

THE BOX

Subtitled:

JESUS HAD A TOUGH JOB

by

Peniel G.G.G.

407 Jarman Drive
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(Contact me - I can help!)

Version 3.1.04

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(See Gail, I told you I could write another book!!)

This is the story of one man's desperate search for TRUTH. He goes from one end of the world to the other seeking his true identity, only to return to his starting point—now knowing the place (and himself) for the first time.

Scott was a seeker of power. He had everything a man could want; yet he felt empty inside. He had tried power through possessions, money, and even social status. He felt these were just shadows of the vast and awesome power he knew he was destined to wield. He was just about to give up his search for his destiny when he met Peniel.

Through this mystifying character Scott begins his quest for power. He travels to a secluded mountain in Japan to seek out The Ancient One—a powerful and wise guru.

The Ancient One gives Scott a small black box, which contains boundless power—his to keep if he passes the tests the box takes him through.

This is the story of Scott, The Box, and the last Ancient One...

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my sweet wife, Gail...

(Although she thought this book was dumb!)

24 June 1994

Peniel G.G.G.

PREFACE

Somewhere, there is a small black box with virtually infinite power. Guardians known as “Ancient Ones” have handed it down from generation to generation since the dawn of man. This is the story of that enigmatic box and the last **Ancient One**.

*(I know... you'll probably think this book is fiction—**think again!!**)*

Peniel G.G.G.

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CHAPTER 1

The Weirdo

It was a time of great abundance—it was a time of deep yearning. I had everything a man could want: money, looks, health, and intelligence. My forceful drive and ambition had brought all of the worlds goods and laid them at my feet. I had acquired everything I was told I should want; and yet, it all seemed shadows and emptiness. There was no significance to my possessions-just pretty wrapped boxes filled to the brim with worthless and mediocre junk. My soul screamed for something of substance to whet its insatiable appetite. You see, only one thing could satiate my burning desire—**power!**

... This is the story of my quest for that power.

Many times things are not as they seem! Those were the last words he said to me. You could also call it the theme that runs throughout this whole story. But, how shall I relate this extraordinary tale? I will tell it, although you will find it hard to believe.

Let me begin by telling you of how I came to meet *The Keeper Of The Box Of Power* who is called *The Ancient One*.

At that time, I was thirty-three years old, lived in the ritziest apartment in Shawnee, Oklahoma, and drove a new Mercedes. I had heard it said that I was the proverbial tall, dark, and handsome; but, that sounds so cliché.

Yeah, I had all the things you guys think you want; but, there remained a deep void, a hollowness and yearning for something more.

I had always known my destiny was something bigger, something great. But, there I was, climbing the corporate ladder at IBM. It all seemed so trivial and uninspiring!

I had been one of the sixties generation, starting out my early years like so many others, dropping out of society, wearing *hip* clothes, and trying to find myself. It all seems so comical now.

Eventually, I abandoned my search. I went to work for IBM at the Central Division Headquarters in Oklahoma City, became a personnel manager, and learned how to handle my supervisors as easily as my workers. Most everyone called me *Good-Ol-Scott*.

There were a few executives at the top who nicknamed me *The Fox* because I was sly.

Recently, I had spent a lot of time thinking about my career. I knew only power could fill the void within me, a chasm so deep it seemed bottomless.

Then, like an omen, came the intensely vivid nightmare. It was my deathbed. My life flashed in front of me and seemed so useless and wasted. I lay there helpless and dying, and realized only then, at death's door—I had never really lived at all. My eyes beheld all the unfulfilled dreams and shattered hopes, as my mind asked where the time had slipped away.

Somewhere, somehow, I had missed it all. My ship had come and sailed, the brass ring of life was missed, and I knew not where or when.

At the end of the dream an old man came to my bedside. He had the wisdom of many ages in his eyes, and his look was one of great pity and compassion. He whispered softly to me, "What purpose—your life?"

No answer came, only bitter tears. An echo of his words resounded deep in the hollow ravine within me.

I awakened at four AM in a cold sweat, and asked myself, "Is this all there is? Isn't there more to life? Isn't there something meaningful and important that I am supposed to do? **Why am I here?**"

Again, no answers came.

I wrote out my immediate resignation from IBM, not giving any explanation.

I took my camping equipment and headed out to Lake Thunderbird, just outside of Norman, not telling anyone. I needed to be alone for a while and sort things out.

Oklahoma is cool in late October, so I had the whole eastern part of the lake to myself. I camped across from the dam, fishing off the bank, building campfires, and exploring the woods, letting all thoughts and worries of the world fall away. This was a good place to find myself again.

I had saved up a nice little nest egg, so I had no financial worries. By the third day, the problems of the world seemed far away, and my mind had cleared.

I began examining my life. I used to think that by the time I was thirty I would have all the answers—I had nothing but questions. I sat down and wrote out the important questions of life that I still didn't really understand. I came up with twenty. At the top of my list was "*What is LOVE?*" followed by "*Why are we here?*" and then "*Why do we choose wrongly?*" and "*What brings man good fortune?*" The other questions were similar.

I realized that after thirty years of searching I knew absolutely nothing that really mattered.

Oh yeah, I had answers to all twenty questions—pat answers that I had been given. I didn't buy it. There must be more to it than the simplistic answers we give our children.

If only I could get God to answer my questions—then I'd be satisfied. I wonder if He plays twenty-questions? I thought, smiling at the absurdity of the idea. I folded up the paper and put it in my wallet.

I spent that evening considering what to do with my life now. I couldn't satisfactorily answer the questions, and neither could anyone I knew. My only desire was to fill the emptiness in me—no matter what! I needed answers.

My fear, more than anything else, was the specter of my death-scene, which still haunted me. The feeling of utter hopelessness was unbearable. If it was an omen, I would like to heed its warning—but how?

I wondered if the right profession would help give me fulfillment. I thought about various jobs: doctor, lawyer, politician, priest, even Indian Chief. Nothing seemed right.

I lay on my cot that night, and added an earnest request to my nightly prayers, begging God fervently to give me some answer, some sign to follow and somehow, to guide my life. I had a strange premonition that my prayer was accepted.

My sleep was troubled. I kept waking up with the feeling something important was happening and it was hidden from me—whispers in the dark recesses of my dreams. I didn't realize God has a sense of humor and loves irony.

The next morning—**he arrived**

He drove up at eight AM in a blue and gold Chevy pickup with his family, towing a real old, red and white ski boat; you know, the kind with the Cadillac fins on the back. There was this custom nameplate on the front of the pickup that read *Mark & Gail*. I thought to myself, typically Oklahoman!

They were singing an old sailor's pub tune, entitled *Whatcha Gonna Do With A Drunken Sailor?*

The whole campground was empty, but they pulled in right next to me. The guy jumped out of the truck, and like some madman, ran over and began kissing a tree.

The rest of the family started unloading the camping equipment. I was lying in my tent, still half asleep, hoping this was all some bad dream.

The wild man came over close to my tent and hollered, "Howdy, neighbor!" He then began digging a pit for his fire, and singing, "Melerdy, melerdy, melllll-errr-deeeee!"

With him were a woman and two lovely kids, a girl of about twelve and a boy of six or so, all laughing and merrily unpacking and being busy. The crazy man wore old blue jeans, tennis shoes, and a hooded jogging top. He looked to be in his mid-thirties, pudgy, with a double chin.

Well, I thought, may as well get up and get the introductions over with. I put on some pants and stepped out of my tent.

Instantly the crazy man came running over, held out his hand, and said, "Howdy partner, call me Buck, Buck Wheezer!"

"My name is..." I began.

"No, no! Don't tell me your name. Let's see now, your name is **Rab Raw'ah**, right?" he interrupted.

"No, my name is Scott; Scott Hurst." I corrected.

Buck looked at me like I was crazy. "Course ya' are! I don't mind ya' bein' ashamed o' yer own name. I'll just call ya **Mister Ginsberg** for now. How's that?"

He's a little light in the lighthouse. I'd better humor him. I thought, and then said, "Whatever you like, Buck."

He turned toward his camp and hollered, "Hey, everyone! Come over and meet **Mr. Ginsberg!**"

I didn't like the way he kept stressing that name, and deduced from his wide grin that he was pulling my leg or something. He had lively brown eyes, and smiled incessantly, as if he were the only person in on some special joke.

His family was quite normal. His wife was named Gail, but was called Mama. The little girl's name was Summer, and she was a real treasure. The boy was Mark-bo. I guessed this crazy guy was really named Mark. My mind told me that the name Buck Wheezer was probably a joke of some sort.

"You'll have to excuse my husband," Gail explained. "He just loves an elaborate joke. I'm afraid he's playing one on you." She didn't have an accent. Mark's accent must be part of the gag, like the name Buck Wheezer.

The boy said, "Hi, I know you're not really named **Mr. Ginsberg**. Dad does this little skit with strangers sometimes. Just humor him, that's what Mama always does."

"My name is Scott." I informed him.

The little girl was shy, and hung close to her mother. "You sure do have a pretty name, Summer." I complimented.

Mark, that is Buck, said to me, "Well, pardner, times a' wastin'. Let's get to chawin' the fat."

I decided to join in his little accent game. Maybe it would break up the monotony. I did my best southern drawl, saying, "Well Buck, what d' ya do fer a livin'?"

He looked at me and smiled, amused that I had picked up on his little game, then switched to a heavy British accent, and said to his family, "Run along and let me 'ave 'o spot 'o time with me new mate, ol' chaps."

"Good grief, there he goes with that terrible English accent," Summer exclaimed.

"Come along kids," Gail said. "Let's leave Daddy to play with his new friend."

They left and began setting up their tent. Mark waited until they were out of hearing range, then continued, “Quite right, Ol’ Chap. I’m a writer, don’t ya’ know.”

I switched to a Sherlock Holmes impersonation. “So, my dear Mr. Buck Wheezer, what sort of things do you write?”

Mark switched back to his cowboy accent, drawling, “Wal’ pardner, I’ll tell ya. I write books ’n stuff like that.”

I switched to a cowboy accent. “Ya’ ’mean bout herdin’ doggies and punchin’ broncos and ridin’ da trail?”

He turned his head to ensure no one could hear him, then said in a normal accent, “No, I usually write about God, Truth, and Love. Right now, I’m thinking of a story about a man who works for IBM and is nicknamed *The Fox*. He quits his job and goes camping in the hopes of finding his destiny and purpose in life. He meets a strange man named Peniel who will eventually guide him back to himself. Peniel shows him how to find the power he is so desperately searching for to fill the vast, empty chasm within him.”

My mouth dropped open. I was speechless.

Then he added, in his cowboy accent, “Naw, I couldn’t make up a stury as silly as that, I don’t guess. It’s too fer-fetched! No one would ever believe it—know what I mean?”

He grinned widely, winked at me, turned and headed back toward his camp. As he walked away he said without turning back, “Welp, I gotta saddle up ma’ boat fer that thur catfishy roundup a way out yonder on the wet range. I’ll talk to yer later, **GINSBERG!**” He laughed wildly.

I could only stand there flabbergasted. An eerie feeling crept over me. There was no possible way he could have known these things. No one knew any of this!

Yet, somehow, this crazy man knew. Suddenly, I got the strange impression that he seemed familiar, somehow.

I staggered into my tent and fell on the cot.

I awoke with a queer sensation and turned over. Mark stood in the doorway, his outline highlighted by the low, evening sun. An eerie light illuminated his face, then vanished. I felt a strong presence of something powerful, but it vanished with the light.

He smiled. “Let’s do some fishing.”

“Okay,” I answered bewildered.

He switched to his Oklahoma drawl, saying, “Pilgrim, put ya’ on a jacket. It gits powerful cold out thur on the wet range a herdin’ fishies.”

I grabbed my windbreaker and followed him, not believing it was already late in the afternoon.

He walked through his camp and stopped to hug his wife. “So long my li’l cactus blossom, I’m a headin’ fer that catfishy roundup away out yonder,” he drawled.

“Good-bye you big nut,” she chuckled, then turning toward me, asked, “Well, sleepyhead, will you have supper with us?”

“Thanks, I’d love to.”

“Don’t let Mark bother you with his jokes, he’s just a little unusual,” she said, smiling widely.

Mark interrupted her. “Now shush darlin’. I’m just a funnin’ **Mr. Ginsberg**. I’m sure he don’t mind.”

I noticed he took particular pains to stress that name every time he said it.

I did my best southern drawl, and informed Gail, “Don’t let it bother ya’ none, ma’am, I got me a heap o’ powerful sense o’ humor—know whut I mean?”

She laughed a little. “Good. Then he will have someone to play with while he’s here. Now both of you run along and bring back some fish for me to cook for our supper.” As we walked away, she added, “Mark, send your son up to camp. He’s still perch fishin’ down by the boat.”

Mark took on the voice and characterizations of an English butler, and said, “I shall faithfully discharge my parental duties forthwith, madam.”

“You’re silly,” Summer giggled.

He put his hand to his brow and with extravagant gestures, and in the characterization of a Shakespearean actor, said, “Alas, ’tis a heavy burden that I, her father and mentor, must grievously bear.” His little skit made her laugh loudly.

We headed down the path toward the old ski boat. When we got close, he hollered, “Mark-bo. I think I hear your mother callin’ you.”

“Okay, right away, be there today,” came the reply.

As I got in the boat, I noticed some words stenciled on the side. It read *THE BOAT GAIL BOUGHT MARK*.

Mark saw me looking at it and explained, “Gail bought this boat for my birthday many years ago and said, ‘I don’t want to hear anyone saying Mark’s Boat. I want everyone to know I bought this boat for you.’ So, I named the boat that, and now everyone who sees it knows she bought it for me.”

“Real cute,” I said.

He started the motor and slowly headed away from the bank. He seemed to enjoy driving it like a kid with his favorite toy.

He turned to me, and said slowly and carefully, as if stressing a great teaching, “Rab Raw’ah, life is for enjoying!”

I nodded in agreement.

That day’s earlier events came back to me. I remembered there was something very peculiar about this man. I wasn’t sure what it was, but there was no denying he was aware of things about me which no one else knew. Gail was right—he was unusual!

As he drove around like a nut, I noticed there weren’t any fishing poles, bait, or tackle. He pulled up to a point of brush well out in the water and killed the big engine (it was an old 90-HP Evinrude, way too big for this little boat.) He then looked at me seriously and said, “Before we begin, you may ask me one question which I promise to answer truthfully. Think carefully!”

“How do you know things about me no one else does?”

He smiled. “Well, that’s a silly question. The answer should be obvious. Are you sure you don’t want to ask something different?”

“No, I want you to answer that one,” I insisted.

He looked at me and smirked. “Okay **Ginsberg**, I know these things because your father told me.”

Now, I knew he was tetch in the head. My father lived in Ohio and hadn’t seen me in years. I decided not to explain this to the loony.

I changed the subject. “How can we fish when we don’t have poles or tackle?”

He laughed crazily, saying, “That’s two! You sure you wanna waste another question on something as obvious as that? My information is of great consequence, ya’ know.”

“No, just forget it.”

He reached behind his seat, picked up an imaginary fishing pole, and pantomimed casting it out and reeling it back. I watched him play his little game, wondering what he was up to. He looked over at me in apparent surprise and said, “Well, do some fishin’. You’ll catch something you like.”

What the hell? I thought to myself, as I picked up an imaginary pole and prepared to cast it out.

“No, no!” he shouted feigning great horror, then switched to a hillbilly accent and said, “Ya danged fool! Ya cain’t fish in fresh water with no salt water deep-sea rig like that. You’ll git yerself inta heaps ’n gobs o’ trouble!”

I caught on to his new game. So, he wants to play that way, huh? I’ll fix him this time. I looked at him, smiled, and said proudly, “Well, I’ll just catch me a salt-water fish then.” I cast my line out and mimicked getting a big strike and having trouble with my imaginary fish.

He picked up on my new skit, exclaiming, “Now look at what yer done done, ya’ dad-blasted idgit! Ya done went and hooked yerself a salt-water whale, ’n I ain’ a’ gonna hep ya git him t’ the boat!”

I continued this new wrinkle in our little imaginary fishing trip and said in a breathless, southern drawl, “Hep me, hep me!! I dun hooked up Moby Dick hisself! He’s a Great White Whale, n’ he’s madder ’n a long-tailed pussycat on a porchful o’ rockin’ chairs! Hep me afore he rips me arms plum outa they sockets!”

Mark laughed loudly at my well-acted part, then continued with our skit. He said, “Ya **Double-barreled Ginsberg!!** That’s what yer git fer usin’ the wrong kinda fishin’ rig. Well—I guess I’d better hep ya afore Ol’ Moby pulls ya right down to Davy Jones’ Locker, ’n bites yer danged fool head clean off.”

He carefully reeled in his imaginary line, placed it in the back of the boat, and then studied me for a moment as I continued feigning extreme trouble.

“Excellent, Rab Raw’ah! You catch things quickly,” he said. He came over to my side of the boat to help me land the imaginary whale I had caught, both of us yelling and acting crazy.

In the accent of a pirate I hollered, “Quick, matey, cast that thar’ giant harpoon into the Albino Monster and I’ll climb up the mast ’n finish him off with me trusty, rusty sword!”

He pantomimed picking up a great harpoon and thrusting it into the whale’s side. I jumped out of the boat with a paddle, which represented my sword, and started slapping the water with it, making sure I splashed Mark accidentally a good many times. Just then, we heard laughter. Mark and I turned to see two old men in a small boat behind us. They were chuckling loudly. We had been so immersed in our little skit we hadn’t noticed them before.

One of them said to the other, “Well, Clem, do ya think these two men need some hep?”

The other laughed, saying, “Yep. But not the kinda hep we can give ’em! I think they needs psychiatric hep,” and both laughed loudly.

I felt like a boy caught playing with dolls or something, but looked at Mark and grinned widely.

I decided I’d better get out of the water, and thought, Why let these two old geezers spoil our fun? I climbed back in the boat, exclaiming, “Men, there’s our mighty prize, all subdued. He’s Moby Dick hisself, ’n he’s all ours!”

Mark took on the accent of a swashbuckling pirate and said, “Aye, ’n that’s a mighty fair piece o’ work yer did on ’im! Just look at the poor big lummo. He’s a cryin’ great big whale tears ’n all. I guess he knows when he’s been licked! Well, now that he’s surrendered to yer, what ’er yer gonna do with the blubbery landlubber, eh Captain Bligh?”

I noticed the two old men were moving on. I took on Captain Bligh’s English voice saying, “Well mates, we’ve had ourselves a bit o’ fun landin’ this here surry excuse fer a fish. I guess we’ll just ’ave to make White Whale Chowder out of ’im.”

Mark continued our new skit, “’N just how’s that done, Cap’n?”

“Welp, first yer take one large White Whale, ’n yer put him in a pot.”

Mark threw in quickly, “At’d ’ave t’ be one Jolly Roger of a pot!”

I continued, “’N then yer put in some boilin’ water, ’n add one potato, a few snips o’ parsley, ’n a spot o’ milk. Cook the entire concoction until bubbly, ’n serve with small round crackers.”

“Sounds simply marvy, ol’ chap, but we haven’t a pot or a potato in sight.”

“Very well then,” I continued, “turn the scurvy dog loose. He’s learned his lesson, ’n learned ’er well.”

Mark handed me the imaginary rope, and said in a normal tone of voice, “You caught him—you release him.” Calmly, he picked up his imaginary rod and began casting it while I sat there holding the invisible rope, staring at my imaginary whale.

Suddenly, it dawned on me that I had just learned some lesson. I wasn’t sure what it was, but something in my head clicked, and a little light came on. I looked over at Mark. He smiled knowingly and asked, “What have you learned?”

“I can’t say,” I answered.

“Oh, has your mouth ceased functioning properly?”

“No, it’s just that I am not sure what it was; but, I did learn something.”

I had the feeling something important was happening and again I was missing it.

Mark looked at me and instructed, “Watch carefully.” He cast out his imaginary line and got it caught in an imaginary tree. Then, he mimicked getting an imaginary rat’s nest in the line. He looked frustrated for a moment, then changed suddenly. He put a big, sheepish grin on his face and nonchalantly threw the whole thing overboard and began humming softly.

Again I thought something was there, but couldn’t put it into words. I sat there, holding my whale rope, with a puzzled look on my face and little lights flashing on in my head.

Mark leaned over, placed a reassuring hand on my shoulder and said, “Don’t be so disturbed. You have done well for your first time! Our fishing has been very productive! Now we should catch some fish for supper.”

I looked at him like he was crazy. “I don’t think Gail can cook what we caught?”

He smiled mischievously. “I think we have indeed caught fish and shall have them for supper tonight.”

“Are these invisible fish, caught without bait or tackle, very nutritious?” I asked.

He smiled wider and paddled the boat a few yards to a small tree sticking out of the water. He reached down and brought in a line tied to this tree a few feet under the surface. He pulled the line and the boat slowly turned. After about twenty feet it was attached to a large, baited trotline.

We ran the trotline, which had been beneath us while we had played our little skits. Sure enough, there were two nice catfish on it.

He was right, we had been fishing all along and I hadn’t realized it. I felt like I had egg on my face, but Mark was very noble about it. He never even mentioned it, which made me feel all the more foolish.

We cleaned the fish then headed back to camp. I became very serious and said, “Please tell me something. Who are you?”

“Peniel,” he said with a smile. “But my given-name is Mark. What is there in a name, ’eh **Rab Raw’ah?**” He reflected a moment, then added, “Perhaps, you would have done better to have asked me **what** I am!”

As we pulled into the shore, he handed me the biggest fish to carry and said, “Why don’t you call me **Peniel** from now on. It would greatly please me.”

“Okay, Peniel.” I went to my tent to change into dry clothes.

Later, we had a delicious catfish supper. When it was cooked and served, Summer looked at her plate, and in an obviously well rehearsed skit, asked, “Is all that for you, mother?”

“No dear, that’s yours,” Gail replied.

Summer looked surprised, saying, “That little bit?!”

They all chuckled. I didn’t get it.

Peniel explained that it was an old family joke handed down from his mother, Lorene, and grandma Della.

While we were eating, Mark-bo said, “What kinda fish is this, dad?”

Peniel replied, very matter-of-factly, “Well son, this one here that I caught might be called an **imaginary fish**. And that one there that **Mr. Ginsberg** caught is, I believe, a species known by its Latin name of *Whitus Whalus Invisibilus* or *Mobius Dickus*, but commonly called—**Crow**. What do you think **Mr. Ginsberg?** Are you eating crow?”

I chuckled a little, and answered, “Yeah, I guess I am.”

We laughed while the rest of them looked at us like we were out of our minds.

Mark-bo looked at his mother, and asked, “Is he funnin’ me mamma?”

She answered, “Yes son. Your father’s trying to be funny—as usual!”

CHAPTER 2

The Ancient One

We finished our delicious catfish supper, sat around the campfire, sang songs, and roasted marshmallows.

They started playing a game called *Fish-Tank* and taught me to play it. I was doing poorly until Peniel explained that it was a game, which teaches you to deal with stress.

It was true. As soon as I stopped trying so hard to win and played to have fun instead, I did quite well. The entire evening was relaxing, and put me in a good mood.

After a while, the rest of the family went to bed. Peniel and I sat gazing into the fire. I was lost in thought about this enigma of a man, not able to understand how he knew such deep things about me, yet acted like such a lunatic. It didn't seem possible.

