

STORY ONE . Aunt Jane, a journey of discovery. Copyright P. Audcent 2017

I wrote this after reading a brilliant analysis of religion some years ago. I cannot remember the author but he gave an in-depth investigation on each religion and searched for known facts and probabilities and the history of each. My own grandmother also delved into various beliefs and discussed them with me. So today I put in what each had thought under the guise of Aunt Jane who was a figment of my imagination. Hopefully for readers it will make them think. What do I think is not important, but its just a story, and maybe there is such a place of peace. Perhaps were it is located it may or may not exist any more with all the worlds troubles. So enjoy. PA

I was seventeen and squeezing my pimpled face each morning, then finally the post arrived and with it came the results of my final exams. Slitting open the envelope my face fell and it looked like my imagined future profession have dived to just unachievable. Mother came down and took one look at my sad face and called father in from the garden.

We sat down, and both, not exactly devastated, but much more gentle in their sadness for their only offspring.

“Well that's put an end to all your plans Thomas how did your other friends go. I expect you rang them?” Father said, I nodded my head.

“Bit lambasted then I suppose?” I nodded.

“Not many prospects down here in the country, but there's always a mechanic or plumber, or even the forestry.” My father in his usual good humour.

“Well there's is always Aunt Jane, perhaps prospects are better in London, I hate to see you go Tom but your future is important to us.” I nodded, my mother was always right at least that's what Father always said. And so it was that I, as a pimply teen, was packed off to the big city away from my beloved coastline, in truth I had few close friends but loved the environment and the the little cottage we lived in. I knew a little of who Aunt Jane was, she was a younger sister of my mothers, she had come to stay occasionally with us and loved the coastal walks that surrounded our small acreage standing on a tiny peninsular that jutted out into the sea.

My grandfather had bought it for a steal years ago as a holiday home though they rarely used it and it was passed on to my Father on my grandparents death. But Aunt Jane loved it as much as I did and we both walked many miles along that coast and woodland stopping where we liked to fossick for bits of flint or flowers. And that's all I could remember of my Aunt. A tall lady striding beside me and anxious I should not fall from the cliffs. The strange thing was she rarely spoke except to guide me from the cliff edge with a curt 'Tom be careful its steep down there' as I crept closer to watch the culls preparing their nest in their chosen alcoves. Sometimes she would gently pull me away by the shoulder. But we loved those walks of ours and I think she was pleased to be with me exploring the hills and dales. Rarely did we go the beach but I remember she was a good thrower of flat pebbles skipping them over the water in competition with me, she invariably won! So in a way my doubts of leaving my parents and all they stood for was at least helped by the fact I was going to someone I knew. And so the adventure began.

She had an apartment in the city so I took a taxi to reach it, paid the fare, and waited on the steps for Aunt Jane's return, she had briefed me on the phone the time to expect her home and although she knew the railway times, as she used the service to the cottage, I think she assumed I would look around the city before finally arriving. An hour later she came, briefcase in hand, greeted me with a hug and ushered me into the hallway. Her flat was high up in the loft area with a huge glass window in the roof and smudges of oil paint on the walls.

"I had a friend stay who painted" she said as I looked.

"Close to God!" I said.

"Oh no, everybody assumes that. That he or she hides away in the ether up amongst the clouds. They say he or she destroyed the Tower of Babel because they were getting near him or her but that was absolute nonsense, the weight was excessive and the foundations or a minor earthquake forced it to give way and I suspect there was a great deal of babble at the time. Iraq had a lot going on, parts of the Old Testament were written there apparently, when the Israelites were captured and sent there as slaves. Against their will I might add"

"Aunt Jane I never knew you were interested in religion." said I in astonishment.

"Well I'm not really, its just that the people who take it over and use it for their own benefit, and you can be sure that there's some silver pieces, gold and greed following on. Still lets get you settled in and if you like we can talk about my intended trip to the Himalayas later on."

Well that intended trip arrived a month later, in the meantime I had obtained a position as a solicitors clerk mainly doing house searches so it took me all over the city and I soon learnt my way around. Aunt Jane took a month off from her work and soon left me in charge of the paint strewn walls which I had promised to repaint for her.

What with my daily routine as a clerk and my efforts at painting with the roller, I managed to finish the walls three weeks after she left, and I was well pleased as it gave me time to air the apartment before her return. Assuming she would have bought loads of souvenirs, I took the tube to Heathrow and awaited her flights arrival. When she did arrive she came just with her old case and gave me a hug for greeting her. So back to work she went and very pleased with the colour Magnolia I have chosen.

"Well I never! It will go with anything I want to hang, what a kind present, now how much do I owe you?"

"Not a penny Aunt Jane after all I barely pay my way in your home!"

"Thank you Tom I have the most uplifting holiday you could imagine, and to have you stay and look after the place was an enormous blessing for me."

Both of us, Aunt Jane and I had the next weekend off so she decided to take me along to the Natural museum to see the dinosaur skeletons on display.

We passed through the hall and climbed the steps to the statue of Darwin, we stopped suddenly and she read the inscription aloud.

“That reminds me I promised to tell you of my fascinating trip to the Himalayas, or close by to be exact.” My Aunt exclaimed.

“Was Darwin involved?” Said I with a grin.

“Not exactly dear nephew but lets reach the top and look down at these poor dead creatures.” Which we did gazing down at the huge structures of tied bones beneath us.

“Presumably Aunt Jane,“ said I, “These old bones have something to do with your tale? But she smiled and directed us both down to the tea rooms.

“Lets find a seat outside and we'll have our coffee in the sun.”

“I was bored with both the town and country and needed to get away to foreign parts and found a little Kiosk that sold trips to Northern India, quite reasonable, and they promised visits away from the tourist areas of the steep mountains. Presumably that was why the holiday trips were so cheap but you had to buy your own air ticket for a certain day in a certain month. Presumably, so all those booked would arrive on the same day. Well I signed up, found out we were a party of six then we arrived a few weeks later in Delhi where we were met by an heavily bearded gentleman who drove us to a hotel and he warned us we would be flying by a Cessna the next morning. The hotel alas could not feed us so we went out and bought food from the local market. I held my voice, but the others were not amused and we eventually returned to our hotel in a growing air of resentment. I pointed out the cheapness of the holiday trip and what did they expect. Apparently a lot better accommodation with all the trimmings that you get in Europe. So I was sent to the dingy little room by the toilet whilst the others were fortunate to share their lodging in a huge hall with hanging fans to cool them. At least we had an inside toilet and during the night I was woken to its continuous use, obviously the food we had bought in the market was to blame.

