

BEAUTIFUL DREAMER

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Western Shore, Nova Scotia, Canada.

The creative dreaming techniques described in "Beautiful Dreamer" are real, and are used nightly by countless people around the world. Many of these people keep dream diaries, and often claim to find inspiration and guidance from contemplation and analysis of their dreams. Lucid Dreaming is also real, although its mastery and use are normally only achieved by many years of dedicated effort.

BEAUTIFUL DREAMER.

Prologue

Nineteen Sixty: Yorkshire, England.

His friends called him ‘Titch’, which was simply a Yorkshire term for a person of small size. In fact Titch was not small; not for his age; it was just that any ten-year old boy who chose to run with a pack of twelve to fourteen year olds was doomed to be thought of as ‘Titchy’. Yet he was not small where it mattered most to the gang -- in his heart and in his spirit -- and he could hold his own in most of their rough and tumble games. But this one was different.

It was cold, that winter; cold enough that the ice on the canal could support the weight of a pack of small boys, who skated and skidded and chased and tumbled on the frozen surface. They ‘skated’ on the soles of their leather shoes, or, for the luckier ones, their winter boots, for ice skates were a rare commodity in that place at that time. And then they decided to play ice hockey.

Since no-one knew much about this strange North American pursuit it fell to Brian Lockwood to determine the rules of play. Being the eldest and biggest of the boys it often fell to Brian to make such determinations. They knew that hockey was basically a ‘girl’s game’ played by their female associates during the winter season while the boys played soccer. Yet they understood that in North America *Ice Hockey* was a game for the toughest, the fastest, the most skilful of men. Therefore the rules for *ice* hockey and *field* hockey must be substantially different in some important respects. Their ‘hockey sticks’ were whatever pieces of wood fell to hand; about half of the group brought out their cricket bats. The ‘puck’ was a well worn tennis ball. Each ‘net’ was represented by two piles of scarves and hats, similar to those which at other times would serve as the ‘goalposts’ for impromptu soccer matches.

They cleared a light snowfall from the surface of the canal over a surface roughly sixty feet long by the width of the waterway – about fourteen feet. The boys were selected by team

captains – Brian Lockwood and his twelve year old brother Neil – into two teams. Titch was the last boy picked, and ended up on Brian’s team. “What position should I play, Bri?” he asked the bigger boy.

“You play ‘Outfielder’” Brian told him. “That’s like fullback in soccer. Go and stand by the goal, and if the ball comes back to you, bash it up to the Attackers. OK?”

“That’s like being Goalie!” Titch complained. “I don’t want to play goalie!”

“They don’t have goalies in ice hockey,” Brian explained. “That’s why ‘Outfielder’ is such an important position, OK?”

Mollified, Titch stood by the goalposts, watching the tangle of arms, legs, bats and various wooden contraptions as the two sides melded into a single brawling mass. He longed to get into the fray, but knew even at ten years old that a good team player holds his position, no matter what. In his frustration he struck at the ice with his cricket bat – a device really sized for a much larger boy. The bat skidded off the surface, cracking the ice, and the momentum of its continued swing carried the small boy off his feet. He jackknifed in the air and headed downwards, butt first, towards the ice.

The front-line scrum continued to hack and swing, to punch and wrestle, until someone, more by luck than by skill, connected a solid whack against the dirty yellow ‘puck’. The ball shot out of the melée, back towards the ‘Outfield’.

“Get it, Titch!” Brian Lockwood yelled. But Titch was not there.

When he hit the ice it exploded beneath him, and Titch fell into the frigid water, his rate of fall barely slowed by contact with the thin sheet of ice. At this time of the year the water level in the canal was less than four feet, but it might just as well have been forty. The shock of contact with the bitterly cold water caused the boy to inhale rapidly, reflexively, filling his small lungs.

He opened his eyes to see an angel. He recognised her from the pictures and descriptions given to him at his Methodist Sunday School lessons. She was enclosed in a sheath of golden light, and a halo of the same light circled her head. Her hair, too, was golden and cascaded about her shoulders in tight, yellow curls. She floated in front of the young boy's wide-eyed gaze, and smiled at him with her mouth and her eyes and her face and with her entire being. The love which she felt for him was tangible and warm. There was no place here for ice, or snow, or frigid waters. There was no place here for coldness of any kind. She held out her hand, and Titch took it.

Together they floated towards a beautiful city of light. The many tall buildings seemed to be made of glass, glowing in all imaginable colours. It reminded the boy of the 'Illuminations' which he had seen the previous winter at Blackpool, on a day-trip by coach arranged by his Sunday school; but these colours were far more beautiful.

The fact of his situation registered, finally, and his small features creased into an expression of confusion and fear. "Am I dead?" he asked his angel. "Are you taking me to Heaven?" The angel made no reply, and the two continued their journey over the gleaming rooftops. They crossed the city and left it behind them. An unknown amount of time passed – minutes or hours, Titch was quite uncertain – before they came at last over more familiar territory, and the boy recognised the small coal-mining village on the outskirts of Sheffield where he had lived for the ten long years of his young life. Along the canal they drifted, to a spot where the snow had been cleared, where a group of young boys were clustered over something – someone?—lying, unmoving, on the snow covered bank of the waterway.

"That's me, isn't it?" Titch asked. "That's my dead body, I know it. Why have you brought me back to my dead body? When are you going to take me to Heaven to be with Jesus?"

"It is best that you should not ask these questions." The reply formed itself in the boy's mind. His angel had not turned, not moved her lips; but she had spoken to him. "Who

are you?" Titch asked. He sought frantically amongst the sketchy memories of his Sunday School teachings. "You can't be God because you're a girl! Who are you, then? Are you the Mother Mary? Are you the Angel Gabriel?"

"It is best that you should not ask these questions," the spirit replied again. "What happened was not meant to happen, and I have come to correct the situation. It is best that you should not know of me, not yet, nor remember any part of what happened here today. I will make it so."

"Yes," said Titch, not understanding, "But you should at least tell me who you are. It's only polite. What will happen now? Will you leave me here? Will you leave me in my dead body? What will happen to me?" The thought of being trapped in his dead body was not a pleasant one, and the boy fought hard to compose himself and not let his fear show through, as befitted a tough son of Yorkshire. Yet his angel felt the fear threaten to overpower the child, and turned to take him in her arms and comfort him. Titch felt the warmth of her love soak into him and through him, and a feeling of perfect bliss soothed his concerns and drove out the fear.

"My sweet child, I will never leave you. I will be with you always, throughout your long life and in the life to come. I will never let you come to harm."

A sudden inspiration occurred to the young boy, derived not from his Sunday School teachings but from a more prosaic source. "Are you my Fairy Godmother?" he asked. The angel smiled, but said nothing. And then everything went black.

He opened his eyes to find himself face down in the snow, coughing out great quantities of foul tasting canal water. Twisting his head slightly he saw Brian Lockwood's concerned face hanging over him, while brother Neil pounded rhythmically on his back. He had no knowledge of how he had come to this. His last memory was of swinging his cricket bat at the canal's icy surface and losing his balance. He did not recall hitting the ice. His memory from the fall to the opening of his eyes was a black void.

In the way of young boys, especially those concerned with impressing their older, tougher friends, Titch did not at all appreciate being the centre of attention and the focus of alarm. It was unthinkable that his friends should be concerned for his welfare merely because he had slipped on the ice and, apparently, knocked himself unconscious for a short time. He had not yet noticed that he was dripping wet and freezing with cold. Titch leaped to his feet and faced his fellows. When he strove to speak he noticed that his teeth chattered, and the full nature of his situation was finally brought home to him.

“Listen, Titch,” Brian told him earnestly, his face a study in concern, “You must get warm as soon as you can. The best way to do that is to *run*. Can you run?” What a stupid question; of *course* he could run. What Yorkshire boy could not run! He began to run. His muscles felt strange, and sharp pains lanced through his legs. Ignoring these small inconveniences Titch ran on, and the pains lessened as the muscles warmed. Brian and most of the other boys ran alongside to ensure that their smaller colleague came to no further harm. They covered the half mile to Titch’s home in a little over four minutes, a very creditable time for the snow covered terrain, particularly given the circumstances. The group hung back at the gate to the small garden in front of the semi-detached home where Titch lived. Alone he unlatched the door and ran on into the small living room where a welcome coal fire blazed. His mother looked up from the newspaper she was reading and took in the scene in an instant. The dripping, panting young boy was at a loss for words and so spat out the obvious.

“I fell in the canal, Mom. I fell through the ice into the canal.”

His mother stared for long seconds, mixed emotions of anger, relief and love moving over her face. “Harry Murphy, if you’ve ruined those new leather shoes I’ll kill you!”

BEAUTIFUL DREAMER.

Nineteen Ninety Eight: Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

Chapter 1

Early in January Harry Murphy decided to keep a Dream Diary. That is, a daily (or nightly) record of his dreams. His wife, Liz, thought it was silly idea, but then Liz was long used to putting up with Harry's silly ideas and this one seemed to be much more benign than many of his previous sillinesses. Less costly too. The expensive Clarinet he had bought a year ago was now gathering dust in a bedroom closet. Harry had seen people playing the Clarinet on TV and thought it looked easy

Harry had been interested in dreams since he was a young man and had read Freud. Unfortunately he was one of those people who rarely dream, so his interest had stayed more clinical than personal. He had always believed, however, that there was something very powerful about dreams; something which, if tapped, could be a very useful tool in everyday waking life. He knew that much of mankind's inventiveness and creativity comes up from the subconscious mind, by means of a mechanism which is neither well understood nor particularly reliable. He imagined that if he could tap directly into his subconscious by way of dreams -- few and far between though they may be -- it could be the shortcut to Fame and Riches for which he had been searching through much of his life.

The decision to keep a dream diary started while waiting for Liz at Halifax Airport one snowy January afternoon, when a small display of books outside Cole's bookstore caught his attention. Harry was attracted to this particular little book by its blue-on-blue cover, its title --

"My Dreambook" -- and the price; about what he had expected to pay for a magazine to pass an hour or so while he waited for Liz's flight. He thumbed open the book and read a few lines from the flyleaf. "Although you may not be aware of it, you *DO* dream," the book told him. "You dream several complex, vivid dreams a night. Every night. And with a little help from this book, you will remember every detail of every dream."

"And that" said the book "Is just the start of where I will take you!"

OK, thought Harry. Sold. He paid the \$7.99 sale price, explained yet again that he didn't really buy enough books to merit getting one of their discount cards, took his prize over to a red vinyl-covered chair and started to read. The next thing he knew Liz was standing over him asking "Harry Murphy, are you going to get up and drive me home or should I get a taxi?" On the way out of the Airport he stepped back into Coles and collected a small notebook and a supply of looseleaf paper.

Harry stayed up past midnight reading his fascinating little book, and learned much about the current state of knowledge regarding dreams. The physical side of the business made for pretty dull reading, with much about brainwaves, dream states and rapid eye movement. It struck Harry that this branch of science had not moved a lot over the last five decades and still seemed to rely heavily on students dozing off in research labs with electrodes glued to various parts of their bodies. About the only progress since the nineteen fifties seemed to be the use of computers. These greatly improved the speed with which scientists could determine which sleep state the subject was in -- for what that might be worth. He speed-read most of this and got very little out of it.

The psychological side of dreaming was more interesting, and seemed to have come a long way since Sigmund Freud had determined that all dreams are about sex, even if you're not dreaming about sex. A section on the interpretation of dreams told him how biblical prophets had once made a good living by telling kings and emperors what they had *really* been dreaming about when they dreamed they were having sex. He learned that dreaming of a cat could

mean any of half a dozen different things, none of which had anything to do with cats. He flagged several pages for later study and moved on.

The spiritual aspects of dreaming were beyond Harry, especially at two o'clock in the morning. There was mention of hypnosis and the opening of one's spiritual channels; of states of meditation and of spirit guides; of spiritual growth and progress along The Golden Path Towards Enlightenment. It made his head ache. He closed the book and went to bed.

* * * * *

Harry arrived at Burton's Press at 7:30 Monday morning and Louise met him in the foyer. Harry had worked at Burton's for close to twenty years, and had worked in virtually every area of the company. For the last eight years he had served as Production Manager for the firm. "It's a Code Two, I'm afraid, Mr. Murphy" Louise told him without even a "Good Morning".

The "Code" business had started as a little joke between Louise and Harry some months ago, but she seemed to have taken it more seriously than Harry had intended. Although he recognised her as a first class Administrative Assistant, he had to admit that Louise was also a first class worrier. At least once a week she would be waiting for him in the lobby with some new piece of gloom and doom, and he had quickly noticed that her dire warnings fell neatly into half a dozen categories. For example, "The Crabtree-Vickers is down again" was a Code One. This was not an uncommon occurrence, nor was it surprising that a forty year old printing press should break down on a fairly regular basis. Any serious production problem was a "Code One". "Code Three" was used for Personnel crises or Union problems. "Code Two" meant that his boss, Theo Burton, was having conniptions again and needed Harry to go up to his office, hold his hand and say "There, there, Theo, don't worry. Harry is here now and Harry will fix it."

Theodore Francis Burton was the grandson of James Elliott Burton, the man who started Burton's Press some eighty years previously with an old Linotype machine and an antique

Letterpress. Theo was the last of the line; no more Burton's at Burton's after Theo. Although the family no longer owned the company Theo remained a significant shareholder in Burton's and served as Chief Executive Officer. This entitled him to an executive office on the eighth floor, an Executive Assistant, an executive salary, an annual executive bonus and, perhaps the most valuable perk of all, a seat on the governing board of AGI -- Amalgamated Graphic Industries Corporation. AGI owned Burton's, five other large printing institutions, eight smaller ones and twenty other companies all more or less connected with the printing and publishing business. Most of his employees considered Theo to be a nice guy, but totally useless. He was the spoiled son of James Francis, who was the spoiled son of James Eliott, but there was nothing of the old man's steel left in Theo. His main function was to attend the monthly AGI meeting in Toronto and bring back his notes to Halifax. These he read to Harry and the rest of the Burton's Management Team on the Monday mornings following the Toronto trips. The meetings were invariably short since nobody asked questions. Nobody asked questions because they all knew perfectly well that Theo had no answers, and it would only cause embarrassment all round the table to expect them from him.

Harry grabbed the coffee which Louise held ready and headed for the eighth floor. Theo met him coming out of the elevator. "Harry," he shouted loud enough to be heard from floor three on up, "Harry, they want me to take early retirement. Early retirement, Harry! How can I take early retirement? How am I going to manage, Harry? They say I won't even have a pension!"

Doesn't anybody bother with "Good Morning" anymore, Harry wondered?

He got Theo settled in his black leather recliner, asked June to bring in some tea, and tried to calm him down. June Sawler was Theo's Executive Assistant, this title being one step up from 'Administrative Assistant'.

"Theo, for starters, you're sixty three years old, and you would have had to start thinking about retirement soon anyway, so let's not lay too much emphasis on this "early" business, shall we? Secondly *none* of us in the management group have company pensions any more.

Those generous annual bonuses we've been getting are supposed to let us make our own financial arrangements for our golden years. And thirdly, you still own twenty percent of Burton's stock, which should pay you a yearly dividend about the size of my present salary and bonuses combined. Take a deep breath Theo, and just think about this."

"Seventeen," he said.

"What?"

"Seventeen percent. I own seventeen percent of Burton's, and they want that from me, too. They want to give me a two percent share in AGI in exchange for my Burton's shares, so I won't even have that."

Harry did some quick mental arithmetic. "Theo, they are being nice to you. They are offering you a good old "golden handshake" to make the parting easier. In terms of how much it will pay you, your Burton's shares are equivalent to about one, maybe one and a quarter percent of AGI stock. If they are still offering two percent this morning call them back and grab it."

"But what am I going to do, Harry?"

"Just what you've always done, Theo." That didn't come out the way Harry intended but luckily it seemed to go straight over Theo's head. "You can do anything you want, whenever you want. You don't have to wait for weekends to go to your cottage. You can spend the whole summer fly fishing if you want to. You can take the trip to Europe you've been talking about for the last five years. Go on a world cruise. Lie in bed late in the morning if you want to. *Every* morning, Theo."

About half of this was getting through, but it seemed to be enough.

"You think it's OK then, Harry? Really, I mean? Honestly?"

"Theo, I think it could turn out to be the best thing that's happened to you in years."

"But what about Burton's, Harry? How are you all going to get along if I'm not here?"

Bite your tongue, Harry. Not even a flicker of a smile. He's one of the Good Guys, remember, and they don't exactly outnumber the other kind around here.

"Well, Theo, we'll have to face that problem sooner or later. And I'm sure that AGI will insist that your replacement is at least as capable a manager as you have always been." Careful Harry, the man isn't stupid.

Theo smiled. June came in with the tea.

So now we come to the big one, Harry thought. The \$64,000 question. Don't let it sound like you really care that much, or as though you've been waiting for this moment for the last five years. Sip your coffee, Harry, and don't drool.

"By the way, Theo, did George say whether they have anyone in mind to replace you?" George Thorpe was the President and Chairman of the Board at Amalgamated Graphics. George wasn't exactly a dictator, but the last person to stand up to him with any amount of vigour had not been heard from for six months. Office gossip said he was managing a Copy Centre somewhere near Yellowknife.

"What? Oh, no." Theo was elsewhere. "You know Harry, I bet I would get rid of this awful indigestion I get every time I eat anything. Get the old insides back into good working order, what? Out from under all the stress, you know, sort out the old tummy, don't you think?"

Stress? What stress? "I'm sure you're right, Theo. Did he, did George, did he happen to mention.....?"

"Oh, yes, sorry. No. Not that I recall. He says he wants me to go up to Toronto to discuss the changeover."

"Changeover? So he *does* have someone in mind for the job?"

"Someone in mind? Oh, I see. I don't know, Harry. Yes, come to think of it, I believe he may have. Probably some recent MBA from some prestigious American Ivy League. Likely the nephew of one of the boys on AGI's board of directors. Somebody who can speak to computers in their own language but has the interpersonal skills of Attila the Hun. Damn shame for Burton's. What the old firm really needs is somebody like *you*, Harry. Someone with a knack for getting along with *people*. If you weren't too old, that is. If I thought there was a chance I'd suggest you to Thorpe when I talk with him next. You know, I think I will, dammit."

Now how's that for a backhanded compliment, Harry wondered. I'm forty seven for God's sake, with twenty good years left in me. I'm a perfect age for the job.

Theo was standing with his back to Harry, staring out of the window, probably thinking about fly fishing. The Code Two was obviously over. Harry excused himself to Theo's back and left.

Back in his office Louise had re-scheduled his morning meetings, postponed those who couldn't make the new times, and replaced his tepid cup of coffee with a fresh one from the machine by her desk. The morning sped past and by the time he noticed how quiet the third floor had become it was half past lunchtime.

Despite the gossip Harry continued to believe that the staff cafeteria ('Staff-Caff' as it was unaffectionately known) was *not* harmful to your health unless you actually used it. He therefore tried to keep his visits down to emergency use only, which averaged out to about three, maybe four times a month. Having an important customer arriving in his office within

the next hour constituted such an emergency, so he grabbed cup, plate, plastic utensils and tray and made the best of what was left in the stainless steel bins. He saw Mick Shaw, Burton's Pressroom Chief, sitting alone and went over to his table.

"G'day Scotty" Harry said, setting his tray down on the small cafeteria table. Mick was as Irish as the Shamrock. He came to Canada in the early seventies, and took a job in a Montreal Pressroom. Mistaking his accent, the locals (with no malice intended) called him "Scotty". It stuck, and moved to Nova Scotia with him in the mid eighties, but he'd never grown to like it. He gave Harry a look.

"Sorry, Mick."

"G'day, Murph" he said, relaxing the scowl. (Finally, half way through the day, the elementary courtesies observed!) Harry had always thought Burton's was lucky to have Mick Shaw as Pressroom Boss. Back not too many years ago you could get by in such a job with a good working knowledge of the printing process and the personal toughness necessary to enforce your orders; but in today's high tech world, with half the equipment using built-in micro-computers the first step in trouble shooting a press problem was often searching for bugs in a computer program. Mick Shaw possessed a rare combination of computer savvy, printing knowledge and ham-sized fists. In the pressroom, when Mick said "jump" it was wise to be well up into the air before asking him "how high?"; And the techies had told Harry, away from Mick's hearing, that "Scotty" knew as much as the best of them, and was immune to jargon. It was said that one smartass sales rep had tried to snow Mick with hi-tech bafflegab once. Only once.

He was puffing and chewing by turns on a long, fat cigar, occasionally flicking ash onto the "Strictly No Smoking" sign which he'd taken from a nearby table and bent into a rough approximation of an ashtray. He looked abstracted, his eyes semi-focussed across the large dining room. Harry followed his gaze in time to see June leaving by the big swing doors that led to the elevators.

"She's a cracking bit of stuff, that secretary of Theo's" he observed. "Do you suppose he's getting any of it?"

"No" Harry told him. "And she'd cut your Irish heart out if she heard you call her a secretary."

"Yeah, what is it? Personal Assistant, right? Well she can assist me personally any time of the day or night!"

"Executive Assistant, Michael. And why do you suppose she'd look twice at a thug like you when you're sitting next to a stud like me, tell me that now, will you?"

"HHmmphhaa" Mick spluttered, spitting cigar smoke and coffee. "Yeah, right, in your dreams, Boyo!!"

It rang a chord. Harry looked at Mick. The Pressroom Boss had the face and physique of a successful barroom brawler, and his lunchtime conversations rarely deviated from sports, Clint Eastwood movies (for which he shared a fondness with Harry) or the supposed sexual appetites of assorted Burton Beauties. Harry decided to try the question anyway.

"Do you dream, Mick?"

Shaw looked at Harry as though he'd been asked how he'd enjoyed his summer holiday on Mars. He said "Do you mean, like do I think I should have a crack at Theo's job when he leaves next month? Like, do I have -- what is it they call them? Career Aspirations?"

Before Harry could register surprise that Theo's secret was already doing the rounds he remembered how it had been yelled out to him at the elevator that morning. Mick had probably known even before that. "No" he said. "I mean regular dreams. At night. When you're asleep. You know. Dreams."

"Odd sort of question, Murph."

"Well." Harry decided to come clean. "It's just that I'm reading this book, and it says that everybody dreams, several dreams every night. But, me, I dream once every two or three months, so you see....."

Mick grinned. "I see. You think you're not getting your share, that it? Relax, Murph. I don't buy it. I don't remember the last time I dreamed about anything. It was probably that June Sawler, personally assisting me, with them long legs wrapped around....."

Harry choked on a piece of yellowish vegetable matter. "OK Mick, not while I'm eating this whatever it is. I take your point."

"You know what, Murph, you should talk to my nephew, Virgil. He has this thing about dreams, too. What was it he was telling me about? Something about 'Elusive Dreaming' which is like some kind of magic trick. If you learn how to do this 'elusive dreaming', you can make wonderful things happen." His watch beeped, and Mick was gone without another word. Well, at least Harry had had a "G'day" from him.

As he watched Shaw's retreating back Harry realised that Mick was probably recalling something he'd heard in passing anything up to four or five years ago, and stored away for possible use somewhere, some time. Quite a man, that Scotty Shaw. Elusive Dreaming, Harry thought, sounded like something worth looking up.

Liz was playing bridge that evening, so after supper Harry sprawled out on the living room couch with Bach playing quietly on the surround sound system, and opened his Dream Book. There was no index and no mention of Elusive Dreaming in the contents pages, so he picked up where he'd left off, and started on the instructions for the remembering of dreams.

It was worse than playing a Clarinet, Harry thought. If he'd expected this to be easy, he'd picked up the wrong little dream book, and his dream diary purchase had been a tad premature. Step One (Step one? Just how many steps are involved here, he wondered. He

flicked briefly ahead and saw that there were four) Step One involved *convincing* yourself that you *would* remember your dreams.

To do this, he read, you need to create a little *mantra*; a little chant, that you repeat to yourself, silently, while trying to fall asleep. It was apparently important that this mantra have not only words, but *cadence*. Rhythm. The kind of thing that little girls used to skip to. (Do they still?, he wondered). It is no good simply repeating "I am damned well going to remember my dreams tomorrow morning." The example given was:

"I *will* remember my *dreams* tonight."

"I *will* remember my *dreams* tonight."

Di Dah Di Diddelley Dah Di Dah.

Over, and over and over. And over. And over.

Eventually, the book explained, even though your thoughts may drift to other things, the mantra will be implanted in your subconscious mind and will have its intended effect. If you listen quietly to your own thoughts you might just hear a faint mental echo from somewhere deep down.

Di Dah Di Diddelley Dah Di Dah.

"I *will* remember my *dreams* tonight."

"I *will* remember my *dreams* tonight."

"I *will* remember my *dreams* tonight."

Until you fall asleep.

Not being particularly good at this sort of thing Harry thought he might as well simply use the example given. After all he'd paid for the book hadn't he?

When Liz got home at 11:45 p.m. Harry was fast asleep on the couch, snoring away to the accompaniment of "Sheep may safely graze" replaying itself for perhaps the fifth time. She shook him awake. He didn't remember any dreams. Nor did he when he next woke up the following morning.

* * * * *

The week flew by. Harry saw Theo once, briefly, on Thursday morning. He breezed by Harry's office, stuck his head through the doorway and told him he'd been worrying needlessly about this 'early retirement business' and everything was working out just ducky, thank you. Theo had, eventually, also done the math, and had called AGI to accept their offer. In addition there was a handsome severance package, which ran well into six figures, and he got to keep his company car. All in all Theo was to be pretty much as comfortable financially as he had been as an employed CEO, and could even look forward to the occasional consultancy fee on occasions when AGI had need of his particular executive talents. Harry thought that it could be a while before such an occasion arose, but he kept this to himself and simply nodded and smiled. Of course, he could well be wrong. Theo was considered to be a Good Guy by one and all, and had more than a few friends in high places. Someone from the board could very well toss a contract his way for old time's sake. Theo's report would probably end up as expensive executive toilet paper, if it didn't go directly to the shredder, but then such are the ways in which business is done at the more exalted levels. He was whistling softly as he walked away.

There was not a single whiff on the office grapevine concerning Theo's replacement. Harry could understand how his own vine might have failed to pick up early gossip, but there was no way that Louise or Mick Shaw would miss it. Louise even happened to bump into

June Sawler in the Staff-Caff and in passing the time of day learned that not even June was privy to upper echelon corporate thinking this time.

Harry resolved to make his move early the following week. He had a few good contacts in Toronto, and a number of markers he could call in. He knew George Thorpe well enough to give him a call. It would certainly not hurt his career prospects to let George know he was interested in the top slot, and that he considered himself competent for the post. In fact Harry knew very well how it would reflect on his career prospects if Toronto got the impression that he did *not* have ambitions in that direction. Still, it would have to be a very well thought out and immaculately timed call. Come to think of it, Harry had several perfectly valid reasons to schedule a few days in The City and although George would see straight through him if he "just dropped in" he would not take it amiss. Must think on this, Harry told himself.

The weather forecast called for one of those beautiful balmy Nova Scotia winter weekends that could pass for spring in many parts of the country, and Harry took himself off to his "thinking place". Twelve years ago Nova Scotian oceanside property had still been affordable by other than millionaires, and Liz's parents had bought a three acre parcel on St. Margaret's Bay, half an hour's drive out of town. Their intention had been to build a year round home and retire there one day, but they failed to take into consideration the intervention of a drunk driver who put an end to all of the couple's intentions, short and long term. Liz's Dad never did see retirement and her Mum never planted the seaside garden she'd dreamed of. The driver walked away with barely a scratch and was found a mile or so down the road, lying on his back on the soft shoulder admiring the stars. Just one more sorry drunk driver story, Harry thought cynically.

The term "million dollar location" is grossly overworked by Nova Scotian Real Estate Agents, but the term fell short of describing this little chunk of paradise. Over the years Harry had come to see the property as the place to go when he needed to think. Two summers ago they'd had a pre-fabricated cottage set up on a poured concrete slab, had drilled a well and had a septic system installed. A woodstove in the kitchen and a log fire in the living room kept

away the worst of the winter chill, and an old record player stood in for the expensive sound system of their Halifax home.

Liz had other plans for the Saturday morning, and would join him later in the day, so on Friday evening Harry drove down and fired up the kitchen stove and living room fireplace, set some Verdi spinning on the old turntable, poured a generous Jack Daniels and settled down to do some serious thinking. He took his sippin' whiskey over to the big picture-window set into the north facing wall and looked out over the huge bay. The lights at Peggy's Cove twinkled in the distance and the ocean was a vast expanse of blue-black ink.

An hour later his mind was unfettered by solutions. The problems, on the other hand, seemed to have multiplied. If he called George Thorpe personally, would other members of the Board -- some of whom he knew quite well -- feel snubbed. But if he called Philip Sutherland -- a board member he counted as a friend (they had got drunk together once) -- would George think he was plotting behind his back? Did George and Phil get along? Could he talk to one without alienating the other? Or did anybody truly matter in this but George himself? Then again, should he call *anyone* before an official announcement arrived? Was he even supposed to know? But if he waited until the official memo arrived would they see him as a fool not to know what the assistant janitor on the evening shift had already known for weeks?

Why the devil don't they teach this stuff in school, Harry wondered.

What he really needed was some help from his subconscious mind, where all questions of this nature are settled in the first place.

Of course.

He hadn't come down to the cottage to study his Dream Book, but some hunch had made him throw it into his overnight bag. He dug out the little book, threw another log on the fire, poured a second generous glass of thought-lubricant and settled down on the old, over-stuffed sofa.

Step Two, he began.

You do not need to train yourself to awaken automatically at the conclusion of a dream. Sometimes this will happen; other times it won't. If needed, you will wake up. Why would you need to wake up after every dream? Because it is important that you make a few notes immediately on waking. The dream takes place in the *mind*, while memories are stored in the *physical brain*. (Let's not go there, at least not yet, he thought. Harry had always thought of "brain" and "mind" as synonymous). In order to imprint the dream onto the brain, you may need a memory jogger. A word or two will do. A short sentence will cover the most complex of dreams. You dreamed that you were Robin Hood? Spent years as an outlaw in Sherwood forest? Were restored to your lands by good King Richard, married Marion and lived to become a grandfather? An eighty year dream, shall we say? Wake up and jot down "Bows and Arrows."

You have a matter of minutes -- perhaps only seconds -- to do this before the dream evaporates like steam from a kettle and becomes as impossible to recapture; but the next morning, as soon as you see the jottings on the little notepad on the bedside table, the entire epic will be restored and permanently impressed into the memory recording apparatus of the brain. Trust me on this, said the book.

Step Three. Good morning. Wake up, recover jottings, remember dream, record in complete, intricate detail in your dream diary. Don't leave out a thing. Write down what you said, what you did, who you met, how you felt. If you don't do this, then the limitations of physical memory take over and when you re-read your jottings a week later you may not have the slightest idea what they were meant to signify.

Nice. Simple. Not nearly as bad as he had first thought. Much less complex than, say, learning to play a musical instrument.

One more glass of liquid gold. He toasted Sigmund Freud, filled his hot water bottle from the kettle on the kitchen stove, and climbed under the duvet into the Murphy shaped indentation in the soft mattress. The living room and kitchen fires would die down overnight, but the cottage would retain enough heat to keep him comfortable until he stoked the fires in the morning.

I will remember my dreams tonight.

I will remember my dreams tonight.

I will remember my dreams tonight.

After about a dozen "remembers" he didn't remember anything.

He slept long and soft. No alarm clocks awakened him; no morning radio DJ cheered himself into Harry's day. No city traffic noise intruded into his sleep. He woke up, about nine o'clock on a sparkling Saturday morning in the most beautiful part of the most beautiful province of the finest country on God's Good Green Earth. He felt full of joy.

He checked his mental registers. No dreams. Nothing. Could it be that the "Dah did-dely dah" business would only work for people who had dreams to remember in the first place? He would have to look in the book to see if there was a section on "inducing dreams".

Other pressing matters came to his attention so he grabbed his dressing own and headed at speed for the bathroom.

When the rekindled fires had lifted the internal temperature back to a more civilised level he went into the bedroom to dress, and found a little white rectangle of notepaper lying on the floor. He picked it up and looked at it and to his utter amazement saw writing there. At least, he saw tracks on it. Pencil scratches. There were two words, but it took some effort to decipher them. Was it in English? After a number of false starts Harry concluded that at some

time during the night he had reached for his notepaper, taken up a pencil and jotted down this important note: Memo to self:

Gravey Shakes.

He noticed that he'd misspelled "Gravy" as "Gravey", but regardless of spelling he had no idea what it meant. Was Grav(e)y an adjective describing a type of Shake (e.g. Milkshake, but made with gravy?) Or a noun, so that "shakes" was a verb defining what gravy does? He supposed that if the gravy was suitably congealed (Burton's staff-caff achieved this well and regularly) then when ladled over the mashed potatoes the gravy would "shake" like jelly, as opposed to flow like, well, like gravy. Had he dreamed of the Staff Caff? Some nightmare involving congealed gravy over soggy, yellowish vegetables? Nothing he tried made any real sense. He was stumped.

Liz arrived shortly after noon. Harry and Liz had graduated to Empty Nesters the previous year with the departure of their youngest offspring to Ottawa, and Liz was now preparing to go back to work. She had studied law for two years at University and worked previously as a legal assistant. A "Paralegal", Harry thought, was the correct term. Liz had told Harry that a Paralegal is to a lawyer what a Paramedic is to a doctor. He had asked if this meant that she delivered emergency legal advice to roadside accident victims. He didn't get a laugh. Liz was taking steps to come up to date in her specialty, and she would then actively look for work. It seemed to Harry that most of what she needed to learn fell into the Computer field rather than the legal. But Liz knew the law. Harry asked her if she knew of any legal significance to the term "Gravy Shakes". She gave him one of her looks.

"Say that again slowly" she told him.

"Gravy -- as in Roast Beef and Yorkshire pudding -- Shakes -- as in Milk variety or post party physical recriminations."

"No." Harry had known for many years not to expect ambiguity or waffle from Liz. He had serious concerns about how she expected to make a successful living in the legal profession.

"Does the term mean anything to you at all."

"No. What is this, Harry? A cryptic crossword puzzle clue?" Liz naturally knew of his predilection for the London Times puzzle page.

"Yes" he lied. Harry knew very well that Liz could see through him like glass, but he also knew that she would usually overlook his more harmless lies for the sake of marital harmony and a more serene lifestyle. "What connotations does it bring to mind for you?"

"Some bizarre concoction dreamed up by misguided youth? Maybe something to do with the drug scene? Like mixing drugs, for example. Especially the 'shakes' part. You 'shake' the mixture and then you 'shake' from ingesting it. Maybe 'gravy' means money, profits. I think that 'gravy' is slang for money in some parts of the world. Any of this help, Harry?"

"Yes" he lied again. "Thanks, Liz." She went to take a shower. Harry looked again at the scrawl on the scrap of paper. Had he dreamed of drugs? Did "Gravey Shakes" refer to drug profits? Was there anything here that could help him with his AGI dilemma? It seemed not. Some help, Subconscious Harry. Thanks a bunch.

Half an hour later Liz came out of the bathroom in her robe and with a towel around her head. "Harry," she said "about your crossword clue, could your "gravy" be as in Grave-y. Remember Scrooge to Marley's Ghost? 'There's more of gravy than grave about you'." Yes, he thought. Indeed it could. Harry did not normally misspell simple words. Graves, he thought. Death and dying. Bones in the ground. Tombstones. Graveyards.

Graveyards. It came back to him like a stroke of thunder. One second he would have taken an oath that he had not dreamed at all the previous night, and a split second later it was

all there, in instant, incredible detail. It was neither Grave-y nor gravy, it was Harry's midnight shorthand for 'Graveyard'. And it wasn't 'shakes'. In the middle of the night Harry had taken a pencil and paper and scratched on it: Memo to self:

Graveyard Snakes.

Harry Murphy's Dream Diary: Friday, January 16.

I walked along a small path, not much more than a rabbit track, through a grassy field. I don't know how I came to be there, nor how I knew where I was, but I knew that I was on the outskirts of a very old village somewhere in the north of England. Immediately to my right ran a large iron railing. At the top of the railing, above my head, the black poles ended in sharp points. The fence enclosed a small stone church; I could see the church tower in the near distance. The fence also enclosed a graveyard, which I could see to my immediate right. The church and graveyard were immensely old.

The day was ugly. The skies were heavy and oppressive, seeming to hang only a few feet overhead, and ready at any minute to release vast quantities of a frigid, wind-driven rain. I was aware of a biting cold, but it caused me neither pain nor concern, as though I were insulated from it in some way. There was no colour anywhere other than drab browns and greys. My mood, too, was heavy and oppressive as though some mighty problem weighed down on me -- though I was not aware of what that problem might be. I felt deeply depressed and despondent. Whatever it was that troubled me, I had no hope for a solution.

I continued walking along the path, looking through the bars at the crumbled old stones. Some had canted against their neighbours; others had fallen and lay flat on the earth like paving stones in an improbable footpath.

My focus moved back from the gravestones to the ground by the side of the path, between the black iron poles of the fence. On the graveyard side of the fence I saw a small brown snake, about two feet long and the thickness of my thumb at its thickest section. As my eyes passed along the base of the fence I saw another snake, bigger than the first but of the same variety. Then I saw more, and realised that the whole graveyard was infested with the creatures, some of them several feet long and as thick as my forearm.

I was concerned that the snakes might take notice of me and see me as prey. I had no idea whether they were harmless or possessed of deadly fangs. Then I realised that the snakes were unable to cross the line of the fence, and were in fact confined to the graveyard. With this realization came an enormous sense of relief.

END.

Sunday dawned clear and colder. Harry had not dreamed the previous night, or at least if he *had* dreamed, there were no little squares of notepaper lying around to give evidence of it. He stared out over the waters of the bay and tried to come to terms with what had happened. How could he have dreamed such a complex, detailed scenario and not known of it until the cryptic "memory jogger" brought the whole script crashing back? How many of these powerful little dramas had he participated in, over the half century of his life? And why had he never, up to this moment, even been aware of them? Had it not been for his scrawled "Gravey Shakes" this experience, too, would have passed unremarked and unremembered.

What had really hit him the hardest was the *intensity* of the experience. When he had spoken with Mick Shaw about his occasional dreams he had been speaking of shallow, low-impact imaginings of no import and no lasting impression. If pushed, he might have said: "I once dreamed of riding a horse," or "I saw my grandfather in a dream." But he would never have believed himself capable of dreaming an entire world into being, replete with weather, lifelike props, emotional overtones. My God, emotional overtones, Harry thought. He had known his emotional state of mind in this dream. He had known himself to be down, dejected, depressed. No, more than that, he had *been* dejected and depressed. How he had come to this state he had no idea. If he had dreamed longer, would he have walked on along the path, to a road, perhaps? To a house on that road? To a family in that house? Would he have opened a door into a home filled with sickness and despair? Was he in financial trouble? Family problems? Where had he come from to be walking alone past a thousand year old churchyard? Somewhere in England, certainly, but nowhere that he recognised from his childhood there. Why could he not cast his mind back five minutes, in that dream, and know from where he had started his walk on that cold, overcast winter's day?

The memory of the dream was now fresh in his mind, and as real and solid as the memory of yesterday's supper and the drive along the coast road past Head of St. Margaret's to the cottage. He could feel the touch of the cold iron railings; He could see the slate grey rain-clouds churning in the angry sky. He had not known at the time that it was a dream. *In* the dream he had accepted it as reality, and even now, only *knowing* that it had been a dream prevented him from filing it away under "real memories" and integrating the experience into his life.

It was all too much.

Liz, always sensitive to his moods, asked what was wrong and Harry told her of the disturbing dream, all of it. That she should be knowledgeable in this area did not at all surprise him.

"These things you dreamed are symbols Harry. The subconscious speaks to us in symbols. I think that you are beset by problems, probably centering on whether or not you *really* want to replace Theo as CEO at Burton's (Is she a witch, this woman, Harry wondered, to know these things? While he was waiting for the right time to tell her she probably already had the AGI list of potential successors in her purse). Your mind throws these issues into your dream as little brown snakes and spike-topped metal railings. Something like that. The iron railings are probably your mind's way of saying that there is a barrier between where you are and where you want to be; but the snakes and tombstones speak volumes about what you really think is on the other side of that barrier. The problems associated with the CEO job -- the snakes in your dream -- can't get at you, not where you are at the moment, not yet. But if you try to climb that fence you will have to deal with the nasty sharp points on the way over, and then face the snakes when you jump down. It sounds to me, Harry, as though your subconscious mind is asking you whether this is what you really want, all this grief and worry."

Wow. But she wasn't done yet.

"You need to get a book on Dream Interpretation, something modern. Freud would have nailed you in a minute with all this sexual imagery; snakes and long black pointed iron poles. Even by modern standards I think you might find that snakes signify sexuality in some way. But you should also look up Churches, Old Tombstones and probably Weather, or specifically "heavy grey rainclouds". I would take bets that the clouds are another way of saying that big problems are looming over you, or about to loom. And that is almost certainly the CEO business, about to thunder into your life, and pour cold water all over your dreams."

Harry staggered under the deluge. "But I don't see this business with Theo as any kind of threat, Liz. Honestly. I mean, I admit I'm having some doubts about the best way to play it, but I see this as a bright new opportunity for positive progress. Why am I not dreaming of sunny meadows, and little brown bunnies instead of nasty brown snakes?"

"This is 'real-world Harry' talking to me now," Liz said. "'Subconscious Harry' has already had his say. Very eloquently, too. It seems to me that Subconscious Harry is trembling in his boots."

Wow again.

Liz left to complete her morning toilette, and Harry walked over to the window. Harry Murphy, he thought. Happy-go-lucky Harry, always ready with a grin and a wisecrack. Harry Murphy, who had never in his life taken anything seriously enough to get depressed about it, stood at the window of his little cottage on St Margaret's Bay and stared out over the white-caps. And, from somewhere deep within, another Harry, a morose and troubled Harry, stared along with him.

Later in the day he took Liz's advice, which presented no problems given that his Dream Book included a whole chapter on the meaning and interpretation of dream symbols. He flipped through the book, and it fell open where he'd last put it down. Step Four. He'd forgotten that there was a step four.

Step four turned out to be "Analyze your dream". Read through your transcript, the book told him. Ask yourself what emotions are triggered by reliving the dream? How do the messages fit into your waking life? What especially draws your attention in this dream? Did you recognize people, things or places? Were they recognisably life-like, or did you just "know" who, what or where they were? Was the dream true to life? Were *some* elements true to life? Which ones? Make notes to review later.

Liz was right again. Liz is *always* right, he thought - it could get to be quite nauseating at times - but in this case she was only partly right. The little book told him that current thinking suggested that there were no fixed interpretations for specific dream symbols. Sorry, Sigmund, Harry thought, but the science has apparently moved on since your time.

The prime --the only -- meaning behind any dream symbol is what it signifies to the dreamer. A spider in a dream, for example, might be a grade "A" nightmare to little Miss Muffet, who is scared witless by the things, but a Walt Disney Special to a young boy who loves insects and keeps a four-inch high tarantula named 'Sweetie' as a pet. The only way to interpret such a dream is *how did you feel when the giant spider put his arms around you?*

This having been said, the book went on for several pages to list the traditional interpretations of some common dream symbols. Riding in a bus or train, for example, can represent how you see your life-progress, but the specifics again depend on the dreamer's reaction to the journey. When you dreamed of the bus, were you enjoying the trip? Did you know where the bus was going? Did you know where you were meant to get off? Had you paid your fare? Liz was also right (Oh, shut up!) about the snakes. They are commonly interpreted as sexual symbols. So are rigid iron rods, with or without points on the ends.

He read again through the dream transcript and had no trouble conjuring up the emotions that had accompanied the experience. In retrospect he realised that the snakes hadn't struck him as particularly frightening or repulsive. He had been alarmed at the possibility that they might try to bite him, but he would have had the same reaction if the graveyard had been full of slaving German Shepherd dogs. The bottom line was inescapable. The dream had

frightened and upset him. If the graveyard behind the iron fence did indeed represent the world of Burton's new CEO, he was no longer at all certain that he wanted to get into it.

He needed more data. He needed to go back to the churchyard, even if he was afraid to go there.

* * * * *

Harry did not attempt any further dream-remembering until late in the following week. This was not because he was afraid of what might happen if he went back to the churchyard, Harry told himself, but more because..... Oh, hell, what was the point of lying to himself, it was *exactly* because he was afraid about what would happen if he went back into the churchyard, to pick up the story where he had last left it. The thing he feared, the truly scary thing about the dream, the thing that clung to him throughout his waking day, had nothing to do with brown snakes or pointed black railings. It had to do with feelings.

Harry had never been depressed. He had trouble even understanding the concept. A person gets depressed because his dog dies, or he gets passed over for a promotion, or his girlfriend gives him the old "dear John". Harry's philosophy had always been this: If your life is going well, your job pays enough to buy the groceries, your marriage is average or better and you have no serious physical ailments -- well then you have no *right* to be depressed. He could never understand the thin faced women on TV talk shows who beat their breasts and cried for the cameras about the miserableness of their lives. If your lives are that bad, Harry had on occasion yelled at the TV screen, then for God's sake find the things that are going wrong and *fix* them!! Change them!! Stop breast beating and *do* something *positive*. It struck Harry as being a lot like alcoholism. He had, with some reluctance, accepted that alcohol abuse was an illness, but what kind of illness compels the hand to the bottle and the bottle to the mouth when you really, truly don't want it to go there? If your life is moving along as it should, Harry believed, and you still feel down in the dumps anyway, well snap out of it!!!

And yet he had walked the little rabbit path by the cemetery with the weight of the world on his shoulders. *And I didn't even know why I was feeling so bad*, he thought. How can such a thing be?

Harry took his own advice. It was just a dream, he told himself. Nothing in his life had truly changed. He tried to snap himself out of it. But it was hard.

He tried a little trick which he had used before on occasion to lift his spirits. Wednesday noon was sunny and mild, so he drove downtown and parked by the Halifax Public Gardens. He took a stroll along Spring Garden Road, stopped in at the bank and changed two twenties into dollar coins. Loonies, as they are known to Canadians, a reference to the seabird stamped on the obverse. He crossed the road from the bank and started along the storefronts on the way up to the public library.

On a slow day Harry could expect to find eight to ten panhandlers along this stretch, while a sunny Saturday could yield anywhere up to two dozen. Young kids mostly, on the road with nowhere to sleep and nowhere to go, hitting on the passing public for the spare nickels and dimes in their pockets. Liz had told him that some of these "kids" were professionals, making two to three hundred dollars a day; but some aren't, Harry thought. Some of them are just frightened kids, down on their luck; and a dollar will still get you a cup of hot, sweet coffee if you know where to look. And a dollar will often buy you a smile, he added to himself. And that is good value for money these days.

He hit the stretch with jingling pockets and started to toss his loonies about like a gardener seeding a new lawn. Heads looked up as he passed, as the youngsters realised what he was doing. He thought that some (Liz's professionals probably) may have recognised him from the last time he did this, last August or September. The first twenty coins lasted two blocks, but it was like tossing crusts to seagulls. The panhandlers flocked to him, and in the end he simply stood, and threw coins in all directions until they were gone. He suspected that some of the more agile youngsters had run around for second helpings; but the smiles were everywhere. A well dressed elderly woman turned from a shop window in time to snatch one

of his shiny dollars from the air -- with quite remarkable reaction speed, he thought -- and rewarded him with a smile that lit up the sidewalk. And then they were gone, the dollars and the panhandlers almost in the same instant. Harry walked on, leaving behind him a chorus of "Aws" from those who had arrived too late. Passing the library he saluted the hulking iron statue of Sir Winston Churchill, legendary statesman and pigeon perch, and turned back to where he'd parked the car.

He was back in his office by one fifteen, and feeling lighter in his heart and in his pockets. He'd had a forty dollar pick-me-up, and very good value for money, he thought. But it didn't last.

On Friday night he put it off as long as he could. He watched the original "Dirty Harry" movie until one a.m. even though he had seen this particular Eastwood classic so often that he could sing along with the dialogue. He climbed into bed as quietly as he could so as not to awaken Liz, who had gone up early after a tiring day of job hunting. He lay on his back and started in on the breathing/relaxation exercises he had found in an early chapter of the book (Harry could not remember the last time he had read a non-fiction book in the same sequence it was written. He had been reading his Dream Book by starting at chapter nine and working out in both directions towards the respective covers). He finished the relaxation exercises and started his mantra. He managed a dozen repetitions before everything faded to black.

The following morning being a Saturday the alarm was not set and Harry woke naturally shortly after nine. Liz was already up, and making kitchen noises somewhere offstage. Presumably the kitchen. He looked to his notepad and with mixed feelings saw that it was blank. The pencil was missing from the bedside table, and he got out of bed to search for it. He found it under the bed, lying next to a tiny, torn-away piece of notepaper, which was covered from top to bottom and from left to right with his nocturnal scratchings.

Harry Murphy's Dream Diary: Friday, January 23.

I was a teenager, back at school in England. I was walking along a corridor towards the assembly room. A slim, dark-haired girl, whom I recognised but could not name, came up to me smiling broadly. She said "I'm so glad you finally came to one of these, Harry". She hooked her arm through mine and walked along with me, and I realised I was going to a school dance. As we got closer to the auditorium I could hear music coming from the two large loudspeakers set high on the wall, one at each side of the stage. I turned to speak to the dark haired girl, but she was no longer there. I looked around for her but she was nowhere to be seen.

I saw a group of boys whom I thought I knew (though I could not name any) and I walked over to them. One of them said "Late again, Harry" and laughed. I realised we were late for class, and I started to run towards the Chemistry Lab, which was on the second floor. I noticed that I was carrying an enormous backpack. When I got to the Chemistry lab there was a crowd of students waiting to go in, but the current class had not yet ended. Through the small window set into the door I could see students working at the lab benches. One of the boys in the group said "This is not your class, Harry" and the whole group began to laugh. I realised that the boy was right and a feeling of panic suddenly seized me. I started running, but I could not recall which class came next or where I should be running to. I reached a stairwell, and started to climb the wide marble steps.

I came out of the stairwell and faced a long, narrow corridor with doors opening off both sides. I knew that classes were being held in all of the rooms along this corridor, and that they were all well underway. The thought of walking into a class that had already started terrified me. I started to walk along the corridor, and a Master opened a nearby door and shouted at me "Keep the noise down out here!" He was very tall and thin, and wore a long black gown and mortar board hat. He stepped back into his classroom and closed the door. I tiptoed on along the corridor.

In a very short time I reached the end of the corridor, and looked out of the window there. To my amazement the ground was far below me. It was like looking down from a trans-Atlantic flight after the plane has reached its cruising altitude. I knew that this was because the school was perched on the edge of a tremendously high cliff.

Without knowing how I got there I found myself back at ground level, walking past the Headmaster's office. Bells began to ring and the corridor was suddenly full of students.

I walked outside and found myself at the base of a high tower, built of brick. There was a door at the bottom and I went in. I climbed to the top of the tower and stood beside a small balustrade which ran around the perimeter. Looking over I saw that I was about twenty feet above the ground. When I turned to go back inside I could not find a door and I felt a surge of panic, thinking I was trapped on top of the tower with no way to get down. I noticed that there was a young girl, perhaps twelve or thirteen years old, on top of the tower with me. I nodded at the girl and smiled, but she ignored me.

I decided that the only way to get down was to climb over the edge, hang by my fingers and drop. I started to do this when I heard someone call "Not there, Margaret. Over here!" I looked around in time to see the young girl leap off the tower from the opposite edge. I pulled myself back onto the top of the tower and walked over to the point from which the girl had jumped. I found that from this edge the ground was only three feet below the top of the tower. I looked for the girl but there was not a soul to be seen. Standing there on top of the tower I suddenly felt an overwhelming surge of joy. The sky was a brilliant blue, and I could see the silvery glinting of the sun on a distant river. My eyesight had become incredibly acute and I could distinguish individual leaves on distant trees. I was with good friends, I was a successful student with a bright future. I had everything I wanted from life, and all was well with my world.

END.

Saturday Jan 17: Notes.

What a relief. After the terrible oppressiveness of my first dream this was so light and enjoyable. I remember in particular the wonderful feeling of peace and joy that came to me at the end of the dream. I seem to recall that was pretty much how I felt about school in my early teens, though perhaps not to such an ecstatic extent. I found the work easy, and did well in sports. I rigorously avoided school dances partly due to a dislike of dancing but largely due to fear of girls. I had many good friends, and despite my primal fear of the opposite sex I fared well enough in that area and rarely lacked for a Saturday date. These were good times. Not the happiest days of my life, which were to come later in Canada, when I met Liz; but they were good days. It was nice to recapture them for a while.

But this was not my school. Well, it was and it wasn't. I attended an English grammar school. The building was a rambling two story, with huge playing fields. There was no brick tower on the grounds, and it certainly wasn't perched on the edge of some dizzying precipice. The masters wore normal clothes, reserving cap and gown for formal occasions such as Speech Day and end of term ceremonies. The Chemistry lab was on the second floor, and it was reached by means of a wide polished stone staircase. I doubt very much that it was marble.

I seemed to recognize many of the players in this dream but none of them were my real life school friends. The one Master I encountered never stood before any of my real classes, although my fourth year biology master was tall and slim.

I can't find any messages in this dream. I cannot see how any of it applies to my current circumstances. The closest I can come to a meaning is "You have more to learn (i.e. go back to school) before you're ready to go on." This would seem to be yet another discouragement to my career ambitions. I'll have to get Liz to read through my transcripts.

END.

* * * * *

On the fifteenth floor of Toronto's Bourque Building the walls are constructed of inch thick glass, causing the Penthouse Suite to be referred to by many of the building's inmates as "the Fish Tank". The floor houses only the office of the President and Chairman of the Board of AGI, the small adjacent offices of his two Executive Secretaries and a spacious boardroom. The stairwell doors on this floor open only outwards, for emergency use of anyone needing to leave the floor, never for anyone wishing to gain access. The elevator can be persuaded to rise to floor fifteen only by those in possession of a special key, of which there are three copies. George Thorpe has one, his Senior Executive Secretary has the second, and the AGI Security Chief keeps the third locked in his safe on the ninth floor. If anyone other than these three requires access to the Power Floor, it is by invitation only. The elevator will rise to this floor only if a special button is pressed by Molly Mason, the Senior of the two secretaries. Molly had called Phil Sutherland -- AGI's Executive Vice President of Human Resources -- to come up for an impromptu meeting at the request of her boss, and when a small red light sprang to life on her desk she knew that it had to be Phil's finger pressing the elevator's "15" button. If there had been any doubt Molly could have activated the closed circuit cameras concealed in the walls of the elevator. She pressed the small button beneath the light, enabling the elevator to respond to Phil's request. Twenty seconds later the elevator doors opened soundlessly and Phil stepped out onto the plush blue-grey carpet which covered the entire floor.

"What's up, Molly?" Phil asked.

"Please go straight in, Mr. Sutherland. Mr. Thorpe is expecting you."

Phil had not waited for a response from Ms. Mason. Although he was sure that she knew *exactly* why Thorpe had sent for him he knew with equal certainty that thumbscrews and heated irons would not extract the information from her. He opened the glass door to the Chairman's office and stepped in.

George Thorpe stood with his back to his visitor, staring out to Toronto's CN Tower, clearly visible even from the Bourque building several miles away. George was a tall, well muscled man in his late fifties. He was extremely conscientious about his diet and exercise regimes and expected to live into his nineties. If he reached the age of eighty five in good health he intended to consider early retirement. As usual he was immaculately dressed in a tailor made black three piece suit with a white dress shirt. A midnight blue silk tie provided his only concession to colour. "Come in, Phil" he said without turning. "Take a seat. Coffee?" he turned at last to greet his guest.

"I think not, George, thanks. You go ahead by all means." Phil lowered himself into a comfortable armchair and crossed his right leg over his left knee. "What's up, George? I hope you realize you called me out of a meeting with Greenfield's people. It took me three months to get them to fly out here." Despite his smile, Phil Sutherland sounded less than happy.

"Good grief, Phil, you make it sound as though I'd issued a Royal Command" said George Thorpe, who's commands were much more than Royal, at least where AGI was concerned. "I won't keep you long. You'll be back to Syd in ten minutes, tops. I know you're in a hurry so I'll get directly to the point. You're a pal of Harry Murphy from the Halifax plant are you not?"

Phil smiled inwardly. He had never known a conversation with George Thorpe which failed to come directly to the point within seconds of the opening "hello". He briefly considered his response. "Well, I like and respect Harry, but I don't know if I'd go as far as calling him a pal. We downed a few beers together last time he was in Toronto, and he ended up sleeping it off at my place. Why do you ask?"

"I need to know if Murphy is going to be a problem. You know the plans for the plant, and you know he won't like them. I never considered him a major player and with Theo Burton out of the way I thought it would be fair winds and full speed ahead. But something's come up. I have reason to believe that Murphy might make trouble for us."

"Can you be a bit more specific, George?"

"Well, let's keep this between the two of us, shall we? Theo thinks that Murphy considers himself a player. He might be expecting to move into the top job when Theo bows out next month. Now Murphy is very well liked at Burton's and highly respected in the trade. When he finds out what we intend to do there he could stir up trouble, and we don't need trouble right now Phil."

"Oh, I see. Isn't that the reason we got rid of Theo Burton?"

"More or less" Thorpe said. "Theo is fluff, but popular fluff. His family is still well respected around the industry, and Theo is on good terms with some very big names. He could have stirred up a lot of resentment against AGI. Murphy isn't fluff. He doesn't have Theo's connections but I understand he's well thought of, and I hear that the Union listens to him."

"Right. Well I got the distinct impression that Harry is a round peg in a round hole at Burton's. I had no idea he might have designs on the big chair. He's an excellent Production Manager. I wish all our plants had a record like Burton's, and that's mostly down to Harry Murphy. I'd sure hate to lose him, George. I hope you can let him down gently. How about a change in job title, Production Director, or Executive Something or other, and a ten percent raise to go with it?"

"Ten?"

"Don't pinch pennies on me, George! You could double Harry's salary and you'd still be getting a bargain."

"Well, I think we could manage something along those lines. Listen, Phil, does the Union really listen to Harry Murphy? Could he stir things up in that direction?"

"Yes he could, George. But he won't. My suggestion is that you bring Harry up here and tell him what we have in mind...."

"Now, come on...."

"Not all of it! Enough to bring him on side. Lot's of "we" in the conversation and make sure Harry knows he's part of the "we" and not part of "them". Then tell him how key his role will be, and in recognition of this, etcetera, etcetera."

"Will he go for it?"

"Harry is a team player. The more you make him feel like part of the AGI team the more he'll like it. And the extra recognition will help. By the time we announce the full plan for reorganisation Harry will think he helped us put it together and he'll sell it as his own."

"Right. Thank's Phil. I won't keep you from Syd Greenfield any longer. Give him my regards, will you?"

Recognising the Royal dismissal Phil Sutherland uncurled from the chair. On the way to the door he turned and looked back at his boss. "One thing, George, don't lay it on too thick. Harry's no mug, and if he thinks he's being jerked around he *could* cause problems for us. At the moment Harry's a happy guy, doing a job he loves, and he's very strongly motivated. For the sake of AGI profits and my own Christmas Bonus I'd like to see it stay that way."

Not getting a response, and expecting none, Sutherland silently crossed the expensive carpet towards the elevator doors. *Leaving* the fifteenth floor involved no security measures.

* * * * *

Liz said she couldn't help him. She read Harry's dream transcript and told him that he needed a professional shrink to make anything of it. She agreed with his idea that his inner self might be trying to tell his outer self that he was not ready to move onwards and upwards yet and should "stay in school" a bit longer. But dammit, thought Harry, I know I could do a better job as CEO than Theo ever dreamed of, if only they'd give me a chance to prove it.

On Monday morning Harry decided to go to Toronto. He had spent much of the morning doodling on a notepad in the centre of his desk. He had asked Louise to clear the morning and reschedule everything, and had then locked his office door. After three hours of hard thinking Harry had written six points on his notepad under three headings:

Why I should be CEO:

1. I can DO the job and I can do it well.
2. I deserve the job. I have been the heart of Burton's for the last eight years and if George Thorpe doesn't know this it's time somebody told him.
3. A total package of nearly \$300,000 per year is better than a salary and bonus which might touch \$85,000 in a good year.
4. I would be a popular choice and would be accepted in Burton's by labour and management. I could move into the job with a minimum of disruption.

Why I Shouldn't be CEO:

1. I had a stupid childish nightmare that may in truth have had nothing to do with AGI and more to do with indigestion.

Conclusion

If I don't move *now* people will see me as a soft shelled wimp. If I don't move *soon*, I will *be* a soft shelled wimp.

He pressed the intercom button and said "Louise, would you come in, please, and bring the Air Canada timetable with you."

* * * * *

Theo effectively took early retirement that week. He came into his office on Monday morning as usual, and left as usual at five thirty that afternoon. He arrived at work at half past ten on Tuesday morning and left at three. On Wednesday he arrived after lunch and stayed for twenty minutes. And then he was gone. The planned farewell party died stillborn. June Sawler claimed not to know anything about anything, and the gossips had already started to speculate as to whether June would be around for long after the new man was appointed next month. The most sensitive of the office grapevines reported that Theo was spending some time at his cottage on the lake -- a year round, eight bedroom mansion which dwarfed the full time homes of most of Theo's workforce. The grapevine lost track of him the following week, although an unconfirmed rumour suggested that Theo had taken Harry's advice to heart, and had departed in the President's Suite of a luxury liner sailing that weekend from New York on a three month round the world cruise.

Theo had poked his head into Harry's office once, on the Tuesday afternoon, not to say goodbye, but to wink broadly and say, in a loud stage whisper, "I told him, Harry. Harry's your man, I told him. Everybody likes Harry, I said, and he's been in the Printing business since the year dot. Don't bother to thank me, Harry, you've earned it." And he left, whistling.

Harry thought that on the whole Theo's recommendation to George Thorpe, if that was indeed what he'd been talking about, had probably done equal amounts of harm and good, and so probably cancelled itself out. He had arranged to fly to Toronto on the following Monday, ostensibly to meet with the paper wholesaler who supplied much of Burton's stock. That meeting was scheduled to begin at nine on the Tuesday morning, and by any stretch of the imagination should be over by noon. Harry expected an invitation to lunch with the sales representative who covered the Maritime sales area, and they would probably be joined by two

or three of the company's mid level brass. At one o'clock that afternoon Harry expected to walk into the Bourque Building and pay his respects to George Thorpe. Harry's planning did not go much beyond that point. Stay flexible, he told himself. If George has the time, press your case right there and then. If he can't see you, be gracious and leave quietly. George Thorpe is nobody's fool and will have got the message merely by having Harry arrive unannounced at his penthouse sanctuary. He would know that Harry was there for one thing and one thing only. If George was not available that afternoon Harry would speak with his number one secretary -- a shrivelled prune of a woman by the name of Mason -- and arrange an appointment for later in the week. He would then spend the time until his appointment lobbying the junior members of the AGI board. At Louise's suggestion he had bought an open ended airline ticket, and advised his hotel that his plans might call for him to remain in Toronto for up to a week.

He had left the production management concerns of Burton's in the hands of one of his section chiefs, who was widely seen to be Harry's heir apparent and was therefore as eager as Harry himself to see the name "Harry Murphy" painted on the CEO's door -- and his own name painted on the Production Manager's office.

With neither preparation nor prompting Harry dreamed twice that week. He did not make pencilled notes during the night, but nevertheless remembered parts of the dreams on awakening in the morning. The first dream had found him walking across a vast expanse of sand towards a distant forest which never seemed to get any closer. The second had something to do with riding a bicycle along a leafy country lane, which he felt had once again been set in England. Neither dream left any lasting impression nor stirred any significant emotion. Harry did not write up the dreams in his Dream Diary nor did he make any attempt to interpret them.

* * * * *

Simon Jensen Junior was not happy. Considering that he had graduated fifth in his class, and considering that his mother had appeared to be over the moon about that achievement, Simon had expected better than a new Audi. He had set his heart on a lemon yellow

Corvette convertible, and had been certain that Dad had picked up on the hints. He had also expected a lucrative low-effort job somewhere in his father's advertising agency, preferably at the Head Office in downtown Boston. He didn't insist on starting at the top; Simon was fully prepared to pay his dues for, say two or three years before moving up to the executive floor, where the *really* good looking secretaries worked. So when Dad told him about the new job, working for Uncle George in *Canada*, Simon had been less than fully fired up about it. When Simon found out that the job was not only in Canada, but in *Nova Scotia*, he was ready to hold his breath until he turned blue. What was there in Nova Scotia besides snow and pine trees? Simon remembered a holiday on Canada's east coast many years ago and the major recollections from that trip were of swarms of biting insects and a total scarcity of good looking girls.

He had faced off against Dad last weekend, but it had done no good. The Old Man seemed dead set on sending him out to the barren northern reaches as though on some mission of penance. He had even suggested that the shine had been taken off Simon's achievement by the fact that he had needed nine years to graduate from a three year course, and was just now starting to earn a living at the age of twenty seven. Imagine it. Two fellows in the class were even older than Simon, and he would take bets that *their* Dads were not bitching about it.

The only thing he could do now was take it up with uncle George directly. George Thorpe had been Uncle George to Simon for as long as he could remember. He wasn't a *real* uncle, like actually being related, but some kind of old school friend of Dad's. Uncle George had been a fixture of the Jensen's Boston household at Christmas and occasionally at other holidays (and a reliable source of expensive birthday presents) since absolutely forever. So working for Uncle George shouldn't be *too* bad, and Simon was sure that with a little coaxing he could trade AGI (Halifax) for AGI (Vancouver), or AGI (Toronto), or maybe one of those French cities in the east of the country. He wasn't sure who had been given those plums, but he would take bets that they didn't call their Chairman of the Board "uncle." Steaming mad, but ever hopeful, Simon Jensen Junior stepped briskly across the lobby of the Bourque building and pressed the button to call the elevator.

On the fifteenth floor Uncle George was no happier than Simon Jensen. Three of his Executive Vice Presidents sat around one end of the large conference table, while two others were electronically present via a bank of TV monitors mounted on a large steel trolley.

"Not good enough" George was thundering at the TV screens. "Those presses are costing us close to twelve million dollars -- U.S. dollars, dammit -- and the Koreans have signed off on a delivery date which they are damned well going to meet. At the very minimum I want the Halifax presses installed and operational before the end of April. Did you remind them of the penalty clause, Andrew?"

The face of the man addressed was decidedly pale, which could have been due to a poorly adjusted contrast button on the TV set. "Of course I did, George, and they say they are desperately sorry but the only source of parts was the warehouse that burned down. They say they *will* pay the penalty, but..."

"They sure as hell *will* pay the penalty, and I'll see that the entire industry throughout North America knows how badly they messed up our plans."

The other TV set spoke up. The face on this set also looked pale. "George, their only hope now of meeting our delivery target is if they can scavenge enough parts from existing equipment, and that would affect delivery to some of their other customers, and"

The sound of distant thunder came from George Thorpe as he cleared his throat, but what he was about to say was lost to a soft tapping on the glass door of the conference room. George redirected his thunder towards the door: "Ms. Mason you should by now be aware that I do not like to be disturbed when I am in conference." George turned to glower at his Senior Executive Secretary but the look of abject terror on her face struck a seldom used chord somewhere deep within his icy heart. "What is it, Ms. Mason?" he asked gently.

Molly Mason opened the door to the conference room. "I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Thorpe, but it's Mr. Jensen. The junior Mr. Jensen, that is. He is in the executive elevator, pounding on the number fifteen button."

