

This Time Around

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For Epheniel

Chapter 1

Once Upon a Time, Space & Dimension

I found myself outside the Hall of Records at what appeared to be the appointed time and looked up. *Mighty impressive*. Squaring my shoulders, I took a deep breath and rang the bell. Immediately, an entity answered my summons. He was about two feet tall and lean, except for an endearingly small potbelly. He had ruddy cheeks, a button nose and dark shining eyes. A sprinkling of freckles peppered his face, and I had to restrain myself from pinching his cheeks. His ginger head of hair, slightly disheveled, begged to be tousled, but I resisted that urge, as well. He wore only an oversized apron; its ties dragged on the ground. Surprisingly, I was not surprised.

"May I help ye?" he inquired, his face crinkling with a smile.

I cleared my throat nervously. "I believe I have an appointment with the Preincarnation Advisory Committee," I replied. "I hope I'm not late. I got carried away by the beauty of the place and found myself wandering the premises."

"Oh, that happens all the time," he assured me. "Come right in! We're not at all concerned with time around here. See?" He lifted his arm and showed me his bare wrist. "No watches!" Taking my arm as officiously as he could, given my considerable height advantage, he began to hurry me down a long hallway with many types of doors. Some were made of a rich, deeply grained mahogany; others appeared to be oak or maple. Some defied Earth sensory description. All were in what I could only describe as various stages of *completion*. I wanted to ask why the doors were all different, but felt that perhaps I should not distract my single-minded spirit guide.

Finally, my curiosity got the better of me when we approached a particularly stunning door. It glowed as if from within and seemed to pulsate waves of unearthly shades of greens and blues. *Whoa. Those colors are definitely not found in any of my crayon boxes*. I was so struck by the beauty of the door, I skidded to a stop, causing the entity to drop my arm and tumble across the hallway. Aghast at my gaffe, I hurried over to him and helped him rise.

"I am so sorry," I said. "I just wanted a closer peek at that door."

"Not a problem, Lassie," he hastily replied. "We just need to equip you with some brake lights!" He gazed at me, grinned and winked. "Most likely that tumble will be the highlight of my day! I tend to get excited when company comes. Go ahead; look all you want. We'll continue only when you're ready – and we'll slow down so you can sightsee to your heart's content."

I smiled my thanks and turned back to the door. I tentatively reached out and touched it, but was shocked to find that my finger seemed to be absorbed by the material. In essence, I *became* the door. Startled, I quickly pulled back my hand and examined it, but my finger appeared to be normal. "Wow," I whispered. "That's some door you've got there."

"Aye, that it be," he replied, nodding. "That it be."

After another moment of experimentation, I was ready to move on. As promised, we moved at a slower pace and I was able to glance into many rooms with open doors. I discovered that the rooms, themselves, were as varied as their entrances. Many resembled rooms of bygone eras; one or two were more primitive in nature, while others did not appear to be of this world and defied description. Some were flooded with light, and I could only blink as we passed; others were easier on my eyes and I was able to detect a variety of entities contained within. Again, a wide assortment met my eyes. Some beings appeared to be human; some seemed to be merely beams of light, while still others contained a delightful variety of fairie realm creatures.

The entity remained quiet, immensely enjoying my reaction, which could only be summed up monosyllabically: *Wow*. Finally, he stopped before a large, ornately carved wooden door. I couldn't help but be further impressed.

"The Advisory Committee is waiting for ye in here." He opened the door and announced me. Suddenly, my nervousness grew to a heightened state, and I wondered if I had made the right decision to come. Fear must have shown on my face, because the light being reached for my hand and squeezed it, motioning me to come closer. When I crouched beside him, his eyes locked into mine and he whispered gently, "No matter what happens, it'll be all right. Ye can do this." He squeezed my hand once more before releasing it and playfully booted me forward. "Go on, Soul, get in there and show 'em what ye've got!" I smiled gratefully at the small creature and took a deep breath. *No matter what happens, it'll be all right*. I lifted up my head and walked over the threshold. *Ye can do this*.

"So ye wish to incarnate?" I jumped when I heard the voice. The brogue was undeniable, and I grinned. *I didn't realize Scotland was heaven! They should put that little nugget in their travel brochures*. I glanced curiously around the room – and found disappointment. It was empty but for a sturdy wooden table and a couple of plain, wooden chairs, one of which was considerably taller than the other. On the table lay a thick scroll and an exquisite quill pen. "So ye wish to incarnate?" the voice repeated. I spun around in search of the voice's owner, and found the same small entity directly behind me, his mischievous smile lighting up his freckled face. I was shocked. "You're the Preincarnation Advisory Committee?"

"Ye're lookin' at it!" He thrust forward his hand and I could not help but return his infectious grin. "Ma name is Ezekiel, Soul – Zeke for guid friends like ye. A'm a sprite!"

"I'm sorry," I said, "but you know me?" When he nodded, I paused and gazed at him for several moments, raiding my memory banks. After several awkward moments, I asked, "This is embarrassing, but should I know ye – I mean you?"

Zeke's pealing laughter rang throughout the room, soothing me considerably. There was no fear here. "Aye, Lassie, we've worked together on many occasions, but as a soul grows closer to Headin' Back Time, memory loss is to be expected." He noted my confusion and pointed to his apron. "This is the problem, isn't it, Soul?"

"It's just that I thought ..., well, since you answered the door ... that apron, you know ..." *I haven't even incarnated and already, I'm judging a book by its cover? Not a good beginning*.

Zeke laughed again. "'Tis a great beginning. There's no judgment on this realm; no court assessing choices. Every soul needs a partner and ... well, ye see, I offered to walk ye through the initial process, plain and simple!" He picked up the apron ties that trailed behind him. "And since partners work together, how about if ye help me by tying these?"

Grateful for the diversion, I nodded and doubled-knotted the ties. "Darned things never stay tied when I do them," he muttered. I gave the ties another tug and he spun around, clearly delighted that they were now secure. "Thanks, Soul!" he said before nimbly climbing the tall wooden chair. He adjusted himself, pulled the thick scroll and quill pen to him, and patted the tabletop. "Come join me." Without a word, I pulled out the other chair and sat.

Once we settled in, the sprite picked up the quill and ran it under his chin, giggling as it tickled him. "I love these things," he sighed. I coughed quietly, hoping to get the conference started. Zeke sighed again, put the feather down, folded his hands and gazed at me. "So, have ye given any thought as to where ye might best learn this lifetime? The cosmos simply abounds with opportunities, Soul!"

"Actually, I'd like to return to Earth, if it's okay with you."

Zeke chuckled. "The choice is up to ye, Soul. It's always been up to ye. My role is to place ye with other entities that can help ye plan this new lifetime. Then, after ye folks make the plan, we'll look it over and make changes, as needed."

"Making sure I'm not biting off more than I can chew, huh?" I asked. He looked confused for only a moment before realization dawned.

"Ah, one of those Earth expressions, eh?" Zeke chuckled and picked up the feather again, brushing it idly across his cheek. He suddenly had a faraway look in his eyes. "Earth. Good old

Earth," he sighed. "Such guid memories! Why, I remember the time I was but a wee lad and ..." He caught my questioning eye and quickly pulled himself out of his reverie. "Aye! Certainly! Better get back to the business at hand here. Let's see," he continued as he ran his finger down the scroll, "would ye like a description of all incarnation locations at yer disposal before making that decision?" Before awaiting a reply, he began to check off his fingers.

"There's the devic realm filled with faeries and gnomes and pixies and sprites and, well, you name it and it's probably one of us!" As Zeke spoke, he reached into the apron pocket and then threw what appeared to be gold glitter into the air. Instantly, the room filled with faeries, elves and pixies, racing and soaring throughout the room. I had to duck to avoid collision with two faeries who were under the distinct impression that I was the Finish Line. To my right, I spied a couple groups of gnomes chatting quietly. The males clenched pipes in their mouths and seemed to be in some sort of a smoke ring competition. The females chatted quietly as they worked tiny, exquisite stitches onto a brightly colored quilt. I leaned over to examine the intricacies therein, and the quilters smiled and graciously offered to have me join their bee.

"The quilt is beautiful and I would love to help another time if the offer still stands," I said. I turned back to the sprite, who was laughing and dancing around the room with the others. Finally, he collapsed with laughter.

Several other sprites appeared in the room, ran up to my guide and spun him into their dance again. The gnomes guffawed and chortled at the sight before fading along with the others. A moment later, the room was silent; Zeke lay on the floor, out of breath, trying to compose himself. *This is definitely not what I was expecting!* Zeke giggled another moment and then continued. From the floor. He stretched out on his back and reached back into his pocket.

"Then there's the intergalactic realm with a plethora of terrific opportunities – I love that word, *plethora!*" Again, the sprite tossed the glitter and a true *plethora* of amazingly diverse beings materialized around a large table. Their discussion involved peals of laughter and I was fascinated by their merriment. Each time they laughed, colorful sparks shot out of them, surrounded them all and then zoomed out through the ceiling. I giggled, watching them, but couldn't help but hope my next incarnation was not the object of their laughter. In another part of the conference room, beings with large, dark eyes conferred seriously together, as they studied a scroll unfurled in front of them. Still others of varying description and colors played some sort of holographic board game. I watched in fascination as these beings, too, faded from my sight. "... the celestial realm, ..." In a mighty jump, the sprite landed on the table next to me. He winked broadly and sprinkled another bit of glitter. I heard the change in realms before I even saw it. A soft sound enveloped me, and as I looked up to find the source of the sound, I realized that it was hundreds of angel wings rustling gently. Thousands. Millions. A feeling of peace descended upon me and somehow, I knew I had come Home. I gazed into their faces and found overwhelming love for me and all journeying souls, and every particle of my being pulled at me to stay with this realm. But as strongly as I felt my sense of belonging with them, I also knew that this time around, my path lay somewhere else. I couldn't help but feel a bit sad when the angelic realm faded away, as well.

Reluctantly, my full eyes returned to Zeke and I nodded. I knew he had instinctively understood; he smiled gently and moved on with his list. He clapped his hands, releasing more glitter. I witnessed a beautiful blue and green orb from light years away. We zoomed toward the planet, drawing closer and closer. When the traveling suddenly stopped, we were at a crystal blue lake. Nearby, the long, thin branches of a willow tree gently danced along the top of the water. The sun shone warmly in the bright blue sky as two dragonflies flitted across the surface of the lake. I gasped with delight.

Zeke touched his fourth finger and winked at me. "... then there's the earth real..."

"Stop!" I cried. "That's it!" I leapt from the chair, shattering the vision with my excitement. "I really think I'd like Earth again."

"Ye sound confident." He leaned toward me and his voice dropped, as he put the remainder of the glitter back in his pocket. "But I'm not done with my list – it's a long one!" He peered closely at me. "Ye fully understand the difficulties presented when making the Earth choice, Soul, right? What ye've just done is select the most difficult location in the universe for yer

next physical life. It will require great courage and perseverance not only to survive the negativity on that realm, but to choose to thrive in spite of it.”

Standing on the tabletop, he leaned forward again, locking eyes with me. His eyes radiated love. “It’s a bit of a rough-and-tumble experience, one which some souls often regret once they’ve landed smack dab within that chaos called *humanity*. Ye’re up for such a task, Soul? Ye fully understand what ye’ve chosen?”

Zeke reached into his pocket one more time, releasing a few twinklings of glitter. In seconds, a little human girl materialized. She was sprawled on a craggy path; tears ran down her face as she sat up to examine her skinned knee. Again, my eyes filled, and I experienced a deep yearning to comfort her. *Why do I feel such a connection to her?* The sprite’s voice dropped to a whisper. “That will be ye, Lass. Ye see, it’s not all flittin’ dragonflies.”

I nodded a bit tentatively as the vision slowly dissolved. My memories of previous incarnations appeared to be fading, so I could only vaguely recall bits and pieces of my earlier Earth experiences, but I understood his concerns and appreciated such an honest appraisal of my decision. I had very specific plans this time around and this placement was the key to all of them. “Yes,” I stated clearly, as I returned to my seat, “I choose Earth.”

Zeke nodded solemnly before he too sat down. He made a notation on the scroll before returning his gaze to me. “Earth it be, then. Tell me, who do ye want to work with?” When I looked blank, he put the quill down and folded his hands in front of him. “I couldn’t help but notice ye felt a kinship with the celestial realm. Perhaps ye’d like an angel.” I looked as blank as I felt. Zeke encouraged me. “Come on, Soul, ye gotta work with someone.” He stood up again and started pacing the room.

Suddenly, he stopped in his tracks. “Maybe ye’ve made previous arrangements with other entities before coming in to see us today?”

I looked blank again. “Should I have made previous arrangements?” I stammered. “I’m sorry. I guess I missed that part. I was just so excited to come and get started that I, well ...” my voice trailed off with uncertainty.

“Nae problem,” assured Zeke kindly. I was amazed that there was no sign of impatience with me, as I struggled to understand the process. I gazed at the sprite closer and realized that not only was he being extraordinarily patient with me, but he seemed to genuinely care for me. As if in response, the sprite climbed back up onto the table and gently kissed my forehead. “Of course I love ye, Lassie! What’s not to love? Don’t be worryin’ about that partner thing; I’m here to help ye with that, as well. It’s just that some souls have more memory of this incarnation selection process than others. Certainly not a problem,” he repeated as I wracked my memory and he climbed down and settled back into his chair, smoothing his apron over his legs. He leaned over and patted my hand. “Don’t worry, Soul. Ye’ll get all the help ye need. I’m here to make sure of it!”

I smiled gratefully. “So I’m to choose an entity to work with during this lifetime? Is that how it works?”

“Aye, Soul. ‘Twould be very difficult for a traveler to make such a perilous journey alone. ‘Tis a support system, see? Ye can choose someone ye’ve worked with during a previous incarnation or ye can choose another.” Surprise must have registered on my face because he smiled and continued. In his excitement, he fell off his chair and rolled onto the floor, waving his arms. Nimbly, he leapt to his feet, not missing a beat.

“Throughout time, ye’ve chosen both paths, Soul, and have learned a guid deal from yer experiences – a plethora! There are more choices that I have fingers!” He held up his closed hand to click off his choices. “Ye can choose to have a guide, ...” He released one finger from his small fist. “... and a guardian angel,” A second finger appeared. “... or an angel who doubles as yer guide.” When the third finger popped out of his hand, he scrambled back onto the tabletop and began to pace, his hands crossed behind him, deep in thought.

“Well, let’s just say that over here, ye can do pretty much whatever ye choose to prepare for yer journey. Get it?” One look at the confusion on my face and Zeke wisely switched tactics. Again.

“Hmmm. Tell ye what, Soul. We’ll just have ourselves a little confab on the purpose of yer next go-round before we work through the guide part. That all right?” I gratefully nodded and he

began.

"Each incarnation has a specific Life Purpose that be chosen during this selection process – you know, what ye wish to accomplish during yer time there." Suddenly, his eyes lit up. "Hey, any chance of ye recalling that in yer previous lifetimes?" When I nodded tentatively, he smiled broadly and continued, "Aha! I believe ye already know yer Life Purpose this time, don't ye?"

"I want to help with the effort to bring peace and understanding to Earth," I replied.

Zeke nodded, absentmindedly rubbing his belly before speaking softly. "'Tis a mighty big task, Soul. Sure ye're up for it?" *Did I hear him softly whisper "again" after that comment? Had I chosen this before?* I nodded confidently and the sprite made another notation. When he finished, he said, "Well, I gotta tell ye that choice certainly points the way to guide selection."

"It does?"

He nodded, his face gravely serious. "Aye, there's a great concerted effort right now to bring about peace and understanding to the earth realm, Soul. If ye would like to join them, my suggestion would be to send ye on to the angelic realm to finish yer choices."

My heart skipped a beat, as I recalled my response to the earlier vision. "The angelic realm?"

When he nodded, his facial expression could only be described as bubbly. "Angels!" he sighed. "Ye gotta love 'em!" He sighed again and leaned toward me. "Don't ye just love 'em?" Without awaiting my reply, Zeke continued. "Angels have headed up this movement from the beginning of yer time, but lately things have sped up more than a wee bit. Humans are beginning to re-establish their connections to their Higher Selves. And the Realm's always searching for souls to help them accomplish that difficult task. If ye're sure ye're up to it, I can recommend a human placement with them and ye can work as a team. How's that sound?" I nodded and he made another notation.

"So what's next?" I asked, anxious to jump back in the fray. "Where do I find an angel for me? Celestial classified ads? Seraphic internet?"

Zeke laughed merrily and slapped the table, startling me. *He's quite the emotional roller coaster, isn't he?* Again, Zeke exploded into laughter. "Oh, Soul, ye'd be mighty surprised by what we have in order to help souls like ye. Perhaps some time ye'll choose to work with us and discover the full range of resources available to us as we help journeying souls – we've got loads of cool stuff! But to get back to the business at hand, ye're as much in need of an angel as they are ye." Zeke leaned over, locking eyes with me. "Tell me, do ye recall yer guardian angel from yer last incarnation at this point, or has too much memory faded?"

I closed my eyes and thought a moment. A wispy memory of being enveloped in love and peace floated across my mind. *Could those have been wings enfolded about me?*

"Aye, Soul, that memory was yer angel," came the soft reply. "Remember." I sighed, deep within my contentment, and finally opened my eyes with the realization that somehow a reconnection had just taken place within me. Almost like a long-looked-for jig-saw puzzle piece clicking into place. Peace flooded through my being. *Whoa. That was not expected.*

"Then that's who I want to work with this time," I answered when my wits returned. "I think I've had this angelic being with me a very long time. Is that normal procedure around here?"

Zeke's face crinkled appreciatively. "That's the beauty of this place – there's no *normal procedure* around here, Soul. Some human spirits request a different angel or guide each time they choose a different do-over. Sometimes they request the same guides and/or angels they've worked with before. Sometimes they request others. Some start their incarnation with one angel and change angels as they grow older or face other challenges. Still others choose not to partner with an angel, but with only a guide." Zeke paused and gazed at me, the quill hanging from his mouth like a stogie. "Ye know, the possibilities are endless!" I smiled in appreciation and he once again gathered his thoughts.

The sprite suddenly snapped out of his reverie and pointed the feather toward me. "Ye have any questions before I turn ye over to yer angel? Anything at all? Ye're known around these parts to be a very inquisitive entity."

I smiled, a bit chagrined and impatient to move on to my angel. "You do know me." I smiled innocently at the Preincarnation Advisory Committee. "Yes, I have many questions but I think

they can all be answered by my angel. I appreciate what you've done for me and all other travelers. Thank you."

Zeke grinned. "Any time, Soul – my pleasure. Shall we go?" When I nodded and began to rise, he jumped up, turned and bounced out of the room. I found I had to run to catch up with him as we negotiated the many hallways with their twists and turns, but didn't mind the pace since we were angel bound. Once again, I was struck by the beauty of the doors; it was somewhat with a sense of disappointment that the door where we finally stopped was rather plain.

"Here ye be, Soul!" He squeezed my hand again. "Guid luck!" he called as he bounded back to his post, his apron ties still secured. "'Twas a pure pleasure!"

"Thank you, Zeke!" I yelled to the disappearing sprite. I turned back to the door and knocked tentatively. No answer. I knocked again without any luck. *Oh, dear, maybe he got the wrong room.* I thought of summoning the sprite again, but knew the many twists and turns would be tough to navigate on my own.

Suddenly, a deep, male voice permeated every atom in my body, "For crying out loud, grab some guts and open the door!" I spun around, wondering if Zeke had returned – without his charming brogue and gentle personality. To my chagrin, I found no one in the vicinity. *Was that just my imagination?* Without waiting for another numbing command, I *grabbed some guts* and gently turned the knob; the door opened easily. I slipped inside before the disembodied voice could follow and latched the door behind me, listening carefully. Quiet chuckling crossed my mind; when it was finished, my eyes peered throughout the twilighted room. I could just make out a shape at an imposing desk in the corner. The being seemed to be lost in thought, pouring over a massive scroll.

"Hello?" I called tentatively. "Is anyone in here?" The being, which appeared to be female, jumped up, obviously startled.

"Goodness, Soul, you flummoxed me!" she said. "How long have you been standing there?"

"I'm sorry," I mumbled as my eyes began to adjust to the dim light. "I thought we had an appointment." The walls of the room resembled a library; they were lined with books and scrolls of all sizes. There were several reading lamps and comfortable-looking, overstuffed chairs scattered throughout the room. A beautiful stone fireplace dominated the room. All in all, it was very pleasant, which somewhat appeased my disappointment in the door.

"We did! We do! Come right in!" the entity exclaimed as she rose to greet me. I stood rooted inside the door as I watched her approach. She was a beautiful angel with magnificent silky-feathered wings, which brushed the ground slightly as she moved. She wore a floor-length, flowing, pale pink and white opalescent gown with a matching pink cord cinching her waist. Her toes delicately peeked out from white sandals. Her long hair, a soft brown, fell in cascading curls around her shoulders. As ethereal as her appearance was, what struck me most was her face. She was a classic beauty with soft, knowing, violet eyes that held my own for a long moment as a deeper reconnection seemed to be made. She had an inner glow that enveloped me, and I was stunned to realize that such a resplendent entity so filled with love and light was willing to walk by my side. She understood my reaction and gently smiled at me, turning slightly so I could appreciate her splendor. "Go on, Soul. Take all the time you need. We've been together a long time, but once you leave this realm, you lose your memory of me."

"You're exquisite!" I finally gasped, probing my mind for memories of her. After a moment of stupefied silence, I pulled myself back to the question on my mind. "Excuse me for asking, but I couldn't help but notice all those other conference rooms that we passed coming here. Are they filled with souls and guides, too?" When she nodded, I continued. "Why don't they all look alike?"

"Many of them are guides. In order to be a guide, an entity must have spent at least one lifetime on Earth so greater understanding is gleaned for the soul making that journey. Oftentimes, then, those guides choose to appear in the form of their last human incarnation." She paused. "For this conference, you, yourself, have chosen to appear in human female form." I nodded, but it must have been evident that my mind was elsewhere.

"You are just as I imagined you would be!" I whispered. *How is that possible?*

"And that's exactly why I look the way I do," she replied. When I looked confused, she

added, "We'll talk more about that later."

I nodded, trying to concentrate on her words. During her entire explanation, as much as I tried, I found I could not take my eyes off her soft wings, framing her beautiful face. She smiled.

"But, first things first, Soul. Would you like to touch the wings?" I nodded numbly and she bent forward to enfold me in the silkiness.

As she did, a whisper hit me like a warm breeze wafting through a summer's evening. "*This is where you belong, Soul. Come back to see me as often as you can.*" I tucked the invitation deep within my soul and sighed. A feeling of peace like none I had ever felt filled me and I was hesitant to break the flow.

"I have missed this more than I ever thought possible," I answered. The feeling faded slowly and my head snapped up. *Whoa. Where did that come from?*

"I am always here for you," the angel softly replied.

How is it that I am so comfortable talking with an angel? Why does this all seem so familiar – the vision of the celestial realm, this angel – all of it? She seems as thrilled as I am that I'm here, which is the most surprising part of all of this.

The connection I had felt earlier strengthened. Just when the flow between us lessened, someOne else's thought crossed my brain. *I love you.* I could only shake my head in wonder.

Slowly, the angel released me, and I found us seated together at her desk. She picked up a delicate quill pen, her hand poised over a parchment scroll.

"Well, Soul, we believe in Free Will around here, so you have lots of choices to make. Let's get started. Sex?"

I looked blankly at her for a moment. "Excuse me. I thought that was a human thing," I said.

"No, Soul," sighed my angel. "By sex I meant *female* or *male*. What shall it be this time around?"

"Oh," I replied, much embarrassed, hoping that this faux pas would not be indicative of the rest of the conference. "Before making that decision, may I ask a question?" She nodded. "What's my time frame this incarnation?"

"Fair question, Soul. Let's see. How about if we get you started at the mid-point of the twentieth century on Earth? How's that sound? By the time you reach maturity, the end of the patriarchal society that has existed for hundreds of years will be nearing. Also, at the end of the century will be the dawn of a new age: Aquarius – a confusing, but exciting time for all souls. Are you interested?"

"Sure. That's fine. If that's the case, I'd like to be a female, definitely female. Sounds like an exciting time to be a woman."

She seemed pleased with my answer. "Okay. Sex: Female. Check. Name. How does *Hildegardenia* or *Brunhildette* sound?"

I began to wonder how I had gotten matched with this particular angel. Had I chosen her many lifetimes ago or had she chosen me? More importantly, how might a miffed angel exact sweet retribution? I fervently hoped that the tone of this conference would improve or I might well end up spending a lifetime as a doorknob in Outer Mongolia. I knew I had to outsmart her in order to escape receiving the name from hell, so to speak. *How does one out-smart a highly evolved light being?* I thought for a long moment, wracking my brain for The Perfect Plan, as she patiently awaited my reply. I opened one eye enough to sneak a peek at her. *She certainly looks innocent enough – maybe I stand a chance by playing that side of her. It's worth a shot.* "Well," I began, a guileless look planted firmly in my eyes. "I'm sure those are very fine names, but I was thinking more along the lines of Cutie Pie Lulubelle, Cutie-Lu for short."

She put down the pen and peered through the dim light at me. Drumming her fingers lightly on the desk, she solemnly considered my suggestion. I returned her gaze with what I hoped would showcase healthy doses of naiveté. Idly, she moved one delicate hand to the mass of ringlets on her head and began to twirl a curl. *Angels have nervous habits? What's next – chewing celestial fingernails?* Suddenly, she leaned forward and spoke earnestly.

"Cutie-Lu? Is that your idea of humor? You want to further progress your soul with a name like Cutie-Lu? Is that what you're telling me?" I nodded as she continued to study me, the

veritable model of innocence. Finally, she put her hands in her lap, leaned back in her chair and spoke. "Humph. That name simply won't do. Besides, I'd never be able to live it down once everyone else got wind of it. For my own self-esteem, please choose another." She looked at me pleadingly. I almost felt sorry for her. "You see, a name should represent you. How about *Esmereudentine*? You'd be the only one on your block with it."

I began to have my doubts about this entire meeting and wondered if there were opportunities for angel guides to take refresher courses on naming souls. I had no choice but to move on to the second stage of my plan. I fervently hoped a biblical tact might be just the way to get out of this sticky situation.

"How about *Martha*?" I countered. "You know, Martha, Mary and Lazarus? She got stuck in the kitchen, washing dishes while the others entertained Jesus in Bethany. Surely, with that type of history, Martha would be an appropriate name for me. Just think of the possible challenges – a veritable plethora!"

My guardian smiled and picked up her pen. "You've been talking to Zeke, haven't you?" When I nodded, she sighed and made the notation. "*Martha* it is, then. Let's go with *Jane* for a middle name. I've always liked that one and haven't been able to sell it to you before."

"So we've been together a long time? You know lots about me?"

She smiled so beautifully, radiating love from within, that I felt a little guilty for having deceived her. Well, almost. The angel reached for my hand and spoke quietly. "We have been together for many of your lifetimes, Soul. Even though your memory is fading, as it must, we know each other intimately – we make a great team."

"Mind if I ask a question?" I inquired, as her wings softly moved with each breath she took. "I thought angels were beings of light. How is it I can see you in your physical body right now?"

"Angels are multidimensional entities filled with knowledge and love that we share with souls on either realm. We have been given many resources to help those on the earthly plane. One of them is the ability to materialize in any form that is needed. You see me in this form because your paradigm of an angel – your belief system — produces this image. Other human souls would see me through the eyes of their own paradigms, providing different images. That's why I look like you thought I would." She paused and gazed into my eyes, sending massive amounts of love coursing through my body. "I have so missed you, Soul. Thank you for coming in today."

Wow. This is unbelievable. I can't believe my luck in getting an angel who is crazy about me. What a lucky move on my part! Since she obviously adores me, it's pretty darn clear that this conference is going to be a snap and soon I'll be back on the earth plane, having loads of fun!

My beautiful angel suddenly narrowed her eyes and sat back, her angelic arms crossed. "But to get back to where we were, if your last incarnation had been chosen within the Hebrew tradition, then your little *Martha of Bethany* ploy would have originated in the Torah instead of the Bible. Do you understand?" Stunned, I gulped. Loudly. When I finally nodded, she smiled broadly at me, uncrossed her arms and peered at her notes in front of her. "So, it's *Martha Jane* then?" I agreed quickly before she could come up with another alternative.

"Now that we have the name down, let's see about heritage. Last time around..." she mused as she thumbed purposefully through her parchment. "Aha! Found it! Isn't this interesting?" I craned my head to see, but could not read the entries. "I am checking your last two incarnations for any detail that might have slipped my notice. Hmmm. It appears that last time around you had it all."

"I had it all?" I squeaked. "Is that good?" My angel's silence began to unnerve me. "Mind giving me your definition of *had it all*?"

She put down her quill, leaned back and gazed at me. Rather disconcertingly. "You chose to have the veil lifted for that lifetime."

"And that's a good thing, right?" I nodded and grew hopeful.

"You were an apprentice to a powerful, religious leader in Russia around the turn and into the twentieth century. You also chose to experience the misuse of intuitive gifts and the effect those choices had on those around you."

"Oh," I replied flatly. "That doesn't sound so good." I found myself fumbling for the right

words. "Sorry about that."

"You learned great amounts from the experience, but we'll get into that later." She glanced at her scroll and smiled.

"It appears that the incarnation before that one, you were a pig farmer in an primitive African village in what is now known as Kenya, several hundred Earth years ago. Tough lifetime," she mused as she scanned her scroll. Suddenly, she stopped and looked up. "Goodness, you met with a pretty gruesome death! Yes, definitely, we'll need a change of place for you this time around."

She turned to a window and snapped her fingers. Immediately, a movie began to play, showing different environments. She paused one and looked at me. "There. How about an area known as *Ohio* in North America?" I looked at the screen and found it a pretty place. Knowing that she had given in on the name, I quickly agreed. "Now. Parentage. What kind were you considering? Young? Old? Parents with abuse or addiction issues?"

I firmly shook my head; my mind was set. "No, I don't want any challenges on that front. Could you make them loving parents? I'll take my challenges elsewhere. Tell you what," I continued, hoping to assuage my angel guide, especially having run the name scam on her earlier, "You can pick the heritage, since I picked the parents. How's that for cooperation?"

"Done!" she agreed. "We're really zipping through this check- list. You are becoming highly evolved!" She checked the column, which appeared to be my Life Chart. "Aha!" she chortled again. "You did learn great things as a pig farmer. That was a stroke of genius on my part, if I do say so." I could only nod politely since memories of my former lives were fading quickly.

"I bet I got bonus points with that gruesome death thing, didn't I? That should have moved me a little bit on the Evolvment Scale. Go ahead, check the Handbook. I'm sure it's Rule #287 or something."

She flipped back several pages, found the notation and grinned. "All right, all right, so you have some bonus points that I missed. It appears that *Siblings* are next on the list. Want any?"

I thought for a moment before answering. "The purpose of reincarnation is to give myself challenges to further evolve my soul into deeper understanding, right?" My angel nodded. "And siblings bring automatic challenges, which will help me in the long run, right?" Another nod came my way. "Well, if that's the case, go ahead and mark me down for several. Don't make me the oldest, though. I'd rather not pave the way for others at this point, but I just don't feel the need to be youngest, either." I heard a definite sniff from across the desk. I chose to ignore it. "Let's make me a middle child and I'll learn to share. That should make you happy."

"How about being the second of four children?"

I nodded, pleased. "And by the way, I don't have much in the memory banks for the apprentice lifetime, but I have a vague memory of being a rather stunted pig farmer. Since I appear to have resolved that shortness issue rather well that time, how about if I'm tall this life?"

Another slightly audible sniff was heard, but she nodded, jotted it down and went on to the next question. "Do you want to go through this lifetime single or married?"

I jumped to my feet and leaned over the desk in excitement. "Oh, I'm so glad you brought that up. Married, definitely married. As I recall, I also wasn't a very attractive pigger and I went through that life alone and lonely. Believe me, that got old fast. Let's have me married this time around. Hey, I'll even let you pick him out; I'm not fussy." I smiled graciously and sat down. "I'd like him to be kind and good and smart and gentle and creative and faithful and on the same path and hardworking and good looking if you can swing it and funny and ..."

My guide firmly interrupted me by tapping her quill on the tabletop. "Excuse me. Mate Issues? Abuse? Addiction? Catastrophic illness?"

I shook my head firmly. "Been there; done that and passing on it this time."

Obviously, my words shocked her and her tone became serious. "Hold on, there, Soul! How are you ever going to become more highly evolved with all of those wonderful things in your life? You know, if you choose lots of challenges, your life may be difficult, but you'll be farther along on the Evolvment Scale and won't have to do Earth as many times."

I paused a moment to consider her logic. "Good points, all, Angel, but you know, I kind of

like this earthly existence. Ever been outside standing in the first spring rain? Ever had a butterfly perch on your hand? Hold a sleeping baby in your arms?" I jumped up and smacked the table, once again startling my guide. "Wait! Kids! I want kids this life, too!"

"Whoa, Soul, slow down! You're jumping ahead of the questionnaire! Let me complete the *Married* part first."

"As difficult as my challenges were in my last two lives, I vaguely remember feeling very connected to the earth and all life. If it fits in with their life charts, I would like my children to also experience that connection. I recall a bit of childish fun, splashing in the pond, learning to hunt, gazing at the nighttime sky, and laughing with friends. I could teach my children all the fun things I did as a kid!"

She sent me a disapproving glance, which I promptly ignored. To be honest, I was a little surprised how easily I was able to ignore a celestial being, but her next words brought me up short, so to speak. "You're expecting nothing but fun, fun, fun?"

"Is that a problem?"

Her eyes narrowed. Again. "And what's the point?"

"Pardon me?"

"Really, Soul, what's the point if you're only looking for fun this time around?" Her voice was rising and her eyes flashed in unexpected exasperation. "If you want fun, why don't you try working with the intergalactic realm? I've heard that Star System Kibilinius is loads of laughter."

"Perhaps we should re-look at that quest..."

But apparently, my guardian angel was not finished. "The earth realm is a tough place. You said you wanted to help with peace, which is one of the toughest tasks there is. You're going to have to make some tough choices in order to complete your tasks."

I nodded, properly chastised. As she wrote, I glanced around the room; she saw me look at the fireplace and asked if I would like it lit. When I nodded, she snapped her fingers again and a warm, soothing firelight engulfed the room. The burning logs gave off a satisfactory popping sound and I settled deeper into the chair, allowing it to lull me into a relaxed state.

"Ten? Twelve? Fifteen?"

I snapped out of my reverie, sat up and looked at her. "Ten, twelve or fifteen what?"

"Children," she responded. "How many would you like?"

"Well, I love kids, but if this lifetime begins at the second half of the twentieth century, then perhaps it would be more prudent to mother a smaller brood," I replied oh-so-sweetly. "How about three?"

"Three?" she squeaked, struggling mightily to maintain her angelic dignity. "Three?" she repeated at a lower octave, but still obviously dumbfounded. "I thought you wanted to become highly evolved. First, you want loving parents and Mr. Wonderful for a mate. Then you only want three children. I ask you," my angel demanded, "where are your challenges?"

This conference was definitely going downhill fast and I resolved to step up to the challenge. "Okay, okay, I'm really not trying to ruffle your feathers. Add another if that'll make you happy. I know – let's make it twins." I beamed at her. "There. Agreed on four, are we?"

She continued to look a bit disgruntled, but seemed to realize it was useless to argue. "Humph! Well, it is your life. I guess it'll have to do. Tell you what we'll do. How about if I just insert some challenges with the four and we'll call it even. What do you say?"

I wanted to show my celestial guide that I was equally amenable, but I had ridden this merry-go-round a time or two and decided a counter offer was worth a try. "Sure," I concurred as I smiled warmly at her. "That sounds swell! Four it is with challenges." I narrowed my eyes a bit and went in for the kill, so to speak. "But if there are challenges, wonderful angel of mine, how about making my children bright, loving and beautiful? That wouldn't break any of the rules, would it?" She solemnly eyed me, but said nothing. After a long moment, she nodded her agreement and continued to write. I waited patiently for her to finish before introducing another subject.

"And before you even ask," I began when she finally looked up at me again, "I'd like some wonderful friends who'll share all my wonderful experiences with me."

"Let me guess," tersely replied my angel, as she once again made several notations on my

chart. "I'm sensing a pattern here: Friends/No challenges." The look she gave me convinced me that at one point, she might as well have been a prim and proper school librarian and I could only nod. "No challenges with your friends?" I nodded again and she continued, undeterred. "You know, Soul, true friendships contain more than just a good time. The really great ones come with guarantees like for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health 'til death do us part, although love between friends transcends death."

"Boy, you know, I get whapped just thinking of that kind. Tell you what since you were so good about resolving that children thing," I said. "We'll compromise. How about if some of my friendships are just for fun, but others can hold challenges? Will that work for you?" The angel smiled victoriously and nodded. I was anxious to finish her checklist; I had a date with Earth.

"Now we're getting somewhere!" I bumbled, hoping that we might complete the next section more easily. "See how easy this is? And what fun – I simply had no idea!" I craned my neck, trying to see what she had written. No such luck. "Now, what are all my wonderful choices for a profession this lifetime? I don't know exactly why I chose to be a short, beauty-challenged pig farmer that life, but there it is. Someone may have twisted my arm a bit to have selected that one. You know," I whispered, "I may not be as highly evolved yet as you would like me to be, but this isn't exactly my first walk around the block, so to speak. I think this life I want something entirely different. Maybe something that doesn't give off such a strong odor, you know? I would also like to regain the balance I lost in my last lifetime. Any ideas?"

My angel looked thoughtful, her soft violet eyes gazing at the fire. "You say you like children, although they have been known to produce unpleasant odors. The question is: how much do you like them? Would you like to work with them if we could get that smell issue resolved?"

"Sure! I'd love to work with kids, but I have vague memories of my former incarnations, and I've always had a hankering for a small monarchy." I leaned over and whispered, "Why don't we look at a major career change for me? You know, something like a Cleopatra, King Arthur or maybe even a Joan of Arc – but without that unfortunate unpleasant ending. Might you have something in a smallish kingdom in Ohio on that list?" I leaned forward eagerly, my mind racing with royal anticipation. I could almost feel the crown being placed reverently on my head as hordes of minions – my minions – raced to do my bidding. As if she could read my mind, my angel sighed deeply and made what appeared to be only a cursory look through the section marked *Available Professions*.

"Kingdoms in Ohio," she muttered under her breath, "... kingdoms in Ohio..." I could feel the crown beginning to slip from my head as her finger flew down column after column. I craned my neck again, hoping to find one she might have missed. *Surely one little kingdom in Ohio isn't asking too much from a highly evolved entity like this angel? I did that pigger thing without too much whining. I hope.* She looked up. "Nope."

"Nope?" The crown unceremoniously slid from my head hit the floor, shattering like glass. "Nope. Sorry, not a one to be found. Now that we're done with that little sidebar, could we please get back to reality?" I nodded and she brightened. "Now, exactly how would you like to work with children if that's what you decide to do?"

"Well, if there are really no kingdoms available, then how about as a teacher?" I replied a bit glumly. "I could be queen of a class- room, I suppose, although it's really not the same. And, I'm not much into wiping runny noses, so let's make it something with older kids." I leaned over the desk to take a closer look. She re- traced the section more carefully. "Do you have something in there that fits that description?"

After a long moment of searching, she replied, "Well, there appears to be an availability that kills two birds with one stone, so to speak, although that expression is frowned upon around here. Here's a life that teaches sixth, seventh and eighth graders and leads several scout troops. You'll not only get your wish to be with children, but you'll have your full share of challenges, too, with classrooms filled with raging hormones! It should be a good follow up to your last life, too." She looked at me with a twinkle in her eye – most likely not due to any celestial power beam, but from personal victory. "What do you think, Soul?"

I decided to give her a break. "Great! It's a win-win situation. Put me down for that one,

although maybe we can reserve a smallish kingdom next time around, okay?" She sighed one more time, which I had now learned to ignore. Things were really looking up and I eagerly awaited her next question.

"Issues."

I looked blankly at her, my enthusiasm suddenly oozing out of my body. "What do you mean *issues*?"

My angel sighed deeply again, read a notation and then sat silently for a moment. I vaguely wondered if sighing was a condition particular only to my guardian angel, or if it was an inherent part of aiding soul progression. Her next comment brought me back to reality and all musing stopped. "What issues will you choose to help move you along your path toward enlightenment?"

"What are my choices?" I asked as my mind raced with possibilities. "Happiness? Health? Love? Fabulous wealth? Those sound interesting. Sign me up for all of those, please."

"You're not going to get very far on the Scale with that attitude, Soul. Now, think. Some souls are overachievers and accept lots of issues and challenges. For example, the guide across the hall just got promoted to Guide Extraordinaire because her entire soul group has agreed to tackle some really tough issues in their next incarnations. How about it, Soul?" She leaned forward eagerly, awaiting my response.

I thought long and hard before answering because it didn't seem a smart move to overly offend my heavenly advisor right before incarnation. In my mind, the jury was definitely still out on her sense of humor. I shuddered with the thought of possible angelic revenge wrought over an entire lifetime, but I did have some definite ideas. Who knew how long it would be before I could voice them again? I took a deep breath and began.

"I hate to disappoint you or further embarrass you at the annual Guardian Angel Conventions, but I do like traveling. I found my time in The Pleiades intriguing, as well as those intergalactic trips. But truth be told, I love Earth. Anyway, I don't mind the fact that I'm a spiritual underachiever," I said resolutely. "As for my side issues, put me down for patience." I looked at her meaningfully. "Perhaps we can work on that one together."

"Patience," my angel repeated with just a hint of reproach in her voice. "That's it? What about trust, power, envy, greed or any of the many delightful options available to you?"

"If I'm going to be the mother of four, my children will be quite convinced that those are my issues too, but, sure, what the heck? Tack 'em on if they make you happy, but make 'em minor challenges. For my main issue, I'm sticking with patience. Besides, if I read the handbook right, you can advise, not bully me into making these decisions, right?" Right then and there, my angelic guardian, my own personal celestial guide, my heavenly protector glared at me. It was obvious I had gone too far and had offended her. *Too late now. Might as well spill my guts, that is, if I had guts at this moment.* I tried a conciliatory tone. "Let's leave the biggies for another more overachieving soul or another lifetime of mine."

She mumbled something about never being able to retire at the rate I was progressing, but I ignored that, as well. "*Patience*," she repeated with a gleam in her eyes that unsettled me. "And my choice of minor challenges." She tapped the plume delicately against her chin for a moment. "Okay, Soul, now that we are finished with the checklist and you are ready to reincarnate, I am going to suggest one more gift in the life you are about to assume."

I looked at her eagerly. "Let me guess! You're going to infuse me with psychic abilities so that I can see elementals dance in the early morning sun?" She shook her head gently. "I'm going to have the ability to see auras and talk with entities from other realms?"

"Soul," she said gently, shaking her head again. "This is a far better gift ..."

"Oh, it will be wonderful!" I interrupted with another leap to my feet. "I'll have such a wonderful time on Earth with all my wonderful choices and all the other wonderful souls going on their wonderful human journeys at this time and with you guys as part of my team – everything sounds just – just – well, wonderful, doesn't it?"

"It might be better if you ..."

"Wait! Don't tell me!" I pleaded, as my voice rose in excitement. "I'm getting pretty far up on that old Evolvment Scale, so I'm sure I can figure this one out for myself!" I went on before she

could even think of trying to stop me. "I have it! I'll be able to flit in and out of different realms, bringing back messages for those poor souls who don't have that ability?"

"I don't think this is such a good idea," she said as she once again shook her head. She reached out and touched my shoulder gently, flooding me with a gentle peace. I sat down quietly and waited for her to speak. "Soul," she began again quietly, now that she had my complete attention, "I am suggesting that you and I choose a special gift, but it won't be any of those things. Why don't we choose for you to be living among many special entities who have these gifts?" She paused long enough for my impulsive nature to regain control.

"Great idea! There'll be a bunch of us with amazing spiritual gifts! Boy, I was worried there for a moment. I know how you can be with all that challenge stuff." I grinned up at her, thrilled that she was finally looking at this my way.

She shook her head again. "I am suggesting that not to be your path. I have another gift in mind for you that will greatly increase your ability to work for peace and understanding. I am very excited about it and hope you will be, too."

There went that librarian thing again. My heart sank. "What is it?" I asked bluntly, instinctively bracing myself for what was to come.

"You have spent many lifetimes, Soul, journeying the earthly realm, deeply connected to our realm and All That Is."

"And so why wouldn't I want that again this time around?"

"You would, indeed, Soul, and you will begin this new life with that same deep connection. But, around the age of seven or so, you will panic, fearful that the pattern from your last incarnation will continue. To ensure that does not happen, you, yourself, will re-attach the veil at that time. You will then live the rest of your life on the outside, looking in."

I looked up at her, unable to believe what she was asking of me. "*On the outside, looking in?*" I repeated in disbelief. "Are you suggesting that I should choose to live my life without feeling connected to all of this?" I looked around the room and my eyes welled with tears as she nodded. "Forever in this lifetime as many around me can experience it all?" I asked as a tear gently made its way down my cheek. I tried not to speak reproachfully, but the human side of me was growing stronger. "Why in the world would I choose that?"

"You and two other human spirits will share an amazing adventure, which you will write about for all those other souls around you, most of whom will be like you. But, Soul, both of the entities with whom you will join will both be on the *inside*." She gently wiped the tear away and I listened carefully. "I know this is not what you want to hear, Soul, but when you were an apprentice last lifetime, you were deeply intuitive and strongly felt the Connection. You also chose to feel connected in the Kenyan lifetime. You accomplished total mortal understanding. Now, the other side is needed for your understanding and growth."

"That *feel connected* thing sounds like something I might like again," I offered gently, hoping that she would see my logic and relent.

"Exactly," she whispered. "In the deepest recesses of your soul, there will be a part of you that will remember all of this," she said as her arm swept the room. "You will always yearn for it, for who could not? You will grieve when you realize that your path lies only on the intellectual realm, Soul, but that is the true nature of the gift."

I waited silently, not trusting myself to speak. My beautiful angel continued. "If all three of you choose to feel that connection, how could all of those souls searching for Truth and Understanding ever really know that the book you write is for them?"

"Whoa! I'm going to write a book?" I interrupted. *All right -- now, things are beginning to look up!* "Is that what you're saying?" She nodded. "I have to admit, that's pretty cool. Thanks."

"Don't thank me – it will be your decision. We in the angelic realm invite you to write a book with us, but the decision will be up to you. We will love you, regardless of your decision." I stared thoughtfully at her.

"I think I would like to be a part of that. Can you jot it down in that scroll of yours?" She nodded, but before adding it to the list, she gave me a long look.

"But you will write the book, Soul, without feeling that deep connection because most of the world at this particular time of human evolvement is still on the outside, looking in."

I gulped, waiting for her to continue. "You will represent those souls and live this journey through the intellectual plane only," she said. "And that, in itself, is a great gift. Besides, for thousands of years, the human race has been formed by the constructs of organized religion, which within all of its rules and *Thou shall nots*, has sought to ban the feeling part of the human spirit. Now on the earthly plane, the shift is moving from religion to science. At this point in the Earth story, your scientists are interested only in cold, hard facts, dismissing the feeling part from that field, as well. Therefore, Soul, the earth plane is primed for an intellectual viewpoint on spirituality and feeling, which will then lead to a spiritual viewpoint on science – a glorious combination."

"But, to feel disconnected?" I asked, still trying to grasp the enormity of what she considered to be my gift. I understood her reasoning, but it didn't make the task any easier. What happened to that easy lifetime I had just signed up for?

My exquisite angel smiled gently at me again. "After the book is written, dear One, you will have a choice," she said. "If you believe at that time being given an understanding beyond the intellectual realm will help you on your path, then it shall be yours."

"You mean I can choose it then?" I asked eagerly, thrilled to finally see a spiritual legal loophole.

"Yes, but it won't be you in your human form making that decision, Soul."

"But you just said, ..." I stammered, as visions of me in non-human form danced before my mind's eye. Her next words effectively snapped me back to our conference room discussion.

"You will be making that decision at some point, but it won't be made by you as human spirit. The choice needs to be made by you as the brilliant entity you are and have been for ages and dimensions past, present and future. Simply put, you and your Higher Self will make the choice whether you finish this particular journey without ever feeling a deep connection."

"My Higher Self?" I asked a bit lamely. I searched for a memory, but came up empty-handed. "Have I met this one yet?" She smiled.

"Each human soul has a Higher Self, bonded from creation. This is the inner core of your being; your connection to all Love and Light; your connection to God. This is where your Higher Truth resonates, where your True Knowledge lies."

"So, my Higher Self is part of my soul?"

Again, my angel smiled gently at me, understanding my confusion. "You're getting there, but there is an important distinction. It is not part of your soul; you are a soul, encased in a temporary human form for a particular incarnation in order to garner further knowledge and understanding and to help others do the same.

And when it is time to leave your physical existence, the empty shell is left behind and the Higher Self returns Home. The soul is the integration of earthly self and Higher Self. Does that ring true to you?"

"Okay," I replied. "Let's make sure I get this since it sounds important. When the book is written, my Higher Self and I will make the decision of what's best for me and that of my future learning?" She nodded. I sniffed, wiped my nose and attempted to smile at her. "Knowledge without deep, personal connection." I repeated, hoping against hope that perhaps I had misunderstood. "Sounds like a swell gift."

"Soul, I told you that it isn't going to be easy. It is a gift beyond measure because it will further your path more than anything else. When we planned out this incarnation, you were given many choices for your next life. I think you understand that this last gift will also be a challenge, but as with all the others, it is your choice, not mine."

I looked up into the eyes of my angel as I tried to readjust my thinking about the life I was about to assume. "Now, let me make sure I've got this straight. You're still going to be with me through all of this, right?"

She nodded. "We'll do it together, Soul. You will discover that there is enough beauty in the physical world to help smooth over the disappointment of remaining only there. When Life gets discouraging, immerse yourself in the beauty of the earth. If you learn to appreciate the multitude of gifts all human entities are given as their birthright, you will be able to live happily."

I listened and understood all for that particular moment in time. I gently tucked the

understanding into my soul to give me solace when that realization would finally come on my journey. It would be enough. It had to be.

"Okay," I agreed after a moment. "After the age of seven, I choose to have only an intellectual understanding during this life- time – at least until after the book is written. Then we'll see if I can somehow finagle a way to get what I really want." My celestial guide beamed at me with obvious approval as she glanced back at the last entry in my soul record.

"Soul, before we stand before the committee with your Life Plan," she said with a twinkle in her eye, "we have to discuss one more thing." She paused and my heart sank.

Oh, great. Do I get to go through this life with two heads on top of every- thing else? I smiled sweetly at her, hoping the two-head idea was not in the scroll.

"According to this document," she said, "you have requested to aid us in the effort to bring about peace and understanding on the earthly realm. That is your main theme during this incarnation and we are thrilled that you have decided to join us because the cause needs many more Light workers. However, I want you to think long and hard before we return to Zeke for approval of this plan." She leaned over and held my hand in hers. *Uh-oh – angelic handholding. Now what?*

My angel continued. "Working toward bringing about peace and understanding on the earthly realm is a very difficult task. This has been an ongoing challenge since human spirits first walked the earth, became immersed in the denseness of the realm and eventually forgot about their intimate connection to and with all Life and God. It was then that the tiffs and the minor disagreements in their own little realities eventually grew in size and strength to become Fear, Greed, Bigotry, Hatred, and War. The need for humanity to be right, in control of others, and to cast judgment upon them clouded what they knew to be Truth, Acceptance and Un- conditional Love. Traditionally, the peacemakers of the world have not been accepted by the masses because they ask too much of the world: to remember the Connection." She paused for a moment, knowing I needed a moment to process. When she continued, her voice was soft and gentle. "Are you sure you understand that which you seek, Soul? Are you strong enough to handle that which will come?"

Her words unnerved me, but I was determined to follow this path. I solemnly nodded. "I know I gave you a tough time with that questionnaire thing back there, but this is important to me. I understand that this will not be an easy task, but I also know deep inside, that for me, there is no other. I may not be able to make a significant difference in the world, but if I don't try, I will never know. And if I am able only to touch one human spirit with my words and actions, I will know my efforts have not been in vain. Do you understand how I feel?"

"I do," she said as she released my hand and closed the parchment gently. "We will work together for that purpose, Soul." She gazed at me a moment, her love radiating throughout the room. "I am proud to be at your side." She stood up. "Well, that appears to be it for now. Before we return to Zeke, we'll stop in other areas of the Great Hall so that you and those with whom you choose to work this lifetime can make plans, as well. There are a great many souls who will wish to be a part of your life, just as you have been an important part of theirs over many, many lifetimes."

"I've got some great friends on this side, too?" The angel nodded. "I'm anxious to meet them and see if any are up for this lifetime of mine – even if I'm not a Joan of Arc!" Within what seemed to be a heartbeat, we met and made arrangements with hundreds of other souls about to make their next trip to the earth realm. It was great fun, greeting old soul friends and meeting new ones, each of us interested in playing a part in our upcoming incarnations. When all was complete and we had returned to the conference room, my angel turned to me.

"We need to present this plan. Are you ready?" I nodded and she once again enfolded me in the silkiness of her wings. A heartbeat later, we stood together before the smiling sprite. Apparently, my selections had somehow appeared on his scroll and he began to read them aloud. When he finished, there was a moment of silence and I nervously wondered if something was amiss.

"Are all these choices made of yer own Free Will, Soul? This is the framework chosen by ye for yer next incarnation?" I thought of nodding, but sensed that a verbal commitment might be

necessary.

"Yes," I replied. "While I received assistance from my guardian angel in making those decisions, I accept responsibility for each of them. It's my wish to carry these out to the best of my ability on the earthly plane." I paused, unsure of Proper Preincarnation Preparation Protocol.

Zeke sat up a little straighter and gave me a curious look. "*On the outside looking in?* That won't be easy, Soul, ye know."

"I know," I replied, "but I understand there is a plethora of resources that can be made available if I need them." He grinned in appreciation. "Besides, I have my angel to guide me and if I can just remember to listen to my Higher Self, as well, I should be just fine."

"I agree," Zeke replied while grinning. "We are all in agreement that the path this soul has chosen will increase knowledge and understanding." He glanced at the angel, who nodded her assent. "Done!" he exclaimed as a great golden seal was gently adhered to the yellowed parchment. "Have a wonderful life, Lass! Ye are free to be reborn."

I thanked Zeke and was again enfolded for the return trip to my angel's conference room. Upon arrival, she asked, "Soul, I'd like you to meet someone before you incarnate. He is a friend of mine and someone with whom we will be working closely when you begin to discover the true nature of your journey at some point during your lifetime."

My hand automatically went to my hair to ensure I was suitably presentable. A chuckle came from my angel. "Oh, Soul, don't fuss now. You're fine just the way you are." She paused a moment in thought. "Soul, I have an odd feeling that will be one of your life lessons." I looked at her questioningly.

"Fussing with my hair?"

"No. Understanding that you're fine just the way you are." "Okay, then," I said once my heavenly head of hair seemed to be in place. "Where is he? Are we traveling by angel power again?" She giggled. "He's standing right behind you, watching you fuss with your heavenly head of hair."

I spun around, mortified that her friend's first impression of me would be so *human*. I gasped at the sight that met my eyes. There, before me, stood a magnificent male angel, overwhelming in his splendor. He was tall – taller than my own angel – and muscular in build. And while his face could never be described as feminine, it was chiseled and beautiful. An amused Aren't-humans-cute smile crossed his face. His wings were powerful and seemed more masculine in nature than those of my own angel. He wore a short white tunic with simple gold trim. Plain, brown, strapped sandals covered his feet and calves. Around his waist was a golden belt and precious gem-encrusted sheath, holding an intricately crafted sword that swung at his side as he stepped forward to meet me. His soft, brown hair hit his shoulders gently and his face was wreathed in love as he extended his hand to mine.

"Soul?" My angel gently tapped me on the shoulder, concern for me showing on her face. "Are you all right, Soul? I'd like you to meet a friend of mine, Michael."

I tore my eyes from him, back to my own beautiful angel only for a second. "Michael?" I repeated as if in a haze.

She nodded, but then caught herself. "Actually, he prefers the pronunciation *Mi-kay-el*, but doesn't mind the modern version, do you Michael?"

The magnificent archangel leaned jauntily on his sword. "Hello, Soul. Nope, call me what you want. Trust me, I've been called much worse." He grinned and held my hand. "I hear you've requested to help us resolve conflict on the earth realm and guide human spirits toward Light. Welcome to our realm, Soul, as we work to bring peace to yours. Remember that I'm also here to help you. Call on me as often as you need to."

My eyes flew from Michael to my guardian. "Didn't you just say that I have chosen to feel disconnected from this realm?" When she nodded, I asked, "Then how on earth – or heaven – can I call him?"

"We can always hear you, Soul; you just won't be able to hear us."

"Call me," Michael repeated with a small smile on his face. "I'll come. Just grab some guts and give me a call!" He moved his hand to his ear to resemble a phone receiver, his eyes twinkling with merriment. I was sure that image would be forever seared into my brain.

Suddenly, my mind reeled with a memory. *Grab some guts? Where have I heard that before?* My eyes narrowed in suspicion. Michael simply smiled.

And, for the first time in what might be several millennia, I was speechless. In Michael's presence, time, space, dimension and even the walls of the room seemed to fall away before me. He filled my entire being, overflowing with love, great wisdom, and respect, leaving me with a sense of exquisite ecstasy. At a total loss for words, I could only nod dumbly. I felt a tap on my shoulder again and vaguely wondered how much time had passed – a moment or an hour? Time had lost all meaning, yet I clearly understood that even in the busyness of the monumental tasks set before him, Michael had recognized me and had deeply honored me with his gracious welcome.

"Soul? Are you all right?" I glanced over to my angel, nodded and looked back at Michael. Or what would have been Michael because he had had vanished.

"That was Michael," I stammered, as I sought to slow the pounding of my heart. "I grinned and corrected myself. "My paradigm of Michael."

"Yes, Soul, I know," my angel chuckled. "I introduced you, remember?"

"No," I said, struggling for composure. "You don't understand. That was Michael, of archangel fame, wasn't he? I remember him from other past lives! I think I even worked with him at some point." Words again failed me, and my angel continued to chuckle. "He had that sword and everything ..."

"Yes, that was Michael, of archangel fame." She patted my shoulder. "Don't worry, Soul. Once you start working with him, you'll get over it." I stared at her, wondering if her words could ever possibly be true. I had certainly learned a great deal already and I had yet to incarnate. If only all human spirits could retain this knowledge for the earth realm.

"Sorry, Soul. While you will remember our conversations when you come back to see me, you, yourself, will drop the veil on all of this at the age of seven."

I had the good grace to grin. "Rule #329.4 strictly prohibits Preincarnation Process Memory Retention, eh?" Suddenly, my heart would have dropped to my stomach – had I had one – with a sinking realization. *She just read my mind!* I cringed inwardly at all my earlier devious mental machinations. I gazed at her in wonder that after all my thoughts, she was still willing to walk with me. As if in reply, my angel once again flooded my being with love before continuing the conversation.

"Remember, even though you will feel disconnected from all of this, you can always tap into your Higher Self for knowledge at any time. That language is one of emotions and feeling." She smiled and leaned over to kiss my forehead. "And then, there's always me." The angel flipped her hair back over her shoulders and vigorously rubbed her hands together in anticipation. "Now, exactly when would you like to incarnate?"

"Now's as good a time as ever, I suppose. As I recall, I'm not crazy about the birth process and there are other parts of humanity that I could live without, but all in all, it's my type of thing." I looked her squarely in her eyes, knowing my time with her on this realm was quickly ending. I was still concerned about the mind-reading fiasco. *Has my foolish pettiness gotten me on some seraphic revenge list? Was it too late for Brunhildette?* I swallowed loudly. "Hey, no hard feelings here with all of that decision-making stuff? I sure would hate to begin this life on a bad note with you."

"No, Soul, it's always wonderful to have you here. I love your spirit. It keeps me on my toes." She grinned. "If I had toes, that is." A feeling of great relief coursed through my being and I resolved to learn my earthly lessons well so that she would be proud of me. Several questions remained unanswered, however, and their answers were critical to my mission.

"So, Angel, if you don't mind," I said, "can you answer one more question before I go? How will I recognize you in my life? I don't want to lose you."

My guardian smiled and enfolded me once again within her wings. "Listen for my voice on the wisp of a breeze. See me in the eyes of a child. Search for me in the rainbow that arches your sky. Feel me in the hearty laughter of a good friend, and find me in the quiet recesses of your soul. Seek me out often, for I will always be with you."

We appeared to glide toward the door. I didn't want to interrupt the beauty of the moment,

but my humanity overtook my awe. "I hate to appear rude, but why is it our door is so plain, while the others are so ornate?"

She smiled. "Our door is plain only at the beginning of each of your lifetimes. As you grow and evolve, extending kindnesses and sharing love, the door will evolve, as well. Each time you go in search of me and find a door that you must open, notice how the door is changing. I fully expect that at the end of this lifetime, even without the fifteen children and Brunhildette, the door will be glowing with a celestial luminescence. Look for the door in your dreams, Soul. Unlock it whenever you can, opening yourself up to the opportunities that are presented to you." She gave me one last hug. I clung to her, suddenly wary.

"Thanks for all you've ever done for me and will ever do, Guardian." My heart suddenly raced as human fear began to over-whelm me. "Is it time now? If I don't leave soon, I don't know if I'll ever find the courage to make the plunge again." I gazed into those violet eyes, trying to sear the memory into my soul. "How can I leave you?"

"Ah, Soul, goodbyes have never been easy for you. You have chosen to work with me for many lifetimes together. I love our connection, as well, but it is now time. Enjoy your Earth and your journey, but remember this above all else: love without condition. If you can remember that amidst all of your challenges, you will be just fine." She paused and I found her words comforting, although human fear was now in full bloom.

"And as for missing me, don't you realize that I will miss our conversations as much as you? We are deeply connected, my beloved, whether or not you may be able to sense the connection this lifetime."

That thought brought me even more comfort, but I felt rising panic as I realized the enormity of the task that lay ahead. I grabbed my angel's hand and wailed, "What if I forget? What if I get lost on this journey and can't find my way back Home?"

"There, there," my angel whispered in my ear. "You're sounding more and more human by the moment. You see, Soul, that's my purpose in your life besides comforting you in times of sadness and celebrating times of joy. If I feel you are losing your way, I will tap you on the shoulder in some way to get you back onto your chosen path. You have Free Will down there, too, remember, so it is up to you how much of this plan you choose to follow. It may be our plan, but it is your choice. Do you understand?"

Another wave of panic hit me and my voice raised another octave. "But what about my working toward peace – the journey – the book? How am I going to know how and when to do all this stuff?"

"Listen to your Higher Self, Soul, and you will have all the answers you will ever need. Begin to work for peace when you have progressed enough to understand conflict and how it destroys spirits, as well as the beauty of the world around you. It is then that your work to bring about peace will begin. Remember, Soul, world peace can be achieved, but only when each human spirit makes the conscious decision to create peace first within themselves and then extend unconditional love to all. Trust yourself; if you listen and learn, you will know what to do. Now, is there anything else before you go?"

Anything else? That's it? That's all I get before I take the plunge? No magic wand or password? She's got to be kidding. She wasn't. My beautiful angel waited patiently for me to swallow my fear. *Get used to it, Angel. You're the only highly evolved entity in this twosome.* A beam of love light filled me to overflowing and I suddenly discovered I could face the unknown without quaking – too much. I released my death grip on the angel.

"So, what now? How do we get this life rolling?"

"It's easy, Beloved. Just hold my hand and we'll go together." She squeezed my hand gently. "Soul, remember to look for me in times of joy, as well as trouble."

I gulped audibly, closed my eyes tightly and nodded one last time, clinging to my angel for dear life. Full-fledged fear had returned with my humanity. "Don't let me go!" I pleaded.

"We won't go until you are ready, Soul," she promised. "Only when you are ready to let go of all of this and embrace your new lifetime, will it be time."

I took a deep breath and for the third time, released the fear. And when I did, all the excitement of the coming journey filled the gap left behind. I dislodged my grip, smiled,

straightened my shoulders and gently reached for my angel's hand. I suddenly knew I could do this lifetime, surrounded by my team. Once her hand was firmly in my grasp, a bright flash and a whooshing sound surrounded us, and we took off – together.

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Awakening

Loved One, only one spark is needed to light a flame. So it is with all of you. The spark may come in a myriad of different forms: the scent of a flower, music, the rustle of the wind, words in a book, art, or the smile of a beloved friend. Each flame connects another link in the spiraling chain of human consciousness. The warmth opens each heart toward remembering a higher level of awareness. We rejoice in the light created by each spark, igniting a new flame.

Chapter 2

June

I walked slowly up the broad, spotless marble steps and gingerly knocked on the impressive doors, hoping against hope that my wispy recollection of the invitation to return to confer with my angel at any time during my lifetime was both accurate and sincerely given. Again, Zeke answered the door, beaming at me. It took me a moment to adjust to the intense light radiating from within the Great Hall and the sprite waited patiently for my eyes to make the transition.

“We’re so glad ye came back, Lass!” the wee being boomed as he bounded along the

stone corridor with me toward my destination. I was freshly surprised that his short legs could move so quickly, and I had trouble keeping his celestial pace. About the time that I decided to beg him to slow down so I could catch my breath, he came to an abrupt stop and I nearly plowed into him. I giggled as another memory hit me.

"Looks like someone else needs brake lights, too!"

Smiling broadly, he nodded, pointed to an open door and then bowed low. "Here ye be!" he called. I had time only to quickly thank him before he turned and bounded back. I took a step closer to the door and peered in.

"Yoo-hoo!" I called out softly, hoping not to startle my guide again. "Excuse me, but do you have a moment to talk with me?"

"Hello, Soul!" came the same lilting voice that I had remembered. She stepped toward me and I was again awed by her beauty. She was aware of my reaction and paused for me to collect myself. "I always have time for you. It is usually you who has not time for me."

As I stared at her, I wondered if there was a gentle scolding in her voice and faltered. Maybe this was not such a good idea after all. Instantly, she reached for my hand and replied to my unspoken thought. "No, that was not a rebuff, Beloved. Remember that you are a spirit now who has chosen to take on the human mantle for this Earth journey. I love you as you are – not what you might wish to be."

I smiled and relaxed a bit as she led me to an invitingly soft, cream-colored overstuffed sofa near the fireplace. She glanced at me and immediately the fire came to life, spreading a warm glow throughout the room. As we settled in, I wondered how to begin. My angel waited patiently.

"Well, life was going along pretty swell with only a small number of bumps and bruises along the way," I began tentatively as she smiled to encourage me to continue. "I had a great childhood, although some of it seems to have faded from memory, I loved my teenage years and rebelled just the right amount, found a wonderful mate, started a satisfying teaching career, then began a beautiful family." I stopped to see if she had a comment. When she nodded, I continued. "We even have this loving dog, Barney, to complete our happiness."

When I faltered again, she spoke in a gentle voice. "It does sound *swell*. Tell me, Soul, what brings you here today?" She saw my face drop and quickly added, "I have been longing for you to return to me – it has been almost fifty Earth years since we began this particular journey together and I rejoice that you have come Home, but I am curious. What prompts your return?"

I took a deep breath and continued. "Well, as I was saying, life was going along swell, just as I had hoped when I was a young girl, dreaming about my future, but now I find my sane, tidy world threatening to turn upside-down, and frankly, I'm confused. I don't know if you realize this yet, but I like to have control over my life and things seem to be a bit out of kilter these days."

I heard what sounded like a snort coming from the direction of my angel, but dismissed it when she covered her mouth with her hand and politely excused herself. Burping angels? I let go that puzzlement and returned to the conversation. "You see, I have two wonderful friends who are either spiritually highly evolved or completely nuts. My problem is that I can't figure out which." Her eyes twinkled and I wondered if perhaps she was laughing gently at me. "No offense?"

"None taken, Soul," the angel said. "Now that you have returned, you will have access to the decisions you and I made about your life." She paused. "Close your eyes." When I did, she whispered, "Remember." Suddenly, memories swept through me so quickly that I reached for the edge of her desk. My angel guided me to a chair and I took a few moments to regain my composure within those memories. Only when I felt more balanced, did she continue.

"The three of you – you and these two other souls – agreed to take part in this great spiritual adventure. Actually, all the people in your life agreed once upon a time and space to work with you, as you agreed to work with them in their lives ..."

"So they're not nut cases?" I blurted, interrupting her, not quite trusting my memories. "I'm not crazy for believing that what we have begun is pure and good and will further progress me on my path – whatever that might be?"

"Nut cases?" the entity asked, her lovely brow furrowed in perplexity. "Would that be some

new phrase on Earth of which I am unaware?" Her brow smoothed as she smiled, regarding me closely. "No, Soul, none of you are nut cases, at least not in this regard." Before I had a chance to question her statement, she continued. "But, again, what brings you back to me today? Has something happened?"

"Has something happened?!" I spluttered. "Haven't you been paying attention to my life?" I paused as a thought crossed my mind. "Hey, wait just a darn minute! Aren't you supposed to know everything that goes on with me?"

"Yes, I do know what is going on in your life. I know every thought that crosses your heart and intimately share all your joys and sorrows."

"Aha! I thought so," I replied, looking suspiciously at my beautiful angel. "So why do you have to ask what brings me here?"

"Ah, that humanity thing – I so enjoy seeing it in action and you do it so well." My first impulse was to thank her, but suddenly I was unsure if it was at all complimentary, so I ignored that, as well. My angel continued. "Soul, oftentimes, it helps to put what you seek into words." She clasped her hands and leaned toward me. "So, we have now established that the three of you are not nut cases, as you so aptly put it. What else do you seek?"

I took a deep breath. "You're not going to believe this, but ...," When I saw her eyes twinkle, I gave up. "Well, okay, I guess you will, but this may take a little bit of time. Do you have a few more moments right now or should I make an appointment to come back another time?"

"We both have all the time in the cosmos, Soul. You just don't remember that yet. Now, get comfortable and tell me the whole story."

"Well, a little over a year ago – Earth time – one of my daughters, Meg, was involved in a serious car accident. It was a scary time for all of us for a while, but thankfully, no one was killed." I paused a moment, remembering the challenges of that event. "It was during that time that I met Deb, who was the mother of Beau, one of the accident victims. Over the long course of our children's physical and emotional healing, Deb and I became friends."

My angel spoke. "Wasn't that accident amazing?"

Is she being sarcastic? So much pain – emotional and physical.

"No, not at all, Soul. Think and remember."

I sat in thought for a long moment before finally nodding. "Yes, I can understand all of that here." I suddenly got up, waved my arm around and began to pace. "Actually, what's the point of all this?" Before she could answer, I continued. "I mean, why bother coming to see you to answer my questions if I forget it all once I return to the earth realm?"

"You may not remember this experience, Soul, once you return to Earth, but the lessons you learn during your visits will become part of your being. Somewhere deep within you, you will store this precious knowledge. Once you return to the physical realm and decisions have to be made, you may think you're using your logical brain, but actually, you will be accessing these lessons."

"Okay, I get it," I admitted and a bit sheepishly, I returned to my seat. "But to get back to your question, you're right. Many learned lessons are being learned as a result of that accident."

"It was an event to bring certain journeying souls together at that time, all of whom received a multitude of blessings from that challenge."

"Makes sense. At least I think it does. Anyway, as our friendship deepened, so did our discussions and it wasn't long before I realized Deb was very spiritual. I was pretty entrenched in the physical realm and her beliefs amazed me. You see, at that time, I considered myself *religious*, but had not yet given much thought to being *spiritual*. Everything she said made perfect sense, although at the time I figured it was right for her since she seemed pretty far out there."

My angel gently interrupted. "Out there?"

"You know, the one-with-the-universe kind of out there. It was later that I read a description of a sensitive and put two and two together. Deb's a sensitive," I concluded. "When she is around others, she automatically absorbs their energies, attitudes and feelings. That isn't much of a problem when she is near happy, healthy people, but do you realize how many people walking this planet are filled with sorrow, hurt and anger? When Deb gets near these people, the effect is almost debilitating. She is still learning how to shield herself." My angel nodded solemnly.

“And as for Mary Lou, I had met her several years earlier through school connections. Our friendship slowly strengthened, and one evening after a day of shopping, we began the trip home in the dark, winter night. It wasn’t long before our conversation changed direction and she began to share her deeply spiritual side with me. I was struck by how similar my conversations with these two friends had been and somehow felt compelled to have them meet.”

“That’s listening with your soul, Soul. Well done! Continue, continue!”

I beamed back at her, glad that in all of my confusion I had earned her approval. “I told Mary Lou about Deb and asked if she could meet her the following day for lunch. She agreed and when I returned home, I called Deb and set up a meeting for the next day. It was to be a brief lunch, but it turned into a two-hour marathon between two extraordinary spirits. I reveled in my role as a catalyst.” I paused in thought a long moment. “I don’t know how or why, but I seem to make things move. Actually, now that I think about it, that may be the reason I am involved in this whole thing. I seem to keep playing this catalyst role.” The angel’s eyebrows lifted slightly, but she remained silent, so I continued.

“But let me get back to the story. That lunch began the amazing friendship the three of us have today and probably have had in many other lifetimes. It was a pretty exciting time – Deb and Mary Lou were able to connect easily on another level and helped each other as they shared insight. Within days, they were thinking in a smooth tandem: when one of them was stuck on something, the other would get a message with instructions to fill in the gaps. I believed there was no place for me in this world of theirs, but I was fascinated and just grateful to be included in many of these deep discussions.” I glanced over to see one perfect angel eyebrow arch, so I hurried on to explain. “It’s like having the best seat in the house. Oh, my friends never made me feel different, but I knew I was. They insisted I was part of whatever was going on, but I reminded them that I was aptly named – you know, Martha of Bethany – because I’m pretty much stuck in this physical realm as they flit from one dimension to the next.”

For the third time, her eyebrow lifted, but this time she had something to say. “And you’re not doing that yourself right now with me?”

“What do you mean?”

“Flitting. Aren’t you flitting by taking the time to talk with me?” Darn. She’s got a point.

“Well, I’m talking about on the earth realm. You know – physicality and all.” My voice trailed off in my vain attempt to rationalize my feelings, but her point was well taken.