He looked over at me, his eyes shining in the firelight. I felt that strange *presence* as he spoke lowly and seriously, "What would you like to talk about?"

"You tell me." I said.

"Let's talk about our fishing trip today."

"It was the most memorable fishing expedition I've ever had."

He smiled warmly and said, "Good. I'm glad you enjoyed it." After a moment's reflection, he added, "I never did answer your second question."

"What second question?" I asked puzzled.

"How could a person fish without the right equipment and bait?"

"Well, there's no use in answering that question now. It seems there is a kind of fishing I was unfamiliar with at the time."

He continued to smile, saying, "You have said well. There are many ways of fishing, which you do not yet know about. Perhaps it would help you to learn another of them."

I thought he was playing word games again, and said, “Well, I don’t know how fishing could help me at this point in my life.”

Peniel leaned forward and stirred the coals with his stick. His smile was gone. The fire flared. I felt a strong surge of that eerie feeling. He said, “Perhaps I am talking of the kind of fishing you are doing out here.”

The feeling went away as he leaned back in his chair, his face lost in the shadows. “I’m not sure what you mean.” I said, “What kind of fishing was I doing out here?”

“Fishing for yourself.” came his quick reply.

I could only sit there and stare blankly at his darkened face.

“I assure you,” he added, “if you fish with the right tackle, use the right bait, at the right time and in the right place, you shall surely catch what you are fishing for. Do you understand this kind of fishing?”

“No. But I was fishing just as you have said, before you came out.”

He leaned toward me, smiled, and said, “I know.”

“But how did you know?”

“As I have said, your father told me all about you.”

“Look,” I answered anxiously, “my dad lives in Ohio and he doesn’t...”

Peniel smiled widely and it suddenly dawned on me what he really meant. I was amazed, and stopped speaking.

“Now you are beginning to see things with clarity!” he said excitedly.

“Do you really expect me to believe that God has told you things about me?”

“It is your choice as to what you believe; and yes, that is what I mean. Father has told me much about you, Rab Raw’ah.”

I couldn’t believe my ears. I felt stunned. “It can’t be,” I replied.

“But it is. Do you not believe even now? How is it that I know these things that as you said, no man knows about you?”

“Maybe you’re psychic or have ESP,” I said defensively.

He looked disappointed, and answered in a lower tone, “Perhaps I was wrongly informed about you. Supposedly, you sought the truth and were serious about life’s most important questions. Did your nightmare not scare you enough?”

I wondered just how much he knew about me.

Peniel answered before my thought had even finished, “Perhaps more than you know about yourself!”

I was flabbergasted again, my mouth hanging open. “But it can’t be. Why would God talk to someone like you?”

He snickered a little and answered, “Why would He not?”

It was too much! “Look, I don’t know what church you represent, but it’s not for me. I’m a practicing Catholic.”

He laughed slightly. “Rab Raw’ah, you’re marvelous. It is a real delight to teach you how to fish. We will fish right here and now. Just as we did this afternoon, only this time it is for real. Go ahead, fish.”

I asked, “What tackle should I use?”

“Openness and honesty.”

“What bait do I need?”

“Sincerity.”

“Where should I fish?”

“Here and now, with me.”

“And what will I catch?”

“You have already caught it. You have been fishing without even knowing it. You have caught just what you asked for.”

“What’s the catch?” I asked intently.

“A person sent to guide you back to your true self. This person will take you to the beginning of your destined path and reveal to you how to achieve the power you are now so anxiously pursuing.”

“Who is this person?” I asked.

“**I AM!**” and as he said this the fire and the feeling inside of me flared up! It scared me. I saw Peniel’s eyes bright in the firelight. They seemed strangely familiar. I realized they were the eyes of the old man in my nightmare who had asked, “What purpose, your life?”

“I don’t believe it!” I exclaimed. “It can’t be. God doesn’t talk to people and tell them things like this. Even if He did, He sure wouldn’t talk to someone like you.”

Peniel looked disappointed. “Like what?”

“Silly and flighty. I couldn’t learn from someone like you! You’re too—loony, and you’re not serious enough!”

He smiled. “Well, then I guess you’re unwilling to accept me as your spiritual director.”

“Are you nuts?”

Peniel told this story: There was a man who woke up one morning with his house full of water. There had been a flood during the night. He got down on his knees and prayed to God to save him from the flood—for he was lame and unable to walk away or swim. He was overcome with the premonition that his prayer was answered and he had faith that God Himself would come down and save him. He crawled out on his front porch and saw a man in a car going by, who said, “Come on, get in. I’ll take you to safety!” to which he replied, “No thanks—I have faith in the Lord, He shall surely save me.” The water rose and the man soon had to climb onto his roof. Along came a man in a boat saying, “Get in and I’ll take you out of danger. The waters coming fast!” to which he replied, “No way. I am waiting on the Lord—He will surely save me, for He has promised.” Fifteen minutes later, the man was on top of his chimney, water lapping at his waist. Along came a man in a helicopter and said, “This is your last chance! They told me you wouldn’t come to safety. Please come with me and you will be safe.” The man refused the ride, and in another ten minutes he drowned. He stood before the Lord for disposition and he stated, “I can’t believe that you let me down! I drowned waiting on you, you promised—why did you not come?” to which the Lord replied, “Look, you—I sent a car, a boat and a helicopter! What else do you expect me to do?”

“But this is not the same.” I argued.

Peniel sighed deeply, and boked down. “Very well, as you wish it. Perhaps you were not sincere when you asked God to show you your destiny and give you a sign. I have given you several signs and you have rejected them. I have taught you many lessons and you have missed the point. I have offered you my services and you have refused them. I have done all I will.”

There was a tense silence for a moment, then he continued, “Go back to your old job. Live your life as it was. I tell you, you will still laugh, but not all of your laughter—and you shall cry, but not all of your tears. You have asked Father and He has sent to you what you requested. Do not ask again, because you have rejected what was sent!”

I wasn’t sure just how much he believed of all this crap, but I certainly didn’t want someone like him as my enemy. I decided to try to mend things.

“Isn’t there any other way?” I asked. “I do not wish to offend, but I couldn’t learn from you.”

His voice grew serious. “Perhaps, there is another way. I could send you to learn from—**The Ancient One.**”

“Who is he?” I asked curiously.

Peniel explained, “Someone who is very serious, not flighty. I assure you, he will not tolerate any person not completely devout and sincere about learning.”

I thought about this a few minutes. “Where could I find him?”

“Far away.”

“What is he?”

“Sentinel of The Box Of Power. ”

Now this sounds more like it! I thought to myself. “I am happy all this appeals to you.” Peniel chuckled slightly. He continued, “He is a wise man, who has the age of the mountains themselves. It is said he has awesome power and knows all things.”

My eyes lit up. I knew this was it! A strange old guru with great power.

“Do you think he would be willing to teach me?”

Peniel laughed a little, and said, “He really does appeal to you that much?”

“Yes, this is just how I pictured it should be!”

“Very well then. You shall have it as you wish.”

“How do I find him?” I asked excitedly.

“First, you shall have to pass a test of sincerity. You must prove your worthiness to learn under one so great and powerful as The Ancient One himself,” he said chuckling.

“What test?”

“It might be terribly dangerous. Do not attempt it unless you are willing to give your very life for this quest!” Peniel grinned so wide I thought his face would split.

“Look, I gave up my job and everything to find this. This powerful guru sounds perfect to me. I am willing to do whatever it takes. Maybe, he can help me to get the power I seek.”

“Oh, he can do that! He is the most powerful thing you shall ever encounter in this life. As a matter of a fact, **for you**, he’s probably the most powerful thing next to God Himself!” he said, laughing slightly.

I got the feeling this was all some big joke because of the way Peniel had put it.

“If power is what you seek, there may be a great price to pay. Are you sure?”

“Yes, power is the only thing that will satisfy me. I will do whatever it takes.”

He smiled again, and said, “Okay **Ginsberg**, the test is to meet with The Ancient One before the seventh day from now. You have until sundown, Friday, to appear before him. Your test will come somewhere along your journey. I hope he is everything you seek and all you find lacking in me.”

He pulled a slip of paper from his pocket and handed it to me, saying, “**Ginsberg**, here is his address. If you don’t make it within the time given, you’ve failed the test and The Ancient One will not teach you.”

I put the paper in my shirt pocket, feeling like I was deserting this poor, foolish man. “I’m sorry things didn’t turn out differently for us,” I said.

He answered in his Oklahoma drawl. “Well, great horny toads, pardner, don’t let it bother ya none! Shucks, I’ve been snubbed by lots sillier people than you—just rolls off me like water off a duck!”

I laughed a little at his skit.

“Are you sure you’d rather learn from some stuffy old guru on an isolated old mountain in Japan than from a wild and crazy guy like me? You’d have a lot more fun if you’d learn from me!”

“No offense meant, but, yes, I would,” I said.

“Okey-dokey, ya great gallopin’ **Ginsberg**! Get goin’!” He pulled a small, black box from his pocket, held it in his hand, and said with great solemnity, “Remember, many times things are not as they seem!” Then he pressed a small button on top of the box...

I was lying on my cot. I sat up startled, realizing it was morning. “It couldn’t have been a dream! It was too real!” I said to myself.

Quickly, I rose, and ran outside. No Peniel, no family, no camp next to me! I raced over to where the fire had been. No hole, no coals... nothing. I stood there in disbelief, remembering it so clearly, unable to believe I had dreamed it all.

I went back into my tent, put on my clothes. I reached into my shirt pocket.

There it was! I unfolded the small piece of paper and read it: *The Ancient One, Mt. Ki, Japan.*

I was shocked. It was in my own handwriting!

Dream or no dream, I had many things to check out, and if it were true I had little time to do it in.

I packed up hastily and returned to Shawnee. My first stop was the new public library down on Main Street. Now I’d find out if I had dreamed it all up or not.

I checked the World Atlas. Sure enough, there was a Mt. Ki in Japan. It was a low-level mountain in an uninhabited dense jungle.

I checked the big dictionary for the name he had called me: Rab Raw’ah. Nothing.

I looked up the word Ki. Nothing. I remembered it was in Japan, so I got a Japanese-to-English dictionary. Sure enough, it was Japanese for *Invisible Spirit* or *Power*. Well, that fits pretty well, I thought.

I looked up Peniel. It was a Hebrew word meaning, *I have seen God and lived to tell of the experience*. The reason it was listed in the dictionary was that it was also the name of a mountain in the Middle East. There was an Old Testament reference to the word, also.

I got a Bible and looked up the passage. When Jacob wrestled with the angel all night and won, he named the place Peniel because of his encounter with the God-like being.

I had a hunch that if Peniel was Hebrew, maybe Rab Raw'ah was also. I looked in a Hebrew-to-English dictionary. Sure enough. It was Hebrew and it meant, *One seeking power*.

I checked the encyclopedia, and looked up Mt. Ki. It said it was a low-level mountain without distinguishing attributes, except for an ancient Japanese legend that maintained that some powerful, invisible being lived on the mountain, and kept watch on the world.

That was enough for me! I couldn't have just dreamed it all up. Somehow it was true.

The clock was ticking now with only six days left. I called Will Rogers' Airport, and booked the earliest flight connection to Japan, then withdrew all my savings and checked my will and other legal papers. I packed hastily. No time to waste.

My flight left early the next morning. I decided against telling anyone what I was doing.

Imagine, a grown man chasing off to Japan after some old legend on the word of a loony who had vanished into thin air, I thought. They'd think I was nuts!

That evening, I sold my car, turned in notice to let my apartment go, and put all of my stuff in long-term storage.

My flight was uneventful. I lost a day getting there. I only had three days left. For the first time in years I felt exhilarated.

I called a tour service and asked how to get to Mt. Ki as soon as possible. They made arrangements for my necessary bus connections and told me it would require a special guide and pack-carriers—very expensive.

I paid. We left. It took another two days to get through the dense jungle to the base of Mt. Ki.

It was Thursday evening when we arrived. So far so good. The mountain was fairly low and gradual. I can make it easily, from here to the top, I thought.

We sat around the fire after eating our supper. I told the head guide they were to stay at the base camp tomorrow morning, while I went up on the mountain alone. They were to wait two days, and if I hadn't returned, they should leave. I paid the remainder of their fees with a nice bonus.

I decided it was time to find out what I could about the legend. I took the piece of paper out of my pocket, showed it to the head guide and asked if he knew anything about it.

He read it then said something to the carriers in Japanese. They broke out laughing. He looked at me with a big grin and said, "You Americans; this is joke, no?"

"Well, maybe." I answered.

"The Ancient One is just an old wives tale." he went on. "He is not real. He exists only in people's minds."

I thought to myself, Well, that would fit in pretty well with the rest of this bizarre story. It seems like everything else about it is invisible, disappearing, or in my mind only.

I laughed along with them.

During the evening, they sang some old Japanese folk songs, then I got out a couple of bottles of Sake I had brought along, figuring to loosen their tongues a little. We had a fine celebration. One of the lesser guides began telling the legend of The Ancient One. He said it was an old legend handed down for many generations. It went like this:

Once long ago, there was the greatest Samurai who ever lived. His name was Kamato. He was the founder of the Samurai warriors, and father of all the Japanese peoples.

He had a beautiful bride named Yoki. She was his passion and only treasure.

The Gods gave Yoki an appealing gift—a small box that made the possessor as a God in power and knowledge. Being a vain woman, she accepted it and in turn gave it to Kamato. It was a great burden upon Kamato, for he was a wise man and this powerful box brought with it grave responsibility.

The legend says that in his later years, Kamato retired to Mt. Ki, and spent all of his time training his body, mind and spirit so that he might safeguard the power entrusted to his care.

Kamato devised many mental, physical, and spiritual disciplines to perfect himself. He became the Keeper of The Gate as he it was later called. These disciplines became Bushido, Aikido, and the various monastic rules we still maintain today.

It is said that he eventually trained some disciple in the way of Ki, which means power, and at his death bequeathed the care and protection of the box to him.

Thus, each new Guardian passes it on to the next Chosen One. The legend says that each guardian is referred to as The Ancient One because his power has come down from the earliest times.

And so, the legend says, it has always been and will be until the last Ancient One takes his place. When he can find no worthy disciple to take over the power, then, this world shall pass away in a terrible time of trouble caused by the box falling into evil hands.

I thanked the guide for sharing the legend with me. I had found it to be very enlightening.

I wondered if I had the test yet. Everything had been easy up to this point.

I didn't sleep well—too much anticipation. I was up before dawn. I didn't know what lay ahead, but I hoped it was all true, and I would finally meet this Ancient One who might fill that great, burning void within me.

I loaded my pack with everything one person would need, including extra rations.

I started up the mountain. As I ascended I found what appeared to be a trail. It was well hidden, but I knew someone used it regularly.

I followed its winding course up the mountain. Now we would see about this Ancient One with his box.

Suddenly, the path opened out into a large clearing with dense jungle all around. On the upper side, the trail continued on.

As I walked out into the grassy area, a young boy with red hair suddenly appeared. I thought I was hallucinating because he just materialized out of thin air at the other end of the clearing about thirty feet away.

He looked to be about thirteen, but had a muscular build. He wore a checkered shirt and old coveralls. He had strong facial features and big lips. He had something strapped on his waist, but I couldn't make out what it was.

He began laughing. It was a hideous, evil sound.

“Can I help you?” I asked, trembling with fear.

He looked at me, his eyes glowed red, with intense hatred. **“Go back!”** he commanded in a powerful, deep voice.

Its loudness startled me. It was an inhuman voice. What have I pushed myself into now? I thought.

I stood there, looking at the strange boy, then I said, “I must go up on the mountain.”

He smirked evilly as he asked, “Why?” his voice rumbling powerfully.

“My destiny lies there.”

He pounded his chest with his fists and laughed loudly, “Your destiny lies here with me!!”

My ears hurt from the loudness of it. The mountains echoed.

“I have no quarrel with you. Please let me pass.”

“Then I will give you reason to quarrel with me.” Quick as a flash he pulled a gun from behind his back, and shot me!

Falling in pain, I looked at my wound in amazement. Blood gushed from it. Slowly, my eyes raised to see the little monster walking toward me with a machete! Quickly, I began to crawl away, shouting, “You bastard! You shot me!”

“Yes, painful isn’t it,” he said in that hideous voice.

I couldn’t believe this. I thought, What the hell am I doing here? Leave!

Suddenly it dawned on me. This was the test! I yelled, “I know why you are here. You will not prevent me from reaching my destiny!” He roared, “Big talk for such a puny creature! You have no idea of the power I have!” As he said this, he grew to almost ten feet tall! I rubbed my eyes in astonishment.

I decided I would continue up the mountain, no matter what. I began hobbling toward the redheaded demon, my leg throbbing with pain. He held the machete high in the air, threatening me.

“If you try to stop me from getting to the top of this mountain, I will go right through you!” I returned menacingly.

He sneered, “Then come right on!”

I walked up to where he stood. My bluff was working because he made no move to stop me.

Just as I passed him, there was an excruciating pain in my other leg. Again I fell. My leg was deeply slashed by the machete! I crawled quickly to the upper side of the clearing.

Then a familiar voice behind me. I turned and saw my mother tied in a chair. The demonic giant stood behind her.

My poor mother was dressed in that old tan gown she had always worn, her eyes still so blue. A tear rolled down her wrinkled old face. I longed to return and help her, but I had to go on.

The apparition grabbed her long gray hair, yanked it hard, pulling her head back. He put the machete to her throat, and taunted, “If you go out of this clearing I will mix her blood with yours already on my blade. Then I shall violate her dead body in ways you never even dreamed of. When I am through, I shall hang her worthless carcass in your apartment for the police to find.”

I had the feeling he could indeed do this. I lay there in agony, trying to figure a way out.

“Scott, please don’t do this. He will kill me!” she gasped.

The redheaded kid grinned evilly and spit on her.

I looked back at my mother. My head pounded and a large lump came in my throat. “Mom, forgive me, but I must go on. I turned and painfully crawled out of the clearing as a terrible scream mixed with blood-curdling laughter emanated from behind me.

The pain vanished as I crawled out of the clearing. The wounds were gone! I stood up, turned around and looked—no one there. Nothing but a trail through the grass.

Amazed, I wondered how such realistic hallucinations were possible. I continued climbing, shaken by my experience.

I traveled over the final hill and started up a bleak, craggy summit. The wind whistled through the rocks, the sky was deep blue with fluffy, white clouds floating overhead.

Finally, I reached the summit and found an old man sitting on a sheer cliff overlooking the clearing I had just traversed. Slowly, I advanced toward this legendary being.

He was real!

CHAPTER 3

The Box

The Ancient One wore long, white flowing robes, and sat facing away on a flat rock with the wind whipping his sun-bleached hair.

I approached as he slowly turned and looked right through me. His face was old and wrinkled, yet there was a sparkle in his piercing, brown eyes. A shiver went through me as I realized he was the old man from my dream!

“What do you seek?” he said in a low, commanding voice.

I thought carefully, then said, “Power.”

“And what shall you do to acquire it?”

“Whatever is required, even give my very life, if necessary. For my life shall be wasted otherwise.”

He turned fully around and faced me, smiling slightly. Indeed, he looked like he had the wisdom of the ages in those haunting eyes. I noticed the sleeves of his immaculate, white robe were stained a dull red at the wrists. “Sit.” He motioned to a flat rock in front of him.

I sat down and took off my pack. I felt uneasy in his presence, as though naked under his searching gaze.

He picked up his staff and put a hand to his chin as he looked me over. Finally he said, “I see that you have courage and sincerity, yet you lack discipline and understanding.”

“Will you teach me?”

“You shall be taught if you are willing to pay the price,” he said calmly. “Power is of the highest essence. It brings with it the gravest responsibility.”

“I still seek it,” I insisted.

He looked sad. “Be sure! Great is the burden you shall bear!”

“I am sure.”

“As you wish it. I shall now give you your life’s koan. When you solve this koan your training shall be finished and you shall possess what you now seek.”

Mark well my words; this is your life’s koan:

A falcon was raised by pigeons
then caught by a naked child
and sold to a wealthy man
for his son’s pleasure.
The son put the falcon with a wild eagle
to teach it to fly.
The falcon saw a cloud
which resembled a falcon
and flew toward it to mate.
After an exhaustive attempt,
the falcon plummeted back to earth.
The son found it, restored it
and put it back with the eagle
who then taught it to soar on the winds.
Thus, the falcon became an eagle.
The son brought the new eagle
before his father
who was greatly pleased.
They had a great feast
at which they killed and ate the eagle.
Thus, they three were made one.

I sat, concentrating, memorizing the whole thing, word for word.

“Now repeat what I have said.” The Ancient One instructed.

I repeated the strange tale, pleased with myself, and thought The Ancient One would be impressed.

When I finished he simply said, “That is correct.” I waited a few minutes while he appeared to be making up his mind about something. “You shall be instructed in the way of Ki, which is power,” he informed me. He held forth his right hand, palm up, and commanded in a tremendous voice, “**Bring forth—THE BOX.**”

I rubbed my eyes in astonishment as a small, black box slowly materialized in his hand. He held the box out to me in a gesture of offering. Carefully, I reached out and took it from his hand, noticing

that my hands trembled. He smiled. “Now you shall have the power you seek. Learn well, I shall return.” He held out both his arms as his body slowly levitated up in the air.

I was startled. I had never seen such power. He continued smiling as he said, “Remember—many times, things are not as they seem to be.” then slowly faded away. I pinched myself to make sure it wasn’t a dream.

It wasn’t.

I gazed at the small black box in my hand. It was about an inch and a half cube with a small white button on top. I remembered what I had heard in the legend.

I put my finger on the button and felt a strange presence—as if someone had entered my mind. I wondered what the box was for?

Immediately I heard a voice say, “I am here to give you what you seek.”

Amazed, I looked around. No one there. I took my finger off the button, and the presence left. I put my finger back, and the feeling returned.

“Who are you?” I asked.

I heard the voice in my head say, “I am no one.”

I realized it was the box speaking to me, somehow. “This can’t be real!” I said, incredulous.

“Reality would be a difficult concept for you in your present state.”

“Oh, what state am I in?” I asked sarcastically.

“Unenlightened, fearful, without integrity.”

“That’s very rude to say!” I answered.

The box replied, “I have spoken truthfully.”

“Why have you been given to me?”

“To give you power and test you.”

“How shall you teach me?”

“You shall teach yourself.”

“How do you know I seek power?”

“I know all things knowable.”

“What do you mean, you shall give me power?”

“Through me, you may do as you choose. I have all power over that which is corporeal.”

“I don’t believe in the legend,” I said sarcastically, “and I don’t think you have that kind of power.”

“Yet, it is as I have said.”

“That’s hard to believe. What can you do?” I dared.

“I can do anything physical. Tell me what you wish, and I shall demonstrate.”

What the hell, I thought, Let me fly like a bird.

“Very well, press the button. You shall fly for fifteen minutes.”

I pressed the button and heard a click.

Instantly, I was blasted with several sensations. I had been transported to some high place, sitting in a tree overlooking a beautiful valley. There was a sheer cliff directly in front of me which

plunged a thousand feet straight down to the floor of this valley. Long, wispy clouds slipped gently by as I sat on my perch.