One mile north of the Bourque building Harry Murphy's business lunch was showing signs of coming to a close. Harry downed one more rum and coke (his seventh) and asked the waiter to call him a cab. His host suggested that finding a cab at that time of day could take up to an hour and ordered another rum and coke for Harry. As chance would have it, however, a taxi was pulling up to the restaurant at that very moment to deliver a fare, and the waiter smartly caught the cabbie before he could pull back out into the traffic stream. Harry gulped down his eighth cocktail on the run, and handed the empty glass to the waiter who was holding the taxi door open. The waiter, expecting a more substantial tip, closed the door forcefully. Harry, well insulated from worldly concerns at that stage of the business lunch, failed to notice.

Simon finally got the stupid button to work, and sailed up to the top floor while rehearsing the delivery of his plea for leniency. He had realised while stuck in the elevator that asking to be released from Canadian penal service was a pointless exercise, since Uncle George didn't *have* any printing plants outside Canada. Not only that, but Uncle George could very well be quite upset at someone who considered moving to Canada to be some kind of *penance*. After all, didn't he have not one, not two but *three* of those red-leaf flags in his office? It would probably be much better -- and certainly much *safer* -- to try to mitigate his sentence by a transfer to Vancouver or one of those French cities.

Simon ignored the harassed looking men who crowded into the elevator as he stepped out. Switching on his most endearing smile he headed straight for George Thorpe, his hand out to receive the hearty handshake which his uncle always gave him at home.

Simon stated his position in a few well chosen words, and with the reasoned delivery which had made him a minor star of his College Debating Society. He gave his Uncle another endearing smile, and waited. George Thorpe placed his palm against the younger man's chest,

and pushed him into the armchair which was by good fortune set behind him. George loomed over his nephew, placed his hands on Simon's shoulders, and brought his face to within three inches of the younger man's startled eyes.

"Now listen to me very, very carefully, Junior!" he growled. Simon's mouth gaped open. This was not starting well. He was saved by a light tap on the glass door of the office.

"NOW WHAT, Ms. MASON?" Thorpe bellowed.

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Thorpe. It's that man from Nova Scotia. Mr. Murphy, I think his name is. Now *he* is in the elevator banging on the button!"

Harry had pressed the button for the fifteenth floor, but nothing happened. At first he had thought that the elevator must be the most silent and smooth he had ever travelled in, but it slowly dawned on him through a haze of rum fumes that it was silent and smooth because it wasn't going anywhere. He pressed the button again. By the time Molly Mason activated the security cameras Harry was pounding on the button with his fist.

Harry finally got the elevator to move. The door slid smoothly open and he stepped out onto the plush carpet. George Thorpe was coming over to meet him from a glass enclosed room facing the elevator doors. Despite his alcohol induced haze Harry could see that there was something odd about the normally immaculate Chairman. His tie was skew, his face was red and his hair looked as though he'd just got out of bed following a highly disturbing nightmare. George in turn saw the Production Manager of his most profitable plant stagger out of the elevator and sway to the left then the right before choosing a central course and lurching towards him.

'I do NOT have time for this right now' George thought. It was actually very fortunate for Harry that he had arrived in such a manner at precisely this time, since under normal circumstances the Chairman would have dealt severely with an AGI executive who turned up at a place of business most obviously the worse for wear. He took Harry by the elbow and with

very little effort steered him through a hundred and eighty degrees back into the elevator. He leaned in and pressed the button for the Bourque lobby, but as the door began to close George recalled his recent conversation with his EVP, Human Resources. What had Phil advised? To prevent Harry Murphy from causing trouble, make him feel like a member of the central clique. One of *us*. Give him a new title and a decent raise. At the last second George stuck his hand in front of the closing door and forced it back in its tracks. "Look, Harry" he said, in a loud whisper, "I don't have time to discuss your new position right now but there will be greater responsibility in it, and more money of course." He released the door. "Oh" he called out as an afterthought "And you'll be getting lots of new equipment at Halifax. Nice stuff. You're going to love it."

George turned back to deal with the hapless Simon Jensen, while a dazed and confused Harry dropped gently to street level. Could he believe what he'd just heard? Was it possible that the Golden Ring was his, without even having to make a grab for it? Handed to him on the proverbial platter? The elevator chimed and the door opened. Harry poured himself out, straight into the arms of Phil Sutherland who was on the way in. Phil stepped back and held Harry at arms length.

"Harry Murphy, what the devil are you doing here? Who's running the plant back in Halifax with Theo gone and you stumbling around in the Bourque?"

Harry saw two Phil Sutherlands, chose one at random and turned towards him. "I've been up to see George" he managed to get out. "Oh," said Phil, recalling his recent conversation with the Chairman, "About your new job I presume?" Harry simply beamed. It had taken Phil about two seconds to recognize that Harry was feeling no pain, and two more to realize that holding an intelligent conversation with him right now was unlikely. "Well, I'm sure the extra money will come in handy. Regards to Liz." Phil stepped into the waiting elevator and the door closed on him. Harry swayed out of the lobby in search of a cab. It was true. He hadn't imagined it. Phil Sutherland, AGI's Personnel Chief, had confirmed it. He had the job. Harry Murphy was the new Chief Executive Officer of Burton's Press.

BEAUTIFUL DREAMER

Chapter 2:

By the time Harry's flight started its descent for Halifax International Airport the rum fumes had evaporated, and he came back to earth both metaphorically and physically at about the same time. His alcoholic insulation had worn off somewhere over Quebec, giving him time to think back over the events of the day before meeting Liz. Despite his best efforts Harry was not able to recall George Thorpe's exact words at the elevator door, but the gist of the message was clear enough. George had said that he would call him later to discuss his promotion. Harry was ninety percent certain that the Chairman had used the word "promotion". And he had said there would be more money, which tended to support the theory. Harry grinned. More money is right, he thought. Between four and five times as much money. Then there had been something about equipment upgrades which would certainly be good for Burton's; several pieces of their pressroom and bindery equipment would probably be welcomed as donations to the Printing Museum he had once visited in Ottawa. For some reason the short conversation with Phil in the lobby was a little clearer. When Harry had told Phil that he had come from a meeting on the fifteenth floor, Phil had said: "About your promotion, I assume." In this case Harry was ninety *five* percent certain that the word "Promotion" had been used.

Harry reclined his seat and pondered. A passing stewardess wondered what the businessman in seat 16A was so pleased about, to be smiling so broadly. She certainly wouldn't need to tell *him* to "Have a good day" as he left the flight.

Would he keep June Sawler as his E. A., Harry wondered? June was better organised than Louise, and certainly easier on the eye; and she had immaculate connections in Toronto. One office rumour said that June had been George Thorpe's mistress some years back, and had

been transferred out east to avoid complications. But then, Louise was absolutely devoted to Harry. He could trust her with any confidence, and knew that when he asked her to do something it would be done, done promptly, and done well. And of course June *was* a bit flighty with her winks and smiles to all and sundry. Probably not the tone he wanted to set when he moved up to the eighth floor. No, Louise had the edge. She would be absolutely overjoyed about her promotion from Admin Assistant to Exec Assistant. June, of course, would probably be devastated when she was discarded with the office furniture. Too bad. Still, there was no need to make that decision yet. On second thoughts, he'd probably keep Theo's furniture.

When Liz met him at the arrivals gate Harry didn't say a word. He picked her up and swung her around, laughing out loud all the time. His mood affected other passengers, who smiled broadly in sympathy with the happy pair. Liz, too, seemed to catch Harry's enthusiasm, but as they pulled away from the Airport she gave Harry a more sober look. "Go on," she said. "Put it into words. Tell me."

"I got the job, Liz. I'm to be named CEO at Burton's. We didn't talk money yet, but I dare say I'll be offered a package pretty similar to Theo's. I did it, Liz. Even Theo had his doubts, but I did it."

"Harry, I really, really hate to rain on your lovely parade."

"But.....?"

"Yes. But I'm going to. I can see for myself that you're happy, but are you sure, really deep down sure, that this is what you want?"

"You're talking about my silly dream. Bugger the dream Liz. Subconscious Harry is a snivelling jerk. This job is what I want, I'm sure of it. And I've got it."

"Well, so long as you're really, really sure. Just one more thing though. You've jumped the gun before on things like this. Did you get your news from George Thorpe him-

self? Is there any possible ambiguity in what he said to you? Any possible way you could have got the wrong end of the stick again, Harry?"

"Come on Liz, I got it from George and had it confirmed by Phil Sutherland. That's AGI's President and his Personnel Chief. How much more positive can you get? Be happy for me, Liz. This is the day I've been dreaming of for years. It's my dream come true."

'Funny you should put it just that way, Harry' Liz thought, but she said: "Of course I'm happy for you, darling. Of course I am. Why don't we drive downtown for a late supper at the 'Five Fishermen' to celebrate?"

"Why don't we do just that!" Harry said. He floored the accelerator and moved out to overtake a line of slower traffic, whistling the introductory bars to "Ode to Joy" as he changed lanes.

Harry Murphy's Dream Diary: Saturday, February 07.

I was riding in an old, black car being driven by a young man I did not recognize. He was short, chubby and fair haired. A pair of round wire-rimmed spectacles gave him the air of a naughty schoolboy from some boy's magazine of an earlier period. We were driving along a dust covered back road somewhere in Australia. I was aware that we were on a tour of Australia, and had been on the road for some weeks. The driver said something to me but I didn't catch it, and asked him to repeat whatever it was he had said. He said "I do not repeat myself, Harry. You must learn to pay closer attention." I was very taken aback by this comment.

In the middle of a barren stretch of road we came upon a barricade and stopped the car. This was a border crossing point, so we got out of the car and met two guards who came out of a small shack which I had not noticed before. The guards wore tan uniforms and carried side-arms. One of the guards said "You can't take cars into Australia." My friend and I accepted this without question or concern. I looked at the old car. Despite its age it was polished to a

high shine and the chrome fittings gleamed in the fierce Australian sunlight. I said to the guard: "Well, I'll miss the old girl, but I guess it can't be helped. Still, I must take my stickers."

I went over to the car and peeled several small, coloured stickers from the hood. The guard said "Leave those alone" and drew his gun, but I had no fear of him and ignored his orders. I looked for my driver but he had disappeared.

I walked along the road and saw a Car Rental Agency in the distance. I walked quickly up to the building and went inside. June Sawler was there. She said "Good Morning Sir, I am the manager here. Can I help you?" I was surprised that June didn't recognize me, but decided to say nothing. Without another word June left the office by a back door and I followed her out onto a parking lot. Despite the fact that there were many late model cars on the lot, June took me to a small, old boxy looking red car which was standing apart from the others. I recognised the car as an Austin Mini, a popular British car from the nineteen sixties. June said "I'm afraid this is all we have for rent at the moment."

I wanted to argue, but decided not to. June gave me the keys and walked away. I took the stickers from my pocket and fixed them to the hood of the small car. I got into the car and found that my friend was already in the driver's seat. He said "Let's go" and we drove at speed away from the lot.

We drove for some time along a straight, unpaved road through countryside devoid of green. Suddenly we came to a T-junction and my partner hurled the car around in a tight left turn. Although I had not noticed it in the distance we were now in the middle of a suburban housing development. Rows of identical semi-detached houses lined both sides of the street. My driver had slowed to a snail's pace and I guessed that he was looking for something. I asked "Where are we?" but got no answer.

Eventually he stopped the car in front of a house much like all the others in the nondescript row. The door opened and my mother came out to stand in the doorway. For a brief moment I thought I saw someone behind her, in the shadows of the hallway; it looked like the figure of a

young girl, perhaps in her early teens, wearing a dress which seemed grey in the dim light of the hall, though I knew it to be white. Before I could get a clearer view the figure vanished. My mother called out to me "How's it all going, sweetheart?" and I called back "Fine, Mom". I tried to open the door to go to her, but it was jammed shut. I opened the window to tell her my good news, but I couldn't quite remember what it was. My driver started the car and moved off. My mother went back inside and closed the door. In the front yard I saw a soap-box go-cart, the kind young boys build to race recklessly down neighbourhood hills. It was painted a bright green and had the number '21' in white on the side.

END.

Sunday February 08: Notes:

My dreams are getting longer and more complex, but I think the most important development is that they are less erratic and more structured. While my earlier dreams jumped madly from scene to scene they now flow in a sequence of sorts as though they are trying to tell a story; though it can still sometimes be a scrambled tale full of oddities.

Why Australia? I don't know why. I have never visited, nor had any desire to visit. Border Crossings? There aren't any in Australia as far as I know. Still, it seemed to make sense in the dream.

The little red car in the dream was without doubt the Austin Mini-Cooper which had belonged to an older school friend in 1964 or 65. It was an amazing little car, with incredible performance, perfectly suited to the narrow, winding back roads of England of that era. I fell in love with it. My intention was always to own such a car as soon as I was old enough to get my driver's licence, but as things turned out we had moved to Canada by that time, and the little Mini-Cooper was not a viable automobile here due to the vast distances and harsh climate.

The soapbox-cart is certainly a childhood memory finding its way to the surface. At the age of twelve I built such a go-cart and entered it in the local soapbox derby, where I finished a close second. It was one of my childhood's true moments of glory, to stand on the podium and ac-

cept the cheers of the small crowd. I cherish this memory. For some reason the dream cart was painted green, while I distinctly remember painting mine with a leftover mixture from the garage shelves, which turned out a brownish-orange. Our numbers were given to us by the derby organisers, and I did indeed paint my number in white on each side of the cart; but it was seventeen, not twenty one.

I didn't recognize the driver in my dream but I accepted his presence there without concern. I recognised my mother without any doubt, but I have no idea what she was doing there or what her presence signified. My mother is alive but very ill in a nursing home in England. On my last trip to see her she didn't recognize me. My mother returned to England following my father's death from cancer in 1989. "Sweetheart" was what she always called me as a child. I think I was her favourite.

I expected more elements of the dream to relate to my promotion at Burton's, but I can't relate any of this dream to my real-life success. Still, there were no negatives there. No snakes or pointed metal rods. Perhaps my subconscious has accepted that, unlike my wife, it can be wrong sometimes.

Liz has suggested that it would take a professional psychologist to interpret my dreams correctly. I don't think she was serious, but I might do it anyway, especially now that his \$200 an hour professional fees will no longer be a deterrent.

* * * * *

Harry had debated for several days whether he should leak the news of his promotion. A quick word to Mick Shaw would do the job. He thought he should also tell Louise, and possibly June. Louise would guard the secret with her life, while June would? What? Probably start badgering Harry for a decision on whether she would be staying on the eighth

floor. Harry was still not ready to answer that, and decided to let June find out about his promotion from her regular sources in her own time.

He pressed the intercom and asked Louise to come in to his office. He told her to close the door.

"Louise, hold your breath. I have some news that I think you are going to like very much. Louise, you are looking at the new Chief Executive Officer of Burton's Press."

Harry had expected that Louise would take the news with one of three possible reactions; incredulity, pleasure or amazement. More probably some combination of these. He was not ready for the actual response. She clutched her notepad and pencil to her chest and her eyes went wide. For a moment Harry thought that she was about to burst into tears. If any expression showed on her face it was dismay.

"Oh Mr. Murphy," she said at last, "Are you sure?"

"Sure? Of course I'm sure," Harry said defensively. "Why should I not be sure? I got this directly from George Thorpe when I was in Toronto last week."

Understanding dawned. Louise was worried that he would be leaving her behind. In a split second he made the decision he had been agonizing over since his trip to Toronto. "You needn't worry, Louise, I've decided to take you with me -- although I'd rather you kept that to yourself for a little while."

"Oh, it's not that, Mr. Murphy, it's just that the office grapevine has been buzzing like mad for the last few days. I tried to tell you, but you didn't seem to hear me. The new CEO is apparently a young man from the United States. Jensen, I think his name is. They say his family is very close with George Thorpe and that's how he got the job. Oh Mr. Murphy I'm so sorry, it's not that I doubt your word its.... just... that....just...."

Louise tailed off, shut up and left. Harry stared at the door as it closed behind her. The office rumours must be wrong, surely. *He* couldn't be wrong.

Could he?

Harry went looking for Mick Shaw. He found the big man emerging from the interior workings of the new web press ("New" only in that it was five years younger than the "old" web, which was a 1972 model). Mick was up to his elbows in machine oil, which was also liberally smeared over his face. He was speaking to one of his pressmen who Harry could not recognize under his coating of oil, grease and printer's ink.

"It's beyond my skill, John" Mick was saying, "Better call Engineering, so they can tell you that they haven't got the parts and will have to make them and blah blah blah. I'm sure you know the story."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, the old sad song" said the man, and walked briskly away.

"Mick, is that you under all that warpaint?" Harry asked.

"Oh, Murph, I was just coming to see you. We've got problems here, sunshine."

"In a minute Scot... Mick. I need to know what you hear about the new CEO?"

"Theo's replacement? It's a young lad named Jensen. Simon Jensen the Second, I've heard. Some little shit just out of school, *brags* about the fact that he knows diddley about the printing business. Apparently Daddy and George Thorpe are very close. Why? Does that fit in with what you've heard?"

"How sure are you of this, Scotty?"

Mick let it pass. "Hundred percent, mate. I got this from Phil Sutherland's office. Personnel. Never been wrong, my source there." He noticed for the first time the look on Harry's face. "What's up, Murph? Do you know something about this turkey? From what I hear we shouldn't expect to see much of him down here on the working men's floor."

"No, Scot.. Mick, no. That's right. Thanks for the scoop."

Harry turned and walked away. Mick called after him "Look here, Murph, we've got solid problems with the new web here? When can I see you about it? We should really be talking replacement, you know."

"There's new stuff on the way, Mick" Harry called over his shoulder. At least he was the first with *some* news.

Harry left work early that afternoon and drove home under a black cloud. He had intended to pour himself a generous Jack Daniels and work out how to break the news to Liz when she got home, but Liz was waiting for him, Jack Daniels in hand, as he opened the front door.

"It's all right, Harry, I know. And to be honest I'm not nearly as upset about it as you must be."

Harry put the glass down on the hall table and put his arms around his wife. They stood that way, in comfortable silence, for a long minute. Harry released Liz and picked up the drink. "Louise?" he asked.

"Of course Louise. I thought you would have figured that out months ago. She seems to think that she is the only one you told, so damage control shouldn't be an issue."

"Yes, Liz, but if she told *you*..."

"For an intelligent man you do come out with some stupid comments sometimes, Harry. Don't you know that Louise would have her tongue ripped out rather than tell a confidence; rather than risk causing you the slightest embarrassment? Do you really not know what a gem you have there? Even to tell *me* she had to put herself through an agony of soul searching."

"I suppose so." Harry drained his glass and moved to the liquor cabinet.

"Please go easy on that stuff, will you," Liz said. "It never really makes you feel any better, just numb. The problems will still be there when you sober up."

"Just the one more, then."

Liz moved into the living room and Harry followed. They sat in the deep, comfortable La-Z-boy armchairs, one each side of the fireplace, which had become over the years "his" and "her" chairs. "Harry," Liz began, "There is really not much of a problem here except your wounded pride, but there is something I want you to tell me about. Louise says that you met with the Taylor's Warehousing people about your paper supply on the morning you went to the Bourque. Did you have lunch with Arnie Taylor and his little gang?"

"I know what you're thinking, Liz, but I only had a couple of rum and cokes with lunch, and I was perfectly sober by the time I met with George Thorpe."

Liz gave Harry the "look" he had first encountered from his third grade teacher many years ago. The "look" that told him "That was not the right answer, Murphy!"

"Harry, listen to me. The only way we get information from your mind to mine and back again is by using words. By talking to each other. If you are going to lie to me this whole process becomes a waste of time and we may as well just sit here and talk about the weather. Is that what you want, Harry? Or are you going to stop acting like a ten year old boy who's been caught with a cigarette behind the bicycle shed?"

"I'm sorry, Liz. You're right of course. And about the booze. I did have more than two."

"How many more?"

"Six."

"Six more than two? or six total? Stop being clever with me, Harry. Being evasive is as bad as lying."

"Six more than two."

"Good God in heaven! You had *eight rum and cokes*?"

"And there was wine with the lunch."

"Harry, what were you thinking of? Were you trying for 'Stupid' in the Guinness Book of Records? It's a minor miracle that you could walk and talk..... Thorpe must have known. George *couldn't* have missed your condition, not after that much to drink. Harry, George Thorpe is *murder* on that sort of thing. I've heard he has fired men just for having alcohol on their breath after lunch! How the devil did you manage to keep your job at all?"

"Liz, please don't get angry with me. I can stand anything but that."

"Oh Harry, how can I not get angry with you? But then, how can I *stay* angry with you? Sometimes I'm not sure whether I'm your wife or your Mommy. Look, just tell me this. Was Louise the only person you told that you had been offered the CEO job?"

"Yes."

"Then there's no harm done except to your ego, and you're just going to have to live with it."

"Yes" Harry said very quietly.

"And there's this; You obviously misinterpreted what Thorpe and Sutherland said to you, but I suspect that even in your highly pickled state you got a kernel of truth out of the conversations. Is it possible that you have been offered some other position? A promotion within AGI? In head office, maybe?"

Harry perked up and sat straighter. "Yes it's possible. It could very well be that."

"Well that's a mixed blessing. I don't much like the thought of moving to Toronto, but there would be compensations I suppose. Look, Harry, you're just going to have to tough this out. When George Thorpe shows up with this Jensen you're going to smile and shake his hand and say "Welcome to Burton's." Liz paused and frowned. "Oh, Harry, I suppose that if you didn't pick up on Jensen you haven't heard the rest of the gossip either. Louise says she's been trying to talk to you about it but you've been somewhere else these last few days."

"What gossip?"

"You really should *listen* when Louise talks to you. She has her ear to the ground, you know; *very* good sources at the Bourque. There *is* no more 'Burton's'. At least there won't be soon. It's going to be "AGI-Vancouver", and "AGI-Edmonton", and ..."

"Not "AGI-Halifax"?"

"Yes. That's one of the reasons they wanted to be rid of Theo. He would never have allowed that. I'm really glad that he's out of the picture."

"Poor Theo. You're right. He'd have fought them tooth and nail. Still, if that's the only change, I suppose we can all adjust."

"That *isn't* all, Harry. There's talk of layoffs. Big layoffs. That's another reason they wanted Theo safely out of the way. Some of the workforce have been with Burton's since his Dad's time. He would never have allowed layoffs in any large numbers."

"No." Harry said. "No he wouldn't. The question now is will Harry Murphy allow it?" His dismay was turning to anger by the minute. "I think I might have just one more refill." Ignoring the look which Liz aimed at his back Harry carried his empty glass to the small liquor cabinet by the living room window.

* * * * *

On Monday morning Louise was waiting for Harry in the lobby. "Good Morning, Mr. Murphy." She said. "We have a Code Seven this morning." Code Seven had been added to the list because it was a realistic possibility, but this was the first time it had been used. Code Seven meant that somebody in the Toronto Head Office needed to talk to Harry urgently. Given that 07:30 in Halifax was 06:30 in Toronto, it must be particularly urgent. Harry knew that George Thorpe was always in the office by six, but then so were several of his first line executives, and even a respectable number of the lower ranks.

"Who?" he asked Louise in the elevator.

"Mr. Thorpe. As soon as you get in, he said."

Harry practically ran to his desk. "Christ" he thought, "George is finally going to get around to ripping my hide off for showing up pickled at his office. Well, I suppose I deserve it. I'd better take my lashes, and hope that I'm as indispensable as I thought."

Indispensable. Louise was quietly closing the office door but Harry call to her.
"Louise."

"Yes Mr. Murphy?" she said, poking her head around the half closed door.

"Thank you."

"You're very welcome" she said, thinking that Harry was talking about the Code Seven. She tried once more to pull the door closed, but Harry called again.

"Louise."

"Yes, sir?"

"Not for this morning; not *just* for this morning. Thank you for everything. Liz told me. You did the right thing, and it was very brave of you. I apologize for not telling you before just how indispensable you have become to me. Thank you very much, Louise."

This time she managed to get the door closed. Just as well, she thought. She wouldn't like Mr. Murphy to see her with tears running down her scarlet cheeks.

Harry dialled the number, and Molly Mason connected him to her boss without the usual polite chatter.

"Harry" the Chairman boomed over the phone.

"Yes sir," Harry said in a very small voice.

"Harry, I called to apologize for the way you were treated when you dropped by my office the other week. All I can say is that I was caught up in events and let the pressure get to

me. I know that is no excuse for my deplorable bad manners, but I hope you will understand and forgive me."

Harry sat, stunned, mouth open.

"Are you there, Harry?"

"Yes sir. Sorry, Mr. Thorpe. There is really nothing to forgive. It should be me apologising for dropping in so unexpectedly, knowing what a busy man you are. I only hope that *you* can forgive *me*, sir."

"Right. Well, no sense in us spending the morning apologising to each other, no sense in that. I'll get right to the point. I wanted to make sure that you understood what I said in such haste at the elevator door. In the new AGI organisation there will be a new position created; each major plant will have its own Director of Production, and the obvious choice for AGI-Halifax is you, Harry. There will be increased responsibilities and, naturally, an appropriate increase in salary. You'll be hearing from the Finance people, but I wanted you to hear it from me first; we're increasing your salary by eight percent. Oh yes, and from now on your annual bonus will be directly related to productivity. AGI-Halifax was up twelve percent last year. If you can repeat that this year it could mean - what, close to \$10,000 extra in your paypacket at Christmas."

"I don't know what to say, Mr. Thorpe. Except Thank You, of course."

"Right. One more thing, Harry. I'm sure that you're up on the gossip. I sometimes wonder why we even bother with formal announcements, coming weeks after everybody already knows the details. You've heard that young Simon Jensen will be named CEO at AGI-Halifax, I presume. Of course you have. Well there's going to be a short delay. Family problems. Young Simon had to return home to Boston for a short time, and he won't be out to Halifax until late March, maybe the first week in April. If you wouldn't mind, Harry, I'd like you to move up to Theo's office until Jensen arrives. Philip Sutherland tells me you have a

very good number two in your group, and he can hold your fort for you. Trouble is, that girl of Theo's, June, has been trying to handle things on her own up there and she's getting into a bit of a mess. If you wouldn't mind going up there and sorting things out, I'd be much obliged."

"Of course, Mr. Thorpe."

"Good. Right away, if you can manage it. Oh, Acting pay for your man, of course. And just one more thing, Harry, I think we've known each other long enough to drop the 'Mr. Thorpe'. After all, you're part of AGI's inner circle now. Call me 'George' would you?"

"Yes, sir. Yes 'George'. Thank you."

George had hung up.

Harry didn't know whether to laugh out loud from joy or cry with relief. He'd got his promotion after all. He'd even got the "top slot", at least for a few weeks. He buzzed for Louise.

"Call Office Services would you please, and tell them that Harry Murphy wants them up here right away to move his stuff into the CEO's office. It's alright, Louise, I'm not hallucinating this time, it's a temporary move -- on George Thorpe's direct orders -- until the new man arrives."

Louise departed, smiling, to make the arrangements. Harry called after her: "When I move up there permanently you'll need to tell them to send two teams. There's no way I'm moving up there without my Executive Assistant."

Well, well. A promotion, a raise and 'call me George', and it's not even eight o'clock yet. Harry grinned broadly and started to collect the photograph frames from his desk top.

* * * * *

Harry Murphy's Dream Diary: Monday, February 16.

I was running along a forest trail. The trees were packed densely together at their tops and cut out most of the light. An occasional bright ray of sunshine stabbed through the dense canopy like a probing searchlight, illuminating tangled creepers and stunted ferns on the forest floor. I didn't know why I was running or what I was running from, but it terrified me. From time to time I could hear distant howls behind me, but these could have come from large dogs, large cats or even human throats. I wasn't even sure that I was running from these pursuers, for the thing which was pursuing me frightened me far more than any earthly teeth and claws.

I was rapidly losing energy and breath. My breathing was already ragged and forced. I knew that I would have to stop to rest soon, and that would be the end of me. The miracle was that my pursuer had not already overtaken and destroyed me, for he was vastly stronger and faster than I.

I had come to the end. I leaned against a tree, fighting for breath. I looked around for anything that I could use as a weapon; a rock; a sharp stone; a stout branch from a fallen tree. There was nothing, but then I realised that even if I had found a great sword lying conveniently on the forest floor it would be as useless as my bare hands against my unseen enemy.

Then out of the corner of my eye, at a distant point in the path, something caught the light. A gleam of green leaf and golden sun. With reserves I did not realize I possessed I began again to run, and the haven of light and safety rushed towards me. In no time at all I ran out of the vast forest into open farmland. Behind me, my enemy stopped at the boundary, unable to leave the confines of the forest. I slowed my pace to a jog, and then to a walk, recovering my breath and energy as I did so.

I saw a flock of sheep grazing peacefully in a distant field and heard birdsong from all directions. A cow lowed in a nearby meadow.

END.

Tuesday February 17: Notes:

Pathetic. Truly pathetic. I realize that when it comes to analyzing my dreams I have no natural flair for such things. Liz is far better at this than I am. Still, even I can interpret this poor piece of nighttime drama. I am of course fleeing from the spectre of the CEO job, which almost caught me and gobbled me right up! I finally escaped by the skin of my teeth due more to good luck than to any competence on my part, and I ran "out of the woods" and into Beethoven's Pastorale Symphony. Or was it Bach? 'Sheep may safely Graze', for God's sake.

"Subconscious Harry" obviously takes me for a simpleton with this children's parable. Come on, S.H., you can do better than that. Although, judging by some of my recent actions, maybe S. H. has a point.

* * * * *

When Harry arrived on the eighth floor he found a June Sawler he had not known before; compliant, deferential and most obviously glad to see him. She even told him so.

"It's been a nightmare, Mr. Murphy, since Mr. Burton left. He was supposed to be here until April you know, according to the Personnel Office. I'm *so* glad you're here. I've put the truly urgent things on your desk, but I'd like to brief you on several other issues, too, as soon as you can find the time. I tried to get Mr. Burton's e-mail up, but I'm afraid I don't have his password. The one he gave me won't work. Oh, I'm *sooo* glad you're here Mr. Murphy, sir. Can I bring you a coffee or anything?"

"Not right now, thank you June. Let me sort through this 'urgent' stuff first. I'll buzz if I need you."

Well, Harry thought, now I've *really* arrived! Not only a "Call me George" from George, but a "Mr. Murphy, sir" from June.

Harry's first meeting of the Board of Directors of AGI-Halifax took place the following Monday. His board consisted of Burton's Department Heads plus various specialist advisors, as well as a few Section Chiefs who reported directly to the CEO. These included Industrial Engineering, which set production standards for the plant, Quality Control and the small Personnel shop. These units were actually components of Head Office Directorates in Toronto, but their managers received day-to-day direction from the local Chief Executive -- Harry.

Harry had June set up the meeting for nine a.m. At 9:11 June informed him that the players were assembled and, with June in tow, Harry made his grand entrance. The men and women around the table met him with a chorus of subdued "Good Mornings." He had not expected hearty congratulations or a rousing cheer on his entry, but a "well done, Harry" at least from his closer friends would have warmed him a little. Harry sat in the Big Chair at the head of the large oval table and cleared his throat.

"I thought it would be a good idea for us to get together and talk about what's happening to Burton's" he said. The only sound was the faint scratching of June's pencil as she took shorthand notes of the proceedings. Theo had once suggested the use of a tape recorder to simplify the note taking business and at the same time produce more accurate minutes, but he had wisely put the proposal to a vote and it had been soundly thrashed. The members of the board relied on the ability to go to June with the first draft of her minutes and tell her "What I really said was.....". June knew perfectly well that they were telling her "What I really *should have said* was....." but, on Theo's orders, she never raised a fuss.

Harry continued.

"I know that you are all tapped in to your respective grapevines, and you've all probably got a very good grasp of the basics, but I would like to make sure that we're all singing from the same songbook when it comes to explaining the changes to our employees."

Harry hadn't noticed, but he had started the meeting exactly as Theo had *always* started his meetings, and had even used several of Theo's favourite phrases. None of this was lost on his audience.

"Well, for starters, in case any of you are unaware of it, this plant is now to be known as AGI-Halifax. Official notification should come through within the week, and we'll get started on changing the office stationery, as well as our advertising."

"Will you want the big electric sign on the roof changed, Mr. Murphy?" June asked.

"Yes, good point. Ed, can you take care of that?" Ed Knowles was Chief of the large, well equipped Engineering Department.

"Not too likely, Harry" the engineer said. "We have no sign making gear in the shop. I can paint you something if you like."

Harry joined in the laughter.

"Office Services will order one, Mr Murphy" June said. "They can probably get the specifications from Toronto."

"Why do we need specifications" someone asked from Harry's left. "That big red sign has been a Halifax landmark since I was a little girl. Surely we can at least keep the same format. Can't we?" Harry didn't recognize the speaker but thought he had met her once or twice on the third floor. Some sort of higher level clerical function. Pay and Benefits, maybe. June was looking at him, and Harry realised that the table had gone quiet once more while waiting for his reply. When it became apparent that Harry was not about to respond to the question June said "I expect that AGI would like to have all of their plants present a standard appearance. That's probably behind the renaming of all the major plants, too."

"Yes, probably," Harry said.

"Is Maple Leaf Press going to be "AGI-Vancouver?" someone asked. "Sam Thompson won't like that. It's been Maple Leaf since his grandfather's time."

"Sam's probably been put out to pasture like Theo," came from the far end of the table. "That's the main reason they bought Theo off, I heard. So he wouldn't squawk to his friends in Ottawa. Isn't that right Harry?"

"Er, yes. Could be, yes."

"Oh, come on, " the third floor woman said, her indignation apparent. "That's a petty thing to say. I heard that the new AGI structure is supposed to increase operating efficiency by 20% and reduce operating costs by the same amount. It wasn't all just some sort of plot to get rid of poor old Mr. Burton, surely. Isn't that right Mr. Murphy?"

"Er, I heard the same thing, yes," Harry said.

As Head of the Press Department Mick Shaw had a reserved seat at the Monday briefings, as did Ron Edwards (Bindery) and Brian Delaney (Prepress). Mick's voice quickly overrode and silenced the other speakers.

"Look, Murph, this is bullshit, all this name changing nonsense. Window dressing from the shitheads in Toronto who've nothing better to occupy their time. What we *really* want to know is, we've all heard that Burton's -- AGI-Halifax if you must -- is finally going to get some gear that is at least from this decade. Is this so and, if it is, what are we going to get and when can we expect to get it?"

"Never mind that" Ron Edwards interjected, getting a scowl from Mick Shaw for his rudeness. "What about these layoffs we're hearing about? My sources say we could lose nearly a third of the workforce. Shiny new gear from Japan is not going to do us a lot of good if we've nobody who knows how to use it."

"Oh surely they can't do that without talking to the Unions first, can they Mr. Murphy?"

"No they can't" said Harry, looking to the speaker, an attractive young girl who looked to be about fifteen years old. "And if they had, I'm sure I'd have known about it, Miss, er....."

"Susan James. I'm representing Don Harrod from Personnel. He's off with the flu."

"No, Miss James. The collective agreement stipulates that....."

"So the rumours are false, then?" Edwards asked. "You're saying we're *not* going to get pink slips?" Ignoring Harry he turned to Mick Shaw who was seated on his left. "What have *you* heard, Scotty?"

"As far as I know,....." Harry began. But then, he thought, even Liz had heard about the layoffs. From Louise, to be sure. Harry wondered how sure Louise had been, and what source the rumour had come from. If Ron Edwards had heard it too, there could very well be fire to go with the smoke. Perhaps he should call George before committing himself.

"Look Murph" Mick Shaw once again cut through the rising babble around the table. "Pick your subject. Do you want to tell us how many men we're going to lose, or...."

"And women, Mr Shaw" the woman from the third floor broke in. Mick silenced her with a look.

"And women, of course, Eileen" Mick said. "So, Murph, how many *persons* are we going to lose? Or tell us whether we'll truly be getting new gear, and, if so, is it pressroom, prepress, or bindery? And how is this going to affect our hours of work and take-home pay? Nobody here is really that much interested in whether we're going to replace the red neon sign

on the roof with a blue one, or whether we all get new business cards and letterheads. Which do you want to answer first, Murph."

Harry decided that Mick Shaw had called him out. This was no time for bluffing. "I'm afraid I'm not yet at liberty to answer any of those, Mick."

"Then get June to round us up when you *can* answer them, Harry." Ron Edwards growled. "I've got our antique signature binding machine held together with scotch tape and baling wire, and if I don't get back to nursing it along we're going to miss a deadline for one of our biggest clients. New gear is not going to be a lot of help if we've lost all our customers by the time it gets here." Edwards picked up his notebook, pushed back his chair and prepared to leave.

"Now just a minute, Ron, we've got a full agenda here this morning," Harry growled. "If you're going to storm out of here the Bindery Department is not going to be represented."

"Ron's right, Murph." Mick Shaw had joined the rebellion. "You're just pulling a Theo on us. You should never have asked for questions until you had a fistful of answers. Wait up, Ron." The two men left the boardroom, heads together in private conversation.

Harry could not recollect *asking* for questions, but conceded that he'd lost control of the meeting about the time the Big Red Sign was first mentioned. "Pulling a Theo"? Surely not.

"I've things that can't be left, too, Mr Murphy." The third floor woman departed, presumably to the third floor. There was a flurry of binder folding and a scraping of chairs. Within seconds only Harry, June and the fifteen year old Susan James were left at the large table. Harry bowed formally to the young woman and gave her one of his best smiles. She had at least showed him the courtesy of allowing him to close his own meeting. "Thank you, Miss James," he said. "I guess the meeting is over." He walked out with June.

"That Susan James," Harry said to June. "How old would you say she is?"

June was taken aback but recovered quickly. "Susan is in charge of the Employee Assistance Program in Don Harrod's shop," she said. "I believe she has a BSc in Psychology and some sort of postgraduate degree, Masters or maybe a Doctorate. I guess that would put her in her mid twenties, maybe a little older. Why do you ask, Mr. Murphy."

"Oh, just curious," Harry said. "It's just that she looks about fifteen."

"My Dad used to say that when he got old all the cops started to look like boy scouts" June said. "Oh, please don't take that the wrong way, I didn't mean to imply"

"No offence taken, June."

"Will you want minutes of the meeting typed up?" she asked diplomatically.

"Oh, I shouldn't think so" said Harry.

* * * * *

On Sunday morning Liz said "Come on, Harry."

"Come on where?"

"Just grab your big parka and come on. I'll go warm up the car."

Harry wondered what Liz had in mind. He looked out of the cottage window at the whitecaps on the breaking wavetops and at the way the leafless trees bent in the wind. He knew without testing it that the wind would have a biting edge to it, and the storm which had been promised since Friday evening could not be far away. This was surely a day to feed the

fire, snuggle into the huge armchairs in the cottage's tiny living room and read something from far away in time and place. Tolkein maybe, although Harry had already twice accompanied Frodo and his gallant band of ringbearers on his world saving epic journey. Liz honked the horn and put an end to such speculation.

Before they reached the freeway Liz turned the Blazer right onto highway three, and when she eased the car off the main highway to follow the coast road Harry knew their destination.

"Yep," he said, "Fine day for Peggy's."

Peggy's Cove is a small fishing village and world class tourist destination perched on the edge of the eternal battle between land and sea. Huge swells built up over three thousand miles of open ocean hurl themselves ceaselessly at gigantic boulders which have withstood this attack through countless centuries. Though the sea is destined to win in the end, the huge rocks will stand firm for many more generations of tourists to come, to gape and to photograph. There would be no tourists today, Liz knew. From Labour day through to the Victoria day start of the summer season Peggy's Cove belonged to the two of them.

Harry had taken Liz there on their first date. They had met at a party thrown by a mutual friend and had known within an hour of meeting that there would be no ending for them that night. They had talked through the early morning hours while friends who had not left for home sprawled asleep around them on whatever soft surfaces they could find. When Liz eventually brought up the subject of going home Harry had said simply "Come on." Half an hour later they were standing arm in arm on the rocks at Peggy's Cove watching the rising sun turn the tops of the breakers into pink froth. Liz had always called that time "our first and cheapest date."

They parked by the restaurant at the top of the village and followed a well worn path out amongst the rocks to the old lighthouse. They knew the dangers of standing too close to the place where rock met sea, and were well aware that the ocean regularly snatched away

tourists who ventured too close to the conflict. But they knew also where crannies in the rock would give shelter from the worst of the wind's fury and let them enjoy the spectacle in comfort and safety.

Liz poured hot chocolate from a small Thermos flask into a paper cup and handed it to Harry. She poured a second cup and held it in both hands, enjoying the warmth. Harry sipped at the chocolate and looked out to sea. Liz had chosen the day knowing that with a wind blowing strongly from the east the waves at Peggy's would be spectacular. Harry had told her on their first and cheapest date that he considered this place to be quintessential Nova Scotia -- a place where all the senses come into play. He said he could sense the place through his eyes, ears, nose, tongue and fingertips. Harry could sit in the lee of a convenient rock for hours, lost in the power and magic of the place.

"I thought you'd like to do some thinking in peace, Harry," Liz said. "And some talking, if you want to."

Harry said "HMMMMM," and sipped his hot chocolate.

"Good idea, this," he told Liz after a few silent minutes. "Yes, I needed this. I'd forgotten how Peggy's can just suck the worry and tension right out of a body."

"What are you worried and tense about Harry?"

"I'm messing up, Liz. This is my big chance to show I can handle it, and I'm no longer sure I can. I had no idea what Theo had to put up with, you know. We all used to joke about how he had nothing to do but practice his putting and tie his fishing flies, but we were wrong. Up there it's a cross between a battlefield and a day-care centre. I've had grown men in my office fighting over which one has to call the other one "Sir" and which one doesn't. I have suppliers on the phone all the time offering to fly me here and there to see their new products, and when I tell them just to bring in some samples for me to look at they act like I've said

something stupid. And you wouldn't believe how many people come to me with a problem and then *tell* me how to fix it."

"Hmmm," Liz said.

"June says that Theo's one great skill was "Coaxing". She says he was a world class "coaxer." If it were an Olympic event Theo would Coax for Canada. When there was some conflict where neither side would budge Theo would just sit in the middle and listen, then pretty soon he'd know which side he could coax, and he'd get that person or that group alone and coax them towards the other person's view. I can't do that, Liz. I'm the great compromiser, and when nobody wants to meet in the middle I just get angry and start looking to bang heads. And then Theo had such contacts, June says. Through his family, mostly. Did you know he was on first name terms with several cabinet ministers in Ottawa? When there was trouble that he couldn't handle he always had a phone number of somebody who could, and he'd make a couple of calls and suddenly the problem wasn't there any more. I can't do that, either."

Liz stopped him with a finger to his lips. "Harry, you don't have to. You're not Theo and you don't have to do the job the way he did. Eventually you'll make your own contacts and develop your own special skills. Remember that Theo was raised in that environment. He inherited many of his contacts and went to school with others. You can't copy that, so don't try. Why don't you stop asking "How would Theo handle this?" and ask "How would Harry Murphy handle this?" Worth a try? "

A gigantic wave crashed against the rocks fifty feet in front of them, hurling foamy water high into the air and splashing the two picnickers with salt spray. "Seventh Wave," Harry said. "Every seventh wave is a biggie, and on a day like this that means a super-sized biggie. Maybe we should move back a few feet."

Harry Murphy's Dream Diary: Wednesday, March 11.

I was in an enormous building. The roof was high overhead and the walls were nowhere to be seen. The building was crammed with people. I knew that I was there for some important purpose but I did not know what. I walked through the crowd and found a large market place. It looked exactly like an outdoor market, with brightly coloured fruit and vegetables on sale from small stalls. It was a very noisy place. I realised that I held a position of authority here, and I started to shout orders to the stall owners. "Your stall is too big; make it smaller. Move your stall over there. You are not to sell those vegetables here." One man tried to argue with me and I ordered him to leave. As I watched him begin to pack up his stall I felt very guilty for my severe treatment of him, and decided to reverse my decision, but before I could act the stalls vanished, leaving a huge open space where they had been.

I walked on past the deserted marketplace and came to an area where many tables were set out in rows. Young boys and girls sat at the tables waiting to be fed, and I saw that this was my school cafeteria from the nineteen sixties. As with the market, I knew that I held a responsible position here and I started to shout out orders; "Bring food to this table! Hurry, there." At a table several rows away from me I saw a young girl in a white dress whom I seemed to recognize. I started to walk over to her but as I approached her table I saw that she was no longer there.

I realised that I needed to find a washroom to relieve the pressure on my bladder, and I left the cafeteria to walk down a dull, grey-painted corridor where I knew there was a men's room. I entered the room and started to pee into the urinal with tremendous force. After some time I noticed that the pressure on my bladder was not diminishing. I left the men's room and went back to the dining area, but on the way there I became lost.
END.

Thursday March 12: Notes:

When I woke up I was bursting to use the bathroom. I was fascinated by the fact that my need to pee had worked its way into the plot of my dream, and that I responded to it within the

context of the dream. There is something very interesting here, but I can't put my finger on exactly what.

The authority business relates to my new job somehow, I'm sure of that. I've no idea what the fruits and vegetables are trying to tell me. To eat better? I have a very good diet. I couldn't fail to notice the message that "When Harry takes charge everything goes to Hell." In fact when Harry tried to take charge in the marketplace the damned thing disappeared entirely.

I see that I'm back at school again, which is probably S.H. still trying to make his point about me not being ready, not qualified to move upstairs. Well to hell with him. While I admit that I may not be as perfectly suited for the CEO job as I thought I was, I still believe that I was meant to occupy that office.

I now have about forty dreams recorded and I read through them from time to time looking for recurring themes. Being back in school is definitely one; being lost is another. Needing to take a pee is a recurring theme, but I think that message is more likely to be coming from an overfull bladder than from my subconscious mind.

I frequently seem to find myself in situations where I don't know how I got there, what I'm supposed to do there or how I'm supposed to interact with the people and places I visit. The thing that still knocks me out is that I feel in these dreams. While the situations always have an unreal aura to them the emotions are one hundred percent real. When I reread the dream transcripts I can always recall the way I felt at the time; angry, happy, irritated, depressed (all too often, that one). I am still amazed by the fact that I am able to feel these emotions without knowing their origins. What am I angry about? Why am I confused? I can't claim to have given this a lot of thought previously, but, if asked, I would have said that emotions were hormonal in origin. I'm angry because my blood stream is full of Adrenalin; happy because of -- whatever hormone makes you happy, serotonin maybe, or the substance that gives long distance runners their high - endorphins, I think they're called. But I can't believe that the emotions in my dreams are merely a result of some gland choosing that moment to dump its

contents into a convenient artery. I mean, why should it? How can my glands know that I'm supposed to be angry (or whatever) when my brain doesn't even know it?

I think I need help here.

* * * * *

Liz was sitting in her fireside chair with her legs tucked up under her and a large three-ring binder open on her lap. Harry approached quietly.

"I hate to disturb you, Liz, but...."

"But you're going to anyway. That's alright, Harry, this is nothing that can't wait. That's your dream diary, isn't it?"

"Yes." Harry handed the small notebook to Liz. "I'd appreciate it if you could just sort of skim through this, Liz, and let me know if you think there are any messages there; especially any recurring themes. You seem so much better at spotting them than I am. I've written my notes after each dream, but I'm sure you'll see things that I've missed. Quite honestly, Liz, I'm wondering if the whole thing isn't just some sort of plot to sell "Dream Books." I know that I've been getting a lot of messages saying "Stay off the eighth floor", but if I'd listened to them I'd never have even got a trial run at the job."

"Of course I will, Harry. I've seen you writing in your diary but I thought it was, well, like a regular diary, private and personal. If you'd like me to take a look I'll do it right away."

"Oh, there's no hurry Liz. In your own time."

"No time like now, my Dad used to tell me; the future isn't here yet and the past has already left. Anyway, I'm sure it's more interesting than reading about torts."

"About what?"

"Never mind."

Liz opened the little notebook and started to read. Harry picked up his current paperback and pretended to read. After about twenty minutes Liz said: "I know you're anxious, Harry, so I'll tell you what comes immediately to mind, then I'll read the rest when you don't have to pretend you're immersed in John Grisham, OK?"

"No fooling you, Liz."

"Ah, you finally admit it!"

Harry didn't respond.

"First thing, you have very nice handwriting."

"That's not....."

"Just kidding. Harry, your dreams are stacked from stem to stern with metaphors; lots of visual imagery but lots of other stuff, too. Remember, I told you that's how your inner mind expresses itself? You shouldn't look at the face value of what is happening in your dreams. Look, you hit the nail right on the head with your jungle dream, where you were running away from the nameless faceless terrors which wanted to "gobble you up". You knew you were in a big forest but you didn't know where or why, or what you were supposed to do? You might say "you couldn't see the forest for the trees?"

"Oh, come on!"

"No, really, that's exactly the way these things work. Think of it as being like your cryptic crosswords. What was that one you were giggling over last weekend? About an air force officer?"

"Oh, yes: Squadron Leader takes off for a drink. Three letters."

"And what was the answer?"

"Sup. The Leader of Squadron is "S", and when he takes off he goes "up", so S-UP is Sup, or drink. See?"

"Cute" said Liz, who was not a fan of cryptic crosswords. "But my point is, the solution had nothing to do with squadron leaders or airplanes taking off. Do you see? You're good at that, Harry, at those crossword puzzles. You can see the meaning *behind* the words, not in what the words say. Now look at your dreams like that. Take your Australian dream. You know the first thing that struck me about that dream? It had nothing to do with being in Australia, or meeting border crossing guards. Nothing from the surface. It was that you were being driven around by someone you didn't even know, and yet you didn't seem to mind a bit. Harry, you even get twitchy when *I* drive you somewhere, yet here a perfect stranger was driving your car, yet you showed not a single twitch."

"Yes, but you just accept these things in dreams, however wacky they seem when you look back on them."

"But you've told me that you're fully capable, in your dreams, of all the emotions you feel in waking life - and more besides. Why didn't you feel mad?"

"Why should I have felt mad?"

"Think of the metaphors, Harry. Someone else was "in the driving seat." Someone else was essentially "telling you where to go;" or "taking you for a ride." There are probably dozens of others, lot's of nautical ones I'm sure, but all essentially the same thing. You're not in charge, Harry, and yet you don't seem to mind. Now it isn't certain that this relates to Burton's, but if I were a gambler I'd put a small bet on it. Your subconscious is saying that you'd

like it very much if someone else took care of the decisions on where you're going and how you'll get there. You'll just be happy to sit there and let somebody else make all the crossroad decisions for you. Harry, you know how people say "My dream is to win the Lottery," or "My dream is to get a new Ferrari," well *your* dream, quite literally, is to give up all say of where you go, when you go, or how you go, and just "go along for the ride." Even at the car rental agency you let someone else decide on what car you got. There were many shiny new cars on the lot, but you were happy to let them give you a nineteen-sixty-something mini-car."

"Yes, but I loved that car!"

"Right. A car from the good old days when you were carefree and had no responsibilities."

"Aw, Liz...."

"Don't get mad at me, darling, I'm only telling you what I think your own subconscious mind is trying to say. You told me that you wanted to use creative dreaming to get in touch with your inner voice, so there's no point in ignoring it now that you've set up a method of communicating with it."

"Yes, Liz, you're right of course. Again. I just wish that Subconscious Harry would get off the one theme. He never seems to stop telling me that I don't belong on the eighth floor, and he's *wrong* about that."

"Is he? Well, let's not fight about it, Harry. And anyway, S.H. is telling you much, much more than what he thinks about your new job. Despite what you may sometimes think, our lives don't revolve around Burton's Press. Now who is the girl, Harry?"

"What girl? Aw, come on Liz! You can't possibly think that I'd..."

"No, Harry, I know you're not fooling around. Believe me, you couldn't get away with that for two straight days, and I wouldn't need to see the lipstick stains. No, I mean a young girl, early teens, usually in a white dress."

"You mean in my dreams?"

"Of course, in your dreams. I know you don't fool around with the big girls, and I know you have no unnatural interest in the little ones. You've no need to blush, dear."

"I'm not blushing; it's hot in here. But I still don't know what you mean."

"Obviously." Liz passed the diary back to Harry. "On a quick speed-read I've found this young girl in five dreams, and I'm sure that when I read it properly I'll find her in several more. She catches your attention, but when you look closely she's not there. When you try to follow her she's gone. Yet she is obviously important because you write about her. She appears in a dream for a few seconds, is about as noteworthy as a sheet of grey wallpaper, and yet you write about her time after time. Tell me, Harry, those little squares of paper you keep by the bed for your 'memory joggers'. Do you save them?"

"Save them? No. Yes. I throw them into the bottom drawer in my bedside table. I don't specifically save them, but I think they're probably all there."

"Look through them. I know that they're rarely more than a few lines, sometimes just a couple of words, but I bet you won't find "Girl in white dress" on a single one of them."

"What's your point, Liz?"

"You always remember her, not as incidental to the dream but as a significant event in it. The appearance of this girl is the single most repeated incident in your dream diary, and I think you should give some serious thought to who she is and what she's doing in your dreams."

* * * * *

On Friday morning Harry stepped out of the elevator at 7:45 to find June waiting for him. "You're to call Mr. Thorpe right away, please, Mr. Murphy."

"What, another Code Seven so soon?"

"Code....? I beg your pardon?"

"Never mind."

Harry dialled the number and was put through at once.

"Ah, Harry. Good Morning. I'll come straight to the point, Harry. Young Jensen will be able to start work sooner than we predicted. He'll be arriving in Halifax this weekend and he'll be at the plant by eight o'clock Monday morning. I just thought I'd give you a 'heads up' so he doesn't catch you unprepared."

"I appreciate that very much, George."

"Don't mention it. Now listen, Harry. He's a good boy, young Simon. Comes from good stock. Sharp as a tack he is, very good mind. But he *is* a bit on the young side; still on the sunny side of thirty, I believe. That's awfully young for a position of such responsibility but I'm sure that he'll be up to it. With a bit of help from more experienced minds, calmer heads, you know what I'm talking about. And of course he'll be relying on his experts, the people who know the printing business. On you, Harry, and on his top ranks. I know you'll do your best for him, keep an eye on him. Do you have children, Harry?"

"Yes, George, a boy and a girl. They're away from the nest now and starting in on their own careers."

"Splendid, Harry, splendid. Then you'll know exactly how he's situated, young Simon. And you'll keep an eye on him for me? Yes, of course you will. Well, can't stay chatting with you all day. Much appreciate these last few weeks, you know, holding the fort for us. We won't forget that."

"Oh, you're very welcome....." Harry began, but he was speaking to a dead line. "Nice talking to you, too," he said to the silent instrument as he replaced it in the cradle.

On Monday morning, March 23rd, , Harry arrived at AGI-Halifax at seven o'clock, and was most relieved to find a lobby devoid of either Louise or June. On Harry's instructions June had convened a meeting of the board for eight o'clock, with the idea of presenting a welcoming party for the new Chief and receiving his orders. At 7:45 the committee was assembled and waiting. At 9:00 they were still waiting. By 9:30 all of the members directly concerned with production had left to tend to their various machineries, and several of the office workers had joined the exodus. Harry remained, along with Don Harrod, Head of Personnel, Ren Barbour from the Finance department and three others. Don was an inoffensive looking little man who seemed to have sprung fully formed from the pages of a Dickens novel. He stood perhaps five feet eight inches on tiptoe and weighed in at maybe a hundred and thirty five pounds dressed. But the image belied the man; Don held a ninth degree Black Belt in Judo and had represented the province at the Canada-wide championships until a few years ago. Now in his early forties he willingly admitted that he was starting to slow down a little, but he still maintained a rigorous exercise routine. Two years earlier Don had left the office late one night to find that his car would not start. Deciding to walk home he had taken a short-cut across Citadel Hill, where he was accosted by five young men demanding money. Twenty minutes later Don walked into the Halifax police station and reported that he had been accosted by five muggers. "Don't worry, sir," the sergeant had reassured him, "Give us a decent description and we'll have them in no time." "Oh, that's not a problem," Don had told the officer "They're still where I left them, and they won't be going anywhere without help. I came

in to report the incident because I thought I might now be in some kind of trouble." In the end the young thugs had decided not to press charges.

At nine forty Simon Jensen Junior stepped out of the elevator, looked at June and said "I presume you know who I am, right? Good. Now get me a coffee, will you doll? Hot, sweet and white, just like your sweet self." Noting activity in the boardroom he dropped his dripping raincoat on June's desk, walked over to the door and stuck his head in. "What's this?" Jensen demanded "Is this where the people with nothing to do hang out? Well you'll be people with no jobs if you don't find something to do pretty soon." Then he left, but looked back into the boardroom. "If any of you know a Harry Murphy, go and tell him to get his arse up here PDQ. That's Pretty Damned Quick for those too ignorant to know. You might tell him he'd have shown a bit more wisdom to be here to meet his new boss."

Harry snarled. "I'm Murphy, and I've had my arse up here along with the rest of your senior executives since eight o'clock, which is the time most of us start work around here."

Jensen smirked. "Executives? Oh, now aren't we fancy? You mean 'managers', sport. The only 'executive' around here is me. And you'd do well to watch your tone with me in future if you'd like to keep *on* being a manager."

Harry bit his lip to prevent an explosion.

"I BEG YOUR PARDON?" he hissed.

"I do not repeat myself, Harry," Jensen said. "You must learn to pay closer attention."

Harry froze. A powerful sense of *deja vu* swept over him; but then he remembered, it was from his dream; the dream of Australia. The other man in the car had said those exact words to him, in that exact tone of voice. The other man in the black, shiny car. The man in the driving seat.

BEAUTIFUL DREAMER

Chapter 3:

By the following Thursday, his fourth day on the job, Simon Jensen Junior had effectively alienated his entire management team and four fifths of the rest of plant's employees. The remaining fifth hadn't met him yet. The management team were assembled in the boardroom for a briefing by Jensen on "The New Structure of AGI." Assisting him in this was a team of three analysts flown down from Head Office for this express purpose.

Jensen sat at the head of the table in what Theo had called "the Big Chair" or sometimes "the Daddy Chair". Harry, during his short stay at the head of the table, had called it the "Hot Seat." Jensen leaned back in the chair and propped his well shod feet on the rosewood table. "These folks" he said, waving his hand in the general direction of the analysts, "Have been flown down at considerable expense to fill you all in on the new AGI initiatives. The main objective of this program is to improve the productivity and cost-effectiveness of the older plants, and let me say that there is much room for improvement here. So if this chap -- what's your name, sonny?-- will get the show on the road, we'll get started. Time is money, as my Uncle George always says."

Although the man referred to as "sonny" looked to be some years older than the insolent CEO, he let the comment slide.

"Good Morning. I recognize most of you, and I think that most of you know me, but for those I haven't met I'm Alan Hurtubise from the Head Office's Industrial Engineering Group. I'm one of those fellows you've seen around from time to time with a stop watch and tape measure, generally making a nuisance of myself. For the last six months I've been working as Project Head on this new initiative, so in a way I like to think of it as "my" project. With me today are two of my colleagues from the Project, Mary"

"Look sonny," Jensen interrupted "You're not applying for a job, and if you were you wouldn't get it. We don't need your CV, so why don't you cut to the chase and tell us all about these 'Centres of Expertise' that Uncle George told me about. Tell us how we're going to become much more efficient and make bundles and bundles of money."

Alan Hurtubise held his breath. "Very well" he said after a few seconds of silence. "Mary, if you would please show the first slide."

The lights were dimmed and the slide projector at the end of the table sprang to life. A brightly coloured image appeared on the screen. Super-imposed on a map of Canada was a bright green line which zigzagged from Vancouver to Halifax. Black circles on the line were used to mark the cities of Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto, Montreal, Moncton and Halifax. Around each circle were many small, multicoloured arrows, all pointing inwards.

"This is not a diagram of Indians attacking a Wagon Train," Alan said. The tension eased a little and several people laughed. Jensen snorted.

"It is a schematic showing how work is directed to the major AGI plants at present. The little arrows are colour coded according to different types of print work. Green indicates book production, for example, while red represents pamphlets and job printing. Yellow stands for magazine printing, which as you all know is generally long run, high quality colour work. Blue is....."

Once again the CEO interrupted the presentation. "Listen, Hurchoby, we didn't come here to look at maps or listen to Comedy Hour at the Kindergarten, and I'm not particularly impressed by your pretty coloured pictures. Let's take it as a given that you can colour your little diagrams without going over the lines, and move along to the meat of this thing. Tell them how it's going to make them work twenty percent faster and twenty percent cheaper, that's what matters. Now can you do this or do you insist on wasting even more of my valuable time?"

Alan Hurtubise had his back to the Big Chair. He stood in silence for several seconds, and a small smile formed on his face. Due to the dimmed lights in the boardroom only those close to him saw the smile, but to Harry, who was looking straight at him, he gave a broad wink.

"You're quite right Mr. Jensen," he said. "Let's get right down to the important stuff. Please put on slide number nine, Mary."

"Slide nine? Of course Alan." The young woman searched among her documents, and a multicoloured image sprang onto the screen. Circles, squares and triangles covered the screen, each attached to the others by dotted, solid and broken lines of various shades. Many of the lines were marked with complex sounding titles. One thick green line was marked in bold-face type "Projected Inversion Fiscal Flows (Limited Equity: U.S. Dollars)".

Unseen by Jensen, Alan winked at Harry and cleared his throat. "This is the economic flow model at the heart of our five year cost-effectiveness calculations," Alan began, "and it is obviously the key to maximising labour efficiency parameters, especially when you take into account that we are basing our projections on a hyperbolic curve. The schematic shows how we integrated ROI projections into a triple reiterated module which was then used as a basis for our trigonometric algorithm. Later I will show you the mathematical formula which we use to modify the algorithm when we need to adapt to first-level industrial environments such as the Printing Industry. This is very important, so I will take a little extra time on the math this morning."

Harry had seen the wink and been ready for this, but others were beginning to mumble as the torrent of words crashed over them. Gradually, pennies dropped. Whispered explanations took place at the far end of the table.

"Moving along now to Mr. Jensen's main interest, the cost-effectiveness projections and Rate of Return calculations." He turned to the CEO and said "I'm afraid that high level recursive economics is not one of my strengths, Mr. Jensen. These calculations were of

course made by the finance department. But I'm sure that I can count on your help with the more complex sections, sir. Next slide Mary."

The next slide made the previous image seem a model of simplicity. The bottom of the chart and the left edge were graph axes, X and Y, but each had multiple labels. Lines and curves darted everywhere, and at intersection points brightly coloured circles, squares and triangles blossomed. The overall effect was like looking at the right hand half of some exotic fruit tree in which no two fruits were the same size, shape or colour.

"Since we're not in the business of selling hamburgers, we must now obviously apply the integration curves to the Printing Trade." The laughter was out of proportion to the value of the little joke and indicated just how much tension had built up in the room. "We'll examine first of all the impact on web fed perfecting offset lithographic presses with on line signature gathering systems, equipped with heat-set inking systems and gas fired drying tunnels. We will need to modify the inputs if you are using computer controlled ink fountain units with sensitometric feedback, of course." He turned to Jensen. "Since this is your special interest, Mr. Jensen, I wonder if you would like to elaborate at this point."

Jensen cleared his throat. "That's more like it, Hurchieboy. Well, I would love to, normally, but I'm afraid I must leave you to it. Sorry I can't stay for more, but I've ... er I've an important phone call to make, and anyway I've seen all this before." He swung his feet to the carpet and left hurriedly. June followed him out. The relaxation of tension in the room could be heard and felt. Someone started to laugh, but Hurtubise shushed them. He waited for some twenty seconds, then said: "Time, Mary?"

"I make it four minutes and twelve seconds" Mary said.

"Is that a record?"

"Not on the timing, but I've never heard of a shutout that worked on the second slide. The best I've heard of was the third slide."

Mick Shaw stood up and began to applaud, and others followed.

"He's not out of earshot," Alan Hurtubise warned.

"He's stupid enough to think we're applauding your presentation," Mick said. "And maybe I am. Now, if you can just show us how to do a "shutout" on a more permanent basis, we'd be much obliged."

Everybody was on their feet, laughing and clapping.

Alan said "I didn't think he was stupid enough for a shutout play; I'd been told in Toronto that he was ill mannered but quite intelligent. I finally realised that it was the only way we were going to get through this today. But now if you'll go back to the first slide, Mary, we can get back on track."

The wagon train under attack was back on the screen. "You see here" Alan continued "that each plant is set up to handle every type of printing thrown at it. You all do a little of this and some of that, and you're all equipped to handle whatever comes through the door. This doesn't make for efficiency, it makes for clutter. Under the new structure..... next slide please."

On the next image the green line connecting the plants was still there, but each plant was now a different colour. AGI-Halifax had turned green, and instead of multicoloured arrows attacking it, only green arrows surrounded Halifax. But the green arrows came from all over the country. AGI-Vancouver had turned yellow, and had attracted all of the yellow arrows.

"This raises the concept of "Centres of Expertise," Alan said. "Uncle George will be pleased to know that his nephew does sometimes listen. Under this model each plant will specialise in one type of printing. The example dearest to your hearts, I presume, is Halifax,

and you will see that the circle here has turned green -- which you may recall I said was for book production. Halifax will be re-equipped to become a Centre of Expertise in book production, and will handle all AGI bookwork for the whole country....."

"The Vancouver customers are going to love that!" Ron Edwards interrupted. "First they ship their manuscripts and artwork across the country to us and then they wait for the work to be trucked back to them. You can add between three and five days to their turnaround time. I don't think so, Alan."

"Not trucked back, flown back," Alan said. "They'll never know their work has moved out of Vancouver. We will pick up their artwork and manuscripts and they'll be in your hands the same day. When the job is done, we'll collect the work and fly it back to Vancouver. The biggest danger is we'll be so fast that the ink hasn't had time to dry and our customers will get their fingers dirty."

"The job doesn't get to the bindery until the ink is dry" Mick Shaw said defensively.

"Sorry, Scotty, just a little attempt at humour."

"You're still adding a day to the turnaround time" Ron Edwards said.

"And you'll get it back for us, plus interest."

"Oh, right, and how exactly....."

"Did you notice I said *re-equipped*"? I guess your boss hasn't told you yet. You're getting three, high speed, state of the art web presses with on line book binding equipment. This represents over five million dollars worth of printing presses, and right now they're somewhere on the Atlantic Ocean on their way to Halifax. They should arrive in less than two weeks, along with the installation engineers, and should be fully operational by the middle of May. What comes off the end of these presses will need very little effort to turn it into a fin-

ished book. I don't want to get too technical here, as it's not everybody's cup of tea, but if you want to get your production supervisors together I'd be pleased to go over the specifications with them. The point is, these presses will knock two days off your normal book production turnaround time. Vancouver will gain a day, and local customers will gain two. And by putting *all* book production in Halifax we gain some very significant economies of scale and some improved efficiencies. Both of these come down to one thing; more profit. More cash in the bank for AGI."

"Sounds too good to be true. What happens when you miss the flight, or it's too full to handle our extra freight?" Mick Shaw asked.

"We won't miss the plane because it's *our* plane," Alan replied. "We have a three year lease on a fleet of three Airbus freighters, which will make daily flights across the country stopping at the six AGI Centres. If you're behind time on a job you call the airport and have the plane wait."

"And the cost of this fleet has been counted into your calculations?"

"Of course."

"OK. One more question. Where's the catch?"

"Please put on Slide Nine, Mary" Alan said.

Mick cut through the laughter. "The catch, Alan?"

"I'd say that from the look on your face you've already guessed, Scotty. It's not part of my presentation, but I'll give you the gist. The new presses automate a lot of the presswork and a big chunk of the bindery work. And since you'll be handling only bookwork you'll have no need for your old jobbing presses."

"Or their operators," Mick said, and the mood changed in an instant.