The result was a deafening roar of non compliance when the old gentleman arrived to take us to the airport. Only one of us had packed and stepped nimbly into the minibus and that was me. So imagine my delight of being all alone in a large Cessna crossing that huge country with the Himalayas up ahead. An adventure about to begin.

I arrived at Srinagar airport, my bag collected and the young driver whisked me away to I don't know what, but to my complete surprise we came to the Green Acre Hotel standing very opulent in the city. 'You will stay here two days if you please, no tips if you please, all has been paid. Breakfast and dinner is provided. The three day tour to Manasbal Lake north west of here starts at nine am we have a strong coach and good driver.' I asked who the driver would be and he pointed to himself, I smiled. Then I asked what accommodation I would have in the hills by the lake? He smiled again and put both hands under his cheek and replied that it was canvas. He told me I would be free to roam but it was close to three borders so he would advise a guide. I thank him and repaired to my designated room and beautiful it was and with a proper single toilet and bathroom. The best in the hotel the manager explained, he said as the

others were not coming, their payment would be accumulated and spent on me. Surprised I could not resist a gasp and a thank you. I really had been well cared for. My following two days were uneventful, I read, took a trip into town, and relaxed, I had to prepare for three nights under canvas and that probably meant cool nights and hard ground and what would I eat?

Well the drive up to Lake Manasbal was exhausting all those curves as we drove into the foothills, more like mountains. We stopped twice for petrol and a thirst quenching beaker of tea. I can't remember the mileage but we got there in the late afternoon. The lad abandoned me to two other aged gentleman who guided me through the woods to the camp site overlooking the water. It was neatly laid out almost Military and I guessed the two old gentlemen had been connected to the British Raj. The man had carried my case over his shoulder like a kit bag and deposited it into the larger canvas tent close by the the water. 'Dinner in two hours enjoy a walk Miss and I will set the table for you.' I wondered what had happened to my driver lad and asked, 'He is with his grandmother back there by the vehicle she will have him digging the garden and later fishing when the sun goes down.'

He turned away to do his duties then suddenly turned to me with a pointed finger towards the house, 'My other nephew will guide you tomorrow but there is a place no man is allowed to venture.' He turned and pointed up the lakeside. 'There is a small inlet forty minutes walk and a track leading into the woods, a scary old man lives there and does not like us helping him, best you keep away.'

So as I changed into my walking boots sitting on the camp bed, which I was enormously relieved to see, I took myself off into the same direction the old man had pointed and started my march, looking back the old man had shaken his head and I expect the word for stupid woman had past through his head. I walked briskly just like we did at your parents cottage and soon I reached the inlet and stopped to sit on a flat rock to take in the atmosphere and a fabulous view which was startling. I found two small wet packages at the back underneath a leafy overhang but then I could not imagine anyone wanting to live in such deserted place and the winters must have been horrific.

'No' came a voice behind me, 'a perfect place to sit and ponder.'

I whipped around and saw a small bent little man with a huge long beard that almost touched his waist coming toward me. 'You are sitting on my rock'. He said quietly. I apologised and stood away so he could scramble up.

'Sit here' he pointed to the ground. 'I catch my fish here, many years ago mine and I presume your fellow countrymen stocked this lake with trout, for sport they said, and now the Bessnes and I feed on their sport, so our thanks to you for the provisions. Presumably you came from Bessnes camp and the old grandfather told you not to come up here.'

"No, he said not to take the track from the inlet".

'Oh I stand corrected. I beg your pardon.'

"Well I must go back as they will cooking for me.'

'I would like to speak to you again.'

"Alas tomorrow I will have a guided tour and after that one day left only, then I will have a morning left before going."

'You seem very precise in your schedule, then I suppose in your job its to be expected.' I looked up sharply into his hazel eyes.'

'I was warned that you might come, a tall English lady, well accustomed to looking after herself. Then come when if you can.'

"Are you not lonely? Here in this wilderness?" I asked as he unrolled his fishing gear. 'Come the morning of your journey home.' Was all he said as he cast his bait from his rock.

So I returned to the camp site to enjoy a freshly cooked trout, potatoes and peas. I did not mention the old bearded one but thanked my host, brushed my teeth and went to bed.

"Now time to go home we'll get some fish and chips on the way."

"But Aunt Jane how did your trip end?" said I not at all willing to leave a story half told.

"Well Tom we are off next weekend to stay with your Mum and Dad so if you can wait until then I'll finish it when we walk down to the bay where that large flat rock protrudes out into the sea, it will be a good reminder of another flat rock I once sat upon, come on move your stumps!"

It was just before lunch at the Cottage and Mum had packed us some sandwiches and fruit plus a bottle of her ice cold raspberry vinegar and I with Aunt Jane set out for our flat rock overlooking the bay. We laid out Dad's old car rug and sat devouring the sandwiches.

"Shall I go on?" said Aunt Jane. I nodded eager to hear the rest.

"In away its quite a sad story, But going back to the camp site I mentioned to the old man's nephew about meeting the fishing man at the inlet and he just smiled.

'I know the man you met I think he's like you from England but years ago at the time of the Raj. Uncles great grandfather bought us up here and we live in the Chalet they built to house the officers who came here to fish. Like you I was interested by my father saying leave the man alone to his solitude, so like any teenager I went up to see for myself. I took a bag of sugar and tea as a means of introducing myself. I walked up the inlet and found a small cave and shouted my arrival. 'Go away' was the reply I got so I left the sugar and tea on the flat rock where he is known to fish from. From that day to this I have stayed away.

'I think they are still there at least I presume that they might be.'

