

Excerpts from

Diamond Eyes: The Last Koorlrhani Warrior

by Neil Britto

How I Imagined

“Curled up like an unborn child in its mother’s womb, he lay in the dark depths of Fantastica’s foundations, patiently digging for a forgotten dream, a picture that might lead him to the Water of Life.” – From the Never Ending Story by Michael Ende.

I’ve attempted in different ways to tell our story, the story of me and you—my beloved guru, Santosha Ma—and have I tried different devices to serve a story that can only really be described as cosmic when told in the proper light. Where do I begin the story? But only from that place where you have pointed me, refocused me to try and try again.

You told me to tell it only from the life that I’m living, and in trying to do so in so many of my years of being in your company, I have only been frustrated in understanding how exactly to do that, as you, during those years removed all of my devices, all my clever ideas which have merely stood in the way as I clamored to fit in and make sense to a conventional audience.

“I am your audience.” You said to me flatly, “You are not telling the story to an audience of egos, but to me.”

You’ve told me that *that* was the grace of sadhana, and that *soul knowledge* was gleaned from it. This was the purpose of its work, not to elevate my sense of accomplishment as an ego or to espouse upon the accumulations of self, but rather to walk with Her in our investigation of who a one, a self is to begin with.

So as I tried to write texts, over the years, and have been met with frustration, it was you, Master who simply addressed how I still did not understand—that I was still possessive of the telling, of you, of the teaching, even of myself—and that was what was truly being addressed and undone over the years.

As I knelt in your hallway, dusting some of your china, I remember how you came up to me. I was frustrated by one of my latest efforts to tell our story in a video. It was not very good.

“What you’re doing (wrong) in your telling is subtle, is a subtle ego trip. Bad things don’t have to keep happening to you for you to understand this. It’s just a very subtle action that has you in the room of your separateness, and you have to get clearer on it,” you said.

I did know what you were talking about, this addiction, the automatically assumed conviction that “I” had to be the center of the story, the doer/teller, the rightful ‘*cumulous*,’ that I was the hero/victim, protagonist/antagonist of it, that my telling had to be evident of my mastery of myself in experience, of my being lifted after being so let down, etc. It is just automatically assumed that I am *a self* divorced and will one day arrive, reborn, renewed by the great adventure.

The story, truly is this: Santosha Ma over these wonderful years, you have cleaned my thick coke-bottle ego lenses and have encouraged me only to really see—to focus beyond the fog of my mind, and notice that the cleverest device is ego endlessly weaving story, stories all told and based on a desire of a one needing to be received by and made happy by other egos, stories based on being apparently separate.

Seeing

On retreat in the Eastern Sierras one year, I acknowledged to Master Santosha Ma that to really understand, to really see how I assumed all along that happiness was a created thing, out there, a framed and static image, it seemed like it took years of her trying new lenses on me, as if I were a near sighted patient, and she a skilled ophthalmologist, sitting on the opposite end of her big machine as she kept switching lenses over each of my eyes, each lens a metaphor for her teaching work to address each of my misconceptions of reality, always at work, always making things clear

“Ok, are we clear or unclear?” She’d say patiently, her guidance such a beautiful gift as her goal was for me to see one day perhaps the way she does.

“Ahhh.... hmm...Clear.”

Then switching the dial to another lens,

“Ok, How about now... clear, or unclear,” each lens for every one to five years of my being stuck, frustrated and still seeking in my life.

“Um... Clear... wait... no...”

Year after year this went on as circumstances changed, and as I lived with her, and over breakfast talked about our lives, what we were up to, and what we assumed. She knew how deeply frustrated I was and so encouraged us to keep yearning, keep reaching for her,

“Stay in the room,” she would say. “Don’t get bogged down. Understand that this is not the story about your failures.”

One day we might, as she said to a group of us gathered in her art studio, “Wake up in the morning after being so completely vexed by something about life, and suddenly have the capability to respond more intelligently,” and have the wherewithal to *see*, to honor and love this “Life you are already living,” as she said.

Until then, my sadhana was only, by her grace, adapting away from limiting points of view.

One Sunday morning in 2007, Santosha Ma and several of her devotees were gathered in her art studio, excitedly talking about starting up some creative projects. She suggested we try films, write stories, or music to honor this life. Seated on a green leather chair, her knees drawn to her she said;

“What if you were able to in some way, some form or fashion, make a collage of your life with me. If you were able to see that your lives are not of someone *failing* on the path, but instead you could see how all along the biggest attraction in your life is Me. You begin to see how along the divine has been attracting you!”

Each lens she tried on me helped me focus in on how I assumed myself separate in an any given area of my life, how I unnecessarily viewed my life as a problem to fix, and how with grace—given insight I was able to let go of that assumption a little more, to relax my grip, and thus unfold to being happy, uncomplicated, no longer preoccupied.

At home, Santosha Ma used to always play around and ask us questions like, “What would be the perfect date?” or, “What would you do with a million dollars if you had it?” After a while it became clear *that we were not clear*, even in our fantasies, on how any of it would really create happiness, since one would still have to generate a response to it, bind to it and to its realistic demands.

Santosha Ma has shown us that nothing is automatic, and instead everything requires conscious intention. In reality everything has a burdensome quality to it, and though you may be happy to work with it and achieve a goal, there are negative qualities to reduce it—whatever it is—to ordinary standards. Ordinary life is just that, ordinary, Santosha Ma taught. She said to me, ordinary happiness is found in acceptance, which can open the doorway that leads to our deepest thirst to know God.

