

Prologue

In the beginning before the planets, stars and galaxies came into being two primary elements existed independently of each other. The two principle and opposing elements - Love and Apathy - contemplated their existence in solitude each unaware of the other when all of a sudden something unprecedented occurred. Through the birth of a dream the Earth suddenly came into being and burst into life.

In this dream, Love and Apathy mingled for the very first time. For millennia Apathy could make little impression on the Earth and could only look on as Love inspired creation after creation through the free will of Man. Death was a concept the creations of the Earth were unfamiliar with during this happy and forgotten period of time in history. People were fully aware of the meaning of life and clearly understood their purpose.

Frustrated with its inability to break down the creations of Love, Apathy temporarily withdrew from the Earth. The creations on Earth flourished and Love continued to grow in strength until one day when something went horribly wrong.

Apathy observed the Earth from afar and noticed something for the very first time. Inspired by its observation Apathy secretly conjured up a monstrous plan and descended upon the Earth once more.

A rumor began to spread across the Earth that no one understood the secret of creation and in order for Man to inspire even grander creations people must understand the secret of creation. It worked – after all, why shouldn't Man understand the essence of their being? Gradually Man began to take apart the various creations of the Earth and strayed from the path of creation, all the while trying to understand the essence of their own being.

All at once it became possible to manipulate the consciousness of mankind.

Man continued to disassemble and reassemble the natural creations of the Earth and this eventually became known as progress. The more complicated Man's processes became the more people relied on them and the less fulfilled they felt, for they were being drawn further away from their purpose in life.

Despite this, Apathy knew that deep within their core Man still aspired to love and creation, even though for the most part people remained blinded to this deep rooted aspiration.

As Man degenerated over time people began to feel less happy and more unfulfilled and so it became possible to spread a second great lie across the Earth - that eternal happiness did not exist upon the Earth but rather in some other dimension. Man now focused its energy on getting to this other dimension at whatever cost, even at the cost of life itself. Over time certain individuals placed themselves between Man and God and between themselves and others and so mankind continued to divide and degenerate.

Overtime as people became more and more divided and distracted Man brought unimaginable violence, illness, famines, natural disasters and horrors upon the Earth. Man was losing control.

Over the course of thousands of years Man slowly forgot the meaning and purpose of life. It would take an unexpected miracle for Man to once again remember the purpose of life.

Part I

I sat with my grandfather in his study next to the fireplace snuggled up in soft comfortable armchair sipping a hot cup of tea as rain pelted the windows of his study. A small round coffee table separated the two of us and a lively fire crackled away inside the adjoining fireplace. I had always enjoyed listening to Grandfather's stories as a child and he would often tell funny stories, sad stories, scary stories, stories of war, dragons and we would become other worlds so we became lost for hours at a time in the worlds he created. I remembered those days with fond memories.

It was a wet overcast morning and it looked as though it would rain all day, not a good day for going outside. Although I was older now I felt it was a perfect day for telling stories and so I asked him to tell me story again like he used to, a story which meant the most to him.

Grandfather looked at me in surprise – I had not asked him to tell me a story for a long time. He smiled as he gazed absent mindedly into the flickering flames of the fire which danced before him. He turned toward pictures of our family on the mantelpiece and various other photographs mainly of relatives and friends. Despite his youthful outer appearance grandfather was old now, perhaps old enough to reflect on life.

He told me that I was now ready to hear his favorite story and that I would be the first person to ever hear it. I asked him why he had never told anyone his favorite story before. He told me that that no one had ever asked him before and if people want to hear something they will ask first.

"It is impossible for somebody to understand your story if they are not willing to listen, no matter how good your story happens to be".

I felt strangely excited that I would be the first person to ever hear my grandfather's favorite story. We both settled into our chairs and Grandfather began telling his story.



Joseph Greenwood was a young man. One fine spring evening he was walking home from university where he studied and worked part time. He looked ahead and noticed a group of suspicious looking youths congregating around an old rundown block of houses. He crossed the street not daring to look in their direction less they should notice him.

Why does it have to be this way, don't they have anything better to do? He asked himself. Joseph dreaded this part of his walk home and he was careful to always walk home in daylight. The area had a notorious reputation for crime yet it was the area in which he lived.

Joseph finally reached the end of the street without incident and embarked upon his favorite part of the walk home. He loved this part of the walk, through the local park which had many beautiful trees, flowers and wild bushes growing throughout the surrounding area. The park might have even been described as beautiful if it wasn't for the graffiti spray painted on the surrounding buildings or the empty liquor bottles scattered across the grass.

Despite the surrounding litter and graffiti, Joseph always liked this part of his walk home, especially during this time of year when the plants were in full bloom and he imagined how beautiful the park

would look if it wasn't for the graffiti and empty liquor bottles scattered across the grass. It's a shame people don't care about where they live, he thought to himself.

As he continued along the path which wound its way around some wild growing bushes he noticed a particularly strong scent in the air. It was the scent of Jasmine.

Just as the sun was beginning to sink in the west he stopped and walked over to examine the flowers which had caught his attention. As he was leaning over to take in the scent of the flowers he caught the sound of a female voice perk up from behind him.

"Beautiful aren't they?"

He looked over his right shoulder and his gaze fell upon a breathtakingly beautiful girl standing by his side. She had long flowing light brown hair swept back into a pony tail which complimented her alluring features perfectly. She had a friendly disposition and was dressed in running attire.

"Yes, they are, I couldn't help but stop and take a closer look" Joseph responded with a fumble, a little taken aback. The sun had disappeared below the horizon and twilight set in.

"Do you know why these flowers are so special?" she asked.

"I have no idea" replied Joseph.

"The delicate Jasmine flower is extremely sensitive. The flower only opens at night and it can be plucked in the morning when the tiny petals are tightly closed, then stored in a cool place until it gets dark. The petals begin to open in the evening as it gets cooler. Anyone who can grow these flowers must know a great deal about life for they are one of the hardest plants in the world to grow, and yet here it is in the middle of a park growing all by itself without any help from anyone, ironic huh?." She reached out and touched one of the flowers which had begun to open slightly as the light gradually faded.

"I didn't know that" replied Joseph, completely taken by surprise at this chance encounter with the beautiful girl who liked to talk about flowers. She is so vibrant, he thought to himself.

"I'm Ana" the girl introduced herself confidently yet not overbearingly.

Joseph introduced himself and soon discovered that Ana lived nearby and liked to take long walks through the park. She was a young woman, perhaps a few years younger than Joseph and she worked at a local café and had no interest in studying or pursuing any kind of academic or professional career for that matter. Joseph on that other hand had already completed a postgraduate degree in environmental science and was in the process of completing his doctorate on the effects of climate change on the world.

Joseph had dated a few girls in the past although he would never say he had ever been in love. He was always far too busy for that.

Right from the moment when Joseph met Ana he somehow felt a dormant rush of energy spark to life from somewhere deep within as he had never felt before. Sure, he had met many girls in the past but there was something refreshingly natural and unpretentious about Ana and besides that he felt drawn to her in a way he could not understand. The longer Joseph talked with her the stronger this feeling grew.

He lost track of how long they had been talking and later on he couldn't even fully recall what they had been talking about. He only knew that he must see her again and so he asked Ana if she would like to go for a walk with him the following day. Ana agreed with a smile and as the weeks passed their walks in the park became more frequent and so they began a passionate romance.



The more time Joseph and Ana spent together the more they thought of one another, even when they were apart. At times Joseph found it difficult to get to sleep at night and had lost his appetite whenever he thought of Ana. He would often dial her number on the pretence of asking a vague question about some unimportant subject they were discussing during the day and Ana would secretly answer the phone in anticipation of hearing his voice.

Occasionally Joseph would surprise Ana by spontaneously walking into the café where she worked and she would always look anxiously towards the door expecting to see his cheeky smile. Joseph developed a habit of sneaking up on her and when she wasn't looking, making her jump in fright. She would cry out in surprise which quickly turned to delight before reproaching him for his cheekiness whilst laughing

“That's no way to treat a girl, you clown”!

“Well if the service was better around there I wouldn't have to!” and so they teased each other back and forth.

Joseph and Ana were different in many ways. Joseph had a rational outlook on life and his thinking was logical for the most part. He was quick witted and always in a rush to do things and would often agonize over Ana's inability to see things rationally or else he would complain about how long it took her to explain things.

Ana on the other hand was not so methodical in her thinking and she had what Joseph would call an irrational outlook on life. She often said or did things on a whim seemingly without any logical thought and she would always become irritated whenever Joseph told her to get to the point as she was trying to explain something.

Anna had an interest in gardening and she liked to dabble in herbal medicines and healing remedies from time to time. Joseph would tease her for believing in such 'hocus pocus' to which Ana would retort

“Well you still haven't solved that environmental problem you are always prattling on about” and so they would tease each other back and forth. Their friends would question why they were even together.

“He is such a bully, always on her case” her friends would gossip amongst each other while his friends would joke with him “why did you go and begin dating a witch?!” Joseph couldn't explain it himself all he knew was that he was completely fascinated by Ana. He had never felt this way about any other girl he had ever met before.



After months of dating Ana and Joseph decided to move in together. They purchased a small house on a generous block of land in the suburban neighborhood in which they both lived. As we already know, the neighborhood was not the cleanest or safest neighborhood in town and it was notorious for crime but the small house they purchased was well built and in reasonably good condition. The property was generous in size, approximately one hectare in total and it had large overgrown backyard and a smaller front yard with a driveway and garage. Most of the property was covered entirely with grass and a single birch tree grew directly in the middle of the yard under which stood an old wooden bench which provided a shady place to sit and escape the harsh summer sun. Perhaps the Birch tree was the only one which survived the clearing to make way for the houses many years ago. It stood all alone yet there was a forest full of Birch trees not too far away from the street in which they now lived.

Joseph continued to work towards completing his doctorate on climate change at the local university where he also tutored and received a small income. Meanwhile Ana remained working at the local café and together they managed to make ends meet.



It was a year since they first met and after months of living together Ana began to feel that the initial fiery passionate feeling of love which had fueled their relationship in its early days begin to fade. Their arguments were not as heated, they did not feel the same passionate delight and excitement upon seeing each other as they had once felt before and Joseph had ceased surprising Ana while she was at work.

Ana's days became less exciting and more routine as she was forced to work longer hours to cover their payments on the house. Meanwhile Joseph had become busier working on his doctorate which he had almost completed and although Ana was happy for him, she secretly wished he would surprise her at work again, even just once.

Ana would complain to her friends about the fading passion in their relationship. She explained how they hardly did anything together spontaneously anymore and how Joseph would just come home exhausted from work each day, turn on his computer and nod off to sleep. Ana was worried and her friends all said the same thing in an effort to console her

"Don't worry Annie. That's men for you and besides, it is inevitable for the passion you felt in the early days of the relationship to fade away and for it to become more platonic over time. Unfortunately that's just the way it is."

Ana thought to herself that it's not the way it should be and she secretly hoped the situation would change. They did not know it but her well meaning friends were comparing Ana's relationship with their own. They tried their best to console her although it seemed more as if they were consoling themselves.

Her friends explained how at some point in life other priorities take over in a life such as careers, payments and children and how it is inevitable for the love they felt at first to eventually fade away. Hardly anyone if anyone at all experiences passionate, romantic love for their entire lives and it is something people can only experience in movies and not in the real world, or so they thought. However Ana was not entirely convinced and she always hoped the passion would somehow return to their lives.

Ana had also been thinking of how she would like to have children and start a family one day although she could not see why children should be a burden in a relationship. On the contrary she thought they should bring more love and joy to her life.



One fine spring afternoon Joseph was walking home from the university through the local park where he had met Ana the year before. He was preoccupied with thoughts on his doctorate which he was tantalizingly close to finishing when he took in a deep breath and once again noticed a familiar scent of Jasmine in the air.

In fact he was at the very spot on the path which wound its way through the park where he had met Ana the year before. He went over to investigate the Jasmine flowers which emitted their pleasing scent. Absent mindedly he proceeded to pick off a number of the flowers from the bush and continued on his way home when he was struck by an entirely spontaneous idea. He knew Ana was still at work and guessed she would probably be closing the café right at that very moment and so he changed his course and headed in the direction of the café.

As he entered Ana had her back turned to the door, she was busy wiping a table so she did not notice Joseph as he stealthily made his way over to her before placing his hands on her shoulders

“Excuse me, can I get some service around her?” he blurted without warning.

Ana gave a start before turning around and smacking him with the towel. They both laughed as they had not laughed in a long time. Ana’s face lit up when she received the flowers from Joseph and she threw her arms around him before whispering in his ear

“Thank you my darling”.

As soon as Ana returned home she placed the flowers directly into a vase, filled it with water and tended to the beautiful flowers each day. Visitors to their house would often comment on the pleasant scent of Jasmine wafting through the kitchen and adjoining dining room in the evenings and they always felt invigorated and pleasantly refreshed after sipping on the sweet herbal tea extracted from the flower leaves.

The kitchen itself had become a little more pleasant place to be in. Slowly Ana began to feel that the love which all but seemed to have vanished in their relationship had mysteriously returned and she wondered why. Joseph also seemed to be in a better mood and he would spend less time nodding off to sleep in front of his computer when he returned home from work.



The following week Ana was sitting on her back verandah when she had an idea. Indeed, she could hardly believe she had not thought of it earlier. Why not take the flowers from the vase in the kitchen and plant them in the backyard? she thought. That way the plain looking yard would become more

beautiful to look upon, the flowers would emit a pleasant scent and they may even regenerate all by themselves so that they would not die, but live in perpetuity.

The sun was beginning to sink in the west and dusk was approaching as she hurried into the kitchen to retrieve the flowers when Joseph suddenly walked in through the door. He was in an irritable mood, seemingly stuck on a problem with his research which he could not seem to solve although his mood changed as soon as he saw Ana pacing about the kitchen with her flowers. He wondered what she was up to.

“Hi darling, you are just in time” she greeted him with enthusiasm and energy as she planted a kiss on his cheek.

“I was just about to plant the Jasmine flowers in the backyard and I need your help to decide where we should plant them”.

Joseph thought it wasn't a bad idea and so he offered a suggestion.

“Why not plant them closer to the back verandah? That way we won't have to walk far from the house to water them”.

“But darling, if we do that the shadow of the house will block out the sun for most of the day and the flowers will die from lack of sunlight and what use will that be?” Ana pointed out, with an air of satisfaction as it was Joseph who was usually pointing out these sorts of problems.

“Yes, well you are the gardener so I guess you are right after all” he agreed.

“Of course I am!” Ana teased as she grabbed the tea towel and flicked him with it.

He gave a cry and they began chasing each other around the house like a couple of school children.

They finally made it to the designated spot where they had agreed to plant the flower, halfway between the verandah and the back fence, alongside their neighbor's fence where it would be exposed to plenty of sunlight and protected from the powerful southerly winds which occasionally blew through the area.

And so they planted the Jasmine flower together and by now Joseph had completely forgotten about his cares with work and did not mention anything to do with work all evening which was rare.

The flowers continued to flourish throughout spring and into the summer. On her days off from work Ana would often sit under the tree in her back yard and read a book or simply sit in the sun.

One particularly fine summer's day Ana was sitting on her bench in her garden lost in her own thoughts. Over time the feeling had been growing on her more strongly with each passing day that she would like to begin a family with Joseph. Ana did not always want to have a family and in fact when she was younger it was the last thing on her mind. However, since she had met Joseph her desires had slowly changed and she now thought how wonderful it would be to have a child with him.

She thought how Joseph would make a great father, however she wasn't sure Joseph shared the same feelings since he had never once mentioned anything about wanting to have a child or start a family before. Indeed, he had become so pre occupied with his work lately that beginning a family was probably the last thing on his mind and besides, Ana intuitively felt it was wrong to pressure Joseph into getting married or starting a family if he wasn't ready.

Despite this she never lost hope that he might one day change his mind although for now she was content that the passion she felt was missing from their relationship until recently had mysteriously returned.



Ana was sitting in her backyard one day under the birch tree when she suddenly felt a craving for fruit. Usually she would go to her local supermarket and pick out all the fruit and vegetable she needed although this time she had an idea. Instead of going to the supermarket she made her way to the local gardening shop where they sold almost every kind of plant, fruit and vegetable available.

She picked out a variety of seedlings and saplings of fruit, vegetables, flowers and small trees. She knew that Joseph did not care much for gardening although he did seem to have enjoyed planting the Jasmine flowers so perhaps he would like to have some say in how the plants should be arranged in their backyard.

Joseph was in a good mood when he returned home from work. He tried explaining to Anna the success he had been having with his work on a new scientific formula he had been working on and Ana listened out of politeness because she really had no idea what he was talking about.

He kept trying to explain how he had come up with a method of putting a price on carbon in such a way that large polluting companies would have no choice but to reduce their carbon emissions over time.

Ana really could not understand why anyone would want to buy carbon and it made little sense to her. She tried asking questions to seem interested such as “How much will it cost?” Joseph explained how the price would have to be negotiated between governments around the world although she really could not understand the concept.