The guide shook his head. Then we continued our hike looking up at the spectacular mountains that protected the plains of Mongolia to the left and Tibet to the right. Inspiring but so dry, no blade of grass or tree could be seen and I mentioned what a sad area this was, he nodded. But safe he said. We found a spot to sit and far in the

distance he pointed out the Chalet.

'Its strange that the officers coming up here always left their fire arms back in their barracks, they came here only to fish not to shoot.'

'It looks so barren I doubt any animal could live up here.'

'No you are wrong there are a few, but even so those soldiers famed for shooting anything that moved, refused to bring their guns up here. Maybe they carried rifles though the gorges you came though for protection but once here they were locked up. This lake has never heard gunfire our Great Grandfather said it had to be respected, if the foreigners with all their power and armoury forbade fire arms here so should we.'

I looked across the lake as still as if iced over, I removed both boots and sock and walked over to the waters edge. It was quite warm and soothing.

'You like?' said my Guide.

'I thought it might be really cold seeing we are so high up and I presume that the arid conditions mean little rain so that could only mean a spring from below feeds it.'

'That maybe so, we gather all the little rain we get from the roof into corrugated tanks but strangely enough the lake neither grows or diminishes its always been the same. My uncle carved a plank which he set into rocks in the lake and he watched the level but it never varied.'

'The old fisher man wants me to see him tomorrow morning, he specifically asked.'

'I will take you on my motorcycle and sit by the shoreline whilst you go and see him.'

I woke up early to the smell of bacon and eggs the old gentleman was serving his nephew my guide so I joined them. I wore jeans in case the skirt got caught in the wheels whilst we were riding. Half an later we were on our way and I was amazed how quickly we went along.

'He will hear the noise from my bike so I expect you will have to walk into the forest to his cave.' The guide shouted above the engine roar.

We stopped by the flat rock I leapt off and as I passed I grabbed the little packages and walked along the track between the trees. I soon came to a small glade where chickens gambled around, I saw a skinny arm signal me from above close to a cave mouth, so I answered with a wave. I climbed the neat steps and the old man indicated a bench for me to sit upon. I handed over the packages and said this was bought to you as a gift from my young guide many years before.

'Alas' he said 'I could not accept his gift, I doubted his intentions and presumed like all kids he was nosey. I asked you to come as I realised I had missed hearing my native language spoken, in truth I was told to expect you. My time is short and I wanted to relate my tale to someone who might understand. There is a cup of cool spring water for you here so may I begin.' I nodded.

I came here with two other drummer boys, to serve the officers, clean boots with Dubbin, care for the chickens and wash up. I guess I must have been fourteen when I was forced by my father to join the regiment I being a

boisterous lad at home, it was one way to get rid of me and teach me survival. We came up here when they finished the Chalet and our chores were simple, to keep the place spotless and keep our eye on the natives, they cooked and washed. Some years later we got orders that the Regiment would return to Britain so you can imagine the joy we all felt. The night before leaving we lads raided the liquor store and drank it dry, least what was left as the adults had got there first. I remember staggering out deep into the bush and lying down to sleep. When I awoke a day or two later all was quite they and the natives had already left. I groped my way into the chalet and the officer commanding had left a message for me to say my young colleagues had said I had left with the native party somewhat worse for wear. But they had searched and not found me so presumed that I had already left. If in fact I was still here my only chance was to walk the forty miles south to the hill station and be taken to the town where I would be arrested and court marshalled. Well you can imagine my hurt feelings, devastated by my friends not finding me, so I decided to make a life here in this huge house we called the Chalet. They had taken all the food but had left the chickens and these below you see are the progeny of those left at the Chalet. There was an extensive library for officers use so to bide my time I started at the bottom shelf and managed to read many books. Some I did not understand so I put them aside to reread. To keep myself active I would often walk near this area so some years later I found this cave and cleared a path from the lake. I looked upon it as my beach holiday home, at no time did I ever feel lonely.

Some years later I heard a vehicle coughing its way up towards the Chalet, at first I suspected the Army had returned then realised it sounded like a very old Diesel so I climbed a ridge and spotted the old native cook looking at the lorry's tyres. I guessed he must be returning with his family and may have bought the house.

That night I caught as many chickens as I could and carried them up to the cave. I made three journeys that night but I confess to having used one of our military bicycles with a pannier. Look, you can still see in in the underbrush over there. The next day they still had not arrived so I grabbed all the books I had put aside to read again and some religious books. On the third day I had heard nothing so I cycled down and took a billy, saucepan, ladle spoon and mug. I managed a bag of grain and flour and cycled back with my treasures. On the fourth day I purloined an axe a fork and spade. On the fifth day candles, matches and a fine fishing rod which had been a spare we kept there, then I fed the remaining chickens so the cooks family would have them in fine fettle. On the sixth day I was halfway to the Chalet when I heard the lorry on its way so at that point I stopped my thieving. Now content I set about planting the seed in a patch I had

dug over there. I thought the chickens could have half and my garden the other half which I the stored in the bottom of the cave being nice and cool.'By the way would you call your guide please?'

'You said you did not want him!'

'Indeed but someone else does, please call him.' I did as I was told and soon the lad appeared.

'Come here boy and drink this water you must be hot.'

'But Sir I have bought coffee for our guest.'

'Well run and fetch it please, then come up here.' The lad did as he was told and returned with the coffee flask clutch to his side and mounted the steps.

'You cannot remember your mother very well can you?' The old man asked as he took the flask from the lad.'

'She died during childbirth.'

'Go down into the cave as far as you can and sit still.' The lad scuttled down into the dark and I thought I would not like to go deep into this cave without a torch and a thick stick.

'Well you have to be welcomed before you are allowed entry. Tell me what you feel about this lake and environment?'

'Its peaceful, quite and welcoming.'