“But that’s not what egos want. Instead ego wants power and wants everything to adapt to them,” She said.

So over the years, as she took away my perceptions, and replaced them with reality, it seemed clear to me that my old choices were for bondage rather than freedom. She saw how I could not abide in simple happiness directly. Instead, I schemed and fantasized.

“Clear or unclear,” The Master would ask me.

“Oh... wow. Wow! Clear!!” I would say.

Santosha Ma, my guru, the true heart beating, is the divine, stands unwaveringly so, switches the lens on me and I can see, let go and the *muscles* where myself concern had me in knotted pursuit, stubborn with volition, insecure with threat, wrapped in the impossible implications of social madness and garbage beliefs, piled up on this concept of a “me,” finally began let go, a breath enjoyed to that opening place, back to innocence, a step deeper.

She said to a small group of us once as we were leaving to go back home from our retreat with her in 2011,

“Before any action,” She said, “Any desire, or impulse, before a future, or past, there is Santosha Ma. Before the dream, there IS ME.”

Her name is that, divine reality, the reality before our mental assumptions. She is that.

“Feel me located in your heart. Say my name there. Be in this heart.” She said as she went around the table and called our attention to what that actually felt like as she placed her finger tips at our hearts.

“To say it here, in your heart is fifty-thousand times more valuable than saying it in your head,” She said.

“And so you feel it now, and you feel less of your separateness, right?” We all agreed.

“Ok, now *never* leave this.” She said.

You can stop reading now, because that’s it! Everything after is just me doing more telling, trying to capture what is boundless!

The real story is authored by truth, openness without all the clamoring, without the lines of self reference. She IS openness, is cosmic and is a telling of the all of everyone, for those willing to hear and recognize it, as well as those not yet ready. In purity, the true author cares not for recognition and only stands brilliant and free as us all... already.

Zen Master Rama once said, “The truth of all ages is this: be absorbed.” A day dreamers prayer

When I was sixteen, living in Atlanta Georgia, all I did most of the time was imagine. I imagined different worlds, and imagined characters who had great wisdom and power. I one day dreamt of a boy named Jeshoya or Jeshibian (jeshoya his nick name). He, like me as a teenage boy, was sad and wished to be happy in the world that seemed beautiful, deep green jungle land, lush and fulfilling, but in reality was also harsh, full of pain and was most actually un-fulfilling.

Whatever I loved in other stories, movies, and books, I imagined my own version of them, of my own galaxy far far away, and spent much of my time depicting scenes from this place in pencil drawings that I obsessed over to the detriment of my school grades.

In July of 2012, Santosha Ma, along with one other of her devotees and I, rode along in her car en route to Lake Lundy in the Eastern Sierras. We were happily reminiscing, about how we all came to be together with Santosha Ma, how the threads of our lives, the various attractions, the fingers of the hands of the Self brought us all to her. The Divine was attracting us.

“I remember how when I was a teenager, I would listen to Tangerine Dream, and they would just take me to another place.” I said.

“That was the self calling you to me. Rama loved Tangerine Dream, and we used to meditate to them all the time.” Santosha Ma said.

When I was a boy, I took the subway trains in Atlanta Georgia, to and from school. I always wore my headphones and listened to Tangerine dream. As I stood on the illuminant neon platform the music absorbed me as the silver train would streak by, and my surroundings seemed like a fantastic sci-fi dream to me. I wanted to go and stay where the music took me, to where it was calling me. I called my imaginary world Sten.

At first I only day dreamed about Sten, its tranquility and beauty, but then began to imagine the story of characters that lived there—Jeshoya and others. I drew their faces, over and over again, and with the music playing, imagined their stories more and more clearly.

I used to share my stories of them with my friends at the time, and they, interested in my dream and being artistic types, would often draw their versions of the characters. We were a very close circle of friends and together we pitched around ideas to each other for a comic book version of my dreams. We collaborated; one of my buddies added his own character, a wise cracking pilot named Red.

We could not agree on a story ending for the main character. I could not shake the idea that in the end, he would simply die and make way for something greater than himself—a great metamorphosis of sorts.

“What is he, Jesus Christ?” my friends would tease me. I never gave up on bringing the story forward, the way it was coming to me. Over time my friend’s interest in the story dwindled and as I graduated high school and moved to California, I felt the story more in my lap, and squarely as my responsibility to dig for.

In summer school during my Junior year in high school, I attended an English class. I was visiting my father that summer and so attended summer school in California. The teacher of the class, seeing that the level of English that was being taught was too remedial for me, saw to it that my homework was solely creative writing. He challenged me to write.

“I just want you to read a few of these mythology tales, and then just write one of your own.” He said, handing me a worn paperback of Greek mythology, and so I spent my time imagining, and losing myself in divinity.

I wrote about a Goddess and named her Ashuta. I wrote about how the dwellers of the One Great Land of Sten often prayed to her to advance themselves over and against one another, and how she constantly tricked them to show them how foolish and unloving they were, and that with each answered prayer came a heavy price to pay—a reality check. My English teacher liked it and encouraged me to write more. There was an East Indian girl in my class. She wore a sari, and I thought she was exquisite with a calm, confident, and dignified beauty. Her name was Mediha. I loved her name, so I borrowed it and used it for a character who would be Ashuta’s daughter, her physical aspect who lived in a different world than Jeshoya.