"Or the cutters in the bindery" Ron Edwards threw in. "Nor the gluing machines, nor....."

"How many, Alan? How many men are we going to lose?"

"I honestly don't know. The personnel people will be down to talk to you about it. But I've heard it could be a third of your workforce."

"Good God, No!" said Harry.

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Harry Murphy's Dream Diary: Friday, March 27.

We had moved into a new house. My mother and Father were in the living room talking quietly together, and I went off to explore. Within a short time I realised that the house was immense, and comprised dozens if not hundreds of rooms. I walked through a large, high ceilinged room to a set of Patio Doors looking out on a small, neat English garden. I opened the doors and stepped through. Once in the garden I saw that I had been wrong about the size of the garden; it was huge. Mature trees stretched to the skies; spacious lawns with manicured edges were set out for lawn bowls and croquet; flower beds displayed a riot of colour. I crossed a lawn and found a small path leading away between two privet hedges, and I followed it for a while, eventually coming up against a high wall of red brick. I followed the wall to the left, and experienced a strong feeling that if I could only find a way to the other side I would find something quite wonderful; but no opening presented itself. Disappointed, I turned and tried to retrace my footsteps, but I did not recognize this part of the garden and realised that I was lost. I was not worried about this since I knew that all I had to do was find an exit from the garden and then follow the road around to the front door of the house.

I set about trying to find a gate leading out of the garden but suddenly found myself in the middle of a small shopping mall. I walked along between two rows of small specialty shops, idly looking into their windows at the displays of merchandise. One of the store windows had a display of weapons, and I stopped to admire the deadly looking implements, which included long, broad bladed knives, rifles of various types and a number of machine pistols. In the centre of the display was a large hard-cover book with the title "How to Kill People" emblazoned in large scarlet letters on the cover. The letters seemed to dance and flow as I looked at them. I saw nothing odd or incongruous about having such a store in the middle of this otherwise normal suburban mall.

At the end of the stores I found a small office, and I knew that this was part of my father's new house. I went into the office and looked out of the window at a busy street scene. At the back of this room was a door which I opened and went through to find myself again in a huge, high ceilinged room. This one had many marble statues lining the walls to my right and left. I walked through the room to the end, where I found several old people sitting around on benches reading magazines. I sat on an unoccupied bench and picked up the magazine which I found there, but it was in a language I did not recognize and so I could not read it.

I looked up from the magazine to see a young girl, about twelve years old, sitting on the bench directly opposite me. She had on a spotless, well pressed white dress and held a small black book. She looked to me as though she were about to attend a Sunday School meeting or bible class. As I looked at her she smiled. Suddenly it became very important that I should speak with this child, but as I stood, so did she. She walked slowly away towards the far end of the large room and, although I ran to catch up with her she rapidly reached the door to the office and went through. I followed her through the door but found that it now led to the garden. The girl had vanished, and I was extremely upset to have lost her. I became very agitated and started to cry. I shouted into the garden: "Where are you? Come back to me."

I suddenly realised that I had met this child before, and on more than one occasion, although I could not remember where or when. It struck me that I should have recognised her, and I

should know her name, yet I did not. I called out again: "Who are you? What is your name?" From somewhere in the garden I heard her call softly: "Don't you know me, Harry? Don't you recognize me, Harry? Why, I'm your Fairy Godmother." Then I heard children's laughter from far away in a distant part of the garden.

Saturday, March 28, : Notes:

My family never owned a house remotely like that. My first years were spent in a small three bedroom semi-detached house in the north of England, and later, when my father became successful in his business ventures we moved to a small bungalow.

I am trying to follow Liz's advice and look behind the face values of my dreams to the symbols and what they represent. Theo once said to me that men choose their houses, cars and wives 5% for their usefulness and 95% for show. Taking the huge house to be a symbol of success, then, I see the dream telling me that my mother and father were more "successful" during my early years, than I have become now, with our grand home in Halifax's east end. Our home is very nice, and quite large, but doesn't include many ballrooms, shopping malls or art galleries. My mother and father were certainly successful in terms of the love they shared with each other and with my brother and me, and I like to think that they set the pattern which Liz and I successfully copied. Is the dream simply saying that such success is worth more than money in the bank and expensive possessions? A bit trite, I think.

The weapons shop was priceless. No attempt at subtlety there. What a beautiful collection of deadly hardware! Rambo would be proud to own any of the knives in that shop window! I assume that it is intended to tell me that I don't like Simon Jensen very much. I don't really want him dead, of course, but as Liz says, this is all symbol and metaphor. When people say "I'm going to kill you" they rarely mean it. I remember very well coming home to my mother once after I'd fallen into the canal while wearing a brand new pair of shoes. She said to me "If you've ruined those new leather shoes I'll kill you." I was a bit worried for a while, even though I knew she didn't really mean it.

The girl, of course, is a very important symbol of something. Liz was absolutely right (I am so tired of writing that!). I counted seventeen appearances in my forty five documented dreams to date. That averages better than every third dream. Always much the same; I spot her, zip, she's gone. And of course Liz was also right about my "joggers"; no reference to the girl in white in any of them.

So what do little girls dressed for bible classes symbolize to me? Purity? Innocence? If so, what is the relevance of that? Naivety, possibly. Is S.H. telling me how naive I am? Not that I'd blame him, given some of my recent performances. But what am I supposed to do about such a message? How am I supposed to react? And why would she call herself my "Fairy Godmother?" Does that make me Cinderella?

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By chance, Phil Sutherland met George Thorpe at the entrance to the Bourque building at ten after six on a brilliant Wednesday morning in early April.

"I was coming up to see you, George," Phil said. "News of your boy Simon out in Halifax."

"Oh, yes. Settling in, is he?"

"You're not going to like this George."

"Out with it then, man. Tell me what you have and I'll tell you if I don't like it."

"They pulled a shutout play on him."

"I don't like it. Alan Hurtubise and his people, presumably?"

"Yes."

"If young Hurtubise and his team hadn't just improved our profitability by half a billion a year I'd have his hide. He knows he can get away with it, at least while he's still riding high on the success of his project. Damn his impudence. I presume his audience knew what was happening?"

"My sources say they gave Alan a standing ovation when your boy left. They're claiming a shutout record, which should make young Simon quite a celebrity in some circles."

"You're right. About me not liking it, I mean. I don't like it a bit."

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As promised, hard on the heels of the Project Team came a delegation from Personnel to confirm the bad news. Harry had suspected that the grapevine estimates were more a result of employee fears than rationalised thought, but the numbers had been confirmed. Two hundred and eighty positions throughout the plant were to be declared surplus to requirements. No area of production was spared, and the layoffs also reached into the administrative and technical areas of the plant. Complicating matters was the fact that negotiations with the various unions had taken place in Toronto, but neither management nor union negotiators had thought to keep their regional people informed. The Union's excuse was that they had considered the negotiations to be incomplete and didn't wish to burden their regional brethren with a partial report. Management's explanation was that Regional employees would do as they were told.

Harry had to admit that the AGI plan looked sound. The cost-effectiveness figures could not be refuted. If the plan worked as projected the company would increase net profits by hundreds of millions of dollars per year, and that, as he had often told his own staff, was the bottom line. AGI was not a benevolent institution. It existed to make money for the people

who had invested in it -- which now included Theo, and, to a much smaller extent, Liz and Harry. He had to agree, too, that the firm was being very generous to the affected staff. Any employee with thirty years or more of service would be granted an immediate, unreduced pension, regardless of age. This included one employee who had started with the company at the age of twenty and would now be in receipt of a full company pension at the age of fifty. He had happily signed the release forms and told Don Harrod that he intended to work in his son's small engineering business, and that with his full pension and the income from his new job he would actually be increasing his earnings. Others would be much less fortunate, although nobody would leave without a separation package of some sort. Nevertheless, openings for operators of the old, technically obsolete equipment in use at Burton's would find it very difficult to obtain work elsewhere, and hard times were predicted for many families that spring.

The plant's employees had rapidly tired of the cumbersome AGI-Halifax designation. Several workers now refused to accept the new name and had reverted to calling the plant "Burton's." Although the management group could not officially sanction this, Harry was secretly rather pleased. He knew that Theo would be pleased, too, if he should find out about this minor act of rebellion.

Simon Jensen saw the use of the old name as an endorsement of his predecessor and an affront to himself, and launched a personal crusade to end the use of the old name. His efforts were a source of great glee to some employees, who treated the CEO's campaign as something of a game, and set up an elaborate spy network to let them know when Jensen chose to lurk in their work areas. A rash of spray-painted graffiti appeared on walls throughout the building, and Jensen even stepped out of the elevator one Monday morning to find "Burton's Forever" painted in dayglow orange on his office door. He had turned on his heels and stormed down to Personnel, straight into Don Harrod's office where a meeting was in progress. He had yelled at Don that in future any person speaking or writing the name "Burton's" was to be fired on the spot. Don had coolly replied that the penalty for minor insubordination was an oral reprimand for the first offence ; for the second offence, a written warning; for the third.....

"I am changing the rules," Jensen bellowed. "You don't have the authority to change Personnel rules," Don informed him politely. "In that case, as of right now you no longer work for me," the CEO screamed. "I never worked for you in the first place, thank God," Don replied, smiling, "And I wouldn't consider doing so for the President's salary."

Jensen: "Then just who the hell do you think you work for?"

Don Harrod: "I think I work for the AGI Corporation."

Jensen: "Who do you report to, you stupid little man?"

Don: "I report to Phil Sutherland at Headquarters in Toronto."

Jensen: ""Phil Sutherland will hear of this conversation!"

Don: "He certainly will, Mr Jensen, before you're even back in your office. I suspect that your uncle George will hear of it, too, before the day is out."

Jensen: "I'll get you for this, you fool. Don't think you can speak to me like this and get away with it. If you weren't such a shrimp I'd take you outside and give you a lesson on how to talk to your boss."

At this point Don's staff had judiciously moved away from the table and seemed ready to start taking bets on which bones Don would break first. In fact the super-cool Mr. Harrod *did* lose control. He burst into hysterical laughter which, people said later, could be heard all over the fourth floor.

Jensen had more recently taken to patrolling the halls in his search for miscreants, and these walks often took him into production areas. Of all the employees at the plant the production people were the hardest headed, and any meeting between Jensen and a pressroom or bindery employee was certain to become a battle within minutes. On one such patrol he had stormed over to Mick Shaw, the only person he recognized in the cavernous pressroom, and

started to rant. Mick had listened politely for a few minutes and then, at a pause in the one sided conversation, had told Simon that he was in a restricted production area without proper protective clothing. Jensen had ranted for a further three minutes, and at the next pause Mick had told him that unless he left immediately and came back wearing a hard hat, steel toed boots and appropriate eye and ear protection, Mick would be forced to close down machinery rather than risk any harm coming to AGI-Halifax's new CEO. Simon ignored this and launched into a lecture on how low-life peasants should react to a visit from eighth floor royalty. This time Mick didn't wait for a pause. He pulled a sizable steel whistle from the pocket of his overalls and blew a powerful blast. Jensen cursed and covered his ears. All around the huge room presses started to shut down. Mick turned and walked away, but Jensen followed him and, very unwisely, caught hold of the bigger man's elbow.

"Just where do you think you're going, Shaw? I haven't dismissed you yet."

To the relief of those watching Mick only smiled. In the unnatural silence of the huge room he was able to speak quite softly.

"A pressroom shutdown is a very serious thing, Mr. Jensen. To restart the presses is a slow, costly job. It can't be done under an hour and normally takes between two and three. You see, the ink-feed ducts will all have to be scraped clean of dried ink and refilled. Paper webs will have to be re-tensioned. All plates will need to be reset to correct register. Drying ovens will cool and need to be re-heated. Material losses usually add up to several thousand dollars, and work in progress could be ruined. The finance people say that the total cost of a pressroom shutdown can run to five thousand dollars a minute, and there is a standing rule from Toronto that the Chairman's office must be called at once when such a shutdown takes place. So I'm going up to the Production Director's office to ask Mr. Murphy to call Mr. Thorpe and explain that the work stoppage and press shutdown was caused by an individual on the floor who refused to wear protective clothing or footwear, and refused to leave when I asked him too."

Jensen gaped.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Mr. Jensen, as a special favour to you, just because I like you." Mick reached out and pinched the CEO's cheek between his finger and thumb. "If you can get your miserable, ugly little face out through that door over there by the time I count ten, I won't tell Harry which particular mindless idiot caused the shutdown."

"You can't talk to me like that, you great Ape! I'm the Boss in this plant and you'd be wise to"

"One" said Mick. "Two."

Jensen was out of the pressroom by the count of five. Mick blew another blast on his steel whistle and the presses started up again. John Rider, the union shop steward, had come over to Mick as soon as he'd heard the stop-work whistle.

"Is that what you meant by 'pulling a shutout play' the other day?" he asked.

"Close enough," Mick said.

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April came to Nova Scotia in a blaze of blue sky and hot yellow sun. Even by local standards the spring was exceptional that year. Crocuses and early daffodils added dots and patches of contrast to the rapidly greening fields, and old Adirondack lawn furniture was hauled out of ten thousand garages to be painted and displayed on ten thousand awakening lawns. At their cottage Liz and Harry welcomed the turning of the earth with an enthusiasm bordering on worship.

Harry liked to assemble an ancient deck chair on the cottage's back lawn and watch his wife at work in the garden. Liz had long ago realised that she would never make a gardener out of Harry and had settled for his occasional help when large plants had to be dug up and replanted, or when barrowloads of topsoil or compost had to be moved and spread. Harry would tell neighbours who stopped to talk that he was practising his specialty, which was listening to the grass grow. He claimed that by listening carefully he could tell where fertiliser was needed, or where some extra seed should be spread to cover a bald spot.

Liz had vowed some years ago to fulfil her mother's dream for the little cottage and plant a seaside garden. At the shoreline the earth was rocky, and subjected several times a year to a deluge of saltwater when storm surges pushed the ocean beyond the normal high tide marks. Surprisingly she had found several plants which could withstand these occasional soakings, including the lovely little Rogosa Roses which grew wild in that part of the country. Liz had dutifully taken cuttings the previous spring and transplanted them along the seaside border of their property. Left to their own devices she hoped the roses would thrive and spread, forming a beautiful natural border to the north end of their home. Closer to the cottage Tamarisk and Russian Olive had shown themselves to be tough and durable, and Liz looked daily for the small green growths which would tell her that her saplings had survived the winter.

A small stream, no more than run-off from the hills to the south, bordered the lot on one side and Liz had planted two hundred daffodil bulbs along its edge last fall. Harry watched her working amongst the golden flowers and tried to recall the poem which fit the occasion. "Beside the Lake, beneath the trees" he remembered "di dah di dah di dah di breeze. Something something something host of golden daffodils."

Harry was feeling more relaxed than he had in weeks. As he sat under the warm April sun and listened to his beloved Liz singing while she worked in her garden he thought back to the messages of his dreams. Trite as it may seem, the message of his recent dream was true. Harry's wealth lay in the love of his family, his robust good health, his freedom from fear of the violence and depravity which seemed sometimes to have a stranglehold on the planet. He

could get up in the morning knowing that he would have plenty to eat that day; that he would have a warm, dry, safe place to sleep at the end of it; that neither he nor his children would be sent to fight a war from which one or more of them might not return. He felt guilty, in a way, that he so rarely took the time to appreciate these things, and that he took such matters so much for granted. He felt embarrassed that he had let his career ambitions cloud the truly important matters in life, and that he had made such an issue of it. He wondered how it had come to be that he should want so badly to move up one rung on the success ladder. Would he then immediately start looking to move to the next, he wondered. There was always one more step, always someone above to envy, always someone with a bigger house, a newer car, more money in the bank. He had already surpassed the ambitions of his childhood, and achieved a standard of living beyond anything his parents could have wished for him; why on earth could he not be satisfied with what he had, and take the time to enjoy it? June had told him that George Thorpe worked between ten and twelve hours a day, every day. He disliked weekends because they got in the way of work, and he hadn't taken a holiday in over ten years. And George still burned with ambition. He had confided to friends that he considered AGI to be "small potatoes" in the business world, and he longed for the chance to head up an international consortium, a corporation which measured profits not in millions of dollars but in tens of billions. George had been married briefly, many years ago. His wife had left him after two years, telling her parents that it would probably be several weeks before George noticed that she had gone. She was wrong. He noticed her absence in only ten days.

Was this the life that Harry wanted? To his surprise and chagrin he could not immediately say that it was not.

At forty seven Harry had never seriously considered his mortality. He had never thought it important to ask "Who am I really?" or "What is the objective of my life?" These questions he considered to be fodder for afternoon TV talk shows and of no substantial value. And at the end of it all? Dreamless sleep. Spirituality was fine for those who needed a crutch to help them hobble their way through life. Someone to thank when things went well; someone to blame when they went badly. But then they *didn't* blame, did they? Christians of his acquaintance seemed positively *eager* to forgive their God when things went badly, or even

more absurdly, to blame themselves for disappointing Him. Thanks for the sunshine, and it's our fault when it rains. God couldn't lose. Harry had long ago stopped asking for an explanation of why an all-seeing, all-knowing, all-powerful God should allow planes to fall into the ocean, deadly epidemics to kill by the millions, unending wars to inflict pain and suffering on the innocent of all races, small children to suffer from terrible, terminal diseases. The vague all-encompassing response that "It is not given to us to understand His workings," or, worse still, "The Lord moves in mysterious ways" only infuriated him. He still had trouble understanding how some of his close friends and associates -- intelligent people all -- could not only swallow this slop, but made it an important and central component of their lives.

"Harry!" He snapped out of his reverie. "Harry, I've been calling you for five minutes! What on earth were you daydreaming about?" Liz was walking towards him from the end of the garden, a basket of yellow blooms under her arm. "Harry, do you think it's warm enough to get the barbecue out? I could drive into Tantallon and pick up a couple of T-bones and a bottle of Cabernet if you think you could barbecue."

"You bet!" Harry called back. Now that was something closer to *his* definition of the Meaning of Life! T-bone steaks, medium rare, sizzling on the barbecue, a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon breathing on the picnic table, and Liz to sit down and share it with him. No need to get metaphysical about these things, no need at all.

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It is very difficult, during the summer season, to get a good table upstairs at Salty's Restaurant during the lunch hour. The tables facing Halifax harbour are popular with summer visitors, who enjoy a tasty lunch, a glass of Keith's Draft Ale, and a splendid view of the hectic activity on the waterfront. Small private sailboats dodge around container ships the size of small towns, and it is not unusual to see a Navy Frigate or submarine passing by the restaurant on its way to or from the Naval Dockyards to the west. In mid May, Liz thought, it shouldn't be too hard to find a good table, so she arranged to meet her friend Rolande there at a quarter

past noon. Arriving first she was pleased to be guided to a window table, and ordered a Whisky Sour while she waited for her friend.

Rolande Bertrand went back with Liz "almost to the beginning" as the two of them would say. They met as small girls when both families moved onto the same street at about the same time. They sat next to each other throughout grade school and were rarely far apart when not in class. They had parted only when Liz chose to study Law in Halifax and Rolande left to study Medicine at the University of Toronto, later qualifying in psychiatry and staying in the city following her graduation. Whenever the two women were in the same city at the same time they would get together and catch up on each other's lives. Rolande spotted Liz first and came smiling broadly to the table.

"Damn you Liz Murphy, you never age! Tell me your secret!"

"A pure heart and a healthy lifestyle. Of course, good genes help out a lot, too. So good to see you, Rollie!"

"Where's the lovely boy who's going to bring me a martini? Oh, there he is. Do you shout "garçon" here, or just wave? Never mind, he's seen me."

The waiter brought Rolande's drink and took their lunch orders.

"Cheers, Liz" Rolande said, and their glasses chinked. "Who goes first this time?"

"You do, Rollie, I went last time. So. Any men in your life?"

"I need another martini before I'll talk about that! There was someone special, at least I thought he was. Unfortunately he was someone else's special, too. *Several* someones, I think. Anyway, let's not talk about him. How's that big hunk of yours doing? Is he running the company yet?"

"As a matter of fact, if you'd asked me that a few weeks ago I could have said yes he is!"

"No! Really?"

"Yes. His boss took early retirement, and Harry filled in until Head Office found a permanent replacement. He's back in his own office now, though, and I can't say I'm especially upset about that."

"Didn't they give Harry a shot at the top spot? He can't be too happy to see an outsider brought in."

"No, they didn't consider Harry. I don't think they considered anybody, really. What I mean is the job went to the son of a close friend of the Chairman of the Board. You know how it is."

"Do I ever know how it is!"

"Oh, come on, Rollie, not in your field surely. I mean, they can give Harry a boss who knows nothing about printing, but in your job professional competence and qualifications are everything."

"You'd think so, Liz. But you know I'm not my own boss, not yet anyway. I'm still a company employee. When I hang out my own shingle it will be different. I hear you're back in the work force now, yes?"

"Who told you that? Never mind. Yes, it's true. I'm back as a paralegal in a small partnership here in town."

"You should have stuck it out, Liz. If you hadn't dropped out when you did *you* would be a partner by now. Don't you ever regret giving it all up for love?"

"I wouldn't put it like that, Rollie. I've enjoyed raising my children, and my marriage to Harry is the most important thing in my life right now. It probably always will be. But since you ask, no, I don't regret dropping out. I could ask you, do you ever regret *not* dropping out! Tom, wasn't it? The professor who wanted you to run away with him and live on love on the Costa Blanca?"

"Him! He's on his third wife now. I doubt we'd have made it through the summer before some bikini-clad beauty turned his head. Anyway I wasn't made for domestic bliss, I was made for my work. I can really make a difference to people, Liz. I can help them cope, help them get back a normal life. I'm not saying that it's the job of my dreams, not as long as I'm working for someone other than myself, but it will come, one day, not too far away. Have you seen my martini boy -- oh, there he is; hey, garçon."

"Don't wave your glass like that, Rollie, you're spraying the people on the table behind you."

"Damn! I thought it was empty! What a waste!"

"Rollie, calm down, I want to pick your brains. In your professional capacity, please."

"Right. Hundred fifty per hour. Special rate for friends, I'll only charge you one forty nine. You're serious? You're not having problems, are you Liz?"

"Not me. Tell me Rollie, what do you know about dreams?"

"I wish you'd asked me in advance. One of our shrinks is quite an authority on interpreting dreams. He's got books galore on it; uses it in his practice. I could have studied up on it for you."

"It's not so much interpretation, that side of it. What do you know about dreaming? What is it? What is the significance of it? Where do we go when we dream? That sort of thing."

"Wow. That's metaphysical stuff. I can't say I know much about that, not sure anybody does. You should maybe see a MicMac Medicine man rather than a psychiatrist. They probably charge less, too. Well, let me tell you the little I know. First, dreaming is essential to mental health. When you dream your eyes move rapidly under the lids, so someone watching can *tell* that you're dreaming. REM, they call it; Rapid Eye Movement. When subjects are awakened every time they hit the REM state, even though they may still sleep for eight or ten hours a night, they soon show signs of psychosis. I don't know why, but they do. Dream deprived subjects can go for four or five days, maybe a week, before becoming very seriously unstable. Pushed past that they reach a point where they're very hard to awaken while dreaming; you can set a bomb off next to them and they'll stay right on dreaming. As soon as the REM stops -- when they finish the dream, that is -- you can just say "boo" and they wake up right away for you.

"Two: There's little doubt that the subconscious mind communicates to the waking mind by the dreams it sends. That brings us back to dream interpretation, Moses and the Pharaohs, all that stuff. The more important the message, the more it will be repeated and emphasised. Of course, the subconscious doesn't just come out and say "stop smoking you silly ass, you're killing yourself". Much more subtle. You'll dream about gasping for breath; drowning, or being in a burning, smoke filled building. Something like that."

Rolande looked into Liz's eyes. "Listen, Liz, you're not asking about this for some imaginary friend who is really yourself, are you?"

"No. It's Harry. He got a book about "creative dreaming" last January and now he's filling notebook after notebook with details of his dreams. I'm wondering if this is a healthy obsession."

"No obsession is healthy. Is he acting strangely in any way?"

"You know Harry. He's no stranger than usual. Can it be dangerous, this creative dreaming?"

"I'm not sure Liz. Let me look into it for you. I seem to remember some case studies I read once about a chap who got heavily into this dreaming thing and ended up being institutionalised. I'll get back to you, but I think you should keep a close eye on your fellow. Still, I doubt that what Harry is doing can be seriously dangerous to his mental health. Well, not very. I think."

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Somewhat behind schedule, the new presses were installed and operational in Burton's pressroom by the first week in June and the Korean Technicians left. Installation had included a week of training and familiarisation on the new equipment, and under Mick Shaw's close supervision the operators of the new machines were making rapid progress. Of the forty five skilled press operators originally working at the plant only eighteen were left. These men operated the three new presses around the clock, two men per press on three eight hour shifts. The presses simply ate up the work, each press printing thirty two pages on each side of a web of paper which sped through the machine at eighteen thousand impressions per hour. The printed pages were fed through flame-heated ovens which dried the ink on the fly, and the pages were then cut, folded and stitched together without any further human intervention. A bindery employee trucked the finished product -- known as "signatures" -- into the bindery area, where they were assembled into finished books. The bindery had been the hardest hit production area, losing nearly two thirds of its workforce. What had once been a noisy, bustling, crowded room was now a huge echoing chamber which on occasion looked and sounded empty. To those who still worked there, it was a disaster area.

Harry wandered through the bindery and recalled his dream of the indoor marketplace which had disappeared before his eyes. "Prophetic" he thought. "Where Harry manages, things vanish."

His own job had changed significantly. Harry's function at Burton's was basically to see that his customer's work passed smoothly through each stage of production, and that the finished product was shipped to the client on time. He was now working for a smaller number of customers, but their needs were very highly specialised, and they were as likely to call from an office three thousand miles away as from the other side of Halifax. Where Harry had known a little about every aspect of the printing business he now found it necessary to know a lot about one particular part of the business. Many nights saw him up well into the small hours poring over some text or other on some aspect of book production.

His clashes with Simon Jensen were becoming very bitter. An enterprising office worker was accepting bets on who would be the first to actually take a swing at the offensive CEO. Mick Shaw was the odds on favourite, with Harry Murphy, Ron Edwards and Don Harrod in a three way tie a hair's breadth behind him.

By his third month in office Jensen was despised by the majority of his employees and seen as an object of ridicule by most of the remainder. However, a small percentage had chosen to side with the new CEO, largely on the theory that the few people at Burton's who were civil to him would reap the rewards of whatever favours he may choose to grant. Three such sycophants had already been moved from their various offices into the CEO's suite on the eighth floor. These "Special Assistants" now had their own small, glassed in cubicles and access to all areas of the plant on their "special assignments." June Sawler found herself in the unpleasant position of despising much of what her boss did during office hours but unable either to stop him or to inform on his activities. She confided to Louise that she had updated her CV and was actively looking for other work.

"But good jobs are hardly growing on trees right now," she added.

Louise sympathised. "I know he's an ill mannered SOB, but can't you just get on with your work and ignore him?"

"What work? About the only thing I have to do these days is dial his phone calls and type up those stupid reports from his "Special Assistants"; who said what about Mr. Jensen, who they said it to, and where and when they said it."

"Is that really what they do, those men?"

"Yes. He sends them all over the plant on made-up errands and they stand around and listen in on people's conversations. Then they make notes and I type them up and give them to Mr Jensen, and he puts them into his file and makes the black marks in his book."

"Black Marks?"

"Yes, just like school. Demerit points. Scotty Shaw has almost two full pages already. You know, things like 'on Tuesday he called Jensen a useless piece of you-know-what', and 'on Thursday he said Jensen wasn't fit to wipe Theo's.....' well, you get the idea. Sometimes I think those men just make up their reports about anybody they don't like."

"What about Mr. Murphy? Does he have any demerits?"

"Yes, but only three or four, I think, and there's no profanity in his. Mostly it's things like "It's unfortunate that our CEO doesn't see fit to learn at least a little about the process that pays his wages." You know, critical but always polite about it."

"What is he going to do with all this, June? I mean is he going to keep Scotty after school or something? Make him clean the erasers? What is it *for*, all this gossip gathering."

"I don't know, Louise, but I know it can't be good."

Five minutes after Louise had reported this conversation to him, Harry went in search of the pressroom chief. As part of the conversion of Burton's to a 'Centre of Expertise' the pressroom had been restructured. Mick Shaw now had a soundproof office on the newly built mezzanine floor from which he could survey the entire shop in comfort and relative silence. Harry found him gazing at the shop floor through his 'picture window', as Mick called the glass wall which comprised one side of his small office.

"Hey, Mick. Got a minute?"

"Always for you, Murph." Shaw continued to watch the huge presses. Within the office the great roar of the powerful equipment was reduced to a murmur. "The Purr of the Presses, eh Murph? I still can't get my mind around those machines down there. Did you do the numbers on them yet? Sorry, stupid question, of course you did. When we're running paperbacks we print a 32 page sheet on both sides. That's 64 pages per impression, and we're running just under eighteen thousand impressions per hour. That's over a million book pages per hour, times three presses, times twenty four hours comes to over seventy million book pages per day. Can you believe that? Seventy million pages!"

"Yes," Harry said, "But they don't run twenty four hours a day, do they? It takes two to three hours to get a press ready to go. Making the plates, putting the paper reels in place, setting the inking systems up, all of that?"

"Of course, but it's still pretty damned impressive you must admit, Murph."

"I do, I do. I'm as stunned as you are. It's a good thing we've all Canada as our market. Those presses would just gobble up the entire weekly maritime book market in time for an early lunch on Tuesday. But that's not why I'm here. Sit down Mick, let's have a talk."

"Sure, Murph. What do you want to talk about. Birds and Bees, is it?" Mick sat down in his office recliner chair, propped his feet on the plastic desk top and lit a cigar. "Another advantage of the new regime. Can't smoke on the pressroom floor, with all the chemicals and

solvents about, but nobody's going to stop me lighting up in my own personal office. All I need now is one of them 'Personal Assistants' and I've got it made. Any chance, Murph?"

"No. Listen, Scotty, I want to talk to you about Jensen and his 'special assistants'. You know, his errand boys?"

"Yeah, his Goon Squad. I hear he's adding two more. Peter Mackey is up there, you know. He was one of mine 'til he got laid off. Can't blame him for taking whatever work he can get. He's got three grown kids at home and about zero chance of finding another job at his age. Don't know the others."

"Do you know what they're doing?"

"Oh, yeah, everybody knows. They come down here -- not Pete, he won't do the production areas -- they come and sit in my office and say to me "That Jensen he's a piece of shit, don't you think?" and I say "No arguments from me on that, boyo," so they go back to Daddy and say "That Mick Shaw, he says you're a piece of shit" and Jensen writes it all down in his little book and puts another black star by my name."

"So you know about the demerits?"

"Oh sure. I think I'm leading at the moment by a short head over Ron, with Don Harrod a poor third. Jensen would like to nail Don, but the Goons can't get him to say much. They just write stuff down anyway and say that Don said it, but Jensen wants proof and witnesses, that sort of thing. I hear you're in the book for a half page or so, Murph."

"What do you suppose he's planning to do with that stuff, Scotty?"

"Fuck him, I don't know. He's got nothing else to do up there, so I figure this is just something he's dreamed up to pass the time. I know he's out to get Don for something that happened shortly after he arrived, and I know for damn sure that he'd like to nail me."

"Yes, I heard about you pulling a pressroom shutout on him."

"Oh, that, Yeah. He didn't like me much even before that. I don't know, maybe he sends photocopies of his book to uncle George and says 'look what I've got to put up with.' Maybe he's angling for a raise. Like I say, fuck him. So long as he stays out of my pressroom and out of my hair he can write what he wants. Even if *he* doesn't know it I'm sure his uncle George knows that without me all this lovely new gear is just so much steel and rubber."

"Still, Mick, I'd watch my back if I were you."

"Good advice, Murph. And I'd watch *yours* if I were *you*. There's nothing that Jensen would like more than for June to come running into his office saying "Oh, Mr. Jensen, there's been such a terrible accident in the pressroom. That Mick Shaw and that Harry Murphy got caught in the cylinder rollers and they're both squashed flat as pancakes."

Harry opened the door and stepped out into the pressroom roar, leaving Mick Shaw laughing heartily at his own little joke.

Jensen's poison spread through the plant like gangrene through an injured limb, slowly but very surely. Production employees were torn between the need to hold on to their secure, well paid jobs and a desire to punish the company which had inflicted such suffering on their colleagues. A month after the layoffs, stories were starting to trickle back about just how much human suffering had been caused by AGI's restructuring. Small family savings accounts had been rapidly exhausted; job searches had yielded little or nothing; the limited aid offered by neighbours and friends ran out quickly. Tales reached Harry of one family which had already turned to welfare; another had put their house on the market and sold their car; several families had moved in with relatives to save on rent; two had packed and left the province. A "Benevolent Fund" was started in the pressroom, spread rapidly throughout the company, and raised five thousand dollars in its first week. The five thousand was gone in three days. By

the end of its fourth week the fund folded as employees realised that, despite the very best intentions, they were pouring their dollars into a bottomless hole.

The new equipment outperformed even the expectations of the company engineers, and the predictions of Alan Hurtubise and his team began to materialize. The AGI Airbuses ferried paper and print back and forth across the width of the country and the large majority of customers remained blissfully unaware that any changes had taken place. Profits began to accumulate, George Thorpe was ecstatic, and the entire project team received sizable bonus cheques.

* * * * *

Looking back later, Harry would conclude that things had started to go badly wrong on Monday morning, June 15, when Louise met him in the lobby with a Code 1. "Pressroom," she said. "Scotty needs you."

Harry found Mick Shaw looking ready to strangle someone and not particularly fussy about who. "Come with me, Murph," he said. Harry followed Shaw into an area off the main pressroom where large cans of printer's ink and other pressroom chemicals were stored. On a small workbench sat an open can of black ink. Shaw took a steel bladed palette knife and scooped out a sample of the ink. "Look," was all he said.

Harry examined the ink. He spread the blob onto a sheet of glass fixed to the bench top for that purpose. Harry smeared the ink over the glass, spreading it into a thin film. The problem was obvious. While a good ink should be perfectly smooth and even, much like a can of quality paint, this one showed evidence of many small granular particles. Harry whistled.

"I've never seen a case as bad as this," Harry said. "Did you call the company?"

"Their man's on the way, but he said if we can *see* the particles then it's not likely to be a factory problem. Even if they'd missed the milling rollers entirely, the carbon black pigment would be almost too small to see."

"Well you can sure as hell see these, Mick. What do you think it is?"

"Sand, Murph. I think it's sand."

"Then you're saying....."

"Sabotage. Somebody got into the ink room over the weekend and stirred sand into random cans. We've opened other cans and it looks like about one in five. We checked for signs of a break in, but didn't find much. We don't normally lock the ink room, mind."

"This ink could wear out a set of plates in ten minutes, Scotty. It could shred the rubber blanket rollers and even damage the stainless steel. Tell me it never got into the press."

"Relax, Murph. Our man spotted these grains in the duct and stopped the press in time to avoid any damage. We've got the ducts and ink rollers stripped down for cleaning, and I think we've avoided any serious problems. I've a man checking all cans of ink. The defective cans are over there by the wall."

"Good work, Mick. Tell your man 'thanks' from me, will you?"

"Tell him yourself, Murph. He'd appreciate that."

"You're right. I will. You know, this could have done tens of thousands of dollars worth of damage if you hadn't caught it, not even counting the delay costs. I'm thinking we should give the Mounties a call."

"Hold back on the police, if you wouldn't mind, Murph. I've an idea I'd like to follow up on before we go that far."

"Not one of our men, surely?"

"Well, one that used to be, I'm thinking. One with very good reason to hate AGI. One that had a family, a home and a standing in the community just a few weeks ago and now has none of that. Leave it with me, like I said. I don't think it will happen again."

"OK, Mick, seeing as it's you that's asking. But let's hope this is the last attempt at sabotage."

It wasn't.

The following week saw Burton's miss a customer deadline for the first time in five years, a record which had been envied throughout the industry. The week after that they missed their second. Five days later a large job was returned by the customer, who complained that the cover had a green title on a red back-ground while the specifications had called for red on gold. Investigation found signs of tampering on the original order which was filed in the Sales Office.

If Harry had pegged the middle of June as the start of the problems at the plant, it was the last week in the month when it hit him personally. Louise stepped into the office uninvited and closed the door behind her. She came close to Harry and whispered to him.

"Mr. Murphy, I just spoke with June in the ladies room. She said you should hear this right away. She overheard Mr. Jensen speaking to Mr. Thorpe on the phone. She knew it was Mr. Thorpe because she always dials Mr. Jensen's calls. He -- Mr. Jensen -- was saying: "I have solid evidence that it's Harry Murphy behind all the troubles we've been having here." Then Mr. Thorpe said something and Mr Jensen replied: "I know, uncle George, it surprised me, too. I know Murphy is resentful that I got the job he wanted, but I never thought he would

stoop to sabotage to get even." Then Mr. Thorpe again, then Jensen said: "Of course, uncle George. I wouldn't make such a serious accusation if I wasn't sure. I have three people who overheard Murphy boasting about the damage he's caused. One of them heard it directly from Murphy himself, how he bragged that he could shut down 'millions of dollars worth of equipment'. Oh, it's Murphy alright, no doubt about it."

Harry took several long seconds to find his voice. "You're sure of this? Of course you are, Louise. Thank you. Can you give my thanks to June without putting her at risk? If you can, please do it."

Louise left. Harry sat. So it's come to this, he thought. Off with the gloves. Jensen has now declared war. Well, if that's what he wants he'll have it. No Quarter Asked; No Quarter Given.

* * * * *

Harry Murphy's Dream Diary: Monday June 29.

I was riding my blue Triumph racing bicycle along an English road, a little used secondary road, judging from the absence of traffic. It was raining lightly and I could hear the hiss of my tires on the wet asphalt and the tick, tick, tick of my Sturmey Archer three speed gears. I loved these sounds and found them very soothing. I was half way along on a trip to the east coast seaside town of Bridlington, with about forty miles to go. This was not in any way a daunting ride, as the distance meant little to me. I had no time limits, and I enjoyed the light, cool rain on my face. I had on a red T-shirt with the number Twenty One in large white letters. I expected to reach Bridlington before dusk, and would buy some fish and chips for supper before cycling out along the coast road to find a suitable spot for camping. Tomorrow I intended to sleep late in my little nylon tent, and after breakfast I would head north towards Peggy's Cove. If all went well I should be back home to my Dad and Liz by the end of the week.

I realised that I had been riding uphill for some time, and I had pushed the little gear shift on the handlebar as far down as it could go. I stood on the pedals for extra leverage, but it was a

losing battle, and I knew that shortly I would have to dismount and push my bike up the rest of this seemingly endless hill. As I got off and started to push I saw another cyclist coming down the hill towards me. By strange coincidence he was also riding a blue Triumph and wearing a red T-shirt with '21' on the front. I waved to him but he ignored me and sped past.

Suddenly I was at the coast, riding along a footpath to the south of the town where the big parking lots were. Although it was mid summer, and the tourist season was in full swing, the parking lots were empty. I stopped the bike and got off to sit on the concrete wall by the promenade and look out at the sea. The view was stunning. The sky was a bright robin's-egg blue, so intense that it hurt my eyes to look into it. The huge waves threw sun speckled foam high into the air as they crashed into the massive boulders fronting the ocean. I walked the bike along the path and found the perfect place to camp for the night, a small grove of trees on a clifftop overlooking the ocean. I put up my little tent, climbed inside and rolled out my sleeping bag. After I finished my fish and chips I noticed that it had become quite dark, so I curled up in the sleeping bag and fell asleep at once.

When I woke up the next morning I was amazed to see that the weather had taken a one-eighty degree turn overnight. The skies were heavy and grey, blowing in over an angry and agitated Atlantic Ocean. An almost continuous rumble of thunder came from the distance. As I came out of the tent a blast of ice-cold salt spray hit me square in the face. I packed up the tent and strapped it onto the frame of my bike. I took my heavy oilcloth cape out of the saddlebag and pulled it over my head. Snug and dry inside my cape, I climbed onto the Triumph and cycled away to the north.

As I rode through the town the weather eased, and I dawdled along the seafront looking at the brightly coloured fronts on the tourist shops. There were trinkets of all kinds imprinted with "A Souvenir of your Seaside Holiday," but I knew that despite their glitter and emotional appeal they were really all quite worthless. I looked up to see the name of a shop, but there was only a number, in large brass letters attached to the wooden frame over the window. Twenty One.

Outside the town, on the same road, I came to a house which I knew. I parked my bike against the brick wall which surrounded the small front yard, and went inside without knocking. In the living room I found a small boy who seemed very unhappy and was sobbing loudly. He looked up as I entered and said "Hello, Uncle Harry. Have you brought me a present?" I made no reply and he started to cry again. Suddenly the sobbing struck me as annoying beyond endurance, so I shouted at him to shut up. I knew that this child had always been given everything he ever wanted without ever needing to do anything to earn it, and yet he always wanted more. I yelled at him "What the devil is the matter with you, you have everything a young boy could want and you're still not happy. What else is it that you want from me?" The boy stopped his sobbing, looked directly at me, and said: "I do not repeat myself, Harry. You must learn to pay closer attention."

This angered me immensely. I opened my saddlebag and took out my Magnum 44 revolver. The boy looked at me with utter derision and said: "Don't be so bloody stupid." I shot him five times. (I always kept the first chamber empty for safety reasons). The boy fell onto the floor, a bloody corpse amongst his expensive toys. I felt very good about this, with not a hint of remorse or disgust at what I had done. I returned to my bike and packed to go. I noticed the number on the door of the house. It was twenty one.

I cycled off to the north, aiming for Peggy's Cove. I hoped to be there by noon, and intended to have a lobster lunch at the excellent little restaurant at the end of the village. As I rode along I saw a young girl dressed in a denim shirt and blue jeans, hitch-hiking by the side of the road. I thought I knew her from somewhere, probably from school although she looked too young to be in my class. She was holding a sign, with her intended destination printed in green ink on a red background. I tried to read it but the letters would not stay still. I stopped to speak with her. "I know you from somewhere, don't I?" She made no reply, but simply stared, smiling at me.

"I killed him, you know," I told her. "I shot him five times." Still she made no reply and I became angry. "What do you want from me?" I shouted at the girl. "What are you trying to tell me?"

"Oh, Harry," she said, "Do I have to hit you over the head with it?"

And she hit me on the head with the sign she had been carrying. I yelped and put a hand to my head. I looked at her sign. A number was printed in bright red ink on a gold background. Twenty One.

END

Tuesday June 30: Notes:

I think that this was my most cohesive dream yet. It had a start, a middle and an end, and it moved from act to act in a logical way. More or less. I had a definite sense of time passing. I even fell asleep during the dream, slept through the night and woke in the morning. I wonder if I dreamed, in my little tent by the sea.

Peggy's cove got mixed in with the scenery; there are no great boulders along the sand beaches of the coastline around Bridlington. I think this was simply because I love Peggy's very much and my subconscious obliged by throwing it in to sweeten the dream for me. Very considerate.

The blue Triumph bike was real with its hissing tires and ticking Sturmey Archer three speed. With all my camping gear strapped onto the bike I could still easily ride eighty miles on a decent day without pulling any muscles. The north-eastern seaside resorts were a favourite destination. All of this, I think, is simple nostalgia for what Liz calls my 'good old irresponsible days'. Wasn't that odd about mistaking Liz for my Mom? Liz says that sometimes she's not clear what role I want her to play, but there is no doubt in my mind, really.

I didn't know at the time, but the brat in the living room was Simon Jensen. I recognised him the moment I woke up. I put five bullets into him from Dirty Harry's Magnum 44, and thoroughly enjoyed blowing him away. I should perhaps have said to him "Go ahead, punk! Make

my night!" Interesting that he appeared as a small, spoilt child, which is, essentially, exactly what I think of him.

Would I really feel that way, if I walked into his office one day and shot him? It's a moot point anyway. I've no idea where I could buy such a gun in Canada.

The girl of course was there, minus the white dress and prayer book. She hit me over the head with her message, but I got it alright. Twenty One. Now I've got it I've no idea what to do with it. Twenty One? I wonder if, now that I've got her message, the girl in the white dress will stop appearing in my dreams.

* * * * *

On Monday morning July the sixth Harry was late for work, something that he allowed himself once or twice per year. When Louise met him in the lobby she was too flustered even to give Harry a code reference.

"Oh, Mr. Murphy, they're all going mad. It's Mr. Jensen, he's going round firing people. He went down to Personnel and he's got Don Harrod so mad he's almost sizzling. He and Mr. Jensen were screaming at each other in Personnel, and then they went through finance and fired some people in Payroll and some more in Accounts Receivable and in the Sales Office and Don is tagging along behind telling everybody to ignore Mr. Jensen, but they're handing out letters to the people and it seems very official and"

"Calm down, Louise. Take a deep breath and hold it. Now let it out slowly. Right, first of all, who is 'they'? Who is with Mr Jensen?"

"Oh, about five of his Goon I'm sorry. About five or six of his special assistants. And Don is with them, or behind them, not really *with* them,"

"Louise, it is very hard to fire people. Even for a serious offence like having drugs in the worksite, the punishment is only suspension. The only thing for which a person can be fired immediately is fighting in the workplace, and even then the EAP people have to be called in, and a psychiatric evaluation....."

"Oh, but Mr. Murphy, they're handing out first offence and second offence and third offence all on memos saying where and when they did it, and then they're saying you're now being fired for the fifth offence....."

"OK, Louise, take it easy. The rules just don't work that way. You have to give the person notice, and then time to change their ways. Just tell me where they are now and go back upstairs and wait for me at your desk."

"Oh, they're in the pressroom, I think. Or the bindery. You'll find them easily enough, there's always a crowd wherever they stop."

"Thank you, Louise. Back upstairs now."

Like a battleship followed by an escort of lesser vessels Simon Jensen cruised into the pressroom. As though zeroing in on a radar fix of his intended target he made straight for Mick Shaw. Don Harrod had been tagging along behind the group, but seeing Harry entering the pressroom from another door he left the convoy and steamed rapidly over to intercept. Jensen stepped up behind Mick and tapped him on the shoulder. Mick turned ready to snarl at whatever misguided individual had dared intrude on the lion in his lair, but stopped open mouthed when faced by the large delegation.

Simon held out his hand to the nearest member of his entourage. "Shaw, Michael," he barked at the man. "First warning."

The assistant opened a vinyl covered portfolio and withdrew a sheet of paper, slapping it into the outstretched hand which hovered under his nose. Jensen took the paper and, without

attempting to read it, passed it directly to Mick Shaw. Still looking a little awestruck by the unfolding events, Mick took the page.

"Gross insubordination, first offence," Jensen said. "A personal insult directed at the Chief Executive Officer of the Halifax Plant of AGI Corporation. The details of what you said, when you said it, where you said it, who you said it to and who witnessed this offence are contained in the memo. Second offence," he said, holding out his hand again to the assistant, who drew a second sheet of paper from the file.

"Gross insubordination, second offence...."

Mick had finally taken in the fact that several incorrectly shod, under-protected individuals had entered his territory, and pulled out the stop-work whistle. "No good trying that trick again, Shaw....." Jensen began, but was interrupted by the shrill blast of the whistle. From a far end of the room John Rider stopped his press and walked rapidly over to the disturbance.

"Gross insubordination, third offence," Jensen was saying, while adding yet another piece of paper to the growing sheaf in Mick's hand. "Details of what you said and who heard it are all in the memo. Gross insubordination, fourth offence, same deal." Jensen passed over the fourth memo, received the fifth without looking, and held up the document with a flourish. The pressroom had become very quiet, and the occupants who were not already gathered around the group hurried to arrive.

"Gross insubordination, fifth and final offence, Shaw." The CEO was now playing to the gallery, and savouring the moment. "On Tuesday, June 23, at two seventeen p.m., you were overheard saying to Ronald Edwards, and I quote: 'The next time that slimy son of a bitch Jensen sticks his nose into my pressroom I'm going to shove his ugly face right up his fucking arsehole.'" This was witnessed by two individuals who have signed a document to that effect. That's five offences, Shaw. Count them. Can you count up to five, Shaw? I'll help you. One, two, three, four, five. And the penalty for a fifth offence? I'm so glad you asked. You're fired,

Shaw. You're dismissed. Sacked. And it's all perfectly legitimate, right from your own little rule book. No possible appeal. Now *you* get out of *my* pressroom, and do it quickly, unless you'd like me to call security to help you find the way out."

If Jensen had been just a little less enthusiastic and a little more interested in self preservation he might have noticed Mick's face turning from tan to pink to red to scarlet. Mick caught the CEO by his lapels and brought him in for a closer look. Jensen was lifted clear of the ground and dangled in front of Mick's enraged face.

"Right, you miserable little piece of dogshit, now it's my turn....."

What Mick was about to say was lost as an arm reached over his shoulder and a hand closed over his forearm. Still holding the helpless CEO Mick turned to the new threat, ready to do battle on however many fronts were needed. He stood eye to eye with Harry.

"Mick, don't do this. Put the man down. I've just spoken with Don Harrod and these documents are toilet paper; they have no force. Don is getting on the line to Toronto and we'll have Phil Sutherland out here by this afternoon. Put him down, Mick, please."

Mick's colour was gradually fading and a calm expression had come over his face, a look which would have warned a more experienced brawler to back off and sit down. The dangling CEO was now shouting. "Violence! He attacked me. You're all witnesses. First offence for fighting in the workplace is dismissal. You're doubly fired, Shaw, and I'm sending one of my boys to call the cops. You're going to be fired in the morning and jailed in the afternoon."

"Then I'll make it worth the trouble," said Mick. Holding Jensen in his left hand he drew back his huge right fist. Jensen, amazingly, continued to smile. Harry grabbed Mick's right arm and hung on, but someone else had attracted the big man's attention. John Rider was whispering into Mick's left ear, and whatever he was saying was having a very pacifying effect. Ron Edwards replaced Rider at the ear and added a few more words. To the amazement

of the small crowd Mick lowered the cackling Jensen to the ground, brushed down his crumpled lapels, and smiled.

"My brother, a shop steward here at Burton's Press, has something to say to you, Mr. Jensen, sir," Mick said.

John Rider cleared his throat. "Mr. Jensen, sir," he began, and the room fell silent. "You seem to believe that the disciplinary rules for office and administrative staff apply also to operational personnel, which they do not, sir. Not entirely. Our collective agreement, signed by labour and management both, permits no dismissals without first convening a labour-management tribunal to hear all sides of the issue. I must warn you that if you persist in these efforts I will be forced to take appropriate action."

"Fuck you!" Jensen screamed. "You're fired, Shaw. What are you still doing here? Too stupid to find your way out?"

"Right," said John Rider. He took out of his pocket a large steel whistle, the twin of the one in Mick Shaw's overalls, and blew three shrill blasts in rapid succession. Turning, he walked away in the direction of the bindery, continuing the triple blast as he went.

"What the hell is this now?" Jensen howled. "Get out, Shaw. And the rest of you get back to work. And don't give me any of that crap about starting the presses in three hours, just press the fucking buttons and get them working!"

"Not too likely," Ron Edwards told him. "We're on strike."

BEAUTIFUL DREAMER

Chapter 4:

If Harry stood close to his office window, pressed his cheek against the glass and looked left he could see the Gottingen Street gates and a section of the large courtyard which led to Burton's loading dock. The huge wrought iron gates with "Burton" cleverly woven into the ironwork had stood for seventy years at the trade entrance to the printing plant. Through these gates on any normal day a steady flow of vans and light trucks would ferry printing supplies in and printed materials out. An occasional articulated truck would ease its way carefully through openings designed seventy years ago for the horse drawn transports common to that era. The loading docks at the far end of the bindery would be buzzing with fork lift trucks and mechanical dollies, stacking palette on palette to the limit of the trucks' capabilities to handle the loads. The large courtyard, which still retained many of its original cobblestones, would be tightly packed with men, machinery and transport vehicles of all types and sizes. Today the loading docks sat silent and empty and the great gates were padlocked shut. A solitary fork lift truck sat abandoned in the courtyard. The strike was entering its second week.

The only activity visible to Harry was the methodical pacing of the pickets as they marched back and forth before the gates, guards on duty, their wooden signs held like latterday pikestaffs over their shoulders. How had they come to this?

More to the point, Harry grimaced, was how Toronto *believed* they had come to this. He knew very well that Simon Jensen continued to pass along a stream of lies and innuendo in his daily reports to his uncle. He knew, too, that the major focus of these fabrications was himself. Once again Harry found himself at a loss regarding his best course of action. Should he call George Thorpe himself, explain that the beloved Nephew was mixing fact and fiction in a witch's brew of his own concoction? But wouldn't that bring the whole thing down to the level of a playground spat? *Nyeah, Nyeah, nyeah, he did it. No I didn't, it was him. No it*

wasn't. Yes it was. Wasn't so. Was so, nyeah nyeah. Not at all the impression he wanted to leave with the board. Yet how was his *silence* being perceived at the Bourque? As an implied admission of guilt? Surely *somebody* had called Bourque to set the record straight. Don Harrod presumably had spoken with his superior, the Vice President of Human Resources. But even if he knew the truth, would Phil Sutherland dare to lay the blame squarely where it belonged, on the slim shoulders of the Chairman's favourite nephew?

This sort of dilemma was becoming unfortunately too common to Harry. What to do, what to say, how to say it, when to say it and to whom it should be said. Harry had always taken pride in his ability to make decisions and act on them without undue delay, but he was beginning to see that his decision making capability had serious limitations. He was very good with decisions in which precedent could be used to guide him. His first class memory was always able to tell him "this has happened before; here is what we did, and this is how it all worked out"; but where there was no previous history to guide him, he tended to flounder. Reluctantly he had come to appreciate the warnings of his subconscious mind, delivered through the powerful emotive imagery of his dreams. He recognised that in any organization a primary responsibility of senior management was to chart new courses for their industries; to evaluate options and plot new directions. By the very nature of such work this often represented radical departure from custom, and therefore had no precedent to offer guidance. In such cases Harry found himself increasingly lost. Perhaps Subconscious Harry, that insubstantial nemesis, really did know him better than the waking Harry knew himself.

He noticed activity at the gates, and pressed harder against the glass for a better view. Two taxicabs had pulled up in front of the gates and were in the process of discharging their contents onto the Gottingen Street sidewalk. A half dozen similarly dressed men walked over to the pickets and rapidly became involved in animated conversation. Harry recognised ranking members of the Lithographers' and Printers' International Union. He had expected to see them in Halifax days before this. His sources had reported to him that local consultations would take place this week, but the general viewpoint of Union Executive was that these talks were largely a formality. Other AGI plants across the country could be expected to join the strike within the week.

Behind him, his telephone continued to ring unanswered. It had been ringing incessantly for days. In an attempt to minimise the strike's impact on its customers AGI was making every possible effort to redirect work to other printers -- printers who would normally be major competitors. Harry was used to expediting customer's work through Burton's, but it was altogether a different game when he needed to apply pressure to competitive plants half way across the country. It was not quite a disaster, and some erstwhile competitors were being strongly supportive of the AGI cause. A case of "There but for the Grace of God go We," Harry thought.

Ignoring the phone, Harry moved swiftly to the elevator, rode down to street level and jogged out through the bindery to the courtyard. The action at the gates was, to any casual observer, placid and unhurried, but Harry well knew the passions which boiled just below the surface. Familiar yellow-press clichés sprang to mind; a tinder-box; a smouldering fire; a gunpowder keg; a smouldering fire in a gunpowder keg? Catcalls and whistles welcomed Harry as he moved towards the crowd, but there were smiles behind the words. Harry stuck his hand through the bars and grinned at the union reps. "Hello, Archie, nice to see you despite the circumstances."

Archie Noble made a show of reluctance to accept the handshake, but everyone present knew that it was merely theatrics. "Don't know about this, Harry. Fraternising with the enemy, some might say."

Harry nodded greetings to the other men, and gave a brief salute to Ron Edwards and John Rider, who stood in quiet conversation at the back of the group. "I'm not your enemy, Archie," Harry said. "Never was. Never will be."

"I know, I know," the LPIU President replied, his expression softening. "From what my brothers tell me you're as far up the creek as the rest of us. What are we to do about this pickle, Harry? You're usually the "idea man" at Burton's Press, have you not one for us now

when we need it most of all? *We* don't want this strike any more than you do, but there's no way I can see to get out of it and save face."

"What would you settle for, Archie?"

"Full retraction. Reinstatement of all the men who've been sacked. An apology from the company and an admission that they were at fault. Payment for days lost. Complete removal of any so-called 'disciplinary action' documents on file. Oh, yes, and removal of Simon Jensen, to be replaced by an appointee approved by us."

"Are they all sticking points? Or will you deal?"

"We've a little flexibility, Harry, but not much. And removal of Jensen is a sticker. A non-negotiable sticker."

"You might run into trouble on that last, Archie. As far as George knows, it's all down to me, this little 'labour relations trouble'."

"Yes, I'd heard that. But Thorpe's no fool and we don't take him for one. I know the stories he's getting from his boy, but believe me, George has other sources; long tested and true sources, some a lot closer than you might think. And anyhow, it strikes me that you'd be as pleased to see the back of the boy as we would, Harry."

"I think 'No Comment' is the wisest thing I can say to that, Archie."

The conversation was interrupted by a chorus of whistles, and Harry turned to see June Sawler climb down the steps from the loading dock and scurry across the open courtyard towards the gates.

"And speaking of George's tried and true sources....." Archie left the sentence unfinished. "I suppose there's no use in hoping that it's *me* June is looking for?"

June ignored the whistles and stood on tiptoe to whisper to Harry "I'm so sorry, Mr. Murphy, but Mr. Jensen saw you through his window talking to the men and he says you're to come in immediately and report to him in his office."

Without waiting for a reply June turned and hurried back to the dock. Once safely out of line of sight of the eighth floor offices she turned and blew mock kisses to the men on the other side of the large iron gates, generating by far the loudest cheer of the day.

Harry turned to leave. Guessing the gist of June's message, one of the strikers called after him: "Best go, Harry. Your master's whistling for you." "Yeah, better trot, Harry," another shouted "He might have a new bone for you."

Harry scowled, but before he could frame a reply Archie Noble turned on the men. "I'll have none of that" he bellowed. The men fell silent, small boys caught in their naughtiness by an angry master. "If any of you doubt that Harry Murphy is as good a friend as the Union could wish for you can pack up and clear off. He's stood by us time and again, and anybody bad mouthing Harry will answer to me for it."

The men shuffled their feet and inspected their shoes. "We was just joshing, Archie," one of them said. "We all got the greatest respect for Mr. Murphy."

"Well, see that you show it," Archie growled.

Harry waved a hand over his shoulder in appreciation of Noble's words as he walked back to the plant.

When he left the elevator on the eighth floor he stepped straight into June Sawler, who shushed him before he could say a word. "Mr. Murphy," she whispered "Mr. Jensen is in a meeting right now, so I suggest that you wait very quietly in the chair outside his office." June pointed to a simple wooden chair set to the right of the CEO's office door.

Harry looked at June and raised an eyebrow. June looked flustered.

"I have to go to the ladies room, Mr. Murphy. I'll probably be gone for fifteen minutes."

Still Harry looked confused.

"Because if I were *here*," she hissed at Harry, "I'd feel bound to warn my boss that there was someone outside his office *who could overhear what was being said inside!*"

The penny dropped. Harry touched June lightly on the shoulder and nodded. June departed along the corridor in the direction of the ladies room, and Harry moved quietly to the designated chair. The men inside were making no effort to prevent being overheard. Harry recognised one of the men instantly as a founder member of Jensen's "Goon Squad", but could not immediately identify the man. The third voice was that of a stranger.

"And the best of it, Mr. Jensen," the Goon was saying, "Is that Eddie here represents a legitimate Security Company, so all his payments can be above board, out of Company funds, and needn't cost you a penny out of pocket."

"And these men can run my presses?" Jensen asked.

"No, sir." The Goon's voice betrayed barely controlled impatience. It was apparent that he had made this point before, probably more than once. "We'll have no problem getting skilled pressmen, either from within Canada or from overseas. I've heard that the Koreans are very keen to get back into Mr. Thorpe's good books after their delivery delays, and I'm sure they would fly in press operators, probably at no cost to you. The same men who set up the presses I should imagine. What Eddie will do is make sure that these men can come and go to the plant without trouble, and make sure that supplies come in and work goes out."

"You can do this?" Jensen asked the third man.

"Oh, yes, sir." There was a definite chuckle in the voice. "Well, that is, not personally, although I'll walk the line, too. But my men will make sure, Mr. Jensen, sir. Believe me, we've done this many times. Your unions will probably recognize my boys, and that will be the end of the problem. Trust me, sir, anyone who has once tangled with my people, well, they're not usually in any kind of hurry to repeat the process."

"You mean there could be violence? I don't know if my unc... if they would approve of that in Toronto."

This time Harry definitely heard a snort, rapidly disguised as a cough.

"Well sir" the stranger continued "It's like this. We won't *start* anything. Often it's enough just to see my soldiers -- a figure of speaking, Mr Jensen, that's all. But if anybody starts anything, we'll finish it fast. My boys, they're professionals. You should see them and you'd know what I'm talking about. Stevie Banks, one of my people, he was a professional wrestler before he came to work for me, and Stevie will walk the line in a T-shirt, rain or shine. Like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Stevie is. His mates, they call Stevie "the Terminator", you know, like after Arnie's movie? He has arms like most men's legs. Not too many of your printers are going to tackle Stevie after taking a look at his biceps. And like I say, if any of them *do* fancy their chances, well, it will all be over fast. Very fast, Mr. Jensen, sir."

"And I can pay your bills through the company?"

"Oh, I'll take care of that, Mr Jensen," the goon said, and Harry finally recognized the voice as that of a junior finance clerk who had been released in the recent downsizing. "I don't need to hide it or anything. We're simply hiring a firm of Security Specialists to protect the property of AGI during a potentially dangerous work stoppage. You can sign it without the need for board approval. The auditors won't even look twice at such an expense."

"And what sort of expense? Just how much will this cost?"

"Oh, very little....." "Hardly anything....." the two men answered together. "Very little, sir," the "Security Specialist" answered. "To begin with I'll supply fifteen men, each paid two hundred fifty dollars per day. With company overhead, that comes to about five thousand per day. The longest we expect the strike to go once we get here is three days, four at most. The Unions, they're not stupid. They won't go on fighting a battle they've already lost. So I figure it'll run you between fifteen and twenty thou. I hear AGI is losing up to fifteen thousand a *day*, every day, while the strike lasts. And if it goes National, it will be ten times that. If I might be so bold as to suggest, Mr Jensen, you could be the man to end the whole thing for -- let's say not exceeding twenty thousand dollars. A tiny fraction of what AGI could lose if you *don't* act. Now if *that* doesn't impress your Chairman, I don't know what will."

"He's my uncle, you know," Jensen said absently.

"Really?" said Mr. Security, "I didn't know that."

"Set it up!" said Jensen to his goon. "Set it up fast. Eddie, I want your men here next Monday, and the strike over by the middle of the week. Can you do that?"

Harry heard a scraping of chairs, and tiptoed quietly over to the elevator. He pressed the button, and when the door opened he stepped in and held the "door open" switch. As Jensen and his two associates came out of the office Harry stepped out of the elevator. He walked over to a beaming Jensen.

"Sorry I'm late, Mr Jensen" Harry said. "I got held up in the"

"What? Oh, it's you Murphy. Well I can't see you now, whatever it is you want will have to wait."

Jensen and the two men stepped into the elevator and the doors closed on them. "Well, well," thought Harry "So that's his game. I think a little bird should have a few words in Archie Noble's ear. If Jensen wants to play rough, I think Archie can find just the playmates for him."

* * * * *

Harry Murphy's Dream Diary: Thursday July 16.

I could hear the train and feel the train long before I could see the train. The wind was from the east, and the train was coming from the same direction, so the sound of the powerful engine carried ahead to me. The hum of the heavy steel rails also spoke of an impending arrival. I could smell it, too. The wind carried the smells of steam, smoke, heated engine oils and an unidentified aroma which I always associated with very hot metal. When the huge engine finally thundered into the station the entire structure shook with the power of its passing, and bright, hot sparks showered down on anyone foolish enough to be standing too close to the edge of the concrete platform.

Behind the snorting head of the dragon the body and tail arrived as an anticlimax. Steel shrieked as the gigantic beast slowed to a halt. Doors slammed, men called to other men and a loudspeaker somewhere high in the station rafters blared an incomprehensible announcement of the train's arrival. From the west of the station the rhythmic panting of the locomotive could still be heard over the din, and the hiss of steam escaping from pressurised piston chambers sounded a counterpoint.

I climbed into a first class compartment and pulled the heavy wooden door closed behind me. Instantly the sounds fell away. Secure in my tiny cell in the dragon's tail I relaxed and thought back over the events of the week. A very eventful week. A very profitable week.

Already the sky was darkening, though it was only mid-afternoon, and as the train pulled out of Quebec City the view from my window turned dim. Despite the ubiquitous covering of fresh snow the distant scenery reflected little light -- there was little to reflect. The skies over Quebec Province were leaden, and more snow was forecast for my overnight trip to Toronto. I had checked my heavy gold pocket watch against the station clock, and knew it to be accurate. If we could maintain a steady sixty miles per hour or better I would be in Toronto by mid morning and home in front of my fire for an early lunch. But by the look of the sky, sixty miles per hour might be hard to maintain through the coming night.

The city fell rapidly behind, and only dim lights from an occasional farm window broke the monotony of the view. I pulled down the shades and lit a cigar. Despite the heated steam pipes passing through the compartment the air carried a chill, and I was glad of the comfort of my heavy cashmere topcoat. All of Canada was cold that winter of nineteen hundred and forty seven.

The second world war had been over for two years. The war had been very good to me, to my family. While we felt deeply for the losses experienced by Canadian families, and while I would never openly admit to my sentiments -- well, it was a damn pity that the war could not have lasted another year or two. Even just a few months would have been a blessing. As it was, the first year of the war had made me a millionaire several times over, and each following year had doubled or tripled my personal wealth. The small manufacturing company which I had inherited from my father in 'twenty nine had already doubled and redoubled in size before the start of the war, and had doubled again during each year of the war to become a corporation rivalling any in Canada. Most in the U.S.A, for that matter. Allied Manufacturing now made anything that could be made of metal. In fact that was our slogan: "If it's made of metal, we can make it!" Two years ago that would have been largely arms, ammunition, and wheeled transports of all kinds. A small offshoot of my corporation had specialised in the electronic equipment developed during the last years of the war, and our early experiments in manufacturing the new RADAR equipment were beginning to pay dividends as we switched to television sets and small, powerful radios for the ravenous home market. I had been to Quebec City to set wheels in motion for a company which would manufacture household items

from the new plastic materials which had emerged from the aircraft industry during the war. Another year and I would have been into aviation. Another two and I would have become Canada's first billionaire. What a lovely war it had been. What a really, truly, wonderful war. I had been far from poor at the start of the war, but now, two years after the war's end, I was arguably Canada's richest man. I,

I.....

I.....

I couldn't remember my name.

That was SO funny. I laughed out loud. Wouldn't that be a story when I got home! There I was, so full of myself, such an important man. And I'd forgotten my own name. Wait until I tell.....

I did not know the name of my wife.

Suddenly it was not quite so funny. I had three children. I could name none. I could not picture their faces. I did not know how long I had been married, nor to whom. With a growing sense of urgency I reached into my pocket for my wallet. It was not there. With the beginnings of panic I opened my briefcase. It was empty.

