“Oh my God” she screamed, “I’m going to be totally alone when I have this baby”. At that moment she had suddenly understood the enormity of what had happened. She tried to remember how it had all began.

Just four years before, it had been a warm, lazy, carefree midsummer afternoon as she and Tony had made their way down the winding backstreets of Stockbridge. This was their first real holiday for five years and they were enjoying every minute of their time together. They found themselves on Hartford Street with its row of small shops. Tony spotted a tiny D.I.Y. shop and commented to Sheila that it“looked completely out of place”. It was far untidier and scruffier than any of the other premises.

Out of curiosity they went in and a bell hanging above the door rang to and from for several seconds. They didn’t recognize many of the tools on the shelves. Tony thought they must have come from a bygone age. An old gentleman came to the counter. He was a strange sight, tall, thin, balding and wore any old grey cardigan. In contrast to the shabbiness of his clothes he wore a pair of spotless white gloves. It had crossed their minds then that he might be slightly eccentric, but now, looking back …

“Can I help you?” the old man asked, looking them both straight in the eye. She felt that he was not just looking at her, but somehow right into her. It gave her the feeling that she knew this old man from somewhere.

“No thank you” Tony replied and they turned towards the door.

The old man called them back to the counter. “Tony” he said in a very quiet voice “I have something I would like to give you”. From under the counter he brought out a small blue glass bottle and inside it appeared to hold what looked like a shrivelled and dried out fruit stone. He handed them the bottle, passing it over very slowly and deliberately.

“When you get your cottage, go down to the orchard, where among the trees you will find an area of freshly dug ground. Dig a hole and bury it in the centre of this patch. Dad has spent a very long time propagating it and it is now ready for you to plant it. I know how much he wants you to have it”.

Tony whispered to Sheila “I think the best thing to do is humour him” and so he took the bottle and put it into his pocket.

“This is a unique variety” the old man said, “please take very great care of it”.

They could not make sense of the old mans’ words. They lived in a tiny inner city flat with no garden. None of their family had ever lived in or owned a cottage. After leaving the shop Tony took the bottle out of his pocket. He wanted to throw it into a litter bin, but the old man’s words haunted him. It was over an hour later as they sat having a pub lunch that he remembered that he had been called by his name. He asked Sheila “How did he know who I am”.

“I haven’t a clue” she replied.

When they returned to their flat at the end of the holiday Tony took the bottle and put it safely at the back of a kitchen cupboard. They forgot all about it.

Only two months later after finishing work and grabbing a quick meal at their local, they got to their flat. As they opened the door they picked up a formally addressed letter that had arrived in the post. The top of the envelope bore the name of a firm of solicitors based in Carlisle. They sat down together and opened it. It was addressed to Tony.

‘Although you never knew your great aunt Edna she had very careful searches made to ensure that you were her only living relative. She specifically asked that we should write to inform you of your inheritance, rather than our normal practice of coming to our office for the reading of a will. She has left you her cottage with six acres of land. She has set up a major Trust Fund for you, from which you can draw sufficient funds each year so that you will not have to work. It is her wish that you finish the restoration of the cottage, and more importantly bring the garden back to life. For these works you can purchase any equipment needed from the Trust Fund’.

The solicitor asked Tony to contact him so that he could hand over the keys and explain more fully particular details of the Will.

They were stunned. Tony had never heard of an Aunt Edna. Gradually a sense of excitement and elation swept over them. No more endless hours repairing cars at Hendersons’ garage, and for Sheila no more sitting at the supermarket tills. They decided to celebrate by opening their one bottle of champagne and Sheila went to the cupboard to get it. As she pulled it out she knocked over the tiny blue bottle. She shivered. She had suddenly remembered being in the shop. “Tony” she said “How did the old man know about this Will?”

Three weeks later they met Mr. Dilks, the solicitor, outside the cottage, which nestled in a small rural hamlet about 12 miles outside Carlisle. After he had carefully checked proof of their identity he handed over the keys.