I fell in love with drawing, both pencil and pen & ink. I took drawing classes in college and obsessively etched away at them, clarifying the lines of the characters, their faces, their sacred places and what they had to express. Though mostly a visual effort I still wrote. While in high school, I drew a few sketches of Mediha, and in the thread of the story that was evolving in me—as I used my mother’s old yellow type writer—the main character, Jeshoya would meet Medeha, and she would show him what true power was. Not knowing what that really was, I left it for later, and hoped it would occur to me.

I did not know then that I would meet my spiritual master, and only in retrospect can I laugh and see how the Self attracted me to Santosha Ma via my imagination, my day dreams, this dreaming work, becoming more clear, more real. I in complete ignorance, through the hallways of my imagination, sought for my master, my sadhana, via a purely fictional fairy tale, a creative visualization, a day dreamer’s prayer.

The thread of the story was not so clear to me then, I only knew that the two characters were destined to be together. In my journal, I drew a picture of Jeshoya seated in Meditation by the ocean while Mediha gazed at him from atop a rock. I did this drawing a few days before I was to leave my mother and start a new life in California.

Mediha was alien, wild, unbridled, fierce, but balanced, wise, and supremely loving. As the story existed in my mind, both she and Jeshoya were from two different worlds (Jeshoya from Sten, Medeha from Banx) and their meeting would simply be the will of Ashuta. All the other characters in the story were the agents to make it all happen.

In college, as I learned more drawing technique, I began to make peace with the idea that Jeshoya was actually me, not another person, and so then I consciously decided to do his portrait again, but with him looking more like me. This felt more natural, and I felt freer to identify with him. It was an act of self love, and acceptance of what I wanted, that which seemed like fiction/fantasy in this back drop world of scientific materialism, cynicism, and doubt of God’s existence.

Once I did the portrait though it became harder to understand why I was writing and drawing, writing and drawing, digging at it. What was this for, and what is its use? Conventionally speaking, what was in it for me, my ego—a story to film, write of as a novel and sell off? What was the point? What kind of credit could I get, or practical use could come from my imaginings. I could not conceptualize this. My father wondered this too, and mildly discouraged me. I had given both him and my mother a copy of the self portrait. It was received with a measure of discomfort from them both.

It was simply the divine attracting me through creativity, calling me to be with her, to imagine our meeting, to hone in on, and bring forward our story.

The Seed

I recall how one evening in 1987, I rested in the top bunk of my best friend Eric's room. He took the bottom bunk and we were telling each other tales as we fended off nodding to sleep. He had given me a nick name, "Stosh the story teller," and that night I had had been spinning a yarn about Mediha and Jeshoya to him for hours, explaining to him that even though she was only a child, Mediha was infinitely wiser than Jeshoya. Though I had ripped off that tidbit—a godlike child—from Frank Herbert, just having seen *Dune* on television a week prior, I wanted to stress to Eric that her character was deeper and more central than Jeshoya who seemed to be having all the adventures. The thing was, I hadn't figured out the details of any of this. I didn't know how she was wise. I didn't know what it was he yearned for. It was just a bright world for my imagination to play in, to take the sting out of the school year drudgery.

The part in the story that I was coming to was my favorite, the part where Jeshoya, while caring for Mediha—an alien child who dropped from the sky and was in the ultimate care of Jeshoya's master Paen—is touched by Mediha gently on the forehead and can then suddenly see as she does. It is a shock, overwhelmingly beautiful, but temporary. A seed experience that will blossom into his... well *enlightenment*. Enlightenment was not the word I had for it as a teenager who was more a devotee to Marvel comic books, Dr. Who, and all things George Lucas, James Cameron, Frank Herbert and C.S. Lewis, but rather my words were of vague descriptions of great power that seemed to go beyond desire for conquest.

"Damn, Mediha is cool as hell." Eric said, before falling to sleep.

"Yeah," I murmured, succumbing to my tiredness but hoping I would have a dream of Mediha and Sten. Eric and I later created a character together, Red Carridean, who would cameo in the stories of our two universes.

A fast forward to 1995:

Since we're talking science fiction, Imagine you are a starship, the Millennium Falcon, traveling faster than the speed of light for the very first time.

Imagine that with you as a sentient craft, distance is suddenly realized to be just a concept, and that in fact you are not moving, have never moved and are just simply here all the time and no distance could be... away from you.

Imagine the sensation, that at first has the stars seeming to move, but then has them stretch as perception of them is bent, all points of location vanishing, compressing together, being absorbed as one, and are no longer the continuity of space by which you can value anything, not even yourself who seems to disappear—though remaining ever so present—merging as all light itself, with no differentiating edges.

You ARE THIS, through and through, and suddenly you realize, God is this, you, and you are that Divinity as the pattern of your "life" is somehow seen to be only a tiny vibrant mandala, a microscopic cell housed in the perfection of cosmic skin, a precious deeply loved chip, all illuminant and intricate, wallpaper patterned, deeply etched as circuitry, within the greater circuitry of all other lives, all nestled

within that of your rainbow-banded central nervous system which is ablaze with the white fire coming from the tiniest and yet brightest flame that seems the core of all cores—living you this very instant, revealing you to YOU, right now and forever. Imagine in an instant how this strikes you to be like the most intimate, deep and yet impossible—to-keep promise ever made good on, that moment, that feeling where you understand that despite an eternity of darkness God has come for you like she said she would, like she said she would when you smirked in your independence, like she said she would when you rolled your eyes, like she said she would when she was a mere other to you in your dreaming, looking for greener grass.