As usual, Joseph began to get frustrated at her inability to understand anything to do with his work and he eventually gave up. It’s like trying to get blood from a stone, he thought to himself impatiently.

All of a sudden Ana remembered the plants she had bought from the gardening shop earlier that day and blurted out “Darling, I know that you have been very busy lately but look here, I have something to show you follow me” she said with a sprightly spring in her step.

Taken in by Ana’s sudden enthusiasm, Joseph tagged along and made his way through the back door onto their verandah. He smiled at what he saw. All the seedlings and tiny plants and trees Ana had purchased from the nursery during the day were spread along the back verandah in neat little rows. There were varieties of berries, fruit trees, vegetables, herbs and spices all lined up together. Joseph walked over to examine each seed and sapling and then looked at his barren backyard.

“What are we going to do with all of these?” he asked curiously.

“Well, look here I have already come up with some designs” Ana replied as she hurried back into the house and returned with different drawings and plans she had been working on to turn the backyard into a garden.

Joseph had never really thought much of gardening before although he was taken up with Ana’s sudden and spontaneous enthusiasm and before long he found himself criticizing different designs or liking

others and so together they stayed up late into the night until they had worked out a design which they were both happy with. Joseph had completely forgotten about the success he was having with his work so absorbed had he become with the prospect of turning his lifeless block of land into a flourishing garden. The more attention he gave the idea the more it grew on him.

Together they worked out where their future orchard would be, where they should plant their fruit, and what variety of plants they should consider. The more Joseph and Ana discussed and thought about their new garden the more their enthusiasm and excitement grew.



There is something about working in one's own garden which draws people into this mysterious and ancient activity again and again. No matter how technologically advanced the world has become or how cheap fruit and vegetables are in the supermarket there is a certain satisfaction in creating and caring for one's own garden that money can never buy. You will be hard pressed to find a selfish, nasty or loathsome gardener.

Kings, emperors and rulers of various civilizations throughout history always maintained a garden for themselves even if they did not personally care for their garden. There is a source of strength one finds from within when caring for their garden and it has been described as being 'good for the soul'.

Ana and Joseph worked on their garden in their spare time. However, over time Joseph found that he had become more and more occupied with his research and Ana found herself doing a large part of the gardening herself. Indeed her passion for gardening had reached new heights and she worked tirelessly with a strong sense of enthusiasm she had not known before. Always in the back of her mind she thought of raising a family in a beautiful home which she would create in love with Joseph.



By the following spring the edges of the yard bordered by the neighboring fences were lined with small plants, flowers and saplings. Ana noticed how Joseph had changed over the past year or so. He hardly watched television anymore. He would come home from work feeling tired as always although he would still go straight to work on their garden and he also completed the majority of the work which involved heavy lifting whenever he could and he had even lost a little bit of weight in the process. They made a good team.

Joseph would explain to Ana how therapeutic it was to come home and work in his garden and how his tiredness would always disappear.

Eventually their well thought out garden started to take shape. A row of baby Frangipani trees were planted at the rear of their property with the purpose of providing a cool and shady place to escape in the harsh summer heat.

Crawling vines were planted on each of the side fences adjoining the adjacent properties which produced magnificent flowers which made the garden more beautiful to look upon. A vegetable garden was planted at the rear of the yard to provide them with tasty home grown fruit and bricks were laid

down to form a path through the middle of the garden. They decided to keep the single Birch tree in the middle of their yard since it had been there before they had moved into the house.

Summer turned into autumn and gradually the once grassy plain looking backyard had been transformed into a well thought out garden. The various seedlings and saplings were sowed in the ground in their designated positions in anticipation of the arrival of the coming spring.

The first day of spring was unusually warm for that time of year. The bright sun shone brilliantly in the sky and the garden basked in golden rays of sunlight for the entire day. .

Later that evening clouds appeared over the horizon and a gentle overnight drizzle softened the earth as if a signal had been given from the heavens for the flowers and seedlings to bloom.

Ana took it as an omen that she was on the right track.

The weather was exceptionally kind during the first month of spring and little seedlings began shooting up through the earth. Flowers bloomed and the dazzling array of color on display from the different varieties of plants complimented one another in such a way that it was hard not to stop and admire the way the garden seemed to blend into a single beautiful symphony with each individual plant and young tree playing its role.

As summer approached it became warmer and the young garden was flourishing magnificently. The fruit and vegetables produced that year were the tastiest Joseph or Ana had ever tasted before. The former overgrown yard had indeed transformed into a beautiful flourishing garden.

Joseph completed his doctorate that summer and his hard work paid off. He now had a PHD in environmental science and his work had already received critical acclaim and was published in numerous scientific journals.

During the summer holiday that year Joseph and Ana did not even think about going on vacation anywhere, so absorbed had they become with their work in their garden. They had new plans to now turn the the rest of their property into a flourishing garden as well, so great was the pleasure they received from working in it.



One day towards the end of the summer holidays as the sun was receding into the western sky Ana and Joseph decided to finish tending to their garden which they had been working in all day. Ana thought she would make a fruit salad using the fresh fruit they had picked earlier in the day and so she scurried off into the kitchen to prepare the fruit.

Ana busied herself in the kitchen while Joseph quietly examined the plants and small trees that surrounded him. He felt at peace in his surroundings as he walked around his young garden, stopping at intervals to examine a plant or take in the smell of a flower as he desired. He could not explain his particularly good mood that day and he had actually felt his mood improving as the day went by.

Joseph was in a calm state of mind and felt as though he was perfectly aware of all that was happening around him. He noticed a small sparrow land on a branch of one of his baby Frangipani trees and

observed the subtle bobbing movements of his head and how it scanned the area around him before flying off again to examine something in the grass which had caught its attention.

He observed a raven perched on the branch of his tomato vine, waiting for the right time to swoop upon a snail or some other insect. This was good because snails were pests that would eat away a lot of the herbs and other plants within the garden. Joseph thought how everything in his garden seemed to be working in harmony and he also thought of how he might even extend and improve his garden in the future.

Ana emerged from the kitchen with a bowl filled with fresh pieces of fruit and they began to eat the tasty pieces of fruit together without talking. Joseph looked up at Ana as he gathered a piece of mango from the bowl and he thought to himself how exceedingly beautiful she looked, more beautiful than ever before.

His thoughts raced along and he began reflecting on her vibrant nature, she was always full of life even if they didn't always agree on everything.

She would make a great mother if we were ever to have children. She knows about life somehow and I think it would be nice to begin a family, he thought to himself.

All of a sudden to his own surprise he blurted out something which he would never forget

"Sweetheart, have you ever thought about one day raising a child together? It would be wonderful thing to start a family, don't you think?"

He stopped short, completely shocked and surprised at his own words. He could not explain why he would say such a thing especially since he had never even thought about raising a child or starting a family before. Joseph blushed from ear to ear as he gazed down in embarrassment before slowly raising his gaze to meet Ana's. She had come over and was now sitting beside him as she took his hand.

'I would like nothing more my darling' she replied as a tear rolled down her cheek. They were married later that autumn.



"Grandfather did that really happen?" I asked.

"I mean, what did a garden have to do with Ana and Joseph falling in love and wanting to start a family? I have never heard of anything like it before".

Grandfather straightened himself in his seat and replied with a question of his own

"What makes you think the garden was responsible for Ana and Joseph falling in love?"

"Well, everything seemed to change when Ana and Joseph designed and planted a garden together didn't it? I mean, before that Joseph used to just come home from work and plunk himself in front of the television".

"There may be some truth in that, but Ana and Joseph were in love before they began work on their garden together. It was only later on that love slowly began to disappear from their lives"

“But why did the love begin to disappear in the first place? They were so happy when they first met”.

“Love is a mysterious, illogical and temperamental energy most people do not understand today - perhaps due to Man’s fading consciousness both individually and collectively”.

“But why is our understanding of love and its purpose in life so poorly understood?” I asked not entirely sure what he meant.

Grandfather replied “I don’t know, perhaps it is precisely due to the illogical, temperamental nature of love which is in stark contrast with Man’s almost fanatical attempts to understand phenomena through logic and reason alone. Many people speak of the intellect, logic and reason as if they were the most defining attributes Man possesses, attributes separating us from other life as if it were all some kind of competition”.

“But it is a competition!” I replied in astonishment. Had he never heard of survival of the fittest I mused?

“Surely intellect, logic and reason are the abilities which separate us from other forms of life on this planet” I argued. I thought everyone knew that.

“Are you so sure?” asked grandfather rhetorically. “Intellect, logic and reason are of no use to us if there is no need to use them and this fact alone cancels them out from being the most important attributes Man possesses. Our most important attribute must be crucial to our very existence every moment of our lives. Even more crucial than eating and drinking”

I tried to think what could possibly be so important before I realized. “Hang on I think I know, you mean love right?”

Grandfather nodded with a smile.

I began to wonder why so many people find love and then lose it. Grandfather seemed to be reading my thoughts when he said

“Love cannot survive for long within dead end feelings and aspirations. In Joseph’s case he had become so caught up with his own thoughts on work and his other artificial aspirations in life that he forgot about love and so love had no option but to fade away. Things only changed for Joseph and Ana when one day, for reasons unknown to us, Joseph spontaneously thought of picking out a flower for Ana and he brought it to her with pure and sincere feelings of love. This was a crucial point in time for their relationship because things were not looking good for them and it could have easily turned sour as so many relationships do.”

“But how can a flower influence a relationship?” I asked not entirely convinced. People give flowers to their loved ones all the time for many reasons such as on special occasions but nothing seem to change for them so why did it change for Joseph and Ana so suddenly? Isn’t it enough just to be in love and to assume that everything else will fall into place?

“The giving of a flower to a loved one is a significant act which has survived from a period in our history we can sadly no longer remember. It is a simple yet powerful act filled with wisdom and meaning yet sadly it is poorly understood by most people”.

I looked at my Grandfather in surprise. How did he know about forgotten periods of time in history and why was he so convinced with his theories? They were only theories after all.

“What do you mean the act of giving someone a flower is poorly understood? Everyone knows that when you love someone you give them a flower because women like flowers and it’s a good way to show them how you feel and they will like you more for it” I asserted confidently. His theories about flowers seemed unbelievable to me and I assumed that he was speaking in parables. Crazy old man, I thought.

“Yes, that is what most people assume today and they are not far from the truth” he responded quietly.

What he said next surprised me.

“But the act of giving a flower is not symbolic or even ritualistic in its true essence. It is a practical act which everyone can apply in their own lives today, as long as the flower is given in full sincerity out of pure love. A flower is a living thing and is therefore infused with the energy of love as all living things are. A flower given to a loved one spontaneously and in full sincerity without ulterior motives is capable of igniting dormant feelings of love within the receiver who will feel a natural inclination to ensure the feeling survives and grows if they are also in love with the giver. In Ana and Josephs case the flower was given to Ana by Joseph in a spontaneous, sincere and loving spirit with no ulterior motive and so Ana felt a natural inclination to ensure the love survived and she intuitively knew what to do next without anyone telling her”.

“Ana simply planted the flower in a designated space in her backyard and it grew and regenerated all by itself. The single initial thought of sincere love was fast to catch on and as their garden continued to grow and flourish over time, so did the feeling of love between them.”

“But why doesn’t love flourish the same way between people who give each other flowers today?” I asked somewhat confused.

“For the most part the majority of people give each other flowers today only because they feel they are obliged to for some reason such as on an anniversary, a birthday or because they want the person to think well of them. Whilst this is still perhaps a good thing, it is incomparable with the power of feeling and love that can be generated if the flower were given spontaneously, sincerely and without the tinge of convention or thoughts to do with personal gain, however subtle”

Grandfather paused as if gathering his thoughts before continuing.

“It is unfortunate the commercial world widely influences many people’s feelings associated with love today. People give each other flowers and other gifts on many different occasions such as on birthdays and anniversaries and for many reasons. Although this is still still good, the person giving a flower in this spirit is not completely sincere because the person feels an obligation to give the flower and not because they are inspired to give purely of their free will. That is the difference between inspiration and convention.”

“But surely it doesn’t matter why a person gives somebody a flower? I mean, the person still received the flower and so surely they must also receive the love of the person who gave the flower?” I asked doubtfully.

I could not understand why the feeling behind giving somebody flowers mattered so much. No one can be sure of a person’s feeling so why does it matter? I thought it would be like if someone gives you a

large sum of money. Surely the person won't mind why they received the money they would just be happy enough knowing they received the money and that would suffice. I couldn't see what grandfather was getting at.

Grandfather shifted in his seat before responding

"When somebody gives flowers to a loved one without sincere feeling or with ulterior motives it may still generate feeling of love within the person. The only difference is the person receiving the flowers subconsciously senses the tinge of insincerity associated with the gift through their feelings and so the flower is unable to be infused with the energy of love to the extent which is otherwise possible. Once the flower dies the person will throw it away and the love infused within the flower also fades away."

I thought how much better the world would be if everybody did things for the right reasons. Often people do things for almost every reason besides the most important one – because they truly *feel* like doing it and not for any other reason.

Grandfather took a sip of his tea and continued, "The more time and thought went into Ana and Joseph's garden and the living things surrounding them the more the feeling of love and life grew between them. In fact, it would be possible to write an entire book on this subject alone although we do not have time today."

"In the back of her mind Ana was always thinking of how she would like to start a family with Joseph although she never mentioned the idea to him. Instead, she followed her intuition and the idea was born naturally inside of Joseph. In the end it is important to note that Joseph wanted to have a child with Ana from his own mind and not because he was pressured in any way or for any other reason. This is crucial because a child conceived through insincerity will be able to feel it and it will affect the child their entire life".

I wondered if grandfather was right and whether or not love is enough. Perhaps it is also necessary for two people in love to share the same aspirations in life in order for their love to grow in any meaningful way.

I thought about what people should aspire to. It seems that even honesty and truthfulness is not enough. In order for love to survive it must be able to grow and therefore it is essential that two people in love both aspire towards creation and growth in some shape or form. But what should we aspire to create with our love?

I had never heard a story like this from grandfather before, his stories had always been so light hearted and entertaining. I wondered if he knew what he was talking about or if the old man had begun to lose his wits in his old age. He gazed at me with searching eyes as if trying to determine whether or not anything he said had made an impression on me.

"I guess there may be some truth in what you are saying grandfather" I said, not entirely convinced.

"Either way I would like to know what happened to Ana and Joseph next. Did they end up living their lives together in happiness or did something else happen?"

Part II

During her pregnancy and especially in the later stages, Ana rarely left her house. Her garden was a pleasant place to be in and she felt as though there was nowhere else she would rather be than in her own home.

After a few months into her pregnancy she stopped working at the local café altogether and remained at home. During those days Ana read many different books on a wide range of subjects such as child and parental psychology, physiology and nutrition. There were many similar and opposing opinions on the best places to give birth such as in hospitals, home births and water births. The more Ana thought about it the more she decided that she would like to give birth at home in natural surroundings.

In the early days of her pregnancy Joseph was adamantly against the idea of Ana giving birth at home,

“What happens if something goes wrong? Hospitals have the best equipment and the most highly trained staff to deal with a situation in case there is an emergency” he protested.

Ana calmly replied “Darling, where do you think people gave birth before hospitals were built? Besides, I think it is better for our child to be born in natural surroundings and I don’t like the idea of complete strangers interacting with our child in some kind of sterile cage.”

The more Joseph thought about this the more he realized that she may have a point and anyway, it would be somehow nice for their child to be born at home.

“Okay but I still think we should hire a wet nurse just in case” he insisted.

“Fine, we will choose a nurse we are comfortable with but I should like to meet her beforehand”.

“Then that settles it” Joseph agreed with a sigh of relief.



Joseph’s work demanded that he was required to travel from time to time with his research into climate change. Every so often he attended conferences in other cities around the country and while he was away Ana missed him terribly. Friends would come over and keep her company whenever they could but it wasn’t the same, she missed her husband.

During one of Joseph’s conferences on the other side of the country he was away for an entire week and towards the end of his stay he was missing his wife and home more than ever.

Joseph was alone in his hotel room and he could not stop thinking about Ana. He felt he wanted to connect with her in a special way when he suddenly had an idea. He stepped outside and it was a beautiful clear night, not a cloud in the sky. He looked up and there it was. The full moon had just crept above the eastern horizon and he figured it would just be a little higher in the sky on the other side of the country where his pregnant wife would be preparing for bed.

He took out his phone and dialed her number.

“Hi darling” he heard her voice over the phone. They talked for some time and Joseph made sure his wife was okay and that everything was in order at home.

“Sweetheart, step outside for just a moment and look up to the sky” he said as their conversation was drawing to a close.

Ana walked out the back door onto the back verandah and looked up to the sky. It wasn't as clear as where Joseph was although the stars could be seen at intervals through the streaks of cloud passing by high above.

“Look towards the east, can you see the moon?” he asked.

Ana looked to the east but she couldn't see anything, only a dim glow of light as the clouds blocked out most of the sky. She walked into her garden and just at that moment the clouds parted for a moment and the white face of the bright moon revealed itself. It shone directly above the birch tree and for an instant illuminated the entire garden.