This was obviously some kind of amnesia, brought on perhaps by a virus of some kind, or by something I had eaten in Quebec City. Damn the French and their exotic foods. Still, my chauffeur would meet me at the station in Toronto and take me home, and everything would snap back into place. Certainly it would.

The train had now attained its cruising speed of perhaps sixty five miles per hour and was hurtling through the night. If we could maintain this speed we would easily be in Toronto by mid morning and all would be fine. I should probably take a short holiday, get away from the

stress for a few days. But there was the Vancouver conference next week, and then there was what? I knew that I was too busy to take a break. But busy with what? Perhaps later; perhaps in the spring.

At least I would ease up on my workload, delegate more to my subordinates, as my secretary had long urged me to do. She would be pleased to see me taking her advice. I would tell her first thing and It struck me that I could not remember the name of my secretary. Could I remember the names or faces of anybody? Of my family? No, I could not. Friends? No.

I needed medical attention, and with an urgency that suddenly could not wait for an arrival in Toronto many hours away. Surely such mental problems hinted at a serious underlying condition. Perhaps there was a doctor on the train. I went to the door of the carriage, intending to step into the corridor and find a steward who could help me. There was no corridor. The doors on both sides of the carriage let out onto a countryside which was flashing by at a speed close to a hundred miles per hour. And still the train accelerated. It was now rocking from side to side, and I quickly sat down before the motion of the train could throw me to the floor.

I tried to be calm; to take stock. I was a very successful businessman, travelling back from a business venture in Quebec City to my corporate headquarters in in Toronto, yes, Toronto. But where in Toronto? I did not know the address of my office any more than that of my home, and I could picture neither. I could not recall the name or face of a single relative, friend or business associate. The only thing I knew for certain was that I owned a very large manufacturing corporation which manufactured what? What on earth was our product? I had known a few minutes earlier. What was the basis of my wealth? What was the source of my success? I had no idea.

I was becoming very afraid. Afraid of the circumstances in which I found myself. Afraid of the mental illness which was overtaking me with the speed of this insane train. Afraid of the motion of the train, which now seemed to leap from the rails from time to time, only to come crashing back down and continue its mad acceleration.

I raised the blinds and looked out. The snow-covered landscape whipped past so rapidly that it was impossible to make out detail. And still the snow fell, streaming horizontally past the stained, steamed windows. I saw a dim reflection looking back at me, wide eyed, slack jawed. The face of a trembling old man.

But I wasn't old. I was only..... I did not know. But I could reason this out. It was nineteen forty seven, and I had inherited the company from my father when he died, just before the war. But how old had I been then? I think my father had been in his eighties when he died, which would have put me..... where? Late fifties, early sixties? But when was that? Before the war, certainly. In the early nineteen thirties, I thought. So now, at least ten years later I would be My God! I would be well into my sixties at least. Probably into my seventies. I looked again at the misty reflection, and saw, without doubt, an old man staring wide eyed back at me.

The train leaned into a curve, and centrifugal force pushed me along the seat to come to rest against the wall on my right hand side. The carriage then took a tremendous leap and I was thrown from my seat. Still I could feel the pull of acceleration as the engine strove for yet greater speed. In the soundproofed, insulated interior of my first class carriage on the Canadian National Railway I lay on the floor and listened to the tortured shrieking of the steel wheels as they strove to stay in contact with the steel rails as the train took the curve ... far too fast.

And then the sounds stopped. All of them.

For a long, long instant we floated free, serenely, without sound, without force. It seemed to me that the entire train had left the track in the same instant, and was now flying free to whatever destiny it faced, and taking all of its passengers along with it to that same destiny.

I had an instant to calculate that, given the speed of the train and the time out of Quebec City, we would probably be running parallel to the Seaway by now. That meant that within a few

seconds at most we would come into contact with the rock hard ice of the Saint Lawrence River. Not that it mattered. Not now. Nothing mattered now.

As the noise came back, and the first class carriage began to crumple around me, I knew that I was about to die, and to my amazement this did not bother me in the least. The only thing that caused me regret was that I didn't know why. Not why I was dying. It was unthinkable that my old, frail body could survive forces which were already crumpling steel as though it were paper. I knew very well why I was dying; But not why I had lived.

Friday July 17: Notes:

Some quick thoughts about the dream, quite apart from the content and symbolism:

Firstly, I think that this was my most cogent and rational dream since I started recording them. There was nothing odd or otherworldly about it; no sudden fade-outs from one scene to another; no magical transformations, such as cars turning into toboggans, or market places disappearing; no mysterious strangers, whom I recognised but couldn't say from where or when. It was a very rational, systematic tale of a man caught up in a train wreck. It started at the Quebec City Station, ended (with a bang) on the frozen seaway, and in between time passed quite normally.

Secondly, I wasn't me in this dream. With a few small exceptions I have always been myself in my dreams. I've been an older self, a younger self (in a good third of my dreams I've been a teenager) and I've been 'me' in different times and places, but always me. When I started recording my dreams I thought I'd be writing about how I became a bird flying over the tree-tops, or a horse racing along the sea shore. But I've always been me. Last night I felt like, well not Harry Murphy the Industrialist Tycoon whoever it was. That was how his problems started, of course, when he couldn't remember his name. HIS name. Not "I couldn't remember MY name". I was a spectator, trapped in someone else's body; along for the ride. That's what it felt like all through the dream. It was a different and very interesting experience.

*And thirdly, the missing factor. My girl in the white dress was missing from the *dramatis personae*. Not that I looked for her, but -- as Liz pointed out -- if she'd been there I would have noticed her. I counted back in my diary and I see that she hasn't been in any of my dreams since she hit me on the head with her "21" sign. That's eleven dreams that she's missed. She presumably feels that I "got her message", which I did, though I still have no idea what it means. It reminds me of the tale in "The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy" where a biological computer slaved for generations to divine the meaning of life, and at the end came up with the answer "the meaning of life is Forty Two." I think that was the number. Well mine was only half that. Makes as much sense, I suppose.*

As to the meaning of the dream, it's straight out of the book. I think I can even quote it, close if not verbatim. "Dreaming of a ride in a bus or train can often represent the dreamer's life journey or career progression. The specific meaning can only be determined by the dreamer, taking into account his feelings during the trip. Were you happy about taking the trip? Had you paid your fare? Did you know where you were supposed to be going, and where to get off?" Well, I knew all of those things and I/he was very happy until everything went to Hell in the final act. Canada's Richest Man, eh? Not much wrong with that! So, equating the train ride to my career progress, what can I conclude? That it is out of control, heading at insane speed to an inevitable derailment and an undoubtedly terminal crash. And that it is already too late for me to do a damn thing about it! Same old theme, Subconscious Harry. Don't you ever quit?

And then there was the parable of the old man who had spent so much of his life acquiring wealth and power that he had totally overlooked the truly important things in his life; the only things which you can take with you -- loving memories of family and friends. Hell, he couldn't even remember the faces of his kids. Of course, the message, that "you can't take it with you", is no more original than the message that my career is about to go off the rails. Still, I am no longer scornful or cynical about these trite, clichéd messages. If S. H. wants to keep reminding me to treasure the truly important blessings of my life, who indeed am I to argue with him?

END

* * * * *

"Hello, Liz?"

"Rollie?"

"Yes, hello, darling. How are you?"

"Fine, Rollie. Are you calling from Toronto?"

"Yes, and I only have a minute, I'm between appointments. It's about your dreaming -- sorry, *Harry's* dreaming. I talked to Ivan, the chap I told you about, the one who uses dream therapy with his patients....."

"Yes, I remember, Rollie. What did he have to say?"

"Well he says that there's no harm if your man just wants to write down his dreams. In fact if he does it carefully and systematically it can be very beneficial to him. Ivan says it's particularly important that every time something big happens in his life -- a move to a new city, say, or a big promotion, or a new baby....."

"Hardly likely!"

"Liz, I only have a minute! Anyway, you know what I mean -- I presume that grandchildren are not out of the question. Well, after any big event like that Harry should re-read his diary, way back, and see if anything in any of his dreams relates. That way, he'll learn how his subconscious projects into his dreams, and he'll be better able to interpret the symbols.

Ivan says he only gets clues to his patients after they've got five or six months of dreams written down."

"So it's not dangerous! That's a big relief to me, Rollie. Thanks ever so for"

"Not finished, Liz. Here's the important thing. Ivan says that a lot of "amateurs" are tempted to try a thing called *Lucid Dreaming*. Write it down, Liz. L-U-C-I-D. Lucid. This is something where the dreamer sort of wakes up while he's still asleep. How to explain? While still in a dream the dreamer realises that he's dreaming. Oh, that sounds worse! Imagine you're dreaming, right? You're in this dream where you're the main Lady in the Sultan's Harem...."

"Sounds more like *your* kind of dream, Rollie!"

"I'll hang up, Liz, I swear! Say you're in this dream and suddenly you say to yourself "I must be dreaming", and you realize that you *are* dreaming. Really. *But you don't wake up*. You say to yourself "I know that I'm really Liz Murphy, and I'm lying in bed next to Harry, who is snoring." Now that you *know* that, you can start to control the dream. You can say "I don't like that Sultan, he's a pig" -- and turn him into a pig! Or you can say "Stuff this dream, I want to dream I'm on a cruise ship with Richard Gere," and Zap! You're on the ship."

"But that sounds like a whole load of fun Rollie. I wouldn't mind learning to do that myself!"

"Liz, Ivan says it's like a drug. Worse, because it's so readily available, not to mention cheap! He told me about studies of men and women who have become, well, he says *addicted* to this lucid dreaming. Dropped out of school, quit good jobs. And there's worse yet. Some of these people have ended up institutionalised. Severely psychotic. And there is some evidence that it can leave users comatose -- or worse."

"My God, Rollie. I can't believe that Harry....."

"Ivan says that Harry doesn't appear to fit the profile of someone at risk. As a middle aged man, in a successful marriage and with a solid career he's not likely to become addicted easily. But let's call this a "Heads Up" shall we? Keep an eye on him, and if you notice any significantly erratic behaviour or changes to Harry's personality, you call me right away. Gotta go. Bye."

"Bye" said Liz by instinctive courtesy, though she stood holding the receiver for long minutes until an angry buzzing from the earpiece reminded her to replace it in its cradle.

* * * * *

Molly Mason pressed the intercom button very tentatively, knowing that her boss was operating on a short fuse lately, and seemed to be moving through his days from fight to fight. His reply, however, was restrained. She thought he sounded very weary, which was a most unusual condition for the chairman.

"Yes, Ms. Mason?"

"Mr. Noble is on line two, Mr. Thorpe. He says it is very urgent."

"In which case you'd better put the call through, Ms. Mason."

"Yes, sir."

George was indeed tired. His phone was lately ringing with a frequency unparalleled in his long career, and every call seemed to bring more problems. He took a calming breath and lifted the receiver. "Good Morning, Archie."

"George. I know you appreciate a man who comes directly to the point, and so do I. But not on the phone. We have to talk."

"Hold the line, Archie, and I'll see when I can fit you in. I think I've some time open on Friday."

"You misunderstand me, George. I'm calling from my car. I'll be at the Bourque in seven minutes and at your office in eight."

"Can't do, Archie. I'm due to leave for the Airport in five. It will have to be Friday."

"I'll drive you to the Airport. I'll wait outside the Bourque. Don't be late, I got a ticket there the last time I tried this."

"Won't work, Archie. I'm riding with Phil Sutherland and we've business to take care of before I leave for Vancouver."

"Bring Phil along, I don't mind him hearing what I've got to tell you. Listen carefully George. If you don't meet with me in....six minutes, there will be no point flying to Vancouver because I'll have your plant shut down before you get there. They'll *all* be closed. I'm not exaggerating, George. This meeting could be the most important of your career. Or the end of it."

"I don't take well to threats, Archie."

"I know that. This is a promise. I've some information we'd better talk about before you fly anywhere, and when we've talked I think we'll both be flying East."

"Listen Archie, if this is some ploy to get the use of my ear for an hour just to tell me more tales about young Simon Jensen -- which is why I assume you want me to fly east -- well

it's not going to work. I know the boy has turned out to be a lot greener than I took him to be but....."

"But nothing, George. You don't know the half of it. You're going to listen to me if I have to come up there and pin you down to talk to you."

"That'll be the day, Archie. But you can forget the rough stuff. If it's truly that important I'll meet you outside the Bourque in five. And it better be good, Archie. It better be *really* good!"

"It's good, George. I'm coming up to your block now. See you in four."

The morning traffic was light and Archie Noble's Cadillac made good progress towards Toronto's Airport. George rode up front with Archie while Phil listened attentively from the spacious back seat. Archie spoke for three minutes, and then waited. Neither of the other two men spoke for long seconds.

"I won't insult you by asking if you're sure of this," George said finally, "But tell me your source."

"Can't do that, George. But my source is the best."

"Then just tell me this: Is Harry Murphy involved in any way?"

"Why do you ask about Harry, specifically?"

"Let's put our cards on the table, shall we? I've reason to believe that Harry has become unhinged due to resentment at Simon for taking the job he wanted. He's ready to do *anything* to discredit young Simon and get the job himself. I've evidence that Murphy is behind several acts of sabotage at the plant, and will stop at nothing to make Simon seem to be the guilty party. And I know for a fact that the man has a serious drinking problem."

"That's absolute garbage, George! All of it!" Archie glared at the AGI Chairman and the big Caddy swerved dangerously across the slow lane onto the hard shoulder.

"Watch the road for God's sake," George growled. "Now you listen to me, Noble. I've known that boy since he cut his first teeth. I'm his Godfather, and he's called me "Uncle George" ever since he could speak. He would not lie to me! Admittedly he's made mistakes, and I blame myself for not keeping a closer eye on him. But *he would not lie to me!*"

"Like you say, George, cards on the table. It *was* Harry who alerted me to this. But I didn't just take his word for it. Do you know Eddie Lewis?"

"I know *of* him. He runs some kind of strongarm organization out of Montreal. Rented muscle. Known as a strike breaker. Supposedly a razor's edge away from being illegal. Said to have underworld connections. That him? I hope you're not insinuating that AGI would have any dealings with Lewis or his kind!"

"That's our boy. He runs Lewis Security Services. And I'm doing more than insinuating; I'm *telling* you. Your nephew signed a contract with him for twenty thousand dollars worth of "security services".

"No way!"

Archie Noble reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a single sheet of paper, folded crosswise. He passed the paper to George.

"Copy of the contract signed yesterday. Calls for Lewis Security "Operational Personnel" to be present at the Gottingen Street premises first thing Monday morning."

George read and reread the paper. "How did you get hold of this, Archie?"

"None of your damn business, George, but you'd better be glad I did. Now are you coming to Halifax with me?"

"But what's the point, Archie? Lewis can put an army onto Gottingen Street, but that won't get a single sheet of paper printed. That equipment we installed, you need a degree in Rocket Science to run it. There's no way any of Eddie Lewis's thugs could get those presses turning. Your men can stand around and have a good laugh."

"They'll not be laughing, George. The Koreans are supplying press operators. They'll be flying into Halifax this coming Saturday. The Koreans are under the impression that *you* asked for them. Demanded them, in fact."

"No way, Archie. I mean, there's no....."

"I know, George. Your Nephew ordered them in your name. I've a copy of the Fax on its way to me, but you can take my word for it. Now the only chance to stop a very, very nasty confrontation is for you and me to show up at the Gottingen Street entry to Burton's Press on Monday morning."

"AGI-Halifax," George corrected absently. He turned to Phil Sutherland in the rear of the Cadillac. "Phil, you'll have to fly to Vancouver for me. I'll call the office and explain things. Can you do that for me?"

"Yes, of course, George. You haven't asked me, but I'll tell you anyway; You've got big blinkers over your eyes when it comes to your nephew, and for the sake of AGI it's time you took them off. For what it's worth, I agree that you and Archie must present a united front at the Halifax Plant Monday Morning."

"Yes, you're right on all counts. Archie, what will it take for you to call off this strike?"

"Full retraction. Reinstatement of all the men who've been "sacked". An apology from the company and an admission that they were at fault. Payment for days lost. Complete removal of any so-called 'disciplinary action' documents on file."

"Agreed," George said without hesitation.

"And immediate removal of Simon Jensen as CEO at Burton's to be replaced by an individual acceptable to both Management and Labour," Archie added.

The silence stretched for only a few seconds, but seemed longer.

"Agreed," said George Thorpe, much more silently.

"I'll call Molly and let her know what's up, George," Phil said. "It'll save you a little time, and she can put the word around Bourque."

"No, don't do that," George said, and paused, deep in thought for a few seconds. "Call Molly, yes, but tell her that you're coming with me to Vancouver. Keep up the pretence that I'm there as long as you can. If you must, you may let Molly into the secret -- but tell her that nobody else is to know I'm in Halifax. I don't want any special preparations made on my behalf. It's best I go there incognito. Do you hear me, Phil?"

"Loud and clear, George. It will be as you say."

* * * * *

On Saturday it rained heavily, and a cool wind blew in from the east. In the evening Liz stayed in the cottage bedroom and used the wet weather as an opportunity to catch up on her correspondence. Harry listened to the light tapping of her lap-top computer as he threw another log on to the living room fire. A rare thing, a fire at this time of year, but Harry enjoyed the comfort of a fire in the hearth on a wet night. He sat in the well worn chair and

propped his feet on the Ottoman. His Dreambook lay on the small chairside table, unopened for the last few days. He opened it now.

Several of the pages were dog-eared, and the little book was beginning to look like a well used reference source -- which indeed it was. Harry let the book fall open on his lap, and read the contents page. Many of the chapters were old friends by now, read and re-read until he could quote whole pages. He scanned the chapter headings. Chapter One: Learning to Relax; Two: Breathing as an aid to Meditation; Chapter Six: Inducing Dreams; Nine: Remembering Your Dreams. All old news to Harry now. His eye moved down the table of contents. Chapter Nineteen: Dream Guides and Guardian Spirits. He had read the chapter, but had many reservations regarding its content. Harry could still not swallow the idea of spiritual entities watching over his daily rounds and nightly dreams. Chapter Twenty: Advanced Meditative Techniques. Not yet, he thought. Not until he had thoroughly mastered the simpler meditation exercises from an earlier chapter. Chapter Twenty One: Lucid Dreaming.

Harry stiffened as though he had experienced a mild electric shock, and sat up straight in his chair. Several loose ends suddenly all came together. The dream message, Twenty One, could it refer to this chapter? It surely must! Mick Shaw's reference, months ago, to "Elusive Dreaming." Mick had obviously misheard, or misremembered. "Lucid", not "Elusive". A simple error. And Harry knew then, without any doubt, that he was at a turning point, a juncture in his use of creative dreaming. This was what he *must* do next. He must learn to become a Lucid Dreamer.

Harry opened his book at chapter Twenty One and began to read.

* * * * *

George Thorpe had left a wake-up call for six o'clock, Monday morning, but was shaved and showered when the call came through to his room. He thanked the operator and

asked whether the dining room was yet open for breakfast. He was assured that the dining room was indeed open, and called Archie Noble to make sure that he was awake. He was not. Leaving Archie to his own devices George dressed quickly and went down to the dining room where he ordered juice, fruitcup, cereal, toast and -- his one vice -- hot, black coffee. By the time his third refill arrived, so did Archie.

Archie ordered two eggs, over easy, with bacon and a side order of french fries. The latter were drowned in ketchup immediately on arrival. Despite George's protests that they had no time for such debauchery, Archie insisted that there was plenty of time, since the Korean press operators were not due to attempt entry to the plant until eight thirty, and anyway it was just plain impossible for Archie to do what he had to do that morning on an empty stomach. Given the evidence of recent days George made no attempt to second guess Noble's information. The man's intelligence network seemed second to none. Nevertheless, by the time they finally left the dining room and headed for the garage, George had passed "jittery" and was showing signs of mild panic.

"Archie, do you have any idea of what will happen at Burton's if we're not there to stop it before it gets started?"

"I think so George. I *have* done this sort of thing before, you know. I've even faced off against Lewis's thugs. Anyway, we're a five minute drive away and we've twenty five minutes to do it in."

Despite his apparent confidence, the tires on Noble's rented Oldsmobile squealed as he raced from the underground parking lot and turned right onto Brunswick Street. Traffic was lighter than expected, and it began to look as though Archie's timing would be even better, with a margin of error of a good fifteen minutes. Grinning broadly, he turned in his seat to say as much to George.

Archie would argue later that the light had been amber, and cross traffic had jumped the lights. George diplomatically claimed to have been deep in thought and not aware of the

condition of the traffic light. Four of the accident victims and three sidewalk observers gave statements that the dark green Oldsmobile had ploughed at great speed through a light which had been red for several seconds, and the fact that cross traffic had been in full flow tended to support their point of view. The Olds slipped neatly between a Ford Windstar heading south and a number eighty-seven bus heading north. The Ford hit the Olds at the driver-side front wheel and spun it clockwise, while the bus hit the rear, right side wheel and added to the spin. The Oldsmobile ended up sandwiched between the two first-impact vehicles and stayed there while two other smaller cars ploughed into it, one from the front and one from the rear. The Olds was thus sandwiched very neatly between four non-functional vehicles, making exit in any way totally impossible. Broken glass was everywhere, and even inside the car both occupants smelled the unmistakable fumes of spilled gasoline.

Halifax police officers were on the scene within four minutes, a tribute to the closeness of the headquarters building and the proliferation of cellphones. Seven people had called 911 within a minute of the collision. An ambulance from the Queen Elizabeth Health Sciences Centre was at the scene in seven minutes due to exactly the same combination of factors, and the Fire Department followed closely on their heels. Inside the Olds both airbags had worked exactly as intended, saving the driver and passenger from injuries which would otherwise undoubtedly have been severe. Archie, who had not even been wearing a seatbelt, thought that he had broken his ankle when it slipped from the gas pedal, lodged under the brake and was then violently twisted as his body moved sideways. In fact his ankle was only sprained, but quite badly. George suffered no significant injuries, needing only a couple of small bandaids applied to scratches on his forehead. He later attributed this to his robust good health and excellent physical condition, while virtually everybody else told him how lucky he'd been.

The possibility of the two men arriving on time at the Gottingen Street yard, less than a kilometer away, had essentially been reduced to zero.

Inside Burton's pressroom the three large presses were already in motion. While Eddie Lewis operated in a grey area between legal and criminal, the man was not a fool. In fact Lewis possessed an intelligence which could have guaranteed him success in almost anything

to which he applied it. At his suggestion Simon Jensen had let it be known that the Korean Pressmen would arrive at the plant at eight thirty with the intention of firing up the presses by mid morning. Lewis knew that, given the low degree of esteem in which the CEO was held, somebody would certainly talk. Expecting major forces to gather at some point between eight and half past, the Koreans had been smuggled into the plant shortly after five a.m., and had spent the previous three hours preparing the behemoths for action. By the time the union countermeasures were in place, Lewis was able to stroll out onto the loading dock, step casually down into the courtyard, saunter over to the padlocked gates and give the assembled strikers his very best smile and a hearty "good morning" to all.

"We've been snookered!" John Rider announced to his associates. "Look at the grin on that fellow. Will you keep the noise down over there?" As the strikers fell silent there came from the building the unmistakeable sound of the three huge presses being powered up to operational speed.

At a sign from Lewis a dozen or so men followed him out of the loading area to take up defensive stances about the courtyard. As it became clear that they had been tricked, angry strikers began to shake the iron gates and hurl insults at Lewis's toughs. And tough they certainly looked. Eddie had not exaggerated the brutal physical appearance of his employees. Knowing full well the importance of psychological factors in his special line of work he had selected men of great physical bulk. While trained martial arts experts would undoubtedly have been equally effective in "security" activities there was no doubt that the Lewis team were far more likely to discourage any kind of physical aggression in the first place.

But it now looked as though the anticipated violence was not to be needed. Harry, taking in the scene from his office window, was not sure whether to be pleased or distressed by this development. Despite strict instructions from Jensen that no AGI employees were to be present in the courtyard that morning, Harry set off for the elevator -- in which he encountered Don Harrod, who had the same intention of defying the directive.

The two men left the elevator at the ground floor and walked rapidly through the bindery to the loading dock in perfect time to see Simon Jensen make his dramatic entrance and walk to centre stage. Deferring to his benefactor, Eddie Lewis stepped away from the gates.

"You men have lost!" Jensen called to the crowd through an electronic megaphone. "These gates stay locked today. And tomorrow. And for the rest of the week. As you have gathered, there is no need for them to be opened. The presses of AGI-Halifax are fully operational and will remain so. Our deliveries will be airlifted by helicopter and taken directly to our waiting aircraft at Halifax Airport. There is not a thing you can do to stop us. I will give you all some advice: Settle this strike now. The troublemakers amongst you have been dealt with. The rest of you have nothing to fear. Return to your jobs -- your *well paid* jobs. End this useless work stoppage, which you have already lost. Return to work today, and I will agree....."

Jensen's rhetoric was rudely interrupted by the blare of an airhorn. A huge articulated truck was making its way slowly along Gottingen Street from the west, clearly indicating its intention to turn left into Burton's courtyard. While Jensen stared at the truck in disbelief a white-coated Korean technician appeared silently by his side, beaming at the huge vehicle.

"Ah, so good," the man said to Jensen, still smiling broadly. "New paper come."

The men on each side of the gate had fallen silent, neither group understanding what was taking place. Jensen spoke slowly to the Korean, as though to a hearing impaired or slightly senile old man. "What the hell do you mean, new paper come?"

The Korean looked at Jensen as though *he* were the impaired one.

"New paper for presses come," he said, and smiled again.

"You already have paper, inside the plant," Simon explained carefully.

"Oh yes, paper in plant," the technician agreed, resuming his smiles.

"Well, why don't you....." Simon began.

"Not enough. Not lots enough of paper. Only good paper in plant enough for make-readies. For getting ready to print. Now need paper for real printing, for books printing. Good Korean Presses need much, much paper every days. New good paper come now in truck."

Whispers began amongst the strikers and pennies dropped rapidly. Someone had realised that internal paper stocks would run out rapidly if they could not be replenished daily, and had ordered in a truckload of the huge paper reels which fed the hungry presses. But nobody had thought to tell the truckers to arrive in advance of their usual delivery times. Laughter broke out amongst the strikers, and when a second great truck rolled into view behind the first, and also switched on the left turn indicator, a deafening cheer went up from the pickets.

"Yo, Junior, what you going to print on?" someone yelled to Jensen. "Better check the ladies room, see how many rolls you can find, 'cause you're sure as hell not getting your hands on the paper *this* side of the gates!"

Several strikers had gone over to the truckers to explain the situation, and it became immediately obvious that the drivers were less than happy about it. The driver of the second truck jumped down from his cab and came to confer with the first, who then made a call on his cell phone.

Simon Jensen was fuming. In complete, smiling innocence the Korean technician asked him: "Paper not coming? If paper not coming, best be if all presses stop. Not good for presses running and no paper go through."

Fresh bursts of laughter erupted from the picket lines. Jensen ignored the pressman and moved over to Lewis. He spoke through gritted teeth.

"Earn your damned money, Lewis. I want that paper brought into the plant and I want it in NOW! I'm not paying your men to strut around and pose. Let's see some of those muscles in action."

"You bet, Mr. Jensen," Lewis said. "But I'll need to work out a plan of action. If we just open those gates it will be World War three in here." Lewis had not failed to notice the presence of several very powerfully built men outside the gates, and even thought that he recognised several "soldiers" from a rival agency.

"Do what you have to" Jensen snarled and stormed back along the loading dock and into the bindery. Harry Murphy and Don Harrod ducked out of sight behind a pile of empty palettes as he passed, both men biting their lips to avoid laughing outright at the way the situation had developed.

Lewis conferred with his men, several of whom were decidedly upset by the way things were turning out. Steven Banks, who did indeed bear more than a slight resemblance to the "Terminator" spoke for many of them: "Look, Eddie, you told us it would be easy money out here. Just pose and flex a bit, you said. Now there's a guy over there swinging a bike chain and one, I seen him stick a lead pipe down his belt. At least six of those men are pros and some of the rest look *very* capable. This ain't what I signed for. You can keep your hundred a day."

"Come on, Stevie," Lewis said. "They're tremblin' in their boots there."

"Yeah, I seen 'em. Steel toed workboots," someone said, but nobody laughed.

"Just let me think on this for a few minutes," Lewis asked. "You just go and growl at somebody and flex your pecs at them. Do that stuff you did when you fought Max the Mauler at Peterborough."

"That was acting, Eddie, you know damn well it was."

"So ACT!" Lewis yelled. The men dispersed.

"Now what?" Eddie whispered to himself as his men moved out of earshot. "A Mexican standoff is what we got here. The fuckin' Alamo is what we got; it looks like I'm John fuckin' Wayne, and we all know what happened to him."

Harry and Don came out of hiding and, meeting no opposition from Lewis's Soldiers, walked over to the gates. They recognised most of the pickets, although it was obvious that Archie Noble had taken Harry's warning seriously and had beefed up his side of the iron gates with rented muscle of his own. The pickets showed no hostility to either Don or Harry, and chatted amicably about the mess which Jensen had got himself into. "Even if he got those two trucks into the yard" Harry told the men "That's barely enough paper to feed the presses for a week."

"What if he tries to fly supplies in by that helicopter he was talking about?" somebody asked Harry.

"Can't be done. It's one thing airlifting printed books in small loads, but the only chopper big enough to lift those huge reels would be one of those twin rotor Labradors that the army uses. 'Air Horses', I think they call them. But they're too big to land in the courtyard and too heavy to land on the roof!" Harry grinned.

"Hey, Murph!" Mick Shaw elbowed his way through the crowd at the gates. "Don't know why you're grinning so much, you're on the wrong side!"

"Am I, Scotty? And which side would that be?"

"Management!"

"Well, and I thought Don and I were on the side of liberty, truth, beauty and the Canadian Way!"

"In that case I guess we're all on the same side," said Shaw, "But you're the one that'll be hung for treason!"

While the men at the gate laughed and joked with each other and the men inside gestured and posed for effect, nobody noticed two elderly drunks stagger up at the edges of the crowd and blend in with the strikers. Even at this early hour both appeared very much the worse for wear. The shorter and stockier of the two leaned heavily on the other man, and both seemed to stagger along the sidewalk as though merely walking were a great effort. The two were scruffy and dishevelled, although a closer inspection would have shown that their topcoats were of the finest material and expensively cut, and both men wore gold Rolex watches on their wrists. Once freed from the trapped Oldsmobile Archie and George had both refused medical attention, Archie relenting only when he found it impossible to walk at all until his ankle had been tightly strapped. The two men remained unrecognised at the back of the group, not even the closest of the strikers recognising their Union President and Chairman of the AGI board from the casual glances they gave them. Only one of the picketers gave more than a casual look, but before he could identify the two men his attention was drawn back to the loading dock where Simon Jensen had once again appeared.

"Lewis!" Jensen roared from his vantage point at the end of the dock "I give you one minute, Lewis! If you have not done something to earn your fees, this contract is nul and void!" Jensen held a single sheet of paper in his hands, poised as though to tear the sheet in half.

Eddie Lewis saw the \$20,000 fee -- half of which was going directly into his own pocket -- ready to go up in smoke. He thought quickly, and that was probably the prime reason why things from that point on went so badly. Pulling a set of keys from his pocket he marched over to the padlock. He put a key into the lock and began to turn it.

Ever well intentioned, Harry placed his hand on Eddie's arm and said "Mr. Lewis, please don't do this. If you bring these two groups together somebody is going to get badly"

Over Harry's right shoulder a massive forearm appeared, grabbed a hold of Harry's wrist and yanked him violently around. "Best keep out of this, Granddad" the big man said, and twisted Harry's arm for emphasis. Before Harry could even cry out Don Harrod stepped between the two and reached, not for the big man's hand but for the smallest finger. Taking the finger full into his palm Don gripped tightly and twisted up and back. As the big man yelped in surprise Don caught the elbow in his other hand and upended the tough as easily as toppling a stack of cards. From nowhere a second thug leaped at Don, and Harry stepped in to intercept. Like swatting away an annoying insect the man backhanded Harry, catching him squarely behind his right ear. Harry saw stars, reeled backwards and came to rest in a sitting position against the west wall of the courtyard. Harry's attacker resumed his leap towards Don only to find that the little man was no longer there. Before he could turn to look for his quarry Don's foot shot out from behind him, hooked the front of his right ankle and pulled back. The man's unstoppable forward momentum carried him into his comrade of the broken pinkie finger, who was just getting up, and the two went down in a tangle of limbs while Don skipped nimbly away.

From his front row seat against the wall Harry watched the events unfold in slow motion. Many things were happening at the same time, and Harry doubted that he could have followed the action in normal time.

Lewis unlocked the padlock and removed the chain. He tugged at the two gates where they met in the centre, and could not at first understand why they failed to open. Then he saw Scotty Shaw, muscles bulging as he held the gates together. Seeing an opportunity to ply his trade Steven Banks strode up to his own side of the gate and started to pull. Steve and Scotty stood nose to nose and strained. The other men gathered around to cheer their respective champions, nobody giving the slightest thought to aiding one or the other. Despite his obvious power, Scotty knew from the start that he was outmatched. The other was a professional,

probably spending hours each day in the gym. Yielding to the inevitable Scotty turned the situation to his own advantage. In the blink of an eye he released his grip on the iron, and when Banks staggered back in surprise Scotty stepped smartly forward and shot him a straight right to the nose. Spouting blood, the outraged Banks hurled himself at Scotty, throwing the gates open, and the mayhem began.

The two truck operators had discussed the situation with their boss, the owner of a shipping company working out of Moncton, New Brunswick. The trucks were supposed to unload at Burton's and proceed to the Halifax Freight Yards, where they would pick up a second cargo for the return trip. The truckers had been told, essentially, to unload at any cost, even if they had to dump the huge paper rolls into the street. Getting the paper into the plant was AGI's responsibility and the shippers would settle in court if necessary; but the truckers were to pick up the second, more profitable load, whatever the outcome. Seeing the chain removed and the gates swinging open the lead trucker started his engine, wound up his windows, locked his doors, depressed the clutch and stuck the gearshift into first. Revving the motor he waited for his opportunity.

In the courtyard blood had begun to flow in earnest. While the regular printers did the best they could, their resistance was generally overcome with ease. Within minutes it had become a clash between the twelve Lewis thugs and the seven men hired by Archie Noble, with Mick Shaw standing beside them. A Lewis 'soldier' was now openly swinging a chain, and several on both sides had drawn heavy metal pipes from concealed pockets. One man was lying motionless, a large pool of blood spreading around his head. Nobody paid any attention to the shouts and gestures of the two old drunks, who were now standing outside the gates. In fact only one of the two elderly men was gesticulating. The taller of the two was staring, wide eyed, at the loading dock where, prancing and leaping, screaming encouragement to his hired thugs through his megaphone, Simon Jensen was showing his true colours to the one person in his entire life who had truly believed in him.

The fury of the fight could not be sustained. After very few minutes only the Lewis men were standing. Scotty Shaw was on hands and knees, reeling from a vicious blow to the

back of his neck by an iron pipe. Blood drying on his chin and T-shirt, Stevie Banks saw the man who had broken his nose struggling to rise. He turned towards Scotty and started forward. Don Harrod, standing to one side, saw the move and yelled "Scotty, look out!" Mick raised his head to see Banks moving towards him.

The trucker, seeing his chance of an open lane to the loading dock, floored the accelerator and let out the clutch. The huge rig roared and jerked towards the open gates.

Banks watched his quarry trying to rise and saw his window of opportunity start to close. He had no intention of standing toe to toe and exchanging blows with the big Irishman. He started to run towards the rising figure.

The truck swerved left, straightened, accelerated.

Don Harrod leaped to intercept the running Banks. Like a baseball player sliding into first base Don dived at Banks, expertly aiming his right leg for the bigger man's advancing foot. As his leading foot tangled with Don's leg the huge ex-wrestler became the victim of his own mass. He had no way of stopping his forward momentum and no way of regaining his equilibrium. As he tipped forward Scotty Shaw rose to meet him, bringing his shoulder up under Banks' muscular abdomen. Don rolled rapidly and expertly out of the line of combat. With a huge grunt Mick stood and straightened, throwing the startled Banks head over heels into the air, directly into the path of the approaching truck.

Even then the tragedy could have been averted if it had not been for a half empty beer bottle, aimed for the front of the truck but crashing instead onto the windshield and disintegrating on impact. By automatic reflex the driver threw his arm over his eyes, releasing the wheel, and as he slumped in his seat his right foot pressed the accelerator to the floorboards. The front of the truck caught Banks in mid fall, where he instinctively clung to the radiator grille. His instincts, which on previous occasions had served him well, now defeated him. The truck carried Banks at full acceleration into the solid concrete of Burton's loading dock -- where Simon Jensen still capered in apparent glee.

The fight was over. The strike was over. For a good five minutes no-one on either side spoke. Scotty Shaw sat in the middle of the courtyard. Don Harrod stood by the wall in shock. The trucker did not realize what had happened, worried only about the damage to his employer's truck. Nobody knew how to tell him. Watching from an office window, a secretary on the third floor called 911. George Thorpe and Archie Noble limped into the courtyard.

George beckoned to Eddie Lewis, who stood, looking bewildered, amidst the remnants of his army. The younger man came over.

"Do you know who I am?" George asked.

"Of course, Mr. Thorpe," Eddie said.

"Good. I have a deal for you. Do you see that lunatic dancing on the loading dock?"

"You mean Mr. Jensen, sir?"

"I don't see any other lunatic up there, do you?"

"No, sir."

"Well I want you to get one of your most trusted men, one with some intelligence if that's possible, and I want him to get Simon Jensen out of here before the police arrive. I want him taken to the airport and put on the first flight to Toronto. Your man is to go with him, take him to an address I will give you, and stay with him until I get there."

"I'll take him myself, sir."

"No you won't. The police are going to want to talk to you. You were under contract to *me*, understand. Hired by me and reporting directly to me. You and I are going to explain

to the police that this was simply a strike action that got out of hand. Nothing criminal, just a very nasty accident. None of your men and none of ours are going to file any charges, and there will probably be a sizeable insurance payout to the family of the man who died."

"Yes sir. I have a man who can take Mr. Jensen to Toronto."

"Good. Do it quickly, before the police arrive."

Eddie Lewis turned to go.

"Lewis. You haven't asked for money."

"I think I owe you, Mr. Thorpe. This cock-up is partly my fault. I didn't realize your nephew was so far gone."

"Neither did I," George said, sadly. "Lewis, get my boy to the address I will give you. If he is safely there when I arrive back in Toronto I will honour your contract."

"Thank you, Mr. Thorpe."

Lewis left. Three minutes later Simon Jensen seemed to have disappeared. Two minutes after that the police and ambulances arrived. As George stepped forward to meet them a white-coated Korean Press Operator came out of the bindery, looked down at the wreckage of the truck and waved to George: "Good New paper come now?" he asked.

* * * * *

In the Chief Executive Officer's eighth floor office George Thorpe and Archie Noble sat in Theo's old leather recliners and toasted each other -- George with his usual black coffee

while Archie sipped the single malt whisky which June had finally confessed was hidden in the bottom of the bookcase.

"It'll be Harry, then?" George asked.

"Harry is a good man, George, and you'd have no objection from my side of the floor. But are you sure he's ready? I wouldn't want to see him pushed into a situation that's over his head. And I wouldn't want you putting him into the top seat out of any feelings of guilt."

"Harry *thinks* he's ready, and God knows I owe him a shot at proving it. Anyway, what it comes down to, Archie, is that we appear to have a selection list consisting of just one name. Acceptable to both of us, you say? Who else is there?"

Archie lifted his glass. "To Harry!" he said.

"To Harry!" George pressed the intercom. "June, find Harry Murphy, will you, and tell him I need him here right away."

"He's here already, Mr. Thorpe," June's voice came back, "He's been waiting for the chance to talk to you."

"Well I'll leave you...." Archie Noble began.

"No, stay, will you, Archie, please? I want Harry to know that he's our mutual choice."

"It will be my pleasure and privilege, George."

Harry opened the door and stepped into the room.

"Harry," George said, "I owe you more apologies than should need to be made by any one man in one lifetime, but we'll get around to that later. Right now, and with Archie Noble

as my witness I would like to offer you the position of Chief Executive Officer at AGI Halifax. This is not a provisional offer, or a probationary offer, or a pro-tem appointment. It is a no-strings-attached offer of the job. I don't know exactly what Theo Burton's remuneration package was, but I'm offering you that plus ten percent to start with, and if you have trouble with the money you're free to take it up with finance and tell them I'll back whatever you think is fair."

Harry stood, saying nothing.

"You've every right to tell me to stick the job up my arse," George said. "I wouldn't blame you a bit. But if you want the position, it's yours. All you have to do is say "Yes"."

"Yes, please, Mr Thorpe. George. Yes, I'll take it. But I'd like to ask you a small favour, if you wouldn't mind?"

"Name it, Harry."

"Would you mind telling my wife? I don't think she would believe me."

* * * * *

Harry Murphy's Dream Diary: Saturday July 25

The sound of the horn woke me. I had not been truly asleep; we took our sleep where we could, and in safer periods, but not in the hours before dawn. Most of the raids took place just as the sun rose, before the villagers were awake and alert enough to defend themselves. My squire came crashing through the door before I had half risen from my cot, and I was certain that the grooms were also awakened by now, and at their tasks. My squire helped me into my armour -- mostly plated leather and light mail, a stripped down version of battle armour for the sake of my horse and the need to ride fast, but still heavy enough. I had not far to go to

reach the stables, and this, too, was by design. We could not afford to leave anything to chance.

Armed and armoured, it took two strong grooms to boost me onto my horse, Edgar -- named for a longtime friend, dead from an unknown vapour the Michelmas past. My squire handed up my lance, and I was third away. I could never beat Andrew or Norris out of the gate; They claimed to sleep battle ready on their horses, and at times like this I found it hard to doubt them. They gave me a chance to draw even and then we all spurred our mounts towards the village, from which the horn still sounded. Even as we galloped the horn sounded again, but it was cut off in mid blast. The pirates were at their bloody work.

But this time we had them.

Our fortress was on high ground, and this was also by design. As we rode down the defile a mist closed in on us, but we dared not slacken our speed. As though to confirm the need for haste the sound of screams reached us from the village.

Despite the grey mist rising and swirling around us my vision clouded with a red rage. I hated the pirates with a consuming passion which my master at arms continually warned me against. He had told me only yesterday that my unreasoning hatred of these so-called Vikings would see me in my grave long before the Reaper had meant to take me. He had warned me time after time to control the anger. It may be an axe which ended my life, he said, but the fault would lie with my temper. I glanced at Norris, his features calm below the metal visor of his helmet. Norris killed with a detachment which I envied. I killed in a wild rage which threw as much fear into me as it did into my enemy. But we both fought with a deadly efficiency which had reduced these coastal raids to once per moon, down from thrice or more that number. And we would see the end of them if we must kill every pirate to do it.

Closer to the shore the mist lifted a little, and we saw the first body, sprawled in the path ahead of us. As we raced by I saw that the peasant farmer had died the death of the blood angel, a bizarre and cruel heathen mockery of our Christian traditions. They had turned the

poor man into an ugly parody of an angel by ripping his lungs from the living body and spreading them to the sides, obscene wings which still functioned for a while as the pirates watched him die. A little further, to the side of the path, lay the man's wife. I did not want to think on how she might have died. A figure loomed in the mist and we saw the first of the devils, probably the man who had followed the farmer and his wife out of the village as they fled. Hearing our horses he turned to face us, and raised his war axe in challenge. But we did not give him the honour of death in battle. Spurring our horses, Norris and I hit him abreast and drove him to the ground, where the iron shod feet of our horses turned him into bloody pulp. Close behind us, Andrew hit him again as the corpse rolled under his horse. If any life were left in the beast our three colleagues, following a furlong behind, would finish him.

Vikings, they called themselves, these raiders from the sea. "Travellers" in our tongue, or perhaps "Explorers". We had other names for them.

We were in the village now, and raised our lances. The lances were not fighting weapons; they were for skewering pigs. They would be left in our first three targets to be retrieved after the fight. I saw my target now, straightening from some foul business he was doing to a small, still body sprawled on the packed earth of the village road. I gave him no chance. I drove my lance high into his chest, angling downwards to his vitals, and I did not let go until holding any further would have tipped me from my charger. I did not need to look back to see that he was dead. I had already chosen my next target.

I dropped the reins and directed Edgar using only my knees. With my right hand I drew my heavy, two edged sword "Invictus", and in my left I held a long-bladed dagger, sharpened to the best edge the metal would hold. My blood was hot and pounded in my ears. I saw two of them, running towards me, towards their certain death. I let Edgar take one, smashing into him with lethal force, while I swung at the other's head. As expected he raised his axe to ward my blow and, exactly as I had intended, I twisted my wrist and brought the blade beneath his weapon in a smooth arc. I slid the edge across his neck in a slash which near severed his head from his shoulders.

I had traversed the village, and brought up against the shore. Through the mist I glimpsed the pirates' dragon-headed longboats, beached for the moment and under small guard. They could wait. I wheeled my mount and raced back to the central square.

There were six of us now, our colleagues having come into the fray a little time behind us. In this way the second triad would approach the undefended backs of the pirates who chased along behind us, and would let much blood before the enemy even knew of their presence.

We had no idea how many we could expect to meet, and no concern either, except a wish that there would be many. Last moon we had surprised a dawn raid and had despatched five hands of these animals, at no cost to us save half a score or so of peasant fishers from the village.

The fray was truly joined in the village and my heart leaped at seeing the numbers of these "Vikings", so much sport for my blade. I screamed a challenge -- though my master at arms had said not to waste good breath on such frivolities -- and raced in. I saw a hand of them attacking Edmund and spurred towards him. Seeing me coming he turned to deal with the pirates to his left, knowing that I would protect his rear and flank. One foolish pig, seeing a supposed advantage in Edmund's turned back, thought to leap on the horse behind him, but I put my long dagger into one of his ears and out through the other. I left the dirk to retrieve later when we burned the bodies.

Of a sudden, Edgar reared, and I saw that a small man had crawled underneath the horse and harried him from below with a wicked short blade. The horse regained his feet, crushing the skull of the fool beneath him in doing so, but I had been caught and was pulled backwards by a cord of some kind, to crash onto the ground behind my horse.

I rolled and cut at the cord, severing it easily. I rolled again, not taking any chances of a blade above me plunging down unseen. Scrabbling to regain my footing I heard Edmund bellow "Unhorsed", which cry would bring any of the others to my aid, should they be free to come. As I raised my eyes I saw a huge pirate, towering above me, his axe raised over his

head and already commencing the swing which would split my skull and loose my soul to paradise.

My left hand groped for and found purchase. An overturned table, a heavy oaken affair, had somehow found its way into the village square. I grabbed for a handhold and pushed against it with every ounce of strength I possessed. As I slid out from under the swing of the great axe I raised my sword and pushed upwards, helping the pig to impale himself on it. But his axe fell on my left hand, still gripping the table, and severed in one stroke every finger and one half of the thumb.

I struggled to my feet. Blood gushed from the severed stubs of my fingers. My light mail gauntlet had never been intended to stand against the full flung might of a war axe wielded by a Viking giant, and had provided no protection. My vision turned red and my hate gave me the strength to continue. Norris also had become unhorsed, and I fought my way to where he stood. Back to back we cut and slashed and thrust at the vile animals who came against us, until our assailants must first climb a wall of their dead and dying before falling to our blades. But there was no end to them. I cared nothing for my own death so long as I could send as many as possible of these vile beasts to Hell before claiming my own reward in Paradise. And so it ended. Three of them leaped in unison over the bodies of slain comrades and swung their axes as one towards me. I chose the centre, and thrust my sword through his belly as the blades of his two compatriots swung towards my head. My last act was to twist the blade, and my last sight was the contorted face of the pig as he cried out in pain. And then, happily, I prepared to die.

But I did not die. In the wink of an eye the Vikings were gone. My brothers of Arthur's Cavalry were gone. The stink of blood and dying men was gone. Only the village remained, and the mist from the sea, and the common, thatched huts of the fishers and farmers of this coast. My left hand still bled, but gave small pain. The redness of my vision faded, and a calmness fell over me. I stood and looked about.

She stood before me then, a young girl in a white dress soaked through with scarlet. Though I could see no wound on her, the dress dripped blood onto the packed earth. She looked at me and I saw tears spilling to her cheeks.

"Sweet maid," I said, "What have they done to you, these animals from the sea? Are you harmed? How have they harmed you?"

"Oh, Harry," she said, "The Viking Pirates of your dreams didn't do this to me. You did."

I thought I knew the girl. But who was Harry?

And then the most odd thing happened. The most remarkable thing. The most miraculous thing. I knew exactly who I was, and where I was.

"I'm dreaming, aren't I?" I said, and I knew that it was true.

Harry woke up next to Liz, who moved softly against him before settling back to sleep. He reeled from the power of the dream which had enveloped him. He could still smell the fires from the village, and the stink of blood; and his left hand hurt like hell. And then.....

"Not yet, " the girl said. "I'm so very sorry, Harry. It goes against all the rules, but I have to hold you here in the dream, just for a while."

The village was once again around me, although there were no bodies, no armed cavalry, no....."

"Oh, let's get out of here," she said.

We were on top of a snow covered mountain. The view was heart stopping. Peak after stunning peak marched away to a misty distance, all framed by the bluest of skies, and.....

"Too distracting," she said.

And so we sat in the old armchairs of our cottage on St. Margaret's Bay, I in mine and the girl in Liz's. Her dress was now a pristine white, and she held a small, black leather bound book in her hands.

"Oh, my poor darling," the girl said. "My poor, sweet, Harry. None of this was supposed to happen. You were meant to get involved in some harmless experiments in dreaming, that's all. In a year or so you would have grown bored with it, and thrown the diary away. You were meant to become Chief Executive of your little printing plant, do a terrible job of it and learn many lessons about yourself. You were never supposed to awaken this darker side of your character, long since conquered and long since buried away. You were never meant to fight Viking raiders, or die in horrific train crashes, or pump bullets into cranky children. Not in this life. Not even in your dreams."

"Who are you?" I asked.

"You can call me Margaret."

"You're just a girl."

"It is an appearance which pleases me, and one which I thought you could be comfortable with. I will change if it annoys you. But we will speak of that later. I desperately need to talk to you, Harry. I am so, so sorry that this is happening to you, and I feel partially responsible. I can't apologize enough. But you must know this: Something in your life pattern has gone terribly wrong. We don't know what, or how it went wrong, and we don't know how to fix it. Not yet. What we are asking you to do is stop your experiments with dreaming, just for a while, until we can work out how to put you back on track."

"You told me to read Chapter 21, didn't you? You told me to read about Lucid Dreaming, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did, Harry. I thought that the best thing to do was guide you into a lucid dream experience where we could meet and talk, but I was wrong. This whole dreaming business has backfired in a way I could never have foreseen. You have attracted entities to your spirit body which are using you for their own ends. They need your passion, your vitality of spirit, to bring their fantasies to life; without you in a central role their dreaming is flat and uninspired. Tonight's dream was an example. We have tried to deal with these beings but they are elusive and cunning. They evade us with ease. Oh, Harry, you are in such danger, and I can't protect you properly."

My left hand was aching and I looked at it. The fingers and thumb were still missing although the stumps no longer bled.

"That I can fix," Margaret said, rising from the chair. She took my injured hand in hers, and a warmth spread through my (missing?) fingers. When I looked again my hand was whole.

"You must be very careful for a while, Harry. Where you are now is not the normal place of earthly dreamers, and has none of the protections which keep them safe from harm. It is a place filled with dangers, and with malevolent entities who will take pleasure simply from hurting you. If you were to lose a hand here you could lose the use of it in the waking world, perhaps permanently. I will protect you to the best of my ability, but for the moment I am limited in what I can do for you. You must take care. Trust no-one and believe nothing. Know that your instincts may be faulty, and could guide you down dangerous roads. We are working hard to correct your lifeline, and will do so as soon as we find some answers, but it may take weeks of your time. Please be careful, Harry. Please."

"Margaret, who are you? What are you? Are you an Angel?"

But she was gone, and I was left to drift through a swirling mist of colours and scents for a long while before I woke up.

Sunday July 26: Notes

When I woke my left hand hurt like hell, and I had very limited mobility in the fingers.

My God, what have I got myself into?

BEAUTIFUL DREAMER

Chapter 5:

The tale grew in the telling, but whichever way you looked at it the hero of the Battle of Burton's Courtyard was Harry Murphy. As it was first told he had simply thrown himself between Don Harrod and one of Jensen's hired toughs, but by Tuesday afternoon there were *two* armed thugs in the story. By the end of the week Harry's Heroic Stand told how he had stood toe to toe with the two thugs exchanging blow for blow while protectively straddling the supine bodies of Don Harrod and Mick Shaw. And if it hadn't been for the intervention of a third tough Harry would probably have won the fight.

Harry was not interested in the gossip and made no comment. Don Harrod was at home suffering from shock and blaming himself for the death of Steven Banks. He had made a statement to that effect to the Halifax police, but in the face of contradictory evidence from many eye witnesses the police refused Don's request to lay charges against him. Mick Shaw had been ordered by his doctor to take some time off work to recover from a blow which by rights should have cracked his skull. Simon Jensen had vanished from the face of the earth and no-one at Burton's mourned his disappearance.

The inquest eventually returned a verdict of death by misadventure, and the only loose end seemed to be a number of conflicting statements regarding the part played in the Burton's fiasco by the company's CEO, Simon Jensen. In the end the fact that Jensen had not been found at the scene, and appeared in any event to have left the country, persuaded the force to close the file. Stevie Banks having no close kin, an obscure cousin living in northern Alberta eventually became considerably richer.

Harry remained numb for a week. He came out of his blue mood slowly and with much urging by family and friends; but things did, as Liz promised, return to the way they had been, and in a surprisingly short stretch of time normal service was indeed resumed.

One of Harry's prime concerns -- how to explain to June Sawler that she was not to be retained in her position -- was solved unexpectedly by June herself the day Harry moved permanently to the eighth floor. To June's surprise several of her attempts to escape Simon Jensen had borne fruit, and in a time of high unemployment in the Maritime Provinces June found herself in a position to choose between three rival offers. Once Harry had assured her that she was not deserting him in his hour of need June handed in her required four weeks notice and took off immediately for four weeks vacation. A few of Burton's more notorious gossips tried to make something of the fact that Louise Boutelier was warming the Executive Assistant's chair before it had become decently cool, but on the whole everyone at the plant was highly pleased with the new arrangement -- not to mention extremely relieved.

In what many considered a very magnanimous gesture Harry redeployed the Goon Squad into available positions within the company. Not all of them found positions and salaries commensurate with what they had previously held, but complaints against Harry Murphy were not well tolerated at that time and the majority of Goons had the good sense to keep any such opinions to themselves.

In the aftermath of Black Monday Harry had little time for his Dreambook. In fact he gave it no thought at all until, seeking diversion on a wet Sunday afternoon he re-opened the little book at chapter Twenty One. He had already skimmed rapidly through the chapter and had a good basic idea of what Lucid Dreaming involved. He had a strong feeling, however, that the importance of this chapter to his progress as a Creative Dreamer had been overtaken by events. Margaret, a.k.a. the Girl in the White Dress, had given explicit instructions on the subject. But Harry wasn't sure. He wasn't sure that he could trust a person who, by her own admission, was "partially responsible" for the mess he was in; especially since she had followed her advice with an injunction to "trust no-one". He wasn't even sure what *kind* of mess he was in. But Harry had long ago realised that, whatever kind of mess he got himself into, the best person to pull him out was indubitably and invariably Harry Murphy. At the very least, he needed to develop his competence in Lucid Dreaming in order to find out just what the hell was going on.

He had taken his first steps inadvertently, when Margaret had pulled him back into the Viking dream and held him there. The difference between that experience and his regular nightly dramatic performances was as fillet mignon versus burger and fries. Sitting with Margaret in the Murphy cottage had been as real as sitting there with Liz during his waking day -- more real in some ways; he had noticed a heightened perception of sight and sound, and suspected that other senses would also be augmented in that strange place. His theory was supported when, for a brief time, he had stood on a mountain top and breathed cold, crisp mountain air. It had not escaped Harry's notice that he had moved from Coastal Village to Mountain top to Oceanside cottage in the twinkling of an eye. If this was a realistic sample of what Lucid Dreaming could do, Harry wanted in. He read on.

There are several methods of attaining the ability to dream lucidly, the Dreambook explained. None are easy and all require much practice. The common first step for all methods is the ability to *recognize that you are dreaming!* And that first step is a big one. Here, said the book, are some ways in which you can test whether you are awake or dreaming.

Observe the continuity of time. You might sit at your desk on a dull Friday afternoon watching the clock tick away long seconds until quitting time, but if you find yourself doing this, you are probably awake. Dreams tend to skip the boring bits and move directly to the next interesting segment. You may also notice that the movie in which you are currently starring has started in the middle. Ask yourself where you are, how you got there, what you were doing previously and what you are meant to be doing now. If you can't answer these questions to your satisfaction, you may well be dreaming.

Try to read something -- a book, a newspaper, the licence plate on the car which just drove by. If the letters blur and jump about, if the headline in the paper changes while you are looking at it, you are either holding the "Dreamworld Daily News" or it is time to make an appointment with your Optometrist.

Pinch yourself. Hard. As hard as you can. Take a rock and crush your fingers with it. The danger here is that you may be awake. If so, it will hurt like Hell. If not, the rock was

not real. But be careful with this one; dreams can fool you. Are you *sure* that you felt that pinch?

Watch out especially for the magical and the mystical. While it is extremely rare in waking life for telephone poles to turn into candy-apple trees, or pumpkins to become coaches, such events are the very *stuff* of dreams.

There were a number of others. While it seems a simple matter to make this determination, the book continued, it isn't. The main reason for this is that the mind of the dreamer is operating in a special mode -- in which critical judgement is strongly suppressed. A fire breathing dragon flying over High Street would certainly attract your attention in the waking world, while in a dream you would probably accept it uncritically and move on.

A well-travelled route to Lucid Dreaming is a technique which the book termed 'Reality Check Conditioning'. In this approach you choose a particular event which occurs both in waking reality and in your dreams; preferably a simple thing such as opening a door, brushing your teeth, walking along a corridor or simply smiling at something funny. Every time this happens in real time, ask yourself: "Am I dreaming?" and then perform the checks mentioned previously. Do this until it becomes ingrained habit. Then one night you will open a door, ask the question, perform the checks -- and realise that you are truly in the middle of a dream. One Lucid Dreamer reported rapid progress by using a method with which Harry immediately identified. Every time he used the men's room he would ask himself "Am I dreaming, or is this real?" After a few weeks of this the man was unable to take a leak without going through his ritual, and when the occasion finally arose where he found himself unsure of the answer he reverted to the reality checks of previous pages -- and to his surprise and satisfaction, found that the answer was "I *am* dreaming." Upon which realization he immediately woke up. Which brings us to step number two.

The natural, and very hard to overcome reaction to finding yourself in a lucid dream is to wake up; especially when the pressure on your bladder refuses to let you dream of anything other than relieving it. This unfortunately prevented the afore-mentioned dreamer's method

from achieving any widespread popularity. The truth is, the book admitted, that whatever means you may use to identify that you are dreaming, the only way to prevent the natural follow-up from occurring is *will power*. Focus on the dream; repeat to yourself: "I *will* stay in my dream; I will *not* wake from my dream." It probably won't work, at least not in the early days. But persevere. Every time you succeed in becoming lucid within a dream you are one step closer to being able to stay there. It *will* happen, eventually. It may take months. It could take years. There are cases on record where it has taken (sorry about this) several decades.

Harry closed the book and threw it across the room to fall behind the sofa, where it would remain for the next ten days.

In the end Harry decided on a carpet-bombing approach, in which he asked himself the "Am I or aren't I?" question a hundred times a day. On starting his car in the morning he ran through several reality checks. On stopping at a red light. On arriving at his parking space (marked in large red letters on a white board "Reserved for the CEO"). In the men's room, much to the puzzlement of the man in the next stall, Harry asked himself whether he could consciously recall the trip to the washroom, and then verified that he could read his driver's licence without difficulty. The Dreambook should probably have emphasised the importance of conducting reality checks privately, discretely, and above all, silently.

At his first AGI Board meeting Harry was welcomed as the Hero of Burton's Loading Dock, and made to feel very much at home. George gave a brief speech outlining Harry's background for those who did not know him and then moved rapidly through the business agenda. Harry took scribbled notes and wondered whether, at his advanced age, he could learn shorthand. Due to the high sensitivity of many agenda items George did not allow tape recording of the meetings.

The final item of the meeting involved the acquisition of a Toronto based publishing house, Chapel Hill Press. The owner and Chief Executive of Chapel Hill, Maurice Bertrand, looked familiar to Harry. Meeting someone whom he recognised but could not name served as one of his "Reality Check" triggers, and Harry went (silently) through a series of checks to

determine that he was awake. He was. Maurice explained to the group that the intention of AGI was to develop a close working relationship between Chapel Hill and the three smaller publishing organisations which were already components of AGI. Eventually all four companies were to be merged into a single publishing house. Harry thought that the plan had much merit, and should certainly lead to increased profitability for AGI.

After the meeting Maurice approached Harry. "I thought we should probably get together while you're in Toronto," he said, smiling warmly. "At the moment our book printing is spread amongst several Toronto printers, but as part of the AGI family I understand that I shall become one of your customers."

"Well, then, I should start by showing how much we appreciate our customers," said Harry. "How about letting me stand you supper this evening. You name the time and place."

"If it isn't terribly bad manners, perhaps you'd allow me to turn the invitation around? I'm afraid that Angela -- my wife -- is out of town for a few days and won't be able to join us, but I have an excellent cook and I'm sure you won't be disappointed. My place at eight, then?"

"Delighted."

The cab pulled off the road through a set of high wrought iron gates and onto a tree-lined driveway leading to a building which Harry would later describe as 'more than a mansion, but a bit short of a palace'. He thought at first that there must have been an error in the address he had given the cabbie, but remembered that the Bertrands were rumoured to be one of Toronto's richest families. The same rumours suggested that running Chapel Hill Press was more of a hobby to Maurice than a breadwinning necessity, and that the true family wealth was inherited. Broad stone steps led up to an imposing oak door. He paid the cabbie and rang the bell. A uniformed butler met him at the door and led him to a large library where a beaming Maurice Bertrand confirmed that he had found the correct address.

After an excellent supper the two men moved to the study. Maurice poured two glasses of a fine Remy Martin Cognac and sat opposite Harry. "I hear you're interested in the art and science of Creative Dreaming," Maurice said.

Harry yelped in surprise. "Alright," he said "Let's clear this up. I knew from the moment I walked into the boardroom that you and I had met, and it's been driving me crazy trying to pinpoint the time and place. But I can count on the fingers of one hand just how many people know that I'm experimenting with dreams, and you're not one of them. Come on, Maurice, put me out of my misery!"

"Rolande."

"I'm sorry, I don't Surely not Rollie Bertrand, Liz's old school friend? But of course! I should have connected the name. We met at Rollie's graduation, right? You're Rolande's uncle! But that must be twenty....."

"More like twenty five years ago. You're very close. She's my baby sister, not my niece. Our mother died when Rolande was only a small child, and she went to live with an aunt in Halifax, where she met Liz. She has an apartment in downtown Toronto now, but visits here often. I must admit that I wouldn't have recognised you if Rolande hadn't spoken of you recently. Then when I saw your name in the list of attendees for today's meeting I thought there couldn't be *two* Harry Murphys in the printing business in Halifax. It had to be either the strangest co-incidence, or a well intentioned fate. Rolande was in Halifax on business last month and met Liz for lunch, I understand. I suppose that's where the subject of dreams came up. I hope you're not offended, Harry. I don't want to pry if you'd rather not talk about it. The only reason that Rolande raised the subject with me is that she knows of my interest in something very similar. Do the initials N.D.E. mean anything to you?"

"It rings a bell, Maurice, but I can't say I know a lot about it. Something to do with dying and coming back isn't it?"

"That's exactly what it is. Near Death Experiences. There are recorded cases from way back in history, but they seem to have reached epidemic proportions in the last few decades. Probably due to the fact that people now die and are resuscitated just about every day in every major city in every country of the world. You can't walk down a street without passing at least a few people who have 'died' and been brought back to life. Heart transplant patients, for example; traffic accidents; knife and gunshot wounds, sad to say, in many north American cities. Thousands of cases every day."

"And they all have the same dream, I understand. Tunnels of light, and shining beings."

"You know more than you're telling, Harry. But they don't call it a dream. They say that it is the most real experience of their lives."

"All of them?"

"No, not all. About fifty percent of people who have clinically died come back with memories of such experiences. You're right about the tunnel of light, and they do usually claim to have met some kind of divine presence. But the experiences are not all the same. And they're not all pleasant."

"I think I've read something about this. Isn't there some kind of physiological explanation for all of these experiences, something to do with oxygen deprivation and signals from a dying optic nerve?"

"Theories from people who have never been there. But the people who have had an NDE will tell you, they don't *imagine* a tunnel of light; they don't misinterpret some random nerve signals. The tunnel is real, and the light is real. And the experience is real. Trust me on this."

"You've been there, haven't you?"

"Yes. I was in a traffic accident several years ago. I died on impact. By the most fortunate chance -- or perhaps fate again -- an ambulance was right behind me, about ten cars back, and the paramedics revived me; brought me back. They said I was "dead" only for about three minutes, but my experience lasted - well, it seemed like much longer."

"Can you tell me about it? I mean, if it's not too painful?"

"Painful?" Maurice laughed. "It was the most beautiful, blissful experience of my life! Yes, I'll tell you about it, Harry, and with pleasure. But what I really wanted to do this evening was introduce you to the topic. From what I know of Creative Dreaming I think that the Near Death Experience may be something very similar. Do you know that there are thirty million recorded NDE experiences in North America alone! Thirty million! And that of course excludes an unknown number of people who won't talk about their experiences for fear of being thought to be a bit, odd shall we say."

"Oh, come on. Surely not that many!"

"Harry, just think. In every major north American city there are probably five or six surgeries per day in which the heart is stopped. Not to mention accident victims who are resuscitated by -- well, by anybody with CPR training who passes by in time. Drowning victims in particular have a very high instance of resuscitation if reached in good time. Now multiply that by the number of cities, by the days in a year, and by the number of years since we've been able to do this, and you'll find that number much more credible."

"But if there are so many people who have had this experience, why are there not books about it? Why are major universities not doing research into it? Why...?"

"But there *are*! I can give you the titles of several good NDE books. Chapel Hill has even published a few. I'd be pleased to send you copies, if you wish. And if you want to read about research, I'll give you some good websites to start your search."

"Websites?"

"Surely you're not going to tell me that you haven't a computer at home. Don't you 'surf the net' as the kids say? Or at least use e-mail?"

"I have a computer at work, and get a lot of my mail on it, but my admin assistant usually does my replies. I'm afraid it's too late for me to learn to type. I think Liz uses e-mail quite a lot though. She has one of those little computers that come in a briefcase that she carries to work and back. Laptops, I think they're called. Anyway, I thought home computers were for kids to play games."

"Ask Liz to show you the Web, Harry. Then get yourself a computer, set up an internet account, and stand by to be amazed! You don't even need to learn to type, if you don't want to."

"I'll do that, Maurice. But tell me about your dream -- sorry, your experience."