'Exactly, I felt it too when we lived in the Chalet and even stronger when I gathered the rest of the seed and flour and deposited them down the bottom of this cave. An overwhelming sense of serenity. I picked a leaf of the bush attached it to the hook and went fishing. I caught a fish. Within a minute, and I cried. The tears were still dripping from my eyes when I came up here to get the frying pan. I needed oil to fry the fish but two leaves floated down and fell into the pan so I fried the fish on them. After eating I recovered a book to read and went down to the rock where I spotted a man sitting quietly with his legs crossed. He looked Indian to me but I begged his pardon for disturbing him. He did not look at me but in my mind I heard him ask at first in his language and then in English what book was it? Without thinking about the oddness that had just occurred I looked at the spine and read out "the life and times of the great Buddha". I asked him 'If you are hungry I will try and catch you a fish, there seems to many in the lake.' Yes I saw you fishing before, came the reply in exactly the same manner. A little frightened now I asked him who he was and I tried the Indian our cooks used.

English will be fine came the reply, they call me the same name on your book.

'I believed you sought enlightenment and what ever that may mean, I said.'

Indeed I did and here on the side of this lake I believe I have found it.

'Was it all you expected?' said I.

Indeed it was so peaceful but in all honesty I left my wife and children to hunt

for this and yet I know those who follow me often suffer the same pressures of not enjoying what they have and yet seek fulfilment when in fact it exist already in their current life, you see I missed seeing my children growing up, now they would be adults and those times are lost forever. Why did you cry when you landed the fish

'I was hungry and very relieved I had caught it so soon. Did you help me?'
No you helped yourself but this is sacred ground so believe what you may.

With that he had gone, I really thought to myself to have dreamt what had just occurred so I sat down on the rock and read his life story.'

“The lad seems to be talking, I can just hear his voice.”

'He will be in there for sometime I expect, with such a lot to catch up with.' But to go on as I read though the book he would sometimes visit me as I fished and we would discuss aspects of his life and generally speaking he seemed satisfied at his way was quickly adopted and given peace and charity to so many. He did not like the adoration showered upon his memory and the lies and non truths placed before the followers. He told me many of those sent faced the same problem. Then he advised me once I had finished the Buddha book to go onto the Qu’ran and leave the Christ till last. Just then the guide stumbled into the light were we sat. He nodded to the old man with tears drenching his cheeks and turned and stepped down into the clearing where he sat quietly amongst the chickens.

“Why, what happened.”

'That is not for you or I to know. Now if you don't mind I would like to taste coffee again.' So he emptied his mug and filled it from the flask, then he did the same with my bowl, he slowly drank it must have been almost cold by this time but he smacked his thin lips in appreciation.

“I will ask the Chalet people to deliver some on the rock.” He nodded his thanks.

'Lets go on, as instructed, I took up the Qu’ran turned the cover over and found a stamped note from the Ministry of Defence asking all officers to read sections of the book to make them acquainted with the native religion and to do the same with the Hindu book. Well I did not have the second so in I jumped in with the one I had. To be frank I found it difficult to get my head around. I had learnt to make light similar to candles from the vegetation and I would creep down to the end of the cave with my lamp and read until I felt a presence beside me. Of course I was alarmed and I said aloud I would seek the Buddha to come. I was told he was already there to oversee the person to which the book related and I could ask questions. I had heard of the Muslims of course and knew a little of their history, in India there seemed some antagonisms between the three religions and I presume that's why they were partitioned. A fact which the spirit

man at my side seemed to be angry at. I asked him about the Angel which had supposedly trained him and encouraged him to write, what was he like. He answered like I am to you. What I really wanted to know did it have white wings? But his reply was more like a laugh, do you want an eagle to talk to, then ask another thing. So we conversed on and off for a year and he gradually allowed me to see into his time in the past with all the rubbish he had to face, death and disease and in fighting of the tribes and what shone out was his love for his older wife. His horror of seeing the breaches in his own family and the constant alteration of the Angels words that he had written by scurrilous people for their own devices. He told me that one of the originals of the writings was held in Egypt and was protected against the betrayers. At times it frightened me as he showed me the various wars of attrition and that they would continue all based on human intervention of the words he wrote. He grieved for the death of his wife who had been a constant support. I asked him more about death and beyond but just then in the coolness of the dark cave he appeared and shook his head. I still hear his solemn words, it is not for you on this place to know what goes on after, live your life as best you can and ride the waves in safety as best you can. I see you have not a book on Hinduism or one of the ones who bandage their hair but they follow similar belief and rules as the book you hold, they have extreme and gentle amongst them. This place that you live in has been visited by many who share the same view and soon you will go on to the Christian people who came from the Jews of Babylon. I said I had the old and new testament drilled into me as a child so even though I had those books I was unlikely to read them again. That would be an error, he said, you must just not read but also understand, yes the old one is made of legend and the new one selected out of many but in them you will meet the real Christ, do not fear he has been here long before you, it is his place. And so ends the visits. I took a break of a year or two, I heard gun fire in the distant hills but all was calm in our valley. I did not eat much, a few fish and eggs nourished me so I thought, but I realised the cool spring water that we drink had enough sustenance to keep me alive, do you feel hungry?

I shook my head but after all I had had breakfast several hours ago.

Finally, I picked up that book of legends and one harsh winter I started to read close to a fire I had constructed and by its light I expected a Daniel or David to appear to help me understand, but it seemed not so. Day by day I read until I reached those infamous lines and galloping horses and wondered what it all meant as others in the outside world did. Befuddled I went to rest and had a dream of the Christ sitting opposite so I suddenly woke and indeed there he was in an old brown garment sitting opposite me. I thought you were Fryer Tuck I said saucily, he smiled alas no, I know you are bewildered by what you read