“I can see it my darling it looks beautiful” Ana finally replied.

“I am looking at the same moon this very instant” said Joseph in a quiet voice.

Ana choked back tears, for some reason she was utterly overcome by that moment. She wished desperately that he was there with her so they could watch the moon together yet at the same time she felt connected with Joseph in a way she had never felt before no matter how many times they had talked on the phone previously. She felt right there and then that she could *feel* everything Joseph was feeling and she knew everything was alright.

Just as they finished their conversation Ana felt a kick and a squirm for within her. At that very instant as Joseph thought of their unborn child. I'll be home very soon, he thought as if he were talking with his child.

The clouds covered the moon again as the kicking sensation finally subsided and Ana went to sleep. She slept better than she had all week.



Ana continued to tend to her garden whenever she was feeling up to it and Joseph would help out whenever he could in his spare time away from work. The variety of trees and plants were prepared well before the onset of spring and as the weather grew warmer, new shoots started to spring up through the earth and the garden flourished in a spectacular array of color and fragrance once again.

The chill of winter eventually gave way to the sweet fragrance of spring. The garden Joseph and Ana had planned and created together was so well thought out in advance that it required minimal effort to maintain and everything seemed to work together in coherence.

The young frangipani trees had grown surprisingly fast and they blocked out most of the strong northerly wind which would otherwise have flattened the young and delicate pear and apple trees planted on either side of the vegetable garden. The leaves which fell from a young gum tree next to their orchard provided a natural nutrient for the soil and little if any manure was required.

The birds would chirp away in the garden throughout the day and they also kept away snails and other harmful pests which would otherwise have eaten away at young saplings. The birds would also occasionally pick at ripening fruit and vegetables from time to time.

This was becoming more of a problem until one day when a stray kitten mysteriously appeared on Ana and Josephs back verandah and kept returning to visit. After a while they decided to keep the cute little kitten and named it Musa. It wasn't long before the kitten would stalk the birds, rodents and other pests in the shadow of the trees and plants and keep them from landing on the fruit trees or the vegetable garden.

If the Greenwoods knew more about cats they would have realized the significance of the arrival of Musa on their back doorstep. Various ancient civilizations understood the significance of the arrival of a stray cat on a household's backdoor step.

Most people think that a stray cat appears at a household because it is in search of food and affection. Whilst this may or may not be true, there is a much more significant meaning behind it. A cat chooses to live within a particular house and to be cared for by certain people because it has an appointed task to accomplish there, just as every single person living on the earth has a specific task to accomplish on Earth.

Cats are the guardians of the underworld in the spiritual realm of existence and a cat arrives at a household to protect a specific person or persons from harmful spiritual influences, usually good people who have something to accomplish in life.

Cats mainly sleep during the day but at night they are most alert and active, hunting harmful rodents which eat vegetables and fruit from plants and trees. When a stray cat arrives at your doorstep and returns day after day, you can be sure you are on the right track in life and there is possibly something you are also yet to accomplish.



One fine morning towards the end of spring Ana gave birth to a baby girl. Joseph and Ana decided to name her Jasmine – after the flower they had first met in front of for the very first time. Jasmine had gorgeous bright big blue eyes and an infectious smile. Joseph delivered the baby and cut the am biblical chord himself.

Little, if any help was required from the hired midwife Ana and Joseph had chosen to help deliver the baby. The mid wife was astounded at the nature of this particular birth as she had never come across anything like it in her years of delivering hundreds of babies.

“I don't understand” she confessed to Ana, more than a little confused.

“The child did not cry, not even once and you did not seem to go through anywhere near as much pain as the average women giving birth experiences.”

Ana could not explain it either - she only smiled as she took little Jasmine from Joseph looked upon her for the first time.

Seeing that everything was in order, the midwife took her leave and reminded them to call her should they require any assistance although she suspected this would not be necessary seeing the good health of the baby and how much Ana herself already knew on the subject of childbirth. If only every mother were that attentive towards their child's birth, she thought to herself as she turned to leave.



In the first few months following Jasmine's birth Ana remained at home with the child whilst Joseph continued to work. He had become extremely busy with his work lately and he felt he was on the brink of making an important discovery.

He often returned home late at night and by that time Jasmine was almost always fast asleep although he made a point of creeping into her room and watching her as she slept. He would try and spend as much time with his family although his work was becoming more and more demanding with each passing year.

Ana stayed at home with Jasmine during her infancy and she continued to read many books on raising children and she had made friends with some of the neighbors.

A young couple, Michael and Jane had just moved in next door. They were similar in age to Ana and Joseph except they did not have any children of their own. Michael worked as a trainee stockbroker in the city and Jane was a real estate agent. Jane would often come around to visit Ana in her garden and they would sit on the bench together under the birch tree while little Jasmine crawled around on the grass, exploring the mysteries of the vegetation that surrounded her.

Jane was a strong willed emotional individual who was never afraid to speak her mind. One day Jane and Ana were sitting together on Ana's bench under the tree in the middle of her garden in the middle of a conversation and Jane was speaking;

"You know your garden is so lovely compared with the rest of this neighborhood. It's a shame the rest of the street can't look like this garden of yours, it would be a much nicer place to live in" she commented as she took in her surroundings.

Birds were singing in the branches and little Jasmine was playing on the grass with Musa the cat.

"That's exactly what I thought when we first moved in" Ana replied as she took a bite from an apple she had just picked from her tree. "But you know it's actually not as bad as we thought it was going to be. At first we never had any intention of staying here for long and we both thought that once Joseph finished his doctorate we would move into a nicer neighborhood, perhaps an inner city townhouse, but somehow this place has grown on us and we could never think of leaving now. We have this nice big garden and lots of space and besides, Jasmine is still young. I don't want to move her round too much while she is still a child".

"Yes I guess you are right in that sense" Jane agreed. "Still, crime seems to be getting worse in this neighborhood. I wouldn't walk near the train station at night and I hear break and enters are increasing."

"Yes, I've heard that too" Ana sighed.

Jane began to get worked up “If only the government would stop making all these promises and get more police out there patrolling the streets” Jane vented with some passion. “We pay our taxes and all those politicians can do is sit there arguing amongst each other while we can’t even walk down the street at night. It makes me so angry just to think about”.

As much as she liked her new neighbor Ana could not help but notice how she complained all the time. She would find a fault in almost everything, even if something good happened to her. For instance one day she related to Ana how Michael came home from work with news that he had just received a large pay rise at work and so he had come home with a surprise for Jane, whom he loved very much. He had bought her a very expensive gold watch and whilst Jane was ecstatic, later she would comment on how it gave her an itch around her wrist and how she could not wear it in public for fear of being robbed.

“Especially in this neighborhood” she emphasized.

“The last thing I want is someone breaking into my house or robbing me for this watch and so I only ever wear it on special occasions. I explained it to Michael and he understands although I could not help but notice some disappointment on his face when I told him why I wasn’t wearing it. He understands now though” she continued reassuringly and her speech seemed to speed up the more she talked.

“Besides, we won’t be here forever, as soon as Michael gets a promotion and I manage to sell some more property we will move into a nicer neighborhood. Property is only getting more expensive and it’s better to be in the city - even if it’s only a small two bedroom apartment – rather than living out here in the suburbs. The more you wait, the harder it will be to buy anywhere near the city and so I think we will try and buy a house in a better location in the next few years” Jane went on, seemingly at a million miles an hour.

As Jane spoke Ana realized how Jane was extremely focused on creating as much wealth as possible. She saw everything in terms of dollars and cents as many people do. She thought how the desire for wealth and power are aspirations which so many people take for granted and how these desires are even held in high regard by almost every sector of society.

We all feel that love can only exist within living things and is unable to grow within anything artificial yet we stubbornly persist with our artificial pursuits, she thought. Surely, this is madness.

Jane was still talking. It was almost as if Jane had completely forgotten that Ana was sitting right next to her and failed to take her feelings into account. Ana wasn’t offended though, she had once thought the same way herself and besides, she had become accustomed to Jane’s emotional outbursts and even appreciated how Jane spoke frankly and honestly about her feelings. She thought to herself that if only more people were like that, small problems would hardly ever turn into bigger ones.

“What about children? Have you ever talked about starting a family with Michael?” asked Ana out of curiosity.

“No way, it hasn’t even crossed our minds” Jane replied firmly. “I’m not sure I’ll ever have children, there are just too many other things Michael and I want to do with our careers first and I just can’t see the point in having children, at least not for a long while anyway. Besides, I don’t think I would like to raise a child the way things are at the moment. There’s just too much violence and corruption around and so I’m not sure I would like to bring up a child in this sort of environment. How did you and Joseph ever manage to do it?”

“Well, I always wanted children and I never said anything about it because Joseph never seemed interested in children when I first met him. Then one day Joseph just asked me out of the blue as if he had suddenly changed his mind about everything. I still don’t know why he changed his mind but he really wanted to have child all of a sudden” replied Ana.

“That really is amazing” Jane replied although she could still not really understand how someone could change their mind so suddenly about something like that.

They sat in silence for a while longer. Jasmine was playing on the grass nearby. Something seemed to have attracted her interest as she made her way over to a nearby rosebush.

“Hey isn’t Jasmine getting a little too close to that swarm of bees over there?” Jane asked in alarm, Little Jasmine had proceeded to crawl across the grass and was becoming closer and closer to a swarm of bees which were collecting pollen from the rose bush.

“No it’s okay wait and see what happens” Ana replied calmly as they both looked on.

Jane’s eyes widened in amazement as Jasmine crawled closer and closer to the rose bush. The swarm of bees continued to collect the pollen from the flowers. When Jasmine reached the rose bush she reached out with her arm before something extraordinary happened.

Instead of attacking the girl, the bees actually began to increase their speed as if an invisible force had suddenly pressed fast forward and they accelerated from one flower to the next as the buzzing sound emanating from the bees grew louder. Some of the bees actually landed on Jasmine’s arm although they did not sting her.

Jasmine sat calmly for a while with her outstretched arm before she pulled away and began to crawl back to her spot on the grass with a large toothless smile beaming across her face. Jane sat dumbfounded as she tried to make sense of everything that had happened.

“Why didn’t the bees sting her?” she asked almost to herself. “If you had not said anything I would have picked her up myself and dragged her away from that dangerous situation!”

“I couldn’t make sense of it myself either at first” answered Ana somewhat reflectively. “When I first saw Jasmine crawling towards the bees I instinctively tried to pull her away although as I went to pick her up she began to cry out furiously so I put her back down and so I thought I would just watch her closely in case anything happened. When I saw that the bees did not harm her I became more relaxed and indeed nothing happened to her. She seemed to even enjoy playing with the bees if such a thing is possible.”

“But I still cannot explain why the bees suddenly speed up whenever she approaches them. It’s almost as if they are trying to *please* her in some way. I have heard of bees attacking people before and even chasing them but I have never heard of them speeding up to collect the pollen.”

“It seemed to me as if the bees were not threatened by her presence in any way - on the contrary they seemed to be inspired by her presence if such a thing is possible”.

As she continued to relate events to her friend, Ana would later think how adults often tell others, especially children what is expected of them - how they should think, how they should behave and even what they are capable of based on their own experiences. Rarely does someone stop to think that people do things in life for all sorts of reasons and if they cannot understand why somebody chooses to

do something – even something that makes no sense at the time -perhaps it is best not to change or criticize the person without fully understanding their motives, especially children.

Ana wondered to herself how many other things children knew intuitively which adults did not.

As she watched her daughter she became more and more convinced by a growing feeling that love can only exist within living things and cannot exist for long within dead feelings and aspirations.

Man is infused with the energy of love as all living things are. Indeed, due to the sensitivity of our feelings, we are more capable of using the energy of love to create whatever we wish in comparison with all other living things but this does not mean that love also exists within all of our creations.

Ana reflected how love would probably not be able to exist within anything artificial for long because it cannot grow within artifice. This does not mean that artificial creations are necessarily harmful – in fact many of them are useful - it simply means that love cannot exist within these creations because it has nowhere to grow, nowhere to recreate.

Ana noticed how Jasmine responded to everything taking place around her. She observed the grass, the birds, the trees and how everything interacted.

She thought how many people feel strong attachments to artificial things such as cars, computers or even a house but the feeling cannot be described as love because these things do not have feelings of their own and are incompatible with love.

Lost in her own thoughts, Jane bit into an apple which Ana had picked from her apple tree that morning and she thought how good it would be to have a little fruit tree of her own in her back yard. She realized that Ana and Joseph did not have an orange tree in their garden and so Jane thought that if she could grow oranges, she would be able to give Ana some of her delicious fruit instead of just taking Ana's fruit all the time. Ana did not mind giving away fruit and vegetables as she always had more than she needed although that was not the point – Jane wanted to see if she could grow tasty fruit as well.

Jane did not know or understand much about gardening, she was more adept at looking at a garden in terms of the value it would add to a property and its potential resale market value. When Jane planted her orange tree she wanted it to yield the tastiest oranges possible and so she began to ask Ana all sorts of questions about planting trees and she even bought various books on the subject so that she could plant a tree which would yield the tastiest fruit. For the first time in her life she did not think about how much value it would add to her house, she only wanted better tasting fruit.

That year Jane planted her orange tree in a sunny corner of her own backyard and watched it grow. Over time she would often come out to check on her tree and water it as it continued to grow. The following year tiny oranges began to appear on its branches and the fruit ripened later that summer.

Inspired by her initial success Jane decided to plant other varieties of herbs, vegetables and fruit trees in her yard and by the middle of summer Jane and Michael's backyard was looking more and more like a flourishing garden.

Over time Ana began to notice how Jane had stopped complaining so much. Not only that, Michael had also started working in the garden in his spare time and the two families would often exchange fruit, ideas and would meet at each other's place for dinner from time to time or prepare a meal together using the produce collected from their two gardens.



Over the course of the following year the entire neighborhood slowly began to change in a mysterious way. Curious neighbors peered over the fence and admired the beauty and scent of the Greenwoods flourishing garden. Ana and Joseph would often give away their excess fruit and vegetables to other neighbors and when they tasted the fruit they were inspired to see whether or not they could also create a garden which was as beautiful and produce tasty fruit of their own.

As the gardens in the street grew and flourished one by one, neighbors were more inclined to exchange ideas and their attitude toward one another improved day by day. It was almost as if each neighbor was competing to see who could create the most beautiful garden. The more time they spent in their gardens the more sociable and happier they seemed to become.

Three more years passed and local authorities were at a loss to explain the sudden drop in crime and the lack of litter polluting the streets which local authorities were accustomed to cleaning up. Indeed, many public servants began to worry they might lose their jobs because a lot of them had very little to do.

Joseph walked home from university and no longer gave thought to his safety or looking over his shoulder. The youths which congregated on the street corner had mysteriously disappeared and instead he noticed many young people trimming hedges or digging up vegetable patches in their front yards. He even thought he recognized one or two faces from the group of youths that used to congregate on the street corner, trimming overgrown trees of one of the houses. There was a time when he would never have thought such a thing were possible and he wondered what was going on.



Jasmine was an unusually gifted young girl. She was walking by the time she was six months old and stringing whole sentences together by the time she was eighteen months.

Little Jasmine would often sit on the grass and take in her surroundings whilst her mother read a book or talked with visitors on the bench under their birch tree. Jasmine observed the changing of the seasons and the contrasting colors of the garden in autumn and spring. She would play with Musa the cat by dangling a piece of string in front of him and pulling it away before Musa could pounce on it.

Musa was never able to catch the string.

Jasmine was fascinated by Musa and she could keep herself entertained hours on end just by sitting in her garden. Although Jasmine enjoyed playing in her garden and had already made some friends with other children in the neighborhood she would always ask her mum when her dad was coming home.



Joseph had become increasingly busy with work in recent times and was unable to spend as much time with his family as he had in the past. He was now professor of environmental science at the university

and his research into the effects of climate change on the planet was taking up more and more of his time. He would often return home after Jasmine had fallen asleep and kiss her goodnight.

During the day, little Jasmine would pick the best flowers from the garden and place them in a beautiful handmade vase. She would then place the vase on her father's desk in his study in hope that he would become so overwhelmed by the beauty of the flowers that he would not want to leave for work the following morning. She was unsuccessful with her attempts although she had extraordinary resolve for such a young girl and never failed in refilling the vase with fresh water each day.

Joseph's research was proving extremely successful and his hard work seemed to be paying off. Much of his work was published in numerous scientific journals. As a relatively young research scientist he had already accomplished a great deal and he felt sure that he was on the verge of making a major breakthrough in his field. The more he developed his highly complicated scientific formulas and calculations the closer he felt he was to making a major breakthrough.

During the period of time when Joseph was working on his research, climate change had all of a sudden become a major international topic in the space of only a few years. Media coverage on the subject had increased and as the leading scientist in his field at the time Joseph found that he was more and more sort after by various government agencies which contracted him to conduct research on their behalf.