“So, your friends agreed with this assessment, Soul?”

“Oh, no! They insisted I was there to do more than just observe in the physical realm, but to be honest, I believed they thought that because they loved me and didn’t want to hurt my feelings. I love them dearly, as well, but so far, I still think mine was the right assessment.”

“Oh, so you recognize and remember your path now, Soul?” she asked quietly.

“I’m not sure,” I admitted. “That’s one of the reasons I came to see you today, but first I have to finish filling you in, okay?” She nodded and I continued. “To be honest, I was content to just listen to their amazing experiences since all of this was so new to me. Deb and Mary Lou have had these intuitive abilities all of their lives and had entire lifetimes to grow used to it. I feel that at age 48, I have been suddenly thrust into a crash course in Weird Stuff 101, you know? Truth be told, I have been happy and quite secure, living in ignorance in the physical realm. I really am quite content climbing into bed each night, knowing I’m not going to be awakened by visitors from other times, galaxies or dimensions, wishing to share their thoughts on the state of the universe, you know?”

“I can imagine that would have been disconcerting to you,” agreed my guide.

“For you it might have been disconcerting, but it would totally freak me! I have a very low creep-out level. No,” I said emphatically as I shook my head, “I am quite content with only hearing about my friends’ spiritual adventures, thank you very much.”

“But, then, suddenly, everything changed. As the three of us became closer, another friend, Sandy, lent me a copy of a book about angels. I thanked her and when I found the time to read it, I was stunned. This was stuff that even I, the blissfully ignorant, could understand. Over the next few weeks as the school year ended, I read and reread the book. It was filled with practical suggestions on how to connect with your guardian angel and I decided that once school

was over, my pace would slow down enough to see what I could actually do on my own.

"Life remained busy until school was out and then the three of us were able to finally get together. Deb, Mary Lou and I laughed and giggled like schoolgirls. During the course of our catch-up conversation, Deb told us about some of her worries. As I climbed into bed later that night, I felt sad for my friend and wished I could help." I glanced over to my angel, who was listening carefully. I continued.

"As I began to drift off into sleep, a thought struck me like a thunderbolt: we could hold an angel party! We could celebrate the fact that our angels are with us. So, first thing the very next morning, I called my two friends and suggested the party. Mary Lou was delighted, but Deb was cautious in her reaction. She needed to know specific details to reassure herself that this would not be a meaningless event. When Deb asked for specific details, I told her that I'd figure it out and get back to them. A day later, I had her answer.

'Okay, Deb, how about this? We arrive at Mary Lou's house before twilight and set up her back porch with lots of pink candles and ribbons. And soft music. And flowers.' I paused.

'You understand that artifacts like those aren't necessary, right?' my friend replied softly. 'All we need to connect is the intent to do so.'

'Of course I know that!' I replied, knowing full well that it was news to me. I tried to mask my ignorance. 'That stuff will just help set the mood for us.'

'Okay,' she giggled, knowing full well it was news to me. 'What else have you planned?'

'Well, I thought we could start with gratitude since I think angels would find it rude to just jump to the Wanna Stage.'

Deb giggled again. 'Wanna Stage?'

'You know, our requests.'" When she remained quiet, I continued, hoping I sounded more knowledgeable than the candles and ribbons part. 'I think they would like it if we each selected and read something that meant something to us. Kind of sharing our hearts, you know?'

'I like that idea,' Deb replied. 'What else, Angel Party Social Director?'

'Well, since you asked, I think we should laugh lots. Everything I've been reading about angels tells me that one of their concerns about humans is that we take ourselves far too seriously.' I paused in the retelling to look up at my angel to gauge her reaction. I was unprepared for the booming voice, which shook the room. It was uncannily like the voice that had commanded me to open my angel's door.

"Holy Toledo, Soul, you just hit the nail on the head!" I leapt to my feet and spun around, determined to find the embodied voice this time. I was stunned to see what looked like Archangel Michael lounging comfortably on one of my angel's divans. However, he no longer resembled a young Greek god; he wore faded bellbottom jeans, a red, faded flannel shirt and sandals. *Are those love beads around his neck?* What had been his beautiful, flowing hair was now held in place with a piece of tanned hide around his forehead. I was clearly shocked.

Without considering possible seraphic repercussions, I blurted, "What happened to you? You looked so good before – so archangel-ish. Now, ..." Immediately, my face reddened as my voice faded.

Michael's laugh rang throughout the room. "What, you don't like the garb?" Michael rose from the divan and strode toward me purposefully. Instinctively, I moved toward my angel. "Haven't you ever heard the expression, *The clothes make the archangel?* Come on, Soul, speak up! I'm a busy angel and haven't got all day!" He grinned from ear to ear. "Actually, I do have all day since there's no time around these parts, but I love that earth expression!"

"What happened?" I repeated dully. *Why is it I sound like an idiot every time Michael comes around?*

Another peal of laughter shook the room. "You're not an idiot, Soul – just human, which isn't necessarily mutually exclusive!" He paused. "Actually, I thought it was time for you to dispel a few of those closely held paradigms of yours. Here's a news flash: I'm not crazy about humans thinking of me as a Greek god. Just as you don't like people pigeon-holing you, I don't either. I'm just Michael. Just an ordinary angel, whose aim is to help humanity. Well, just an ordinary archangel. Wait, make that an important ordinary archangel." Suddenly, he puffed up his chest and a glowing mist suddenly surrounded him. His voice filled my being. "I AM

MICHAEL, OF ARCHANGEL FAME, PRINCE OF THE REALM!"

When the mist cleared, I saw that Michael's clothing had been exchanged for royal garb. He wore a gold tunic with precious gems encrusted at the collar. This was covered with a red velvet cloak, which trailed behind him. He carried a scepter and wore a ridiculously oversized gold crown, which covered most of his eyes. I couldn't help but laugh. "Now, you look positively ridiculous! I think I prefer the faded hippie look, Michael of Archangel Fame."

"So do I!" In a heartbeat, Michael had returned to the casual look.

"That's much better, Soul – laugh! You humans take yourself so seriously. Sure, it's tough on the earth realm, but for Pete's sake, you chose your lot, so live it fully in joy until it's time for you to come on home!" He grinned and planted a kiss on my head. "Gotta run, but remember to keep that perspective once you return to the earth realm." And then he was gone.

Whoa! Talk about dispelling paradigms! I remained in stunned silence for a long moment.

"Soul?" my angel asked, "Are you okay?" When I nodded, she asked me to finish the retelling of the angel party.

So I told Deb there would be LOTS OF LAUGHTER involved." I looked around the room, wondering if Michael was lurking somewhere, but he had apparently moved on. I sighed and continued.

'Deb,' I had suggested, 'after the gratitude and the readings and the request, let's end the party with small gifts for each other. That should take care of proper angel party protocol' I paused. 'Whatdya think?'

'I like it,' Deb said. 'I'm in!'

I looked at my angel, radiating love for me. "And so, in a loving environment filled with gratitude, laughter, love and light, we asked the angels to help us – to invite them to be an integral part of our lives. After some discussion, it was decided to hold the event the following Sunday evening at Mary Lou's home out in the beautiful countryside."

I paused. "It was weird, though. Before all of this started who would have guessed that I would be involved with angels of all things?" She peered at me closely and I laughed. "Well, you know I've always loved angels, but I don't know that I was exactly what you'd call prime angel material."

"Prime angel material? What do you mean?"

"I wasn't sitting on a mountaintop in prayer all day long. I was leading a wonderful but chaotic life – filled with four busy teenagers, teaching sixth graders, planning lessons, filling out forms, grading papers, averaging grades, penning parent newsletters, attending meetings, and then finding time to cook meals, fold laundry, attend and host parent/teacher conferences, feed the dog, water the kids, or is that water the dog and feed the kids and, well, I mean, y'know?" I took a deep breath before continuing and my angel smiled.

The angel next to me sighed in contentment. "I think it all sounds lovely. Must be The Grass is Always Greener Theory in action here." She sighed again before continuing. "Wouldn't it be fun to switch places for a day?"

Stunned, I could only nod. *She'd like that chaos I call my life? If we should ever have the chance to switch places, I'll need to remember to do it on a night when I have fifty spelling tests and science quizzes to grade!* Her next question brought all musings to a halt.

"So you made it a point to enjoy daily, quiet meditation in that very hectic life of yours in order to touch base with your Higher Self?"

I looked at her incredulously. "Are you kidding? At that time, I didn't even know about my Higher Self, let alone how to meditate. Sure, I had heard of others doing it and knew it was right for them, but figured they probably had some quirky California connection. I seemed permanently overloaded with ideas, worries and racing thoughts. Who had room in my life for meditation, let alone angels?"

My exquisite angel turned on her high beams, radiating love throughout the room. "There's always room for angels!" she replied. I squinted in order to see her until she toned down the brilliance. "Sorry. Sometimes I get carried away."

"Hmmm. Seems we have something else in common."

"But given all this doubt, you went ahead with the angel party?" she prompted, obviously tickled that I had at last become aware of my true journey. "Oh, and by the way, what is *proper angel protocol*? I should probably know in case anyone should ever ask me." I knew she was poking gentle fun at me and I grinned back at her.

"The funny thing was, I was pretty clueless, so I just made it up and the amazing thing was that they believed me! I made special invitations, which explained what to bring to the celebration: a bouquet of flowers we had nurtured, as many pink and white candles as we wished, a reading which meant something to us, a simple gift we would give, our wishes, doubts and worries and all of our luminescent love, light and laughter. And then we ..."

My angel put up her hand, interrupting my flow. "I know Deb talked to you about artifacts, but let's talk about ritual for a moment. Ritual by and of itself, will not make the connection that many souls seek. The mere spouting of rote words without personal meaning, thought or intent will not move you where you might wish to be. It must be a creative ritual teamed with intent, which will then allow a vast majority of humanity to connect. What was important was that the three of you came that evening with open hearts, minds and souls. It is all about *intent*, Beloved. Your intent was to connect, and so you did."

I nodded and continued. "Yep, I get it. When I brought the party invitations to Deb and Mary Lou, I told them that I'd decided to ask the name of my guardian angel. I had learned that the number three is a sacred number, so I decided to try asking for the name three nights in a row. It was more of a lark or a challenge to myself. And you know me," I grinned. "How could I resist a challenge like that?" My guardian rolled her eyes. Without thinking, I called her out on it.

"Hey, what's with the eye rolling? Doesn't that go against Handbook Rule #342 or something?"

My guardian laughed. "Just as Michael is not as you thought he would be, neither am I. Wouldn't you rather be teamed with someone who can roll her eyes, quite dramatically, thank you, rather than just a nonfeeling beam of light?"

"Good point. I'll take you this way – attitude and all!" Actually, I was rather surprised that I had the audacity to correct a highly evolved being. *Guess my paradigms are changing.*

"So, to get back to your name, before I fell asleep that first night, I prayed to God and then had a talk with my angel. I asked that if it might be possible, I was requesting it give me its name."

She cocked a perfectly arched eyebrow. "It?"

I paused a moment and nodded before continuing. "But I couldn't leave it at that. I pointedly reminded him/her/it/them – is that better?" She nodded vigorously and motioned for me to continue. "I pointedly reminded him/her/it/them that I was the one without the intuitive abilities and would need a sign so huge that even I, as your basic-run-of-the-mill-nutcase, would notice.

"When I awoke the next day, I said a quick prayer and bid good morning to my angel – you." She grinned in appreciation as I sat for a moment in thought. "This is too weird," I mused. "Hmmm. Tell you what. It'll be easier if I just tell this story the way I told my friends, okay?" She nodded and I continued. "I re- minded him/her/it/them of my request and the need for neon lights around the sign. I then asked to be given a sign if this really was meant for me to do and began my day. So, after a reminder to make sure I would recognize a celestial sign when I saw one, I headed for the car to take one of my kids to work." I stole a look at the entity next to me. Amazingly, she sat in rapt attention.

"We listened to my daughter's radio station choice on the way, but I changed it to one of mine for the return trip. As I was driving along, my thoughts mulled over my request, wondering – not for the last time – if all this was real and not some bizarre mid-life crisis and silently voiced that question. The very next song on the radio answered my question: Bobby Vinton's *You are my Special Angel*." I paused. "By the way, thank you for that gift. It meant a great deal to me."

On that serious note, I paused briefly and glanced up from the fire to see my guide chuckling quietly. I shook my head. Chuckling angels. Why am I having such a tough time with this paradigm? I understood her quirkiness as we planned this life. Why can't I remember everything is not always as it seems? I paused, as a realization hit. Actually, probably nothing is as it seems. I turned back to the fire in thought.

After a moment, my guardian replied. "You're very welcome, Soul. You have no concept of

the depth of my love for you. I am thrilled that we are sitting here, chatting away. I have so missed you!"

I considered her words, knowing she was right. I was hopeful that eventually I would grow into that understanding.

"When I first realized what song was playing, I was thunderstruck, but then started giggling, thinking that if this was my sign that I liked his/her/its/their style. This was so much fun that I asked another question aloud, 'Was that my sign or my overactive imagination?'"

"I returned home, but it wasn't long before I had to cart another kid. After the drop off, I turned on the radio again and asked the same question. It was answered with the very next song: *I'm Telling You Now* by Herman and the Hermits. I was so stunned that I almost drove off the road. I had no choice but to acknowledge it as a sign. I was thrilled. Here I was, a true psychic Neanderthal, getting signs the size of Montana."

"That night – night number two if you're counting – when I went to bed, I again prayed to God and asked for the name of my angel. I thanked my unknown guardian for the humorous signs of the day and greedily asked for another the following day. When I awoke the next morning, I thanked God and the angels for everything in my life and repeated the requests for the name and another sign. Sure enough, while taking one of my kids to work again, we listened to her station choice. Madonna came on with the song, *Angel*. Obviously, my attention was once again caught, but the line that jumped out of the lyrics was *If you call me, I will come*.

"You can imagine how excited I was about your sense of humor and I couldn't wait to see what would happen after the third night of a name request. As I climbed into bed for the third night, I let my mind wander, wondering how my disc jockey angel might grant my request: *Louie*, *Louie*; *Liberty Valance*; *I'm Henry the 8th I am*; or *Bad, Bad Leroy Brown*. I was doing my seraphic utmost trying to be an open-minded person, but certainly would be disappointed if I turned on the radio the next morning only to hear *Puff, the Magic Dragon*."

"But I like *Puff, the Magic Dragon*."

"Oh, I do, too," I quickly reassured her as I seemingly once again questioned – what was that faint memory tugging at me about her preference for rather bizarre names? "Just not for my angel's name."

"Anyway, the third night came and I prayed to God and again requested the name. And, for the third night, I reminded the celestial realm of my very human dimwittedness. Too early the next morning, after a very late night of conversation with Deb and Mary Lou, our dog, Barney, woke me up, insisting he had to go out. I pulled my weary bones out of bed, and as we trudged along the hallway to the door, I grumbled to my pooch and most likely the entire universe. After completing his task and returning to the house, I snapped at him to lie down, and then I turned and crawled back into bed, hoping to drift back to sleep. Barney sent me a doleful look and tucked his tail between his legs. Wracked with guilt only another animal lover would understand, I apologized to both my angel and my dog for being so cranky and reminded him/her/it/them that today was *Angel Name Day*.

"I got comfortable in the bed and was just between the worlds of consciousness and sleep when my mind went totally blank and a blackboard appeared in my mind's eye." I grinned. "On the board was a name in huge capital letters: *E-P-H-E-N-I-E-L*. I sat up, reached for a piece of paper beside the bed and copied it down quickly so I wouldn't forget it."

I looked at my angel, clearly pleased with herself. "Nice touch, wasn't it?" she preened. "You know, teacher? Chalkboard? I chuckled over that one for days!" Then, she became serious. "You know, I had tried to get through to you for some time before that morning. Your reading that book allowed you to at last listen." She paused. "Did you dance for joy for being given that which you had sought?"

"Actually, no," I admitted freely, only a mite embarrassed. "I was so tired that instead of celebrating, I lay back down to try to go back to sleep, hoping to make sense of it all later. But first, I asked a question: 'Was that my imagination or did you just give me your name?' Again, my mind went to a total blank and the blackboard appeared again: *E-P-H-E-N-I-E-L*. The teacher side of me had to check the spelling, before allowing myself to drift back to sleep. Later, when I told Deb and Mary Lou of the experience, they were as excited as I was, although the

pronunciation was still questionable at that point.” I paused and looked at my angel closely. “Your name is pronounced *Eh-fee-nee-uhl*, isn’t it?”

She smiled gently and nodded, love once again flowing from her core. “Yes, Beloved. Oh, Soul, how I have missed you! But, do go on with your story.” Epheniel drew her legs up under her gown and snuggled deeper into the sofa. I was thrilled that she seemed as excited about my life as I was.

“Okay,” I said. “As the morning wore on and the shock lessened, I found myself wondering about my angel’s gender – not that it matters, mind you.” I turned to her. “I just wanted to be able to ‘see’ you better in my mind.”

“So, what did you do?”

“I figured I was getting pretty highly evolved with the radio communication, so I thought it wouldn’t hurt to try it again. Besides, with four teenage kids, I did a lot of chauffeuring that summer. The next time I got into the car, I wondered if I would hear I am Woman or Johnny Angel. I knew that if all of this was a result of a high beam of angel power, the radio didn’t matter, but just to be on the safe side, I waited. Okay, I thought before I turned on the radio, *I’m thinking it might be more effective to speak slowly, using short, simple phrases...*”

A quiet cough interrupted my flow. “Speak slowly, using short simple phrases? Soul, did you think I was somehow deficient? Last time I looked, you were the entity looking for enlightenment ...”

“I know. I know. That was then and this is now,” I said, hoping that my mishmash logic would impress her, suspecting that it wouldn’t. I didn’t pause, preferring to push on through the mish- mash. Suddenly, the topic became more serious.

“You know, even though I recall everything we discuss when I am here, the veil continues to cover my eyes on the earth realm. Therefore, what I share now is my way-too-human perception of events, even though my Higher Self is already aware. Does that make any sense?”

“I understand,” Epheniel replied. “Continue to tell your stories through your humanity. I so enjoy hearing your perception!”

I nodded. “Okay, so, when I finally turned on the radio after the gender request, guess what was playing? *California Girls* by the Beach Boys! What kind of warped sense of heavenly humor is that – a definite female title with a definite male group? I knew I’d really been given the right angel on Angel Distribution Day. Somehow, I immediately understood that you wanted my perception of you to be female, which was later confirmed by my local handy dandy official angel translators, Deb and Mary Lou.”

“*Angel Distribution Day*? Somehow, that event has escaped my notice, but then it is often difficult to stay up on the latest celestial trends around here.”

“Perhaps you missed the memo on that one. I can only imagine the logistics of running this place. Darned good thing I came in today to help you out. Now, here’s how I see it. Angel Distribution Day would be the day we humans are assigned our guardian angels.”

“So you remember this process, Soul?” my angel inquired.

“Well, not exactly,” I said, “but I have my theory.”

“Then, by all means, please fill me in on the procedure. You never know when I’ll need this information.”

“Okay.” I took a deep breath. “Now, don’t quote me on this, but the way I see it is we’re all gathered in a big, dusty, old, gym- type room – you know, all the souls and potential guardian angels. We’re divided into two groups and then go through individual orientation.”

“Orientation?” my angel asked.

“Yeah, you know, kinda like *Guardian Angel Workshop* and *Humanity 101*, depending upon your job description. Once orientation has been completed, they probably line up everybody and start pairing ‘em off – kind of like an auction.”

“An auction? Fascinating. Tell me, Soul, exactly how does that part work?”

“Well, the way I figure it is that they put a soul on the auction block, so to speak.”

“So to speak.”

“Right. Now, over the loud speaker comes the soul’s earthly name, Life Chart – you know, the whole shebang. And then the auctioneer probably ends it with something like, ‘Okay, who

wants this one?”

My angel looked skeptical. She drew her knees to her chest and rested her chin while she thought a moment. “I don’t know, Soul. Sounds a bit arbitrary, doesn’t it? What if two guardian angels want the same soul?”

I thought a moment. “Arm wrestle?”

“Hmmm. I’m not seeing it, but go on. What happens next?”

“That’s about it, I think. I’m rather hoping that I ended up with you because we chose each other, not because you lacked the muscle, you know?”

She sat up, rolled up her shimmering sleeve, flexed her considerable arm muscle for me and winked. I grinned and nodded.

“Well, okay, so you have the muscle.” I continued. “Actually, Epheniel...” I looked over to her as I called her by name at long last. She, too, appreciated the moment and I could feel great love flowing from her through me. I closed my eyes to breathe it in, hoping to hold it forever. “I gotta tell you that I had more than a few questions after your name was given to me.”

“Well, while you are on Earth, that is one of my roles in your life. You ask me the questions and then if you listen carefully, you’ll get answers. Of course, you realize that it may not always be the answer you were hoping for, but you’ll receive an answer. Many times, you may get the answers before you even think of the questions! Do you understand?” I nodded, hoping I did. “Now ask me what questions went through your head and let’s see if you already have the answers.”

“Well, okay. The first question I asked was: ‘Was this all just one big coincidence that those songs came on when they did?’”

“And your answer?”

“I have been spending the last few months reading everything I could and listening to my special friends who appear to have a foothold in both the physical and spiritual realms. It seems an amazing coincidence. As a matter of fact, I have been noticing just how many of those amazing coincidences there are surfacing in my life right now. It’s getting a little weird, you know?” She nodded again. “As for what I learned, I guess I have come to the conclusion somewhere along the line that there are no coincidences in this world.” I paused and looked at her, hoping I had figured this out, too. “Am I right?”

“Go on,” she coaxed. “You’re doing very well. And the next question?”

“Was I simply reading what I wanted into those songs?’ To be honest, one choice we must have made is my love of music. I listen to music wherever I go, but somehow during that time, I was tuned in for the particular ones that I was supposed to understand. I can’t really explain it,” I said, faltering. “A feeling just kind of came over me that I was supposed to be listening to the lyrics.”

“Well done again! Any other questions?” When I nodded, she waited.

“Am I imagining all of this? I know you think I have all the answers, but I’m not convinced I have any of the questions yet, let alone their answers.”

“What are you to learn, Soul? When a situation arises, always ask yourself that question. With prayerful contemplation, you will hear the answer.”

“I guess I’m learning to be open to possibilities, to be more ...” I paused, my mind blank.

“Serendipitous.”

“Seren...what?”

“Serendipitous, Soul. That’s when you actively seek out opportunities that happen to come your way. The more you practice serendipity, the more you will understand that there are no coincidences. Besides,” she confided, “it makes Life so much more interesting when you choose to follow what you term as hunches and what your friends term as intuition. It’s the same thing – just different names for it.” She paused for a moment and gazed at me. “As long as we’re discussing spiritual terms, Soul, would you like to learn another?” I nodded. “Synchronicity is like a cousin to serendipity. Do you know that word Soul?”

“No,” I admitted. “Although I think I can guess.” She smiled and nodded encouragingly. “It must come from synchronized, which I bet has to have something to do with being in harmony.”

“Good for you. Synchronicity takes coincidence one step farther. It is a particularly

meaningful coincidence.” I looked confused and she thought a moment. “Okay, let’s say you and a friend are having a profoundly meaningful discussion. Suddenly, a white dove dips down from the sky toward you. How would you feel?”

I considered her question for a moment. “Weirded out.”

“Why?”

“Because it was such an amazing coincidence, except there are no coincidences.”

“Right, because it had deep meaning to you, it would be synchronous. And while synchronicity doesn’t happen as frequently as what you term *coincidences* do, it is a reminder that you are doing just what you are supposed to be doing with those you chose in another time, space and dimension.”

“Kind of like a pat on the head from the Universe?”

She nodded. “Look for it in your life, Soul. It will help you stay the course. Now, what else do you seek?”

“Well, I always had a sense that this whole spirituality/metaphysical thing was only for a select few. I have to admit, I find most of it to be rather ...,” Again I stumbled for the word.

“Elitist?”

“That’s it! I had read more than a few books and felt little connection with any of the authors. I felt as if I lacked some magic password or something to get into *The Club*. It was almost as if I had to be highly evolved in order to understand what they were talking about. Everyone in those books seemed to be flitting around the universe instead of stuck in the earthly mire as I appear to be.”

“And your answer?”

“That’s a tough one. So far, I’ve found no book for people like me at square one of the journey.”

“Soul, you’re not at square one. You’ve been on this journey all of your life – you’re just now aware of it. And as for the password, there is none. Some souls have chosen to experience a spiritual awakening at this time. Others have made the choice that it not be their path at this time. There is no right path, but it is the path you have chosen. As with every book you read, you must learn to discern.”

I interrupted. “Discern?”

“Take what is relevant to your life and your part of the journey and let the rest go. Perhaps it will be only a line or two in an entire book. Perhaps the entire book will touch your life, helping you garner deeper knowledge and understanding. Perhaps no book will give you what you need. Read with an open heart and mind – you will know what is meant for you.” I nodded and she continued. “Now, speaking of your journey, have you learned anything else so far?”

I sat up. This was something I understood. “Yes, for the first time in my life, I’m paying attention. I have a deep hunger to understand this whole thing, so I figure if I pay attention, I’ll learn.”

“Good, good. Any other questions?” She cocked her head at me and thought a moment. “By the way, have you noticed that you’ve had the answer within you for each question so far?”

I nodded and continued. “The last one was the one that brings me here today. ‘Am I a complete lunatic or is this really happening to me?’ You know, I don’t share this with very many people, but sometimes the thought crosses my mind that I am actually losing my grip on reality.”

My angel nodded solemnly and whispered, “*Nut cases.*” I nodded guiltily and she asked, “So what was your answer to this?”

“I was kinda hoping you’d confirm the fact that I’m not crazy. Am I to get involved in this spirituality thing? I’ve never done anything like this before. Suddenly coming to the realization that religion and spirituality are two different things is a bit scary.” *Be honest with her – remember this one reads minds!*

“I have to admit, though, it’s really very exciting, as well. You know, I am not at all familiar with any of this stuff.” I paused, hoping she would understand my confusion. “I guess the bottom line is: Am I really supposed to do this?”

“Remember, Soul, you are where you are supposed to be on each leg of your journey in this human adventure. Every step you take, every thought that crosses your mind, every breath

you inhale, prepares you for what is to come as it all unfolds, enfolding you. You and every spirit who undertake this human journey are very brave because this task to return to Earth is not an easy one.” She paused and held my hand. Her words and touch deeply moved me.

Epheniel continued. “Some days, it’s an act of courage just to get out of bed and face the world.” Love flowed through her being into mine and I wondered why it had taken me so long to return to her. “And as for the angelic realm, we are all thrilled that you have discovered this part of your path. The entire angelic realm rejoices for the recognition of a journey.”

She paused another moment before continuing. “As for religion and spirituality being different, I think you will eventually come to the conclusion that in many cases they are, but they do not have to be separate. Spirituality has always been the core of existence, as each soul strives to grow closer to the Light.”

Abruptly, Epheniel rose to her feet, wrung her hands and began to pace. Her voice grew sorrowful. “But in its need to control, humankind sought to place restrictions around it, created rules to govern it and consequences for when those rules were broken, and then called it *religion*. In order to control the masses and to give themselves further power, far too many religious leaders set up an adversarial position between human souls and God: ‘Stick with us and follow our rules because if you don’t, you will be cast into eternal damnation.’” She paused again, a tear glistening in her eye. “How sad that as humanity grew more mired in the density of the earth plane, needing God even more, it chose to put up these walls between itself and God and then cast judgment.” Epheniel’s voice dropped to a whisper and I looked away discreetly as she returned to her seat and took a moment to regain her composure. “But, then, it is all unfolding as it must. Please, Soul. Go on with your story.”

I considered what she said carefully before I continued. “Okay. The day of the angel party finally arrived. What had started out as a spur-of-the-moment lark now fairly bristled with expectations. Arriving early evening, the three of us chatted and laughed and walked around the woods, admiring all the beautiful plant and tree life that abounded. It was during this leisurely nature walk that Deb calmly announced that she also knew her angel’s name. Before telling us, Deb shared her disappointment in the name.”

Epheniel leaned over with a quizzical look on her face. “Why? What possible name could have brought her such grave disappointment?”

“Well, Deb had been hoping for a pretty, little, fragile female angel – kind of a fluff-chick angel.”

“Ah,” mused Epheniel, “another spiritual term, no doubt. Must have been on that same memo. I take it she didn’t get a *fluff-chick*?” Epheniel’s eyes danced with mischief.

“I know you know, but I’ll tell you anyway. Actually, Mary Lou and I were wondering exactly the same thing and asked the name of her angel. We were absolutely stunned to learn her angel’s name: *Michael*. Deb did not understand the significance of the name of Michael, the Archangel. Mary Lou and I reeled with the knowledge that Deb was given the most powerful angel in the realm as her guardian because she needed the protection and guidance in the tasks she had chosen.”

Epheniel held up her hands. Shaking her head, she scoffed, “Whoa, Soul, think! Deb does not *need* Michael. Like us, she and Michael agreed once upon a time and space to work together as two loving light entities.” She chuckled softly. “But, tell me; Deb had been hoping for a cute, little pixie-type? Oh, please don’t stop – I just love humanity!”

“Well, Mary Lou and I were also stunned because earlier that day, Mary Lou had confided to me that she had just found what she thought had been a lost medal she had purchased in Rome several years earlier.. When the medal surfaced the day of the party, Mary Lou had a strong feeling that she was to give it to Deb as her gift at the end of the party, so she wrapped it for her.” I smiled at Epheniel. “You know what medal it was, don’t you?”

“Michael.” We sat a moment in thought before she continued. “So did Mary Lou tell Deb this?”

“No, neither of us said a thing and Deb was flabbergasted at the shock that greeted her when she announced the name. We told her that she would have to wait until the end of the evening for an explanation, but you can imagine what Mary Lou and I felt, walking back to the

house to begin the party.

"After that bombshell, Mary Lou, announced that she, too, knew her angel's name, but was having a hard time pronouncing it: *Loiteim*. Several pronunciations were tried, but nothing seemed quite right. There was a sense that in time, the pronunciation would come, which it did: *Lay-team*. Mary Lou felt a maleness about her angel, so before the celebration had begun, all three of us knew the names and genders of our angels..."

The tinkling sound of celestial chuckling interrupted my tale and I held up my hand in mock protest. "I know. I know. That gender thing is only for feeble human understanding. I know pure light entities have no gender. I'm not that deficient in my understanding, you know." I sniffed a bit pompously and I glance up to see my guardian angel engulfed in giggles behind her hand. Deciding to take the higher road, so to speak, I merely continued.

"As we began the angel party, I was struck with the unique gift we had all been given. Honest to goodness, if all of this hadn't been happening to me, I'm not sure if I would ever believe it – any of it. I gotta admit that this whole thing sounds as if three friends suffered from Overactive Imagination Syndrome." I held up my hand again. "But it did happen. And before you even ask, I learned that if something like this can happen to me, then it can happen to anyone."

Epheniel nodded in approval. "How was the angel party?"

"Oh, we had a great time, talking and laughing as we waited for the sun to set and darkness to creep onto the screened-in porch. We lit two dozen pink and white candles of all sizes and shapes. We played quiet music as we brought out the flowers, the readings, the gifts and the intentions before settling in.

"First, we each expressed our gratitude to God and our angels for watching over all of us and our loved ones. Then, we took turns and explained the significance of the individual flowers we had chosen. After that, we shared readings that were symbolic to us."

"It sounds as if you three were securely wrapped up in celestial Light and Love that evening. What else did you do?"

"Well, we also spent time in silence, listening to the music and the nature surrounding us behind the screen of the porch. The warm, welcoming glow of the pink and white candles, scattered pale pink luminescent bows, flowers and the scents from the candles gave the area a deep and abiding sense of peace. We felt wrapped in celestial light and love. Each of us gave our intentions, speaking from the heart and pouring out our worries and hopes and dreams, asking our angels to watch over loved ones. We laughed and joked and talked to the angelic realm. And, finally, it was time to exchange gifts. As delightful as all of the gifts were, Mary Lou and I waited with unconcealed glee for Deb to open hers. When she did, she was speechless. None of us pretended to have an answer that would satisfy our logical minds. The only certainty that night was that it was clearly understood that whatever we had inadvertently started was filled with a sense of goodness and ..." I fumbled for the word, "... rightness." Epheniel nodded.

"Deb slipped the medal onto the chain around her neck and we proceeded outside. We decided to burn our intentions and send them heavenward. Once burned, we buried the ashes in soil, returning them to the earth."

"Sounds a bit seriously ritualistic, wouldn't you say?"

"Nah, we knew it would be a playful final sign from us. The angel party was officially over and we were amazed to see that it was almost two o'clock in the morning. There had been little sense of time during the celebration. The party decorations were removed, the house cleaned up, hugs exchanged and Deb and I took off in my car."

My own angel sighed with satisfaction. "And that was the end of the evening's events?"

I shook my head. "Actually no. You see, on the way to the party, Deb and I had been listening to a quiet tape on the tape player. Because I had just turned off the car when we had arrived at Mary Lou's house, it automatically came on when I started the car. Although we were talking and the volume was low, I suddenly realized that something was wrong with the tape or player, and turned it off. After dropping off Deb, I chatted briefly with you, asking what you had thought of the celebration. Idly, my thoughts went back to the tape and turned it back on to analyze the problem. When it was apparent that the tape was playing at an accelerated speed, I immediately ejected it, afraid it would be ruined. As the tape popped out, the radio automatically

came on to play this line from *The Everly Brothers' Dream*: Any time you want me, all you have to do is dream."

My angel spoke quietly. "You listened and got your answer again, didn't you?"

How do I put this into words? "Yes, but..."

"Yes, but what? Sounds to me like it was a pretty swell party." She gazed at me expectantly. "What else do you want to ask me, Soul?"

I took another deep breath, briefly wondering if all spiritual journeys required deep breaths. I quickly decided they must. "Okay, I'm just going to say it. Hearing the name of Deb's angel and then watching her unwrap the medal with Michael's name on it was probably one of the most shocking things I have ever experienced in my life – truly synchronous – amazingly synchronous – mind blowingly synchronous."

She smiled and more warmth flowed throughout me. "I know, Soul. This is all new to you and you need to remember that not only are there are no coincidences in your realm, but everything is unfolding as it should. Just as you and I planned out this incarnation that you would strengthen our connection at this point in your life, Mary Lou and Deb have done the same with Loiteim and Michael."

"Speaking of Michael – of archangel fame – he's a different sort of entity, isn't he?" When Epheniël gazed at me, I hastily added, "That wasn't a judgment, just a comment. What else can you tell me about Michael?"

Epheniël spoke, carefully considering her words. "I think I will allow you to discover Michael on your own, rather than share my knowledge of him with you at this time. It will be interesting to see how your concept of him evolves throughout your journey."

"So, Michael is back in Deb's life right now?"

"Yes, it appears to be that way, Soul, but the truth is that he never left; Deb just stopped acknowledging him for a time. It is now time for Michael to work with your friend on your realm, bringing her to ours. She will find that at the beginning of this relationship, the medal she received will become heavy when he wishes to get her attention. Soon, as her vibrations accelerate enough for him to better communicate with her, she will be given flashes of insight. She will pay close attention to them because her task is to go where there are no words – our realm – and then go back to her world of words and try to translate that which she has learned, writing it down for others to understand. It will be challenging for her to do this, but you and Mary Lou will be there to help support her in this particular task."

"Wow," I whispered in obvious awe, "that's exactly what is happening right now. She is calling them the Michael Messages." I shook my head in fresh amazement. "It's hard to imagine this is happening to my friend." Epheniël knew exactly where I was headed in my thoughts and she spoke again before I could even finish the thought.

"Soul, each entity on the earth realm is as significant as the other. You will find that to be true over the next months and years, but for now, you must take my word for it. Each soul going through the Earth experience has a very specific role to play in the evolution of humankind. Just as each link in a chain is vital to the strength of the chain, each human spirit on a chosen path is critical to the progress of humanity. Deb has chosen to work with Michael to help bring peace to your plane – much the same way that you have chosen to work with me toward that same goal."

I nodded. "When Michael desires to connect with her, she meditates and goes deep within herself. There, he shares messages on Life, asking her then to return to her realm and translate them into human words. It's an awesome responsibility, but one she cherishes, you know?" I paused and put on a bright smile, hoping to mask my true feelings. "Mary Lou and Deb both have very special tasks to perform this time around."

Obviously, the bright smile wasn't working. Epheniël had my number. Again. "Each of us is critical, Soul. You will feel frustration as you work through all of this on your journey, but eventually you will come to an understanding and will be able to share this message of love and hope with many others. And, as you do this, you are to remember not only to love without condition, but to trust and let go."

"Let go?" I repeated, confused. "Of what?"

"Humans have a need to control everything and everyone, but we will discuss this further

at another time.” She sat back and gazed at me expectantly. “You will come back, Soul, won’t you? I won’t have to wait another fifty years, will I? All you have to do is remember I am here for you, and the connection will be made.”

This time it was my turn to smile at her and I felt the love flow from my spirit to hers. I was suddenly struck that this smile/love flow was something that I needed to remember in the physical realm and whispered a quick prayer that it be granted. There was so much that I had learned, but I instinctively understood that it was only the beginning. “Oh, yes, Dear One. I will be back.”

.....

The Writing of the Book

Are we to continue with the book?

Trust and continue.

I am unsure. I don’t know how to go about this book thing. Why me?

Loved One, the totality of who you are allows our communication. You are frustrated because your particular tuning device is through feeling. We recognize that putting spiritual concepts into matter or words is difficult. Be patient. Soon there will be chemical and energy changes in you that will allow visualization to be part of your perception. It is necessary to have your busyness now. Too much too fast would not be healthy. Be patient.

Connections

Why I am able to connect better during storms, rain and atmospheric changes?

Loved One, you require change to heighten awareness. The “in-between” – for example, the calm before the storm, dawn and dusk are times when change occurs. The vibrations in the body accelerate. A willingness to communicate coinciding with these in-between times allows you to let go of earthly concerns. Life – all life – can then be centered in the God Light, which in turn plugs you into a “lift,” carrying you into “All That Is.” Remember how much you are loved regardless of what your vibrations may be at any given time.

Creation

Vision: I saw a fluid, bright white light – love causing form in the heart of Light, part of the Light, made of the Light. There was balance and quiet and stillness as I watched the consciousness – the energy – growing in form. I felt Love and Divine Will breathing and movement began with the form desiring to express itself. I felt the Divine Will choose to create a physical reality; sound, word, spirit and energy merged so that a form/matter/material creation could begin, experienced. It coalesced, implanting its Identity in Light and Spirit into evolution. As this vision faded, the message began:

Loved One, as you remember who you are, you will realize all life is created in God’s image. There is a holographic imprint of His image in every cell of every life form. You are not separate from God, each other, or any life!

Consciousness and Divine Will are an ultimate expression of God’s love through His word, and is given freely to mankind. Because of this, you are able to question, learn, grow and create for yourself. You are conscious of your being-ness.

You were conceived with an innate love for the earthly plane, which made you the ideal

stewards of the Earth. As you have chosen to move further into the density of material creation, you have hardened your consciousness – forgot- ten the truth of who you are and your connection to all life. When you began to isolate yourself from other life, you forgot its glorious value, putting more importance on power over other life forms and each other. Soon, you forgot the responsibility you have of stewardship for your planet. This has caused a feeling of separation from each other, from God's Grace and Love, and from the very planet on which you live.

When you remember the connection you share with all life, you will no longer be able to take for granted the responsibility you share by being stewards of the Earth. You will see His image in all life, making destruction abhorrent to you. You will feel connected again through honor and respect for yourself, and the prolific life on Earth. A sense of the perfection in creation will fill you when you witness the life cycle of a butterfly, or the miracle of a bird in flight, or the magnificence of a tree. Balance will return as you begin to treasure all life as a precious gift and your innate connection to it.

Do not lose hope when you begin to open your eyes to the chaos and destruction man has created. Just as your spirit is beginning to “see” action and reaction on your planet, so are many others, causing a great change in your vibrations. An exponential progression is taking place as each one of you once again accepts the responsibility of stewardship and feels your true identity in all life. You will come into your true power through love and respect for life, making the power that has been used for destruction seem as nothing. You will see through the illusions created when mankind began manipulating symbols and concepts as he described God's image. Know that you have always retained your identity in the infinite and eternal Light of God's Heart and Spirit.

The changes in vibration so many of you are experiencing due to your progression allows us in the celestial realm deeper communication with you. Both individually and collectively, you are dispensing with the illusion of a gap between the physical and spiritual realities. Our destiny is interwoven with your own; we watch and wait patiently for your divine will to request our guidance and assistance. Even when you are not aware of us, angels are always with you, waiting to remind you of your Goodness and Light.

Chapter 3

August

"Thanks for seeing me again so soon," I said as I closed the door quietly behind me.

"My pleasure," Epheniel replied. "I'm thrilled you've returned so soon." She seemed to float toward me and I was once again caught up in her beauty. She embraced me and then offered me a seat.

Settling into a comfortable, old, red leather chair, I glanced around the room and was struck again by its serene beauty. I felt a slight breeze and my eyes traveled to the open window. I turned my head to embrace the waft, closed my eyes and took a deep breath, inhaling Life. Unexpectedly, I began to tingle with wisps of former memories and I lost all sense of time.

"This is how it is all supposed to be, isn't it?" I whispered, my eyes still closed. "The earth realm, I mean." I opened my eyes slightly, hoping to keep the memories and saw Epheniel nod. "Will we ever get to this?" I asked tentatively, knowing the physical plane as well as I now did.

"That's the great plan and hope for humanity. All of the realms are connected in that effort."

"Seems more than a bit daunting."

"But, you know, Soul, human spirit had all of this at one time. The goal this time is not only to get back to all of this, but to do it together – walking as one toward the Light."

"I seem to know that somewhere within me," I said. "I have so many questions about it all. Let me think how I want to start."

"Take all the time you need, Soul. I am always here."

It took me a few moments to pull my attention from the beauty of the window view and gather my thoughts. "Well, I guess we finished our last conversation with the end of our angel party, didn't we?" Epheniel nodded. "I slept like a baby all night after turning off my bedside lamp. To my utter amazement the next morning, the lamp was turned on, shining brightly on my face." Epheniel smiled innocently. "And although I slept, apparently Deb and Mary Lou had been awake most of the night, receiving stuff from you guys."

"*Stuff from you guys?* I don't recall sending them anything," she smiled.

"Well, probably not you, per se, but the universe or something," I said sheepishly.

"What you are telling me is that they allowed themselves to remain open to receiving information from other realms besides their obviously physical one," she rephrased.

"Yeah, I guess that's just what happened. That whole book thing that we talked about when planning out this life of mine has finally surfaced. Deb and Mary Lou were both told that I was to write a book about all of this. Of course, now I recall our previous conversation about the book, but at the time, I thought it was pretty far fetched."

"Where's the far-fetched part, Soul?" she asked gently. "You enjoy writing."

"Hey, this is me, remember?" I yelped as I sought to explain. "This is me sitting in front of you – not some fancy-degreed, theologically trained writer with a bunch of fancy initials after her name. What do I know about any of what is going on in my life right now, let alone know enough to write about it?"

"As you correctly recall, we chose this path for you, Soul, a long time ago. You may have no human memory of it, but listen carefully; your soul remembers. We agreed that not only are you to write a book, but you are to write it because you are you and not some fancy-degreed, theologically trained writer with a bunch of fancy initials after your name. And as for what you will write, Beloved, you will write and write, deleting many words until you find the right ones."

"How will I know when the right words come?" I whispered. "Remember, I don't have these amazing abilities that so many of my friends have. I'm the one mired in the physical realm, not flittin' about in the celestial one."

"Whoa, wait just a minute there, Soul. First of all, all this flittin' makes me think of an amusement park ride: *Ride The Flitter and bounce from one realm to the next with ease and grace! Must be 48" tall to ride.*" My angel paused and we giggled together. "And second, you could have fooled me. Look around," Epheniel said, as she waved her arm. "If you're not *flittin'* right this very moment with me, a bona fide, card-carrying member of the celestial realm, then I

don't know who would be. You're doing exactly what your friends are doing. Only difference is they remember it and you don't."

I smiled weakly. *Why does everything make perfect sense up here, but when I return, everything becomes befuddled?* It's that darn veil. Whoever put it in place had better remove it one of these days. My eyes widened in realization. *Oops. That was me, wasn't it?*

Epheniel nodded. "Let's finish that whole book thing. That is precisely the reason why you will write the book – because you feel mired in the physical realm, although I know you will later not feel this way so much. And, as for wondering where the right words are, when you feel a creative flow, you will know the words are right."

I returned my gaze to the window as I considered her words. I was taking an awful lot these days on trust and faith. What are a few more things?

"Anything else happen in your life lately with this great adventure the three of you have begun?" Her voice brought me back to the room and I smiled at her.

"Well, the other evening I finally shared with my family what was going on with the three of us," I said.

"And what was their response?"

"They listened, but to tell you the truth, I think whatever doubts they had about my sanity have now been confirmed. Remember, this is new stuff for them, as much as it is for me. I just didn't want them all to wonder what was going on or think their mother was involved in some bizarre mid-life crisis cult. Even you've got to admit that it takes a leap of faith for all of this."

"A leap of faith is a great description for all human journeys," Epheniel said. "Isn't it a leap of faith to face all of the challenges of daily earth realm life? So what's one more?"

"Those are my thoughts exactly. That's why I wanted my family to try to understand." *That was some meeting!* My mind slowly drifted back.

'I suppose you're all wondering why I called this family meeting,' I began one warm July evening several weeks after our angel party. I had told Keith everything, although that sanity question crossed his mind, as well. He had just mowed the front lawn and was sweating. He washed his hands, wiped his face, sat down and lit a cigar. We silently watched him blow smoke rings for a moment. All of us. And Barney, the dog.

'What'd we do wrong this time?' Katie, my wise twenty-year old asked.

'Nothing,' I assured her. 'I just wanted to talk with you.'

'Will this take very long?' Emily asked, my sixteen-year old social butterfly. 'My friends are waiting, you know.'

'Yes, I'm aware that you all lead busy, wonderful lives, but I thought we might just take some time to talk.'

Meg groaned loudly. 'We're not doing that Birds & Bees thing again, are we Mom? Trust me, we get it. We're lilting, little buttercups, filled with precious nectar, just waiting to get picked off by buzzards.' At eighteen, Meg was ready to move on to the joys of college life.

'I don't recall that buzzard part being in the lovely little book I shared,' I protested. "But, no, this is about something else.'

'Whatever,' Meg replied, picked up her dog-eared copy of *Gone with the Wind* to begin yet another rereading. She sighed with contentment and settled into the chaise lounge to become one with Scarlett O'Hara. Her own family faded into the lush Georgia plantation.

Emily's twin, Michael, spied a stray basketball, picked it up and bounced it on the driveway, inches from his beloved family. Whomp, whomp, whomp. WHOOSH! 'Hey, Dad, did you see that shot? Nothin' but net! Come on, a little one-on-one?'

Keith looked at me longingly. 'Do you mind? It'll only take a few minu...'. One look at my face changed his mind. 'Mike, I think your mom wants to talk first. Then we'll shoot, okay?' In response, Michael nodded and continued to bounce the basketball. Whomp, whomp, whomp.

'I still think we're in trouble and she's going to lecture us,' mumbled Katie to Meg, who nodded without skipping a word on the page.

'YOU'RE NOT IN TROUBLE!' This was not going as I had imagined it. Where were those adorable, dimpled faces of yesteryear, upturned in complete adoration of their loving mother, awaiting treasured pearls of wisdom from which they might fashion their own lives in her image?

In my frustration, I continued. 'AND I'M WORKING WITH THE ANGELIC REALM!'

Whomp, whomp, whom...

'What'd you say, Mom?' asked Meg, over the top of her paper-back. Even Scarlett held her breath.

'I told Laura I would meet her at 7,' Emily added, looking at her watch. 'I can't be late, you know. This is important.'

Whomp, Whomp, Whomp.

'What'd you say, Mom?' asked Katie with a look of concern on her face that had nothing to do with awaiting pearls of wisdom, but everything about making a quick psychiatric 9-1-1 call.

'Please!' I yelled. 'Could we all just calm down and I'll tell you?'

'Why are you yelling?' Michael asked. 'We're plenty calm.'

'I'm not yelling. I'm discussing,' I replied. 'I just want you to know what's going on with me these days – why I've been gone so much in the evening lately.'

Whomp, whomp, whomp. Michael was a man of few words.

'You've been gone lately?' Emily asked, checking her watch again. 'It's 6:45, you know. Can we wrap up this chat in five minutes? There's a sale at the mall and I know you don't want me to miss it. Saving money is what it's all about.'

'Yes, I've been gone quite a bit in the evening,' I tersely replied, 'but I forgot that you wouldn't know that because you'd rather spend time with your friends than your family!'

'Mom's losing it. I told you we were in trouble!' Katie whispered to Meg as I sent a motherly glare her way. 'Uh-oh, here it comes!'

'Mom, I'm a teenager,' Emily stated calmly. 'That's what teenagers do.'

'Kathleen, I'm not losing it,' I fumed. 'And I promise, this won't take long, if I could just tell you.'

'Then tell us, Dear. We're all listening.' Keith looked around the group. 'At least I am. And the dog.'

'Well, it all began when I read this book about celebrating the fact that the angels are with us and ...' I began. Soon, I'd see those upturned faces, I thought.

'Scuse me, Mom,' interrupted Emily, 'could you just give us the condensed version? Laura's mother will be here any minute and you certainly wouldn't want her mother to wait, would you? She has important stuff to do tonight.'

Whomp, whomp, whomp.

'Michael, would you mind terribly not dribbling that ball while we talk?'

'Sure, Mom, no problem.' Michael picked up the basketball and concentrated on making it spin on his finger.

Foosh, foosh, foosh.

'MICHAEL!'

'What? I thought you weren't yelling!'

Katie smiled through clenched teeth. 'What'd I tell you? Trouble.'

Keith glanced at me and gently removed the basketball from our son's hands. 'Katie, you're not in trouble. No one is getting yelled at. Let's just sit quietly and listen, okay?' He turned toward me. 'Emily's right. Speed it up, Sweetheart. The natives are getting restless.'

I nodded. Taking a deep breath, I began. 'The condensed version. Okay, Deb, Mary Lou and I decided to hold an angel party to more deeply connect with our guardian angels and my angel's name is Epheniël, Mary Lou's is Loiteim and Deb got Michael.'

Michael grinned. 'Cool. Too bad, though, that you didn't get Michael. Great name! Who'd you say you got? Eppleheimer?'

'*Epheniël*,' I replied sweetly. 'So that night after the party, the angels chatted up Deb and Mary Lou most of the night. One of the things they told them was that I was going to write a book. About angels. About this thing that we have begun. I just didn't want you thinking I was in a cult.'

'A cult?' Michael said. 'Cool. Do you get to shave your head and chant around campfires, flinging dead chicken parts?'

'To tell you I am *not* in a cult,' I repeated loudly. I stared at my son and asked, 'By the way, how much television are you watching?'

'It's an angel thing,' Keith graciously offered. 'No chicken parts. No chanting. No shaving of heads.' I nodded, grateful for his support. Michael looked disappointed.

Suddenly, a car pulled into the driveway. Emily jumped up. 'Mom, it was great having this little family chat, but I gotta run – 'bye! See you at midnight!'

'Try 11:30,' growled Keith. 'In the house by 11:30!'

'Okay. 11:30,' Emily sighed. She ran down the driveway so quickly that I didn't have an opportunity to see whether or not her face was upturned with adoration of me, but that left five for the family chat. And the dog.

'Now let me get this straight,' Katie said. 'You actually talk to angels, Mom?'

'Well, yes, of course I talk to the angels,' I answered. 'I've always talked to angels. Haven't you?'

'Yes, but they've never talked back. And what you're saying is that they talk back to you, right?'

'Well, yes, I guess they did or, rather, she did when she gave me her name.'

'Eppleheimer,' Michael grinned.

'Epheniel.'

Meg looked long and hard at me, perhaps awaiting the punch line. She glanced at her father, gasped and pointed. Our eyes followed to find a small gray moth on Keith's right hand, which held the cigar. 'Don't move, anybody,' I whispered. 'Let's watch it.'

We watched in rapt attention as the moth slowly rose from one hand and flew up to my husband's head and perched on his sweaty ball cap. After a long moment, it slowly flew to his left hand. We were mesmerized. At least, I was. Before long, it made the final leg of its journey, completing a perfect circle by returning to Keith's right hand before finally flying away.

'Now, what do you think?' I demanded. 'That was a sign if I ever saw one.' I debated discussing synchronicity, but decided against it. Don't overwhelm them. Give them bite-sized pieces.

'Well, I bet the cigar attracted the moth,' began Keith. 'You know, moth to a flame?'

'In case you haven't noticed, your cigar is not on fire. You've smoked many a cigar during our summer evenings on the patio and no moth ever descended on you before. I tell you, it was a sign!'

Meg spoke up. 'Dad's pretty hot and sweaty from mowing the grass. Maybe his aroma attracted the moth.'

'Meg, your father has been hot and sweaty many times during the twenty-six years of our marriage. No offense, dear, but your aroma has never attracted anyone or anything before.'

'None taken.' Keith's eyes narrowed slightly. 'I think. But let me get this straight, Dear.' I smiled at him gratefully. I knew my husband would support me lovingly. After all, 26 years of heavenly bliss, married to me, would have to account for something. 'You've got Eppelheimer, right? A guardian angel.'

'Epheniel.' I nodded.

'And I've got – what? A guardian moth?'

26 years. Cute. Very cute. I smiled thinly at him, but made no reply. Michael snickered and grinned at his father's decidedly weird sense of humor before feeling my withering glance; quickly, he leaned over to rub Barney's belly.

My eyes swept anxiously around the group. Still no sign of upturned adoration. The only sound was Barney's tail thumping in ecstasy over the belly rub. Finally, I took a deep breath – the deepest breath of my lifetime – of any of my lifetimes – grabbed my guts and broke the silence with five little words. 'So what do you think?'

More silence. Thump. Thump. Barney rolled over to lick Michael's hand.

Finally, Katie spoke. 'It's cool, Mom.' She giggled. 'A little weird, but cool.'

I looked at Meg, who smiled. 'Definitely weird, but yeah, it's okay.' She snuggled back down onto the chaise and lifted the book to resume her reading. 'My mother talking to angels. That's just weird.'

I turned to Michael, fully confident that his face would be upturned with that mother/son bond thing. His face was upturned, but to his father. 'Wanna play?'

Keith looked at me for approval. I sighed quietly and nodded. It hadn't gone as I had hoped, but the way I look at it, four teenage, upturned faces in adoration of their mother would have just been plain weird. Cool, but weird. Upturned faces or not, I had set the stage for my family. Over the course of the next few days, weeks and months, I casually talked about what was going on when a moment presented itself, but I made sure to keep it light and amusing."

"Gentle humor is always a good tactic to face the challenges of your realm," said Epheniel. "It helps keep Life in perspective."

"I agree. You know, changing subjects, I seem to feel a need for constant reassurance in this adventure," I began. "Why is that I am always searching for signs that I am okay, that the journey is meant to be and that I have a role to play in it?"

"You are a spiritual entity on a human journey right now, Soul, so you have all the baggage that comes with humanity. It is normal to feel insecure, although there will be many, many times when you think you may have lost the connection to us. There will always be signs in your life, but you will eventually come to a place where you will no longer feel the constant yearning to feel and/or see them. Trust, Soul, that everything is as it should be." She paused as I processed her words. "But I also want you to remember that the baggage that comes with humanity is a good thing. That baggage allows you to keep your sense of humor during challenging times. It props you up when you're feeling discouraged. It is a constant reminder that this wonderful journey through the Earth experience – which you have chosen – is truly a gift." She paused again. "So, speaking of journeys, how is your personal journey coming these days? Are you learning?"

I grinned at her. "Oh, I'm learning, all right. I made the decision one day not long ago to learn to meditate."

She clapped her hands lightly, clearly delighted. "And have you unlocked the secrets of the Universe during your meditations, Soul?"

"Let's just say that I'll tell you the story and you can decide that part," I suggested. "Ready?" When she resettled herself comfortably onto the cushions, I began. "Well, I had heard that certain things like caffeine, alcohol and doing rigidly-structured activities like crossword puzzles could block celestial messages. I knew my caffeine/alcohol levels would not be a problem, but knew that crossword puzzle thing might. See, I not only love to do cross- word puzzles, but complete them in ink, often timing myself."

I heard an audible sniff. "Sounds a bit obsessive/compulsive to me ..."

"Hey, I thought you didn't sit in judgment."

"No judgment cast, Soul, just stating a fact."

When I looked at her suspiciously, she winked and I giggled.

"Yeah, maybe I am a bit obsessive/compulsive, but I love the mental challenge. Anyway, that's why I decided to drop them cold turkey. I would read the nightly paper and not even glance at the puzzle, hoping against hope that my minor sacrifice would further my spiritual development."

"You wanted more signs, so decided giving up crossword puzzles and cola would vault you into a higher realm? Was a sack cloth and ashes next on your list?" Somehow, my angel's rephrasing made my logic a bit cockeyed, and although I ignored her sarcasm, it did give me pause to reconsider my viewpoint.

"Yep. Epheniel, I'd beg, I traded crossword puzzles for Enlightenment – where are you? But Deb and Mary Lou and you keep reminding me that I am where I am supposed to be. Be patient, Deb was told, too much too fast would not be healthy."

"And did your tact work? Did you see signs in the physical realm?"

"Oh, throughout the months, I would recognize an occasional sign, but I find it very challenging to crawl through this incarnation when it seems all my friends are flying and soaring with the eagles. The signs I wanted were letters blazoned across the sky: *Soul, hang in there – you are where you are supposed to be, doing what you are supposed to be doing and all is swell!*"

"Kind of like *Surrender, Dorothy!* In The Wizard of Oz?"

"Hey, what do you know about The Wizard of Oz?"

She sniffed. "When will you remember that we angels know a thing or two about your

world? I'll have you know, Soul, I am a great fan of that movie. Glinda's gown was so shimmery – and her wand!" she sighed. "Oh, and I love the songs, especially that one those adorable little Munchkins sing."

Singing Munchkins? My jaw dropped. The image of my guardian angel with her feet propped up, watching *The Wizard of Oz*, and eating popcorn with butter dripping down her chin was too much for me. I shook my head to dispel the vision.

"Yeah, I was looking for huge signs, but found little ones, instead. As a matter of fact, one day that I had begged for a sign, I turned on the radio and the next song was *Gimme Some Kind of Sign* by Brenton Wood."

I looked over and saw Epheniel engulfed in giggles. I grinned sheepishly, knowing my humanity was not only forgiven, but celebrated.

"Okay, I believe you were going to tell me how you connected with the Universe during your meditation," she said after regaining her composure.

"Well, you know me – boy, do you know me. I pretty much play by the rules, so I figured in order to meditate, I needed lots of stuff."

"Stuff?"

"Yeah, you know. Stuff like books and how-to-meditate tapes – that sort of thing. I carefully picked the day to commune with the Universe, as you said. I read the books, listened to the tapes and waited for a day when I was physically exhausted."

My angel looked confused. "Why would you want to be exhausted?"

"My plan was to capitalize on hitting theta state right before drifting off for a much-needed nap. Yes, indeed, I thought I was ready to cosmically commune."

Epheniel interrupted me. "Had you experienced theta state before?"

"No, but I'd read about it in countless books as that place between wakefulness and sleep. It appealed to me, so I wanted to try it." I thought a moment before continuing. "Hey, remember those *Lives of the Saints* books that I loved and inhaled as a child – the ones with the pictures of the saints with upturned faces?"

"Holy, smokes, Soul!" boomed a voice right behind me, startling me out of one of my celestial lives. "What is it with you and upturned faces?"

I spun around, wondering how Michael might be garbed. I wasn't surprised to find the archangel wearing an old baseball cap, a pair of green plaid Bermuda shorts, a Grateful Dead tee shirt and sandals. Once again, he idly twirled a pair of sunglasses as he returned my questioning gaze.

"What?" Michael asked, turning around to give me a complete view. "Were you expecting me to appear as a dancing pony or something?"

"Only with a pink tutu," I giggled. "And a plumed headdress. You're quite the stylish angel today!"

He performed a pirouette and then wagged a finger toward me. His twinkling eyes narrowed. "Seriously, what is it with the upturned face thing?"

"Perhaps it's a by-product of my 1950's Catholic grade schooling. I spent a lot of time reading about saints and angels back then. They all had the upturned face thing and the round halos." I lowered my voice. "Truth be told, they also looked more than a little boring to a ten-year old, but, hey, who was I to judge? They'd made it into literary immortality, as well as heaven. I found that I couldn't read enough about them – and as many books on faeries that I could get inhale."

"Saints, angels and faeries," Michael mused. "Not bad reading material."

"I was just going to tell Epheniel about my first meditation attempt. You're more than welcome to stay and listen. Unless there's some world crisis that you have to see to ..."

"There's always a world crisis, but I've got some time, Soul, go ahead," he said as he perched on the edge of a chair nearby.

I smiled and continued the story. "I'd been especially moved by the story and illustration of Catherine of Sienna, whose name I later chose as my Confirmation name." Epheniel nodded and I continued. "Well, when I decided to meditate, I recalled that illustration and I thought to myself, *Move over, Catherine o' Sienna, I have come to play.*" I looked over at both angels, who grinned

appreciatively. "I lay down flat on my back on my bed and tried to relax, hoping to shut down my racing mind. Barney, of dog fame, decided at that very moment that Mom looked 'way too lonely there on the bed, so hopped up to join me, smashing his eighty-five pound furry frame against mine. I was confident that I'd be able to handle that situation if he settled down and drifted off, but the dog obviously had other plans. Apparently, unbeknownst to me, it was time for his pedicure."

"Whoa!" interrupted Michael, as his sunglasses went flying across the room in his excitement. "You gave your dog a pedicure? I thought you wanted to meditate." The sunglasses reappeared in his hand again as he awaited my answer.

"I did want to meditate and since it is obvious that you are not *one with dog*, I'll explain. Dogs chew their nails, and in order to get into a good position for this activity, the aforementioned dog must balance the rest of his weight on one leg, which happened to be digging into the human-type person next to him. In short, the situation didn't look promising for any cosmic communication.

"Apologizing profusely as I sought to move him slightly away from me and earnestly avoid his *Don't you love me anymore, Mom* look in his eyes, I settled in once again. I was feeling pretty darn smug at this point because I'd remembered to turn on the fan to block out house noises. I closed the bedroom door and decided that I'd try to chant my way to a meditative state. After having read several suggested chants in different books, I tried one on for size. As the chant continued for a couple minutes, I realized that the sound went from sounding something like nnnnhna-ahhhhhm- nhhhhh...nnhn-ahhhhhm-nhhhhh..."

"Nnnnnhn-ahhhhhhhm- nhhhhhhh? That sounds interesting, Soul," said Epheniel. "Where'd you get that idea?"

"The book," I said, "but it soon changed to *I know the phone is going to ring. I know the phone is going to ring.*"

"Did you get that from the book, too?" Michael asked. "Maybe you should try, 'Nanna nahhna, nanna nahhna,..."

"Hey, hey, hey, goodbye'?" I peered at him closely. "Is there any song you guys don't know? Actually, I chastised myself for not assuming the correct meditative attitude, although I can't for the life of me figure out where I might have picked up that kind of attitude, do you?" Epheniel smiled serenely and motioned for me to continue; Michael just grinned.

"Anyway, I took a firm hold of myself and said, *Stop that and get back to the business at hand*. Apparently feeling hurt and suffering from low self-esteem from my earlier rejection and quite possibly wondering why Mom was emitting these decidedly weird sounds, my dog decided to plop a proprietary paw upon my chest, so there went the chanting phase of my meditation for the day. I sat up and looked him squarely in the face. 'Okay, dog, I'm yours. What do you want?' He sniffed and hopped off the bed. 'Great. You want to get out of the room. I can do that.' As I let him out, I thought, *Aha! This'll be a piece of cake now.*"

My angel spoke up sweetly. "Another new spiritual phrase perhaps?" When Michael guffawed, I ignored both and continued.

"Time for a meditation tape! I thought, and soon I'll be out there, conversing and soaring with you guys. I even briefly wondered if I should take a travel sickness pill, but decided against it. The tape came on and a soothing voice directed me into a beautiful wood. *Is there poison ivy in here?* I wondered, as I stepped into the wood in my mind. *You know I'm not crazy about poison ivy. Stop!* I demanded. *Stay with the tape. There is no poison ivy in the celestial realm wood, so just calm down, walk into that darn wood and get highly evolved.*

"Okay. So I settled in again and listened as the voice moved me further into the cool, dark forest. I was doing pretty well and thinking myself pretty darn highly evolved – that is, until the phone rang. I groaned and reached for it."

Michael's face wore a deadpan expression. "Was it the celestial realm?"

"No, it was not the celestial realm. It was a highly evolved window replacement representative, quite certain that I was interested in replacing my windows and could he please come out and discuss it with me? I thanked him for his concern, told him my windows were fine and hung up. But, unfortunately, when I had jumped to answer the phone, I forgot to pause the tape. By the time I returned to the bed, the soothing voice had not only gone through the wood,

but had reached nirvana – without me. I sighed and turned off the tape. But, before I crawled back onto the bed, I turned off the phone. *Minor setback*, I assured myself. *No problem.*”

“No problem,” agreed Epheniel. “Go on.”

Apparently, Michael had found his *Was it the celestial realm* question highly amusing. He repeated it several times, trying unsuccessfully to stifle a laugh. I sighed and continued.

“After firmly closing the bedroom door – again – I once – again – settled in on the bed. Obviously, the chanting and the meditation tape had not brought the desired results, so my mind scanned to Meditation Phase 3: *counting backwards*. I slowed down my breathing and started with number four. With each exhalation, I dropped a number. When I hit one, I began the countdown again. I was doing pretty well and thinking that perhaps I should get out of teaching and into the meditation business, when just as quickly, I realized that I was not focusing on my task at hand: *Inhale-4-exhale, inhale-3-exhale, inhale-2-exhale, inhale-1-exhale* seemed to be morphing into the grocery list on my kitchen table: *Inhale-4-containers-of-yogurt-exhale, inhale-3-loaves-of-bread-exhale, inhale-2-gallons-of-milk-exhale, inhale-and-a-partridge-in-a ...*,” Another sniff from across the sofa turned into a snort. “Okay, okay, so the counting didn’t exactly work for me. I recognized the fact that I am an intelligent, flexible adult capable of creative problem solving. It was obviously time for a new strategy.”

“Obviously.” Michael was now engulfed in laughter. “Oh, Epheniel, don’t you just love humans?”

I looked closely at the Prince of the Realm before continuing. Was I sensing a bit of an attitude here? In response, she grinned at him and I picked up the tale.

“It was at this point in my meditation that Barney felt extremely lonely in the hallway outside my bedroom and jangled his collar until I once again dragged my bones from the bed to reopen the door to admit him back into the room. One look at my decidedly non-angelic glare sent him to the floor, where he curled up, giving me his *But I love you so much I can’t stand being away from you look*.

A plaintive sigh interrupted my thoughts. “I just love dogs.” I looked at my angel, wondering if she was serious.

“I love dogs, too, but this one was doing his utmost to keep me from communing with the Universe. I decided that it was now time to try the *Concentrate-on-Each-and-Every-Limb-Thinking-Them-Light-Enough-to-Float Technique*. Just as I was thinking that I might drift off into the ether, one of my delightful teenagers came in, walked down the hall and closed her bedroom door behind her – loudly.”

Another sigh, “I just love children, too. They are just so sweet.”

“I like ‘em, too,” Michael chimed in, “but for different reasons. They’re dirty and loud and smelly and are lots of fun as they set about discovering their new world. I love playing with kids!” He sighed, as well.

What’s with all the sighing around here? I cleared my throat, hoping it might help refocus the angel audience. “*No problem*, I told my floating limbs. *She’s in her room for a while. Hang in, there, toes – you’re next on the float list*. Slam! There went another door in the house. *Which kid doesn’t know how to shut a door properly*, my elbows demanded. *I wanna float, too!*”

Michael exploded in laughter this time, no pretense of stifling present. “Floating elbows? Good thing you came in. I need to get caught up with all the new earthly spiritual jargon. Floating elbows? What’s next?!”

I continued, pretending not to have heard his comment. “‘Where’s Mom?’ boomed a new voice. ‘Does anybody know where Mom is? MOM?!’ Slam! I sighed heavily and looked at my watch. An hour had passed since I had made the decision to meditate and I was as earthbound as ever. It had sounded so good at the time.”

“So you didn’t commune?” Michael asked. “Not even with the floating elbows?”

“No, I didn’t commune,” I answered a bit tersely. “But after that experience, I do have some questions about those religious books I used to read. Just how many kids did those saints-with-the-upturned-faces have? How many had dogs that preferred to worship their mistresses from under foot? Did those holy souls teach all their children how to shut a door so that the saintly mother type person in the adjoining room could commune with the Universe? What’d they do?”

Tie and gag their kids in a loving and nurturing fashion? Turn off the phone?" I stuck out my lower lip. "Why couldn't I have been one of those guys on the mountaintop this time around?"

"Pardon me?" Epheniel asked. "Guys on the mountaintop?"

"You know, the guys in the pretty-colored robes, chanting in the mists on a Himalayan mountain?" I sighed. "Just think. No dishes, no lesson plans, no meat loaf – just chanting and communing with the Universe."

Epheniel replied, "Have you considered that perhaps – just perhaps – you might learn to commune as you do those dishes, write those lesson plans and make that meat loaf? Soul, you did not ask to remove yourself from the earth realm, but to thrive spiritually as you are ensconced in it."

"No mountaintop, huh? I think I'd like that sort of thing, you know."

"I know, Soul. No mountaintop this lifetime; maybe next time around."

Michael's voice was quiet and serious. "What'd you learn?"

"Well, I got up from the bed and went on with the business of living. The lesson learned that day was that, while I may not have felt a communion with the universe, at least I know my dog loves me. And you know, over the course of time, space and dimension, there's a lot to be said for that."

"I agree – well done!" beamed Epheniel. After a moment, she added, "What else is going on with you these days?"

"Well, I read a book that talked about accessing your soul name. That sounded pretty neat, so I thought I'd try it."

A look of pure-driven-snow innocence crossed my angel's face as she sweetly asked, "And did you access it?"

I nodded. "I tried the same thing I'd done to get your name – you know, three nights of asking – that sort of thing. And sure enough, as I was drifting off to sleep one night, a name began to run across my mind's eyes: *B – R – U – C – E*. I woke up immediately and sat up. *BRUCE?* Now, mind you, I have nothing personal against the name *Bruce*, but I wanted something more ...," I glanced at my angel, chagrined at my own human reaction.

Michael interrupted. "And may I ask what's wrong with *Bruce*? I'll have you know that *Bruce* is a very fine name! I have lots of friends on both side of the veil with the name *Bruce*."

I glanced at Epheniel, but she merely shrugged. Apparently, I was on my own. I cleared my throat. "Well, you see, ... well, I mean, you know, ... I wanted something more elegant ... more ... celestial."

"CELESTIAL?! What do I have to do – scrounge up some passing light entity, hand him a crown and trot him out to you as the great and powerful ARCHANGEL BRUCE?" He slowly shook his head. "I just don't get you humans sometimes. What's up with you and the name thing? You're just so ..."

"... human?" I offered with a straight face and then turned to face Epheniel. "I'm not done with my story, since someone interrupted me. Would you like to hear the rest?" Epheniel nodded and I glanced back at Michael, who grinned broadly. I couldn't help but giggle.

I continued. "Suddenly, a voice in my head told me to look back at the name in my mind."

"Voices in the ol' head, eh, Soul? Looks like you might have gotten that Joan of Arc wish after all!" He leaned forward. "And for the record, that would have been me – both with Joan and you!" Michael boasted, puffing out his chest in a pompous manner. The massive, oversize gem-encrusted crown suddenly reappeared on his head. After the flourish of a shining scepter, he gestured for me to finish.

Unsure what to make of the events, I plowed ahead. "So, I looked back at the name running across my mind and found there were three more letters at the end: *B – R – U – C – E – S – A*. My soul's name is *Brucesa*, isn't it?"

Michael spoke. "Actually, *Bruce*, your soul name – or any entity's – cannot be pronounced by the human tongue. It sounds more like the whisper of a breeze on a butterfly's wing. But for your human perception, you get *Bruce*."

"*Brucesa*," I correctly a bit smugly.

"Whatever," Michael replied. As I watched, the angel began to fade. He grinned and

waved. "I gotta run. Check on my minions, you know. 'Bye, Eppelheimer! Catch ya later, Bruce!"

I opened my mouth to correct him on my soul's name and realized that I rather liked his version of it. Instead, I turned to my angel. "A Grateful Dead tee shirt? Without casting the least little bit of judgment, I beg to reiterate: that Michael is a different sort of angel, isn't he? Whatever happened to the proper, angelic-looking Michael I had met earlier?"

"Simple," replied my angel. "Your paradigms are changing as are your perceptions, as well." She looked at me closely, noticing my alarm. "That's a good thing, Soul – Bruce." "

"It is a beautiful name, isn't it, although I'm not sure if it really fits me. Perhaps Michael is right about that Bruce thing. Until the name grows on me, let's just have you continue to call me Soul. Perhaps Soul is a constant reminder of who I am, you know?" When Epheniel nodded, I sighed in deep contentment. Perhaps there is some correlation between sighing and being highly evolved. Have to give that some more thought.

"I think you sent me another message not long ago just like the way I discovered the names. My husband and I had tickets for an outdoor concert. Anyway, we had an extra ticket and were trying to decide who should get it. When I asked that question right before drifting off to sleep one night, my mind cleared again and I got the name *D-E-B*. For some reason, she was supposed to be there."

"Did you ever find out why?"

"Deb's vibrations were further accelerated and she received more understanding."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, there was a tremendous thunderstorm that night and Deb believed that the Realm had provided an opportunity for her to get out of her very earthly self. At the same time, her vibrations increased, allowing her to share deeper insights from Michael. So, she thought that night was very much a gift from the Realm."

"Did you enjoy the concert?"

"Yes, but a most amazing event occurred on the way there. We were on the highway, traveling at high speed, when suddenly, the car coughed and sputtered, lights flashing."