No, She cracked the universe in half, and it may have taken half a billion lifetimes to get you to see just this mere glimpse, but *she did it* and *showed you*—God IS, and IS HER, and is you. Imagine the sensation of how the heart just melts to know this is actually and absolutely true—as the light of it all pours in, rains down, drenches you and fulfills the promise of your yearned—for sanity of love’s truest reality. That promise has been kept.

That is what Santosha Ma showed me when she initiated me—when she touched me.

My head was thrown back, my mouth open, tears of joy streaming from my eyes as God made love to me, revealed to me Her beautiful face, in which I resided. Breath which had quickened stopped and my heart beat which also had quickened felt to have unraveled as I let go to what I just described.

I was so humbled by such reality, such majesty, that when It was done with me—that is when I could no longer let go without becoming afraid, terrified—I threw myself onto the floor and wept with broken-hearted joy to have seen that which can never be described. Words to this day fail me to convey to you how real it was, it is.

“I never knew.” I just kept saying, weeping, wiping tears profusely streaming from my eyes, “I *never* knew, oh... I never knew,”

I never knew that I had it all *so wrong*, had it so backward. I had lived my life up to that point with such doubt, but also with so much arrogance in assuming that my eyes always held within them the clearest vision. My mind was blown completely away that night, to make way for what is beyond its grasp.

I knew from that night, and I knew *that I knew*, with the most concrete confidence, I was **wrong** about everything. I knew in that moment that God was alive, was living me, was my heart and that that truth rendered me so softly weeping in the bright spell of god-distracted gladness, a home-felt happiness that informed me that my guru had entered the moving picture of my life to claim me as her devotee! I was hers. She did indeed crack the universe in half to get through to me, to introduce to me her world, bigger, brighter, than any Sten I could have imagined.

I made it from my bedroom floor to my bathroom, my heart slowing down, my eyes readjusting from what felt like staring into the sun—white spots seen between blinking.

My heart felt to be a soft thing, like the sensation of absolute, clean and sweet, utter adoration, like a child’s first obsession, as Santosha’s name resonated within it. I looked into the mirror, and the face staring back at me was not my own. It was Jesus Christ. I let out a gasping laugh. I couldn’t believe it. It was as if she said, “Do you know what I mean now?”

I looked intensely at the vision, how it was light, just like she said, sewing reality right before my eyes. How deep the play of God was! I remember looking at Jesus’s beard, the fibers of the hair, over that

which should have been my clean shaven chin. I looked at my chest, Jesus's chest and I felt my soft melted heart which was reflected as Jesus's heart ablaze with fire, and I began to cry again. Was I crazy?!

She was showing me, giving me a mere glimpse, of what enlightenment was, what it meant in a manner that would translate to me in terms I could better grasp. She, like Christ, was the One, her heart pure.

I knelt against the sink, and buried my face into my hands so overwhelmed with awe.

How could it be? How could it be?

"Everything is of the same source light," Santosha Ma said to me, about a week before that night. She gave me my first lesson as we walked around Lake Lagunitas in Marin County.

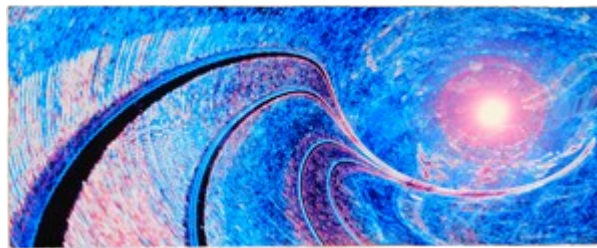
It was the spring of 1996, and one day I was visiting my best friend, son and devotee of Santosha Ma, at the "Novato" house and knew that I was going to get to catch sight of Santosha Ma. I was not her student then, only hearing about her through my friend and meeting her in person only a handful of times, but in my heart—deep beneath the confused and conventional layers of my mind—I wanted to be her student, and I wanted to see her that day. The plan for the day was that my buddy and I would do some music together, or perhaps we were going out somewhere. When I entered the house, there was Santosha!

I was my usual nervous, and tongue-tied self as soon as I saw her, and she had just only come over to me and said "Hey Neil, how are you doing?" I remember that most of the time when around Santosha Ma I would start to break into a sweat, or my hands would get clammy.

She had been printing her art at her work table in the living room and I caught a glimpse of one picture, standing vertically on the floor and leaning against the wall. It was a large print, at least five feet tall, of what looked to me to be the creation of the universe, or of existence.

"It's actually a pair of railroad tracks," she said,

My jaw dropped and I think I said something like, "Whoa!" I just loved it.



I loved the piece. It seemed magical and the sight of it made me feel expansive. Later, before we left, Santosha Ma came out into the living room from the kitchen and said to me, "So Neil, how about you and enlightenment?"

I think I gurgled, and stuttered and managed to say,

"That sounds really good to... uh I mean yeah, yes, I'd like that. I'd like to know about that?" I was taken aback by how sensitive she seemed, picking up on my desire to get to know her, and pulling me past my shyness.

"OK. Maybe we can take a walk together." She said. I couldn't believe it. I was going somewhere with her.

After that day, Santosha Ma and I walked around Lake Lagunitas where she gave me my first teaching.