I felt odd, and turned my head to look at myself. I was an eagle, with powerful wings instead of arms, and I had huge legs and talons! A cold, crisp breeze blew in my face. I stretched forth my wings to feel it rustle through my feathers.

I was dazzled by the intensity of the sights I beheld. Beautiful meadows spread far below, yet I could see the smallest details. My eyes were clear and sharp.

For the first time in my life, I was completely at ease and one with nature. I was not a man pretending to be an eagle—I was an eagle with the mind of a man!

I jumped off the perch, folded my wings tight against my body and screeched as I plummeted down the sheer cliff. The force of the wind in my face was like a hurricane. I gently undulated the muscles in my abdomen to form a slight resistance to the wind rushing underneath me and instantly moved away from the cliff. The ground raced up toward me as I hurtled through empty air.

I must have been going a hundred miles an hour, but in the smaller body of the eagle it seemed much faster. Just as the earth was reaching her bosom out to me, I flung my wings outward and pulled my abdominal muscles tight. My beautiful form cut gracefully across the face of the earth. The feeling of power was tremendous!

I arched my wings, vaulting high into the sky. My speed rapidly decreasing as I gained altitude. I twisted my body into a slow left-hand turn. I peered upward and saw the rocky cliffs looming above like some Gothic cathedral. I veered sharply off toward them.

About sixty yards before the cliffs, I sensed a thermal updraft. I circled in this warm upwelling from the earth allowing it to carry me effortlessly higher.

I soared above the cliffs, gazing reverently on my domain below and was astounded by how natural I felt, almost forgetting I was a human being.

Suddenly, I saw a twitch on the floor of the canyon a thousand feet below. A rabbit had hopped from under a bush and my sharp vision caught the movement.

Instinctively, almost automatically, my wings tucked in close and I plummeted like an arrow shot from a bow toward my unsuspecting prey. My shoulders whistled slightly as they streaked through the cold air, while my neck stiffened against the ever-increasing blast of wind in my face. My eyes constantly refocused on the rabbit and as they moved, ever so slightly, my tail feathers responded to correct my course.

The speed of my every move astonished me. No thought, no slow decisions, just simple responses.

I was the hunter! I had the power!

As I neared the rabbit, my wings shot fully out from my body like two bolts of lightning. My legs moved forth from under me, and my talons ripped the air like razors. My body reared back just as my dagger-like talons thrust into the warm flesh of the rabbit. A short squeal, then he went limp.

I soared into the sky carrying the prey in my powerful grip of death, beating my tremendous wings as I flew slowly back to my perch. Then, I voraciously devoured half of the rabbit and hung the rest of it on a tree branch for later.

In a flash it was all gone. I was sitting back on the flat rock on Mt. Ki in Japan. The small, unobtrusive box still lay in my hand.

I found my experience baffling. My heart was still racing wildly. I put my finger on the button and asked, “Did I really eat that rabbit? I can still taste it and feel it in my stomach!”

“That is a matter of perception.”

“But was it real?”

“For you, it was. Did you not experience it fully? Was it vague as a dream?”

“No it was more intense and vivid than what I am experiencing right now!”

“That is the way my master willed it,” the box explained.

“Who is your master?”

“The one you call The Ancient One.”

“Is he watching me?”

“Through me, he is aware of all that you experience.”

“Can I contact him through you?”

“You may. Yet he chooses to watch from afar so as not to alter or influence your actions by his presence. In this way, your tests will be more natural and less complicated.”

“Okay, if he wants it this way,” I agreed. “Will you do anything I ask you to do, kinda like the jinni in the bottle?”

“As long as it is within my power.”

“How will I be tested?”

“You will be placed into situations in which you will have to choose how to use my power. Through your choices—you shall learn. Humans learn best from experience and their mistakes. This is how you shall be taught.”

“If I pass the tests and complete my training, how much power will I receive?”

“All you desire. But, you will make that decision, when and if the time comes. Then you shall be enlightened and able to make the choice correctly.”

“You mean like Zen enlightenment?”

“Enlightenment is enlightenment. It doesn’t matter along which path you travel to arrive.”

“Would you help me with my koan?”

“I am able to tell you anything. Perhaps you would derive greater benefit if you solved it yourself.”

“I see, but could you help me a little? I’m lost, and don’t even know where to start,” I pleaded.

“Very well, **YOU** are the falcon. Will that help?”

“Yeah, thanks. I’m anxious to start my training. How do I begin the tests?”

“I shall take you to the place from which you shall start. It is called The Quiet Place, and you may go there whenever you like. Press my button and I will take you there.”

“Okay, take me to The Quiet Place.” I pressed the button.

I sat in a desert on fine, powdery sand, that extended in all directions. I was naked.

A small breeze blew gently. The sky was clear, but it was a strange color—orange! I looked up and saw two suns, one was large and red, the other small and yellow.

Far off, toward the suns, were some low hills. In the other direction were some buildings in the distance.

It was quiet and peaceful. I felt a great calmness inside. I could understand why it was called The Quiet Place. Not a sound to be heard. It was so quiet I heard my own heartbeat.

I just sat, enjoying the peace on the cool sand, and felt the warm sun on my naked skin. It was pleasant to be surrounded by such serenity.

I looked at the small box in my hand, put my finger on the button, and thought, Can I use your power?

“Yes, just think what you wish done, then press the button.”

“Okay, first, I want some clothes.” I said, and pressed the button. Immediately, I was wearing my old blue jeans and favorite sweat shirt.

“How did you know?” I asked.

“I read not only your thoughts, but their intent and meanings, also.”

“Okay, how about some food?” I pressed the button again.

A silver tray appeared in front of me with a Big Mac, large fries and Coke on it. All right! I thought, this is great!

“You may come and go as you wish. You may stay as long as you like.” the box informed me.

I ate the food then relaxed for a while. Finally, I got bored and decided to experiment with the box. “Give me the ability to fly but leave me in my own body—like Superman.” I pressed the button. Nothing happened. “Well?”

“You have the ability. Just will it, and it will happen.”

I put the box in my pocket, extended my arms, and jumped up. Sure enough, I flew up, up and away!

What a rush! It was as good as being an eagle. I veered, turned, and flew in circles for about ten minutes, then decided to do some aerial acrobatics. I did a couple of barrel rolls, and got the bends.

I slowed, carefully settled to the ground, held my dizzy head and threw up.

“Okay, I’ve learned my lesson. Take away the power to fly,” and I pressed the button.

“Done,” the box informed me.

I stayed on the ground and walked the sickness off. I saw some old buildings a short distance away and set off in that direction.

There were two dilapidated structures and several cars. A human skeleton lay on the steps of a large mansion-like building. Everything was bleached from the sun, and covered with a thin layer of fine, powdery dust. “What happened here?”

“I could show it to you if you wish.”

“Yeah, show me.”

“Very well, but remember, you shall view it as a movie only—you will not be able to interact or alter anything. It is cemented in the past, therefore unchangeable.”

“Okay, I understand. Show me what happened.” I pressed the button.

Everything vanished. It was the same place, but the buildings and cars were gone. “What’s the deal?”

“This is just before it happened. Just wait.”

I waited, and a minute or so later a young man, stark naked, appeared in front of me. He had jet black hair and a thin build. He looked to be about twenty or so.

I said hello but he couldn't see or hear me. Then I remembered this was like a movie.

I noticed he had a box just like mine. I watched him as he used the box to get some very expensive leather clothes. Then he got a pizza and some beer. He ate, then used the box to get a fully-dressed Harley. He jumped on it, rode off like a bat out of hell, went out about a mile, then turned around. He came racing back toward where I stood.

When the bike got up to about a hundred miles an hour, it began hydroplaning in the powdery sand. He lost control and crashed just as he passed me.

Apparently, his leg was hurt because he screamed and grabbed it. The box had flown out of his pocket when he crashed.

He crawled over to it, picked it up and used it to fix his leg. Finally, he rose, walked over to the Harley, mumbled something, then kicked it. He produced a case of dynamite with the box, and put it under the bike. He lit a long fuse, then used the box to teleport himself a safe distance away.

BOOM! The Harley flew about two-hundred feet in the air. Motorcycle pieces shot off in all directions. The young man laughed wildly, and applauded. I thought, How childish.

He walked back to where I stood, and used the box to get a mansion. It was the building I had seen. Then, he got a Porsche 944, a Lotus, a Corvette, a Camaro Z-28, and a Trans-Am. He was like a spoiled kid in a candy store.

He jumped in the Porsche, went racing off in the distance, did a couple of donuts, then came screaming back toward the house. He stopped and switched cars.

This continued until he had played with all his toys. How quickly he tired of them. Then, he sat down on the steps of his mansion and got some cocaine with the box. He snorted a couple of lines and danced around.

“Who is this?” I asked my box.

“His name is Jeff Adams. He was in the Air Force and met the one you call The Ancient One. He was here many years ago.”

Jeff went in the house and came back out a minute later with a glass of Johnny Walker Red and Coke. He sat down on the steps and looked bored.

He pressed the button on the box and a young girl appeared in front of him. She was very attractive with long, honey-blond hair that curled at the shoulders, and large breasts. She was wearing a petite white skirt and beige top.

She looked up surprised and cried, “Where am I? Where are my parents?”

“Git them clothes off, baby,” Jeff commanded, “I'm gonna give you a hot-beef-injection!” He laughed, a slight slur in his voice.

She looked dazed. Suddenly, she got up and started to run.

“Freeze!” he shouted angrily, then pressed the button.

She froze in her tracks and fell over. He walked toward her with an evil grin on his face. “Baby, you're gonna like this,” he laughed.

He started ripping her clothes off. When she was naked he forced her legs open and raped her. When he finished, he spat on her.

He then used the box to release her. She sat up and tried to put her ripped clothes back on to cover her naked body. She looked over at him, and screamed, “You bastard!”

Shame welled up within me, I wanted so much to be able to help her.

He just laughed and said, “Watch it, or I’ll do worse to you.”

She rose, ran over and began violently beating him. He socked her a good one and she fell to the sand sobbing.

He used the box and got a long butcher knife, waved it at her and threatened, “Do that again and I’ll cut your heart out and feed it to my dog! I’ll have need of your body later.” Then he walked over and stuck the knife into the steps.

He walked into the house. I heard loud rock music.

The weeping girl walked over to the knife, tore it out of the step and placed it against her chest.

I screamed, “No!” but my plea was unheard. She plunged it deep in her chest and fell on the steps in a pool of blood.

I felt weak, and sat down with a thud.

Jeff came out of the house, and saw her lifeless body laying there. He walked over and kicked it, saying viciously, “You weren’t any good, anyway. If I want to, I’ll git another one just like you!” Then he laughed, pressed the button and disappeared.

As soon as he was gone, the box said, “That’s it. Do you want to go back to your own time?”

“Yes, take me back.” I pressed the button.

I was back where I started. Everything was bleached and dust covered again. “Who was she?”

“An eighteen-year-old, blonde virgin with big yaboos— just as he requested.”

I couldn’t believe he had done that. I thought about the power of the box and how abused it could be. The thought scared me. “Where did she come from?”

“I brought her here from earth.”

“What about her family?”

“As far as they knew, she just disappeared in front of their eyes. One minute she was there eating supper and the next instant her fork dropped out of thin air to her plate. She was gone. No one would believe her parents story. Everyone thought they were trying to cover up the fact that she had run away.” I sat there stunned, thinking that Jeff didn’t care about what he did to anyone. He seemed very immature.

I picked up some of the dust, asking, “What is this?”

“The remains of things people like you and Jeff have brought here and left. Over the centuries they have all turned to dust. It covers the entire planet to a depth of several feet. You could say it is the remains of unwanted dreams and broken hopes.”

“You mean like the house and cars?”

“Yes, they will eventually become dust. There is nothing lasting on this planet, except the oasis.”

“What is the oasis?”

“A small area where a garden has been planted. It has many animals and supports a variety of plant life.”

“Take me there.”

“You must remember to press the button if you want something done.”

“Oh yeah,” I said, and did as it asked.

Now I was standing in a beautiful garden with a pool beside it. There were all sorts of trees and plants around me. I was shocked when a lion walked from a clump of bushes and stared at me. My heart raced. I remained motionless. The animal casually strolled up and began rubbing against my leg like a big kitten. She licked my hand with her huge, rough tongue. I reached in my pocket and put my finger on the button. “Am I in any danger?”

“No, she’s as gentle as a lamb.”

A group of animals gathered around me in a circle.

There was a falcon, monkeys, a giant tortoise, impala, lions, a couple of wolves, some rabbits, and geese. It seemed like a dream. The calm and placid animals gazed at me.

“Where did they all come from?”

“Earth.”

“Who brought them here?”

“The Ancient One.”

“Why?”

“For his pleasure and their protection. Some of them are endangered. The Ancient One has great respect for **all** life.”

“They are all so tame! It’s just like the Garden of Eden!” I exclaimed.

A voice from behind me said, “Not quite.”

I turned. It was The Ancient One, naked as a jay-bird, smiling at me.

“This is an amazing place you have created here!” I said.

“I did not create it.” he answered casually, “I merely planted it. Then I brought the animals. It has been here for many years.”

“Don’t they fight or kill each other?”

“No, they have all become vegetarians. There is plenty of food and they have no need for aggression.”

He sat down on the lush grass and motioned for me to do the same. He waved his hand for something. A growling young lion cub came tumbling through a bush, and walked up to him, purring. He began to stroke its fur.

I watched him play with the cub, like a boy with a kitten. “Do they die?” I asked, curious.

“Of old age and natural causes. There is no disease here. When they die, the others bury them; it is as it should be.”

He looked up at me and continued, “Feel free to come here as you wish. It is a very relaxing environment and will give you repose from the cares and worries you may have to endure.”

I thanked him as he rose and petted an impala. "I must go now," he said finally. "I shall be watching you." He turned and walked toward a large boulder and vanished through it. I got up, went over, and examined the boulder. It was solid. I wondered how he could accomplish such things.

I asked the box, "Can I begin the tests now?"

"Yes. The first one is called The Blind Man. If you wish to stop time in a test you may come here. You may wish to do this to give you time to think or sort things out."

"Okay, I'm ready now. Take me to The Blind Man test."

CHAPTER 4

The Blind Man

I was standing on a street corner in downtown Shawnee, Oklahoma, my own hometown. I recognized the spot. It was on Main Street next to The Federal National Bank. There was an old blind man sitting in a chair. He had a cup with pencils in it and a sign around his neck that read: "*Pencils, 25 cents.*"

I looked around to see what was going on. There were two people standing at the corner. One was an old woman with a ragged, purple shawl. Her back was bowed with age and her face was scowling. Her arms were full of groceries and she was complaining to a man in a business suit. He appeared to be in his mid-thirties, with dark hair, tall and good looking. Both waited at a bus stop. I listened to their conversation for a minute.

The elderly lady nagged, "You know that damned bus driver is never on time! Just look at what the sign says. What does it say?"

The man looked as if he wished he were somewhere else. "It says nine-forty."

The old woman nagged on, "That's right—nine-forty. My poor little babies are probably starving to death. It's almost ten now! He's always late. I've got a good mind to give him a piece of my mind. I could get him fired, if I wanted to. I could say plenty! It's a good thing I'm a Christian woman and don't tell him what I really think."

The man in the suit became more agitated at her harping. A disgusted look came over his face. He turned and walked in front of where I stood, then walked up to the corner in order to cross the street. He looked around and saw the blind man sitting there.

Suddenly, his face changed to a surprised expression. He quickly approached the blind man and took out his billfold. He whispered something in the old man's ear, then stuffed a hundred-dollar bill in the can among the pencils. It protruded noticeably.

I glanced down the street, and saw a couple of thugish looking hoodlums looking this way. They perked up when they saw the hundred-dollar bill. They started whispering.

There was a policeman standing on the other side of the street, talking with someone. He hadn't seen what had just taken place.

The bus arrived. The old woman got on it complaining to the driver about the price of groceries.

The light changed. The man in the suit grasped the old man's hands then hurried across the street. People walked busily past.

I guessed that the hoodlums were thinking up some trouble. They split up, and one of them went across the street about fifty feet up from the cop. The other walked toward the blind man.

I had my hand in my pocket on the box's button. Box, what is in his mind? I thought.

The thoughts came to me that one of them planned to snatch the bill and run. His friend would distract the cop if necessary. They would meet later and buy dope with the money.

The first thug was twenty feet away and coming fast. I figured I had better do something and quick.

I stepped over to the blind man and said, "Excuse me, did you know that the man who just spoke to you put some money in your cup?" I glanced up the street. The thug was looking in the window of a store. I figured he was waiting for a better opportunity.

"Excuse me?" the blind man said, "What do you mean?"

I explained to him, "The man who just spoke to you—he put a hundred-dollar bill in your cup. You'd better put it away before someone sees it and tries to steal it."

The old man got a sad look on his face, and said, "Don't you know it's not nice to tease? Why don't you go play games with someone else." Then added angrily, "I've had it with people harassing me. Where's Jim?" Then he hollered, "Jim!"

I turned, and saw the policeman looking toward us. He started across the street.

Great, just what I need! I thought to myself. The hoodlums were walking slowly away.

A second later, the policeman, who had a strong Irish accent and a fat stomach, approached us, and said, "N what do we have here?"

I explained to the officer what had happened. He said, "Me mother be praised! Joe, he's telling you the truth. There is a hundred-dollar bill in your cup."

The officer looked at me. "Thank you for helping Ol' Joe like that. He's an old friend, and even speaks a bit o' Blarney, don't ya know. You should be given a medal or something."

"I just did what I thought was right," I said.

"Joe put that money away," the policeman ordered.

The blind man felt around in his cup, took out the bill and put it in his pocket. Then he said, "I'm very sorry, sir, but I thought you were like the others, always teasing me."

I said, "Don't think twice about it. I'm happy to help."

The policeman smiled at me then shook my hand, saying he had to get back to his duties. He turned, and walked down the street.

I noticed the hoodlums still looking this way, put my finger on the button, and thought, What's in their minds now?

Their thoughts came to me. "I'll wait until that old fart tries to go home. Then we'll jump him and get the bread."

I turned to the blind man. "Perhaps I should walk home with you."

He reached out to me, took my arm in his hand and said, "If you would be willing to help me, I have a better idea."

"What?"

"Would you go to the store with me? I have a friend there and she'll keep the money for me. It would sure help if you would go with me. This way, there won't be anything to steal."

"That's a good idea. Sure, I'll help you."

A huge grin came over his face and he said, "Man, I can buy enough groceries for a month. This is a really good break. I sure can use the money!"

I felt sorry for him, and remembered seeing similar street-people when I was a boy.

I walked him down the street to the grocery store, where he spoke to one of the checkout girls, then handed her the money.

He came back over to me. We walked around the store, picking out groceries. He looked excited. The cart's wheel squeaked as I pushed it along.

I decided to just go with whatever happened and wondered what might come up next. I was considering giving this old man some of my own money. I thought it might make the test results look better for me.

I looked down at the stuff in the cart. He had me pick out four loaves of week-old bread, a large bag of beans, a couple of Twinkies, a big jar of instant tea, and twenty cans of Alpo. We walked along and picked out a large bag of potatoes and a quart of buttermilk. I thought his seeing-eye dog must have been at his house, since he was buying so much Alpo.

I felt a knot in my throat as I realized what a good life I had compared to this man who had almost nothing.

We went through the checkout line where his friend was. She loaded three bags of groceries and the sack of potatoes. I offered to help carry them.

The girl smiled at me, then lipped silently, "Thanks."

I felt good about the test. This isn't so tough. I thought.

We walked up Philadelphia street to an old abandoned apartment building, near Horace Mann High School. He went around the back and up the fire escape. He said, "Please forgive my place; it's not much but it's all I need."

I assured him I understood.

He remarked jokingly, "Oh well, an old blind man doesn't need electricity. I cain't see anything anyway."

We entered an old run down apartment. There were bugs everywhere. It was damp and the wind blew in a half boarded- up window. A wind-up record player was the only thing in the apartment not covered with dust. It looked like a place right out of some movie, I found it difficult to keep my composure, seeing how this poor wretch lived. I could sense that he was bothered by my being here.

I tried to ease his tension. "Where's your dog?" I asked, looking around.

Suddenly, his face turned red and a look of terrible embarrassment overcame him. He didn't answer.

I couldn't figure out what was wrong. I went in and started putting away the groceries. He said thanks for my help and asked if I'd like some tea.

I said, "Why not?"

I noticed a spoon in a half-eaten can of Alpo on the counter.

Suddenly, it dawned on me that he was eating the dog food!

My mind became a little fuzzy, but one look at the cabinets confirmed it: three cans of dog food, three slices of moldy bread and a jar of instant tea.

I thought to myself, my God, I never thought people really lived like this. I had heard about it before, but didn't think it happened right here in my own hometown!

And like a moron I asked him where his dog was. I thought about saying something to make up for it, but decided it was best to say nothing. I'd just put my foot in my mouth again.

I figured he needed some decent food, though. That was probably what this test was about. I finished putting the groceries away, then said, "Joe, would you let me take you out to dinner?"

"Look, I thank you for all you've done," he replied crossly.

I thought, That's some thanks for my offering to help. He opened the front door, and said, "Perhaps it's best if you just leave. Thanks for what you've done for me, but I won't accept pity. I do quite well on my own."

Well, I've put my foot in it again. I thought, then said to him, "Look, I'm sorry if I've offended you. I just thought you might like to go out to dinner with me."

"Damn you, you're not bull-shitting me," he snapped, "You just want to ease your own conscience. You think dog food isn't good enough for me. I don't need this sympathetic crap! Go and play social-worker with someone else. I won't take your pity."

He stormed out of the door. I heard him stomp down the hall, then down the fire escape. I felt stupid for having made such blundering comments.

Yes, he's right, I thought to myself. It's just pity.

I waited a few minutes, hoping he would come back. Ten minutes passed, and I realized he wasn't coming back.

I began to think intently about this strange test. It brought out things in me that I hadn't considered before. Very strange.

I left the apartment and went down the fire escape. There he lay at the bottom step, dead. He had been stabbed with a knife, his broken cane lay beside him. His clothes had been ransacked. My mind reeled and I became slightly nauseous.

I stared blankly at his lifeless body, disbelieving my own eyes. This was my fault, I thought, becoming furious.

I grabbed the box. "Take me out!"

I was back on Mt. Ki. I burst into tears and cried long and hard. To think I could have prevented that terrible tragedy, but I let it happen. Stupid! It was such a senseless waste of human life.

I spent the whole day going over my test. I couldn't help remembering that somewhere out there, far across the oceans, a poor old blind man lay dead. And what really hurt me was the fact that I knew the thugs were up to no good. I hadn't realized they would kill him.

A terrifying thought came to me. Maybe the reason they had killed him was because he was angry at me and had snapped at them.

I grabbed the box. "Is it true?"

"Yes. He was so mad when they jumped him, he began beating them with his cane. He was angry at you, and that's what caused him to lose his life."

My weeping began again. I prayed, "God forgive me for what I've done."

Finally, hours later, I put it behind me, wondering what the Ancient One would say when he returned. I had surely made one big blunder of this one.

I ate some of my rations, went to sleep, and had terrible, haunting dreams about the blind man.

I awoke late in the morning, my heart was still heavy. The Ancient One was sitting on his rock, gazing away from me, surveying the beautiful mountains to the east, toward the risen sun.

