloped embryo and I couldn’t stand that. It was the right thing to do going to Liverpool.”

She replied quietly. “I think Jack suspects something. He seems to know that I don’t want him anymore.”

“Don’t worry so. A secret is a secret unless you tell someone and neither you nor I will ever tell anyone, will we?” He looked at her as if he had made a threat. “Anyway, I have made him think I am knocking off Jean by playing around with her in his company and sometimes I feed him a line or two to keep him guessing.” Melanie also thought her secret lover could be shagging Jean and considered the last two years of her affair as going nowhere, but she always gave him the benefit of the doubt. The sex was good compared to Jack whose cock was only half the size of his best mate’s.

She smiled at Peter and said lovingly, “You are so earthy and practical my lover. That is so different to theoretical Jack, the man who plans everything to the ‘nth’ degree and then complains when I haven’t done something.”

Peter checked his flies before answering. “Well that’s Jack for you. Over-serious and over-controlling!”

She gave Peter a quick hug before he jogged out of the back door with a big smile on his face.

Jack arrived at the Rosset warehouse and walked in as a focused professional. Shoulders back, head high and a ‘Right, let’s get on with it attitude’. Good sex over the weekend had helped him feel confident about himself. It was eight thirty am on another frustrating Monday morning following a meaningless weekend again.

He handwrote a list of personal to do’s before throwing himself into his work.

The top items on the list reflected their joint purchase of an apartment in Spain a year ago at a place called Yapanç. They had been to the Costa Brava many times previously and stayed in places like Tiramisu and were captivated by the area. He hoped the builders would have completed renovating the apartment by Easter so they could move in at last.

His life’s to do list read:

Be there for Joseph.

Spend lots of time in Spain and less time at work. You can’t buy time!

Work to live and stop living to work.

No C (carbohydrates), no D (drink, alcohol) or no E (Edmunson). Get a grip on your life and stay fit.

Sort out my marriage once and for all. Success or failure but sort it out.

Write a book. Funny, Zany, Spiritual and meaningful.

Do it all now, it’s not a rehearsal. See number one. He then made a calendar, a mini timetable on an Excel spreadsheet showing

the number of days until he might die at a statistical sixty-seven.

“How sad is that,” he thought as eight hundred and seventy weeks made it sound so short because each week went by in a flash. “Perhaps it’s just depression?” as he swallowed his second St. John’s Wort tablet of the day swilled down by strong espresso out of the office machine.

Jack got to Wednesday without thinking about Bridget but that afternoon his mobile rang out ‘Te Amero’ by Il Divo and he saw the caller was her. He pulled in a deep breath before answering. “Hello you, this is a nice surprise, lovely!”

“Lo there! Well Jack, I don’t know why I am doing this but it seemed more personal than a text.” She sounded excited.

Pleased to receive the call he said. “It is more personal and having a private conversation with you is something I have been thinking about for a long time.” He blurted this out without thinking of holding anything back.

“Just assure me Jack that you will delete any call records because God forbid if Peter ever found out. You know he could truly kill someone who steps on his territory, he really could. You don’t know anything about him and what he is capable of.” Bridget was genuinely scared but she still felt it worth taking a risk at least in talking to Jack.

He asked the obvious. “Is it that bad between you now? I’ve seen you grow apart over the last two years and especially the arguments but you never know the hidden things.”

“Jack, you cannot imagine how he treats me behind closed doors. Even my girls don’t see it and it has gotten a lot worse lately. The most horrible thing is the sexual abuse.” She started to cry, the telephone call was one for help and understanding not to start an affair.

“The other day I was asleep with my back to him and he just shoved his dick up my bottom. Just like that. How brutal can you get? He just demands sex all the time, sometimes two or three times a day, period or not he just wants to shove it up and come

all the time. It's disgusting and degrading, treating me as a blow-up dolly with no love or thought. He is just an animal Jack." She cried more.

"Bridget, I am so sorry, I never knew you were under so much stress. I just want to be there to give you a big hug." He was shocked by the confession.

"Look Jack, I've got to go now and collect the girls from hockey, I'll ring you when I can okay?"

"Anytime, day or night Bridget and I'll eliminate all records immediately so don't worry. You can talk to me about anything, anytime and it's private between you and me forever." Jack sighed. "Bye Bridget, take care, love you lots."