First Santosha Ma explained that everything was a dream, an explanation I did not quite accept very easily, but had me intrigued. As we walked along the wooded paths, she told me that everything I encountered is light and is filtered and organized through the perceptions of my mind. She said that through my perceptions, an error was being made where I was falsely identified as a separate individual in opposition to the others and objects perceived. She told me that this person, was the false self and that she would show me what the real self was.

“Everything is source light, Neil, non-separate. Everything is God.” She said.

“But, Santosha, this tree is separate from me.” I said, trying to understand, stopping as I put my hand on it, and feeling the bark against my palm.

“Yes, but it is all really light. You are that same light.” She said.

She told me that the white light, the fullest degree of that light was really who I am, and that she was going to show me over the period of my sadhana the truth of it. That was her job, she said, to reveal this to me.

“But you should know, it is a serious endeavor, and will take everything you have.” From my point of view, I was excited, but also in a state of shock over the magnitude of the matter at hand as she described more and told me about her own sadhana with her gurus, her wild and beautiful dreams and visions as she walked the path and realized the Self! I did not understand how it could be pulled off. I did not know what to do.

“We’ll begin with love and trust.” She said, “Stick with me, kiddo. I’m going to get you out of this.” A few days later, she invited me back to the house for a meditation, where afterward, she asked me, what I thought about becoming her student. I smiled rather widely, said yes, and Santosha then said festively, “Ok, You are now officially my student!” Everyone cheered. I was really happy. I couldn’t believe it.

It was then about a week later, where I sat down on the floor and spontaneously followed her name from mind to heart, let it drop like a weighted fishing lure sinking deeply inward, abandoned to what might lay beneath breath, beneath gut and belly, beyond spine and nerve, where then there was a sudden shift, like a leviathan rising quickly and rapidly putting space between “me,” and my usual perceptions, a void so great, so awesome, so terrifying, that I wept like a little boy.

“So your heart opened a little bit?” Santosha Ma joked, teasing me. I lay on the foldout couch in her living room in Three Rivers. She had moved there, and so I stayed over for a visit.

“A little... eh..” I grumbled.

She held up thumb and index finger to measure the very half inch of a little—the extent of my spiritual prowess. If what I saw was only the tip of the ice-berg, I could not begin to imagine what the fullest degree of it would be like, but I knew that she stood at that place, was looking at me from that indescribable space, and was calling me to there.

“I... want to feel like that again.” I said, unable to describe the experience with satisfaction to her. I held off on telling her about my experience for many weeks, unable to comprehend what had happened. I felt I should have questions for her about it, but I couldn’t form any. I just wanted to experience it again, and not run away next time.

“You will she said,”

But first...

Adventures

“This one a long time have I watched. All his life has he looked away...to the future, to the horizon. Never his mind on where he was. Hmm? What he was doing. Hmph. Adventure. Heh. Excitement. Heh. A Jedi craves not these things. You are reckless.” – Yoda From Star Wars : The Empire Strikes Back.

Well, as I retold our story a number of times, I again recall the first time I saw Santosha Ma. I was a pretty sad kind of guy. I was living with my father and his family; having moved from Atlanta GA, away from my mother, having started college (community college) and having come to a place where it seemed nothing was going my way.

I did not notice then that on the tip of my mind’s tongue were always the words, *‘if only,’* the chit chattering of all my wishes that obscured true happiness, deep, and to never want for more—already.

Then one day, there she was. My spiritual master stood in line, my line, buying CD’s from the record store where I worked as a cashier. I did not recognize her as the one calling to me via my free flowing day dreaming of her. Instead, I was in my shroud of self, digging and seeking along conventional lines for some kind of release in the material world.

Santosha Ma said to me however, after all the years of the story’s actual unfolding, that she recognized me, and as I’ve seen now with the beauty of hindsight it was her work all along.

“I went into the store and I saw you and I thought, there’s a good soul.” She told her son, my best friend, to go get a job at the store where I was working and so then we became best friends. It was her work, her attracting me, to recall my spiritual Master.

That thing that I did, that she focused me to see that day where I knelt on her floor and dusted china was to leave her out, to make her story mine, rather than submit to her, participate in her story, the correct metamorphosis.

She is the absolute power of the story, for without her, I have nothing to lose myself to, no real base. Instead I build on the unreal foundation of myself, its propaganda, unable to learn vulnerability, humility, self-sacrifice and true love.

As Santosha Ma showed me, the adventure of my life was only to chase after my reflection, to ‘Be somebody,’ instead of abiding in consciousness free of identity.

Santosha Ma since 1992, has shown me always, over and over again, that it was a useless gesture, to chase, to grab at, to reach for, as well as to run from, to avoid, to duck and dodge experience. She only and always tried to show me, have me see—switch the lenses of my limited perceptions—and point out that one subtle thing that all egos do which was to not notice the room of actual life but rather to only behold and wrestle with abstract ideas and spin the story teller’s yarn of problems.

The Life You are Actually Having

In the springtime of 2008, my third year of living at her home (the ashram) I was standing in Santosha Ma's kitchen again; the chimes on her porch were carrying on in the wind that day. I had spent much of the day working on a musical piece while in my room. I noticed that Santosha Ma was home and so I went up to visit her. We had a conversation where I said to her that I finally felt I could see what she meant all of these years, that I noticed that what she did in her creative works, her art. She greatly engaged her life, noticed everything around her and created art out of her life rather than from a preconceived idea, which is where I had always operated.