I rose, walked over to him and sat on a smaller flat rock. I gazed off toward the mountains also. He moved a little, then put his hand on his chin as if in deep thought. I noticed a bandage with a small round bloodstain under his robe's sleeves, on his wrist. I felt deep shame. I thought, He has such power, yet, he is calm and peaceful, I sat musing. I wonder where his power comes from?

Without turning, he said, "All power has the same origin, flowing from within the spirit, out through the instrument of the body and directed by the will."

He can read my mind! I thought.

He still stared off toward the east, stating, "To know the thoughts of others is of little consequence. To know ones own true thoughts is a greater achievement. Do you still seek power?"

"Master, I have failed you terribly!" I sobbed. "I have abused the power you entrusted to me and a man has died because of my stupidity."

Master turned his snow-white head toward me, and with a comforting look on his ancient, wrinkled face, consoled, "I have seen all. There is an old proverb that says, 'Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' What are your thoughts on this?"

"Perhaps it is true in many cases. But I do not believe it must be so," I answered thoughtfully.

"Why?"

"You have great power, yet, I see no sign of it having corrupted you."

"You have spoken truthfully. It does not have to corrupt. It requires great integrity to withstand the temptations which come from such power. Do you understand this?"

"Yes, now. I am sorry I have failed you and killed a man."

"You have not failed me—you have disappointed yourself. The blind man was killed by others, not you."

"Perhaps, but I feel responsible. If I had done things differently, he would be alive today."

"Tell me what you have learned in this test."

"I learned some things seem right and good, but end in evil."

"What else have you learned?"

“I should be more careful to think and understand things before I speak.”

“Yes, unguarded words often wound deeply. What else?”

“I had fairly keen insight into some things. The woman was probably lonely and her nagging was a way of getting attention.”

“You have spoken rightly. This is a good insight you have discovered. I am pleased.”

“But how? I don’t usually have such insight. Things aren’t clear to me in my normal daily life.”

“Because, in the test—you had a purpose. When you are doing something in which you are interested and concerned, you pay attention to the seemingly insignificant details which becomes insight.”

“You mean, I’m not interested in my daily life?”

“What purpose—your life?”

I remembered the dream. An intense feeling of that “presence” overcame me. My face flushed.

“That was the reason I came looking for you,” I stammered, “to find some meaning for my life. You’re right; I didn’t pay much attention in my old life.”

“You have found a truth about modern human life. Many people spend the majority of their time in a state of **non-experience**. They have tuned life out because it seems intolerable and empty when they see it clearly.”

“Wow! That’s just how it is!” I said, astounded by the simplicity and truth of his teaching.

“Spend the day in thought on what you have learned. Remember your lessons and do not let what has happened haunt you. Accept all things as they are and cultivate what good you may. Later, we shall speak further.”

“Can I continue the tests, even though I have failed so miserably?”

“You may continue, and you have done well! The purpose is to assist in learning the truth you do not yet understand, and to unlearn the false beliefs which hinder your life’s progression. You have done some of both.”

“But there were terrible consequences from my mistakes!”

“And such is life. Yet, we cannot resign ourselves from it, lest there would be no reason to go on living. Do not give up on the path because you have fallen. Get back up and walk all the more carefully.”

“Thank you, Master. I shall do as you say.”

He sat motionless, staring intently toward the mountains. I looked hard to see what he was looking at.

“What do you see?” I asked, curiously.

“What you have missed,” he answered solemnly.

I looked harder—nothing. I felt uneasy because of what he said.

“Go to The Quiet Place,” he instructed, “and spend some time in reflection. If you have done wrong, you are forgiven.”

Oh how much those words consoled me. He couldn’t have said anything more comforting. I was relieved as I went to The Quiet Place and spent time thinking over all that had happened.

I returned to Mt. Ki that evening.

“Would you like a fire?” The Ancient One asked.

“Yes, that would be wonderful.”

“You are hungry—eat.” He waved his hand. A fire appeared, with a rabbit roasting over it. I suppose he knew how I loved rabbit. There was also a large silver tray of various fruits and vegetables. On the side, was a golden decanter of wine.

I looked at him and he smiled back at me. “Would you prefer a cheeseburger?” he asked, chiding me a little.

I smiled and said, “No thanks, I love rabbit.”

“You say grace.” he said seriously.

My heart raced. Oh no! I thought. He’s probably Buddhist and won’t approve of my Catholic grace.

He put a reassuring hand on my shoulder, saying, “Do not be so troubled. Any grace, said in earnest is acceptable.”

I said my normal grace as carefully as possible. When I had finished he made the *Sign-Of-The-Cross* with me. “Aren’t you Buddhist?” I asked politely.

“Why? Did I make the *Sign-Of-The-Cross* wrong?”

“No.”

“Does it displease you?”

“No.”

“Good, then eat.”

As we ate, I paid close attention to him. He would pick up a bite of food, smell it, look at it a second, then put it in his mouth and chew it carefully. He appeared to be savoring each morsel of food as if this were his last meal, and he wanted to get the most out of it.

I started mimicking the way he was eating. He saw me doing this, smiled, and said, “You do not have to alter yourself to please me. I accept and appreciate you just as you are.” Then he comically mimicked the way I was eating.

I laughed a little at my foolishness and went back to eating the way I normally do. He was so wise, yet made me feel totally at ease around him.

“Understand,” he began, “here on the mountain, I use my power freely. This is not to impress you, but will serve as an example. One day you may have such power of your own and you shall remember all I have taught you.”

“You mean you don’t use your power when you are away?”

He smiled. “When I am among the unenlightened I veil myself. I do not allow them to see my power.”

I was puzzled. “Why not?” I asked.

“It is not good to take beautiful pearls and cast them to the swine to be trampled in the mud. I would not abuse my station in such a manner.”

When we had finished eating, he made everything disappear.

“Master, why do you eat so carefully?” I inquired, curious.

“Rather—why do **you** eat so carelessly?” he returned with a polite smile.

I thought about that for a minute. He was right; I did eat carelessly. I decided to start eating more carefully.

“I enjoy my food as fully as I can,” he informed me. “There is such pleasure and beauty in all things for him who takes the time to receive them. Food, like life, cannot be fully enjoyed, unless it is fully experienced.”

“I see what you mean,” I agreed. “It is like my being more attentive to life in the test.”

“Yes, it is the same.”

“Master, how may I best use my time with you?”

“Learn from my example how to return to your lost, childlike qualities. Learn to enjoy life, and see clearly—**what is.**”

He took my hands in his, and gave me a look of intensity to preface the coming lesson. “Rab Raw’ah—**life is for enjoying!**” he said earnestly.

“Yes, I understand. I shall enjoy it more, I promise.”

I got into my sleeping bag and he lay on his flat rock. The fire blazed sending dazzling silver and gold sparks into the air. I turned my attention to the brilliant stars in the clear, mountain sky—they were startling to behold.

I began to see what he meant by fully experiencing things. I remembered gazing at the night sky for hours when I was a child. I forgot about my test.

I woke up a couple of times in the night and saw The Ancient One kneeling on his flat rock, absorbed in prayer. A blazing light emanated from him! When I woke up in the morning, the Ancient One was gone again. I wondered if I had only dreamed about him.

I felt alive and exhilarated, anxious for a new day. I said some special prayers of thanks for this new day and asked God to help me to appreciate and enjoy all of it.

“What is the name of the next test?” I asked the box.

“*The Plane.*”

“Very well. Take me there,” I said.

I was sitting on an airplane, a 727. It was about three in the morning. The lights were dimmed and most of the people were asleep. There were only about a hundred on board. I was dressed in my traveling suit, my briefcase on an empty chair next to me. I opened it and looked at my ticket. It read, “New York to London.” I reached into my pocket. I put my finger on the button. “Where are we?”

“Thirty-thousand feet up, over the middle of the Atlantic.”

I decided I would concentrate on learning, instead of trying so hard to do well.

A little boy came up to me with melted Hershey’s bar all over his hand. He put it on my coat sleeve and said, “Hi, how you doin’? I’m Jeffrey. I’m four years old,” and he held up three fingers. I thought, Well, that’s about par for the course. I guess my patience is being tried now.

His mother saw what he had done and hollered, “Jeffrey, you git your butt over here and sit in this seat!”

Suddenly, a low rumbling went through the plane. I felt uneasy, and heard several people begin to mumble among themselves.

I put my hand in my pocket and put my finger on the button. It was uncomfortable, so I decided to switch the box into my coat pocket. I looked around to make sure no one was watching. All clear. I pulled the box out of my pants pocket. At that moment there was a loud bang and the plane pitched violently downward.

Things happened fast, yet the entire episode seemed to be in slow motion.

The box flew out of my hand and hit the ceiling. The plane suddenly slowed and the box rolled along the top of the ceiling toward the front of the plane. I panicked and thought, Oh no, if I lose that box, I won't be able to get out of here.

People began screaming. Two women flew through the air past my seat. They had terrified looks on their faces. I could only watch the scene in disbelief. They hit the front of the cabin—blood splattered. I felt sick.

I saw where the box hit and thought, I've got to get to it! The plane continued to veer and dive.

Jeffrey flew past me, and hit the two women who had already impacted on the front wall of the cabin. I heard him screaming for his mother with pain and fear in his voice.

The loud speaker came on and the captain yelled for everyone to prepare to crash and something about life vests.

The plane regained some stability. I quickly unbuckled my seatbelt. Everywhere, people cried and screamed. There was general Pandemonium.

I rose and held on to seat backs as I made my way forward.

“Bang!” another explosion. The plane veered sharply to the left. I was thrown against the right wall. I felt a stabbing pain and I looked down. I saw blood oozing from my forearm. I looked back up and saw my box hit the magazine rack at the front of the cabin.

Someone slammed into me as the plane banked sharply again. The pain in my arm increased. Bodies flew all around. A lady in the seat near me had a deep gash in her arm with a piece of metal sticking out of it. Her eyes were open wide and a look of terror was on her face. I grabbed the metal and yanked it out of her arm. She passed out.

I was dazed, but knew I had to get that box. I had crawled about thirty seconds when the plane started pulling back toward level. The loud speaker came on and the captain shouted something about hitting in a few seconds. I quickly pulled myself into a seat and put on the seatbelt. My heart racing and my head pounding.

An old man on my left screamed and grabbed my shoulder. I watched as his face turned pale and his eyes glazed over. My ears seemed to explode as the plane suddenly went through decompression.

SLAM! We hit the water. There was a loud roaring noise. Everything was quiet except for the low sobbing and moans of people.

Lights went on full-bright. I eased out of the seat and crawled over the one in front of me. The box was wedged between the magazines in the rack.

I scrambled for it. Someone at the rear of the plane pulled the emergency door handle and a cold blast of air hit me.

I turned and looked back. My eyes widened at the scene I beheld. Two young girls were crushed under a large counter that had broken loose and flown down the aisle. An elderly lady was leaning over a seat-back, a stream of blood pouring out of her head. The air was heavy and an eerie feeling hung over the scene. It was too much for me to stand!

I grabbed the box and shouted, “Take me to The Quiet Place!”

I sat naked on fine powdery dust. It was night. The sky was pitch black—no stars or light.

I rested a minute, in shock over what had just happened. I felt the box in my hand. “Make some light.” I commanded, my voice cracking from the intense emotion I felt.

A Coleman lantern appeared next to me. I looked at my arm. It was badly bruised and bleeding, but not broken.

“What happened?” I asked.

“The engine exploded. When it blew up, it severed the lines to the pilot’s wing controls.”

“How many people are dead?”

“There were one-hundred and thirty on the plane: nineteen are now dead, nine badly injured, and twenty four have minor injuries—including yourself.”

“Damn! I could have prevented all this!” I said ruefully.

“I thought you were going to concentrate on learning, not doing well.” the box commented.

“Okay, I can’t do anything about what has already happened. How long before the plane sinks?”

“About two minutes.”

“Can everyone make it out?”

“Everyone, except two people.”

“Who?”

“A woman, at the front of the cabin, with a broken leg, and her son, who is unconscious in his seat beside her.”

“Will anyone else help them?”

“It is impossible to predict human behavior.”

“Could I get to them and help them out of the plane in time?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, I want everyone alive to make it out of the plane even if you have to force them out. Do you understand?”

“I could have the water form a wave and wash any reluctant ones out. How would that be?”

“Fine.” I delayed for about twenty minutes, regaining my composure, then said, “Take me back to the plane.”

CHAPTER 5

The Liferaft

People were scrambling all over the place, and I heard the sound of a life raft being inflated. I quickly stuffed the box in my pants pocket and tried to reach the lady and her son. Everyone else had cleared out of the front of the plane, and water was rushing in.

“Please help us,” the lady begged. I saw that her leg was bleeding profusely, part of a broken bone stuck out of the flesh. I grabbed the unconscious boy and helped the lady up on her good leg.

The plane pitched down in the rear, which helped us to reach the exit. We got into a life raft and I noticed some people being washed out of the plane on a large wave. There was a lot of confusion and screaming going on. Someone pushed hard against the plane and our raft drifted slowly away from it.

The 727 pitched up and slid under the water, leaving an eerie silence broken only by the gurgling bubbles from the submerged aircraft.

I heard someone say sarcastically, “There goes my best luggage.” I didn’t find his joke the least bit funny. Someone else said to him, “Shut up, you ass! Don’t you realize people have died.”

We saw the light of a lantern nearby. Another raft paddled up beside ours. The captain was in it. He had someone tie the rafts together.

There were several people in the water. One lady, about sixty was hanging on to the side of our raft. I noticed she had blue hair. A boy helped her in and some fat slob across from me said, “Don’t let her in, it’s too crowded already! We’ll sink!”

The feisty old lady replied, “Look fatso, if you’d get your big ass out, we’d have room for about ten more people!”

Others swam up, clutching at the raft.

The aircraft pilot, Captain Tim Spence, was tall. He had brown hair and strong masculine features. He took charge of the situation ordering those people in the rafts to give their life jackets to those in the water. He did an accounting for passengers and checked the emergency supplies.

There were about forty people in each of the two overloaded life rafts, designed for about twenty-five each, and another twenty or more in the water hanging onto the sides.

The captain asked who was hurt and if there was a doctor with us. Several were injured, and we did have a doctor. He began to examine the people with the most serious injuries.

"Everyone try to be as calm as you can," the captain instructed. "A radio message was sent. There should be help on the way soon."

After her leg had been treated, the lady began telling everyone how I had saved her and her child. I noticed that she had severe arthritis, her hands were severely twisted. I tried to quiet her, but everyone kept congratulating me, making me feel very uncomfortable.

I heard a commotion as someone hanging onto the other life raft began shouting and trying to crawl in it. The captain shouted at him to stop. He continued, and knocked two people out of the raft, which quickly began to fill up with water. Quick as a flash, Captain Spence pulled a gun out of his pocket and shot the man right through the head. He fell back and the water turned red. There were several screams from the people in the water. I looked down and saw a young man gazing up at me in horror. Then he was gone, ripped away from the raft with a violent jerk. A second later his upper body floated to the surface. He had been bitten in two. I turned to the young girl sitting beside me. We just stared blankly at each other. Her eyes widened, then she screamed, "Sharks!"

I sat there bewildered, looking at the floating body. I regained my senses, grabbed the box and thought, Take me to The Quiet Place, quick!

The lantern was still here. I looked at it.

It took me a few minutes to get over that look of horror I had seen on the young girl's face. I began sobbing. It happened fast, and my mind froze in terror. It was like some horrible nightmare.

"I've got to go back and do something to save these people. I have the power."

I said to the box, "I want several things to happen as soon as I get back in to the test. Can you do that?"

"Yes, just give me a list of things to do. When you get back in, press the button once and all the preplanned events will occur. What do you wish done?"

"First, I want the immediate danger neutralized."

"Okay, how?"

"Get rid of all the sharks within a mile of us."

"Do you want the fish to have heart attacks, be dematerialized, turned into goldfish, or what?"

"Hey, that's an interesting idea. Turn them into harmless goldfish."

"Normal-sized, or shark sized?"

"Normal-sized."

"Okay, what else?"

"I don't want any other sharks to come near us?"

"How close?"

“Make an invisible barrier that repels sharks at a distance of a hundred feet from the life rafts.”

“Do you want this barrier stationary, or to move with the rafts?”

“Have it move with the rafts.”

“Okay, anything else?”

“Yes. I want another raft, so the people in the water can get in it. I want it to be just like the ones we already have, and I want to discover that I’m sitting on it so no one will think anything strange.”

“Okay, anything else?”

“No. That will do for now.”

“When you get back in the test, just press the button and it will all happen simultaneously.”

“Okay, I’m ready. Take me back in,” I said, as I pressed the button.

I was sitting back in the raft, and pressed the button again. I felt a change beneath me. A goldfish swam by.

“Hey, look what I found!” I exclaimed, as I pulled out the raft.

The captain took it, and inflated it. Then the people in the water carefully climbed into it while others watched for sharks. None came. The new life raft was tied to the others.

People began to calm down some, there was less crying and moaning. A few people had those weird blank stares on their faces. I guessed they were in shock or maybe they couldn’t believe what was happening either.

We drifted along without incident for about ten more minutes. Then, there was a commotion in the other raft. I tried to see what was going on. Someone passed along the information that we were being rescued. A diver was in the water, talking to Captain Spence. I put my finger on the button, and asked, “What’s going on?”

“A diver is talking to the captain.”

“I know that! Where did he come from?”

“A ship nearby.”

“Excellent, will they pick us up?”

“They are being notified now.”

I saw the captain pull out a flare gun and shoot it into the air. The flare burst into a great ball of fire, then slowly fell back to the ocean. A few moments later, we heard three blasts on a ship’s horn. Everyone began to cheer. I looked around again. No blank stares this time, everyone was smiling and laughing.

The diver left and a few minutes later several others surfaced next to the rafts. One came up near me and took off his mask. “Don’t worry,” he said, “our ship is on the way. It’ll be here in a few minutes.”

I was relieved at being rescued, but had the strange feeling that it wasn’t over yet. I decided to bide my time and see what happened.

A ship rescued us. There was a doctor on board, and he treated the injured passengers. We headed for New York Harbor. I wondered how long I should stay in the test.

There was much talk during the three days it took to get to New York Harbor. I kept to myself, avoiding the talk. I wanted to be as inconspicuous as possible.

When we arrived, there were several reporters waiting. The lady told the story of my saving her and Jeffrey. Other passengers told their own stories. I received several offers to go on TV, but declined. Some news-hounds tried to dig information out of me, but I played it down, saying only that I was returning to Shawnee, Oklahoma.

I flew back home the next day and found a hotel room. Not an hour later, the phone calls began. I had made the headlines of several major newspapers. Everyone wanted to congratulate me or get a story. I declined all of it.

Two days later, I received a strange phone call from a man named Phil Smith. He said he was with the LISP foundation (League for the Investigation of Strange Phenomenon.)

I asked how I could help and he said he would like to ask me some questions, if it was all right. I thought this was somehow connected to the test. He said he would fly to Oklahoma City tomorrow and would meet me in Shawnee in the afternoon if that was convenient. I agreed.

After he hung up, I grabbed the box, and asked, "Who is this Phil Smith?"

"He's an investigator with the LISP foundation."

"Why is he investigating me?"

"He's not investigating you. He has spoken with several people who were passengers on the plane. You just happen to be one of the people on his list. It's his job to investigate strange phenomenon."

"What strange phenomenon?"

"Well, there have been several reports connected with the plane crash and they have a few things in their possession which exhibit strange qualities."

"What?"

"First, there is the report from the shark research vessel divers. It says that during their nighttime underwater observations of shark behavior the divers witnessed the transformation of several sharks into goldfish. The LISP people have in their possession three life rafts that somehow have the strange ability to repel sharks. They also have several videotapes and films from the ship Achilles Heel showing sharks in cages being turned into goldfish. They have three goldfish in captivity that exhibit very strange habits. They have tapes of two sharks that were in special cages built into the ships hull that were pushed right through the bars of the cages as your rafts approached the ship. They have a list of sixteen unexplained phenomenon connected with the incidents surrounding the plane crash and rescue."

"Oh my God! I forgot all about that stuff!!" I shouted. "Quick, turn the force fields off."

"Okay, it's done."

"Now turn the goldfish back into sharks."

"Done."

"Now change all the tapes and films to show only sharks, not goldfish."

"Okay, that's done."

"There, that should get rid of any evidence. That's about all I can do."

I began to plan what to say tomorrow at the interview. I was very nervous, yet unsure of the reason. I had the feeling something was still left undone.

I went over in my mind how to answer the questions Phil might ask and decided to act like I didn't know anything about the strange events. I've gotten myself into a jam this time, I thought. Phil knocked on the door at about four in the afternoon. He was a robust fellow. He was dressed in a tailored blue suit.

He seemed to be a pleasant sort of guy. I liked him.

After the formalities and introductions, he got right down to business. "Do you mind if I use some of my equipment as we talk?" he asked, smiling.

I had my hand on the box in my pocket. Can his equipment detect you? I thought.

The box answered, "No." I felt relieved.

"Sure," I said to Phil, trying to give the impression of being cooperative.

He set his briefcase on the table, opened it, and pulled out a small tape recorder. He turned it on, smiled, and said, "Just so I don't misquote you."

I returned his smile, attempting to appear unconcerned. He reached into the briefcase and turned something else on. I tried not to look curious.

"I'm going to be frank with you, Mr. Hurst," he began.

"Please do."

"We have seen some very strange phenomenon concerning the plane crash you were involved in and we are interviewing all of the passengers."

He then proceeded to explain about the things I had already learned from the box. I tried to feign surprise.

When he was finished, he said, "Do you have any idea how these things happened?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," I lied.

He peered into his briefcase, then looked at me and raised one eyebrow a little.

"Is there something wrong?" I asked nervously.

"Are you sure you don't have any ideas at all?"

I shook my head. "No, none at all," I said, trying to speak casually.

"Have you experienced any strange events in your life recently?"

"No."

"Any encounters with unusual people?" he asked, still peering into his briefcase.

"No. Everything has been pretty normal lately," I lied again.

"May I ask what you do for a living?"

"I was working for IBM in Oklahoma City, but quit a few weeks ago."

"Is there anything you can tell us that may help us?" he prodded.

"I don't think so. I'm sorry I haven't been much help to you."

He smiled, saying, "Well, you've done what you felt was best." I sensed a little sarcasm in his reply.

I was upset with myself for lying, but I just couldn't answer those questions truthfully.

He wrote down some notes, then said he appreciated my help. For the next twenty minutes, we talked casually, during which he asked me about my friends and hobbies. Then he thanked me again and left. I was relieved he didn't ask more questions.

I stayed around for three more days and nothing special happened. I then decided to leave the test.

“Take me out.”

I was back on Mt. Ki.

Master was there. “Tell me, how do you feel about the choices you made in the test,” he queried wisely.

“Not very good. I really made a mess of things.”

“That is of little consequence. What did you learn?”

“Again, I didn’t check out the full situation before using the power. Because I didn’t have some important facts I caused much difficulty for myself.”

“What difficulty?”

“Almost being found out. They have their suspicions about me now. I also could have saved some other peoples lives if I had acted more quickly.”

“And is this the criterion on which you judge yourself, how many lives are saved or lost?” he asked with a slight sarcastic tone.