sadly humans have altered our fathers words to suit their own devices, it has happened throughout history, because they are served by greed, jealousy and many other crimes including death. Purely to achieve their own personal avarice, and so they tread a path that their directors set them and they waver. They are to be forgiven for it is a test set by others and which may not be entirely clear to those on earth. I asked him if indeed he was the Christ, and he nodded. I once lived here myself he said simply. And now you will proceed to the book which supposedly relates to my coming, my being and my passing. Yes I said is it full of legends? Yes mostly those who wrote were not with me but they tried to write from others words or recollections. 'You were the first Christian?' Indeed no I was an Essen, a type of Gentile, then the Jews took us over and I was bought up to read both the scriptures, Essen and Jewish, like you did a while ago, other people made me into what I was not. To me its seems strange that the modern priests expect to be called Father, yet you only have two fathers you biologic one and your Creator, who is the architect of all you see before you and much else. I asked him about the after life, and he smiled, you will see what I said about the subject in the book you hold. So I said 'Lord the others they wouldn't tell me!' He turned his full gaze upon me and smiled. All creatures created by our Father have a soul, the physical body is merely a container in which it resides, each soul has a director, a governor if you will and their job is to seek various situations that the soul can learn by, in this manner the soul can move into various transformations until it reaches a peak alongside the Father. The possible problem is if people were aware of the partition they were in, and it was bad, they would choose to end it and hope for another more comfortable role. Do you see why, whilst you are on earth learning, you should have no desire to change anything except though your own efforts. The wonderful thing is that the atoms your body are made from cannot be destroyed, after death, they are released to make something else, a tree a bird whatever. I believe the time will come for you to write what I have said therefore I will not say anything more on the subject. Those you call Angels are highly respected by the Father and have achieved what the Buddha was looking for. In his way he found Nirvana but was also affected for achieving it. Then I asked 'Why the Christians chose the cross to portray their Lord which it surely is a creation of torture. ' He nodded it is truly cruel and strange for well believing people to carry a means of torture and death about their person. But you have already learnt much from your previous conservations so now delve into the book supposedly about me, yes there are truths and untruths about my life, embossed by others in some cases, and I will help you to discover how many who followed me did so for their own devices. 'Devices a word used by my other tutors.' Yes he said, a word not entirely hurtful but being to the point.

There was one thing above all others that actually annoyed me and that was the way those so called leaders took against the Magdalene, to destroy a gentle creature was so cruel, how foolish and stupid men can be. Now sleep, I want you to find a soul who will write what you tell them, then our duty will be done. He left me, I could see him as clearly as I see you but around him was joyous aurora, it was difficult to explain but there was gentleness in his eyes. Yes there was so much more I wanted to ask, he visited me again as I progressed through the book about him and he did answer many questions but that first visit was the only one he allowed me to write about, so if you can obtain paper and writing material I will retell this first visit. '

'You must join your guide, please ask him to come with paper and pens, give him your address, and I will ask him to send the papers to you by post, I believe that the Christ is God anointed and he will return to me again and I will be his student. You are due to leave this place soon and so will I in a year or two, I think you realise I have not told you all but it is for others to debate and question, please write all I have told you but under no circumstance add anything extra, do not tell where this place it only describe it how it felt being here. Goodbye, hopefully my letter will follow in a year or so.

“I wrote the address of your cottage in case I moved again, he had an old stubbled pencil and I had a small notebook in my wallet. The guide and I rejoined the motor cycle and I departed that place the same afternoon somewhat memorised.”

It had been a long story and we packed up the rug and picnic bag then returned to the cottage. Mum called Aunt Jane into the kitchen and said she had a package from India on the hall table.”

“Aunt Jane turned to me. Nephew I will write that book once I've read these papers, and I'll ask Mum and Dad if I can keep them all here and write my book in the spare bedroom.”

Alas I never did see the papers. The Bessnes sent a note to say the bearded one had passed away when the guide visited him with more coffee, apparently he had disliked tea! They continued to request visitors keep away from the inlet and leave the old man in peace, eventually they buried him in the glade. The lake to this day remains a haven of peace but alas lies between disputed national boundaries, Aunt Jane fears disruption will come to pass in that same area but she intends living with us and has promised to let me read and edit her work before she publishes. We had a man arrive from the MOD last Thursday and inquired about the old man by the lake. She told him about the death and how he lived, but nothing about what he told her. She felt they were only interested in possible legal ramifications because the military had inadvertently left him there. What Aunt Jane could not understand was how they

discovered she had visited and found him but I presume the Bessnes may have inadvertently mentioned it when they posted the package. A call to her own service stopped further investigations. Aunt Jane studied the package for any chance of it being opened and she was sure it had not. But to be sure she took it back to London and had a colleague check it thoroughly. She worked for the security service, I knew that, but we never learnt which one. You cannot just resign when you leave them, you are apparently always on call but she did semi retire some months later and joined my Mother and Father in the cottage where she started the book as she referred to it. I continued my studies living in her flat.

About three months later I came home and found Aunt Jane had taken over my bedroom. My Mother had said the natural light was better for my Aunts eyes so I ended up in the back bedroom overlooking the veggie plot. Mother said her sister had gone down to the beach so I said Hi to Dad and rushed off down there. I found her sitting on our outcrop and the first thing she said was.

“I apologise for stealing your room.”

“That's fair enough Aunt Jane I am borrowing your apartment.” With that settled I sat beside her and she produced a piece of what looked like old packing paper.

“Now read that Tom its from the nephew of the Chalet family.” And it read,

'Excuse for me writing, I went to take coffee to the old man and I took a paper one of guests had left. The paper said the sun was to grow bigger and destroy Earth! The old man sat me down and offered me a cup of water. 'Yes' he said ' I have been told but not in our present life time which for me is getting shorter by the day but the future is not for us to see. In several billion years our galaxy will clash with another and the Earth will be drawn away. That is all that I have been told so tell the good woman if you will.'

“So nephew we've all known about the movement in the heavens now advise me if I should add this into my book?”

“Why not the old man had obviously implied by asking the Indian lad to convey the message to you. Sad to hear that he had died though.”

“Well according to his pencilled notes he may yet appear in another guise at a later date, but you will have to await the book if it ever gets finished and published that is, I can see plenty of bumps in the road ahead of me, there are those who do very nicely under the current arrangements! I think I was picked because my profession not because I can write, so I have asked my sister rather than you to proof read my work. I could see why she spoke of her profession, she must have been very high up in its organisation to have mentioned it, as I guess a sort of defence or protection against what lay ahead. But I being an inquisitive sort, or perhaps nosy asked my Aunt for more details on what the old gentleman had said. She frowns and turns to me

“You'll have to wait for the book Tom. But he does say there is some anger from those he spoke too, that the current crop of imbeciles are wrecking the Earth and we must be more careful. Strangely he mentions one of leaders making money out of some recent war. So there are dire warnings to all to elect only the most suitable.