"It seems to me that you always have your camera, and are always noticing so much, and you bring it all *home*, and are always expressing so much of it. It also seems you've been showing us this (teaching us to notice) through the different things we're attracted to. I'd like to do this, capture pieces of what's actually going on and that seems to be the trick."

"That's wonderful to hear, because that means you're interested in the life that you're already having instead of seeking another life, another experience, another way other than the life you're already having! So now you actually have that appreciation."

I was so happy for that moment, that day, where instead of the consideration of ego's illusion being seen as a privately vexing thing, something I accepted in my head—which always nodded in agreement—but was rejected at heart, this consideration, this picture that Santosha Ma framed for me to witness, removed the entire burden of my need for anything other than the love for Her that stirs in my being. I was with my Master! There was no need to figure out *anything*—no failure, no victory neither in celibacy nor marriage. She had been telling me this from day one!

Later that year, Santosha Ma went to the Eastern Sierras. This was my first trip where I joined the others in retreat. The same openness that moved me so much that day, that same perfect flow of Her grace continued with me during that trip. While in this amazingly quiet and sacred power place, I regained by her continued gentle sanding of my egoic cleverness, a childlike whimsy which called me to want to go out and play.

From within the A-frame cottage that she sat in consideration with all her devotees, she waved for me to go explore. I walked the woodsy avenues and climbed rocks, and visited the water falls nearby, with a charmed grin on my face. I knew she brought me to this, her unending care. I wept in the woods, feeling honored to be with her.

■ **EXERPTS: THREE CHAPTERS** Love's Ever Strong Heartbeat *In the Chapters 'Loves Ever Strong*

Heartbeat,' and 'The Master's Discovery,' we see the outcome for what Master Paen has set up. The Master has already told his young disciple that as he grows, he will protect and defend all which he is in love with. Everything that he sees as troublesome in his brothers, the Terrible Six, of which Jeshibian is the youngest, will be that which has him approaching life in the same manner, as one trying to get fulfilled, all the while vexed, being pulled by the strings of his destiny that will lead way beyond his ideas.



I awoke, dehydrated in a dark room. My hands and legs were bound. The blindfold was removed. I saw a figure, backed by light, enter the room and approach me. He unbound me from the floor, and then pulled me up by my restrained hands. It was Minot.

He gave me water and food.

“Jeshishibian,” He said.

“How many days has it been?” I asked desperately

“Two”

“She’s still alive. I must go,” I said, and I went to rush out of the room but was stopped by two guards. I put my face to my hands, felt Minot’s hand on my shoulder.

“Who is this you keep talking about?”

“Ursya... she’s alive,” I said.

“The Mayak they spoke about?” Minot said looking at me sternly.

I nodded.

“The Mayak, who tried to *kill* Seleth?” Prejudice colored his phrasing.

I then remembered the blood on the snow.

“Minot... she carries my child,” I cried, and I held my shaking and bound hands out to him, begging to be freed.

Stunned, his eyes widened, he stroked the stubble on his chin. I could tell Minot struggled with the idea of where I had been, what I had done, and that I now loved a Mayak as my wife. It seemed a blow to him. He could not overlook my anguish however.

“I will come back and stand any trials, pay any debts. I swear!” I pleaded with him.

Minot’s eyes still betrayed shock, his hands still stroked his chin and he began to pace the room, a holding cell.

“Please let me go. Come with me if you must, but...”

“Jeshibian, Darlian sent an arrow through her. She can’t be alive.” “She is!”

“How do you know?”

“Because she’s strong!” I wailed, and then I sank to the floor. Minot seemed paralyzed, confused.

I said, “I can still *feel* her, her heart beating in mine, but she can’t hold for ... “ Minot grabbed me by the shoulders.

“You must forget her, brother! Your life is here among Khoorlrhani.” And I looked at Minot, and wondered where my real brother was.

I smacked his hands away from me and yelled.

“Is this how Paen has taught us, to be paralyzed in our prejudices?! Ohh.. *Minot*...if you don’t free me and she dies ... I will forever *hate* all Khoorlrhani! I will never have a place in my heart for you, Minot! If she dies, you will have killed any love I ever had for you. I will pray to the highest form of the Goddess to turn my heart black against you!” I cried, the words daggers, pleading, begging, threatening, and trying anything to get his appeal.

And then I sank to my knees, driven mad by my love’s *ever-strong* heartbeat, calling me, and I planted my head to the ground and before my brothers feet, kissed them, pleaded, begged, a broken dog.

“Let me go brother. I ... beg you. Let me go to her.”

A drop fell to his feet, a tear from his own eye splashing on his sandal. He left the room.

A few hours later, I was before my father, Khoorlrhani–Tah. He looked grim, and looked upon me like a foreigner. My brothers were among me. They had no words for me, and only Darlian looked at me. I could see him peripherally. I could tell he wished to speak to me, but I would not give him my eyes. I could not forgive him, not now. I was resolved not to.

“Son. You have turned your back on us, left us. Why?” My father asked. His face seemed aged.

How long had I been gone? Perhaps more time than I counted, perhaps years. It looked as if the war and the absence of Master Paen had resurrected Khoorlrhani–Tah’s former dark self.

I had no words for them. I could not explain myself

“You were given the Master’s gift, his sword, his sight, and then ... abandoned us in our darkest hour.”
“The gift of the Master is not a gift of invincibility.” I said, “The Master’s invincibility is the reflection of his love of Ashuta. It is the gift of vulnerability.” I muttered.