“I guess. If people die that could have been saved, isn’t that wrong?” I asked indignant at his apparent insensitivity.

“The tests are not designed to show right or wrong.”

He stood up and held his long, white robes out in the wind. They waved gently in the breeze. “Which is moving—the wind or the robes?” he asked.

I thought about it a minute, then said, “Both.”

He smiled. “No—neither is moving. The mind only is moving.”

Suddenly I got one of those flashes of insight, but didn’t know exactly what.

The Ancient One smiled. He perceived I had gotten something.

“Master,” I began, “I know something, but cannot put it into words.”

“That is no matter, just put it into action.” He stared intently, then said, “The truth is—what works. If something conflicts with reality, it will not work.”

I looked at him puzzled, “So, what is the truth?”

“Reality.” he stated blankly.

“And what is reality?”

“What is,” he insisted.

“That seems too simple, isn’t there some deep metaphysics underlying it?”

He laughed a little and said, “You have watched too much television. The truth is always simple. Our inadequate perception of reality causes the apparent complexity.”

“Too deep for me,” I concluded, “I just can’t grasp things like that.”

“You **can** and you may, if you allow yourself to. Let us speak of your test. What difficulties did you have?”

“I wanted to fix the plane, but didn’t have time.”

“Why did you wish to fix it?”

“I could have avoided all of the problems that later developed.”

“Is that your goal?”

“What?”

“Avoiding problems?”

“No, I want to learn.”

“And how do you learn?”

“I guess through working out problems. I didn’t think of it that way. Maybe it’s good to have problems, so that I can learn.”

“Very incisive. What other problems did you have?”

“Well, I had a little problem with Jeffry. I don’t like my clothes messed up?”

“Why not?”

“Because I like to look good.”

“Why?”

So I will impress people, I thought, but didn’t say anything. I was trying to hide it from my master. He frowned a little. “No, I can’t hide anything from you. I want to impress people—that’s why I try to look good.”

“And do you think there is something wrong with impressing others?”

“I don’t know?”

“If you thought it was perfectly all right, would you have tried to hide this fact from me?”

“No, I feel it’s bad to want to impress others.”

“Let’s move on. What else bothered you?”

“I could have saved the other people.”

“Didn’t you save any of them?”

“Yes, but others died.”

“Yet, instead of being pleased with yourself for the good you did, you harass yourself over what you didn’t do. How very unhappy is the man who after receiving a king’s ransom is still unsatisfied because a few coppers remained ungiven. You must learn to appreciate the good in a situation and not dwell on the negative aspects. Be happy for what is and be not saddened over what was not.”

“Okay, I get that. I see what you’re doing. You are having me examine the problems, in order to get down to what caused them.”

“Very good. And why do you think I am doing this?”

“To help me find the truth?”

“In time, you shall be able to do this yourself without prejudice or bias. You will begin to discover many truths.”

“I thought you were going to teach me how to use power.”

“If that is still your wish.”

“Do I have to learn these truths before I will be able to use power correctly?”

“My son—the truth **IS** power. All power comes from some truth. When you understand and apply a higher truth, you gain a greater power. All of man’s technology is this. He learns more about reality—what is—and applies this knowledge to gain power. Knowledge is merely a reflection of power.”

“If I knew some higher truth, would I have greater power?”

“Yes, only in this way. The truth gives power because the truth is what works.”

“Is there some Final Truth?”

“Yes.”

“Is it what they call enlightenment?”

“Some call it that.”

“What would I receive if I knew this Ultimate Truth?”

“Ultimate Power.” the Ancient One answered gravely.

“Then that is my real goal. I want to know this Truth!”

The Ancient One looked at me seriously. “It is all well and fine to wish this noble thing,” he said.

“Yet, there is a great price attached to what you ask. Perhaps, you should reconsider.”

“What price?”

“It is different for each man who seeks. The price could be as high as your very life.”

“It doesn’t matter. I still want it.”

“Yes, I know how you feel. You must truly wish this Truth more than anything else, for only then will you be worthy to receive it.”

“I do! I want it even more than the air I breath. I would give up my life to find the Ultimate Truth. Maybe it would fill the void within me.”

“Oh, it will fill you! Do you now change your final goal?”

“Yes, I want to know **The Truth.**”

“And do you believe you need this Truth?”

“Yes, I need it for fulfillment. I thirst for it. I need it more than life itself.” I said anxiously, feeling like The Ancient One was toying with me.

“Very well then—follow me. **I will show it to you!**”

CHAPTER 6

The TRUTH

The Ancient One rose, smiled, then stretched forth his staff in front of him. We were transported to a beautiful forest, standing on a well-trod path. I smelled salty sea-spray in the cool air.

I thought, Is he nuts? How's he gonna show me the Ultimate Truth? Is he gonna show me a tree and say that's The Truth? Slowly, he began walking down the path, gazing up at the trees and birds. I followed.

We strolled down the path for several hundred yards, and it opened out on a beautiful beach beside the ocean. Roaring waves crashed on the shore. He strolled casually along the beach for a while, looking at the sky and water.

More thoughts came into my mind. He's flipped. That's it. He's gonna pick up a sea shell, and try to convince me it's the Ultimate Truth. I don't get it. Why did we have to leave Mt. Ki? Couldn't he show me The Truth there? Again, I remained silent about my many doubts and followed, thinking he was playing some game with me?

The Ancient One turned and waded out into the ocean. The second his feet touched the water, it became suddenly still. I was astounded at this extraordinary event, standing in awe, then followed him into the now calm water.

I don't get him. What's he up to? Surely there's no truth out here. What's he gonna do, show me a fish and say that's The Truth? There's no truth here that's not everywhere else. I really think he's flipped this time.

I decided it was time to voice my doubts. I came up close behind him. We were about waist deep in the water. "Master, I don't und..."

SLAM!

He grabbed me in the middle of a word and thrust me under the water. I was caught completely off guard. I hadn't had time to close my mouth before the plunge. I fought to get free. His grip tightened as I struggled. A flood of thoughts came to mind. I was right! He's gone insane, and he's trying to kill me. I've gotta break free and get away.

Just then he pulled me out. I gasped for breath, trying to speak. I was only out of the water a second when he plunged me down again. I struggled fervently to break his hold, but my efforts were futile. Thoughts raced through my mind, all regarding the fact that The Ancient One had somehow snapped and was crazy. I planned how to break his hold if he raised me up again.

A few moments passed, he did raise me, and I tried my plan. It failed and again I was thrust back under the water. This time, for what seemed an eternity. My life flashed before my eyes.

I received a flash of insight. **OH NO!** He's going to kill me and upon dying, I will see The Ultimate Truth. **NO!** I don't want to die!

I decided to stop struggling the instant the thought came to me. Suddenly, he released his hold on me and walked away.

I came up sputtering, gasping for air. I looked up. He was slowly walking out of the water. I heard him laugh nonchalantly, and I was hit with another of those inner lights. As usual, I didn't know what it meant. I stood a minute, drenching wet, my jeans and sweatshirt clinging to me and watched him. He left the water, walked across the beach to a nearby palm tree, where he sat down in its shade. He was smiling.

The waves had started again. I walked out of the water, then over to where he sat. He was drawing pictures in the sand with a stick. I sat down beside him, my face red with anger.

I jumped up, did a little dance, reached inside my shirt, and pulled out a crab that had just pinched my nipple. I threw it down angrily, feeling very foolish, as I picked seaweed out of my hair.

After a few quiet minutes, he calmly asked, "So, tell me, when we were in the forest—what were you thinking about?"

"I thought you were flipping out."

"And what did you think about along the beach?"

"The same thing. I thought you were crazy. I wondered why we had left the mountain. I didn't think you could show me the Truth here."

"I see. And what did you think when we first waded out in the water?" he posed with a wide grin.

"The same thing."

He paused. The lesson was forthcoming. He looked me directly in the eyes, "And tell me what you thought about when you were down there, under the water."

"Well, I really thought you were insane then. I thought about breaking free and all kinds of things."

"What else?"

"I saw my life flash before my eyes and I figured it out."

"What?"

"Why you were trying to kill me."

“And what then?”

“I thought you were going to kill me and in that way I would finally get to see the Ultimate Truth. That’s when I stopped struggling.”

“And did you wish to die?”

“No. I wanted to live.”

“While you were under water—what did you need?”

“Well, I needed air?”

“Did you think about air much?”

“Yeah, a great deal!”

“And while you were down there, did you need—**Truth**?”

Slowly, I began to see what he was driving at. I stammered, “Uh, no. I didn’t need it, I don’t guess?”

“Oh, how do you know?”

“Because if I really did need it, I would have thought about it some.”

“Did you think about The Truth much?”

“No, hardly at all.”

“And not an hour ago, you said you needed and wanted this Ultimate Truth more than your very life, more than the air you breathe.”

“Yeah, I guess I was mistaken. I really want to live more than to find The Truth.”

He smiled widely. “I am happy you now understand this. This is the truth I brought you here to see, not the Ultimate Truth, but the truth that you did not yet desire it sincerely.”

“But how did you know?” I asked.

He looked at me compassionately, then said, “My son, when you really desire the Ultimate Truth that much, He shall come to you and instantly reveal Himself. You shall not have to seek Him at all. This is how I knew you were mistaken in saying what you did. If you truly needed Truth more than air you would already possess Him.”

“I see. You are very wise. I hope to be like you some day.”

He chuckled, saying, “Strive rather to be like yourself. Be content to be what you are. Do not deceive yourself into thinking you want things because you feel they should be wanted.”

“I will try.”

“Do not try—for to try is to fail. Rather, do it.”

“Okay, I shall do it.”

He stood, waved his staff in front of him and we were back on Mt. Ki—and dry. There was a fire, food, and drink. We ate quietly while I reflected on what I had just experienced.

I thought to myself, If I ever tell anyone these things I’ve been through, they won’t believe a word of it. I wouldn’t believe someone, if they told me such things.

I slipped into my sleeping bag, went quickly to sleep, and dreamed of drowning, crabs, nipples and seaweed—very strange!

When I awoke, The Ancient One was gone.

I decided that it was time to work on my koan. I remembered the falcon represented me. I considered the first sentence, “A falcon was raised by pigeons.”

My parents had raised me. Were they the pigeons? Humm, why pigeons and not adult falcons? Falcons are powerful, graceful hunters and pigeons are fat, stupid scavengers. It was hard to believe that pigeons symbolized my parents.

The falcon is eventually put with an eagle who teaches it to fly. Then my parents didn’t teach me?

You know, to birds, flying is their whole life. That’s their purpose in a nutshell. If that’s true, then flying represents my purpose.

Humm, I guess that’s true. My parents didn’t tell me why I was here. I remember when I was a small boy I asked my father, “Dad, why did you and mom have me?” He snapped, “Shut up and eat your supper.” Strange, that scene is still vivid after all these years.

There were various birds in the koan. I was the falcon. Perhaps the pigeons were my parents. It seemed that all the people were represented by birds. I wondered who the eagle was. He taught me to fly, so I guess it would have to be The Ancient One—he’s the one teaching me how to find my purpose. Yeah, that fits in real well! He’s teaching me how to fly! But why didn’t my parents teach me?

Flash!

Another bolt of insight came to me. My parents couldn’t teach me to fly, because they didn’t know how! And they couldn’t fly, because their parents hadn’t taught them, and their parents hadn’t taught them—back for many generations. Sure! That’s it. No one knows why they’re here! They can’t teach their kids because they don’t know; because their parents didn’t know—and so couldn’t have taught them!

I never thought of this before. No wonder everyone is asking the question, but no one answers it. My dad was ashamed because he couldn’t teach me how to fly, so he told me to go jump off a cliff instead.

The koan was so simple, yet it reached deep within my mind.

I mused, Yes, but The Ancient One is an eagle, greatest of all birds—powerful and wise. He knows how to fly and will teach me.

Let’s see, “the falcon is caught by a naked child and sold to a wealthy man for his son’s pleasure?”

I don’t get it. If birds are people, what do people represent? I wondered aloud. Birds? No, that’s silly. No bird caught me or sold me.

I thought and thought, but couldn’t decipher anything else from it.

Let’s see if this is correct, I thought, getting out the box. “Am I on the right track in the koan?”

“It depends on what you mean.”

“Was I right about the pigeons being my parents?”

“Perhaps you would lose some of the joy and merit of solving the koan if I assisted you in solving it. Do you wish this?”

“No, just tell me in general terms—something that won’t reveal anything I haven’t figured out.”

“Very well. You are correct in the assumption that the pigeons represent the people who raised you.”

“Hot dog! I just knew it! It fit so perfectly.”

“As you gain insight into a koan, it reveals more information than was originally given.”

“Yeah. For instance, the pigeons don’t know how to fly and that’s why they didn’t teach the falcon.”

“That is very incisive.”

“And it’s correct, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“But that’s about as far as I get.”

“You will get more as you learn about yourself.”

“I don’t understand why my parent’s are represented as pigeons. Pigeons know how to fly. Why weren’t they falcons like me?”

“Perhaps the different birds represent something else.”

“Yeah, I can see how The Ancient One would be an eagle, but I can’t see my parents as pigeons. Could you help me out without giving away too much?”

“Consider this: perhaps one type of bird may be transformed into another. If so, they may have been falcons once, and later, became pigeons.”

“Yeah, I can see that. Thanks.”

I decided to take another test. “What’s the next test?”

“It is called The Patient.”

“Okay, take me to it,” and I pressed the button.

“Before you begin, I must tell you that in the beginning you will be invisible.”

“Why?”

“It is part of the test. You may become visible, if you wish to.”

“Okay, I understand. Take me in.”

Sure enough, I was invisible. I held out my hands, but couldn’t see them. I was in a hospital room. There was a man and a woman standing by to a bed talking with a doctor.

The man wore checkered slacks, white shoes, and a sky-blue shirt. I thought he must be color blind to wear such clashing clothes. The woman looked cute in her little green jump-suit. She was very petite, about five-feet four, with curly red hair.

In the bed was a gaunt, old man, with several machines hooked up to him. He appeared to be a hundred years old, with large brown liver spots all over his pale face. His head was almost bald, with just a wisp of cotton-white hair.

I listened to their conversation.

“Well, doctor, has there been any change?” the man asked.

“No, your father is still in a deep coma. He’s stable, but completely unconscious,” the doctor replied. He was a handsome man, tall and sandy blonde. He wore very thick glasses which reminded me of two coke bottle bottoms. He was dressed in white, the ever-present stethoscope hanging around his neck.

The woman pleaded, “Honey, I do wish you’d consider our situation. The insurance has run out and these machines are costing a fortune every day. I’m afraid this will ruin our family and the business.”

“You know I feel the same way, but I have to talk to him—even if for just a minute. I have to!”

“Mrs. Shiroda, I know how you feel,” The doctor cautioned. “You must understand that your father-in-law has a good chance of recovering and leading a good life for a few more years. Legally, I can’t take him off these machines.”

“Look here Dr. Kinnaman,” the woman scolded, “I know perfectly well you can. There is a way, isn’t there?”

“Only if the release forms are signed by Todd. Your husband is his next of kin and only he can sign them. It would be the equivalent of murder in my opinion.”

Todd looked down into her face, “Kelly, don’t you think George deserves a chance to live? I know you hate him, but he is my father.”

“Honey, I don’t hate him. I love you and hate what this is doing to us. I won’t let it destroy us.”

“I understand, but there are things you don’t understand.”

“Well, you both know my position on this,” Doctor Kinnaman interrupted. “I’ll leave you alone with George for a while,” and he left, closing the door.

I watched the two tortured people sit by the old man in the bed. I decided to get all the facts before I did anything. It seemed the lack of information was what had made me screw things up in the other tests. I whispered, “Take me to The Quiet Place.”

I was sitting on the dessert, having effectively stopped time in the test. “Take me to the oasis,” I said.

I was sitting beside the beautiful pool of water. I went into a long question and answer session with the box. It went like this:

“How long has George been on those machines?”

“Nine months.”

“How much is it costing the family per day?”

“Thirty-five hundred dollars.”

“When did the insurance run out?”

“Sixteen days ago.”

“How much money do they have?”

“They’re almost broke now. They’ve exhausted their resources, except for the family business.”

“What’s that?”

“They have a company that makes candy mints. It is worth a lot, but George has controlling interest in it. They really can’t use it as an asset, unless he dies.”

“What’s it worth?”

“About four or five million-dollars.”

“Why’s George in a coma?”

“He has a tumor putting pressure on part of his brain and keeping him unconscious.”

“How long will he stay in the coma?”

“Forever, unless the tumor is removed.”

“You mean he won’t come out of it?”

“Not unless he has an operation, or a miracle happens.”

“Why can’t they perform the operation? Is it too dangerous, or don’t they have the technology to do it?”

“No, it’s a fairly simple operation and isn’t risky.”

“Has Todd decided against the operation?”

“No.”

“I don’t get it. Why doesn’t Todd have them perform the operation?”

“He doesn’t know about the tumor.”

“Wait a minute, that doesn’t make sense. Does Dr. Kinnaman know about the tumor?”

“Yes, he’s known about it for a long time.”

“Then why doesn’t Todd know?”

“Dr. Kinnaman told him there was a defective part of the brain causing the coma. It was healing very slowly.”

“Is that true?”

“Not at all.”

“Doesn’t the doctor know he’s lying to them?”

“Oh, he knows.”

“Why’s he lying?”

“He was instructed to do so.”

“By who?”

“Dr. Tyrone Teal, head of the hospital.”

“Why?”

“Because George Shiroda met all the requirements for their special project.”

“What special project?”

“Keeping selected elderly people in a comatose state intentionally for long periods of time.”

“Why?”

“Because the doctors receive a big kickback. There’s a lot of money being made this way.”

“I’m beginning to understand. Who is in on this?”

“Four doctors and a couple of nurses.”

“Don’t they make enough money being doctors? Why do they need so much?”

“Well, it was all started by the hospital’s chief surgeon who had a lot of gambling debts. He did it four years ago to pay them off. Then, Dr. Kinnaman found out about it. He was paid off, and they’ve been in cahoots ever since. They’ve gotten it down to a science.”

“My God! I didn’t think such things happened.”

“You are in for many surprises as you begin to see clearly.”

“Couldn’t Todd and Kelly get a second opinion?”

“They did, from another doctor.”

“Let me guess, Dr. Kinnaman.”

“No, actually it was Dr. Fletcher. He’s a doctor at a hospital across town to whom Dr. Kinnaman usually refers his patients.”

“And I guess he’s getting a kickback for agreeing with the opinion?”

“No, he’s being blackmailed into it. Dr. Bryson knows Dr. Fletcher came in drunk one night, and through his negligence, a woman died. He covered for him, but now he’s using it to blackmail him into agreeing with their prognosis.”

“Who’s Dr. Bryson?”

“The hospital’s chief surgeon.”

“I don’t believe how complicated this is. Their gonna get caught!”

“Perhaps.”

“Okay, let’s see. I don’t know what the real problem is. If I just cure George, the doctors will go on doing this to others. If I expose the doctors, it’ll ruin their families and they’ll go to jail. They might even kill the patients to try to cover up the evidence.”

“That’s very possible,” the box replied. “They’ve killed others to keep this project going.”

“Humm, I don’t know what to do. There’s got to be a core problem causing all this. If I fix it, everything else should work out okay. How did it start?”

“Dr. Bryson’s sickness.”

“What sickness?”

“Uncontrollable gambling.”

“If I cured that, then he wouldn’t have the need for so much money.”

“Yes, but all the rest of the people involved have become used to the extra money. You’d be hard pressed to change their ways now.”

“What if they had a big scare?”

“Like what?”

“Like almost getting caught?”

“That has happened. They just went back to doing it again, after a few months.”

“Well, I’ve got to do something.”

“What do you choose?”

“I don’t know yet, I’ll just see what happens. At least now I know what’s really happening. Boy, if I didn’t know all this, I might have really blundered this one, too.”

“You probably would have.”

“Okay, take me back in,” I said, and pressed the button.

I was back in the hospital room, still invisible. The woman got a devious look on her face and said, “Todd, be a darling and get me a coke?”

“Sure. There’s a coke machine right down the hall,” Todd answered eagerly.

“No,” Kelly replied quickly. “I want a cup of ice for my coke. Would you go downstairs to the cafeteria and get me one, please?”

“If that’s what you want.”

Kelly smiled. “You’re a darling.”

Todd left the room. A minute later, Kelly rose and tip-toed over to the door. She carefully opened it just an inch, and peered out. I knew something was wrong, so I thought to the box, What's she thinking right now?

"She's thinking, 'The coast is clear. Good.'"

She closed the door again and walked over to the heart machine which was beeping softly. She looked it over, then reached behind it.

"Now what's she thinking?" I asked, curious.

"She's looking for a circuit breaker. She plans to turn off the machine and let George die."

"No! Don't!" I shouted without thinking. Kelly spun around and stared at the closed door.

Her freckled face went pale with fear. She whispered, "Who's there?"

Damn, I thought. Now she knows I'm here.

I watched her as she rechecked the door, then suddenly remembered she couldn't see me. I decided to capitalize on the situation. "Kelly, Kelly Shiroda."

In terror, she looked in my direction, and said, "Yes?"

"Kelly," I responded in a deep voice, "do not do what you are thinking. There is another way. Go to a hospital of your choice, not the doctor's, and get a different physician to take over the case. The doctors here have lied to you. George can be cured with a simple operation. Do not let anyone know what you are doing or they may kill him to cover their evil deeds. Do you understand my instructions?"

"Who are you?"

"I am here to help you. Do you understand the instructions?"

"Yes, but I don't get it. Am I crazy for hearing voices?"

"No! Just do as I have told you and you shall see. If you don't, I will tell your husband what you were about to do."

"I wasn't doing anything wrong!" she said defensively.

"Kelly, do not be afraid," I answered compassionately. "I will not say anything, and you will never hear from me again, unless you fail to follow the instructions."

Just then, the door opened, and Todd walked in with her coke. Her face was chalky, her green eyes wide.

"What's wrong, honey? You look like you've seen a ghost." Todd asked, concerned.

"I think I've heard one," she said, trembling. "Let's get out of here!"

I asked the box, "Is she going to do it?"

"It's impossible to predict human behavior, yet, she is now planning to."

"I want to stay with them for awhile. Where are they going?"

"To their car."

"Okay, teleport me into the back seat." and I pressed the button.

A few minutes later, sitting in the car, I watched them come out of the hospital entrance.

They got in, Todd driving. I felt the tension in the air. Finally, Kelly said, "Dear, I don't know how to tell you this, but there's something very wrong."

"Like what?"

“I want to get another doctor to look at your dad.”

“We’ve already had a second opinion. You know what they said.”

“I don’t care, let’s pick one out of the phone directory, without Dr. Kinnaman knowing. Can we do it?”

“If you want. I don’t get it though; what’s gotten into you?”

“I don’t want to say just yet. Let’s wait and see what happens with another opinion.”

“Okay, if that will please you.”

Yes, I thought. Finally, I’ve done something right. At least I’m getting more good than bad results in this one.

I decided not to tell George what Kelly did. There’s no use in causing a lot of unnecessary problems. I’ll try to keep my actions simple this time.

I followed them.

The next day they picked a random doctor from the phone book. They called and told him what they wanted. He agreed, as long as they would pay the fee.