Even the media began requesting interviews and he was invited to appear on many talk shows. In one month alone he had interviews scheduled in multiple cities across the country and he was forced to spend more and more time away from home as a result.

The government had recently commissioned Joseph to conduct an independent study into the affects of climate change and how it would impact the country. Joseph was expected to submit a report to the Climate Change minister. He also had many other deadlines to meet and he was constantly on the phone or on his computer working on his many pressing deadlines.

Ana was proud that her husband was so highly regarded and in such demand by seemingly important people and organizations yet deep down she would gladly have given it all away to spend more time with him as they used to, during those summer days when Joseph would come home from work and they would work in their garden together. Although he never mentioned it, Joseph sometimes wished that he could come home early because he loved his family very much although he could not possibly see how he would be able to tear himself away from work and the expectations people seemed to have of him.

Joseph had been working extremely hard on his scientific formulas yet he faced two main problems no matter how accurate his predictions proved to be or how much critical acclaim he received. The first problem he faced was that despite the success he was having with his work, there were always people who opposed his methodology and therefore refuted most of his projections no matter how irrefutable his conclusions appeared to be.

This led to the second main problem he faced. Joseph's calculations were so complicated that most ordinary people did not understand how he arrived at his conclusions. His wife would always appear to be interested in what he had to say out of politeness although he would get frustrated when she repeated questions about something he had just explained and so he would lose patience and the conversation would change. Despite this, he felt his main task was to convince politicians and policy makers in government of his theories and to get his message across to people in positions of power who could affect real change, or so he thought.



A week before his preliminary report to the climate change minister was due Joseph suddenly fell severely ill and was forced to rest at home. This was a surprise because Joseph was hardly ever ill and this particular illness could not have come at a worse time. His report to the climate change minister was a deadline he simply could not miss and many important politicians and government bodies were depending on him. His report was to underpin the basis of the climate change policy which the President of his country was to use in an address to a large international summit where all the world leaders were to meet and ultimately come to an agreement on reversing the affects of climate change.

Despite his ambitions and pressing deadlines, Joseph was bed ridden and left to the care of Ana at home. Joseph could not understand why people became sick, especially at inconvenient times.



The previous spring Ana had read through many books on herbal healing. She thought back to a herbal healing plant which she had planted in her garden the spring before. At the time Jasmine had only just started to talk when she noticed her mother tending to the plant. Ana was trimming the dead branches of the plant when without warning Jasmine suddenly pointed to the branches growing out horizontally and said repeatedly

“Chop chop mama”.

Ana could not understand why she wanted her to chop those branches as they were healthy. Then she thought ‘what have I got to lose?’ and followed her little girl’s instructions.

Later that day she continued reading when she came across a paragraph which sent a shiver down her spine. The chapter recommended trimming branches growing horizontally on all medicinal plants so that more energy could be channeled upwards to new growing leaves which would yield more powerful and effective medicinal leaves.

Perhaps life is the same way, she thought. We need to get rid of the things in life which drain our energy so that we can focus our energy on the important things in life, the things which matter the most.



During his first day in bed Joseph tried to continue working but it was no use, the moment he tried to concentrate he felt his throbbing headache intensify. He had no choice but to lie still in his bed and he did not stir for the first day. He was left to the mercy of his wife who would bring him a strange tasting herbal tea.

As we already know, Joseph did not believe in the healing properties of herbal tea or any other form of alternative medicines for that matter. However, this time he was too ill to argue with his wife and so he consumed whatever it was she put in front of him without arguing.

On his second day at home he felt slightly better but still not well enough to go back to work. Alternatively, Ana suggested he take in some fresh air outside under the orchard they had built together at a time when he wasn't so busy. It was a nice sunny morning outside and some fresh air might even do him good. Like a distant memory he suddenly remembered his garden and thought it wasn't such a bad idea and so he obliged.

Ana brought out some pillows from inside and arranged them on the bench in such a way that it would be comfortable for Joseph to lie down. She gave him some more herbal tea to drink and without a word Joseph finished off the tea before lying down on his bench and immediately fell into a deep sleep.

Joseph fell into one dream after another and many different images flashed before him, some of the past some of the present and some which were unfamiliar, dreams which might possibly come to pass in the unforeseen future.

He saw his small house with his beautiful garden which dazzled brilliantly in the afternoon sunlight. His garden looked the same as it always did with one exception. The tree in the middle of the garden was gone and a little girl seemed to be standing beside a small baby tree which had taken its place. Then he recognized her, the girl was his little daughter slightly grown up although she looked sad somehow. He thought he noticed tears in her eyes. He tried to talk with her but she could not hear him. She seemed preoccupied with her thoughts and no matter how loud he shouted, still she could not hear him.

All of a sudden Jasmine looked up towards the sky and smiled. She seemed to have noticed him although he could not be sure as she seemed to be staring straight through him.

"Daddy, daddy"

He heard her voice as she reached out her arms towards him. Before he could respond he opened his eyes and awoke from his sleep.

The sun was higher in the sky when Joseph woke up yet he was not exactly sure how long he had been asleep for. All he knew was that he felt much better and his headache seemed to have completely disappeared. He had forgotten about his dream as he sat up and looked around him.

"Daddy, daddy!" he heard the cry of his daughter as she ran towards him with outstretched arms.

"Are you feeling better? How do you feel now?"

Joseph bent down and picked up his daughter, sat her on his lap.

"I feel much better sweetie, thank you" he replied before planting a kiss on her right cheek.

He actually felt a lot better than he had felt in the past couple of months and he was at a loss to explain his sudden improvement. All of the pills he had taken which were prescribed to him by his doctor had not worked and after only a nap and a sip of herbal tea he felt immeasurably better.

"Good, then it is working!" exclaimed Jasmine in delight as she climbed down and ran off again before Joseph could ask what it was that was working.

As Joseph looked on he realized why Jasmine had run away in such a rush. She was in the middle of a game of tag with Thomas, an orphan who lived down the street who was in the care of a foster family.

Thomas frequently moved between foster homes and had an unstable upbringing. Although he was an extremely polite young lad whenever he was visiting the Greenwood's he also had a reputation for being a general nuisance and a trouble maker in the neighborhood although Joseph could never quite understand this.

Thomas had a short temper and was prone to outbursts of anger and loss of self control. In fact he had a sad story to tell behind his upbringing which does not form part of this story. He was the same age as Jasmine although he was physically stronger and faster than her. Thomas had also developed a stutter which frustrated him to no end and he was often made fun of by other children whenever he tripped over his words.

Joseph observed the game of tag taking place in their backyard. Jasmine was 'in' and she chased after Thomas as fast as she could but it was no use, Thomas was much faster. He easily pulled away from his smaller and slower friend and he seemed rather pleased with himself. He would run ahead, zigzag from side to side, and sprint in short bursts whilst showing off his superior pace.

Jasmine stopped running, visibly upset with her inability to catch him. Then all of a sudden she stopped running altogether. Her face lit up with a smile. She ran after Thomas once more except this time she did not sprint. Whenever Thomas turned around to see where Jasmine was, Jasmine would increase her pace just a little before slowing down again as he looked away.

All at once Thomas accelerated to show off with his speed once again and began to zigzag from side to side. Jasmine continued to run at a fast jog when all of a sudden Thomas pulled up short as he tried to catch his breath. Now it was Jasmine's turn to sprint. She ran as fast as she could and easily caught up with Thomas who was still out of breath, tagged him while laughing before running off again to hide behind some bushes. By the time Thomas looked up, Jasmine was nowhere to be found and let out a sigh before ending the game 'ok, ok I g-give in' he conceded.

To his own surprise, Joseph shouted out loud

"That's my girl!"

He was strangely excited by his daughter's success. "Very clever, very clever and so fast"! Jasmine turned around in bewilderment at her father's sudden transformation. He was now standing up and jumping up and down like a mad man, all because of a game of tag.

Only an hour ago, he had been ghostly pale although he now seemed to be a completely different person, full of color, life and spirit.

Joseph was not only excited because of the game. He realized something else. Indeed, how could he have failed to notice it before? As he watched Jasmine triumph over her stronger and faster companion a realization dawned upon him. It was as if somebody had flicked a switch in his head.

All of a sudden he realized that the only way to solve the problems connected with climate change and perhaps all manmade problems for that matter is to first slow oneself down. People are always in such a hurry, always trying to get ahead in life that they do not stop to think whether or not they are even on the right track.

Joseph remembered a scene from his school days. From the ashes of an old flame scattered on the edge of a distant memory he suddenly recalled a poem written by one of the most famous poets in

history. Seemingly out of nowhere, one distinct line from the poem flickered and burst back into life in Joseph's mind. He vividly recalled one of the lines of the poem. It had read

'Work is love made visible'.

As if looking upon at his garden for the very first time Joseph took in his surroundings. He pondered each flower, plant and tree he had carefully planned and created with his wife in love and he watched his daughter play happily in the sun. He reflected how the garden was created from a single thought which grew from a single flower. The garden had taken a lot of effort, especially in the beginning and the trees had taken a long time to grow and indeed they were still growing.

But perhaps that's the way it is, he thought to himself. Like a garden - the worthwhile things in life take thought, effort and time in order to flourish and only once they flourish can you appreciate the full significance and meaning behind everything you have done. He realized then and there he was exactly where he should be.

All the clever scientific formulas, reports and speeches he had ever delivered in the past now seemed to pale in comparison with the living creations which surrounded him. Each blade of grass, plant and tree suddenly filled him with wonder and he became consciously aware of the pure miracle of these creations for the very first time in his life.

Before this moment in time he had always assumed how the words of the poem from his childhood could simply be applied to anyone's career or profession. Only now did he fully comprehend the true meaning behind those rich words and he felt a tingling sensation surge through him as he had never felt before.

For the first time in his life he realized that the living creations surrounding him created with the energy of love were creations nothing and no one could ever replace and then there was his most fascinating creation of all - his daughter playing happily in the garden as his wife stood on the verandah smiling as she made her way over to him carrying some more tea.

Up to this point in his life, Joseph only ever viewed the world through his intellect. He was more interested in numbers than he was in people, more interested in emissions than he was in plants and more focused on politics than his family.

He was struck by a realization that the serious problems facing the world could never be solved through the intellect, science, technology, politics or wealth and now he knew why although he was astounded by the simplicity behind his realization. He saw that genuine love did not exist within these things and he could now feel it on every level of his being.

Joseph realized through his feelings that the answer to any problem, no matter how big or small could always be found in nature through love alone.

Perhaps that is why Jesus Christ wandered in the desert and the forest before returning to civilization with his insights that would change the world. Maybe that's why Buddha retreated to the wilderness for years before returning with his wisdom which founded a new religion. In the end all the great prophets of history found the answers they were seeking within themselves through their interaction with the natural world. All found love and understanding in their quests.



Joseph did not return to work that day or the next day or the following day even though by now he had completely recovered from his illness. In fact he had completely lost interest in continuing with his work altogether despite his impending deadlines.

He was tempted to hand in the report half finished. He talked it over with his wife and she looked at him in alarm “But you can’t hand in a half finished report” she exclaimed with a worried look on her face.

Joseph explained that he had lost the will to continue with his work.

“Fine, but you still must finish the report, especially if other people are counting on you” Ana protested.

She was right, he must finish his report regardless of how he felt. People were counting on him and it was the right thing to do. He finished his report and sent it into the minister.

He never received a reply from the government and his report was not used in the Presidential address to the international climate change summit. Joseph did not receive any more offers to conduct television interviews either.



Grandfather paused and took another sip of his tea. “What happened grandfather? Why did Joseph never receive a reply and why did everyone suddenly lose interest in what he had to say?” I asked in earnest.

“Most of the time people will only listen to what they think they want to hear and not what they really want to hear”.

“What do you mean?” I asked in confusion.

“Most people are so caught up in their day to day that lives they have little time to think about the things that matter most in life. The more ambitious someone become’s the more success they crave and the more they are obliged to look towards the future. If they are not careful the inertia of their ambitions will take control of their lives and they will be unable to stop and take in the beauty surrounding them in the present and the miracles taking place in their lives on a daily basis. This is a real tragedy.

The present calls out to them quietly for them to stop and take a closer look around them yet they are moving along with such inertia they never really have a chance to stop and notice, so preoccupied are they with what lies ahead. The faster they move in life the more obliged they are to look further ahead lest they fail to recognize the perilous bends in the road.

They do not realize that all they need to do is slow down and take in the beauty surrounding them and they will notice that the bends in the road are not treacherous death traps but rather a welcoming change to the scenery as it unfolds before their very eyes.

Only once they slow down will they realize that life is not about the miles covered but rather the miles enjoyed and experienced with love. Sometimes it takes an illness or some other misfortune for people to change and it is well they become ill and experience these difficulties in life. Illness is a conversation between Man and God and it is not always wise to interfere in such a conversation, for each person has their own path to walk in life.

Grandfather paused, sipped his tea once more before continuing with his story.

Part III

So what did Joseph write in his report which would cause the authorities to ignore him? Joseph always felt he should have received a reply from the minister's office at the very least. It may seem strange to someone looking in from the outside but the second half of Joseph's report emphasized the importance of every person finding love, having a loving family and creating an environment of love in their life.

This formed the central conclusion of his report regarding the question of how to reverse the effects of climate change, so you may be able to begin to imagine why people in positions of power within a modern political party would ignore this kind of response.

The leaders of the nation were expecting to receive complicated graphs, tables and succinct arguments, in short they were expecting an in depth intellectual analysis with a definitive conclusion at the very least.

It would be very embarrassing for the government if the President were to speak about how everyone should strive for love in their lives as a solution for the climate change problem, or any other man made problem for that matter on the international stage. Grandfather explained:

"Ironically the world depends on problems in order to operate in its current state. If there was no crime there would be no need for a police force and if nobody became ill we would not need doctors, hospitals or pharmaceutical companies. Just think about it. Without problems, half the world would be out of work. This is why man made problems will never be solved through manmade inventions including science, technology, politics, religion or any other man made construct for that matter. People in positions of authority will always ensure this is the case and so they too are drawn further away from the most important thing in life and they bring people with them in the process."

"Hand on, do you mean understanding the meaning of purpose of life?"

"I mean understanding the purpose of life and *living* it" he emphasized.

There was a silence and grandfather paused so I could think about what he had just said before he continued

"If everyone was to feel and understand the true meaning and purpose of life, why would they need to believe in an idea? Why would they need religion? They would simply know. There are unseen forces

at work constantly ensuring problems remain at the forefront of everyone's thinking, especially people in positions of influence such as politicians and business leaders".

"The unseen forces are always making sure these people are preoccupied with their problems and fears. They are always distracted with all sorts of meaningless information and they are constantly in demand by a whole range of people for many different reasons although never for the most important reason.

They are expected to front the media on call and rush around to events and summits all over the world. People expect them to be everywhere but rarely are they afforded the opportunity to sit in peace and quiet and simply think. Our world leaders are not in a position to lead their own lives as free human beings let alone to be able to lead an entire nation!

If even one of these world leaders were to stop and sincerely think for themselves about life and if they began making decisions grounded purely in love and not based on abstract theoretical concepts which most people cannot understand, it would set a dangerous precedent. The thought could potentially catch on and people might begin to make their daily decisions based on love rather than fear.

As long as people remain distracted with their individual problems love is forced to take a back seat whilst apathy governs destinies of individuals and nations in a world increasingly devoid of love".

I thought about these unseen forces grandfather spoke of which always ensure there are problems in the world.

It all seemed a little fantastical to me although there was something about the way grandfather spoke which sent a shiver down my spine. I thought to myself how many times I had tried to sincerely do something good for myself and how many times I was either laughed at or told I had lost the plot.

I realized the majority of people do things in life out of fear and insecurity even if they are unaware of their own predicament, without so much as a thought about love and everything grandfather said suddenly made sense.

"So does that mean Joseph's report to the minister was a complete waste of time?" I asked.

I began to feel sorry for Joseph and desperately wished that his efforts were not in vain. Grandfather raised an eyebrow.

"What do you think? Is anything done out of love ever a waste of time? There was one lady on the government's climate change panel who read the report and was instantly moved by its essence. She understood the simplicity and meaning behind the professor's words. In fact, she was so moved by his report that she resigned from her position on the panel the following week. Some people are not able to continue with their work once they realize the fruitlessness of their pursuits. This lady was one of those people." Grandfather paused to take another sip of his tea before continuing with his story.



Joseph was not commissioned to conduct further research by the government or any other authority for that matter since he had submitted his report to the minister yet neither was he officially reprimanded for his strange response.

He was simply ignored by the government and his academic peers and people in these circles whispered behind closed doors how the 'nutty professor had finally lost the plot' and so he was gradually forgotten in the political and academic spheres over time. Indeed there was no shortage of people willing to take his place as the leading authority on climate change. There has never been a shortage of people like this all through history.

Joseph still worked at the university although he was now required to spend more time lecturing and less time conducting research. He did not mind his change in circumstance because he now had more time to spend at home with his family and he was not nearly caught up with work to the extent as he had been before. In a way he felt as if he had been set free and his whole perspective on life seemed to have changed, it was as if he saw life from a completely different perspective.