My father chuckled in a low patronizing voice.

“Where is the sword Jeshibian?”

I was dumbfounded. Surely it was on the back of Nanui the moment my brothers placed me on her back.

“I do not know.” I responded ... I welled up again, as we were wasting precious time.

My father glared at me, sighed, then said.

“Until I figure out what to do with you, you will remain in Toumak’s dihj. Clean him up, and get him out of those rags!.”

“No father! Exhile me! Please release me!”

My father leaned forward, slammed his hand against his ivory armrest and bellowed, “You are not free to do what you please! Haven’t you learned that yet? The world is not your personal playground! You are a Khoorlrhani Prince, not some ... stud to Mayak bitches!” In that moment I saw my father’s ugliness, his blind hatred for the Mayak, as he could not recognize me anymore, as I surely stood as one, a Mayak. As I looked about the room I saw the same mode of bigotry expressed on my brother’s faces. They were ashamed of me, a deserter, a black sheep, and a turncoat.

This was what the Master was undoing, what was resorted to when the master was not holding them to him. I lowered my eyes, nodded and was taken away.

My insides turned. I could think nothing else but of Ursya. I felt her fading, slipping from me. I could not sleep. If I could not break free, I was determined to at least feel her, that tangible faintness, until it could no longer be felt.

Later, I heard a noise from where I sat on a solitary mat. It sounded as though the bolt on the door was removed. The door was set ajar, and then it opened slightly letting in the cool nighttime air.

No one entered.

I approached it to see no one outside, neither guard, nor officer. My winter skins and boots along with a water bag and food was packed for me. Outside, beneath the moonlight, was Nanui.

I went to her and noticed Maburata securely fastened to her side. My brothers hid the sword! I cut my bonds, mounted Nanui and immediately set forth to the East. I looked back once and saw a familiar silhouette beneath the glow of torchlight. It was Minot, watching me leave Arkaya once again.

In that moment I regretted the harsh words I said to him.

I pushed through the rest of the night, and soon the glow of dawn was upon me and we did not stop for many hours! Nanui dug in and served me like no other. We stopped for a short time for water, but were soon back at it.

We traveled for two days, only resting at points but not camping. The third day Nanui could only trot as we headed into the foothills. With the altitude, came snow, and howling winds, but we did not stop.

We pressed on and all the way I could feel Ursa. I knew she was alive. Through the cold winds the warm thread of her life, linked to me, called me to her. She was waiting for me. She was indeed strong.

Nanui and I came to the cave. I dismounted her and ran upward to where Ursa and I once made our home. It was dark, empty, and lifeless.

We rode on, further up icy switchbacks, beyond to all the places Ursa and I had once camped. She was nowhere to be found. I wrapped myself in my heavy animal skins that Minot returned to me, but they were not enough for ripping winds and sleet and snow. For however long Ursa lived in the mountains, I never acclimated completely to the low temperatures in these peaks, but I was determined to travel higher than I had ever been to find her.

Nanui trudged along, and I could only hold on as we traveled up the face of the mountain. I knew Ursa was still alive. My conviction of this was deep as marrow. I would come for her.

For hours I saw nothing but hues of white and grey. All I felt was the stinging cold. My heart sank as the sun began its descent to conclude our fourth day of travel.

Weak, I began to rethink myself, began to crave warmth, honey, sun light and breezes. I was still the small boy from Arkaya who only wished for the comfort of his mother, and yet hoped somehow he would magically change and have strength. Still, I was unwilling to let go, and so instead endured more pain. After some hours beneath the white moons, I and Nanui came to a broad portion of mountainside, a white hill marked by sparse trees beneath the intensity of lunar radiance, the twin orbs full and large.

I swayed on Nanui's back, hovered between consciousness and unconsciousness before I saw a dreamlike mirage—two riders in the distance of silvery glow. Their heads were wrapped in rags that billowed in the harsh wind. The snow covered the hooves of their animals as they watched me from a distance, and then approached.

I swooned. My eyes shifted out of focus, and then all of a sudden the riders were right before me.

They were horrified by the sight of me.

I coughed, "Ursa?"

One, recognizing me as Khoorlrhani, laughed, drew his sword, ready to make an easy kill of me.

At that point, I welcomed the idea of being beheaded, as I could go no further.

I did not withdraw Maburata, for I was too weak. I only focused on the name and pleaded: "Ursa? Ursa?"

Before the warrior could strike, the other stopped him—blocking his elbow—and with a gesture of his hand asked me to again repeat myself. He peered through the eyelets in his head-wrap.

"Ursa!?"

He stared at me, said something to the other, and then grabbed the reins of Nanui, pulled himself close to me and withdrew a dagger. He said more to me, but I could not understand at first, too tired and unwilling to hear. The dialect was too strong and harsh. He yelled at me and looked at me with eyes that did not trust me.

"E keje de badme ... Koo-ran-ee dog," *I should kill you Khoorlrhani dog*, he said to me. I understood Mayak fluently now, love having taught me. I heard, and expected death though not entirely concerned.

I shivered, then over Nanui's side, vomited, coughed and managed once more to utter the word.

"Ursya."

I felt a hand on my shoulder, pulling me up. The warrior held a small water bag. He patted my shoulder, and beckoned me to drink.