"Yes, of course. This was in ninety five, late September. I was driving back from a meeting in Ottawa. I deal a lot with the people at the Government Publishing Centre there; we work with them on a number of titles. 'Co-Publishing', they call it. If the weather is good and I can spare the time I like to drive there and back. This was a Friday evening and as I drove through Oshawa it started to rain. Well, it had been a hectic three days in Ottawa, and I was a little tired -- but let's skip the excuses, shall we? The traffic was as usual going far too fast for the conditions, and it was very heavy -- I guess you're not interested in the road conditions or weather report, either. As our Chairman loves to say, I'll come straight to the point. I crashed the car. I was doing about a hundred and ten. I hit the car in front and skidded sideways. I was hit from behind by a hearse, of all things, and sideswiped by a pickup truck. My car rolled. I had no airbag in the car I owned at that time and I wasn't wearing my seatbelt. Some people say it wasn't an accident, it was more like a suicide attempt. I must admit that I see their point. It was by far the most stupid thing I've ever done. And I paid for it. I died.

"I opened my eyes expecting to see the crumpled windshield or the buckled steering wheel, but I found myself looking at the wrecked car. I could smell gasoline fumes, and my first thought was 'Thank God I got out in time.' It never struck me to question how I'd managed that particular trick, nor how come I was still in one piece. I walked around the car, and I saw winking blue lights coming along the shoulder. I thought 'lucky for somebody that an ambulance was in the traffic line-up'. I never thought that *I* was the lucky one, but that came later.

"Then without knowing how, I was floating above the accident. I saw the ambulance making its way along the shoulder, and I saw people getting out of their cars and running forward to see if they could help. I floated back down, seeing nothing odd about my ability to do this, and went to speak with one of them; he ran right *through* me! I thought, no way, he *couldn't* have done that. I must be so shaken up from the accident that my imagination is playing tricks on me.

"And then I saw the tunnel. It wasn't leading upwards, but opened right in front of me. It was right about then that I realised I was dead. But there were no trumpets or celestial choirs; no angels to meet me and guide me to the Pearly Gates. I've been a practicing Christian all my life, and I'm not sure what I expected, but not something like this. Everything was very quiet, very calm. I couldn't hear any earthly noises at all. Without thought, I stepped into the tunnel and started to walk along it.

"Harry, this was no illusion caused by dying neurons firing along the length of my optic nerves. It was a tunnel, damn it. I walked along for a while, perfectly content, and then I realised that I wasn't walking, more like floating along. I stopped my legs from moving but continued to go forward. And yes, there was light at the end of it. Not spectral, heavenly light; just light.

"Before too long I noticed that someone was walking by my side. I started moving my legs again because it felt more natural and somehow comforting in that strange place, and here

was this fellow walking in step with me. He was surrounded by a beautiful white light which seemed to come from within him. As soon as I noticed his presence the most wonderful feeling of peace and joy came over me. I was filled with love for this being, and I felt his love for me as a tangible thing. I asked him "Are you God?" He smiled and said "No, I'm not God." I asked "Are you Jesus Christ?" He smiled again and said "Neither am I Jesus Christ". So I asked him "Are you Saint Peter, then, come to render judgment on me?" and he said "No, I'm simply a friend who has come to talk with you."

"Without knowing how we got there we were out of the tunnel and walking along a path in a broad green valley. There were trees to each side, more heavily wooded towards the tops of the hills. There were people everywhere, strolling about or sitting on the grass, singly and in small groups. I asked who they were, these people, and my friend said "Oh, they are just like you." I asked "You mean they're dead?" and he said "Hardly that, Maurice; let's just say that they've been asleep and just recently awakened. But never mind them, I have to talk to you."

"So we sat on the grass, and my new friend asked me "Did you find what you were seeking?" and I said I didn't know what he meant. He said "Was your life on Earth satisfactory? Did you accomplish what you went there to do?" I said I still didn't understand, and he asked "Did you find love?"

"I thought this was a strange question, but I considered it for a moment and said "Yes, my life was filled with love, from my parents, my friends, my wife and children. I have known love all my life."

"Then he said: "That's alright then. But you have unfinished business'."

"I asked him why he should think so, and he pointed to my waist. I saw then that there was a slim silver belt fastened around my waist and connected to something behind me by a silver cord which ran back into the distance until I could no longer see it. He said "That is

your connection to earth. It is not yet severed. You still have things to do there before you can come home."

"I thought about that, too. I thought of how my wife, Angela would be totally devastated when she heard of my death, and how she and Rolande would weep so. I thought of my children, who live far from Toronto now, and of grandchildren I would never meet. I remembered the plans that Angela and I had made for our retirement, which would be starting in a few years. All gone now. So I said to him "Yes, I have unfinished business; I'm barely sixty years old. I'd planned on at least ten more good years, maybe more. I suppose it's too late to fret about it, but I wish I could at least have left Angela better prepared. Not financially, there's always been lots of money, but she's so helpless in so many other ways."

"And then my friend said "It's not too late; not for you. If you wish, you can go back and finish what you went to earth to do." I shook my head. "No, it's too late now. I've been dead for an hour or more (which I thought was how long I'd been in the tunnel and the valley) and my brain has been without oxygen for far too long. I'd go back as a living vegetable and cause nothing but heartache to the people I love." And he replied: "Not so. Make your choice, Maurice. That's all you need to do."

"Well I guess I made my choice, because I lost consciousness for a moment and when I opened my eyes I was in the ambulance on its way into Toronto, and every single part of my body hurt like hell. The first thing I heard was the Paramedic saying "Welcome back, buddy. It was touch and go for a while, but you're going to be alright."

The two men sipped their brandy, saying nothing for a long minute. Then Harry said "Maurice, the last thing on earth that I want to do is argue with you or upset you, but your tale strikes me as so much like my dreams that I could have written it up as one of my own. The time lapses; the instant transportation from scene to scene; floating and flying; freedom from physical pain; magic tunnels and spectral beings. By your own admission you were unconscious through all this, so how can you be sure that you weren't dreaming?"

"How can I be sure that I'm not dreaming now, Harry? I've dreamed all my life. I don't claim your expertise in that area, but I've dreamed enough to know the difference. I'm not dreaming now, and I wasn't dreaming then."

The two men moved on to discuss other things, to establish the basis for a good working relationship between their two companies as well as the beginning of an enduring friendship. The evening passed very pleasantly. It was midnight before Harry left for his hotel. He made a small note in his diary before going to bed. *Near Death Experiences (NDE). Ask Liz about Web.*

* * * * *

Remembering the last time he had convened a meeting of Burton's board, Harry entered the boardroom with some trepidation, but his fears were groundless. As he followed Louise through the door the entire board stood and cheered. Harry blushed, stammered, sat. He nodded to Mick Shaw at the far end of the table, who was wearing a neckbrace, but seemed otherwise recovered. He looked for Don Harrod, and saw Susan James in his seat.

"Any news of Don, Susan," he asked.

"I'd be pleased to discuss it with you after the meeting, if that's OK Mr. Murphy."

"I think that Don has many good friends around the table who would very much like to hear news of him."

"I'm afraid that the news isn't good, sir. I'd much prefer to speak with you privately, then if you wish me to do so I'll give a full report at the next board meeting."

"I will accept your better judgement in this area," Harry said, with a small smile. "Let's move on, then."

Harry gave news of the AGI meeting from the previous week and invited questions. There were several and Harry had answers. He moved rapidly through the business of the day and wrapped up.

"I'm making some changes in procedure for these meetings," he said, as people started making preparations to leave. "For starters, any regular attendee of these meetings, or any properly named delegate (he nodded to Susan) will now be entitled to add agenda items. With the greatest deference to Theo, I know that the common feeling about these board meetings is that they were largely a waste of time. That is going to change. Now I don't simply want to send you a list of topics before each meeting, I want you all to help me make sure that the agenda is full of issues which need to be brought to the attention of Burton's management for discussion and decision. My only rule is that any topic on the agenda must involve at least a majority of us. An item which just involves two or three of you, say, should be sorted between yourselves, involving me if you need to. In future, then, Louise will contact you three working days before the meeting for your agenda items. This will give her time to distribute copies of any documentation that you want us to see before the meeting. Use your common sense on this. I mean, there's no point in asking us for an opinion of a report and then handing out copies of it at the meeting, so we all sit around reading for an hour or two. In any case if anyone tries that I'll simply table the document for discussion at the next meeting and move right along. Last minute items *can* be added, but they'd better be important. If you're unsure about an item, call me. Any questions?"

There were none. On the way out Mick Shaw and Ron Edwards stopped to congratulate Harry personally. "Meeting suit you?" Harry asked. "Or did I just pull another 'Theo'?" "Well, Murph," Mick replied, "If there's an opposite to 'pulling a Theo', I reckon you just did it."

Ron departed but Mick hung back. "I understand I've you to thank for keeping the dogs off me while I was out of it on the cobblestones," he said to Harry. "Not so," Harry replied. "Don't listen to that Harry-the-Hero nonsense, I was knocked out of it in the first few seconds of the battle and watched the end of it from the sidelines after my vision cleared."

"No Harry-the-Hero?" Mick asked. "I'm a bit sad about that, Murph. I kind of liked you in the 'Dirty Harry' role, beating up the bad guys."

"You'd do me a favour if you'd straighten the record, Scotty. I've tried myself but people say 'oh, he's just being modest'."

"Well, Murph, you know I think I'll just leave things as they are. I appreciate what you *tried* to do, what you *meant* to do, and that took courage. I think it suits most of us at Burton's just to leave the medals on your chest."

Harry met with Susan James and learned that Don was so severely depressed that his family physician was talking of having him hospitalised for treatment. Despite a steady stream of visitors telling Don that it was in no way his fault, he continued to blame himself for the death of Steve Banks. He had told Susan "I threw the man under the truck, how can I not be responsible for his death?" Mick Shaw had visited and told Don "It was me that threw Stevie over my shoulder, and plain bad luck that the truck roared by right about then!" but Don had refused to respond. Harry promised himself that he would visit with Don as soon as possible and felt guilty that he had not already done so.

At three thirty Harry stepped out of his office and pressed the elevator button. "I'm gone for the day," he told Louise in passing. "Got some shopping to do, so you're in charge." Louise grinned. "I've got your mobile number," she said. "I'll find you if there's a Code Two."

"There *are* no more Code Twos," Harry said as the elevator door closed.

"Oh, of course not!" Louise said, turning pink. Code Two was their private shorthand for a 'Panicked Theo' emergency.

Harry drove out of Halifax heading north-east and followed highway 102 up to the exit at Bayer's Lake Park, known to local shoppers as the "Big Box Shopping Centre." He parked outside Future Shop, stepped through the doorway and instantly froze, mesmerised by the huge display of computer hardware, software and peripherals within the cavernous store. He had asked Liz about her computer and been somewhat surprised to find that she claimed little expertise in this field.

"I know how to use the thing, Harry, but it's like the car. I know which levers to pull and what buttons to press, but I haven't the faintest idea of what's going on inside or how the thing works. When I bought my laptop I simply went to Future Shop, spoke with one of their young men, and followed his advice."

"Yes, but what do I do when they start talking bytes and bits and megathings?" Harry had asked.

"Tell him you only speak English."

"Can I help you, sir," a young salesman had noticed Harry's hesitation.

"I need a computer."

"You're in the right store, then. Do you have any specifications?"

"You mean Rams and Gigahertz, stuff like that? I'm afraid I only speak English."

"English will do fine. I really meant do you have something specific in mind that you want to *do* with the computer? Do you want to play games on it, for example, or keep finan-

cial records, follow your investments? Or send and receive electronic mail? What I'm getting at is that I don't want to sell you a sports car if you really need a lawn tractor. Or vice versa."

"Ah," said Harry with some relief, "*Those* specifications, I can handle. What I want to do is learn how to use the World Wide Web to find information. Is that specific enough for you?"

"It's a very good start."

They looked at several impressive laptops but when Harry saw the large screen desktop displays he decided that he'd prefer a stationary model. He listened to the pros and cons of high speed cable internet versus high speed modem phone lines, talked about the size of Hard Drive he would need to store his programs and data files, and gradually the bytes and bits all fell into place. He left after an hour with the assurance that everything he would need was contained in one or another of the big boxes in the trunk of his car. He also had the phone number of "Dan the Disk Doctor", a young computer sciences graduate who would, for a fee, help Harry install, debug and operate his new system. Harry called Dan the Doctor and made arrangements to get his computer up and running the following weekend.

Compared to learning the Clarinet, Harry found that operating his home computer was easy. Of course much of this was due to Dan Robinson -- "Dan the Disk Doctor" -- who took care of anything remotely complex or difficult. Dan set up an account for Harry with a local service provider and interconnected all of the component parts of his system. He automated the log-in process and turned his back while Harry typed in his password. "If your password is your wife's name, forwards or backwards, Mr. Murphy, I'd suggest that you change it. Sorry, I should have mentioned that earlier. Don't use family names or birthday numbers. The safest password is a random collection of numbers and letters."

Harry, who didn't see the need for a password in the first place, backspaced Z-I-L and entered T-H-E-O-D-O-R-E.

All that Harry had to do to reach the World Wide Web was press three keys; one to turn on the system, a second to activate his web browser, and a third to connect to the internet. Then he needed only to move the pointer around the screen by means of his "mouse," clicking on whatever caught his attention.

Dan showed him how to do a simple search, using the engine from his home page. He typed in the letters N-D-E and sat back. His first search attempt scored over a million "hits", and left him shellshocked by the experience. Visiting the first web page on his hit-list Harry found several dozen books on the subject of Near Deaths, and a cross-linkage to a second site which contained several thousand first hand accounts of such experiences.

He was overwhelmed.

He stayed up past three o'clock on Sunday morning reading accounts, book extracts, theories and counter theories. When Liz came down to drag him away from the computer he was wide eyed and open mouthed in amazement.

"It's like every library in the world at my fingertips," he said. "Private libraries included. I can't get over the size of it."

"Hang in there, Harry," Liz told him. "You're in an area I know something about now, using the web for research. Tomorrow I can show you how to refine your searches to get specific information, and if you're a really good boy I might show you how to use your credit card on-line to order some of those books you had on the screen."

Head spinning, Harry followed Liz upstairs.

* * * * *

Harry Murphy's Dream Diary: Monday August 3

I was in a large office complex. It was night, and the building seemed unoccupied. I walked along an empty corridor, lit only by emergency lamps placed at intervals along the low ceiling. My feet made no sound on the plush carpet which covered the entire floor.

I came to a double-door and went through to find myself in a large auditorium. The seats were wooden benches, arranged in semicircles facing a small stage on which sat a wooden podium. There was a small, illuminated lectern on the podium. I walked down a staircase which bisected the semi-circular seats and stepped up onto the stage. I saw that there was a thick stack of papers on the lectern, and on the top page "Harry Murphy" was printed in large, black letters. I turned the page to see close-set five point type which covered the page. Flipping through the stack I saw that there were hundreds of pages covered in this tiny, hard-to-read type. I tried to read the page which I was holding, but the type danced in front of my eyes. I gave up and replaced the page, but as I stepped from the podium an uneasy feeling came over me, as though I had forgotten something important.

I climbed the stairs to return to the corridor, but the door now led to a parking lot, lit by a solitary lamp fastened high on the side of the building I had just left. There was only one car in the lot, but I recognised it as mine. It was a large, older-model Rolls Royce Silver Ghost, painted now in a high-gloss black. The amber light of the sodium lamp high above was reflected in the paintwork like a surrealistic moon. I took the keys from my pocket and started towards the car.

As I crossed the lot I saw movement over by the exit, where the lot joined the street. Three figures, dimly backlit by the lights from the street, were walking towards me. I hurried to my car, opened the door and jumped in. I locked the doors and checked that all of the windows were tightly wound to the top. The three figures sauntered slowly towards my car.

I turned the key and automatically started my Reality Check. I could account for the last few minutes, and I knew that I was at my office building, about to leave after a long, tiring day at

work. I had successfully read the papers on the lectern in the auditorium, and..... No. That wasn't right. I could only read my name, in large letters on the top sheet. The other, smaller letters had jumped about so much that I had abandoned the attempt to read them. I pinched myself, hard, on the cheek and winced from the pain. I took out my driver's licence..... the letters blurred and swam in front of my eyes. The first of the three figures had arrived at my car. He was a slim young man, dressed completely, as far as I could tell, in black leather. He started to pound on the window, and his two colleagues rapidly joined in.

Their inconsiderate actions made me furious. I wound down the driver's side window and yelled at the three men "Will You Please Stop That Stupid Noise!! Can't you see that I am trying to do a Reality Check here!!"

The three men disappeared. They did not walk away, they simply ceased to be there.

And I knew then that I must be dreaming.

I sat in the car and focussed on the soft glow of the instrument panel. All around me the scenery started to take on an illumination of its own. The interior of the car, the parking lot, the high walls of the dark building, everything began to glow. I looked at my hands and saw the same bright glow surrounding my fingers. The glow from my body had a faint violet tinge to it, and sparks flashed deep within the aura. At the same time a wonderful feeling stole over me; a feeling of expectation, reminiscent of the way I had felt as a young boy, waking on Christmas morning, sneaking silently down dark stairs to the treasure trove of the living room. Something very wonderful was about to happen to me. Stay in the Dream, I told myself. Stay in the Dream!!! Pleeeeeease stay in

I woke up.

Tuesday August 04: Notes

That was a Lucid Dream. It didn't have the depth or intensity of my visit with Margaret, and certainly not the duration. But it was lucid; and I did it on my own. Now all I have to do is

learn how to stay in the dream. How to wake up, but stay asleep. I think my Dreambook said that should take somewhere between two weeks and a lifetime. I don't know what the dream signifies; the office building, the parking lot thugs. Somehow that doesn't seem especially important any more.

I lay awake for a long time, and eventually, for fear of disturbing Liz, I got up at about four thirty. I spent the rest of the night at my computer, reading a lot of nonsense about spirits leaving their bodies and going down a long tunnel of light to speak with Jesus Christ.

END.

* * * * *

Harry learned to surf the net proficiently in very little time. Within a week he was spending so much time on-line that Liz arranged for high speed cable to be installed at the house and connected to his computer. While Harry was very grateful to her for this new development (he now needed to press only *one* button to access his web pages) Liz claimed that she had only done it to regain the use of her telephone.

Liz showed him how to download files for later reading, and soon he had amassed a large virtual library of NDE experiences. Despite his rapid adaptation to the high-tech world Harry still liked to print out his files and peruse them in his fireside chair or in bed, where he could cover them with scribbled notes, cross references and comments. As a result the house soon began to fill up with odd pages, singly or stapled into small files, and often to be found in the oddest places. Under the impression that this was diverting Harry from more threatening pursuits, Liz learned to live with the clutter.

Harry had been prepared for the volume of case studies available to him through the medium of the web, but was surprised by the variety. While the large majority of the NDEs described visions of peace and beauty, some of them had evidently been trips to Hell and back.

In the case of the former most of the people who returned to life claimed to have lost all fear of death. On the other hand those who returned from the nightmare NDEs lived in constant fear of a return to whatever they had encountered. In almost all cases, positive or negative, the experience triggered significant life changes.

On a website titled "Hollywood Near Death Accounts" Harry found a list of well known names who had undergone an NDE. It read like the guest list for the opening night of the big screen's latest blockbuster epic. Peter Sellers provided details of his experience, while Burt Reynolds merely confessed to having had one. Eric Estrada, Donald Sutherland, Gary Busey, Larry Hagman and Lou Gosset Junior were all included in the list. Elsewhere Harry found details of NDE accounts from scientists of all disciplines, Politicians of all stripes, Bureaucrats, Doctors, Lawyers, Schoolteachers and Bankers. The NDE experience seemed to be totally non-discriminatory; an equal opportunity employer. Even Carl Jung, close associate of Sigmund Freud and a pioneer of modern psychology, had experienced and recorded an NDE episode.

An interesting site compared the NDE accounts of people from various faiths and assorted geographical locations. Apparently the "tunnel of light" encounter was very common to Christians of all persuasions, but was rarely a factor in Hindu NDE accounts. It seemed that the Divine Powers had provided an environment which allowed participants to view the experience in whatever form they found most comfortable. Either that, or there were competing NDE suppliers on the "other side".

Several small, isolated accounts proved to be especially interesting to Harry. In one of these a young woman, blind from birth, was able to see for the first time in her life during her NDE. She gave detailed accounts of what she had seen which were too close to the real thing to be written off as hallucinations. Returning to her body, she was once again blind. Harry tried to imagine how he would describe a tree in circumstances where he had never seen one. Or to describe that same tree from observations of his nose, ears and fingertips alone.

He was intrigued by the case of "P", an unidentified young girl, as told to and reported by a nurse who had worked with the young patient. "P" had undergone serious heart surgery, involving several separate operations, which had in the end been unsuccessful. Finally the team of doctors working with the teenager had determined that only a transplant held any hope for a longer term solution. After waiting months for a suitable donor, the transplant surgery finally took place on the day before Christmas, 1996. As the team of surgeons cut into the child's chest and removed the diseased, barely functioning heart, P left her body and hovered over the operating table. Not surprisingly the youngster had developed a strong distaste for things medical, and decided not to hang around in the operating room. Passing easily through closed doors -- and even through solid walls -- P travelled around the hospital, eavesdropping on conversations here and there, and finally ending up on the roof of the building. While floating around up there, enjoying the beauty of the heavy snowstorm which was blanketing the city, P noticed a strange thing. A blue plastic sandal had somehow found its way onto a small ledge at the western edge of the roof. It was a small sandal, probably belonging to a child, and was light enough to have been carried onto the roof by a strong gust of wind, or perhaps by a curious bird. As she watched, the sandal was rapidly covered by snow.

The surgical team experienced great difficulty with the transplant, but the operation was eventually successful. The new heart was induced to beat, and the patient was taken to recovery. Recover she did, and before leaving the hospital she told the story of her out-of-body wanderings to a nurse with whom she had developed, over the long months of her treatments, a strong friendship. The nurse, having heard of NDE cases, attempted to verify the story by contacting people whose conversations had been overheard, and met with a reasonable degree of success. The nurse was not able to check the story of the small slipper due to continued bad weather, and when she was finally able to get one of the janitorial staff to check the roof he reported finding no such object.

Months later, the snow long gone, the nurse was working her notice before transferring out of the city, and on impulse climbed the stairs to the roof and checked the door. It was open. She walked to the western rim of the roof, and slowly along the edge. At about the mid

point of her walk she spotted and retrieved without difficulty a small, blue plastic sandal, probably the property of a young child.

Harry thought long on this story. He did not doubt its veracity. Why would the child or the nurse manufacture such a tale? Not for fame, obviously, as neither of them had even wanted their names used in the story. Certainly not for money. But if it were true, how was it possible? How could the child have *dreamed* about the sandal unless she had *known* about the sandal? And how could she have *known* about the sandal unless she had *seen* the sandal? And how could she have *seen* the sandal when at the time of the sighting her chest was open and devoid of a functioning heart?

Harry found several such cases in his first few days of research, and they gave him much to think about. He could not find it within himself to dismiss thirty million North Americans as cranks or liars, particularly when this group included many prominent citizens, people whom Harry had long admired and respected. The stories could be neither fabrications nor hallucinations. Could it really be that in such cases the spirit detached itself from the body and moved independently of it? Was that also what happened in dreams? Then what was Margaret, his girl in white? Was she more than just a manifestation of his subconscious mind? More than merely a symbolic way of communicating with his inner self? Could she possibly be a spiritual being in her own right? If so, it opened up entirely new perspectives on the whole business of creative dreaming.

He realised that he would have to face up to and deal with a concept which had played at the fringes of his mind for some time now; the idea that these episodes concerned something far removed from the subconscious mind of the dreamer; in fact quite separate from any part of the physical being. These were voyages not of the mind, but of the spirit; and taking place not within the brain, but where? Harry had rejected religion at a very early age -- barely into his teenage years -- and with it had gone the concept of his immortal soul. He was quite ready to believe that his brain/mind had several levels, as identified many years ago by Freud and still accepted, with some modifications, by mainstream psychology. In fact the whole purpose of his efforts in creative dreaming had been to reach and communicate with these

deeper levels of his mind; to seek guidance and inspiration from them. But the thought of a separate spiritual body, leaving the dead physical body and having adventures all of its own -- Harry still found the concept very difficult to swallow.

He would definitely need to think about this.

* * * * *

Harry Murphy's Dream Diary: Wednesday August 5

It was late evening, somewhere towards the centre of a great city. I was sitting in an old car; old only in years, not in condition. It was a Rolls Royce Silver Ghost, but no longer in its original colour. It had been professionally painted a high-gloss jet black, and the reflection of city lights in its immaculate paintwork resembled a night sky twinkling with distant stars. The car was in mint condition; the motor ran with a soft purr, only discernible because the car was not in motion. I was late leaving the office ... again. Very late, this time. I knew that my wife would be annoyed to find me arriving home past midnight, and I could not fault her for feeling that way. I slipped the car into reverse and backed out of my parking space. Changing into first gear I rolled across the deserted parking lot and out onto the road. The attendant's hut at the parking lot entrance was deserted at that late hour, and I drove slowly through the exit onto a quiet city street. As I crossed the sidewalk and turned left I saw that the city was not yet totally deserted. Three young men, dressed head to toe in black leather, lounged against the wall close to the lot. I was sure that they were up to no good, and I was glad to be safely beyond their reach. Nevertheless, I pressed a little harder on the accelerator pedal and left the trio behind as rapidly as possible. In my rearview mirror the dark tower of my office building receded and disappeared.

I accelerated along the slipway to the six lane freeway leading out of the city and settled to a comfortable cruising speed of one ten. I switched on the radio, pre-tuned to my favourite station, and the clear, haunting notes of Debussy's "Clair de Lune" filled the car. I crossed smoothly over an enormous bridge and watched the city skyline grow smaller in my mirror as I headed for the eastern suburbs.

The scene in my rearview mirror had now grown black, but as I swept my eyes over the glass in a routine check I saw the lights of a distant car appear and begin to close rapidly. No doubt some other poor fool working until midnight to afford luxuries he could never find the time to enjoy. As I watched, the headlights separated. Not a car, then, but a pair of motorcycles. Not a pair, but a trio. As the lights drew rapidly closer a third light split away from the pair. I eased off the gas pedal. I had no intention of throwing down any kind of challenge to a trio of

young bucks, high at least on hormones if not on artificial stimulants. I dropped back to eighty, sure that they would roar on past, barely noticing a single slow-moving car in the far right lane.

But they did not pass. Not all of them. While two of the bikes took up flanking stations, one sped past and rode vanguard. I saw his brakelight flash as he began to slow down.

I became immediately suspicious. At this speed these three idiots presented no threat to me. If any were foolish enough to challenge my two-ton automobile at high speed, there could be only one outcome; perhaps some minor bodywork might be needed on my car, but major bodywork would be needed on the riders who came into contact with it. But if they were to force me to slow down, and perhaps stop, I would be at their mercy on this dark, lonely stretch of road. I could not, would not, take such a chance.

The car purred with power as I floored the gas pedal and steered between the front rider and his colleague to my left, but just as I did so the rider in front veered left into the path I had chosen for my escape. I couldn't miss him. I immediately began to calculate the best course of action; whether to stop and use my cellphone to call for help -- and risk the wrath of the remaining two bikers -- or to continue onwards, and risk the wrath of the Provincial Police in their pursuit of a hit-and-run driver. Before I could come to any conclusion I hit the front runner head on. And drove through him.

In my rearview I could see the three riders. The two flankers seemed to be berating their friend for some reason, probably for the stupid -- if not suicidal -- piece of riding he had just demonstrated. He was incredibly lucky to be alive and still riding his bike in view of the fact that I had just -----

---- driven through him?

Time for a Reality Check.

I didn't need one. There was no need to ask myself where I was or who I was, or to try to read my driver's licence. I already knew that if I took any document out of my pocket the writing on it would flow and dance before my eyes. Motor bicycles do not dissolve when hit by large cars. Except in dreams.

In my mirror the bikes and their riders were gone, but the distant city skyline was back, aglow with a faint blue light. Inside the car the same light surrounded all objects, flesh, fabric or metal.

Please let me stay in the dream. I will not awaken. I will stay in the dream.

I opened the door and stepped out onto the hard shoulder. I took a few steps along the highway and looked around at the glowing scenery. I held my breath for fear of awakening. I took a cautious step back towards the car.....

..... and woke up.

Thursday August 6: Notes

Closer, but no cigar yet. Last time I managed to stay in my dream for about ten seconds after it turned lucid; tonight I stayed for over a minute. That's progress.

This time I was up and surfing the net by four a.m. I'm averaging two hours sleep per night. Can't go on like this for too long.

END

* * * * *

The difference between a civilised man and a savage is three days without water, five days without food or a week without proper sleep. After a week of two hours sleep per night Harry began to show serious signs of coming apart at the seams. His road manners were rap-

idly deteriorating, and his driving was becoming daily more dangerous. For the first time in his entire driving career he had started to use the horn to signal his intentions and an upraised digit to signal his arrogance. On the highway he would regularly hog the centre lane at speeds averaging one-thirty and frequently touching one-fifty kilometres per hour. On the Friday evening of his first week of partial insomnia Harry received his first speeding ticket in seventeen years. On the Saturday morning he received his second, and a three point penalty against his licence.

On the following Monday morning Harry staggered into work at 9:30 and, when Louise tactfully pointed out that five people had been waiting for him in the boardroom for over an hour, Harry growled at her to tell them all to go to Hell. Although Louise told them no such thing, by the time Harry condescended to step into the boardroom, twenty minutes later, the delegation had left.

Expecting his insomnia to be a transitory thing, Harry did not seek help. He had read that the body cannot be long deprived of sleep, and that when a certain point is passed the mind will take the sleep it needs, whatever the circumstances. He recalled stories of British soldiers during the First World War who had taken enemy trenches by approaching silently to find the entire opposing forces sleeping as soundly as babies. His grandfather had told stories of how, as a young soldier himself, he had learned to take his sleep where he could find it, which sometimes had included, he swore, marching in formation with his fellows.

So Harry waited, sleepless night after sleepless night, for his mind to seize, in desperation, an opportunity to sleep again. But it did not happen. In the first week of August he averaged two hours of sleep per night. In the second week he slept not at all.

At the office he moved as though through a thick fog, a fog which numbed all of his senses, and through which the faces and voices of his colleagues came to him muffled and vague. He countered these with equally vague responses or none at all.

Louise ran out of excuses, and delegated much of Harry's work to helpful colleagues or handled it herself. Where possible she procrastinated and hoped that by the time the issue reasserted itself Harry would be back to his old self and ready to deal with it.

At the elevator one morning the opening of the door triggered a Reality Check, and while a young finance clerk held open the door, waiting for her CEO to enter, Harry proceeded to tell her where he had come from that morning, where he was currently standing, and where he was heading. This completed, Harry withdrew his wallet and extracted his driver's licence, which he found difficult to bring into clear focus. He then asked the young clerk to pinch him and offered his cheek for this service. Recoiling in shock the clerk released the button she had been holding and the door closed on Harry. Having not felt the pinch, having been unable to read his licence, and being no longer certain where he was supposed to be heading, Harry concluded that he was dreaming and shuffled out of the building to the parking lot. Half an hour later Louise found him sitting at the wheel of his car staring vacantly through the windshield. Using Harry's cellphone she called Liz, then nudged Harry into the passenger seat, took his keys from his limp fingers, and drove him home.

Between the two of them they managed to get Harry into the house and parked him in his recliner chair in the living room. Liz thanked Louise profusely and waited with her until the cab she had called arrived. Liz knew that Harry's insomnia had reached a point where professional help was needed, and strode into the living room to confront him on this. "Harry....." she began. But Harry was soundly asleep.

Harry Murphy's Dream Diary: Thursday August 13

I was driving a black Rolls Royce along a dark highway. In my rearview mirror I could just make out the distant lights of a city skyline. It was late, and I was tired. Too many nights lately had seen me working over my desk, my colleagues long since departed for home and supper. Now it was almost midnight, and it would be another half hour before I saw my own front door. Liz would be furious with me, and who could blame her?

In my mirror I saw the lights of a distant car, which seemed to be closing on me very rapidly. I was in no mood to enter a motor race with some fool teenager, high on testosterone, nor was I eager to get into a discussion with an RCMP officer over a speeding infraction. I slowed to let the car catch up and overtake.

As the car came closer I saw the headlights separate and then close back up, and I realized that it must be a pair of motor cycles rather than a car. Since neither the Provincial Police nor the Mounties patrolled in pairs, I knew that these must be civilian bikers, and I sped up again.

I switched on the radio and the soothing sounds of Debussy's "Clair de Lune" filled the car. The bikers were closing rapidly and I saw now that there were three of them. I relaxed and, foolishly, closed my eyes. Just for a second. Just to rest my eyelids. I opened my eyes to find the car heading down the hard shoulder at a hundred and thirty kilometres per hour, twenty feet away from the huge concrete abutment of an overpass. I had no time even to jerk the wheel or press the brake pedal, and my two-ton automobile met the concrete head on.

And passed through it.

REALITY CHECK.

Not necessary. I took my hands from the wheel. The car corrected its aberrant path and came back into the slow lane on total cruise control.

The bikers had caught up to me. Two flanked me while the third took up station in front, and I saw his tail light brighten as he touched the brakes. They were trying to slow me down, to stop my car on this desolate, deserted stretch of highway on the outskirts of an unidentified Canadian city in the middle of the night in the middle of my dream.

I didn't wait for them. At a hundred and twenty kilometres per hour I opened the door and stepped out into the road. I stood in the middle of the highway and stared at the two bikers,

who had also come instantly to a stop and regarded me from fifty yards away. There was no sign of the third. I walked towards them.

"Listen up, you sons of bitches," I yelled at them "I probably have about ten seconds before I wake up, and you two bastards are going to do ten seconds worth of talking if I have to squeeze it out of you like toothpaste from a tube. So who wants to go first? Now who the Hell are you and what...."

The two turned towards one another. One of them said something like "Is he supposed to be able to do that?" and they both vanished.

I stood in the road, my temper cooling. My car had vanished with the bikers, but I didn't care. At the side of the road the trees were shining with a pale blue light. The sky now had a glow of its own, and I saw that my hands and feet had become luminous, a pale turquoise energy streaming from my fingertips.

I walked along the road, waiting for the inevitable; but it did not come. Tiring of my slow progress I decided to fly home. I leaped into the sky, a capeless Superman -- and fell onto the hard shoulder. It hurt!! I looked at my scraped hands, which seemed to be leaking translucent turquoise blood.

"OK," I said to the air "I'm ready to wake up now." But I did not wake up. "I know I'm at home, lying next to Liz, probably snoring. And Liz is hogging the blankets. So I think I'll wake up now." But still I dreamed on. From one extreme to the other, I thought. Couldn't fall asleep; now I can't wake up.

But I felt calm and unconcerned, and I had no objection to staying within the dream for a while, although I would have been glad of a change of scenery.

"Hello, Margaret!" I called to the sky. "I made it! I'm here. Got your message; read chapter twenty one and now I'm here. Come on down and we'll have a chat. Come show me how to do

your travelling trick, and we'll go for a hike in the mountains instead of along this bleak highway to nowhere."

No response. Wispy blue clouds crossed in front of an azure moon. Blue on blue, the colours from the cover of my Dreambook.

I came to a small farm by the side of the road. A long driveway of crusher-rock led past a rickety barn and a small enclosed paddock to the house, a half kilometer back from the highway. I stood for a while, knowing that I had the choice of exploring the farmhouse or continuing along the highway. I was Dreaming Lucidly, and waiting for wonderful things to happen. Where were my magic abilities? Where were my super powers? I couldn't even fly!!

I walked through the farmyard towards the house. To my left -- presumably the east -- the sky was beginning to lighten. I expected at any minute to hear a cock crow. I thought I could detect faint farm smells; silage; pig manure.

As I approached the house I saw a faint light coming from one of the upper windows. A night-light, perhaps, in the room of a child. Or the bedside candle of a farmer, rising to meet the dawn, ready for his demanding day.

The front door was small and simple, but as I approached I saw that it was bordered by a slim line of flickering flame. By the time I was close enough to touch the door the flames had grown higher and brighter, casting dancing shadows on the path behind me. I touched the flames and they jumped to my fingers, burning not like fire but like ice.

I knew what the door was. I lifted the latch and pushed it open. With a last look at the peaceful farmyard and the now distant highway, I turned to the door of yellow flame and stepped through.

Thursday August 13: Notes

I awoke to Liz's concerned, caring face. I was in my recliner, with my feet up and my head on a pillow she had placed there for me. Despite the heat of the summer evening she had wrapped a blanket around me; for comfort, not for warmth. She said "It's ten o'clock, Harry my love. You've slept for almost twelve hours. Would you like something to eat? Or have you still more sleeping to do?"

I stretched and threw off the blanket. I got up from the chair and held my beloved Liz close to me. Though I could not see them I knew that streamers of beautiful turquoise energy were flowing from me to her, and from her to me, and were surrounding us and strengthening us and protecting us from anything evil.

I felt hungry, and said so. I had done enough dreaming for one night. I knew that my sleep patterns were out of sequence, but I would correct that soon enough.

I knew that I had mastered Lucid Dreaming. Oh, I knew that I had much to learn before I was ready for my Superhero Cape, but I was ready to learn, and eager to learn. There was no hurry. I could go back any time I wanted to. I had learned how to find the doorway.

* * * * *

BEAUTIFUL DREAMER

Chapter 6:

Harry's sleep patterns rapidly returned to normal but Harry did not. Following his bout of insomnia he seemed to have undergone a change of personality. At first the differences were subtle. The old happy-go-lucky Harry had been replaced by a more sober, more morose individual. Burton's employees attributed this to the unsettling experience of the strike, with its terrible finale, and/or to the added responsibilities of his new position. In fact it owed its origin to neither of those factors. Harry was wrestling with strange, unsettling concepts which had sprung directly from his new found dreaming capability and from his recent research.

Harry had taken to the Word Wide Web like the proverbial duck to water, and now roamed the internet until the early hours of most mornings in pursuit of new data. His readings in Near Death Experiences had done no more than whet his appetite for more information on the life of the (alleged) spirit, but he had found that instead of answers his search led only to more questions, and always of increasing complexity. An NDE site which included an oblique reference to past-life regression opened an entire Pandora's Box of vexing questions. Harry read about hypnosis and suggestibility. He found sites which instructed in hypnotic technique. He learned that hypnotised subjects could easily be persuaded to speak of long past events as though they were currently living them; he read of how subjects could be regressed back beyond early birthdays and spoke of passing through a strange period of disassociation into previous lives -- lives which could later be historically verified. He located the story of his namesake, Bridey Murphy, a young American woman who, regressed to a previous life, had given extensive, often intimate detail of the life of an Irish woman dead many years. He read how a trip to Ireland had unearthed old parish records which verified the facts given by the hypnotised subject -- facts which the young American could not possibly have known. And he read how the whole thing had been discredited as a fraud, and how the discreditors had themselves eventually been discredited, and how the whole issue was now more of a mystery than it had ever been.

He read how a young child had, without benefit of hypnosis, given to her parents specific detail of a previous life in a different age and a different country; and how the intrigued parents had, at considerable expense, verified the child's tales. How a woman in the south of England had drawn to scale a map of a remote Spanish village, which compared closely to maps held in a Madrid museum of that same village -- in the sixteenth century.

From reincarnation he moved on to ghost sightings and hauntings. His first search alone furnished several thousand first hand accounts. Thence to poltergeists; to mediums and séances; to bizarre messages furnished by Ouija boards; to tales of table tipping and levitation. There appeared to be no end.

Even Harry himself could not understand the desperation with which he pursued his search for answers and explanations. Questions which had previously been of little or no importance to him suddenly required answers as a matter of dire urgency.

He turned at last to religion, which he had rejected out of hand many years before, but in re-reading the Bible he found only those same shallow stories for children which he had shunned previously; or perhaps, he conceded, stories told in terms best suited to the unsophisticated minds of the inhabitants of a land distant both in time and place. He recalled how, in a less distant time and place, he had once passed a rainy afternoon with his science master - a confirmed, card-carrying atheist. Together they had calculated what proportion of the earth's surface would become submerged if every molecule of water on the planet's surface were to be converted from vapour or ice into liquid. By condensing several million tons of cloud and melting several billion tons of polar ice, the two had concluded that the overall sea level would rise some thirty feet. Given that even the local *hills* were several hundred feet high, there would still be a large sufficiency of solid earth to allow the inhabitants of the planet to continue their surface existence quite comfortably. So much for Noah, his Ark and the great Flood. On subsequent afternoons the two of them had demolished, with much glee, tales of talking serpents (no larynx), Adam and Eve versus Charles Darwin (no fossils), the thousand year lifespans of certain biblical notables (biologically unlikely), the parting of the Red Sea

(hydrologically improbable), and the likelihood of virgin birth (the pros and cons of which severely confused the twelve year old Harry for some time afterwards). He recalled sharing the tale of these theosophical assassinations with a school chum who had turned out to be a devout Roman Catholic. The boy had patiently explained that God, being God, could do whatever he wanted to without the necessity of explaining himself to puny Science Masters. He had then driven home his point by giving Harry a bloody nose for his temerity.

Books from various websites now arrived daily, and Harry immersed himself in a study of comparative religion. He had of course known that there were alternatives to Christianity, each with its own theories of the origin and ultimate destination of mankind. He had heard of Buddhism and Islam, knew that Native Americans held to their own home-grown theosophies, and considered that there may well be a half dozen other possibilities worthy of at least a passing glance. He wasn't prepared for what he actually found.

A web search for "Religions" identified sixty four mainstream earthly religions and their major offshoots. He learned that, despite the efforts of Christianity to suppress them, the Druidic and Wiccan religions still flourished in some parts of the world. He read outlines of Confucianism and Taoism, and learned that, far from being a fabrication of horror fiction writers, Voodoo was a legitimate religion with a sizable following. While many of these offered interesting alternatives to Christian theology (he developed a special affinity for Buddhism) none of them spoke to Harry's burning basic concerns. If he were to concede that he possessed an immortal soul, Harry believed, then there were four simple questions he needed to have answered with some degree of urgency:

- Why was he so totally unaware of it?
- Where had it come from?
- Where was it all leading?
- Why was it now imprisoned in this physical body?

No single website, book or theology answered these basic concerns to anything

remotely resembling Harry's satisfaction. In the end, disenchanted, he gave up. He knew that, with or without the virtually limitless amount of information now available to him at the touch of a button, he would still have to find his own answers.

At work he became distracted and disinterested. This was clearly demonstrated at the Plant's monthly meeting when the subject of Ed Knowles' Engineering Department was tabled for discussion. Engineering had long been given credit for the very survival of Burton's Press. It was due solely to the inventive constructions of the Plant's Engineers that the old equipment had been cajoled into continued daily production. The need to manufacture parts not available elsewhere had produced, over the years, a very large, very well staffed and expensively equipped unit. Given that Burton's hardware was now brand new and state-of-the-art, the need for a large, costly Engineering Department had become moot. In the middle of a spirited, sometimes acrimonious boardroom debate on the future of the department Harry had remained strangely silent. When an agitated Ed Knowles asked Harry whether he intended to say anything on the subject, Harry had replied that it was all the same to him. Specifically he had said: "What the hell does it matter? Do whatever you want." Whereupon he left. When he eventually returned to his office Louise asked where he had been for the last three hours. Harry, with apparent surprise, said "Sorry, didn't I say? I've been down at the Public Gardens, feeding the ducks."

Harry Murphy's Dream Diary: Thursday August 20

I stepped into the dream and entered a dimensionless sphere of silence and darkness. I floated there enjoying the tranquillity of not being. Here, time and space held little meaning. I knew that I could float here for an eternity and awaken an eyeblink after I had fallen asleep, or stay only for a second and awaken after eight hours. The darkness and silence were comforting, and I drew the stillness into myself. When I was ready I imagined the door and it was there. I moved towards it and opened it. I felt the cool fire of the flames as I stepped through.

I saw that the sun was now high in the sky, and I felt the warmth of its rays on my face. I walked through the small farmstead to the highway. I had hoped to find my dream-car here (the Rolls Royce lived up to that definition in every sense of the word) but the highway was

deserted. No matter. Today I intended to start the exploration of my new universe, and I could do this as well along this highway as elsewhere. Primarily I hoped to find inhabitants. Even the unpleasant youths from my previous highway encounter would do. I walked along the highway and called out to whoever might be within range of my voice. "Hello, Margaret. Harry calling Fairy Godmother. Come in, Godmother." When this elicited no reply I tried a new tack. "Breaker, Breaker. Come on back, Good Buddy. Breaker on Channel Nine, this is a Mayday. Come on back, anybody." When this, too, failed I gave up and simply walked. I knew that it was unimportant how far or how long I walked. Whatever time and distance might be involved I would still awaken in about eight hours in bed, next to Liz, and without the blisters or aching muscles which a lengthy walk would have normally produced. So I walked; and observed; and allowed my thoughts to drift.

I noticed that the indigo glow of the surrounding scenery seemed to have lessened since my last visit to the highway, and that my own energy streamers seemed likewise subdued. I attributed this to the fact that I was now walking along the highway in daytime, rather than night, and dim lights always seem brighter when the sun goes down. I had been correct in assuming that all of my senses were functioning at a heightened level, especially my eyesight. I could identify individual hairs in the mane of a horse grazing in a distant field. I could also hear distant sounds with particular clarity, and I thought I could still detect the aroma of the farmstead, now far behind me.

Apart from a few animals, all distant, there were few signs of life. No cars passed me. No farmers walked their fields. No aircraft left condensation trails in the high atmosphere. No distant radios sent snatches of song over the highway. No dogs barked at departing masters. On a whim I knelt in the grass by the side of the highway and peered at the ground from a distance of about three inches. No bugs. Very realistic grass, a perfectly passable dandelion, scratchy grit. No grasshoppers. No ants.

I began to grow bored, and my thoughts started to wander. Where was my elusive "Angel" now that I needed her? Where was Margaret, who had hit me on the head in order to have me open Chapter Twenty One and learn the Art of Lucid Dreaming? Here I was, as ordered, and

she had stood me up! I tried to remember her warnings from the Viking dream: Be very careful, she had warned me. Trust no-one; even your own instincts could be dangerously misleading.

But where was the danger in this tranquil setting? Not even a biting insect to spoil the serenity. No little brown snakes to frighten and confuse me. I could remember my first dream as though I had just now awakened from it. With hindsight I wondered how I could have possibly missed the visual symbolism of the dream with its snakes and sharp iron rods -- and all of it merely to tell me that Theo's job was not right for me. Yet now that I had the job, it all seemed so meaningless, so trivial. What did it matter, in the final analysis, whether I served out my days as Production Manager or Company President? Or a doctor, as my mother had wanted. Or fisherman, or farmer? Or garbage collector? After all of his days of close involvement with his Grandfather's company, what did Theo have to show for it in the end? A comfortable retirement, perhaps; but would he not be equally as comfortable in a small cottage as he was in his multi-room lakeside mansion? I knew without doubt or question that I would choose a one room shack with Liz in it over Theo's palatial estate without her. Poor lonely Theo. Poor little rich boy. I wondered where he was now.

Fifty paces ahead, in the centre of the hard shoulder, I saw the doorway. I did not know whether it had been there all along without my having noticed it, or had just sprung into being. It stood seven feet high, four feet wide and was outlined by a pale yellow flame which was hard to see under the bright sunlight. Without hurry, I walked up to it.

I looked behind the doorway and saw -- the back of a doorway. I examined it from the side, and saw a vertical line of yellow fire. It didn't seem dangerous in any way, but I recalled that my instincts were supposedly fallible and dangerously misleading. What the Hell, I thought, Nothing Ventured, nothing gained. And Fools rush in. I stepped through the door.

I found myself on hard packed grit. In front of me and to both sides the Alberta Badlands stretched to the horizon -- behind me, too, for the doorway was gone. Large stone pillars surrounded me, abstract sculptures of hard rock left standing when wind, weather and time

had eroded the sandstone and softer rock from their outer edges. There were no evident pathways; no roads; no trails.

Theo was here. Somehow I knew that the doorway had appeared in response to my thoughts, which had been turned towards my old boss -- my old friend. I could feel that Theo was close, and I knew I had no need to seek him out. All I had to do was walk. My instincts would guide me, I knew. Maybe into danger. Maybe not. Fools rush in.

I climbed from the sea of sand onto an island of rock and started along a spiralling ledge which took me around and up. Well before I saw it I knew that in the wall of rock to my right, about fifty feet further along the ledge, was the opening to a cave. I walked the fifty feet, and stood by the entrance.

I stepped into the cave and paused there, letting my eyes accustom themselves to the dim light after the scorching blaze of the desert sun. At the back of the cave I saw movement, and heard sounds. The sounds were the unmistakeable slurpings and slaverings of a pack of scavengers enjoying a feeding frenzy. Dogs of some kind; Hyenas, possibly. But what had this to do with Theo? I could still feel his presence, somewhere nearby. I felt no warning tingles of fear; the hairs on the back of my neck did not rise; a cold sweat did not break out on my forehead. Yet should I turn and leave now, I wondered, before these beasts became aware of my presence. I remembered well Margaret's warning that my instincts could be dangerously misleading. If these beasts turned on me and attacked, would I suffer real-life physical damage as a result of their bites?

As I moved closer to the beasts the first of them sensed my presence and turned. It was not a hyena, nor any member of the canine fraternity that I recognised. It was a tall, slim beast with matted fur, a long pointed snout and a mouthful of huge, white teeth. The animal dropped the hunk of meat it held in its jaws and snarled at me. The remainder of the pack rapidly followed suit. The largest of the animals began to move towards me.

As the beasts parted I got a glimpse of their prey, a huddled lump lying against the far wall of the cave, the remnants of some largish animal, possibly a deer. To my amazement the lump seemed to be moving, trying to turn. It was still alive. The lump rolled onto its side, propped itself onto an elbow and raised its head.

"Hello, Harry," Theo said. "What the devil are you doing here?"

I saw a nightmare version of Theo. Not the plump, jovial friend of my working days but an emaciated shell. Here and there great bites of flesh had been ripped from the living body, which oozed a dark purplish fluid onto the cave floor. As I watched, one of the beasts, having dismissed any threat that I may have presented, returned to the frail body and set its teeth into Theo's arm, high, by the shoulder. Twisting its powerful neck the animal ripped a chunk of living flesh from the arm. The jagged wound began to drip dark blood. Theo glanced casually at the terrible injury.

"Won't be long now, Harry. They've been eating me for years, you know. All those years I thought it was indigestion, but it was these boys here, eating my innards. Not much left for them to eat, now though. Won't be long."

I screamed, and screaming ran out of the cave to fall from the narrow ledge down to the sand, a long way below. Down and down.

Thursday August 20: Notes

I was screaming when I awoke. I pretended that the effects of the nightmare were fleeting, so that Liz could be calmed and return quickly to sleep. When I was certain that she slept I got quietly out of bed and went downstairs. I turned on every light in the living room and poured a large glass of Jack Daniels. On second thoughts I drained the glass and took the bottle. There would be no more sleep for me that night.

By the last week in August Harry had achieved a record of sorts. He had taken more time off in the previous three months than in his entire working career prior to that period. While he could still count on the loyalty and support of the majority of Burton's employees, some relationships were beginning to show signs of strain. The old, warm and witty Production Manager had turned into a sombre, snappy short-tempered Chief Executive and, for the first time in his life, people were going out of their way to avoid him. He could on occasion be mean and hurtful even to those who had previously been as close as family. When he saw Louise collecting donations in a large brown envelope he snapped "Not another Burton's charity case! What am I expected to support this time? Another new baby? Somebody's wedding? Or have they finally started begging for help with their kids' education?"

Close to tears Louise explained "It's just the weekly kitty for Theo's flowers, Mr. Murphy. I don't ask you because you've told me before not to bother you with it, but some of us just like to make sure that Mr. Burton has fresh flowers in his room every week, since he has no family do this for him. The doctors say it's only a matter of a few weeks now, maybe even days, and we....."

"Theo's room? Doctors? What are you talking about, Louise?"

"Why, Mr. Burton's cancer. They were talking about more surgery, but now they say....."

"Theo has cancer?"

"Oh, Mr. Murphy, I *knew* you hadn't heard me. They said you didn't *care*, but I knew it was just that....."

"Yes, never mind that! About the cancer?"

"I swear I've tried at least six times to tell you!! Theo had to cut short his cruise and come home when he got these terrible pains, and the doctors found advanced colon cancer.

They operated at once and started radiation and chemo, but it was too late, it had spread everywhere. Oh, Mr. Murphy, it's eating him alive! He isn't the Theo we knew any more. You really should see him, I know that he would love to see you before..... before..... and there's so little time now. He's stopped all treatment, not that it was doing any good, and....."

"Where is he?"

"He's in the cancer ward at the Queen Elizabeth Health Sciences Centre. I have the room number in my purse, I'll get it....."

Harry was already on his way.

The visit was too little, too late. The man in the hospital bed was not Theo. He had lost at least half of his body weight, and his colour was not that of any living being Harry had ever seen. The doctor spoke quietly with Harry, but it was doubtful that Theo could have been disturbed if they had shouted to each other across his bed. "We're keeping him free from pain, Mr. Murphy, and that's about all we can do now. Despite what you see, your friend is a very tough man. He's still fighting. But he can't win, not now. He should have come to us a year ago, when the first symptoms started to show. But then that's the trouble with so many forms of cancer, the early symptoms are often petty and get ignored. By the time they're a real discomfort it's too late. Anyway, there's no profit in diagnosis by hindsight. I'll leave you to visit with your friend."

There was nothing Harry could do; nothing he could think of to say. He sat by the bed, held Theo's limp, grey hand, and wept for his friend.

Harry Murphy's Dream Diary: Tuesday August 25

There were two gates in the dark sphere. One, I knew, led to the small farmstead by the empty highway, and the other led into the Alberta Badlands and Theo's cave. I had to return to the cave and fight the beasts which were killing Theo, but I did not know how. I believed that I

could find the courage if only I could think of some way to fight them. Going unarmed into that cave would not be the act of a brave man, but that of a suicidal fool. How could I fight an entire pack of wolf-sized beasts, equipped with razor sharp claws and inch long canine teeth? I remembered very well Margaret's warning to me that injury here could result in real, physical wounds, and I had tasted a small sample. My fingers had taken close to a week to regain their normal flexibility and the thumb still gave me some problems. If I died in the cave, defending Theo, how would it help him? And what would happen to my sleeping body in the process.

I needed to find a weapon of some kind. If I could only find my way back to the mansion which my parents had owned in a dream from a few weeks ago, there was a store in the middle of a small shopping mall which had exactly what I needed. But how to go there? Was it even possible? Did the mall continue to exist after my dream ended?

I knew too little, and needed to know so much.

Shunning the door to the wild lands I plunged through the farmstead and ran to the highway. I stood in the centre of the road and howled. My emotions were as real as the pain and guilt I had felt at Theo's bedside, and I could not see how any creature within hearing range of my cries could ignore them. But no-one came.

Tears ran down my cheeks and fell to the asphalt. Even in my grief I marvelled at the realism of the Lucid Dream experience. I knew very well that my eyes were closed in sleep, and probably dry, but when I wiped a knuckle over my eye it came away wet. I licked the back of my hand and tasted salt. I felt the sun, hot on my face, and a small breeze which cooled my tear-streaked cheeks. I had no need to perform a reality check, for none was needed now. I was able to move from awake to dreaming and back again without a break in my stream of consciousness or a blank spot in my memory. I knew exactly where I was.

It was becoming obvious that I could expect no help in my attempt to save Theo's life. I had no

idea whether this was even possible, but I was committed to try. I deeply regretted that I had not noticed Theo's situation in time to visit while he was still conscious. I wondered whether he had known I was there; whether he had heard me weeping over his wasted body. When I had last visited my mother I had sat by her still, unresponsive form and talked to her for almost an hour. The nurses had assured me that she could hear me, but due to her illness she was not able to respond. In my mother's case, too, I had left things too late. I had let her slip into a coma -- her final coma, by the doctor's testimony -- before I could find the time for a trip to England, and, like Theo, I had let her slip beyond my reach.

I almost stumbled through the doorway before I noticed it, and I leaped back on contact with the cold flames. I was not quite ready to go to Theo's aid, but I knew that I could not put it off much longer. And aid him I would, even if I had to fight off the beasts by hand. I looked around for something to take with me for use as a weapon; a tree limb; a fencepost; a rock of any size. But there was nothing. I clenched my fists. I had those, and my teeth, and my feet. I was not unarmed. I leaped through the doorway.....

.....and stood on a stretch of wet sand by the Atlantic ocean.

This was a seaside resort at the peak of the summer season. It was night, probably sometime in the small hours of an August morning. The holiday makers were asleep in the hotels and Bed-and-Breakfast establishments fronting the promenade. A lone policeman patrolled the boardwalk, but when I tried to speak with him he could neither see nor hear me. A dog trotted past and looked up as I whistled to him. The moon was so bright that it cast sharp-edged shadows onto the pavement.

This was Skegness, a seaside resort on the east coast of England. It was the location of the "Full-Care Retirement Home" where we had sent my mother to die. We had chosen it because a room was available overlooking the ocean (at a staggering cost!) and I did not regret that choice even though there was no evidence that my mother had ever enjoyed the view. I could see the house now, about a half kilometre away.

It had not been my thoughts of Theo which had opened the door for me this time, but thoughts of my mother. That was a valuable lesson, and I would think about it -- later. I walked towards the house, a converted Victorian Mansion, in which the many rooms had become as many expensive wards, patrolled day and night by competent medical staff, who, despite their skills, could do little for most of their patients save keep them clean and pain free while they waited to die.

The main door was closed and locked against the night, but opened easily when I turned the knob. As I stepped in I saw that there were two doors, the one which I had opened and the more solid door which I had stepped through as if it were made of mist. Another lesson to be dissected at leisure, later. I climbed the stairs.

There were sounds from various rooms, not surprising since I suspected that the conventional view of day and night had little meaning to most of the residents. I found my mother's room, and went in without bothering to open the frail door from the upstairs hall.

I stopped in sudden shock. My mother was alert and awake. She was struggling on her bed against the combined efforts of three white coated assailants. Two large men held her by the upper arms, their strong fingers fully circling her thin biceps. A third man struggled to find a suitable injection point for the huge hypodermic, filled with an oily red fluid, which he held in his right hand. As I watched, he stuck the needle deeply into her upper thigh, injecting the fluid rapidly and forcibly, while my mother shrieked in pain. Dropping the empty hypodermic he reached into a pocket and withdrew a second. But he was not going to have any opportunity to use it.

Hurling myself at the doctor -- as I supposed he was -- I grabbed the needle from his hand and threw it to the floor. Pulling back my fist I prepared to flatten his nose and hopefully break it, but with amazing agility he wriggled free of my grasp and joined his colleagues who were half way through the now open door. I let them all go. My mother was unconscious, and I lowered her to the bed. Once I had assured myself that she was comfortable I left quietly and went in search of the "medical professionals" who had just eluded me. We had business that was far

from finished. My mother would be out of that "Full Care" home before forty-eight hours had passed, but that was not even the half of what I intended to visit on this establishment. How many others had committed their loved ones to the "care" of these insane "professionals" I wondered? How would they feel when I told them how their loved ones were treated after the visitors had left and the window shades were drawn?

I raged through the building, but found no-one awake. I was not surprised that those I had encountered were not to be found; in hiding somewhere, probably. Wisely. I was in a way relieved, since I could not have promised that self control would overrule my urge to punish these men severely. But there was no-one there; not in the surgeries, not in the administrative offices; not in the rooms of their patients.

I had done as much as I could for the present. I would return at a more appropriate time, and in a more appropriate manner.

I looked for and found the doorway. I ran into it.

Tuesday August 25: Notes

I awoke so angry that I disturbed Liz. "What's wrong, Harry?" she asked, but I could only answer "I must go to England." She said "Then so must I," and got up to pack with me.

This will be my last entry into my Dream Diary, as I no longer believe that recording my dreams in this manner serves any purpose. I'm not sure that it ever did.

END

Liz and Harry left for England at ten twenty that evening, having paid a minor king's ransom for the privilege of a last minute booking. Air Canada had explained that they could offer a "compassionate rate" if Harry were to be travelling on urgent personal business such as,

say, to attend a funeral, but Harry had only barked that he was travelling in an attempt to avoid one. The flight touched down at Heathrow at ten o'clock the following morning. Liz had slept little; Harry not at all. They followed a familiar route through the airport to connect with the Avis courtesy bus, and thirty minutes later they drove their rented Vauxhall Vectra onto the A1M Motorway heading north. At midday they pulled off the road to lunch at a small pub. Tired from the long flight, Harry would not take the chance of washing down his steak and kidney pudding with a pint of British bitter. A split second of indecision could see him aiming the Vectra down the wrong side of the motorway, with who knows what results.

They arrived in Skegness just before three o'clock, and drove directly to the Retirement Home. Harry had told Liz the detail of the dream but she had said only that he must, of course, reassure himself that his mother was as well as could be expected in the circumstances. Privately Liz was very concerned about Harry's mental stability, and had agreed to travel with him not because she shared his concern but because she was afraid to let him travel alone.

They entered the home without knocking and went straight to the administrative office where Matron Agnes Campbell looked up in surprise from her desk.

"Mr. and Mrs. Murphy! What a lovely surprise! I had no idea you were in England! Now you'll be wanting to visit with your Mum, I presume."

"Before we go anywhere, Ms. Campbell, I'll be wanting to discuss the way you treat defenceless elderly patients in the middle of the night when you think yourself safe from watching eyes!"

Over the next ten minutes Harry learned much and spoke little. He was informed that:

-- No treatments whatsoever were given after 'lights out' (ten p.m.) except in an extreme emergency:

-- No such emergencies had occurred at the home in at least the last two years.

-- To ensure a good night's sleep by all, any unstable patients (who might disturb others) were housed in a separate wing and were usually given a sedative (subject to a doctor's concurrence) with their evening cup of tea or cocoa. For a further guarantee of nocturnal peace and quiet, a night nurse was always on duty in this wing.

-- There were no live-in male medical staff. Only three of the nurses lived at the home, and these were all female. At the present time there was one male nurse on staff. He normally left by six thirty, and was in any case on vacation in Ireland where he had been for the previous two weeks.

-- The home used the services of a local doctor who called at two p.m. on Mondays and Thursdays for routine medical needs, such as prescription refills, and was on call at other times if needed. The last time the doctor had visited after midnight was four months previously, when he had been summoned to the bedside of a terminally ill, ninety eight year old patient who had passed away peacefully.

-- Neither the Matron nor any of her staff would under any circumstances tolerate the holding down of a distressed patient for injection of medication. In rare cases where patients became agitated before receiving injected medication they were given a mild sedative (or a cup of tea, which the Matron believed to be much the same thing) and calmed by quiet conversation. Never, under any circumstances, were they held down by force. Furthermore, this was irrelevant to present circumstances, since all current patients were so accustomed to hypodermic injections that they barely noticed receiving them.

-- Mrs. Murphy Senior had required no such treatment. While remaining comatose, she gave no evidence of being in pain or otherwise distressed, and her current therapy consisted mainly of ensuring that she was kept clean and comfortable, free from bedsores, blood-clots, and the several other complications which could plague patients confined to bed for extended periods.

In conclusion, Ms. Campbell asked -- *demanding* -- that Harry give her the name of whoever had put such evil ideas into his head. Whoever it was would most certainly be meeting the home's lawyer, and the meeting would not be a pleasant one. Agnes calmed down enough to tell Harry and Liz how fortunate it was that Susan -- Mrs. Murphy Senior's primary caregiver -- was absent from the home at the moment. Susan would be absolutely heartbroken to think that anyone could believe for one minute that she might allow such things to happen to a helpless old lady entrusted to her care. And *Matron* would be extremely unhappy, Aggie Campbell advised, looking sternly at Harry, if such accusations should somehow find their way to Susan, or to any other of the home's devoted and dedicated caregivers.

Harry's mother was clean, comfortable and totally comatose. She showed no reaction at all to Harry's presence, but, on the assurance that she could hear him Harry talked with her and sang to her (songs from his early childhood) for an hour before leaving. The two then checked into a local hotel, taking a room next to the elevator shaft since it was the last available, and caught up on lost sleep. Despite the continuous rumbling of the old elevator just feet from their heads, both travellers slept well and deeply. Harry did not allow himself to dream.

They had intended to spend four days in England, this being Harry's estimate of the time it would take to place his mother in a new location. A phone call to Air Canada quickly revealed that, being high season, it would not be possible to travel before this date unless they wanted to hang around the Airport on the slim chance of obtaining a standby seat. Liz suggested that Harry should use the four days as a short -- but much needed -- vacation. While she would accompany Harry on whatever he decided to do, Liz had some urgent business to attend to first. After a short conversation with hotel management she was able to plug her laptop into the room's phone line and was soon receiving and sending mail as readily as though she were at the Halifax office.

Left to his own devices Harry drove the small Vauxhall along the seafront and headed out of the town to the northwest. The reflexes needed to drive on the "wrong" side of the road soon returned, and he handled the car with ease, changing gears without thought and hurtling around the narrow, winding backroads as though he had never left them. He stopped for a pint

and a pie at a small village pub and afterwards decided to explore for a while before getting back into the car. Harry's father had always described an English village as five houses, a church and two pubs; if it had three pubs it was classed as a small town. Harry quickly found the second pub, and on continuing his tour he noticed the small greystone tower of the village church. Not being particularly interested in church architecture he turned back to the carpark and his rented Vauxhall, but turned again as the church bell began to strike the hour. Something about the small stone tower attracted his attention, but he could not immediately say what. As he walked closer he saw that to get to the church he would have to cross an open meadow through which a small footpath straggled. Climbing a stile into the field he crossed the meadow and came parallel to a small, enclosed cemetery, separated from the field by a low concrete wall. By now he had realised that the church and its enclosure had reminded him of his first recorded dream, which seemed so long ago. The resemblances were, he saw, quite superficial. While the tower was similar the graveyard was much smaller and much better maintained. Although the stones seemed well worn and obviously old, they were for the most part upright and placed in neat rows. Looking closely at the low wall he saw the stubs of metal railings which had been cut down and removed many years ago. But the overall scene was very evocative, and Harry remembered the mood of the dream -- not substantially different from the way he felt today.

He stood on the path for a while, taking in the scene. In contrast to the threatening skies of the dream, a hot sun shone, with passing clouds providing an occasional welcome patch of shade. As Harry turned to retrace his path he saw movement in the grass at the base of the stone wall. Disturbed from its afternoon nap, a small green and yellow snake wriggled across the path and vanished into the longer grass of the meadow. A harmless English Grass snake, Harry knew. No deadly fangs; no symbolic messages. He walked on to retrieve his car.

Back home in Canada Harry brooded. While he went daily to his office he handled the work there without spirit and with the minimum required effort. He answered phone calls listlessly, and two out of three callers asked whether Harry was "alright". The same question was being asked of Louise at least a dozen times each day. Where decisions were required Harry was arbitrary and uncaring. When colleagues called to question them he was abrupt to

the point of rudeness. Ed Knowles called by his office to discuss the Board's recent decision to cut Engineering's budget for the next quarter by sixty percent, and Harry told him brusquely that the cut was not open to discussion or debate, and that in future he should not call on the Chief Executive Officer without first making an appointment. When he gave essentially the same response to Mick Shaw the Pressroom boss countered with "I thought we'd gotten rid of the Dictator of Burton's, but I see that we just replaced him with an older version." Harry did not look up from his desk. Mick's barb had little impact, if Harry even heard it at all.

* * * * *

Harry had discontinued entries in his dream diary, which now lay alongside a large collection of tiny slips of notepaper in the bottom drawer of his bedside table. He made no more efforts to implant subconscious instructions regarding the memory of dreams, nor did he make any preparations to ensure lucidity. Such planning was no longer needed any more that he needed to prepare mentally to start his car or drive to work. All of this was now habitual and automatic.