Bridget took in a deep breath. "Love you too Jack, I'm sorry to dump on you but it just seems right talking to you. Love you. Bye."

Jack put his mobile on the desk in his office and walked out through the open-plan area to the main door and into the car park. The sun was setting and cast a red glow across the freckled sky as he stared into the west and thought of her. He felt very sad for her but also in truth for himself. He thought of the women he knew and considered whether she was different and might be his Sun Sharer?

"Don't rush in Jack," he murmured to himself, "don't be driven by your dick."

He remembered something Peter had told him about women needing careful understanding and that they even have their own language especially for their husband.

"I bought it ages ago." And you are too stupid to notice the extra cash drawn out of the joint account.

"Fine." I am really pissed off with you and you should know by now that I am right, so stop arguing with me and shut up.

"Five minutes." Is only five minutes when you are watching football but if she is getting dressed to go out it will be half an hour.

"Nothing." The calm before the storm. The argument following ends in fine.

"Go ahead." Do it if you dare.

"Loud sigh." You are an idiot.

"That's okay." Think carefully before you do it or you will

have your bollocks cut off.

“Love you.” Bridget had said the words. I respect your feelings and I know you respect mine so shall we try to take this further because I want to.

“Love you too.” Jack’s acceptance of that respect and commitment.

That evening he sat in the bar of his hotel and telephoned Peter’s landline hoping to hear Bridget’s voice if she picked up the call.

“Hello?” Unfortunately for Jack, Peter was in and Bridget was driving the girls somewhere.

“Why do you never say your name, wanker?” Jack chided him.

“Because I know who I am, tosser. Where are you then?”

“Usual shit hole hotel, in a dead bar with dead people. Tell me mate, why do women always seem to have sunglasses on all the time now? There’s a bird here, sat at eight in the evening and wearing frigging sunglasses. What’s all that about then?”

Peter put him straight. “It’s just fashion. Following their peers as in *Hello* and *OK* magazines.”

“Well, how stupid women have become and what a stupid use in a stupid place just for fashion.” Jack wasn’t impressed as Peter interrupted him.

“My wife doesn’t do that you know. Never follows fashions and rarely buys clothes. Well, I think she doesn’t,” Peter checked himself.

Jack replied too honestly, “Well, wanker, you are lucky having such a good wife!” And Jack genuinely meant that whether compared to Melanie or any other wives he had met.

“It’s all down to the art of communication Jack.”

“What the hell are you on about Peter?”

“The art of communication. It’s all a question of distance. Mouth to ear and hand to head. Smack.” Peter’s sound effect resounded in Jack’s ear and jumbled his thoughts.

He wondered if Bridget had meant that as well before replying carefully.

“Well tosser, that’s novel, they don’t teach you that at school. So how are you Peter, how’s your week going?”

“I weighed myself yesterday for the first time in months and I have lost a few pounds.”

Jack was impressed. “You looked physically great on Sunday mate; you looked like that sprinter, what’s his name, Linford something.”

“Ah! Yes Linford Christie,” said Peter, “but the subtle difference is the size of his lunch box. Mine’s bigger!” Peter bragged and knowing the truth from Melanie it made him feel cocky.

Jack couldn’t resist it. “No mate, the subtle difference is you’re not black.”

“Okay Jack, hah bloody hah, as your wife would say. You might not be jealous of my Lycra shorts image but at least I can wear them, unlike yourself tosser. Let’s face it all you can boast about is wearing your Sloggi maroon underpants to all the girls!”

Jack responded. “But wanker, I have good reasons to wear maroon Sloggis. First of all you can’t see the piss, which at my age seems to come out whenever it wants to. You know I thought it was cystitis from having too much sex but of course that’s wishful thinking.” They both laughed before Jack carried on in the same vein. “You can’t see the shit either but there again the only problem is you can see the white secretions from your arse where your haemorrhoid suppositories have leaked out squirt ... squirt... squirt at a time.”

“That is fucking disgusting!” Even Peter was appalled but of course the graphic descriptions justified the truth of it.

Jack continued, “I used to enjoy big knickers on Melanie as well you know. When you could pull them back to see a tantalising bit of arse before shoving it up and then along came thongs. What a waste of time they are. Now I have to pull back the fat to find the thong to then move it over and get my dick up. Sometimes, it seems a waste of time; you might as well shove the thin bit of string in as well to add a bit of friction.”

“Oh God Edmunson, you really do need to get a woman in Rosset.”