Above all, over the past couple of months Joseph felt much closer to his family and he liked to spend more time in his garden.

Little Jasmine had also taken up a passionate interest in the garden and she would often sit by her father's side and help him plant seedlings and gather the autumn leaves.

Ever since Jasmine was little she was fascinated by how a tiny little seed could grow into a plant and blossom into a beautiful array of colorful flowers which could also bear tasty fruit and vegetables all by itself. Sometimes Jasmine would gather the fruit and eat it straight off the branch and she was always satisfied with the tasty fruit she picked to eat. Occasionally she would feel a craving for apples, tomatoes or oranges and she never complained to her parents about feeling hungry or not feeling well.

Curiously Jasmine had never been seriously ill for more than a couple of hours at a time in her short life to date and whenever she felt an illness coming on she knew exactly what herb, spice, plant or tea to consume in order to feel better. She could cure herself of just about any illness and it was unknown how many diseases were prevented simply through the intake of her natural diet.



One fine spring morning when her garden was in full bloom Ana noticed something for the first time. Her old birch tree which had been in the middle of the garden since they had first moved into the house had suddenly become ill and much of the bark had fallen off. Sap oozed from the trunk and Ana knew it was time to cut the tree down.

She felt sad in a way since the tree had been part of her garden from the very first day she had moved into the house with Joseph and she felt it would be a shame to cut it down. Joseph was also sorry about the tree's fate.

"It's a shame you know, I will miss that tree. In a way it has been the centerpiece of our garden for so long" he said quietly before retuning inside his house to get ready for work.

That same day, Joseph brought home a peculiar looking baby tree after work.

"That's a beautiful little tree, where did you get it?" Ana asked out of curiosity as he carefully lowered the tree to the floor.

"Well, that's some story my darling" he replied as he stood up again to stretch.

“Go on, tell me what happened” insisted Ana impatiently.

“Well, you see I was in my office marking some papers when all of a sudden I get a knock on my door. I told the person to come in without even looking up, thinking it was one of the student tutors wanting to drop off some more papers for me to mark. The door opens and in walks this lady with a cheerful face carrying this baby tree. She puts the tree down carefully on my desk on top of all my papers. I ask her where she came from and what this tree was for. She tells me the tree is a gift and insists I take it from her. What she said next really astounded me.”

Joseph paused as he stroked the stubble his chin whilst looking into the distance absent mindedly.

“So, what astounded you?”

“Well, she says that she used to work for the climate change minister’s advisory panel and she had read the report I wrote to the minister. She said that no report had ever affected her the way this report had and she attempted to endorse it. Her efforts were in vain though. The minister and the rest of the panel ignored her recommendations and she was even questioned about her professionalism regarding the matter.”

“Ah, so I’m not the only one who doesn’t think you’re crazy?” laughed Ana.

“Yes, but who was the crazier one for marrying a madman?” he responded with his usual cheeky laugh.

“Anyway, the lady said she had quit her position on the panel and immediately began conducting her own research into the importance of love and family in solving not only the climate change phenomenon but also other man made problems that exist today. I never actually thought of it that way myself, I really always just focused on my field but I guess when you think about it – what could be more crucial in ridding the world of all its existing problems than beginning with a single family? The most important organization of people that can be found upon the earth! Never mind relying on politicians and big business taking care of our problems, the only possible way is through love and understanding. Everything begins and ends with individual people and their families.”

“Yes, well not everyone will agree with you my darling in fact many people will argue the exact opposite.”

“Maybe those people did not receive the necessary love in their own lives from the beginning and so for thousands of years it has been the case of the blind leading the blind. And the blind will continue to lead the blind from generation to generation until someone finds a way to show how love can change the world for the better”.

“Darling, no one has managed to do that all throughout history. Even Christ could not find a way to unify the world through love”.

“But looked what has happened to us over the years, look what has happened to the nice lady who gave me this tree. I’m taking it as an omen that I am on the right path and that it is possible for everyone to find love in their lives, regardless of their upbringing” Joseph argued persistently.

“I may not be one of the great prophets but I am a man, a human and I will do what I can in my own way”

"You see, this little tree here is no ordinary tree. It is a Cedar tree. This lady said she wanted to give me this baby cedar tree as a gift to thank me for the report I had written which she claimed had changed her life for good. I asked her why she had chosen this cedar tree in particular. She said that her family was from Lebanon and people always receive a pleasant feeling when they sit under the trees in her hometown. She knew someone who was growing these trees nearby and so she was able to bring one for me as a gift. It is a beautiful looking tree don't you think? And here, smell the bark and the needles on the little branches, it has such a distinctly refreshing scent". Joseph stroked the tiny needled protruding from a branch.

"Well, yes I suppose it does give off a nice scent" admitted Ana.

She thought how the tree was an unusual gift although it was also a special one because it was given in a loving spirit. Lost in her thoughts she suddenly had an idea.

"You know where we should plant it? next to the old birch tree in the middle of our garden. That tree is sick and probably doesn't have much longer to live. I think it would be a nice replacement don't you?"

"Yes excellent idea my darling! You are a lot smarter than I give you credit for some of the time" exclaimed Joseph rather excitedly.

"Well, you underestimate me" Ana shot back.

Joseph was moved by this gift and he felt it was an extremely important one because of the spirit in which he had received it. Above all, the tree was given out of love and so naturally he was happy to plant it in his garden and what better place to plant the tree then next to his sick birch tree?

At that moment Jasmine burst through the back door and onto the verandah full with a beaming smile. She had been listening to their conversation from within the kitchen and she wanted to say something.

"I know daddy, why don't we make this our family tree?" she exclaimed in excitement.

"Here's trouble!" exclaimed Joseph called out as he took her in his arms and turned her about over his shoulder.

"Where have you been hiding and eavesdropping all this time eh?" he put Jasmine back down on the ground and she replied

"Well, sorry for that but I couldn't help but listen to your story about the cedar tree Daddy and I also thought how nice it would be if this tree was to become our family tree" exclaimed Jasmine.

"A family tree, well I have never heard of that before but I guess it wouldn't hurt, actually I like the idea. What do you think darling?" he asked as he turned to face Ana.

"Yes, it's a nice idea I like it" Ana replied as she nodded in agreement.

"Well, what are we waiting for, let's start planting!" exclaimed Jasmine in delight as she darted out the back door.

The whole family gathered around and planted the tree in its designated spot. They each took turns in digging a small hole for the roots and carefully covering up the roots with their hands. They did this in silence and each person was lost in their own thoughts.



Jasmine was thinking how good it was to have parents who loved one another so much. She also thought of her friend Thomas and how it must be extremely difficult to get through life without having any parents at all. Jasmine thought she had the best parents in the world.

Ana was thinking how she would do anything for her daughter and how fortunate she was to have such a healthy, good natured little girl. This was the most important thing. Ana was also thinking how much she loved her husband and how they had changed together over the years. When Ana had planted that first Jasmine flower so many years ago she had sparked a keen interest in gardening with Joseph. When she wanted to raise a child with Joseph, he had been the one to suggest the idea himself. It seemed as though their aspirations in life had changed together and she was thankful for that and even though Joseph could be irritating from time to time, she always prayed they would remain together for the rest of their days.

Joseph pondered many things as he planted his family tree. He reflected upon how much he had changed in the time he had known Ana and how different his outlook on life was compared to when he first met her. As Joseph helped fill the dirt over the roots of the baby cedar he found himself muttering a prayer in the silence of his thoughts although it was not a prayer of the conventional kind.

There were no words capable of conveying his feeling at that very moment in time and he knew that he was praying to God but not because anyone was asking him or forcing him to. He was not asking for anything either - no special favors or requests as he felt he already had everything he needed. He found himself thanking God, the grand creator or so he would have put it if he could, for everything he already had and for the love which was growing stronger in his life with each passing day.

When he was younger, Joseph gave little thought to God or religion for that matter, so preoccupied was he with seemingly other more important and pressing matters. He was not religious and did not even stop to think much about God, death or eternity up until now.

A lot of people in this world who have no faith suddenly turn to God when faced with a crisis and it is well they discover God this way for everyone discovers God in their own way. Ultimately every single person on the Earth is searching for the same thing in life. In reality everyone is searching for feelings of divine bliss whether they are conscious of it or not, it's just that each person goes about their search in their own way whether it be the numbness a drunkard feels from drinking too much or the sense of empowerment a king feels when ruling a kingdom, regardless of the seemingly obvious futility of their individual pursuits. Everyone has free will to choose their own path in life.

Joseph reflected how destiny is perhaps not only determined by our free will alone. We are all interconnected and influenced by the people we meet, the places we visit and our life experiences. As a sand dune is shaped over time by the wind it is still made up of sand just as people are shaped externally although our essence remains unchanged. Maybe we are also able to control the wind if only we knew how, he thought to himself.

We are free to choose our road in life although we have no way of knowing what will happen to us on that road. We have many experiences in life and we may feel compulsions to do many different things at various times for unknown reasons. Initially Joseph felt that to fulfill his destiny in life he must become an important academic but this feeling is not exclusive to Joseph alone. Most people are

caught up with their individual pursuits in life from their careers to their hopes and dreams that they forget that everything they ever need in life is given to them right from the very beginning, from the moment they were born.

Contrary to his youth Joseph now thought that to be ambitious and to harbor feelings of pride or resentment in life is mere illusion. These feelings are provoked within people in order to distract them from feeling and generating true love which anyone is capable of feeling at any moment with a mere thought. A thought is like a seed that if nurtured correctly under the right conditions is capable of blossoming into a magnificent flower, a flower of life and hope capable of spreading life unto life and love unto love.

The Greenwoods did not think the above thoughts consciously as they are written before you. They sensed everything intuitively through their feelings and a great deal more which is not possible to describe in words available today.



Finally, the baby cedar tree was planted and Joseph, Ana and Jasmine stood in silent in contemplation of their new family tree. They did not speak for some time as each person remained lost in their thoughts. Finally Joseph broke the silence

“Well, it is time for supper. But I was thinking, why don’t we bring the table out here and dine under the stars tonight? It is such a beautiful night, not a cloud in the sky” and so they dined outside that evening.

As the family prepared for their evening meal a gentle summer breeze stirred the air and the branches of the baby cedar tree swayed for the very first time. Were the family to have glanced back towards their tree they would have noticed a brilliant shooting star speeding across the open sky from west to east. There was something distinctly unusual about this shooting star though, it did not fade away as most shooting stars do - on the contrary it grew in intensity and speed until it disappeared entirely into the eastern sky. A farmer on the other side of the country was the only one to see the star. He looked up in wonder and thought how unusual and beautiful the star appeared as it raced across the brilliant star studded sky as he gathered the last of his crops for the day. He thought to himself it must be an omen of some kind. He scratched his head and wondered if a change was in the air before returning his attention back towards his business. He was not far from the truth although that was as much as he would ever know of the matter.



“Grandfather, what has a shooting star got to do with a family planting a tree?” I interrupted in amazement. It seemed to me as though it was no coincidence that the star appeared in the sky at the same moment the Greenwoods had planted their family tree and it also seemed a little fantastical. Grandfather peered at me through his bushy eyebrows.

“Would you say that everything in this universe is connected in some way? You are connected with the earth, the earth is connected with the atmosphere and the atmosphere is connected with space which connects with everything else. Would you agree?” Grandfather asked.

“Well, yes I guess everything is connected somehow if you put it that way” I agreed.

“Well then nothing should be a surprise seeing as though everything is connected and therefore anything is possible.

“The great prophet Jesus Christ once said “Nothing is impossible” and he was not one to lie or to throw words around lightly. But we should not get used to looking to others for answers in life because we need to begin to rely more on ourselves and besides – all life’s most important questions are already within you.”

“Why did this particular star shot across the sky at that moment in time? Who can say? But you should know that shooting stars that do not fade away are extremely rare and appear every one thousand years, usually only when something really good happens on Earth. Prior to the Greenwoods planting the baby tree, a family tree had not been consciously planted on this Earth for thousands and thousands of years and so it was a monumental event when one day an ordinary family freely plants not just any tree, but a family tree planted with feelings of sincere love within the bounds of their home connecting them with the entire universe”.

“I don’t know, sounds more like a fairy tale to me” I protested stubbornly. I had never heard of anything as farfetched in my life and wasn’t sure if Grandfather was now merely making fun of me. Perhaps I had been the subject of a joke all along and grandfather was merely having fun, wondering if I would notice his game.

“It is no fairytale” he replied with a hint of annoyance. “Everyone sees the trees, grass and plants every single day whether they are on their way to work, walking through a park or even in the middle of a busy concrete city yet not once do they stop to think about the pure miracle of a tree. Sure, everyone knows that a tree provides air for us to breathe, shade for us to sit under and they can be very beautiful and even grow delicious fruit and have countless other beneficial properties besides. Despite this, perhaps the most important property of a tree goes unnoticed”

“What property?”

He cleared his throat and looked me straight in the eye “A family tree planted with feelings of sincere and unconditional love is the keel of a family enabling us to communicate with our ancestors and through them we are able to understand the mystery of eternity and the illusion of birth and death if only we are prepared to listen”

“But I have never heard of anything like that before and it is not in any of the textbooks or scientific journals at school” I protested in disbelief. Surely, if a tree was that important people would have noticed it by now and they would have done something about it.

“Just because people do not know something today doesn’t mean it will not be discovered tomorrow. Today’s fairytale often becomes tomorrow reality and so do not underestimate the seemingly impossible, especially if you are not yet familiar with the subject at hand” retorted Grandfather.

I knew elderly people were prone to becoming frustrated from time to time but I never really thought of grandfather this way. In fact the more I thought about it the more I realized the truth in what he said so I decided to listen until he had finished explaining before coming to any more premature conclusions.

“Every living thing on this earth has its designated purpose and trees are no different. Trees are not only life - they are the breath of life – for we are unable to breathe without them. A tree planted by a

family with sincere and genuine feelings of love is one of the most powerful acts that can be carried out by a person today.

When Joseph planted his tree with his family he was carrying out an eternal act which would be remembered upon the Earth for generations to come. Each family member was thinking only loving thoughts towards each other and their garden when they planted the tree and those thoughts were communicated with the universe and solidified in the Earth for eternity. The Earth would remember their aspirations of love forever, for even after the tree had died it would regenerate all by itself just as an entire forest regenerates after a fire, and so they would be reborn again upon the earth in forthcoming days of peace and understanding”.

The intonation in Grandfather's voice seemed to change as he spoke. Before, he merely spoke in his usual kind voice although now his voice had changed and the words he used seemed to flow freely from his mouth in a rhythmic dance. Everything Grandfather said seemed to go against the very grain of logic and reason yet I believed every word he uttered not with my mind but with all my soul.

The feeling behind his words could be vaguely detected though the kind and sincere expression on his face and through his melodic voice although I had the sense that even his words did not do his feelings justice - if words ever can.

Regardless, I can still remember every word he said right up to this day when he spoke of the significance of a family tree. Grandfather says that every family should have one and they should know the importance of consciously thinking and feeling loving thoughts when planting their tree. This is not a superstitious act and there is no set ritual to follow. The only important condition is for all family members to be truthful and honest towards each other and to themselves when planting the tree.

Grandfather also explained how if a family member is thinking unwholesome thoughts or has ulterior motives in their hearts it is best they speak their thoughts or at least refrain from planting the tree until they have purified their feelings on the fundamental level of consciousness for otherwise harmful feelings will be planted which does more harm than good. He believed that God alone reads our hearts and there is no point in trying to conceal our feelings from ourselves or from the divine.

I thought how much better the world would be if people refrained from doing things in life under the guise of seemingly good intentions when in fact they harbor feelings of resentment and bitterness deep within themselves which ultimately does only more harm than good in the long run. Grandfather looked into my eyes as if he were trying to determine something for himself before continuing with his story.

Part IV

Time passed and Jasmine entered into her first year of school. She was extremely gifted for her age as she could already read proficiently and she understood arithmetic and could even solve complex calculations in her mind although she found this boring.

Teachers were amazed with her unusual ability and were contemplating moving her into a higher grade at school “she is far too intelligent to be in her grade” teachers would say amongst themselves in the staff room whenever they spoke of the unusual little girl.

After some welcoming games to get the children acquainted with one another - Jasmine's teacher, Mrs. Brown was talking to her class about the progress of mankind throughout history and the importance of

technology in everyday life. This was part of the national school syllabus and all teachers had been instructed to expose children to technology from a young age.

This was in line with the national idea that each child should become as computer literate as possible in order for the children to keep up with global technological trends. This was considered to be the national educational idea and the single most important goal of the school syllabus.

Mrs. Brown was in the middle of her discussion with the class, explaining how important science and technology was in everyday life. "Without technology such as computers, we would not be able to live the way we live today" explained Mrs. Brown.

"We are now going to play a game. Can anyone tell me about something in your home which makes your life better? It can be anything with wires and buttons such as a television, a computer or a car."