I asked if this doctor was in cahoots with Dr. Kinnaman. No, he wasn’t.

They set up a hospital transfer for the afternoon. I asked the box what was going on with the doctors in the little band. A couple of them were playing golf. None of them were scheduled to be at the hospital.

Things were working out better than I had hoped. The decision as to what to do to the doctors would rest in the Shiroda’s hands—not mine.

All went as I had hoped it would. George was transferred and treated. The new doctor found out what had been going on, Todd sued Dr. Kinnaman and the medical board set up an investigation.

I decided to get out while I was ahead. “Take me out.”

CHAPTER 7

The Wish-Clown

The Ancient One was sitting on his rock, gazing out in the distance. I was pleased with myself.

He turned and looked at me sternly for a moment. Then, his face changed, and a large smile came over it. “I see you are pleased with your test this time. To what do you attribute your good judgment?”

I continued to feel self-satisfied saying, “I took my time, found out the truth about the situation and took advantage of what was.”

He smiled again. “Very interesting choice of words. What do you mean by what was?”

“Well, I was invisible. It seems my situation was beneficial. I stumbled onto this insight accidentally, but it worked out great!”

“I am indeed pleased with you. You have done well. I will now give you a great opportunity. You may ask me one question, which I will answer truthfully.” His voice grew serious, “Be warned! Do not ask something which you do not wish to know, for whatever you ask will be answered.”

I thought about it a minute. What one thing do I really want to know more than anything else?

I started to inquire if I could ask something about my koan, but before speaking, master answered, “You may ask anything.”

“In the koan, what does the rich man represent?”

The Ancient One answered casually, “Your father.”

I considered this curious answer silently, but gained no insight into it. I thought about asking something else, but master had turned his back on me and was staring out into the distance again.

What does he see when he looks off that way? I wondered.

He turned and answered my thought. “I see you and your future.”

I decided not to press my questions further, went over and sat down on my cot. I thought how strange all this was. Sometimes it all seemed to be a wild dream that I would awaken from in the morning; but, morning never comes.

I decided to press right on into the next test, feeling cocky over my recent success. I wanted to continue on a roll. "What is the name of the next test?" I asked the box.

"The Girl."

"Okay, take me in."

I was standing in the reception room of a beautiful hospital, dressed in a clown suit and wearing clown make-up.

I admired myself in a hall mirror next to the reception desk. I had on white makeup with a large red smile painted over it. My hair was green and fuzzy, covered by a tattered old hat. I also had on a pair of giant coveralls, a large hoop inside the waist held the stomach way out in comical fashion, a red and white checkered shirt, twenty-two inch yellow flop shoes, green and white polka dotted bow tie the size of a frying pan, and tiny white gloves with the fingers cut out. Quite a sight!

The woman behind the desk said, "I'm so glad you could make it. You're all Heather has talked about for days."

I thought, Just play it by ear and try to do this one without asking the box any questions. "Yes, I'm very happy to be here." I answered the robust receptionist. She was a large black woman with beautiful eyes. She wore the typical white nurses outfit on. She looked very good in it. I complimented her on her appearance. She jokingly returned the compliment.

"Well, I don't know what the agency has told you about Heather," she began, "so I'll give you a quick briefing. She has been here at St. John's for two months. She has Leukemia, and will probably die within the next four months. She's a real doll, as you'll see, and all she has talked about for days is that she wants a wish-clown for her birthday. And that's today. A few of us have prepared a little cake for her. She's such a treasure that all the nurses chipped in and bought her a nice present, even though it's against regulations. This will be her last birthday," she finished sadly, losing her composure. She paused a moment, took a deep breath, then asked if I had any questions.

"No, may I visit with her alone?"

"Certainly. I'll show you to her room. It's private and you may stay as long as you like. She deserves the very best. I hope you're a good clown."

I assured her I was the best wish-clown there had ever been. She asked me to sign in, and told me she had to check my ID for security reasons.

I showed her my driver's license and signed in. She verified my name and signature, then took me to the room. Before opening the door, she leaned up, kissed me lightly and said, "You must be a wonderful person to do what you do. Thank you."

Boy! I thought, this Heather must really be something to make such a strong impression. Poor kid. Leukemia is a terrible and painful disease.

The nurse left and I walked in all smiles.

There lay the cutest little girl I had ever seen. She had long honey-blond hair, and a wisp of a smile. Her thin little body was ravaged by the heartless disease. She wore a blue nightgown, with little pink elephants merrily scampering all over it. She looked like a sick little angel.

She turned and saw me. Her bright jade eyes lit up like sparkling Christmas lights.

“Princess Heather, I presume,” I greeted and bowed low with dignity, my tattered hat comically falling off to reveal my fuzzy green hair surrounding a central bald spot with the word “Ouch!” on it.

She put both hands to her mouth and exclaimed, “Oh my gosh! You came! You really came! I just knew you would. I told them you’d come!”

“And indeed I did. I am your wish-clown.”

“But how? Papa said they couldn’t get you.”

I put my finger to my lips, and whispered, “A wish-clown is very magical and knows things no one else knows. No one sent me. I came because of you!”

“Oh joy, such a wonderful present for my last birthday!”

“And what makes you think this is your last birthday?” I asked lightly, horrified at her knowledge of her impending death.

She lost her smile and said, “I thought you were magical.”

“Oh, I am very magical.”

“Then surely you know I have Leukemia, and will die soon.”

I was floored by this blatant statement. I tried not to show my inner torment. “I know perfectly well that you have Leukemia, but you should have hope. Perhaps you will get better.” I encouraged.

She smiled a little, her pale, thin lips quivering. “You don’t get better from Leukemia,” and then she squinted. I could tell she was in pain, trying to hide it from me. I started losing control. I choked up a little. She turned an embarrassed red and said, “I’m sorry if my pain embarrasses you.”

“Let me tell you a story.” I suggested, changing the subject.

Her smile returned as I began:

“Once upon a time there was a rabbit with a twisted leg. He couldn’t run and chase butterflies like all the other rabbits.

“But he was a very special rabbit. He always saw the bright things in life. He was grateful for his bum leg so that the other rabbits would look at him and be more thankful they had four good legs.

“One day, the rabbit had a birthday party and invited his friend the frog over to have cake and ice-cream. He invited his rabbit friends, but none wanted to come. They wanted to run and chase butterflies, instead of visiting with the little rabbit.

“Well, the frog came and they had a wonderful party. They played some real nice games—and one especially fun one called *Fish-tank*.

“After they had finished playing, the frog asked how the rabbit could stay so happy even though he had a bad leg.”

I looked at this wonderful little girl and said, “If you can tell me what the rabbit answered I will grant you a wish.”

She smiled warmly, and replied, “Oh, that’s an easy one, the rabbit told the frog that it was no good crying over spilt milk—**life is for enjoying!**”

My eyes grew wide. My mouth dropped open. “Who told you that?”

“What?”

“Life is for enjoying.”

“No one told me, silly, all kids know that. Didn’t you know that when you were young, before you lost your fun?”

I pondered that a moment. She was right. When I was young I did know that. “Yes, of course. You are very clever, Heather. Now, what is your wish?”

She grew very serious and turned her gaze away for the first time. “I’m afraid your magic isn’t strong enough to get what I really want, but I have a smaller wish I could ask.”

I felt like I had been baited. I already knew what she would wish for with her “Big Wish,” and thought to myself, Should I cure her Leukemia?

I wondered what the long range effects would be of my interfering. I knew all too well the trouble I could cause by messing with what is. “Well, why don’t you tell me your big wish first. I am a very powerful wish-clown, and you would be surprised what I can do.”

She looked back at me, her eyes searching mine for a ray of hope. She smiled again, and said, “Yeah, you came when they said you couldn’t; maybe you are magical enough.”

“Oh I assure you, my lady, I have the power to grant your wish. The real question is whether this wish is the best thing?”

She sighed, “Well, here goes. Billy is my bestest friend, and I love him very much. He’s got brain damage and he’s in terrible pain most of the time. The doctors say he would die if they took him off the treatments and his parents won’t do it. He hurts so bad all the time. We’ve talked it over, Billy and me, and he said he’d like to die naturally, rather than be hooked up to those terrible machines ’cause they hurt so much. His parents won’t listen to him, and they say he’s just a kid and doesn’t understand. But I know him, and he does understand. He understands his parents can’t have any more children and won’t let him go. They are forcing him to live on, even though it hurts so much. So, my wish is that you could make them understand, and let Billy decide for himself. I love him so and it hurts me to see him hurt so terribly. I feel real lucky cause I have Leukemia, and it only hurts sometimes and not so bad. Poor Billy hurts all the time.” She turned her head and began to cry softly.

A tear rolled down my cheek as I heard the beautiful and selfless wish. My God what a child! I thought. No wonder she effects the nurses as she does.

I walked over, took her in my arms, hugged her fragile body, and wept bitterly. I kissed this jewel of a child, straining through my tears, “I’ll tell you a very special secret, if you promise not to tell anyone, ever.”

“Oh I can keep a secret,” she said as she wiped away her tears.

I wiped my eyes with the back of my hand. “Because you have been such an unselfish and good girl, I am going to do better than you ask—I’m going to fix Billy so he lives a long and happy life without any pain, if you want me to.” Then I added, “But, understand this, I could cure you of your Leukemia instead. Which would you choose—to be cured yourself, or to help Billy?”

Without hesitation she said, “I love Billy so, and his pain is so bad. They’ll keep him suffering for years, while I’ll be in heaven in just a few months. Oh please sir, if you will—fix Billy.”

I couldn't believe the tremendous sacrifice she was willing to make. "My princess, your wish is granted! Billy will get better very soon."

She hugged my neck tightly, and whispered in my ear, "Oh thank you. I love you, wish-clown! I'll remember you when I meet Jesus, and tell him what a wonderful thing you did!"

I couldn't compose myself. I burst out into sobs while the sensitive little girl took my hand and squeezed it, saying, "Don't be sad. It is what I wish for more than anything. I know what you're thinking. But, I just couldn't live knowing I could have helped poor Billy, but had been selfish and used it on myself instead."

My weeping continued as this treasure of a girl hugged and comforted me. After a while, I regained my composure. "Child, in all of my life I have never met anyone like you. You are a priceless treasure and it is a privilege to have met you. I shall always remember you. Don't worry, your wish will come true, and even more than you have wished for."

She smiled and said, "No, thank you for making this my bestest birthday ever. Now I can leave this world happy, knowing I have done a really good and important thing. Thank you very much!"

I walked out of the room, crossed the hall and saw the nurse coming my way. I stopped her. "That is one remarkable little girl."

"Yes, she is very special."

I left the hospital, walked out to the parking lot, and looked around. No one there. I put my hand in my pocket, my finger on the button and said, "Take me to The Quiet Place."

I was sitting on the cool sand. The lantern was still there. I turned off the valve, even though it had long since run out of fuel.

I sat, pondering this marvelous little saint. Then put my finger on the box and said, "I want Billy to wake up tomorrow morning with no pain, cured of all medical problems."

"It will be done as you say."

"I also want Heather cured when she wakes up tomorrow morning."

"That will be done as you say."

"I want both cures to be complete and miraculous." I insisted.

"Oh, they will be that. The doctors won't know what hit them!"

"Will Heather tell about me?"

"It's impossible to accurately predict human behavior, and I think they couldn't force her to tell even if they tortured her. She believes a secret is sacred and the magic might be broken if she tells."

I felt completely fulfilled. I suddenly realized the emptiness inside me was gone. In its place was a warm, joyous fire that burned and gave me an incredible high.

I finally had peace!

I went back to Mt. Ki.

The Ancient One was sitting next to a fire, stirring the coals with a stick. I felt extremely pleased with myself again.

"Did you see?" I asked anxiously.

"Yes. I saw all," he answered without the slightest emotion in his voice.

"Well?"

“Well, what?” he asked calmly.

“What do you think of it?”

“Do you seek only my approval in your actions?”

“It is nice to be appreciated,” I replied, a bit upset.

“So long as one does not need to be appreciated.”

I thought about that for a minute. He was right. I did do many things simply to gain the approval of others.

He continued his teaching. “You see, it is good to receive another’s approval, yet it is a flaw to need or seek it. You should rather learn to detach yourself from the yoke of others opinions and strive to please yourself. You have to live within yourself, and only you can please you. Learn to be the source of your own joy.”

“I see what you mean.” I said speculatively.

He smiled. “And yes, I thought well of you. I always think well of you, even when you are making big trouble for yourself and cause others to suffer.”

“But why would you think well of me then?”

“Because I love you deeply. I view you as my own son—even closer. It is easy to think well of another when he is doing great. Even the worst people think well of you when you do them good, so what merit is there in this? True Love thinks well of the loved one **always**.”

“You really care this much about me?”

“Yes, I love you unconditionally.”

“But why? I haven’t done anything to deserve your love.”

“I give it freely. There can be no reason to love if the love is pure—for pure love is beyond reason. Did you not love Heather?”

“Yes, very much.”

“And what did she do to deserve your love?”

“She didn’t have to do anything. I loved her because of who she was.”

“And I love you for who you are; the true you—and for what you may someday be.”

I thought about this great man before me and searched my feelings for him.

“What are you thinking?” he asked.

“You know. You can read my thoughts easily.”

“Tell me anyway.”

“I am sorry I don’t love you as you love me.”

“Do not be troubled over this. It is enough that you respect me.”

“Oh I respect you greatly.”

“Then that is enough. Let us eat,” and he waved his hand. A great feast of fruits, fish, and wines appeared on flashing, intricately designed, golden trays.

“In honor of your great accomplishment,” he said.

“What accomplishment?”

“The filling of your void, your first taste of fulfillment.”

“Yeah, that’s right! It is a superb feeling to know I have done just as I chose and have chosen wisely.”

“It is Love Himself who rewards a true lover, as you have become. Your fulfillment comes from Love. Remember to be grateful.”

“I am.” I said as we began the delicate feast.

After we had eaten, master stood and said, “And now, in honor of your triumph of Love, Love wishes to give you another gift.”

“I am honored.”

He waved his staff in the air. Birds flocked toward us from all directions. They landed all around me. All began singing together like the tinkling of little silver bells. My body tingled with delight and excitement to behold this miraculous event.

When they had finished, master whistled something to one of them. It seemed the songbird answered him back.

“Can you converse with the birds?” I inquired, amazed.

“Yes. They are quite simple, so you have to speak simply to them.”

After the celebration we drank wine. It was delicious, and I became a little lightheaded. I said, “You know, if I ever go back to Shawnee and try to tell anyone about this, they’ll never believe me.”

“I know.”

“Doesn’t it bother you?”

“I do not allow the opinions of others to influence my joy in life.”

“Say what?”

“I do not let other’s opinions make me feel bad. I am in control of how I feel, and choose to have joy.”

“Man, I wish I could do that!”

“You shall be able—in time.”

“Did I do the right thing?”

“When?”

“In the test with Heather.”

“I will not judge as to whether you have been right or wrong. I love you too much to stoop to judgmentalness. Love sees the bright side of things.”

“But would you have cured her and Billy if you had been in that situation?”

“What I did in that test is of no consequence, only what you did.”

“But I really want to know.”

“Very well; no, I did not cure either of them.”

“What? I don’t believe you!” I said, a little angry at his insensitivity.

“I accept that,” he said calmly.

“Why wouldn’t you have cured her?”

“For reasons you have yet to understand. Reasons you shall soon find out—if you survive.” He said these words as if he were quite concerned for me. I decided not to ask anything else.

I lay in my cot and watched the thin, wispy clouds slip gently overhead. I felt so peaceful and fulfilled. I basked in the warm glow of my accomplishment.

I slept well for the first time in years. Upon awakening, I felt alive and joyful. I sat quietly, waiting for Master to rise.

He did. It was very strange to watch his morning ritual of prayer before dawn.

With great reverence, we watched the sunrise. He seemed to get such a kick out of this simple pleasure.

I asked the box the name of the next test. It said, "The Chinese Harbor." I said to The Ancient One, "I am going to take another test now."

He looked at me steadily, saying, "I know. I wish you well."

I didn't like his tone of voice. It sounded like he didn't expect me to return. There was a finality to his reply.

CHAPTER 8

The Chinese Harbor

I was in China, standing on a wooden dock. There were hundreds of boats all around, and Chinese children over on the shore, running after something. I watched them closely. They were chasing a grasshopper. Finally, it was caught, and two boys began fighting over who would get it.

One knocked the other down, grabbed the grasshopper and quickly ate it. I realized these children were starving. I heard the low crying of the hungry all around me.

I looked down at myself and saw I was dressed in the dirty clothes of a Chinese peasant with the traditional domed hat. I must have looked like one of them because no one seemed to notice me as they passed.

I was watching one of the boats a few yards away when I heard a young woman speaking in Chinese and a baby crying. I was trying to figure out which boat the sounds were coming from when a skinny, well-tanned boy emerged from the boat canopy. He wore old, torn blue jeans, had bare feet, and no shirt. His stomach was protruding and I knew he was starving. He pulled the cord of his boat and it drifted to the dock. He jumped out and scurried up the bank. He began rooting around in a large garbage heap, looking for something to eat.

The crying continued and I heard the woman begin to weep softly. She emerged from the boat canopy, with the baby in her arms.

She leaned over the edge of the boat and began bathing the child, who began to scream. She plunged it under the water and held it there.

I grabbed the box within my clothes and thought, Have a large fish knock the woman out of the boat. Keep the baby above water.

I pressed the button. There was a splash. I heard the woman floundering in the water, and continued thinking to the box. Now, have the fish carefully push the child to the dock, here where I am.

I saw the fish and child approaching, and reached out and retrieved the screaming urchin.

I instructed the box to let me speak fluent Chinese in their dialect, then said to the woman, "Look, I have saved your child from the fish that knocked both of you in the water. It is an omen of favor. The fish must be sent from God."

"Omen or no omen, I cannot feed my children. What do you think the fish would say to that?" she retorted.

"I wouldn't know, I only know here is your child." I placed the baby back in the boat, where she was drying her clothes by wringing them out.

I put my hand back in my clothes and thought, Now have the fish jump in the front of her boat.

The fish jumped in, she screamed, grabbed a stick, and started beating it over the head. It finally quit flopping and she called to her boy, "Chay, Chay, come and see!"

The boy scampered from the dump. "What is it?"

"A fish has saved your little sister, and now he has jumped into the boat. I have killed him. We shall have food for several days."

"Mother, it's a miracle!" the boy cried. "Miracle, perhaps, but it is food, certainly."

I smiled to myself over the scene, then looked around to see what else could be done. My heart went out to these people. Everywhere, there was hunger. I asked the box, "Is there no food around here?"

"There is a great storage bin full of rice not a mile away. The grain is just sitting and rotting."

"Why?"

"The landowner is trying to drive the price up."

"Does he know there are people starving here?"

"He does not think that concerns him. He is interested in making a profit. These people have no money to buy his rice, so he pays no attention to them."

"Is he rich?"

"Very."

"It's not fair, let's arrange a little accident." I said mischievously.

"Such as?"

"Let's have a small earthquake knock down his grain bin."

"But it's surrounded by a fence."

"Okay, then let's have strong winds blow the rice up in the air and gently rain it down all over the shore in this area."

"Anything else?"

"Yeah, lets give them some fish with their rice."

"Okay, how?"

"Have a large school of their staple diet-type fish run up onto the beach."

"How many?"

"Enough to feed all of them in this area for a few days."

"There will be plenty of rice and fish for all."

"Good, now one last thing."

“Something to drink?” the box posed, expectantly.

“Yes, what Chinese wine goes well with fish and rice?”

“Might I suggest a nice dry, white wine.”

“Fine, arrange for plenty to wash up on shore from an apparent shipwreck out at sea.”

“Okay, do you want all this simultaneously?”

“Yes, but do it on my signal.”

“What signal?”

“You’ll know.”

I turned and started shouting, “Everyone, listen to me. There has been a great miracle happen here. This woman’s child was saved by a giant fish, which then provided her with a meal. This must be a sign that God has looked down upon your trouble, and is about to show you all mercy.”

Someone yelled back, “Be quiet, you drunk!”

“I am not drunk,” I insisted, “I have seen this thing with my own eyes. I tell you, indeed, God will smile on all of you.”

The reply came from some boat, “We don’t need smiles from God, we need food for our starving children.”

“Behold what is happening even now!” I exclaimed with authority.

The earth began trembling and shaking. The sound of the grain bin crashing in the distance was clear enough. Then came the roar of the great wind. The sky grew dark as the rice gently rained down on the beach.

I heard “oohs” and “ahs” from all around. People began shouting and running toward the beach. They scrambled, gathering up the rice.

Just then the fish all swam up on shore. I roared with laughter as I watched the excited Chinese people grabbing fish and trying to hold on to them. They began taking off their clothes and putting rice and fish in them. I saw the bottles of wine come slowly drifting in past me. I was the only one not on the beach.

“Look what comes to you now! How blessed all of you are to have God smile on you with such gifts,” I shouted. I continued to grin, watching them scramble into the water after the bottles. After some time, I noted that everyone had all he or she could carry.

I asked the box, “Is everyone here provided for?”

“No, there are a few old people that have no relatives, and no one has gathered food for them.”

I called out to the people on the beach, “Do you know there are people right here in your midst who have nothing to eat.”

One man came to the dock, and stated coldly, “What concern is that of ours? We need what we have to survive.”

I looked at him angrily, and said, “How is it that when God has been so generous to you, you are so selfish with others?”

He looked a little ashamed. “Will no one share their surplus with those who have nothing?”

Several people called out that they would. I smiled, saying, “Good, I am sure God will reward your generosity.”

The lady who had tried to drown her baby came up and bowed low before me. “I realize now you are a holy man. I am ashamed of what I have done, and beg your forgiveness.”

I put my hand on her shoulder and told her to rise. “You are forgiven, do not do it again.”

Several people saw what she did, and began calling out, “Prophet! Prophet! You have done this great thing for us!”

I decided it was best to beat a hasty retreat, and had headed down the dock toward the beach when I saw a small crowd coming from the road toward me. Those behind, were following, shouting, “Prophet, provider!”

Several policemen accompanied by a fat man dressed in purple robes advanced toward me. The fat man was irate. “This is my grain!” he said to the policeman. “They have stolen it! It all belongs to me, and I want it back!”

The officer said, “Okay, lets try to straighten this out calmly,” then the lady told how the fish had saved her child and brought it to me, then told how I had said it was an omen from God.

Another man told how the grain fell from heaven and rained all over the beach, just before the fish came, while a boy added the part about the wine.

A man with the policeman said he had seen the grain bin fall down from a great earthquake, then the wind blew the rice high into the air.

“We cannot take the grain away from the people,” the policeman reasoned.

“But what about my profit and my grain bin?” the fat man insisted.

“I suppose that is a matter for your insurance.”

“No, it is his fault! He has done this thing. Arrest him!” Mr. Stomach raged, pointing to me.

“You cannot arrest him, he is a holy man and has been the hand of God!” a lady in the crowd said.

I shoved my hand in my clothes and put my finger on the box, in case I had to make a quick getaway.

“How could he do this?” the policeman asked. “You heard your own workman say it was an earthquake and a strong wind. Did this man do these things?”

“Yes, he is a prophet!” several people shouted.

Great, just what I needed! I thought to myself.