"Lovely angelic lights?" asked Epheniel, giggling like a school-girl.

I grinned. "No, silly, they were lovely the-car-engine-is-in-big-trouble-which-will-cost-you-an-arm-and-a-leg-once-you-get-off-this-highway-that-is-if-you-get-off-this-highway-in-one-piece type of lights. When I realized the danger we were in, I turned to Deb, who was sitting in the back seat with my daughter, Meg, and her Deb' son, Beau. "Tell Michael we need help," I said. "The car's dying and we're in trouble." She nodded and within a heartbeat, the car suddenly kicked back into operation and we sped off, stunned into silence. That car never had another problem like that."

"What was the reaction?"

"Well, Deb and I grinned, as did Meg and Beau. Keith, on the other hand was skeptical. He claimed it could easily be explained without any angelic intervention."

"How?" I had bluntly inquired. 'I'd like to hear your rational, scientific explanation for what just happened.'"

"He thought for a moment before answering. 'Well,' he said, 'the engine could have gotten some moisture in it and it worked its way through, resulting in the car regaining its speed.'"

"I stared at him. 'Yeah, and it could have been just an amazing coincidence that it occurred at just the moment when Deb asked Michael for help.' Keith nodded, grateful for my assistance in his attempt at reason. 'Or it could have been that the atmospheric conditions of that particular evening were in perfect harmony with polar ice cap density, thereby creating a gravitational pull on the engine, which, in turn, caused seismic activity to commence, which resulted in a slight tremor, dislodging moisture from a point on the surface of the road just at the precise moment our car traversed said point. As the droplets of moisture leaped forward, Newton's Third Law of Motion kicked in: *Once in motion, an object will remain in motion unless a force acts upon it.* In this particular case, the force was our vehicle, which attracted the droplets, as discovered and later written up as the *Subatomic Particle Droplet Theory of a Car Speeding Down a Highway in Ohio*, thus resulting in the moisture getting into the car engine, causing the car to sputter. Of course, one can hypothesize that said moisture was then absorbed by the gasoline particles

through the *Opposites Attract Theory*, thereby allowing the car to resume its previous unspattered condition. There,' I finished. 'Could that have been what just happened?'"

"Exactly,' said my husband. As he turned his head back to the task at hand, I swear I could hear him muttering something about how a little bit of knowledge could be a dangerous thing."

I paused a moment in thought. "That evening was fun, but what happened to me that next morning was extraordinary. I had been hoping to sleep in a bit after getting home late from the concert. Some type of inner alarm went off and, much to my chagrin; I was wide awake at 6:30 a.m. I lay there, trying to hold a one-way conversation with you, reliving the previous night. I tried to lie still so as not to awaken my husband, who also needed sleep. It appeared I was wide awake, but I lolled in bed when he got up. When I heard him shoo the dog out of the bedroom and close the door, I decided to try to go back to sleep. I lay flat on my back with my arms at my sides and my legs uncrossed and relaxed my mind. I slowly drifted back. Suddenly, I recognized that I must have reached theta state.

"I felt as if I were floating. My body tingled, and then suddenly, an enormous wave swept through me, head to toe. I was stunned by the magnitude of the wave."

"Pretty amazing?" Epheniel asked as I paused to collect my thoughts.

"Amazing? I was thrilled beyond measure that it was finally happening to me. But I was more than amazed at the experience – incredibly, it happened three more times. The waves were so great that I tingled all day long until early evening with the afterglow of the experience. As the day wore on, I wasn't sure which stunned me more: the experience, itself, or the fact that I was allowed to have such an experience."

Epheniel raised her hand in protest. "Whoa, Soul! Wait a moment! Theta state is not just for a select few, but can be accessed by everyone."

As I listened to her, I hoped I would be able to recall this conversation on the earth realm. After a few moments, I said, "Looking back on it now, however, I wonder if it was a process to increase my vibration frequencies to further my understanding. I still don't know..." I faltered.

"Is it important that you know?"

"No, I guess not. We'll just add it to the growing pile of *Stuff I Don't Get Yet.*"

She nodded. "Sounds wise." She adjusted a wayward feather on her wing and then looked over at me again. "Is that it for today, Soul?"

"I guess so. It's still hard for me to remember on earth that I am right where I am supposed to be on this journey and not where I might wish."

"All is as it should be, Soul, regardless of where you think you ought to be."

"It's so easy to remember when I am here with you," I replied, "but it's so much more difficult when I'm caught up in my day-to-day busyness." I thought again for a long moment. In the peaceful silence, I suddenly realized that I could hear the far-off strains of music and laughter. "Hey, I'm not keeping you from something, am I?"

"No, as you are where you're supposed to be, so am I."

I sighed deeply, began to relax when something caught my attention. "Say, what's that sound I hear? Sounds as if someone's having a party! Weren't you invited?"

"Soul, I have the ability to bi-locate, which means I can be in two places at once. It's not a party, but a concert. I am there, as well, enjoying the beauty of song." She saw my eyes widen in surprise and went on to explain. "Our world is on the other side of the veil."

"The veil?" I struggled to understand.

"Close your eyes and try to recall our earlier conversation during your preincarnation conference." Epheniel suggested. I did and to my utter shock, the entire conversation played before my mind's eye. My eyes flew open in surprise and she smiled gently. "You have all of our conversations within you," she said. "Just go looking for them." She paused a moment before continuing. "Remember your reading material as a child?" I nodded. "Perhaps you were yearning for all of this," she suggested. "By that time in your lifetime, you would have already returned the veil before your eyes. Perhaps you were simply Homesick, but not knowing why."

"What's the difference between the two worlds on either side of the veil?"

"Unconditional love is the difference, Soul. We have unconditional love, learning and total acceptance."

I looked at my angel thoughtfully, as I pondered her comparison. A moment later, she laughed. "You've got a question, Soul – ask it. That's what you're here for, remember?"

I nodded. "If I'm not being too nosy, what do you do all day?"

"Pardon me?"

"I mean it. If you are able to bi-locate, that means you can be in twice as many locations, doing twice as much as I might be doing in one. That gives you twice the time, as I look at it. What do you do during all that time, given both sides of the veil? I figure you don't eat and you don't sleep. Talking with me can't take up too much of your time. How do you spend your time?"

She chuckled and said, "Soul, human spirits are very time oriented. There is no time on this side of the veil. What passes for a lifetime on your side, could equate to only a few moments on this side. Time is a human-created concept, but we'll talk more about that later. Regardless upon which side of the veil a soul chooses to be at a particular time, learning is paramount to growth." Her eyes narrowed as she leaned closer to me. "I've got to tell you, Soul, watching over you is a full-time job most days, if there really were days, which there aren't, but we will get into that more fully another time." I quickly glanced over to her to see if she was serious. Instead, I found her eyes twinkling. "Seriously, I not only watch over you, but help as needed elsewhere, to bring about peace and understanding to the earth realm. And that, dear One, is my job description."

"Peace on earth? Isn't that a rather daunting task, even for angels?"

"Peace on earth, Soul, begins with human spirits creating peace in each of their own lives and then connecting one area of peace to another, continually enlarging the area. And, like a candle lighting another in darkness, if enough candles are lit, Light will eventually overtake the darkness." We sat in silence as I absorbed what she said. Her words had struck a powerful chord deep within me. Everything she said seemed so familiar, yet I hadn't heard it phrased quite like that before.

"You asked what we do all day," Epheniel said. "I talked about angels, but didn't explain what other souls do. Would you like to know?" When I nodded, she continued. "Many souls on this side of the veil choose to work."

I gasped. "Work? You mean when we're done with all the work on Earth, we get to move on, only to continue working? Man, that certainly isn't my idea of heaven – getting stuck with pots and pans for all eternity!"

"I somehow get the feeling that you don't quite understand. Let me try to explain. You missed an important word, Soul – *choose*. If, when you come Home at the end of this life, you choose to scrub pots and pans, you may. Souls can also choose to go to classes, lectures, concerts or spend their time creating, but we are all involved in helping Earth progress. You can also just float in the ether if that will garner learning. In short, as Zeke says, 'There is a plethora of choices!'"

"So with that choice thing, I could opt to stretch out on a celestial sleeper sofa with my feet up, watching old movies and eating bonbons?"

She ignored the sarcasm in my voice and asked sweetly, "And what learning might be garnered from such an experience?"

"Well, I could learn to master a remote control since I've obviously been unable to do that in this lifetime. That, alone, could launch me to the top of the Evolvement Scale. I could learn ..."

Epheniel waved her hands to interrupt me. "Okay, I get it. Souls thirst for knowledge; they choose that which will help them gain that knowledge. I wouldn't want you to think me judgmental, but I think the celestial sleeper sofa idea wouldn't cut the job description."

"Darn. There goes my idea of heaven." I paused. "Okay, let's recap. You don't eat. Anybody sleep?"

"Only if a soul chooses to sleep, but again, that is unnecessary on this side of the veil. Every soul goes through an orientation of sorts to try to bridge the gap between their latest incarnation and the ethereal plane. Orientation time is dependent upon individual needs and desires. Some souls return Home and, after a short period of rest, are anxious to return to the Earth classroom or another spot in the universe or even dimension to continue their learning."

"This is hard for my human mind to wrap around," I said.

Epheniel gazed at me before speaking. "I know, Soul. We will talk more about vibration levels later, Soul, but basically, everything in the universe vibrates – from submicroscopic particles to any and all types of beings to blades of grass, redwood trees and flitting dragonflies – everything and everyone. What you do on the other side of the veil is determined by your vibration level when you cross over at the time of physical death. Some have baggage that needs to be shed before moving on to other tasks."

"Sounds complicated," I mused.

"It sounds like it," agreed Epheniel, "but it's really quite simple. I promise we'll revisit this conversation topic at another time."

"Agreed. Hey, are you omni... what's that word that means you know all?"

"*Omniscient*, Soul?" I nodded and she shook her head. "No." "Omnipresence is out since you only bi-locate, right?"

"Only bi-locate?" Epheniel demanded, her hands on her hips in mock indignation.

"Simultaneous existence doesn't impress you, eh?"

I grinned. "You mentioned some souls not wanting to do Earth again. Why? What's wrong with Earth?"

"You may recall our earlier discussion here, as well. Earth is the most challenging choice of incarnation locations. Most souls choose the Earth journey at some point, but those of you who make such a choice are very brave. In no other location in the Universe is there so much density as on this planet. Because of that, many souls on this side of the veil choose not come to Earth and take their learning elsewhere. There are countless numbers of learning opportunities from which to choose."

"Like where?" I asked. "You're not going to tell me that some of my friends' earlier incarnations have been as little, green aliens from Mars, are you?"

"Remember that humankind is limited only by imagination, Soul. What your scientists perceive of the Universe is only a small part of it. The Universe has existed for all eternity. Surely, you can understand that there have been – and continue to be – many places in that vastness that are ideal opportunities for learning. It might help if you think of all of it as a classroom with the Earth experience being only one subject. The universe is also interdimensional, so that further complicates human understanding."

"Hmmm. Interesting. You know, I've read articles that claim life not only existed on Mars before a blast from an exploding nearby planet destroyed it, but that intelligent life abounded on that planet. Any truth to that?"

She looked at me a long moment, as if deciding what to share. "Without wishing to sound like a broken record, humankind is limited only by imagination. Remember how modern-day scientists view science from the Middle Ages?"

"Archaic," I mused. "Single mindedness. The earth is flat, period. No discussion, especially with those holding dissenting opinions. Are we still like that?"

She nodded. "Yes, to a certain degree, but although humankind has a long way to go with science, they're working at it."

"So, basically, a soul can choose anything?"

"Souls choose tasks that will increase their learning and understanding, and as this learning is increased, so is their desire to learn and understand more. That is the entire purpose of a soul's existence, whether they choose to be guides, reincarnated souls or those on this side of the veil within that multitude of dimensional possibilities."

"Okay, let's take it from the top and see if I have this right. You aren't omniscient; you're not omnipresent – even though you are brilliantly talented at being able to bi-locate and I am truly filled with absolute and overwhelming awe at your ability to do so. I suppose you're going to axe the *omnipotent* thing, too, aren't you?"

My angel chuckled. "No, Soul, angels are not all-powerful in your dense realm, although we can do what you consider amazing things like pushing your car out of trouble when you drowse off at the wheel and it's not your time to leave. But, because of the realm's density and lower human vibrations, it's very difficult sometimes to get your attention. That's when the guides and guardians go for help."

"Who helps you?"

"Oh, there's a full range of resources at our disposal. It often depends upon what is needed at the time as to whom we go to for that help."

"What do you mean?"

"For example, let's say you're hiking in the woods and your foot turns, breaking your ankle. You're all alone and cannot walk to safety. If, for some reason, I am unable to help you, due to the denseness of your plane, I will beseech the devas for help."

"Devas? Are they the guardian angels of the woods? I suppose the next thing out of your mouth will be that dragons, gnomes and faeries are real, too."

Epheniel paused a moment, as if wondering how to answer. Finally, she tapped her chin and said, "I see we have to work on that memory bank of yours, Soul." Suddenly the vision of Zeke and his dancing, devic friends filled my mind. I reddened. "As for that question, would that be an open-minded question or a closed one?" I reddened. Again. She'd caught me and we both knew it.

"Let's try another approach," she said. "The world is made up of energy, Soul, right?" I nodded. "If you're looking for a scientific explanation, let's look at the cellular level." I gulped, fervently hoping my science background was sufficient for such a discussion. "Your scientists have long known that everything contains molecules with subatomic particles. Tell me, can you see these subatomic particles with the naked eye?" I shook my head. "But just because you cannot see them, does it mean they do not exist? Given that logic, is it even remotely possible for you to believe that the devic realm exists, as well? Different realms contain different types of energies with different entities, but humankind is only limited ..."

"... by imagination," I finished. *Man, I'm going to have to rethink a lot of stuff after today's discussion!* But, plenty of time for that later. Right now I still have questions. "Okay, different types of energies with different entities. Got it. What about the angelic realm? Different types there, too? Is it that choir of angels thing?"

Epheniel nodded. "We each have our own tasks we've chosen to complete, so although we may have different duties, the angelic realm helps all who seek our help."

I wanted to understand this and tried again. "But what about the choir concept that the Church taught. Is there a hierarchy within the angelic realm?"

Epheniel thought a moment, obviously trying to find another explanation for my limited understanding. "We are only classified by humans for human understanding," she began. "It is actually a far more complex concept, but let's cut to the bottom line, as humans are wont to say: We are free-willed energy beings. We are here just as you are here: to accomplish Oneness. We can – and do that in a myriad of ways."

"Okay, let's continue this. When I need help and you're unable to give aid, who would you call?"

"Again, that is determined by the problem. If you are in need of special protection, I could go to the archangels and beseech their help. You've heard of Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel, but there are others. They are God's special forces, so to speak, and are powerful protectors and healers."

"Are all the archangels like Michael?" I had visions of the tee shirted angel, as well as the one with the oversized, gem-encrusted crowns swinging his scepter.

"We are as individual as humankind," answered my angel. "Many humans communicate with us."

"Deb and Michael," I mused.

"Yes," agreed my angel, "but anyone can beseech the archetypes in times of trouble. Just ask them to come to help you. Unless it would interfere with a lesson you asked to learn, they will help."

"What do you mean, *interfere with a lesson?*"

She sighed and considered me carefully. "I know this is overwhelming and maybe we should stop for today ..."

I leapt to my feet. "Oh no! I have so many more questions for you. Please don't stop!" I begged. "There's so much I want to understand. Epheniel, please – explain about interfering with

a lesson.”

“Too much too soon is not healthy, Soul.”

“But it’s not too much,” I pleaded. “There is a fire burning within me that cannot be squelched. I need to understand. Please.” Epheniel looked dubious for a moment, but then nodded. “A little bit more, Soul?” I nodded gratefully and returned to my chair. “When souls choose their paths – their Life Charts – with assistance from other light entities before incarnation, sometimes they overachieve and attempt too many challenges, forgetting the difficulties that the earthly plane presents. And while we can strongly advise against such choices, sometimes those souls are adamant about the course of action they wish to follow in that incarnation and override our advice. Celestial advisors have even been known to go over the head of that soul to take the case to the Council. These wise, loving entities try to persuade the soul to cut back the number or degree of challenges desired.”

“Sounds like a disagreement to me,” I interrupted. “I thought you don’t argue over here.”

“It may sound like a disagreement, but that’s not the case. These souls want to overachieve because of the burning desire to understand and learn.” She paused and looked at me. “Sound familiar?” When I nodded, she continued.

“They are impatient and want to learn as quickly as possible, forgetting the reality of the earth plane. All of these discussions are a result of love and the desire to further progress. Does any of that make sense?”

I nodded. This is something I totally get. “So does the Council overrule the soul’s decision in such a case and do something official like mandating a less challenging life?”

“No, Soul. Like Higher Selves, the Council can only advise, not mandate. If, after getting advice from others and going before the Council, the Soul is still determined to take on those difficulties, it is permitted.”

“Free Will.” She nodded. “What happens to those souls once they hit Earth and realize that they overachieved and can’t do it? Is that when you call in the archetypes?”

“We can assist souls only as much as we are able without changing their Life Charts. Once made, these plans cannot be cancelled.”

“So they’re stuck with ‘em? What if they come to Earth and find that they can’t do it, even with all the help you guys give?”

“Some go through life continually being challenged and return to us barely recognizable.” Her voice dropped to a sad whisper. “And some souls despair and take their own lives.”

“But don’t you know that ahead of time with all of your knowledge? Can’t you stop them from doing that?”

“Free Will, Soul. You need to understand that suicide is not a choice made before an incarnation, but a desperate attempt to flee from the overwhelming challenges facing those souls. It’s a very sad time for all of us when a soul despairs.”

“When I was growing up, I learned that taking your own life was a mortal sin, which would automatically send you to hell.” I paused in thought. “A lot of stuff sent you to hell back then. I used to worry that I would somehow unknowingly cross that invisible line between little venial and mortal sins and end up in hell for eternity. But now that I think about it, I bet there isn’t a *hell*, is there? It doesn’t seem to fit in this picture.”

She firmly shook her head. “No, there is no hell – fire and brimstone or otherwise – but if you think about how extremely difficult and negative the earth plane is for journeying souls, your earthly plane can be termed a hell, although I personally find it heavenly. We’ll talk more about that later.”

“Could we get back to suicide? I still don’t get it – what happens to those souls after death? Do they, too, rest and choose their options? And by the way, where does compassion play into this? I’m sorry, but my God is a loving and compassionate One.”

Epheniel spoke quietly, “Loving compassion flows throughout all of the Light, but that’s not the issue here.” My angel again shook her head sadly. “Remember, we cannot alter the choices made by those souls. They must reincarnate under the same conditions – although it could well be in an entirely new location on Earth – to learn the lessons they chose to learn. Once chosen, the lessons must continue until they’ve been learned.”

“And every soul completes every lesson chosen before returning Home?” I asked.

“Actually no, sometimes not all the lessons are learned.”

I put my hand up. “Wait a minute. I thought you just said you had to learn the ones you choose.”

“You do. Whatever unlearned lessons left over at the time of physical death become tacked on to the next incarnation’s life lessons.”

“Ahh.” It made sense even to me. “You know, I’m not surprised there’s no hell, but I am very relieved those sad, despairing souls are not condemned to eternal damnation.”

“There is no damnation, Soul, not in any part of this Divine Plan. Damnation signifies judgment and there is no judgment on our realm. Again, it was only when humanity organized churches that damnation began to surface as a way to keep the masses in check and under control.”

I shook my head sadly. “I must tell you that it sure worked for me as a child. I clearly remember being told by a nun in grade school that my having eaten the mincemeat cookie that my mother had packed in my Friday lunch was a mortal sin. When I asked if I would go to hell, she assured me that I would not because I had been ignorant, but if I took another bite with this new knowledge, I certainly would find myself in hell when I died. It sounds ridiculous now, but at the time, it scared me silly.”

“A mincemeat cookie? How very sad,” My angel quietly replied, shaking her head. I nodded. “How very sad for all of you to have been taught and to have lived something so far from the Truth.”

I nodded. “Generations grew up in fear of God and that brimstone hell. A control mechanization, eh?” She nodded. “I can easily understand how the clergy kept control for thousands of years. *The Mincemeat Cookie Lesson* taught me that the road to hell must be jam-packed as a result of all those rules and regulations. I could also never figure out why my childhood friend would go to hell when she died because she was a Lutheran, even though she lived a good life. None of this ever made sense to me even as a child. I had trouble reconciling my idea of a loving, understanding God with that of the one being taught by the Church.”

I paused in thought and then continued. “The Catholic Church was undergoing lots of changes when I was a child. I’ll never forget my shock when the Church announced one day that Friday meat-eaters would no longer go to hell. I was stunned. What would happen to all those souls of meat-eaters sitting in hell before the new ruling was announced?” I shook my head. “At the age of twelve, I clearly understood with that ruling that everything I believed was now up for grabs. What would go by the wayside next? As a result, I began the formation of my own belief system.”

Epheniel nodded. “I remember. Soul, there has been endless pain, war and suffering in the name of God throughout the ages. Until human spirits understand that they have personal responsibility for their souls and the choices they make and not relegate this to a select few religious leaders, this suffering in God’s name will continue.”

“How sad,” I said. “How very sad. Can you imagine how wonderful it would be to live your whole life with a God without judgment and condemnation?” I shook my head and returned to our original discussion. “So, let me make sure I understand this. Once written, a soul must follow The Plan to the letter.”

“Yes, but remember, sometimes they can be modified. When Life gets difficult, you can ask me to modify the chart.”

I looked confused. “Whoa! I thought you just said that whatever lessons were not yet learned have to be tacked on to your next incarnation’s lessons.”

“I did, but the lessons you chose can be modified. For example, let’s say that you selected cancer. While I cannot take away the choice of you having cancer, you can ask that it not take your life. This does not work, however, if you wrote into your Life Chart that cancer would take your life. I can represent you at the Council and beseech them to help you.” She paused and gazed at me.

“There are exit points throughout every human’s journey, Soul. Do you yet have an understanding of these?” I shook my head. “Exit points are times on your journey where you

might decide to go Home.”

“You mean die?” When she nodded, I asked, “How does a soul decide to take a certain exit point?”

“Actually, there are several considerations. If all of the chosen lessons have been learned, then the soul may wish to leave. But the soul also has the choice of remaining on Earth once those lessons have been accomplished because of either desired increased learning or a wish to help others on their human journeys.

“However, to get back to the Life Chart, we cannot do anything to change a choice you made, regardless of all the prayers you and your loved ones send to God. Do you understand the difference? If a car accident was written into your plan, you can ask that it be a fender bender instead of one that kills and, if that doesn’t interfere with anything else, your chart can be modified. You have to ask, however. It won’t be done without your permission.”

I looked at her for a long time, considering her words. Her teachings raised more than a few questions. I narrowed my eyes. “Doesn’t that seem a little ..., well, *underhanded*? What about all these people wandering the Earth who don’t know the rules of the game, let alone that a Rule Book even exists?”

She looked at me curiously. “What do you mean, *underhanded*, Soul? What is *underhanded* about needing permission to go into someone’s chart and make modifications?”

“But until right now, I’ve lived my life, thinking I was helpless and vulnerable, being buffeted along by the whims of fate. I didn’t know I had control over so much of what happens to me.”

“Control, Soul? Isn’t it interesting how important that is on the human realm?” I was trying to keep an open mind, as I witnessed so many long-held paradigms crashing around my ankles. Another one had just bitten the dust, and the expression on my face confirmed it to my angel guide.

“Let’s talk about that, Soul,” Epheniel said. “Feeling as if you were *buffeted by the whims of fate*, as you put it. Deep inside, you always knew that by your thoughts and actions, you could change your life and others. How many times have you urged your students to make a difference? If you didn’t believe each of you can, then you would truly feel you were without any control. You have never been buffeted by the whims of fate, but have made conscious choices how to live your life, which has, in fact, proven to be the power of which you speak.”

“But this kind of power makes the other pale in significance!” I protested. “All I have to do is pray and ask God and it will be granted?”

“As long as it doesn’t interfere with the Life Chart. Or it is not in the best interests of your Higher Self. If those are the case, your Higher Self will block the energy of the prayer. The power of prayer is true power, Soul. Tap into it and it will change your life dramatically. So many times, souls on a human journey pray for something and that which they ask is not granted and assume that either no One is listening or that they are too insignificant to be heard. All prayers are heard by God, for prayer is energy flowing throughout the grid, seeking like energy – God. And oftentimes, humans believe that their prayers are not granted because the answers are not in the form for which the soul had sought.”

“Excuse me,” I interrupted. “The grid?”

She nodded. “Take a breath, Soul – this is a big one. The world is composed of energy. God, the Universe, Higher Power, All That Is, Yahweh, Allah, Jah, Aum, Krishna, Raam – whatever word or phrase that is used, and there are many – is a vast energy grid; therefore, everything contained within it is energy flowing throughout the grid.”

“All right, I’ll work on understanding that, but are you telling me that I can pray to win the lottery and I will?” I asked incredulously.

“How would winning the lottery help garner knowledge for your Higher Self?” When it was obvious I had no reply, she continued. “If you pray for something that is not good for your Higher Self in terms of the choices you made this time around, your Higher Self will block the energy of the prayer. Prayer is not for the microcosmic human reality, but for the greater good – the macrocosmic Big Picture. Simply put, your Higher Self brings to you what you need in order to learn your lessons.”

“I hate to argue with a celestial light being, but why is it that millions of people pray for

peace and wars continue?”

“What are those millions of people doing besides praying for peace?” Epheniel asked. “Do they choose to live their lives promoting peace? Are they actively working toward peace in their own life and those around them?”

“Some of them do,” I protested lamely.

“That’s right, Soul. Those that do make a difference in their world, but in order to claim peace for the entire world, more than a few need to work for peace.”

“Kind of like *If you’re gonna talk the talk, you gotta walk the walk?*” She nodded. “How would we know that? You, know, instead of a Rule Book, maybe there should be an Earthbound Soul Manual for those of us searching for truth and learning. This seems too hard and far too arbitrary – just hoping that what you are doing is the right thing.”

“You are where you are supposed to be when you are supposed to be there. And, there is a manual, Soul. It’s called *Listening to your Higher Self*. Each human spirit comes with that manual, but many choose not to use it. Adding prayer to the manual opens an immediate connection with the Light, allowing you to sort out the truth from the fallacies.”

“Okay. Let’s talk a little more about prayer. How am I supposed to pray?”

“Prayer is unconditional love energy; there are many of types, Soul. Each spirit must find the one that resonates most for that entity. Many human spirits have found that the most effective way to make that connection, however, is to just talk to God, pouring out their hearts and souls in an attitude of gratitude. Remember, it all goes back to intent. If your intent is to connect, you will.”

“*An attitude of gratitude*. I like that,” I mused. “You’ve taught me so much today and I thank you, but will I be able to recall at least some of our conversation once I get back to my life?”

Epheniel smiled. “This is your life, Soul. The earth existence is just an illusion. As for what we discuss, just as you now know you can recall our preincarnation conversation, you can recall these discussions, as well. Look deep within your soul and you’ll find me and all of our conversations. Go there as often as possible and find the answers that you seek. They’re all there.”

I nodded, hoping she was right. “You must be anxious to get to the concert.” She smiled and I remembered. “Oh, yeah, you’re there! That brilliant bi-location thing you talked about. But before we call this a day, could I ask you one more question?”

“Of course, Soul. Ask away. My task is to share my knowledge when you request it if the answers will aid your soul’s growth.”

“Are you saying that some souls choose to incarnate lots of times and others don’t? Don’t those others want to get ahead on that ol’ Evolvement Scale?”

“Ah, now you’re placing a judgment on an existence that is without judgment. What each soul chooses is the right choice at that time, just like you and the choices you make in your life on Earth. A soul that gains incredible knowledge in three or four lifetimes might take another soul twenty lifetimes to accumulate. There are many ways to gain knowledge, Soul. Incarnation, while particularly difficult on Earth, especially if challenging tasks have been chosen, is only one of many options. But a soul can often find more progression – more learning – from an Earth experience because of those very challenges. This side of the veil offers no challenges, so progression is slower. Do you understand?”

I nodded, deep in thought, knowing that all the many questions that had been answered by my angel had only opened the door for more.

“It is all unfolding as it must, Soul. Trust that it is all unfolding as it must.”

.....

Visions

You foretold that visions would come that would be easier to put into words. How will you ever contend with my density? I am so grateful for these visions; you touch a knowingness within me when I receive them, but I still despair over my inadequacy in converting messages/visions into words.

Loved One, do not lose hope. What you receive from us is always available for you to tap into at any time. Any concept that is unclear on any level can be returned to. You are not alone – in the spiritual or earthly realm. Others will be learning with you so there is a need for you to share and help each other. Their input is needed.

Epheniel is quite adept in converting visions or messages into words. Loiteim's strength is clarification. Working together will come naturally to all of you. Earthly and celestial life will feel extremely connected during this endeavor. Be content to maintain a foundation for now. Your pyramid is a revolving one and the three of you will change roles often in the next three years.

How will I ever describe the vision of the grid?

Loved One, the grid is a leap of faith at this time. It is a visual image enabling you to “see” how All That Is connects, overlaps and intertwines. It illustrates cause and effect, free will in action, and individual dynamics of all life: balance, infinity and flow. It explains why nothing exists in isolation. All matter, from the smallest particle to whole galaxies, is represented in the grid – the whole.

Religion

Loved Ones, open your hearts and come with me to recall your memory of the origin of religion.

When life began to be immersed in matter, there was a need to remember and celebrate your connection to each other and your relationship with all life. Just as you needed food, water and air to keep your bodies alive, so did your soul need sustenance to keep it healthy and alive.

Music in the air signaled the time for life to come together to rejoice – to share the God force connected to life. All life was included and there was communication among all species. You even have a phrase for this phenomenon: you call it collective consciousness. Some of you still remember this time and find yourselves spontaneously talking to plants and animals, only to chastise yourselves when your ego kicks in and says you are not able to do such a thing!

It was not uncommon during these celebrations to travel dimensions, enabling humans to visit angelic realms and vice-versa. There was a very real cooperation and jubilation over what was being created on Earth. This was the origin of prayer. It was an opening of the heart in gratitude for love being able to express itself and create. Dimension traveling is still very real but most of you are only aware of it on a subconscious level or through dreaming.

As humans became more submerged in matter, religion also began to change. When you forgot your connection through God to all life and saw yourselves as separate, your focus turned to other priorities. As a separate entity you felt the need for protection and ego began to take the place of the Holy Spirit. Ego made you forget how beautiful and special you were and you felt the need to have the world beyond yourself reinforce your very purpose for existence. This created a false need for power and control over life, making you forget your very connection to All That Is. You found yourselves unable to hear the music of your heart reminding you to come together to rejoice and celebrate, but because you missed this, you began to break off into separate groups (reinforcing your feeling of separation), forming different ideas on how this ritual of religion should take place. Some of you with the strongest egos (hence the deeper need for power) became the leaders of the different groups and led your flocks in all different directions. History shows you what happened after this occurred. Your attitude of separation led you to misunderstanding each other, which led to hatred, war, and the strife that you know to this day. You even forgot your connection to the life called Earth, and the Earth simply became your stage to act out your scenarios of power. Throughout time, enlightened souls even agreed to live amongst you to remind you of the innate love in which you were created, but even though many of you heard and felt truth in your hearts, you were not convinced as a collective species.

Because the true reality of your existence is not separate, you must all take responsibility for the negativity that has been created in the name of religion. A balance can be restored when you remember what beautiful beings you are, innately connected through the Holy Spirit. When

power and control is no longer your focus, you will be able to understand that your separate ideas about religion are false. Without power play, you will begin to see that different religious groups are saying the same things, only in different words. Communication can be restored through love and the walls between you will crumble.

There is a great opportunity for this awakening to occur right now. Even though there is great chaos and pain on your planet, there is also a movement toward ending this stage of your evolution. Many of you have opened your hearts and have become aware of your connection to life, creating a nurturing environment where religion can move toward the true purpose of celebrating your connection of life, love and Holy Spirit. You know who you are. The sound of a church bell may be a trigger to a deeper memory of heart music. Or perhaps you will feel the heartbeat of the Earth, and be able to hear its music, or the music of the stars, or birds, or trees dancing in the wind. I promise you, when your heart Hears, its voice will add its own harmony and you will re- member why religion is a celebration of your connectedness, not some man-made duty to be endured, or an excuse to pump up your ego in the name of God. The music you will hear is the perfect harmony of who you are, one with God, in All That Is.

Chapter 4

November

Somehow, I willed myself to the base of the steps, strode up to the great doors, and knocked confidently. Within a heartbeat, the sprite once again appeared. "Hello, hello, hello!" he beamed as the doors swung open to admit me and I was again blinded by the light from within.

"Excuse me," I said as I passed over the threshold into the Great Hall, hoping I wouldn't trip as my eyes adjusted. "You always seem to know me, and I sense you told me at some point, but I can't seem to recall your name." I cast a chagrined look his way, squatted down to be at his level and thrust out my hand.

He took my hand and pumped it vigorously. "No problem, Soul. It's Ezekiel – Zeke for guid friends like ye." He continued to pump my hand as he explained. "I'm kind of the one-entity Welcoming Committee around these parts, although I'm also the multidimensional handy sprite if the occasion warrants. Glad to meet ye. Again!"

I gently extricated my hand and smiled broadly. "Thank you, Zeke. The pleasure's mine." I stood and could not resist the thought that crossed my mind. *Now, that's one short entity!*

Zeke laughed and his voice filled my head. *Good things come in small packages, Lassie.*

Mortified to realize that apparently Zeke could also read my decidedly judgmental thoughts, I found myself suddenly wordless, hesitant to think or speak. "I'm so sorry," I began after an awkward moment.

Zeke collapsed with laughter. "Think nothing of it, Soul. Ye'll get the hang of this in no time! Now, I believe ye've got someplace to go if I'm not mistaken and you look like ye're in a hurry to get there!" When I nodded, he grabbed my hand and we began trot-ting down the hallway.

Actually, I trotted; Zeke bounced, his apron ties gaily bouncing behind him like errant kite strings.

"So, is Earth everything ye wanted this time around?" he asked as we turned onto a hallway.

"It is," I assured him, "but, ..."

"What but?" he giggled, looking up at me. As a result, he tripped over one of his apron strings.

"May I tie those for you?" I asked, helping him to his feet. I had an odd sense of déjà vu as he grinned and turned for me. I pulled the strings together and tied it neatly.

"Tighter, Lass! And could you double knot them like last time?"

The preincarnation memory suddenly returned to me and I grinned in the knowledge that that Zeke and I were good buddies. I tugged the strings too tightly and Zeke yelped.

"Whoa, not that tight, Lassie! Ye'll cut off my circulation – this place needs their handy sprite!"

Loosening the strings, I tied it and smoothed the bow. "There. Better?"

Zeke bounced up and down a few times before bounding off again down he hall. I had to run to catch up. "Much better, Soul, thank ye. Now I believe we were talking about yer but when I tripped. Is the Earth experience not what ye had hoped for?"

"Oh, it is," I quickly assured him. "It's just I have trouble hearing ..."

"I don't recall auditory challenges being in yer chart, Lass."

"My physical hearing is fine," I said. "I just can't seem to hear guidance from your realm. I always seem to be fumbling around, searching for my path."

Zeke laughed. "Oh, Soul, relax with that path searchin'. It's ever so easy." The sprite spread out all ten fingers, ticking them off as he spoke. "Live yer life in unconditional love. Avoid judgment and condemnation. Don't take yerself so seriously. Get rid of yer ego. Help others. Make time to connect with us. Laugh often. Look for angels. Create peace." He tapped his lone finger on his forehead in thought. "Hmm. What is that tenth-finger one?" He gazed at the lone finger for a moment before his face brightened. "Oh, yeah. Always secure apron strings!"

Zeke suddenly stopped before Epheniel's door and motioned for me to lean over. He cupped his hand to his mouth and whispered, "Did ye ever consider that perhaps ye can't see yer path 'cause ye're standin' right on top of it?"

I leaned over and gently kissed his cheek. "Are you sure you're only a handy sprite around here? You're awfully wise!"

He grinned and touched his cheek. "Lass, things aren't always what they appear to be.

Let's leave it at that!"

"I sure hope that even though you and Epheniel know my thoughts you'll both continue to love and support me."

"Ah, Soul," Zeke whispered, "always remembered that Here ye are loved for who ye are, not for who ye wish to be! I love ye, Lass!" He reached out to hug me when a familiar voice came lilting from the room.

"I love you, too! Welcome back, Beloved!" I hugged Zeke, thanked him and walked into the room. My angel enfolded me in her wings and I was once again filled with peace and love. As she held me, I knew that this feeling was what prompted me to hug those I love in my own life. Enfolded in peace and love.

"I thought you might enjoy chatting somewhere different to-day," she said. "Shall we go out into my garden? I think you'll enjoy it." I nodded and she led me out through an open, beautiful cut-glass door to an exquisite garden. There was a multitude of trees, shrubs and plants, but instead of giving it an eclectic look, there was a welcoming, lived-in feeling. Here and there, tiny, winged creatures flew, tending the flowers. Fragrant aromas intermingled and I spent a long moment in appreciation. Epheniel asked where I would like to sit and I gazed around at my choices. Finally, I selected one particularly beautiful section of the garden, which contained a pond with a small waterfall. Nearby were two simple, black, wrought iron chairs. As we settled in, she gave me another long moment to drink in the beauty. "So, school has started again. How's it going?"

I smiled at her. "Great! The kids are wonderful and even though my life is always hectic during the school year, trying to balance everything, I love it!" I paused in reflection. "You know, I'd been hoping that I'd experience some sort of spiritual zapology during this past summer because my time is so limited. I guess you could say I'm one of those overachieving Type A personalities with trying to live my life as a wife and mother, daughter, sister, friend, writer and teacher. Trying to get highly evolved on top of all of that seems pretty insurmountable to me. Where will I find the time to do that?"

Epheniel smiled gently at me and I found I was mesmerized by her. Her gown sparkled in the garden sunshine, and I was freshly amazed that such an exquisite entity had agreed to walk my life path with me. "*Spiritual zapology*, eh? Soul, you may not yet have this knowledge, but you are already evolved. All souls are highly evolved, as you put it. Remember, when we planned this lifetime, I told you the seeking of deeper understanding is not done as a side issue when the meat loaf is made, your papers graded and the laundry folded and put away. What you are experiencing is not something to be added to, but to be integrated throughout your entire life. This is your real life, Soul, not the dinner, papers, and laundry. Those things you will do as you live your earthly life."

She leaned over and whispered, "Would you like to know one of the most prized secrets of the universe?" I nodded, startled that something of such great importance was about to be imparted to me. "The purpose of your existence is not to get from Point A to Point B in this lifetime, Soul, but how you get there. The journey, itself, is all that matters – how you live your life during that journey – what choices you make and how you respond to the choices made."

"Choices?" I asked, desperately wanting to understand. "What kind of choices? I don't suppose they're like trying to figure out whether you should move out of state or start a new job?"

"No, Soul, those kinds of choices are not in the Big Picture. The ones I am talking about are the hundreds – no, thousands – of tiny choices that face each of you on this human journey every day. Every thought that crosses your mind and heart is a conscious choice. Your responses to the hundreds of tiny occurrences in your life are conscious choices made by you. And whether or not you realize that yet, those are what make up your journey."

"I'm not sure I know what you mean," I answered quietly.

"When the alarm goes off in the morning, you make the choice to greet the day in a positive or negative fashion. When you stumble to the kitchen and trip over the dog's bone, you make the conscious decision on how to respond. Waving hello to the neighbor child as you drive out your driveway, being curt with a coworker, extending a helping hand when needed, being miffed when things don't quite go the way in which you wish, giving a smile to someone who

needs it, making the time in your busy Earth life to help others The list goes on and on. Everything that happens to you during your day, week, month, year, decade and life – tiny or overwhelming, it makes no difference – is your journey.”

I lifted my hand to stop her. “But that’s overwhelming,” I protested. “There’d have to be billions of choices in a lifetime!”

Epheniel nodded. “How you choose to respond is what it’s all about. Your tiny choices all day long following another day of conscious choices and another and another eventually turn into a month and then a year and a decade and suddenly a lifetime. All of it – those billions of choices – make up this human journey upon which you chose to embark – nothing else.” She paused so that her words could sink in. It was so simple, but awesome in its scope and significance of a lifetime of thoughts and choices.

“You see,” she continued, “every human on this journey goes through tough times. It’s an inherent part of the trip, chosen before incarnation. But your response to the challenges determines how much understanding takes place. When you react in anger, you perpetuate a difficult, negative situation, increasing the challenge. Souls need to learn from the negative as much as the positive, but there is an important distinction between learning from it and creating it. When you respond in love, you not only heal faster, but are able to rise above the emotion of the situation to see it more clearly in order to learn.”

“Respond, not react, eh? The Big Picture,” I mused.

“Yes, the Big Picture,” she agreed. “The macrocosm. It’s so easy to get caught up in the trivialities of life or the microcosm on your journey, and when you do, you tend to forget why you chose to come to experience challenges and learn from them. Each challenge, regardless of its nature or size, was chosen by you to help you learn. Once human spirits can integrate that tenet into their lives, they will not only find much more happiness and serenity on the earthly plane, but will be able to shed the negativity that has weighed them down for so long. God is not the Master Puppeteer, controlling the strings. The Universe is not to blame for human difficulties.”

“Wow. How many times have I heard people wonder why God gave them a difficult situation? Or even that God gives us only what we can handle?”

“God/the Universe/the Supreme Being/All That Is not only allows you to plan your life chart, making your own decisions on challenges, but then allows you to fulfill it. In return, you share your learning with the Universe, but we’ll get more into that at another time. Simply put, you asked for it, you got it, so live it in love.”

I nodded. So much to think about. A totally different perspective from the one so many of us live. “If you choose to live your life responding in love, and have integrated it into the fabric of your being, you will find it very freeing. The challenges you face will remain because you had requested them, but you will no longer be mired in them. Therefore, you will be better able to cope on a higher level, learning more from each experience, thus enriching your life.”

“Sounds like Free Will popping up again,” I mused.

“Of course. And it doesn’t have to involve life and death issues. For example, at the grocery store, you have Free Will to smile at the haggard cashier and thank her or to make the decision to treat her as if she is someone of no consequence. How many times a day – an hour – do you have the Free Will to extend compassion with a smile or a kind word? If you make the conscious choice to respond to your world in that fashion, you experience True Learning, which is what your task was when you set out on this earth experience – for humankind to come together and evolve into a deeper understanding of the Truth. And when you begin to live like this on a simple level, when the challenges do come, you will be more prepared to face them, no matter how difficult they may be.”

I gave this some thought before continuing. “It all sounds so simple. When I am here, it all makes so much sense and yet, when I am there...”

“It *is* simple, Soul. Once you incarnate, that which seems simple becomes complex, mired in the denseness of your plane. That’s one of the many reasons why living life on your plane is so challenging. It’s so easy to forget your mission, the task you accepted when you chose to come and experience the earth realm. When you agreed to reincarnate, you were filled with loving knowledge of all of this,” she smiled as she pointed to the beauty of the garden. “Through the

process of incarnation, most of you chose to lose that knowledge and spend the entire lifetime seeking answers.”

“That would be me,” I admitted. “Except many times I don’t even know the questions, so the answers seem pretty unobtainable.”

“Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”

“I’ve been seeking and knocking, but I don’t find many answers. Actually, speaking of answers, I went looking for them since we last spoke.”

“Looking for answers?” my guardian angel repeated with a perplexed look on her face. “Have you not learned that you hold all the answers for which you seek deeply within you now and always? Zeke was right. You don’t need to search for the path. You’re smack dab on it.” She looked at me and tapped a finger to her chin in thought. “No, Soul, I guess you have a way to go yet in learning that lesson. But, tell me what you did.”

“Well,” I began, suddenly unsure, “first I had my numerology done. It made several puzzling references to my childhood.”

“Like what?”

“Well, I think when I pulled down the veil, my memories went with the intuition. There are great gaps in my early days without memories. So, I was confused when there were mysterious references to things I cannot remember. I thought that if I could somehow unravel the mysteries, I might gain understanding, making further progress on my path.”

“So, what did you do?”

“I visited a regression therapist, hoping to discover past lives that would hold some answers for me in this life. For some reason, I not only couldn’t be regressed, but left disappointed and discouraged that I was somehow at fault for what I perceived as a failure.”

“Why did you react that way, do you think?”

“All the authors in all of the books I had read talked about how easy it is to be regressed and how it had answered so many questions for them. All of my friends who had been regressed felt the same way. I try it and fail.”

“I know that’s how you perceived it, Soul, but the time was not yet right for that. The timing was not set by God, but by you through the writing of your chart. But please, go on.”

A weight lifted from my heart as I continued, knowing that not only would she understand, but she would love me regardless of my earthly fumbling.

My angel smiled gently. “So have you found peace with all of this?”

“Oh no. To be honest, my desire for celestial understanding increased with each passing day. Several of us decided to attend a convention on spirituality one beautiful September day. I had never done anything like this, so it was very exciting. We spent the day attending lectures on a vast variety of spiritual topics, as well as wandering the convention hall, looking at books and wares to further progress the soul.”

My angel playfully wagged a finger at me and asked, “Books and wares will further progress the soul?”

I paused momentarily before answering. “I know you’re teasing, but I wonder sometimes if you truly understand the depth of my yearning. Here I was trying to live a serendipitous life, as you had suggested earlier, so I thought this might be the possible door to understanding. How could I not go and take it all in?”

“You’re right, of course, Soul. I know you need to follow your path. But let’s return to that convention. Did you find understanding at this event?”

“The whole day thrilled me as my mind absorbed all that I saw. There were many psychics offering their services, and after careful consideration, I sat down at one booth. He asked for my watch, held it in his hands and looked at me. After a moment of silence, he said that I was a great thinker, but that I think too much.

“You think too much?”

“Yeah, that’s what he said, but I could never figure out what to do about that one. What else do people do with their minds but think? Anyway, he said that I couldn’t get where I want to go by only thinking, and that he said that I will get where I wish to go, but that I need to learn how

to relax and let go before I find what I am looking for. I need to use my creativity combined with thinking to get there.

"He asked if I was trying to move to another state. I nodded and told him that it was to another spiritual state. He told me that I was already there, but I just didn't realize it yet. He equated it to driving a car or swimming: after you learn to do both, it's not a conscious effort to succeed, but an automatic response."

"Interesting. Letting go has come up again. Tell me, what was your response to this experience?"

"Oh, I'll get back to that in a moment. That wasn't all I experienced because I went to a second psychic that day."

"One wasn't enough?"

"I guess not," I admitted sheepishly. "I had watched an interesting tarot reader work and I figured I had already gone to one psychic, so why not another? I got in line and asked for a reading. After she said a quick prayer that only good would come from the reading, we began."

"She told me my cards were wonderful and related several things about my life and family."

"Were they true?"

"Yes, they were, but since most of them were things to come, I wasn't really sure. The ones concerning the present were about my soul, and who knows yet if any or all of that is true?"

"You do, Soul. You just don't know it yet. Go on."

"She told me I'm searching for something and working very hard at it and asked what it is. When I told her I am searching for spiritual development, she smiled and pointed to a card. Upon the card was a white-haired man standing in the snow, holding a lantern of light. She told me that not only would I find what I am searching for, but that it will come during the winter."

"This winter?"

I paused in thought, recalling the psychic's words. "She was quite specific, but only in terms of seasons, rather than a specific year. She said once the Understanding comes, I will have hurdles and challenges, but that I would conquer them all. The last card of the twelve caused her to positively glow. The picture held blooming daffodils and a crown. Not only will I find what I am seeking in the winter, but marvelous things and accomplishments will come to me in the spring. The archangel, Raphael, apparently, played a dominant part in the chosen cards."

"Raphael!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands merrily. "He's a particular favorite of mine!" I could only gaze at her and nod, having no knowledge of him. She continued. "Had you said anything about angels at this point?"

"No, but her mention of Raphael added a great deal of credence to what she had told me."

"So, what you're telling me is that you left that convention convinced that you had found your answers?"

"Well, yes, I think so. At last I had something to grasp. After several months of feeling directionless, I felt as if I had been given something precious – hope – and I frankly loved the feeling."

"What did your friends think of this experience?"

"They all found the entire day interesting, as well, although they paid dearly for it."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, they pick up energy vibrations so easily that by the end of the day, they were completely exhausted. Mary Lou felt it especially each time she walked down the healing demonstration aisles at the convention center. It was as if the healers were sucking energy from those who passed by the booth. As a result, her legs felt rubbery as if she could not even carry herself through the rest of the day. Actually, it was several days before they were able to find some sort of balance again."

"Were they as excited as you were to hear what happened at your readings?"

"While they joined in my happiness, they were very cautious and kept trying to tell me in gentle ways to take everything I experienced that day with a grain of salt – including the messages. Actually, I couldn't understand their hesitation. Here I was given clear direction that what I sought would be found and within six months. I was thrilled beyond words."

Epheniel gently placed her hand on mine. "Six months, Soul? I thought you said no year

was stated. Why did you assume that time frame?”

I thought a long moment before answering. “I think it was because of my intense desire for more than an intellectual understanding. Michael had told Deb that this would be a three-year journey. Surely, if I was really involved in part of that journey, I would be gaining Understanding I seek within that time frame. The ol’ *Whiz Bang Ending* thing happening here.”

When Epheniel nodded – a bit sadly, I curiously noted – I returned to our previous discussion. “I was heady with that short time period and my friends wanted me to slow down and make sure it rang true for me. I didn’t understand why they seemed to discourage my unbridled joy.”

“Do you understand now?”

“No, but that whole New Age thing worried them, too, I think. Having had deep spiritual connections all of their lives, they were better able to discern the whole experience than I might have been.”

“Interesting that you should use that phrase, Soul, *New Age*. How do your friends view New Agers?”

“Oh, they were worried that too many souls like me might get caught up in the glitz and glamour and the tapes and the books and the messages instead of focusing on the most important, yet non-glamorous part of it: seeking to deepen one’s own spirituality, as well as helping others do the same.”

“So you listened to your friends and tempered your excitement and expectations a bit?”

I couldn’t help it; I roared with laughter. “Are you kidding? If you had been in my shoes, I think you would have done the same thing. I thanked them for their concern and, being the very human human I am, I plunged headlong into the hope of the message. I viewed the challenges ahead as the precursor to spiritual understanding. I knew I could get through anything with the knowledge of what awaited me by the end of winter. I prayed to God and the entire celestial realm throughout this period: *You might as well let me in. You know you’re going to have to eventually because you know I’ll drive you crazy until you do! I’m not going away.* Even with my celestial nagging, however, Understanding eluded me, but at least I knew without a doubt that it would come within months.”

“Soul, remember, I was in your shoes that day, as always. I know it is often hard to see things the way they really are and not how we want them to be.”

We sat in silence a few moments, deep within our thoughts. Finally, Epheniel spoke. “What about now? How are your friends doing on this great adventure of yours?”

I grinned. “Oh, they’re fine. Mary Lou continues to get bombarded with visions and messages, some of which she understands and others she doesn’t. She amazes me with how she can cut right through the confusion and get to the heart of the message pretty easily.”

“And Deb?”

“Deb continues to work with Michael. It’s not an easy task, but she feels deeply honored to play a role in bringing to light the Michael Messages.”

Epheniel nodded and I continued. “Actually, she brought me a personal message from him not long ago, but was hesitant to pass it along because she doesn’t feel as if she is an authority by any means and is not very comfortable in her role as messenger.”

“Deb’s task is difficult. Did the message surprise you?”

“Very much. After she told me she had a message for me, she hesitated and began with I don’t think you’ll like this ...”

“What was your response to that?”

“Well, remember how insecure I’ve been with all of this?” Epheniel nodded. “When she began that way, I immediately guessed that Michael had decided at last that I was unworthy. I waited for her to tell me that I was no longer needed. I even decided in that split second that I would take the news without flinching or whining. It was only a matter of time anyway, I’d reasoned, until you guys realized the wrong human being had been tagged.”

“And was that the message?”

“No. Michael told Deb that he wanted me to write about reincarnation.”

“And your response?”

Before I could reply, I heard a far-off deep rumbling sound. Vroom. Vroom. Vroom. *Celestial thunder?* I glanced at Epheniel, who only smiled. I looked around as the sound continued to increase in volume and scanned my earthly memory banks. VROOM. VROOM. VROOM. *Hey, I recognize that sound – that’s a motorcycle!* VROOM! VROOM! VROOM! *A very powerful motorcycle!*

A moment later, I was proved correct. The largest, most powerful, black, gleaming motorcycle I had ever seen came roaring into the peaceful garden, scattering the tiny faerie gardeners. They chattered in response, but it was a joyful sound, not one of frustration. *No road rage up here,* I mused. There was no question in my mind who would swing his heavenly legs off that motorbike.

“Hey, Bruce, Eppie, what’s shakin’?”

Michael was dressed in black leather from his close fitting, fringed jacket to his tall boots. His hair was tucked under a red and black handkerchief, tied neatly at the back. He removed his sunglasses and grinned.

“Hi, Michael,” I replied. “Just chatting. Hey, no helmet?”

“Yet another perk of immortality, Bruce – no need for helmets!”

“Then why the leather if you don’t need protection?”

“Cause I look good in it, silly human!” He struck a pose and I laughed. He swaggered over. “You guys wanna go for a ride?”

I looked at Epheniel and tried to hide the yearning from my face. She laughed and nodded. I fairly pranced back to the bike.

“Do I need protection?”

Michael and Epheniel chuckled. Most likely at my expense. “When are you gonna learn that you are already protected, Bruce? You are always under our protection and guidance, but what I think you’re really asking is if you can look as cool as I do, right?”

I grinned in reply and in a heartbeat, I looked down to see a soft, fawn-colored, fringed, suede jacket and pants. Soft matching boots covered my feet.

“Leather and suede?” I asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Faux, Soul, faux!” chuckled the archangel.

My hair was also tucked up under a cream colored handkerchief. I was delighted. I looked up at Epheniel and found that she, too, had switched from her flowing gown to match my own. She clicked her fingers and a smaller version of the bike appeared.

“You go ahead and ride with Michael,” she suggested. “I’ll tag along behind you.”

Michael hopped onto the bike and patted the seat behind him. “Let’s rumble, Bruce! Let me show you some sights!” Eagerly, I swung my leg over and automatically wrapped my arms around the archangel. “Go ahead and hang on if you think you need it, but I promise you won’t fall off. Cross my heart. Just sit back and enjoy the ride!”

“How about if I start out this way and see what this ride is like before making any decisions?”

“Always the cautious human! Hey, whatever floats your boat!” Michael looked at Epheniel, who gave him a thumbs up. The angels revved their bikes – loudly – very loudly – before thundering off across the garden. This time, the garden devas stood out of harm’s way, waving merrily.

We rode at a tremendous clip and my arms stayed tightly wrapped around Michael’s waist. I was terrified and closed my eyes, hunkering down as low as I could get, trying to concentrate on just staying on the bike. My fear was evident.

“Whatd’ya think, Bruce? Isn’t this beautiful?” Michael finally yelled, his voice barely registering over the rumbling.

“I c-c-c-can only see the b-b-back of your jack-k-k-ket!” I yelled through chattering teeth. My arms were beginning to ache with the strain of trying to control my hold. I pondered my sanity in agreeing to the ride.

Suddenly, Michael was inside of my mind. An unearthly peace filled every crevice of my being, and I found myself relaxing my grip until I realized that my hands were sitting gently on my lap. My teeth stopped chattering and I breathed deeply. I looked around and gasped with the

beauty of my surroundings.

Still working out control issues, I see, Bruce.

I stumbled for the right thoughts to reply. *But I was afraid*, I finally stammered.

Michael was not the least bit sympathetic. *Before we got on the bike, what did I tell you?*

That I was protected – that I am always under protection. That I wouldn't fall off. That I should just relax and enjoy the ride.

And did you?

I hung my head. *No. I was too busy trying to control what was happening.*

Anything in that statement ring a bell, Bruce?

Yeah. My life. I was quiet a moment, absorbing the lush and bountiful colors surrounding me. In my fear, I almost missed this.

When you choose to live in fear, you miss the beauty of the Earth experience, for like living a life of love and joy, living in fear is a choice. Yes, your reaction was a control issue, but something else needs your attention, Bruce. Think.

My heart sunk, knowing I had failed Michael's test with flying and thundering colors. He was quick to speak.

Don't let fear-based ego get in the way, Bruce. For Pete's sake, stop beating yourself up. All we ask is that you learn. You chose to come to Earth and learn. He paused. So, what did you learn?

I pulled my eyes from the beauty of the surroundings and went deeply inside myself. I sent my ego packing and took a deep breath. *I can do this.*

Of course you can. Every human is equipped with the capability to do this if they choose.

Okay. First, I have to remember not to live in fear so I don't miss the beauty of the Earth experience.

And what else?

Trust. The other thing that needs my attention is trust. Right?

Bingo! Bruce, let's be frank here. You trust others, but don't trust yourself. What's up with that? You also have faith and trust when Life is going along pretty easily, but what about those long-term challenges you selected?

I allow fear-based ego to get the upper hand and forget that I am protected and that all is unfolding as it must. Without my earthly-self input.

Yep. Right on, Bruce! If given that choice, who would elect to live in fear when you're gonna miss all this beauty in the process?

Lots of humans, Michael. Including me, 'way too often, I'm afraid. Michael coughed. *No, that wasn't beating myself up, Angel, that was stating a fact. I vow to work on both the trust and control issues, for they both stem from living in fear.*

Sounds wise. Look up ahead, Bruce. There's a spectacular waterfall I think you'll like.

We rode a little longer and I reveled in the experience. Michael slowed his bike to a low rumble and pointed. The most spectacular crystal-clear waterfall never to be found on the earth realm was almost close enough to touch. A little park bench invited us to sit. When only Epheniel and I dismounted, I turned to Michael.

"Not coming?"

"Gotta split, but you two enjoy. I loved chatting with you, but duty calls! You can ride back with Eppie!" He revved the engine loudly and grinned.

"Thanks for the ride, Michael," I called. "And the lesson!"

"My pleasure, Bruce. See you later!" And with another deep rumbling, Michael thundered off. I turned to my guardian angel.

"He's something else, isn't he?"

"Yes, Beloved, you are, too." She motioned to the bench. "Shall we sit and you can continue to tell me about Michael's message to you."

We settled quickly on the bench and drank in the beauty of the falls. I thought back to the story. "Well, when Deb shared his message, I about fell over. *Reincarnation?* I told Deb that I would be glad to follow his directions and would certainly do it, but did he realize that of the three of us, I knew the least about all of this stuff? I could research it, but could write about it only from

an intellectual viewpoint. With hundreds of books written by hundreds of experts in the field, why was I being asked to write on that subject, as well? I asked her that if she had time, I would appreciate more clarification from him. Within half an hour, Deb called back.

"Michael wants you to start on reincarnation from the intellectual plane because that's where you are right now. But, later, with help from Epheniel, your father and me, you will be brought to another plane."

I paused as I recalled the experience. Epheniel waited. I finally looked back at her. "You? My father? That news was just as thrilling as the news that eventually there would be another plane for me besides the human, intellectual one I seemed stuck on. Deb went on to say that she wasn't sure why, but she knew she was supposed to pass this message on to me before I left for school. We chatted briefly about other things and hung up.

"As I went about finishing breakfast dishes and straightening up, I pondered the timing. Before I left for school, I sat in a comfortable chair, turned on some quiet music and closed my eyes. First, I told you that I was here and open to anything and everything, and all you had to do was communicate with me in a manner that I could understand. I told you I was excited about our task and waited to see if there might be some communication. When there was none, I tried to connect with a different person."

"Hi, Dad! I hear that you, Epheniel, Deb and I are going to work on a project together. I want you to know how much I love you. As soon as those words crossed my mind, my body was flooded with goose bumps – except they weren't normal goose bumps, but something quite extraordinary. I grinned and said that I knew that he loved me, too. After almost twenty-one years, I still miss you. Once again, as soon as this message flashed to him across my mind, I was again flooded with goose bumps. I told him I looked forward to it all and said good-bye – for now – and left for school." I sighed again, still glowing from the memory.

"Speaking of my father, apparently, he occasionally stops by to say hello to Deb. One morning soon after that goose-bump episode, Deb came to see me before school to say that he had once again visited her. She said she'd been rather grumpy with him, telling him that he should go talk with me, not her. He laughed and said that as a baby, I wanted to walk before I crawled and run before I walked. When Deb told me, she asked if I knew if it was true. That night, I called my mother and asked if she could verify. She remembered the first part vividly, saying that I was always a bundle of energy, but her memory failed her on the second. But it didn't matter; my father was obviously making a statement about my total lack of patience." A snicker was distinctly heard from the presence in the adjoining chair. "Okay. All right, already. Point taken."

"Patience," interrupted my angel. "I seem to recall that being a major issue in your life we chose for you, Soul. It appears that has yet to be resolved."

"Well, I still have trouble remembering all of our discussions before this lifetime, but it doesn't surprise me at all," I agreed. "But I'm working on it! Oh, we decided to have another angel party about this time. D'you want to hear about it?" When she nodded, I continued. "We'd fallen into a pattern of having them about once a month. Sometimes there were just the three of us; other times, someone else would join us, as was the case at the October party. Four of us met at Deb's house that Friday night. Our friend, Cathy, had worked on getting her angel's name with some frustration. She had decided that the name didn't matter – she knew her angel was working with her. I marveled at her patience, remembering my own impatience.

"Deb and Mary Lou had gone shopping together several weeks earlier and were having a marvelous time until two women walked into the same small shop. The atmosphere in the shop changed instantly when the women arrived; they were both angry. Just as it happened at the convention center the previous month, Deb and Mary Lou were physically affected by the negative energy bombarding them. After talking about it, Deb discussed it with Michael and found out that Michael had placed those women in their path to help Deb and Mary Lou understand what he termed thought pollution. Furthermore, Michael wanted us to use the opportunity of the Angel party to discuss thought pollution and find ways to heal it. He asked us not to brainstorm the topic, but to *heartstorm* it at our gathering, so we knew we had a task ahead of us.

"We decided that heartstorming meant to discuss a topic, using our Higher Selves and the

Big Picture, so that's precisely what we did. We discussed the energy behind our thoughts – both positive and negative. After we had thoroughly heartstormed thought pollution, we began to discuss the vision Deb had earlier received from Michael that week: our angels. He had showed himself with his sword, slicing and clearing away anything that might hinder Deb's understanding. Deb informed me that you're a beautiful angel who loves me a great deal and whispers in my ear." I glanced over to find my angel radiating love, which coursed through my being. I closed my eyes and let it flow throughout me before continuing.

"Were you thrilled, Soul?"

I nodded. "Beyond words, although I asked Deb to pass along a message to you: *Try a bullhorn!* But to return to the vision, we were amazed to hear that Loiteim, Mary Lou's angel, was not one angel, but three: a male presence behind her and female entities at either side.

"The next piece of news rocked us. A very upset Deb called me several nights before the angel party to say that Michael had informed her that we were ready to take a big step to honor our courage: he would use Deb as a channel to communicate with us at our party. Deb was frantic because she had no desire to leave her body and go off somewhere while Michael moved in."

"Moved in?" repeated Epheniel. I nodded.

"Deb was upset for a while and then calmed down. I reminded her that while she had Free Will in all of this, Michael had broken the news three days early so that she could have the time she needed to adjust to it.

"Aha!" grinned my angel. "So, you do have a role in all of this, eh?"

I returned the grin and shrugged. Good point, Angel. An immediate reply reverberated through my head: *Thank you.*

I grinned again and continued. "Michael had told her that all conditions must be right for the channeling to take place, so there was no certainty that it would even happen. He also stressed that since this was the first time for Deb, for her sake, his visit would be brief. I had asked Deb earlier if Michael wanted his visit tape recorded, but he had told her that wasn't necessary; we could take notes if we wished."

Epheniel asked, "How did you and Mary Lou respond to the news?"

"Mary Lou was uncharacteristically without words and shaken to the point of tears when Deb told her. All week she was overwhelmed with thoughts that she was unworthy to be present at such an event. By the night of the party, Mary Lou had the beginnings of a migraine, which we all felt was the result of her anxiety and excitement.

"And you?"

"Me? Nothing surprised me anymore. I, too, was speechless for a moment and then filled with awe. Try as I might with my spirituality, I felt I was still at the crawling stage while Deb and Mary Lou had long ago crawled, then walked, ran, and now were soaring. I frankly didn't know enough to be nervous, so I wasn't."

"*Blissfully ignorant,*" repeated Epheniel, remembering my earlier description.

I cast my eyes down modestly. "What can I say? And I'm darn good at it, I might add. Anyway, very early the morning of the party, Sandy, my friend who had initiated everything by giving me the book about angels and knew of our plans for the evening, called and told me that she could feel a gathering of gentle entities making their way into Deb's house. She also asked to give her regards to Michael. Sandy now knew that she had worked with him at an earlier time or life and wished to pay her respects. Deb also knew loving entities were beginning to gather in her home early. When Deb went to the store to purchase items needed for the party, she found herself meandering through the aisles. Very clearly came a voice previously unheard: *Go home!* Needless to say, Deb went directly to the cash register, paid for her purchases and went home to spiritually prepare herself for what lay ahead.

"When Cathy, Mary Lou and I arrived, Deb offered us a glass of wine, as Michael had directed her to do. We lit our many candles around the room and settled in. As always, we began with gratitude. We read our selections, keeping in mind thought pollution, and heartstormed the subject as Michael had asked. Several hours had already passed and everything was unfolding as was foretold. It was during the readings that I glanced over to Mary Lou and noticed that she

was sniffing the air, although there was no apparent change in scent in the room. Knowing that Mary Lou used all of her senses with her intuition, I suspected something was up. She reported smelling roses, which often precede gatherings of angels. Within moments, Mary Lou felt a heavy presence. Deb smiled and said that it was Michael and that she would center herself. It seemed to be time.

I paused in the retelling, drinking in the beauty of the moment. Letting go of fear-based ego and control. Trusting. Epheniel waited.

“Deb settled herself on the sofa, crossed her legs underneath her, leaned forward and became quiet. The only sounds in the room were the quiet music and the muffled life and laughter of Deb’s family in the other parts of the house. Within a minute, Deb started to laugh and straightened. She said that Michael had told her that she needed to work on self-discipline before he could use her as a true channel, speaking in first person. He was afraid that she would so enjoy being out there while he was using her body that she would not want to come back. So, until he knew she had perfected discipline in this matter, he would speak to us through her in a second-person role.”

“So you all agreed to this?” asked my angel.

I looked at her blankly. “Who besides Deb would even consider arguing with an archangel? Anyway, she went back under to listen to what he wanted to tell us and then pass it on to us.

“Michael first announced himself. We sat in awe for a moment before the rest of us started to take notes feverishly, hoping to get down verbatim what he had to say. Through Deb, he talked quickly, however, and we each came away with only snatches of notes. He told us that he had come to accelerate the work with our angels, wanting us to integrate with each of them. He then spoke of each.”

“*Loiteim is an entity that chose to split into three to help Mary Lou find the balance. Besides Loiteim, she has Corinne and Celeste. When Mary Lou is ready and she has learned to center her- self and balance, these three entities will become one and then integrate with her.*”

“Next, Michael gave Cathy her angel’s name and told her that she and her angel were both permeated with silvery strands of strength. I didn’t understand the message, but apparently, she did, for she began to cry quietly and later told us that the hairs on the back of her neck bristled while he talked about her angel.

“When Michael said the name Epheniel, I couldn’t contain the grin that spread across my face – I couldn’t wait to learn more about you. As you know, I don’t have the ability to remember our time spent together like this and had yearned to know more about you and here I was in this very special gathering of angels. I was ecstatic. *‘Epheniel does the dance of dawn, remembrance – of recognition. She does this through sounds and words. In fact, your whole family will use sounds and words to grow.’* I was thunderstruck with my message. *Remembrance? Recognition?* These were about my angel when there was so much of my early life that I couldn’t remember? Why?

“Michael then said he had a vision concerning our husbands, who all had been under great amounts of stress. Ever since our first party, each of us had prayed for them as our first petitions in order for help in easing their situations. The vision that Deb described was a stream with big rocks. It was beautiful, but there was growth – plants – on the rocks with their roots growing under the rocks, but the plants desired to be free. A chisel could be used to free the plants, but that would be too risky. Over time, the water flowing over the rocks would eventually free the plants. Michael told us that our husbands were in different stages of understanding. Some were the plants, but some were working to free the plants.”

I glanced over to Epheniel, who was totally absorbed in listening to the retelling of the events. She asked, “What did you think of that message, Soul?”

“Well, I could not speak for the other husbands, but I knew with certainty that Keith, in his quiet, loving way, was one working to free the plants.” She nodded.

“A shocking thing then occurred: Michael asked if we had any questions. I told him Sandy had sent her regards. There was a pause and then Deb smiled. *‘Loved one. She can read and understand with the Creator. Loved one.’*”

“What a wonderful message for your friend,” sighed my angel. I nodded.

"It meant a great deal to her when I delivered the message the next day. That message helped Deb, though, as well. Up until that point, as Deb told us later, she had thought that when Michael used that phrase with her, *Loved One* meant *Beloved One*, referring to Deb, alone. She knew when he said it with regard to our friend that *Loved One* meant *Loved with the One: Creator, referring to all Life*.

"Michael then asked if there were other questions. I looked at Mary Lou and Cathy, wondering if they had any to ask. When neither showed any sign of wishing to do so, I took a deep breath and jumped in. 'What can I do to get to where I want to be?' A long moment passed before the answer came.

"What do you want?"

"I was thunderstruck. Not having been at a channeling session before, I had had no idea that we would be permitted to ask questions and I wanted to be able to phrase my question honestly and intelligently. My mind raced. How do I put all that I want into mere words? Moments passed and I realized that I needed to come up with something. 'I want to be able to communicate more and be where my friends are.' As soon as I said it, I realized how humanly trite and hollowly whining it sounded. I was a bit ashamed of asking for something that obviously wasn't mine yet to have.

"Deb smiled. 'Marty, ever Martha! When you were a child, do you remember sharing a cookie with an invisible friend?'"

"My heart sunk. *Here we go again. More memories that I'm supposed to have that aren't there*. I replied that I didn't have that memory."

"Be as a child. Remember what it feels like to share with your friend."

"Knowing that my message was over, I glanced at Mary Lou. She said nothing, so I asked about our husbands and their angels. When he finished, I looked over at Mary Lou, urging her with my eyes to ask a question. She and her husband were leaving for Ireland in a few weeks and she took a deep breath and asked what she was to learn during her upcoming journey.

"There was no answer. We looked up from our note taking and Deb was rubbing her eyes and was back with us. It took her several minutes to get over feeling fragmented and scrambled. She was cold and shaking. She told us that Michael had not stopped the conversation; she had. She wanted to show him that she had self-discipline because she loved being out there, but knew she had to come back. She arrived, crashing herself back into reality, somewhat like a deep-ocean diver coming up too quickly from an ocean depth.

"We discussed the visit at length because Deb remembered some, but not all of the conversation. Mary Lou could sense exactly where Corinne and Celeste were within her and was so pleased to know their names at last. Cathy was overcome with the revelation of her angel's name and the entire experience.

"My friends asked me what I was feeling. I told them honestly that I was confused. I understood nothing. I remembered nothing, yet that seemed to be precisely what was expected of me. I had been told before that I could get to where I wanted to be not through an intellectual process, but a feeling one. I felt as if everyone had been given a Sugar Honey Puff Bombs decoder ring but me. It made just as much sense to me as if Michael had said, '*The secret to Enlightenment is: klfenml bpvquhg wlcop tvxalz. Now go out and do just that and all will be revealed to you.*'"

Glancing over at Epheniel, my tears threatened to spill. "*Marty, ever Martha*. I felt scolded – gently so – but scolded nonetheless. I felt as if I was being asked to jump through hoops in order to move to another plane. It wasn't that I minded jumping through the hoops. I knew I had to be spiritually ready in order to make such a leap. I also knew Michael's favorite sayings by heart: *Too much too soon would be unhealthy. You are where you are supposed to be on your path at this moment*. I would gladly jump through as many hoops as were needed, but felt as if those hoops were in a pitch-black room and the hoops were constantly moving, so I couldn't find them to even try to jump through them."

Epheniel picked up my hands and held them lovingly. She knew the depth of my feelings and my need to express them now. I had held them inside of my heart long enough. "Be careful of what you ask for; you just might get it. I had heard that often enough from Deb and Mary Lou,

but I was like someone dying from thirst – my every waking thought was working toward quenching it. Simply, I had an overwhelming, burning desire to understand and feel my Connection with God.”

I slipped one hand out of Epheniel's and quickly wiped my eyes. Feeling my pain, Epheniel gently picked up my hands and held them softly in hers. “So what did you say when they asked for your thoughts?”

“I just smiled and said I had to give it a lot more thought, but I felt as if I was doing it all wrong since nothing appeared to be happening. *Be as a child*. What's that mean? I turned the phrase over in my mind, hoping to discover a meaning that would ring true with me. What does a child do? She trusts that she will be cared for. She plays. She spends time with those who love her and with whom she loves. She laughs. She delights in simple pleasures. She is impatient and stomps her foot when not given what she wants the moment she wants it. She cries when things don't go her way.”

I paused and the grin returned to my face. “You don't even have to say it, Epheniel. I knew that was the perfect description of my spiritual life.”

Epheniel gently interrupted. “*Be as a child*. Might there be another explanation of that message, Soul?” I cocked an eyebrow in surprise and she continued. “Remember, you chose to reinstate the veil. In order to complete your chosen tasks, the memories of that connection would have to have been severed.”

Shock must have registered on my face, for she laughed softly. “Just something to think about, Soul. Remember, when you were born, there was no veil before you eyes. In your anxiety that your intuition would not be used for good, you slammed the veil back into place. With that went those memories. *Be as a child*. Remember that just as you placed the veil, it is up to you to remove it.”

“But how? If someOne could just give me the instruction manual on veil removal, I would do it in a heartbeat.”

“Hmm. How did Michael phrase it?”

“*Long-term trust?*”

Epheniel nodded. “All is unfolding as it must. When it is time, you will know. Trust. As for interpreting earthly experiences, remember to discern what is for you and let the rest go, as much as you might like it. It is wise to be open to other possibilities so that you can continue to view the macrocosm.” I nodded and continued the tale.