What did surprise me was his knowledge of our current world, and he living in a so called vacuum away from people and only that one magazine or newspaper to read. I know you want more but I'll leave you with this, he said we all have free will there are many paths you can walk, its our choice whether we accept what is at hand or whether we change the journey and its prospect. Its all achievable in our mind.”

“Was that all there was Aunt Jane.”

“Not exactly he said I was going to have trouble with a young nephew and that I should start charging you housekeeping!”

“Oh” said I, but she laughed at my unease.

“There were probably twenty of pages and not all legible, but he gave some clear instructions. So you might as well hear them.”

“About me paying housekeeping?”

She laughed. “No that was me having a dig!” She went on. “One, beware of bullies who keep saying 'do as I tell you.' Two, beware of those that threaten with a place called Hell. Three, look at the pathways already set out by those before and make your choice after investigation. Four, God is a spirit with no physical body, the spirit encompasses all. He has many names and people look to the sky to seek and find him or her, God is everywhere through his high level spirits and directors, when people criticise the Great Spirit for disease, or illness, yes they came about via mixed up molecules, but your particular pathway was predestined to come across them. The old man noted that he fortunately had managed to avoid every disease even the common cold, probably due to the fact he never met another human since he lived alone in his cave. I was surprised he hadn't caught bird flu with all his chickens running about but I expect the same applied to them. Or else the drinking water from the gully had something to do with it. But in any event he has left me some work to read through with a sharp comment not to add or edit his words. And yes I was tempted like other humans before me, but looking at that last sentence stopped me in my tracks!”

So that's how it ended, we stayed awhile then sauntered down to the beach, I got beaten yet again at pebble skipping.

The end.

Eventually I shifted my gear into the six people tent. Dan had erected it close to where I used to look after the little orphans, that must have been seven years ago now, wonder how they got on? I piled in my foam matt and sleeping bag and then when over to fetch Jessie, Dan's little terrier and was she a terror terrier nipping everything in sight but I guess it was in her breeding and living on a Kenyan safari park she had to be able to look after herself. Diana and Dan had left me a pizza and a beer on the kitchen table plus a can of dog food. And a note to say look in the fridge.

“Now Jess I wonder which is yours and do you need a knife and fork?” She jumped at the tin and I opened it up and dumped half the contents into the bowl.

I remember asking Dan how my little tribe were getting on but he just laughed and continued packing. He and Diana were off to a conference for three days and I had offered my services to take care of the horror dog who at this moment was busy licking her paws and scraping them with her teeth.

Diana had looked at me after Dan had laughed.

“You won't be lonely Ted that's why Dan laughed!”

“But where are the kids I asked.”

“Staying with the Trent's and their kids, Dan thought looking after the two of them and the horror dog would be beyond the line of duty. Still I reckon you will have enough on your plate!”

Well Both had got picked up by a Cessna two hours before and I guess the reason they were in such high spirits was this would have been the first time they had gotten away for a break in something like twenty years or so. I first met them when my father suggested I fly out to their safari park during my gap year and give his old friend a hand. In fact I spent the year and holidays out here helping and hindering this couple in their enterprise. My first job had been checking the gates of the paddocks and fencing. Eventually Dan moved me over to the kids section as Diana was expecting and he felt the workload would be too much for her.

So that was it no kids and just little Jess and me, easy. But I wondered why Dan suggested the tent, after all their cottage was quite large with several bedrooms. I picked up Jess and made for the outside garden. I noticed Dan had left the main gate open so I went over to close it. It was locked to a second post. Strange I thought this leads out to the park itself. I put Jessie down and walked back to the tent but she seemed apprehensive, her ears went flat and she sniffed. I found out why when I opened the flap and found Rastus a fully grown lion stretched on the mat his head resting on the bedroll. Next door to this magnificent creature was Blossom obviously his partner, those two had been as thick as thieves when they were young.

“Move your stumps you old rat bag.” I kicked him lightly on the rear leg but he just rolled over on his back with his huge paws held up.

“Rastus definitely no cuddles, you are too big and look at the size of those teeth.” At the mention of teeth he opened his gaping mouth for me to inspect his teeth. I used to

say this to all the animals to examine their teeth and gums it saved prising them apart

16

with hands and risk getting a bite. Usually a peanut or two followed the operation and a general crunching and spitting out the shell. Surely he couldn't remember that! Blossom crept slowly to me with a loud purr and I sat down and called Jess into the tent. I looked at both of the lions and said sternly.

“Rastus and dear Blossom, Jess is Dan's little dog so take care of her and don't be bossy.” Rastus rubbed his huge face on my leg so I gave him a warm shake. I could swear I could see a mischievous streak in his eye. A thought passed my mind about had they been feed so I crawled outside with the two lions behind me.

“Have you been fed Blossom?” “I asked and she trotted over to the corner hedge and there was a half eaten body of a goat.

“You weren't very hungry Rastus” I said caressing his golden head.” Oh how I remember how I used to do exactly that seven years ago, and did they both remember also. I was bemused, and I guess a little perturbed to find them in the tent. It wasn't the same. The old one I slept in was a four person and we all cuddled together for security all those years ago. I looked up into the hills and wondered how those two Gorillas Erik and Ernie were. The four of them slept in my arms, the two cubs and the two little Gorillas .

Then there was Mahmoud the baby male elephant who grew so fast he slept next to Block the baby rhino at the entrance. What a menagerie to have in a tent but we all slept soundly and safe. Dan thought me mad but Diana just nodded a smile, she understood.

Jess wavered at the entrance and I pulled back the flap and there sat in the middle of my bed were Eric and Ernie. The two lions swept past me and greeted their old friends with howls of what I could imagine were joy. I was dragged down by the Erik and my clothes fully examined by both. Jess surreptitiously moved to a very far corner.