The police said, “Would you mind coming down to the station to straighten all this out?”

I thought about using the box to get out of there, but decided they couldn’t prove anything, so answered, “Okay, if you insist.”

As we left, the crowd was shouting, “Hooray for the prophet.”

Several people followed us as we headed through the village. As we walked along, I decided to try to handle as much as possible without using the box. Then, if in trouble, I’d use it as a last resort.

We got to the station house, such as it was, actually, just a shack with some armed men around it. The police captain, the fat man, and I, went inside.

We sat down at a rickety little table while the police captain took out a piece of paper and pencil. “Okay, let’s have your story,” he said gruffly.

I told him the facts of what had happened, nothing more.

“That’s hard to believe,” he said doubtfully.

Fat man began complaining again about how he would starve because his grain had been stolen from him.

The captain poked Lardo’s huge stomach and said he hadn’t missed many meals so far. Then he said to me, “The people say you are the one who has caused these things. They say you are the hand of God. What do you say to that?”

“If it is true, then I should be treated with due respect. If it is not true, then I am simply an innocent bystander who has been wrongly accused. Either way, it appears I have done no wrong worthy of ill-treatment.”

“There is something in what you say.”

The fat man spoke up. “Look at him! He is not from around here. He is a foreigner!”

The captain peered under my hat. He said, “Please take off your hat so I may see your face.”

I removed it. His eyes lit up. “So, it is true. You are not from around here,” he expounded.

“No, I am not. I am an American.”

His face wore a puzzled look. “What are you doing in this place, and dressed like that?”

“Is it a crime to dress as one wishes or go where one pleases?” I asked simply.

He grew angry. “Don’t play word games with me! I don’t buy the story about your being the hand of God! Let’s have your papers and identification.”

I reached in my pocket, pulled out my papers and wallet, and handed them to him.

“This is a Visa from Japan,” he stated officially. “It is not from America at all. How do you explain that, Mr. Hurst?”

“I live in Japan now. Naturally, my Visa is from there.”

He looked crossly at me. “This is all very strange. I shall have to ask you not to leave until this gets straightened out.”

He wrote down all kinds of information about me, then called his headquarters on an old crank-type phone in his office.

“Am I under arrest?” I asked, unafraid.

“No, you are free to go, but do not leave the village.”

“Very well, but I had not planned to be here long. Is there somewhere I could stay?”

“There is a boarding house in the center of the village. I will send a man to show you.”

He called in a policeman, and had him escort me to the village inn. It was not much, but it had a roof and walls. I paid with the Yen in my billfold.

Several people followed us. It wasn’t long before a crowd had gathered, trying to get a look at me. I kept to my room, and closed the door. I began wondering if fame was more trouble than worth.

By about six in the evening, the crowd was blocking the street. Police came and tried to break it up, but the people refused to go. They said they wanted the prophet to speak to them again.

I resisted the temptation of making a quick getaway with the box. After a few more minutes, one of the policemen came in and asked if I would tell the people to go home. They would cause a disturbance, and he wanted them gone. I agreed.

He left my room. I decided I'd better secure the box. I got it, and asked, "Can I utilize your power without having to press the button?"

"Yes, I can maintain contact with your mind so long as I touch your body. You may alter my functioning so that I only require the thought from you to respond."

"Okay, how is it done?"

"When you wish something done, think the words 'Box—Command', then think or say what you wish done. Once you have thought it all out, say or think the words, 'Box—Execute.' It will happen just as if you had pressed the button."

"Okay, I want you to operate this way until I say to change it back." I pressed the button.

"Done. Remember, I still must be in physical touch with your body to function."

"I understand, can I change you into a coin or something?"

"No, my physical structure is immutable. I cannot be changed in any way."

"Okay, but I don't want anyone else to be able to use you. Can I arrange that?"

"No, that cannot be altered, either. If someone has me in their possession, I will function just as I do with you."

"Okay, then I want something prearranged."

"What?"

"If anyone else uses you, I want them, you, and me all transported instantly to The Quiet Place, and for them to be unconscious. Can I arrange that?"

"Yes, it is arranged. Push the button to activate it."

I pressed the button.

"Done." the box replied.

I put the box back in my clothes and made sure it was in contact with my body. I thought, "Can you hear my thoughts?"

"Yes, I hear them," the box replied.

I walked outside. There must have been three or four-hundred people standing around waiting. I felt uneasy, knowing I was drawing such attention.

"The police say you will not obey them. They say you will not go home," I said sternly.

"We want you to speak to us. Teach us." someone in the crowd yelled.

"Teach you what?"

I recognized the man who had earlier refused to give others part of his food. He was in the front of the crowd. He said, "Tell us what we should do to keep the Gods smiling on us."

I frowned at him. "You have followed me here because you have been fed. You do not wish understanding. You want more food."

Someone in the crowd cried, "We are poor peasants. You have worked a miracle and fed us. Will you now leave us to die after the food is gone?"

"If I did indeed work this miracle, then you should listen and follow my instructions; and I tell you to go home. If I did not do it, then you should go home anyway, for there is nothing to see here but an ordinary man."

They murmured among themselves, then one by one, began leaving. Some called out that I was a fake. All left, except three. “Well, aren’t you going home, too?” I asked.

A woman looked up, and I recognized the lady to whom I had spoken before.

“Good sir, I wish to serve and follow you,” she began. “I am not seeking only to fill my belly. I believe you are the hand of God, and wish to learn from you. Tell me what you will have of me?”

Should I send her away? What could I teach her? I wondered. “Woman, I appreciate your offer, but I am not what you seek. Go your way, and do the best you can with what God gives you.”

She left, mumbling to herself.

The policeman thanked me and left the now empty street.

I went back in and sat down on the sleeping mats. I had the strange feeling that I had missed out on a golden opportunity. I wondered what The Ancient One would have done in this situation.

I lay down and wondered what to do now. The captain had my papers. That was no problem, but I couldn’t just leave. If I did, he would report it, and it would be global news.

I rose early the next day and went to get my papers.

There she was again. “Woman, will you please go home.”

“But surely you won’t refuse to let me help you. I wish to repay you in the only way I can.”

“How?” I asked, perplexed.

“My sister is married to a powerful man in the police force. I will ask her to help you.”

I was impressed by her generosity. “Thank you very much, but I can manage quite well on my own.”

“But you don’t know the police here. You may wind up in serious trouble.”

“If I am the hand of God, could I not handle the police?”

“Yes, I guess so. May I stay with you and learn from you?”

“What would I teach you?”

“You would teach me what God wants from me. You would teach me the truth about life, and why the poor are not heard by God, and things like this.”

“And you believe I know such things?”

“If you were not a prophet, how could you do such miracles?”

“Perhaps what you say is true. If it is, shouldn’t you trust me and do as I ask?”

“I suppose so.”

“Good, go home.”

She looked at me as if I were crazy, then shook her head and slowly walked away.

“That’s just what I need—a Chinese groupie following me back to Mt. Ki,” I said to myself, as I walked to the police station.

Several people were there. When I entered, my eyes were dazzled by flashing lights. There were several reporters here, and they started asking me questions. I pushed through them and into the captain’s office.

“Do you see what has happened? If you do not give me my papers and let me leave, you will have a lot more trouble.”

He gave me my papers, saying, “I am glad you are leaving. You are becoming a headache here. Go!”

I said thank you, pushed through the reporters, making my way back to the docks.

I walked along the beach for a couple of miles until I was alone. I said, “Box—command—take me back to Mt. Ki. Box—execute.”

CHAPTER 9

The Return To The Hospital

Master was there as usual. He had his usual air of serenity about him.

“I don’t like the way things turned out,” I said to him.

“That is of no consequence. How do you feel about the choices you made?” he inquired calmly.

“Lousy.”

“Then, there is a problem. Let us speak of your dissatisfaction.”

“Okay, first, I almost got caught.”

“Are you sure?”

“Well, I could have escaped easy enough, but it would have messed things up for me in the future.”

“How so?”

“They would have sent off my papers. If I ever went home I’d have a lot of questions to answer.”

“Do you think what you did was wrong?”

“No, what I did was okay, it’s how I did it that caused the problems.”

“Explain.”

“Well, I saved the baby and that was okay. But then I shot my mouth off because I felt powerful. I thought I was in control of the situation.”

“You were powerful and in control of the situation. This is why you felt so comfortable and calm in the turbulent surroundings. This is good.”

“Yeah, but then things went sour.”

“When exactly?”

“Well, when I tried to leave and the police came. Things went wrong after that.”

“Do you think you made some wrong decisions with the box after you felt uneasy about the situation?”

“No, I didn’t use its power after that incident.”

“Then your bad feelings were not caused by the way you used the power, was it?”

“Humm, I guess not. Maybe it was the consequences of my using it earlier that I didn’t like.”

“No, that’s not it, either.”

“Why was I so depressed? Not ten minutes earlier I was in control, and feeling like a king!”

“You have answered your question within the question. Most questions imply the answer within themselves.”

“I don’t get it.”

“You didn’t like it because you gave up your control of the situation. You no longer felt good about it because you no longer felt in control of the situation.”

“Yeah, that’s exactly it! I didn’t feel like I was in control anymore. I didn’t understand this until just now. That’s what makes me feel fulfilled and good. That’s what causes the high I get—it’s being in control!”

“Very good. This is a breakthrough for you. Now you can see clearly the source of your fulfillment.”

“Yeah, I gave the policeman control of the situation because I was afraid!”

“Excellent. He didn’t take it from you—rather you surrendered it to him. In truth, weren’t you still able to remain in charge of the situation—if you chose to?”

“Sure, I have almost unlimited power with the box.”

“And here is the key. You gave up your control of the situation. The policeman naturally accepted it from you. Here is a valuable lesson for you to remember—**Someone is always in charge, whenever two or more are together.** It must be this way!”

“I see it now. I guess that’s one of those little things everyone knows, but doesn’t understand.”

He said, “Yes, to the enlightened man, these thoughts no longer hide from his conscious.”

I said, “Let’s get back to the test.”

“Lets.”

“Why did things turn out so rotten?”

“Oh, why do you think things turned out badly?”

“Because—it dawns on me how that I was playing games and not really helping people.”

“Explain.”

“One of the people said I would leave them and they would be right back in the same situation in a few days. It left me speechless because he was right. I wasn’t doing any real good for them. I only temporarily relieved their hunger.”

“What else could you have done?”

“I could have provided food for a longer period of time.”

“And you disappointed yourself because you don’t think you did enough for them?”

“Precisely.”

The Ancient One chuckled.

“I don’t see what’s so funny. I think it’s very serious.”

He tried to stop laughing, and smiled at me.

“Well, aren’t you going to explain?”

“Explain what?” he asked innocently.

“What the hell is so funny?”

“You are!”

“Why?”

Master gathered his thoughts, preparing to explain this to me. After a few minutes, he said, “Tell me, who do you admire more than any other?”

“That’s easy, Jesus. He was the ultimate, and I really dig the way He handled things. No offense meant to your beliefs.”

“No offense taken. Now, let’s say Jesus was in your situation there on the docks. What do you think He would have done in your shoes?”

“Humm, I guess He probably would have fed the people. He did that a couple of times, fed thousands miraculously.”

“I agree with you. And if this character came up to Him later, and said Jesus would just leave, and then they’d go hungry again; what do you think Jesus would have said to him?”

“He’d probably have told the guy that He fed him out of compassion. He should appreciate the good done and not worry about what trouble the future may bring. What nerve to say something like that to Jesus after He had just fed you!”

“Indeed. Yet, you did as you think Jesus would have done. Do you think He would have stayed around forever, feeding those people every time they got hungry?”

“Of course not. That’s silly. He has important things to do and they are better off than they were. They shouldn’t be complaining, they received a nice gift and...”

“Yes?”

“I get it—I let this guy make me feel bad. Again, control passed to someone else. This time it was control over my emotions. The guy had a personal problem and probably would have complained if he had received a million dollars.”

“Very good. Your insight is improving. You have overcome many of the false beliefs which keep The Truth from you. I feel that soon you shall be at the very doorstep of enlightenment.”

“But it could have been better. I understand what was done was good; but, the way I did it leaves something to be desired.”

“I accept that.”

“How can I learn to use tact and diplomacy and power wisely?”

“The way to learn—is to be!”

“Okay, I’m going to take another test.”

“I wish you well, I pray that you shall be safeguarded from evil and achieve all that is destined for you.”

It shocked me a little to hear him say this. Why’s he so worried lately? I wondered.

I got a good night’s sleep and woke up refreshed. I decided to backtrack a few steps to check on Heather. I had been so touched by her and wondered how things turned out.

I asked the box to take me to The Quiet Place in the middle of the oasis.

A lion cub came tumbling over to me, and I began petting it. I asked, “Can I go back in and see what has happened in the other tests?”

“Yes, you may reenter at the present time.”

“Where is Heather?”

“She is still in the hospital.”

“How long has it been since I visited her?”

“Four days.”

“Is she cured?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, take me to see her. This time I’ll stay in charge of things—like before. Take me in as the wish-clown.”

“Very well, command me to execute it.”

“Box—execute.”

I was in the parking lot dressed in the wish-clown garb, walking up to the entrance.

I went inside and met the same nurse as before.

“Hello, I came by to see how Heather has been doing?”

“Please sign in.”

I signed in, she checked my ID again, then said she’d have to get the doctor’s approval.

“Fine, I’ll wait here.”

I thought to myself, now, no matter what happens, maintain control of the situation and you’ll wind up feeling as fulfilled as the last time you were here.

I waited about twenty minutes. A little boy came limping up to me. I gave him a big clown smile and said, “Hi Jimmy, I’m a wish-clown. How’s your leg?” His eyes lit up. “Gawd, you’re magical! How’d you know my name?”

“A good magician never reveals his secrets.”

“Would you do a twick for me?”

“What would you like?”

“Can you make a wabbit come out of a hat?”

“Sure.”

I thought to the box, Box—command. When I reach out behind his head, I want a hat to appear in my hand. Box—execute.

“Watch carefully!” I said mysteriously.

I showed him my hands were empty and there was nothing up my sleeves. I reached behind his head. When I pulled it back a moment later, I had a black, silk magician's hat in my hand.

His small, hazel eyes grew as big as silver dollars.

I smiled. "Now, look inside."

He looked, "Empty."

I put it on his head. "Now take it off."

I thought, Box—command. When he takes it off, have a rabbit on his head. Box—execute.

Jimmy reached up and slowly took off the hat. His eyes rolled up high because he could feel the rabbit on his head.

"Go ahead, take him off your head and pet him," I invited.

Jimmy removed the little rabbit from his head, and cried, "Wow, I've never seen such a great twick!"

"If they would let you keep the rabbit, I would give him to you. But here is one you can keep." I used the box to make a quilted, stuffed toy rabbit hop out of the hat.

I traded Jimmy the toy for the real rabbit, and said, "Say good-bye to the rabbit."

"Good-bye magical wabbit," he said obediently.

"Now, snap your fingers."

As he snapped his fingers I had the box make the rabbit disappear, right before his eyes.

"You may keep the toy rabbit. I hope your leg gets better," I said gently, as he turned and limped away, hugging his rabbit.

I felt good again.

A doctor arrived, dressed in the typical green operating outfit with white mask. He said, "Mr. Hurst?"

"Well, I'm a wish-clown right now, just call me Big H."

The doctor looked at me like I was a little off. He said, "Fine, Big H. I'd like to speak with you privately, if I may."

I thought, Okay Scott, remember, no matter what—**You** stay in charge of the situation and call the shots! I said, "That's fine—**after** I see my friend Heather."

He looked at the nurse, then back at me. "I think I'd better talk to you first," he insisted.

I thought to the box, Box—command. Give my eyes a powerful intensity he will understand clearly. Box—execute.

I felt something incredibly powerful in my eyes as I looked at him, and said, "I wish to see Heather **first**—if that's acceptable with you."

The doctor looked like he had gone into shock. He stammered, "Okay, yeah, uh, I guess it's okay. Please, go right ahead."

I smiled. "Thank you very much." I winked at the nurse, then walked merrily down the hall, my huge shoes flopping rhythmically.

Yeah, that's the secret, I mused. Don't give them control. I've got the power! Stay in charge. Don't be pushy or unkind, but don't let them take control away either!

I felt good, as I burst into the room, laughing, and saying, “Well, how’s my beautiful little wabbit named Heather doing?”

She was playing with a Barbie doll. She looked up and those beautiful jade eyes of hers smiled at me and lit up. Oh, how good that look made me feel.

“You came back! You came back!” she exclaimed.

“Yes, now, how are you?”

“I am cured, or at least that’s what the doctors say.”

I faked surprise, saying, “Oh my goodness. That’s wonderful! However do you suppose it happened?”

She burst into tears. “Oh wish-clown, I love you. Thank you for giving me the chance to live again.”

“You are very welcome. But remember, it’s a special secret. You must never tell anyone.”

“I will keep it. Billy’s cured too! It’s so wonderful!”

“I am happy you are pleased. I love you!”

“You don’t even know me, yet, you have done such a wonderful thing like this. Why?”

“I love you. Never change, Heather.”

We talked at length about her hopes for the future. She said she wanted to help other children with Leukemia when she gets older. I was very touched.

Finally, I said good-bye and gave her a big kiss. “Perhaps someday, we shall meet again, my Princess Heather.”

“I hope so, my shining knight-in-armor.”

I left feeling high, and walked down the hallway to find the doctor. I passed an open door. I heard a noise behind me.

Suddenly, everything went black...

CHAPTER 10

The Abduction

When I awoke, everything was still black. I was tied in a chair, naked. My hands, feet, and chest were securely bound. There was a gag in my mouth, my head was pounding and there was a big bump on it. A strange, high pitched, and whining voice came over a speaker. “Well, Scott, we’re glad you’re coming around. Let me introduce everyone. I am Ned Rynearson, billionaire. In the room with you is Chris Chavez, one of my henchmen. I hope the bump he gave you is not too painful. Also in the room is Phil Smith, who interviewed you. Then there is Bobby Bell, my main hit-man, who has a gun pointed directly at your head. Give him a poke to let him know we’re not playing games.”

I felt the cold steel of a revolver touch my temple.

The whining voice continued, “And there are a couple of my other friends in the room with you. Say hello, Ted Bellows.”

A young man said, “I’ve got a gun pointed at your mother. I’ll take off her gag a second.”

He removed her gag, and she pleaded, “Scott, please...” and he gagged her again.

I hoped it was another illusion. The strange man continued, “Now, Scott, I am not there with you. You see, I have taken certain precautions. In another place, your family is being held. In case I don’t contact my men at regular intervals, your family will be killed. You see, I’ve done some checking on you. I have found some interesting things! I know one thing for certain—wherever you go, things happen. I guess you have some gift, or power, or something. Let’s just say you are a lucky man. I don’t know how you do the things you do, nor do I want to know.”

The air was alive with tension. Ned continued, “I want to borrow a little of your luck. I don’t want much, and offer something in return. I want two things, both very specific. But first, is there anything you want?”

Someone removed my gag. As it came off, the gun touched my temple and Bob said, “No tricks or I’ll blow your brains out!”

“Let mom go. You don’t need her.”

Ned’s shrill voice came back, “Fair enough—set her free, and take her home.”

One of the men shuffled around, then a heavy door opened and closed.

“There now, what else can I do for you?”

“Tell me what you know.”

“Very well. I have been funding a special research group for several years now called The League For Investigation Of Strange Phenomenon; LISP for short. I have been hoping to find someone just like you, Mr. Hurst; someone with—power. I thought my LISP group might turn up a saint or a mystic perhaps. Instead, I found you; and your story is a bizarre one! You seemed quite normal until a few weeks ago, when you quit a perfectly good job at IBM without any explanation, disappeared for several days, then flew to Japan. God only knows what happened there. A few days later, your name turned up in a routine police report from your hometown of Shawnee, Oklahoma. But you hadn’t flow back from Japan; and, I don’t think you swam. Nevertheless, you got hooked up with some old street tramp who turned up very dead. The police investigation traces you to the man’s apartment, and your fingerprints are everywhere.”

I began sweating profusely as he continued telling the tale. “Next, you’re in a plane heading from New York to London. The plane goes down, and you save a woman and her child. All kinds of weird things start happening! The shark research vessel, The Achilles Heel reported these peculiar events to my group. This is how we first learned of you. Phil Smith called, then came and talked with you. But when he interviewed you using the Voice Stress Analyzer, it said you were lying your ass off. We realized later that it was at the exact time Phil first phoned you that all our weird phenomenon suddenly quit or changed. We had one of our best women checking the strange behavior of a goldfish, when it suddenly turned into a great white shark. Poor girl died from the heart attack. We eventually figured things pointed to you, Scott. I launch a full-scale investigation of your peculiar story. I sent Ted Bellows to follow you. You went into your hotel room in Shawnee, and an hour later, Ted knocks on the door to meet you. No answer. He used a pass key and entered. No one there. You had just vanished from within that room, which tells me that you have developed a very unique method of transportation. I tried to find you, my people looked everywhere—nothing. I found out later that you were next heard of in China. It made the UPI newswire services and one of my investigators saw your name. Seems you had some trouble with the local police there, too, and something incredible happened, which you were naturally tied up in. I’ll have a full report on it tomorrow. It should be very interesting, knowing you were involved. You didn’t fly from anywhere to China; I’d know if you had. You just showed up. Just one day before you were in China, you paid a visit to someone very dear to me.”

His whining voice trailed off, he coughed emotionally, then continued, “You see, I have no legal heirs, no family to leave my money to—as far as anyone knows. But, there is one relative. I loved a married woman once, and she had my child—a beautiful, precious little girl. Her name is Heather Johnson. One of the main reasons I founded LISP was to find someone who might be able to heal Heather. Only a miracle could cure her leukemia. Well, while I was desperately searching for you, the

irony of ironies, you show up to see Heather dressed like a clown! You signed your real name on the nurse's log, visited Heather, and then disappeared again. The next day, wham! She and her friend Billy are both miraculously cured! I did not believe such power existed. I immediately retrieved the tapes. You see, my poor daughter was dying. I had cameras installed behind the mirrors in her hospital room so I could cherish the memories of her last few weeks for the rest of my life. I watched the tender scene between you two, and saw how you were touched by her. After your strange excursion to China, you returned to the hospital! The doctors kept Heather to run some tests, but I never expected you to return. When they called and said the wish-clown was back, I sent Chris to get you. He hid in the closet until you went by, then bopped you on the head with a billy club. And that's the story as I have pieced it together so far. Now, if you don't do things my way, you'll pay dearly! But, I don't want to have to resort to threats, I would rather be your friend, if that's possible. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

My mind hurt. I thought, My God! I've really done it this time! I've screwed things up beyond hope! All this time I thought I was doing well, but left a trail of events that would catch up with me. I should never have used that damned box! Thank God this crazy man hasn't figured out where my power comes from. If he finds out, there's no telling what he might do! Damn, and I'm responsible! Well, I'll just have to play along until I can get it back—then I'll fix this bastard's wagon but good!

There was a long silence, then Ned said, "Well?"

"Do you really think you could do anything for me that I can't do for myself?"

The speaker clicked back on. "Perhaps not. What would you like me to do?"

I thought, Now, if I can just bluff my way out of this; maybe I can get the box back; but, don't let on that it's important, lest he figure it out. I'll have to be very sly. I said, "If I don't cooperate, what will happen?"