“We slowly brought our angel gathering to a close with petitions and continued love and laughter. We rehashed everything as we straightened up and prepared to go home. Mary Lou had baked cookies for the party and as she wrapped them, I asked for one. She offered them all, but I said I needed only one as a symbol to put by my bed in hopes that Epheniel might have been my invisible cookie friend. Last hugs were exchanged and we went home at 2 a.m.

“As soon as I got home, however, a sense of disappointment came over me. I'd left my rose quartz crystal candle holder at Deb's house. I'd lit a candle at night for you every night for the last month and here was the night when I'd been hoping to communicate with you at last and the candle had been left behind.

“Rituals are not important, Soul. You're remembering that books and wares will not further progress the soul, right?”

“Yeah,” I said, “I'm remembering, but anyway, I took a shower and went to bed in the dark, quiet room, quickly thanking God and you for all of my blessings. When I awoke the next morning, my head was facing up toward the bedside lamp. For the second time since June, the light had somehow been turned on and was shining brightly down upon me.

“Again, I was filled with a sense of awe and gently turned off the light. But, for twenty-four hours, I submersed myself with much-needed physical and mental activity because as bizarre as this may sound, even with the gifts of Michael's profoundly moving visit and the bedside lamp, I was upset and confused.

“I didn't understand my path. I didn't understand how to even find the path. But I also knew that my burning desire would never cease, try as I might to live a life without feeling the Connection. Someday I may even be given the key to unlock my hidden memories, but the desire to gain

understanding of the Light would always burn brightly within me. And just maybe that was what Michael meant when he said, *Marty, ever Martha*. That pure, unbridled childhood excitement for Life has remained inside of me as I search for not only an intellectual, adult understanding, but a deeply emotional and spiritual one, as well."

Epheniel pulled me toward her and we sat together like that for a long time. Suddenly, I didn't feel quite so all alone.

.....

Cosmic Law

Know that just as love is returned in full measure, so is negativity. Center yourself in the truth of love at all times and radiate your cosmic heritage. Loved one, know that there is much power in the thought forms sent into the universe. Cosmic Law ensures whatever energy is sent out from you will return in full measure, whether it be love, hate, fear, compassion, etc.

Can you be more specific and explain how this happens? [After asking that question, a vision was received. Its description follows.] Vision: I see the life force or energy surrounding an individual soul. I focus on one single beam of energy. The beam goes out into the universe, collecting like particles of energy and returning to the originating soul.

Loved One, focus on a single beam of energy in thought form emanating from a soul. During the thought's conception, it is propelled into the universe. The strength of the thought form determines the rate of velocity or how far this beam will go. As it travels, it attracts and collects the same kind of energy. When the strength of the propulsion has been depleted, the energy beam will return to the same soul with all the like energy still attached to it. Ergo, a thought, feeling or action centered in positive or negative energy returns in full measure.

Remember, the strength of your thought forms determine their power. They can be so strong your soul may be in a different lifetime when they return. Cosmic Law guarantees the same soul will collect his/her energy on return to the earth realm. Your Higher Self knows it must be claimed as yours.

In your extrapolation of Cosmic Law, know it is incorrect to judge negativity as being wrong. As a child, you learned that touching a flame would cause pain. Through this negative experience, you learned and remembered not to touch a flame. So it is with all learning experiences. No matter how difficult the lesson is, your Higher Self will seek positive and negative energy to enable you to learn and grow.

Balance between positive and negative will lead to truth. Center in your own resonations of truth, Dear One, and claim your cosmic heritage of balance, beauty and light.

Thought Pollution

Loved One, you are developing an awareness of pollution on your planet and the necessity for finding ways to eliminate it if you wish to continue to live on Earth. You are aware of water, air, soil and noise pollution. There is another pollutant also generated by mankind just as threatening to your environment: thought pollution.

You have always considered your thoughts as separate from other life entities and rarely consider the effect your thoughts have on others. You tell yourself that only actions count. You go out to tend your garden with negative thoughts and wonder why you are not successful. Politicians meet with nothing but their own individual agenda on their minds and wonder why nothing is accomplished. You go through the motions of listening to your children when your thoughts are in chaos and wonder why the children rebel. You have forgotten that thoughts are made of energy and the kind of thoughts you are having is the kind of energy you are sending.

Remember, under Cosmic Law, this is the same kind of energy that will come back to you.

In order to comprehend the true power of thought pollution, allow yourself to feel the difference between these two environments. First, enter a room where people are relaxed and enjoying each other's company. Feel the connection and flow taking place as people share thoughts and ideas with one another. Observe the energy in the room. Look at the people. Their eyes are bright, their mouths are smiling or laughing. Some are talking, some listening, some simply being, because it is a place of love and acceptance. How do you feel being there? Do you feel yourself smiling? Now, enter a room where people are thinking thoughts of fear, insecurity and animosity toward each other. How does it make you feel? Can you feel your shoulders starting to droop, your face begins to tighten up and your feet begin to drag? No one has even spoken to you yet, so why are you feeling so worn out? The answer is thought pollution. It is real.

Know you are not powerless against thought pollution. Walk into the last room again, determined to keep your thoughts positive. Notice the intrinsic good in people that you know is there. See each individual, one by one, as the Creator would see him or her. Suddenly, you hear someone laugh, then another smile and a heaviness begins to lift. You see, people can be thought purifiers as well as thought polluters!

There are many forms of thought purifiers for you to utilize. If you allow yourself to feel the many different means available to you, you will know what is just right for you. For some, it is being with animals, petting and playing with them. For others, physical activity or listening to music seems to purify their thoughts. Begin to live in the moment, working with thoughts of love for yourself, your planet and each other. Open your hearts to one another, sharing ideas on how to change thought pollution. Heartstorm instead of brainstorm. Allow your focus to center on being the best you can be. Just taking responsibility for your own thoughts is a giant leap toward higher consciousness. You will be giving a tremendous gift to everyone and everything around you. Contemplate what your planet will be like when everyone accepts this responsibility!

Chapter 5

Late April

As I approached the massive doors, I considered knocking, but then on a whim, quietly opened the door myself and slipped into the Great Hall. Much had happened on the earth realm these last five months and I was anxious to talk to my angel. I took a moment to allow my eyes to adjust before making my way down the corridor. I spotted Zeke chatting with another entity and waved at him. He grinned and waved back. Within moments, I was again standing before what used to be my angel's door, but somehow it looked different. I knocked gently and poked my head into the room. "Hey, what happened to that old, plain wooden door you used to have? You guys having trouble with celestial termites?"

Epheniel smiled and rose to greet me. "No, Soul, there are no celestial termites. You are changing the door as you face and make decisions that will further your path during your earth journey."

I considered her words and looked at the door, which stood slightly glowing before me. "I did that?" I asked. "Cool. Definitely cool."

"I'm so glad you returned, Soul. I know you have a lot of questions, but I do, too. Come sit with me," Epheniel said as she glided across the room to embrace me, "and maybe we can find the answers together."

In a few moments, after we had comfortably arranged ourselves, Epheniel spoke. "You seem agitated, Soul. What is it?"

"Well, I know we each are given the choice of having a guardian angel when we incarnate, who sees us through each lifetime."

"Not necessarily."

"Not necessarily? Are you telling me that some of us don't get an angel?"

"No, Soul. What I am telling you is that some get more than one."

"Like Mary Lou." Epheniel nodded and I continued. "So why does someone get more than one?"

"You can think of it this way. Once upon a time, space and dimension before Mary Lou's present incarnation, she and many other light beings were excitedly discussing what she hoped to accomplish this life. And when the discussion was finished, many of them wanted to come along and join her in her chosen tasks. Some happened to be souls about to embark on their own incarnations and some happened to be angels."

"Hmmm," I mused. "That puts another spin on this whole angel thing, doesn't it? I always felt we were on a lesser level than the angels."

"That's your humanity showing, Soul. Look at this through the eyes of your Higher Self. You are a pure light being, just like those on the celestial realm. The only difference is that you have chosen to come to this difficult plane to garner further learning and understanding. You and the angels are partners in these tasks rather than you being subservient to us. Rather than thinking yourself unworthy of our help and having to beseech us on your knees, just talk to us as you would a partner." She peered closely at me. "Do you understand, Soul?" I nodded and she continued.

"Now, when a soul – any soul – is going through some difficult challenges, sometimes extra angels have been commissioned by you ahead of time to be brought into the situation in order to lend light, love and support."

"Kind of like an angelic SWAT team?"

Epheniel nodded. "Working with the angels is actually reconnecting with old friends from the other realm. We stay until the task has been completed and then move on to another soul's task. Sometimes, however, a soul chooses to experience a challenge without angelic support, so we honor that request, as well."

I gasped. "No guardian angels? They're left alone on this plane?"

Epheniel patted my hand. "A soul is not being abandoned, but remember that this is a team effort, so team decisions were made and each member of that team has a specific role to play in order to make this great earth experiment work."

"Earth experiment? You've alluded to that before. You just mean souls experiencing the human journey, right?"

She shook her head. "You and all other souls journeying the earth realm have chosen to help move as one toward the Light. In order to accomplish such an undertaking, a great number and variety of light entities have agreed to help, as well. This is a monumental task with perhaps the largest team effort in the Universe!"

"The Great Earth Experiment, eh?" I mused. "Tell me, is this the first of its kind?"

Epheniel shook her head. "No, there have been other attempts, but they failed. This time, however, there are great hopes for success."

"Why now?" I asked.

"This time, tremendous challenges were inserted with the earth realm – its density, your survival instinct..."

I stopped her with a protesting arm wave. "Whoa, wait just a minute there! What do mean, *your survival instinct*? I get the density thing, but why wouldn't the survival instinct help us in our goals instead of be a challenge?"

"That instinct is *personal* survival, Soul, not moving toward the Light as one. That primal urge – Ego – goes directly against what we hope to accomplish, but without overcoming it, there can be no success." She paused a moment in thought. "Perhaps the strongest challenge faced on this realm is the feeling of disconnection from the Light."

I shook my head ruefully. "Boy, I get that one." I paused to recall her earlier statements. "So what you're telling me is that when the other experiments took place, the conditions were different?" She nodded. "Wow. Are you allowed to tell me about those other experiments or is it against some rule around here?"

"Sure, I can tell you anything you want to know if it will help your soul to progress. All you have to do is ask. One of the previous experiments was the devic realm experiment, but since those light beings were fully connected to the Light, there was no basic desire to move as one toward the Light."

"So it flopped, huh?"

Epheniel arched her delicate eyebrows and gave me a long look, reminiscent of my mother's when I was a child and had burped in public. "Casting judgment, Soul?"

"Hey!" I protested, holding up a hand. "You're the one who said it failed, not me, Angel." I leaned close to her, put my arm around her and whispered, "Any other big ol' flops you want to tell me about?" Suddenly, I was feeling considerably more highly evolved. After all, I was a

participant in the Great Earth Experiment. I sat up a little straighter and Epheniel couldn't help but laugh.

"We're all involved in this one, Soul – all the realms, including those which you term *flops*. As for your question, another answer is intergalactic beings."

"What?!" I squealed. "You've got to be kidding!"

"I'm not kidding," she serenely replied.

"So what you're saying is that dragons and little green men are all part of this somehow? How?"

She sniffed. "What is your fascination with little green men, Soul? I prefer the term *intergalactic* and *interdimensional beings*, but, yes, they are involved. They were part of previous experiments and are extremely interested in the progress of this one, so travel in and out of this realm from time to time, checking on it, and giving help as needed."

"That's pretty far out there, Angel. You do realize that, don't you?"

"Humanity is limited ..."

"Yeah, yeah, I know... only by its imagination. Boy, you just gave me a whole lot to think about." I was quiet a long moment, knowing it was time to share my journey with my angel guide, yet not quite understanding how to begin. *Just spit it out for Pete's sake!* I took a breath. "With all that team effort, it must have gotten very crowded around me these last few months. I expect you and my support team have logged a lot of overtime. Hopefully, you guys all got at least time and a half."

"So tell me why you're really here today."

I nervously fiddled with my fingers for a moment. She waited silently and patiently for me to speak. "Well, things started happening slowly the week following the angel party and then quickly picked up speed. One early morning meditation finally brought me into theta state."

"How did you know it was theta state?" Epheniel asked.

"I felt suddenly thrust deep inside myself – just like before. I continued to relax and without warning, a pale blue edge of color formed around the top of my mind. In my typically highly evolved-type neophyte reaction, I blurted out silently, *What is that?* The color continued for another minute or so and my mind slowly faded back to black. I thanked you or my Higher Self, not knowing who sent it and acknowledged my blessing. I had read enough books by this point to understand that blue light was a healing light and I was grateful for the gift I'd been given." I glanced over to see a gentle smile of encouragement.

"During the next day's meditation, again I was surprised to feel the same deep plunging within myself and knew something might be coming. Sure enough, I suddenly felt as if granite had been inserted inside of me. The amazing thing was, as soon as I felt it, I knew it was granite. I figured that I had just been given a gift of strength. That feeling, too, lasted about a minute before fading slowly away.

"Within days of that experience, Deb relayed a personal message to me from Michael: *I would be presented with a series of personal emotional challenges in the coming months*. Immediately, I connected the granite strength with the challenges to come."

"So you're getting to know Michael?"

I looked at her, wondering why she would ask such a question. "On this realm, yes. I love our relationship, but on the earth realm, no. Deb knows him. I only know of him through her experiences." Epheniel nodded and a small, knowing smile crossed her face.

Suddenly, Epheniel's office darkened and a blindingly bright spotlight highlighted a stage that had not been there moments before. A voice pierced the room.

"Live! Just back from Vegas, it's Michael – of archangel fame!"

Michael appeared in the spotlight. He was looking more dapper than any of his previous garb. He was dressed all in white: a perfectly pressed and form-fitting tuxedo with a pale pink/opalescent cummerbund. He wore a pale pink boutonniere in his lapel and white, spit-shined shoes on his feet. His hair was perfectly coiffed. In one hand he carried a white, pearl-topped cane; in the other a white top hat. He spun around for effect and then picked up a microphone, which had also not been there moments before. He slid the hat down his arm and popped it onto his head.

He motioned to what appeared to be invisible orchestra, but as I strained my eyes to see, I realized that the garden faeries had returned – with tiny instruments – all dressed in a similar manner as Michael. The faerie conductor flew forward and tapped her wand on a tiny music stand. A hush fell over the room. Suddenly, the faerie orchestra began at full orchestra volume and I fell under its lilting spell. Michael began to tap dance around the stage, awaiting his cue. *Wait just a moment. I know that tune!*

“Tiptoe to the window...” Michael crooned, as a grin spread across my face. “by the window ...” The archangel danced around the stage. “... that is where I’ll be ...” He swayed and danced as if he were in a Vegas revue, but his movements were gigantic, as if he were playing to a crowded stadium. “Come tiptoe ...” He got down on one knee, singing only to me. “... through the tulips with me!” He spun around and just as suddenly as he had appeared, Michael – and the faerie orchestra – vanished.

I turned to Epheniel, who was still giggling. “Do you know what has been one of the biggest surprises about coming to visit you?” I asked. She lifted an eyebrow. “Humor! I thought all of this stuff, ...” I waved my arm around her room, “was serious soul stuff, but what I’ve found is that there is an underlying – or overlying, in Michael’s case – thread of humor, although some of it has proven to be more than a little bizarre.”

“Why does that surprise you?” Epheniel asked. “The Universe is filled with Light, Love and Humor. It’s just that once you hit the denseness of the earth realm, life seems to become suddenly serious. Don’t get me wrong, Soul, there are serious parts in any journey, but try to adopt a lighter view of your challenges. Your efforts will allow you to see the macrocosm.”

We sat in thoughtful silence before Epheniel returned to our earlier topic. “So, the prediction from the psychic in September had just been reinforced. How’d you feel about that?”

“Naturally, I was a little nervous and prayed that I’d be able to handle whatever would come. But, to be honest, I was also thrilled for I now reasoned that the challenges would be a precursor to Understanding. I figured it was only a matter of time before I would have more than an intellectual understanding. I would be able to soon feel the connection with All That Is – these challenges would probably be a test of my worthiness.”

Epheniel looked aghast. “A test?” When I nodded, she said, “Soul, knowing all you do, how you could have ever thought that your worthiness, as you call it, would have to be tested? How was it that you did not recognize Truth?”

“I don’t know,” I admitted quietly. “It all sounds so logical when you remind me, but back on the earth realm...” My voice faded away as I added this new information to the stash within my head. I would learn, I promised myself. You are learning, was my angel’s gentle reply. I smiled at her, overwhelmed by her unconditional love for me. “Anyway, I figured that if I could just pass the test, I’d be considered worthy of the connection. And, of course, since Michael’s message was a reinforcement of the previous challenge predictions, I automatically assumed that the rest of the psychic’s predictions were accurate, as well.”

“Finding what you wished by the end of winter and accomplishing great things in the spring.”

Again I nodded. “We’d been told that all would unfold in its own time, but that Michael had come to the last angel party to accelerate the changes. With this last bit of information, it sounded as if we were progressing at light speed and frankly, it thrilled me. But accomplishing great things in the spring sounds as if I was looking for cheap parlor tricks. I wasn’t; I sought Enlightenment.

“Soon after prayer one early Sunday morning, I again felt myself begin to drift into theta state. Suddenly, I was on a high point, overlooking a beautiful, lush green valley. At first, I was leery of looking to my right or left, afraid the vision would vanish. I gingerly moved my eyes and found that I was able to scan it. Then, it faded and I realized I was in a desert – perhaps I was the desert – but it was not a panoramic view like the valley. I had a sense of an enormous amount of sand. That, too, faded and the valley returned for another moment or so and then faded into nothingness as I returned to boring ol’ alpha state.”

“What did you learn?”

“What followed within the next twenty-four hours initially surprised me. To put it simply and in noncelestial terms, I freaked out. I didn’t understand it, nor did I know what to do with it or the

challenges that were to come. I hadn't had nightmares for a long time, but I had one that next night. I'd gone to sleep as I'd done for the last three months with a very small votive candle that burned itself out each night. I awoke terrified from the dream and realized that there was a tremendously bright light in my bedroom, which frightened me even more. I literally jumped out of bed, trying to figure out what was terrifying, realized that the light being given off by the candle appeared to be ten times its usual magnification, and I quickly jumped back into bed, hiding under the covers. I shook with fear until I mercifully fell back asleep."

"Do you understand the fear?"

"I think so. I spent a lot of time over the next few days thinking about what had happened and my reaction. I came to the conclusion that perhaps I had not yet confronted all of my fears about this spiritual adventure that I had agreed to take and needed to do just that."

"What exactly frightened you? Sometimes just naming them aloud helps to diffuse them."

I thought a long moment before answering. "I'd thought that I was welcoming the experience and that I had no fears, but I guess I actually had several. I was afraid that I'd be asked to do something I could not physically do; I was fearful that I'd be asked to do something that I had not the courage to do; I was afraid that if there was Light, there might also be dark; and I realized that I had fear of the unknown."

Epheniel picked up my hand and gently rubbed it. Concern for her charge was evident on her face. "Tell me, how did you resolve them?"

"When I faced them squarely and worked on releasing them, the fear left. I remembered that you and all of those who walk in the Light were here to love and guide me and not judge me, but I couldn't help feeling as if I had let someOne down. Once I released the fears, I prayed that I'd be given another chance but I gotta tell ya that as I was working through it, I felt like such a ...," I paused as I fumbled for the right word.

Epheniel supplied it. "*Human?*" I nodded a bit ruefully. "You are greatly loved by all who walk in the Light, just as all human spirits are, Soul." We sat in silence another moment. "So you worked it all out successfully? What decisions did you make?"

"Well, I gave it an enormous amount of thought over the next few days and finally remembered."

Epheniel's face lit up in expectation. "Remembered what, Soul?"

"Remembered that I am where I am supposed to be on this journey and that God gives us only that which we have requested. As part of a lifetime's progression, I think all humans slowly add layer upon layer of faith, trust and understanding."

I stopped a moment in thought. "Even that was interesting – God giving us what we have requested."

"What do you mean?"

"I was shocked when I realized that when I ask God for help, it is provided."

"What's so shocking about that, Soul?"

"It dawned on me that for all these years, I'd been asking for strength." I looked at my angel squarely in her clearly puzzled eyes. "How is strength increased?" I quietly asked. Without awaiting an answer, I blurted, "By doing hard things to slowly build up muscle. Same with this. I had asked for strength all those years and my prayers had been answered by being given lots of challenges to overcome, in order to build spiritual muscle. With each challenge faced and surmounted, human souls become stronger." I shook my head. "After figuring out that little corollary, I very quickly stopped asking for strength, and replaced that plea with one for the grace, Light and humor to face those particular challenges." I wagged my finger at Epheniel. "Phew! The challenges we chose together are enough for me to handle; I don't need any more, thank you very much. Somehow, I did feel courage was going to be needed in my life."

My guardian looked at me questioningly. "Why is that, Soul?"

"I don't know if it's because I was a product of that Catholic grade school experience, but I always figured I'd be asked to do something that would require courage, and so when I remembered that, I realized that I have been preparing for this part of the journey all of my life. And journeys, while possibly planned to the finest detail, always contain the unknown – you know, like when the map says the road is a good one and you find detours or potholes, a tourist

stop along the way which looked fascinating in the travel booklet, actually lacks substance, so you change your plans and go another way.”

Epheniel nodded and spoke. “Good, Soul! Remember that the success of that journey depends upon your response to all of those things. Two people can plan the exact journey, have similar glitches on the trip and return home with two totally different responses to the experience. One may have control issues ...” She paused and looked pointedly at me; I had the good grace to grin. “... and not see the experience as positive. The other may be living a serendipitous life and may delight in the unexpected, excited to see what it may bring. In the end, a journey always comes down to our response to it all, especially to all the bumps in the road.” Neither one of us spoke for a moment. Finally, she said, “How did you resolve the If there is Light, might there be dark issue?”

“Actually, I had to give that one a lot of thought. Ever since I was young, I’ve felt close to God. I do remember an early Christmas morning when I was a little girl. As most children do, I had awakened early, excited about what the day would bring. I knew from the clock next to my bed that I dared not get up or even wake my older, sleeping sister in the bed next to me. As I lay there, unable to return to sleep, I glanced out into the hallway at the window. There, I saw an angel.”

“Be as a child, Soul, remember? Tell me, what was your response?”

I grinned at her. “Well, I guess some things never change. I was absolutely terrified. It didn’t matter that I felt close to God and that I prayed often. Seeing that angel scared me silly.”

“What did you do?”

“I dove under the covers – please note that in nearly fifty years, the reaction was the same – and finally was allowed to fall back asleep. In the morning, as we all tramped down to see what Santa had brought us, I slyly checked the window and convinced myself that they were just curtains blowing in the night air.”

“Night air? On Christmas Day in cold Ohio?”

“Yeah, I know,” I said. “I thought of that. There was no heating vent near that window and, of course, the window was closed because it was winter, but I had to come up with something to calm my fears, so I filed it in my mind as an overactive imagination.”

“So, looking back, do you think it was the curtains or an angel that morning?”

I looked at her a long moment before answering. “I don’t have a clue, but I wonder if it was real since many memories of my childhood are weak or nonexistent and that one remains so clear. I don’t think it matters if I ever know if it really happened or not; it’s just interesting to ponder.”

Epheniel nodded. “And that took care of all of your fears?”

“Well, as for the fear of the unknown, truly if we are living a life open to all possibilities, isn’t it all the unknown?” Her head bobbed up and down excitedly. “I realized – again – that I was not alone on this journey, so decided that I could either live my life cowering under my covers or embrace the unknown. Even with my good intentions, however, I still expect to run cowering under the covers occasionally, so don’t be surprised if you find me there sometimes.”

“When you are remembering to be brave, also remember it’s quite all right to be human since that’s what you have chosen to be right now.” I nodded and she asked, “Now, where were we?”

“The vision, which brought fears, which I released – just in time, it appears.”

“What do you mean?”

“Within two weeks, the first of the personal, emotional challenges hit and I cried on and off for three days before I was able to face it squarely and release it. During the first of those three days, I was given the gift of blue light during a meditation and knew that, while the challenge was difficult, it would be resolved in time and that I would learn lots.”

“Did you reach any other conclusions with the first challenge?”

“Well, it did cross my mind that perhaps I was going to undergo them to better understand the nature of challenges and how we are to respond to them.”

“Good,” said Epheniel. “The most important aspect of the human experience is facing the challenges that have been previously chosen. And while there is Free Will in how the spirit faces

these challenges, without them, there would be no growth.”

“So it’s what you told me earlier. All of us have challenges; it’s how we choose to respond to the challenges which determines our learning, right?” She nodded.

“You know, it was a very odd feeling knowing that my strength and courage were going to be tried again and again in the coming months and I prayed that I could handle these challenges with love and trust that everything was unfolding as it should.

“I sat in meditation that early Christmas Eve morning several months ago. In the quiet dark of my living room, I prayed and then chuckled that if anyone on the other side wished to give me a Christmas gift, I would be more than glad to accept it. With that thought, I drifted slowly and unknowingly toward theta state.”

“Unknowingly?”

“Remember I am still flying by the seat of my pants, so to speak, with all of this. The only way I reached theta state was by falling into it. It was still very much a hit-and-miss proposition with me. The vast majority of times that I meditated, nothing happened. That fall, however, things seemed to fall into place and theta state seemed more accessible to me. But, to get back to the story, as I felt myself once again sink deeply, I quietly rejoiced that I was about to receive my Christmas wish.”

Epheniel once again leaned forward in anticipation. I smiled at her, grateful that my angel understood me so well. “I was flooded with three things: goose bumps, white light and noise. I had felt those ethereal goose bumps on two other occasions, so recognized them immediately.”

I glanced up because Epheniel was rubbing her arms. “I get goose bumps just hearing this!” she said. “I love it!”

“I know,” I answered. “Me, too. During that experience, the light was beautiful and I knew I was smiling in the beauty of the experience. The noise was new to me and I could not place the sound. As soon as the first flood of goose bumps swept my body, a second one hit and then a third and fourth. Each wave was separate and I rejoiced in the experience. Finally, after the sixth one, I sensed it was over and allowed myself to drift back. It was at that point, however, that I realized that I had most likely drifted off in my meditation and for a fleeting moment was disappointed and asked if it might have all been just a dream. When this thought crossed my mind, however, and I was fully conscious and out of theta state, I was given my answer: another small wave of light and goose bumps – number seven – hit me and I knew.”

“That was a special Christmas for you, Soul,” Epheniel sighed with deep satisfaction, as she leaned back in her chair.

“I wish I had appreciated it even more at the time,” I replied quietly. When she looked at me questioningly, I added, “You’ll hear.” I took a moment to gather my thoughts.

“During the time Mary Lou and her husband had gone to Ireland, Deb and I had gone shopping. In a yarn shop, we had purchased three different sets of directions for beautiful, intricate cross-stitch angels. We chose a different angel for each of us. Once again, what started out as a lark took on significance. Michael informed Deb that these were important because so often the three of us make things for others, but not for ourselves. He also told us that there were important life lessons in the making of these angels.”

“Life lessons? In a cross-stitch?”

I nodded. “They were so intricate that we needed to graph the fabric and sets of directions. Michael reminded us that each square of the tapestry was vitally important, as insignificant as it may appear by itself. And like the stitching, we were all part of the great tapestry of Life – or God or the Grid or one of the other multitude of names humankind uses – which would not be complete without each little square – each of us.” I thought a moment. “So, it goes back to that whole God thing: put that way, as a piece of the tapestry, we really are of God.” Epheniel nodded, clearly pleased.

I beamed, grateful for her approval and said, “One Sunday morning during meditation, I lapsed into what I thought was a dream, but unlike any dreamlike state I had ever experienced – a dream-that-was-not-a-dream. I sat alone in a high-rise, hotel-like room. Suddenly, Jesus appeared in the room, ...” I paused to glance at my angel. Her brow was furrowed and mouth was open, but I beat her to the punch, so to speak. “Yes, I know that the form of the vision was

derived from my Christian-based paradigms.” She smiled and closed her mouth. *I am learning! How about that?!* “Anyway, I somehow knew it was Jesus. I was in total awe, but when He began to talk to me, I was deeply disappointed because I was unable to understand Him – He was speaking too softly and His words were lost to me.

“Realizing that I couldn’t hear Him, He took me to the window and motioned to me to look at the scene that lay below. I was startled by how much activity was going on. There was too much to note, so my eyes just swept the view, noting a dolphin leaping playfully in and out of the water of a fountain, as well as a roaming elephant.

“I looked back at Jesus then and He urged me to look more closely at the scene. When my eyes returned to the window, I noticed that there were dashes across the entire view – just like a grid. Jesus then told me that it was through those slots that I could get to the other side. At that point I woke up, startled by the experience. I kept it to myself for twenty-four hours, wondering what it meant. I finally stored it in my heart and soul, thinking perhaps that it was just another layer in preparation for something to come.”

We sat a long time in silence before Epheniel spoke. “Do you understand it yet?”

“The grid?” I shook my head and said, “No, that’s Deb’s domain these days. I’ve read about it in books, but have only a limited intellectual understanding of it. Basically, I think the way it works is the earth – and all it contains, including us – is composed of energy, right?” She nodded. “The universe has this amazing grid surrounding it. I know we’re supposed to tap into that grid to reconnect with the Light, but that’s about all I understand at this point, which is enough for now, I think. As for the dream-that- was-not-a-dream, since I stored it away, I know that if I ever needed it, it will be there.”

My angel beamed at me. “You are learning. Well done! You have gained much more understanding than I think you give yourself credit for, Soul. Think of where you were before all of this started.”

“Actually, that’s interesting that you should say that. Deb asked me during this period what I had gained from the nine months of our journey since our first angel party in June.”

“What did you say?” Epheniel asked.

“I was silent for a moment and I think Deb wondered if I could find something to say, but I was silent because the depth of my answer was so great that I had trouble knowing where to begin.

“I began with my thoughts on pain. I told her that I believe it’s our natural inclination to protect our loved ones from pain. But, if we really believe that growth can only happen through challenges and the often-resulting pain, then we must also realize that while we cannot protect our loved ones from its sting, what we can do is to equip them with the tools to successfully work through the tough times. And with this philosophy, pain then becomes not a responsibility to growth, but a right.”

“How did Deb react to that statement?”

“I could feel Deb cringe when I told her that if pain is a door to spiritual growth, then I welcome it because I don’t want to be left behind. She disagreed with me completely, saying that pain does not have to be a part of growth – we can grow without it. But her knowledge came from a world that I had yet to know and so all I could do was to come to my very human conclusions.”

Epheniel sat silently for a moment and then jumped nimbly to her feet. “Let’s go for a stroll and stretch our legs,” she said. “It’ll do us both some good.”

“Grand idea, Angel – lead on!”

We walked out of her conference room and down a hallway I had not yet seen. Curiously, I peeked in a few open doorways and met several other entities, all gracious and welcoming. After a while, however, I was content to return to our conversation.

“You know that elephant in the vision?” She nodded, but said nothing. “Remember that famous story out of the Buddhist tradition of the blind men and the elephant? Each man touches a different part of the elephant, so extrapolates that the entire elephant resembles his own little reality?” She nodded again. “I imagine that I’m one of the blind, holding the elephant’s tail. The only part of the elephant that is known to me is the tail, so I cannot even begin to imagine what lies beyond it. Deb has full sight, so she sees the entire elephant. And while she tries to describe

what she sees, it is difficult for me to move beyond my tail experience because that's all I've ever known. I can imagine what that elephant looks like because I have read and heard so much about it, but my reality is still only the tail." I stopped and looked at her. "Does that make any sense to you?"

"Yes, Soul," Epheniel said. "I understand – go on."

"Okay. To get back to Deb's question of what I had gained over the last nine months, I told her that I'd been given many gifts, one of which was the gift of time to prepare for those emotional challenges. As each one hit, some more difficult than others, I knew instinctively that how I handled these challenges – my response – was the lesson. Do I become a mealy-mouthed whiner or do I learn the lessons within and move on? I knew at some point I'd be on the other side of the challenges and wanted to be proud of the way I faced them."

"So you shared this pain with your friends?"

"No," I answered, "as a matter of fact, I didn't. I think Deb and Mary Lou thought I was pulling away from them in pain, but I wasn't. I made the conscious decision to hunker down and concentrate so that I could do what was expected of me in an honorable manner. I found that as I faced each challenge squarely, I became stronger for the next one."

"And you learned from each challenge as you awaited the next?"

I nodded. "I wrestled with truth and hope and prayer and *Thy will be done* during the winter, trying to understand and live that phrase as I sought my place in the great spiritual adventure we had begun the previous summer."

I paused slightly and Epheniel asked, "Thy will be done? I'm curious, Soul – how do you view that particular phrase?"

"The three of us had discussed its implications, knowing how difficult the actual living of it often becomes. *Thy will be done*. As we discussed it, the enormity of its meaning hit me. It's so difficult to release all of those very human desires and allow God to set the path." I looked at her questioningly. "Am I right?"

"We need to talk about that, Soul. I know it's difficult to believe, but the beneficent grandfather-type God of your childhood paradigm does not set the path. Remember, you set the path before you came; you wrote the rules. *Thy will be done* was not meant to be *Suffer all you can in My name*."

"So it's not the-soul-who-suffers-most-wins-all-the-marbles? Boy, that's not what I learned in Catholic grade school." I shook my head in wonder. "What does it mean then – *Thy will be done*?"

"Exactly what it says: *trust in God, which is to live in the Light*. You were not created to come to Earth and suffer, but to truly live in the Light of God's great love." Paradigms crashed around me as I strove to understand what Epheniel was saying. "Souls can reconnect with the Light without pain, although some have chosen before their incarnations to experience pain and suffering on this realm for further learning not only for themselves, but for every entity, angelic realm included."

I was quiet a moment and then looked up at Epheniel, who smiled at my confusion. "Yes," she agreed, "it is true that pain is unnecessary when it is not warranted by the Higher Self, but added to the chart by your earthly self. However, when a life lesson is about the pain felt on the earthly realm, that pain is necessary for the learning process, so in essence, you and your friend are both right."

"Pain is another path to growth, Soul. For example, let's say that someone has said something that deeply wounds you. You feel pain. The memory of that pain will help you remember not to do the same to others. Likewise, being involved with those of a loving nature is a constant reminder to live in love. Simply put, pain shows us what *not* to do; love shows us what to do."

"How can we tell the difference between those types of pain – whether they're lessons to be learned or just wallowing in ego?"

"Another good question, Soul," answered Epheniel. "Be aware and pay attention and get that ego out of the way and you will be able to view challenges through the eyes of your Higher Self to discern if pain and suffering is important to the challenge you face. If it isn't, get rid of it."

"That's a lot harder to do than it sounds." I peered at her closely. "To be honest, I don't know how well I'm doing with that yet."

"I know, Soul. It's difficult letting go of the need to control. Humans have a need to be right. That automatically sets up an adversarial situation in which judgment must, inevitably, play a part. Instead of looking at the big picture – the macrocosm, they stubbornly cling to their own little realities, in which they allow their egos full control – the microcosm."

I had been so caught up in our discussion, that I hadn't paid attention to where we were heading. I glanced around me when Epheniel stopped talking and gaped in amazement. We had walked to an open door that led to a balcony overlooking a waterfall – Michael's waterfall. The view was mesmerizing and I asked if we could sit on the balcony for a bit. She motioned to two chairs and we sat, silently watching the water for a long time.

Finally, I turned to my angel and said, "You were talking about pain. That's a big thing on my realm and I want to understand. Tell me more, please."

She thought a moment. "Well, souls choose to come to earth to help each other grow and learn, right?" I nodded. So far, so good. "But once the journeying soul gets mired in the denseness of the realm, however, it is difficult not to get caught up in your own little dramas, forgetting this is supposed to be a loving, nonjudgmental group effort."

She paused another moment, obviously trying to find the words that would give me the understanding I sought. "But it's important to understand what I mean when I use the term nonjudgmental in this case, Soul. Your earthly self must learn not to cast judgment, but your Higher Self needs to learn to discern between what will help or hinder you. Once that Higher Self discernment is complete, the earthly self is informed through that gut feeling – when you know something is wrong or something does not ring true for you. Those are the judgments that must be made."

My gaze went back to the waterfall. *How am I ever going to be able to do all of this?* I shook my head in frustration. "I gotta tell you it's overwhelming some days. When Life is going along happily, those concepts seem easy to understand and accomplish."

"Ah, Soul," my angel interrupted, "but look back at your life. When did you experience real growth – when things were going along easily or after successfully facing challenges?"

"Oh, I know. If you survive the challenge, you'll be a better, stronger person. I've known that for years, but now that concept took on a whole new meaning when I realized that I was to specifically learn from each of those challenges that winter. I was to change because of them. And then we go back to that hope that I had been harboring since September: true understanding. How could I say that I was truly trying to live *Thy Will be Done* if I was hanging onto a human desire? This became a challenge, in itself, for me."

"Remember, Soul," consoled my angel, "that while true learning takes place with challenges, it also takes place with nonchallenging parts of your life." I nodded. "Spring has now arrived on your part of the Earth, Soul," came the soft voice next to me. "Did the winter unfold as you had hoped it would?"

I shook my head as my eyes welled up with tears. "It wasn't until the last day of winter, that it dawned on me that perhaps my dream would not become a reality. I know it seems hard to imagine, but I had so counted on that prediction coming true that I never considered the alternative. Not for a moment. Not for a heartbeat of moment." I paused a moment in reflection.

"Remember when I told you about my special Christmas gift from you and the goose bumps and light and noise?" When she nodded, I continued. "Well, Christmas Eve was the very last time that I was able to reach theta state through my own efforts. I continued to meditate each morning for an hour before my family rose, but was never again able to experience anything of what had been given to me that very special autumn when the visions flowed. Suddenly, when I thought I needed that connection the most, it was gone."

The soft voice once again broke into my thoughts. "I know that all throughout the long winter of your challenges, you felt alone and abandoned, didn't you?"

I nodded and a tear streaked my cheek. "It was okay at the time, though, because I thought it was just part of The Test: one more challenge. When the calendar officially proclaimed that winter was over, I went into a spiritual tailspin, as well as a depression. Every particle of my being

had counted on passing the test and being rewarded with spiritual enlightenment. I was rocked to my core and prayed I could survive this challenge. The other challenges that had presented themselves were of an emotional nature, but this spiritual challenge seemed almost too much to bear."

"Why are you surprised, Soul?" Epheniel softly asked. "Spiritual challenges are much greater than emotional ones." When she saw my blank look, she continued. "When you're going through an emotional challenge, you have your Higher Self to keep afloat your head, mind, heart and soul. But when you face a spiritual challenge, it naturally involves your Higher Self, so you cannot seek solace from that source."

I nodded and the tears now flowed freely from my eyes. "I was drowning," I cried softly, trying to explain. My beloved angel held me in her arms, and to my surprise, she cried with me.

"I went through a period of time and questioned everything about myself. In my grief, I foolishly believed that I had failed the test and was found unworthy. I even wondered if the whole spiritual journey thing was some type of huge cosmic joke in which everyone would have a good laugh."

I looked at Epheniel, wondering if she found me blasphemous. Very quietly, so quietly that I had to strain to hear her, she said, "No one's laughing, Soul."

I nodded and took a deep breath. "It wasn't that I had been refused the gift of insight that sent me spiraling downward, but that I had been found undeserving. The pain was overwhelming, but I sought to deal with it alone."

"But you are never alone, Soul," Epheniel said. "Did you forget?" She waited for me to answer, and when I didn't, she continued. "Remember I told you that when a soul needs help, more angels are sent to lend their support? Did you not feel them around you?"

I shook my head. "No, I wish I could say I did. Were they there?"

"We were all there with you through that difficult time, whether or not you felt us. Once upon a time and space and dimension, you made that choice."

I attempted a smile. "Most likely, I would have never gotten through the pain without all of you. I was just not aware of you." I paused. "I wish I had been."

"All is unfolding ...," Epheniel said when I interrupted her.

"I know."

"Why didn't you share this terrible pain with your friends?" "Deb and Mary Lou thought I was just as integral a part of this journey as they were. How could I tell them that they were wrong and I had failed? They knew something was very wrong, but waited until I found the courage to finally tell them. I shut out those who meant the most to me because I believed public pain was far worse than private."

Epheniel thought a moment before asking, "How did they respond to the news when you finally shared it with them?"

"They were heartbroken for me," I replied, "but instinctively understood that I needed to work through this challenge as I had done the others. I reminded them that it was my journey and as much as they loved me, they couldn't walk it for me. I had to find my own answers."

The angel took my hands in hers and asked gently, "And did you work through it?"

I replied, "If you want to call working through it putting up walls as fast as I could."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I know this may be difficult to understand, but please try to view this situation through my very human eyes. When I believed I'd been found unworthy, I was devastated. All I knew during those weeks was that I could not handle any more pain. I figured that the only way to ward off the pain and grief was to erect sturdy walls and hide behind them."

"So the walls went up."

I nodded. "Oh, yes, big walls. In my anguish, I decided that if I could say one thousand times, *It doesn't matter*, maybe at last I would believe it and could find peace."

"But it did matter. It mattered a great deal to you."

"Oh, I knew that, but I had to do something to survive in the earthly realm with so much pain and confusion within me. And so, I came up with that idea."

"Did it help?"

My tears began to flow again. “Over the coming weeks, *It doesn't matter* became my mantra of sorts. But, the funny thing was, though, when I hit the magic number of one thousand chantings, the pain was still there, so I continued, hoping eventually it would ebb. When the walls were tall enough and strong enough to ward off the pain, I settled in behind them.”

“What did you do behind those walls?”

“Mostly, I stayed safe. I stopped reading books on spirituality because everyone in those books was accepted and loved and considered highly evolved. In that mindset, I found them extremely elitist, but I stopped wondering why there were no books of hope for people like me. I stopped looking for auras and signs. For a period of time, I even stopped asking questions. Voicing anything brought pain, which was the very last thing I wanted. I forced myself to stop thinking about it all as much as I could, preferring to shelve it all until I could better cope.”

Very quietly came the question, “And did you at last find peace in that place?”

I shook my head. “While the pain ebbed behind the safety of my walls, I found no restful peace. I was so tired – so very tired. All I wanted was for someone to take it all away so I wouldn't have to carry it anymore.”

We sat in silence a long while before my angel spoke. “Did you give up on God during this difficult time, Soul?”

I wiped my face awkwardly with my sleeve and faced the entity. It was important to me that she understood. “No,” I said firmly, “I never gave up on God. In fact, I prayed more than ever during that period that I would be able to survive it. In plain truth, I gave up on me. At the time I didn't see this challenge as a challenge, but as the death of a beautiful dream. Now I understand that it was one of the greatest challenges of my life.” I paused as I reflected on our earlier conversation. “Perhaps this challenge was what I had prepared for all of my life. And if that is the case, I'm not sure that I did it the right way.”

“You did it the right way, Soul – exactly the right way. You know this: everything that happens, happens to prepare us for a future event. Any choice made in prayer and love is the right choice for that particular situation. You stayed open to God and all of His love and blessings, even though you were grief-stricken. Humans are so hard on themselves. Remember to be as gentle with yourself as you are with others. Forgive yourself and celebrate your humanity. Try replacing unforgiving, self-judgmental, condemning phrases like I'm not sure I did it the right way or I can't believe I did something that stupid or What's wrong with me? with *I unconditionally accept, forgive and love myself and others*. You'll be amazed at how your life will change.”

We sat in silence for a long moment before she spoke again. “And at last you found someone who could carry it all for you, didn't you, Soul?”

I nodded. “When I found that I could no longer hold the grief by myself, I finally remembered that I could hand it over to you and God. I decided that didn't seem to go against the rules. I remembered – AGAIN – that I was not alone and I could choose not to have to tough out anything alone. But it seemed to take forever before I remembered that. I wonder why I tried to handle it alone for so long.” We sat in silence, gazing at the flowing water before us.

“And the walls?” asked my angel.

“Oh,” I replied, “the walls are still there. I'm not ready to let them go, so I guess they'll remain until I no longer need them.”

“You'll know when it's time for them to go, Soul, but let me know if you need help in dismantling them.”

I nodded gratefully and smiled. “It's a deal.” I continued to gaze at the scene before us; the waterfall had a hypnotic effect. I felt I could almost move deeply into the flow, becoming one with it. *Whoa!* I sat up quickly. *Where'd that thought come from? Sounds pretty highly evolved.*

I chuckled to myself and heard my angel's voice reverberating throughout my being. *That's because you are highly evolved, Beloved!* I chuckled again, but this time, angelic chuckling joined my own human variety.

After a long time, Epheniel broke the silence with a familiar question. “So, what did you learn?”

“Lots,” I said. “I look at life and people through different eyes. I try to look at my family and friends and students through the eyes of my soul. I have learned legions about how to walk the

path. I listen more than I speak and with intensity that I never thought possible, filtering what I need to learn. I have sought and found courage and patience, although the latter might be harder to spot in me.”

I wiped the remnants of my tears with my new-found resolve. “I have expanded my intellect a thousand-fold with new ideas and theories and am slowly learning to discern what has my name on it. I now have a personal relationship with God and you, although I gotta say you all deserve a raise as I continue to struggle to find Truth. And so, in the light of all of this, was the pain of releasing a dream worth it? At the time, I was unsure, but now I understand that it was.”

I waited to see if Epheniel wanted to comment. When she did not, I said, “I no longer feel the deep intensity to understand. I no longer crave signs from you, but that doesn’t mean I don’t recognize them when they appear. And while I’m open to Light and Love from all sources, there’s no longer the intense desire to know and have. And I guess I no longer wonder why I have misplaced certain memories.” I paused. “I guess if I needed them, they’d be there.” Epheniel still made no reply.

“To answer your question, this spring I am going through Life saddened. Although some of the challenges were more difficult than others, none were as painful to conquer as the fact that I believed I was not good enough for God.”

Epheniel continued to hold me in her arms, rocking me slightly, trying to ease the pain. She whispered in my ear, “You now understand that those challenges were not a test, don’t you?” I nodded. “You do know that you are good enough for God, Soul.”

“I don’t like this!” I said defiantly before softening my tone. “It’s too hard.”

“I know it’s hard,” she said softly, “but you are learning. Now, your task is to release the pain so you can see what lies ahead for you. Until you do, you cannot move forward, nor can you find the peace you seek. Stay behind those walls all you want, but remember that until you find the courage to remove them, you’re going nowhere on your journey.”

“A rest stop for my soul?” I asked. “How about if I just remain there at the oasis for a little longer? I’m not quite up for jumping back into the fray.”

“Do you recall the vision of the valley last autumn?” Epheniel asked. When I nodded, she continued. “Do you understand it now?”

I thought a moment. “Maybe the first part of the vision was what was going on with me during that time. It was a peaceful period of my life, so perhaps that accounts for the peaceful, beautiful valley. Through the different visions, I was receiving glimpses of the other world I wanted.”

“Perhaps, Soul. What about the desert?”

“That one’s not tough.” I smiled at her. “I’m definitely in the desert now with the aftermath of these challenges.”

“Recall the vision, Soul. What followed the desert feeling?”

“The green valley came back into view. If I had to guess, I’d say that as a result of learning from these challenges, I’ll grow and peace will return.” I paused. “How’d I do? Is that right?”

She smiled gently at me. “Well done, Soul! Everything is as it should be. Sometimes in the midst of a challenge, however, it just doesn’t seem that way. I know it’s difficult, but try not to keep expectations. They are limiting and close the door to serendipity. Keep open to possibilities and learning situations.” She squeezed my hand. “Remember your Higher Self and I are always here, Soul – advisors and master celestial wall demolition experts. We’ll be waiting for you.” She paused slightly. “So is peace.”

Suddenly, ever-so-quietly, I heard Michael’s voice in my ear. “*Trust, Bruce. Trust yourself, knowing all is unfolding as it must.*”

No matter what happens, it’ll be all right. Ye can do this.

I returned Epheniel’s smile. *I’ll get through this. I know I will – with a little help from my friends. But even in the face of the pain during that time, I still recognized one fact clearly: I will not give up this journey to seek Understanding. No matter what, I’m not going away.*

.....

Reality

Loved One, you are gifted with an immeasurable capacity to process information. Now is the time to break away from limitations imposed upon you by societal rules and regulations. You have allowed apathy to become part of your everyday life, perceiving yourself as incapable of existing beyond your own reality. You are equipped with all the hardware and ingredients to see and internalize so much more!

Imagine yourself as being the center square in a vast grid. Your focus is only able to see those squares that are immediately surrounding you. Now step up and away from the center grid. A whole tapestry of squares is becoming a part of your vision! This is what happens when you begin to step beyond your idea of a separate and limited reality.

Begin to bring your focus back to a single square of the tapestry. Can you see how beautiful and perfect this single square is? So it is with you! When you start to see the other squares around it, do you also see how beautiful they are, too, or do you compare them and judge this or that one as better in some way than another one? Now look again at the whole tapestry. If one small single square of a tapestry is left undone, the picture is incomplete – flawed. So it is with you. Never allow ego to convince you that your own reality – or anyone else's – is insignificant. You are all a vital and intricate part of the whole picture!

Stop what you are doing/thinking right now and look around you. Are there other people near you? What are they doing/thinking in this moment? Expand your own consciousness and you will see there is no limit to what you can process. You are not in a vacuum, but are connected in every way to each other and the living Earth on which you stand.

You have placed so many insulating barriers between yourself and the Earth. Clothing, shoes, automobiles, walls, floors and sidewalks are just a few examples of things keeping your feet from ever touching the Earth, which nurtures you. Belief systems and languages have locked you into believing a shallow concept of reality. You are inundated with programming and brainwashing through the media, allowing your heart to be anesthetized. TV – television – has its merit for entertainment and media information; your own IV – intuitivision – gets very little attention and is vastly more sophisticated! The information received through your IV is infinitely more life-supportive and accurate than anything you learn from your TV. Your own IV can even act as a filter for processing information from the media. You sometimes call this “reading between the lines” or instinctively knowing when information is incomplete or incorrect. This example is only a minute part of how your innate intuition or intuitivision can enlarge your reality.

Begin to listen with your heart, see with your third eye, and feel with your intuition and Behold! You have stepped out of your own perception of a limited reality and into uncharted territory. Old paradigms are shattered when you reach beyond your idea of a limited reality and into the larger area of light and love. Listen with your heart as well as your ears and an automatic shift will take you out of the micro-world and into the macro-world. Cultural rules formerly accepted by your ego will make room for Holy Spirit to step into your life. You will not be able to stop yourself from gently touching the hand of someone who needs a gentle touch because your reality is automatically connected with theirs. Feeling life through someone's heart will make caring and loving more important than protecting the ego or inhibitions taught by society. You will begin to understand that your spirit is Alive, Alight and All Love as it always has been – and always will be.

Ego Evolution

Loved Ones, ego was originally designed to assist you in observation and navigation while traveling in a world of matter. Holy Spirit and ego were intended to work in conjunction during this endeavor. Holy Spirit was to keep you in touch with Divine Holy Spirit, enabling you to have a constant awareness of your true reality. It was unexpected that the human emotional body would be so sensitive to gravity, such that you reacted in a fear-based pattern, resulting in ego beginning to preempt Holy Spirit.

You began to see yourself as separate from the Creator instead of who you truly are: the Creator, experiencing and expressing life through you. In other words, you believed you were Here, and God was There. You forgot the most fundamental truth of your existence: that you, minus the Creator, are Nothing; whereas, you, plus the Creator, are One.

How often have you heard the phrase, "The world does not revolve around you!?" In fact, the world does revolve around you and every other life form. There is a life force, individually unique, revolving around you and the Creator in a beautiful flow of energy. Ego has convinced you otherwise, causing you to be Self-Conscious out of fear, instead of Self-God Conscious. You became afraid to be You because you were cutting off your awareness of Holy Spirit and allowing ego to do a job it was not designed to do. Ego began to rationalize that the Creator existed before you and could live without you, but you could not exist without the Creator, inventing a nonexistent dualism. Ego began to take on responsibility for survival, believing your physical body was all of you, rather than a small part – believing the death of the physical body meant the death of you, rather than the completion of the experience of living in matter. You knew you could not live without your Creator, so instead of living in joy with the Creator, ego convinced you to validate your very existence by manipulating matter, resulting in materialism and the need for power and control. You lost the confidence to live in your own shadow and began to live in others.

Through example, civilized society serves to teach this self-conscious and ego-based attitude. Observe a small child before she has fully integrated this concept. Her Holy Spirit actively pursues individual expression in an attitude of Love, Light and Joy and is quite comfortable living in her own shadow. Sooner or later, this child will learn through the observation of others to become Self-Conscious, and gradually allow her own ego to gain more control over who she believes herself to be. Oftentimes, this transformation turns into a child's struggle that adults label as "growing pains". In fact, the process of learning to live in someone else's shadow is not an easy one because ego is constantly judging and has a need to be right. Fortunately, there are some children who fail to fully internalize this self-conscious and ego-based concept and continue to be aware of their connection to Life through Holy Spirit. These children are the ones you sometimes label as "trouble makers" or "rebels" because they are not afraid to speak their heart-minds about an unjust, cruel and uncaring society. They are the ones who actively pursue peace and harmony, often being rejected for being responsible for forcing people to look uncomfortably close to established and accepted social injustices. Yet, there are still others of you who allow Holy Spirit to see itself reflected in these children and recognize them as "Star Children," nurturing them because they reveal the truth of the purpose of Holy Spirit – to be who you truly are – the Creator expressing Life through your beautiful individuality.

Dear Ones, try not to be too harsh when contemplating and dealing with ego, whether your own or others. Remember, it was not intended or equipped to perform the tasks you expect it to do. Invite ego to join with Holy Spirit to allow harmony and peace in your lives by releasing the constant need to be right through power and control. Gently, but firmly, ask ego to consult with Holy Spirit in sharing some of its burdens. Through judging each other less, you will all be more. Then you will be as little children who derive joy in living, actively interacting with curiosity and wonder for all the world that revolves around them because they are secure in the knowledge of their Beingness, irrevocably joined to the Creator.

Chapter 6

Late November

I gazed long and hard at the imposing stairs before I finally made the long climb and then paused again before the great doors, suddenly wary. As I stood there, debating whether to knock or just let myself in, the doors swung open. There, on the other side, stood the one-entity Welcoming Committee, grinning from ear to ear.

“Come on in, Soul. Are ye telling me that life on the earthly realm has ye so addlewitted that ye have to spend time wondering how to enter?” He twinkled as he spoke and I immediately felt much better.

I grinned back at him, a bit chagrined. “No, I guess not, Zeke. May I come in?”

Zeke dramatically bowed low before me, extending his arm. "Welcome Home, Lass. Please enter." As I stepped over the threshold into the Great Hall, a sense of deep love and serenity once again claimed me and I stood a moment, allowing it to enfold me. Zeke peered at me closely.

"Okay, first ye spend time deciding whether or not to knock, then ye're rooted to the spot just inside the doorway. Ye've been going through a rocky time down there lately, haven't ye? A bit puggled, are ye?" he asked, concern showing on his face. When I nodded, he continued. "Well, ye came to the right place, ye did. Yer Epheniël will fix ye right up! As a matter of fact, she and I were just chatting the other day. "'Epheniël,' I says, 'Has the Soul currently in Marty been to see ye lately and I've just missed the lass?' She shakes her head, she does, and tells me that ye're trying to handle it all on yer own and that all she can do is send ye lots of light and love until yer return." He reached up and patted my hand. "She'll be awfully glad to see ye, she will."

I nodded. "You'd think I'd get it one of these days. I could choose to come often, but somehow, as I slosh through my days, I forget that little fact until I'm totally overwhelmed and frantically show up on your doorstep." I sighed and looked at the sprite closely. "Will I ever have it all together, Zeke?"

"Ye have it all together now, Soul – ye just don't realize that yet. But, look at me, talking as if I'm the celestial advisor around here. Better get ye to the one who knows all the answers to all the questions ye have before The Boss discovers I'm giving out free advice. One of my many tasks is to welcome souls and make them comfortable as I take them where they wish to be." He touched my arm and we slowly began to walk down the familiar stone corridor.

"Sounds like an amazing job description when you put it that way, Zeke." I paused as a thought crossed my mind. *Has Zeke spent time on Earth?*

Zeke looked up at me and answered my unspoken question. "Aye, I did Earth once, Lassie. It's a requirement for those who work around here so that we can better understand the joys and sorrows of ye folks who experience the Earth journey."

"Do you remember it?" I asked, knowing that to be a particular challenge of mine. "The journey?"

Zeke closed his eyes as he searched for the words. "Aye, Lass, I remember Earth. I was but a bairn, but especially remember the way Earth smells after a spring rain. I remember the marvelous feeling of warm mud squishing between my toes. I remember ma mother's wonderful smell as she held me close to dry ma tears when I stubbed those toes, which happened often." I sent him a puzzled look. "Ye see, I chose to be born blind and poor so that I could learn to see without ma eyes and experience wealth beyond measure without coin."

"Whoa. Talk about an overachiever, Zeke! When was this?" I realized I was already feeling a bit better.

"Oh, it was pretty early on in yer Earth history, I suspect. Ma time there was short, in comparison to the time ye've spent, but I learned ma lessons and came Home to help fellow journeyers."

Suddenly, Zeke's meanderings ceased. "Jings! Look at me, just chattering away with ye. I'm to get ye where ye long to be and we're just standing around bletherin'!" He started his bounding stride, but abruptly stopped. "Hey, where's ma head these days?" he grinned. "That is, if I had a head. I just love those earth realm expressions! Epheniël will meet ye wherever ye wish to be this time. She thought ye'd like a break from the conference room."

I stood in thought. *Where would I like to be?* My thoughts wandered, mulling over possibilities, when my mind settled on one. Instantly, I heard the familiar whooshing sound and found myself at a high point, overlooking the lush, emerald green valley. I drank in the vision and sighed, knowing this time it would remain as long as I wished. I closed my eyes and hugged myself, hoping this was one memory I could keep.

"Do you still find yourself in the desert, Soul?" my angel asked in the soft voice I had grown to love. My eyes flew open and there next to me stood Epheniël. When I nodded, she enveloped me in her love and within a heartbeat, all my earthly worries faded. I remained in her arms a long time before I chose to speak.

"My life is filled with countless blessings, for which I am deeply grateful. I have a wonderful

family, beautiful friends, health and happiness. When I see the pain others are in around me, I am a bit ashamed for not being able to quickly get over this ...," I paused, searching for the right word.

Quietly, the word came. "Separation. What you perceive as rejection is actually a separation, but you have caused it, Soul, not God." Her voice dropped lower. "It's a pretty lonely place, isn't it?"

I nodded. "Intellectually, I know that it wasn't a rejection from God and the celestial realm, but the intellect doesn't rule the emotion."

"But, do you see the progress you've made on resolving this issue? I sense you've traveled leagues since our last visit together."

"Oh, I have, indeed. I've learned much about myself as I worked through it these last seven Earth months."

"Eventually, I hope you will conclude that pain is not necessary for growth, Soul. It is the inherent choice for all journeying souls to work through their challenges and hopefully come to the same conclusion. And while you cannot take away another person's pain, you can support them with love and light as they continue on their paths."

Epheniel paused and gazed across the valley. My eyes followed, drinking in its beauty. As I allowed it to flow through me, I could feel its soothing effect on my spirit. After a few moments, the angel continued. "There are no coincidences, Soul. Each human spirit you meet – either briefly or for an extended amount of time – has agreed to come into your life at that particular time to provide or procure some sort of learning. This learning can come from either positive or negative experiences. It is all part of the master plan to which you and those other souls agreed once upon a time, space and dimension."

"I know," I said softly. I paused as I thought of all I had learned since our last visit together. "So we grow closer to some souls and choose to reincarnate several times together?"

"Yes," she replied, "some souls choose to experience humanity with a few close friends, so to speak, as human family or friends or as one who brings something important into your life. Sometimes, whole soul groups come to Earth to learn together. And other times, a soul wishes to try Earth with only her angel guide and Higher Self and finds it a very lonely journey. One way is not better than another, however. Each brings growth." Our conversation stopped as something caught Epheniel's attention. She pointed upward and we watched a white dove soar across the brilliant blue sky. As we watched, another joined it and they darted and chased each other with the pure joy of being alive. We sat mesmerized by them until at last, they disappeared from sight.

"Please tell me more about my Higher Self," I said. "We were created together and will stay together for all of eternity?"

She smiled. "Let's see, how shall I explain this? Remember, your Higher Self *is* you, Soul. It is the spiritual side of you. What you might think of as your conscience. Like me, your Higher Self remembers the pact you made before this incarnation and knows that which you have come to learn. And like me, she guides you toward that goal."

"She?" I giggled. "Now who's the highly evolved one here?"

My angel ignored my attempt at humor. "Like the rest of the celestial realm, Higher Selves have no gender, Soul. If you are female in this incarnation, you may wish to view this part of you as female. During a male incarnation, perhaps a male viewpoint may be preferred. How you view your Higher Self is not important – only that you acknowledge the God-part of you and learn."

I sighed, thinking of all the times that my Higher Self had tried to guide me through the muck. "Hope that Higher Me is getting combat pay." How many times had I not listened? "No wonder I'm stuck in the earth realm," I ruefully shook my head and sighed again.

Epheniel gave me her your-library-book-is-two-weeks-late look. "You are who you are, where you are supposed to be, with those whom you have chosen. Every thought and action is to prepare you for what lies ahead, Soul." A delicate sigh escaped from her. "You seem to have particular difficulty in remembering this vital concept regarding reincarnation."

"That's because I am who I am, where I am supposed to be and with those I have chosen!" I said.

"Touché. Now, tell me of your life at this time. How is your family?"

"Oh," I replied airily, "they're fine. We now have two in college and two more to follow within a year, so it still gets pretty crazy sometimes, but I wouldn't trade any of it." I paused. "I'll get to the rest of my family in a moment."

"And teaching?"

"Teaching's great – hectic as always, but by the end of May, it was winding down. It was then that I received the last of the challenges." I paused as I tried to organize my thoughts.

Epheniel waited patiently and finally said, "Can you talk about it or would you prefer to leave it at that?"

"No, I think it's important that we discuss it because I learned much from the challenge." I took a deep breath. "One beautiful May Sunday afternoon, my seventy-nine year-old mother went to one of my sisters' homes to plant a shrub for her as a surprise. As she drove homeward, she realized that the car behind her was closely tailing her and was concerned that she would be hit. She was relieved to pull into her driveway, naturally assuming that the other car had continued down the street. She got out and leaned into the back seat to retrieve her shovel and straightened up again when she realized that a teenage girl was standing in the garage with her."

"Did your mother know her?"

I shook my head. "No. My mother was startled and asked what she wanted, thinking perhaps she was lost. The girl, who we later discovered was seventeen, glared at my mother and demanded her car keys. My mother was startled by the request and thought perhaps she had not heard correctly and asked her to repeat it. The girl took a threatening step toward her and repeated her demand for the keys."

"So your mother handed them over?"

"No. In her shock that this could be happening to her in her garage in a safe neighborhood on a sunny Sunday afternoon, she took a step back and said, 'No' – as in 'No, don't hurt me.' The girl took it as 'No, I won't give you the keys.'"

I faltered as I sought to gain control of my earthly emotions. So many tears had already been shed. They seemed to come so easily these days, and when I realized that I did not need to stop them, I took a deep breath and continued. "Thinking she needed to overpower my mother, the girl began to beat her savagely."

"I know, Soul," Epheniel whispered, "I'm sorry."

Tears flowed freely and I had trouble getting the words out, but I needed to share it. "At that point, another teenage girl jumped out of the car and joined the first in trying to get my mother's car keys. My mother, who now lay bloodied on the garage floor, tried to protect herself from the flying fists and feet, and curled up instinctively. When their anger had been spent, they grabbed the keys from her hand, stole her car and sped off with it, the other car following. It was when her car raced out of the driveway and down the street that a neighbor suspected something might be wrong and started across the street. By this point, my mother had gotten herself to her feet and to her back door, where she collapsed. Within moments, an emergency vehicle arrived and she was transported to the hospital." I wiped my eyes in order to focus more clearly.

"Are you sure you can go on, Soul?"

"Yes, I want to finish this." I took another deep breath and continued. "Neighbors got hold of one of my sisters, who met her at the hospital. Several hours later, the emergency room personnel released her, but not before the police had taken gruesome photos of her. She had suffered a severe beating on her face, upper body and arms. One of her legs was swollen from the kicking it had received. She was given many stitches in her face and hand, which had suffered the most vicious blows."

"How was her emotional state after this brutal attack?"

"By the time I arrived with my daughter, Meg, five hours had passed and although she was subdued, she smiled at us and told us not to worry. Her greatest concern appeared to be how we were all handling the beating. She spent a great amount of time over the next few days reassuring each of us that as bad as she looked, she had survived the ordeal and in time, would heal."

"So, her concerns were for you and your sisters instead of herself."

I nodded. "My mom had always been like that, so it didn't surprise any of us that she was

so strong in the face of the brutality.

My daughter and I spent the night and by mid-morning, my out-of-state sister had arrived, so all of us were together.”

“Are you close to your sisters?”

“We’ve always been close, but this brought us even closer as we dealt with our mother’s physical and emotional needs, as well as the multitude of legal consequences. My mother has some wonderful friends and neighbors who also were a tremendous help to her. And, within two days, her car was spotted in the girls’ home city and they were arrested.”

I paused a moment, remembering the horror of that moment. “They had stolen a car in their city and sought to sell it at a *chop shop* in a nearby city. Once they arrived and found it closed, they knew they had to steal a new car and ditch the old one, rather than trying to drive the stolen vehicle back home. As soon as that decision had been made, my mother approached the intersection and she became their target. They had planned to ram her from behind to force her to inspect the damage, and then steal the keys and the car. The driver, a sixteen-year old girl, was nervous about hitting her car, and by the time she got the courage to carry out the plan, my mother had turned into her driveway. Furious that the original plan had not been carried out successfully, the older girl had approached my mother with frustration and anger, resulting in the beating.”

Epheniel held my hand in hers and said, “Tell me how you responded when you first received the phone call from your sister.”

I took a moment to consider her request. “I had had more than a few challenges during the previous five months, and if I had learned anything, it was that I could choose my response to the challenges. Anyone receiving such a call would have been as stunned and saddened as I was – as we all were. But, even as my sister was telling me of the beating, and as the tears streamed down my face, I was given a very clear awareness that my response to the horror lay in my hands at that very moment and a conscious decision would have to be made. A strong voice/thought emerged from my racing mind. *You have been taught. How will you respond?*”

“So what did you decide, Soul?”

“As I saw it at that moment in time, I could either react in anger or respond in love. If I reacted in anger, negativity would be reinforced, inflaming the situation further. If I chose to respond with love, there would be healing for all of us.”

“And what choice did you make?”

“I knew instinctively even with the shock and grief that had immediately engulfed me that everything I had learned the last eleven months was to prepare me for this challenge, as well as all other challenges – sort of like a building-step process. I knew that other souls had been put in our lives in order to learn, regardless of whether they bring positive or negative energy to us.” I took a deep breath and continued. “I didn’t share my thoughts with anyone else at the time other than Deb and Mary Lou, but as I listened to my sister talk about my mother’s injuries, I understood – and I mean clearly understood – that at some point in time and space, my mother had chosen to experience this trauma. My sisters and I had agreed to help support her, as did all of my mother’s wonderful friends. We were all part of the plan as it was now unfolding.”

I paused and looked at Epheniel. “But, to get back to your question, the voice/thought continued to resonate in my mind: *You have been taught. How will you respond?* I chose to respond with love, and by the time I had hung up the phone, I’d already forgiven the girls. There was no other choice.”

“You have learned your lesson well, Soul. As you and your family went through the healing process and legal system, did you sense a difference by choosing to respond with love instead of anger?”

I thought a long moment. “Well, by choosing love, I didn’t have to deal with the negativity and pain that comes with anger and bitterness. And while there were many tears shed that summer as the healing process continued for all of us, tears of sorrow are much easier to deal with than the consequences of anger.” I paused another moment before continuing. “Although we’d never spoken of making such a choice, I believe my mother instinctively understood, because she, too, responded with love, and while it will take considerably longer to conquer her

fears, she physically healed quickly. She put her life on hold for only a short time until she was able to return to it. The lessons she taught her family were invaluable.”

“Tell me of them.”

“She taught us a new definition for courage as she bravely faced the summer’s physical and emotional ordeal. She was relieved when the girls were sentenced to prison, not because she hated them, but because at last she’d be able to sleep without worrying that they would return. She taught us a new level of determination as she sought to regain the life that had been threatened that sunny May afternoon.

“Slowly, she made herself do all the things that she had normally done, but that now brought fear: working in her garden, taking a stroll and even going into her garage. And as terrifying as the thought of standing in the courtroom for the sentencing phase within feet of those who beat her, she faced that as well, reading her statement, as requested. But, instead of reading one filled with anger, she talked about how those few moments had changed her life. It was written in love, not anger – just as my mother had chosen to respond to the whole challenge.”

“She sounds like a remarkable spirit.”

“She is,” I agreed. “My mother taught us many things over the years, but the lessons she lived and taught us that summer were remarkable.”

We remained silent for a long time, preferring to inhale the beauty of the valley that lay before us. Finally, Ephaniel broke the silence. “Do you see how you already possess the understanding that you seek? You brought your intellectual understanding of spirituality into your decision to respond with love instead of reacting in anger.”

I nodded and gazed out again over the remarkable vista as I pondered her words. *Have I ever seen a green that deep or a blue that pure?* Unearthly birdsong broke my reverie and my thoughts moved to the earth realm. *Why can’t that be enough for me? Why am I driven to seek more?*

I stretched in the warm sun like a contented cat. My mind wandered before selecting another topic. “Karma,” I said. “Let’s talk about karma. Did it play a part in my mother’s beating?”

“Ah, karma. An interesting subject. For thousands of years, there have been deep, philosophical discussions on that subject. First of all, it is not a spiritual concept, but an earthly one. Simply put, the traditional earthly viewpoint has been that, for every action, there is an opposite and equal reaction in order to maintain balance. That meant that every act of evil or greed or selfishness – the list could go on and on – must be balanced with an act of kindness to be performed in either the present incarnation or a future one, but the balance must be maintained at all costs – kind of a balance sheet-mentality.”

“Makes sense,” I said.

“However, if one ascribes to that way of thinking, the reverse must also hold true: each act of kindness must be balanced with an act of evil. Does that ring true for you?”

I shook my head and asked, “So karma doesn’t really exist?”

“Karma is a product of human emotions, rather than spirituality, so it exists for earthly selves only. It comes from the misunderstanding that the flow of positive energy flowing from the celestial realm is directly linked to perceived negative energy created by the earthly self. Only the earthly realm operates on the *what goes around comes around* mentality; the Higher Self does not.”

I sat up straight, struggling to understand. I asked, “But why does it seem to work?”

Ephaniel answered. “When the earthly self does something unkind, he blocks his own positive energy, preventing the crucial flow.”

“Ah, appearing to cause negative energy?”

“Right,” she agreed, “but, in effect, it doesn’t – it’s just that the positive energy flow has been blocked. Every time earthly selves treat others as they wish to be treated – with kindness – positive energy is created and the flow continues, which is the spiritual concept most closely associated with karma.”

“So when people say something has bad karma?” I asked.

“What earthly selves refer to as bad karma is actually just the lack of positive energy. It’s

the concept of cause and effect – how the energies of different humans affect each other.”

“Again, we are back to energy,” I mused. “So listening to our gut – our Higher Self – will continue that flow of positive energy and is, in effect, our guidance system.”

She nodded and continued. “It is important to listen to that gut feeling because doubt is telling you that your understanding of a situation does not ring true to you on the earth realm. Karma is the human microcosmic perception, but it is far more complex on the universal, macrocosmic level.”

I thought about her words and knew they rang true. I remembered an earlier conversation I’d had with Deb and turned to Epheniel. “All of Michael’s lessons for Deb have been profound, but the latest really hit home for her.” Epheniel arched an eye-brow, but said nothing. “But before I tell you the lesson, let me explain more about my friend.”

“Deb feels energy, but she can also see it. She enjoys watching group prayer, especially in a church. As each person prays, a small eddy of energy rises and spins from that person into the air above them. And since energy gathers like energy, the small individual eddies combine with neighboring prayer energies, creating larger spinning energy orbs. As groups of these combine, Deb can see a massive energy funnel rise and finally burst through the roof of the church. If the prayers were targeted to someone in particular, the funnel finds its way to that person, bringing the love, Light and grace of the prayers.

“One day in meditation, Michael took Deb to a hospital emergency room. A teenage boy lay on the gurney; he had obviously been the victim of a grisly murder. His mother, naturally distraught, sobbed and wailed over her son. In her grief, she cursed his murderer. In horror, Deb watched the negative energy rise from the mother and move upward and out of the emergency room, traveling all the way to the murderer – further empowering him. It was a shocking, potent image meant to demonstrate the power of negative thoughts. *Love thine enemy* took on a whole new meaning for Deb.”

Epheniel spoke quietly. “This *Great Earth Experiment*, as you call it, will only succeed when humankind truly understands the power of positive and negative thoughts, words and deeds, and accepts personal responsibility for them. It is all about energy.” I must have looked overwhelmed, for she continued. “I know it seems like a great deal to ask humankind, but until journeying souls can do just that, they will remain mired in the earth realm.” She paused, sensing my attempt to process what clearly seemed impossible.

“How do we do this? What do we do when negative thoughts come?”

“The first step is to recognize that the thought is negative. Then, make the conscious choice to stop it.”

“Do you realize how difficult that will be?” I lamely protested. “It will be challenging when all is going well, but nearly impossible when times are tough.”

“When did I promise it would be easy?” Epheniel replied. “Let’s say you are exhausted. If a negative thought starts to cross your mind, block it. Remind yourself that you are tired and you will examine the situation when you are rested. Force the thought to leave your mind. Then, when you feel rested, re-examine the situation through the eyes of your Higher Self. Once you can view it macrocosmically without ego jumping in, you can process the experience without negativity.”

My face must have shown my doubt. Epheniel continued. “I promise we’ll discuss this further, but let’s leave it for now.”

Will I be able to remember all of this, let alone do what is asked by accepting personal responsibility for every thought that crosses my mind? I shook the cobwebs from my brain, determined to learn. “Okay, let’s talk about predestination. Is that an earthly-self idea, as well? What role does it play with all of this choosing ... stuff?”