“Maybe I will mate, maybe I will.” Jack thought of Bridget and then spoke about the coming weekend. “Knowing my luck Melanie will be ‘on’ when I get home this weekend.”

Peter gave some Peter type advice. “Don’t worry, the extra blood flow to her nether regions will probably improve the sensation for her, she might like it more than usual.”

Jack was appalled. “No way, I can’t have sex when it’s her period, what a horrible sight. Imagine that, you couldn’t lick it could you?” Peter obviously had experience of this.

“Well turn the light off mate, you just need to shag something don’t you?”

Jack was still unconvinced. “I don’t want to do that either, I like to look.”

Peter quipped. “They say that’s a sign of age.”

“What is Peter?”

“When you can’t rely on your sense of touch anymore.” They both laughed again.

“But seriously Peter, all these things just show you that you’re getting old and I do worry about that. There are only two important things in life, being born and dying. The rest in between is what you make of it, using your free will which most people seem to have lost. They replace it with whatever the world forces on to them pushing them one way or the other. You meet so few characters with a free spirit and free will to change things. The world is lost in our Western culture and I know other cultures see it differently because I have been reading about it. Getting older should be fun, a time to focus on the family, rather than disappear up your own arse trying to keep up with everyone and everything.”

Peter wasn’t impressed by the speech as all he saw every day was the practical grind of life and he rarely considered the future. He was interested in death though and did reply about that. “It’s an interesting concept death isn’t it? What happens when you die? I think it goes black and that’s it. No coming back, no afterlife, nothing.”

His soulful mate argued against him. “I definitely can’t agree with that. You read so much about things after death that you have

got to believe something. Maybe it's just mankind's vanity but suppose you do come back or go and exist in a different dimension. How will you justify your life to whoever controls it all? Will you take the risk?"

Peter replied confidently. "Of course wanker, until proven otherwise, you come in with nothing and you go out with nothing and that's the facts."

Jack wouldn't let go. "Look fifty-seven million people die each year in the world, one hundred and fifty-seven thousand daily or nearly two a second. If nothing else that's a lot of human emotion that is released in a day, a lot of energy, a lot of souls going to heaven mate. Take for example the difference between a murderer and a saint. A murderer kills someone and mostly because the police don't catch them no one gets to know who it is. On the other hand a saint brings someone alive and everyone in the world hears about him. Does that mean that death is easier than life?"

"Jack mate, I think I will concentrate on having fun and so should you; so come out this weekend on my new quad bike."

Jack had two responses. "Well let's face it wanker, a quad bike is just a bad car and secondly it would kill my hips to sit on it. You know I would love to come with you really but it's Edima's wedding in Paris so I won't have time I'm afraid." The banter petered out and they said their goodbyes without Bridget arriving home so Jack decided to ring his Mother.

Whilst Peter and Jack put the world to rights, Melanie was talking to Bridget who was using her mobile whilst sitting waiting for her girls to complete their music lessons.

"Are you free to lunch with Harriet and I on Thursday?"

"Oh, if only Melanie. Peter is sending me over to Yorkshire to collect some plants in the lorry. Can you believe that! The things I do for him and he doesn't ever say thank you." Melanie started to envisage her meeting with her absent friend's husband and immediately felt horny.

“You are so good to him Bridget. How do you put up with him?”

“Because I have no choice. He supports the girls and I and we have a nice way of life but if someone else was available, well maybe I could envisage an alternative lifestyle.”

Melanie asked hopefully, “You wouldn’t leave him would you?”

“No, not really Melanie, it’s just a thought that us girls have after years of marriage. How about you? Would you consider leaving your old man?”

“Old being the operative word. He is always complaining about his hip or his back. It really pisses me off sometimes. Moan, moan, moan.”

Bridget didn’t like Melanie running Jack down and asked, “Yes but what about answering the question?”

Melanie paused before replying. “A secret is only a secret if you tell nobody!”

Bridget had heard the expression used many times by her husband and pondered how close he was with Melanie. “Bye Melanie, I can see the girls coming out. Enjoy Thursday. Bye!”

As Melanie replaced her receiver she revelled in the thought of Thursday. Illicit and exciting sex with Peter followed by a girly chat, white wine and a nice lunch before collecting Joseph from school. She mentally hugged herself and smirked as she was so content with her lifestyle.

Mother was rambling from the start of the obtuse conversation with her youngest son.