He lay on his back in bed and focussed on his breathing. He felt the air move in and out of his lungs, and he relaxed his muscles. Within three breaths he felt the dark sphere form around him and the focus of his mind shifted from waking consciousness to dream. He floated in the emptiness and stilled his mind. When he was completely relaxed and calm he called for the doorways. Selecting one at random he floated through into the dreamworld.

He was on a wide dirt-road which passed through a lightly wooded area. He had selected this place at random, having no intention of staying here long. He had thought long and hard on the lessons learned in the last few lucid dreams, and was now ready to put some of his new knowledge to the test. He had located Theo and his mother not by visualising their location -- in Theo's case he could never even have guessed at the strange destination. His thoughts had been focussed on the *person*, and some strange dream mechanism had taken him

to them. Harry saw nothing odd in this. Awake, many aspects of technology were total mysteries to him. He had only the vaguest idea of how a television or cellphone worked, and yet he used them every day. He had no idea how gravity held him to the surface of the earth, and yet he spent no time at all worrying about the possibility of falling off it.

He focussed on Margaret, on the appearance which she had always chosen to present to him so that he might be comfortable. He closed his eyes and pictured her face. He expanded the vision to that of a young girl in a white dress holding a small black prayer book. He held the vision, focussed on it to the exclusion of all else.

"Hello, Harry," she said.

He opened his eyes to find himself still on the dirt road through the small copse. Margaret stood in front of him, exactly as envisaged.

"We have to talk," he said.

"Yes. Let's walk along a way. There is a small lake a little further where we can sit for a while."

"Why walk. Take us there."

They sat by the side of a small lake. Behind them a heavily laden haywagon trundled along the road. Across the lake a young doe stretched her graceful neck to the water to drink.

"Very nice," Harry said. "Did you make this?"

"No, I didn't make it. This place was made a long time ago, and its maker is not known. As long as people visit and take pleasure from this place it will endure. The energy of their love sustains it. You want to know why I did not come to help you when you called for me."

"Yes. I know that you heard me."

"I did hear you. And I wanted to come; but I was forbidden."

"What? Forbidden? Who could forbid you to come to me?"

"I have my superiors, too, Harry. There are many powers above me, and I must often accept their better judgement. As I am sent to guide you, there is someone who guides me, and he told me that it was best not to interfere. Not yet."

"Who told you that? God?"

"No, not God. Would it help you if I put a name to him? He has used many names. Would it comfort you if I gave him a title? If I said "My Boss" ordered me not to help you?"

"Is he an Angel, your Boss?"

"That is a strange question from someone who calls Christian lore "a load of crap written for children and people of small mental capacity". But if you like, you can consider my Spirit Guardian to be an Angel. Would you like me to list some of the names he uses for you to choose one?"

"No. No matter. Why did he forbid you to come to help me?"

"Very simply, because you were doing so remarkably well on your own. We have been trying to identify a number of evil spirits who have formed an attachment to you and are using you for their own purposes."

"You warned me about these 'beings' before. Just who are they?"

Margaret did not answer immediately. She seemed to be considering how best to answer this question. "They were human once," she said at last. "And may become so again, although it will be a long and difficult path for them."

Harry waited, saying nothing, until Margaret continued.

"Christians assume that our world – 'Heaven' if you like -- is a place of perfection; that there is no pain there, no suffering. But they are very wrong. There are men and women on earth who are so perverted in their tastes and habits that when they cross over to this world their souls are damaged beyond our ability to help them. The worst of these are people who have exercised great power for their own ends; dictators, tyrants, murderers, torturers; men who have caused unspeakable suffering. They are addicted to their ways of oppression and cruelty and try to continue them here. But that is not possible – they have no physical power over their victims here, and any authority they wielded on earth is lost at their physical deaths. So they seek out the weak spirits of earth. They prey on the sick and the frail, spirits crippled by earthly suffering, deriving satisfaction from their ability to cause pain and anguish. Several of these beings have been plaguing your dreams, and we were very worried for you, as I told you when we last met. Three such creatures have been tormenting your mother. We were called to help her a few days ago but by the time we arrived we found that you were already dealing with the problem. Before we could interfere, you scared them away. We were overjoyed to find that you were able to do this. Think of it like this: A small boy is being badly bullied every day at school. His parents, or maybe his elder brother, start to hang around the schoolyard to protect him, and every time the bullies show up they jump out and frighten them away. But how long can they keep this up? They have jobs to go to; the brother has his own school to attend. Then one day the bullies strike, but before anyone can leap out of hiding the small boy turns on the bullies and puts them to flight! Imagine the joy of the parents!"

"So I've scared away the bullies! Happy ending!"

"I'm afraid not. They ran from you because your actions were so unexpected. They thought that the small boy must have a weapon in his pocket, or a previously unknown martial

arts skill; and like all bullies, they are cowards at heart. So they ran. But they will be back. They'll be back *mad*. And you *don't* have a secret weapon, Harry. The unfortunate truth is that on this level of existence they are very much stronger than you. You've frightened them off several times now. When they come back next time they will be much better prepared."

Harry gaped, sat silently for a while. Margaret said nothing.

"When these beings were tormenting my mother, it wasn't real, was it?" Harry asked at length.

"Oh yes, it was 'real'. Very painful for her. But not in the waking world. In your 'real' world your mother slept peacefully. After you had chased them away I had permission to come to you and explain what had happened, but before I could move you had called for a doorway and left. Then there was no chance to get to you before you were on a flight to England."

"Why don't you have somebody with my mother all the time?"

"Your mother has a Guardian Spirit who is with her always. It was she who called us. She cannot fight these creatures without help, and by the time help arrives"

"So they can't be stopped? Found and stopped? My mother must suffer this every night?"

"Not every night, and not for long. She is only vulnerable because she is still tied to her body. It is a very frail thread and will break soon. Your mother can then pass on to a place where these creatures cannot reach her. Until then, we will do what we can."

"So where does that leave me?"

"Where you were before. Your progress has been amazing, and your strength in this place grows daily. But I warn you again, be careful. Try to avoid serious injury here. Use caution. I will help you when I can."

"You're saying that my mother will die soon! If you can't protect her until then, I shall go to her every night, ..."

"I know. Please remember my cautions."

Harry called for a doorway and it formed in front of them. As he stepped towards it Margaret spoke to him.

"You don't need those Harry. It is a convenient way to visualize going from one place to another, but all you really need to do is hold the place or the person in your mind and you will go there."

"Thanks, Margaret, but I like my doorways. I'll keep them, if its all the same to you."

He stepped through.....

.....and was in his mother's room.

The room was quiet and peaceful. His mother seemed to be sleeping, although Harry could see no movement of her chest beneath the thin cotton sheet, and could hear no evidence of her breath even when he placed his ear directly over her lips. He realised that what he was seeing and hearing was not his mother's physical body, but the reflection of it inwherever he was now. In his dream? No, more than that, although he was not ready, intellectually or emotionally, to put a name to this place. It would mean admitting that.....what? That he was sentient in a place where he could see without eyes and hear without ears? Was this, then, an acceptance of a spiritual existence? And what was he guarding? He knew that, despite the screams and contortions at his previous visit, his mother's body had not moved, nor expressed

in any way that she was experiencing the least discomfort. Harry knew that he *must* address this issue soon, possibly with Margaret's help. But not here; not now.

He was here to protect his mother from torment and torture by these... creatures. Not human. Beings which had no counterpart in the physical, but which were a real and deadly presence in this other place. Philosophy and Theosophy must wait. The question right now was how could he *fight* these creatures?

Again Harry looked around for a weapon. Something sharp. Something heavy. Yet again the question arose, what merit would such a weapon have against something as insubstantial as a wraith? Harry recollected from something he had long ago seen in some B-grade horror movie for the nineteen sixties that wraiths were insubstantial vapour-like beings, somehow associated with misty graveyards at the darkest hours of night. How had they been fought? He strove to remember. Certainly not with a knife or any other cutting weapon. How do you attack a vapour? In his dream of Viking pirates he had effectively cut at shadows, figments of his dream, hacked them to pieces with his great sword 'Invictus'. Perhaps that was the answer. An imaginary sword to slash unreal beings. Moot, in any case, he thought, since his great sword had probably vanished with the dream. Or had it? *He* had remained; the huts and belongings of the fisherfolk had remained. His armour had not vanished.

Even as the thought formed, so did the doorway. On the far wall of his mother's room the outline appeared in the now familiar yellow flames. The doorway, to be sure, to the small fishing village on the north-east coast..... Wait. Doorways led both in and out. Perhaps this particular doorway was a way *into* the room, not out of it. Harry held his (unnecessary) breath and waited.

Nothing/Nobody entered the room. If he could only welcome them with a sword, Harry thought, it was worth risking exposing his mother to a few moments torment. She had experienced worse. He ran through the doorway.....

..... and appeared a small open space amongst the gigantic trees of the coastal rain forest of British Columbia. Monstrous redwoods towered over him, blocking the dim twilight. He could see a few stars high above the clearing, and suspected that nightfall could not be more than minutes away. The air was moist and pungent. The quiet of the place was almost tangible.

"I think this is what you are looking for."

Harry turned. A small, slim brown-skinned man was standing in the centre of the clearing. He wore a magnificent headdress of many-coloured feathers, and was dressed in a buckskin robe, beautifully decorated with beads and quills. Over his shoulder he had draped the ornamented scabbard, and across his extended palms he held the weapon which Harry had come to find. Harry took Invictus from the man, who then held out the scabbard.

"Is that my sword?"

"Yes. I took it up from where you left it in a recent visit. You left rapidly along with your Spirit Guardian. She is very strong, that one. I thought that you may have need of the weapon at a later time, and I have kept it safe for you."

"I don't know what to say. I have nothing with which to repay you," Harry said.

"Who has asked for payment? If you feel that you are in debt to me, we can discuss this later" the small man replied. "But I think that you have more urgent matters commanding your attention right now. If I may point the way?"

Harry turned in the direction of the man's outstretched arm and saw the doorway. Without question or concern he stepped through it.....

.....into his mother's room. He entered behind the three beings, who stood side by side at the foot of his mother's bed. She was staring at the three with an expression of fear and

loathing, and in anticipation of the activity to come her face was already wet with tears. Through blurred vision she saw a fourth tormenter step through the doorway. Taller than the rest and armed with a formidable looking sword which he now raised over his right shoulder. The sword was so huge that its tip carved a deep gouge into the white plaster ceiling. Yet something about this arrival was strangely familiar.

"Harry? Is it you..... but how?"

"Hello, Mother," Harry said as he swung *Invictus* in a horizontal arc, neatly slicing through the neck of the nearest creature. "Nice to see you sitting up and taking notice."

The passage of the sword through the creature's neck did not sever the head, and did not seem to incapacitate the creature greatly. But it certainly did hurt. The being hopped and howled, moving as far away from the swinging blade as it was possible to get within the small room. The other two gaped in obvious surprise as Harry prepared his second swing.

"What is it?" one asked. "It cannot be human. What is that instrument which it holds, and how is it able to harm us?"

Harry's second swing passed through the torso of the questioner, who leaped further and higher than the first, making similar sounds of discomfort.

And then they were gone. Where and how, Harry neither knew nor cared. He knew that he had hurt them, and he suspected it had a lot to do with the fact that the weapon he used was a creation of this place, and had been made by these creatures – although they had never intended that it should be turned against them. He placed the sword in its scabbard and set it down on his mother's bed. He went to sit with her and hold her hand.

"Harry, my sweetheart, how is this possible? How did you get into my dream, and where did you get that incredibly big carving knife?"

"I can't tell you because I don't understand it myself. The only thing that matters is that you're alright. And you are alright, aren't you? You know who I am. You haven't known that in over a year, Mom."

"Oh, Sweetheart, I always knew who you were, I just couldn't get my mouth to say the words that were in my mind. I think that my internal phone lines were down or something. Some of my wires were shorted out. You were here last week, weren't you? You sat at my bed and talked to me, and you sang "You are my Sunshine", and "Daisy, Daisy" to me. I've heard every word, my darling boy, and it tore at my heart that I couldn't even say Thank You. So I'm saying it now. Thank you for not giving up on me, and I'm so sorry for all the heart-ache I've given to you and Liz. Is Liz here, too, Harry? Oh that would just make it all perfect."

"No, Mom, it's just me. Liz is safe at home, sleeping."

"Oh, Harry, I'm so tired. So worn out. Sing to me now, Sweetheart, and sit by my bed, and keep those awful bogeymen away so that I can have a good sleep. Would you do that for me?"

"That's why I'm here, Mom."

Harry sat by his mother's bed and sang softly to her until she fell asleep, and when she finally slept peacefully he sat with his sword across his knees, daring evil of any kind to come within reach of his blade. The window shades eventually turned to a light grey, and sounds began to come from the floor below as the home prepared for another day. Harry stepped through the doorway leaving his mother smiling in her sleep.

When the telephone rang at breakfast he was expecting the call. Liz answered the phone and when she replaced the receiver she came around the table to take Harry's hand.

"It's alright, Liz," he said. "I know. It's mother, isn't it?"

"Yes Harry. In her sleep last night. Very peacefully, Aggie Campbell believes. She says your Mom was smiling when Susan went to check on her this morning."

"That's right. She was."

* * * * *

When Liz left for work Harry called Louise to say that he would be in late, and went back to bed. He took off his shoes and lay down on the bed in suit and tie, ready for the office. What he had to do would not take long.

His breathing slowed automatically as he prepared his mind for the dream state. Although he wasn't aware of it his pulse slowed to half normal and his temperature dropped by one half of a degree. Harry entered a state of consciousness closer to a hypnotic trance than to a dream, but such niceties were of little importance to him. He entered the darkened sphere, now softly illuminated by a growing number of doorways set in the inner surface. At the centre of the sphere Invictus hung waiting, a soft blue light outlining the great blade. Harry took the sword and strapped on the scabbard. Without conscious effort he drifted to the doorway he needed.....

.....and stepped directly into the cave.

He stood by the cave entrance and roared. The snarling pack turned as one, but did not immediately attack. Harry remained in the cave entrance, presenting a backlit target which the hounds could not ignore. He did not want to move further into the cave, where the walls diverged, as that would give the creatures a greater chance to slip past him and escape. He did not plan to leave any beast in a condition to return after he left the cave.

He stared at the red eyes of the huge animals, wondering which would attack first. They all did. The pack came at him as one, a single-minded, merciless killing machine. But then, so was Harry. He met the pack in a blur of motion, his blade sweeping through a broad horizontal arc which slashed through the beasts at the head of the pack. Using the momentum of the swing to help him, Harry leaped to his left and crouched, bringing the sword up in front and uptilted at a shallow angle. The first animal to change course and leap at the crouching figure found itself impaled.

Harry had theorised that these beasts must be close cousins to the beings he had so recently met in battle, and therefore subject to damage from the sword, but he had underestimated his weapon's power. Severed limbs remained severed. The great wounds he had inflicted at his first pass spurted a thick, dark fluid. Three of the first four attackers already lay on the cave floor, two of them unmoving while the third dragged its badly crippled body towards the cave entrance.

Two of the uninjured dogs turned on one which had lost a forelimb to Harry's sword, and while the three were preoccupied with one another he despatched them all. Twenty seconds after the fight had started Harry found himself the undisputed victor. He walked around the arena using his sword to ensure that all of the beasts were totally, irrefutably and irreversibly dead. Only when he was sure of this did he walk slowly to the back of the cave where the bundle of rags and greying flesh showed no more sign of animation than the dismembered corpses. Gently, he lifted Theo and turned the dying man towards him. Theo's eyes were closed, and his body was completely limp. Harry had come to late.

Not too late, but barely in time. Theo opened his eyes and, with much difficulty, focussed on his rescuer. "Good God in Heaven, Harry!" he said, quite distinctly and with more than a trace of annoyance, "Now you've done it! Oh, now you've put the cat amongst the pigeons! What on Earth did you think you were playing at, Harry? Just who gave you permission to interfere in my dying?"

"They're dead, Theo!" Harry said, stunned by his friend's reaction. "They're all dead! You can get well now. I killed them all."

"You certainly did!" Theo said indignantly. "Oh, yes, you did that alright. But look what you've done to *me*! I was nearly dead! Nicely done for! All the suffering behind me. Just a couple more hours and I'd have crossed over and been with Dad. I've been talking to him, you know. He's been a great source of encouragement and comfort while I was being eaten! And now I'll have to do it all over again. My God, this could add *months* to my suffering. I don't suppose you left any of them alive, by any chance? No, I didn't think so, the way you were swinging that great cleaver! I suppose I'll just have to wait here until they can send some more hounds in to finish the job. Oh, get out of here, Harry. Just go! Now, don't start sulking, I know you meant well, and I know that it was a very brave thing that you thought you were doing. But just *go* now. Shouldn't you be doing something at Burton's? I hear you got my job there. And you'd better get that bite treated, that one there on your left leg. Looks like one of the hounds got in a lick of its own. Go on, Harry, there's nothing you can do here; you've done quite enough, I think. Thanks for the thought, I suppose I should say. Off you go now."

At a loss for word or action Harry backed out of the cave and fell through his doorway directly into his bed. He looked at the clock. If he hurried, and didn't hit heavy traffic he could still make the nine o'clock board meeting. When he got out of bed and tried to stand his left calf was so sore that he walked with a pronounced limp.

At three o'clock that same afternoon Louise burst into Harry's office without knocking, grinning broadly. "Oh, Mr. Murphy, it's a miracle. They're even saying at the hospital, it's nothing short of a miracle."

"Theo, I presume?"

"Oh, yes. Did you hear already?"

"No, Louise. Carry on, please."

"Yes, it's Theo. They expected him to, you know, pass away last night, but this morning he's sitting up and talking to people. He's very weak, but, I mean, considering everything, well, they don't know what to make of it. His doctors can't say now, for sure, whether the prognosis is still terminal or what. It's a miracle, Mr. Murphy!"

"Yes, Louise, that's marvellous news! I couldn't be more pleased. Are you still sending flowers? Would you take this twenty from me? Thank you for coming straight in to tell me."

Louise left. "Poor old Theo," Harry thought. "Now he's got to go through it all over again."

* * * * *

He was at a crossroads, he knew. It was strange to think that just a few short months ago his world was organised, stable and well understood. The object of his life was clear; to make enough money so that he and his family could live comfortably, free from worry, and enjoy the finer things in life. He had achieved financial security, prestige within the community and the self assurance which followed from his private and professional successes. If anyone had asked the Harry Murphy of previous times "Who are you, really?" he would have fallen over laughing. The concept of 'finding himself' would never have occurred to him, while the question "What is life all about?" would have been too ludicrous to merit an answer. Harry remembered a bumper sticker he had received as a gag-gift on his fortieth birthday which read "He who dies with the most toys, wins." Harry had attached the sticker to the rear bumper of his new Thunderbird (his fortieth birthday present to himself) and adopted it as his mid-life philosophy. Even six months ago he might have claimed the axiom to be as good a

viewpoint of life as any other. Yet now he wrestled with questions and concepts which made his previous attitude to life seem juvenile and frivolous.

These all centred around a single fundamental question: Where did he go in his dreams?

How could he see when his eyes were closed? How could he hear voices which made no sound anywhere close to his ears? How could he move from place to place when his feet did not move from their position at the end of his bed? Who were the characters he encountered in his dreams? Had he *really* met with his mother? Had he *really* spoken with Theo? And who was Margaret, his Guardian Angel and Fairy Godmother? Was she a real being, or a creation of his own subconscious mind?

The simple answer – that *all* of the above were mere figments of his imagination – no longer held water. Harry recalled the comments of Maurice Lalonde regarding his Near Death Experience on the Toronto Freeway: "How can I be sure that I wasn't dreaming, Harry? I've dreamed all my life. I don't claim your expertise in that area, but I've dreamed enough to know the difference. I'm not dreaming now, and I wasn't dreaming then." Harry had taken the comment with a pinch of salt at the time, and had let it pass for the sake of courtesy and respect. But he now saw it as much more than empty words. His dreams were at *least* as real as waking life. If anything, his dreams were now the more real of the two; his senses were sharper and the dream experiences were altogether more solid. His dreams had become the real life, and his waking life had become the dream.

This change in attitude could not fail to produce a change in the way he viewed his waking reality. Things he had considered important were now trivial. The Chevy Blazer and late model Cadillac in his garage had been symbols of his success in the world, but were now only a means of conveyance. If anything, he felt embarrassed to be seen in the huge Caddy, which now seemed to him nothing more than a symbol of opulence and arrogance. His expensive suits and custom tailored shirts were frequently left hanging in his closet while Harry

went to work in sweatshirts and old jeans. Behind his back the titters turned to sarcasm and scorn, and finally to sorrow and concern, for Harry was quite obviously losing his mind.

Previously important matters of his office became increasingly trivial, and beneath his notice. Ren Barbour, Burton's Finance Chief, brought to Harry's attention the fact that a large customer was showing increasing reluctance to pay an account which was several months overdue. The same customer had now placed another very large and profitable order. Ren's investigations had suggested that the customer might be in serious financial trouble, and could be facing bankruptcy. Under these circumstances, he asked, should Burton's take the risk of accepting further business from this book publisher? Harry, who would not long ago have solved such a problem with ease, told Ren not to bother him with such trivial matters. When Ren very politely and patiently pointed out that he was under standing instructions to bring such matters to the CEO's attention, and that these instructions had come from Harry in the first place, Harry exploded. He leaped out from behind his desk and began a tirade against the people who were in league against him. While berating Ren for trying to trap him with a puzzle which had no solution he began to punctuate his comments with a jabbing finger. The unfortunate Finance Chief now wanted nothing more than to escape from Harry's office. Waiting outside for his turn to meet with the CEO, Mick Shaw saw what was happening, stepped into the office and placed himself between the two men. Ren thankfully withdrew. Still jabbing, Harry barely noticed that his target had changed and continued his tirade. Gently, but with an iron grip, Mick caught hold of the jabbing finger and as Harry looked up in surprise Mick held him with a steely expression.

"This has gone too far, Murph," he said. "I don't know what's wrong with you or what's to be done about it, but you can't go on like this. You need help, Sunshine! You need serious help."

Harry exploded afresh. Snatching away his entrapped hand he began to swing both fists against this new, larger threat to his safety, now yelling loudly about what he would do when he returned later with his great sword. Mick parried the blows with ease, his expression one of increasing concern for his disturbed friend. Behind Harry the door opened once more.

This was more than he could take. He turned snarling to face his new attacker, but found himself caught from behind in a grip which left him barely room to breathe. He looked up to face the new intruder and saw George Thorpe, his face a mix of alarm and concern.

“I didn’t know you were in Halifax,” Harry said meekly to his boss.

“It’s right here in your diary, Harry,” said George, lifting the leather bound book from Harry’s desk.

Mick released Harry from his stranglehold and turned to the Chairman. “Mr. Murphy was just demonstrating how he defended me against the hooligans at the battle of Burton’s.....” he began.

“I guessed that’s what it was probably all about,” George lied, “But if you would excuse us, Mr. Shaw, I’d like a few minutes alone with Mr. Murphy.”

Mick left. Louise closed the door. Harry sat opposite George and felt tears begin to run down both cheeks.

“I can’t explain, Mr. Thorpe. Mick Shaw is my friend, and like many of my friends he is a very poor liar. And so am I. I was attacking him, trying to hurt him, and I don’t know why. I don’t know much of anything right now. I think I may be mentally ill.”

“Is this to do with your dreaming experiments, Harry? Could they have unbalanced you in some way?”

“I don’t know. I honestly don’t know. Possibly. But I know that I haven’t been pulling my weight around here for some time now, and I think that the only honourable thing left for me to do is to give you my resignation. I’m sorry to land you in such a situation, Mr. Thorpe, when you’ve been so very good to me, but I think it’s for the best.”

“Well I don’t” George said. Harry looked up in surprise. “And you needn’t bother with the resignation, since I will not accept it. I don’t know what’s wrong with you, Harry, but I agree with the comment I heard on the way in here. You need professional help. Your illness may be related to your dream experiments, or it may be that I placed you into a situation for which you had neither the proper training nor adequate experience. Then I dropped Simon on you and left you to fend for yourself. And when the whole thing went sour I supported young Jensen and blamed you. It was completely down to me that you ended up in that battle zone where you so distinguished yourself. Then in some bizarre show of ‘gratitude’, I stuck you with the job and took off for Toronto. Well, Harry, I’ve let you down four times in a row, but I’m going to do the right thing by you this time. You need professional help and I intend to see that you get it. I will be behind you all the way, and so will AGI. As of today you are on indefinite sick leave, and will remain there until I receive a doctor’s statement of your complete return to health. Now, just so that people don’t think I’ve gone completely soft I’m setting you back to your previous status as Production Manager while you’re on leave. You will receive full pay and benefits at that level for however long your period of absence may last, and all medical and professional services will be paid for by AGI. Phil Sutherland has been itching for some hands-on production experience, and I intend to give it to him. Phil will move in as Halifax CEO and he’ll stay here until you’re ready to resume the position. Does that sound fair to you, Harry?”

“No, George. Not a bit. I think it’s grossly unfair..... to AGI! Fair would be to have security throw me out onto Gottingen Street. More than fair would be to give me a month’s pay in lieu of notice. Your offer is..... I don’t know what it is, but ‘fair’ just doesn’t cut it.”

“Yes, but will you shake my hand on it?”

“Gladly George, and I consider myself indebted to you.”

Harry stood and came around his desk. The two men shook hands. George left.

Harry made his goodbyes to Louise and Mick Shaw, who had waited outside the office for the outcome, and departed Burton's without fanfare. As he drove from the lot he looked back at the plant through the rearview mirror and wondered whether he would ever return.

* * * * *

Elias Sylliboy sat in his sweat lodge and waited for his spirit guide. The 'lodge' was actually a modern sauna in the basement of the Sylliboy split level ranch house by the Gold River in the county of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. Elias no longer used – no longer *needed* to use – natural or synthetic stimulants to help him communicate with his spirit guide; hadn't needed them for many years. He still found the sweat lodge useful; at the very least it relaxed him and allowed him to let go of the day to day tribulations which could otherwise get in the way. And there were the physical benefits, too. A body couldn't live in today's world without taking in toxins through virtually every orifice, including the several billion pores which his skin exposed to the elements. The sweat lodge helped to expel the toxins back out through the same holes that let them in. Elias had no such problems with his Spirit body; not due to lack of contaminants, for there were almost as many as there were toxic substances in the physical world. But Elias knew how to protect his spirit from invasion by the such poisons, and he never let down his guard. Physical poisons could make his body sick, but spiritual contamination could do infinitely more harm. He prepared himself now. It helped to pass the time while waiting.

Elias relaxed his muscles, one by one, starting with his toes and gradually moving upwards. This step alone had taken almost an hour when he had first learned the art, decades ago. Now it took him less than a minute. He slowed his breathing, lowered his pulse rate and blood pressure. He focussed attention on the heated air as it moved into and out of his lungs, carrying pure energy in with the steamy air and carrying unwanted spiritual and physical substances out into the tent. When he was ready he formed the egg. In his mind's eye he saw the bright, shining shell form around him, encapsulating all of his bodies within it. He filled the

egg with the blazing white fire of the love of God for His earthly children, and felt the wonderful relaxation of tension which it carried to him. The fierce white light burned away all evil, all cruelty, all negativity and left Elias floating in a sea of bliss. Thus cleansed and protected, he opened his eyes. Seated across from him, at the other side of the glowing coals at the centre of the 'tent' sat a small brown-skinned man dressed in the magnificent regalia of a Mi'kmaq War Chief.

"Where the hell have you been, Running Elk?" Elias asked. "You know I've been sitting here over an hour waiting for you?"

"Keep your bonnet on, Sylliboy," said the apparition. "You think you're my only customer? You think I have to come running every time you snap your fingers?"

"Listen, wise guy, *You* called *Me*. And what on earth are you doing in that Big Chief getup? You were never a Mi'kmaq Chief, Running Elk! Not even close. You were"

"I know what I was! But you're right, I did call you. And that was in a dream nearly two weeks ago, so don't give me that crap about waiting an hour for me! How come it took you nearly two weeks to get the fire lit? An electric fire at that!"

"Oh, I had a spot of family trouble. Patty ran into complications with the new baby. Had to go in to Halifax for a few days. You know, they took the baby out and fixed it up and put it back inside her! Amazing what they can do...."

"I know about your granddaughter's baby. Don't worry she's going to be fine. And the baby is a boy."

"I know *that*! We're not living in the stone age, you know. You never hear of Ultrasound?"

“I forget sometimes, Elias. The baby will be a healthy boy and he will be called Thomas, and he will grow up to become.....”

“Don’t spoil the story, Elk! I don’t want to know how it comes out. Anyway, what do you want from me, now that we’ve finally got together?”

“The Spirit Council ask a favour of you, my son. Not far from here a good man has missed his footing on the path and needs your help to find his way back. He wanders in dangerous lands and he is neither knowledgeable nor able to defend himself. It is a miracle that he has not already been badly harmed. Not even the Council understands how he is able to continue, and yet he presses deeper and deeper into danger.”

“How did he get there? Is this yet another man dabbling with forbidden magics? If so I want no part.....”

“No, Elias. This man is innocent, and of good spirit. His soul was well along the path to rejoin with his Gods, but something has happened; something has gone very wrong.”

“What do you mean, ‘gone wrong’. Things don’t just ‘go wrong’. What was he dabbling with?”

“He did nothing other than examine his dreams. Nothing that any child in our culture couldn’t handle with ease. But he met up with Dream Riders and they have enticed him into their world.”

“So the Riders threaten him?”

“Yes, but so far, in several encounters, he has bested them! This is a very strange thing, but we cannot count on it to continue. Elias, the man’s very soul is at stake. Will you help him?”

“No, Running Elk, I will not. I am nearly eighty years old, and my body is tired. My bones ache in the mornings, even before the cold weather is upon us. I think that soon I will rid myself of this old bag of bones, and come to join you where I, too, may dress as a Mi’kmaq Chief and keep old men waiting on my pleasure. I’m too old and too feeble for this. Get one of the younger men to do this thing for the Council.”

“None of the younger men can do this, Elias. Your body is old and frail, truly, but in the land of dreams you are more powerful than any. Only you can help this wandering soul. Say that you will reconsider.”

“No, Running Elk, I will not reconsider. I am neither able nor willing to help this wandering white man. Find another to help him.”

“White man? Who said he was a white man? Is it then so small a thing as the colour of the man’s skin which causes your reticence?”

“Don’t think to trap me with words, Running Elk. Find someone else.”

* * * * *

BEAUTIFUL DREAMER

Chapter 7:

He hadn't retired but it certainly felt that way. For the first time Harry understood why so many men refused to accept that, for them, that day would ever come. He faced the question which had always struck fear into the hearts of the bravest of men: "What am I going to do with all of this time?"

He wandered through the gardens, at home in Halifax and at the cottage, where the fierce midsummer heat was starting to wane now, and occasional mornings carried a hint of the turning of the earth towards fall. He marvelled at the beauty of the morning mists, flowing in from the ocean and giving to Liz's seaside garden a hint of surrealism until the sun rose high enough to burn them away. The stillness of the cottage, which he had once found peaceful and energising, had begun to feel stifling and oppressive.

In a sealed cardboard box on a garage shelf he found a hoard of old paperbacks, musty treasures from his children's early readings. He dug through the damp books and found a copy of "Treasure Island", a favourite of his own youth. Rereading the little book was like being reunited with a long lost childhood friend. Back in the box he found works by Dickens and Trollop, by Hemmingway and Shaw. At the very bottom of the box he found a dog-eared copy of "Reach for the Sky", Paul Brickhill's biography of Douglas Bader, the legless World War Two fighter ace and one of Harry's childhood heroes. His problem of what to do with his time was solved. For a while.

He returned to his computer, and renewed his recent acquaintance with the Web. He revisited old sites and found new ones. He became fascinated for a short time with UFO phenomena, which he often found associated with his early searchings amongst the occult and the arcane. But the endless discussions of "Are we alone in the Universe?" could not sustain his interest for long. In any case, he had begun to suspect that if mankind was truly destined to

explore the universe it might best be done by leaving his physical bodies in safe storage somewhere back on Earth.

He stumbled by accident on a website which fascinated and repelled him in equal measure, and for the next two days Harry moved through the netherworld of Internet Pornography. He witnessed sights and concepts previously unseen and unsuspected throughout his forty seven years on the planet. An accidental click on one such website took Harry into a subculture which involved very young children in these activities, and which so sickened him that he turned off his computer in abject disgust and pulled out the wallplug for good measure.

He turned once more to the world of his dreams – although strictly speaking he no longer needed to sleep in order to enter the dreamstate. Given reasonably peaceful surroundings and a comfortable place to relax Harry could enter the dreamstate within seconds. The question of whether he was ‘asleep’, ‘self-hypnotised’ or merely ‘refocusing his awareness’ never entered his head.

In dream after dream he found himself wandering through unknown surroundings, always pulled towards a horizon which never came closer. He could be striding down a lonely highway or along the crowded sidewalks of some strange city. One dream seated him in a dugout canoe behind the broad shoulders of a dark skinned man who refused to turn or speak throughout the long, fruitless journey. Another set him once again on the seat of a drop-handled sports bicycle, pedalling furiously along a winding country road towards a destination never known, never seen and never reached. The common factor was the pull. He was desperately eager to go somewhere, but had no idea where.

After his first two weeks of enforced idleness Liz quietly and gently reminded Harry that a condition of his sick leave was that he should seek and receive professional help.

“I don’t think that’s going to work for me, Liz,” Harry told her. “I have this overwhelming feeling that there’s somewhere I should be going and something I should be doing.

When I get there and do whatever it is that I have to do, all this weight will be lifted from me. Everything will be fine, just as soon as I work out where the hell I'm supposed to go."

"Harry, Darling, that's just part of the sickness. A symptom of whatever it is that's wrong with you. Depression is almost certainly a part of it; and one symptom of depression is this urge you feel to get up and go somewhere. Anywhere. Just somewhere other than where you are. A friend of mine in college was depressive and it was nothing unusual for her to get up in the middle of the night and drive for three, four hundred kilometers just for the relief she felt by the act of 'going somewhere'. She told me the destination was totally unimportant just so long as she kept moving."

"Oh, I don't think I'm depressed, Liz. It's not so much that I'm sad, more like that I'm driven; unsatisfied. It's like I've something very important to do but I can't remember what it is, and it's driving me crazy – no pun intended!"

"Well I'm glad your sense of humour is still alive in there somewhere, Harry. But 'depression' isn't just about being sad. There are all sorts of emotions involved, and not the least of them are fear and anger. Why don't you use your new computer to do some research into it. One thing you'll find right away is that Depression very often has a bio-chemical cause. It's as simple as a short-circuit in an electrical gadget; the brain is just not making the connections it should, and a simple pill can often supply these chemicals and put the whole thing right for you."

"I don't know, Liz. I don't think so."

"Harry, I think your biggest problem could be you're just not ready to admit that you might have a mental illness of some kind. That's not surprising and not unusual. People still think in terms of padded cells and barred windows when they think of mental illness. There's an awful stigma attached to it. But you owe it to yourself at least to find out. Not to mention that you owe it to AGI, and to George. And to me. Let me make an appointment for you. George Thorpe's office gave me a contact who they say is one of the best men in Canada. You

don't have to admit to anything, just go along and talk to this man. How on earth can it hurt you just to talk?"

"Alright, you win, you silver tongued little devil. You've talked me into it. But if they put me away I want you to promise that you'll come and visit me. Every day."

"Harry, I swear that if they put you away they'll have to put me away right along side of you, alright."

"Deal."

* * * * *

Norman James Arrenberg polished his gold-rimmed spectacles and opened the leather bound portfolio which his secretary/receptionist had placed on his desk. The portfolio looked as though it contained nothing more than a small sheaf of notepaper, but Arrenberg knew better. The folder contained gold. A Corporate referral. Before he even saw the file on his new patient Doctor Arrenberg had opened a large loose-leaf binder which he kept in the book-case behind his desk for easy reference. His secretary received regular updates to the binder from the service to which her boss subscribed by means of a monthly fee. The file was therefore up-to-date and accurate, and contained vital financial information not on the good doctor's patients, but on their employers and insurance companies – that is, on those who paid the bills. Within a few seconds Arrenberg found the data he sought and replaced the binder. This Mr. Murphy was apparently a senior and much valued executive of a stunningly wealthy corporation with plants in every major Canadian city. And the man himself seemed to be seriously disturbed. The confidential background information on his new patient suggested that he had been overheard talking to himself on several occasions, had experienced lapses of memory during which he failed to recognise colleagues of many years acquaintance, suffered from fugues and anxiety attacks and even had a recent history of violent physical outbursts. Pure Gold. Arrenberg recalled cases, some recent, where his accumulated fees had eventually

exceeded the limits which the insurance companies were prepared to pay on behalf of his patients. He had then been forced to terminate these cases by referral to a public mental health practitioner. But the top page on his current file made it quite clear that this 'AGI' organisation clearly understood that he accepted only private patients, that he gave no time guarantees on patient recovery (in fact he gave no guarantees at all), that his fees were \$300 per one hour session with additional charges for special services. And in the little box marked "Cost of treatment not to exceed....." someone had written "No limit established."

"No Limit." Pure gold. He hoped that this Mr. Murphy was as sick as his notes suggested. He would be careful not to suggest chemical therapy until he had established a close rapport with his new client. It would be a real tragedy if the man were to stumble onto one of the new psychotropic drugs and be cured by a simple pill. First let's establish some trust with Mr. Murphy, he thought, and then very gently let's lead him to the conclusion that pills are rarely the answer. It can be very dangerous to put these powerful mood-changing drugs into one's system and you never can tell what side effects may crop up. Done carefully, he would be able to write in his file "Patient refuses to consider drug therapy." It looked so much better coming from the patient. Pure Gold.

He pressed a small button on the multi-purpose telephone/intercom device which graced his heavy oak desktop, and five seconds later his receptionist was showing the new patient into his office.

Arrenberg saw a man of medium height, fairly trim with just the beginnings of a middle-aged spread showing beneath his old, paint-stained sweater. He had obviously not bothered to shave for this appointment, and it was clearly some days since he had paid any attention to his hair. He wore old running shoes, no socks, and an old pair of blue jeans which had once been quite expensive. If the doctor had passed this man on Spring Garden Road he might have offered him the price of a cup of coffee. Probably not. And yet this person was apparently a Senior Executive of a multi-billion dollar conglomerate which wanted him back so badly that they considered the cost of his rehabilitation to be of no importance. Arrenberg smiled, partly in welcome and partly in avarice.

Harry saw an expensively dressed man in his early middle age who was not more than a few ounces short of being classed as obese. He wore small, metal rimmed glasses and a small, well trimmed Vandyke beard with exactly the right amount of grey in it. Everything about the man and his office screamed to Harry “Look How Important and Successful I Am.” Harry had been sceptical and nervous while sitting in the opulent waiting room, but now became guarded and angry without knowing exactly why this should be. With some effort the Doctor heaved himself out of the large chair and came around his desk to meet Harry. He extended his hand, which Harry shook. The hand was flabby and moist, but the grip was firm. “I’m so pleased to meet you, Harry. Please come in and make yourself at home.”

Without thinking, Harry retaliated. “It’s Mr. Murphy, Doctor. Possibly we shall come to know each other well enough, in time, to move to first name familiarity; but we are not there yet.”

Arrenberg showed no sign of being insulted, offended or even surprised by Harry’s attack. “My apologies, Mr. Murphy. It shall be as you wish, of course. Would you like to take a seat in the armchair by the fire?”

Harry looked in the direction indicated and saw two large armchairs facing each other in front of a large fireplace in which wooden logs burned. He knew that the thing had to be artificial, since there were no smoke exits in the office and the entire block was air conditioned anyway. This was confirmed when he moved over to the fire, as the great crackling log gave out no heat. The whole effect was brilliantly done, and included sound effects, simulated smoke and a perfect illusion of leaping flames. Despite himself, Harry was impressed. He sat. With some effort Arrenberg eased himself down into the opposite chair.

“Well, Mr. Murphy, perhaps we could start off by finding out a little about each other. I will be glad to answer any of your questions, but perhaps I could go first?” Receiving neither a negative nor a positive response from Harry the Doctor continued. “I understand that you

are a Senior Executive Officer of the Amalgamated Graphics Group, based at their Printing Plant here in Halifax? Is this correct?”

“Doctor Arrenberg, you are charging my company two hundred dollars an hour, and you intend to spend the first session obtaining information which you could have had for the asking from our personnel files? Do you not have my date of birth? Do you not know my marital status? The number of my children? I doubt that you can be so incompetent that you have not already obtained this information, but if you are indeed so inept, please send me your forms and I will fill them in when you are not billing my company to do *your* homework.”

Still Arrenberg showed no spark of emotion.

“Very well, Mr. Murphy, I take your point. And yes, I do indeed have the basic data concerning your case, provided by a Mr. Harrod with the authorisation of your Company President, Mr. Thorpe. I take it you have no problem with this?”

“Of course not.”

“I was seeking only to ‘break the ice’ between us. My fees, by the way, are *three* hundred dollars per session, but since your employer has agreed to foot the bill, I suggest that we don’t let the matter of money serve as an obstacle between us. Perhaps we could move on to”

“Let’s get that little point straight, too, before we move anywhere. I’ve spent twenty years giving as much concern to my company’s expenditures as to my own. I care very much about the way in which company funds are spent and I will not see them squandered.”

“Thank you for clearing that up, Mr. Murphy. It really is very important to me that we start on the right foot, and I don’t want to cross swords with you. I understand that you may be feeling a little anxious over having been referred to me. Many of my patients find it very

difficult, at first, to face up to the fact that they are mentally ill, but let me assure you that we will.....”

“It hasn’t been established yet that I am mentally ill.”

“No, of course not. Perhaps that would be the best place to start. If you wouldn’t mind, we can talk a little about the symptoms of your your situation.”

“My symptoms?”

“Yes. What were the factors which caused your company to suggest that you and I should spend some time together?”

“*Those* symptoms. Very well. Often I don’t know whether I’m awake or dreaming. I consider ninety nine percent of what people do for a living to be trivial and unworthy of serious effort. That includes my job. My *jobs*, all of them, past and present. I’ve missed a lot of work lately because I consider it more important to feed the ducks and pigeons in Halifax Public Gardens than to go in to the office. A few days ago I got into a stand-up fist fight with one of my oldest and closest friends, and if I hadn’t been restrained I would have taken a swing at my Company President. You must mean those symptoms.”

“Yes, indeed. I think that would be a very good place to start. Tell me, please; what was the fight all about. Why did you feel the need to attack ‘an old, close friend’?”

“He made me angry.”

“How did he do that, Mr. Murphy?”

“He was bothering me with trivia.”

Despite his avaricious and arrogant outer shell, Arrenberg was a competent psychiatrist and could not fail to notice that Harry was becoming more agitated by the second. His fists were clenched, and he was pounding them steadily on the arms of his chair. His eyes had narrowed to slits and his comments were delivered between clenched teeth. The doctor had dealt with such patients before and knew the importance of continuing to stay calm and focused.

“Are you equally angry with me, Mr. Murphy?”

“Yes.”

“But what have I done to upset you? We only just met a few minutes ago, and I’ve tried to be completely accommodating to all that you have asked. Why are you so angry with me?”

The silence stretched between them. After ten seconds of it Harry snapped: “Because you’re fat!”

This time the doctor *was* taken aback. He paused to calm himself and decide how best to proceed. He had no intention of letting this golden opportunity slip through his fingers. The man obviously required *years* of treatment. But it was not starting well. Perhaps the time had come for a little display of the steel fist within the velvet glove.

“Mr. Murphy, from the moment you entered my office I have treated you as one adult to another. I have observed all the basic courtesies. And yet you seem determined to bring our conversation down to the level of the junior school playground. If I thought it would serve any purpose to sit here and allow you to insult me I would be happy to do so. But as you have pointed out, I charge a very high fee for my professional services, and it would be unfair to your employer for me to charge such a fee for simply acting as a target for your childish diatribe. If you insist on name calling, on making derogatory remarks about a condition over which I have no control, then I see no point.....”

“Of course you have control,” Harry snarled. “Nobody but you stuffs those cream cakes into your mouth. You’re not chained to the dining table until you’ve crammed down enough to feed Ethiopia for a month. I’d bet you have several boxes of chocolates in various desk drawers.”

“Then you would lose your bet, Mr. Murphy” Arrenberg stated, firmly and with just the right degree of righteous wrath (after all, the chocolates were in bars, not boxes). “My condition is due to a glandular imbalance which the medical profession has been unable to.....”

“Crap! Now who’s playing in the schoolyard? Glandular my arse! It’s a matter of pure energy physics; simple math; calories in and calories burned, though God alone knows when you last burned any calories. Apart from hauling yourself out of bed in the morning.”

Time for a bluff, Arrenberg thought. *I have* to turn this thing around. “Very well, Mr. Murphy. You win. I see no point in continuing with this charade. You know where the door is, and you are free to leave at any time. There will be no charge for the fifteen minutes of my time which you have wasted. But before you leave, I will give you my professional opinion, perfectly free. Today’s Special, shall we say? You are a severely ill man, Mr. Murphy. There is not the slightest shred of doubt about that. No normal, civilised human being attacks another human being on meeting and without provocation, and yet you chose to do exactly that! You are suffering from severe psychosis, at the root of which I suspect is some deeply embedded trauma. By your own admission you have already attacked close friends, and I assure you that this is nothing but the beginning. As your condition progresses you can expect more of these outbursts, and more violent ones. Untreated you will become, in less than six months, a serious danger to yourself and to those close to you. Inside a year you can expect to be institutionalised for your own protection, but by then the trauma will be buried so deeply and so effectively that it can never be treated and removed. That, Mr. Murphy is my professional opinion. Neither you nor your employer will receive a bill for it. The door is behind you and to your left. Good luck in finding a slimmer therapist.”

Harry rose, turned towards the door. With his hand on the ornate doorknob he paused and looked back at the doctor. “Perhaps.....” he began.

Arrenberg turned to Harry, trying hard to appear calm and unconcerned. He raised an eyebrow. “Yes?”

“Maybe I’ve been a trifle hasty. I *do* seem to be losing the ability to hold civilised conversations with decent people. Perhaps, if I apologise, we could try again.”

“Of course, my dear sir. My entire function is to help you deal with these problems. Now why don’t you sit back down by this pretentious fireplace and I’ll bring us both a glass of a very fine single malt whisky which I keep here for medicinal purposes.”

Harry sat while Doctor Arrenberg waddled over to his desk. Harry stared at the simulated flames and completely missed the expression of relief which passed over the doctor’s plump features.

* * * * *

It had become very important to Harry to understand the world of dreams; particularly, to understand how the dreamworld related to waking reality. He knew from his visits to his mother and to Theo that there was a rough correspondence, but that the details were very inexact. When he had seen his mother writhing in pain at the hands of her tormentors, he now realised, the pain and her body’s reaction to it had not been ‘real’. Her inner anguish, however, had been very real. Theo was not really being eaten by wild beasts, although the waking world reality was not very far removed from this. It was once again a case of metaphor and symbolism, and the correspondence between the two states was governed by this relationship.

Harry arranged a number of simple experiments. At a Halifax hobby store he bought a number of sheets of coloured construction paper and a supply of crayons. He cut from the

paper several large, simple geometric shapes – a red circle, a green square, a blue triangle. On these he wrote the name of the shape in different coloured crayons. The coloured crayons on coloured paper produced some interesting variations. He then attached these shapes to the walls of his living room. Alongside the shapes he pinned cutouts from the local paper; headlines, columns, bold type and small type; photographs and line etchings; classified ads and full page advertisements for Sear's One Day Sale at the Halifax Shopping Centre. Then he drew the blinds of the bedroom windows, shutting out the bright mid afternoon sun, and went to sleep.

In the centre of his sphere of tranquillity Harry pictured his bedroom and stepped through the doorway to stand at his own bedside. His body fully clothed, lay on his bed, looking exactly as he had expected it to look. Same size, same colour, same general appearance. Harry stared at his body for a while. Despite his now considerable experience in lucid dreaming, this was the first time he had stood next to his own sleeping body, and it reminded him forcibly of the still unanswered questions. Who was he looking at, and what was he looking *with*? Harry decided once again to postpone thinking about it, and walked into the living room.

The red circle was a yellow circle. The green square was still a square but was now pink. His cutouts had retained their shapes and sizes, but had changed colours. Yet not all of them. A bright purple oval was still a bright purple oval. He moved to the newsprint, and confirmed what he had found in previous dreams, that bold headlines could be read with some difficulty, but small type flowed and jumped and changed so much under his gaze that it was impossible to read. The photographs were unchanged in general outline, but the details were blurred and unstable. Even when he knew exactly what the photo and caption were, it was difficult to confirm this in the dream.

He turned again to his artwork, and saw that the yellow circle was now an *orange* circle.

So shapes and sizes retained their properties while colours were inconstant. While he had confirmed his inability to read while in the dream state Harry felt strongly that this was something he could learn to do. There was a technique involved here, if he could find it. Must ask Margaret about this.

He focussed his thoughts on Liz and a doorway appeared. He stepped through it and stood by her side at her small wooden desk in the tiny law office on Robie Street.

It was Liz, but not Liz. The differences were small and subtle but, they were there. To Harry, the love of his life would always be beautiful and would always be thirty five years old, but the real-world Liz would be turning forty four this year. She had added a few pounds since their wedding day, had a few small streaks of grey in her dark brown hair, and had small lines at the corners of her eyes and mouth which makeup did not completely obscure. The version which Harry saw now had jet black hair with no trace of grey, and was as svelte as she had been on the day of her senior prom. Nose to nose scrutiny revealed a skin as taut and blemish free as that of a new born baby. Harry realised that he was seeing a version of Liz which was shaped in part by her own self image. Leaning forward he kissed her gently on the cheek. Liz looked up in surprise and touched her cheek. She looked around the office in puzzlement, and then dismissed the incident and returned to her computer screen.

As Harry stepped back from the desk one of the two young lawyers stepped into the room. Harry recognised the man from their several meetings, and was amused to see that in this case the differences were far from subtle. While this young man was slim to the point of skinny, his dreamscape version was muscled in a way which would have given several cinema screen heroes good cause for envy. Was this the way the young lawyer saw himself, Harry wondered, or the way he wished to be? This was very interesting. Harry wondered how his own dream-body appeared to others, but when he tried to check this by means of a mirror in the men's room he found to his dismay that he cast no reflection.

Caught up in the spirit of his new experiment Harry concentrated on the face of his Chairman, and found himself instantly inside the glass-walled office of the Bourque Pent-

house. George was seated at his desk, and looked much as he did in life, but when he rose to cross the room Harry was amused to see that the Chairman wore the imposing uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet from some long past age. Looking through the glass wall to the outer offices he noticed that the two elderly executive secretaries seemed to have been replaced by two younger and more attractive women. Closer examination of Ms. Mason's replacement revealed that it was, in fact, a younger and prettier version of the same woman, and Harry realised that Molly Mason still saw herself as being several years younger than her true physical age.

He spent the better part of the morning examining the self-images of friends and associates. Mick Shaw saw himself as a cross between John Wayne and Clint Eastwood (in one of his western roles). Louise Boutelier was essentially a slightly younger version of her true self. When he visited Don Harrod he found at first what appeared to be an empty bedroom, until he noticed the translucent cylinder lying in the centre of the double bed. Inside the cylinder, like a fly encased in amber, lay his friend and colleague. Don had built this shell around himself and was daily adding to its thickness. It was already difficult to see the man inside this prison of his own making, and Harry calculated that if Don were to add just another inch to its thickness it would no longer be possible to see him at all. He picked at the cylinder with his fingernail and found it to be as hard as granite. He wondered whether 'Invictus' would make any impression on it. Harry realised that it could be very dangerous to Don if he were simply to chop away at this self-constructed shell, and knew instinctively that he must ask advice before making any such attempt. But he would not leave his friend here, cut off from interaction with his colleagues, from his family, isolated from everything which had, only a few weeks ago, been important to him.

His last visit was to his earthly nemesis, Simon Jensen Junior. He found his ex-boss at his family home in Boston, having not been allowed out of the house since Uncle George had dragged him home in disgrace and explained in great detail why Junior was no longer in the employ of Amalgamated Graphics. His father had said essentially that he had expected nothing better of his wastrel son, while his mother had explained to George that some sort of serious mistake must have been made. After all, this situation was not new to her: Simon's peers

had a long history of blaming the boy for things that went wrong in their organisations. All the way back to Kindergarten, in fact, where he had been held responsible for that awful fire, just because one of his little school pals had planted the box of matches in Simon's rompers.

Harry found Simon in his bedroom. To his total amazement, Simon looked up as he entered the room and seemed to recognise him. "What are you doing in my bedroom, Murphy?" Simon asked. "If you want to see me, make an appointment with my secretary. Can't see you today anyway. Far too busy." And Simon Jensen Junior went back to playing with his electric train set, which was very appropriate for a ten year old child, which was exactly what Harry saw, sitting there on the fitted carpet of the nursery in the Jensen's Boston household. Making a note to ask Margaret how it was possible for the "boy" to see and recognise him, Harry called for a doorway back to his own bedroom and woke up.

Harry approached his second visit to Doctor Arrenberg with a positive mental outlook. He acted on the assumption that (1) he was indeed mentally ill, and (2) Doctor Arrenberg was his best hope for some kind of cure. The question of whether his illness was a result of his dream experiments, work stress, a bio-chemical malfunction of the brain or some currently unknown cause was, for the moment, immaterial. It was akin to an emergency room surgeon wasting time by trying to determine whether his patient's leg had been broken by a fall from a high place, collision with a motor vehicle or some other currently unknown cause. Just fix the damned leg. When the receptionist opened the door and ushered him into the luxurious inner office Harry therefore stepped forward with a warm smile and a firm handshake.

"Good morning, Mr. Murphy" Arrenberg said cautiously. Remembering the previous encounter the doctor was anxious to say nothing in any way controversial until he was certain he was on secure ground. "May I offer you a small brandy?" Harry accepted with grace and gratitude and the two men settled into the comfortable chairs which flanked the ever-burning log fire.

“If you wouldn’t mind, Mr. Murphy, I’d like to explore in a little more detail something you said to me at our last meeting. That is, the fact that you are sometimes uncertain whether you are awake or dreaming. I feel strongly that an important key lies in here somewhere and the more I know about this the sooner we can start looking for a cure.”

Arrenberg observed his patient carefully. Harry had winced at the word “cure” – presumably because the need to search for a cure presupposed an acceptance of the fact that he was ill, something that the patient had not yet conceded. But the moment passed and Harry seemed to be ready to respond without antagonism. So far, so good.

“I’m a little hesitant to do that, Doctor. You see this is all very real to me, but I know that if anyone else told me such a story I’d think they were barking mad!”

“Oh, my dear sir,” Arrenberg said, assuming his best ‘caring professional’ expression. “I assure you that, firstly, everything you say to me is said in total confidence. Absolutely everything. Not one word will leave this room. And secondly I promise you that nothing you can say would top some of the stories I have heard by this fireside. Some of the stories, I assure you, would make anything you have to tell me sound tame in comparison. And in any case, ‘Barking Mad’ is not a term I use professionally. Please be assured that you may safely say whatever it is that you feel I should know.”

“Very well,” Harry began, “In a Lucid Dream the difference between dreaming and the waking state is very hard to pinpoint. The definition of waking reality is dependent on the evidence of the senses, of course. Descartes, you know: ‘I think, therefore I am’” Arrenberg nodded. Harry continued. “When I dream lucidly I see more clearly, hear more distinctly, even my senses of smell and touch are more vivid. Therefore, to me, the dream state has become more ‘real’ than the waking state, in which my vision is not so sharp, my hearing less acute, etcetera. In short, waking reality is a comparatively fuzzy kind of awareness. Do you see what I mean?”

“Hmmm, yes,” Arrenberg replied, nodding for emphasis “Fuzzy. Yes, I see where you are leading.”

In the next twenty minutes Doctor Arrenberg filled eleven pages of his notebook. Harry explained about the use of doorways to move about the Astral Plane, which he considered to be only the lower level of a series of planes which could be visited by shifting one’s mental focus. The doorways, according to Harry’s Spirit Guardian, were apparently not really needed for this but, much like the crystal ball of fairground mystics, they helped to focus the flow of mental energy. He filled half a page with notes on the various colours of psychic energy which, according to Harry, were perceptible on the lower astral levels. Mostly shades of blue, from turquoise to violet. He heard how the beasts which had devoured Harry’s friend Theodore were actually self constructed metaphors which reflected earthly reality, and how Harry had erred in destroying the spiritual component of the metaphor without making a corresponding attack on the physical level. If the doctors had started an aggressive program of chemotherapy and radiation at the same time as Harry had chopped the heads off the metaphoric beasts, he was told, then the cancer would almost certainly have gone into remission and the prognosis would have been so much better.

As the pages filled and the story grew the Doctor could hardly believe his good fortune. ‘Barking Mad’ fell far short of the mark! The man was as nutty as the proverbial fruitcake. He was a raving loony! Not only was he good for a small fortune in fees from his (fortunately) well-heeled company, but there were at least two or three papers in this. Arrenberg could see himself at the podium, as the crowd of learned therapists from around the world rose to their feet, their applause crashing over him like waves on some exotic Pacific beach.

He came back to earth. His patient was looking at him expectantly. He had apparently asked a question. The doctor scribbled on for a few words. What he actually wrote was “Don’t blow this Arrenberg!” What he said was “I’m terribly sorry, Mr. Murphy, I was just completing my notes and I missed your comment. I should really have learned shorthand many years ago. I do apologise. What was your question, again?”

“I simply asked for your observations, Doctor” Harry said, and his smile was tight about the edges. “What do you think is wrong with me?”

In his mind Norman James Arrenberg still stood at the podium of the crowded hall basking in the adulation of his peers. And that was his downfall. He responded to Harry as though to a question from the crowd. “There is no simple response to that question.” he began. “The patient displays a web of overlapping symptoms culminating in psychosis of immense depth and complexity. The patient has constructed a fantastic quasi-reality in a desperate attempt to rationalise his ongoing descent into delusion and self deception. While it is impossible to speculate at this time as to the root cause of the paranoia there is little doubt as to the mechanism and therefore the ultimate prognosis. I foresee a series of monographs on this patient over the next several years as I penetrate his layers of delusion and expose the unpleasant realities from which he is obviously hiding. I should mention that the patient has developed a strong sensitivity to any criticism of his construct, seeing such criticism as a personal attack on his closely held, almost religious belief system. This would tend to explain the recent episodes of violent physical confrontation which have.....”

Arrenberg was jerked from the podium to find himself being lifted by his lapels from the deep cushions of his armchair. Only his great physical bulk prevented his complete removal from the chair, when Harry realised that a serious hernia was not only possible but imminent. He dropped the therapist back into the chair and brought his own face down to a nose-to-nose contact.

Through gritted teeth he said one word -- “Quack!” -- then stormed out of the office. Norman James was so relieved to have survived the encounter intact that he failed to notice that a case of Pure Gold had just left his office in such a manner that he clearly did not intend to return. To Harry’s great chagrin the huge oak door proved too massive to allow itself to be slammed.

* * * * *

“But Harry, we’re into October and the nights are already starting to get colder. Do you know at least how long you intend to be gone? Do you not have some slight idea of where you will be heading?” Liz hovered nervously over Harry as he tried in vain to find space for yet another pair of woollen socks in the huge, overstuffed backpack.

“I think I’ll head west, Liz,” he said, not looking up from his packing. “I’ll follow the coast road, at least to start. The young chap in the “Outward Bound” store told me that there is a fairly extensive trail system already in place along the old CN railway line – that is, along the right of way where the lines used to be. If I can find that, I’ll probably stick to the trail.”

“Oh, Harry, don’t you think you’re a bit too old to be sleeping on the ground in a little red nylon tent? Isn’t there some other way?”

“Liz, when I decided to do this, I felt as though I’d put down some massive burden that I’d been carrying for weeks. I have no idea why, but I know that this is something I have to do. And it isn’t just a ‘little red nylon tent’! The salesman said that this is the same tent they used on the last Antarctic expedition.”

“Who exactly is ‘they’, Harry? Did ‘they’ all make it back? Were all their toes and fingers still intact?”

“Don’t fret so, sweetheart. The tent is made from some space-age insulating fabric that just happens to look like nylon. And the groundsheet is made of the same stuff, but the one eighth inch thickness is equivalent to six inches of that pink fibreglass stuff we have in the walls. And I’m not sleeping on the ground. I have this thermal mattress in the bag, specially designed for cold weather and my sleeping bag is supposed to be guaranteed to twenty below zero. I could be sleeping at the North Pole and be as warm as I’d be here at home in bed!”

“The bag may be guaranteed, but what about the man inside it?”

“You’re making too much of this, my love. I’ll be gone a few days – a week at most, I think. I’ll be down along the south shore somewhere, but how far can I get on foot and carrying this forty-five pound backpack? I’ll never be more than an hour’s car ride away. And I’ve spare batteries for the cellphone, so you can call whenever you want, and I’ll call every evening to let you know where I am and how I am. Honestly, it’s not like I’m off to find the source of the Nile.....”

“Somebody already found that.”

“Well, then, I don’t need to go there. I just need a few days of solitude to think things through, and our old friend Subconscious Harry tells me that I’ll do the thinking a lot better this way.”

“Couldn’t you find your solitude at the cottage. I’d promise to stay in Halifax until you tell me I can.....”

“Give me a hug and wave me on my way, my love. I’ll call you tonight as soon as I find a place to set up the tent.”

“Oh, Harry!”

“Oh, Liz! Come on now. I’m not off to war. The inhabitants of Hubbards are quite friendly so I’m told. And there are no longer any cannibals living in Chester.”

“Chester! You expect to walk all the way to Chester!”

“Bye, Liz.”

“Bye, Harry. Do take care of yourself. Did you remember to pack your blood pressure medicine?”

“Yes. Bye, my love. I’ll be back before you know it.”

With little difficulty Harry shrugged into the padded leather straps of his new rucksack, marvelling at how light a forty-five pound load could be when it was scientifically distributed and properly carried. He gave Liz a final wave and swung jauntily away, a strange sight in the affluent east-end suburb. Half an hour later he was marvelling at how forty-five pounds could feel like a couple of tons, and how well padded leather straps could rub like coarse-grit sandpaper and cut like razor blades. He had covered less than three kilometers.

At the Armdale rotary, a huge traffic circle and the meeting point for several major roads, he chose Herring Cove Road. He tugged on the straps of his backpack in a vain effort to ease the friction, and moved on. A kilometer further along highway three Harry found a small trail leading off the highway and he turned to follow it. The trail climbed a little way up the hillside and then turned to run parallel to the road, heading southwest towards Saint Margaret’s Bay and the Aspotogan peninsula.

As the day wore on and the sun began to show evidence of sinking beyond the western hills Harry felt a strange sense of peace begin to steal over him. He was reminded of a comment made to him many years ago by a fellow student who had been a great fan of hiking as a way to reduce stress and stimulate creative thought. “Get out on the hiking trail, Harry” the young man had said to him. “Put your legs in gear and your mind in neutral and you’ll be amazed at the thoughts that find their way into your skull.” And indeed, strange thoughts were beginning to form in Harry’s mind.

It now struck him as completely self-evident that the modern world had become too complicated, and that the fundamental truths of life were being obscured by artificial priorities. For thousands of years mankind had worked twenty four hours a day just to ensure that there was enough to eat. If there had been any time left over it would probably have been spent trying to ensure that one’s family (including oneself) survived the night without being eaten by predators or murdered by one’s fellows. This state of affairs had endured for generation after

generation with essentially little change, well into the start of the current century. It was a very recent development in the story of human evolution that mankind had enough to eat, security from predators (four and two-legged) and, for the most part, an assurance that accident or illness would not play a significant role in determining the length and quality of one's life-span. All of these advantages could now be earned by labouring in a safe environment for a fraction of man's waking day.

So what had man done about it? Was he now enjoying the fruits of progress? For the first time in the entire history of the human race he was able to enjoy that most rare of Nature's gifts – leisure time. And was he, indeed, enjoying this rare delicacy? Like Hell he was! He was working all the hours that he possibly could, often at two or more jobs, in conditions which he often found abhorrent, to obtain goods for himself and his family that none of them truly needed and few of them could find time to enjoy. He had invented new illnesses to replace those which science had conquered. Finally safe from marauding predators, he now died an early death from stress induced circulatory disorders or emotional instabilities.

Harry's only pressing problems had now been whittled down to two. The need to relieve the pressure on his bladder without being arrested for lewd conduct or public exhibitionism, and the need to find a convenient place to pitch his little tent where he could safely pass the coming night. The first problem was easily taken care of by stepping off the trail into a convenient gap in the shrubbery. The second demanded a little more thought.

The trail now ran along a high ridge. Directly below him, about a hundred meters out from the other side of the highway he could see a small sand beach. A few trees and a small patch of grass fronted the beach, and the whole area seemed to be far enough away from the highway to ensure that passing cars would not be a distraction, and passing pedestrians were unlikely to be a problem. Surprisingly there were no buildings of any kind close to this little beach. Although the property must certainly have an owner somewhere Harry doubted that this unknown person would have any serious objection to his pitching a small tent for a few hours of darkness.

He walked on a little way until he saw a clear path leading down to the road, and then descended from the ridge, walked back a few hundred meters and crossed a short stretch of rocky, overgrown headland to come at last to the small stretch of sand he had seen from above. It seemed perfect, and with no small amount of relief he shrugged out of the abrasive straps and dropped the heavy pack onto the sand.

While the sun was now below the horizon, and darkness was quickly swallowing his view of the ocean, it was still surprisingly warm. Harry stretched out on the sand, his head pillowed on the backpack, and looked at the stars. A few wispy clouds passed over the moon, but for the most part the heavens were unobscured. He recognised Orion and the Big Dipper. As the darkness deepened he was able to make out the larger craters on the full moon. The soreness was beginning to leave his muscles, though he knew that there would be a price to pay tomorrow. He felt quite tired, but it was a healthy kind of tired brought on by exercise. He closed his eyes.

He opened his eyes when he heard the voices. The moon was now high in a cloudless sky, and he realised that he must have slept for a while. A billion stars shone down on the tiny beach, and the moon cast sharp-edged shadows on the sand. Harry listened carefully for evidence of the voices which had awakened him but heard only the lip-lap-lap of small waves breaking on the pebbly shore. He propped himself up on one elbow and looked around. The bright moon and sparkling stars gave plenty of light, but he still did not see the youngsters until they were already on the beach, only a few feet away and strolling towards him. He clambered to his feet.

“Don’t panic, Harry. We’re friends. Friends of Margaret. She sent us to help you. You have nothing to fear from us, Harry.”

Despite the circumstances Harry found himself ready to trust the strange trio. They were very young, somewhere in their mid-teens, he guessed. Two boys and a girl. He sat back down in the sand and the three youngsters sat with him. They wore casual clothes – T-

shirts and jeans – and smiled pleasantly. “My name is Abram,” the boy told him. “My friend here is Cabell and the girl is my sister Juleen.”

“Those are strange names,” Harry replied. “Not Nova Scotian names. Are you from this area?”

“No, Harry. They are very old names, and we are very old people. We were already old when your great-grandfather was young, but your friend Margaret is older yet. She was already ancient when only the Mi’kmaq roamed these shores, and the people of your birth-country lived in caves and painted their bodies blue. And you, too, are very old, but you do not remember. We can help you to remember. We can teach you. We can reveal your past lives and restore to you the powers which you have suspended for the duration of this earth life. Come with us, Harry.”

“But you seem... this must be a dream. How is it that I did not know I was dreaming?”