Many children raised their hands eager to please the teacher and show off their knowledge. Some children explained how we need cars to get to places or how we need telephones to stay in contact with each other. All these things had wires and buttons. With every response Mrs. Brown nodded in acknowledgement and encouraged the children with compliments whenever they explained how a certain gadget makes their life better. As more children offered answers more raised their arm to try and impress their teacher.

There was only one child who did not participate with the activity taking place. Jasmine remained sitting quietly at the back of the classroom without raising her hand or offering an answer. She seemed to be gazing off into the distance absentmindedly as if in another world. Mrs. Brown noticed this and turned her attention upon the little girl.

"What about you Jasmine?" she asked "Can you think of anything?"

Jasmine remained silent for some time before responding "No Mrs. Brown I can't think of anything with buttons or wires which makes life better but I can think of something else without buttons and wires which does make life better" replied Jasmine with a quiet conviction.

Mrs. Brown looked up in surprise. Children this age rarely think for themselves and answer questions this way.

"What about cars?" Mrs. Brown asked. Perhaps the child was just shy or maybe she couldn't think of anything to say.

"Well, my mum and dad don't own a car Mrs. Brown. Mum says everything she needs is either already close by and she says that owning a car would just create more problems."

Mrs. Brown was confused not so much by the strange answer, she was more surprised because the last thing was expected was to get into a debate with one of her children. Usually the children she taught would simply go along with the game but Jasmine already seemed to have her own mind made up on the matter.

Mrs. Brown reflected how she was an experienced teacher with many years of teaching behind her and how she was simply following the school curriculum and doing her job as she was instructed by 'the board'. The more she thought about this a stunning realization began to dawn on her. Indeed, how could she have failed to see it before?

Mrs. Brown had not once even thought for herself about the very question she was asking her class. She had not once stopped to think whether not science and technology *was* as important as she was making it out to be, regardless of whether or not it was. She was merely going through the motions and doing what she was instructed to do.

The more Mrs. Brown thought about it the more she realized how she had in fact thought less about the question at hand than the child. The child could not see how technology improved her life and so she remained truthful in her answer as children are.

Mrs. Brown on the other hand, a teacher with many years experience did not stop to think about the essence of the question, not even once – she simply went along with the curriculum.

Mrs. Brown was not only an experienced teacher she was a real teacher who knew that she could learn a lot from children, perhaps even more from them than they could ever learn from her. Mrs. Brown always thought the teacher's role is to inspire the student to seek the answer for themselves and discover that which they knew all along in the depths of their being. A teacher's role is not to give of their knowledge but rather to give of themselves.

It's amazing how much children can teach you if you are prepared to listen, she thought to herself.

Mrs. Brown did not want to get into a debate with Jasmine in front of the other kids in the first week of school although from that moment on she took more notice of the quiet little girl sitting in the back row. Only later in life would she realize the full significance of what had taken place on that day in class.



After lunch on the first day of school, Mrs. Brown asked each child to bring a device or a photo of a device which makes life better on the following day. The next day the children brought in all kinds of items and photographs of devices such as their parent's cars, televisions and their favorite computer games and explained how each item made their life better.

Jasmine was next in line and she waited patiently while the other kids had their turn at explaining how their devices improved their lives. She confidently stepped up in front of the class and held out a photo of a baby cedar tree. Some of the kids laughed at what she had brought and Mrs. Brown raised an eyebrow. Mrs. Brown skeptically asked how this baby tree made life better around her house and Jasmine replied as follows:

"I have planted a little tree like this in the middle of my back garden with my parents and it will grow up to be a beautiful tree, very big and strong and it will be nice to sit under this tree in the hot sun. But this is no ordinary tree. You see, the tree we used to have in the middle of our garden became sick and died some time ago. Mum and dad were sad to cut this tree down but *this* tree will not become sick or die any time soon. I have planted it with my mum and dad in our beautiful garden and it is our family tree. It will give off a pleasant scent and if anyone rubs up against the bark they will be cured of any disease, whether they know it or not because this tree is no ordinary tree. It is a Cedar Tree and it will protect our family from all bad things and above all my family will be remembered through this tree when they have passed away from this Earth and our future family will be thankful that their parents planted this tree with so much love and they will also be protected from all bad things. They will have an even nicer, shadier place to sit under on a hot day as the tree will grow bigger with each passing year

and so will their children and their children and so on. My parents will not be forgotten and will continue to live on in future generations because they brought so much love to the earth and to everyone else they knew”.

When Jasmine finished her presentation she unassumingly walked away and took her place in the front row on the floor. The class fell silent and Mrs. Brown felt tears welling in her eyes.

She had never heard anything like this from anyone before in her life, let alone a small child. Although everything Jasmine said sounded like pure fantasy, Mrs. Brown was actually moved in some way and intuitively believed everything little Jasmine said. In fact, she felt inspired to leave her classroom that very moment, returning home and planting her very own family tree.

As Jasmine spoke Mrs. Brown was able to visualize everything Jasmine said and somehow she believed everything although she could not understand why or how, there was no logical explanation and even if Jasmine was wrong, she had no idea how such a little girl could know about things like eternity with such conviction and belief.

Mrs. Brown paused for a moment before quickly recovering her composure and calling upon the next speaker in the class although she could not get Jasmine’s presentation out of her mind and so she pulled her aside after class.

“Jasmine that was a beautiful presentation but tell me, why you think this family tree of yours is so special?” she asked in a serious yet unimposing tone. She was careful not to act as if she knew more than the child. Children sense this artificial feeling of superiority when an adult speaks to the child in an overbearing tone and it is impossible to obtain a genuine response from a child in these moments as the child will feel a compulsion to fulfill their assumed inferior role which is imposed upon them, however subtly.

“Well Mrs. Brown, trees were planted on the earth from the very beginning of time and they are very good. Some trees are special and capture a lot of good energy which people give off and these trees themselves can be used to prevent and cure just about any disease you can think of. The Cedar tree is very good at this. It is an especially beautiful tree and people feel better whenever they sit underneath them.”

Mrs. Brown was of Christian faith – a catholic - and she was familiar with the teachings of the Bible. She was well aware of the holy significance of the Lebanese Cedar tree which is mentioned many times in the bible and she wondered if this was the same tree Jasmine spoke of.

In the Bible, King Solomon built his entire house using cedar wood from the Lebanese Cedar tree and traded many cities for cedar wood which he used to build his palace. People living amongst the trees in Lebanon have reported to experience a pleasant feeling when sitting or walking underneath the branches of famous Cedar of Lebanon and many cafes arrange outdoor seating under these trees. Cedar oil can be extracted from the sap of the trees and its healing properties are known and applied widely all over the world to cure the body and ward off disease although deep down Mrs. Brown had always been skeptical of this.

She speaks like a little adult, Mrs. Brown thought to herself.

“And tell me, is this family tree of yours also a Cedar Tree and can it do these things you said?” asked Mrs. Brown.

Jasmine looked her straight in the eye and replied without hesitation “Yes it is and our tree can already do these things and it will get better at it over time”.

Mrs. Brown thought the child must either know something no one else knew or else she had an incredibly developed imagination for her age.

Mrs. Brown thought the child must have overheard her story from someone else - probably her parents - and so she didn't bother the child with any further questions. All the same, she was taken aback by the little girl's articulation and annunciation in her speech for her age. She thought there must be a logical explanation and so she made a point of discussing the issue with Jasmine's parents. What did they know of their little girl's knowledge of the tree and her passion with this 'family tree' she spoke so passionately about?



Ana arrived at the school gates at the usual time of three o'clock to pick Jasmine up from school and Mrs. Brown casually struck up a friendly conversation with her in passing.

“Hi Mrs. Greenwood” she greeted Ana warmly. “Your daughter is a gifted young girl” she commented as she recited the day's events back to Ana.

“I have seen many unusual things in my years of teaching but I cannot explain how Jasmine was able to give such a convincing presentation with so much conviction for her age and I am curious to know how she came across her story about the cedar trees.

Is it a story you or Mr. Greenwood told her?” she asked out of interest.

Mrs. Brown made Ana feel at ease and she felt comfortable talking with her about her daughter. She had a feeling that Mrs. Brown was a good person and had Jasmine's best interests at heart and so Ana recalled the events which took place leading up the planting of their family tree. She then went on to explain how the family had planted their family tree together.

“Things just seemed to happen one after another. The moment our tree died, we received this tree as a gift and sometimes I wonder if this was an accident or not” reflected Ana. She secretly thought that things happen for a reason and it was no accident that the baby cedar tree was brought to them the moment their old tree had died.

“Well, that is an unusual chain of events” replied Mrs. Brown. She couldn't decide whether or not the entire family was crazy or if there was some truth to what she was hearing.

“As far as Jasmines ideas on the healing properties of Cedar trees go, I have never mentioned anything to her about them and neither has my husband as far as I know” confessed Ana.

“In fact, we knew nothing of it before she mentioned it and it remains a mystery to us where she got her ideas from. She does say unusual things like that from time to time although we have become used to it over the years.” She paused and seemed to look past Mrs. Brown into the distance.

“Still, we cannot always fully understand what she is trying to say. Jasmine herself finds it difficult to explain her thoughts sometimes and she can become frustrated when we fail to understand something she is trying to explain. She probably gets that from her father”.

“That’s quite remarkable” exclaimed Mrs. Brown. “Can you think of anything else about Jasmine which you could not fully understand?” she asked out of curiosity.

Ana paused and thought back to some of the peculiar things about Jasmine such as how nature seemed to respond to her in an unusual way such as when the bees would speed up whenever she would approach them. She thought of Jasmine’s unusual attentiveness to her garden. Jasmine could spend hours lost in her garden and not once did she complain about being bored. She continued to think back to all the strange events which came to mind and one event clearly stood out from all the rest in her memory.

“There was one time when Ana was little, perhaps about three years old. I had spent all day running different errands and I felt exhausted by the end of the day. I had a developing headache and my whole body seemed to ache. I wasn’t sure if it was the flu or if I was just under a lot of stress at the time but it was also a stressful time in my life because my husband was completely consumed with his work and left all the domestic chores such as paying bills and running around with Jasmine to me.

Anyway, I finally returned home for the day with Jasmine and I just about collapsed on the couch, not wanting to move but knowing that I had to get dinner prepared in time for Joseph when he returned home.

Don’t get the wrong impression, Joseph would not mind at all if I didn’t cook as we could always get a take away meal but I felt it was my duty make sure my family was eating properly and that includes having a home cooked meal. But this day I felt particularly out of sorts, not just physically but even more so psychologically. Just at that moment in time Jasmine came up to me and says

“Mum, you look tired why don’t we have a picnic in the back garden and then you will feel much better.”

I thought it was nice that my daughter was so in tune with my state of mind and the idea actually felt appealing so I agreed. We made sandwiches and fresh apple juice from our apple tree and sat on a blanket under our birch tree in the middle of our garden. By the time I had finished my sandwich and a glass of apple juice I felt much better and amazingly the pain I was feeling earlier had mysteriously disappeared. Not only had my pain disappeared, I felt energetic and began thinking about how I would prepare our evening meal. To this day I have no idea how Jasmine not only knew how I was feeling as I had not mentioned anything to her about it, but also how she knew exactly what to do to make me feel better.

She is actually very good at tuning into people’s feelings and there were times when Joseph wasn’t feeling well and she knew how to treat him as well although it was different to the way she treated me. Whenever Joseph is feeling unwell she gathers a variety of herbs and spices from our garden and makes tea.”

Mrs. Brown remained in a pensive state as she tried to take in everything Ana said. She did not offer her thoughts immediately on the matter but nodded attentively when Ana spoke.

“Mrs. Greenwood, initially I thought that perhaps Jasmine was too intelligent for her age to be in the first year of school. I was going to consider moving her up a grade or two but now I realize there is no point in doing that. It seems to me that Jasmine is extremely intuitive for her age while at the same time I have noticed how she ‘drifts off’ from time to time as if she is in a far away dream whenever I am

explaining something to the class. I know it's only her second day of school and I need more time to see if I can determine what is going on inside her head although now it is clear to me what should be done.

I think she should remain in her current grade for the moment and we can see how she develops in six months from now. Apart from that I must say that between you and me there is definitely something different about Jasmine, but in a good way Mrs. Greenwood”

“Well, thank you” replied Ana as she looked out the window at her daughter playing happily in the playground. Yes, she thought -she loved her daughter very much and intuitively felt that moving Jasmine ahead of her peers was the wrong thing to do.

If no one could explain her daughter's unique intuitive abilities then she saw no sense in rushing her daughter through the schooling system when it was not yet clear what these abilities actually were or where they came from, if these things could ever be understood.

She thought how people rush to achieve many things in life at whatever cost without first stopping to think about where they are going or why.

Ana was a simple mother who only thought of raising a happy and healthy family she could not understand the point in exerting unnecessary pressure on her daughter.

Besides that, Mrs. Brown was secretly curious in trying to understand Jasmine as little better herself and felt that in many ways she was the luckiest teacher alive to have her in her class. She had never come across a girl like Jasmine before in all her years of teaching. It seemed to her that Jasmine was unique and that she somehow had something to accomplish in life. She did not think these thoughts consciously to herself but she could sense it through her feelings and therefore she was in no position to analyze the situation. She had to rely on her intuition.

When Jasmine returned home that day she immediately ran outside into the back garden to water the baby tree, her very own family tree. It already looked magnificent in the garden amongst the other trees and plants and Jasmine thought quietly to herself how even more beautiful the tree would look in a hundred years from now. Perhaps she would be old enough to see it by then she thought quietly to herself.



The neighborhood in which the Greenwoods lived had transformed itself out of sight. Next door Jane and Michael's garden had flourished beyond recognition compared to when they had first moved in. Years later, Jane and Michael were still living next door and Ana noticed how Jane no longer spoke of wanting to move out any time soon. On the contrary she could not stop talking about how beautiful the neighborhood was looking and how much it had improved over the last few years. Not only had the streets become cleaner, people in general seemed happier and kids played together in the street – something she had not even dreamed possible merely five years ago.

One day Ana and Jane were both in their gardens when Jane called out from over the fence

“Oh good morning, you know it's amazing how much this neighborhood has changed over the years”.

She was as picking fresh tomatoes off her tomato vine and placed them in a bucket she was carrying under her arm.

“I actually feel safe walking down the street at night and the place has scrubbed up rather well” she declared in a cheerful tone.

Michael still worked in the city as a stockbroker although he no longer cared so much about moving into the city.

“Michael likes it out here as well. Who would ever have thought we would both end up staying right here in this very house for all these years? Yet here we are and we couldn’t be happier” she said with a smile.

Ana thought to herself how much her friend had changed. She no longer seemed to complain so much about things outside of her control such as the government not doing this or that for the community or how unsafe it was to walk through the neighborhood at night.

“People seem to be doing all the cleaning up for themselves” Jane affirmed proudly. “Still, it’s not like the governments helping us or anything – the area is being cleaned up by the people who live here! And here we are paying taxes to this good for nothing government!” she vented with some passion.

I guess people never really change in their essence and perhaps this is a good thing – the world would be a dull place if everyone was the same, Ana thought. But Jane was right, for some inexplicable reason the neighborhood in general seemed to have cleaned itself up in recent times with no help from the government or anyone else for that matter. It was the residents themselves who were taking better care of their neighborhood.

Ana was at a loss to explain her friend’s transformation although one thing was clear. Jane had been spending a lot more time in her garden of late. She still worked in real estate yet she no longer talked about a property in terms of dollars and cents or how much more value a refurbishment would add to her house. Her whole mindset on property had changed completely. She now saw property as a way of creating a better place to live in which she could raise a loving family and she no longer viewed property purely in terms of its monetary value or saw it as a status symbol as she had once before.

Indeed, Jane now spoke of a desire to begin a family and her attitude towards children had also changed. She no longer saw children as an obstacle in her career driven mindset. She now felt that she would very much like to start a family and Michael also spoke of his desire to have children. There was no logical reason why she should have changed her mind over the past couple of years although it was fair to say that her general attitude and focus in life had shifted more towards the wonder of the natural world and she would often comment on how much more at peace she felt within herself in her environment.

Ana noticed how despite the changes in her general attitude towards life, Jane would still get worked up about subjects she felt passionately about although lately she had stopped complaining so much and had begun looking for solutions to problems instead of just complaining all the time as if they were things were out of her control. Many people spend their whole lives complaining about all sorts of things which they assume are out of their control when in fact they are capable of changing everything themselves, no matter how daunting the task at hand seems to be.

Daily cares did not seem to worry her nearly as much as before and above all she would say how she somehow felt infused with love. She felt was ready to begin a family and Michael felt the same way. She was pregnant a couple of weeks later and had never felt happier in her life.

Ana remained lost in her thoughts.

People may not realize it but it is almost as if they are dependent on a system which is only designed to ensure its own survival even at the expense of life itself. Mysteriously, as soon as anyone ever decides to think for themselves and take their lives into their own hands they are almost always faced with a barrage of seemingly insurmountable obstacles which lie in their path and so people eventually lose heart and continue living the same way as before.