She smiled, understanding my limited vocabulary. “Does predestination exist? Yes and no, Soul. Yes, you can call it *predestination* by scripting ahead of time that which you wish to learn during a certain incarnation and then carrying through with it on the earth plane, but the great unknown in this equation is our response. It always goes back to our response to the events we have charted,” Epheniel said. “A soul may plan a Life Chart and then incarnate and say, ‘Forget this – it’s too hard.’ Yes, the Chart was written and yes, eventually the soul must complete the tasks, but there is no time line given for that completion.”

She paused before continuing. "Something else you may wish to consider is this: let's say that a soul has agreed to work on a task. That task has been predestined once it is written. How the task is completed is not and becomes a case of Free Will. Simply put, predestination might be best termed as the framework of a lifetime. Do you understand?"

"Many paths leading to the same destination – one of those get-there–anyway-you-want-as-long-as-you-get–there things?"

She smiled. "In a sense, Soul. Free Will is how learning takes place – it's a major part of your journey." She paused again in thought. "You know, you talked about anger earlier when we discussed your mother's beating. Let's go back to that now and discuss negative responses." I nodded.

"Each human entity has two bodies, Soul," Epheniel said. "There is the physical body, but there's also the ethereal body, which you may recognize as the Higher Self. Just as you'd treat your physical body with care, nurturing it and watching over it, the ethereal body needs attention, as well, in order to thrive."

"What kind of attention?"

"Well, recall what we just discussed about going against your inner being. The outward response is what many call karma, but each time you do that, the inward response is that you tear the fabric of the ethereal body." I looked confused. She took a deep breath and tried another tactic. "Let's say you become very angry with someone. What is the earthly expression so often used to describe the tirade you unleash against that person?"

"You mean when you rip someone?"

"Exactly. In that process, the earthly self takes over the Higher Self. What human souls fail to understand, however, is that in the processing of ripping someone, they not only rip the ethereal body of that soul, but also rip their own."

"And that's why I feel so lousy after losing my temper?"

She nodded. "In essence, you not only bring harm to a piece of someone else, but to your inner self, as well. And, like your observation about karma, there are a lot of ripped ethereal bodies on your realm. When these reach the other side of the veil, sometimes they are so torn that they are often unrecognizable."

"Because they've been pretty well beaten up while on Earth?"

"No, Soul, because of the enormous growth that has taken place as a result of the challenges." She paused. "But anger is not the only emotion that can destroy the ethereal body. Any type or strength of violence tears the fabric of our being. Fear, hate, condemnation – the list goes on and on. All negative thoughts, words and actions harm the one doing the damage, as well as the intended victim and those in witness. And as is quite often the result, the earthly self builds walls in reaction to the survival instinct, which has kicked in, preventing further learning."

The enormity of her words stunned me. I wondered how many rips and tears I was personally responsible for over the course of my lifetime. I was filled with a sudden grief but, just as quickly, found myself enveloped by the unconditional love of my angel.

"No regrets, Soul," Epheniel whispered. "Instead of dwelling on past hurts and guilt, learn from all of this. That's all that is asked of you. That's all you have asked of yourself."

"So what do we do to fix all of this?"

Epheniel arched her eyebrows and I knew that I had missed something. "Always the fixer, Soul? The only way it can be fixed, is to remember and safeguard the fragility of all souls. Be gentle with your words and actions – gentleness is part of your own core earthly self beliefs – that which you innately recognize as Truth. But, it is just as important to remember to be gentle with yourself. Humans tend to beat themselves up over what they perceive as important issues, but are, in fact, trivialities in the Big Picture. Unconditionally accept and forgive yourself and others. Release the need to be right and the need for control over your life and that of others. Release the need to criticize others and place judgment upon them. Release the need to think that some souls have more value than others. Physically remove yourself from those who seek to tear your ethereal body unless your Higher Self guides you to the challenge. Live a life of gratitude, appreciation and selflessness."

"Selflessness?" I asked. "Then we shouldn't think of ourselves?"

"No, Soul, another type of selflessness. You are beautiful and unique and are loved by the entire celestial realm – God. That, in itself, is a cause for constant celebration. But look beyond the bounds of your earth-rooted reality and step into others' so that you can better understand those around you. Watch out for each other. Have faith and trust that all will unfold, enfolding you as it should. And finally, live a life of unconditional love. And that, Beloved Soul, is how it can be *fixed*."

I was struck by how similar Zeke's list had been. We sat lost in thought a long time. Epheniel finally broke the silence. "So, as the healing process continued with your mother, did it also continue with you?"

"I guess so, although spiritual healing seems to take a lot longer than physical or emotional healing – at least it did for me. I spent a great deal of time last summer with my mother, helping her heal. I found that helping her, helped me. I slowly began to put back into my life all those things that I had removed in hopes of becoming more acceptable to God: crossword puzzles, computer and card games and those sorts of things."

"Did their return bring you joy?"

I shook my head. "It took me a great many months to enjoy them again, however, because every time I completed a crossword puzzle, for example, I was reminded that I no longer cared about being acceptable. Although, I have to admit that was interesting."

"What?"

"The very first day I put back crossword puzzles into my life, one of the lines asked for celestial beings. Of course, the answer was *angels*."

Epheniel smiled. "Most often, Soul, you'll find the answer is angels. Besides, I thought it might help you understand that crossword puzzles would not keep you from where you wish to be."

"I figured, but at the time, it really startled me. And, as the summer wore on, the walls climbed higher. I knew I was responsible for it all – failing, excluding my friends in my healing process – all of it, which, in turn, then brought more pain."

"I know. I helped as much as I could."

"Were you the one who sent me the vision of the walls?" She nodded.

"I figured. It surprised me because I'd had no visions for six months. And then one night during a dream, I was given a vision of me actually building the walls. Very precisely, I placed each layer carefully upon the last. The odd part was that my walls held a special niche, in which I inserted stunning works of art."

"Stunning works of art? Isn't that interesting?" mused my angel.

"At least I had the bittersweet knowledge that my walls were masterpieces." I grinned at her. "By the way, you have fine taste in art!"

"Thank you. I also have fine taste in souls."

We sat a long time in thought before Epheniel asked, "So, what did you do with the walls?"

"Well, by the time school had begun, I was ready to put it all behind me but there was one slight problem: while I had become a master wall builder, I didn't have a clue on how to dismantle them. I began searching for answers, and ..."

"From within?" Epheniel asked.

I shook my head. "I knew what was in my head, and there were definitely no answers anywhere. Believe me, I searched. Kris, a dear friend, had told me that she was successfully working with the technique of talking with the guardian angels of the difficult people in her life in order to better understand their roles in her life. I decided that perhaps I should also give it a try. So, that very night, I prayed that someone would come to me the following day and say something – anything – that would help me. The next morning, I prayed again that someone would be sent to me. I promised to listen carefully to every word that was said to me so that I could begin to tear down the walls. All morning long, I paid close attention, waiting for a message.

"At noontime, it came in the form of another friend, Julia. Normally, she ate lunch in her classroom, but that day, she came into the staff room. She took me aside and said that she'd been thinking of me the previous evening. She'd been reading a book that gave a description of spiritual willingness. She said she had immediately thought of me and wanted me to know. She

must have thought me deranged, because I could only stand in stunned silence. That afternoon, when I could think normally again, I jotted her a note, explaining that she had been sent to me with that message.

"I shared the experience with Deb and Mary Lou and Sandy, bubbling over with joy. Sandy then wrote me a letter, which I will forever save. May I read it to you? It means a lot to me and came at just the right time." She nodded and I pulled out a piece of paper from my pocket.

"... 'I, too, envy tremendously those people to whom it seems to come so easily and apparently. They are able to share their gifts so obviously. I want that desperately, and yet I do not get those apparent messages. But then strangely, I do seem to hit things every once in a while – from whence I have no clue. It is on those truly rare occasions that I can come to terms with the understanding that, Hey, I have been created for a purpose or two. I don't know exactly why, but if I can live according to those ways that I feel are true and workable for me, that must be what I need to be doing. It is not for me and my growth to know why.

"Those times of frustration when I think I need the booming voice of God or the handwriting on the wall, I make absolutely no progress at all. I will continue to pursue the knowledge and I will continue to apply things that I learn – and be aware that my purpose (though unknown to me) may just be to be in someone else's journey. It may not appear vitally essential to my personal perspective, but if I were not who I am, doing what I am doing, being what I am being, at this time, someone else (or lots of someone elses) could not be making their journeys.

"Do I make any sense? I have never tried to put this in words before because it is NOT what I would like to be experiencing! I want to see auras – I want to be telepathic – I want to hear the animals – the birds – the winds – the earth – the stars – to touch other galaxies (and be aware of it) – talk with the angels and spirits of the earth and actually hear them talking back! I really want this, but I don't have it.

"And every time I get near someone to ask why as I am pursuing eagerly, I get a migraine or an obvious sign or a message that says, *My child, I love you every bit as much as I love all that I have created. I have gifted you every bit as much as I have all that has been created. You have been given people and books and experiences and blessings that have helped you grow, cope, share and realize your existence. For these things be ever and eternally grateful and realize these things each moment. I have given gifts to others that may appear more appealing, but they are no more important and vital nor no less important and vital than the gifts I've given others.*

"Think on this as well, Marty, you have chosen your existence and reality. Do you realize that you have chosen to experience in this manner because you desired the growth? You've already had the shortcuts. You need things this way for the opportunity and the community. Seek, if you must, but do not be willing to trade off what you do not know for less than what you have."

I quietly refolded the letter and we sat in silence for a few moments before Epheniel said, "Your friend sounds very wise."

"She is. And you can see that between the experience that day in the teacher's lounge and receiving this letter the following day, I was finally able to begin the wall-dismantling process. I was more than a little nervous about getting rid of them, but knew that at last the walls could go."

"It's interesting that again you waited for an answer outside of yourself instead of searching within, Soul. Have you noticed the pattern all throughout the journey? You choose to react to the pain instead of responding by trusting yourself."

"How would I have known what to do unless someone told me? You keep saying I hold the answers and I keep rummaging through the file drawers in my mind and coming up empty-handed. I don't think I could even recognize my own answers now if I heard them." I wrung my hands in frustration and my voice rose. "What do the answers look or sound like? I don't understand!"

"Soul, have you yet learned that when one is given a lesson to learn, that lesson is repeated until the desired learning has taken place?" I nodded. "It seems to me that until you really start listening and learning to trust yourself, you will continue to find yourself in similar painful situations." She looked at me as a tear slowly streaked my cheek again. She once again enfolded me. "It seems to me that you're putting your trust in everyone but yourself. Learn to trust

yourself and you will find all the answers you seek. They are all within you.”

“But what about the rest of the walls? How do I get rid of them? I feel as if I’m cowering behind them again.”

“Humans have been building walls since the dawn of time, Soul, as a coping mechanism for such things as worry, guilt, insecurity, pain and fear. Many souls built them when they were very young in order to survive trauma, settled in, felt safe and stayed behind them their entire lives, adding to the walls as needed.”

I stared at my angel thoughtfully. “I suspect that we don’t even realize the depth of our walls since wall-building and maintaining them is so much a part of our earthly-self lives.”

Epheniel nodded solemnly. “Look around you, Soul. See the walls in your physical world. They take up a great amount of space. The same thing happens when you build walls inside your soul. So much space is taken up that there is little room for anything else. And while you may feel safer, you are also depriving yourself of wonderful opportunities which cannot take place because consciously or subconsciously you have left little room for anything else.” Epheniel shook her head sadly. “There is so much sadness and fear in your world, Soul, and so much of it is unnecessary.”

“So, let’s get back to getting rid of them,” I said. “How’s it done?”

Suddenly, the teeth-jarring sound of a jackhammer broke the serenity. Dit-dit-dit-dit-dit-dit-dit-dit. A very loud jackhammer. DIT- DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT. Without looking around, I knew exactly who had appeared. I turned around to find Michael – of jackhammer fame – in a dirt-smudged, sleeveless, ripped, used- to-be-white tee shirt, navy blue work pants and dusty, steel-toed boots. He wore a battered neon orange hard hat over his scarved head. He also wore a huge grin; he reminded me of a little boy showing off his favorite toy. DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT- DIT- DIT.

“Hey, Bruce, check this out!” he yelled over the noise. DIT- DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT- DIT. A thick concrete wall materialized, which he joyously – and loudly – DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT ... destroyed. When it crumbled, another took its place. DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT. It soon bit the dust, so to speak. Another appeared.

“Whatdya think, Bruce? Cool, huh?” DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT- DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT.

“I think it’s loud, Michael!” DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT- DIT-DIT.

“What? Speak up! I can’t hear you!” DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT- DIT-DIT-DIT.

Now, that’s a pleasant turn of events. An angel who can’t hear me for a change.

“I THINK IT’S LOUD!” I replied. DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT- DIT-DIT-DIT.

“What?” DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT.

“I THINK IT’S ...” Michael flipped the key and suddenly the silence that followed was as deafening as the jackhammer had been. “... off,” I ended lamely.

“Cool, huh?” Michael repeated.

“Cool, Michael,” I replied. “Let me guess,” I said as the dust began to settle. “This is your subtle way of showing me your prowess in wall demolition, right?”

“Yep. Call on me when it’s time and I’ll bring ol’ Bessie here with me and we’ll take care of them for you. Free of charge.” He shook his head. “Can’t beat it, Bruce.”

“Bessie, eh?” I grinned. “I’ll remember, Michael. Thanks for the offer!”

“No, problem. DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT. Gotta run. DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT. There’s lots of negativity in the world that ol’ Bessie and I have to handle.” DIT- DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT. “Catcha later, Bruce, Eppie!” DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT-DIT.

I nodded and waved weakly, but Michael – and ol’ Bessie – had disappeared.

I smiled at Epheniel and reveled in the silence. “Okay, let’s pretend that Michael and ol’ Bessie are working in other parts of the universe when I’m ready to begin the process of dismantling. How do I do it?”

Epheniel smiled. “Start with prayer, Soul, so that you can connect with the Light. If you do not recognize the purpose of the walls – why you built them in the first place, then ask for that knowledge. And when it is given, take a deep breath and examine that pain behind the walls, and work through it so that you can release not only the pain, but the walls protecting you. When you can finally release control over the pain, the walls will start to crumble and the real you can begin

to emerge.”

“That sounds very difficult,” I replied softly. “I’m not sure I have enough courage to face all of that.”

“Remember, Soul, that I am with you always. You don’t need to try to handle it all yourself. You were never meant to do so, but you were also never meant to live behind walls. I know it’s overwhelming. No one is asking that you tear them down quickly. After all, they were built slowly over time and may take some time to let them go. Pray to God, Soul. You’ll receive the strength you need for the task.” She hugged me once more. “And don’t be surprised that once you have finally released control and the walls are removed that your body manifests a change.”

“What do you mean?”

“Your doctors know there is a direct link between illness and the spirit, Soul. There is a great deal of research in this area now, and those results will help pave the way for the eventual scientific evidence for the soul, but we’ll get into that another time.” I looked confused and she thought a moment before continuing. “Let’s finish addressing the physical changes manifested during and after a spiritual change.” She paused. “What happens to your body when you are stressed, Soul?”

“You mean things like headaches, clammy hands, ulcers, a feeling of exhaustion?”

“Yes,” she said, “but researchers now know that many more serious illnesses are linked to the mind/body’s attempt to cope with trauma within the body. Whether consciously or subconsciously, human spirits choose to bring on a myriad of physical manifestations in order to cope. Doesn’t it make sense to you, then, that once the walls come down that there may be some physical change, as well?” I nodded and she hugged me one last time. “Be aware, Soul, and you will notice a difference once the walls start to crumble. You will feel free – untethered, but a bit vulnerable in your new state. Trust that you will be protected and feel safe with- out those walls. Remember that together, we can do amazing things, Soul. I am here, waiting.”

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Dance of Chance

Vision: I see the grid, noticing an area with great light activity. Slowly focusing on light, I move in closer. Michael encourages me to observe closely. There is a bright white light emitting a single pure note in the center with twelve multicolored lights closely surrounding it, singing their own particular musical note. More lights come to my attention, moving at different speeds from different parts of the grid, each bringing with them their own note. They are like fireworks, except the lights implode instead of explode. As the new lights join them, each colored light is altered: its light brightening or darkening and/or its musical note becoming harmonic or discordant. At first glance, it looked as though the lights were affecting each other randomly. As I observed more closely, I witnessed a beautifully choreographed dance with perfect timing and orchestration.

Chapter 7

June

I found myself fairly skipping up the many steps to the great doors, but came to an abrupt stop when I thought I heard something. It was a deep, muffled sound – *There it is again*. It seemed vaguely familiar, but I couldn't place it. *What is it?* I listened carefully, but it seemed to be gone, so I shrugged it off as my overactive imagination and ran up the last dozen steps. With nary a pause, I pulled open the massive doors and slipped inside. As my eyes adjusted to the light change, I found Zeke looking up at me from where he lay on the floor with a cleaning rag and a pail. A grin automatically spread over his face as he jumped to his feet and vigorously pumped my hand in greeting.

"Eh, Lass, ye're getting better with entering. I didn't even hear ye coming today!"

I smiled and gently extricated my hand from his. "Yep! It's taken a while, but I think I'm learning. I guess you can teach an old dog new tricks!" We began to saunter down the corridor together instead of his usual break-neck pace. "How are things going with you, Zeke? You looked pretty intense, scrubbing that floor back there. Why don't you just blink your eyes and zap it clean?"

"Because, Soul, there's something to be learned from getting down on my knees and scrubbing. I chose to learn a lesson from the experience."

"What d'ya learn?" I suddenly reddened with the realization of my rudeness. "I'm so sorry – please forgive me. I don't know what came over me to even ask you that question."

Zeke grinned. "Now, I know that I am not the one who is supposed to be giving out the answers around here, but I find yer question to be very interesting – ye've come a long way,

Lass!”

I was clearly confused and stopped to better understand what Zeke had to tell me. “How so?”

“This is very good news that the first thought that crosses yer mind these days is to find the lesson and learn it. I knew ye’d get to this point eventually! Hey, ye know that old television commercial, ‘Ye can either pay me now or pay me later?’”

Surprise must have registered on my face because Zeke laughed merrily. First, my angel is watching old movies and now the Hall of Records handy sprite is quoting old oil filter television commercials. “I don’t have to watch yer television to know what’s being broadcast, Soul! Remember, we garner information from many sources as we seek to gain understanding and learning. Open yer mind, Lass, to all possibilities!”

By this point, I could only nod. After a moment, I returned to his original question. “Yes, I remember that commercial – why?” *Please don’t try to sell me a new oil filter.*

“Actually, it’s the same with these lessons ye’re to learn. Ye can learn the lesson early and move on or ye can continue to face the lesson through different challenges until the lesson is learned. Ye chose to learn these lessons, so learn them ye must – either now or later. Personally,” Zeke leaned toward me and winked slyly as we continued again down the hallway, “if I were ye, I’d learn them early on. It’ll save ye heartache down the road, if ye know what I mean.”

I nodded thoughtfully, wondering how many times I had faced the same lessons throughout my life because I hadn’t truly learned from them. I vowed to be more aware of future lessons. Saving *heartache down the road* seemed like a pretty good idea to me.

“And, as for yer question, Soul, sometimes it’s easier for me to understand when I’m down on my knees. And, yeah, I did learn something: when I’m down, I can only look up, which is a pretty good way to find understanding.”

We picked up the pace, and soon we were at the door. I barely recognized it. In fact, if Zeke hadn’t pointed it out to me, I may very well have passed it by. It appeared to shimmer with a life of its own. Beautiful pale pink and white opalescence greeted me as I waved goodbye to my sprite friend, quietly knocked on the door and let myself into the room.

“Wow,” I breathed as I located my guardian angel at her desk. “That’s some door, isn’t it?” I recalled her explanation of the door evolution and grinned. “Zeke and I just had an interesting talk about learning lessons. I must be learning a lot to change the door so much!”

Epheniel walked over to me and placed her hand on my shoulder. I closed my eyes and sighed, feeling her love spread through me. “Could we just stand like this for the whole visit today?” I ventured quietly.

She chuckled and stood back, gazing at me intently. “You’re doing so well, Soul. Have you that realization within you?”

I smiled and nodded. “Yes, things seem to be going right along these days. I just don’t seem to find the peace on Earth that I do when I am here.” I sighed and stepped back, releasing her. My guardian and I had lots to discuss today. “Go on,” I challenged. “Ask me.”

She gazed within me, smiled gently and asked, “The walls?”

“Gone!” I answered. “Want to know what I did?” Without awaiting my angel’s answer, I excitedly continued. “First, I decided to take a shower.”

“Take a shower?”

“Actually, I lit a white candle and then took a shower. I figured the cleansing water would help wash away the walls. I also figured out the walls were made up of disappointment, feelings of perceived rejection and failure, raw emotion and ego, so the water would help in that cleansing, as well. I thought of the emotion as the glue holding them together. In tearing down the walls, I released the emotion keeping them in place.

“Once I was under the streaming water, I announced my intent was to ask the angelic realm to help me tear down the walls. I painstakingly – and I mean painstakingly – talked out all of my pain.”

“Why, Soul?” Epheniel asked.

“I just felt that verbalizing the pain would help release it. I was tired of it being inside my

head and the only way I could think of getting it out was to talk it out. And I talked it out. I reached deep inside myself and brought out anything that might even remotely resemble negative emotions, so my cleansing would be complete. Of course, it didn't take long for the tears to start flowing. I had boarded it all up once the official start of spring had arrived, and prying it open was more than a bit scary and emotional, in itself. So, a flood of emotions poured out of me.

"Once I felt devoid of emotion and the hot water tank was almost empty, I calmed myself down with slow, deep breaths. I began talking again, but this time, I asked for help in removing ego so I could re-examine the situation, but this time through the eyes of my Higher Self."

Epheniel interrupted. "You moved out of the microcosm of your earthly reality to the Higher Self macrocosm, Soul. Good for you!"

"Actually, I pretended that I was a fly on the spiritual wall – a dispassionate observer. As I talked through the situation again, I kept reminding myself to comment, *Isn't that interesting that this is unfolding as it is? Isn't that interesting that I allowed myself to let ego take control? Isn't that interesting that these are the lessons I requested?* I found that when I eliminated ego from jumping in and demanding attention, I really could be a dispassionate observer. Looking at it through the eyes of my Higher Self allowed me to dismantle all of the walls. Each and every one is gone. I'm not sure who helped me or where the walls went because I asked you, my favorite hardhat and my Higher Self to handle that part for me, but I know there's no trace of those walls anywhere within me." I looked at her carefully. "I admit to being curious, though. Where'd the artwork go?"

Epheniel smiled and swept her arm delicately from one end of the conference room to the other. My eyes followed her movement and I gasped as I realized that while the walls had been dismantled, the masterpieces had been salvaged. I drank in the beauty of the paintings. "I'm so glad these were saved!" I whispered in awe. "They're beautiful!"

"Of course, they are, Soul. They're you. But let's get back to that emotional cleansing. How did you feel afterward?"

I thought a moment before answering. "Pretty empty. You were right; I felt rather vulnerable without the walls to protect me." Epheniel opened her mouth, but I stopped her. "I know, I know. They weren't protecting me, but hindering me."

"They were blocking your connection to All That Is. You were blocking the connection."

I nodded. "I know. Even though I feel vulnerable now, I know they needed to go."

Epheniel cradled me in her arms. "Imagine yourself reaching into my energy, swirl it around your mind and body, and then shoot it out into the Universe for others to use," she suggested. "That will help with the vulnerability."

She smiled and then gently released me. I knew she was as happy to see me as I was to be with her. She cocked her head slightly. "Where shall we talk today, Soul? Why don't we be adventurous? Egypt? Ancient Rome? Africa?"

I thought a while. "Ancient Rome? We can go there?"

My guardian nodded. "You spent a lifetime there. You interested in seeing it again?"

Am I interested? Yes! But as excited as the thought of it was, I knew the very-human part of me needed more information before embarking on such a trip. I thought a long moment and faced Epheniel. "You'll be with me, right?" She nodded. "The whole time?" She nodded again. "And I won't get stuck in that place, unable to get back to my present life?" For the third time, she nodded, smiling. I looked at her long and hard. "We're talking about time travel here, aren't we? Going back in time?"

Epheniel laughed. "Maybe what we need to do first is to talk about *time*, Soul." She returned my penetrating gaze. "You haven't received a degree in quantum physics of which I am unaware, have you?" I shook my head. "Taken any class lately *like Quantum Physics in One Easy Leap?*" Again I shook my head. She smiled. "I thought not. Pity. Now, this may sound a bit bizarre, but let me try to explain. In the entire universe, time is linear only on Earth."

"Linear?"

"Linear. Your time runs second to second, minute to minute, hour to hour, day to day. Events follow one another; years build upon the last; one thing occurs after another. Are you following?" I nodded and she continued. "However, linear time is only a physical phenomenon.

The reality, however, is that we are all a part of simultaneous existence. That is, all of our experiences take place at the same ...," She giggled. "...moment." I knew I looked thoroughly confused because she paused as she gathered her thoughts. "Here, let me try to explain it to you with an onion."

"An onion?"

"Yes, Soul," Epheniel said. "When you cut into an onion to halve it, you do not just cut through one layer, but all layers at once." She thought a moment and said, "It's difficult to understand because time is so ingrained in human spirits. Even the word *once* is a time-oriented word. *Before, after, during, when* – they're all delineations of time. But to get back to the onion, each of our incarnations is like a layer of onion." She stopped again when it was obvious that I needed more than a crash course in Basic Quantum Physics. "When I talk about revisiting previous incarnations, I don't mean we're going *back*, but moving to the layer of the onion that holds that particular lifetime."

I grappled with her explanation. *I think I get the human delineations of time part and the onion layer part, but simultaneous existence? Phew! That's some leap from an onion.* I remembered the emotional-release verbalization had been helpful, so thought I'd try it here.

"Okay, Epheniel. Let me see if I get this. What you're saying is that my Ancient Roman lifetime is occurring now as this present one is occurring?" My angel nodded excitedly. "All of my previous incarnations are occurring at the same time as well – simultaneously?"

"Yes," she answered, "as well as your future ones, if you want another familiar time-oriented word, Soul. Actually, it's a very interesting concept that should intrigue you once you are able to grasp it. Once this is understood and integrated, you can cross through those layers to gather more knowledge or understanding to better complete the task that lies before you in a particular incarnation, whether it be thousands of years in the past or future or the present."

I interrupted her. "And the rest of the cosmos is operating on this simultaneous existence thing?" She nodded. "Okay. So, not only could I cross through the layers to gain more understanding of my previous and future incarnations, but I can do so through different dimensions?"

Again, she nodded vigorously and smiled broadly. "When your soul decides to make an earth journey, it's for a specific purpose." Epheniel paused. "You with me so far? It's going to get a bit complicated now."

It's going to get a bit complicated now? Yikes! I gulped and nodded, trying to grasp the concepts.

"Because time is not a linear existence, it is possible, then, that in two separate lifetimes – this one and another – you might need to gain a knowledge that can be procured in what you perceive as your present lifetime."

"Whoa!" I jumped in. "Are you telling me what I think you are?"

My angel smiled. "You tell me, Soul. What do you think I'm saying?"

"There may be more than one physical body containing my inner core on the physical realm at any one time?"

Epheniel beamed. "Well done, Soul!"

"More than one of me?" I squeaked. She nodded and waited while I tried to process the information. "So, it's conceivable then, that while I am picking out bananas at the grocery store, I might bump into ..., well, *me*?"

She nodded again. "Time does not exist, Soul, but progress does. That's essentially why it is possible to live in two different realities, yet tap into the same pool of knowledge." She paused again so that I might have a moment to absorb it all. "You see, as an entire group, humanity has experienced all. It is now the journeying souls' desire to experience all as individuals and then come together as one to become Light."

"That would be the big challenge earlier Earth experiments lacked," I mused.

She beamed at me like a proud mama. "Exactly. Would you like an earth realm analogy to help you better grasp this?"

"Yes, please," I replied, hoping a degree from M.I.T. would not be necessary.

"Many elementary schools have fundraisers..."

All right! I just hit the analogy jackpot!

"Stay with me, Soul," she said with a wink. "Oftentimes, the results of a fundraiser are twofold: each seller is rewarded with a prize, but the school, as a whole, benefits greatly from that fund raiser. The more a seller contributes to the fundraiser, the more benefits will be accrued for all – sort of like a pool of funds, right?"

I nodded. *So far so good.*

"Similarly, the more journeying souls contribute to the pool of knowledge through each bit of individual learning that takes place, the more a part of the pool – God/Universe/Higher Power – each becomes. Therefore, in order to gain deeper understanding of that individual learning to deepen the pool from which all of humanity can dip, simultaneous existence is not only possible, but crucial." She paused again. "So now you understand simultaneous existence as opposed to linear time?"

I looked at her, dumbfounded. *You expect me to understand quantum physics of the cosmos with only the onion visual aid and the fundraiser analogy?* "This is going to take time to absorb what you just told me, but I promise I'll work at it."

I remembered her offer and was determined to take her up on it. "Wow. I really experienced Ancient Rome in one of my lifetimes?"

She laughed and picked up my hand. "Come on, Soul, we'll leave the time issue for now and go together." And before I could think twice and change my mind half a dozen times, I heard a faintly reminiscent whooshing sound and then nothing. And then everything. I inhaled a large nose full of dust and dirt from the thoroughfare in which I suddenly found myself – sprawled face down.

"Get out of the way, you half-wit!" yelled a mounted Centurion guard, resplendent in his uniform as his horse reared high above me. He had narrowly missed me as he thundered around the nearby corner and dodging me had slowed his pace. I needed no other warning, but scrambled through a cloud of dust, sputtering and coughing as I strained to find a safe place. I landed some thirty feet away in the shelter of a building. Overwhelming chaos descended upon me as I sought to make sense of it all. Wiping the dust from my eyes and breathing a little easier, I looked around and realized that I had literally been plopped in the middle of a busy marketplace, teeming with people and animals and sounds and smells.

I leaned back against the building and looked down at my scraped knees, noticing painful welts on my legs. The realization hit that I was not only barefoot and dressed in a short, filthy, ripped tunic, but that I was a boy. Absentmindedly, I brushed a hand through my hair, which appeared to be a mass of unruly, dirty curls, raining down more dust upon me. As I touched my head, I realized how much it itched and I scratched it viciously, but it did nothing to relieve the irritation. When I sneezed twice and went searching for a tissue to wipe my nose, I found that my hand was clutching a crude bucket.

Another sudden realization dawned and my heart sank. I hadn't come to visit Ancient Rome, as I had thought, but somehow had been thrust back into that particular lifetime. I frantically scanned the marketplace. *Where is Ephnie!*? My heart raced in unbridled fear. *She promised she would stay with me!* Unbidden tears began to flow down the dust on my face, making dirty rivulets. Then, just as suddenly, a familiar peace flooded my body and I instantly calmed.

I am here. I scanned the crowd, searching for my angel. *No, Soul, don't look for me outside of you. I am within, as I have always been.*

"Within?" I croaked as another cloud of dust engulfed me, causing painful hacking. "I need you out here with me! I almost got killed by that stupid horse! Did you see that?" I spluttered, more than a little disgruntled at my present state of affairs.

Calm down, Soul. Of course I saw it. I am part of you. It was not yet your time to leave this realm or the horse might well have trampled you to death, now, wouldn't it?

"What a pleasant thought," I grumbled under my breath. "I feel so much better about it all, thank you very much." I continued my grumbling as I picked lice from my head.

Ah, that's why you are so cranky, Soul. Tell me. Did you ask me before we left what Life Chart theme had been chosen for this lifetime?

Drat. She had me and we both knew it. "No, I just assumed that ..."

Assuming again, Soul? Will you ever learn that assumptions and expectations rarely help a situation? What did you expect to be this time around – a noblewoman living in luxury, her every whim gratified instantly by her loving and protective servants? Or perhaps a Roman senator with legions to do his bidding?

"Those sound good," I offered. "Those sound like something I might like." A sense of déjà vu coursed through me. *Where have I heard that before?*

Sorry, Soul, but in this life you chose to understand humility, not attempt to deal with wealth and power.

"Humility?" I muttered, still disconcerted with the present state of affairs. "Whose great idea was that?"

*You and your guide for that lifetime, Nemphu. And you're right, Soul. It was a great idea and you learned a great deal before coming Home. All of it – the lice and the heat and the dust and the beatings and the physical and mental deficiencies – allowed you your present understanding of humility, which you poured into the pool for other journeying souls. She watched me struggle to gain understanding, but finally asked, *Would you like to meet him now?**

My mind reeled with all that was happening around me. A rat scurried past me and I reflexively shivered and shrank farther into the shade of the building, hoping to shrink myself into invisibility. I found I could barely maintain my flow of thoughts, let alone process those of my guardian angel. I scratched my head again, thinking how absolutely, positively, miserable I was. "What'd you say? You want me to meet somebody? What?"

Nemphu, your spirit guide this life. Would you like to meet him, Soul?

Oh, swell. Just what I need right now – another voice in my head. As if I don't have enough to deal with right now. I find myself dumped in the middle of this chaos, a horse nearly tramples me, I'm hot, filthy and I positively reek. My head is crawling with lice... another sneeze broke into my thoughts. And to top it all off, apparently, dust allergies have followed me through at least two incarnations. I can't believe I let myself get talked into this. When will I learn to ask the right questions before jumping into things?

I heard a low chuckle next to me and a quiet voice whisper in my ear, "Still the same old Soul, I see, Epheniel!" I spun around and found squatting next to me a dark-skinned young man with black hair, twinkling eyes and a beautiful smile. He was not dressed as the others in the square, and I had a sense that he came from an even earlier time with his simple, cream-colored tunic, sandals on his feet.

I sneezed one more time and made the sudden sad realization that there were no clean tissues in my pocket. In point of fact, there was no pocket. I wiped my nose with the back of my hand and looked suspiciously at the visitor. *Why does he look so familiar?* "I'm sorry. I appear to be up to my eyeballs in dust and didn't catch your name. Who are you?" I inquired as I swatted away a spider that had begun to crawl up my dirty leg. Even through the chaos of the marketplace, I heard a deep sigh from my angel.

Soul, you're not listening. This is Nemphu, your spirit guide through this particular incarnation.

"Still not listening, eh, Soul?" Nemphu said, chuckling again as he put his hands over mine. Instantly, the noise and dust of the marketplace ceased, and my mind cleared. "There," he said. "Is that better?"

I gazed at him and sighed. "Now, that was some neat trick!" I reddened with mortification at my humanity. "I'm sorry I was so rude. It's just, ... well, it's just that I didn't understand what I was getting into when I agreed to this trip ... and ..."

Nemphu exploded in laughter. "Where have I heard those words before? Epheniel, you hear that?" he roared again, slapping me on the back. I heard the distinct sounds of my present guide chortling deep within my head as he said, "About two thousand of your Earth years have passed and that's still coming out of your mouth?"

"What do you mean?" I asked as I gazed into his beautiful dark eyes. "What's still coming out of my mouth?"

Epheniel spoke up. Before this Roman lifetime, when you and Nemphu wrote your chart

together, Soul, you insisted on taking on many challenges. He tried to dissuade you, but you were stubborn. You know how you are, Soul. When you get an idea, you are pigheaded – kind of like a dog with a bone, refusing to give it up...

“Hey! Okay, okay. I get your drift. I’m a pig and a dog. You don’t have to rub it in.”

Indignantly, I pulled my hands away from those of my former guide’s. In my desire to save face, I had inadvertently leaped from the frying pan into the fire, so to speak, thrusting me back into the market chaos. My mind tumbled with the return of the heat, the dust and the cacophony of sound from the marketplace.

“Actually, if want to know the truth,” I shouted to be heard over the din, “I would prefer you use the words *tenaciously persistent*, if you don’t mind.” Suddenly, what seemed like thousands of small flying, biting insects made a beeline toward me. I swatted at them, finding my efforts futile. “And what’s with these stupid bugs? They’re swarming all over me.”

Another belly laugh erupted from my visitor. “Oh, Soul, you haven’t changed, have you? I love your *tenacious persistence!*”

“I’m so very pleased that I continue to amuse you,” I answered rather tersely, still totally flummoxed. I sneezed several more times and rubbed my beleaguered eyes, only making matters worse. Again and again, I flailed my arms unsuccessfully to rebuff the swarm of insects, which somehow had selected me as their main entree. “Ach!” I yelled as I jumped up to rid myself of the pests, “I can’t stand this! This is awful! Get me out of here! Please get me out of here!”

I heard another whooshing sound and suddenly, I found myself sitting in an old olive garden north of the city, overlooking Rome. The view was breathtaking and I drank it in slowly.

“Is that better, Soul?” Startled, I looked over to see both Epheniel and Nemphu sitting on either side of me – their faces filled with love and concern. I looked down at me again, wondering if I had changed with the scenery. I appeared to be the same boy, still filthy and covered with lice and bruises, but I was surprised to discover that now none of those earthly challenges seemed to matter. I grinned rather sheepishly at my guides.

“Thanks for getting me out of there. I can’t imagine why I chose that for myself!” I paused as I suddenly remembered my irritation with both of my guides during the challenges facing me for those brief moments. “I’m awfully sorry I was so rude to you,” I offered again, hoping to placate them. I didn’t want to run the risk of irritating them and find myself in the midst of the dust, heat and insects again. I felt very vulnerable and was not at all comfortable in that role, in which I seemed to have no control over my life. “Forgive me?”

Nemphu smiled. “Nothing to forgive, Soul. We’re a team, intricately bound. You don’t anger us; we don’t punish you.”

“We understand your human response and you are loved because of it, not despite it,” agreed Epheniel.

“Remember, I was once a human spirit on this journey,” reminded Nemphu. “I know you were involved in that lifetime again for only several moments this time, but tell me, what did you learn?”

“What?” I gazed suspiciously at both of my guides. “Is that the number one question they teach you at Spirit Guide Academy?”

Nemphu answered quickly. “You should know, Soul.”

“I should know what?” I vaguely wondered if the dust had caused me to become extra dull because I was having difficulty following the conversation. “I should know what I learned or I should know that question is a particular favorite of all spiritual guides?”

“Both,” came the reply in unison before they folded over in laughter. I watched them as they fought to gain control and Nemphu wiped the remnants of tears from his cheeks. *Swell*, I thought with my nose still just a bit out of joint, *I not only get one lame spirit guide, but two*. That thought brought even more laughter on their parts.

“Oh, this is such fun, Epheniel!” cried Nemphu. “We should do this more often! I haven’t laughed this hard in a long time.”

She smoothed her spotless, lice-free gown and then looked at me. “Soul, the reason that we found that question so amusing is that you were once Nemphu’s spirit guide. Would you like to guess what question you continually asked him?”

“*What did you learn?*” Instantly, they began to giggle again. “Finally!” I gasped. “Some good news! Tell me, Nemphu, was I a wonderful, highly evolved spirit guide for you?”

“The best, Soul! We had a great time discussing philosophy and spirituality during my lifetime.” He paused a moment. “And we had a great time laughing together.”

“Wait a minute,” I protested. “Nemphu, are you telling me that you were aware of me being your spirit guide during your lifetime – even ‘way back then?” I looked at his twinkling eyes and knew I could deduce what he already knew. “Wait. Let me guess!”

“Soul still likes playing the *Wait, Let Me Guess* game, I see!” Epheniel smiled in response and nodded.

“You must have been *out there* during that lifetime, Nemphu,” I finally blurted.

“Out there?” repeated my former guide as his brow furrowed in confusion. “Out where?”

“You know, highly evolved ..., psychic ..., one-with-the- universe ...,” I flung my hand away from me, but it resembled more like a flop. “You know, ... out there.” The giggles began again, but it was such gentle amusement that I really had no choice but to join them.

“Oh, now I see what you mean,” replied Nemphu. “Yes, Soul, I would meditate and the two of us would easily commune.”

“Hopefully, I had more knowledge and understanding then than I do now,” I muttered. “I would hate to see someone stuck with me as their spirit guide with the limited knowledge I possess at this point.”

“Actually, it was a particularly tough incarnation and you were invaluable with your unconditional love and assistance. And that is why when you asked me to be your spirit guide several lifetimes later, I was more than happy to pledge myself to you in that capacity.”

“Where did those incarnations take place?” I asked, a bit mollified by the recent turn of events. It felt good to know that I had not been totally ignorant all throughout eternity, although sometimes it certainly felt like it.

Nemphu smiled. “You were my spirit guide during what you might term a primitive lifetime of mine. I called you Astran; I went by the name Pek-tar.” I nodded and he continued. “Then, later, I was your spirit guide for one of your incarnations in Egypt, as well as here in Rome.”

“Whoa. I have several questions, Guide. Pek-tar? Were you a female or male entity at that point?”

“Actually, I was male. That society was an incredible one.” His voice dropped and I sensed a deep sadness about him. “We were part of an amazing spiritual experience, which became lost to us through our own fault.”

I didn’t know how to answer him, so I remained quiet. “But, the lessons learned there have given me so much understanding with my chosen tasks since that time.” He paused, lost in thought.

Finally, I spoke. “What did you mean, *one* of your incarnations in Egypt? I had more than one in that region?”

Nemphu nodded. “Yes, Soul,” his eyes twinkled as he leaned forward. “We spent an incarnation together in Old Egypt as twin brothers.”

I clapped my hands in delight. “We did?” Before he could reply, I asked, “Did we have a great time?” I looked at Epheniel’s face and quickly rephrased the question. “I mean, was there a great amount of learning taking place for us that time around?” She grinned at me and I looked back at Nemphu.

“Soul,” he said, “we not only learned great amounts about the responsibility that comes with wealth, but had a great time doing so together!”

“Wealth? Are you saying that I had a lifetime in which I was wealthy? There was a lifetime in which I wasn’t filthy and covered with bugs or one in which I wasn’t washing dishes and sweeping out dust bunnies?”

Nemphu nodded. “Fabulously wealthy!”

“All right!” I grinned at my guides. “What’d we do with all that wealth? Have parties, buy stuff and live the good life?”

“Yep,” replied Nemphu, “we did that, indeed, until we realized what was truly important in life and then gave it all away. We died penniless.”

I was aghast. "Penniless? We died penniless? How sad."

"Not at all, Soul," my brother said. We found the more we gave away, the happier we became, so eventually we just gave everything to those who needed it. We may have had no material wealth at the end of our lifetimes, but we possessed great nonmaterial wealth and joy." Nemphu gazed deeply into my being, recognizing me. And while there was no recognition on my part, I knew his words rang true. The three of us were silent within our thoughts for a long time as we gazed at the beauty of Rome that lay before us.

"So why the choice to thrust me back into this Roman lifetime instead of just telling me about it?" I asked quietly. "Was it to learn something?"

"What did you learn?" came the two voices together. I looked at them for a long moment, gathering my thoughts.

"Well, let's see. I learned that there were most likely no lessons chosen that involved dealing with fabulous wealth since I seemed to be a street urchin." I paused, but my guides remained silent. "I noticed the scratches and welts on my legs. I would assume," I said, looking pointedly at my guides, "that I had been mistreated. Obviously, there would be multitudes of lessons to learn within the theme of abuse." They nodded, but kept mute. "I bet I learned that happiness is found in simplicity, although that didn't look too much like a happy place. I would imagine that there were many needy souls around me, looking for support. And, right off the top of my head, which was, in fact, teeming with lice, I would guess my response to the situation in which I found myself is pretty similar to my present incarnation. I became frustrated very quickly and very impatient with all that was occurring around and to me and felt totally out of control."

"Well done!" Epheniel cried.

"Don't be too hard on yourself, Soul," consoled Nemphu. "Today you purposely placed yourself in an especially difficult situation without any preparation. In the reality of that lifetime, however, you would have – and did – respond very differently."

"What do you mean?" I stammered.

Nemphu smiled gently. "Soul, you've become very perceptive in figuring out the lessons to be learned. In this particular Roman lifetime, you are a ten-year old male, Darius. Your parents had been killed in a fire that raged through the squalor of the slum you lived in. You then tried to survive on the streets alone and were near starvation when a cruel merchant took you on as a slave for the meager bowl of soup and a crust of bread each day. He beat you when you didn't respond quickly enough to his demands."

My eyes widened in horror and my filthy hand flew to my mouth, but I said nothing. Nemphu continued. "Today, you had been sent to fetch water and speed was your only concern, not safety. Before this incarnation, you had also requested to be mentally deficient, so the opportunities for spiritual learning without much intellectual interference would increase. Unfortunately, that translated into the earthly plane as many more beatings than what might be usual in such a situation. And that's what you perceived as safety – getting back with that water quickly so you'd be spared another flogging."

"How sad," I murmured, my heart breaking for the lad, knowing full well that lad was me.

How incredible is this?

"If you look at this through the eyes of your Higher Self," Nemphu added, "it's not *incredible*, but simply a way to access knowledge from other lifetimes. And, as for that particular lifetime, Soul, that was only the beginning. Without going into gruesome detail, you eventually grew to be a man, but one with deformities."

"What happened?" I found I could only whisper.

"Remember the horse that nearly trampled you?" I nodded. "Another horse will eventually trample you."

"The trampling must not have killed me if I grew to be a man," I reasoned, trying to find a bit of sunshine in an otherwise stormy lifetime. "Did it?"

"No, Soul, but you became a cripple. As a result, the merchant wanted nothing more to do with you. A kind, elderly woman nursed you back to health, although you were never able to regain the use of your legs. You spent many years of your life as a beggar until you met a leper one day at the gates of the city and knew you had found your task."

"Wait!" I interrupted. "This is important to me. How did I know it was my task? Did someone tell me?" I asked hopefully.

"Soul, oftentimes, when journeying souls hit what you call *rock bottom*, they can more easily learn to listen for inner guidance."

"Are you talking about a conscience?" I asked.

Epheniel nodded. "This guidance system brings up a physical feeling that you attribute to your intuition."

"It comes from the heart?"

"Actually," my angel said, "for many of your Earth decades, scientists believed that that the heart was the core of your being."

"I love you with all my heart," I mused.

"Exactly, but this fire that is within you is not located in your heart, but lower in your physical body."

"A gut feeling. Is that it?" I asked excitedly. "The fire's in our guts?" When she smiled and nodded, I asked her to continue with the Rome story.

"The fire within you – your heart fire – guided you to that leper colony, where you helped bring joy to those suffering. And what others in that lifetime might have considered a negative choice – inviting death, so to speak, by entering such a community – you knew it to be a positive one for you understood that love transcends death."

Love transcends death. As I heard her words, the fire she spoke of seemed to kindle in my gut – not a roaring blaze by any means, but more of a gentle ember glow. I closed my eyes, letting it spread slowly throughout my body, mind and soul. When I was confident I understood the feeling so that I might recognize it on Earth, I opened my eyes and turned to Epheniel.

"How did I bring them joy?"

"Through your voice, Soul," she answered. "While your body was mangled and earthbound, you had a voice like an angel. Your voice brought joy to the all who heard."

"I died as a leper, didn't I?" I idly ventured, wondering if there was a memory of those joy-filled days in the colony left in some deep recesses of my soul.

Nemphu gently answered, "There was great sorrow in the colony when you passed on, Soul. They each knew you to be a special Light in their lives. You taught them many things, which they, too, passed on before they went Home."

"Wow," I breathed, as the enormity of the chosen challenges hit me. "I bet I did learn lots with that life." I grew thoughtful. "Did I choose the voice? Was that part of the Chart?"

"Actually, no, Soul," replied Nemphu. "When we could not dissuade you from all of those challenges, we knew something had to be given to you to help you cope and survive it all. We came up with the gift of song."

"We?"

"Epheniel and I. She was your guardian angel during that lifetime, but you requested that I be your spirit guide."

"Ah. So, I was an overachiever in this lifetime, eh?" When Nemphu nodded, I leaned over to Epheniel and grinned wickedly. "Please take note."

She smiled, and for another long moment no one spoke. My angel broke the silence. "Did you remember any of those who shared that lifetime with you, Soul?"

"What do you mean?"

"Did you recognize anyone from your present life in the one you just experienced?" I thought long and hard and finally shook my head. "I think, perhaps," she said, "it was because you re-experienced only a short part of it, Soul. That merchant has played an important part in many of your lives, although sometimes the gender changes, just as yours does."

The confusion I felt must have shown on my face; she thought a moment and tried another strategy. "All journeying souls have played that role of difficult person during at least one incarnation. It's one of the roles chosen if a soul wishes to experience full immersion in the earthly self. As humankind progresses, however, there will be fewer difficult people on your realm because so many have already learned that lesson. And once a lesson is learned, there is no further need of the role. If you are ever able to have recall of past lives, you may look for this soul

because he or she, in the role of the difficult person in your life, has helped you make remarkable progress along your path.”

“How are we all supposed to cope with the difficult people in our lives?” I persisted. “It’s wonderful to say up ...,” I halted momentarily... “here that we contracted with them to learn, but it’s yet another thing to deal with them in our daily lives, you know.”

“Ah, now that’s the key, isn’t it?” Epheniel said. “Surviving difficult people in order to learn from them.” She thought a moment. “Well, Soul, the first thing you have to always keep in mind is that difficult people are gifts from God, chosen by you to help you learn. Keep that Big Picture in mind and you won’t feel so sucked under when they’re around you.”

“Sucked under?”

“Soul, have you ever had a conversation with someone and felt exhausted at the end of it?” I nodded. “Ever thought to yourself how much that person exhausts you?” I nodded again. “It’s an energy issue. You need to remain aware of those types of humans and the effect they have upon you.” Epheniel noticed my confusion and paused, pondering her words. “I want you to start noticing this in your world when you return, for once aware, these situations are generally easy to spot. When you go into a room and everyone seems *down*, try to determine the reason. Chances are, someone has brought negative energy into the room. In order to balance that negativity, those in the room send forth energy, thereby depleting their own supply.”

“How’s that work?”

“The earthly self gives energy to the Higher Self, who sends it out when a situation warrants it. And while your own physical energy may be depleted, your Higher Self energy has tried to balance the negative energies of the room. Remember, we have pledged to walk as one to become Light. We have pledged to help those around us, regardless of our depletion of energy.”

“Sucked under,” I mused. “Sounds rather difficult.”

“But you did it when you mother was attacked, didn’t you?” Epheniel asked gently. I nodded. “You saw the Big Picture then – the macrocosm. Just transfer that to all the little attacks difficult people launch. What you are doing is removing your ego from the scenario. Once ego has been removed, the emotion that often accompanies attacks from difficult people is released, as well. You are now free to look at the situation objectively, figure out what you are to learn from it and move on. Does that make sense to you?”

I nodded once again. *The ol’ fly on the spiritual wall thing*. She smiled. “Once you’re able to do this, then you’re in an arena that your friend, Deb, understands. When you are able to step out of the emotion, you are also stepping out of the pain of the situation. Can you better understand, then, what she means when she says pain is not necessary to understanding and growth? Challenges, yes. Pain, no. Choose to see situations through love and not fear, anger, or hate. Remember, you did it with your mother.”

“But every situation?” *How can this be done?* I thought a long moment, stunned by the staggering implications if such a concept could be understood and implemented by all. “There are an awful lot of people – journeying souls – in awful situations,” I mused.

“Yes, I know,” Epheniel answered. “Another practical suggestion for these types of people is for them to pray so that they might view the difficult person and situation through the eyes of their Higher Self.”

“Okay,” I agreed. “I get it – I’ll give it a try.”

I paused a moment in thought and both guides waited patiently. Finally, Nemphu broke the silence when it was clear I was lost in thought. “Verbalize it, Soul. What’s troubling you?”

“Oh, I was just thinking that I wish I had remembered to see the Big Picture during my tailspin. It would have made the whole thing so much easier to bear.”

“Your Higher Self feels no regrets, Soul,” said Nemphu, “so try to release the regret habit. You need to remember that everything is a lesson requested, including that tailspin. Don’t you see by now that it was all part of your plan in order to view the Big Picture?” I nodded hesitantly, clearly not convinced.

Epheniel spoke quietly. “Actually, you asked for that tailspin, as you like to call it. Living through it and understanding how to cope with it will provide you the means to help others cope

with similar situations. You asked to experience this incarnation in order to balance and to help others. How can you do that without experiencing it?"

Whoa. That puts a whole different tailspin on the tailspin.

Nemphu smiled. "Think of it this way, Soul: give Life your best loving shot and when things don't go as planned in your human brain, release them and move on. When you dwell on regrets, you live in the perceived negativity of the past. And likewise, when you spend time worrying about what the future might hold for you and whether or not you can face something, you are living in the perceived negativity of the future. Live now, Soul – in the Now. When you are able to do that, you will find that your understanding and learning will increase one hundredfold."

It all made sense. I vowed to try it when I returned. It would feel good to let those regrets and what-ifs go. Whenever I would get into that mentality, I hoped I would recall how much that thought process with the unwanted baggage was draining my energy. *So much to remember!*

I looked over to my special guides, who were patiently waiting for me to process all that I had heard. Finally, I spoke. "Let's see. Where were we? Oh, yeah. Finding people from that life that may have joined me in my present incarnation." I thought for a moment and then glanced over to Epheniel.

"The old woman who nursed you back to life?" she asked. "Do you have knowledge of her?" Again I thought for a moment and shook my head.

"Deb."

Deb? My angel knew this was news to me and waited a moment before asking,

"The leper at the gates of the city?"

I can do this. "Wait. Let me guess!" Immediately, my spirit guides began to chuckle and I joined in with them. After we regained control, I asked, "Mary Lou?"

"Right!" Epheniel said. "Good for you!"

I leaned closer to my guides and whispered, "Oh, she'll love that – a leper in a former life. I can't wait to pass that gem along to her."

Nemphu smiled and then became serious. "When you meet another journeying soul on your realm with whom you quickly connect, realize that you feel that way because you are strongly connected. When making life chart choices with other light entities once upon a time, space and dimension ago, souls often ask others with whom they've already worked to rejoin them in other lifetimes. Oftentimes, there is an earlier connection so that the earthly self will be more easily drawn to them. Sometimes, other souls just pop in your life to briefly reconnect. Other times, these soul mates play more significant roles in your life, as you do in theirs." He paused, considering me. "Speaking of coping and surviving, Soul, how are you doing in what appears to be your present lifetime?"

"Piece of cake compared to this one!" I grinned at him. After a moment, I asked, "Do you have all knowledge about this lifetime of mine or just the one I shared with you?"

"If you want me to have it, I can tap into this knowledge. It's your gift of Free Will, Soul."

"If that's the case, then I ask that you have all knowledge of my present incarnation so that you will understand this discussion." I paused a moment as I looked at Nemphu. "How soon will you get it?"

"Get what?"

"Knowledge of my lifetime."

"Soul," he said, "it was instantaneous from the moment you requested it. I now possess the understanding."

"Whoa, that was fast. So you now know all about the journey?"

He nodded and asked, "Tell me about your friends and their own journeys."

"They're fine," I replied. "Mary Lou just got back from a trip to Italy, searching for cosmic connections. She recognizes that the trip was an important part of her journey right now as she strives to understand. Dozens of wonderful moments occurred before, during and after the trip." I paused for a moment. "It sounds pretty amazing."

"And Deb?" asked Epheniel. "How is she doing these days?"

"She's very busy, trying to be a wife and mother, as well as working outside the home. That's a lot to balance in itself, let alone working with Michael on your plane to help bring about

peace on our plane. It gets to be an almost-impossible juggling act some days, but she's hanging in, trying to maintain balance. She finds it challenging. It's rather like having one foot in each realm."

My thoughts wandered and suddenly, my hand reached up to my neck. When my fingers found the chain, I relaxed again. "Boy, for a moment there, I thought I'd lost this," I said to both. I looked at my angel. "I appreciate you allowing me to wear this when I visited my former life." I paused. "Want to hear about it?"

My guides nodded as Epheniel turned to Nemphu. "It's always interesting to see that while an earthly self may seem to forget an incarnation, that knowledge is retained somewhere deep inside, waiting to be accessed. I so enjoy hearing her perceptions of events even though I was there with her." She turned back to me. "Tell us, Soul."

"Well, remember the medal Mary Lou gave Deb at the first Angel party?"

"The Michael medal," Nemphu said.

"Yes," I replied. "Well, if you remember, when that medal surfaced, Mary Lou was stunned because it had been missing for several years. But, at the time of that discovery, there was only one – the one she gave to Deb. Mary Lou and her husband had purchased two, however, and its mate was still missing. Last fall, however, while Mary Lou was cleaning out a dresser drawer, she came upon the second medal. She was delighted to find it and placed it around her neck immediately. She had called us with the good news and we knew it was now where it needed to be.

"Within a couple of weeks, however, in another drawer, Mary Lou was stunned to discover a third Michael medal. She had no idea where or when this was purchased, but knew after finding it that it was mine. Mary Lou called me and asked me to come and see her – she had something for me. When I opened the box, I sat stunned, looking at the medal – my Michael medal. For all those months since our first angel party, being so completely different from my friends, and seeing that difference at every turn, I had repeatedly doubted my place on this leg of the journey. Filled with awe, I picked up the medal from the box that night, put it on a chain and have worn it ever since.

"As you know," I continued, glancing over at Epheniel, "I had long ago given up listening to the radio for messages, but as I turned out of Mary Lou's driveway that evening, the Moody Blues' *Nights in White Satin* began to play. I was struck by several things as I turned up the volume to enfold me: it was a particular favorite of mine; Nights/knights carried swords like the sword on my medal; and, the last line that swirled through my body over and over in the darkness of the car was '*... And I love you.*' I knew I had turned another corner. And while I may not have understood my task in all of this besides writing a book, at last I knew with certainty that I belonged."

"Aren't there two medals on that chain?" asked Nemphu as he peered closely at the chain and medals I fingered.

"I'll tell you that story in a little bit." I grinned at him.

"I'll be patient," assured Nemphu. "We have all the time in the cosmos." He smiled and a deeper recognition of him flowed through me.

"I know," I answered, suddenly realizing that I did understand more than even I would have believed after two years of intensive reading and my conversations within and outside my physical body. *But, is an intellectual, earthly understanding going to be all I would ever have? Would the desire for more ever lessen with time?* "I felt a bit like Dickens' Tiny Tim, trying to peer through the glass window at the feast within. Through the winter months, I was caught up in my busyness at school and trying to balance my family life with all my school responsibilities. But throughout that time, I continued to journal.

"In early March, Deb's son, Beau, called and asked if he could come visit me. He said he had a message. Because I knew that he was also intuitive, I welcomed the news. At last someone was going to tell me what to do!"

Epheniel coughed pointedly, no doubt a gentle reminder of the lesson that I had been trying to learn for two years and one that apparently still eluded me.

"I know, I know," I assured her. "Seek answers from within. I'm getting to that part if some

of us can exhibit a little patience, please!"

"Just clearing my throat, Soul. You know – the ancient Roman dust and all."

I peered suspiciously at her. Her exquisite face beamed with innocence and love for me, and if I didn't know any better, I would have believed her lame excuse. I knew – and she knew – I wasn't buying it, but I let it pass. I couldn't exactly blame her for her reaction. I certainly challenged her with my seeming inability to learn quickly from many of my chosen lessons. I wondered vaguely why some lessons seemed so easy, while others took on epic proportions and a long time to grasp and assimilate.

"Beau arrived, looking a bit nervous and my pulse started to race with all of my insecurities. I had been deeply involved in all of this for twenty-one months with no sign of ever attaining anything other than an intellectual understanding. He told me that a few weeks earlier, he had received a vision from the Akashic Records – the central storehouse for all human soul records. Preferring to remain in the physical realm, he had chosen to ignore the vision. Not wishing to be ignored..." I paused to grin at my guides, who had the good grace to return the grin, "they began to bombard him to discuss it with Deb, Mary Lou and me." Epheniel began to giggle, which I pointedly ignored. "I guess the Realm had finally had enough – his car wouldn't start that day and he used jumper cables. Even though he had placed the cables correctly, Beau received a shock. Literally. Instantly, the vision expanded with the shock and he knew he had to speak to each one of us – that very day."

"So one might say that the Realm jumpstarted him?" My angel asked sweetly, as Nemphu guffawed. I gazed at her glowing, innocent face. Man, she sure has that angel look down pat. Ignoring her lame attempt at humor, I continued. "To get back to the story, Beau started with his mother, then went to Mary Lou's and ended up at my house, looking exhausted."

"He told me the vision began with three things: a tear, a hammer and a blank piece of paper. The tear represented Deb because, as a sensitive, she feels not only her own pain, but those around her, and it is often overwhelming. Mary Lou's representation was the hammer because she is so often hammered by the universe and needs to learn to discern."

"The piece of blank paper represented me. Beau said it was time to write the book. He further stated that two of us were insiders looking out and that one of us was an outsider looking in. It didn't take much imagination to figure out the players in that scenario. He said that it was important that I not be an insider because if the book were written by insiders, no one outside would ever feel it was meant for them. He also said that I needed to make time to write. I needed to write and write and write, even if I deleted most of it. Eventually, I would write what needed to be written."

"When I asked how I would know what to write, he thought a moment and said that his mother and Mary Lou were the dictionary and that when I needed it, I should go to the dictionary and then put it into my words. He said it was like taking a dry paragraph from a reference book and adding creativity to make it into a story. He stressed that the book could not be completed until all of our pain had been released." I paused to gather my thoughts.

My angel had picked up one of my hands and held it in hers. "How did you feel as he told this to you, Soul?"

"To be honest," I replied, "I had written several hundreds pages as our journey had unfolded, but his words scared me – probably much more than they had for Deb and Mary Lou. What he was asking was monumental and I wasn't even sure he had the right person. I was to get no visions, see no auras, experience nothing from the other side and still have enough to write a book?"

"Beau went on to say that I might possibly get an understanding of the veiled realm once the book was written. When I looked perplexed, he continued. It was not my choice now to receive more than an intellectual understanding. I had chosen to be put on this earth at this time for the macrocosm – for what I do – not for what I experience – or the microcosm. Once the book had been written, I would then have the choice as to whether I am given a true understanding, but that decision would not be made by my earthly self, but my Higher Self if the understanding I seek will further my path."

"To help others. Another affirmation, Soul," Epheniel whispered. I nodded.

“By this point, Beau was yawning, exhaustion etched on his face. He fervently hoped the annoying universe would leave him alone for a while and let him live in the physical realm. He felt buoyant, knowing that a great weight had been lifted from him and thought he just might giggle for the next three days. While I was starving for more information, I also knew that he was done – the rest, I knew, must be discovered on my own.”

Nemphu gently asked, “How did you feel once Beau left?”

“I now knew that I had to release all of the pain in order to accomplish what I had obviously agreed to many times and dimensions ago with several other very special entities. I had no idea how I was to go about doing this task and was more than a little nervous considering the job ahead. But, in the face of all this unknown, Beau had given me possibly the greatest earthly-self gift of my lifetime: I knew now without a doubt that I was not too ignorant to understand – that it had not been a case of trying too hard or not enough – and, most critical, that I was unworthy. I really had chosen to be without spiritual understanding in order to accomplish something mind boggling: the writing of a book that might help others along their path. The thought of it all scared me silly, but the profound relief that I had not been found undeserving far outweighed the fear. I knew with an absolute certainty that I would begin this next part of the journey willingly, trusting that it would all enfold and unfold as it should with or without my ever truly understanding what lies just on the other side of the glass.”

I paused and squeezed the hands of both of my guides. “To be honest, it won’t be easy to resist pressing my nose against the glass pane to view what is not mine to have at this moment. We both know that there will be times ahead when the old yearnings may surface, but somehow, I know the gift of intellectual understanding will be enough for me now.”

“So what happened?” Epheniel asked. I looked up into the depths of my angel’s eyes and smiled, knowing how well they both knew what had happened.

“Well, I had been told to make time to write. My life was extremely busy during the school day, and dinner preparations, family and schoolwork kept me busy in the evening, so when could I make time to write? It didn’t take longer than eight and a half hours to discover the answer. The following morning, I was unexpectedly awakened at 4:28 a.m.”

I paused when the giggling began again. I had no choice but to join them. I took a deep breath and spoke quickly. “Now, when I say *awakened*, I mean thoroughly awakened. By 4:30, I had begun to write and I wrote ten pages in two hours before I needed to get ready for school. I stood up, stretched, wandered to the kitchen sink to get a drink of water and was immediately struck by the intense rays of the dawning sun. I looked at the sight through new eyes. I didn’t squint, wondering if I could see energy if I tried hard enough; I didn’t look around my backyard, hoping I might see elementals in the transitional period between night and day, nor did I search for signs from another realm. After now knowing that my path did not run in that direction, I was able to gaze at the beauty and appreciate it for all that it was and not what it could be or mean. There was a profound sense of relief inside of me. I knew that I was already releasing the pain.”

“How did Deb and Mary Lou react to the messages given to all of you?”

“They understood their own messages and while they were not crazy about my being told to remain on the outside looking in, they were happy for me because they understood what I had been facing and realized I could not release it without help.”

Nemphu was clearly enjoying the tale. “I have so missed chatting with you, Soul. Tell me, did the wake-up calls continue?”

I grinned. “Like clockwork! Without ever using an alarm, I was somehow awakened each morning so that I was sitting at the computer and typing by 4:30 a.m.” I couldn’t help laughing at the memory. “One morning, the celestial realm must have had a hard time rousing me because suddenly I was bolted wide awake by the very loud sound of ‘MARTY BOYLE!’” I glanced suspiciously at my angel, who was convulsed in giggles and shot me another angelic look.

“What?” she asked. “Some people are not always easy to rouse.”

“Did you get time off on weekends for good behavior?” asked Nemphu, clearly pleased with himself.

“Actually,” I replied, “after several days of this schedule, the weekend was approaching and I negotiated a deal: Let me sleep until 6 a.m. and I’ll still put in the writing time. So, obviously,

someone agreed that I wasn't asking too much, for on Saturdays and Sundays, I was bolted awake and writing by 6 a.m., giving me an extra ninety minutes of blessed sleep."

"Were you tired all day long?" asked Nemphu.

"Surprisingly, no. Not any more so than usual. However, I did have to go to bed by nine in order to do all of this, but life soon settled into this pattern of early morning writing. Things were going along swell – until I hit a wall. I had been told that when the words were right, they would flow. Suddenly, I realized that I was fighting the words and wondered what was wrong. The previous day I had received a message from Sandy, reminding me that I had all the answers within me."

Epheniel coughed again. She pointed innocently to her throat – no doubt, more Roman dust had provoked the coughing. I grinned at her and continued. "Sandy had said that if I wanted to know what to write, I just had to ask. So, when the writing appeared not to flow, I decided to address my concern with the Universe." My guides looked blank. "I whined and stomped my spiritual foot." Both grinned at me. This was the Soul they knew and amazingly, loved.

"That night on the way to bed, I whined, 'I was told the book would flow, but I'm fighting the words. What do I do?'"

"Immediately, a thought that filled my being came into my head in the form of a question: *When did it flow?*"

"I answered, 'It flowed when I wrote *This Time Around*.'"

"The reply was instantaneous: *Then that's how the book should be written.*"

Nemphu raised an eyebrow. "Did you understand?" he asked.

I nodded. "I had written what would be the first chapter as a humor piece the previous summer. I had even tried to get it published, but that didn't work. I put it away, but it seemed to haunt me."

"Haunt you?"

"It was only a humor piece, but I kept going back to it and reread it dozens of times. It had touched me deeply as I had written it and it continued to do so even though it sat in a drawer. Now I understood why – it was to be the framework of the book."

"And what was your response to this, Soul?" Nemphu asked as I smiled at Epheniel.

"I was positively, absolutely blown away by the conversation I had just had with someone. After all, I had read about celestial communication for almost two years and had heard a multitude of my friends discuss their own communications. I knew I had not imagined it – the voice had filled every corner of my mind."

"The next day, I took what I had written and deleted most of it, rearranging the book so that the whole thing could be the conversation with my angel and then the words flowed." I laughed suddenly. "Remember that message that Deb passed on to me from Michael early into the journey that I would write a book on reincarnation? The book is certainly about reincarnation, although I didn't understand it at the time how I could possibly do such a thing!"

"So the lesson learned there?" prompted Epheniel.

"Oh, I know that one. Keep your mind open to all possibilities; let those closely held paradigms crash around you and miraculous things occur. Anyway, to finish my tale, I wrote in my early-morning fashion for five weeks, getting most of it down the way it seemed to want to go. I have always loved to write, but writing this took on a whole new meaning of the word love," I said as I idly fingered the chain and medals around my neck. "I feel almost transported when the creativity flows from my mind down my arm to my fingertips onto the keys from all of my co-authors on the other side of the veil."

"And the second medal?" reminded Nemphu.

"Well, as I was going through my notes in order to begin to put the book together, I came upon the reference to Raphael in the tarot card reading from that first September. It mentioned that Raphael played a dominant part in my cards. I was taken aback a bit when reading that because I had not only forgotten about it, but had never felt a real affinity for that particular archangel. I decided that it didn't matter whether I felt something or not, so decided to put another medal on the chain, hoping to lure him into this adventure with me!"

"And did it work?"

I thought a long moment before answering. So much has happened – so much more to come! “I don’t think he needed to be lured since the two of us set this in motion with Michael once upon a time. But more importantly, to my profound relief, it doesn’t matter to me anymore. I did find it interesting that when I researched Raphael, I found him to be the angel of *vision*. And while there is no tugging on my medals, I find great comfort in wearing them.”

“You appear to have come a long way on your journey these days, Soul,” commented Nemphu.

“Oh, she has!” beamed my angel.

“So, will I get a chance to say goodbye to you, Nemphu? Epheniel and I generally just allow our conversation to drift away into nothingness and suddenly I find myself back in my present lifetime.”

“Well, you can say goodbye, but I have a strong feeling that we’ll be in and out of each others’ lives many more times. We have had a multitude of adventures together and I expect we’ll share many more! Good luck and love on your journey, Soul. You may not realize it yet, but that psychic was right about one thing: You are already there, Soul.” With that, he stood up and held his hands out to me and engulfed me in a long, loving hug.

“Thanks, Nemphu, for everything – past, present and future – but mostly thank you for your last comment. It means the world to me – yours and mine!”

“My pleasure, Soul. It has always been my pleasure.”

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Life Language

Vision: I witness communication between life forces in all its various forms.

Loved Ones, most of you would describe language as being communication through spoken words. While this description is correct, it is incomplete. Communication takes place in a beautiful variety of forms beyond simply the voice. In fact, words alone oftentimes actually hinder transferring accurate information.

Ask yourself how much dissension is caused in your life, country and planet due to lack of understanding through verbal and written words. An enormous amount of hurt, pain and negativity could be avoided if you eliminate misunderstandings between life forces, by using all your vast communication abilities.

There is a great effort to teach young people how to speak and write properly. As you get older, there are classes titled “Communication” that teach how to access and use sophisticated technology, all of which is most impressive and civilized. Yet, misunderstandings infiltrate all levels of your lives. Could it be that many of the most basic and honest forms of communication do so?

Your human hardware includes more than just a voice to speak with when you are communicating; your whole body is wonderfully equipped to express and receive information. Body language has been made note of by some, but for the most part is almost ignored. For example, when you were learning language in school, were you taught to look into the person’s eyes while you were exchanging information? Or did you learn the opposite through the example of others that, in fact, eye contact made people uncomfortable? And yet, eye contact is one of the most accurate forms of communication. You have ears to hear while others are using their voices, but do you really listen? The voice itself has a whole array of intonations and inflections that enhances accurate transference of information. You have incredibly expressive faces while communicating, but do you really see them? A tilt of the head, the use of hands, posture of the body, or life movement in general, all convey information if you make yourself aware of these nuances. Oftentimes, information given by the voice is altered significantly when you are aware of combining body and verbal language.

Then there is communication through the means of telepathy. Intellectually, you have been programmed to totally disregard this method of exchanging information. Yet, you do know on

some level that telepathy is a real part of life language equipment. When telepathy connections occur in your daily lives over and over, there is a quiet part of you that knows telepathy is not a coincidence, in spite of what you have been programmed to believe.

How often do you “accidentally” run into someone who shares information for which you have been actively searching? How often do you act on an impulse and discover you have acted on information sent to you telepathically? For example, you have an urge to pick up some obscure item only to discover this is the very item someone needed at home to prepare dinner. Even though you put great faith in all your scientific research, you know on a personal level these telepathic communications are not just coincidence, as you have been taught.

Yet, in spite of this personal experience, and wisdom, you rarely explore or give much credence to your ability to use telepathy as a language.

Another language you possess is energy language – an essence uniquely individual about all life forms that transmits valuable, useful and important information to you. This essence is energy created and surrounding all life. When you enter the proximity of any other life forms, you can “feel” the energy transferring information to you about an individual life force, whether it be plant, animal, human or celestial. By using this type of language, you know before you ever engage in open communication what kind of energy you will be dealing with, positive or negative, to help avoid misunderstandings during an interchange of other forms of communication.

You also possess the life language of intuition or feelings. Your innate intuition gives powerful input “from” you, “to” you, transmitting highly sophisticated and important data. Being in touch with your own feeling or intuitions, your own personal life language, is really the first priority before engaging in any other form of language. When you “know” yourself, you prevent giving others unintentional misinformation. Becoming polarized between yin and yang or being comfortable with both male and female aspects of yourself will enhance the “feeling” language. An imbalance will cause distortion in the feeling due to emotion (yin) or control (yang). Polarization allows a flow for true interpretation of the intuition or feeling language.

Dear Ones, awareness of your whole spectrum of life languages enables you to explore and find what works best for you during different levels of communication. It is a glorious prospect to progress toward eliminating misinformation and misunderstandings. There is enough open disagreement on your planet to keep you stimulated without the pain of needless misinterpretation of language. And remember to be the beautiful life you are. This, alone, is powerful communication because you are living messengers of light.

Chapter 8

Early July

"1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11..." *Whoa. There it is again.* As I strode up the many steps to the massive doors, I suddenly realized that it had not been my overactive imagination. There was a familiar sound coming from somewhere. *What is that?* Suddenly, recognition dawned – it was the unmistakable sound of purring. Loud purring. I looked up. At the top of the steps on either side of the doors, there were two stone slabs. Two majestic lions – a male and a female – sat on them, appearing to guard the entrance. I stopped in mid stride, paralyzed with human fear. Within a heartbeat, however, peace flooded throughout my being and I understood that there was nothing to fear. As I continued my way up the steps, I was overwhelmed with the beauty and dignity flowing from the beasts and found myself reaching out to touch them. They responded to me by leaning into me and purring with even deeper sounds of pleasure. I reveled in the unique experience and breathed deeply of their spirits.