I could not believe these animals could remember me or the past. I realised what Diane has said, she must have kept up the affinity with these special creatures and maybe Dan kept the gate open for them. Well all it needed was Block to turn up and pock his nose though the entrance.

“Where do you think little Block is Rastus?” I asked but he just rolled over and grunted. That grunt heralded the flap being pushed apart and an enormous horn pushed in followed by a great head. I rose immediately to welcome the intruder but he snuffled, turned and lay prone across the entrance. I gave him a rub on his back and the others followed suit. If I had not seen it I would not have believed it.

I had quite forgotten Hugo, even as a baby Hugo was huge but thankfully hippos eat at night so Hugo was collected from my pen at night to go and eat with the local tribe. But now here before me was a huge face adorned with his hairy moustache as it leaned over Blocks ample body. I gave Hugo a massive huge and I always keen to check their mouths and teeth for disease so I suddenly thought lets see if Hugo will remember.

“Teeth Hugo” He opened it wide. I touched his teeth, well kept and white.

“Absolutely great Hugo, close it now. I expect you will be feeding tonight so thank

you for calling I'll walk up the lake and see you tomorrow." I patted him on the head

17

and the others lying around me uttered their calls of welcome, except Jess who was somewhat overawed by the visitors.

I was beginning to feel overwhelmed myself so lay down flat on my mat with Rastus's back beside me when all of a sudden the tent side by Rastus caved in which the shape of an elephants back.

"Is that you Mahmoud" I cried out as Rastus moved his body away from the offending bellowing side.

"You nearly sat on Rastus you have to be more careful. I'll come out and have a look at you Mahmoud." Which I did with the whole tribe following me out. A thought strayed in mind that once I got them all out I'd dive back in with Jessie and close up the flaps. Then again I'm sure I would not have a tent if Block took umbrage!

So I looked at Mahmoud, he was huge and just as soft looking. African Elephants are well known to be lets say, nasty. But Mahmoud still sitting greeted each in turn and finally twisted his trunk around me going for the pockets,

"Ah Mahmoud I don't have any buns for you today. What humans say cupboard love!"

Then I realised it was heart felt and a genuine hug and I gave him one back as much as I could, he really had grown into an ample lad! Well it looked as the tribe had reunited and the sun was sinking down fast.

"Time for bed. And careful how we go. Erik and Ernie at my head by Jessie, Rastus and Blossom by my side Block by the door and massive Mahmoud outside and keep watch."

And believe me that's what happened. I fell asleep to the sounds of Rastus's gentle snore in my right ear. Bedroll, no need I was warm enough with all these animals around me and safe, I felt entirely safe.

It must have been ten o'clock when I eventually woke to a symphony of sound, wheeze. Groans, whistles and grunts. The places had changed with Rastus now almost

entirely on my bedroll his great head lolling against my little one. And Jess had moved from the top of the tent to lie comfortable between Blossom's front paws. The two Apes had shifted right over to Blocks broad back and Mahmoud had not moved at all for which I gave merciful thanks! Blossom opened one eye then the other and I felt she was thinking time to wake that lazy Rastus up. Which I did with a smack on his back followed by a half hearted growl which quickly subsided when I explained that Blossom had so requested me to wake him. These animals had learnt some sort of sixth sense between then when they were growing up and even I became sensitive to their needs almost by accident.

"OK guys everybody up, go and find breakfast and then we go to find Hugo in the lake, or perhaps we do that first have a wash there and breakfast after." I always gave the kids, these animals, a chance to choose, thus they had a choice. They knew

perfectly well what to choose because Erik and Ernie slid over the Rhino's back and

18

out the door, no doubt heading for that part of the garden that Diana had planted their favourite bushes. Block slowly rose, shook and headed out to Mahmoud. Out in the Paddock where several trees that could be pushed over and provide food. I guessed Dan had planted a grove of them both for shade and food. Blossom gently rose, moved Jess off her paw and purring like the big cat she was strode over to the door and gave Rastus a nudge on the way through. I heaved myself up strapped on my boots and used Rastus as a lever to get out of the tent flap, by this time Rastus gave a mighty groan and followed me out, Jess of course has not moved so I called her to come to the house. Rastus followed and pushed past me as we entered the kitchen. To my knowledge he had tasted dog food before so I opened another tin and Jess had hers in a bowl and Rastus had the tin which was half empty and took him several seconds to lick out. After a quick lick of the tin he wandered out no doubt to help Blossom with the rest of the goat. Well two eggs and toast, a large cup of tea downed and I was ready to call up the troops.

I crossed over to the backyard where Erik and Ernie were surrounded by branches and leaves, then they scrambled up when they saw me coming and ambled across. We decided to leave the lions to their meal and crossed over to the paddock where Mahmoud had brought down a branch and both he and Block were finishing it off, I called them over and we set off for the lake. Mahmoud suddenly stopped and put his trunk over my shoulder, I looked up at this colossus and he seemed to say 'come on up I'll give you a lift!' I had never ridden an elephant before especially not an African so I was a bit cautious. He pressed me over to his side I stepped on his tusk, grabbed his ear and with his trunk below pushing my backside up managed to reach his head and neck. I'd seen Indian lads do the same on video but I was amazed that Mahmoud had worked this out for himself. I turned my head around and found the Apes had climbed aboard Block who trotted beside Mahmoud. I waved, they waved, turning to the front I could see the water glistening in the distance so we were right on track.

We came round a well trodden track though some high Acacia and onto a well trampled lake shore. When I was here first this was a popular place for the animals to drink. The elephants had dug out a watering hole further up the shoreline for bathing and they had a dust bowl close by, I suspected that's where Mahmoud was headed for so I tapped him on the neck to allow me to get down. I was joined by Block and the Apes as we walked to the waters edge and Mahmoud carried on to his bathing pool. I remembered with pleasure at seeing his joy when we first discovered the basin filled with water. And while he wallowed a large Hippo had approached with serious intention to move him away, Block had spotted the movement and he and Hugo stood square in front of the moving mass of flesh, soon joined by the two lions. Meanwhile Mahmoud continued his frolicking whilst the menacing brute plodded forward. The Apes and I had drawn back for safety but then rising out of the Acacia trees strode a large female elephant, she stood right over my little orphans, raised her trunk, blasted out a roar and the massive Hippo retreated back into the water and then Erik and Ernie fled over to their friends leaving me alone and

watching what might the female elephant do to a small insignificant lad standing all by himself. Luckily she just

19

snorted her derision and tramped away. Sadly I never saw her again but I suspected in my heart she might have been Mahmoud's aunt.