“My sister always wanted to be better than me. She wanted a Hercules bike, a new one you know son.” He didn’t know as they were last made forty years earlier. “She saved up for two years and wouldn’t accept having a second-hand one. I don’t know why she did that. It was always like her to want new. I’m quite happy here now but I might go into a home down south by the seaside. You know in Devon where your Dad liked it. I’m not sure I can though because I have got a bad hip, did I tell you that Jack? Where are you working now?”

Since the dementia she was always thinking about her sister and what she didn't do right in Mother's eyes. It was a constant gnawing complaint.

"Ay son, she thought her boyfriends liked her but I never told her how they used to chase me behind her back. I would save money for the 'wakes' and follow them all inside but my sister was so mean she never even gave me one of her chips."

Jack lasted as long as possible before wishing her goodnight.

His mobile started to sing 'Te Amero'. The colour display showed the name.

"Hiya Bridget, where are you? I just rang your house."

"I'm sat outside Tina's music teacher's house in Peckforton and as I've got nearly half an hour, I thought I'd say hello. In fact, I spoke to your wife and lied about the girls' lesson finishing so that I could talk to you."

Jack felt a warm glow inside. "That's nice, thank you. It's lovely to speak to you. Did your day get any better?"

"Just the usual, it was freezing here today. I even put my thermals on with three fleeces when I was out in the shop. I don't think I have warmed up properly yet. The rest of it is normal. I run around behind everybody, tidying up, cooking or placing the farm shop order and they all relax and take it easy. So just a normal day." Jack was holding the mobile in his right hand and seemingly like all boys of all ages when relaxed, he had unconsciously put his left hand down his pants fiddling with Mister Wiggly. A typical boy thing, not sexual, just habitual whether on the telephone or watching 'Match of the Day.'

"Well my lovely, do you wear your thermals instead of big knickers or do you keep those underneath for extra warmth?" Jack couldn't get an image in his mind.

"How do you know that I wear knickers at all Mister Edmunson?" she replied with a sexy giggle. "You might think me lumpy, frumpy and dumpy like you keep telling my girl friend but I might have hidden qualities!"

Jack's penis was harder as he perked up and replied. "You are just a tease and will always hide your best bits hey! I bet you have a chastity belt on so no one can find out if you are a true blonde or not."

"Well, there you go Mister Edmunson, something you may never find out you bad man."

She was interested and he could tell it from her voice and so Jack pushed harder. "Firstly, what is so bad about wanting more from you and secondly I would like to find out. I have always thought about you when I am away in my hotels on lonely nights." He left an opening for her.

She was husky with her quiet reply. "What have you been thinking about me doing Jack?"

"I have thought whilst lying in my bed about kissing you. Is that okay?" Jack's prick was hard in his left hand.

Bridget sighed. "Yes of course that's okay. Sometimes, when I'm forced to have sex and I mean forced into sex and not making love, I considered what it would be like if it was you instead."

Jack was stroking his prick, which was very hard now and his voice had risen. "I tell you Bridget, you and I would not have sex. We would only make love and the reason is because love is in the mind and isn't just physical. If you desire someone in your mind it makes the sexual side a hundred times better."

Bridget said quietly. "I would like to make love for a change. I need that tenderness in my life and someone to want me for being me rather than just taking advantage of my presence."

Jack was short on breath as he talked. "I am thinking of you now my darling. I am touching myself and thinking of kissing you. I am putting my hand inside your blouse and touching your nipple, can you feel me doing that?"

Bridget was sighing as she replied. "I have my eyes closed Jack and I can picture you kissing me gently and touching me. I can smell you, do you know that?"

Jack was desperately hard in his hand; the zip on his trousers was undone as he wanked himself. "God I want you Bridget. I am wanking myself thinking of you. Do something for me will you?"

“What do you want from me Jack?” came her soft reply.

“Put your fingers down your pants, keep your eyes closed and believe that it’s my hand. Have you done that?” Jack’s prick was pulsing with excitement.

“I have Jack; I am so wet thinking about you.”

“I am still kissing you so keep rubbing your hot wet cunt my lovely. I am rubbing you and now I am down there with my mouth licking and sucking your clitoris. Are you feeling good my darling?”

Bridget was breathless as she answered. “Jack, I can’t believe I am doing this but I feel like you are here licking my clitoris and God I am so horny, so hot and wet my love.”