“Does it matter? After all of your experiences, you should know by now that the difference is of little importance. Are you looking *at* the glass or *through* the glass, Harry? It is nothing more than a matter of focus. There is no ‘real’ world and no ‘dream’ world, there is only the one world, and the ability to focus your awareness. Come with us and we will fly out over this ocean and we will have great adventures together. We will retrieve your great sword and the four of us will go forth against the evil which threatens our world. We will fight....”

“No.”

“No, Harry? Why not? You have been searching for the truth for almost a year now. Ever since your spirit awoke within you, on a footpath by an old church and a snake infested burial ground. We can show you the truth. We can open your eyes and your mind and...”

“Then why do you mention my sword? I want nothing more to do with that sword. I want no more of fighting. Let’s go, then, the four of us, but let’s leave the sword where it hangs.”

A silence fell over the group. The three young people exchanged glances, but none spoke.

“As I thought,” Harry said. “You rode with me to fight the Vikings, didn’t you! You forged that sword for me, never dreaming that it might one day be turned against you. You are the motor cycle riders who tried to trap me in the empty parking lot, and later on the deserted highway. You mean to drive me to anger and feed on my emotions. Were you also at my mother’s bedside? Did you feel the sting of my sword there?”

“Perhaps this may change your mind.” The girl stood, and as she rose from the sand she began to change. Her thin figure swelled and curved. Her short, fair hair grew longer and darker. She was Liz, as Harry had first known her. When she spoke it was in Liz’s voice. “Come with us, Harry,” Liz said. “We can be young again. We can be young forever. You can love me as you used to love me.”

“My Liz would never say such a thing” Harry told the apparition, smiling. “She knows that I love her now as always, and will love her as much, or more, when she is grey and withered and her skin is like old leather. If you think that I love her for her hair and her figure and her youth, then you are a fool. However old you may be, you have learned little about men and women, and you know nothing of love. Now clear off and let me sleep in peace.”

“Then you leave us no choice,” the first boy said. “It would be better for all of us if you were to accompany us by choice, but accompany us you will.” Both boys and the ‘girl’ grew and changed. They became taller and broader, and muscles swelled on arms and thighs until three huge armed warriors stood in front of Harry. The tallest of the three gave a deep growl as he reached to grab Harry by the throat.

Harry threw back his head and roared with laughter. “Oh, you foolish children!” he said when his laughter subsided. “You claim to be so old, but I see that you do not have the wisdom which should have come with your years. You think to dress up like small boys on Halloween and frighten old ladies in their hallways! Trick or Treat, is that the name of your game? Well it doesn’t work; not with me, at any rate. You may have terrorised my mother, but you will not frighten me so that you can drink my fear as you did with her. Nor will you annoy me so that you can feed on my anger. You are weak and you are stupid. Go and play elsewhere, and think yourselves lucky that I don’t turn you one by one over my knee and give you a good spanking. Go now. You are wasting perfectly good dreaming time. Go, before I call for Margaret. I think that she would be much less tolerant of your childish theatrics.”

He had touched a nerve. The three figures wavered and faded away, leaving only the moonlight and the lapping of the waves. Harry lay back once more against the back-pack, and when he next opened his eyes it was too a stunning sunrise over a blue ocean, and an appetite for fried eggs and hot black coffee.

* * * * *

By mid-day Harry had covered an additional four kilometers. He had thought that packing twelve pairs of heavy woollen socks was possibly a little over the top, but four of those socks now supplemented the padding on the broad leather straps of his backpack, and the amount of abrasion he incurred with every step had been greatly reduced. The pack was still heavy, but was no longer becoming heavier with every kilometer. After breakfast Harry had been tempted to jettison some of the heavier cooking implements and possibly his spare pair of boots. He was glad now that he had decided against this. From an outer pocket of the backpack he had taken a couple of “energy bars” – a concoction of grains, nuts, dried fruit and unidentified bits and pieces, all held together by honey – and he was happily munching away as he walked. The ocean was a distant blue stripe between land and sky, and the day was warm enough to be comfortable but not so warm that he needed to shed any of his outer clothing. He still didn’t know where he was going, but he was going. All in all, Harry was feeling

very content and was almost ready to burst into song, or at least whistle something, when the dog bit him.

Fortunately the bite only caught his pants leg, missing the flesh by a clear inch. Harry decided that the bite was less of an attack on his person than an attempt to gain his attention. He looked down to see a scruffy-looking smallish animal which fit no breed definition that he recalled ever seeing before. The dog was gazing fondly at Harry – or, more specifically at the energy bar from which he had just taken a bite.

“Hungry, huh?” Harry asked the dog. The dog continued to stare at the confection, obviously considering the question to be far too stupid to actually require any kind of response. Realising this, Harry dropped the remains of his mid-morning snack and the dog swallowed it whole. It then demolished the remaining five bars which Harry fed to it without any noticeable decline in its eagerness to have more.

While Harry fed the dog from a can of pressed meat (which he had intended to have, heated, for his evening meal) he petted the animal. The dog took no exception to this; in fact it seemed to enjoy this display of affection. “You’re as starved for affection as you are for food, aren’t you, boy?” Harry’s examination of the dog had established that it was male, underfed, and of very mixed parentage. It wore no collar and had no kind of identification that Harry could find. He doubted very much that some caring owner had taken the trouble to have a tattoo inscribed in the dog’s ear or a microchip implanted under the skin – either of which could have been used by the nearest vet to establish ownership and address. “What are you, exactly?” Harry asked the dog, who was too busy at that moment licking out the empty can to respond to his question. “You’ve the face of a German Shepherd, but no Shepherd ever had a tail like that! And your coat looks like there’s some Labrador Retriever in you, but you’ve not the size for it. You’re more the size of a Duck Toller, but no Toller had ears like yours. I suppose you’re just an old Heinz 57 variety type Mutt. Nothing wrong with that, I’m a deal that way myself, with my Irish roots and my English upbringing, and me a Canadian for close to four decades. Well, come on, Mutt! You may as well tag along, since I’m obviously your

best bet for a food supply today. We'll see if I can't get you a bed at the animal shelter when we get to Hubbards."

The dog seemed to find this proposition much to his liking and trotted happily after Harry as he wriggled back into his rucksack and stepped onto the trail.

More by good luck than due to careful navigation Harry had stumbled onto the Aspotogan Trail, which followed the old rail bed from the days when Canadian National Railways reigned as transport of choice for most people. There were, therefore, no significant gradients, since even the slightest of inclines could cause serious problems to a train which could be a mile or more long. The slightest of inclines could also have caused serious problems to a 47 year old man carrying a 45 pound backpack, and Harry was therefore glad of the flat terrain. He completed the long, gradual climb to top the ridge which represented the highest point of the peninsula and was rewarded with his first sight of Mahone Bay. Except for the specific tucks and turns of the bay's perimeter, which would have been more significant from a bird's-eye view, Harry thought the great expanse of ocean to be much the same as Saint Margaret's Bay which now lay behind him. The Oak and Birch trees between his vantage point and the shore were in their most resplendent autumn colours, and the reds and golds blended beautifully with the various greens of the conifers. Harry stopped to soak in the view, and Mutt seemed to share his sense of wonder.

They camped that night in a small clearing to the south of the trail, near enough to the ocean to hear the sounds of breaking waves carried to them on the breeze. Harry called Liz and brought her up to date on his progress, but when he tried to introduce Mutt by telephone the little dog refused to co-operate. With Mutt by his feet Harry snuggled into his sleeping bag – not yet needing the bag's ability to keep him warm at temperatures well below zero – and fell asleep within twenty seconds.

Dreaming, and well aware that he was dreaming, Harry continued his hike over the Aspotogan towards Mahone Bay. The aches and abrasions caused by his burden were gone now, and the walking was easy. He strode out in search of his destiny, and, when he glanced

to his side, he found Mutt trotting along with him. He knew very well that this dog was his recently acquired companion of the Aspotogan trail, but not from the dog's appearance: The dog of the dream was possibly the most magnificent specimen of a German Shepherd that Harry had ever seen. Mutt now stood over two feet high at the shoulder and clearly weighed a hundred pounds or better. When Harry called to him, the dog trotted gladly to his new master and jumped up to place his paws on Harry's chest and lick his face with great enthusiasm. Whatever other problems the little stray may have, Harry thought, he certainly had no trouble with his self-image.

The two strolled at a leisurely pace along the trail, with Mutt stopping periodically to sniff at an interesting aroma, or to place his own scent-message on a tree or large rock. Looking at the huge animal Harry thought "I can't go on calling you 'Mutt' if we're to go dream-wandering together. Looking like that you should be 'King', or at least 'Baron'. What do you say, King?" The dog paid no attention. "OK," Harry said, taking the dog's lack of interest as a negative vote, "Mutt it is!" As though to signify agreement the large dog ran back to Harry, circled him and then took off along the trail, tail wagging furiously the whole time.

A strange thing was happening to the dream, and Harry did not at once appreciate the significance. The scenery periodically blurred and reformed, and he realised that he was covering large stretches of the trail in leaps and bounds. A large boulder by the side of the trail was left far behind in half a dozen strides. A distant stand of white birch approached at the speed of an express train. While such things were common in a normal person's dreams they were rare for a lucid dreamer unless they were being caused by specific intention. Harry concentrated on the trail and tried to bring their progress back to a normal walking rate; but he was unsuccessful.

In a short time they came to a large trestle bridge over a wide river, and their progress slowed and stopped. The bridge was built of old creosoted timbers, many of them nothing more than stripped and tarred tree trunks, bolted together at strategic points by threaded iron bars. The boardwalk, however, seemed to be built from factory trimmed, pressure treated lumber, and pedestrians were protected by large railings at each side, built of the same mate-

rial. Far below them the river roared and tumbled over its bed, throwing clouds of spray into the air. Without conscious effort, Harry found himself crossing the bridge to its southern anchor point. He felt like a prisoner trapped in his own body, but recalled that until a few weeks ago all of his dreams had felt like this. At the end of the bridge he climbed over the railing onto a steep, narrow path which led down to the river, and was barely successful in reaching the bottom while staying upright. Here he found another trail, wider than the one above, which turned to pass under the bridge and follow the course of the river. Without conscious volition Harry followed the path. Mutt trotted down to the bank and began to drink.

They passed under a second bridge, this one a modern construction of steel and concrete. Heavy traffic roared past overhead. A kilometer further along the trail petered out, but Harry pressed on, clambering along rocks and pushing through overgrown patches of wild rose and blackberry, continuing to stay close to the river. Shortly they came to a small clearing and, again acting as though controlled by a remote transmitter, Harry pitched the small tent, climbed inside, called for Mutt and zipped up the doorflap. This done, he slid into his sleeping bag and fell asleep almost instantly.

He awoke to bright sunlight which turned the interior of the tent scarlet. For a moment he wondered whether this was a continuation of the dream, but noted that in *this* tent Mutt took up significantly less space. The little dog had regained its normal size and shape. Harry wondered what had caused the strange dream, and strongly suspected that it carried a message of some kind. He unzipped the doorflap and stepped out, relieved to find that his tent had not been magically transported during the night. He rummaged in his backpack for the necessities of breakfast, an act which met with enthusiastic approval from his companion.

Harry and his new 'best friend' rapidly became truly inseparable. Sleeping or waking, the dog trotted happily along, never out of sight or earshot. They came down from the trail to pass through Hubbards, where Harry replenished supplies and used the electrical outlet in a small restaurant to re-charge his cellphone batteries. He had used a guyrope from the tent's weatherflap as a makeshift leash for his new friend, who did not appear to have any objection to being tethered to his master. At a hardware store Harry replaced the rope with a respectable

leather leash, and also fitted Mutt with a bright red nylon collar, replete with engraved dog tags carrying Harry's phone numbers for the Halifax residence and seaside cottage. They walked along the highway by a sign noting the way to Nova Scotia's Shelter for Homeless Animals in Distress, but by that stage there was no chance that the little dog would be needing any help from the good folks at SHAID. Not then; not ever. Returning to the trail Harry slipped the leash from Mutt's new collar and the little dog trotted off to explore yet another stretch of new sights and sounds and, especially, new smells.

The two hikers settled into a daily routine which seemed to have been ticking along for years. Rising shortly after dawn they would leave the tent for the privacy of surrounding brush to attend to various personal functions, and would then meet back at the small propane stove, or sometimes at a tiny campfire, for breakfast consisting of some combination of fried eggs, bacon, sausage, toast with jam or marmalade, coffee and ginger cookies. Sometimes all of these. Harry had included a small bag of dog food and a pack of dog biscuits amongst his provisions, but as often as not Mutt shared whatever emerged from the cooking pots. Harry, in return, tried one of Mutt's dog treats but found that he preferred his own English Ginger Snaps. After breakfast Harry would pack his belongings, do his very best to leave no sign that there had ever been a camp on this site, and step back onto the trail. Their pace varied according to the weather, the terrain and their respective moods, but Harry had found that, fully laden, he could comfortably manage a twelve to fifteen kilometer hike with minimum aches, pains or uncomfortable after-effects, and he saw no reason to push for greater daily distance.

Late in the afternoon of their seventh day they came to the bridge. They had passed through the small coastal village of Chester Basin, where Harry had once again replenished their stocks of consumables, and had been back on the trail for perhaps two kilometers. Across a small road the trail curved to the south-west and came immediately to a broad, turbulent river. From his map Harry learned that this was the Gold River, and that at this point it was very close to where it joined the Atlantic Ocean. The bridge was, in life, exactly as he had found it in his dream, and there was no longer any question about the message of the dream. Somebody wanted him to follow the directions he had been given.

Crossing over the broad span he came to the western edge of the bridge and climbed the guardrail to the narrow path which led downwards. Unlike the dream, he was unable to hold his footing on the steep descent and slid down the last twenty feet of the path on his back. Mutt immediately ran over and licked Harry's face by way of commiseration.

Dusting himself off, Harry followed the trail along the river's edge to the point at which he knew he must leave the path and force his way through undergrowth to the small clearing, where he knew he must camp that night. Right on schedule, the clearing opened in front of him. The light was fading rapidly by this time, and the two campers were comfortably tucked up inside their tent by nine fifteen, where both were sound asleep before nine twenty five. Harry did not dream.

He was awakened to the scarlet light which signified a sunny morning, and to the sound of a hard rain falling on the trees around the tent. Still fuzzy from sleep Harry could not at first reconcile this apparent contradiction. As he sat up he noticed that Mutt was no longer in the tent, and wondered whether his friend had decided to continue his wanderings alone. More probably he just gone out to answer some call of nature. The fact that the dog would have needed to – and would have been *able* to -- unzip the doorflap did not surprise Harry at all. Strange, he thought, how the sound of rain hissing into the brush sounded exactly like bacon frying. Stranger yet was how it could *smell* exactly like bacon frying. Probably, Harry thought, because it *was* bacon frying! Now, if Mutt had found the supplies, rekindled the campfire and got breakfast underway, that certainly *would* surprise Harry. He lifted the flap and looked out.

A small, shrivelled brown skinned man squatted over the campfire, on which, supported by four small rocks, sat Harry's lightweight teflon coated aluminum frying pan. Next to the small man sat Mutt, licking his lips in anticipation.

"Some guard dog you turned out to be!" Harry said to the dog. Hearing the voice, the old man looked over to the tent. "Oh, he challenged me, Harry, and he needed a heap of reas-

surances before he let me take any liberties in your camp. I brought my own bacon, by the way.”

“Oh, there’s plenty for three in my backpack,” Harry said. “But before we get down to the social pleasantries, would you mind just telling me who the hell you are!”

“Sure. I am Sky Reader. I am so called because even as a small child I could foretell the weather for weeks in advance. My English name is Elias Sylliboy. And I’ve heard every possible joke about that, so I’d be much obliged if we don’t bother with any of it this morning.”

“You’re an Indian.”

“Sheesh, barely introduced and already we’re into the ethnic stuff! You, I suppose would be a square-headed Mick with some Canuck.”

“No offence intended,” Harry said. “I just meant…….”

“Never mind. We don’t have time for it. Hurry up and do whatever it is you have to do before breakfast and I’ll make you a bacon sandwich and a strong cup of tea. Brought my own tea, too, as well as a fresh baked loaf. We’ve a lot to do, and I’ve already wasted five days waiting for you to come to me, since I’m past the point where I’d gladly walk fifty miles to meet you. Come on then, lots to do today.”

Harry emerged, stretched, scratched. “What exactly are we about to do?”

“Your Spirit Guide sent me. She claims that you have wandered seriously from your planned life-path, and I’m to see if I can help you get back onto it.

“Margaret? You mean Margaret? I thought keeping me on the right path was *her* job!”

“Your ‘Margaret’ is a very powerful, very busy person. She serves the Spirit Council which oversees much of what happens on this part of Earth.”

“You must be confusing her with someone else. My Margaret is just a girl.”

“To you she appears as a girl, probably to make you feel at ease in her company. To me she is a great and powerful leader, and when I am summoned before her she appears as a mighty warrior queen. She has lived on earth many times, and if I told you some of the names she was known by you would find it hard to believe. In her home land she was long ago known as Boudi’chea. She was a great warrior and the Queen of her tribe. When she lived amongst the Mi’kmaq she was a medicine man revered by our people throughout the northern lands for her knowledge of healing, and for her wisdom.”

“You mean medicine ‘woman’.”

“When she chose rebirth amongst us she lived as a man. Several times she has chosen to be male when circumstances required it, although her preference is to be female. During her time with us, alas, the voices of women were not always respected by our warriors.”

“Why would she send you to help me? I’m not Mi’kmaq. I’m not even Native Canadian.”

“Harry, I can assure you that the only reason I’m here is that your skin is white. If you had been of my blood and my tribe I would not have stepped across my threshold to help you. Now get into the brush and do what you have to do before the bacon gets cold. Like I said, we’ve a lot to do and little time to do it in.” Harry scratched again, walked around the tent and moved off amongst the trees. Elias Sylliboy and Mutt the mutt looked at each other and shrugged.

* * * * *

BEAUTIFUL DREAMER

Chapter 8:

“Tell me again, Sky Reader, about this ‘life-path’ I’m supposed to have wandered away from.”

“Harry, I know now that you’re not a bigot. I know that you measure a man by his deeds and by his heart, and that you care little for what labels he carries. But when you use my Mi’kmaq name I’m never sure that you’re not being just a tad sarcastic. I’d be much obliged if you’d call me Elias, or ‘Eli’ if you prefer, which is what my friends call me. You *do* want to be my friend, don’t you, Harry?”

“‘Eli’ suits me fine. And yes, you seem like a decent sort of chap and I’d like to be your friend. But about this ‘life-path’ business?”

“If you haven’t realised it yet, you will soon learn that the purpose of earth-life is to learn and to grow spiritually. Earth is a school. You come here to learn specific lessons, which have been constructed with your input and approval. The way.....”

“Whoa, there, Eli. I’m still coming to grips with whether I have an immortal soul or not. Now you expect me to buy into this ‘school’ business? And are you saying that my life was all planned out before I was even born? What proof do you offer me?”

“Proof? You want proof? None, Harry; I offer none whatsoever.” Elias’s words flew like bullets and his eyes turned angry. “I’m well aware that you’ve stumbled through your life wearing blinkers, and you haven’t a clue about what’s really going on! But it’s not my job to open your eyes or to make you see what’s hanging under your nose. I’m told you’re a competent Dream Walker – Lucid Dreamer, I think is your term – but as I see it you go around

every night seeing, yet denying that you have eyes; conversing with folk yet refusing to accept that you have ears and a mouth; walking.....”

“Eli, I know I that have eyes, but they are closed in sleep. My dreams are nothing more than imaginings, taking place only within my brain. I don’t really.....”

“Harry, it’s like I said, *we do not have time for this*. You’re just going to have to accept the evidence of your senses – your *spiritual* senses, and move on. This should have been settled long ago. It’s as though a small child should say to its mother ‘Prove to me that the thing I see over there is a real thing’; or ‘When I stroke the cat, how can I be sure that it is a *real* cat?’ Why can’t you can trust me? Take my word for it? Can you do that, do you think? Or am I, too, just a figment of your imagination?”

“Are we to sit here and play word games all day, then? Is that how I’m going to be put back on the right path?”

Elias seemed to shrink back inside himself. “No, Harry. I apologise. I’m a tired old man, and I got up very early to drag this weary, worn out body down along the banks of the Gold River, and to be honest I didn’t really want to come. So please forgive me if I’m a little grumpy. I shouldn’t have tried to get smart with you and I shouldn’t have got snappy with you. But to tell the truth it just burns me up that you refuse to accept something that’s always been a part of my daily life; something that I consider to be so obvious that it goes without saying; something that every child in my culture knows as well as his name. Try to see it from my point of view. Suppose *you* had been asked to convince *me* that a simple inoculation can prevent certain serious diseases, and I’m sitting here telling you that the very idea is preposterous. Little animals too small to see, crawling about in my bloodstream? What nonsense! *You* grew up knowing this to be a fact, but what could you do to convince *me*? What proof could you offer? Look, I’m just getting all steamed again. This is no good. Under the circumstances I think that perhaps the best thing for us to do is meet up in the dream world. At least while we’re there I can point to the realities of the place by way of demonstration. Will you do that for me?”

“Do you want to start right away?”

“Yes, if you’re ready.”

Harry dragged his sleeping bag out of the tent and spread it on a bed of the pine needles which covered the small clearing. He rolled a spare shirt into a makeshift pillow and made himself comfortable. He looked at Elias, who had settled against the trunk of a large spruce, and at Mutt who lay at his feet. Elias nodded.

Harry relaxed his body and focussed on his breathing. He moved rapidly into and through his sphere of darkness and stood beside his tent. Elias came to his feet in some surprise, and the huge German Shepherd loped over to Harry, wagging his tail in obvious delight.

“I am *most* impressed,” Elias said. “Especially for a white man! Damn! I always forget I’m not supposed to say that stuff any more! Sorry if I caused offence. I was told that you were good at crossing, but that was as well done as *I* can do it.”

Harry, too, had been taken by surprise. The man by the tree was in his prime, somewhere in his early thirties. His eyes were bright, and twinkled with mirth. He wore only a small loincloth and heavy muscles rippled as he moved. His jet black hair hung almost to his waist.

“What?” Elias asked, seeing Harry’s expression. “Oh, yeah. The body! Welcome to one of the many benefits of dreamlife! Back in your waking reality you have to live with what you have, more or less. Plastic Surgery can only do so much. Time and Gravity always win in the end. But here, my friend, you can be whatever you want to be. Did you not notice your scruffy little four-legged buddy there? Well whatever he can do, you can do. Usually better.”

“I don’t even know what I look like, Eli! I tried looking in a mirror but I had no reflection. I know what my *physical* body looks like, but.....”

“Harry, I am so glad to hear you say that. ‘My *Physical Body*’. That tells me that you are closer than you care to admit to believing that some part of you exists outside the physical. If you can accept that, my work is half done.”

“Eli, you just can’t know how much I’ve wrestled with that! But I guess I gave up on religion a long time ago. An invisible soul, floating up to heaven to sit on a throne and listen to a bunch of angels playing on their harps! For ever and ever! Eternal boredom, I’d call it! But honestly, what garbage it all is! I saw through it when I was twelve years old, and it makes even less sense now than it did then!”

“You ever hear about throwing the baby out with the bathwater? You’re talking about Christianity, of course, but if you’d been a child raised in my religion you’d probably have come to the same conclusion. Our stories differ from yours; no wise men, no guiding star, no manger. No Messiah! But you’d have gagged on the story of how the sun and moon were made, and our creation story is no less far fetched than ‘Adam and Eve’. But these were tales for a less sophisticated time, Harry. All religions are pretty much the same. You wouldn’t have fared much better under Buddhism, or Islam, and you’d have made a lousy Druid.”

“Well then, what’s the point?”

“The point? Maybe just ‘Don’t confuse Spirituality with Religion; they’re two very different things!’ Maybe I have no point at all. I’m an old man and my mind tends to wander. But we were talking about the *reality* of this place. Do you *see* me now?”

“I see an image; but I know it’s not you. I know that in reality you’re an old man, sleeping against a tree, just as I know that the big dog with you is.....”

“Nonsense! Utter nonsense! Where the hell do you think you are now, exactly?”

“I’m dreaming.”

“Then who or what is that, lying over there on top of the sleeping bag?”

“That’s my sleeping body. I’m dreaming an image of my sleeping body.”

“Then look at *my* body. Walk over to it. Look closely above my right eye. What do you see?”

Harry looked. “You have a scar there. Faint. Looks very old. It runs right up into your hairline.”

“I *do* have such a scar. I got it when I fell from a horse as a young man. But I didn’t tell you about it, or show it to you. So how do you know it is there?”

“I see it.”

“What with? Your eyes are in your body, over there by the tent, and they are closed, Harry.”

“I see it with.....with.....”

“With your eyes, Harry. With your spirit eyes. We are standing here talking to each other, looking at each other. You see me; you hear me. Do you want to touch or taste me? Come closer and smell me!”

“Don’t be revolting!”

“Let me try it this way: What would it take to convince you that you are alive, alert, and fully functioning quite apart from the physical body which lies out there beside the tent.” Elias drew from his belt a wicked, long bladed knife which gleamed under the bright sun. He moved over to Harry’s sleeping body.

“What if I killed this body, Harry, and yet you continued to live? Would that convince you?”

Elias put the edge of the blade to the throat of the sleeper, and Harry reflexively leaped forward. Elias raised his hand and Harry ran into a solid wall of air which held him as though he were bound by ropes. Elias sheathed his blade and stood. A wave of his hand released Harry's bonds.

“Please know that I would never harm you; not here, and not in the waking world. My temper does not improve with age. But believe me, Harry, if someone came into the clearing while you slept and cut your head clear from your body, you would continue to exist exactly as you are now. I'm at a loss as to what will convince you. Can we just leave that issue, for a while, and move on to the Life-Path?”

“Eli, I don't mean to be hard on you, it's just that I see no point in agreeing with you for a quiet life when in my heart I can't accept what you say. But yes, let's move on then.”

“Do me a favour, just listen to me for a minute. I swear to you that everything I say will be the absolute truth. If you still need proof, we'll come back to that later.”

“OK.”

“Your spirit came into existence many thousands of years ago and has been evolving ever since. It has grown and developed by several means, but by far the best and most effective of these is earthly incarnation. You have lived on earth several times. You have been a great leader, a powerful warrior, a renowned teacher and a man of science. You have always chosen to be male. You have learned much, but have missed one very important lesson. Before you were born to your present life your Guardian Spirit met with the Great Council on your behalf to determine the course of your time on earth. She had already discussed with you the kind of life you wished to live, and meeting with the Council was, in your case, pretty

much a formality. It was agreed that the most useful life you could live this time would be as husband and father. You had no further need to study the use of power or the leadership of men. Yet despite all of your experience you had missed out on the most valuable of all life's lessons; you did not know how to love, or how to be loved. So a life was devised for you which would give you the chance to learn. Love for your parents, your children, your friends – even your pets. Love for all of humanity -- though few can succeed at that! But above all, love for your wife, Liz. You had known Liz in previous lives, but not as a lover or a wife. It was decided also that your career would be less than successful in order that you may learn something of humility – a quality which you do not possess in quantity, Harry! That was to be the pattern of your life.”

“But sorry, Eli, I know I said I would not interrupt, but where is the learning in this, if I do no more than follow a script? As a character in a play, where is my free will?”

“Free will is everywhere! The outline of your life was planned in order that you could encounter situations you needed to face in order to grow; but how you deal with those situations is entirely up to you. You could have treated your friends badly – as indeed you have in recent weeks. You have caused your friends much pain lately, Harry. You could have said ‘goodbye’ to Liz on the night you met, never to see her again. Or you could have known her as a lover for a short time and moved on to other women. You could have married her, and then fought and feuded for sixty years. You could have abused your children, or neglected them. You could by now be estranged from your entire family.

“And if I had made such choices?”

“Then you would have needed to repeat the lesson. Until you got it right.”

“And I failed?”

“Do you love Liz?”

“With all my heart, and without qualification.”

“And do you allow her to love you?”

“*Allow* it? Her love is the most precious thing in the world to me.”

“Then how can you have failed, Harry?”

“But you say that I have left my path?”

“That is not to say that you have failed! But yes, you have wandered from your path; from your life-script. It was written that you would succeed to the position of Chief of your organisation. Many trials were planned for you there. You would have been required to bring hardship to your friends for the sake of company profits. Your career and personal life would have come into great conflict, and ultimately you would have had to choose between your career and your wife.”

“No contest.”

“Not *now*! And that is the root of the problem. Somehow you have seen through to the shallowness of many of your earthly pursuits. You now count your career as of little value. How can you be placed in a learning situation by being forced to choose, when one of the two choices has become valueless to you?”

“But how did this happen, Eli? I don’t understand it myself! Less than a year ago I would have killed for the CEO job. Right up to the time I got it, I thought it was the most important thing in my world. What happened to me to make me see it, now, as such a trivial thing.”

“We don’t know Harry. Honest to God, we just don’t know. And the question we move to from there is, under the circumstances, is there any point in your continued earthly existence?”

“What do you mean? That I could..... I could die?”

“Physically, yes. Exactly that. Why plod through another thirty years of a life which has lost it’s meaning? Drifting from day to day like a sea anemone, with no purpose except to exist? What is the point of such a life? You will face no hardships; you will not be tested; you will not learn or grow in what is left of your earth-life. It would be the easiest thing to arrange for your body to die, here and now. A sudden, unexpected heart attack. A passing hiker would find your body a couple of days from now. Or that same hiker could kill you in your sleep, for the credit cards in your wallet and the few possessions in your back-pack.”

“But Liz.....”

“Would be heartbroken, yes. And facing that would be, for her, a valuable lesson in itself. Just as your children would have to face losing you. Your friends, too. For all of them, their life patterns would be disrupted, but much could be salvaged. All of this could be arranged, but we come back to the central question: What is the best option for Harry Murphy?”

“Are you asking me? Are you asking me what I want?”

“In a way, yes. Your wants and needs are more important than you can know. Where do you want to go from here, Harry?”

“I don’t know. You’ve shown me one possibility; what other choices do I have?”

“You could forget everything. We could erase every memory of every dream. Better yet, we could leave sketchy memories of shallow experiences, so that you would think your experiments in dreaming had come to nothing, and would experiment no more. We could re-

script the remainder of your life. At least that way you will grow old with the woman you love; you will have the chance to support each other through age and illness. There are still some lessons to be learned by such a choice.”

“Then if you can do that.....”

“But we cannot undo the events that have already taken place, and we cannot - we *will* not - tamper with your essential soul. We will not change what you have now become. You would go back with a clean bill of health to your AGI, cured of your ‘mental illness’; but would you still want the job? I think not, now. Then what would you do? You have an expression which I’m not sure I understand – a ‘loose cannon’. That is what you would be, I think. A loose cannon. Free to make choices. And depending on your choices, the paths of many people close to you would hang in the balance. Would you become a Christian Missionary to some remote location? Doubtful, I suppose. Would you go back to University, study medicine and find the cure for some dreadful disease? Or make some important scientific discovery? Or turn to a life of crime? All of these are possibilities, and all are unknowns. Then, to fit in with the changes to *your* life-script, we would need to change the scripts of many of the people close to you, affecting the lessons which they went to Earth to learn. We could never be sure that it would be to their advantage, to make such changes.”

“Or?”

“Or you could start over. We could erase all memory of this life and send you for rebirth to live essentially as you lived before. As always at re-birth your memories would be washed clean, but your character would remain exactly as you stand before me now. ”

“And Liz?”

“If you wish to relive your life together, we must wait for Liz to complete her time and ask her whether she wishes to live again as your wife. The wait would be small on this side of the veil, and from what we know of the two of you I feel certain that.....”

“Would we go back to the same time period? Or be born into the twenty first century?”

“We can’t move your time backwards but we could recreate the circumstances quite precisely. You could both be born to the same parents and live under similar circumstances as before. The things that truly matter would be the same.”

“I don’t know, Eli. I need more time to think.”

“Take all the time you need, Harry. We can make this day last for a hundred years if you need so long. Let’s walk a little, shall we?”

Elias turned and walked along a small path into the woods. Harry followed with Mutt at his heels, and found himself in a primeval forest of huge sequoias, twenty feet thick at the base and towering so high that their tops were lost in cloud.

“I was here before,” Harry said. “I received my sword here. That was you, wasn’t it? You brought my sword to me.”

“No, not me. A good friend of mine. His name is Running Elk, and he is my Spirit Guardian. He thought that you might have some use for it against the Dream Riders who were tormenting your mother.”

“It was indeed most useful. Thank your friend from me when you see him.”

“He hears your thanks. He has watched you closely these last few weeks.”

They walked on along the path, which wound around the huge trees and through marshy ground. Foot long, bright yellow slugs crawled slowly along the side of the path.

“I know this place.” Harry said. “This is the rain forest of the Pacific Rim. Liz and I visited it when we were in British Columbia. Those creatures are called Banana slugs.”

“There are such places along the coast of Vancouver Island” Elias said “But this particular stretch does not exist any longer; except in our dreamworld. In your real world men have cut down these trees for lumber. But in this world they it will live forever. Listen to the silence.”

The two men walked and listened, while Mutt raced back and forth in ecstasy, surrounded by a canine paradise of new sights, sounds and smells. Harry thought he could hear the sounds of the ocean, very faintly, in the far distance. His mind raced as he tried to come to grips with the facts which Elias had offered to him. What should he choose? If he ignored the whole situation, would Elias and his ‘Council’ choose for him? Would he awaken in his ‘real’ world to some situation not of his choosing and far from his liking? Or would he simply awaken, returned from a complex dream to the world much as he had left it? In the end, he could not choose.

“Elias, I could walk in these woods for a hundred years, and still not come to any conclusion. I need more help. I need to understand and come to terms with what has happened to me. I accept now that what you have told me is true. I accept the reality of my immortal soul, and I accept the transitory nature of life on earth. But I still have a thousand questions, and I still need time to let this new awareness sink in. It’s still all too new to me, and too strange. I want to know more. I want..... I want to know.....I want to know *everything!*”

* * * * *

In a place which was not a place a thousand beings who had once been human met to discuss the future of one small, undistinguished man. Their discussion made no sounds which could have been heard by human ears, if there had been such ears present, and took place at the speed of thought. On the fringes of this meeting a being who was still human observed the

proceedings. Sky Reader had made his report to the council and had been granted permission to remain. In this place of eternal peace and contentment, Elias was ill at ease and definitely not happy. He had known Harry Murphy for only a short time as earth hours are measured, but had come to like and admire the man. Harry had a good heart and a strong spirit. By rights, his present earth-life should have been penultimate. One more lifetime on earth should have given him the spiritual strength necessary to progress beyond the need for earthly incarnation. His present life had been intended to teach him how to love and be loved, and in this he had made excellent progress. Apart from a few relatively minor trials related to earthly employment, Harry had been considered home and dry. It had been intended that in his final days Harry would be required to nurse his beloved wife through a hard battle with cancer, a fight which she would ultimately lose. A tough test, but one taken by many loving couples at the end of long lives spent together. Harry was expected to face his ordeal with courage and compassion, and in so doing he would have developed considerable emotional strength and spiritual power. All in all, a very profitable life-script for the Murphys, and one which should have produced a highly satisfactory outcome for both of them.

And now where were they?

Sky Reader had reported to the Council, through his Guardian Running Elk, that his efforts had failed. He was unable to offer a solution which Harry could accept, and reluctant to force a solution onto the man.

The Council had accepted his report without comment and in doing so had taken to themselves the responsibility for resolving the problem. Questions and comments filled the ether. One question, if it had been expressed in earthly terms and in a human language was “Does anybody yet have an answer to how this situation came about? Why did this man’s character suddenly take such a radical about-face?”

“His studies of dreams surely caused this,” came an instantaneous response. “He achieved a high degree of knowledge and competence in an incredibly short time. We could not have known that he had such aptitude.”

“No,” another ‘voice’ cut in. “The dream studies were incidental to the attitudinal changes. The fact that they occurred at the same time is coincidental. We should be asking ourselves, rather, what caused the deviation from the scripted life-path? The man did not *choose* to make such deviation, it was thrust upon him. His newly acquired ability to re-focus awareness was the mechanism of the deviation, not the cause of it.”

A new ‘voice’. “I am his Spirit Guardian. Let me speak to this.”

The new speaker had no image in this place, but her personality was very clear to all participants. The strength and love flowing from the being was almost overpowering to Elias, who remained on the boundary of the proceedings. He knew that, in past meetings with Harry’s Guardian, she had appeared to him as a woman in her fifties, handsome rather than beautiful, knowledgeable and wise in the ways of the human race. He doubted that Harry would have recognised his Margaret from the description, though they were one and the same. Her thoughts came clearly to Elias, as to all participants at the meeting.

“I have lately come to believe that the deviation may be linked to an intervention which I made when the man Murphy was very young. A minor variance occurred which resulted in death by drowning of the young boy, and it was necessary for me to correct this imbalance. For reasons still unknown to me the boy died instantly upon immersion. He should have survived without difficulty for long enough to be rescued by his friends, who were nearby. But his spirit drifted. I had to pursue and capture him, and then re-infuse his life-essence into the body. While separated from his body Harry achieved awareness. This, too, was unexpected and should not have happened. In order to prevent a life-path deviation at that point I suppressed memory of the experience. It was far too early in his life for him to become aware of his spiritual qualities. I now believe that this suppression caused a severe inner conflict which smouldered for almost forty earth years: What he *knew* to be true, he believed consciously to be impossible. This inner conflict finally exploded into Harry’s conscious awareness in his late forties when he attained the ability to examine his subconscious mind by way of his dreams. He very rapidly obtained a waking knowledge of his spiritual existence which was

incompatible with his planned life-script. The situation was then further complicated when he insisted on suppressing his new knowledge by conscious reasoning. What he *knew* to true just *could not* be true. And this conflict drove him mad.”

“Yes,” from many ‘voices’. “This could be. But it does not help us towards a solution.”

“No, it does not. But I think, perhaps, that our council is missing the key ingredient necessary to determining the best solution.”

“What ingredient?”

“The mind of Harry Murphy.”

“He is unready. He does not have the intellect needed to function at council, and will not possess this for at least one more incarnation. How could he be brought to us to participate except through your representation?”

“I will prepare him. He has told Sky Reader that he has many questions, and that if answers are supplied he, himself, will make the decision regarding the remainder of his planned earth-life.”

“What does he want to know?”

“He wants to know “everything”. And I intend to teach him.”

* * * * *

Harry awoke as from a dreamless sleep, and for the first few seconds was dazed and disoriented. As the world came into focus he realised that Elias Sylliboy was leaning over him while Mutt licked furiously at his whisker-covered cheek.

“Come on back, Harry,” the old man said. “Wake up now!”

Harry sat up. “What happened?”

“Oh, not much” Elias told him. “You slept for a while, is all. Six hours, actually. I expect you’re pretty hungry by now. I’ve some stew in the pot over there, but I’ll be leaving you and your pal here to enjoy it alone, if it’s all the same to you. Now your dog has been showing remarkable self restraint, but if you don’t get up pretty soon I think he’ll reach the end of his control and just tuck into that stew all by himself.”

“You’re leaving, Eli?”

“Yes, Harry. I’ve done what I can, though it was little enough I could manage for you. Your future is in other hands now. Capable hands, and loving hands. I’m sure that it will all turn out well. But I must be away now. I’m an old man, and there’s not much juice left in me. I’d as soon be back to my bed now as spend another night on pine needles. But let me say this to you. You are a man of great heart. A good man. I admit freely that I didn’t want to come to help you, but as it turned out it has been a rare privilege for me to share your path for a few steps. We will meet again, Harry Murphy, but not in this world. Goodbye now.”

Harry sat up, intending to thank the old Mi’kmaq for his help, or at least for his good intentions, but the man had gone. “Goodbye, Sky Reader” Harry called to the trees. “I will remember you as I last saw you, with hair to your waist and the muscled body of a young warrior. Goodbye my friend.”

He did not sleep that night, but sat outside the tent with Mutt curled at his feet, listening to the night sounds from the woods at his back and the eternal roaring of the Gold River on its endless journey to the sea.

* * * * *

By sunrise of the following morning Harry and Mutt were once again on the trail and heading west. They had retraced their steps along the banks of Gold River and climbed back up to the trail. At Western Shore, a coastal village a few kilometers further west, they left the trail to replenish their food supplies. At a local hardware store Harry picked up a new propane cylinder to fuel the small camp stove which he carried in the backpack. The pack now seemed a fraction of its original weight, and the abrasion at the shoulder straps had become no more than a minor annoyance. The trail wound south-west, passing through a series of small settlements, and away from any sight or sound of the ocean.

As Harry walked on the days and nights fused together into a seamless continuum in which time had no meaning. He slept little, and dreamed not at all. As often as not he made camp simply by dropping the backpack onto a convenient patch of ground and covering himself with the unzipped sleeping bag. By fortune, the nights remained cool but not cold, and little rain fell. His dog would station himself between Harry and the passing trail, standing guard until his master roused himself to resume their quest. When Harry called Liz to give his nightly report she asked him why he sounded so sad. This surprised Harry, who was not at all sad. When he thought about it, he was not especially anything. He walked through an emotionless void, an empty vessel ready to accept whatever emotion were to be poured into him.

On the morning of the thirteenth day of his journey Harry rose with the sun, strapped on his backpack, threw a handful of energy bars to Mutt, and walked to the trail. As far as he could calculate he was half way between the picturesque town of Mahone Bay and the ancient settlement of Lunenburg. He had visited the latter several times, and liked the feel of the old town, which was preserved pretty much unchanged from the time of its inception as a sailing and shipbuilding centre some two hundred years ago. With a little imagination Harry could

walk the streets of Lunenburg and persuade himself that he was a mariner of the last century, about to take ship and embark on a voyage to unknown parts of the unexplored globe. He strode out briskly, turned a sharp corner and almost walked into a young girl in a white dress who stood, smiling, at the centre of the trail.

“Hello Harry. I am very pleased to meet with you.”

“Hello, Margaret. Am I dreaming, then? I could have sworn I was awake.”

“You are asleep and awake. Neither and both. The distinction was always a matter of mental focus; do you look *at* the window or *through* the window? You learned how to focus your awareness, to do either, and now you are able to do both. You can see the glass and you can see through the glass.”

“Those odd children at the beach said much the same thing. Abram and another boy, and the girl Juleen. They told me that there was only one world, and that what we saw in it depended only on our mental focus.”

“So Juleen is back with her brothers now. She was male when I last saw her. I hope that she remembers well what I told her I will do to her when we next meet. But in this, at least, they did not lie to you. I see that you have bested them again, and probably for good. After your last meeting I doubt that they will come to you again. They seek weaker prey; more pliable minds.”

“Elias said that you appear to him as an older woman. Why do you come to me always as a child?”

“When we first met you were very young, and I took from your mind an image which you found unthreatening. I have kept it, but we can change my image at any time.”

“Young? It was earlier this year when we first met. But then, I am told that you are older than the hills, so I suppose that forty seven is.....”

“No, that’s not it. But let that pass for a while. Would you prefer me to appear as I do to the Sky Reader and his Guide?”

As Harry watched Margaret transformed into a woman of Harry’s age, perhaps a few years older. Her expression was kind, but Harry thought it might be a very bad idea to cause that expression to turn to one of anger.

“No, Margaret. I find the situation confusing enough. Leave me what little stability I can find in it.”

The young girl was back. “As you wish, my sweet Harry. Come on, then. Come with me. Put your pack by the side of the road. I will place wards at this spot and nobody will disturb your dreaming body. Your new friend will stand guard against the chance that my wards should fail.”

“Harry did as instructed. He made himself comfortable at the side of the trail and stepped out of his body to stand with Margaret on the path. To anyone passing, an elderly tramp was taking a nap at the side of the trail, with his mongrel dog standing guard as he slept.

“Come with you where, Margaret? Where are we going, you and I?”

“Where you asked to go, Harry. I’m taking you to school.”

* * * * *

BEAUTIFUL DREAMER

Chapter 9:

“Take my hand, Harry.”

The land fell away rapidly, and Harry found himself soaring through the air, hand-in-hand with his Guardian Spirit. Far below, the coastline of Nova Scotia shimmered with haze and blurred with distance. Thin cloud gradually obscured the view, and, without a point of reference by which to judge, the sense of movement ceased.

Very soon they began to descend, and Harry saw the outline of a great city far below. A warm, golden glow seemed to cover the entire city, and as they came lower he could see that each building contributed its own inner light. Flying over the rooftops Harry felt a strange stirring within him, as though some memory of this unearthly place were trying to surface to conscious awareness.

“I think I have been here before, Margaret.”

“Everyone passes twice through this place Harry, or one very much like it; once on the way to rebirth and again on the return trip. It is a way-station of sorts, but for you it will serve as a school, at least for a time.

“Is this an earth place? An earth city?”

“It has an earthly counterpart, but if you visited it you would see only a few scattered villages and a large monastery. An unimpressive place, and one which draws few tourists.”

“Where is it located on Earth?”

“See, we have arrived at our destination, and here is your teacher to welcome you.”

“Why did we not travel here directly? Why was it necessary to fly through the sky to get here?”

“Too much traffic. See, your instructor awaits.”

They stood on the flat roof of a tall building which stood amongst many even taller structures. Like all of the surroundings, this construction gave off a light of its own. Walking towards them was a man of medium height and build, dressed in a one-piece loose fitting robe. He greeted the new arrivals warmly.

“I know you, don’t I?” Harry asked. “You’re my science teacher from my third year at Grammar School!”

“Does this appearance suit you?” the man asked, looking concerned and a little agitated. “We thought that the image of a respected teacher from your earthly schooldays would be appropriate. If it does not suit you I would be pleased to change it. I have little experience of the assignment I have been asked to undertake. Would some other image be more appropriate?”

The last question was directed to Margaret, who smiled at the man and reached out to touch his shoulder. “Harry is much concerned with appearances, Malek. He makes many associations between appearance, ability and intention -- most of which are wrong. Your choice of image will suffice well.”

Margaret turned to Harry. “This man will instruct you in the functioning of the after-life. You may call him Malek, which is the name by which he was known during his last earthly incarnation. While he instructs you in each aspect of the life of the spirit he will also answer any questions which may occur to you.”

“But I thought that *you*.....”

“Malek has much experience as a teacher of men. In earlier lives he was known by other names, some of which would be well known to you. If my presence is required at any time I will come to you. I will be watching your lessons constantly, and much interested in your progress.”

“Malek began to walk to a door at the edge of the roof, and Harry followed. Turning to say goodbye to Margaret he saw that she had already departed. He followed Malek down a flight of stairs into a small classroom. A single desk sat in the centre of the room, facing a wall completely given over to blackboard.

“This is not at all what I expected of the afterlife,” Harry said to his teacher.

“Oh, this is not the afterlife, Harry. You would be most uncomfortable in that place while still attached to a living physical body. We may visit there for short periods, but I will shield you at those times to prevent damage or discomfort to you.”

“Yes, but a classroom? A blackboard? A school desk? Not even a computer? This looks like a setting from the early nineteen hundreds.”

“I am sorry if I have disappointed you, Harry. I conferred with many colleagues about a setting in which you could feel at home, but none of us has ever been asked to do this before. To instruct a living human! It is unheard of. Perhaps if you could give me some idea of a setting in which you might feel more at ease.....?”

“I’m sorry, Malek. This is all new to me, too, and I didn’t know what to expect. Perhaps one thing only? Might I ask for a more comfortable chair?”

The teacher smiled with obvious relief and gestured towards the desk. As Harry turned he saw that it had already been replaced by the black leather recliner from Theo’s office.

Shrugging his shoulders, he sat. Malek moved to the blackboard, and picked up a piece of chalk.

“Your first lesson,” he said, writing on the board “Will concern the structure and composition of the astral plane.”

On the board Harry saw that he had written: Lesson 1: Physics.

Harry's First Lesson: Physics:

Malek turned from the board and Harry saw that he was holding a rectangular shaped bar of some light coloured, shiny material. He passed the bar to Harry, who examined it briefly. The bar was hard and heavy.

“That is a bar of iron. It is an exact replication of its earthly counterpart. It has the same physical properties and structure. You will say that it is quite solid.”

Harry grinned. “Extremely solid, I should say.”

“Most men of earth would agree with you. But of course you are wrong. The material is quite insubstantial.”

Harry raised an eyebrow and looked at his teacher for some sign that he was making a joke, but his face was composed and unsmiling.

“Let us examine this material together. You may find this experience a little disorienting, so please advise me at once if you are subjected to any discomfort.”

The iron bar floated out of Harry's hand and sat, suspended, a few feet in front of his eyes. Harry felt an instant of dizziness and all the lights went out. He found himself staring at the same bar, which hung exactly as it had moments before; but his perspective had shifted

substantially. Instead of being perhaps fifteen centimeters long and five wide it now seemed like some immense structure floating free in space; a massive station of some sort, around which Harry and his instructor floated in orbit. Turning his head, he found that he could see neither his own body nor that of Malek, who spoke to him now as a detached voice.

“I have made a few little changes to time and space in order that we may examine this bar” he said. “Let us approach closer now.”

Harry floated towards the bar, which grew until it completely covered his field of vision, and continued to expand. As he came closer to the surface of the metal he saw that it was far from smooth. In fact the surface was extremely irregular. Closer yet and he saw that, far from a homogeneous substance, it was assembled from discrete chunks, not even visibly connected to one another.

“At this level we begin to see the individual molecules from which the metal is constructed. I wish you to note that the supposedly ‘solid’ substance, when examined in this way, consists of a number of discrete masses, each more or less spherical. In terms of the total volume of space which it occupies, as you see it is mostly.....”

“Empty air!” Harry interjected.

“Not air. And not empty. But let us examine one of the molecular masses.”

Like a small spaceship approaching a large asteroid Harry moved towards the nearer of the floating spheres. “I thought molecules were like coloured beads connected together by sticks and strings,” he said.

“Ah, yes, your science class representation,” Malek responded, apparently amused by Harry’s observation. “Let us now enter the molecule.”

They moved towards and then into the molecule, which now seemed as insubstantial as a grey raincloud. Harry saw that, once again, the substance comprised a number of vague, dark grey shapes, floating, seemingly unconnected through – emptiness.

“Those darker spots which you see about you are the atoms,” Malek told him. “We will now enter an atom of the element ‘iron’.”

Once more Harry drifted towards the grey shape in front of him and passed inside. The scenery here was more familiar. He was moving through a large dark solar system, in which orbital planets circled a huge, central sun. But the sun gave off no light. The space inside the atom seemed to glow with a faint blue radiance. The effect was quite beautiful, and Harry was lost in wonder. Malek, sensing this, remained silent for a few moments.

“A wondrous construction, is it not? But you will observe again that in terms of the total volume of space occupied by the atom, most of that space is filled with.....”

“Nothing!” Harry said.

“Look again.”

Harry studied the scene in front of him. Far away, the dark nucleus of the atom seemed somehow in motion; somehow alive. Above him a small planet passed in rapid orbit.

“I have, of course, modified the time scale. Your normal perceptions would be ineffective at observing the passage of the orbital electrons.”

“Of course!” Harry realised. He was looking at a classic portrayal of the atom, pretty much as his science teacher had long ago described it. But he could still see no evidence of ‘matter’ of any form within the ‘solar system’ before his eyes.”

“There is nothing there, Malek, unless it is something which I cannot detect.”

“You see nothing?”

“Only a blue light.”

“So there is nothing there; but it is a blue nothing.”

“Is it a gas, then?”

“Think, Harry. At this scale the atoms of any gas would look much like the atoms of iron, differing only in the composition of the nucleus and the number and placing of their orbital electrons.”

“Then what is it?”

The lights came on and the bar of steel was gone. They were back in the classroom. Harry sat in the recliner as his teacher wrote on the desk and went over the points of his lesson.

“What it is, this blue light, is the basis of all life in this universe. Let us see what we have learned. The ‘solid’ bar of steel is made of mostly empty space, with a scattering of molecules, bound together by energy. These molecules are themselves mostly empty space, with a scattering of atoms, bound together by energy. Each atom, in terms of the space it occupies, is also mostly empty, the components held together again by an unseen energy. So the whole bar of steel is mostly emptiness. But we have seen that it is not ‘emptiness’. The massive vacancies are all filled with a nothingness which is blue. And here we are at the heart of the lesson.

“The blue glow is energy. It is not light, although it acts much like light in some ways, and it is able to interact with the visible spectrum. It is not electromagnetic energy at all, not as men understand the term. It is an energy which men on earth have at present no way to detect. Not by their senses and not by their equipment. Oh, Kirlean Photography came close

at the middle of the last century; and one day, not too far away, a man and a woman will devise a way to detect and use it. Their names will then stand amongst the giants of science. And the world will change, that day, more than ever before. But for the moment the blue energy is undetectable.”

“What is it.”

“It is the energy from which everything here is made. It fills the entire universe, physical and spiritual, and permeates everything within. It is the energy which, when coupled with a suitable physical material, vivifies that material and sparks life.

“I say that it cannot be detected on the physical level; nevertheless it is well known. Men have known of the existence of a vivifying energy for many centuries. It is called by many names; prana, chi, elemental essence, astral matter, holy spirit, Life Force, God's Love. This energy is the source of your spiritual existence -- your spirit is *made* of it. It is the spiritual equivalent of the atoms and molecules which form physical objects, and it is no less 'real'. For the sake of consistency and simplicity I suggest that we choose one name and stick to that name. For myself, I prefer the use of ‘astral energy’, and will use that title if you find it satisfactory.”

“Fine by me,” Harry said. “You say that my spirit is made from this blue energy? This ‘astral energy’. How can that be? It is not solid; it has no substance. How can my body – even a spirit body – be made of something which lacks substance?”

“Ah,” said Malek, smiling broadly. “Did not Mr. Einstein demonstrate to you that matter is merely a special form of energy? A ‘condensation’, could I say? There is a very famous equation which explains this relationship. But I see that you are an apt and eager pupil. You are ready at once to move forward to your second lesson! Very well, let us do so.”

Malek picked up the chalk and moved again to the board where he wrote:

Lesson 2: Biology

Harry's Second Lesson: Biology:

“Physical Matter attracts Astral Matter to it. It does this by a force very similar to gravity. Because of this the Astral form follows the outline of the physical body, overlapping it by a small amount. This overlap is seen by psychics – human beings who are able to perceive astral matter – as the ‘Aura’. The aura can reveal much about the human being which it envelops by its colour, its consistency and by certain other characteristics.

“At the death of the physical body the Astral body retains its shape for a period of time which varies greatly from one individual to another. Some have named this body the ‘etheric double’. But this shape is not the true Astral body of the individual. Over time, the surplus astral material dissipates, leaving the basic structure. This, as we shall see, is essentially a slightly asymmetrical ovoid. An egg, if you like. However, many people, especially at the level on which we now find ourselves, choose to ‘clothe’ this by attracting to it astral matter to form the shape of their choice. This is frequently the shape of the physical body they have recently left, but with any imperfections and infirmities corrected.

“Thus I have taken this particular shape in order to help you learn in a familiar non-threatening environment. My true astral form would appear like this.”

As Harry watched, Malek's body began to turn translucent, and then transparent. Inside the body he could see the outline of a large, shining egg. Finally the body had completely disappeared, leaving the egg floating at the front of the classroom. Malek's voice continued, although in his present state Harry could see no mouth nor any organ approximating one. In fact he could see no organs at all.

“Once ‘stripped’ to my basics, I am at liberty to re-attract astral matter, and shape it into any other form I desire. Thus I might wish to appear in the guise of someone personally familiar to you. This is often a useful mechanism for establishing trust.”

The 'air' around the egg became misty. The mist thickened and swirled; colours and shapes formed, and Harry's mother stood at the front of the class.

"No!" before the image could speak Harry leaped from the chair and shouted at the shape in front of him. "You will not take on that appearance in front of me."

Malek stood before him in his original guise. "My sincere apologies, Mr. Murphy. It was not my intention to upset or offend you. I plead again my ignorance in this, and my lack of experience. Please forgive me."

Harry resettled himself. "I over-reacted, Mr. Malek. Please continue."

"Thank you. We will move on, then. In order to understand the 'biology' of the astral body, I must first ensure that you have a knowledge of closed, self sustaining energy vortices. I will illustrate this."

The blackboard dissolved, to be replaced by a black-and-white image which flickered and jerked. It looked like an image from a very old movie – and it was! Harry recognised a scene from the "Wizard of Oz".

"This," said Malek, "Is a Tornado."

Harry felt himself drawn into the screen to become part of the movie. Malek's voice came to him once more from a disembodied source. All around him debris spun and twisted madly. He expected at any moment to see a young girl with a small dog whirl up from the ground to join him.

"What you are experiencing is a duplication of an actual storm," Malek said. "The actual event on which our simulation is based took place in the southern USA some years ago."

“I already figured out that we were in Kansas.” Harry said.

“Kansas?” Malek was obviously puzzled by the reference. “Oh, no, Mr. Murphy., I assure you that we are not in Kansas. Our actual location – I should say, the earthly counterpart of our present location, is somewhere in Tibet, I understand.”

Ah, Harry thought. I’ll just tuck that little bit of data away in case I should need it some day. He decided to press for more information. “Tibet you say, Mr. Malek. Strange that I saw few mountains on the way here.”

Malek roared with laughter. “Mountains! Oh, Mr. Murphy! You have such a splendid sense of humour!”

As Harry tried to make sense of the odd response he found himself drawn downwards towards the mouth of the great funnel, which was sucking up anything in its path. An out-building of a nearby farm disappeared into the mouth of the tornado and was instantly torn into a thousand pieces of shredded timber. Seemingly unimpressed, Malek continued his dissertation:

“So long as the vortex receives energy, the storm will continue. If it can obtain sufficient energy it will grow. These storms, as you probably know, are spawned over warm oceans, but rapidly lose their vitality when they make a landfall. If the tornado were a sentient being, and able to seek out energy sources, it would become self sustaining and could theoretically exist for all time. Fortunately for mankind, they cannot.”

The scenery changed, and Harry was looking down at a huge whirlpool in the middle of a vast expanse of open ocean.

“The maelstrom is another type of vortex,” Malek’s voice came from everywhere. “The principle is much the same. And this is yet another vortex.”

They were back in the classroom, Harry in his comfortable chair while Malek stood before him at the blackboard. In his hand he held what seemed to be a shiny spinning top.

“This particular vortex is one which I have just now constructed. It is built from that same astral energy which we have seen elsewhere. I have caused the vortex to spin, and have made certain modifications to the mouth of the funnel so that it is able to draw energy from its surroundings. If I were now to release the vortex into the room it would exist here forever. It is self sustaining as long as it can find energy to draw into itself, and the energy which it requires is infinite and everywhere.”

Harry watched the spinning top float up from Malek’s hand and hover in front of his eyes. It seemed to glow from within, and Harry could now see colours beginning to form until, with a sharp ‘pop’ the vortex vanished.

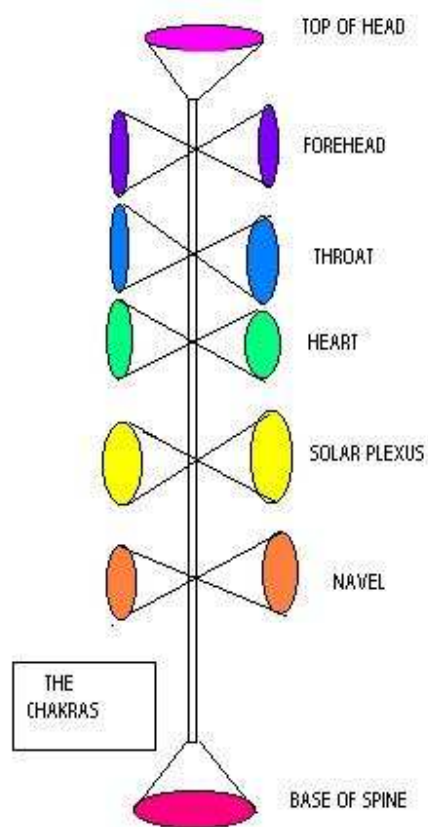
“You must know that it is against our laws to create such vortices and allow them to become sentient,” Malek said. “You may begin to understand why this should be when I explain to you that the self sustaining vortex is the basis for the spirit body. Let me show you my bones!”

Chuckling, Malek’s form wavered and vanished, leaving the glowing ‘egg’ which Harry had seen previously. His voice continued to come from some source which Harry could not pin-point.

“You now see the outer form of my astral body, but this is mostly random astral matter which has been attracted to the essential structure. I will take away this extraneous material.”

In the centre of the egg Harry saw an outline begin to take shape. As the outer layers dispersed the outline became, as Malek had indicated, an assembly of vortices. A slim central column floated approximately where Malek’s spine would have been in a human being. At the top and bottom of the column were two funnel-shaped constructions, joined to the column by

the mouths of the funnels. Along the length of the column were five more pairs of vortices, once again connected at their pointed ends to the column itself.



“You are looking at my bare bones, Harry. My bones and my bodily organs. Each of these paired vortices fills a particular function, much like the organs of your physical body. Focus your attention on the lower organs until you begin to see a predominant colour.”

Harry did as instructed and the lower paired ‘organs’ took on a rusty brown tinge.

“They seem to be vaguely orange,” he said.

“Yes. Each of the pairs operates at a frequency which causes a sympathetic vibration in the visual spectrum. The lower organs can sometimes be seen as orange. The higher ones are seen at the blue-violet end of the spectrum.

Harry gaped. Was he truly looking at a human soul, stripped to its basic components? He could find nothing to say.

“I must tell you that this is less newsworthy than you seem to think, Harry! Men have been aware of this construction for many years, although the knowledge is less widely spread through the western world. Men call these organs ‘Chakras’, which is an old term for a spinning wheel; you will notice that from certain vantage points that is exactly how they appear.”

Malek turned to face Harry, who saw that from this viewpoint the astral organs did indeed resemble rapidly spinning wheels.

Without further discussion the egg reformed rapidly, as astral matter was pulled to the structure from its surroundings, and within a few heartbeats Malek stood once more at the front of the classroom.

“This, then, is the basic construction of the astral body.”

“So this is what my immortal soul looks like!”

“No. Pay attention, please! Your soul – which, by the way, is *not* immortal, not eternal – comprises several bodies, including the astral. You may learn of the other bodies in time. I think that we should now move along to the next lesson.”

“But I have more questions: How do these chakra work? How do I *see* with them? How are we able to communicate.”

“You are a strange man, Harry Murphy. You have lived forty seven years on earth without knowing or caring how your physical eyes work; why should the machinery of astral sight suddenly be of interest to you?”

“But I *do* know how my eyes work. It’s like a camera, with a lens and an aperture and

“The basics, yes. The very *basic* basics. But how do the photoreceptors of the retina convert electromagnetic signals into nerve impulses? And how does the brain then process the mad jumble of signals into a form which it may recognise? Or perhaps you could explain to me how visual purple is secreted to enhance night vision? Tell me.....”

“Ok, I get your point.”

“Shall we move on to discuss the workings of the ear? Or perhaps you could explain to me the mysteries of taste and smell.”

“No, Malek, let’s not. Let’s go on to the next lesson.”

“Harry, on earth much is known of the functioning of the chakras. Look it up if you return home. Speak with those knowledgeable in

“What do you mean, *if* I return home?”

“I was advised that you have not yet determined what course of action you intend to take. Am I wrong in this?”

“No. Let’s move on. What comes next?”

“Ah, you know now of the astral body; how it is constructed; how it feeds. You must learn now how it grows. We could call this lesson ‘the meaning of life’.”

Malek went once again to the board and wrote: ‘Education and Spiritual Growth.’

Harry's Third Lesson: Education and Spiritual Growth:

"This is an immature astral body," Malek said. "I should probably rotate the diagram, since it is the spirit body of an animal."

Harry had been looking at a diagram on the blackboard which seemed to be nothing more than a slim vertical tube with a funnel at the bottom and a number of bumps along its length. As he watched, the chalk drawing rotated through ninety degrees and became a horizontal tube, the funnel protruding from the extreme right. Malek sketched the outline of some animal around the tube.

"What is that supposed to be?" Harry asked.

"Let's say it is a horse," Malek replied, and the sketch changed slightly to correspond more to a known animal. "You will note that the lower chakra, now placed by the animal's tail, is the only developed organ. The others are no more than stubby growths at the place where the chakras will eventually form. The only structure less developed than this would be that of a plant."

"Plants have souls?"

"That question demeans your intellect, Harry. Plants, like all living organisms, are infused with astral energy. In plants and lower animals, the energy is not structured, and dissipates on the death of the host creature. In higher animals the energy is tightly structured in interconnected vortices, as we have seen. If the structure is sufficiently well developed it can remain intact on the death of the physical body, and the being may then reincarnate and begin to develop. In the case of this horse, there is very little chance that the spirit has the necessary cohesion, and it will not survive the death of the body.

"Here is another animal," Malek said, and the chalk lines changed to represent some smaller animal. "This one is female. She mates for life, and protects her young until they are

capable of taking care of themselves. She forms associations with others of her kind and will fight to defend the common good. You will note that several of the chakras are quite prominent when compared to the previous example.”

Harry studied the diagram. The vortex at the tail of the animal was quite large and well defined. The other chakras, though less well defined and smaller, were still easily seen.

“The spirit of this female animal has a chance of surviving physical death. Now this one.....” Once again the chalk outline re-modelled itself on the board. “.....is a dog; a family pet; well loved and cared for, and in return loving and devoted to his master. You will see that the chakras are strong here; large and well developed. The spirit *will* remain intact; the individuality of this animal will survive. This spirit will reincarnate once more in animal form, perhaps twice, and should then be strong enough to animate a human body. Now what this

Harry was stunned by what he had just heard. “Wait a minute, Malek! Just let me digest this. You are telling me that human beings developed from animals?”

“Harry, your Mr. Darwin already proved that many of your years ago.”

“But you are saying that the human *spirit* also evolved in this way!”

“Of course. Where did you think that human spirit came from? Did you think that it sprung instantly from nothingness in one inspired burst of creativity? Are you about to preach the ‘Adam and Eve’ story to me? Would you tell me of your ‘Garden of Eden’?”

“No. No. I suppose that it’s logical, when I stop to think about it. It just came as a bit of a shock. You mean that I.... that my spirit.... that I was once an animal?”

“Yes. Shall we move along, then? Very well. Let us now consider what is needed in order that an astral body may grow and develop. Now, obviously a source of energy is a re-

quirement, but not a key one. As we have seen, an infinite supply of suitable energy is everywhere available. But something else is needed.

“The strength of the spirit is determined by the power of the Chakras to use astral energy. The illustration which I first gave you showed an immature spirit, with barely developed chakras, which could do nothing with energy except absorb it, and even this it could not do particularly well. The later version, the family pet, showed some well developed chakras. It was able to understand basic emotions, to communicate quite effectively, to develop lasting relationships and, most importantly, to give and receive love. Incidentally, that was a diagram of your canine friend, the one who somehow followed you here.”

“Mutt? Mutt is here?”

“Yes. We’re not sure how he got here, but his bond with you was so strong that he was able to ‘follow the scent’ and find you. He is being cared for, and has been made to understand that his presence would detract from your studies. You will be reunited with him soon enough.

“So we come to the question: ‘how can the chakras best be developed?’ And the answer? Much as you would strengthen and develop your physical body during your earth life by exercise and a good diet. We will discuss the ‘diet’ in a later lesson. By using the chakras you strengthen them. By testing them to their limits you cause them to grow stronger. What is it that your athletes say of their training? ‘No pain, no gain’ I think is the expression. So it is with the spirit. If you wish to develop the intellect, use it! Tackle problems which you may think beyond you. *Stretch* yourself! And your emotions, too. Learn to express your love; to control your hate; to express your grief; to stifle feelings of jealousy and lust. And how can this best be done? Many ways have been tried, but the only one which has worked consistently well is.....”