The cottage had oak beamed rooms, one of which had an Inglenook fireplace; a very traditional kitchen with an Aga and three very good sized bedrooms. It was so beautiful and should have felt wonderful. Sheila said to Tony that it was a really great inheritance but went on to add “then why do I feel such a sense of foreboding?”

The garden was an entirely different matter. It was totally overgrown. There were masses of weeds, thorns and wild bushes that would have to be cleared. Sheila tried to explore the land but found for the most part that the brambles made it impossible. The exception was the fruit orchard. She was able to wander among the apple, pear and plum trees. She loved the smell of the fruit. She stopped dead in her tracks. In front of her in this orchard area was an open area of rich brown soil. This was exactly where the old man had told them it would be.

She met back up with Tony and Mr. Dilks and they went to the local pub. Over a ploughman’s lunch he went into detail of how they could access the Trust Fund. He handed over an initial cheque for £30,000 to cover their move and the first few months’ costs. He then went on to say “There is one specific item in your aunts’will that I don’t understand. She drew it up with me three years ago and was very particular about this detail. She said you had been given a stone to plant in the garden, and in knowing this she had employed someone to prepare the area for it”.

“Hold on” said Tony, who was quite shocked “that’s completely impossible. We were only given the stone two months ago. How could my aunt possibly have known about this three years ago?”

Mr. Dilks went very quiet before replying “I have no idea. I can only pass on to you the terms she laid down”.

Sheila shivered again, just as she had done in the orchard.” I’m as mystified as you” she said “I can’t explain it either”.

The next day they both handed in their notices at work and six weeks later were preparing for the move. As they completed the packing she took the blue bottle and packed it very carefully in a reinforced box. After the move was completed they spent the winter finishing the re-decoration and fitting out of the cottage

The following spring and summer they laboured slowly but surely to clear the garden including paying for the hire of a mini-digger to clear the worst of the overgrown shrubbery. They loved the work finding that as month followed month they were getting healthier and fitter. Throughout the work they were continually drawn to the patch of prepared brown earth. It was Sheila who took the decision “I’m going fetch the bottle” she said and after a few minutes came back to Tony.

He took the bottle and unscrewed the lid, taking the stone in his hand to bury in the hole he had already dug. He did not see the sharp spike protruding from the stone. As it pierced his finger he let out a sharp cry of pain. The blood seeping out soaked the stone. He dropped it into the hole and went inside to clean and dress the wound. When he returned they filled the hole in. They both suddenly felt very cold. Sheila turned to Tony saying “I have an overpowering sense of evil all around me”. He took her in his arms and held her tight. He had the same feeling but didn’t want to tell her.

By the following spring they had been able to plant the allotment area, and had sown wild grass would give them lawn areas to enjoy.

By the summer of 1979 they had become so successful with their vegetables that they were becoming self-sufficient for their food. The fruit trees in the orchard were also giving heavy yields. Their mystery tree had now grown to the height of six feet and was putting out lots of side shoots but showed no signs of what fruit it would grow.

Late one evening Sheila went out to pick some of the fruit when her eyes were drawn to the tree. She could see immediately that its side shoots had been pruned away. It was not this that disturbed her. She called Tony and he came over to her. “Look” she said, and pointed to a small mound of cuttings. What really disturbed her was that beside the cuttings was a pair of white gloves, neatly folded.

In early September Sheila surprised Tony with some very exciting news. “Guess who’s going to be a father” she said and was thrilled by his response. He let out a cry of jubilation “Yes” he shouted punching the air. They had been trying for a baby since they moved into the cottage.

On Christmas Day they decided to celebrate alone, knowing the baby would change everything. They had gone to midnight mass for the first time in years having been drawn along by the bells at the church. They enjoyed a traditional Christmas dinner made even more special as they were using their own crops. By the evening they were both unsteady as they made their way upstairs, having drunk far more than usual.

It came without warning at 3.57am on Boxing Day. The ground shook violently and they felt the cottage begin to shake. A deafening rumble filled the air, and then everything went pitch black. The tremors increased and the house began to move. They were terrified. As the noise grew and grew, a powerful force hit them, and they blacked out. Just before he lost consciousness Tony felt the house was being forced upwards from the ground.