Jack pushed harder as he was so close. “We are kissing face to face now and you are straddled across me and I’m slipping my prick inside of you and sucking your hard nipples. Can you feel my big hot cock inside of you Bridget?”

“Oh God Jack, what are you doing to me for God’s sake I’m nearly coming.”

Jack was out of breath now. “I am inside you and I can feel your hot juices dribbling down my bollocks, Oh God I’m coming and thrusting and coming.” As he gasped and spunk flung itself across his hands he heard Bridget gasp and then gasp again. He carried on softly and tenderly. “Did you have an orgasm darling?”

“Yes Jack, I can’t believe you excited me so much over the telephone my love. I have never experienced that in my life.”

“Did you really come Bridget, really?”

“Yes, of course. I would never lie to you and that is the first time in more than a year but I need some real love Jack, do you understand what I’m saying.”

Jack was thoughtful. “We need to get together. Can’t you visit your friend in London next week and see me too? I can be in the City in less than an hour by train.”

“I’ll try my love. I will try but I have got to go now. Thank you Jack.”

“No need for thanks Bridget, drive carefully, let me know okay.”

“Okay,” and she was gone. He sat in his bed and looked at his limp dick. Yellowish spunk was still spread across his hand, pants and bed sheets and he felt dirty. Guilty and dirty as he imagined it would be with a prostitute.

“Why have I done that? Why complicate my life?” He thought about it but it was too late to change his path.

*Because you needed to Jack.  
You think she is special.  
You hate Melanie and feel you have lost ‘Real Life’  
and therefore your manhood.  
That’s why.  
So don’t feel guilty; feel happy that someone truly  
wants you.*

“I suppose all men are the same Nim, you see despair in other couples but not in yourself? It must be rare that occasionally one man breaks that desperate mould. One man has got the guts and courage to get out of the marriage and that’s what it takes to be able to walk away.”

The weekend started in Rosset and ended there for Jack.

He caught a forty minute Easyjet flight to Charles De Gaulle airport from Luton on Friday night and found a temporary parking spot for his hire car to wait for Melanie’s plane that was forty minutes late. He shut his eyes and closed out the long day trying to relax. He had grave misgivings about the weekend as he had not seen the majority of the wedding guests for twenty-five years. He was stressed at the thought of reliving his old life and that rekindled the heartache and emotion from the time when wife number one had left him.

The last time he had seen her she was big, fat and ugly, a far cry from the slim dark woman he had cried so much for when she had walked off with his best friend. He also felt outnumbered. There were a whole six guests from Jack’s side of the family, his family

plus his brother, sister-in-law and Mother. Whereas, number one had invited seventy-six from her side which Jack considered 'OTT' especially as he was footing the eight grand bill. He decided he needed to be more assertive in his life, mainly with women who tended to rule over him.

He sighed deeply and recalled his first marriage as a departure thundered overhead. Number one was his childhood sweetheart. The first and only girl he had sex with before Melanie. If he had been a stronger character he would have realised that he needed to sow his wild oats elsewhere and avoid the obvious trap that the first is the best and the only one for you. He always regretted the stupidity of marrying his first real girlfriend and felt it had affected his whole life, causing him to waste much of it. For a long time he had been jealous of Melanie's male friends and had presumed with typical vanity that it was her behaviour that was at fault. But as he sat considering his past, he realised that it was a character defect in him as he had a controlling and therefore a jealous personality. So it was something to do with his childhood or the way his parents behaved that had ground the possessive streak into him. Or the jealousy was caused by a lack of confidence, a need to feel wanted, but there was something definitely missing in his character set. When number one eventually told him about her affair with his best friend he realised he had known because her behaviour had changed. She had become less loving and more interested in vague subjective parts of life.

Melanie had behaved the same way over the last two years but Jack loved her less each month that passed and so he wasn't bothered if she walked away from him. In fact some of his behaviour towards her actively encouraged this.

"How sad is that between two people Nim?" Who she might have had an affair with was quite limited and all were known 'friends'. His thoughts were confused. "Has she committed adultery? Was Briony my daughter?" He would never know as it was not in her psyche to be wrong and so she would never admit anything.