“Earth life.”

“Well done, Harry! Yes, indeed, earth life! Physical incarnation is a hard teacher. It is so frighteningly harsh that there are many here who have never dared to experience it. But as a route to growth of the spirit, nothing else even comes close.

“On earth, people think of the afterlife as perfect. Do you still call it ‘Heaven’ in your culture, or is it ‘Nirvana’. I forget these things which I once knew so well.”

“Christians speak of Heaven.”

“Yes, ‘Heaven’, then. Well, Heaven is not perfect by quite a wide margin. There is still contention and disagreement; there are accidents and ailments. But on the whole it can still be considered a very tranquil and peaceful place. Now consider this: to develop physical muscles you need an appropriate environment. A hard physical occupation, for example, or a well equipped gymnasium. Similarly, to strengthen spiritual ability you also need an appropriate environment, and Heaven does not provide one. Therefore some other environment is needed. In order to learn how to control hatred, you must experience hatred. Similarly for greed, lust, jealousy; the whole spectrum. Earth provides such an environment – how do you say this? In Spades!”

Malek laughed at his own humour and Harry joined in with him. “Ah, Mr. Murphy,” Malek said, grinning widely “What an entertaining assignment this is turning out to be! I am sure that my colleagues will now compete against each other if there should ever be another such requirement.”

“And so you are sent to Earth, and placed in a controlled situation in which you come face to face with the emotions which you wish to experience. How well you fare in this, of course, depends completely on you.”

“Who determines whether I have been succesful or not?”

“Ah, have patience. We will come to that.”

“Is God my judge then, or Saint Peter?”

“I see that patience is not your ‘strong suit’. Oh, isn’t this use of language such good fun. I had forgotten about ‘fun’.”

“Tell me this at least, is the judge hard on those who fail?”

“Hard? Oh, gracious yes. You will never again encounter such a harsh, critical person as the one who judges your degree of success. He will pick apart minor faults which you never even noticed that you had; and he will give little credit for deeds which you considered to have demonstrated your great virtues. Things you thought important will turn out to be trivial, and minor acts of kindness will prove to be your salvation! Oh, what a shock you are in for, yes indeed.”

“Then I will be sent to Hell!”

Faced with Harry’s downcast expression Malek once more broke into laughter, but rapidly recovered in the face of such obvious distress. “Oh, be of cheer, Mr. Murphy! I assure you that there is no ‘Hell’. The concept exists only on earth, and only in the religion of Christianity! I give you my solemn promise that you will not be ‘sent to Hell’!”

“But.....”

“No, ‘but’ me no more. We must now address the question of how you are able to meet the situations needed for your personal growth. After all, there would be little point in having you drift through life like a sea anemone through warm waters, encountering no challenges.”

“My friend Elias said exactly the same thing to me.”

“Ah, yes. The Sky Reader is a man of great strength and wisdom. But this is not a problem. It cannot happen. We can be very sure that you will encounter the situations you require during your earth life. Because we write the scripts!”

Harry's Fourth Lesson: Art and Literature:

“First, you must know this. Earth is a school. That is its only function and its only purpose. Everything in life is either a lesson or a test; *everything*! And a test is merely a special type of lesson; one in which you learn how much you do not know!

“Under the circumstances it would be foolish to leave the learning experience to chance. It would be like a school with no classes, no teachers, no examinations. How much would you have learned if your earthly schools had been run along such lines? Very little, I think. But your earth life is well organised before you are even born. Depending on the lessons which you wish to study you may be born into the family of a powerful King, a wealthy industrialist or a poor carpenter. There is nothing haphazard or random about this choice, for it determines much of what follows.

“The single most important aspect of this form of training is that you must continually push yourself. You *must* face adversity. For this reason, many choose to be born into poverty and hardship and then ascend to fame and riches by their own strivings. There is much to be learned from such a life, and people find it very satisfying. Most men would choose such a life over one in which power and riches are bestowed on them due to no effort or achievement of their own. But at the base of all this is the fact that no burden will be set unless the student should agree to it. No challenge must be faced in life that the student has not requested be placed there.”

“Pause a while, Malek. I have questions!” Harry had hesitated to interrupt the flow of words as his tutor warmed to the subject. “What if a man should take on a life of hardship and then find it to be more than he can bear? Or let us say that a man is facing the end of his life,

suffering from an illness that can never be cured, and is looking forward only to more months of pain and.....

“You are going to ask me, Harry, why it should be considered wrong for such a man to end his life prematurely by his own hand.”

“Yes.”

“You were thinking of your friend Theodore?”

“Yes, in part. But I was thinking more of another, a friend of my youth, who killed himself on his twenty-first birthday at the home of his parents.”

“Why do you say that such an act would be considered ‘wrong’? Who do you think would consider it so?”

“You, Malek, would you not?”

“No, I would not. I realise that some earthly religions teach this, but it is not my personal view. I would consider it not to be wrong so much as weak and foolish! Less so, of course, in the case of Theodore, who was in any event close to the end of his life and would cause few problems by leaving a little prematurely. But for the young man, this is a different case. That person undertook earthly life in order to face certain challenges necessary to his development. That he was unable to face them tells much about the man’s character. It is much akin to dropping out of school, Harry. He will leave in the middle of his grade, his education incomplete. He will be unable to progress, and, in the end, he will be sent back to face again that same set of circumstances from which he fled. Time and time again, if need be. Yet there is another side: The tangled mess of lives which he leaves behind by his premature exit will need much work to straighten. Many scripts will need to be rewritten, and some will have been damaged past the point of restoration. Your friend’s parents, for example, had not built such a challenge into their scripts yet now must face this situation. Be sure that these

effects will sit hard on the shoulders of the suicide when he faces the seat of judgement, and it is unlikely that he will be shown lenience. On the whole, it is not a course of action which I would recommend, nor one, I think, that your friend's Spirit Guide will soon forgive. Perhaps, on reflection, 'wrong' might not be too strong a term. Have I spoken to your concern? Shall we return to the lesson? Yes? Very well.

"At this time of planning you will also be allowed a say in the *length* of your life. On earth a long, healthy life is much prized, and those who achieve a very old age are often held in high esteem. But remember, you would be planning this from your 'heaven', from a place of great contentment and freedom from hardship. You would be asked, essentially, 'how long do you wish to stay in that place of pain and suffering? Of accident and illness? Of disappointment and regret? How long do you wish to endure cold and heat, to be blown about by winter winds and burned by summer sun? To be involved in wars and plagues and famines, and live in almost constant conflict with your fellow man? Some would say that a person requesting a long life under these circumstances is a great fool!

"Yet it stands to reason that, if the course is set hard enough, more can be learned in a long life than in a short one; in the end, the majority of people settle for something close to the average span of years, and for a moderate degree of hardship and suffering."

"I have another question," Harry interrupted once more. Malek showed not the slightest sign of irritation and waited patiently for Harry to continue. "Tell me why some should choose to live only a few days, or weeks? Why should they choose a life of sickness, pain and early death?"

"The short lives of children are often lived more for the sake of the parents than for the child. Watching a child suffer and eventually die is perhaps the hardest test set for men and women on earth, and not many would face this willingly. Yet for those who are able to bear it, the potential for growth of the spirit is very high. And, of course, some are required to live such a life due to Karmic obligation."

“To what?”

“Karma. We will discuss this in your lesson on Justice and the Law. But if I may continue, we will now observe the process, you and I. We will listen in on part of a planning session for a man who is shortly to return to earth. He will neither see nor hear us, so you may feel free to ask any questions which occur to you.”

“Malek, I don’t much like eavesdropping, spying. I would feel happier if we were doing this with the consent of the man who’s life is being planned here.”

“This attitude does you much credit, but your concerns have been addressed. The man in question does not mind that you should observe the process.”

“I guess I’ll have to take your word for that. Let’s go, then.”

Harry followed Malek through the classroom’s rear wall. Moving through solid objects no longer posed a problem to Harry, but it reminded him that he was still dreaming. He found himself in a similar room to the one he had left. Seated across from each other at a small table were a middle aged woman and a plump, jovial looking man in his early twenties.

“But you have already lived twice as a warrior, Phillipe,” the woman was saying. “You have proved your courage and your valour many times, but you have ignored other aspects of your personality. And you would have lived again as a warrior in your recent life if I had not prodded you towards a career in science! Even then, you insisted that you would begin your scientific studies only after your return from fighting with Napoleon! You place far too much emphasis on this outdoor activity; this riding and hunting, and carving up your fellow men in battle. It is time to change your focus. You come to love war too much!”

“Oh, my dear Angelica, you know that is not true! I take no pleasure from the pain I must inflict on my fellow man, but from the

“Yes, I know. Planning the campaign! Outwitting the enemy! Winning, always winning!”

“Oh, but you have had me loose, too. In my last life you took away my left arm! And at eighteen years of age!”

“Phillipe, it was the only way to stop you fighting! And you succeeded well enough. But let us not dwell on the past. You know too much of war and killing, and far too little about love. You have never married. Never raised a family. And you have enjoyed far too much success. You must learn how to handle defeat.”

“I accept your better judgement as I have always accepted it. You are truly my Guiding Spirit, Angelica, and I would be a fool not to accept the course which you chart for me. Tell me again then about my planned life as a factory manager, then; tell me how I will grow weak and pale for lack of sunlight.”

“The career is secondary. You will earn your daily bread in such a way, but the focus of your life will be family and friendship. You recall Lillianne, your aunt in your last life?”

“Aunt Lillith, yes, of course! My mother’s sister. I loved aunt Lillith very much when I was a boy. Throughout my life she was very dear to me.”

“Yes, and she felt much love for you. She will have the part of your wife in the next incarnation. She will bear you two children. You have the potential to learn much about love in this life, and your spiritual progress will benefit greatly.”

“Very well, then. Let’s go over the script again. Tell me about my factory.”

“You will manage a Printing Factory in Canada, and you will succeed to high office. But you will find problems there, and conflict with the family values we wish you to study.

Let us start, then. You will be born shortly after the end of the second world war in the north of England. Your parents, the Murphys, will be middle income, and your father.....”

Harry stood, open mouthed. “That’s me. You fooled me, Malek. That is *my* life they are planning. Is this a recording or something? Or are those two acting the scene for us?”

“You could call this a recording. And the

“Where is Margaret? Shouldn’t she have been with me to do this ‘script writing’?”

“That *is* the being known to you as Margaret. At the time of this discussion she had not yet taken on the form in which she now appears to you. That was done when you were very young.”

“They spoke of other lives, previous lives. I was a soldier? A warrior? Malek, I simply cannot absorb this. There is just too much. Let’s move on to my next lesson, and I will try to make sense of what I have seen later.”

“A sensible course of action. We will move on then. You have asked me before about the process of judging a life -- how it is determined whether you have succeeded or failed. I told you that the judge in such cases is extremely strict and almost impossible to please. I have arranged for you to see him in action.”

“I am going to see a case being tried?”

“No. You are going to be judged.”

Harry’s Fifth Lesson: Law and Justice:

They stood on the sidewalk of a broad street somewhere close to the heart of the city. There was no vehicular traffic on the wide street, but many people walked swiftly here and

there around them. The building was magnificent. Even here, where immense skyscrapers were commonplace, the Judicial Building dwarfed its surroundings. A flight of polished stone steps led upwards to massive doors, flanked by carved columns which rose so high that their tops were barely visible. Half way up the flight of steps a large sculpture on a huge plinth represented a set of scales. Harry thought that a medium sized ocean-going liner could fit on one side of the balance, while one of the space shuttles – complete with blast rockets -- might fit comfortably into the other.

“I see that here, too, the balance is the symbol for justice,” Harry commented. “Here the balance represents Karma,” Malek replied. “Come. Our time approaches, and here is your defence counsel, ready to plead for mercy on your behalf!”

As the two men climbed the steps Harry saw Margaret waiting for them by an open door at the top of the flight. He was concerned that she had chosen to arrive in her ‘Girl-in-White’ guise, as he did not know what weight this would carry with the dread judge who he was shortly to face.

“I will wish you good luck, and leave you to your judgement, Harry. We will meet again shortly.”

“Yes, if I’m not consigned to Purgatory!” Harry said glumly. Malek left, laughing again.

Deep in his personal thoughts Harry said little to Margaret as they moved into the hall. Although crowded with people, who seemed to be rushing about in all possible directions, the silence in the huge building was tangible. Harry found himself talking in whispers.

“Margaret, I don’t want to hurt your feelings or insult you, but do you think that your present appearance is the best choice for the work we have in front of us today? What will this judge think if I am represented by a young girl?”

“I know this judge well, Harry. Believe me, this is the best of all possible images to present to him.”

“Well, I guess I’m going to have to trust you. Malek says he is a cruel and heartless judge, the one who will hear my case today.”

“Not at all, Harry. He is the kindest of men. Malek probably meant to say that he would judge you harshly, and condemn every little failing without mercy; that he would overlook the kindest of deeds, but condemn even the smallest act of oversight or thoughtlessness.”

“Is that true, then?”

“Oh, yes. All of that and much more.”

From high above them Harry heard his name called, and turned to Margaret, his face a mask of fear. “Where do we go? What should I do?”

“Have courage, Harry. See that little door over there? Go through it. Inside you will find a chair. Sit in it. Then wait.”

“Are you not coming with me?”

“I shall enter by another door and see you inside.”

Knees knocking as he walked, Harry approached the small door, opened it, and stepped through. Inside, the room was dim, but he could just see the outline of a large chair. He sat in the chair, and waited. After a while his eyes adjusted to the dim light and he could see that he was in a medium sized court chamber. There were two chairs; the one in which he sat and a second, smaller chair by the side of a small door to his right. As he watched, Margaret entered the room and sat in the smaller chair.

“Are you ready to begin, Harry?” she asked him.

“Margaret,” Harry hissed, “The judge is not yet here!”

“He is here, Harry. He entered when you did, and he is sitting in your chair!”

Harry leaped to his feet and looked around, but there was nobody else in the room. Margaret was laughing.

“Please forgive us, Harry. Malek was playing a joke on you, and he asked me to go along with it. Malek has not shown a sense of fun in over two thousand years! You have really had an amazing effect on him in your short time here.”

“What joke? Is the judge coming late? Is there to be no trial today?”

“There is but one person fit to judge your life Harry. No-one else is competent or qualified to make such a judgement. The judge is *you*.”

Harry sat, stunned. After long seconds he managed to gasp out “Me?”

“Of course you! Your life was planned for *your* benefit. Your life was lived for *your* benefit. Who is to say whether you received that benefit but yourself? But I warned you that the judge will show you no mercy, and I did not lie. Are you ready to begin?”

“Yes. I think so. No. I’m not.....Yes.”

“Then we will begin at the beginning.”

In the centre of the room a baby was crying. Harry saw his mother, a young woman, come to the baby and pick it up. She rocked the child and sang softly to it. Harry realised that he was one with the scene. He was part of the scene and at the same time a distant observer.

As he sat in the high chair he also lay in his mother's arms. He could feel his mother's love for the new infant; her hopes for the child. He knew that she would give her life without question or hesitation if it should ever be needed to save this little baby. The scene flowed, and sped up. Images flashed past like landscapes glimpsed through the windows of an express train, but Harry identified with every flickering image. He felt his mother's anguish when he was an hour late for their evening meal. He knew she cared little for the wasted food although that was how she berated him. And for every tear she shed, then and later, he felt the sting of the lash on his own back. He was a cruel and unmerciful judge. He forgave himself nothing.

After seconds or hours of this he met Liz, and felt with her the dizzying heights and terrible lows to which a woman in love is always subjected. He felt each tear she shed, each time she was stung by some thoughtless act on Harry's part. But now, with each tear, Harry brought the whip down on himself. Without mercy.

He saw his generous gifts to charity in their true light – money he could easily afford, given, in part to prove his goodness to himself and to others. He saw a coin thrown carelessly to a panhandler on the Spring Garden Road. He felt the gnawing of hunger in the young boy's stomach as he sat down to his own meal. Again and again the lash fell.

But there were highs to cancel out some of the lows. He saw his love for Liz shining through the tarnish of his life. He loved her truly, not for any personal gain, not for any reason of social need; he loved her because it was the right and natural thing to do. And by her returned love he knew himself to be the most fortunate of men.

For hours or seconds or perhaps days the scenes came and passed and changed and Harry felt all of it. He felt the pain he had caused to loved ones, to innocent bystanders, to people he never knew that he had harmed. And he felt the love, the gratitude, the warmth of feeling for acts of kindness. At the end he knew that he had made no great sacrifices for others, had been less than generous in showing tolerance or understanding where it was needed. He saw his career successes to be as valueless as throws of the dice in some game of chance. His promotions, his high salary, his expensive possessions – worthless now, in this place, and

never really worth what he had thought at the time. The only lasting thing of value from his working life was the fact that he had used his power well; not for personal gain or self interest. He had been fair in his decisions and had treated his employees well. In the end he saw that he had not succeeded, but neither had he failed in any great way. A mediocre result. A mediocre life. He gave himself a passing grade; barely.

But the show was not quite over. He saw himself walking along a disused railway track, a large backpack sitting uncomfortably on his shoulders. On a collision course came a small, scruffy, hungry animal which had lost its way. Bought as a Christmas puppy for a child who had no true interest in such a pet, this animal had lived on the end of a rope for most of its short life. Fed occasionally; petted on Christmas Day and rarely thereafter. On a recent summer morning the little dog had caught his rope collar on a jagged splinter of the shabby dog-house in which he spent his days and, except for the very worst of the winter, his nights. In trying to pull himself free, he had broken the collar. Knowing nothing other than a life in captivity, he had decided to see what life was like on the other side of the fence. By the time he met up with Harry the dog had eaten nothing in three days. His owner, noting the dog had escaped, did nothing. The dog had approached children and been driven away by thrown rocks. He had barely escaped traffic on the coastal highway, but quickly learned how to evade the clumsy cars. He approached Harry, his tiny stomach cramping with hunger and fear. The big two-footed creature was eating. It had food. The dog expected at best a kick, which he was now almost too weak to evade. He hoped there would be no more thrown stones, one of which had hurt him badly.

But two-foot had fed him! And had not harmed him! And fed him again! And rubbed his head, and stroked his belly! Within minutes the little dog was ready to lay down his life for his new friend. He did not know what he could give to two-foot in exchange for all of the wonderful gifts he had been given, but whatever it was he wanted in return, Mutt would give it readily. Willingly. Eagerly.

The movie ended. The curtain fell and the lights came up.

“Well, Harry,” Margaret said. “Are you ready to give your verdict?”

But Harry sat with his head lowered, his body wracked with sobs. He had already rendered the verdict, and it was every bit as harsh as Margaret and Malek had promised it would be.

* * * * *

“Are you ready to resume your lessons, Harry,” Malek asked. “There is still much to learn of law.”

They were back in the classroom. Neither Margaret nor Malek had asked Harry to discuss his experience at the judgement seat, and he was unready to volunteer any information.

“Yes,” he said. “Let’s move on. What am I to learn about today?”

“Karma. Do you know this term?”

“Yes, I have read something of this. It is ‘fate’ is it not, or ‘destiny’?”

“It has such connotations, but what I want to discuss with you is more in the context of Karma as ‘balance’. A simple explanation would be ‘good begets good; bad begets bad’. If you live a life of goodness and concern for others, then good acts and thoughts will be attracted to you and happiness will follow. If you live a life of evil, then the evil you do will rebound to you, possibly, manyfold, and you will be unhappy. This is a considerable oversimplification, but would put you on the right track.

“Now, the whole thing seems too simplistic to be true. It is much like the mother telling the small child “Eat your greens and you will grow strong and healthy.” Another oversimplification, of course – but with an important kernel of truth.

“That same mother may say to the same child “Be good, and good things will happen to you.” This is patently untrue, and I am sure that you can cite many examples of good people who have been beaten down by bad. But on the spiritual level, things are a little different. Here, it is not an altruism. It is not a moral rule. It is not the law as given to us by some great and powerful figure. It is a law of nature! It is the way things work here. Let me explain this.

“You have seen that everything in the universe has at its root astral energy. But this energy is not all the same. There are grades and levels of this energy, much as ‘light’ is actually a whole spectrum of electromagnetic frequencies. On the astral level, these grades of energy are associated with emotions -- actually, they *are* emotions, but that is deeper than I care to go at this point in your studies. The lower, coarser grades are associated with basic animalistic emotions. They are attracted to the lower chakras, and resonate with the colours red and orange. Higher grades of energy are associated with the upper chakras and the blue end of the spectrum, and are identified with emotions of caring and concern.

“Therefore a man who indulges his animal passions, who lives by violence and greed, will attract to his astral body the coarser matter, and will form his body from this energy. If he should die while in such condition his astral body will be able to detect only the coarser energies, and he will find here only hate, lust, violence and evil. When he comes to this place he will see only red and orange, the colours of flame. It is this predominance of evil and the colours of flame which have given rise to the legend of Hell; yet these are not characteristics of the place, only limitations in an evil person’s ability to see and feel. Let us now consider another man, one who has lived selflessly, has cared much for others, has loved and been loved by those around him. This man would, during his earthly life, have built an astral body of the finer grades of matter, and on arriving in the afterlife he would experience the emotions of love and caring, while seeing a world of blue. This has given us the concept of a heaven of blue skies and loving beings, although here again the characteristics are not those of the place, but are due to the inability of a good man to see evil. Most men, of course, fall mid way between these examples.

“So you see, the mother’s injunction ‘Live a good life, and goodness will accrue to you’ is not so very far from the mark.”

Harry thought about this for a while. “If this is so, Malek, then why would good men be born into a life where violence is commonplace and good deeds are often seen as weakness. Why would we be thrown into a place of such evil, such temptation, and then be told ‘be good’?”

“Ah, Harry, I see that you must review your notes from earlier classes. Think, now. Let us say that, in the physical world, you were born the son of a king. Everything was brought to you for the asking. When you wished to travel, you would be carried to your destination. If someone threatened you, armed guards would leap to your defence. In such circumstances would you, do you think, develop a powerful, well muscled body?”

“No, of course not.”

“But then, let us suppose that you were born the son of a slave, and must every day carry great loads for long distances. When you were given food, other slaves would fight to take it from you. What then?”

“I would build hard muscle and I would learn to fight.”

“Of course. Therefore, if I wished to send you into an environment where you would learn to overcome base desires and aspire to goodness in thought and deed, where would I send you.”

“Yes, I see it now; please forgive my foolishness. To a place where I could face these desires and overcome them, of course. To earth, with all of its evil.”

“Yes, indeed, Harry. Yes indeed.”

Graduation:

Harry was back in the classroom, for the moment alone. He thought back to the lessons which Malek had taught over the last few days. He seemed to have been in this place for weeks now, but realised that his sense of time was not reliable. In his early studies of dreams he had come to know that a dream could seem to last for years yet be over in seconds. He suspected that something like this was taking place at the moment, and that he would return to his body just minutes after leaving it. Otherwise, someone would by now have certainly called the police, and Harry could expect to awaken in some hospital bed to a tear-stained Liz sobbing by the bedside. He hoped that would not be the case.

As he thought back over his lessons Malek appeared in front of him and Margaret came to stand by his side. Malek was smiling warmly.

“Harry, I have told you how I came to this assignment at the request of your Spirit Guide, and how I came to it unwillingly. I should have taken the advice I so often give students: ‘Approach life at all levels with an open mind and a willingness to revise what you thought you knew.’ I have enjoyed the assignment very much, and I have enjoyed spending time with you. I am certain that our paths will cross again somehow.

“I know that you must now go with your Margaret and make a difficult decision. I hope that I have been instrumental in helping you arrive at that decision, and that it will not be too difficult for you.

“I would like to leave you with a few words in summary of what I have taught you. Call this a ‘synopsis’. Possibly you could call it ‘Cliff’s notes on the Astral World’. Or even ‘Malek’s Notes’.

“You are a being of light and energy, temporarily tied to a physical body. Your spirit

has evolved over many centuries from a more simple form, and continues to evolve. In terms of your overall spiritual growth, you have barely begun. To use a physical analogy, you are a small child who has just taken his first steps.

“Nothing of what you have learned should be taken to imply that earthly activities are unimportant. Every part of your earthly life is valuable, and designed to expose you to the lessons you are there to learn. There are specific lessons in childhood, and other lessons you are meant to learn in old age. Your childhood, working life, marriage, parenting, middle years and old age -- every stage is an important learning experience designed for your benefit, and must be taken seriously. Every aspect of your everyday life has a spiritual component. Spirituality is not something to be confined to a particular place or a special day, but is in everything you say and do. *Everything*. Of special importance is the way in which you interact with those around you.

“Some of the most important life-lessons are best learned by facing adversity. The major problems you will face in life have been designed with your input, and the way you face these determines your spiritual growth. A life of hardship faced with courage and honour will profit a person far more than a life of riches and power which is selfishly used. If you decide that you have not learned from your recent life you may need to repeat the lessons in your next. Only you can determine this. There will be no other judge of your progress; no other will praise or condemn your earthly actions.

“Graduation from earthly life is not the end, merely a move to the next level of instruction. There are several more levels above this.

“Live your life to the full. Love much and hate little. Face the challenges of your daily life to the best of your ability; bearing up well under adversity is one of the best possible ways to strengthen and develop your spirit.

“Goodbye, Harry. Until we meet again!”

And Malek was gone. Harry turned to Margaret, who held out her hand to him.

“Come, Harry. Time to go from here. We will collect your little dog on the way, for he pines to be with you again. We will go to a place where you may think, and I will help you if you ask it of me. But in the end it must be your decision. Only you can make it.”

“Oh, I’ve already made my decision Margaret. It wasn’t really so hard at all. Let’s go then, let’s find Mutt and go to some nice restful place which you have ready for us, and I will tell you what I intend to do with the rest of my life.”

BEAUTIFUL DREAMER

Chapter 10:

Harry threw a snowball at Mutt, who leaped to intercept it and sprang back in amazement as the projectile disintegrated on contact. The huge dog was having a splendid time romping and rolling in the snow, digging with his large snout for imagined treasures hidden beneath the white carpet. Harry brushed snow from the top of a large boulder and sat. Squinting into the rising sun he gazed out over the seemingly endless white-tipped peaks of the mountains called by locals the “Roof of the World.” As far as his eyes could see there were no signs whatever of human habitation. He knew that somewhere among these mountains there was a large Buddhist monastery, but no sign of such a construction was visible from the peak on which he now sat. Mutt trotted over to him, ankle deep in snow, and placed his muzzle in Harry’s lap.

“She’ll be back soon,” Harry told the dog. “Then I think it will probably be time for us to go back to the real world. Or the other real world. Or to refocus our conscious awareness onto the physical plane. How does it go? ‘There is no heaven; there is no hell; there is only the one world and mental focus.’ Damn it, Mutt, this business is still beyond me. You’re lucky that the whole thing seems to come naturally to you. At least you don’t seem to spend much time worrying about it.”

By his expression Mutt agreed that, yes, he was indeed lucky, and no, he didn’t worry overmuch about the construction and purpose of the universe.

“The Great Council has agreed,” Margaret had arrived at the peak and walked over to the boulder where Harry now sat. “They say that your plan is a good one, and they have agreed to let me arrange it for you. They made a couple of suggestions, though, which I have accepted on your behalf; I am sure that you will find them reasonable.”

“Is that like ‘an offer I can’t refuse’? Or ‘I promise this isn’t going to hurt very much’?”

“Oh, Harry. Malek was right. You bring to this place a sense of fun which has been much missing. There is contentment here in large quantity, and happiness, too; but we don’t often get to fall over laughing. Malek is regaling his colleagues with the tale of your education and people are coming from far distances to find out what all this mirth is about. In a way I shall be sorry to see you return to Earth.”

“I never understood what Malek was laughing at half the time. But about those little additions to the small print?”

“The Council says that your knowledge of how to travel between planes must be removed, along with most of what you have recently learned at Malek’s hands. Your spirit will not be touched. You will be as you now stand before me. Only the knowledge will be taken from you, and even that will be returned when you come here at the end of your days.”

Harry stood up from the boulder, his eyes angry. “Oh, come on Margaret. What was the point in my learning all of that if I’m now to forget it?”

“You needed the information in order to make a decision. You have made that decision, and it is a good one. But to live on Earth with the knowledge you now have would cause great conflicts. The deviation from your path in the first place was because of something you knew to be true and at the same time you knew to be false. This time I will make certain that no such conflict exists. And, to be blunt about it, we can’t allow you to stumble around interfering with other people’s spirit lives.....”

“Interfering? I only.....”

“Tell me you weren’t thinking of hacking away at Don Harrod’s self-built shell.”

“Well...”

“Or that you could resist doing battle with wild beasts which dared to attack any of your friends, much as you destroyed Theo’s antagonists in his desert cave.”

“But.....”

“And if one night, in a dream, you found some vile nightmarish creature in the process of attacking Liz, tell me that you would not at once reach for ‘Invictus’”

“I would take up my sword, or use my hands and teeth if needed, but I would not rest until I had torn such a beast into pieces too small even for Malek to examine.”

“Yes. Much of the warrior still lives on in you, Harry, as our friend Juleen and her brothers found to their cost. Yet you *know* that Liz must face her own beasts, those of the spirit and those of the flesh. It is what she is on Earth to *do*. You are there to help her, to stand at her side, not to fight her battles. Surely you see this, Harry.”

“I see it. Will I retain nothing, then? Will I not even remember you? Will you be with me no more?”

Margaret stepped forward and took Harry’s hands in hers. She gazed into his wide open eyes. “My sweet child, I will never leave you. I will be with you always, throughout your long life and in the life to come. I will never again let you come to harm.”

And then Harry stood on the summit with only his dog for company, but Margaret’s voice came to him one more time over the high peaks of the encircling mountains.

“Wherever you go I will see you. Whatever you do I will be with you. When you call me I will come to you and when you need me I will be there. Your new life will be full of wonder. Live it to the full; grow and prosper. Goodbye, Harry. Until we meet again.”

Harry turned to survey the summit. Two figures were approaching from the eastern edge, backlit by the sun which still sat low on the horizon. As they came closer he saw that they were a man and a woman, both in the full vigour of youth and smiling broadly.

“Mom? Can that be you? And.....Theo! But this is wonderful. I suppose that if you are here, then you ... you are..... you have ...”

“Oh, yes, my boy, I’m dead at last. And what an experience that was! Thanks to you, apparently, I went through twice what I planned to go through only once. It gained me an extra bunch of brownie points, so I’m told. Or something like that. Not sure what’s going on, actually. I was supposed to be on my way somewhere when this chap asked if I’d like to say a word or two to Harry Murphy before I leave. Damned if I can understand all this babble up here. Anyway, thanks for what you tried to do, Harry. Or what you did, or thought you did.... Well, let’s just say thanks for the thought, eh? I say, I’ve been talking to your Mum. She’s on her way to the same place as I am, apparently. What an interesting lady she is! She’s been telling me what a rotten little kid you were.”

Harry threw his arms around his mother and the two swirled about in a mad dance until the snow flew up around them. Mutt ran in large circles around the dancing pair, barking and wagging his tail in his own contribution to the mountaintop madness. Theo parked himself on the boulder which Harry had recently vacated and enjoyed the show.

The three sat in the snow and talked for hours or seconds or days or forever, until the sky became dark and a billion points of starlight turned the scene into a silhouette in shades of blue and black – and Harry knew then that it was time to go home. Slowly, very slowly, the shadows deepened and the figures blurred into black mist; and on the top of an unknown mountain in the presence of three beings who loved him deeply, Harry Murphy closed his eyes and went to sleep.

* * * * *

He awoke in bright sunshine to find that he had slept by the side of the trail, his tent unpitched and his backpack serving only as a pillow. His watch told him that it was morning on the thirteenth day of his trip. He felt dazed and disoriented. He knew that he was on a hiking trip along some old railway right-of-way, a trip he had undertaken to do some private thinking and to put his life in order. He had been ill; mentally ill. Harry didn't feel ill now; he felt wonderful. Fit in mind, body and spirit. His dog came over to where he sat and put his head on Harry's knee.

"Ever hungry, eh Mutt? Come on, boy, I'll dig out some of your favourite food..... Hello, I thought we had more energy bars left! Where the devil did that last pack go? You haven't learned how to open my backpack have you? Wouldn't put it past you, you sneaky little beast!"

Harry turned the little dog onto its back and rubbed vigorously at the small pink belly. The dog writhed and wriggled, his madly wagging tail stirring up dust devils on the dry trail-side.

Well, Harry thought, if I came on this expedition to get well, I think I can report myself fully cured. So I guess it's time to go home. Only problem is, where the hell are we?"

He established from his map that he was about ten kilometers from the town of Mahone Bay, and a further two kilometers from intersection number ten on the freeway. He dug his cellphone out of the side pocket of his backpack and called Liz."

"Hello, my love. Just called to say 'Good Morning' and let you know that I'm coming home."

"Oh, Harry, I am so pleased. Are you all right, Darling?"

“All right? I feel twenty years younger and twenty points smarter. To tell the truth I’m a bit fuzzy about what I’m doing out here, but I seem to remember that fuzzy thinking was at the root of my trouble. I was ill, Liz. You knew it; George knew it; Louise and Scotty knew it. The whole damn world knew it except me. But I’m not ill now, Liz. I declare myself cured. Now, I think that I’d like to save bootleather and a week of blisters, so if you would meet me at exit ten on highway 103, I’d be very grateful. I’ll be there by two this afternoon, say. Don’t hurry! I’ll wait if I’m there before you. Would that be alright? Liz? Are you crying, Liz? Don’t cry, my sweetheart, everything is going to be fine now. I swear it.”

Harry and Mutt reached exit ten shortly after one o’clock, an hour earlier than predicted. Liz had been waiting there for almost thirty minutes.

* * * * *

“Hello, Liz. It’s me, Roll.....”

“Hi, Rollie. How are you on this magnificent autumn day?”

“Wow! I just called to see how things are going, but I gather they’re going very well. Either that or the cooking sherry just took a pounding.”

“I’m fine, Rollie. I really am. I presume that what you really want to know is whether my husband is still a raving looney or back in the land of the sane. If you call this land ‘sane’”

“We don’t use the term ‘raving looney’ all that much in psychiatric circles, Liz; but you’re close to the point. Maurice heard all about Harry’s episode at the Printing Plant. He says its all over the industry that Harry got into a fist fight with Thorpe and George sacked him on the spot, but Maurice says the truth is that George.....”

“The truth is that George was just brilliant about the whole thing. Well he was, Rollie. He put Harry back to ‘Production Manager’ and sent him off on indefinite sick leave. Quite honestly I wish Harry had never left the Production Manager’s job in the first place. Anyway, he’s been off for five weeks now. He’s been away on a hiking trip along the South Shore and just got back a few days ago. He’s fit as a flea. Sound in mind and body.”

“He’s back at Burton’s then?”

“No. Harry says he has no interest in a management job. He says he’s going up to see George next week to find out if there’s a janitor’s position going. He winked when he said it, but I’m not sure he was kidding. He has something up his sleeve, but he’s playing it close to the chest. He’s promised not to do anything without talking it over with me first, so I’m not too concerned.”

“But he’s not showing any signs of, well, let’s say ‘unusual behaviour’?”

“Oh, Harry’s whole *life* is unusual behaviour! He came back from his hiking trip with this scruffy little dog that goes everywhere with him now. Cost us a fortune at the vet the other day. I draw the line at having the mutt – that’s what he calls it, ‘Mutt’ – I draw the line at letting it into the upstairs bedrooms, but Harry treats the thing like some long lost child. And then he saw an obituary notice in the paper that got him a bit upset, and when I asked who it was he said it was ‘just an old Indian weatherman’. He goes every morning to sit with Don Harrod. The poor man is still in some sort of coma. Harry says he’s working from this side, as he is sure that somebody is chopping away from the other side. I asked what that was supposed to mean and he looked puzzled and said he didn’t exactly know. Let’s see; what else? Oh, he’s talking about taking a holiday in Tibet. I ask why, Harry says ‘why not?’. And then there are all these little pieces of paper around the house with sums on them; calculations of some sort. Look like dollars and cents. I ask what they’re about and he just winks at me.”

“And you’re not worried about all this, Liz?”

“No, it’s just Harry. But he is so bright, Rollie, so alive. He leaps out of bed in the morning ready for anything. And into it at night with the same attitude, if you know what I mean.”

“Wonderful, Liz. That’s wonderful. But I’d still keep an eye on him, you know. Don’t hesitate to call me if you have any reason for concern.”

“Rollie, it’s just so good to have my Harry back. He whistles around the house. He grabs me and dances around the garden with me just because he’s so happy. We had a small snowfall yesterday and I found him rolling around in the yard with his yappy little dog, laughing fit to beat the band! But he’s back, Rollie! He’s back to me! His black moods are gone. That awful ‘driven’ expression has gone from his eyes. He’s home from wherever he’s been, and that’s all I prayed for, to have him back home.”

“And his dreaming experiments?”

“He hasn’t mentioned the subject, and I’m damned if *I’ll* bring it up. That ‘Dream-book’ seems to have disappeared along with his diary and notepads, and if I find them before Harry does I’ll burn the damn things.”

“Bye, Liz. I’m glad things are back to....normal.”

“Thanks for calling, Rollie. Bye now.”

* * * * *

Molly Mason threw the little switch on her desk to activate the cameras and recognised Mr. Murphy in the elevator. He seemed to be carrying a huge bunch of flowers. She pressed the button to allow the machinery to lift Harry to the Penthouse floor.

“To brighten your world on this cold December morning,” Harry said, passing the bouquet to Ms. Mason and favouring her with a smile which lit up the office. While the Senior Executive Secretary stammered out her thanks and said something about water and a suitable vase, George Thorpe stepped out of his office and shook Harry’s hand with great vigour and obvious pleasure.

“I hope you realise, Harry, that I’ll have no more work out of her this morning, and precious little for the rest of the day! I think it’s been a while since anyone brought flowers to Molly Mason. Harry I am *delighted* to see you looking so well! Even lost a few pounds, haven’t you. Well, I presume, I sincerely *hope*, that you’re here to tell me you’ve a clean bill of health and you’re ready to come back aboard. I got some nonsense from that chap Arrenberg out in Halifax, but when I called Liz she told me that it was all rubbish. Said you’d gone off on a little hiking holiday. That’s where the extra pounds got burned off, I suppose. Damn it Harry, you just look *outstanding*.”

Harry was bowled over by Thorpe’s enthusiastic welcome. It was possibly the longest speech he had ever heard from the chairman that wasn’t business related. The two men made themselves comfortable and George buzzed for fresh coffee, which Molly Mason delivered with an enormous smile. He turned again to Harry.

“Phil has been having a bit of a hard time out there in your chair” George began. “I don’t think he truly realised that you fellows on the front lines live in a constant state of controlled panic. Oh, he says your people are the best. Couldn’t have done the job if it wasn’t for the help he gets from them. Nothing is too much to ask, Phil says. And that Louise Boutellier, well you’ll be lucky if I don’t try to steal her from you in a year or two when Molly retires. Still, I think Phil will be relieved to hear that you’re back in harness. Maybe I should give him a ring right

“It’s not going to happen, George. I’m sorry, but it’s just not going to happen.”

“Excuse me? Are you saying you’re not ready to come back yet? If you need more time, Harry, there will be absolutely no problem. Just tell....”

“It’s not that, George. It’s just that the job is no longer right for me. I can’t explain what’s happened to me in recent months, but I just know that I would be a walking disaster if I were to go back to my old position.”

“Well, Harry, you would know best, of course. At least Phil will have an easier time of it with you as his number one. Not that your man has done a bad job as Director of Production, far from it, but to have you back in that chair would let Phil

“Sorry, George. Not that chair either.”

“Well, Harry, perhaps we’d better come to the point. Name the job and it’s yours. Except mine, of course!” The Chairman grinned, but his expression showed growing concern with the way the conversation was moving.

“George, *nobody* could replace you. I mean this sincerely, you are the very best possible person to serve as President and Chairman of this company, and it has been for me a privilege to have worked under you. I must also say that quite apart from business considerations, what you have done for me on a personal level has put me in your debt for life. If there is ever anything that I can do to repay you, you have but to ask. Unfortunately, the one exception is that I can’t return to AGI. Not in any capacity.”

“Might I ask why, Harry? Is it to do with the company, or is it a personal issue? Is it in any way something that I could fix?”

“The problem is in me, George. If it is a problem. I’m not sure. I just don’t see the job as worthwhile any more. I can’t explain it. Less than a year ago I thought it was the most important thing in the world. But not now. What caused this change in my thinking? I’ve no

idea. But the way I look at it, with such an attitude I would not inflict myself on AGI. After all that the company has done for me, it deserves better from me now.”

“I don’t understand this, Harry. But I can do no other than accept it. And of course, there will be a generous settlement from the company on your retirement. But what are you going to do? Will you stay in the printing business? You’ll not be joining our competition, I hope!”

“Well, in a way I will, George. Please don’t look at me like that! I’m going to buy a Print Shop. I’ve been going over my finances and I think I could re-mortgage my properties and put a good down payment on a small local place. I’m looking for something around eight to ten employees, with an annual gross of somewhere around.....”

“Harry, please don’t make any financial arrangements without talking to me first. You should have no need to re-mortgage anything if AGI will co-sign for you, and of course we will. I may even be able to talk the board into financing.....”

“George, I’m not sure how to explain, and I’d hate to cause offence to you in any way, but this has to be done my way.”

“What would you do with this little plant, Harry. Would you move in as Owner-Manager, or would you.....”

“I intend to run the presses. I intend to drive the delivery truck. I’ll stay after hours and sweep out the pressroom. I’ll mix the inks when we run colour. I’ll go out to lunch at Tim Horton’s Doughnut Shop with the paper salesman. I’ll stand behind the counter and smile at the customers. I’m toying with the idea of not even letting the staff know that I own the place; let them think I’m just the odd-job man. But then I don’t think I could start off my new life by basing it on a lie. I want to get back to where I started in the printing business, George; right at the front end. Ink under my fingernails and paper dust in my hair.”

George sat quietly. Harry stood and held out his hand, but George waved it away.

“Sit down, Harry. Please. I think I understand why you don’t want help from anyone. I seem to remember that when I was young..... Well, let’s not get onto that theme. But I think that AGI *can* do something for you..... no, just hear me out. I think we can do something for you and at the same time benefit ourselves. Now you can’t object to that! You just finished saying that you owe a debt to the company.”

“George, you are up to something! But yes, I’ll listen to it.”

George stepped out of his office and spoke on Molly Mason’s phone for a few minutes. He came back into the office and sat down.

“When AGI bought Burton’s, we brought Theo onto the Board at once. I had a soft spot in my heart for Theo – one of the few soft places in a hard heart, my people will tell you. But he was never much of a businessman. Anyway, Theo got the idea that he was supposed to ‘acquire’ for the company, and he bought this printing plant in a place called Tantallon, somewhere outside Halifax. About twenty-five employees, I think. A larger sized jobbing printer. No specialty; a bit of everything. Well, it just didn’t fit. I think a couple of employees have moved over to Burton’s over the years, but by and large the place has been running as it always did, independently. It contributes a small annual profit to AGI, but quite frankly we’d do better by selling the plant and buying Canada Savings Bonds with the proceeds! The only reason we didn’t close it was Theo Burton. Now Theo’s gone, and the plant is still there. We’ve tossed ideas around, but nobody has come up with a plan that we can all agree on. Harry, if you want it, the plant is yours.”

“George, a twenty-five person shop is bigger than anything I had in mind. And much more than I can afford.”

“Who mentioned a price? Now, don’t jump out of the chair. I wasn’t going to *give* it to you. I have a Board of Directors to answer to, remember. We will *sell* it to you at the aver-

age of three estimates, minus the separation allowance AGI owes you whether you want it or not. We'll accept any down payment which you care to offer and finance the remainder at current bank rates. Everybody wins. Here comes the girl from finance with the folder. Take it home. Read about it. Visit the plant. There's no pressure, so take your time. When you come to your senses, call me and I'll have the transfer papers drawn up."

Harry stood, grinning broadly. "Thanks, George. How could I say 'no' to a sweet deal like that? But, you know, you're standing there like Santa Claus, and I'm the kid with the big present; so why do I feel like you just put one over one me?"

Harry left the office smiling, and the small group of men waiting to enter wondered what the previous meeting was all about. They had rarely seen their Chairman looking so pleased with himself, and yet the man who had just left seemed to be equally happy.

* * * * *

"So you see, Liz, if we accept George's offer we've most of the down payment accounted for, and if we re-mortgage the Halifax property the bank will certainly put up the rest. I've gone over the profit and loss statements for the last three years, and I'm certain that I can triple the profits over the first year. It may mean re-mortgaging the cottage, depending on how much of the equipment needs replacing. Some of their stuff is even older than Burton's. But the system is good and the craftsmen seem competent, and even under present management the company shows a small profit. But I swear to you that if you're not completely happy to go along with this, I'll send the package back to George and go back to looking for something on a smaller scale, something more affordable."

"What, Harry Murphy? And take that gleam out of your eye? If that's what it takes to put the sparkle back into you, I'd mortgage the house, the cottage, the kids, and I'd throw in that scruffy dog of yours. But there's no need, Harry."

“Liz, I can’t start off my new life with a gift from AGI. Somehow during the last few weeks I’ve come to understand that rewards given to me for no effort on my part are worthless. I must earn this; I must *make* it work. I must....”

Liz stood up from her chair and threw both arms in the air. “So once again, your honour,” she said, speaking to an imaginary Judge presiding over an imaginary court, “I put it to you that this husband of mine never listens to a damn thing anyone tells him. I call as witness his ex-secretary, as well as half of his employees, who will all testify that this Harry Murphy.....”

“What’s this all about, Liz?”

“Harry, I told you. I knew it hadn’t registered so I told you again. Now for the third time, there is a letter in the rack by the hall door from your mother’s London solicitors. It says that the home at Skegness drew funds largely from the interest accrued to your father’s investments. Only during the last two years has it been necessary to touch the capital. After all duties and taxes and sundry grabs for money – including a fat solicitor’s bill – they have enclosed a banker’s draught for the remaining seventy three thousand dollars. You will need to countersign it before I can put it into the bank.”

Harry grabbed Liz by the shoulders and grinned like a maniac. “I’m sorry Liz. I’ve just been so tied up in my own thoughts these last few days.....”

“When were you ever not, Harry Murphy?”

“But that’s wonderful! God bless you Mum, and you too, Dad, wherever you both are. That will completely take care of the down payment, and the cost of new equipment.....”

“Will also be easily taken care of,” Liz broke in “By the second envelope on the hall table, in which you will find that Theo had left you a quarter of a million dollars in his will.....”

“No way!”

“.....which, however, he changed during the miraculous but unfortunately short period of remission of his cancer.....”

“Theo changed his will? I think for some reason he was mad at me.”

“.....to increase his bequest to a half million. The remainder of his large estate is divided amongst a dozen assorted charities, most of them local.”

Harry was open mouthed, and silent. Liz enjoyed the peace for several seconds and then hugged her husband.

“Of course I agree, you nitwit! Tomorrow morning you call George and tell him to go ahead with the deed transfer. Spend any or all of your money on your new printing plant, and may it always make you as happy as you seem to be at the moment.”

“Not my money, Liz. Not my plant. There is no ‘*my*’. There should never have been, not since the day we first stood together on the rocks at Peggy’s Cove. No ‘*my*’, only ‘*ours*’. Always ‘*ours*’.”

* * * * *

Eddie Burke sat opposite his boss in the foreman’s small office just of the main press-room and scowled. “But he ain’t actually *said* that there would be layoffs. He ain’t actually *said* that he’d be downsizin’ the plant.”

Tommy MacDonald looked at his nephew as though he were some idiot child who could just not figure out that two and two *always* made four. What was it his sister called her

kid? 'Developmentally challenged'. "What is it with you, Eddie? How many times do I have to tell you? I haven't even met this guy yet. All I know is what I got from my friend in Burton's pressroom. This Murphy was some bigshot executive under Theo Burton, but he fell foul of the new management after AGI took over the plant, and they must've squeezed him out. You know with executives, it's not like you or me, who'd just get given our cards and showed the door, these guys, when they get the axe, they get a big cash package to make it sweeter. So, as I heard it, this Murphy gets this big package, and maybe adds a bit from the bank to it, and makes AGI an offer on Tantallon Press, and Bingo! We've got ourselves a new owner."

"Yeah, I know that Tommy, but the question is, what is he goin' to do with us? Betty, up at the office, she says he just wants to run it for the money, now that he don't have his big executive salary no more. But my Winifred, she says he's likely to just come on down here and try to tell us how to run the place. Imagine! You don't think that's likely, do you Tommy?"

"Oh, no way, Eddie. I mean what could a guy like that know about running a print shop? I mean, just because he's been in the industry for like thirty years, and just because he's only been running the biggest printing house in Nova Scotia for the last twenty, I mean what would a guy like that know about running a fine modern printing shop like Tantallon Press?"

"Yeah, that's right. So we've no reason to get upset, eh Tommy!"

"That was sarcasm, you asshole! I guess the first thing he'll do is get rid of the dross. You know, the guys who just hang around here and don't really do nothing. You know anybody like that?"

"Gee, Tommy, I don't know. You mean maybe like Charlie Evans in the bindery?"

“Charlie runs the big cutters. That don’t mean he’s busy as hell all day, but if you get rid of Charlie how do the presses get their sheets cut to size? Put you on that big guillotine and you’d be short two thumbs before lunchtime!”

“Well I don’t know then Tommy. Geez, you’re the press foreman, I’d think you would know that better than me.”

“Tell you what, Eddie, you just go sweep off the loading dock and I’ll rack my brains and see if I can think of anybody, in case the new owner should find his way down here and ask me who we should let go.”

“Huh? Oh, yeah. I’ll go sweep off the loading dock. OK, sure Tommy.”

“Well I know one man for sure that should be lookin’ in the want ads,” he added to himself after the odd-job man had left to find his broom, “And it ain’t Tommy MacDonald and it ain’t Eddie Burke. This new man might or might not need a sweeper for the pressroom floor, but he sure as hell don’t need no high priced General Manager to run the place for him. I’m glad I’m sittin’ down here and not up in the GM’s office. If I was Terry Jackson I reckon I’d be shakin’ in my boots right about now.”

Harry pulled the Cadillac into the forecourt and saw a row of reserved parking spaces up against the large brick wall at the back of the bindery. All of the slots were filled. He coasted on past a white painted sign which said “Terry Jackson, General Manager” and was surprised to see a small red Austin Mini parked in the slot. He motored on to the general parking area and found a spot for the Caddy. Walking back towards the main entrance Harry took a second to enjoy the bright sunshine, although the day was cold and small piles of snow dotted the parking area. A solitary workman was sweeping the loading dock, and the unmistakable sound of presses operating at speed came from the high windows.

Instead of using the main entrance Harry climbed the short flight of steps to the loading dock and waved to the man with the broom. Eddie Burke watched the stranger climb up onto

the dock and leaned on his broom as the man walked over to him.

“Good Morning,” Harry said.

Eddie stared for a couple of seconds, taking stock of this man, and decided that basic civilities were probably in order. “Mornin’,” he said. The other man stood on the dock for a while just looking around. He seemed like a decent chap, and Eddie thought it only fair to warn him that he was on dangerous ground.

“Hey Mister, you’d better not be here hangin’ around when the new man arrives. New man, he’s goin’ to be lookin’ for folks jes hangin’ round with nothin’ to do, and they’re probably goin’ to be hangin’ around on the dole, that’s what Tommy says.”

Harry had sized up the man in the first few seconds. “Well it’s a good thing you’ve got that broom there, or the new man might think you’re one of these fellows with nothing to do” he said.

Eddie absorbed this. “Yeah, that’s what Tommy says. ‘Lay on with the broom, Eddie,’ he says. You know Tommy, do you?”

“Would that be Thomas MacDonald, the pressroom foreman?”

“Tommy, yeah. That’s him.”

“Well I see you’re busy so I won’t hold you up. Better get on with the sweeping before the new man comes.”

Eddie smiled at the stranger, who obviously meant him no harm, and started once more to sweep the endless dust from the loading dock. Harry stepped down and walked along through the executive parking lot to the main entrance.

The lobby had seen better days but was spacious and clean. Harry followed a sign to ‘enquiries’ and was directed to Mr. Jackson’s office. He entered a decent sized office with large windows looking out over the parking lot to a distant view of the ocean. A middle aged man was in the process of packing his personal belongings into cardboard boxes. The man greeted Harry with a sincere smile and a warm handshake.

“Nice to meet you, Mr. Murphy. I recognise you from the description I got from my friend in Burton’s.”

“Nice to meet you, too, Mr. Jackson. Who would that be, your Burton’s friend?”

“Oh, no harm in telling, especially since he speaks so highly of you. Scotty Shaw and I have been curling together for close to ten years now. Scotty says to treat you well, ‘cause you’re one of the ‘good guys’.”

“Well Mr. Jackson, if you’re a friend of Mick Shaw that makes you instantly a friend of mine. But could I ask you why you seem to be in the middle of packing?”

“Look Mr. Murphy.....”

“Would you do me a favour and call me ‘Harry’? And I’d like to call you ‘Terry’ if it’s not taking liberties.”

“Terry is fine. Look, Harry, I’m not going to make this difficult for you. I don’t know what part you want to play at Tantallon Press, but for sure you’re not going to be sweeping the loading dock.”

“No, I just met your dock sweeper and he seems to be doing a fine job!”

“You met Eddie? No matter. I figure you *might* still need a dock sweeper but you sure don’t need a general manager. Scotty says you’re probably the best production manager in

Canada, and he knows what he's talking about. Now I don't want to cross you, a man with your contacts, especially since I'll probably be talking to some of them while I'm looking for a new job. So I'll make it easy. If you don't mind, I'd prefer that you accept my resignation rather than you had to 'let me go'. Is that OK with you, Harry?"

"Hell no, Terry. I could probably find a competent floor sweeper without too much trouble, but please don't make me go looking for a new General Manager! From what I've read and what I've heard, you'd be a hard man to replace."

"Let me get this straight, Harry. You mean I'm staying?"

"If you would, please. I have no intention of running the plant on a day-to-day basis. That will continue to be your job. Perhaps I can help you make up your mind. I've been going over the salary figures, and I think yours is a bit on the low side. Would you consider a five percent raise an incentive to stay on?"

Terry Jackson sat, stunned. "I don't believe what I'm hearing. You're not just joshing me around? No. I see that you're not! Well, I'll be damned. OK, Mr. Murphy! Harry! You have a deal. Boy, do you ever have a deal. I must call my wife, she's not slept a wink this last week. Oh, I'm sorry. If I may, Harry, could I call.....?"

"Sure, Terry, you call your wife and tell her to stop worrying. I'll tell you what, I'm going for a little wander around the plant. You can tell your secretary to spread the word, so nobody is going to have a fit when I show up on their turf. Then you can start unpacking, since I won't be taking your office either. I'll be back in about an hour, and I'd be obliged if you'd get your first line managers and shop foremen together for me. I'd like by the end of the week to have a first draft of a five year equipment plan. From what I've read there are some pieces well overdue for replacement and others that should probably be replaced or upgraded over the next five years. I'd like your people to have a lot of input into this. I've about \$200,000 in hand for the first year, and I think the bank will spring for whatever else we need. Oh, and I want to talk to you about a profit sharing scheme I have in mind. And spread the

word, Terry: No layoffs. Not now, not later. If we need to downsize – and I think it will be more the opposite – we’ll do it by attrition. Got all that? Oh, one last thing. Is that your Mini in the parking lot.”

“Yes, it is.”

“Any chance you’d consider selling it to me?”

“Sure, we can talk about it. Our Plant Engineer rebuilds them as a hobby. Not just Minis, all sorts. I bought that mainly to help him out financially. You know it’s no good in the winter here. I was just about to put it on blocks until the spring.”

“Yes, I know that. It’s a personal thing.”

“I’m sure we can work something out, Harry. Geez, that’s a plateful you’ve laid on me all at once. Yes, I think I’ve got it all. The men will be very relieved to hear your news. Oh, and Harry; welcome aboard.”

* * * * *

Nobody ever knew where that strange Mr. Murphy was likely to pop up next. When Charlie Evans sprained his wrist, and ended up with a backlog of paper skids way out into the pressroom, it was Harry Murphy who arrived at the guillotine to help Charlie catch up on his cutting. The two of them worked side by side all afternoon and went off together to a nearby tavern after work. Laughing all the way, by most accounts. Ritchie Collins almost fainted dead away when the new owner walked in on him while he was rebuilding a Volkswagen carburetor on company time. Harry merely asked if Ritchie could possibly spare the time to look at some modifications he wanted made to the little Mini-Cooper he’d just bought from Terry.

Eddie Burke knew that the whole plant was in on the joke, but it was all done in good fun so he didn't take it badly. They were pulling his leg that the new odd-job man was really the new owner! But Eddie was too smart for that. He had asked his friend, Harry, what he did at the plant and Harry had said 'Oh, all sorts of odd jobs around the place, pretty much like you, Eddie.' So Eddie had figured that Harry did the sweeping up around the offices upstairs, and if he had a bit of spare time he'd bring his broom down and lend Eddie a hand at sweeping the dock. A good friend, Harry was. He was always ready to lend a ten or a twenty when money ran short, the week before payday. And he never got nasty if you were a bit late in paying back.

Harry did not triple the net profits in the first year; but he did double them. And the reason that he didn't quadruple them was to be found in the exceptionally generous bonuses given to all twenty five employees, and the no less generous employee benefits which he set in place during his first year at the helm.

The Tantallon janitor had duly repainted the wall at the back of the bindery, and a large parking space was now reserved for 'H. Murphy: President'. This had been done under the instruction of the General Manager, Mr. Jackson, since when the janitor had asked Mr. Murphy what title to paint on the wall Harry had answered 'General Dogsbody'. Regardless of the title, the space was empty as often as not, and the little red Mini-Cooper was as likely to be found in the general parking area behind the loading dock.

The President's dog also became well known to all employees, and it was a rare thing to see the Boss striding down the corridors without the little mixed breed trotting along behind him. Only when Harry visited production areas was Mutt left in the little room which Harry had set up next to the sales office. Some joker had placed a sign over the door to the little office saying 'Presidential Suite' and Harry left it there.

Tantallon Press thrived. During his third year as owner-dogsbody of the plant Harry was embarrassed by an article in the local paper titled "The Secret Santa of Tantallon Press" which told of wonderful Christmas gifts from an unknown source which had been delivered by

a red-suited stranger to the children of the Plant's employees. Everyone at the Plant knew the secret source of these gifts, but figured that if Harry didn't want people to know of his generosity, then the least they could do in return was keep his secret. Harry resisted the temptation to expand the plant, choosing to keep it to the same size and staffing levels as when he obtained it. He did, however, ensure that the plant kept up to date with equipment developments and improvements to operating efficiency and safety. In the third year of operation he turned down an offer to purchase at four times what he had paid for the plant.

And the years went by.

Visitors from Burton's Press were frequent. George Thorpe made a point of calling at Tantallon whenever he visited his Halifax plant, and Harry would normally stand lunch for George at the local Doughnut Shop or, on special occasions, at MacDonalds. On one such trip Harry had the pleasure of treating both George and his newly hired Senior Executive Secretary. On the retirement of Molly Mason George had, true to his word, offered the position to Louise Boutelier, who had accepted without hesitation. Scotty Shaw was also a frequent visitor to Tantallon Press, and could usually be found in the company of Ritchie Collins and Harry, heads deep in the innards of some piece of recalcitrant machinery.

And the years went by.

The cottage on St. Margaret's Bay suffered little in the way of upgrades and improvements, but Harry did have a good sized Garage/Workshop built on the highway side of the property. He could usually be found there at weekends tinkering with his little Mini-car, most often in the company of Ritchie Collins and an assortment of other employees from the plant. Liz was used to the clank of metal on metal, the occasional roar of a finely tuned engine and the odd muted curse. She listened to these sounds now as she fixed her hair at the bedroom dresser. The streaks of grey were becoming very noticeable, and Liz was still undecided about whether to colour them, or to admit to the world that she was now a Grandmother. Moving to the closet she sifted through the dresses, searching for one to fit the mood of the day. On the floor of the closet, next to Harry's Clarinet, she saw an old shoe box.

“I found something this afternoon, Harry” Liz said after the supper dishes had been cleared away. “I wasn’t sure what I should do with it. Why don’t you take a look?”

She passed the shoe box to Harry, who lifted the lid and peered inside. Liz held her breath. She had debated for a long time that afternoon whether she had the right to consign the shoebox directly to the garbage bin, and in the end decided that only Harry could make that decision. He delved into the box and came up with a small, dog eared blue covered book.

“Oh, this is that Dreambook I bought -- when was that, ninety eight, I think. Oh look, this is the diary I kept of my dreams that year. And all my little ‘memory jogger’ notes are in here too.”

Harry placed the two books back in the box amongst the scattered notepaper. He closed the lid and dropped the box by the side of his chair. Liz bent and picked it up.

“What should I do with it, Harry?” she asked.

“Oh,” Harry said absently, picking up his newspaper, “Put it in the trash, will you, Liz? Or leave it there and I’ll burn it with the garden waste tomorrow.”

“You don’t want to keep it then, Harry?”

“Keep it? Heavens no. It never came to anything. Just another silly Harry Murphy idea; you must get fed up with them. I seem to remember thinking that I could get in touch with my subconscious mind, and figure out the secrets of the universe. Poppycock, of course. I think I wrote down a few of my dreams but it was just rubbish. Don’t you remember? You can have a little read through my diary if you like, but you’ll be bored to tears by it.”

“You don’t have any interest in dreams any more then, Harry?”

“Oh I rarely dream these days, my love. Why do I need to dream when I’ve got the perfect life while I’m fully awake? How on Earth could I improve on this?”

And Harry dropped the paper, grabbed his wife and spun round and round on the carpet, his little dog yapping furiously at his heels.

And the years went by.

Beautiful Dreamer:

Epilogue:

Twenty Thirty-four: St. Margaret's Bay, Nova Scotia, Canada.

She walked down to the ocean, through the avenue of tall Russian Olives, in blossom now, filling the air with their pungent fragrance. She stopped by the thick rose hedge then moved on through the archway to the sea. The water was busy today; whitecaps filled the bay and a salt spray moistened her cheek as she stood on the shingle, staring out across the water to the misty outline of Peggy's Cove on the opposite shore. A small stone slab, overgrown with creepers, sat just above the high tide mark. She knelt by the stone and pulled away the creepers.

"Ms. Murphy?" The tall, slim man walked towards her through the seaside garden, his face wrinkled in concern.

"Heavens, Doctor, I haven't been a 'Murphy' for a long time. It's Mrs. Blake, actually, but I'd be happier if you would call me 'Joanne'."

"Joanne then. I'm Doctor Carpenter. Peter." He looked at the stone. "Family pet?"

"Yes. A silly little dog that Dad picked up on a hiking trip once. The bane of my Mom's life, it was. Lived to be almost fifteen years old."

The woman straightened from her task and shook the doctor's hand.

"We met briefly at Mom's funeral last year, Doctor."

“Peter, please. Forgive me, Joanne. I’m a bit flustered this morning to tell the truth.”

“Is it about Dad? Is that why you came out to find me?”

“Oh, no. There’s no change. I was just wondering if you’d heard from your brother?”

“Jimmy? Yes, I got a message this morning. Apparently there’s been some sort of bomb scare at the airport. No flights are likely to be leaving for at least twenty four hours. There’s a flight this afternoon from Manchester, but he doesn’t know if he can get there in time.”

“You’d be doing him a favour, Joanne, if you could reach him and let him know not to go to any heroic lengths to get here. I’m afraid your Dad doesn’t have that much time left. It’s down to a few hours now. Perhaps only minutes.”

“I have a cousin in England who can reach my brother on his mobile phone. I can’t call Jimmy directly, something to do with the different systems. I’ll call from the house.”

“I’m afraid you’ve had a hard time of it, these last few years.”

“Not really, Doctor.... Peter. It was hard on us all while Mum was fighting her cancer, especially with us being so far away. It left Dad to do all the hard work. He never complained, you know. He used to say it was his obligation and his privilege to look after Mum. It was a blessing, actually, when she passed away. It might have been better if she’d been less of a fighter. Easier on everybody. When she died we knew that Dad wouldn’t be far behind. We couldn’t really imagine Harry without his Liz.”

“It’s surprisingly common, actually, for one spouse to follow another when it happens like that. Is he a religious man, your father? A strong faith can be very helpful in times like this.”

“He never talked much about it. He certainly was no church-goer, and I don’t think he had much time for Christianity. I guess he was a bit of an atheist, to tell the truth.”

“Ah, well. It’s not important that your father should believe in God, since there’s no doubt that God believes in your father.”

“You’re a religious man yourself then, Peter? That surprises me, I mean you being a man of science.”

“In all my studies and all my work, I’ve found more mystery than scientific fact. And some of the things I’ve seen go a long way to convincing me that there’s *something* following the death of the body. I’m certain, in my heart, that your father is about to step through a door, no more than that. And I’m fairly certain that your Mom will be waiting at the other side of that door. It’s a belief that brings me comfort at a time like this, when the patient has moved past the point where any skills of mine can help.”

“Well that’s very sweet, Peter. I wish I could believe in something like that.”

The VON nurse stepped through the French doors to the garden and walked hurriedly down to the shore, where the two people came at once to meet her. “It’s not what you think!” she said quickly as Joanne approached. “He’s asking for you, but he’s sitting up in bed looking out of the window! He is perfectly lucid, doctor. He just said ‘Ask my Jojo to come in, will you?’ and gave me a big smile.”

The three stepped briskly into the sitting room, where a very professional looking hospital bed had been set up facing the picture window which looked out across Liz’s garden to the bay. Harry was, indeed, propped up on the pillows, looking like he’d just recovered from a mild case of the flu.

“*I remembered!*” he told his daughter, his face alive with excitement. “She made me forget it all, but of course I’d forgotten that I’d forgotten it! But Margaret let me remember, and then fixed it so I could come back for a while; but only for a few minutes.”

“Dad, you’re rambling. You’re not making any sense. Who is Margaret? What has she let you remember?”

“Everything! Margaret is my Fairy Godmother. Always has been. But hush now, darling, I don’t have long. Listen; your Grand-daughter Michelle, her next baby is going to be a girl. She will be called Lillianne – and the Sky Reader has agreed to be her Guardian Spirit! Isn’t that wonderful, Jo?”

At a glance from the Doctor, Joanne said “Yes, Dad, that’s wonderful news.”

“I knew you’d think so! Now what else? Oh, yes. I’ve seen your Mom. She’s waiting for me now. She refused to cross through and she’s been waiting for me in Tibet. Stubborn woman; always was! She’s been studying with Malek! She says he makes her laugh! *I* taught him that, you know. He took her on a trip down into a volcano! Imagine that! All he did for me was take me to the ‘Wizard of Oz’! And you wouldn’t believe it! Mutt is a police dog in British Columbia! An honest to God German Shepherd. But then, he always thought *he was!*”

Harry laughed and, laughing, started to choke. Calming himself he reached for his daughter’s hand and looked into her tear filled eyes.

“Listen my darling, there’s no time left now. I wish they had let me remember in time to tell you, but now it’s too late. Just know this: The harder life seems to be, the more you will profit from it. It’s all about learning and growing. Nothing you will ever have to face will be beyond you. Remember, all of your trials were put there at your request. And – this is important – when you face the judgement seat you don’t have to worry, because the judge is

you. I won't be afraid when I go into that room, not this time. Not like last time. Goodbye my love. Your Mom and I will always watch over you. Coming, Liz. Coming, Margaret."

Harry closed his eyes and, smiling, died. And, smiling, opened them again and stepped through his doorway.