Suddenly, the massive doors swung open to reveal my small friend, Zeke. As always, his face was wreathed in a smile and he wiped his hands on the back of his apron before extending both to me. He pulled me in, laughing and dancing lightly across the threshold and it was easy to join in his merriment. Suddenly, he tripped on one of his errant apron ties and we both found ourselves on the floor, convulsed in giggles.

"Now, that's an entrance, Lass!" he finally spluttered.

"I didn't even get a chance to knock this time, Zeke. Did you know it was me before you opened the door?" He winked and I reddened. "Oh yeah. Of course you knew it was me."

He puffed out his chest in mock protest. "Hey, I am the celestial handy sprite around here. I know a lot more than ye might think! As for yer question, yes, I did know it was ye. Ye see, I've been waiting and watching for yer return, Soul!"

"You have?" I asked curiously. "What's up?"

"The sky," he answered with a straight face. It took me a heartbeat to realize he was joking and we both giggled again.

"That's got to be the oldest, dumbest joke in the world," I said.

"Actually, in several worlds," Zeke replied, which set us off again. The entranceway echoed with our laughter and when we had at last managed to control ourselves, we sprawled lazily on the cool stone floor. Suddenly, a thought occurred to me and I sat up.

"Hey, when'd you guys get the lions outside?" He looked at me quizzically. "The lions?" I repeated. "You can't miss them. They're on either side of the doors. Surely you've seen them?" It seemed incredulous to me that he didn't understand or hadn't seen them.

"Soul, those lions have been there since the dawn of time."

I looked blank. "What do you mean? Why haven't I ever seen them before? How could I have missed something like that?"

"Good question, Soul. Do ye have the answer within ye?"

I was thunderstruck. *How many times had I walked the many steps? How could I not have noticed two massive beasts at the top of those steps?* I sat a long time and then lay back on the stone. I knew Zeke was expecting an answer and would wait as long as needed to get it. My gaze was drawn to the ceiling and again, I was stunned. There, before my eyes was the most magnificent domed ceiling I had ever seen. *How many times have I walked through here and never thought to look up? Caught up in my own earthly reality, have I really ever been able to see?*

I sat up again and looked around me, noticing for the first time the breathtaking sculptures filling the room, the intricate tapestries, beautiful works of art and the most exquisite stained glass windows I had ever seen. The brilliance of the light danced through the windows, electrifying the

colors. I looked over at Zeke, who was patiently waiting, smiling at my confusion.

"I don't understand," I faltered.

"Yes, ye do, Soul. Think. Ye can do this." He grinned at me and I knew he was poking gentle fun. I returned the grin and began.

"Okay, we'll play Twenty Questions. I'm just guessing here, but might I assume that the tapestries, sculptures, artwork and windows have also been here since the dawn of time?" Zeke nodded and smiled, encouraging me to continue. "Might I also assume that for some reason, I was not able to see them?"

"*Able* is the wrong word, Soul. Ye've always had the ability to see 'em. Try again."

I thought a long moment. "All right. I'll give it another shot. I was always able to see them, but in my busyness, in choosing to live in the microcosm of my own little reality and ego, I was not open to seeing them?"

"And?" Zeke was plainly going to make me work for this one.

"And, now that I am trying to look at the Big Picture, I have literally opened my eyes and can now see and observe more than I have ever been able to in the past?"

"Bingo!" He was clearly delighted and clapped his hands with glee. He jumped up and helped me to my feet. As I rose, I noticed the beauty of the stone floor. Each stone was exquisite in its shape, color and texture and I knelt to trace them with my fingers.

"Let me guess. I've walked on these each visit and never noticed them, right?"

"Yep," he replied, offering me his hand again. We brushed ourselves off and started down the hall. This time, however, we walked slowly and silently, so that I could take in the beauty. When we got to the familiar door, I turned to face the sprite.

"I feel as if I've been blind all my life," I stammered. "What incredible sights have I missed these fifty years? What glorious sounds did I fail to hear?"

"Those sound like regrets, Soul." Zeke shook his head firmly. "Not permitted on the premises. Sorry." He shook his head again. "Nope. But instead of spending precious time regretting what might have been, why not celebrate this unexpected gift of radiant sight and sound? Yer senses have been heightened and it appears that at long last, the veil is thinning for ye. That, alone, is cause for great celebration!" And with that, he bade me lean over and then hugged me. "Congratulations!"

"Thanks," I said, returning the hug. "I have another question, Zeke."

"Shoot!" he grinned. "I love talking with ye – I learn so much."

"Ye do?" I reddened again and grinned. "Well, how about that? But my question is, if the veil is thinning for me and I am able to gain this beautiful sight, what awaits me if the veil is completely removed?"

"Light, Soul, pure Light. Well, done! I knew ye could do it, Lassie!"

"I did, too!" Epheniel called from within the room.

I planted a quick kiss on the sprite's cheek and waved goodbye as I opened the door to greet my angel. I peered into the dim light and found that she was already halfway across the room, anxious to greet me. After she had once again enfolded me in her silkiness,

I asked, "If you don't mind my asking, Angel, why do you keep the lighting in this room so low?"

She suddenly grew protective. "Is it too dark in here for you, Soul?" When I assured her the lighting was fine and that I was just curious, she answered. "So often humans in developed countries are bombarded by so much noise and light that I like to provide you an atmosphere that is conducive to quiet conversation and contemplation."

"Bombarded by noise and light?"

"Look at your world, Soul. Television, radio, ringing telephones, microwaves, computers, cell phones, beepers, stereo systems, video games, and then there is all that harsh, artificial lighting found in so many work places ..." She paused as she sought the correct word.

"Fluorescent lighting?"

"That's it! All those intrusive devices send out disruptive waves and when there is so much of it bombarding you in your daily life, it is not surprising that so many humans cannot find the Connection. Who could amongst all that chaos?"

“So what’s the answer – chucking technology?” I asked. “That doesn’t sound practical.”

“No, Soul. Just be aware that you are living in this chaos and try to reduce it or eliminate as much as you can as often as is possible. You need to maintain a balance between technology and spirit.” She paused a moment. “Remember our conversation about the fragile ethereal body?” I nodded. “All of these bombardments affect that body in that they require full attention to the earthly self, making it harder to connect.”

“Connect? How do we do that?”

“There are many ways of connecting – it’s an individual choice as to what works best. For you, it might be good to walk barefoot through the grass; go to a body of flowing water and drink in the sight and sound; work in a garden; sing; dance; laugh; create; the list goes on and on. Remove yourself from the chaos as much as possible and the connection will be more easily made. Remember, if it is your intent to connect, you will.” She paused and looked around. “Well, look at us, Soul. We’re just standing here, *bletherin’ away*, as Zeke says, and I haven’t even asked you yet where you wish our conversation to take place today.”

“I don’t seem to have any strong desire to go anywhere,” I said. “Especially after our little trip to Ancient Rome.” I cast her a suspicious look and she threw back her head and laughed. The sound of her merriment brought a smile to my face and I was suddenly filled with light.

“You must admit that you learned a lot, though, didn’t you?” I nodded and she thought a moment. “Tell you what, Soul, let’s go to one of our beautiful outside amphitheatres. We can relax and talk amongst the beauty of nature and music.”

“They won’t mind if we’re talking while they’re performing?” I asked, not wanting to take a chance on being rude and provoking any highly evolved light being. *Who knew what might happen then? Ancient Rome had taught me many lessons. When in Rome, do as the Romans do had taken on a whole new meaning. One lesson learned was to make sure that I clearly understood what I was really asking for.*

“No, Soul, we don’t have restrictions like that here. We’ll be able to hear the music, talk all we want and it won’t disturb anyone around us. Game?” I nodded, hoping I had not just somehow agreed to face a twelve-headed, fire-breathing dragon from some other side of the cosmos with no other protection than my wits. *These angels – you gotta watch ‘em. They can be awfully tricky.* Epheniel laughed again and waited. I had loved traveling by angel transport, so I was a little disappointed to find that she had not enveloped me within her wings.

“I thought you might like to try another type of travel, Soul.” My suspicion antenna sprang to attention again and my eyes automatically narrowed.

“Is dust involved?” She laughed and again I felt a lightening. Suddenly, I realized that this was part of today’s lessons. *I survived Ancient Rome. Surely, I can survive what she has in mind today, right? “Okay, tell me what to do.”*

“We’re going to merge and travel by what you may call thought transference. What you need to do, Soul, is to close your eyes, breathe deeply and slowly, gently clear your mind of thoughts, and allow yourself to let go. Trust, Soul. We’ll go where we wish.”

“No lice, right?”

The sound of Epheniel’s laughter caused me to smile and I closed my eyes briefly. When I opened them, I found we had reached our destination.

We were seated together on a grassy area in a large amphitheater, surrounded by hundreds of light beings, many of whom did not seem human. Some looked paradigmatically angelic, while others were dressed in the clothing of vastly different time periods. Entities were talking quietly as they enjoyed the music. My eyes traveled to the sound and I watched and listened for a long moment. I saw a platform upon which seemed to be singing light beings, but something seemed out of place. Curiously, I watched their mouths. I could hear music the likes of which I had never heard, but the performers didn’t appear to be singing any words. Each seemed to be singing only one note, which, when joined with the hundreds of others, made the most exquisite harmonies no earthly voices have ever produced. I sat in awe, soaking in the beauty of song.

“Let it flow through you, Soul,” Epheniel said. “Let it become part of your being – another merging.” I did as she suggested and felt love and peace course throughout my being. The music

overwhelmed my heart and soul and spirit. It was almost as if I had *become* the music. I remained silent for a long time as I experienced *Music* for the first time in my life. Finally, I sighed deeply and my angel asked if I would like to continue our discussion. I was tempted to refuse her offer, but the thought crossed my mind that there would be other opportunities to enjoy Music, and I had lessons to learn. I grinned, knowing that my Higher Self was keeping my earthly self in line. Again.

I sighed and nodded. "I find it interesting that you included laughter on your list of how to connect with the Light. You just showed me how that plays a part in connecting, didn't you?"

She nodded and thought a moment. "Let's go back even further. When you and Zeke were laughing earlier, how did the laughter make you feel?"

"It felt great. I love to laugh."

"No, I mean, really think. How did it make you feel inside? What did you feel as the two of you laughed? What effect has laughter had on your life?"

She waited a long moment before receiving an answer. "I think laughter must lighten the soul and perhaps even heal the etheric body," I began hesitantly. She nodded encouragingly and I continued. "I feel lighter after laughing. Actually, I often feel lighter even when I only hear someone else laughing. Laughter is kind of uplifting, right?" She nodded.

"What else does humor and laughter do?" prodded my angel. Apparently, she and Zeke had made a pact today to make me think.

"They diffuse negative situations on earth. I've seen that happen with squabbling kids on a playground. Tempers fly in the heat of the game and when I am able to address the problem with humor, it doesn't take long for the squabblers to see how silly the argument is."

"Perceived negative situations on earth, but we'll get to that in a moment. Anything else? What's the medical effect?"

"Well, I know that researchers have found that the power of laughter is also a healing one. Patients who laugh easily often heal more quickly." I glanced over and made the connection. "Ah, I see what you're asking. So, laughter not only heals the ethereal, but the physical body, as well." She nodded. "I would guess that humor also transforms attitudes."

She nodded again. "Good, Soul. How?"

"We talked briefly about this earlier and it made sense. Everyone's experienced walking into a room of people who see down. The perceived negative energy heaviness in the room is almost palpable. You had described it as an energy issue. I know that if I remain in that room for very long without trying to balance that room by blasting positive energy, my spirits will droop, too."

"Then, when someone laughs, it seems as if the heaviness in the room lifts a little. The more laughter, the lighter the room, and suddenly there's a different type of atmosphere present – positive energy."

She clapped her hands, clearly delighted with her charge. "The world is comprised of energy, Soul. Remember when we talked about taking personal responsibility for every thought and action?" When I nodded, she continued. "When you are thinking or speaking in a fashion that is perceived as negative on earth, a kind of negative energy is being transmitted from you out into the universe. As it travels in waves, as do sound and light, it picks up like negative energy before returning to you. This negative energy affects and, in a way, *infects* those around you before returning to you. Similarly, when you send out positive thoughts and words, this positive energy travels outward in waves, attracting like energy before returning to you. That energy also affects those around you, but in a positive way, lightening a room of its heaviness. The earthly self created laughter as a physical release from being so filled with Light."

"Cool," I grinned. You know, I bet people are more productive in a work environment where laughter is encouraged," I mused.

"Of course. Just as it's difficult for your feet to wade through muck, it's difficult for your mind to deal with the suffocating heaviness surrounding you and still be productive, as well. Ideas and creativity cannot flow through muck. As a matter of fact, your scientists will eventually prove that this psychic energy is just as real as the physical world and its principles."

Epheniel paused. "Consider the words *light* vs. *heavy*. Positive energy lifts us. In a flow of

positive energy, the flow comes from the Light. The mood is described as lightness, and that transfusion/transference of positive energy elevates you to operate through the eyes of your Higher Self.” I nodded and she continued. “Humankind feels the heaviness caused by the physical world’s constraints, such as density and the gravitational pull.”

“Earlier, you talked about the effect on us with too much artificial lighting and other electronic devices. What about technological bombardment? It sure seems as if getting blasted with all that technology would do a number on us, right?”

“It’s interesting that you should use the descriptor *bombardment* in reference to technology. Technology plays a significant role in what you like to call this Great Earth Experiment. Humanity will use technology to aid us in our goal to walk as one toward the Light, not detract us. Embrace, technology, Soul; don’t shy away from it.”

“As long as I am not asked to do the impossible, like program the television remote control – I’ll embrace it.” I paused, grinned at her and then returned to our conversation. “What else weighs us down?”

“Allowing ego free rein and choosing to live in the microcosm of perceived human reality, adds to the heaviness, as well. But it is only earthly selves which feel heavy, not Higher Selves.”

I interrupted, anxious to understand. “Obviously, we don’t have any control over the density of this planet or its gravitational pull since we chose to experience both, but we do have control over choices we make. So, in order to live as we were meant to, we need to get rid of the ego and move into the macrocosm, where we can better view the Big Picture, right?” Epheniel nodded.

I thought a long moment. “How, if any, does that positive and negative energy thing translate to good vs. evil? Is there evil in this world?”

“You’ve asked what appears to be a simple question, Soul, but the answer is quite complex. Let’s think about the planning stage of this Great Earth Experiment. I think that will help.” She paused, gathering her thoughts. I wasn’t surprised that it would require a complex answer; humankind had considered and debated the question for a very long time. I waited patiently, hoping I could grasp its complexity.

“When the Earth Experiment was first being debated on this side of the veil, those energies made the decision to allow evil to exist on the physical realm. The concept of oppositional forces was permitted to manifest itself in the physical realm – both good and evil.”

“Why? Wouldn’t that be undermining the experiment?”

“No, Soul, they understood that the human entities would garner their learning from both positive and negative experiences. Journeying souls call it evil because it provides the force needed to overcome to move toward the Light as one.” Epheniel knew that this was new territory for me, so she paused momentarily to allow me to absorb it all. She gazed at me a long time and then switched tactics.

“Remember the God Pool?”

“Sure. Each soul, regardless of location, garners learning, which is added to the Pool for all of us to access.”

“Good. In an earthly sense then, evil provides the opportunity for deeper spiritual growth. When things are going well and life is easy for you, there is not as much growth as when you are facing a tough time, right?” When I nodded, Epheniel continued. “The concept of evil is a gift, then, given to earthly selves for their inner battles in order to learn and grow, but it’s not a personal thing.”

“So, no Satan? No demons? Really?”

Epheniel shook her head. “No Satan. No demons.” She smiled. “Really.”

“I don’t get it. What about all these reports and warnings of demons throughout time? Good battling evil – that sort of thing. Those are all just human perception?”

My angel nodded again. “Evil/Satan/demons are paradigms that many hold near and dear, so for their reality, they are real. When humankind chooses to veer from its true paths and hurt others, it is often referred to as an evil act, but as for evil as an entity, no, it is only perception.”

“And hell?” I inquired.

“Hell is another interesting concept, Soul. *Evil* and *hell* are similar in that they give us the

impetus to work toward the goal that journeying souls agreed upon when the idea for this Earth Experiment was presented.”

“So, we all signed contracts or something?”

“Everyone who agreed to participate in the experiment had to make a commitment to it and to everything it entailed. Evil and hell were a part that commitment. All participants agreed to involve the concepts to aid the challenged, not the challengers. For example, the Holocaust provided enormous growth for the world that helped progress humankind toward its goal.” Epheniel watched my jaw drop. “We’ll get back to that in a moment. Let’s finish this first.”

“Hell is not so much a means of control for the world religions, although many religious leaders certainly took – and continue to take – advantage of the concept in order to further empower themselves. It is a culmination of humankind’s greatest fears, the greatest of which is that they will be eternally trapped in physical form. In essence, they fear an eternity of physicality.”

“I can understand and appreciate that fear, but it surprises me that it is a universal fear.”

“It is a fear that is deeply rooted within the soul – that of being eternally trapped in the hellish earth realm.”

I didn’t speak for a long moment, desperately trying to wrap my mind around this. “Okay,” I finally countered, “I can buy the no-Satan concept, but let’s get back to the Holocaust. What about someone like Hitler? Wasn’t he pure evil? Why did God allow that to take place?”

“So we’re back to the Master Puppeteer, eh?” I blushed; Epheniel gazed at me for a long moment before speaking. “I understand that this will be a stumbling block for many journeying souls, but you have already resolved some of these questions. Think, Soul. Did God allow your mother to be brutally beaten? Did God allow your father to die from cancer even though you and your family prayed for his recovery? You did not choose to come to this realm to judge and condemn, but to love unconditionally and to learn. Remember, those particular events were chosen by your parents’ Higher Selves for the learning that would take place for them and those who love them. They agreed to participate in those particular challenges.”

I nodded, trying to absorb the enormity of her words. “But Hitler?”

“It was the same thing, Soul. Hitler’s series of choices resulted in the Holocaust.” Epheniel paused again, knowing the level of trust I would need to accept her words. All I could think of were the millions of humans who were brutalized and killed in this perception of evil. As always, she knew my thoughts.

“And as for the innocents that were dragged from their homes, stripped of their belongings and families, taken to concentration camps where they were tortured, starved and put to death – while it may be enormously difficult to imagine – those souls also agreed in another time, space and dimension, to experience ...”

“Stop!” I cried, as I leapt to my feet in shock, not even giving Epheniel a chance to finish. My whole body shook as waves of nausea swept through me. “You’re wrong! You can’t tell me that millions upon millions of men, women and children – for God’s sake – chose to experience that ... that horror?”

A booming voice behind me shattered my thoughts. “Think, Bruce, think!” Startled, I spun around. Michael was standing with his arms crossed, his face stern. *Uh-oh. Not a good sign.*

“Michael!” I yelled without thinking. “For Pete’s sake, stop doing that! You’re going to give me a heart attack one of these days!” I looked around the amphitheater to find smiling entities surrounding me. Obviously, they were much amused at my expense. Again. I hurriedly sat down, but turned to face him. My admonishment had not seemed to have affected him in the least. He continued to lazily chew the blade of grass.

“Who’s Pete?” he asked idly. “Anybody I should know about? You’re not two-timing me with this Pete character, are you, Bruce?”

I sighed, got comfortable and checked out the angel. His face was unshaven; his hair unkempt. He wore sandals, cut-off jeans and a t-shirt that read, *EAT AT JOE’S.*

I sighed again. “What do you mean, *Think!?*”

Michael’s eyes bored into mine. “When are you guys gonna get it?!” My jaw dropped again. *Is he yelling at me?* He sighed and began again. “No, Soul, I’m not yelling at you. I’m just

frustrated with the whole lot of you! How long's it going to take humanity to get the concept that in order to cross the finish line, you've got to develop other paradigms?"

"Like what?"

Michael's voice rose. "Like understanding the purpose of this Earth Experiment for one!" he replied. "Stop pitying what you consider to be the victims of the Holocaust! You should be erecting statues of every single one of them. They agreed to participate in the horrors of that experience to give humankind a much-needed spiritual jumpstart at that point of Earth history. Each of those millions and millions of souls was filled with an intense passion for their mission and the lessons within it, vastly increasing the God pool! Honor them, Soul, but don't belittle their valor with your pity!"

Epheniel tapped Michael on his shoulder; her eyes twinkled. "You wouldn't be bullying my soul, now, would you, Mi-kay-el?"

Michael looked shocked. "Me? Bully a soul?" He shook his head. "Wouldn't think of it!" He rose, brushed off his pants and glanced at me. "Let me add one more thought: Who'd the world learn more from – Mother Teresa or Hitler? You will think about all this, right, Bruce?" I nodded and he sat down.

I stared at Epheniel for a moment. "I wonder how people will react to the news that their challenges were chosen by themselves and not decreed by some vengeful God? When Epheniel raised her eyebrows, I continued. "I know we've talked about this before, but it's huge. How many times in my own lifetime have I heard the questions: *Why did God allow that to happen? Why didn't God prevent that tragedy? So much evil in the world – where is God?* Even knowing that those who experienced the horrors of the Holocaust had chosen it for humankind's growth, may pale with the realization that loved ones in their own lives chose their difficult challenges, as well. I suspect this will be a difficult concept for many to accept."

Epheniel smiled gently at the archangel and then at me. "Michael is often impatient with humankind, but he's right. Each soul is on its own path, chosen once upon a time, space and dimension ago. Each progresses on individual bases, although our task – all of us – is to walk together as One toward the Light. For some, acceptance of this concept of soul responsibility will come naturally. It will resonate within them. For others, time will be needed to process the information before deciding to integrate it into their lives. And finally, others will choose to believe in the vengeful God, who arbitrarily slams humanity with challenges of immense proportion. Those find it easier to blame God, rather than accept responsibility for their challenges. As in everything, it is all unfolding as it must with each soul, following its chosen path."

I nodded. When my angel put it that way, it made so much sense. I hoped I would be able to recall this concept after our visit today. "So, I'm curious, what happened to Hitler when he died?"

Epheniel considered my question carefully before replying. "Is that information necessary for your spiritual growth, Soul?" Chagrined, I shook my head. "We will discuss afterlife at another time, Soul. I promise. But, even though I can and most willingly will answer countless questions, you and all journeying souls need to keep in mind that not all will be revealed to you until you come Home."

"Not mine to know at this point?" I asked. She nodded.

"All will be revealed to you when you come Home," Michael repeated. "Now is your time to trust that all is unfolding as it must. As for choices that you make, all choices made with love and the intent to walk toward the Light will be helping you stay the path."

I thought a moment and asked, "Tell me, are you allowed to explain war?"

Michael smiled. "Yes, Soul. That's my field of expertise, unfortunately. The purpose of Earth's creation was to learn amongst challenges. War is yet another challenge, often begun by the need to control ..."

"Whoa!" I interrupted. "You know how many wars have been waged in the name of God throughout time? Tens of thousands!"

"*God wars*. A bit of a dichotomy, isn't it? In the face of all the wars and prejudice and hatred in this world, we are progressing toward our goal, even though sometimes – oftentimes – it may not always seem like it."

"I guess I need to rethink all that God stuff, eh?" I asked thoughtfully. "I grew up thinking God called the shots, but that theory scared me silly because I found it all rather arbitrary."

Epheniel gazed deeply into my eyes. "Soul, we need to talk about God now. Tell me more of your perception."

"Well, as I told you earlier, my childish perception was the benevolent grandfather God, sitting on a golden throne, scepter in hand. I imagined He loved us very much – even with the fire and brimstone hell of my Baltimore Catechism education. Then, as I grew older, He became younger somehow – maybe it was just because I was getting older!"

"And now?"

"You tell me, but with all the paradigms crashing around me these days, I expect this will be a big one, too." I took a deep breath, wondering what was to come. "Who is God?"

"Are you really ready for my answer? Are you listening with an open heart, mind and soul?"

Remembering my reaction to our *evil* conversation, I reddened. Again. She smiled gently. "I'm going to make my explanation very simplistic for now. Let's go back to our discussion of energy for a moment." I nodded again. "You're made up of energy. A blade of grass is made up of energy. A rock is made of energy. Zeke is made of energy. A kitten is made up of energy."

"Everything and everyone is made of energy," I summarized, anxious to get to *the God part*.

She nodded. "God or the Universe or Higher Power or All That Is – whatever word is used – is a vast energy grid; therefore, everything contained within it is energy, flowing throughout the grid. Because everything contains energy, everything contains God; God is in everything; God is everything; everything is God."

I gasped. "Are you telling me what I think you are?"

"What do you think I'm saying, Soul?"

"I am God?" I squeaked.

Epheniel nodded. "You are God. Everyone is God."

"That blade of grass is God, as well?"

"Does it contain energy?" Michael asked. I nodded, desperately trying to understand. The archangel continued. "Everything within the grid is God and God is the grid. There is a constant flow of energy from within the grid to all parts of it. All realms are deeply connected by the grid, even though much of humankind has chosen not to remember that connection."

Remember the connection? My mind reeled with all I had learned today. We are all God? Could that be true?

"Whoa, that's a pretty radical concept, angels. A lot of people are going to have a tough time reconciling that notion with their paradigms of God." I looked at my angel and considered her words. "A blade of grass ..."

"Each soul has made choices for this time around; some have chosen to work toward an understanding of the true nature of their journey; some have chosen to do that at another time and are learning other valuable lessons within their paradigm of God. Each one is right for that particular soul. Regardless of those choices, together, our task is to connect as one and move into the Light."

I looked at Epheniel a long time and then slowly returned to my seat. My eyes soaked in the beauty surrounding me, as my mind reeled with what I had learned. I discovered that I still had questions that demanded answers.

"Earlier," I said, "you talked about the evolution of the human species. With such perceived evil being created by the physical body, how can we ever all make the connection and evolve into Light? Isn't that asking the impossible? Earth contains billions of individual souls!"

Epheniel stared off into the distance in obvious thought. "Hmmm. Let's start small here. You have a consciousness, don't you?" I nodded. "It contains your belief system and how you respond to the events around you. Your Earth is made up of all the billions of individuals, each with his and her own consciousness. There are also billions of souls in other places and dimensions outside of Earth. These are combined into a whole or what is known as the collective consciousness. Are you with me at this point?" I nodded again. "Okay, now that you have that part, let's take it a step further. When an individual human entity makes the choice to live in Truth,

Light and Love, that individual makes a paradigm shift into a state of enlightenment.”

I interrupted. “But how do people know how to make that shift?”

Epheniel gestured for Michael to answer. “By seeing and living the Big Picture. Once human spirits can step out of their own little realities and experience others, understanding and acceptance will be an automatic response. The little realities served a purpose once, but now it's time to put our learning to use. When humans stay mired in their own little realities, there can be no true understanding. There must be a paradigm shift in order for this planet to evolve.”

“And for the experiment to be successful,” I observed. “Okay, but we’re talking billions of people on this planet. Do you angels honestly expect that at some point every person on Earth will make that choice?” I slowly shook my head in disbelief. “It seems ridiculous to even consider that happening. Have you been down there lately?”

“A seesaw, Soul,” Epheniel replied.

“What?”

“Actually, that simple concept will help you understand how this shift will take place. It's a physics concept, which I'll try to explain in simple terms for you.”

I smiled at her. *Simple like the simultaneous existence concept using only an onion, I bet.* She took a deep breath. “There is a concept in physics called *critical mass*, which refers to the amount of mass within a celestial body required for the internal forces of heat and compression to initiate a thermonuclear reaction which transforms the celestial body into a star.”

My mouth hung open. *I knew it!* “That's your idea of simple?”

“I'm not done, Soul. Let's think of it as a plane on a fulcrum, balancing – like a seesaw. You've got a handful of stones, which you are placing on each side. But in order to tip the seesaw, all of the stones in your hand don't need to be used. You only need 51% to make that shift so that it tips, right?”

I nodded dubiously, hoping I could stay with her explanation. “And so translated to our collective consciousness ...?”

She smiled. “All is unfolding as it must. It takes only one soul to make a change to live with Truth, Light and Love. As others see the rightness of the shift, they, too, adopt the changes. As more and more souls choose to make that choice, the change in consciousness grows exponentially. And like the teeter-totter, at some point, 51% is reached and there is a shift in the entire collective consciousness and a new era in human evolution has begun.”

“Wow,” I breathed. “*One person can make a difference* takes on a whole new meaning, doesn't it?” She nodded. “And our goal for this Great Earth Experiment is to move into the Light as one, right? And I agreed to help?”

“Yes, Soul. You chose that as your Life Purpose before this incarnation and I agreed to help you with your task.”

“How in heaven's name do I possibly accomplish something that massive? I'm not exactly you, Michael, with a shiny sword, motorbike and demolition equipment.”

“I'll always help. We'll do it together. Besides, ol' Bessie can be wherever she's needed, Bruce. Just give me the word and we'll be there.” He gazed at me a moment. “But you're already equipped with your own demolition equipment, Bruce.”

“What's that?”

“Love,” he replied simply. I nodded.

“So, we are really going to work together on the earth realm?” I didn't want to sound like a parrot, but this angel wasted no time on chitchat and I knew I would need all my wits about me just to keep up with him. Suddenly, I was filled with insecurity. “You really want to work with me?”

He wagged another celestial finger at me. “Boy, do you sound human. Come on, Bruce, release the ego filled with feelings of unworthiness and look at me through the eyes of your Higher Self. We're both light beings, filled with love and light, dedicated to helping this planet reawaken. Until you can do this, unify all parts of your being in the Light, we cannot possibly accomplish together that which we both seek.” His words made perfect sense. I released the awe and the unworthiness and faced him. “There!” he said smugly. “That's more like it! Now that we have that little issue squared away and I have a bit more time, what else do you want to know?”

“I have some questions for you if you don't mind and have the time,” I began hesitantly. He

raised his eyebrows disapprovingly and I tried it again. "Michael, I have a question for you."

He grinned. "Shoot."

"Have you always been an archangel?" I asked. "You mean, as opposed to my being a farmer or something?"

He shook his head as if he had given the matter great thought. "No, Soul, in all of eternity, I can't say I can recall ever having been a farmer. Why do you ask?"

"Actually, I was wondering if you have always been the age you are now. Were you ever a young angel?" I immediately reddened, hoping he wouldn't think I looked upon him as old. He grinned, patted his hair and laughed. "What? A little gray showing these days? I can appear to be any age in any form I wish, Soul. If I am near young humans, it would scare them silly if a large male angel brandishing a powerful sword suddenly materialized in front of them, so I choose to take the form of someone closer to their age."

"Deb." He nodded, paused, and cocked his head my way.

"I get it. You're trying to understand me, aren't you, Soul? Get a grip on that old archangel thing?" I nodded and he grinned. "Tell you what we're gonna do. Have you ever played Lemme Guess?"

My eyes narrowed suspiciously. *Why do I have the distinct impression he's poking fun of me? Again.*

"Lemme Guess?" When he nodded, I shook my head.

"It's usually called *Angel Guess*, but I figured with you, ..." He grinned. I found the good grace to return the smile. "It's a great game! One of us picks a category and we tell what we like best, okay? I'll start us out, okay? Trust me, it's a great way to get to know each other." I nodded and he plopped down beside us. He briefly searched for another blade of grass, found what he was looking for and began to chew it before announcing the first category. Epheniel grinned broadly, clearing enjoying herself. "Color," he stated confidently.

"October blue or forest green," I answered, awaiting his answer.

"Purple, definitely deep, royal purple. Looks good with my eyes." He sat up and coyly batted his suddenly-two-inch eyelashes at me. I laughed. "Earth season?" he asked, his eyelashes returning to normal length.

"Spring, when Life returns to replenish our spirits. You?"

"Winter," Michael grinned. "I love winter!"

"Because you like to catch drifting snowflakes on your tongue and make those pretty, little snow angels?"

He snorted. He actually snorted. Michael, the Archangel, Prince of the Realm, snorted. I glanced over at Epheniel. "Is he allowed to snort? Isn't that against some rule? Where's that Handbook of yours when we need it? And, furthermore, what may I ask, is wrong with cute, little snow angels?"

Epheniel smiled. "Soul, you're on your own here. I'm just going to sit back and enjoy this." She smiled at Michael, got more comfortable and closed her eyes. The archangel was clearly enjoying himself, most of which appeared to be distinctly at my expense. He continued, undeterred.

"Snow angels? Are you kidding? I love winter because you can build great snow forts and have amazing snowball battles and build snowmen with powerful swords hanging at their sides, then come inside, peel off the leggings and the boots and the coats and the scarves and the mittens and warm up with cocoa." He paused and grinned. "Double marshmallows." He paused again. "Mmmm, food," he stated. "Your favorite?"

I thought a moment. "Hmm. Probably fresh summer fruit and vegetables like cherries, peaches, corn on the cob and tomatoes. You?"

"Hot dogs, coleslaw and a cold brew." He laughed at my expression and continued. "If you want to make me really happy, hand me those foods and stick me at a baseball game. Ah, now that's my definition of happiness!" He grinned at me and said, "As long as we're discussing food, what's your favorite dessert?"

"Ice cream," I promptly answered. "Banana ice cream." He started to talk, but I held up my hands. "Wait! Let me guess!" I begged.

Michael roared. "Hence the change of this game's name, *Lemme Guess!*"

I ignored his not-so-subtle gibe. "I bet I can get this one: angel food cake!"

Another snort. "Is that your idea of a joke? No thanks. Forget boring angel food cake and just give me devil's food cake with double fudge icing, and I'm in heaven." He grinned and whispered, "I love that Earth expression!" He paused and rubbed his chin in thought. Suddenly, his eyes lit up. "Your turn," he said. "Holiday!"

I didn't need any time to think. "Christmas! At last we've found something we have in common!" My elation oozed out of my body as I saw Michael shake his head slowly.

"Halloween!" he grinned.

"Isn't that kind of ..., well, *illegal* for you guys?" He looked at me questioningly. "It started out as a pagan holiday, you know. Children dressing up as witches and demons running about ..."

Michael gave me a long look. "Check your facts, Bruce. Halloween began as Samhein, an ancient Celtic festival, a holy day to honor the dead. Druid priests also used this day to perform sacred rituals, commemorating the end of harvest and the beginning of winter.

"And as for Christmas, I don't need to celebrate the Christian holy day of Christmas one day a year. I live the spirit of Christmas – and Samhein – and all religious holy days in all religions – every day." More paradigms came crashing around my ankles. "I celebrate any day that will bring human spirits closer to the Light. Remember, Soul, we are not Christian angels, but for all souls, regardless of their religious, ethnic or cultural beliefs."

"But Halloween?" I was clearly at a loss for words.

He grinned. "You wouldn't be casting judgment, now, would you, Bruce?" I reddened again, this time a deeper crimson. *How do I get myself into these predicaments?* He laughed heartily. "Because you're human, Human. Sure, some cross the line into the occult, which is dangerous to their inner core, but all in all, most understand that it's just fun. In fact, I've done more than my share of trick-or-treating in my day, wearing this great angel getup." He leaned over to whisper, "You're not the only one smitten with angel wings. But seriously, Halloween is a time of great imagination in which kids of all ages shed reality and attempt to step into someone else's for a short time. And while the different reality may be only imaginary, it's good practice for when we ask them to do it on a spiritual level." I looked blank. "The paradigm shift? That shift in consciousness won't happen unless human spirits step out of their own little realities in order to see the Big Picture." I nodded, still trying to puzzle out his logic.

I soon gave up because he announced another topic. "Television show."

"Television show?" I managed to sputter, shaking my head. "Let me get this straight. You are The Michael, the Archangel, Battling Avenger of the Universe, and you have time to watch *television*?"

He grinned and nodded. "What can I say? I multitask."

I was just going to have to rethink all of this stuff. First, my angel confesses her love for the Wizard of Oz and Glinda's glittering gown, and then I learn the Hall of Records handy sprite watches oil filter commercials and now this. "Well, I don't watch much television, but when I do, I stay away from the violent stuff. I suppose a good, old-fashioned movie would be my favorite."

"Chick flick." I could only nod at this point. My mind had been blown several topics ago, so by now I was feeling pretty numb. I raised my eyebrows questioningly.

"Well, I thought I understood angels, but it appears I have a lot to learn. I suppose you're going to tell me your favorite show isn't going to be about adorable, little angels flitting about the universe, right?"

The familiar snort exploded from him again. "Cartoons."

"Cartoons," I repeated in a dull manner.

Michael grinned and I was suddenly reminded of a sleepy, little tousled-haired boy padding his way into the family room on an early Saturday morning to watch his favorite shows, dragging his blanket in one hand and his teddy bear in the other. "I love cartoons. Good versus evil."

I shook my head free from its meanderings. "Pardon me?"

"Good versus evil, Bruce – positive and negative energy. Right there on the screen." When I still looked confused, he paused in thought.

"Okay," he said, "take the Roadrunner as an example."

"The Roadrunner."

"Right. Talk about your positive and negative energy. That mangy, old coyote, like the mind's scheming, creates earthly toils in trying to catch the roadrunner and what happens every single time?"

I couldn't resist. "A commercial comes?"

"No, Bruce, stay with me. The coyote gets zapped. Anvils fall on him. He slams into things. He gets blown up by his own devices. *What goes around comes around?*" I smiled at his use of my words, especially since I now better understood the karma concept.

"Hey, that was an old paradigm. I threw that one out long ago, Michael! But I guess I never really viewed The Roadrunner Show in exactly that particular spiritual terminology."

"Oh, I love that little guy," Michael said, but added, "although I gotta tell you that I love the coyote, too. Must be his can-do attitude. Hey, there's another one I love, too. Wanna guess?" I could only shake my head, but it didn't matter – he wasn't planning on awaiting my reply. "Elmer Fudd."

"Elmer Fudd."

"Yeah, you know, Elmer Fudd and that wascally wabbit?"

"So what you're telling me is that Michael, the Archangel, Prince of the Realm, loves the Roadrunner and Elmer Fudd."

"Hey, don't forget the wascally wabbit. See, another perfect example of what I was saying. Elmer Fudd wastes all that time and energy chasing after Bugs Bunny. There is never any question of who is going to triumph, is there? And there you have it!" I shook my head.

"And the exact highly evolved message again is ...?"

"Don't waste time on negative energy unless you want to be zapped. Or get blown up or have an anvil dropped on your head ..."

"Okay. Okay. I get your drift. Maybe we'd better move on. If you watch television, you must see an occasional movie." His face lit up. "Favorite?"

He leaped to his feet, startling me, pulled out his sword that had not been there a moment before and struck a dramatic pose. "Errol Flynn in Captain Blood!" He sighed longingly. "I love swashbucklers. I can just see myself, standing on the deck of a ship in my shiny black boots, a white, ruffled shirt, sporting a gold earring, a ruby ring and a patch over one eye, buckling my swash and using my masterful fencing skills to smite the bad guys." I nodded.

"Isn't that a little... well, *violent* for an archangel with all that smiting and stuff?" I asked suspiciously. "Doesn't that go against that angel code thing?"

Michael laughed. "You have to remember that I am a battler by nature. You also have to remember that I love your Earth. It's so ... *physical*. You may yearn to be connected to this realm, Bruce, but many on this realm, yearn for the physicality of yours."

"Wow. I never thought of it that way. Grass is always greener, eh? You really would love to spend your day buckling and smiting, wouldn't you?" He grinned and nodded.

"I'll choose *It's a Wonderful Life*," I said. "It always makes me cry. And I like Clarence, that angel who seems to struggle as much as my earthly self does these days."

I gazed at Michael a moment before suggesting the next topic. "Sports," I said. "Let me guess the sport you like most to play." Before he could answer, I added, "You already told me that you like to watch baseball, and something tells me it's not going to be ping-pong, so is it basketball?"

"Nope," he answered. "Football. Hard-hitting, no holds barred, down- in-the-dirt, in-your-face football. Of course, before football, I was a great fan of jousting tournaments, but they kind of fell out of disfavor after the Middle Ages." He paused in thought. "Great fun," he mused, "those Middle Ages."

I should have known better after seeing him with that jackhammer. It's that battle thing going on here again. "Good thing you weren't given the title, Michael, the Archangel, Protector of the Knitters. You'd never survive all these millennia with nothing but yarn and needles."

"Sure I would, Bruce. Those knitting needles would make great swords!" He paused briefly and announced the next topic. "Favorite subject in school?"

"History," I answered without thought, but then realization dawned. "Hey, I thought you've always been an adult-sized angel. Are you telling me you went to – what? Oak Street Angel Academy?"

"Nah," he admitted, "just wondered what your favorite subject had been. Had I gone to school, though, my second favorite subject would have been history, too, with all that battling going on throughout the pages of the book, but I have to admit, recess would have most likely won over history!"

He suddenly turned serious. "Well, Bruce, it's been a blast talking with you and getting to know you, but I have lots to do and so must leave. I don't know if you've noticed, but the world is a mess out there! Thanks for all your help." He leaned over, kissed me on the forehead and whispered, "We'll talk later. Stay in touch. Later, Eppie!" I blinked once and he was gone. I sighed deeply and turned to Epheniel.

"His energy is exhausting! I know he has serious work to do on the earth realm, but he really is fun, isn't he?"

"Angels are by your side in serious situations, Soul, and can comfort you in times of great sorrow, but always remember how much we love to laugh. Humans so often take themselves too seriously. There is a need to learn how to lighten up, as your phrase goes. That's one part of our job that we particularly love!"

I nodded. "You know, if Michael had gone to school, I can just imagine his third grade report card:

Oak Street Angel Academy Report Card

Student: Michael, Archangel in Training,

Level: 3

Grades: Math: D+; Reading C; History: B-; Science: C-; Handwriting: D; Spelling: F

Teacher Comment:

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Archangel,

Little Michael is not performing at expectation in my classroom because he has trouble staying in his seat and focusing on tasks at hand. As a result, he has had many late/missed assignments in important subject areas. He much prefers to scamper about the room with his little cardboard sword, wreaking havoc. During our current event discussions, he often jumps onto the top of his desk, shouting, "I'll take 'em on. I'll take 'em all on! Let me at 'em!" Really quite inappropriate.

His social skills need marked improvement; he is constantly challenging the *Forces of Evil*, as he puts it, to battle. We at the Academy have never believed that fractions are inherently evil, but his practice of randomly smiting the textbooks must be strongly discouraged.

This kind of imagination and energy just cannot be considered "normal." This situation has become quite unacceptable and will not be tolerated in our fine little school. One wonders if he spent more time learning those valuable spelling rules and multiplication facts and less time flitting around, flaunting authority and smiting times tables, mightn't he be more successful?

Now, unless these issues are seriously addressed and immediately resolved, we are afraid that little Michael's future is in serious jeopardy. Do have a lovely day.

Sincerely,
Boriana J. Sanctimonium,
Headmistress, Oak Street Angel Academy

.....

Harmonious Habitat

Loved Ones, when ego began to take on the responsibility of human survival, without the input of the Holy Spirit, it was compelled to invent the means to accomplish this goal. One of these concepts that you transformed into action was, "Only the strongest and fittest survive." In order for one to be stronger than another, there developed a hierarchy unnatural to your species. You began to believe that the more power and control you could exert over others made you stronger. Instead of working in tandem to achieve higher development, you fought wars, killing each other to prove your own strength and superiority. Any excuse initiated a cause to prove your dominance; differences between genders, color of skin, culture, or even habitat locations became opportunities to prove dominance.

One of the best examples of the supremacy attitude is one of the oldest: male dominance over women. Even though it was a threat to your species to create such a division between female and male, because of the male's physically stronger being, the female became the first target to play out domination tactics. Physical prowess alone was certainly not a strong enough factor to convince women to participate in this domination. It was the female gender's wisdom in comprehending the threat of extinction combined with male physical strength that made them believe they must submit to male dominance. The effects of the perpetuation of this attitude has caused astronomical pain and suffering over the ages. Both male and female have endured great harm by creating this division because no one was free to experience both masculine and feminine energies embodied in the self. If the male was expected to prove dominance, he felt compelled to suppress his natural feminine traits, and if the female was to be accepted while surviving in a male-dominated world, she needed to hide normal male tendencies. The result was a divided self and a divided world.

It has taken tremendous courage to work toward ending gender domination because it is so deeply embedded in your cultures. Many of you have displayed this courage working to make great strides toward human wholeness. You have begun to realize that it is possible to embrace equally the Divine Mother and Divine Father. You are evolving toward the end of the reign of patriarchy and moving into whole-self realization. This integration attitude will allow freedom for a soul in a male body to explore and express female energy, and an end for the soul in a female body to attach herself to a male to ensure survival. You have begun to understand a soul must experience both feminine and masculine energies within the self. This is your true heritage, Dear Ones. The angels rejoice as your courage propels you toward a centered wholeness.

Another example of a concept ego used to prove human power and control was to convince you to believe you "owned" parts of the Earth. Instead of recognizing the Earth as a living entity and cherishing it, the Earth became your battlefield to prove your power over territorial "ownership." To this day, human blood, pain and suffering continue to cover your planet because of this territorial power struggle. You live your daily lives with the threat of extinction because of sophisticated weapons developed to ensure power over your "territory." However, again, many of you have demonstrated the courage to dare to believe in stewardship of the Earth and fellowship while living on it. There are people who live every day of their lives working toward the prospect of peace and harmony – and more and more children are being born on your planet with peace planted firmly in their hearts, with the full intention of promoting it. The time is right for letting go of useless territorial struggle and beginning a new era of enlightened harmony – and again, the angels rejoice!

A third example of an ego-inventive means to prove supremacy was differences in skin color and culture. Because some cultures developed more advanced means of transportation and weaponry, it was easy to subjugate those of different color and culture (and they ruthlessly went about doing so). Instead of enjoying the vast, rich differences among cultures of humankind, the differences became just another excuse to exert domination.

The angels again rejoice in the stand many of you have had the courage to take against color/culture domination. You have joined together in a movement for equal rights that has the potential to evolve into a movement toward a total harmonious habitat. This is a vision inclusive of all Life on the planet, promoting Light and Love. This vision of a harmonious habitat is of a place

where people genuinely care about Life – where there is no manipulation – where violent conflict is only part of history – where authorities represent the needs of all Life, rather than promote dominance and oppression – where both men and women are free to express their whole Soul Selves – where color and culture are respected and embraced – where humankind accepts stewardship of the Earth. Receiving this vision is the first step toward bringing it to fulfillment.

Chapter 9

Late July

I bounded up the steps to reach the lions and catch my breath. ... 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33!
Loud purring greeted me at the top of the marble stairs.

“Why, hello, there!” I whispered as I nuzzled my head into the cats’ powerful necks, rubbing them one at a time. They responded in turn, almost knocking me off the platforms with their gentle cuddling. “You’re just big babies, aren’t you?” I smelled deeply of their essence, thrilling to the unique experience. “I’ll be back for more, but right now, I’ve got to run.” I stepped forward to knock on the massive doors, but decided just to open them instead.

As I walked inside the Great Hall, my eyes took a moment to adjust to the light and then I carefully scanned my surroundings. The magnificence struck a chord deep within me and I stared at the towering stained glass windows sparkling in the brilliant light. The masterful artwork and delicate statuary knew no earthly rival, and I was freshly amazed that I had missed all of it for so long.

As I gazed around me, trying to take it all in, Zeke came bouncing forward to greet me. He spun around for me to secure the apron ties.

“I have an idea,” I said. “I’m going to triple-knot these babies so they stay better secured! That okay with you?”

“Sounds like a plan, Lassie,” he replied. “Why didn’t I think of that?”

“Hey, that’s what friends are for – to triple knot your apron strings!” As I tied them, he giggled. “I’ve got a new one!”

“A new what?”

“Joke. Wanna hear it?” Without awaiting my reply, he said, “God was talking to uh, ... was it Raphael? No, I don’t think so.” When he sat down to ponder, I had no choice but to join him. Zeke rubbed one ear in thought. “Could it have been Gabriel? No, he went out that night.” He rubbed the other ear. “Maybe it was Uriel.”

I gently interrupted. “Is this part of the joke, Zeke, or you having trouble remembering it?”

His whole face suddenly lit up and he jumped to his feet. “Wait! It was Michael! That was it! Okay. Now I can do it. Ye ready?” I nodded again, got comfortable, knowing Zeke as well as I did. The handy sprite began over. “Okay. God was talking to Michael the Archangel one day and He says, ‘Mike, I’m whapped.’” Zeke looked at me, his brow furrowed in befuddlement. “Ye know sometimes we go by nicknames instead of our formal ones. Ye know, Zeke for Ezekiel? Well, this was still Michael, the Archangel. God was just using his nickname. Thought it might help with the joke – just wanted ye to know.”

“There is a punch line to this joke, isn’t there?” I asked, not wishing to appear rude. I had lots of questions for Epheniel and was anxious to see her.

“Oh, yeah, Lassie. It’s a great joke. Ye’ll love it!” His face fell. “It’s great so far, isn’t it?” I bobbed my head up and down with as much enthusiasm and patience as possible. He rubbed his chin pensively, obviously understanding the ear rubbing had been ineffective. “Let’s see, now, where was I?”

“God was talking to Michael.”

“Oh, yeah. Mike, Soul. See, that’s his nickname like mine is Zeke. Get it? The joke’s a lot funnier if ye tell it right.” My head felt like a yo-yo, but I continued to smile politely. *Keep your mouth shut and this joke will eventually have an ending.* I instantly regretted that thought as soon as it had crossed my brain. *When will I remember that thoughts are heard on this realm?* I was preparing an apology, when I realized that Zeke was so caught up in the telling of the joke, that he had not heard me. He began to pace the corridor. I breathed a sigh of relief and vowed to brush away all such thoughts until Zeke got to the punch line.

“Anyway,” Zeke repeated, “God was talking to Mike one day and He says...”

I couldn’t help it; my eyebrows raised. “He?”

Zeke grinned. “Been learning lots, I see. He, She, It, All That Is, the Grid, ...whatever you like. Lass, just go with the flow and please let me finish this joke. You’re gonna love it. Promise.” “Anyway,” Zeke repeated. Again. “God was talking to Mike one day and He says ...,” He paused dramatically.

“I got that part, Zeke. What’s the next line?”

A look of dismay crossed the sprite’s face. “Ah, ye made me forget the next line, Lass. I have to start over again now.”

“Of course you do,” I said sweetly, smoothing a wrinkle on my shirt. I was doing my utmost to be patient and willing. I smiled afresh at him. “Go ahead and I’ll wait patiently for the new part.”

“Ye’re a swell soul, Soul! Okay. One day, God was talking to Mike.” He looked at me, almost daring me to speak. I pursed my lips together and pretended to lock them with an invisible key, which I then pretended to toss behind me. He grinned. “‘Mike,’ He says, ‘I’m tired.’ Or was it ‘beat?’ What was that word?”

I fumbled for the tossed key and unlocked my lips. “‘Whapped,’ Zeke. God was *whapped.*”

His face fell again. “Have ye heard this joke?” When I assured him that I hadn’t and my guess was simply a stab in the dark, he continued. “*Whapped.* That’s it, Lass. Ye gotta have the right word for these funny jokes or they’re not funny, ye know?” The bobble head was once again set in motion. “Okay. Where was I?”

“Right. So, God was talking to Mike one day and says, ‘I am whapped.’ I held my breath, hoping we could finally get past this roadblock and onto the next line. Zeke grinned at me and continued. “Mike,’ He says, ‘I just created a 23-hour period of alternating light and darkness on Mars.’” Zeke paused and I inwardly groaned, but kept the smile bright on my face. “Wait,” he said seriously, pausing in his pacing, “are your human days 23 or 24 hours long?”

“24.” I was hoping short-and-sweet might encourage the same from him.

“Oh, yeah. I always get that mixed up.” The pacing resumed. “Wait – ye’re from Earth, aren’t ye?” When I nodded, he grinned again. “Now I have it! Okay. God was talking to Mike one day and says, ‘Mike,’ He says, ‘I’m whapped. I just created a 24-hour period of alternating light and darkness on Earth.’” Once again, I held my breath and pursed my lips more tightly. “Mike looks at Him and says, ‘What are ye gonna do now?’ And God says...’ Ye’re gonna love this, Soul.” Zeke stood in front of me, seemingly anxious to gauge my reaction. I vowed not to let him down. “Are ye ready?”

I sat still, barely breathing. “I couldn’t be any more ready if I tried, Zeke. Go ahead. Tell the ending.”

“Okay. Mike looks at Him ...” I tried not to sigh and kept my smile bright. *Patience is a virtue. Patience is a virtue.* “Ye’re gonna love this!” he promised.

“I’m sure I will. Please finish the joke.”

“Okay. Mike looks at Him and says, ‘What are ye gonna do now?’ And God says, ‘Call it a day!’”

Zeke collapsed with glee, his legs flailing, as he fought to regain control. “Do ye get it, Lass? *Call it a day?* Isn’t that the funniest joke ye’ve ever heard?”

I had to laugh. Zeke was so obviously taken with himself and his joke that it really was funny. “Let me guess, Zeke,” I finally said as his hilarity wore down long enough to hear me, “You haven’t told too many jokes, have you?”

Zeke’s mouth dropped open. “How’d ye know?”

"Just a lucky guess." I smoothed my shirt again, yearning to see my angel.

"Ye're right. I never used to be able to tell a good joke, but I've been practicin'. Ye're ma first to hear that one!" He was obviously thrilled with his delivery and I made a mental note to provide him with a good joke book when I returned.

"Well, you did a great job, Zeke. That is a good one!" I paused, hoping not to offend. "You wouldn't mind if we moved along to Epheniel now, would you? I'm rather anxious to see her today."

"Oh, my, my no! I mean, yes! Let's get ye where ye long to be." We rose and started off at a fast clip and it wasn't long before we were standing in front of my guardian angel's door. He looked at me anxiously. "I hope ma joke didn't cause a problem?"

"Zeke, it was a wonderful joke and you told it beautifully!" I kissed him on tip of his nose and opened the door after rapping softly. He turned and I watched him slowly walk back down the hall in thought. "Zeke!" I called. He spun around, his eyebrows raised in question. "I have a joke for you. Interested?" He nodded vigorously. "What do you call a celestial being who hangs around doorways?"

He grinned. "What?"

"An arch-angel!" He doubled over in laughter and I stood in the doorway, enjoying the sight.

"Lassie," he finally gasped, "Would ye mind if I used that?"

"Go right ahead, Zeke. Be my guest – it's now yours!" He continued down the hall, repeating the joke and chuckling. I turned to my angel and was greeted with a radiant smile, emanating love from halfway across the room. I closed my eyes and inhaled it slowly.

Finally, I spoke. "Are we staying put today, Epheniel?"

"That all depends on you, Soul. What do you seek?"

"Well, as I was climbing the steps to the Great Hall today, it struck me that we had yet to talk about the Hall or why it's even here. And, by the way, where are we – heaven?" Epheniel laughed.

"All in good time, Soul, but if that is the learning you wish to seek today, I suggest we take this conversation elsewhere."

I suspiciously narrowed my eyes at her. "Okay, but I now have a few hard-earned lessons under my belt, you know. I'm going to demand some solid answers before taking off on any type of journey: Where are we headed? What are we going to see? Will large amounts of dust and lice be involved?" I paused. "I learned my lesson in Rome."

"But, did you, Soul?"

That stopped me. "What do you mean?"

"How can anyone know all the answers before taking the journey? What is the purpose of the journey if you already possess that knowledge?" She paused in thought. "Perhaps what you learned in Rome, Soul, was not to ask the right questions before agreeing to such an experience, but to remain open during the journey for a variety of experiences that will enrich your life and expand your understanding." Her eyes twinkled in humor. "And a variety of experiences would include the dust and the lice, Beloved. Without experiencing the Roman reality, you would not have gained as true an understanding as you did."

"All right," I agreed "point taken. Could I at least ask where we might be headed this time?"

"Sure, Soul. You asked about the Great Hall. There's only one place for such a discussion – Ancient Egypt." With that, she held both of my hands in hers and I felt immense love flow as our beings merged. Far too soon, she released my hands and smiled. There, standing in front of us was a familiar figure.

"Nemphu!" I shouted and ran to embrace him. He picked me up and hugged me, twirling me around, obviously pleased to see me, as well. His garb was the same tunic and sandals, but this time, he wore a simple turban. When my feet finally touched, I looked around me. Sand – as far as the eye could see. Desert – blazing- sun-in-a-cloudless-sky – desert. Not-a-whisper-of-a-breeze desert – any-possibility-of-changing-my-mind-and-returning-to-the-Hall- of-Wisdom-office desert.

I looked up at my former guide and said wryly, "Oh, this looks like a fun place."

He grinned, knowing my fondness for the cool oases of my world. "Could have been far worse, Soul. Ever been in a desert during a dust storm?" He leaned over to me and said rather pointedly, "Roman dust pales in comparison!" I gulped, nodded and became instantly grateful. "But on to business. I hear you want to learn about the Great Hall." I nodded.

"Good, Soul, good. We'll start there, then." He saw me squint into the sun, looked around and snapped his fingers. Instantly, we were transported to a cool, shady area near the sound of running water. I sensed it was the Nile River, but did not ask. There were stone benches located under a palm tree, which was swaying gently in the breeze. Nemphu invited us to sit and get comfortable.

"You know, there's a lot of talk out there about the pyramids and the building of them and what they may have actually been used for," I began. "What's the scoop on that?"

Nemphu smiled. "Well, Soul, the *scoop* is that throughout human history, there have been many references to the possibility of these magnificent structures holding more than the remains of pharaohs."

"So," I asked, my excitement building "is that true?"

"Humankind is limited only ..."

"Yeah, I know," I grumbled, "... by imagination."

"Those questions will all be answered soon," Nemphu promised.

"What do you mean soon?" I asked, knowing how tricky these celestial entities could be. "Soon as in another hundred million years?"

Nemphu shook his head. "Soon as in within a generation, Soul."

"You're kidding!" I cried.

"Nope, it's the truth!" he promised.

Nemphu solemnly returned his gaze to me. "Soul, haven't you ever wondered about the possible mysteries contained within such magnificent structures?" I nodded and he continued. "After millions of years, humankind is now on the cusp of enlightenment, Soul."

"Whoa!" I cried. "We human beings have been working on this Great Earth Experiment for billions of years?"

"Yes, Soul. Humankind continues to evolve, but has existed in one form or another for that amount of earth time."

"One form or another?" I thought a moment. "You mean our early stages were like astral bodies or something? Remember we briefly talked about that lifetime together?"

Epheniel nodded. "The beginning of humanity was ethereal in nature; earthly bodies had very low densities."

"And when did the progression to the physical world occur?"

Nemphu replied, "Those evolutionary periods overlapped for great periods of time. At the beginning, they were millions of years long. As each new progression sought to become established, the old one slowly vanished." He paused in thought. "That teeter-totter is growing closer to the needed 51% and the evolution that began those billions of years ago will move into a new era."

"Wow," I breathed. "Epheniel and I talked about that teeter-totter. So, it's taken us billions of year from the time the Earth was created and human spirits chose to come to learn to get to this point?"

"Actually, no. There were highly-advanced human spirits on your planet at one time, but their cultures were destroyed."

I looked at her. "Are you talking about Atlantis and Lemuria? I've always wondered about them. Atlantis is known as the lost continent. So, it really existed somewhere on Earth?"

Epheniel replied, "Yes, Soul. Hundreds of thousands of years ago in your time."

"Okay. I'd like to understand those civilizations. Were they on the same continent? Were they similar? What happened to them?"

Epheniel laughed and held up her hands. "You are an inquisitive human spirit, aren't you?" I grinned and shrugged sheepishly, settling back comfortably. "Lemuria was the oldest of Earth's civilizations and really can be thought of as more of a state of mind, but it was a continent located in the Pacific Ocean near what is now known as the Hawaiian Islands. In order to better

understand Lemuria, you have to expand your way of thinking. Lemurians were entities filled with peace, understanding, unconditional love and acceptance of all Life. Theirs was a nonverbal society in which thought transference was the common mode of communication. They used their vocal chords only to make musical tones, which then joined others to form harmonious melodies throughout Lemuria.”

“Like the Music we heard at the amphitheater?”

She smiled, pleased. “Exactly. Lemurians had a great reverence for all life and understood the importance of energy vibrations and had, in fact, integrated that concept into the very core of their existence. For example, they ate only foods that were in harmony with their own individual vibrations, primarily fruits and vegetables. Everything they did revolved around their complex understanding of energy.”

She paused and I jumped in. “Let’s get back to that thought transference, please,” I requested. “How’d that work? Everyone knew everyone else’s thoughts?”

Nemphu answered. “If two souls wished to communicate, they would merge with one another – with each other’s consciousness.”

“Wow,” I breathed, looking from one to the other. “No secrets?”

“There was no need for secrets in Lemuria, Soul,” Epheniel replied. “I know this may be hard to understand, but there was no need to hide behind thoughts or secrets because of the total unconditional love and acceptance of all that existed. To harbor a secret was not even in their realm of understanding because all thoughts and learning were shared with one another as they helped each other grow. There was also never a question of harming anything; wild animals roamed peacefully as do your domesticated animals of today. It all came down to their understanding of vibration energy and its flow throughout all life.”

Nemphu smiled. “Simply picking up a flower and holding it, merging their consciousness with that of the flower’s brought instant knowledge and understanding of nature; hence, the sacredness of life was an inherent part of their being.”

“Disease? Illness?”

My brother shook his head. “Disease could never even be imagined because of their balance. Every single thing in Lemuria was in this vibration energy balance, and therefore, disease and illness were unknown.”

“Did things die, then, or did they live forever?”

Epheniel spoke softly. “Lemurians were so intent on learning, understanding and evolving that they wanted you term *death*, knowing it to be a critical part of the cycle of life. When they had lived and learned enough for that physical form, they would announce that they were going to make the transition. No living thing ever made that transition alone; it was an event to celebrate, whether animal or human. It’s interesting to note that flowers were an important part of this transition, just as they are for many present-day humans. However, there was no rot or decay from the living creations that made the transition. They were absorbed naturally back into the energy of Lemuria.”

“How intriguing that flowers have remained a part of the transition ceremony that we call a funeral, isn’t it? It’s all part of the flow you talked about, I bet.”

She nodded. “This sacred flow was so critical to the Lemurian society that even their homes were free-flowing without doorways. Their architecture reflected this simple form, free of restriction. Clothing was loose fitting and light. And because Lemurians had mastered the flow of consciousness, they were able to transport themselves from one location to another by thought at the speed of light. They had no need for currency because they had no need for ownership because they had no need to live in fear of being without.”

“Sounds as if Lemurians had no need for rules and regulations,” I murmured. Epheniel motioned for Nemphu to respond.

“Actually, they had a governing body, which was there to serve the people, not regulate their lives. Their leaders were revered. Lemurians lived in this Eden-like existence for hundreds of thou- sands of years.”

“What happened to it all?” I found it hard to believe that an entire society so highly evolved and filled with such love could perish.

"Well, before we speak of the demise of Lemuria, let's talk about Atlantis, okay?" I nodded and Nemphu continued. "There was a massive continent located in what is now known as your Atlantic Ocean. Outside of Lemuria, the Earth plane was filled with density and those taking part in the human experience cried out for help. Wonderful, loving beings from throughout the cosmos came to remind them of their roots and their task and to learn the beauty of life. A relatively small group of these intergalactic beings settled on this continent and created a magnificent community, which they called Atlantis."

Nemphu paused and Epheniel took up the tale. "Once this community was complete, they invited human entities to come and visit to learn and experience. Once there, many humans made the decision to remain. After making sure Atlantis was well established and the human entities understood the principles of Atlantis and had begun to reawaken, these beings returned home, only visiting Atlantis occasionally. Their task was complete; it was now up to the community."

Epheniel paused for a moment to gather her thoughts. "Atlanteans became a thinking, spiritual people, but most of that spirituality was in an analytical fashion. Instead of living their lessons, they dissected them, trying to give them an intellectual basis. This was an understandable response since they sought to understand every facet of life."

"Did they communicate with words or thoughts?"

"Both," replied Epheniel. "They not only were able to use thought transference, but used a very beautiful verbal language they had created."

"I've read of the great accomplishments of Atlantis. Weren't crystals a big part of it?"

My angel nodded and continued. "Crystals played a critical part in all life on Atlantis. A crystal not only possesses an incredible energy, but is an expression of consciousness."

When I looked confused, Nemphu spoke. "Let me try this, Epheniel. Their entire society was centered on crystals. They constructed a communication temple that sent and received messages across the universe via a crystalline transmitter. They also constructed a healing temple, in which crystals healed the emotional, physical, mental or spiritual body, balancing and energizing a human spirit as needed. And because Atlanteans were an extremely intelligent people and reveled in debate, it is not surprising that a third temple housed the philosophers."

"Sounds like ancient Greece," I commented.

"Actually, many of the Atlanteans later incarnated into an ancient Greek lifetime in order to continue to debate. Plato and Aristotle are such examples. During the Golden Age of Atlantis, there was a great acceptance of life. Again, there was no judgment of other beings. As a result, it was a time of great peace that lasted hundreds of thousands of years."

"As peaceful as Lemuria?"

Epheniel answered. "There was occasional disharmony on Atlantis, Soul, and when that happened, those involved would go before a council to resolve the conflict. Generally, both parties left satisfied and peace reigned. This harmony also extended into the animal kingdom, but as for living an existence of total peace, love and harmony, nothing will surpass the Lemurians."

"So these Atlanteans chose to avoid meat, too, I bet."

She nodded. "Atlanteans also had a vast understanding of vibration energy. Because the vibration was all-important and animal vibration was not what was needed, their diet generally consisted of fruit, nuts, vegetables and flowers. They ate to maintain an energy balance. This culture grew so advanced in knowledge and technology that during the Golden Age, beings from other galaxies traveled to Atlantis to learn from them."

"Did they also travel by thought?"

"They used the crystal chambers and their immense knowledge of vibration energy to move from place to place."

I looked at Nemphu. "So what happened?"

"Well, now let's go back to Lemuria," he said. "Atlanteans discovered the Lemurian society and looked upon them as some of your civilized humans might regard an aboriginal tribe: they were fascinated with the simplicity of their beautiful life, but felt they could help them become civilized by sharing their technology with them."

"So they didn't truly understand or appreciate the Lemurians?"

Epheniel shook her head. “No, and had they recognized that and brought it into their own culture, Atlanteans might have maintained the balance that they eventually lost, which brought about their destruction.” I looked blank and she smiled. “I’m jumping ahead of myself here. It was a fascinating time for both societies when the Atlanteans and Lemurians began their interchange of cultural ideas. Atlanteans shared their knowledge of their exquisite art, the likes of which the Lemurians had never seen, as well as their scientific and technological knowledge and inventions.”

“It sounds as if the Lemurians were slowly sucked into the Atlantean culture and eventually disappeared,” I interrupted. “They didn’t stand a chance.”

She nodded. “Remember, the Lemurians were a totally balanced people. When that much outside technology and science was integrated into their daily lives, the balance could not be maintained; their wonderful, spiritual world was slowly replaced by the intellectual. It didn’t take too many thousands of years before Lemurians could no longer communicate with thought transfer or travel telepathically. There was no longer the deep energy flow between the human spirit and all Life. Tales of Lemuria became only that.”

“How very sad. What happened to Atlantis then?”

Nemphu replied, “Well, we talked about the crystals and the temples of communication, healing and philosophy, but the scientific community thrived, as well. Their desire to learn and understand more about crystal technology, harnessing this crystal energy and its almost unlimited power became all-consuming. Their scientists rose in prominence as Atlantean levels of technology increased, but as they rose, so did a controversy over the increased use of this energy. There began a struggle between the scientists/technologists and the philosophers/healers over its use. As experts in the field of this powerful energy source, the scientists were eventually able to gain control of the government. The Atlantean connection grew weaker as scientists grew greedier for even higher levels of technology and crystalline energy.”

“They lost the balance, too, didn’t they?” I asked. Both guides nodded. Typically impatient to get to the bottom line, I asked, “What’d they do – blow up their own continent, or something?”

“No, actually,” replied Epheniel, “the scientists kept increasing the vibration of the energy, and it became so heavy that the land mass could no longer support it. Consequently, the continent sunk slowly into the ocean. Because it was not an immediate destruction, the scientists who were responsible for the demise of Atlantis, sent out a cry for help. But they had waited too long before understanding what they had done. The same loving beings who created Atlantis returned to find their beautiful creation now void of all spirituality. They chose a selected group of Atlanteans and placed them in ancient Egypt to begin life anew.”

“Egypt?” I interrupted again. “Wow, this story sounds just like a sci-fi movie. Unbelievable.” I shook my head and turned to Nemphu. “Weird. And not long ago, we talked about the two of us there.” I paused in thought. “I wonder...” My voice trailed off as my imagination soared. “Ancient Egypt. Would the pyramids have anything to do with Atlantis, then?” Epheniel nodded.

“Stonehenge, Easter Island, and the pyramids in Egypt, South America and Mexico were all constructed by intergalactic beings. These were used for many purposes: communication, energy healing, initiation ceremonies, and a variety of other aspects of their lives.”

I stared at Epheniel for a long time, shocked. “You, know, Angel, I have tried to be open-minded about this whole spiritual adventure and all this stuff you’ve been sharing with me – not that I don’t appreciate it all, thank you very much.” She opened her mouth in reply, but I rushed on before she could reply. “This whole Atlantis/Lemuria thing was bizarre enough, but now you’ve pushed it too far. Let me get this straight. You want me to share all of this with my fellow journeying souls, right?” She nodded. “In the book?” Another nod. “You want me to say that the pyramids were created by intergalactic beings?” For a third time, my angel nodded. “And you expect humans will buy it? I’ll be a laughing stock when the book comes out with that interesting little nugget included.”

She opened her mouth again, but I motioned for her to let me continue. I got up and began to pace. Suddenly, I clapped my hands. “I know! How about if we just say that Atlantis and Lemuria were once part of Earth history, but over the course of hundreds of thousands of years, those civilizations died, like so many others. We don’t need to go into that whole weird crystal

thing or the intergalactic being connection, but especially, we can just ignore that whole pyramid-building event." I stopped, hoping against hope that my hollowly whining plea would be granted.

"You are greatly loved, Soul – because of your humanity and your courage in facing the earth challenges, just like all other journeying souls. There will be some who will read the book and will feel the Truth within it. But there are others who have elected – once upon a time, space and dimension – not to respond to this Truth. Perhaps they chose to feel the connection with All That Is during a different incarnation. Be careful not to make assumptions about others' paths. Each walks the path that was chosen. Your words – our words – will touch those they were meant to touch." Epheniel stood and picked up my hand. *Drat. Why do I have the distinct feeling I'm not going to be crazy about what she's about to say?*

"As for being the laughing stock, Soul, give it up. If you worry about the effect your words will have, you will surround the book with negativity. Do you wish that?" I shook my head. "You have understood writing and releasing this book would take courage. We'll face it together, as we have always faced your challenges. And as for what you write, you decide, but we have given you Truth."

Double drat. Some choice: stand up and be counted, even if I'm standing alone, or be a mealy-mouthed, lily-livered coward for all eternity? I quickly pondered the obvious benefits inherent with the lily-livered choice, but then sighed deeply and gently squeezed my angel's hand. "Okay, all right, already, you win. I'm in, but if you can't find me when the book comes out, check under the covers. You may think I have the courage for all of this, but I'm still a work in progress."

I paused a moment. "Any other nuggets to share? Hit me with them all right now so I can get 'em all over with." Epheniel smiled gently. "Just that humankind will one day find physical evidence of God within the Great Sphinx. All in its own time, Soul. It's all unfolding as it must." I shook my head in wonder.

"That whole thing is pretty bizarre." I looked at Nemphu. I still had questions. "But I wonder – is it possible that some of us were a part of either Lemurian or Atlantean society at one time or another?"

"Yes, Soul," he said. "Because of the arrival of the Age of Aquarius, the time of the planet's great reawakening, there were tremendous numbers of requests from Atlanteans and Lemurians to incarnate during this time to help the planet regain that which was lost."

"My generation?"

"Yes, but there are many more of your generation giving birth to these different souls. Eventually, millions of reincarnated Atlanteans and Lemurians will help bring about the shift in consciousness we talked about earlier."

"How are these souls different?"

With an inviting glance from Nemphu, Epheniel spoke. "Many are what you might call *star children*." When it was obvious I was clueless, she continued. "Look around your children's generation, Soul. You may be able to notice that many of these children are different. As babies, they walk early, needing little sleep. Their babbling often has a rhythm to it, which is tuned to their higher vibration energy. As they grow, they discover and develop amazing talents in the arts – music, art, and writing. Color is important to them, especially shades of mauve, and they feel an innate connection to all kingdoms of consciousness – plant, animal, human and Earth. These beings care deeply about humanity. While they may spend great amounts of time daydreaming, staring out into the sky or water, other times they seem incredibly focused. Like the Lemurians, they are attuned to vibration more than others and seek out foods that are more in keeping with their own vibration energy, preferring nuts and grains. They have a greater longevity and will appear more youthful than their age belies, especially in the earlier star children. They are here to teach, helping to enlighten the 51% needed to make a shift in the collective consciousness. Your generation, while mostly from Atlantis, has given birth to these children to help reawaken the sleeping planet."

I allowed my mind to travel through the list of young people I knew who matched her description. "How do you know if you might have had an incarnation on Atlantis or Lemuria? Do you have to be highly evolved or regressed or something to remember this lifetime?"

She smiled. "No, Soul, there are indicators for each society. All you have to do is recall the descriptions of both cultures and decide which might ring true for you. If you have a great desire to learn about either one, feel a strong responsibility toward humanity..."

I sat up, wondering if this description would apply to me. "You mean like an unpaid debt? Would that description apply to both?"

Nemphu replied, "Yes, although you may have Atlantean connections if you feel confused and are searching for something or if you feel a connection to intergalactic beings. Atlanteans didn't struggle with trying to find answers. Remember how intellectual they were? That translates into this incarnation as never considering that they can't do something, so they just go ahead and do it. It's an *all-things-are-possible* mentality."

"Confused and searching for something would certainly describe about half of humanity right now, I would guess," I replied. "I don't know if that is me, though, especially the no-struggle part. Tell me about Lemurians and I'll see if, perhaps, that rings true."