However, number one had admitted wanting an affair and told him she wanted a different life as she wanted to simplify things but she had not had sex with his best friend. A typical story used by most people and believed by them at the time of a break up because it made it easier. Jack thought it was a load of bollocks but it still seemed like the end of his world and he did everything possible to keep her. He vividly remembered her driving away in her parents' car with Edima and Rodney waving goodbye to their Dad at ages four and two. That sort of emotional scar had created the Jack who sat with his eyes closed in his car listening to the roar of jet engines and thinking too much as always.

A text arrived from Melanie on his mobile telling him to collect them from arrivals, which he duly did and then they started the forty minute drive to the wedding hotel outside Meaux.

“What a strange day,” he thought. “Everything has happened in chunks of forty minutes and so perhaps I’ll get forty minutes’ sex later?”

That was also Jack, ever hopeful, but it never happened as they were too tired and didn’t have enough love in them to overcome the fatigue.

Saturday started with the obligatory kiss to number one and a brief handshake with few words to the ‘ex’ best friend. Jack moved away as fast as good manners allowed. The rest of her family were welcoming and old. It was shocking to see how people had changed and it quickly put his ‘fifty down fifty to go’ theory well out of shape.

The wedding was held in a little village Mairie on the edge of a sandy square bordered with sculpted plane trees that were waiting to leaf. Opposite stood the ancient but small Catholic church for the blessing.

Mother started out badly, saying to all those assembled, “Hello number one; when are you and Jack going to have your next baby

to keep Rodney and Edima company? You need to do a lot of poking to have one you know!" She cackled as she said it.

"Oh fuck." Jack tried to steer her away to number one's grandparents.

Mother continued. "I've got a bad hip you know, not that my sister cares of course. Why are we having a party Jack?"

"It's Edima's wedding lovey with my ex-wife number one. Do you remember her?"

"I don't remember anything anymore son. Is she pregnant again? She does look fat."

The wedding breakfast was going well and Jack relaxed as Melanie became more stressed with his 'ex' relatives around him.

She never liked Edima and was muttering under her breath about how tasteless it all was when the Scottish piper, not particularly native to France, marched in playing incredibly badly. This was followed by the gay Best Man's speech which was incoherent nonsense, apart from the bit everyone heard about Edima's new husband shagging her best friend. Most people concluded this was down to the drugs he was taking for Aids or perhaps the cocaine snorted in the toilet an hour earlier.

Jack was in his element. The wedding was much better entertainment than he had expected and he had developed a permanent drunken smile on his face by the time he had to say a few words.

"I am very happy to be here to see you all again. I can't say I have missed you but that's life hey! I am also very happy to be able to play with my new grandson and look forward to seeing you all at the Christening. To you my darling daughter, good luck as you'll need it on the rocky road of marriage. To the bride and groom!"

Random claps and a few 'bride and groom's' wafted round the room as the piper kicked in with Rolf Harris's 'Two Little Boys', enjoyed immensely by Jack as he sang along loudly.

"For fuck's sake Jack." Melanie was not impressed and never normally swore. "This is diabolical and we are paying for it!" Jack

became more relaxed as his wife got angrier.

“I am paying for it, not you Melanie. You never pay for anything lovely. Chill out, it’s funny and in fact as I pay for everything stop thinking it’s a waste of your money that you want to spend differently on yourself.” Melanie went off to the toilets in a huff, dragging a reluctant Joseph with her as the piper had kindly let him try his bagpipes.

Rodney, Jack’s eldest son, plus number one’s daughter by the ‘ex’ best friend and three of Edima’s girl friends all stood at the bar ‘doing shots’ and having silly conversations. Despite his fifty years Jack had missed out on shots in his life but was learning quickly. He decided that tequila was shit especially with all the salt which was bad for his blood pressure. Aftershock was better and an After Eight was like a nice dessert pudding. A subtle blend of crème de menthe, Baileys and Tia Maria slipped down his chin on to his shirt and just a little into his throat as he stared at the young girls’ boobies pushing out of their new dresses. Number one’s youngest daughter was thrusting her groin into him as the bride joined them. “You lot are a nightmare!”

Number one’s youngest looked shakily at her sister and explained, “I like your Dad; he’s good fun and nothing like Mum said he was, you know; a complete fucking bastard.”

Jack smiled on as happy as a pig in shit. “I’m looking forward to wives three and four Edima, is that okay?” Jack giggled with her girlie friends as he gently put his arms around two of them and accidentally on purpose touched their tits. The best man waltzed past as if on a cloud and putting his hand on Jack’s shoulder he slowly and lovingly shoved his finger up Jack’s arse taking in half the fabric from the seat of his pants. Jack turned and smiled at him.