It was later that morning that they came round. They stepped out of the cottage into brilliant sunshine, but everything was totally different. The air was hot and humid. Their cottage and garden were exactly as they had been before but all around the perimeters there was tropical forest. There was no longer any village; no pub; no church. They could hear the sound of running water. They discovered a stream was now flowing through their garden.

“Where are we” Tony asked in bewilderment “where did everything go, and why is it so hot?”

“I can’t understand what’s happened” Sheila replied

As they walked on into the garden they noticed someone was in the orchard. They both knew instinctively that it was the old man from the shop. His appearance had been transformed. He looked younger and stronger now, and his body and face were tanned. He walked over to them, smiling gently.

There were so many questions they wanted to ask. He was aware of their struggle, and he suggested they walk with him to the stream. A large piece of log lay beside it.

“There is so much I want to say to you at this moment” he said “but I ask you to trust me. It will all become clear. Please come and sit each side of me, on the log.” They joined him.

“Now there is something I want you to do for me.” From his pocket he took out two long rusty nails which had very sharp points. “These have very deep memories for me” and as he spoke Sheila thought she detected pain in his eyes. “These are a reminder of the depths that love can go to” he said. “I want you each to take a nail and push the point into the palm of your hands”. Tony was uneasy but something made him feel that they should do as he had requested. He took the nail and as he pushed it into his palm a tiny trickle of blood appeared. The same thing happened to Sheila.

As the stranger reached out to them they saw wound marks in his palms. He took each of their hands and held them against his own. They could feel his wound but strangely they felt no fear. Very slowly blood from his palm began to mix with their blood and they were aware it was seeping into their wounds. Within moments they were conscious of nothing else but sheer bliss. They saw indescribable light and colours. They felt totally at peace. As they looked into his face they felt totally loved. They then felt that blood from their hands was seeping into his palm.

They had no idea how long they sat together. Time ceased to matter. Eventually he released their hands, and gently pressed his finger into each of their palms. Their wounds healed.

“I will now explain what I have done for you. I have given you the gift of my perfection which I alone could ever give to you. As I am now, and as my Father is, so you both are. You felt that entering you. I have also forgiven you and all evil has left you. You also felt that happening. You are now new people, and can live and love as I live and love.”

Tony responded “Something has really changed, but I don’t understand what you just said”.

He looked at them again. “I have not just given you my perfection but I have also given you the gift of my freewill. This will allow you both to make choices, just as I had to make choices when I lived in your time”.

He got up from the log and asked them to walk with him. Eventually they came to a pair of iron gates that stood on the boundary of the garden.

“Look through the gates” he said “and tell me what you see”.

As they peered through the gates the landscape changed completely. Everywhere was a jungle of overgrown weeds and thorns.

“It’s just like the garden was before we moved into the cottage” Sheila said “It will take forever to clear it”.

The stranger laughed “I could not have put it any better”. He asked Tony to run through the gates. He tried, but as he reached their centre he crashed into an invisible barrier and fell backwards. He got up and dusted himself off.

“You cannot leave this garden by these gates of your own free choice. If however you have to leave, you will never be able to re-enter again.”

He turned to Tony “that barrier you felt is there to protect you both. It surrounds the whole of the garden.

He turned and began to walk back to the cottage and they followed him. As they walked along they were aware of so many new sensations filling their hearts and minds.

They went into the cottage and sat down.

“I should explain” he began “that your cottage and all its’ land have moved here for you. The garden will supply all your food and the stream will give you pure water to drink”

Tony was still totally lost and asked “Where is here?”

The stranger looked towards Sheila, waiting for her to say something. He already knew that she was just beginning to comprehend where they were. She said to Tony, very quietly “We’re out of time”.

“Why are we short of time?” Tony asked.

“No, Tony, we are not short of time. We are out of time. We are at the beginning of time” she replied. She looked at him “Tony, I’ve never thought to ask you until now, but do you have a middle name?”