As soon as a person decides to make a change in their life, especially a change which involves lessening their dependence on the system, these mysterious mental obstacles automatically arise and are magnified within a person's mindset. People do not realize that these very obstacles only exist within their mind because they are convinced of a reality which they have created for themselves under the influence of a system which is designed to shape their personal destinies in the interest of something else entirely – continuity and growth of the artificially created system and for that reason alone.

People all over the world make their illusions become reality in their minds and ultimately believe in their personal realities which they create for themselves.

Ana felt there is only one force capable of truly enabling people to shake themselves free from the binding chains within their own mind – the force of love.

Ana reflected how much her neighborhood had transformed itself in a relatively short period of time. There was less crime, the streets were cleaner and people had even become friendlier towards each other. The neighborhood in general had become a more pleasant place to live in the space of just a few years. The glass bottles littering the park had disappeared and young people no longer congregated in large groups in the local park. They were far too busy for that.

Over time a trend had caught on within the neighborhood whereby each household had started to grow all sorts of fruit and vegetables in carefully thought out gardens with a goal of producing the tastiest fruit and vegetables possible. There was far too much work to be done for children to go about causing trouble and for the first time in a long time, local kids in the neighborhood had a worthwhile goal to work towards - to make their family garden the best and most flourishing in the entire neighborhood.

Just as families sometimes compete in certain streets at Christmas time to see who can show off the most colorful display of lights, families had taken to working in their gardens and a kind of full time competition had developed to see who could produce the tastiest fruit in the neighborhood, which households flowers emitted the most invigorating scent and which garden looked the most beautiful in general.

Older children in the neighborhood would still meet together in the street although they ceased forming gangs and being a public nuisance. Instead, they valued the area in which they lived and their thoughts were for the most part focused on creation, not destruction.

All by themselves the children had created and developed a game. Each child would plant a variety of fruit and vegetables in the winter and by midsummer most of the fruit would have ripened. During the cultivation stage they would experiment with different planting techniques and by the end of spring

they would gather the best of their fruit and vegetables and the children would meet at somebody's house.

Each child would then be blindfolded and they would taste each other's fruit. The child whose fruit was voted the tastiest by the other children would be the winner and had first choice of everyone else's fruit and vegetables. The winner would take one piece of each kind of fruit and then the other children would help themselves to the fruit and they would then play various other games amongst each other.

The parents would also partake in these games from time to time and gradually a strong sense of community had developed in the neighborhood and parent's relationships with their children had improved almost out of sight.

Not only that, the games also developed and stimulated the child's thought and creative processes. This did not happen overnight, it took many years for the community to change although it was well worth waiting for.

The simple fact that everyone in the neighborhood preoccupied themselves with their various activities, especially those connected with their gardens, also meant they had less time to worry about things in general. There was no time to worry about their promotion at work or their next car or gadget they were thinking of purchasing because these things seemed insignificant in comparison to taking good care of their gardens and creating the most beautiful living space possible.



As the months passed, something seemed to be happening in Jasmine's class. Ever since Jasmine's presentation about her family tree, parents began gossiping amongst each other about how the children had come home demanding that they plant a family tree for their own families.

The more parents talked about this phenomenon amongst themselves the more prevalent this idea became. Before long each child's family in Jasmine's class had a family tree planted in their backyard. Despite this, the parents were more surprised by another phenomenon.

As parents helped their children procure their family trees they felt moved somehow and eventually they began to be drawn into their children's activities. Like a fashion trend, each child wanted to grow a family tree of their own and instead of rushing home to turn on the television they would run into their backyards and water their baby trees whilst thinking about what else they could plant in their gardens. The parents eventually became caught up in their child's activities and they would sometimes think how life had become so full of joy all of a sudden.



There was one child in Jasmine's class who did not get excited about planting family trees. It was none other than Thomas.

Thomas was not only an orphan, he had what adults referred to as learning difficulties and he was considered a problem child. He was hyperactive and could not keep still in the classroom and whether it was due to his upbringing or his personality it was difficult to tell.

Foster parents would take Thomas into their homes not be able to cope with his disruptive behavior and so they would send him back to the department of child services, a government body, where he would be placed in the care of another family.

The list of families willing to adopt Thomas had shrunk considerably and he was standing on thin ice with his current family, possibly the last family in the city willing to adopt him. Thomas was especially jealous of other children, even those whom he lived with - his 'foster brother and sisters'. He could not help but feel that he was always second best wherever he went and he had a developing inferiority complex.

He did not have many friends, indeed the only person he would call a friend was Jasmine and he would only ever go over to her house to play. He did not grow fruit or compete with the other children in the fruit growing contests and in general he was considered an outcast and a loner.

One day he was playing with Jasmine in her garden when Jasmine all of a sudden asked "Thomas what do you want to do when you grow up?"

Thomas looked away and said "I d don't know but I think I w would like to travel" he sputtered. He always seemed to trip over his D and W words.

Many children and indeed, many adults have dreams of traveling especially when they are young. Some people want to run away from something, others want to find something and many people want to experience something they feel they are lacking in their everyday life.

Thomas had experienced life without love up to this point in his short life. Perhaps he wanted to travel because of all three reasons.

The conversation changed and Jasmine asked another question

"Thomas, why don't you grow a family tree like all the other kids?"

Thomas looked down and mumbled "I d-don't know". Normally he would go into a rage when someone asked him a stupid question like this but with Jasmine for some reason he could never bring himself to get angry. Instead, he felt ashamed and embarrassed that he could not plant a family tree although not because he was incapable or did not want to, he simply did not have any family and so he thought it was impossible for him to plant a family tree.

He was also jealous of the other children and how they all had families whom they could plant their trees with. He felt alone and this only fuelled his resentment.

"Well, sulking about it won't do anything" asserted Jasmine. She was the only one who could speak to him like this and for some reason he always listened to her.

"Look here, I have an idea. Why don't you plant the seed of your family tree in a small pot and you can put it next to our tree in our garden. Once it grows a bit, we can plant it in our garden together where it will be safe and well cared for and of course you can come over and water it and look after it as much as you want. Mum and dad are always happy to have you over as long as you behave yourself and don't go messing up my mother's new plants".

Thomas looked up at Jasmine with hope in his eyes. "That way your tree will still be a family tree as it will be part of our family, then when you grow up and start your own family, you can take it with you

your family will be happy too.” Thomas began to speak but he could not find words to describe what he had to say. Children and especially young children are capable of feeling to a degree which adults perhaps lose as they get older and they are often misunderstood with their outbursts of emotion.

He planted his family tree with Jasmine the next day and he had never felt happier in his life. He chose to plant a Birch tree in memory of Jasmine’s birch tree which had died last fall. Jasmine thought to herself how thoughtful Thomas was.

Thomas felt if only for an instant that all of his cares and worries in the world didn’t matter anymore. He thought how kind Jasmine was and how she always made him feel better. He hoped they could always play together and that if she wanted to stay in this very garden for the rest of her life, he would happily stay with her her. For the first time in a long time he didn’t feel like travelling.

Once the seedling was planted in the soil of his small pot he took Jasmine’s hand and started to blush. Without warning she tagged him on the shoulder and cried out “tag, you’re in!” before running off behind some bushes.

“Not fair you could have told me first!” laughed Thomas as he chased after. It was the first time ever that he had finished a sentence without stuttering.



“Grandfather, how did Jasmine know what to do to make Thomas feel better?” I asked.

“What makes you think she knew anything of the sort? She was simply doing what anyone who cared about someone would do in that situation - she wanted to make Thomas feel better. Jasmine sensed what the matter was and rather than lying and speaking about things she did not know as many adults do today, she simply gave him an opportunity to create his own happiness rather than lying or trying to make him into something he wasn’t”.

“It’s amazing how the simple things in life end up making the greatest difference” he mused in his usual thoughtful tone whenever he was lost in his thoughts.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“The majority of people look at somebody who appears to have a problem and either right them off completely or attempt to force these people to be more like themselves. Sometimes they even use violence out of fear or frustration.

When someone is perceived to have some sort of problem, society says ‘fix them’ without even a second thought.

“I still don’t see the connection. Anyway, how can you be sure you are doing the right thing whatever you do?” I asked.

“By listening carefully and paying close attention to the person in need” he emphasized.

“For instance imagine if you had never seen a person in a wheelchair before, when out of the blue a disabled person in a wheel chair approaches a few steps near to where you happen to be standing and asks for your help to get down so he can continue on his way”.

“He asks for your help yet you stubbornly refuse to help him, believing he is too lazy to get out of his chair as you don’t really understand his problem. He asks for your help a second time yet you refuse to help him, believing he is really pushing his luck. He then becomes angry and insists you help him down the stairs yet you continue to disregard him, looking at him with even more suspicion and growing contempt. He keeps asking for help and becomes angrier and more disruptive by the minute when finally you have had enough. Finally you push him down the stairs believing he has got what he deserved” he paused in his usual manner of speaking whenever he tried to emphasize a point he felt needed to be understood clearly.

“We all have problems of some sort, and often all we need to do is listen to the person who appears to be in difficulty a little more carefully and then offer our help, but only if our help is required. We must then ensure we give the person in need our full attention and sincerely try to understand their position before jumping to any rash conclusions”.

I thought about this before replying “Sure, in an ideal world that would be good and I would agree except that people don’t always have time to give their full attention to everyone who needs help as they have their own cares to think about” I protested. “How would anything ever get done if everyone thought this way?” I asked in bewilderment.

“You are right” grandfather replied with a hint of sadness. “There is not much to be done if people are not willing to listen. In that case it is probably best to do nothing at all”.

The rain intensified outside as it beat against the window pane relentlessly like a thunderous drum. Grandfather stared out the window lost in his own thoughts as I poured myself a hot cup of tea from the teapot on the small circular table which separated the two of us.

“Looks like the gardens going to get a good soak. Excellent it will save me a lot of time watering it later” he said as if he were satisfied although I wasn’t sure if he was talking to me or to himself.

After a moment of silence he spoke “You know, at first glance most people would say that I am old and you are young, would you agree?”

“Well yes its obvious isn’t it?” I replied cautiously with a question of my own. I had started to become accustomed to Grandfathers rhetorical questions by now and so I tried to think about what he was really trying to say before answering. I could not see any trick this time around although I suspected to receive another philosophical response from the old man which would contradict mine. I am old and he is young and as far as I was concerned that was that.

“Tell me, have you ever met somebody, even a young person and had a *feeling* that they somehow knew about life in a way which did not quite make any sense? I am not talking about life intellectually, philosophically or even in terms of maturity. I am talking about the age of their soul which cannot be described, measured or classified, the soul which dwells on all planes of existence simultaneously.”

“Well, Grandfather I am not sure what you mean by that” I replied thoroughly confused as I had never heard of someone speak about the soul in these terms before. “The only plane of existence I know of is the here and now, the one we exist in and I’m not sure of any other although many people speak of spirituality and religion”.

“Ah, you are talking about the physical plane of existence, the one we all consciously dwell in, but there are two other planes of existence which people are familiar with but usually only in their dreams” he continued.

“And what are these two other planes of existence?” I asked curiously.

He paused to draw a deep and deliberate breath before speaking. “The spiritual and the divine planes”, as he pronounced these words his speech slowed down as if he wanted to emphasize the words themselves.

“There are many forms of life spread throughout the universe but they do not exist on all three planes of existence simultaneously. There is life which exists only on one of the three and some even exist on two of the three but there is only one form of life which exists on all three planes of existence at once...”

“Wait, I know – you are speaking of Man” I interjected.

“Yes, very good you are finally starting to think for yourself” replied Grandfather with satisfaction.

“It is important to note that Man is the only creation in the universe which exists on all three planes simultaneously. Everyone is aware of the physical plane of existence because we experience it through our consciousness daily. Unfortunately or fortunately the other two realms cannot be detected through our senses and so they are easily forgotten or ignored, especially if people rely too much on the physical plane alone.

A man who relies too much on the physical plane of existence and defines his reality through this plane alone lives only a shadow of an existence. However, many people live this type of existence today and always wonder why they are never completely satisfied with life. It’s as if they are eating a meal, unable to fill themselves no matter how much they eat yet they stubbornly persist in eating the same unsatisfying food. These people are commonly referred to as ‘materialistic people’ today and for them life is neither exuberant nor completely dull for they live in the world of the in between.”

“In between what”? I asked.

“In between love and apathy” he replied quietly.

“What about the spiritual realm of existence?” I asked. “Surely people who live in this realm are more enlightened than the materialistic people?”

“The spiritual realm of existence consists of all spiritual beings, including the spiritual existence of Man although most of us remain oblivious to our spiritual existence. Not all spiritual beings are good, in fact some are pure evil – nevertheless spiritual beings exist and certain people throughout history for one reason or another come into contact with them. Some people are more in touch with their spiritual existence than others although every single person is capable of living in their spirit. Unfortunately, due to our increased dependence on the physical plane we pay less attention to the spiritual and divine planes and as a consequence our awareness and understanding of these planes diminishes over time”. He paused to take a drawn out sip his tea.

I wondered what Grandfather was getting at and what he was trying to say. It sounded to me like he was trying to explain something of importance judging by his tone of voice.

“Have you ever heard of people hearing voices in their head? I’m taking about crazy people, people you might call insane?” asked Grandfather.

“Well, yes everyone has heard of them and they are often locked up in mental institutions or hospitals, especially the ones who go on killing sprees - the mass murderers for instance” I replied with a shudder.

“And do you think these people - especially the ones who are responsible for the mass killings and assassinations - were mentally insane?”

“That is obvious, everyone knows they are and it’s no good trying to find excuses for these people, they are pure evil, whether or not they are insane” I replied in discomfort.

“Call it what you will, no one is born evil it’s just that they are more susceptible to manipulation precisely because so little is known of the spiritual realm of existence. Many of these ‘insane’ people are not strong spiritually and so they are prone to mistake ‘voices’ they hear for sublime commands. Sometimes the spirits even call themselves God or divine inspiration and flatter these people into convincing them that they have been chosen in some way to carry out a revolutionary act of violence in the name of a greater good - depending on how they are being influenced or manipulated.

Some people feel impulses to do certain things and so they follow their intuition while others actually do hear voices. A lot of the time these people are thought to be loners or outcasts by the rest of society before they commit their acts. In actual fact they are highly sensitive people in vulnerable positions and they merely possess an ability they do not know how to control”.

Why was he telling me this? “I don’t believe you, I can’t!” I protested almost in a shout.

How could Grandfather believe in such nonsense? How could he possibly call mass murderers, monsters of history *sensitive*? Here he was talking about spirits and other planes of existence yet something deep down inside of me could not disagree with what he was saying which is probably what frightened me more than anything else.

“Well, in that case perhaps it is better for everyone to forget about the spiritual realm of existence and continue to live their daily lives. We are far better ‘living in the in between’ and doing things such as watching television, going to work, paying our bills and living a normal life than getting caught up in this spiritual realm of existence” I declared. To hell with it all, if these evil spirits can manipulate us so easily why even delve into that sinister world? I asked myself if trying to reassure myself of something.

“If that was all there was to it I couldn’t agree more. But there is more to it than lies on the surface. People keep on committing horrendous acts on a more catastrophic scale as time goes by and until we find a solution nothing will change – in fact the situation will inevitably worsen over time.”

“People will keep going to work, paying their bills, watching television all the while growing more apathetic to the problems of the world - the problems in their lives - and seemingly ‘insane’ acts will continue and worsen in their vileness and scale as history has shown”.

Why did Grandfather always have to go and speak so gloomily like this I wondered? What made it worse was that deep down I could not help but agree with everything he said.

The rain outside had intensified and the more I thought about it the more I could not help but think how dire Man’s situation had become, especially in some parts of the world.

“Grandfather, is Man heading for disaster then? Is there no way to reverse the situation?”

Grandfather did not answer me straight away. He merely stared off into space as if he were in some other world.

“Fortunately, there is one other realm of existence which every single person exists upon and which separates us from all other forms of life in the universe” he said in a low voice.

“Wait I know, you are speaking of the divine plane of existence aren’t you?” I interjected.

He nodded. But why do people know so little of this plane of existence? I had to know.

“Hang on, what did you mean back when you said people’s understanding of the divine plane of existence has diminished over time?” I asked. “Even if a lot of people don’t believe in God, a lot of people do and some even devote their entire lives to study God and religion in their respective disciplines and so surely our knowledge hasn’t diminished that much,” I said as if trying to prove a point.

“What word did you just use to describe people’s understanding of the divine?” asked grandfather.

“*Believe*, many people *believe* in it” I repeated.

Grandfather sat back in his seat.

“The mere fact that people need to believe is proof enough of our diminishing understanding.” Once again he paused for a moment or two as if gathering his thoughts before continuing;

“Imagine if engineers had to believe in the laws of physics to build a bridge. Nothing would ever get built and anything that was built would probably fall apart in an instant. Not only do engineers understand the laws of physics, they also understand how to apply them so that the bridge is safe and people can pass over it without having to fear for their lives. Our understanding of spirituality and God is no different. The sad fact that the vast majority of us have to even believe in God - if we believe in Him at all - is evidence enough of our shallow understanding not only of the divine but of life in general. Belief is never a word that should be used to describe a person’s faith yet that is exactly the word used today” said grandfather in a sad, reflective tone.