“That was so considerate, thank you! Please enjoy yourself; it’s my pleasure to have you here and your pleasure to have me.” When Jack swayed down to the toilets a few minutes later he glanced out of a side door to see a group of people holding his eldest son and the best man apart as they tried to swing pathetic little punches at each other.

“Aren’t young men so stupid Jack? So inexperienced don’t you think?” Turning he saw number one’s youngest had followed him down the corridor. She linked her arm in his and guided him into the ladies. Shutting the trap door she shoved her tongue down his throat and pulled his groin into her, quickly followed by unzipping his fly and grasping his hot red dick.

“Oh fuck!” Jack was about to stop her and walk out as she bent down and started to give him a blow job. “Oh fuck.” He sighed again and grew harder, thinking how both number one and two had always refused to taste his semen. Perched on the toilet with his trousers down and his ex best friend’s daughter sucking his cock caused him to think hard, very hard. But then the thought passed as he came shuddering in her mouth, happy to get some revenge on the bastard who upset him all those years ago.

“I’ve got to go.” His lame excuse left her in the cubicle with a hot wet cunt and no one to fill it. He justified it to himself as not having a shag so he could deny it like Bill Clinton. Back in the ballroom he sat alone unsteadily on his stool to try to get his breath back and stop the walls moving. He could see Melanie purposefully walking towards him. The disco was in full swing and at nine pm, she had decided enough was enough and told him so.

“An ouef is an ouef,” Jack joked. “It’s a yoke. It’s fucking French.” But she missed it completely.

“Jack! Joseph and I are going to bed early as I am so bored. Are you coming too?” Her manipulation of him suddenly seemed blatant rather than carefully cloaked.

He staggered slightly as he stood and then he shouted across a very loud Robbie Williams, “Don’t need to come now.” He smirked. “Got to stay up for my daughter’s wedding dear, need to be sociable!” Bending down he kissed Joseph goodnight.

“Don’t be late,” Melanie warned him ineffectively.

He wandered off to dance to ‘Come on Eileen’ with number one. He decided he should tell her how he felt after twenty-five years apart but he was having trouble placing his mouth near her head.

“You should never have left me you know. What are you still

doing with that waster,” pointing to the ‘ex’ best friend who he thought about hitting.

She leaned into his ear in complete control. “Jack, after all these years you are right but you were an impossible person to live with. So don’t forget that and give Melanie a break yes?”

“No way! She is a fucking asshole compared to you lovely,” he pulled her in closer to his body so that his words were only heard by her. “She doesn’t treat me right. At least you had some respect for me and some brains in your head.” He pulled away and twirled her round, deliberately letting his hand brush her breast. Jack was on an adrenaline roll and wondered if he could shag his ‘ex’ wife.

“Why not? Give me a good reason Nim.”

*Because you are going to get yourself into even more  
trouble than you are already in.*

*You are running away from what you know you have  
to do.*

Number one’s youngest joined in the dance, still wanting Jack to shag her and therefore saving her Mother by diverting his attention. As the disco died a natural death the party moved into the hotel bar at one in the morning where they found the drunken Scottish piper collapsed in a corner. Number one’s youngest came to sit on Jack’s lap with her hand inside his shirt pinching his right nipple.

“I don’t drink you know,” she slurred.

Jack giggled into her ear. “Neither do I.” He kissed her cheek. Edima’s girlfriends had moved on to the seats next to the Marseilles rugby team that was on tour and the girls sat choosing which hunks they would shag that night. This was simply a practical expedient as they had no room booked. Eventually, Jack collapsed into his room at four in the morning, banging into the dresser as he tried to sneak in with the lights off.

But God he felt alive and happy for the first time in years.

Melanie started exacting her day of revenge at six thirty in the morning.

“Wake up Jack, Joseph wants to watch TV. Try and find an English channel for him. What time did you come in?” Her voice was harsh and never ending.

“About one.” Jack felt like death warmed up. His mouth was like a kangaroo’s jockstrap as she nudged him.

“We need to be at breakfast for seven thirty. Remember we promised to take Joseph to the Eiffel Tower.”

“No problem lovely,” he replied through gritted teeth as she turned on her side to snooze.