"Well, Lemurians in this incarnation are often found seeking answers to internal struggles, but don't trust themselves and so rely on outside spiritual guidance instead of looking within for answers." I gasped, riveted to his words. "Former Lemurians do this because they don't understand how they lost the precious connection in the first place, so continue to search for it. Like their former selves, they seek peace, happiness and balance and understand that which is most important in life."

"That's a perfect description of me," I whispered, stunned. "My gosh, that's really me. Wow, wow, wow." I shook my head as I tried to come to grips with my possible past incarnation. I turned to Epheniel. "So, let's say that if my roots are, indeed, Lemurian or Atlantean, I've chosen to come back now to help reawaken the planet? To restore peace and understanding?"

"Yes, Soul," she replied. "Remember you chose that as your Life Purpose before this incarnation and I agreed to help you with your task."

"Whoa." I had difficulty trying to assimilate all that I had learned: human evolution, Atlantis, Lemuria, and incarnations that took place so long ago. My head swam with knowledge overload. "So, I guess the obvious logical question then, after all these billions of evolutionary years, is: *What's next?*"

"What do you think, Soul?" asked Nemphu.

"That shift in consciousness which we're talking about will herald in the next era?" I was rewarded with smiles from both.

"The enlightened human spirit."

"Wow," I breathed reverently. "The Age of God is really upon us? Are you telling me that we're actually going to be around to witness the formation of the next stage of humankind?"

Epheniel smiled and answered.

"Many of you will be, Soul. Others of you will be here in the ethereal realm rejoicing as well. Remember, this Great Earth Experiment, as you like to call it, is a massive, joint effort among the realms. This new period will be a time of great peace and understanding for the Earth, and humanity will live in that peace for thousands of years."

"Wow," I repeated. I was so stunned that I could utter nothing more. "Wow." My guides were silent as I sat, processing the information I had just been given. My mind was blown by the implications, but my earthly self quickly decided it wanted in on the action. I sent a quick prayer: Thy will be done, God, but just in case You want my input on this matter, I sure would love to see it arrive! Epheniel and Nemphu smiled at me as my imagination soared.

"Remember, Soul," Nemphu said, "the time is nearly upon us when the individual frequencies of all of humanity will be unified in the perception of truths. Different religious tenets will no longer matter." He looked at me and smiled. "After millions of years, Soul, humanity is now on the cusp of this integration of understanding. The earth realm now stands on the threshold of the Age of God."

I gazed around me, drinking in the beauty of the desert. After a moment, I said, "So, let's get back to that Sphinx comment Epheniel made earlier. I've heard the scuttlebutt before – does it really hold physical evidence of God?"

Nemphu laughed. "Scuttlebutt, eh?" He leaned closer to my angel and whispered, "Better

jot that one down in your Highly Evolved Phrases List!" He turned back to me. "You humans and your need for proof! Are you not a miracle in and of yourself? Is a flower blooming not proof of God? Yes, Soul, eventually, your scientists will find the evidence they seek and the scales will tip, but the period of time before enlightenment won't be without its challenges. Change does not come easily and this is no exception."

"Are you talking war?" I asked.

Nemphu looked grave. "It will be a time of great confusion for your planet."

"Will be? It sure seems greatly confused now. How will we handle it all?" I paused. "Wait, let me guess. I'm bettin' you want me to tell you, right?" Nemphu nodded and I sat in thought a long time, trying to verbalize all that I now understood.

"Well, it seems to me that all of us will be needed in this effort, regardless of our humanly-perceived connections. We need to address the challenges facing us at this critical point with love and light and a sense of peace that will transcend the perceived negativity." I paused.

"There. How'd I do?"

"Sounds as if you're getting pretty highly evolved, Soul," Epheniel laughed.

"Watch out, both of you," I warned. "I can finally see the Light at the end of the tunnel. Like the rest of humanity, one of these days, my vibrations will be accelerated enough and I'll be zippin' through the cosmos, flittin' here and there as I wish. And then, there'll be no stopping me, white-haired or not!"

"There hasn't been any stopping of you since you were created, Soul," dryly commented my guardian angel. "You've always had this burning desire to understand. But, I'm truly happy for you, Beloved."

"All rightee-rootee, things are definitely looking up here," I beamed.

"Don't forget, Soul, millions of individual choices have to be made to embrace the Light before there is enough to enable the final shift of consciousness. Does that make sense?"

I nodded. "Are we getting any closer to that goal as a species?"

"Yes, Soul, look about you on a global scale. The countries of the world are now more apt to seek the peace process before launching a war. There is more of a concerted effort everywhere to work together as a global community, rather than as individual entities. Look at the economic situation. Countries are finding it more advantageous to work together than to remain in their own little realities."

"Like?" I urged.

"European countries have collaborated on their monetary system. Globally, people and countries are starting to come together to help Africa face and conquer their many challenges, although many more humans need to get involved. This effort will accelerate as humans remember their shared connection and move out of their micocosmic reality into a macrocosmic one."

"And on the smaller scale, communities are now working together to bring peace and safety to its citizenry. And that citizenry is also becoming more aware of the importance of taking personal responsibility for not only their actions, but for peace. So, yes, Soul, while many tragedies still occur, humanity seems to have made the turn toward peace and understanding – oftentimes because of those very tragedies. Remember, humanity learns from both positive and negative experiences." I nodded. "There will be a type of snowball effect during this pre-awakening period – acceleration, if you wish – as we strive toward that 51% needed to make the shift."

"So, what's being accelerated – time?" As soon as those words came out of my mouth, I blushed. "Except there is no time..." I faltered.

Nemphu laughed. "Soul, remember, we love you because of your humanity, not in spite of it. Many on your planet feel as if time is accelerating, but actually, it is not time, but progress."

I nodded. "It sounds kind of scary, you know, for everyone involved, although I'd like to help if I am needed." *Always the coward.*

Nemphu looked at me sternly. "Soul, stop beating yourself up. You are growing in courage daily. If you are asked to help, then you will be ready for such a task. Remember you will be asked to help if you requested to do just that. Many Light workers will be involved in this mighty

effort, Soul – you won't be alone. Prayer and energy from all souls will aide in this monumental effort. It has been – and continues to be – a task for all of us on all realms.”

Epheniel spoke up in an authoritative voice. “I think this soul has had all the excitement she can stand for one day, Nemphu. She's exhausted and needs to rest. We'll say our goodbyes until another time.” We stood, stretching.

“I am tired,” I admitted sheepishly, as I tried unsuccessfully to stifle a yawn. “Thank you, Nemphu, for helping me to understand. It's been wonderful seeing you again.”

“Me, too. Take care of yourself and when things seem to get foggy and you have trouble finding your way out of the muck, remember what is to come. The vision will see you through, okay?” I nodded and we embraced.

Nemphu's eyes twinkled at Epheniel. “Oh, and Soul? And don't you worry for one little moment now that you understand Atlantis and Lemuria. As Astran, I'm sure you weren't truly responsible for the total annihilation of those highly evolved civilizations. As Pek-tar, I tried my best to stop you, but, ...” Nemphu's voice dropped to nothingness.

Suddenly, I felt wide awake. My eyes felt as if they had jumped out of my head. “What?!” I yelled. “I thought you said their demise was due to the scientists and their need for greater technological advances!”

“Guess who the top scientists was at that time, Astran?”

My heart dropped to my toes – had I either heart or toes. I turned a stunned face to my angel.

“Relax,” replied Epheniel, stifling a giggle. “That's just Nemphu's idea of humor.”

“So I really wasn't responsible?” I asked my angel. She shook her head and Nemphu roared.

“It's been a long time in coming, but I've finally paid you back for all the times you've done that to me!” he grinned. Epheniel and Nemphu clasped arms in farewell. Once I understood that a civilization's extinction had not been my fault, I allowed myself to yawn again.

“Okay, Nemphu, you got me, but just watch your back for the next several millennia, if you catch my drift.” I yawned again.

“I'm sorry,” I apologized. “I just seem so sleepy.” As I fought to keep my heavy eyelids open, I felt Epheniel gather me gently into her arms, enfolding me in her wings.

“Sleep, beloved, sleep.” I heard no more as at last my eyes blissfully closed.

Suddenly, I was jolted awake and sat up quickly, wondering where I was. I gave a sigh of relief; I was lying on a sofa, covered with a soft down coverlet in Epheniel's conference room. Darkness had fallen and the light given off by the fireplace was warm and soothing. I rejoiced; I was still with Epheniel. I rubbed the sleep from my eyes and tried to recapture the dream that had startled me awake. Lost in thought, I didn't hear Epheniel approach.

“What do you remember of it, Soul?” she asked gently.

“I was in a large, white house with many rooms. I was all alone, but I don't think I was lonely.”

“What were you doing?”

“I went from room to room...” I paused and closed my eyes gently to recall the memory. “Cleaning!” I exclaimed. “I was cleaning out these rooms filled with clutter! Figures,” I grinned. “That seems to be the running thread throughout this incarnation.”

She smiled. “What else do you remember, Soul? What did you do with the clutter?”

“Well, somehow I managed to get rid of it because when I went back through the rooms later, they were clean. Then, I went outside and apparently, it had been raining because there were raging flood waters all around me and I had to get through it all.”

“Were the flood waters clean or murky, Soul?” I thought a moment.

“They were clear, but I was nervous about being swept up in the current.”

“Did you get through the water?”

I nodded. “Yeah. I got to the other side with little problem. And here is where it gets really weird. I glanced down and realized that I was pregnant – very pregnant!”

“How did you feel about that?”

“How would you feel if you were fifty years old and found out you were with child and

apparently had been for some time?" I giggled and she joined me. "Seriously, Epheniel, it didn't seem to bother me that I was that old and pregnant. I remember thinking it unusual, but interesting."

"Did you, in fact, give birth?"

"No, I think the logs in the fireplace here popped, pulling me out of the dream." I looked at her expectantly. "You asked me a lot of questions. What's it all mean?" She laughed.

"Dreams are a wonderful way for the subconscious part of you, which connects to the ethereal part, to connect with the conscious." I still looked confused and she chuckled. "Soul, don't you think that the mere fact that you sleep one-third of your lifetime might be significant?"

"I thought I was just tired," I yawned. I rubbed my eyes again and sat up against the soft pillow and sighed, thoroughly enjoying this cozy room and quiet conversation.

"Dreams serve many purposes, Soul. They can help you solve problems that your consciousness can't seem to handle. How often have you gone to sleep, unable to solve a problem and awakened, confident that you now had the answer? What you've done is to hand over the problem to your subconscious, which is not battling all the distractions and games with which your consciousness has to contend. But remember, there's no linear time anywhere else but your earth realm, so that's why some dreams make no sense with regard to time. As earthly selves may have difficulty with the concept of simultaneous existence, the ethereal realm may have difficulty with the concept of linear time."

A thought occurred to me. "Are you involved in the resolving of those problems while I'm sleeping?"

She smiled at me and replied, "Yes, Soul. Dreams are a wonderful way for the celestial realm to connect and communicate with the physical one. We do much of our work with human travelers during those times. Remember, I am here to protect and help you all times of the day and night." I smiled at her and she continued. "Dreams can foretell the future, as well." Surprise must have registered on my face because she laughed.

"You mean, psychics can do that, right?"

"No, Soul," she replied. "Everyone has this ability. If you want to see what I mean, make a habit of writing down your dreams as soon as you awake from one, even if they seem to make little sense. Hold onto these descriptions for at least a month and then reread them and see if you better understand them. Also pay attention to lucid dreams, Soul."

"What are those?"

"Dreams in which the sleeper is fully aware that he or she is dreaming. These often contain messages for the sleeper."

"Sounds like a sci-fi movie. Don't dreams also reflect strong desires?" She nodded.

"Oftentimes your true feelings on a subject can be manifested in a dream. If you pay attention to these dreams, as well, then you can learn to recognize your true feelings and work with them to accomplish your tasks." My eyes narrowed suspiciously.

"You're not suggesting that I wish to be pregnant at age 50, are you?" She shook her head and laughed again. So did I, although mine was more of a wave of giddy relief than merriment.

"No, Soul, many dreams are deeply meaningful. Let's take yours, for instance. You said you were in a large, white house with many rooms. That gives three different descriptions: white represents cleanliness and light; a house represents your spirituality and the many rooms represent the many facets of that spirituality. And what were you doing in those rooms? Clearing out the clutter. Rather significant, don't you think?" I grinned at her and asked her to continue with her dream analysis.

"After you rid yourself of the clutter, you went outside and realized that a flood was swirling around you. Water may represent the subconscious and being afraid of getting swept away by the flood may mean that you worry that you cannot handle that which you are given. But, because the water was clear and not murky, it most likely represents a challenge you're currently facing." Epheniel looked at me. "How did you react to the flood, Soul?" I thought a moment.

"I knew I had to get to the other side," I began as realization dawned. "And so I did! I made it across the channel, surviving my challenges, right?"

She smiled. "Perhaps the tailspin?"

I nodded. “Yep, but that pregnancy part. That was more than a little odd.”

“Soul, you aren’t pregnant with a physical baby.”

“So, what does a pregnancy dream usually mean if you’re ..., I mean, *I’m* not actually pregnant?”

“There are many differing interpretations on that, but I think in your case given the rest of the dream, it would be giving birth to new ideas or bringing something new into your life.”

“Like Enlightenment?”

She nodded. “There’s another type of dream that is significant, which most humans disregard: daydreams.” I started to protest and she laughed. “Look at you. I bet you were going to say that daydreams are just your imagination, right?” I nodded guiltily. “How many times have events happened that you sloughed off as just coincidences? How many times have you seen serendipity in your life and you have ignored it because it was just your imagination?” *Again, guilty as charged.*

“Imagination is the soul – the feeling part of your mind. But just because it’s not logically intellectual, humans often give it little credence. If you could throw away one phrase as you’re clearing out the clutter in those many rooms of yours, let it be: *It’s just my imagination!* You’ll find your life will be much more enriched. Now,” she said firmly, although the twinkling began anew, “as for daydreams, they, too, are a barometer for your subconscious mind. Notice your daydreams – what are they? If something keeps surfacing, it would be wise to address it. It’s no coincidence that they are coming to consciousness. Listen to these dreams if they are something that will further you on your path. Work toward them.”

“So daydreams are good?”

“Daydreams are like all thoughts. They put out either positive or negative energy vibrations, Soul. If you find yourself lacking in positivism in thought, word, action or daydreaming, you need to become aware of that and work toward changing your thought patterns. Each of you is personally capable of fully embracing love, and accepting it as the only true energy everyone can understand. Remember that.” She smiled at me before continuing. “Actually, sleep dreams also send out energy, Soul.” I looked at her, startled.

“But we don’t have any control over our dreams to create this flow, do we?”

Epheniel thought a moment before answering. “Have you ever awakened yourself in the midst of a frightening dream?” I nodded. “You need to be aware that it, too, is being sent out into the universe.”

Whoa – dreams, too? I paused a moment, pondering the effect of my own dreams in the universe. Suddenly, another thought crossed my mind. “Speaking of being sent out into the universe, are out-of-body experiences real?”

“Yes, Soul,” Epheniel chuckled, “they are real and most occur during sleep times. Many humans can easily perceive leaving their physical bodies; others find it a more difficult process. All speak of the silver cord that is attached to them once they leave their physical bodies.” She peered at me closely. “Soul, do you remember any out-of-body experiences?”

“No, I don’t think I remember flittin’ about the universe. As an avid fan of Peter Pan and Dumbo, I think I would pretty much remember suddenly being given the ability to stretch my wings and soar.”

She chuckled. “Now you’re talking of astral travel, in which the soul travels through the astral plane for pleasure or learning. But memory or not, you have, indeed, been *flittin’ about the universe*, Soul.” I looked at her. “And, yes, you love *flittin’!*”

“I figured,” I grinned. “What’s not to love?” I paused. “But, let’s go back to something you said. What’s the purpose of the silver cord?”

“It acts as a kind of lifeline to the traveling soul, connecting their etheric and physical bodies.”

“Sounds a bit like an umbilical cord.”

“Speaking of umbilical cords, let’s get back to that dream of yours. What have you learned?”

“Well, I learned that I’m busy clearing out the old paradigms inside of me, making way for the new and improved me! For the most part, I appear to be facing my challenges squarely and

successfully. And finally, I'm ready to give birth to something, which hopefully, won't involve an inordinate amount of diaper changing, strong odor and round-the-clock feedings."

.....

Unified You

Loved Ones, you are living in a time and place full of wonder and promise. Recalling the memory of the total you enhances the experience and expression of who you are and where you are.

To navigate in the world of matter you are housed in a magnificent body, also composed of matter, complete with all you need to assist in manifesting your chosen reality. Encased in this body, you have a mind that enables you to rationalize and direct data pertinent to whatever you choose to create. The eternal you, your spirit or soul, permeates every atom of your body. It reaches beyond the physical body and mind to animate, activate and energize the expression of you. Encapsulated in your soul is free will, enabling you to determine for yourself how to express your own nature by invoking the power of choice.

Awareness and acceptance of your totality allows joy of living to your full potential, because all aspects of self are free to express in an attitude of cooperation. The expression "I am my own worst enemy" is the antithesis of a unified you, but awareness of this disharmony also serves to enlighten the concept of becoming "your own best friend" through unification.

Because you are only conscious of reality in a physical dimension, you automatically believe in those things that have weight and density. Even though technological advances have proven there is more to life than what you can see, taste and touch, you persist in doubting that which has not been scientifically proven. This is the biggest hurdle to a unisonous you because you have not yet "proven" the existence of your soul. This is ironic because you would not exist without it.

Consider the incredible feats accomplished by your world-renowned athletes. By allowing the mind, body and soul to believe in the unknown – or the unproven – the united self is able to feel the flow as it works in harmony toward its goals. The soul is the impetus, which inspires the mind to create the reality for the body to activate the dream. By acting in unison with the self, the potential for positive energy is unlimited because embodied in your soul is the power of your individual connection to life and All That Is. This joining of soul, mind and body is what enables you to be a human becoming and unfolding in a physical reality.

Scientists credit the mind for being in charge of your individual identity. They also proclaim that You are the control mechanism of the mind and You are responsible for your actions. Who is this "You" they refer to, if not your soul or spirit? Through this obvious dichotomy, the scientists have inadvertently proven the reality of the soul, but will not claim this proof until the soul can be seen, tasted or touched. There is nothing wrong with the scientific approach to proving or disproving reality. It has facilitated miraculous discoveries to enhance the quality of life. It is only when science excludes the unknown as nonexistent that it impedes the innate wisdom encompassed in what is yet to be proven. The existence of the human soul will be proven through the advances of scientific technology. When humankind's focus is on the peaceful uses of energy rather than manipulating energy to create weapons to destroy, scientists will also make this shift.

Dear Ones, over the ages many of you have demonstrated the courage to believe in the unified you through faith in your own connection to All That Is. You simply "believe" and allow science the time it needs to prove or disprove. Through your free will you choose to manifest self by using all your abilities and gifts to create a better world. You are becoming aware of the "universal you" by expressing the unified You, allowing your body, mind, and soul to work in harmony. Consciousness of the "universal you" leads to the ecstasy of imagining, creating and fulfilling your destiny because the "universal you" believes in a truly wondrous miracle: You.

Chapter 10

Early August

I ran up the stairs, two at a time, bid a quick hello to my large furry friends at the top, and bounded into the Great Hall. I looked briefly for Zeke, but did not see him. *He must be escorting another visitor.* I made my way quickly down to the room housing my guardian angel. I knocked on her door, noted its glow with a glow of my own, and popped my head inside the room. Slightly out of breath, I asked, "Could we talk now or is this a bad time?"

She smiled and beckoned me into the room. "You look as if you're in a rush, Soul. What's up?" We both grinned at her reference to Zeke's joke and I walked into her welcoming arms. After a moment, I stepped back and looked deeply into her eyes.

"I've been thinking of all the stuff I've been learning lately, especially the part where each of us can make a difference." She nodded and I continued. "It dawned on me that there must be more that souls can do to help humanity make that shift than just checking our thoughts, words and actions and loving unconditionally."

She chuckled. "You don't think that's enough?"

"Oh, I'm not saying that it's going to be easy. I'm just saying that there must be more that we can do to cause that shift." I looked at her twinkling eyes. "Aha! I knew it! There is, isn't there?"

"Yes, there is. Besides doing what you just described, souls can also send out peace, love, and light energy to heal your realm and those souls traveling through it now."

"Sending out peace, love and light energy?"

She nodded, paused and rubbed her chin thoughtfully. "Soul," she said, "we could talk about it, but I think it will be more effective if you experience it. I'm going to send you down the hall today to see another friend of mine for some hands-on learning." I glanced at her nervously and she laughed. "Be open to all possibilities, remember, Soul? Does that ring a bell?"

"That human thing, Epheniel," I said. "Every once in a while, it still manages to get in the way."

"I understand. Now, are you ready to try something new?" I nodded. "Good. That's more like it." She walked me back to the door, gave me directions and handed me a pair of what appeared to be industrial-strength sunglasses. I raised an eyebrow in confusion, but she ignored it. "You can't miss it, Soul – good luck!" She kissed my forehead and I left, the directions resounding in my head. Before long, I stood before a door that was more than a bit battered. A slightly bent sign – hanging off kilter – was next to it: *Special Delivery: Peace, Love, & Light. You need it? We got it!* I glanced at the sunglasses and back at the sign. This must be it. I rapped quietly on the door. Instantly, it swung open and a blinding light greeted me. I fumbled for my

sunglasses and slipped them on, trying to navigate my way. “Uh, anybody here? Excuse me, but would you mind dimming that light a bit?”

Suddenly the intense glare flickered and faded. “Sorry, Kid.” I looked for the source of the voice as my eyes once again tried to adjust, but found no one. “Got carried away! Always like to give a bright first impression. Come in, come in! Get comfortable!” I removed my sunglasses and stepped forward.

The room was a large, open area, sparsely furnished. The small amount of furniture in the room was obviously well used. Everywhere I looked, I saw scorch marks, gashes in the floor and dents in the sofa and chairs that looked as if an ax had been taken to them. I decided I would stand rather than sit on the sofa, which held ripped and soot-streaked cushions. This place gives a whole new meaning to the word “distressed” – more like “destroyed.”

I heard a chuckle behind me and spun around, realizing that once again, I had put my celestial foot directly into my non-celestial mouth. There stood a rather short, pleasantly plump angel, hands on his hips, his angel toga in disarray. His soft, blonde hair was askew, but the welcoming smile on his face was unmistakable. He carried a clipboard and absentmindedly twirled a pencil as he considered me. I looked down at his feet and was amazed to see – *combat boots?*

“Casting a little judgment, eh, Soul? Be patient. You’ll soon understand why this place and I look the way we do.”

Once again, I crimsoned in chagrin. *Have I learned nothing these last two years about the power of my thoughts?* I smiled lamely, hoping to recreate his first impression of me. I gazed at him thoughtfully. “You look familiar,” I said after a moment. “Have we met?”

He preened a bit and straightened his shoulders, offering me his business card. “You probably recognize me. Most souls do.” He paused dramatically. “I was the original model for the cherub design around these parts. Here,” he offered. “I’ll turn sideways so you can get a better view.” I stifled a chuckle and pretended to nod impressively. If nothing else, I had learned celestial etiquette.

“Absolutely,” I agreed, “a cherub is exactly what you are!” I paused, hoping to move on from this discussion. “Excuse me, but is this the right place to learn how to send peace, love, and light?”

“Yes, Soul. This is the place!” he beamed, pointing to the sign on the door. He looked around the room proudly.

“Do I need anything?” I stammered. “I didn’t bring anything with me, other than these glasses.”

“Don’t need a thing, Kid, other than your desire to help bring peace, love and light to the Universe. It appears there’ll be another entity joining us today, so we’ll just have to wait for his arrival,” the cherub murmured, as he checked his pocket watch.

“Hey,” I protested, “I thought no one used watches or clocks around here.”

“I’m the exception,” he said, puffing up his chest slightly. “See?” I peered closely at his watch and found words instead of numbers: *Time to send peace; Time to send love; Time to send light, What the heck – BLAST ‘EM!*”

“*What the heck – BLAST ‘EM?*” I repeated, dumbfounded.

“That’s for the really needy souls, Soul. That’s when there’s no time to ask questions – we just blast ‘em with all of it – peace, love, and light.” I nodded, idly wondering if my local discount store carried such a watch. Just then, the door flew open and into the room raced an entity, who in his hurry, tripped on a familiar-looking errant apron tie, went sprawling and landed in the middle of the floor.

“Zeke!” I called as I bent down to help him to his feet. “Hello! I missed you earlier. What are you doing here?”

“Same as ye, Lass. I heard ye snuck into the Great Hall without seeing me, so I went to Epheniël. She tells me ye’re going to take this class.” His eyes shone with excitement. “So I says to her, ‘Epheniël,’ I says, ‘would ye mind partnerin’ her up with me?’” He glanced at our instructor and then whispered to me, “Every soul needs a partner, Soul. ‘Sure, Zeke,’ she says – she has such a good heart – ‘help yeseelf.’ And here I am!” he ended with a flourish of his arm.

"I'm so glad you're here!" I said, kissing him on the tip of his nose. "We'll learn together!" He blushed and we turned back to our instructor. "Zeke, do you know ...," I realized I didn't know our instructor's name and glanced down at the card in my hand and saw a long series of names. "... Loreto?" They both nodded. I looked at the card more closely. "My, you have a lot of names for an angel!"

"My real name is Loreto Octaviano Ignacio Tomaso Eduardo Italo Mario, but that's an Italian mouthful, so I decided to shorten it. Took souls so long to call on me that their energy crises were about over when word finally reached me. Besides, it definitely fits me better." He put down the clipboard and rubbed his hands together. "Now, shall we begin?" Zeke and I nodded vigorously, although it was obvious that he was nervous, too.

"Okay!" the cherub said, as he picked up the clipboard, made a notation, and then stuck the pencil behind one ear. "Let's get started. First thing you're gonna learn, Kid, is how to summon up energy in order to send it out. Have a seat on the floor and get comfortable." We plopped ourselves down and settled in. "Now, clear your mind of riffraff."

"Riffraff?" I asked.

"You know, *riffraff* – stuff – chaos. Go ahead and try it." Things were already looking a bit shaky – my track record wasn't so good in that area. I looked at him dubiously and closed my eyes. I gently waved away doubts and found to my surprise that my mind had cleared; no riffraff to be found. My eyes flew open in amazement and I found him grinning at me. "Every soul can do this. There's no Highly Evolved Requirement here." I eyed him with suspicion. Obviously, he had been talking with someone. SomeOne. He laughed. "Let it go, Kid. Go on. Just close your eyes and gently clear your mind. I'll talk you through the rest." I did as he said and soon my mind was once again clear.

"Okay, good. Now what you want to do is visualize white light at the core of your being. Some think it's easier to think of the area behind the belly button, but since I never had one of those, that image didn't work for me." He waited a moment as I followed his instructions. "You got that part?" I nodded.

"What you want to do is bring the light throughout your entire body. First, send it slowly down your legs to your toes. Let those toes squish in its beauty." He waited while I did as he asked. "Then, allowing some of it to stay there if you can, bring the rest slowly back up your legs, through your torso and down your arms and into your fingers. Slowly, gently, feel those energized fingers of yours!" Again, he waited. "Now, leaving part of that light there, move it back to your torso and on into your head. Gently, slowly, allow the light to touch every part of you. If you can become familiar with this feeling, it won't be long before you can get to this stage almost instantly."

I felt a warm glow grow within me – *I'm doing it!*

"You are, Kid – keep it up. Feel the energy. Now, we're moving on. Let's say that your friend, Zeke, here's in need of peace, love, and light. You're going to visualize him and then send a blast of energy to him. Try it now."

I did as I was told and instantly heard a whooshing sound, a squeal and something hard hit the wall. My eyes flew open and much to my dismay, there lay Zeke in a crumpled pile across the room. His clothes were scorched and his hair singed, with little wisps of curling smoke rising from it.

I jumped up and ran over to him. As I stood over the small entity, my feet grew warm. The floor was still sizzling from the heat of the last blast and I suddenly understood the need for combat boots. I jumped from foot to foot and wailed, "What have I done to you, Zeke? Does it hurt much?"

My friend looked up at me a bit dazed, grinned, and then shook his head. "Nah, ye can't hurt me, Soul. Now ye see why souls taking this course need a partner who isn't concerned with that mortality thing!" I gently brushed him off and extinguished the small brushfire on the hem of his clothing.

"What'd I do wrong?" I asked, as my teacher stood, grinning at me.

"Wrong Soul? You did nothing wrong!" He rubbed his chin in thought.

"But I can't go around zapping people like that. What do I say, 'Here's some peace, love

and light energy. If it doesn't kill you, it'll help?"

He laughed. "You got some powerful stuff there, Kid. No doubt about it."

Zeke looked up from the floor. It was clear his head was spinning. "You just need to fine-tweak your delivery."

Fine-tweak your delivery? I could just see the newspaper headlines now: *Local woman jailed for destruction of entire town. Claims she was sending peace, love and light.* The angel could sense my hesitation.

"Come on, Kid. It just takes practice. Let's try it again." He glanced at Zeke. "Maybe it'll be a better idea if we put your sprite friend right by the wall – unless he liked the trip across the room?"

Zeke shook his head as if to unscramble his brains. "Wow! That was great! Let's do that again!" He bounced to his feet and stood in front of me. "He's right, Soul. Don't give up – zap away!"

My instructor waved his pencil at me as an idea hit. "Maybe this time, let's see if you can direct the light in a single beam, rather than a blast, Kid, okay?" I nodded and closed my eyes. I quickly cleared my brain of its busyness and felt the light again spread throughout my body. More quickly than before, I seemed loaded and ready. "All right now, Kid. Zap 'im!"

I released what seemed to be more of a beam of light. Instantly, I heard the shattering of glass and my eyes flew open. A wild missile of white light bounced crazily off one wall and into another like a super ball, crashing into everything it came into contact with. It was now clearly evident why the furnishings in this classroom were not only sparse, but *distressed*.

In the meantime, Zeke was having the time of his life, clapping, cheering and doubling over in laughter as my misguided light continued to go berserk. A moment later, the light missile found its source and crashed into Zeke's rear end, causing him to tumble all the way to the wall, where he once again lay in a heap, laughing hysterically.

"Oh, dear!" I yelled as I ran to help him to his feet. Again. "I don't know if this is such a good idea. I don't seem to be getting the hang of it, do I?" I looked at Zeke. "Are you okay?"

"Again!" he gasped between waves of laughter. "Try it again!" I looked at the angel, who shrugged and grinned, as Zeke rubbed his rump. "That's some stuff you got there, Lass!"

"Kid, sprites make great partners for this, don't they?!" He looked into my eyes. "Look at him. He's fine. We'll just work with you until you have nailed this down a bit more before sending you out into the world, okay?" I nodded dubiously and he laughed. "Peace, love and light energy are the most powerful tools your planet possesses. Most souls just don't know that yet. I hear that once you get the hang of this, your job will be to help teach others how to do it." He grinned and looked at me. "Now, you're not going to try to take my job away from me, are you?"

"No need to worry about that. Now, tell me how to harness this thing, please. The Great Hall needs their handy sprite, so I better learn quickly." Zeke continued to grin idiotically and I worried that while he might not need to concern himself with that mortality thing, his brains might be permanently scrambled. But, since no one else seemed to be the least bit worried, I gathered my courage again. "Okay," I sighed. "Let's try it again."

For a long time, we worked on my delivery. Before I had mastered the basics, my explosive energy had somehow mysteriously managed to turn Zeke's hair kelly green, had given him several pairs of donkey legs, and was responsible for the still-smoldering debris that was once known as the sofa. All the while, the angel clapped his hands delightedly. In fact, the only time that he had appeared to become the least bit impatient with me throughout the lesson was when he hadn't ducked quickly enough and my energy beam had beheaded him. It had taken more than a couple moments to resolve that little consequence.

At last he decreed that I was ready to try my stuff out on the earth plane. The thought crossed my mind that he was releasing me because he had had quite enough of my *stuff*, but I thanked him for all of his help and half-carried Zeke out the door, who was still grinning like an idiot, giggling and protesting that he wanted more. The angel waved good-bye.

"Remember to watch out for the neighbor's dog, Kid! Don't let your mind wander or you won't know what havoc may result!"

"I'll be careful!" I called back as I walked to the door. "Thanks, Loreto!"

He put up his hand and I paused. "Actually, Kid, I shortened all those names to their initials and use that name." He smiled at me. "Go ahead, try it."

Try it? What does he mean? I pulled his business card out of my pocket and read aloud his initials: "L-O-I-T-E-I-M." Realization dawned on me and I gasped. "*Loiteim?* You're Loiteim, Mary Lou's angel?" He nodded and grinned again. "Wait until I tell her we met. She'll be so excited!" I thanked him again and helped Zeke back to Ephaniel's room.

When we arrived, Ephaniel suggested that Zeke recuperate on her sofa for a little bit before resuming his duties. I gently deposited him there, and tucked him in with a down comforter. He sighed deeply with pleasure and drifted off for his much-earned rest. Ephaniel and I then tiptoed over to the other side of the room nearest the window. As we settled ourselves, I caught a fragrance of a delicate flower and closed my eyes to try to seal it in my memory.

"Don't worry, Soul, you'll be back many more times."

"I know -- I'm just very conscious of keeping memories these days."

"Any luck with retrieving any?" I shook my head.

"Nah, I guess when I made my choices this time around, a good memory was not at the top of the list. I've decided to let it all go." She looked at me questioningly. "The hunt for the memories, I mean. If they're supposed to surface, I guess they will someday. If not, I've released the desire to know. I choose to move forward."

"When you release the veil, those memories will also be released if you want them. All in its own time, Beloved."

"I know you can't give me all the answers I seek, but are you allowed to tell me when I get to lift that veil?" I asked coyly. I had the good grace to smile. "I'd even take the general decade, give or take a few years. Or *how* to lift that veil, would you?" I teased, knowing her as well as I did now.

"Beloved, you may not have recognized, but you began to lift the veil the very day you began writing this book. Odd that you feel your memories are gone, because it was at that precise time that you actually began to *Remember*. You've thought of the book as fiction, but it is actually a recognition and recollection. As for the rest of the veil, that will come in time -- at the right time -- you will know. Your father and Deb and I will help. Trust." She gazed at me. "But, speaking of released, how are you doing in that area?"

I paused as a memory returned. "Not too long ago, I had a dream in which I was clinging to the edge of a tall building by my fingertips. I was filled with fear, afraid I would fall. A voice came into my head that urged me to let go -- that I would be caught."

"And did you? Let go?"

I thought a moment. "I think I took a deep breath and let myself fall."

"Were you caught?"

"I woke up, so I guess I'll never know for sure, but I'm pretty confident that someOne did just that. The problem is I knew how to do it in that dream, but I don't yet understand how to do it in my life. It sure seems to be one of the keys to finding understanding, doesn't it?"

My angel looked at me closely. "Does it bother you that you don't know how to release control?"

I grinned at her. "It used to, but I consider all parts of myself valuable and necessary to fill a specific role or task. I'm not even sure what I'm clinging to so tightly -- probably out of fear of the unknown -- but, hopefully, that will all come in time and trust." I leaned over to her and whispered, "Why don't I just let you and God take care of the pesky details while I live my life?"

"Always a good idea, Soul. How is your journey coming these days, besides releasing the desire for memories and working on letting go?"

"Well, I know it won't be over until I draw my last breath, but I have come to some conclusions about it all." She motioned for me to continue. "Suddenly, I find I not only no longer need memories, but I no longer crave answers. I've found that my answers do lie within, but somehow I thought they would be earth-shattering in their significance when I found them."

"What do you believe are your answers, then, Soul?"

"Same thing that you, Michael, Nemphu and Zeke have reminded me over and over again: *to live life, sharing unconditional love*. That's it, isn't it? Everything we've talked about for two

years comes down to one word: *love*. My father knew this and, as he lay dying, wrote of it in a letter to his family." I paused in thought. "I brought his words with me today. May I read you the last part of it?"

"Please do, Soul."

I pulled the letter out of my pocket, opened it and began to read. "... Each departure is an ending, but also a beginning toward a new destination for which all that came before was made. Many depart through tears, not truly believing that happier galaxies await. Only love can undertake this journey. Love is all. Love is the brightest, most powerful force. Love is the one perfect virtue, which transcends time and place, and guides us to our new abode beyond the stars we know. In time I hope to be waiting with arms open in welcome, seen in the celestial light of the last frontier, as at the end of a long tunnel. This guiding light shall not fail as my loved ones, in their own good time, approach me closer, filled with love, truth, beauty and grace, which miraculously distinguished their spirits on earth. Blessed Lady, cup my quivering soul in thy gentle hands, as thou would comfort a frightened bird, and take me to the place I most devoutly wish to be, I pray." I folded up the paper and returned it to my pocket. "He knew." I looked at my guardian angel. "He understood it all." She nodded.

"And his love for all of you has seen the family through some challenging times, hasn't it?"

"Yes. It's really that simple, but I was somehow expecting neon lights around a glittering sign. I expected fireworks but instead, found one quiet, soft word: *love*." I paused in thought and smiled. "I know. Expectations. But for being so simple an answer, I only hope that I can live it. That seems to be the hard part."

"No, it isn't, Bruce," came a deep voice from across the room. I spun around and saw Michael walk toward me. I grinned in an automatic response and rose to greet him. I was further surprised to see the archangel looking like an archangel. Michael noted my reaction.

"What? Can't an angel wear the getup once in a while?" He grinned and his powerful wings moved slightly, mesmerizing me. Michael chuckled. "You know that you've definitely got a wing thing goin' on here, right?"

When I nodded sheepishly, he stepped forward, engulfing me in those magnificent wings. It was a wholly different feeling than Epheniel's hugs. Sheer power emanated from him, and when he released me, I could only gasp.

He grinned broadly. "You're not the only one around here with good stuff, Bruce!" He paused. "Hey, speaking of *stuff* how'd that go?" His eyes twinkled and I was suddenly certain that not only he, but the entire celestial realm, had been provided a good chuckle. At my expense. Again. In response, I returned the grin.

"Well, it was pretty rocky at the beginning, but I think I've got a handle on it now. Once I go back, I'll start off small and then work my way up."

"Sounds as if I need to send out an alert to the devic kingdom," he teased. "That way they'll be on the lookout for three-legged gnomes or snails soaring through the sky."

"Loiteim gave me a passing grade, so I guess I'm ready."

"Soul, you've always been ready. You've been sending out peace, love, light all of your life, as all humans do with a smile, a helping hand and a kind word. There's no magic formula. Your father was right: love is all that's needed. But it's a troubled world out there, Bruce. We need all the Light workers we can find – in all different forms – in order to make that shift."

"You know, I can't help wondering if you have the right person here, Michael." He looked at me, dumbfounded.

"We're not going to go through all this unworthiness stuff again, are we? I thought we resolved that some time back."

"No, it's not that I feel exactly *unworthy*, but I'm a bit fretful that I may not be up to the task." I fumbled for the words. "I guess I just want you to know that ahead of time so there'll be no disappointment later on down the road."

"Well, Bruce," he said quietly, understanding my humanity, "it appears as if we need to talk about this." He plopped down on the floor next to us. "So, what's up?"

I smiled with the memory of Zeke and took a breath. "I suspect you won't find this shocking, but I find it hard to maintain balance in my own life, so I feel more than a little hesitant

offering to help you. I'm awfully ...," I paused. "... *human*, you know."

"So who told you that you had to be perfect or that being human wouldn't be perfect?" He gazed deeply into my eyes, understanding all and loving me, because of – not in spite of – my humanity. "That's it, Bruce, isn't it? Listen, if the celestial realm waited for humans to become perfect, the shift would never take place and humanity would continue to wallow in the muck. God is all-perfection, Soul. No other entity can make that claim until we, as one, walk into that perfection. Besides," he added, "remember that is humanity's whole purpose in coming to the earth realm: *to learn and grow together*. There was no mention ever made about achieving perfection. Okay, Soul. Let's see what else is on your mind these days."

"Pain." He looked at me quizzically.

"What do you mean *pain*?"

"For two years I've been hearing Deb and Epheniel talk about pain not being a necessity to growth and learning. I want to learn how that is accomplished."

"Ask and ye shall find."

"What are you talking about?"

"It's simpler than you can imagine, Soul. All you have to do is ask to learn your lessons with ease, grace and humor, knowing no emotion but love. Pain was never meant to be part of that process – let it go."

He smiled at me and continued. "That's what has always confused me about humans. Why in tarnation is it so hard to accept that they choose their challenges? Is theirs a vengeful God who would decree cancer and beatings and car accidents? Is theirs such a vindictive God? The God I know and love has given souls

choices and loves them enough to allow such trauma to unfold if they so choose in order to quicken learning and further understanding. But, again, most lessons can be learned with ease and grace and humor."

"Most? Not all?"

"Some souls have chosen to experience physical pain and suffering to further their paths and the paths of those around them. Many have not, however."

"Okay, so that's it, Michael? There's no long, involved process here – no changing Life Charts or pleading my case before some council or such if I choose to learn my lessons without pain and suffering?"

"Nope. That's it, Bruce. Plain and simple. Whenever you pray to God, you are, in essence, connecting to the Light. Being human, you may wish to ask for a reminder that you have chosen to learn your lessons with ease, grace and humor. You will still have to face the challenges you chose at some point, but you can then face them without the accompanying pain and prolonged suffering humanity seems to embrace."

I raised a hand in protest. "Oh, I'm not sure we humans exactly *embrace* pain."

"Pain gives humanity something to cling to, Bruce," Michael answered. "It's Ego jumping in and pouting, *What about me?* It's a totally different mindset that you must embrace if you want to face your challenges without pain. Ego's been doing that act since you were born, so it's a difficult habit to break. And, of course, every time you keep Ego in line, you automatically increase your learning and growth, so the benefits are enormous." He paused in thought. "Oh, and Bruce?" I raised my eyebrows in question. "when you pray, you might want to remember to chat with your celestial team, too."

"What do you mean?"

"You wouldn't believe how many humans wait until they are in a crisis situation before they think to call on the angels – we feel like celestial paramedics, continually bombarded with 9-1-1 calls: *Angels, that truck is going to hit me – save me! Angels, that bully is about to smash in my nose. Help me duck or at least sit on him so I can get out of this! Angels, quick! I need to pass this spelling test and I haven't looked at those words since Monday.*"

I had to grin, remembering Michael's third grade report card image. "Hope you relegated that last one to the Spelling Test Archangel."

"Cute," he grinned. "You humans are all so cute. But, to get back to my point, however, Bruce, why wait until a crisis situation occurs before asking for help? When you are asking to

face challenges with ease, grace and humor, just talk to us. Ask us to watch over you, keeping you from harm. Make it a practice to talk with us all throughout your day. Make us an integral part of each day. After all," he boasted, puffing out his chest, "that's what we're here for! The bottom line is: Angels are pure expressions of love and light energy, here to help humanity, assisting you in your learning. Look for our replies in your hearts or in the kind voice of others."

He looked pointedly at me and continued. "We're at your prayerful beck and call, so include us on a daily basis." He peered at me even more closely. "It all comes down to reconnecting, Soul. That's the whole purpose of your existence on this plane." He leaned over, softly kissed my forehead, and whispered, "Remember the connection, Beloved." I gulped and nodded, hoping this was one memory I could keep forever. He waited a moment as I tried to assimilate all I had learned. I suddenly realized that he was staring at me, as if waiting for something.

"What, Michael? What do you want to tell me?"

"As long as we're talking about the connection, let's go back to suffering. So much of the pain on Earth exists because of greed. There can be cures for the diseases and afflictions that continue to kill and cause great suffering, but money is needed to fund research. When souls agreed to participate in the Earth experiment, they agreed to help each other and walk together toward the Light. Until humanity understands not only the connection they have with God, but the innate connection among all: black, white, red, brown, male, female, heterosexual, homosexual, young, old, Kenyan, American, Chilean, Russian, Chinese, Buddhist, Christian, Jew, Muslim, human soul, angelic realm, devic kingdom, water, blade of grass, grain of sand, and the One, humanity will continue to suffer needlessly."

He paused and continued. "One of humanity's tasks is to help each other. With all that technology and wealth available, why should a child anywhere in your world go to bed hungry? Why should medical care be denied to the aged or those who cannot afford to be well? Why should millions of people suffer and die from diseases that plague your realm?" He shook his head sadly. "And when will humanity finally understand the connection they have with all life and God?" He shook his head again. "Why don't you guys get it? So much unnecessary pain."

"I know, Michael," I replied. "Perhaps the teeter totter will tip humanity into truth and understanding soon." We sat in silence for a long moment. Finally, he pulled himself out of his reverie and asked if I had any other questions.

"So, what do you do, Michael? What are your chosen tasks?"

"Well, angels get great joy from helping souls like you, Bruce, but mostly you can find me in troubled spots around the world. When there is war, the energies are completely out of balance, with the earthly energies making us forget about the Light. He stood up and pulled out his sword, which seemed to gleam with a life of its own. "I work tirelessly to slice through negativity and try to regain balance. But, if humanity could only understand that if they make peace within themselves, they will never have to worry about war again --there would be no need." He sheathed his sword and sat down again.

"Hmm," I mused, thinking of Lemuria, "as there would be no need for laws and prisons."

"You've got it, Bruce!" He paused, knowing I had more questions. "What's next?"

"Well, I keep reading about a doom and gloom period that seems to be heading our way. Any truth to it?"

"Doom and gloom, huh?" He shook his head. "You learned about the past attempts, didn't you?"

"The Great Earth Experiment? Are you talking about Lemuria and Atlantis?"

He nodded. "Why did the Lemurians live such an incredibly spiritual existence of love and peace?"

"They were balanced – their energy vibrations were balanced."

"Right," Michael said. "We're back to balance again. And how did these and other similar societies perish?"

"They could not maintain the balance."

"Right again." He leaned over and patted my head. "You've been paying attention, haven't you?" I nodded and he continued. "Well, let's take that one step further. In order to shift into that new consciousness, only slightly more than half of humanity must be in that kind of balance. In

order to do that – and bring peace to Earth – you must first bring peace to yourselves. You must balance all parts of you first – Higher Self and earthly self.” One look at my face and Michael knew he was losing me. He started over. “All souls were created as androgynous entities.”

“Androgynous?” I asked. “As in a type of unisex creation?”

“No, on the soul level. When humanity came to experience Earth, they had already planned their lifetimes – like you remember doing yours. However, souls, themselves, are androgynous.” Again, I looked blank. “Inside their beings, there was perfect balance: male/female, Higher Self/earthly self, intelligence/faith.”

“Are you talking about yin and yang?” I asked, hoping to get a handle on the discussion.

“Yes, Bruce,” he answered. “When you were created, yin and yang were perfectly attuned. It was only when you chose to incarnate on the earth plane that you were split and sent without your other half. Every soul needs a partner.” I smiled at Michael and glanced toward Zeke, snoring softly on the sofa.

“You mean there’s another me flittin’ around somewhere – a soul mate or something?” Epheniel, who had remained silent up to this point, groaned audibly. I grinned at her. “Just think of all the fun you’d have if you had two of me to safeguard! Boggles the mind, doesn’t it?”

She smiled in appreciation and Michael continued. “There are many groupings of souls on the planet, each of whom has a specific task they have chosen to complete. The vast majority of soul mates, or twin souls or whatever earthly name you wish to call them, is split on two different realms. Somewhere deep inside you, you yearn to be reunited with your other half to complete the whole.”

He paused. “Another way to look at it is to think of these other halves as your cheering section while you are on Earth. And just as your soul has been split, human spirits are fragmented. Think of each fragment, if you will, as a small wayward negative energy: Fear, Anger, Greed, Disease, Addiction – the list goes on and on. If you want to be balanced, you must face each one of these fragments, resolve the issue and then integrate it back into your being to make yourself once again whole.” Michael paused a moment before continuing. “Many journeying souls have misplaced fragments from other incarnations, as well, further complicating finding the balance that is so crucial. You’ve heard this before, but it bears repeating. Start by loving yourself, Soul. Forgive yourself. Accept yourself as you are, while still working toward reunification. If you can do that, fragmented souls will heal, which will further human progression.”

The look on my face must have registered my surprise. “Do you realize what you’re asking, Michael? How in heaven’s name could we ever accomplish such a feat?”

“You just said it, Bruce. In heaven’s name – in the name of All That Is – all things are possible. Pray and be open to learning situations. Get Ego out of the way. Look at the Big Picture. Heal yourself. Send peace, love, and light energy. Love unconditionally. That’s it.”

“That’s it.”

He nodded. “As for the doom and gloom, there will be difficult times ahead as each spirit tries to integrate itself, finding the balance. It’s not an easy task, but the results far outweigh the challenges humanity will face as they attempt that process. But, again, ask that you be able to integrate these fragments with ease and grace and humor – whatever you do, don’t forget the humor.” Michael looked at me closely. He knew I had saved the big question for last. “It’s about the book, isn’t it?” I nodded. “Go on, Bruce, ask it. Ask and ye shall find.”

“Well,” I began, “you understand that I want to be brave, but I can’t help wondering how my words will affect those who read them?”

“What do you mean, Soul?”

“Michael, reincarnation is pretty far out there for many on the earth realm. I just don’t know ...” I faltered, suddenly uncertain of how to put it all into words.

“Wrong. Reincarnation is not out there. It’s an integral part of most of the world’s religions. In this lifetime, you’re coming from the Christian belief system. But, did you know that reincarnation was an integral part of the Catholic Church’s teachings until the 5th Ecumenical Council in 553 A.D. when it was banned – not through religious objection, but through political machinations?”

“What do you mean? What happened?”

“Emperor Justinius, a power-hungry ruler, took it upon himself to convene that Council with the expressed desire to ban reincarnation from the Church. He believed that if he could change this particular dogma – removing personal responsibility for one’s soul and creating a need for liaisons between God and journeying souls – the power of the Church would exponentially increase. To further his plan, Justinius convened a special meeting before the council met to curtail the authority of the Church and Pope Vigilius in order to gain that increased power for himself. In protest, Pope Vigilius did not attend the Council, nor did many other of the respected Church leaders. Without their presence, the emperor was able to not only introduce the ban, but railroad it through the Council, making the Church accept it as a valid, religious doctrine.”

“And no one questioned that?” I asked.

“Who questions emperors, especially one like Justinius? And then, after his reign, it remained, because by then, it was accepted Church policy. By the time Martin Luther nailed his theses on the church door in the 16th century, beginning the fracture of the Catholic Church into different Christian sects, reincarnation was a long-moot point.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. “And in the 1500 ensuing years since that Council, no one has questioned the validity of the Council’s ruling?” *How could such an important tenet have been so arbitrarily banned and removed from Church teachings?* My mind reeled with the implications involved if Justinius had not sought more power and convened that council so many centuries ago.

“Yes, Soul, through the ages the controversy over it has continued, but the Catholic Church teachings have remained firm, thus making it seem out there, as you put it today. Look at the other world religions, Soul, where Justinius had no control, and you will find reincarnation has always been a basic tenet. With so much to learn, do you really think it can be done in only one lifetime?” He paused and gazed at me for a long moment. “And as for the words you write, I must ask you a question, which I want you to think long and hard about before answering. Are you ready?”

I gulped audibly and nodded, hoping I would have an answer. “Do you believe in peace?”

“What?”

“Do you believe in peace?”

I was startled by the question and wondered why he thought I needed time to consider my answer. “Yes, Michael, I believe in peace.”

His voice grew strong. “Soul, how much do you believe in peace?”

“What do you mean?” I countered uneasily, trying to figure out what his question had to do with mine.

“Just what I said. *How much do you believe in peace?* If you believe in peace only to send pretty, little Christmas cards with the words Peace on Earth to your friends and family once a year, then I have greatly misunderstood you. If you believe in peace because it is the politically correct thing to do these days, then I have greatly misunderstood you. If you believe in peace because the words ease your conscience, then I have greatly misunderstood you.” His voice fell to a whisper, but the power in his voice was unmistakable. He leaned forward so that we almost touched. “Have I greatly misunderstood you, Soul?”

Without warning, tears began to stream down my face. I now understood what the monumental task was that I would be asked to do someday. I had to decide whether or not I wished to stand up for what I believed was right, even if it meant I might be standing alone. I clearly understood that I was being given a choice at that moment in time. Michael, Epheniel and the entire celestial realm would love me, regardless of my choice. But, I had talked the talk all of my life. It was now time to walk the walk. In that moment I was made fully aware of the power of my words and how it would affect my life. But I also knew that the last two years had prepared me for the question this angel now asked of me.

“No, Michael,” I said clearly, “you have not greatly misunderstood me. I commit myself to peace now.”

“There’s a great amount of work to do then. We need to get started.” He smiled gently at me, knowing the depth of my emotion. “You have lived in illusion for most of your life – it’s almost time to remove the veil. Hang onto your hat, Bruce. You’re in for the ride of your life!” And with

that, Michael, the Archangel, Prince of the Realm, held out his hands to Epheniel and me and I once again glanced over to Zeke, who was now sitting up, rubbing his eyes.

"See you next time, Zeke!"

"Haste ye back, Lassie – thanks for the thrills!"

I looked deeply into Epheniel's eyes – into those eyes overflowing with love for me. Words could not express the love I, too, felt for her as she helped me on the perilous journey called *Life* that I had chosen once upon a time, space and dimension ago. More tears fell, but these were tears of joy, not sorrow. She held out her hand to me, as she had done innumerable times before, and smiled. I grasped her hand firmly, and together we walked forward to take Michael's outstretched hands. As our hands joined, I heard a faintly reminiscent whooshing sound and the three of us took off – together.

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Polarity

Loved One, as a species, human thought forms have created a divided self and a divided world. You have done this by repressing the Divine Yin. It is time to integrate wholeness and embrace equally the Divine Mother and Divine Father. When you polarize toward one to the exclusion of the other, you feel off balance and divided. This division has caused great suffering over the ages. You are evolving toward the end of the reign of patriarchy. A soul in a feminine body will no longer need to attach herself to a man to see self-realization. A soul must experience both feminine and masculine energies within the self. The result is a wholeness centered in the Christ Light. Claim your heritage, Dear One, of both knowledge (yang) and wisdom (yin). The angels rejoice!

Prayer

Loved Ones, there truly is great power in prayer and every reason to put faith and trust in it. Do you remember why?

The very nature of prayer is infinite, without origin, because it is connected to the energy of life. Prayer, composed of energy itself, is fluid and ever changing, but constant. There has always been communication between life and God, whether you have been conscious of it or not. When life began to express itself in a world of density and matter, you used prayer as your means of connection to your Source of Life.

The human ego has had powerful input when considering the power of prayer. It repeatedly points out how imperfect prayer is because of the pain and suffering in the world. Let us remember the mechanics of how prayer works and explore the energy of its power. If you enter a dark place and need to see, you turn on a light. Rarely do you consider from where the energy for the source of light comes, but simply expect the response of light through your action of turning the switch. In the same manner, you turn on the energy of prayer by your motive. The intent of your prayer instantly activates a given energy pattern and is linked with it. While it may be unnecessary to be conscious of where the energy source comes from to switch on a light, it may be prudent to be aware of the energy source you are activating through the intent of your prayers.

Initially, your motive in prayer was as pure and simple as turning on a light to enable you to see. You prayed and switched on the energy needed to connect with your Higher Source to see and feel Light. Your intention was clear. Indeed, you did see and feel Light.

When your free will desired to move deeper into the illusion of a dense physical reality, the intent of your prayers began to focus on concerns of a physical world, enhancing the perception of separation from your Higher Source and Life. In this attitude of isolation you began to feel a need for control and power over each other and life itself. Survival became paramount in an

environment of cruelty, conflict and war. The intent of your prayers was directed accordingly, linking you into the inertia of fear instead of Divine Light.

Through the mechanics of prayer, you determine the composition of energy required to activate your prayer. Through this focus the energy links with fear, hate, control, love, light, harmony, peace, and any others, adding to the power of any particular energy composition.

Mankind has developed many different styles of prayer over the ages. Briefly reviewing some of them may be beneficial and help to make conscious choices as to what kind of energy you are empowering.

Liturgical prayer, those prayers of which you are not the original author, recited in either a group setting or individually, can be effective in connecting energy in certain circumstances. When one connects with the meaning of the words recited, an energy connection is activated, along with any others in the group who are also in the same heart place. On the other hand, simply mouthing words of a liturgical prayer is just that – mouthing words.

Rote prayer, reciting words as in a mantra, serves the purpose of quieting the mind of irrelevant thoughts and opening the door to real prayer. When you recite a mantra (either silently or aloud), using such words as “Peace” and “Quiet” on an in-breath, and “Love” and “Harmony” on an out-breath, you are turning off thought energy. When you first begin your mantra of words like these, they are often said as just words with no meaning being conveyed. As the mind quiets, your interpretation of those words can begin to be felt in the heart, triggering an energy connection. Rote prayer, in and of itself, will not connect with the energy of Light. Without the heart-meaning of the words, they are merely words – empty air. When there is no heart-feeling or intent, there is no energy connection, but it does serve the purpose of calming the mind.

Ritual prayers are words often used in traditional, religious ceremonies, such as a wedding ceremony, uniting two souls for their journey through life. When you participate with your whole heart in ritual prayer, you not only activate your own energy link, but you are also involving your energy in a pattern created and used over and over throughout time. Every time that ritual is used, it becomes more powerful.

Let us explore the mechanics of group prayer. Imagine a whirlwind of colorful leaves, gathering more leaves as the vortex swirls. The leaves close enough to the energy of the wind will be pulled in and become part of the motion. Now imagine this as a vortex of energy spiraling and collecting all similar prayers/energies everywhere, becoming more powerful with all this new inertia with which it connects. This is the movement of energy activated during group prayer. The language and/or method of the prayer used is immaterial, whether it be ritual, liturgical, contemplative, meditative, etc. When your heart's aim is similar to others, it automatically connects with that energy and becomes part of the larger vortex. These vortexes connect with like energy, positive or negative. Even if you are engaged in a private prayer, the energy of that prayer joins with like prayers of other individuals, becoming a group prayer. The energy activity on this level produces what you would term as miracles/truly amazing action/re-action brought into your dimension through prayer.

Contemplative prayer is the ultimate state of awareness or at-oneness with All That Is. It takes you beyond superficial consciousness of seeming separation and alienation into cosmic Love and Light. Great spiritual masters have demonstrated contemplative prayer without actually teaching it because there are no words involved. Witnessing a master in quiet prayer was all that was needed to see the wonder and beauty surrounding them. When experiencing the conscious state of the interconnectedness of Being, the very air is charged with the energy of Love and Light.

When you allow yourself to participate in this type of quiet prayer on a regular basis, you begin to share in the true reality of life interlocking in One-ness. As wordless prayer becomes less of an exercise it will become more of a state of dynamic dimension; you are aware of not just what you Do, but who you Are. Holy Spirit is free to recover life communion and dispense with the illusion of separation. There will be more and more moments in your daily lives of joyous bliss in catching glimpses of the Oneness of Life. It will feel like jumping into the stream of life and being in its flow while you are right in the middle of daily tasks. You will realize you are all capable of being spiritual masters, whether sitting on a mountain in contemplative prayer or

washing dishes. You will be on a journey remembering to discern between a superficial or ultimate reality.

Dear Ones, when you pray, be spiritually aware of where you are. Only you can determine what type of prayer best suits your purpose at any given time. What type they are is immaterial if your heart's aim is clear. If your intention is to connect with your Higher Source, you will – instantly. In this energy pattern you will know – you are Light and Love.

Chapter 11

June, almost three years later

I dragged myself to the bottom of the stairs and looked upward, wondering if I could possibly climb the same staircase that I had previously skipped up so many times. As I seriously considered the choice of turning around and saving the climb for another day, I heard a small noise beside me. Somehow, Zeke had materialized and was smiling sadly at me. Without a word, he extended his hand and I accepted it. We began the climb as unbidden tears began to streak my cheeks. We climbed slowly but deliberately, Zeke allowing me to set the pace. When at last, we reached the top; he turned to me and beckoned. I knelt down slowly and looked into his eyes, hoping to find answers. He smiled gently again and wrapped his arms around my neck. “Ye made it, Lassie. Welcome Home.”

We sat for a long time at the top of those stairs, wrapped in each other's arms, as my tears continued to flow. Zeke crooned softly to me, rocking me gently as his earthly mother must have done when he had stumbled and stubbed a toe. And while the thought crossed my mind that no amount of crooning or rocking could ease the tremendous sorrow inside of me, a gentle peace descended.

“She's waiting for ye, Soul. Shall we go together?” I could only nod at this point while I heavily got to my feet and began the familiar walk. I noticed the beauty of my surroundings, but was intent on my destination, so did not linger. As we moved closer, my spirit seemed to get lighter and soon Zeke and I picked up the pace, only slowing when we arrived at my angel's conference room. The door was glowing with an opalescence that caught my breath. I drank in its beauty for a moment before turning to hug Zeke.

“Thanks, friend,” I whispered.

“Anytime, Lass. That's why I'm here.” He smiled sadly at me again. “If ye need me for the return trip, just give a whistle when ye're ready to go.” I nodded and without another word, the sprite disappeared. I faced the brightly glowing door and took a deep breath before knocking. I knew I had made the right decision in returning today, but in my attempt to ease the pain over these last few years, I had shoved so much of it under some celestial bed that I knew my arrival here would force all of it to resurface. Could I face it? Deciding at last that it was Zeke I could not face without knocking on this door – Zeke, who was so confident that I could conquer all of my challenges – I rapped softly.

The door swung open and I had to momentarily shield my eyes from the brightness that engulfed me from within the room. When my eyes adjusted, I gasped. My memory of Epheniel had faded with time and I was freshly in awe of her beauty. As always, her wings enchanted me with their silky softness and I yearned to be enfolded by them. Instantly, I got my wish and a deep sigh escaped me. This is how I want to die. I'm ready. *Take me Home, Angel.*

I could feel Epheniel smile; her glow grew stronger. “You don't need to die to come Home,”

she whispered softly. "Remember." As she spoke, a deeper feeling of peace swept through my body, a feeling I had not felt in two years. I would have crumpled with it, had Epheniel not been holding me. *How many times during these last two years would I have crumpled without my guardian's embrace, especially when I had felt I'd been abandoned?* As my angel held me close, I could feel the beginnings of healing start to take place deep within me. "Are you ready to tell me about it, Soul?" I nodded and she moved back a step to look into my eyes. "Where would you like to talk?"

"The valley," I answered immediately, remembering the peace I had found there on previous visits. My angel enfolded me again and we were instantly transported to the lushness of the valley. I stood overlooking it, freshly stunned at the color that lay before me; the sky was a flawless October blue and the valley, an emerald green. The sun shone bright and warm and I instinctively uplifted my face to embrace it. A slight breeze danced throughout and I smiled with the joy of being alive. Epheniel sat down on the bench and I joined her. Together we gazed out over the vista for a long time without speaking. *Where do I start?*

I took a deep breath and began. "I gave myself a deadline to finish the book. With school starting soon, I knew I needed some quiet time before the craziness began again, so midnight of August 1st became my deadline.

"Soon after, school began and the amazing summer writing days became only a memory." I paused as my thoughts meandered to such a joy-filled time. "So many wonderful things happened during the writing of that book."

She smiled. "Tell me about them."

"There were so many connection times." Epheniel arched a delicate eyebrow. "I had formed a philosophy during my writing – I termed it *The Falling Piano Theory*."

"The Falling Piano Theory?"

I grinned. "I had the very real sense of angelic protection. I had agreed to co-write the book; I trusted that they would protect me during that time. And, while I did not choose to walk under falling pianos, I almost felt as if I could, you know?"

When Epheniel smiled and nodded, I continued.

"Mary Lou preferred to work on other areas than writing, so after I wrote each chapter, I gave it to Deb to read. And though I determined the content, she was a wonderful sounding board." I heard a delicate sniff and I grinned, loving my angel's quirks. "All right, already – someOne else may have determined the content, but it was still comforting to have Deb's input." I heard a sniff that sounded suspiciously like a snort. "Oh, for Pete's sake, I get it. I may have given it to my friend, but the input came not only from her, but from the Realm. I was getting to that point if someone would let me continue," I protested. She smiled victoriously and motioned for me to continue.

"Actually, I seriously considered changing the book cover to state: *This Time Around, written by the Angelic Realm, typed by Marty Boyle*." I grinned. "Far more accurate, I believe." Epheniel smiled that secret smile of hers, as I continued to explain the process of co-writing.

"Deb would read a chapter and then meditate. If something was not written quite as Michael would have liked it, she would be told. Then she, in turn, would tell me. I would rewrite the paragraph or section and resubmit it for celestial review. If it met with approval, I would know I could continue. If not, I would work on the passage until approval was given. Sometimes it was an inadequate understanding; sometimes it was a word or two that made only a shade of difference, but that was important enough to change. One day, however, Michael must have been rather impatient."

"How so?" asked my innocent-looking angel.

I snorted, "As if you don't know! One day, I wrote a passage and mulled it over, wondering if I had gotten a concept correct. Deb called me and said that whatever I was working on wasn't quite right and asked me to read it to her. After I read my latest passage to her, she re-explained the concept." I paused. "I was more than a little bit flabbergasted with the whole episode. Initially, it shocked me, but then I found it hilarious. Talk about lack of celestial patience!" Epheniel giggled beside me and I grinned at her in reply. "You angels are a tricky lot!"

"Someone casting aspersions on my fine character?"

I grinned as I turned around, wondering what I find this time. I vowed to remain open. I looked around the room, but could not locate the angel.

"Hey, I'm a busy angel. You wouldn't want me to just sit around and twiddle my thumbs, waiting for you to realize you'd misunderstood an important concept, would you? Misuse of my time!"

"Michael, there is no time on your side of the veil," I reminded him as my eyes scanned the room.

"Oh, yeah," he replied. "I always get that mixed up!"

Still no sign of the archangel. "Yeah, right. Where are you, Michael? I can hear you clearly, but I can't see you."

Suddenly, a pure white dove, flew gently toward me. I instinctively opened my hand in invitation. The dove landed softly.

"Hello, Bruce," the Michael dove replied. "I know you're going through a tough time right now, but don't forget about us. We can help. We love you. I love you."

Tears came unbidden and streaked my cheeks. Again. I leaned over and gently kissed the dove. "Thanks, Michael," I said. "I'll try to remember that."

And in typical Michael fashion, the dove – and archangel – vanished. I looked at my hand where he had been. He had left two perfect white feathers. I sighed and picked them up, running them across my cheek for a long moment. I looked at Epheniel, held up one of the feathers.

"That one is for Mary Lou. She, too, would appreciate a Michael feather these days." I nodded, knowing how much the feather would mean to my friend. "Speaking of Mary Lou, how is she doing?"

"She's doing well – busy as always. She chose to work on other spiritual tasks during that amazing summer of writing, as well as later on."

"And speaking of the book, what did you think of the Roadrunner?" she asked sweetly.

I put my hands on my hips in mock irritation. "You guys had a great laugh over that one, didn't you?" She nodded without remorse and chuckled. "Well, early one beautiful morning that summer, I went to visit Deb. We sat in her kitchen, winding floss for the intricate angel counted cross stitch projects we had recently purchased. Remember?" She nodded. "The angels were such ornate designs with so many different numbers and combinations of threads that the three of us had decided it would be easier in the long run to separate the colors, recombine them as directed and wind them back on the floss holders. That was the setting that summer morning.

"For some reason, Deb felt that when she prayed for something, her prayers were not always answered. But when she asked me to pray for her, it seemed to work. I thought it was crazy, but I didn't question success, you know?" Epheniel nodded.

"That day, Deb asked me to pray for something to which I agreed and then we went back to winding floss. She and I could spend hours together and not feel the need to talk, so we were very quietly contented with our task at hand that day. After a few minutes of quiet, Deb looked at me and said, "You never ask me for anything."

Startled, I looked at her, wondering what she meant. When I asked, she replied, "I always ask you to pray for me. You never ask me to pray for you. Why?"

"What did you answer?" Epheniel asked.

"Well, to be very honest, I had always figured that my friend was busy working on major issues with Michael; why would I trouble her with my requests? Obviously, she had seen the writing on the wall, so to speak, and was now going to take me to task for it. As I explained this to her, she seemed to understand, but I was to find out that she wasn't done with me yet."

"Ask me to pray for something," she had demanded. "It's your turn to ask me."

"My mind went blank. What could I possibly think up within the course of a moment or so that would merit her prayers and wouldn't make me look like an idiot?"

My favorite light being emitted another cough, but smiled sweetly.

"Don't even bother," I replied tersely. "I know, I know." I looked at her – *She sure looks innocent enough – if you didn't know how secretly devious she could be with her human charge.* I returned the same sickeningly sweet smile and picked up the threads of the story again.

"What do you want?" came Deb's question. "What do you need?"

“Okay,’ I agreed as a devilish idea hit. ‘I need a humor piece for chapter eight.’ I had worked out the other parts of that particular chapter and the humor piece had thus far eluded me. Frankly, just between the two of us, I figured that would keep her happy and busy for a while.”

“Marty needs a humor piece for chapter eight,’ she announced, smiling at me. I returned the smile and we continued to wind floss quietly. At least I thought we were being quiet; she, apparently, was hard at work. Less than two minutes of silence passed. Suddenly, she looked up and said, ‘The Roadrunner.’”

“I looked at her quizzically. What is she talking about? Has she wound one too many flosses today and scrambled her brains? ‘The Roadrunner?’ I asked.

“Yes,’ Deb replied. ‘That’s the answer to your prayer.’”

“*The Roadrunner?*’ I repeated like an idiot. ‘The Roadrunner is the answer to my prayer?’ She nodded.”

“You asked for a humor piece for chapter eight – the answer is the Roadrunner.”

“I remember narrowing my eyes suspiciously. I leaned close to her and asked, ‘I want you to listen very carefully right now. Are the angels laughing?’ She grinned again, her eyes twinkling, and nodded. ‘Okay,’ I concluded. ‘We have now established that they are laughing. The question is: Are they laughing with me or at me?’ Deb doubled over in merriment.”

“I can’t tell!’ she gasped. ‘I just know they’re laughing! They think this is hysterical!’”

“Great, I remember thinking, I’m glad that I can so easily throw the angelic realm into hysterics.” A distinct giggle came from my guardian. I chose to ignore it. “I continued to wind the floss, laughing, as well, although mine was more of a nervous nature. I still didn’t understand what was going on, but I could appreciate the humor, most likely at my own expense. Again. At that precise point, Deb dashed off to the bathroom, leaving me alone with the floss, my thoughts and the laughing angelic realm. Suddenly, I heard another explosion of laughter from the bathroom.

“Elmer Fudd!’ Deb yelled.”

“I couldn’t help it. ‘*Elmer Fudd?*’ I repeated stupidly, stunned.

“Yes, Elmer Fudd! That’s the rest of your answer!’ she called from the bathroom. Soon she returned to her chair, winding floss again as if nothing had happened.

“Let me get this straight,’ I began. ‘You ask me for a prayer request; I tell you I need a humor piece for chapter eight. You ask the angelic realm and their response is *The Roadrunner* and *Elmer Fudd*. Is that what just happened here?’”

Deb grinned again and nodded. She was immensely pleased that her prayer had brought such sudden and unexpectedly delightful results. I was happy for her, but I remained clueless and my face must have shown it. ‘It’s not that I am not grateful,’ I began again, ‘but what am I supposed to do with that information? Do you have any other answers for me?’ Deb shook her head and asked me what concepts were being discussed in chapter eight. I scanned my memory banks and came up with the one I had just worked on earlier that day: *good vs. evil*.”

“Go with that one,’ she suggested. ‘Maybe that’s the link.’”

“*Go with that one? How exactly was I going to go with that one?* It was at that precise moment that I made the leap to highly evolved light being. I decided to pick up the angelic realm’s gauntlet that obviously had just been tossed to me. If they were laughing at me, I would, by-gum, write a humor piece that flowed with the rest of the book that included *The Roadrunner* and *Elmer Fudd* for chapter eight. If they were laughing with me, by gum, I would still write that humor piece. Either way, I had been given a challenge and I was, by gum, going to rise to the occasion.”

“By gum,” nodded Epheniel sagely, obviously working hard to keep a straight face.

I grinned at her in reply. “When I left Deb’s kitchen that day, I was still at a loss as to exactly how I was going to accomplish such a seemingly formidable task, but within a few hours of sitting down at the computer next session, I’d done it.”

Epheniel smiled at the memory. “And Michael?” she asked. “Tell me about Michael.”

“Isn’t that request more than a little bizarre?” I asked. “Shouldn’t you be telling me about Michael?”

“No,” she replied. “I want to hear about him from your earthly perspective and that of your friends.”

I thought a long moment. “Remember the first angel party, during which Mary Lou gave Deb that Michael medal?” Epheniel nodded. “Well, as I told you earlier, an astonishing journey began that night for all of us, but Deb’s was even more remarkable. Within a day, the Michael medal grew heavy around her neck and within a couple of days, she had learned that when it grew heavy, Michael wished to communicate with her. Deb would center herself and meditate and Michael would take her spirit to a world without words. Her job was to translate what he shared into human language when she returned from each visit. It was very difficult for her to do this at first, but within a short time, she was able to do just that. Over the course of the next year or so, these messages kept coming. When they stopped, there was a total of eighteen: *Creation, Realms of Life, Dance of Chance, The Writing of the Michael Messages, Awakening, Connections, Visions, Radiance, Unified You, Cosmic Law, Polarity, Thought Pollution, Reality, Religion, Life Language, Prayer, Ego Evolution, and Harmonious Habitat*, their length ranging from a paragraph to several pages on a particular subject.

“It was a fascinating time and I was thrilled to help by typing and compiling the messages. Several times, Deb called to ask me if I knew what a certain word meant. I would give her the definition, knowing why she asked. Even though she was translating from a realm without words, once back, Michael would occasionally provide her words, some of which weren’t familiar. I would ask her if the definition I had provided fit and she would always say that it was the perfect description for something she had seen or felt or experienced. Deb, Mary Lou and I were always struck by the simplistic beauty of the words.

“How did you feel about all of this, Soul?”

“The whole journey was amazing. At the beginning, I tried to fathom how all of this could happen, and of course, as you well know, there were more than a few times when I butted heads with the Realm out of frustration, but in general, I trusted that all was unfolding as it must. There were so many incredible events over the course of those years – what were a few more?”