It seemed to Grandfather that believing was simply not enough – people must find practical ways to apply their belief in their daily lives. I wondered what sort of magnificent temples would have to be built for this to be possible. I wondered how everyone would suddenly need to begin going to church to pray and ask forgiveness for their sins and I thought about all the schools that would have to be set up to teach people this new enlightened branch of wisdom.

But I had begun to lose myself and my imagination had run away with me once more. And then all at once a stunning realization dawned on me. Indeed, how could I not have noticed it before? In a single flash my thoughts returned to grandfather’s story about the Greenwood’s. From a single flower planted in love their lives were transformed.

The Greenwoods were certainly not religious in the traditional sense, they did not go to church or preach about planes of existence or other things which they knew nothing about yet they seemed to have a profound understanding of life and the love in their lives also seemed to have flourished over time.

I began to wonder how the story would end.

“Grandfather, tell me. What became of the Greenwoods and their neighborhood in the end? Were they able to live happily in peace for the rest of their lives?”

Grandfather turned to me and his face had changed. He no longer had that reassuring calm smile spread across his face and he seemed distracted with this question, or so I thought. It was getting late now and the rain outside had lessened. I thought I could catch a glimpse of the evening sunlight trying to break through the dark overhanging clouds. He did not answer me for quite some time.

“It’s getting late and I need to remove some weeds from the garden before the rain returns” he said as he prepared to rise. He could not leave a story half finished like that! I needed to at least understand what happened to the Greenwoods and their neighborhood in the end.

“Wait! I blurted out. Come on Grandfather, at least tell me the next part of the story and I shan’t keep you any longer, I promise” I said pleadingly.

Grandfather turned to look at me from out of the corner of his eye before lowering himself back into his seat.

“We have been sitting here all day and I need to tend to the garden before the sun goes down and while the rain has lessened but I will tell you the next part of the story if you wish”.

“Yes, yes I will like that please go ahead” I replied eagerly.

Part V

Jasmine continued to flourish at school and she easily excelled past her peers. She had already mastered arithmetic, grammar and reading with seemingly little effort. However, her parents and teachers at her school were at a loss to explain her unusual abilities and the issue of whether or not Jasmine would be moved up a couple of grades at school had been settled.

Jasmine herself had made the decision when one day her parents sat her down after school. Ana was the first to speak “Jasmine dear, your teachers have been talking with your father and I and we have some very good news. We all agree that you are an extremely smart girl for your age and we want to let you decide whether or not you would like to move up a couple of grades at school”.

“All your teachers, even Mrs. Brown think that you are far too smart to remain in your class but tell me, what do you think of the idea?”

Both parents had been expecting Jasmine to jump at the idea, after all what child would not want to be moved up a couple of grades at school after being told they were too smart for their class?

However, Jasmine looked towards the ground before asking a question of her own “will it mean that I won’t see my friends in my class anymore?”

“You will still see your friends in the playground but no, they will not be in the same class as you and although you will still see them you will probably make other friends” Ana reassured her daughter.

“But I don’t want to leave my friends, I like them a lot and I want to see them in the classroom as well. What about Mrs. Brown, will I still get to see her?”

“No dear, you will have a different teacher because you will be in a different class” replied Ana solemnly.

“Well I don’t want to move then, I like my friends and my teacher” replied Jasmine in a tone of voice which suggested she had made up her mind about the issue and did not want to discuss it further. Ana was relieved. She did not want to pressure Jasmine into doing something she didn’t want to do and at the same time she did not want Jasmine to feel as though she was being held back in any way.

She did not want her daughter to grow up with regrets.

Ana also noticed how for Jasmine the choice was simple. Her little girl did not think about changing grades so she could become smarter or because she was ambitious, these thoughts did not even enter her mind. She simply loved her friends and her teacher and so her decision to stay in her grade was easy.

If only everyone made their decisions in life based on these principals, thought Ana and she wondered how many other lessons could be learned from children.

In the beginning of spring that year Ana was walking through the nearby forest of birch trees which stood near their house. It was a brilliant warm sunny day, not a cloud in the sky. She came across a familiar rocky ravine which was split by a small stream which ran in an east westerly direction far below.

She walked along the southern ridge, careful to avoid the edge of the ravine which gave way to a treacherous fall below. She liked to walk through this small forest and pick wild mushrooms from time to time which she would use in preparation of her evening meal. Besides that, it was a good way to take her mind off things and indeed she had a lot on her mind lately. Above everything else she had a surprise for Joseph that evening and she wanted to tell him about it after he had finished his meal and once Jasmine had gone to sleep.

Ana returned home that afternoon with a basket full of mushrooms. They were extremely tasty and plentiful and they complimented the delicious pie she had baked that morning. Completely exhausted after her meal and a full day of school followed by playing with her neighborhood friends, Jasmine quickly grew tired and went straight to sleep.

Joseph and Ana cleared the dishes together and once everything was in order they retreated onto their back verandah and Ana put the kettle on.

Once they were comfortable Ana thought now was the perfect time to tell Joseph what she had been dying to tell him all day.

“Darling, I want to tell you something, I have some wonderful news”.

Joseph sat up in his chair and gave his wife his full and undivided attention.

“Yes my dear?” asked Joseph.

“I’m pregnant we’re going to have a baby”.

Joseph went straight over to his wife and embraced her. He was delighted with this news although not at all completely surprised.

Unlike the events leading up to the birth of Jasmine, circumstances were completely different this time around. Ana felt no uncertainty about Joseph's desire to have a second child as he often spoke of having a large family since Jasmine was born.

His aspirations were clear and he was not at the least bit surprised as he was overjoyed at this wonderful news. At that moment he reflected on the joy which he had experienced since Jasmine came into the world and he could think of nothing more joyful than having another child with his wife who he loved beyond measure, a true goddess or so he thought of her to himself.

They sipped their tea and Joseph realized that then and there he was the happiest he had ever been in his life. His sense of happiness at that moment was not one of elation or ecstasy such as the euphoria one feels in moments of triumph or adulation. These moments are only ever experienced in the vast desert of unfulfilled happiness and they are always temporary and fleeting.

Joseph felt that he was completely satisfied with his life and he felt neither elation nor ecstasy, rather he felt a calm sense of happiness.

All the books he had ever read and all the movies he had ever watched on unfulfilled love being the ultimate form of love a person can experience now seemed laughable in comparison to the depth of feeling he experienced at that moment in time. He knew that whatever the future held, nothing could take away the beautiful feeling of life and creation he felt on that warm spring night.

They both sat in silence as Ana leaned on his shoulder. Lightning could be seen in the distance and a cool breeze stirred the leaves of their magnificent garden. Looks like a change is coming, Joseph thought to himself as he closed his eyes with a smile spread across his face. The scent of mushrooms lingered in the air and Joseph remembered that moment with pure joy for the rest of his days.



A couple of weeks later Joseph awoke at the break of dawn. He was careful not to wake Ana. He crept silently out of the bedroom and passed through the front gate of the house without a sound. He planned to return home before Ana awoke.

He made his way to the outskirts of town through the same forest Ana had walked through to collect the mushrooms just a couple of weeks prior. The rain had eased yet the ground remained wet and the stones and rocks lying in his path were slippery.

With basket in hand he started collecting one mushrooms one after the other placing them neatly in his basket. He chuckled to himself that never in a hundred years would he have imagined himself in this situation as a young aspiring academic – out collecting mushrooms on a rainy overcast morning.

In his youth he was so adamant that he knew all the answers to life and he was extremely outspoken and opinionated as many young people are. He remembered how he thought he would change the world and yes, he had been ambitious.

Secretly while he daydreamed as a young academic he could see himself standing up to claim the Nobel Peace Prize for science and people would applaud in awe and admiration at his miraculous accomplishments. He had remained convinced for the majority of his life that his accomplishments would bring him true love and happiness.

Josephs thought then returned to his own family, his garden, home and friends and how much he loved everything about his life.

He thought how extremely lucky he was not knowing that luck really had very little to do with it all and that everything in his life was connected in some mysterious yet unmistakable way.



He made his way through the forest and his basket was starting to feel quite heavy. Just as he thought he had all the mushrooms he needed Joseph caught a glimpse of the rocky ravine ahead through some branches.

He brushed his way through the overhanging branches and stepped out into an open space between the trees and the ravine. He crept up to the edge of the ravine and peered over the rocky ledge. The little stream sung its soft melody far below.

As he turned away he caught a flash of something out of the corner of his eye. There, only a few steps into the ravine he caught glimpse of the largest most beautiful mushroom he had ever laid eyes on. It was so large it protruded over the edge of the sheer drop below. Joseph thought to himself how this mushroom alone would be enough to feed his small family and he imagined the delighted look on his wife's face as he brought the mushroom through the front door.

He took a few cautious steps in the direction of the mushroom, careful not to slip on the wet stones under his feet. He steadied himself and using one hand attempted to pick the mushroom from the rocky slope whilst using his other hand to keep his balance. In one swift movement he removed the mushroom from the ground and leaned across to place it in his basket which was slung around his other arm.

He gathered the mushroom. He raised one leg in an attempt to climb back up the ravine towards the ledge only a couple of meters away. Just as he began to climb back he unwittingly planted his left foot on a rock covered in green moss and in an instant he found himself sliding back towards the rocky ledge of the ravine.

He frantically tried to grip onto something as he continued to slide. The basket fell from his arm and plunged over the ledge. 'This is it' he thought when at the last minute he managed to grab onto a vine which overhung the edge of the ravine. He came to a screeching halt and he found himself suspended over the sheer drop in mid air.

He dared to sneak a look below. He saw his basket and mushrooms lying sprawled across the rocky stream. He thought he noticed the basket caught up in some rocks but he could not be sure. His only thought now was how to climb his way back over the ledge and to safety. At that moment he felt a sharp jolt followed by a cracking sound. The vine which he clung to for his life was giving way yet he could not see how he would manage to pull himself up in time.

In that moment he felt it was useless to attempt to climb back to safety. He knew he didn't have long before the vine would snap and he awaited the inevitable plunge to the stream far below. Instead of fighting his way back to the top he reflected upon his life.

He thought how grateful he was to have realized his purpose in life. He had a loving family, he had warm and friendly neighbors around him and in those last few seconds he could only be thankful for the life he had lived. Above all, he was thankful for the love which shone persistently and carried him through even the most difficult times in his life. He felt completely happy and at ease.

The chord snapped and he fell. They say your life flashes before your eyes in those final moments and it is true. Not only did Joseph's life flash before him in clear and distinct images, he could feel every sensation he had ever felt in his life. He felt his frustration with work and his ambition which fuelled his thirst for knowledge in his youth. He felt the love for his family and the love for his unborn child.

Perhaps that's the way it is, he thought to himself. Once you fulfill your purpose in life it is necessary to depart from this world, even if you cannot understand why and there appears to be no logic behind it.

There was nothing timely or logical about his death yet perhaps that's just the way it is.

With his final breath he dreamed that one day in some unseen future everyone will understand their purpose in life, the illusion of death and the mystery of eternity. Dreams have a strange way of turning into reality. He could not help but smile and contrary to his fate he had never felt more alive in his life.

Epilogue

Ana awoke and wondered why her husband was not in bed. She waited all morning for Joseph to return home and she began to worry. Where did he go? Why did he not tell her he was going out? Apart from that something strange was happening.

Musa the cat had been particularly restless all morning. Usually he would laze around all day in the sun as all cats do. On this morning however, Musa ran around the garden in a frantic craze and would not stop meowing - it was almost as if the cat was trying to say something.

Ana had no idea what the matter might be. The day drew on and she began to grow more anxious about Joseph's absence. Jasmine was sitting in the garden with her mum in silence. Just as Ana was considering whether or not to go out and look for Joseph, Jasmine blurted out quietly yet confidently

"Mama, we should follow Musa – he will lead us to daddy".

Ana was not even surprised by her daughter's unusual suggestion.

"Let's go then", was all she could manage.

Musa led the way to the forest and the closer they came to the ravine the more Ana's heart sank.

They followed a path leading down to the bottom of the ravine. When they reached the bottom Ana stood transfixed at what she saw. There, lying on the rocks was Joseph's body. Before she could stop her, Jasmine was at her father's side and a tear rolled down her cheek.

Ana walked up slowly from behind and bent over her husband's lifeless body. She could not hold back her tears at what she saw next.

She saw the basket near where Joseph lay and the mushrooms which had not been swept up down the stream remained scattered on nearby rocks. The largest mushroom remained intact inside the basket and only small pieces had broken apart from the plunge.

They did not say a word although as Ana looked upon her husband's face she was surprised as what she saw. It looked as though Joseph was actually smiling and his face was not cold or pale.

They both wept and remained at Joseph's side until nightfall.



The funeral took place later that week. It was a hot sunny afternoon with not a breath of wind in the air as Ana and Jasmine stood in their back garden beside their baby cedar tree accompanied by their close friends and neighbors - Jane and Michael whom stood behind them along with a small group of other neighbors and friends who had gathered around the tree. It was Ana's wish they bury her husband next to the tree, their family tree which they had planted not that long ago.

Joseph was buried and the guests departed one by one. The sun began to set in the west and Jasmine and Ana remained there alone, arm in arm after all the guests had departed and dusk set in.

"Goodbye my darling, I will love you forever" whispered Ana quietly as she turned and made her way back inside. Just before she entered their home she stopped and turned to look back towards her daughter.

Jasmine remained next to the tree deep in thought. She looked up and stretched her arms towards the sky directly above where the cedar tree was planted. And then she saw it. The white face of the bright moon shone brilliantly in the night sky in exactly the same position where it had been all those years ago when Ana spoke to Joseph from the other side of the country.

"Daddy, daddy" she called out with her little arms still outstretched.

The stillness of their warm night was only broken only by a gentle breeze which rustled the small branches of the cedar tree. In that breeze Jasmine felt as though she could make out a soft voice muffled with the wind. She could not hear the words yet in an instant she understood everything.

All the while Musa sat quietly on the back fence watching over Jasmine in her garden as the sky darkened. Jasmine had a sense of what she must do in life as all children do except Jasmine felt as though nothing could stand in her way her way or stop her from trying. All children know what they must do in life when they enter the world, they just forget over time. Jasmine turned around to go back inside.



“And that my boy is where the story ends for today” declared Grandfather as he stood up and turned about to leave.

“Wait, what happened next? What did Jasmine understand about the rest of her life can you at least tell me that?” I asked pleadingly.

“That is a whole other story and I don’t have time to tell it today – maybe another time” replied grandfather as he turned about to leave.

I had so many questions still unanswered but it was no use. The stubborn old man was leaving.

Storytelling was over for the day.

I lingered in his study lost in a daydream. Perhaps it was best that Grandfather leave me to think about the story for myself for a while, I thought. After all, the best stories can never be summed up in words and some people just never understand the essence of a story no matter how well it is told.

I wandered through grandfather’s garden lost in my own thoughts and I reflected upon all I had heard that day. Grandfather’s story had somehow changed my way of seeing things.

Puddles had formed in the grass from the heavy rain which had been falling all day. My mind began to wander and I started to reflect. Staring at the puddles on the ground I thought how vital water is to our existence yet we know how to harness its life giving qualities by only drinking small doses of clean water at a time. If we drink too much at once without taking a breath we drown and if the water is contaminated we become ill yet it senseless to blame the water itself if we drown or become ill.

Like a river, love flows through the deserts of the world with the sole purpose of quenching everyone’s thirst. How can we blame the river for our recurring illnesses if we stubbornly persist in pouring our filth into its clean flowing water? Perhaps it is better to purify our filth or discard of it altogether in order for the river to flow purely once more. If we were to do this, the great life giving river of love caressing the shores of our world would be filled not with contamination and disease but with a life giving force capable of satisfying everyone’s thirst, enabling us to accomplish things we cannot even begin to imagine today.

Only then can we possibly realize the true purpose and meaning of life. Perhaps that will be the joyous task of our children who will remember us with love and gratitude– their beloved ancestors who brought Man back upon its true path - in the silence of their inner most reflections.

It was getting late and I was getting carried away with my thoughts.

The rain had ceased outside and I looked up towards the sky. The clouds had cleared a little and I caught a glimpse of the stars glimmering in the pale evening sky. I wonder if I will ever see a shooting star which never fades away, I thought.

As I continued to wander I noticed a row of giant Frangipani trees standing like ominous sentinels in the dusk watching over the boundary of my grandfather’s garden. For the first time in my life I consciously thought about them. I noticed the beautiful array of plants and vegetables arranged in their designated spots.

I stopped in front of a giant tree which stood in the middle of Grandfather's garden. I walked up to examine it a little more closely, stopped and stood still. It was none other than a giant cedar tree.

It was completely dark now and a gentle breeze rustled the branches of the beautiful tree which looked majestic in the sliver moon light. The breeze carried a scent of Jasmine.