By eight thirty Melanie was ready to leave the breakfast room and start sightseeing. The Marseilles rugby players were clapping five of their colleagues into the room as two of Edima’s friends walked towards the exit waving to Jack and shouting loudly. “Hello Jack from wives number three and number four.” Melanie turned to him with her mouth open.

“Just a joke last night lovely. Just a bit of fun.”

Number two carried on outside dragging poor Jojo as Jack said goodbye to Edima and wished her a happy honeymoon.

“Dad, look at these pictures on Rodney’s camera. Do you want a copy?” The digital pictures were remarkably clear compared to Jack’s brain. The concrete deer with Jack sat naked astride it looked truly alive. The white alabaster of wife number three or possibly four’s tits glared out with Jack’s head between them. Fast action shots such as dancing with his trousers down whilst stood on top of a table and snogging wife number one were not blurred enough.

“Edima, just email them to me at work. At work you understand!”

He walked out of the hotel with a smile on his face.

The rest of the day was a letdown. Vomiting inside a French broadband telephone box whilst trying to get the Chester and Liverpool football results. Settling the bar bill behind Melanie’s back. A four hundred and eighty pound hit excluding the one hundred and fifty pounds cash that she never realised Jack had spent.

“What’s this entry for a night bar at eighty four pounds just

here?” This was the only sensible question she managed about it all.

During the weeks that followed Melanie’s friends would ask about the wedding weekend and always got the same reply from her. “It was fine,” delivered in a clipped voice.

Jack got asked the same questions at work and in The Pheasant Inn. “It was fucking brilliant, the best weekend of my life.”

A sharp contrast in their attitudes to life before the wedding, during it and after it.

The weekend after was pleasant enough as the whole family were focused on Easter and the first holiday in Spain in their new apartment. The weather helped, spring had arrived at least temporarily and the garden started to bloom. A thousand daffodils nodded their heads underneath the old beech hedging in the front garden. Early frogspawn dotted its way around the edges of the pond watched hungrily by fish that were marginally less languorous as they threw off the lethargy of winter. Jack delighted in walking around his garden to watch life drip feed back into it. The little shoots on the fuchsia excited him as he cut back the old growth and lost the frosted shard splendour of the wizened twigs. The huge climbing rose across the front of the cottage had numerous leaves by now due to the warmth of the south facing wall so he sprayed for blight and fed its single massive root.

It was spring and a time for reflection and new beginnings.

He was never happy with her now and never happy at home.

A terrible thought before starting a new life in Spain.

Melanie left him alone in the garden for much of the time and avoided speaking with him. Jack was happier on his own and escaped across the fields to see Peter and collect some School Ball tickets.

She watched her husband’s back with hatred vowing to make him pay for the new disrespect he constantly showed her.

She picked up the telephone and dialled her best friend Harriet.

“Have you got a minute?” Harriet was alone too as her husband Matt worked harder and stayed away from their home longer.

“I have hours at your disposal Melanie. Matt is out again and the girls are at boarding school. Tell me. What has he done wrong now?”

“Nothing wrong really. He just ignores me when I ask a sensible question. He thinks he is so clever and just can’t be bothered to help us mere mortals.”

Harriet liked Jack a lot and defended him when replying. “They are all the same you know. Big men in their important but small worlds. We are just housewives made for cleaning, cooking and looking after children.”

Melanie agreed wholeheartedly. “But it’s so sad because they push us away and can’t see the damage they do to their family lives. I tell you what, I am worth more than that and if I ever left him I would take him for every penny to make up for his demeaning attitude.”

They moved on to safer, less controversial topics like schools and pushed their unhappiness aside because the real secrets remained secret.

Later in the evening Jack walked back up the hill from their friend’s cottage and as he looked at the stars he realised how old his soul was and how long his Karma had been.

He could see his moon shadow and he felt at one with the world.

He was happy for a few minutes realising that most people never get into this state of spirituality. They were shackled by the day to day practicalities of life: kids, food, TV and money.

He knew then what was meant by living and how lucky he was.



*Do you remember Catalonia Jack?  
You were a Centurion in the Roman army, a master  
of the citadel in Sant Martin.  
Do you remember asking the Goddess Artemis to  
provide good hunting and her vestal virgins for other  
favours?  
Do you remember?*

He was looking forward to Spain and oblivious to his spirit guide as he waltzed happily down the road.

He loved Spain and couldn't wait to get there.

It always made him happy but he could never pinpoint the reason why.