I paused in thought. “For example, one summer day more than a year after she’d received the medal, the clasp on Deb’s chain broke and I offered to take it to the jewelers while she was at work. Sitting in the car outside the shop, I gazed at the medal with awe. There, right before my very eyes, was physical proof of Deb’s angelic communications: the part of the medal that attaches it to the chain was much thinner than the rest of the part. It was obvious that something or someone had been tugging on it to erode it at that spot and I knew with certainty it wasn’t Deb.”

I paused again before continuing. “Sometimes I think I was chosen to get the best seat in the house on this adventure because no matter how many times I experienced amazing events, I was – and am still – in complete awe when they occur. In fact, I had to acknowledge that awe, but then gently put it away since Deb was not at all comfortable with me being in awe of her.” I grinned. “But, truthfully, how many of us have a friend who works with the angelic realm? So when these amazing events occurred, instead of showing my awe, I would remind myself to plug in my *Awe Checking Device: It’s just Deb*. It’s just the way she is. But let me tell you, when I witnessed such things, it was often difficult to reign in my response.”

“Interesting that this *best seat in the house* observation has come up again. You have not yet resolved this?”

“No, both Deb and Mary Lou continued to think I was an integral part of our adventure and not just an observer, but our realities were so far apart that it was hard to believe that I was as deeply connected as they appeared to be.” Epheniel opened her mouth to begin to speak, but I held up my hand. “Oh, I’ve come a long way on that path and understand that each of us has a vital role to play in the Big Picture, no matter how small the role appears to be some days, you know?” I desperately hoped that my angel would not only understand, but love me, knowing that.

To my great relief, Epheniel smiled and nodded. “So your *Awe Checking Device* worked?” When I looked blank, she smiled. “*It’s just Deb?*”

“For a while,” I smiled. “I would get that awe thing back under control, return to our easy friendship and then wham! Something else would blow me out of the water and I’d have to start the process all over again. It really got to be pretty funny.”

We sat quietly for a long moment before Epheniel asked, “Were Mary Lou and Deb as

amazed as you were by the adventure?”

I smiled and nodded, thinking of all the connections Mary Lou had made over those three years. My mind was filled with memories of Deb’s experiences with Michael and the Messages. “It was pretty awesome for both, but Deb was especially humbled by her task.”

“What did Michael want Deb to do with the Messages?” Epheniel asked.

“Well, we all wondered about that for a long time and finally figured that we would know when the time was right to share them.”

Epheniel nodded. “So once the Michael Messages were complete and the book was done, the adventure ended?”

I shook my head. “Nope. One day, after school had started and the book was completed, Deb told me that she had awakened with a story going through her head – just like a movie. She said it involved delightful little gnomes and various woodland creatures, but since it had never happened to her before, she didn’t know what it was all about. We agreed that it really was amazing and that she should just enjoy the show. But as the days wore on and the story continued to expand, Deb realized that it was a story that incorporated several of the Michael Messages. Every day she told Mary Lou and me about each new installment and we marveled at her experience.

“I distinctly remember the day Deb decided we needed to do something with the story. Because Mary Lou was still not crazy about writing, that left the two of us. I was excited because I’d been encouraging her to write and thought this was the perfect opportunity. However, my friend had other ideas. She thought that perhaps I should write the story. I protested vehemently – I’d not been given the story – she was the one to write it. But Deb insisted that she was not the writer; I was. So there we were – at an impasse. What should we do – if anything? Finally, I caved in and said I would write the story if she would co-author it with me so that we could share it. She agreed and we got down to work.

“Even though Deb had described a great deal to me, I knew I needed to figure out a way to get the story that was playing in her head into mine. One evening, we sat together for several hours. Deb would tell me just a tiny bit of what she was seeing and I would jot it down. But before she went on, I would ask dozens of questions about that part. I needed to see what she was seeing and I could only write it if I had a complete pool of knowledge. I asked about copious details that never hit the book, but which enriched my knowledge as a writer developing characters. I asked dozens of questions over the course of those several hours. Then, when we thought we were done, I would read back my pages of notes to make sure I got it down the way Deb was seeing the story. Once that was done, we agreed that I’d give it my best shot and if we discovered that the story wasn’t mine to do, we’d leave it in peace and go to the yet unknown Plan B.

“I was more than a bit nervous writing that story, especially when it came to parts that had obvious holes. I would call Deb and tell her that I didn’t know how I was supposed to leap from one part to the next, and she’d say that she had no more information and that, as the writer, this would be my choice. I’d then take a deep breath and just trust that I could figure it out on my own or that someOne would let one of us know.” I thought a moment. “Actually, at the time I thought it wasn’t trusting in myself so much as it was knowing that if I didn’t do it, no one would, and that alternative was unacceptable. So, I just *grabbed some guts* and wrote, preferring to table the thought that this was an extraordinary process.”

“As I was writing it, I’d get to a stopping point and then give it to Deb. She’d read it and make suggestions or slight changes, but remarkably, we’d hashed through it so much before I had sat down to write that the changes were mostly editorial in nature.

“Titling the book was a curiosity to me. I never thought that I’d be given that privilege. I’d naturally assumed that it was Michael’s story given to Deb, only written down by me, so as third party, I figured I’d not have that job. That theory ended one day when I was writing away, not thinking at all of a title, when it hit me like a ton of bricks: *The Legacy of Harmony Hollow*. The title reverberated throughout my mind – that’s the best way I can describe it. I called Deb a bit sheepishly, wondering if I had the audacity to suggest a title. I told her what had occurred and she was delighted and knew it was all unfolding as it must.

“And so, as I wrote and passed sections to Deb, she’d make changes or suggestions and I’d go back to edit them and then give them to her again. It was not a large book and working nights and weekends, it took only a month to write. Anytime there was a question, Deb was able to easily access the movie in order to answer it. It remained accessible in her mind until it was done, at which point it faded from her mind. When we completed the last of the editing, I felt we needed to verbalize the fact that the book was finished. It was simple: *I think the book is done. Do you think so?* Deb answered that she, too, believed it was done. And then the most amazing thing happened.” I paused and glanced over to Epheniël, knowing she already knew all of this, but loving her for allowing me to share it with her. She smiled in that knowledge and I continued.

“The very next morning after declaring *The Legacy of Harmony Hollow* complete, a second movie began to play in my friend’s mind: book #2. We were both delighted, but I was a little anxious that the first attempt had been a fluke and hoped that I’d be able to pull off writing a second one. We waited several days for most of the story to crystallize in Deb’s mind, and then went through the discussion/note-taking process until the story was fixed as firmly in my mind as possible. *Birdsong* was the result.”

Epheniël smiled. “And at the end of book #2?”

“Book #3 – *Dragon Boy*.”

“The first three books of *The Devic Realm Chronicles*, as we came to call them, were written between late September and mid-December. That autumn was a blur as I spent every free moment either writing or planning how to write something. I was in awe at the speed we were moving, wondering how many books we could write together if we were able to continue such a pace.

“As we wrote that autumn, Deb began to complain about pain in her abdominal area. When the pain did not go away through Deb’s attempts to balance, she went to the medical world and began a series of tests. At the end of December when we were waiting for the results, the beginnings of book #4 had already begun to roll – again, twelve hours after declaring *Dragon Boy* complete. Deb was just as enthralled with this story as she had been with the others, but we decided to wait until after Christmas and after the doctors had resolved her physical problems before sitting down together to get the story into my head.

“Soon, Christmas was over and we continued to wait for the results, which brought more testing and more waiting. We kept saying that soon we would hash out the story, but we all grew more concerned about her medical condition. A hysterectomy date was scheduled, but her concern grew. Finally, a week before surgery, Deb told me that perhaps we should meet to discuss the story – just in case. I remember that night clearly. We worked quickly because we had such a good system of peering into each other’s heads, but it still took us several hours. We were very brave with each other, but we were fearful of what was to come.

“Deb, Mary Lou and I spoke by phone most of the night before surgery – quick phone calls to reassure each other. We tried to keep them upbeat, but Deb’s last phone call that night was frantic. She had a daily message angel calendar by the phone in the kitchen. Each day, she would read it to me. We would generally smile or chuckle at the messages; they were just fun. My friend had made it a practice to not look ahead at messages, but that night she made an exception. When she called the last time, she had passed nervous and was now very afraid, for in order to try to calm herself, she had broken her own rule and had peaked at the next day’s calendar message. While all the others had been fun, the message she read that night for January 30 had chilled her: *The angels have arrived*. She wanted to know if I could tell her why it was so different for the day of her surgery. Did it portend disaster? I was as stunned as she was and had no answer for her that I knew she would accept. Eighteen hours later, her husband, Bill, called me with the news that third stage ovarian cancer had been found.

“Because my father had died of cancer twenty-some years earlier, I understood the path that lay ahead. And, like the rest of Deb’s family and friends, I was rocked to the core. In my mind, all I could see was the ten-foot word, CANCER, whether my eyes were open or shut. We had been given a story to write and Deb had cancer? I couldn’t reconcile it. After all the books I had read, after all the deep spiritual discussions we had had, after being involved in this incredible spiritual adventure, I was still at a loss. How could this be? Cancer? Within a month of

surgery, Deb began chemotherapy treatments that took a massive toll on her; she began the fight for her life. Other medical problems compounded her condition, and she lost a great deal of weight and became weak.

"To write, I need to go to a quiet, peaceful place in my mind, and I couldn't find one for several months. Finally, seeking a return to what was, I sat down with my notes from January and began the fourth book. Deb loved the books as much as I did. Would writing this book help her cope with her challenges or be just one more thing to worry about as she fought the cancer? We decided I would write when I could and she would edit when she could, so consequently between the two of us trying to help her survive, it took until summer vacation for me to finish the manuscript.

"Book #4, *Garden Gold*, was finished in July, and once again, within twelve hours of announcing its ending, book #5 began to play in Deb's head." I paused and Epheniël reached again for my hand. She knew what was coming.

"Six months after surgery, on July 27, with Deb bald, emaciated and nearly broken from chemotherapy, her beloved husband, Bill, died at work from a sudden heart attack. The date was a special one for both of them: their 27th wedding anniversary. After the funeral, I moved into Deb's home to help her as much as I could, but with school starting within a few short weeks, it was obvious that my care-giving time was woefully limited.

"When Deb became ill, her children had rallied to help her – curtailing their education. Deb's strongest wish was that her children return to school and their lives. Her oldest daughter, Kara, lived in Texas. The family decided that Deb and her son, Cory, would go to Texas, where Kara could care for them. The house would be sold to ease the financial burdens the family now faced. Within a week of Bill's funeral, my dearest friend and I were torn apart from each other, causing further devastation for both of us."

I stopped and looked around, suddenly realizing that I had been so caught up in the tale that I had not been paying attention to where we were heading. We had exited the Hall and were strolling the beautiful grounds. Exquisite statues graced the landscape and I found myself asking if I could touch one. Epheniël nodded and we walked to the nearest one, a graceful sculpture of a young boy with an open face, full of laughter and life. For just a moment as I gazed at him with wonder, I envied him his unbridled joy.

"A statue, as beautiful as it is, has no life, Soul," reminded my angel, reading my thoughts. "This child will feel no love."

My reply was immediate. "But neither will he will feel grief."

Epheniël's face softened in compassion. "What did you learn when your mother was beaten?"

"That I could view the event through the eyes of forgiveness and love, rather than bitterness and fear," I said simply.

"You did it then. Was it so hard to do it during this difficult time?"

"I think I became overwhelmed and lost my bearings," I replied. "Michael told us that our journey would last three years. Exactly three years and one month after that first angel party, Bill Clark died." She looked at me questioningly and I continued. "Life felt out of control. Here we were on this incredible spiritual adventure, writing for the Realm, and first, Deb gets sick. Then she has cancer and then chemotherapy and then more medical problems and then her husband dies and then the finances collapse and then she has to move to Texas. And while the friendship that bound Mary Lou, Deb and me continued to unfold in love, it was patently obvious: the journey was over."

Epheniël's voice came so quietly that I could barely hear her reply. "And Deb was gone."

A tear streaked my cheek. "And Deb was gone." I wiped the tear with the back of my hand and my voice rose. "What the hell kind of spiritual adventure is that?"

"Who told you that a spiritual adventure, as you call it, is all fun and laughter? Remember, Soul, the whole purpose of a light being's accepting the human journey is twofold: share love unconditionally and garner learning. You learn through both positive and negative experiences, but I'm sure you have found that more growth comes as a result of the greater challenges in your life."

"Then I'm tired of growth!" I snapped irritably. "I'm tired of pain. Make it stop!"

"You don't need me to make it stop, Soul. You have that power within you. You always have and you know it." When I looked blank, she continued. "When you are in pain, you are in the microcosm. If you move to the Big Picture, the macrocosm, the pain eases."

"I know," I quietly admitted. "I tried. I really did, but it was a hard time and too much was happening too quickly. Life spinning out of my control." At that last word, Epheniel smiled gently, but said nothing. We both knew what she was thinking. She enfolded me for a long moment.

"Do you want to stop for today?" she asked. "This has not been easy for you."

"No," I stated strongly, "I want to continue because when I'm finished with this, I have a question for you, but I won't ask it until I'm done." Epheniel motioned to a park bench some distance from where we stood and I nodded. As we began to walk, I continued.

"Deb's doctors wanted to perform more surgery to correct other medical problems, but with Bill's death and her emaciated physical condition, they knew she would never survive, so when they heard she was moving away, they recommended that she take whatever time she needed to grieve and try to build up her strength and body so another surgery could eventually be scheduled.

"Despite her loving daughter's care, Deb was very unhappy away from the rest of her family and friends. She remained adamant about her children staying in school and their careers, so she tried to make the adjustment, but continued to be unhappy.

"One night as Deb lay sleeping, she dreamed she left her body with the intent to visit me. Deb began her astral travel, and within moments, spotted my house down below. She began her descent quickly. Too quickly. Suddenly realizing that she didn't have the flying thing down pat, and just as suddenly realizing that my garage door was down for the night, Deb crashed into the garage door. Instantly, she was thrust back into her sleeping body in Texas. The next day, she called and asked if I'd been awakened by a crash the previous night. When I heard why she asked, I was saddened to say that I'd slept like a baby. We had a good laugh about it, but the escapade strengthened our resolve to bring them back to Ohio; we began to secretly plan in earnest. Neither of us wanted to go against her family's wishes, but we knew it was best for her emotional health to return.

"When Deb and Cory came to my home for a Thanksgiving visit, we shared our plan with her family. They agreed, and by the end of the visit, most of the glitches had been worked out for their permanent return in January. I had pledged to care for Deb and Cory during the week and her children were able to come on weekends, so we all felt the arrangement would work as well as it could, given the difficult circumstances. Pieces easily fell into place: Deb and Cory found an apartment that week, an Earth angel stepped forward to pay the rent and we all looked forward to January.

"It was in Texas earlier that autumn that Deb got the first strong glimmerings of book #5. She contacted me one day and told me that Michael had instructed her that the next book was difficult and complicated – on religion – and that we were to begin to research the world's major religions. Deb was in a state of panic over that one. Here she was a physical, mental and emotional wreck and Michael wanted us to research the world religions? I raged. *Does he even have a clue as to what's going on here?*"

With one glance at my angel, I held up my hand. "I know, I know. She had contracted with him before incarnation, so I shouldn't have taken it out on Michael, but giving him a piece of my mind felt good. That head-butting thing, I suppose. Anyway, I told her that I'd figure out a plan and call her back. I found a simplistic book, ordered two copies, and, that autumn, Deb and I carefully read about each religion so that we could discuss it all when she and Cory came back at Thanksgiving. We also held the hope that enough of the story would come to Deb so that while they were here, we could get most of the story line down on paper and I could work on it over Christmas break.

"The book on world religions was fascinating and we both learned a lot, but as for a zap of realization, there was none. We did what we had been asked to do: read each religion, studying its tenets, looking for similarities. And while there were obviously many differences among them, they also shared common themes. With that thought firmly implanted in our minds, we waited for

Michael to make the next move. At this point, Deb only knew a few generalities about the book we were to write: it was complicated; the premise seemed to be about the number of humans who have died throughout the centuries in the name of God." I smiled weakly at Epheniel. "God wars. And this was what humankind had done with God's love when we chose to experience the earth realm?"

"Cory and Deb moved back home in January. We were involved in trying to get her physical and emotional problems resolved since her insurance carrier had not been effective out of state. During the appointments and visits and therapies, we continued to wait for Michael to expand the story. Finally, he did in April, and we began to write book #5, *Line in the Sand*.

And in our own reality, spring continued its march, as did our trips to doctor appointments. Deb, in agonizing physical pain, soon had another surgery scheduled for May 30. Even though she had been in remission earlier in Texas, we suspected that to be no longer the case." I paused and looked at Epheniel. "You know, all through that spring as Deb lived each day in debilitating pain, we searched for answers. If she were to discover the Big Picture, learn the lesson, would the cancer go with the lesson? We racked our brains those months, hoping that might be the case. What had Deb learned throughout her ordeal? Simply, we went on a hunt for a miracle. I went on a hunt for a miracle.

"I believed my Faith and Love would find that miracle; I just had to seek it. The rest of the summer, after Deb's her surgery, as I stormed heaven, she and I stormed the medical world together. At the beginning of July, one doctor gave her two months to live. We continued to follow the Doctor/Appointment Trail; it seemed there were at least two appointments every week and we looked at them as part of the Great Miracle Adventure. It was difficult and discouraging, but the thought of the waiting miracle got us through them.

"I learned a valuable lesson during one of these doctor visits. We had finished another disappointing experience, had eaten a casual lunch and were strolling around the grounds so that Deb could gain a bit more balance before facing the return trip.

"For the last several years, I had found feathers that had been placed in my path. They'd always made me smile and I picked them up, acknowledging my gift from the realm. That particular summer, however, every single time I found one feather, I would also find its twin nearby, which I would present it to Deb as soon as possible. We both understood the significance of the paired feathers.

"That day as we strolled the grounds, trying to lift our discouraged spirits, Deb suddenly stopped in her tracks, looked up at me and asked, "Why am I doing this? Why am I putting myself through all of this?"

"Before I had a chance to answer, I looked down. There on the ground, directly in our path, was a perfect, silken feather. I leaned over, picked it up, handed it to her and softly replied, 'Any other questions?' Without another word, I then bent over and searched the ground.

"Deb knew what I was doing and said quietly, 'There are no others.'"

"I replied, 'Deb, there is a mate to that feather. I know it's here – I just have to find it.' Within a heartbeat, I spotted a smaller one off to the side. I grinned at Deb, leaned over and picked it up. 'That's called Faith, Friend,' and slipped it into my pocket. She agreed because we both knew I had enough faith for both of us when hers wavered. We moved on in silence, each lost in our own thoughts, but had not gone more than a few yards when another feather caught my eye – the perfect mate of the first feather in our path. Wordlessly, I picked it up and Deb and I gazed in awe at it. We said nothing, but returned to the car for the trip home. She fell asleep as she always did and I weaved my way through city traffic, protecting my precious cargo.

"Once I was safely on the highway, my mind returned to the three feathers and I chuckled at how highly evolved I had been in believing I would find another feather if I looked hard enough – just like the miracle that I knew would occur. And then, a realization hit me that almost caused me to drive off the road. The Feather Lesson was not *Hold faith and that which you seek shall be yours*. I now realized that the point was *Release and all will unfold as it must*. And even though I understood the lesson, I could not release the need for the miracle that would save my best friend.

"As each doctor sent us to yet another, we took strength from each other and the angelic

realm until finally we found what we'd been seeking: a reprieve from the death sentence. We immediately connected with a reknown group of palliative healers and rejoiced when one of the doctors proclaimed that Deb could live a good several years with the right treatment. That day, I asked the team if they had ever seen a miracle. When they replied that they had seen only little ones, I invited them to take a good, hard look at Deb because hers would be a whopper. They smiled, a bit uncomfortable with the lunatic in front of them, but were gracious, and we left that day, feeling better than we had in a very long time, filled with Hope. She would get the miracle I so desperately prayed for.

"As Deb's illness proceeded, her goal became to live to see Cory graduate from high school in three years. When she said that, I'd gently chide her – my goal was for Keith, Deb and me to rock on rocking chairs when we were in our nineties and reminisce about our Great Adventures. Deb would laughingly agree when I described the picturesque cottage with accompanying mountain, ocean and waterfall in the backyard, our families visiting when they could, but her goal never wavered: Cory's graduation.

"Our summer was spent in the medical world, searching for the miracle; nothing further came for the book. Then, one morning in late July, Michael told her to go to North Carolina in August to visit her oldest son, Jody. Her medical condition was deteriorating, but she wanted to go, so I told her I would again move heaven and earth to help her get there. Since she was so ill, her family made the decision to join her for a vacation. I was thrilled for them. Within a day or so, she told me something that rocked me: I was to go, too. Her family wanted me to come, as well, but I was wracked with indecision. What if we don't get that miracle and this is the last time she will spend time with her family? At last I agreed, hoping I would know when to quietly exit to allow family time if needed. But before we left, Deb received a third message: *Bring book #5*.

"Our time together was spent laughing and talking with her kids and soaking up the warm rays of the sun; neither of us brought up the subject of the book. I figured if it was meant to be, we would know, so I waited patiently for some sign. One late afternoon, Deb and I had been sitting on the porch, drinking in the view of the ocean when she suddenly turned to me. 'It's time.' I knew exactly what she meant and asked if she felt well enough to do it. She nodded and we went up to our room, got her comfortable and I pulled out the book. We started with the latest chapter, which she had not yet read. It gave us the impetus to pick up the story line at that point and move forward with it. We worked for a couple of hours, and were almost to the end of the book when Deb abruptly said that was all she had been given.

"We both knew the ending – we had known it early on, but Michael liked to make lots of insertions before that last period hit the last page, ending a story – and those were still missing. I smiled at Deb and closed my notebook, but inside, I grieved. All summer long, I'd wanted Michael to give my dearest friend the end of the story, not so that I could write it, but so that book #6 would begin to roll and give Deb the Hope that she would live. Now Deb claimed that there would be no more for now. Now was not the time.

I paused a long moment, collecting myself and my thoughts. "When we returned home, I finished all she'd given me and continued to wait for the ending. We'd talked about it earlier and were both willing to leave book #5 in peace if it was to remain unfinished, but should I sit and try to finish it myself? When October came with no word from Michael, and Deb had no sense of which way to go, she said that I could try it if I wished. I cleared a weekend in October to finish *Line in the Sand*. When I sat down to write, my computer suddenly – and expensively – crashed, and we roared over the blatant sign, although truth be told, I would have laughed harder had the Realm fixed the computer instead of the computer repair person. The book was to remain unfinished."

During our vacation, Deb insisted on calling the doctor's office for the results of her most recent blood work. We were told that her cancer was not only out of remission, but was raging throughout her body. Over the next several days, she made the decision to go back to chemotherapy, as painful as it had been, in an attempt to keep the graduation goal. My faith in the miracle only grew stronger. All I could think was that God and the Realm were going let us wait before handing us one whopper of a miracle because Deb's condition continued to deteriorate rapidly. I never once considered the possibility that I would not get that miracle. I had

pledged to hold the faith for both of us; I allowed no doubt to surface.

Blood work results the first week of November revealed that Deb was now in renal failure. My dearest friend – my friend imbued with such courage that I had never seen before and most likely, will never see again – was given two weeks to live. When would the miracle come? As her primary caregiver, I was able to take off time from school to help my friend die. Together, we tied up as many loose ends as we could. Surprisingly, we talked very little – we'd been so close over the years and had talked about so much that, when she lay dying, we became quiet, preferring to just be. Every moment that I spent with her was a treasured gift. And then, on November 21, the world turned upside down once again. With her family and her best friend beside her, Deb Clark quietly released her spirit to God.”

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Radiance

Allow thoughts, feelings and actions to emanate from your inner light. As surely as the sun rises with each new dawn, so shall your love light long to radiate from you to all life. Think love, express love freely and it will return a hundred fold.

How can we do this amidst the constant challenges in our daily lives?

Loved One, ask yourself this: If your life on Earth were not filled with challenges and change, would your spirit grow? Change is a constant, but growth is a choice. You have all chosen paths that will allow your souls expansion and expression. No matter how dark or terrible any challenge may appear, there is always the choice, eminently yours, on how you think, feel and act. It is easy to be grateful when you are feeling all is well. I say to you be grateful even in the face of adversity, for your Higher Self rejoices as each new change or challenge assists in your growth; the angels rejoice with you.

Chapter 12

That same day

Wordlessly, Epheniel cradled me in her arms as sobs wracked my body, my spirit wailing with grief. We remained like that a very long time until it changed to gentle weeping. Totally spent at last, I lay exhausted within her comfort and allowed myself to drift away into sleep. When I awoke, I opened my eyes to discover that my angel was still at my side.

"You were there throughout it all, weren't you?" I asked, knowing her reply.

"Yes, Soul," she answered as she stroked my head. "Throughout it all."

"Even when I was angry with you, God and the entire Universe for allowing such a tragedy to occur – even though I understood Deb had chosen this path?"

She smoothed my hair. "Especially at that time, Soul. That's when you needed me the most, but you didn't know it at the time."

"But I didn't see any feathers," I protested, holding up the Michael feathers. "I thought you'd left me, too."

"Ah, but you didn't want any feathers at that time. Remember? You wanted nothing to do with any of us and we respected your decision. You needed to find your own way. Besides that, when a soul on a human journey grieves, the sorrow is often so loud that it's difficult to hear anything but the soul's wails – especially our words of comfort. We understood that and waited for you to be able to hear and then invite us back into your life. But we never left you, Soul. We would never leave you to face that kind of grief alone."

I sat for a long time, remembering the long, sad journey after her death – one that I was still traveling. "I was stunned for a long time that Deb actually died," I admitted. "What happened to the miracle with her name on it? I was so certain, so very certain ..." I let my voice drift away into nothingness.

"The Big Picture," came the quiet reply. "Once upon a time, space and dimen..."

I didn't let her finish. "Don't bother; I know the party line. Deb asked for this set of challenges and I told her I would walk through them with her. I just didn't want this ending," I protested lamely. "I want my friend to be alive and well."

"Deb is now more Alive and well than she has ever been, Soul. You know that deep within you."

"I want her on my realm again! How many times during those first hellish months did I ask God – beg God – to just bring her back for her family and me? How many times did I try to strike a deal: *If You could just turn back time and we can have a do-over like a playground four square game, then I'd do whatever was asked of me for the rest of my life.* I assured God that no one would ever know – we could hide her from the rest of the world and just be with her a little bit longer and learn from her a little bit more and laugh until tears ran down our cheeks and dance in the early- morning sunshine and sing silly songs and set off on a few more adventures and write a few more books together and philosophize about Life and quilt and sew together and just ..." I paused for the right word, "... be."

"You felt abandoned."

I nodded and then very quietly added, "I wanted her back." I paused and dropped my head, whispering, "I still do."

"She never left you, Soul. Remember that you are as special to her as she is to you. She loves you, Soul, as much as you love her. You will always be connected, even though you may not always feel it." Epheniel gently lifted my face and held it gently, as one would a baby.

"Everything you are feeling – no matter what it is – it's all normal."

"Feeling as if I'm going to go crazy with grief is normal?" I angrily pulled my head up and out of Epheniel's hands. "Seeing Deb everywhere I go, in everything I do, knowing that someone with whom I was so deeply connected on several levels was ripped out of my world – remembering her struggle to breathe at the end and not being able to help her – that's all

normal?" I gazed at my angel a long moment before I calmed down enough to continue. "It took me a long while to recognize the fact that it was not just the death of my friend that I was grieving. There were so many other issues woven within it." Epheniel cocked an eyebrow, but said nothing.

"I lost my best friend, but in my grief, I believed I'd also lost my connection with The Realm. Deb – the Journey – the Realm – my soul – God – they were all interconnected, and when Deb died, it felt as if she'd taken the rest with her. I felt stripped of it all. I was devastated."

"Do you still feel that way?"

I shook my head slowly. "It took me a very long time to separate it all – more than a year, but I finally did. During that time, I also resolved the miracle issue and the painful fact that the journey the three of us had undertaken all those years ago was also over. As much as I tried to remember to look at the Big Picture, because I had been a caregiver for my best friend, it was difficult not to think of myself as a failure."

"Soul, Deb asked you to walk with her all the way through death, didn't she?" I nodded. "Then you did everything you pledged that you would do. Your role was to help sustain her spirit as she walked that difficult path – you couldn't walk it for her. You were both blessed to have walked so closely together at the end of her life. You need to remember that." Epheniel paused in thought as she continued to caress my hair. "You also need to remember the good times, Soul."

"I have trouble remembering her healthy and happy since there was so much pain and sorrow the last two years of her life," I whispered. "I search for her face in my mind, and when it comes, there is only sorrow and pain etched on it."

"That will all come," my guardian promised solemnly. "Trust. Even if it doesn't seem like it, everything really is unfolding as it must." I nodded and she continued. "Tell me what happened after your friend died."

I took a deep breath and gathered my thoughts before continuing. "After the memorial service, I began the difficult process of saying goodbye to her children as each left town. When the last, Cory and Jody, left for North Carolina, I went to the cemetery and had a long talk with my friend."

"You know she wasn't there, right?" came the soft inquiry.

I smiled. "I know, but it was more symbolic than anything else. I told Deb that each of her children had returned to their lives, all embarking on their new journeys without her on this realm. Again, I promised to watch over them with her, figuring that between the two of us on different realms, we might have a better handle on that difficult task." I grinned at Epheniel, who grinned back. "Then, I went home and began to write."

"You found a quiet place?" my angel asked, remembering our earlier conversation. I nodded.

"I was reeling so emotionally out of control that I knew I needed to create a safe place to find some sort of balance. Going into my mind to write was like coming Home, so that's where I went. I began writing the story of our adventures over the previous six years for her children. I emailed them sections of the story every other day and then compiled them into a book just for them: *Silken Feathers*. I wrote from the first week of December until mid- January. In my final section that I sent January 15, I prayed that I would be permitted to continue to write for and with the Realm. Besides losing my best friend, I had also lost my co-writer. I was nervous about ending *Silken Feathers* because I knew it meant that I'd have to leave the safe place and face the world without my friend.

"Then, something amazing happened. Early the next morning, I read my email. There was a message from Deb's son, Beau. He told me that he had book #6 swirling in his head. As I read his words, I was stunned that my prayer had been so quickly answered." Epheniel looked as if she wanted to comment, but I held up my hand. "Wait; it gets better."

"During a snow day two weeks later, I was cleaning out old files. I came upon a copy of an email I'd sent a friend two years earlier, before Deb's diagnosis and Bill's death. It was a description of a dream-that-was-not-a-dream that I had been given the previous night. In it, a little girl had given me a message: *The prayer you pray on the Ides of January will be granted because of its purity.*

“Those words now hit me like a ton of bricks. That email was dated January 10, two years earlier. At the time, I had marveled at the wording: *Ides of January*. Of course, I knew about the Ides of March, so assumed it was January 15. That date came and went quietly, and with Deb’s diagnosis at the end of that month, the memory of the dream faded – until I cleaned out that file.”

“All is unfolding ...”

I smiled. “Yeah, I know.”

“The story continues,” Epheniel added softly.

“The story continues. One journey ends; another begins.”

“Tell me about the sixth book.”

“Instead of spiritual fantasy, the genre for *Star Child*, the first of *The Star Child Trilogy*, is spiritual science fiction, also based on The Michael Messages. My best friend would have loved these books.”

“She does love, them, Soul.” We sat in silence a long time before Epheniel spoke. “Tell me about your friendship with Deb.”

“It was the Friendship of all friendships. We both believed that we’d been together for many lives because our connection was so deep. Deb had once read a description for twin souls and decided that best fit the description of our relationship. I used to tease her about how our Preincarnation meeting might have taken place – how we might have made the decision to join forces at the end of her last lifetime, for that was what she had always known.

“As one light being to another, she would have shared with me all the challenges she chose this time around. Knowing my current fondness for spiritual *underachievement*, I’d have been appalled at the work ahead of her and, most likely, would’ve tried to dissuade her from such a daunting lifetime. She, most likely, would have winked and told me that the decision to join her life was strictly up to me. Most likely, she told me that she’d love me, regardless of my decision. I’m pretty sure that I sighed heavily at that point and agreed to play a role in the last years of her life, vowing to hold the faith for both of us when times got tough and to protect her as much as I could for as long as I could. And when I could no longer do that, move that protection to her beloved children as much as I could for as long as I could.

“On this realm those last years of her life, we spent so much time together that we could finish a sentence we had begun the night before when we were interrupted and had to end a conversation, as well as finishing each other’s sentences during the hundreds of discussions we shared.”

“Deb and I spent time forming our philosophies on Life and the many aspects of our spiritual natures, trying to reconcile it all with the judgment and the condemnation of the world. We wondered at our place in the Big Picture and marveled at the multitude of blessings in our lives. We shared a deep love of reading and writing books, quilting, cross-stitching and mostly, our children. And when we talked of our children, we never had to hold back for fear the other would judge us as bragging. Together, we rejoiced in our children’s accomplishments and cried when they hurt. I was as proud of her children as she was of mine. We looked to each other for parenting advice, as well as a great recipe on a shoestring budget that would feed a flock of kids, especially if it had mushrooms that could be served on the side so as not to contaminate the rest of the meal for those still-naïve taste buds.

“And while run-of-the-mill best friends don’t come with a footnote of in sickness and in health until death do us part, I believe that the very best ones do. When it dawned on us that others found our friendship unique, we decided that one of the many wonderful parts of our friendship was that her children, my children and those who knew us, were able to witness and understand the true meaning of *Friendship*. Deb Clark was my twin soul, my teacher, and my friend.” I gulped for air as my eyes filled once again. How many tears had I cried? My voice quavered. “I miss her so much.”

“I know,” Epheniel whispered. “I know.” We sat a long time in silence before my angel whispered, “What have you learned?”

“Actually,” I said, as I swiped at my face with my sleeve. “I knew you were going to ask me that question at some point, so I’ve given thought to the answer. I’ve learned a great deal over these difficult last few years. When I stormed the heavens for a miracle and thought I’d found

none, I was shattered." I paused again in thought. "A multitude of lessons for me has come out of that. I gazed at the beauty of my surroundings before looking at Epheniel.

"Perhaps I did get my miracle in a thousand little ways. I know Deb's life story and true purpose will help move this planet toward the connection that we consciously or subconsciously seek as spiritual beings on a human journey. That, alone, is pretty miraculous: that one spirit's journey could so strongly impact others in such a gentle manner. Perhaps the love, faith and quiet courage she displayed even as she took her last breath will inspire those searching for their true journey.

"I know I've cried more in the last six years than the rest of my years put together. I now look back on those times and acknowledge the tears not only as an outpouring of grief, but as growing pains. As you are also well aware, I am, most likely have always been, and most likely will remain throughout all eternity, a relentless – as opposed to *pigheaded*, thank you very much – heaven-stormer. I have butted my head many times over these last six years, quite often against the angelic realm, as you so well know." When my angel's eyes twinkled in delighted memory, I had the distinct impression that she had enjoyed the head butting, too.

"Another thing I've learned is that a little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing. Once I discovered that humankind and angels had the same mission statement – just operating in different form – and that we were to work together toward the same goal, I became a bit of a loose canon. And being able to operate only on the intellectual realm, such as my intellect is, I quickly honed my skills of spiritual logic to an art form. I took a deep breath. I had given this a lot of thought and knew it was important to verbalize it. "During these last five years as I have struggled to find understanding. Enlightenment. I have cajoled, whined, debated, demanded, discussed, schemed, pleaded, wept with grief and, occasionally, given up on me and/or the angelic realm. Thankfully, however, I have also celebrated, cheered, laughed, exulted, reveled, rejoiced, wept with joy and have been filled with loving gratitude that the angelic realm refused to give up on me during tough times, especially when there was no miracle to be found."

I cocked my head toward Epheniel in mock protest. "How is it that the angelic realm can function without Marty Boyle's input? I had such a whiz-bang ending to that whole cancer scenario and someOne else had another agenda? How's that possible?" I shook my head slowly, as if I were truly befuddled. "I also learned to my shock that even though my friend is gone, the sun continues to rise and set, the earth to spin, and the stars to shine." I paused as I considered her. "Now, that's the miracle!"

"She'll always be with you."

"Darn right. The highly evolved devious side of me made sure of that." Epheniel cocked an eyebrow. "Throughout the course of our friendship, I would occasionally find something that had Deb's name written all over it and would buy it for her. She'd love it and usually try to pay me for it. I'd remind her that it was a gift and that propriety frowned on that sort of thing. Occasionally, I'd pay for lunch or dinner or a carton of milk or some such silliness. She'd pull out her wallet and I'd wave it away and tell her I had to run or that she could pay me next time. I tried to keep coming up with some kind of valid excuse why the money should stay in her pocket, not mine. I knew how expensive four children are – she had six.

"Then one morning, after we knew she would not live much longer, I happened to buy her a cappuccino. Out came the wallet once again and I stopped her.

"How will I ever pay you now?' she asked when I once again refused to accept her money.

"Aha! I thought. I have you now! I looked her squarely in the eye and offered her a deal: 'Well, Friend, as I see it, you have two options before you. You can either pull out that wallet again and I'll tally up a bill that'll knock your socks off with the accrued, compound interest over these many years.' I paused dramatically. "Or if you agree to watch over me the rest of my life, we can call it even.' I smiled sweetly at her. 'Your choice, Deb. Which shall it be?'"

"Her eyes twinkled and her mouth crinkled into that pixie smile of hers. I had her cornered and she knew it. 'I think I'll choose to watch over you,' she replied. I grinned back at her with the knowledge that I had just made a sucker deal with my best friend. It would have been far easier

for her to reach into her wallet and hand me several bucks. Now she was stuck with me for my entire lifetime.” I grinned again at the angel at my side. “And you know better than anyone that watching over a loose canon is not a simple task.”

“Sounds like the deal of a lifetime,” smiled Epheniel.

“More like the deal for a lifetime!”

“So she’s with you.”

“Yeah,” I said, “I may not feel her around me, but more than a few times, I’ve heard her favorite songs on the radio and know she’s dropped by to check in on me. I have to keep reminding myself not to feel cheated for having her in my life only a few years. I would have wanted a lifetime friendship with her, although I think we may have crammed the span of a lifetime friendship into those all-too-short years. As for the feathers, however, once she died, I stopped finding paired ones. I guess now she has access to all the feathers she wants and no longer needs them as a reminder.”

“But you do?”

I thought a long moment before answering. This was an important question and I wanted to be able to phrase my answer well. “No, I don’t think so. I enjoy finding the feathers and always acknowledge them, but I don’t *need* them anymore.

“I guess another thing I’ve learned is that it makes little sense to be a professional heaven-stormer, as much as I enjoy it. It’s all unfolding as it must, regardless of my own magnificent, well-laid-out, yet very human plans. My problem is ...” I glanced over to my smiling angel and quickly amended the wording. “One of my problems is that control thing. It must be the teacher in me. I like to be in control especially of my life, and find it challenging to just give up the struggle some days and accept, but I’m working on that – most days. Like the poster.”

Epheniel’s eyebrows raised in question. “Ah, yes, the poster. Now that was an interesting little episode.”

“Yeah, well that poster episode pretty much describes me. You see, when life’s little disappointments would occur, Deb would state, ‘Well, it obviously was not meant to be.’

“‘What do you mean?’ I’d storm. ‘You’re not even going to argue with the Realm over that?’ She’d just smile and shake her head and I’d wonder how she could so easily release her will.” I leaned closer to my angel so my voice would not carry. “Frankly, it used to drive me crazy. Perhaps Michael and I have more in common than I thought with that *battle thing*.”

“Well, once when Keith and I visited our daughter, Meg, I spied a beautiful poster of Michelangelo’s *Creation of Adam* in a corner of her room. ‘Why don’t you have it hanging on your wall?’ I asked incredulously.

“Meg looked at me and smiled. ‘Mom, I tried hanging it on my wall, but it kept falling off. After the third attempt, I knew it wasn’t mine to have. Do you want it?’” Did I want it? Yes! I hugged her and accepted the unexpected gift. When we returned home, I found a hammer and twelve nails, and promptly hung the thing.” I smiled at Epheniel. “That poster’s going nowhere!” I ended triumphantly.

“So the lesson learned there was ...?”

I sat up straight and looked Epheniel squarely in the eye. “Oh, it’s a very important spiritual concept,” I assured my angel, trying to keep the twinkle out of my eye. “If heaven-storming fails, grab a hammer and twelve nails and pound the sucker to the wall.”

“Sounds highly evolved. I’ll look for that when the Handbook is published. With that kind of advice, it should be a bestseller.”

“Works for me, Angel.” I cocked my head at her. “Interesting that you should use that phrase – *highly evolved*. I really have come to believe that all humans are highly evolved. They would have to be to make the difficult choice of Earth, wouldn’t they?” I asked. Epheniel nodded and smiled, pleased that I had discovered the concept on my own. “I mean, take me for example,” I grinned.

“I did,” smiled Epheniel.

I ignored her lame attempt at humor and continued. “Here, I’ve been a professional heaven-stormer all these years and what has it gotten me?”

“A lumpy head?”

"A what?" I asked.

"You know – butting heads with the Realm – lumpy head?"

What is she – a standup comic now?

"Actually, I'm sitting down." *Darn. It's blatantly obvious that it's been several years since my last visit; I forgot that not only can my angel read my thoughts, but she has a decidedly lame sense of humor.*

"Okay, okay, while I've been fine-tuning my highly *evolvidness*, you've obviously been trying to hone your sense of humor. We're even. Anyway," I glared at her, "the point is: *what really is the point?* Why couldn't I just be like Deb and placidly accept things as they come, acknowledging that all is unfolding as it must? My daughter could do it; my friends could do it. What was wrong with me?"

"Shall I compile the list?" came the sweet-voiced reply.

"Boy, you really are on a roll today, aren't you?" She nodded, obviously pleased with herself. I reminded myself to locate a humor-honing handbook so we could do some major work on her another time. I cleared my throat to get her back on task. "But then I came up with another thought: obviously, I'm a strong-willed person with a strong personality." I sneaked a peek, expecting to see my guardian rolling on the floor, engulfed in laughter. To her credit and my great relief, she just smiled.

"Obviously," she agreed. "I'm still putting out brush fires on the edge of my robe from your blow-torch anger and frustration."

I reddened. "Sorry about that, Angel." Chagrined, I moved on quickly. "Now, could we get back to this?"

"Please do," she replied.

"Okay, my point is we are each created the way we are for a specific purpose. One thing I learned is to stop trying to be someone I'm not. And while I'll most likely always work on releasing the need for control, I can forgive myself and can also accept me for ..., well, *me!*" I paused in thought. "Know what else I've learned after all these years?" She cocked her head questioningly. "That whole on the outside, looking in thing."

"Tell me," she replied. "I know this to be a major driving force within you."

"I've decided that it's all relative – *outside vs. inside.*" When she looked blank, I continued. It had taken me a very long time to come to that conclusion and I suddenly realized its importance and my need to verbalize it. "Actually, I think it's a personal thing. Each of our earthly selves has our own little realities – like squares on that tapestry that Michael talked about. We also have our own perceptions of our realities and those of others, further compounding the issue. And while I would like to feel my connection with *All That Is*, I have come to the conclusion that there may be those who have the feeling connection, yet wish they had the intellectual understanding I possess. They might look at me and feel as if I am on the inside, looking out and they're outside."

I paused and tapped my chin in thought. "Who knows? Maybe it's a case of *The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.* Regardless, for as much as we hang around together, I think we humans are pretty solitary – and often lonely – in our own little realities, thus reinforcing the yearning for other perceived realities, you know?"

"We have a great deal in common, Soul," whispered my angelic guide.

"How so?"

"I, too, am on the outside," Epheniel answered. My face must have registered shock and she hurried on to explain. "As you know, souls choose to participate in the earth experiment, knowing how difficult this realm can be." I nodded. "But besides the challenges that face all of you on a daily basis, you also get to experience the physicality of your realm – something that angels cannot."

"Physicality?" I asked. "Are you telling me you want to sweat and get all dirty from cleaning out dust bunnies under the bed and pick up puppy droppings and scrub the toilet and have your muscles ache from spreading mulch on the garden and rake leaves and shovel snow?"

Epheniel nodded. "Those sound ..., " she paused as she searched for the right word.

"... heavenly," I supplied.

"What I am – the core of me – is the same as you: we are both light beings working together for the same purpose. The form you have assumed is a human one, but an angel is a beam of energy. As such, I can only imagine what it feels like to hold two squirming puppies in your arms or deeply inhale the fragrance of a flower or dance to the beat of a hard-driving song or wipe the tears from a young child's eyes or make love." She paused while I tried to absorb all that she had said.

"Whoa. I never thought that an angel might yearn for what I possess," I admitted.

"You possess a great deal, Soul. It always amazes me how quickly journeying souls forget that once they incarnate."

"So, this earth realm thing looks pretty good to you, huh?" She nodded. "We're a good match, then – you've got the celestial realm down pat and I happen to be your local expert on the earth realm. Together, we've got both bases covered!"

"You've learned a great deal over the years, Soul," Epheniel repeated. She paused and looked at me solemnly. "Tell me. How is the grief process going?"

"You know, I wonder if we humans ever end that process. I still mourn for my father and he died more than twenty-five years ago. And while I no longer weep for him, there's a sad spot within my soul. I think we just learn to live without our loved ones on this realm – the grief softens with time, but never leaves.

"Since Deb died, I have sought to better understand death. My father died when I was twenty-seven years old; I had never experienced the death of someone I loved before that time, other than the occasional childhood goldfish or hamster."

"No grandparents' death?" Epheniel asked.

I shook my head. "Interestingly enough, my grandparents were gone by the time I was two. We had few aunts and uncles, so my father's death became the first death experience for me. And since he had died a cancer death, I knew what Deb was asking when she asked me to walk with her to the end of this lifetime." I thought a moment before continuing.

"Actually, I've read countless books since Deb died, trying to better understand life, death and afterlife. I think I have worked through a critical chunk of the grief now, although I know I'm not yet finished. For me, it was not enough to let Deb go in peace and work to forgive myself for not finding her miracle." I glanced at my angel and quietly corrected myself. "*My* miracle. Once she died, I believed my task to be one of trying to understand what happens next when a journeying soul leaves the earth realm after a lifetime."

"What did the books tell you?" Epheniel asked.

"It didn't take too many books to recognize a pattern. All of them were written by highly respected/evolved authors, but the realization I made was one those authors probably didn't expect me to make. I couldn't understand why there wasn't just one universal answer to the question: *What happens after death?* As I pored through book after book, the answer to my question always began the same way: *the soul leaves behind its physical shell and returns Home*. However, it took me more than two years of reading and thought to finally discern that, depending on the author's set of paradigms, *Home* was the essential word."

"Paradigms?" Epheniel interrupted. "Why did you realize paradigms play a role in determining *Home*?"

"Well, let me talk it all out and then you tell me if I'm right," I replied. Epheniel nodded, as I got up and began to pace the room. Thoughts crowded my brain and I took a moment to sort them out before beginning. I knew this was critical to my intellectual understanding. I took a deep breath.

"The world is made of energy. Everything in the world is made of energy. God is energy. We are energy. Energy vibrates; hence, everyone and everything in the universe, regardless of realm, possesses vibrational energy. Deb could see the energy grid everywhere she looked." I glanced up to see Epheniel smile and nod. "Okay. Remember, I teach elementary school science, so it didn't take long for me to figure out that before I could understand death, I needed to try to understand some of the basic physical laws of the universe."

A soft voice interrupted. "As humankind understands and interprets them at this point of your evolution."

I nodded in agreement. “Point taken.” I paced a bit more before continuing. “Well, I knew that there’s a basic scientific law called *The Conservation of Energy Principle*. It states that the total amount of energy in the universe is constant. Translated, that means that energy can be neither created nor destroyed; energy either remains in its original form or is transferred to other forms. I gotta tell you I was pretty amazed when I looked at that principle through the Big Picture mindset.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, Deb always claimed that human science has been unwittingly paving the way for Enlightenment. I think this is what she was talking about.”

“Do you find it at all ironic that the very group who sought to ban the feeling part of humans, will be the ones to discover the truth?”

I nodded and hurried on to explain. “Okay, so when we die, we leave behind the physical shell while our energy – our soul – makes the transfer.”

“To?” prodded my angel.

I nodded and took a breath. “Well, let’s talk about something else first. We wrote our charts before incarnation, and hopefully, we’ve taken care of all the stuff we wanted to accomplish this life- time or at least most of it, and the rest will be tagged on for another lifetime.”

Epheniel smiled. “*Stuff?*”

“Yeah, you know,” I grinned. “*Stuff*. Anyway, this is where all those books and authors differ. Some talk about going to afterlife guided by angels; others write about loved ones greeting you; or still others claim that the guide who has accompanied you through this particular life journey takes you Home. All these books claim authenticity, and I think they’re correct in doing so, for after reading so many differing scenarios, I came to a conclusion. As I dug for answers, initially, I believed that each individual soul transfers to its corresponding energy vibration.” I stopped the pacing and looked at my angel.

“You’re doing fine, Soul. Keep going.” Her voice was like soft velvet.

“I think this is where the paradigm thing comes in,” I continued. “I have come to believe that while on earth, if humans lock themselves into certain paradigms – belief systems – that are limiting, narrow-minded or judgmental, then at death, transfers of such energy would be to a lower vibration level.”

“Are you changing your mind about the existence of hell, Soul?”

“Oh, no!” I replied. “I’m still of the firm opinion that there is no hell. But for some people who hold to the belief that they will spend time in a type of hellish existence, there is. I believe that rather than hell being a place, it’s a state of mind. I now think that we create our own reality of afterlife, based on our beliefs.” I grinned. “Actually, I’ve come to believe that we also create our own realities on this realm, too. Our beliefs determine our human and afterlife experiences. It’s got to be an individual kind of thing.”

“What about heaven?” Epheniel asked.

“Well, since you brought it up, I have to say, my ideas of heaven have changed drastically, too, not only from my childhood God, but from the beginning of this journey.” I grinned at Epheniel. “Truth be told, that particular paradigm was given up rather reluctantly. I kind of liked the idea of putting in my time on earth and then going to heaven where I could hang out with God for all of eternity.” I sighed. “But that sounds a bit silly, given everything I now know. I had to let that paradigm go with a lot of others.” I looked at her. “How am I doing?”

“You’re doing very well, Soul, but let me interrupt. If your soul’s desire is to go to heaven and just hang out, you could. Remember, a plethora of options are available, none of which are silly. Also remember, that all of this is symbolic. It is impossible to describe the afterlife experience, using human senses, but we’ll talk more of that in a moment. Now, let’s go back a bit. What other paradigms have you released?”

“Well, let’s take purgatory, for instance. I grew up in the Catholic Church, hearing that all of my venial sins would sentence me to an undetermined amount of time in purgatory. Well, obviously, no heaven, no hell, no purgatory, but I began to think: *What about those who believe in purgatory*, which was eerily reminiscent of the question I asked at age twelve: *What about all those Friday meat-eaters?* With that energy transfer thing happening, contained in that purgatory

belief system, it makes sense that for those humans, purgatory would be the place of transfer.”

“But you just said you don’t believe in it.”

“I don’t; others do. Like hell, I think purgatory is not a place, but a result of human belief systems. And, as for the length of time, since there is time only in this realm, that would be dependent on how long it takes the soul to understand that it does not need to be there. Once understanding comes and the soul’s vibration level has been increased out of that lower vibration level, I believe it is then free to move on to other afterlife tasks, whatever those may be.”

“I’d like to hear more of your perception before we continue. Go on. What else do you think limits a soul’s vibration level?”

Suddenly, I stopped pacing and thought for a long moment. “On those days when the Big Picture is clear, I understand that we humans need to be continually working to increase our vibration levels, so that when we die, our energy is not transferred onto a limited level.”

“Exactly how do you plan on doing that?”

“Well, let me tell you what I think and then you tell me. Deal?” When she nodded, I continued. “What limits vibration levels? I believe the first and foremost one is just how we live our lives – those millions and millions of individual choices we make over the course of a lifetime that we talked about earlier. If we choose to live lives in unconditional love, learning, growing and moving forward together, we vibrate at a higher level. Conversely, if we choose to live a life of narrow-mindedness, judgment and condemnation, when we die, our energy will be transferred to its comparable lower vibratory level.”

“Anything else, Soul?”

I nodded. “Addictions come into play here, too, I believe.”

“Addictions?”

I nodded. “Alcohol, food, power, gambling, drugs, money, sex, tobacco, fame ... The list could go on forever. I guess we could call an addiction anything on the earth plane to which we habitually or compulsively devote excessive time and energy, *excessive* being the operative word. Given that, the addiction could include just about anything. Regardless of the nature of addictions, when we cling to anything of this realm, it makes sense that it would affect vibration levels as we live on the earth plane, which ultimately determines our energy transfers at death. Kind of like whatever we’re still clinging to at death stays with us, weighing us down. Seems to me the practical thing to do would be to face our addictions squarely and overcome as many as possible.” I paused and smiled. “Remember Zeke’s Oil Change Philosophy on Learning Life Lessons: *You can either pay me now or pay me later.*” Epheniel nodded. “I think it’s like that. And as difficult as it is to conquer addictions, it’s wiser to recognize them in your life, knowing it will lower the soul’s vibration.”

Epheniel put up her hand. “Okay, Soul, well done. You’ve given this a great deal of thought, but let’s clear up a few things. You’re correct about the vibrational part, but remember not to cast judgment on vibration layers. The soul has asked to be at that level; placement is not the result of limited success.” When I look confused, she changed gears.

“Try this. Imagine yourself vibrating.” She waited a moment. “Now?”

“Yes, but let’s change that. I want you to actually vibrate,” she said.

I shrugged. I stood up and wiggled all over, giggling the entire time. Suddenly, a thought struck me. “Hey, how fast do you want me to do this?”

“My point exactly!” Epheniel replied. “You see, everything vibrates and there is a vibrational energy transference at death, but everything vibrates at different speeds. What you might perceive as lower levels are actually slower speeds. But remember, these slower speeds are a gift for humanity. They are the catalysts for the massive change that humankind is seeking. Without those slower vibratory levels, there could be no change. Without change, the experiment fails.” She paused.

“When humans leave their physical bodies, they vibrate very slowly. Remember, they carry the precious lessons and learning they accumulated during their human lifetimes. On earth, this learning is in the core of every atom; at death, the soul takes it for the next part of the journey. Along with this is all the baggage that comes with humanity, which considerably slows down the vibrations. While continuing to hold the lessons, each soul seeks to vibrate faster and faster to

free themselves of the Earth baggage, whether it be any type of infatuation or addiction or obsession. As these are released, their vibrational levels increase.”

“Is someOne telling them how fast to vibrate?”

“There are many entities whose chosen task is to urge them on, acting as a sort of celestial cheerleaders, but remember those souls who have taken on the greatest challenges, often have the most baggage, but they also carry many contributions for the God Pool.”

I thought a long moment. “I’m betting negativity plays a huge part in determining that vibration speed, too. If we choose to live in fear or hatred or bitterness or greed or selfishness or ... you name it, it seems obvious to me that those choices would also naturally slow the soul’s vibrations.” I began to pace again, my mind racing.

“I also learned something else that rocked me to the core when realization hit,” I began. “I had understood that when someone you love dies, there’s a natural grief process. I was well aware of the stages of grief.” Epheniel nodded. “I knew that some go through the stages more quickly than others; there is no one-size-fits-all. But six months into my own grief process for Deb, I read that excessive grief can impede progression in the afterlife.”

Epheniel gave me an odd look. “Your progression or Deb’s?”

“Deb’s. I thought I had let Deb go, but when I learned that my grief may have been holding her back from the tasks she wanted to accomplish on the other realm, I reacted in typically Marty Boyle fashion – I ranted and raved, stomped my feet and stuck out my lower lip.” I had the good grace to grin at Epheniel.

She giggled, and then became serious. “Let’s talk about that, Soul. You’ve searched long and hard for your answers, but in this instance, you’ve got to rethink.”

“About which part?” I asked.

“Anger is a natural stage of human grief. What you need to understand, however, is your love of and for Deb, and that your resultant grief did not deter her in her tasks in afterlife. Once you cross over, you understand that time only exists on the Earth realm and in a matter of moments, you will be reunited with loved ones. Those on the other side of the veil possess that understanding, but Earth travelers do not, which brings grief. This, in turn, slows your healing. Deb rejoices that you are staying the path, even though it is difficult to do so without her. All of us in the angelic realm rejoice when journeying souls can pick up the pieces of their lives, shattered by tragedy.” Epheniel held my hand. “Walking the earthly path of grief is difficult for all those who come to the earth realm. It is one of its greatest challenges. Like all of those others, you had much to face and work through.” She gazed into my eyes. “Yes, for the well being of the human left behind, eventually, you must release the loved one to God, but grief counseling would have helped you find balance and peace.”

“I know, but all I could think was I was just the Best Friend Left Behind. I was leery that those in therapy, trying to cope with the loss of a life mate, would find my loss inconsequential in comparison to their losses. I was fearful of being judged unworthy of help.”

“And as a result of operating from a misplaced sense of fear, your grief overwhelmed you.”

I nodded. “Oh, it gets worse. I had loaded myself up with guilt. First, I couldn’t find a doctor that could cure her. Then, I couldn’t find a miracle with her name on it. Then, I learned that my grief might be slowing her transition. It was too much for me. Quite simply, I staged the biggest spiritual tantrum I could concoct.”

“And now?”

“I’m glad to hear my grief wasn’t holding her back from further evolution, and I certainly wish I had known that at the time, but seeing as everything unfolds as it must, I guess there was a reason for it.” I remembered Epheniel’s words on my need for answers. “Somewhere. I guess I’ll know when it’s my time to know it.

“Having lived this experience will allow you to better understand others’ grief. Do you understand?” I nodded.

“As for Deb” I replied, “I remember the Big Picture much more these days, but occasionally, tears continue to fall when the enormity of the loss overwhelms me. I try to remember not to focus on the sorrow, but the honor I was granted in being a part of the last years of her life.” I paused. “But I do have a question about that.”

"The question you brought today?"

"No – another one – one that I eventually hope to be able to answer on my own. "How do earth journeyers know which experiences have their names on it?" Epheniel looked puzzled. "For all these years, I've searched for understanding – to feel the Connection – the search for Enlightenment." She nodded. "How do I know if that understanding is mine to have this time around? Perhaps I chose not to have it this lifetime. The question is: *How do you know?*"

Epheniel smiled. "Quiet the noises and listen. Eventually, you will know." I thought a long time about that and finally nodded.

"I've given that whole *Martha of Bethany* thing a great deal of thought these last few months – you know, doing the dishes while others get to sit at the feet of the Lord?" Epheniel nodded. "At first, I tried to embrace the whole concept in my attempt to balance, mostly because so many of the books I read suggested it, but it didn't make me happy because it wasn't who I am.

"Finally, I stormed that I didn't want to be a pot scrubber; Martha of Bethany chose it, not I." I peered at her closely and my voice strengthened. "If you want me to be a pot scrubber, then I'm afraid you're going to have to look elsewhere, Angel. I now believe that my strength is for another purpose. I will no longer be content sweeping out celestial dust bunnies while those around me soar. I'm putting you all on notice. If I don't get to soar this life because of some highly evolved choice I made once upon a time, fine, but don't look to me for pot-scrubbing duties. The maid just quit." I paused to let my words sink in before quietly adding, "How do you like them apples, Angel?"

"I don't know what Epheniel thinks, friend, but I've been telling you for years that you don't have to play the role of pot scrubber."

I gasped at the sound of the voice and spun around. Deb. She stood behind us, smiling, free from pain and sorrow. I bolted out of the chair and ran to her, tears streaming down my face. We embraced and I could only tell her over and over again how much I loved her. She held me in her arms a long time, crooning softly to me, as I had done for her so many times over the course of the last few years. "I know," she kept saying, "I love you, too."

"This is too hard," I began once I could finally talk. "I can't do this without you."

"Yes, you can, Marty," she said softly, as she gently wiped the tears that continued to streak my cheeks. "Look at you. You are doing it."

"But I don't want to do it anymore," I protested. "It's too much. I miss you too much. It hurts too much. I feel lost too much."

She laughed gently. "I know. I felt the same way when Bill died, remember? But love got me through those challenging times – the love of my children and friends and people whom I had never even met who sent love and prayers to me. That same love will get you through this. It will get easier with time," she promised solemnly. "We're separated only by the thinnest of veils; we'll re-main as deeply connected on two realms as we were on one. It's just a veil, friend – just a veil."

I pulled myself out of Deb's arms so I could see her. She glowed with a light I never knew existed. As I gazed at her radiance, the awe thing hit again and she laughed and wagged a finger at me. "You're doing it again!" she scolded playfully. "Plug in that Awe Checking Device!"

I laughed merrily and hugged her again. "How are you?" I asked. "Are you happy?"

Deb smiled and nodded. "I am *Home*."

"You look happy, but mostly, you look filled with peace."

"I am. I continue to work toward peace on this realm, as I did on the Earth realm. It's still not an easy task. Are you ready to help or do you need to work through the grief longer?"

I hung my head and whispered, "I was very angry for six weeks, Deb." I paused, wondering how much she knew. "I'm afraid I went on a bit of a rampage."

"I know," she giggled. "You don't get angry often, but when you do, it's a doozy." She spoke softly again. "Tell me, why did you stop raging?"

"Sheer exhaustion," I admitted. "It takes considerable energy to hold a celestial grudge and I couldn't carry that burden a moment longer, so I finally gave it up, but let me tell you, it was one helluva battle!" I paused and my voice lowered. "When I could bear it no longer, I emptied myself

of all of the pain and sorrow I'd been carrying and gave it to God, hoping that peace would fill the emptiness left behind."

"And did it?" Deb asked.

I nodded. "I think so. I'm still exhausted, but it's a quiet exhaustion, not an angry one."

"What did you learn at the end of the battle?"

"Mostly that you were still dead and that I was still alive and no amount of ranting, raging or pouting was going to change that. When I tried to send light soon afterward, it didn't feel the same as it used to and I worried that I might have done some permanent damage to my soul in my raging."

"No, there's no permanent damage," answered Deb. "Love is the only permanence." My friend grasped my hands in hers. "Love, time and patience with yourself, Marty. It will all come back, just as you have. Trust that all is unfolding as it must, as difficult as these times might be."

"I'm trying, but it's hard. Perhaps we can just think of me as a work in progress."

"I agree." She paused and then added, "I brought someone with me today. Are you up for another visitor?" I gulped and nodded. Deb pointed a short distance away and my eyes followed. There stood my beloved father, smiling and healthy-looking, arms extended. I glanced up at Deb. Would embracing him send my friend away? She knew my concern and smiled. "Go on," she urged. "I'll wait here."

I walked slowly over to the man who had been such an enormous influence on me for twenty-seven years. He continued to smile, love pouring from every part of his being. He engulfed me in a bear hug and we remained like that a long time. "I love you, Dad. I've missed you."

"I know," he assured me, as Deb had done, "I love you, too, but I have been with you, your mother and your sisters for all these years throughout all the good times and the tough ones, as well."

"I figured. By the way, you have eight wonderful grandchildren, Dad, as well as several grandcats and granddogs!" I couldn't resist teasing him. "You've also had several grandgoldfish and grandguinea pigs ..., but I think you know all that, don't you?"

He nodded. "I like your puppies."

"Barney died right before Deb was diagnosed," I explained. "And then the world caved in when she died, and as a result, I went into a dark, sad place. The puppies brought me back," I admitted, amazed that I was having this conversation. "I learned that it's rather difficult to effectively pout with two puppies tugging at your heartstrings." My father smiled. "And as for pouting, it also didn't help to continue the rant while Deb and the angelic realm – and most likely you, too – kept niggling at me."

"*Niggling*? Is that its proper form?" My father had been a writer, so his question was not unexpected. I distinctly heard two sets of giggles coming from across the room and my suspicions were confirmed.

"Aha!" I said. "I thought so! As for your question, Dad, the answer is yes, but that darn friend of mine, angelic realm and the whole blasted Universe, including you, I strongly suspect, moved it into an art form. Someone kept niggling somewhere deep inside of me: *You have been taught. It is time to put that knowledge to use. Will you react with self-pity or respond with love?* It's that darn Big Picture thing again going on here. So, the bottom line is that some days, I allow myself to feel good and sorry for me and Deb's family and friends until that niggling thing starts up again and I have no choice but to look at the Big Picture." I glanced at Deb and Epheniel again. "I don't always like it," I yelled loudly, but then quietly admitted, "but I'm working on it."

"Glad to hear it," smiled my father. "I've got to get a move on, but since we've had this visit, look for future ones. Maybe now it will be easier to hear me since your grief isn't quite as loud."

"I promise, Dad. I love you," I said again as we hugged farewell.

"I love you, too, Martha. Be gentle with yourself. You are greatly loved."

"Okay, Pop. I'll try." And with that, my father left. I sighed and walked back to Deb and Epheniel.

"I suppose you have to go now, too, Deb?" She nodded. "I have to say goodbye to you again?" I paused, looking at my angel. "That's another thing I've noticed. I'm having a hard time saying goodbye to friends and family members these days, but I suppose that's normal, too,

right?" When Epheniel nodded and smiled, I whispered to Deb, "She thinks everything is normal. She's a great one to have hanging around when you're going through a major crisis, emotional or otherwise!"

Deb grinned. "I know," she said, "Epheniel is perfect for you. Remember how I wanted an angel like her before that first angel party?"

"Fluff chick," I grinned. She nodded. "But don't let her pretty name and appearance fool you for one second," I warned. "This is no fluff chick angel standing before us. Trust me – I know." Epheniel smiled innocently and then flexed her arm muscle impressively. I glanced back at Deb. "She's as strong as I am. Together, we're a formidable force!"

"Speaking of a formidable force, what about me?" The voice boomed around and through us, and I could only laugh. I turned and found the archangel dressed as a professional wrestler. He wore purple satin boxing shorts, purple shoes and a huge golden belt. He swirled a gold-lined, deeper purple satin cape around him. But as stunning as his garb was, my attention was drawn to his muscles. Big muscles. Huge muscles. Celestial steroids muscles. He flexed impressively, strutting the room.

Deb, Epheniel and I roared with laughter. "Hello, Michael," I finally managed to say. "Yes, you are certainly a part of our formidable, stylish force!" When we had regained our composure, I said, "Thank you for the feathers, Michael. I'll make sure to give Mary Lou hers."

"You're welcome. I know your fondness for them – even in the light of your sorrow."

The archangel turned to Deb. "Hey, Charge, what's happenin'? Good to see you and Bruce together again. Another formidable force!"

Deb smiled at her former guardian. "Yep. Formidable forces all around us, Mik-ay-el."

"She's doing well, isn't she?" he said as might a proud papa. "Recognizing and learning lessons left and right!"

I blushed and glanced at Deb. My Best Friend. She nodded, her face wreathed in smiles. I knew our time together was quickly coming to an end and my heart began to race. "You'll be back, right?" I asked anxiously and then hurried on to explain, "I mean, I don't want to keep you from your work or anything, but I need you in my life in order to do my work, you know – at least until I can get used to living without you in my daily life. And don't forget, we have a book to finish!"

Deb smiled gently. "I know, Friend. I'll always be here with you. And while you may not be able to hear me, I will always hear you. As I recall," she grinned, "we made a deal."

I smiled, a bit embarrassed at my devious nature. "You don't really mind, then – keeping watch over a *loose cannon*?" Doubts began to surface. "Because if you'd rather break off the deal ..." my voice faded.

"Renege on a deal?" she asked, her voice rising. "Never! The deal stands!"

"Okay, Deb, but consider this fair warning. I am learning to trust myself and know all answers are within me. I plan on living a good, long time and having a gaggle of adventures. I plan on writing for and with the Realm the rest of that very long life." I hugged her. "Oh, and by the way, I plan on soaring with you one fine day, as well, so hopefully you've fine-tuned your landings!"

"Ye mean fine-tweaked, don't ye?" Zeke had appeared beside Deb.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came to say goodbye!" I cried. I leaned over and hugged him and noted that his apron strings were tied securely.

"Thanks, Lassie," he replied. "When it comes to apron ties and Life, there's no one else quite like ye. I've not had a bit of trouble with those darn ties since you triple-knotted them. Thanks!"

I smiled and teased, "Oh, I bet you say that to all the souls, but that's what friends are for! I watch over your apron strings and you watch over me!"

His face crinkled in delight and I knew how much I had grown to love him as well.

I turned back to Deb. "It will be fun to soar with you one day."

Deb giggled. "My landings are so much better these days, as is everything else. Just you wait and see!" My best friend and I hugged each other tightly. "One of these days," she whispered in my ear, "we'll do just that. Tell Mary Lou that I love her. The three of us still have

lots to do. Until next time, dear friend.”

I gazed at her, trying to drink her in, hoping this moment would stay with me. A not-so-subtle cough broke the silence. Deb laughed.

“All right, already, Mik-ay-el. Zeke, Marty and Epheniel, Mary Lou and Loiteim and Michael and I and the rest of the Universe have lots to do together!”

“Until next time,” I softly repeated. With love, I released Deb and she faded from my view. Again, I sighed and looked at my other celestial friends. “Well, I don’t know about your schedules, but I’ve got to be going, too. I have this wonderful life to lead and books to write and adventures to have, you know. I can’t just sit around here bletherin’ all the time with you, as enjoyable as it has been,” I added quickly, winking at Zeke.

“Don’t forget to trust yourself, Bruce,” Michael said. “That’s the key for you.” I nodded at him and watched his pro wrestling garb slowly vanish. The simple tunic and sandals had returned, as had those powerful wings. I closed my eyes a moment to seal in that memory, as well.

Epheniel smiled. “We’ll walk you out,” she offered. She held out her hand and we moved out of her conference room and down the many hallways in comfortable silence, broken only by the soft sound of angel wings. When we got to the door, my angel turned to me and asked softly, “So, what’s your question?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“When you first came, you said you would tell me the story and then you had a question for me. You finished the story – what’s the question?”

“The question’s been answered.”

“Who answered it?” asked Michael. “Your father? Epheniel? Zeke? Deb? Me?”

“Nope,” I smiled, as I hugged each of the beloved entities. “Me. Surprising – shockingly – I asked the question and then looked within for the answer. I am going to make it. I know that now. Zeke, you were right all those years ago when you told me that no matter what happens, it’ll be okay. I’ll be okay.” I grinned at Zeke, who blushed. “We’ll be okay. Humankind will be okay. One of these days, we’re going to walk together toward that Light. You just wait and see!” I promised.

“I’m glad you know that, Soul,” Epheniel replied. “I’ll keep on whispering in your ear.”

I considered her words and then said, “Still no chance of switching over to that bullhorn, eh?”

“You don’t need a bullhorn, Soul,” Epheniel answered as a familiar whooshing sound began to swirl around me. “You never did. I love you. Go live that wonderful life of yours, but remember where I am, should you need to talk. I am always with you – all you have to do is listen.”

“I will,” I solemnly promised, as we approached the massive door. “*Epheniel does the dance of dawn, remembrance – of recognition.*’ I’ve given that description so much thought over the years.”

“And what have you concluded?” Epheniel asked, her eyes twinkling.

“Well, that *dance of dawn* part is that you’re a Type-A overachieving morning angel, who likes to rouse her human to write before the sun comes up!” Epheniel giggled like a schoolgirl. “*Remembrance* is easy. Once it is time to lift the veil before my eyes, my memories of you – of all of you – will be waiting for me.” I paused. “And with that remembrance will come *recognition*. There!” I stated triumphantly. “How’d I do?”

“Great!” replied Epheniel. “I knew you could do it. We all did!”

I looked at Zeke, Michael and Epheniel, marveling at how much we had accomplished together during this part of my human lifetime. Zeke reached for the door.

“Wait!” I cried. “Let me do that!” He bowed and moved out of the door’s pathway. Using both hands, I swung open the great double doors and walked forward into the brilliant light. I turned and smiled at the lions, lazily grooming themselves. My eyes brimmed with tears of joy and gratitude as I gazed back at my soul friends.

“I love you,” I whispered. “Thank you. I’ll be back one day. Promise.” Epheniel touched her fingertips to her mouth and then blew me a soft kiss. I turned and stood at the top of the staircase, looking down. How many times over these years had I walked them to visit my angel?

Sometime walking, sometimes leaping and sometimes crawling, praying I would make it? Finally, I would now make the trip back down these stairs, filled with the knowledge, wisdom and understanding I'd sought for so long. Without a look back, and filled with excitement, I bounded down the steps, anxious to return to Earth life. My life. *LIFE*. I would make it. It was my time to soar.

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Realms of Life

Vision: There are miles of tiered votive candles, some lit, some not.

Loved One, your life force emits energy in many realms. When you agreed to participate in the limitations of a time-oriented, three-dimensional reality, your focus has been locked into certain parameters. As you remember your multidimensional self, you experience conflict and confusion. You are beginning to understand the power of your thoughts, feelings and actions, knowing they are connected to much more than you ever believed possible. By internalizing the truth, you have had to shed a falsehood that has kept you powerless – The Big Lie – believing that one person cannot make a difference. You now know the power of a single thought and the energy it creates on more than the earth plane.

Dear One, since the time you entered the Earth realm, you have longed to place your focus on a single reality. You use busyness, addictions, ego insecurity and self-destructive behavior in your attempts to lock into Earth parameters. This sometimes inhibits appreciating the magnificent energy and beauty of the Earth and all of its expressions of life and love.

When your focus is on experiencing energy in a multidimensional and spiritual plane, you long to shed the confines of your earthly body. You wish to terminate the connection you agreed to in the creation of your Earth form. You forget the excitement you felt about participating in the Earth experiment.

Your purpose for creating this feeling of separating yourself has been fulfilled; you no longer need to define yourself on an either/or basis. IT IS DONE. FINISHED. THERE IS NO SEPARATION – NO END TO WHO YOU ARE. You are a spiritual being choosing a multitude of means to express yourself. Smite the concept of limitations from your thought process. Shackles do not bind you – you are free to explore and create whatever manifests in your heart, in any realm. Know and trust that your higher self recognizes Light and Love everywhere – always. God's love is infinite and never exclusive to a particular place or time. Remember that you are an expression of His Love and Light!

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Gratitude

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