He looked back at her replying “Adam. Why?”

She stopped, silent, lost in her own thoughts and for a time she could not speak. Then, knowing now for sure what she was saying she told him “My middle name’s Eve”.

After a long pause she then asked him “Do you know the name of this garden?”

He shook, frightened to respond in case he was right. He said only one word “Eden”.

Now in shock he turned to the stranger. He needed to know “Are we the only two people in the world?”

The stranger answered quietly “Yes”. He turned to Sheila. “You are right. You are both at the beginning of time for your world. This is the Garden of Eden. My Father created this garden about five thousand years ago and over all that time he has been preparing it for your arrival. He loves to walk in it from time to time during the cool of the evenings”.

Tony wanted to know “How can you move through time? How did our cottage move through time?”

He smiled “I am not bound by time or space. Time serves me, I do not serve time. I can enter time in your world, and leave it, as I will. All created things obey my voice and the voice of my Father. The power of our Spirit makes everything happen”.

He could see that they were tired. He gently raised his hand and said to them “Sleep”. Immediately they fell asleep in each other’s arms.

He was sitting across from them and knew how deeply he loved them. He thought to himself ‘I can create the endless universes into the depths of space. I can control all of creation, the wind and the seas and the storms. I can heal and even raise the dead. But I cannot interfere with your wills’. He paused, and then in deeper reflection thought ‘my destiny and all that will happen for me is eternally linked to your decisions’.

After two hours they woke and he had prepared a meal for them. When they had finished he asked them “Please come with me into the garden just once more”. They followed him. He took them to the orchard and to the tree they had grown. They were utterly astounded. It was no longer a small sapling. It was now a magnificent tree, laden with beautiful fruit, which reminded them of their apple trees. “Do not ask how it has grown” he said “but it had to be ready for this moment”.

“This tree” he said” took my Father millions of years to cultivate, but he could not plant it. When I gave you the stone in the shop the seed within that stone contained the seed of all goodness from the beginning of time. It stretched back into the very heart of my Father. There was no evil in it, for there is no evil in Him.”

He continued”For the tree to become all that He intended you had to suffer for a very brief moment Tony. In you, as in all men, was the evil that had destroyed everything in our creation. When your blood covered that stone, that evil mixed with the good. As you planted it you were unknowingly planting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This tree stands before you now in all its’ grandeur. Look now at the fruit on the tree. In its rich red colour it is beautiful. It has however a power that can change the world.”

Tony and Sheila could not take in what He was saying. “I told you earlier that now you were new people. There is no evil in you now. I know you already sense that. I also gave you the freedom to choose. You can pick and eat everything in the garden. It has been grown for you to enjoy”. He stopped.

“Well, everything except the fruit of this tree. Here in this garden you can live with the Father and with me, but you cannot know us as we really are. If you take one bite of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for a brief moment you will touch the very centre of our being. As the evil is also in the fruit this knowledge will destroy you. You will then know fear, the fear of encountering total goodness and the power of evil. That fear will cut you off from us. The penalty for this act of disobedience is that you will have to leave our presence, and therefore the garden, forever.

Tony suddenly understood.” The gate we went to see. If we eat this fruit we will go out through that gate and we’ll never be able to return. Am I right?”

He replied “Yes. The barrier that now protects you would then bar you from re-entering. If you choose never to eat the fruit you will often see my Father, and I will also be here from time to time. We have so much to share with you. For the present it is our hope that you will take time to adjust to all that has happened for you and to enjoy the wonders you will discover here day by day”.

He rose and as He was leaving the cottage He turned to Sheila.

“I want to reassure you that here in the garden the birth of you baby will be time of great joy and free from all pain. If you eat the fruit of this tree, and leave the garden that birth will be long and painful”.

Sheila had forgotten all about the baby. She thought ‘No doctor. No hospital. No midwife. No nurse.’

“Oh my God” she screamed, ”I’m going to be totally alone when I have this baby”.

END