"Your family will be killed, your name will be slandered and you will never be heard from again."

He was serious. The gun at my head made me nervous. If Ned killed me, he'd eventually play with the box, and figure it out. "Then I shall do as you say—**IF** you do something for me," I said stiffly.

"What?"

"Set me free, give me my clothes and possessions back; then I will do as you ask."

Two minutes of agonizing silence elapsed, then the shrill voice replied, "No, I will let you loose and provide you with clothes, but you must prove yourself first. If you succeed, I shall do as you request."

I didn't want to push. I agreed.

The whining voice continued, "Well, I have a big project to give you, but first you will do a minor task to prove you can be trusted."

"What?" I asked indignantly.

"There is a man who is opposing me and my friends in certain matters. I want him to stop. I don't care what it takes."

There was no way out of this one. "What do you want me to do?"

“Mr. Chavez and Mr. Bellows will take you to the man’s residence. I want you to stop his opposition.”

They removed my bindings and blindfold. “Where is Mr. Rynearson?”

“He’s not here—for safety reasons. Don’t worry, you’ll meet him soon enough.”

“I can’t wait,” I said sarcastically.

They drove me across town. I didn’t know what city it was, some small, midwestern town, I guessed.

They drove up in front of an odd looking house. Chris handed me a pistol, saying, “Mr. Rynearson wants him stopped, even if you have to kill him.”

“I don’t want the gun. I won’t use it!”

“Look, this guy’s got a lot of power—you may need it.”

Reluctantly, I took the gun, walked up to the house, and knocked. A strange, short-haired man dressed in long black robes answered the door. I guessed that he was a monk. He said, “Yes, may I help you?”

“Brother, is there someone else here?”

“No, I am alone. What can I do for you?”

He motioned to a chair. “Brother,” I began, “I don’t know how to tell you this.”

He put a hand on my shoulder to reassure me. “My son, you seem deeply troubled.”

“You wouldn’t believe it. I wouldn’t believe it if someone told me.”

“I have heard many things in my time. Just tell me what is troubling you.”

“I was sent here by Ned Rynearson.”

“I’ve heard of him, he’s very wealthy.”

“He sent me here to make you stop opposing him.”

“In what way?”

“I don’t know. What do you do?”

“Well, I am a monk. I teach, pray and live my life.”

“I don’t think that’s what he meant. He said that he and his friends were trying to get something accomplished, and you were opposing them. Do you know what he means?”

The old monk’s wrinkled face grew very serious. “Yes, now I understand.” He lit his pipe. “Go back and tell Mr. Rynearson there are some things he can’t buy—I am one.”

“But if you won’t stop,” I explained, “he will kill my family. He’s holding them hostage.”

“You should report this to the police immediately.”

“No, he probably owns the police. I beg of you, for the love of God, have mercy on me; stop what you are doing.”

“You do not know what you’re asking. I am the Gatekeeper. If I left the gate untended, terrible things would enter this world.”

I pulled the gun out. “Brother, they told me to use this if necessary. I don’t want to, but you don’t understand. I too have a great responsibility and if things don’t get straightened out—there is no telling what might happen. The whole world may be in danger.”

“Son, I cannot help you with your dilemma, for I will not stop my work. You do what you have too. I shall pray for you.”

He bowed his head in prayer.

I put the gun against his head and cocked the hammer. “Brother, forgive me.”

I began to squeeze the trigger. The gun went CLICK.

The monk looked up, wearing an evil grin on his face. The door burst open and in walked Ted and Chris. “Well, did he do it boss?” Chris asked.

In that high, whining voice, the fake monk answered, “Yes, he did! I just knew you would. You see, we had to be sure you’d go through with it.”

He pulled his mask off. It was Ned Rynearson!

I was madder than a wet hornet. “You bastards! You tricked me!”

Ned said, “Oh come now, you didn’t really think we’d let you go untested. We had to know for sure.”

I sat there feeling abused. Ted took the gun and loaded it. “Now we’ll take you to the real monk’s house.”

“I won’t do it.”

“Oh, you’ll do it, all right!” Ned taunted. “Just wait and see.”

They drove me about ten miles to a small house and gave me the gun. “Cheer up. You might not have to use it. But, don’t come back unless you’ve stopped him.”

I put the gun in my belt, walked up to the door and knocked.

The monk who answered looked just like Ned’s disguise. Even the voice was similar. “Yes, may I help you?”

“Brother, we must talk. May I come in?”

He invited me in. I was surprised they had faked everything in such detail. The room, even the furniture was the same.

I sat down. “Brother, I have something unbelievable to tell you. You’ll probably think I’m crazy.”

I told him the story about Ned Rynearson, the fake monk, the gun, everything. I showed him the gun and had him look out the window at the black limo. After I finished, I asked, “Brother, does the word Gatekeeper mean anything to you?”

He looked at me in astonishment. “Where did you hear that?”

“When Ned was pretending to be you,” I answered, “he said he was the Gatekeeper, and if he did not tend it, terrible things would enter this world. What does it mean?”

He looked away, then searched my eyes. “He has told you this in order that I would believe you. No human being knows that term, or my work. I am The Gatekeeper.”

“And you know I was willing to kill you in the test they gave me. Do you understand I will do it.”

“Oh, I have no doubt you will do it. But what did you mean you had great responsibility and the world might be in danger. What are you tied up in?”

“Brother, I can’t tell you. Believe me, if things don’t get straightened out, something awful will happen!”

“Then, I can see no clear solution to your problem. If you are going to kill me, I ask you to give me a few moments to pray.”

“I understand. You want to square yourself first.”

He smiled. “No, my son. I am already square. I pray for you.”

He began praying. I put the gun to his head, he turned and looked me right in the eyes. I cocked it, then got a haunting premonition that he was more than he appeared to be. I began to sweat, my mind clouded up, and my hand trembled. I closed my eyes and tried to squeeze the trigger.

I couldn’t do it. My hand fell to my side, and I began to cry. He put his hand on my shoulder and comforted me. “I am sorry. Can I help you now?”

I thought about telling him everything; the Box, The Ancient One, the tests—everything, but decided against it.

“Do you wish me to call the police?”

“No.”

“I am sorry you are in such a dilemma, but the gate of this world must be carefully tended.”

“Brother, I understand about the gate. I myself am a gatekeeper of sorts, and tend the gate of power. If I don’t get my possessions back from these evil men—this power will fall into their hands.”

“I don’t understand. What could they do?”

“Just about anything. The gate of power is untended now and they may find out how to use it. You must help me!”

“How?”

“If we could fool them into thinking you have stopped, then I could regain my power.”

“I don’t think that’s possible. You see, Mr. Rynearson would know. He is far more powerful than you realize.”

I had no choice. I told the monk about the box, and what it could do. I didn’t tell him everything—only about the box.

“This seems unbelievable. Are you sure they could use it?”

“Yes, anyone who has it in their possession can. All they have to do is to think what they want done and push the button. It’s power is almost limitless!”

“That’s all I need to know.” he said, smiling widely. “Thank you for being so cooperative.”

I was confused. A door opened at the back of the room and Ned Rynearson walked through.

My eyes widened. I had been tricked again. I quickly aimed the gun at Ned and pulled the trigger.

CLICK.

Peals of laughter emanated from behind him. Ned chuckled in that whiny voice, “You don’t think we’d give you real bullets, do you.”

He walked to the door, opened it, and waved. Phil and Chris came in.

Ned put his hand on the monk’s shoulder and said, “Mr. Hurst, this is Mark Agnor, the best actor in the world. He works at one of my studios. He is very convincing, isn’t he?”

I thought, Damn, they made this whole thing up! It was all a front to get me to tell them about the box.

Ned said, "Let me speak with Scott alone for a while. Wait outside in the limousine. Bring in the bag too."

They all left. A minute later, Chris came back with a bag, handed it to Ned, handcuffed me in the chair and left.

Ned sat at the table, opened the bag and pulled out my clown suit and the box. "To think this little box has such power. Where in the world did you get it?"

"You lying, deceitful bastard! I'll tell you nothing!"

"No matter. If anyone can use it, as you said, I'll find out for myself."

I thought, I've got to bluff. "You really bought it, didn't you. Haven't you got the joke yet?" I laughed.

He looked at me suspiciously. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm pulling your pud! There's nothing to the box. I made it all up. I figured, if you made up this wild tale about some gatekeeper monk, I'd make up a wilder story about my power. It's a gag!" I began laughing wildly. "You're such a cretin! What a moron!"

He picked the box up. "We will see." He put his finger on the button. "I feel funny. What's going on?" he asked; and a moment later, "Is it true you can do anything?"

As he conversed with the box, I remembered the arrangement I made in China. If Ned uses the box, we will be teleported to The Quiet Place and he will be unconscious. I have to get him to use it.

I thought, This old fart is too clever. If I try to get him to use it, he'll figure out it's a trap. I'd better not say anything. He'll use it eventually, then I'll get it back.

Ned said, "I don't want anyone else to know about your power. Destroy the limo outside," and he pressed the button.

There was an explosion, then blackness. I was sitting on the fine, powdery sand of the desert, Ned unconscious beside me.

CHAPTER 11

The Return To Reality

I sat a few minutes, thanking God I had set up that prearrangement.

I picked up the box, smiled, and said, “Yeah, you messed up, didn’t you. Oh, you’re smart all right, but not smart enough. What am I going to do with you now?” There would have been no end to the evil he would have done with the box. He would have killed me next.

I strongly considered throwing the box as far as I could. I was sick and tired of the power and responsibility.

I couldn’t figure out what to do with Ned—he knew far too much. I considered killing him right here on the spot. He deserved that. Instead, I would ask my master what to do.

“Take us both to Mt. Ki.” I said and pressed the button.

The Ancient One was sitting on his rock, smiling knowingly.

“Did you see what happened?”

“Yes, I have seen all. How do you feel about using the box?”

“It’s extremely dangerous. If some madman got the box—I shudder to even consider it. I swear that I’ll never use it again.”

He smiled even wider. “I am very proud you have made this decision. I too, many years ago, made this same choice. Each new Ancient One arrives at this conclusion, for the cost is always too high. Do you understand?”

“Yes, I see it clearly. What must I do now?”

“Do as you have thought, never again use it. As you have discovered, all the good you did with its power, ended in a greater evil.”

Master hugged me. “My time draws to a close. You have indeed learned the lesson well. What will you do now?”

“I don’t know.” I sighed. “The police in Shawnee are looking for me, LISP wants me, and who knows what other web I wove for myself.”

“I am afraid it is worse than you know.”

“What do you mean?”

The Ancient One’s face grew serious. “Ned is a very clever man. He made certain arrangements.”

“Like what?”

“If anything happens to him, the entire story he told you will be put in the major newspapers in the United States. People will come looking for you. It will only be a matter of time until they find you.”

“My God, I can’t take the risk of anyone getting the box, no matter what the cost. I will return to The Quiet Place and spend the rest of my life there. This way, no one can find me.”

Master frowned. “And how will you get there?”

“Well, I’ll just use the...” He shook his head at me.

I said, “I won’t break my promise.”

“If you keep it, Ned will awaken tomorrow. What will you do with him? He will try to get away, or get the box.”

“If I had never used that damned box, none of this would have happened. It’s all so stupid! All because I hungered for power, when all I really wanted was the fulfillment which comes from control. I don’t need the box for that.”

“What shall you do?”

“I don’t know; but, whatever it is, I won’t use the box ever again.”

“Will you kill Ned? If so, the story will be put in the papers. If not, he will surely return at a later time to get the box. He is quite resourceful.”

I fell into a deep depression, afraid things were messed up beyond repair.

I asked Master, “What will happen if Ned gets the box?”

“Then, as the legend says, there will be a terrible time of chaos and tribulation throughout the whole world. It must come one day—perhaps that day has come.”

“Master, please help me.” I pleaded. “You have power. Do something!”

He said sternly, “No, the evil you have caused I will not fix for you. You must stand alone. After I am gone, who will fix your problems? You must solve this dilemma by yourself; otherwise, you are unworthy to become an Ancient One.”

“But I have sworn to never use the box again.”

“Then you must undo these things by yourself.”

“I wish I had never gotten into this mess.”

Master smiled. “It is this way each time a new Ancient One is about to be made.”

“Will you answer some questions?”

“Yes, but my time grows short. Tomorrow, at sunrise, I shall be no more. You shall never again see me.”

“You’re dying?” I asked incredulous.

“After sunrise tomorrow—I will exist no more.”

“My God, that’s not much time.”

“It is enough. Use your head, think, I have confidence you will arrive safely at your journey’s end by sunrise.”

I looked at the sun slowly sinking in the west. This was the last night I would have with The Ancient One; but far worse, it was his last night.

“First, is the legend true?”

“Most of what you have heard is true. Over the ages, certain things have changed because of dialect changes.”

“Who had the box first?”

“Kamato, the father of all the Japanese peoples. He was more than that, however.”

“Oh, what else was he?”

“The father to all peoples. The name Kamato, if translated to English, would be Adam.”

“You mean Kamato was really Adam, the first man?” I asked, astonished.

“Yes, and Yoki was Eve.”

“But if that’s true, then the box has been here since the dawn of time.”

“Yes, the serpent tempted the woman with it, saying it would make her as a God in power and knowledge.”

“You mean this box was the apple?!”

“Well, you could say that. When man accepted the power of the box without God’s approval, it affected them and all things.”

“The fall.” I said to myself. I asked, “But how has the power been safeguarded for so long?”

“There has been an unbroken line of guardians—Ancient Ones. Each one came to understand what Kamato knew to begin with—man was not destined to have this power. You have now come to understand this lesson also.”

“This is unbelievable!”

“Did you not know the apple was something that would make man as a God in knowledge and power?”

“Well, I had heard or read that, but never suspected anything like this. What will happen when there isn’t a worthy person to take control of the box?”

“The Evil One shall regain what he originally made.”

“Who is he?”

“Lucifer. He will regain what once was his, after the box passes through a few unenlightened hands. He will use it to vent his fury against all the humans in the world. It shall be a terrible time with wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

“I may have unwittingly started this terrible tragedy!”

“Perhaps. If you can find a solution to your dilemma without breaking your promise, then it will not happen. You shall become the next Ancient One. If not, I was the last.”

“Master, what must I do now?”

“Solve your koan. When you have solved it, you shall regain control of your life. If you cannot solve it before sunrise—the end has begun!”

Master said, “I will say good-bye now. I have loved you and it makes my heart heavy to leave. I wish you well in solving your koan—my son. I pray God help you and keep you eternally in his favor!”

After saying this, he raised his hands, levitated into the air and smiled. “You shall see me no more. Remember:

Many times things are not as they seem to be!”

I wanted to say something, but he had gone. I was alone with Ned snoozing quietly beside me, the box in my hand.

Night had fallen. I looked up at the brilliant stars and prayed, “God, please help me.”

I began remembering the koan master told me:

A falcon was raised by pigeons
then caught by a naked child
and sold to a wealthy man
for his son’s pleasure.
The son put the falcon with a wild eagle
to teach it to fly.
The falcon saw a cloud
which resembled a falcon,
and flew toward it to mate.
After an exhaustive attempt,
the falcon plummeted back to earth.
The son found it, restored it,
and put it back with the eagle
who then taught it to soar on the winds.
Thus, the falcon became an eagle.
The son brought the new eagle
before his father
who was greatly pleased.
They had a great feast
at which they killed and ate the eagle.
Thus, they three were made one.

I fell into a long process of thinking it out.

I am the falcon, and the pigeons were my parents. They were pigeons, not falcons, because they had resigned themselves to a life of conformity. They had been falcons once, but became pigeons because they gave up looking for their destiny in life.

I was caught by a naked child and sold to a wealthy man. Humm, master said the wealthy man was my father. It wasn’t my earthly father, so I guess he meant God the Father.

I was sold to him for his son's pleasure. That would be Jesus.

The son put the falcon with a wild eagle to teach it to fly. I know the wild eagle represents The Ancient One. That means Jesus arranged for me to meet him.

But then I fly off toward a cloud to mate? The cloud must represent some illusion, and I fall back to earth.

That part of it just happened to me, and now I'm wounded. It says Jesus finds me, and puts me back with the wild eagle.

Wait a minute, The Ancient One said he would exist no more after tomorrow morning. How could Jesus put me back with the wild eagle?

It began to dawn on me that The Ancient One wasn't the wild eagle. It says after I get put back with the eagle, he teaches me to fly, so I must have been with him before.

All at once it hit me like a bolt of lightning. I saw it as clear as crystal and understood completely.

The wild eagle was the crazy man—Peniel. He is the one God sent to teach me. But I didn't accept him. I wanted some mystic guru on a mountain in Japan to give me awesome power.

Peniel didn't meet my specifications; but, who am I to decide how God must do things for me?

And The Ancient One was the cloud. He looked like a falcon, or rather, he was my idea of the perfect teacher and guru. I flew towards him to mate, to join with him, become one with him. I wanted to be like him.

I wanted to be a powerful guru on a mountain in Japan, and do things my way. I get it; The Ancient One is my conception of myself as God!

The koan says that I get found, restored, and put back with the eagle and taught to soar on the winds.

I think I've been restored by seeing the truth of this, but I don't think it's possible to get back with Peniel. It's too late, I've ruined everything! God, I'm sorry.

I misjudged that crazy accent-user, judged him by my own stupid standards. Worst of all, I rejected him. I blew the rest of this koan by acting so childish with him. It could have been wonderful, if only I hadn't been so judgmental. And through my strict judgment, I have condemned myself!

I went into a deep depression which lasted hours, weeping bitterly as I considered the harm I had done. My eyes were blurred with tears, my head bowed low.

Suddenly it felt as if some tremendous burden lifted from my shoulders. Slowly, I raised my head, and through my tears, saw the glow of a campfire. I heard bullfrogs croaking in the distance. My eyes widened in amazement. There was Peniel grinning at me like the Cheshire Cat. I was back at Lake Thunderbird—right where it all began...

Peniel laughed loudly. "Well, Ginsberg, do you get it now?"

I was dazed. "What happened?"

"You have been in an ecstasy. It was all in your head."

"My God, it can't be. It has been many weeks since I left here!"

Peniel snickered. "What a double-barreled Ginsberg! It's only been six hours. Gail and the kids are still asleep in the tent. The sun will be up in an hour."

“But how? Where did those experiences come from?”

“I made it up. Well—some of it. Of course, parts of it are true. Many parts are edible! I just made the rest of it up as I went along. I was sitting right here telling the story as you experienced it. It was kinda like a trance, or a dream.”

He stirred the coals of the now low fire. “You see Ginsberg, I tried to tell you Father sent me to teach you, but you had this idea I ought to be like The Ancient One. I pulled that character right out of your imagination.”

“I still can’t believe it didn’t really happen. What about the legend, the box, and all that?”

He laughed lightly. “If there were such a box, would you want to know about it, after all you’ve been through?”

I started to laugh myself. “No, I don’t guess so.” My face took on an expression of amazement as I realized that this strange man before me really did have power! Somehow, he had caused me to experience this entire story. My amazement turned to fear.

Peniel soothed my fear, “Be at peace—I won’t bite you. I love you. It will be a great honor for me to be allowed to be the instrument through which you shall receive your instructions, and learn of life’s true answers to all of the intriguing questions you have. If you wish, we will begin your training after you rest.”

I answered, “Peniel, I understand now—please, teach me whatever you have been sent to teach me. I guess you are the guy in the car and I’m the lame guy with the flood, huh?”

“No, the man in the car came for you years ago, you didn’t recognize or go with him. The boat driver was a lady friend of yours—you spurned her too. I am the helicopter pilot coming for you.”

I pondered that for a moment. I guess he should know, he seems to know everything about my situation—even things I don’t know. I said, “I accept you as my teacher because I have realized an important truth.”

Peniel said in his Oklahoma drawl, “‘N what’d that thur be, pilgrim?”

“I shouldn’t put shackles on God by insisting how He must do things for me. And more important, I shouldn’t judge others!”

Peniel continued in his accent, “Welp Ginsberg, that’s a heap better ‘n you thunk before. I’m rightly proud of you.”

“But was any of my experience real?”

“The good you have gained is real, the evil you believed you did was imaginary. The fact that you have come to understand your own judgmentalness is true.”

“Now, will you teach me?”

Peniel switched back to the southern drawl, “Shucks, Ginsberg, I’d be happier ‘n a fat cat with a bowl ‘o catfish ‘n cream to teach you—that’s my purpose in life, to teach people The Truth! But...” His voice changed to a serious tone, “Only if you accept me as I am, and respect me any way I choose to be!”

“Thank you, Peniel. I will.”

“Excellent, we shall begin your training tomorrow. Now the exciting part begins! You are about to learn the answers to all of life’s important questions. Beginning tomorrow you shall find The Truth!”

“Are you going to take me out in the water?” I asked, smiling.

“No, I will let you listen to some conversations between Dad and I. It should be highly enlightening for you. The first conversation we will have will deal with—What is LOVE, followed by a conversation in which we will discuss Man’s Reason For Being. Then we are going to talk about Why Man Chooses Wrongly, and then What Brings Man Good Fortune. And then there are sixteen other discussions that God and I want you to hear.”

“My God,” I exclaimed, “how much do you know?”

“All that is necessary to teach you your purpose and give you the power you are destined for.”

“There’s something else I’ve learned.”

“What?”

“Many times things are not as they seem to be!”

“Good. I’m glad you got it. Now let me tell you a story.”

I listened carefully as he told the following story:

There was this bazoony-head named Mr. Ginsberg who went to France on a business trip. He checked into a nice hotel, and went to have breakfast. The restaurant was crowded, so the waiter seated him at a small table.

A few minutes later, the waiter seated a Frenchman at the table with him. The Frenchman didn’t speak any English.

When the food was delivered, the Frenchman held his glass of orange juice up to Mr. Ginsberg, and said, “Bon a petit!” Mr. Ginsberg, thinking the Frenchman had told him his name, held his glass up and answered, “Ginsberg!”

Seeing this, the waiter smiled, waited until the Frenchman left, then came over and explained, “Excuse me, but when the man told you Bon a petit he was not telling you his name, that is a toast which means Have a good appetite.”

Mr. Ginsberg thanked the waiter, saying he would remember the toast. That evening, while drinking at the hotel bar, Mr. Ginsberg saw the same Frenchman eating. He went over and held up his drink, saying to the Frenchman, “Bon a petit!” to which the Frenchman replied, “Ginsberg!”

I laughed for a long time. “Yes, I guess I was a Ginsberg, wasn’t I?”

In the voice of Oliver Hardy, Peniel said, “You certainly were! Now Stanley, it’s been a long night. Go and get some sleep. We will begin your instructions after you rest.”

I went to bed and saw the sun slowly coming up in the east. I lay there in my cot and thought of what Peniel had said. After I sleep, I will find the true answers to all of my questions—and I thought God wouldn’t play twenty questions!

In that twilight which exists between night and dawn, between wake and sleep—I peered out of my tent. There sat Peniel by the fire. He was wearing the long black robes of the gatekeeper monk.

In his hand, a small black box...

...or was I still dreaming???

(Available NOW!)

Look for the next part of this story entitled...

THE TRUTH!

subtitled:

My Conversations With Jesus

Peniel G.G.G.

Friend, CONTACT ME! (I can help.)

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