Hugo came onto the beach and welcomed us all, then we all went to see Mahmoud in his pool, I fancy he must have been reminiscing his memory as he wiggled and thrashed his way in that water spraying it far and wide and almost emptying it completely. Years ago I had dug a small trench from the lake into the pool to keep it filled and I saw Mahmoud's eye looking for that ditch. I knew exactly what he was thinking and I said.

“You've just pushed all the water out and the ditch destroyed, so you dig it out again!”

Mahmoud did not move except for turning his head to me. So I looked around for a piece of timber to drag out a new channel. The two lions had now joined us, I guess they had followed their noses.

“Ok you guys Mahmoud needs his bath filled again can you help scrape out this soil.”

Block buried his horn and stomped along the channel I have drawn whilst the lions used their huge paws to dig deeper and apes flattened the sides with their huge hands, soon the water began to flow again but Mahmoud just got up and wandered over to the dust bowl and started his gyrations one again. Block seeing the water bath now empty decided he wanted a cooling bath as well. I wondered whether the others would join him and possible get crushed, but apparently not. I found a piece of grass to sit upon, the rest soon joined me under a shady tree. And there we sat in total silence as the two big lads enjoyed their water and dust baths. The sun had risen high and we watched the mother hippos with their babies in the distance. Block rose out of the water bath and followed Mahmoud in the dust bowl so Hugo decided to tramp over to the bath and cool himself in it. Block had mixed up a heap of clay in the water and I suppose Hugo found it soothing for his skin. Blossom and Rastus had their heavy heads on my legs and Erik and Ernie rested their big heads on my arms so I wasn't going anywhere quick. We snoozed.

It was the huge Acacia that had spelled its magic over us all, or the shade it gave us, but we all slept well. Around midday we were woken by the revs of a four wheeled drive coming down the track toward the bungalow so I got up slowly and made my way stepping over sleeping bodies and then retraced my way back to the house. I went through Diana's garden and opened her gate just as a two vehicles swept though.

Our stepped a remarkably well dressed man with golden cuff links to match. He held out his hand palm down and I shook it briefly.

“I'm from the Ministers office and the gentleman in the other car is Mr Laszlo Parker.” I nodded to both, but I knew of Laszlo and his circus of death, he ran a shooting park, enough said.

“Can I give you all a cold beer?”

“Tea will do. The natives have their own water bottles.” This from the black gentleman. I was stunned at his insolence to the drivers. But we returned to the house.

20

“You are not the owner I presume.”

“Just the caretaker, Dan and Diana are away at a conference for a few days.”

“Indeed.” Said Laszlo, but I got the impression he already knew”

“In brief the Minister is given to understand that you have animals here, our animals I might add, that are acclimatised to humans and Mr. Laszlo Parker needs these for his parkland.”

“To shoot you mean?” But Parker shook his head.

“Maybe later when they are old and useless, but we are setting up a Zoo where our clients can walk amongst wild animals in complete safety.”

“Wild animals are wild.” said I.

“Yours I am told are not,” The Ministers man. I looked out of the window and noticed one of the drivers picking a flower from Dana's rose bush. I recognised him and searched my brain for his name, then I got it.

“I presume Teckie told you?”

“He works for me now.” Parker.

“Dan sacked him for cruelty I believe.”

“We have several lorries along the road and will collect the animals if we may”, the Ministers man.

“You of course have a letter of intent from the Government.”

“No need they are our animals and you people are aliens to our land.”

“I presume Mr. Parker has gifted a portion of his new zoo or ten silver pieces whichever!”

“How dare you you imbecile there are four of us already here and more along the road, you have no help here. You will stay here and Mr. Parker will show us the way to the animal enclosure.”

“Not a good idea Mister who ever you are, they will take you as poachers, thus your safety is not guaranteed”.

“Then we bind you hands and mouth and bring you with us. Please let us go and not waste time.” Laszlo Parker the bound my hands just as Rastus poked his nose through the open door.

“I suggest you both run for the cars, now,” They laughed. Laszlo fronted Rastus and tied to pat him. Rastus looked at me, I sniffed and he gripped Laszlo's wrist and bit hard. I turned my bound hands and Rastus bit though the rope, Then he roared his disapproval and Blossom crashed throughout the door and crashed against the government man.

“Hold him but don't hurt.” I said gently. But I was more worried about Block and Mahmoud. Suddenly a scream punctured the bizarre scene and Teckie was thrown into the room followed by Erik, who obviously remembered his beating only too well.

“Now I will give you two minutes to leave these premises, I will tell Dan and Diana and their neighbours who you are and what occurred, so Blossom let the nasty man up and Rastus leave Parkers leg alone. Now get up you two, and you Teckie never

come here again.”

21

I walked them out to their cars, Block and Ernie had the other driver up a tree so I held them back and he climbed down. I could not hold Block and He raced forward and hit the poor man in the rear with his horn.

“Don't come back I said”. As Mahmoud stood over them snorting his anger. They ran

just as Erik grasped the government man's arm and ripped the shirt below the sleeve away, Mahmoud swung his tusks and caught Parker a mighty crack in his rear. The car doors slammed and reversed. I looked down and saw I had stood on the rose that Teckie had picked, so I bent and picked it up, then Eric's hand swiftly grabbed it back and ate it prickles and all. In the distance I saw the shirt arm with its gold cuff link attached and I picked it up and put in my pocket before Eric could get it.

“No Eric you got the rose, I get this for Dan and Diane!” I swear Eric smiled his delight.

The end.

Well two quite different stories from my pen, I hope you enjoyed them, perhaps something to read over the holiday Christmas period. Why don't you write your own and publish it on Free-Ebooks.net and let others get the enjoyment of reading.