The fluid was hot, harsh, biting, but made me warm. I coughed from it, and the two warriors laughed. He gestured and said in my language.

"Drink boy! Bring back Koo-ran-ee dog soul!"

I did, and the warrior squeezed the bag to force more into me. Much of it spilled against my face, thawing my cheeks.

I felt calmer. They led me up the mountain, randomly patting my shoulder to keep me awake.

"No sleep. No die yet. We see her."

An eternity passed with us riding beneath the moons, up the steady slope until we finally came to a circle of large skin tents obscured by large ice covered rocks. Behind them was a large frozen over lake, reflecting the pale glow of the moons. My body trembled with the realization that I was entering a Mayak camp, but in the pit of my stomach I felt Ursya. I knew she was there.

The warriors were greeted by others, and a commotion was made about my presence. Dogs, their large black wolves, growled at me, but were beaten back by their masters at the behest of the warriors that guided me. There was some violence, but it did not escalate beyond shouting and shoving. A young warrior, angered at the sight of me spat on me, but the two I was with prevented him from doing anything more. They sent him away, told him to go to his wife.

I was escorted to a tent. The lead warrior then pointed. I dismounted with some difficulty, and was brought inside. Nanui snorted with exhaustion. They took her, gave water and food.

It was warm, a golden glow inside, and in the center of the room was a large bed of animal skins by a generous fire. There she was, lying, my Ursya. From across the dirt floor, a short and round woman came to me. She spoke to the warrior, glancing to him then back to me. Her eyes were large and grey. Her hair was straight, pulled back tightly and tied into a bun. She saw me, listened to the warriors telling of me, gasped and said.

"Jeshibian?"

I nodded. A tear escaped her eyes. She took my hand, and brought me over to Ursya who slept. I fell to Ursya's side, put my face to hers. I merely looked at her and felt restored. I touched her face, and she woke up. Our eyes on each other finally, we smiled. I kissed her.

She then coughed, and winced in pain. I moved her covers down along her right shoulder. Her wound did not look good. She coughed more violently, and then the woman came over to us, and tended to Ursya. She gestured Ursya to move to one side. She then worked to clean where the arrow entered from her back through the collar bone. I put my hand on Ursya's belly. The woman looked at me with an expression that confirmed my fears. She had miscarried. I was adrift in waves of emotion. Was I to have nothing to hold to?

Ursya turned on her back, and took my hand. It then set into me that Ursya was really dying. I remembered this moment. Like the moment with Suwan, my mother, this was the moment of our saying goodbye. The old woman looked at me and Ursya, then softly wept. I did not run from it. I would accept it. I had learned now that death was a part of life, and the people that you love were all subject to die at any time, that hopes and ideas all died, and that *in love* was the only dignified response.

Why not play in love, the Master words in my mind.

By those words, I knew I would heal, but also by them, I did not regret loving Ursya, nor begrudged God for taking her now. I only wanted to look into her eyes, and feel, to love being grateful for our final moment, to love and regard her and her family as she went.

We did not stop looking at each other. She whispered.

“I wanted to give you this baby, Jeshibian.” She said.

“I wanted to raise it with you.” I said.

“I waited for as long as I could for you.”

“I came as fast as I could.” I trembled

“It was not written in the stars for us though ... “ She said, then laughed, “But you will love again,” she said softly. I understood her to mean that I should move on, not stop.

She began to cough more, and then managed to say.

“I love you.”

I lay beside her, stroked her hair, “I love you” I whispered grinning, looking deeply into her.

I reached into one of my bags and produced a single Khoorlhani gold coin, and showed it to her.

“The ransom,” I joked, placing it in her hand. She laughed her smile wry, and her eyes shining in humor, curling her fingers softly around the coin.

“Okay, hostage, you behaved well. I let you go now.” She said softly, and waved her hand to free me.

Our eyes lingered for some time—throughout the night— before she went to sleep again, still holding my hand. She gripped for as long as she could and then dawn took her away from all of us.

Again, I died inside, but was so happy to have loved her.

What a grace you are Master, I thought, knowing that as I stood, it was somehow his standing in my heart, to show me, to teach me, to slowly fix my vision to notice the wonder of surrender, the enormity of value in the surrender to this love always given, and recognizable despite the tragic passing of dreams, fantasies, lovers and life itself.

I cried into my hands, still the sense of loss so great, so overwhelming, but somehow the gratitude for her in life was so alive in honoring and accepting her death, and made the pain only natural, almost beautiful, not offensive and to eclipse the joy of love itself.

This is what my Master taught me. This was what being a true warrior was about.

The old woman took me into her arms. Others then came in, those who clearly loved Ursya and who grieved for her death.

An older man came to me, an old warrior. He spoke my language.

“Khoorlrhani centurion, I am her uncle, Theseron,” and then he pointed to the woman, “And she is her mother, Adla.”

I remembered that name, and he seemed to recognize me. It was years ago we met, when I was not yet old enough to ride my own mehra. He was the Unat’s ambassador, the peace maker, who transported gifts to my father. His face was now lined with age.

I rose, and went over to him. I composed myself, wiped away tears.

“Adla, Theseron. I grieve for you,” I said in his tongue.

Theseron nodded,

Adla then spoke, a different dialect, and Theseron said, translated; “We both know that you loved Ursya. We grieve for you. She called your name in the nights.” I fought back the tears, but was overwhelmed.

“If I had fought for Adla, Ursya would have been my child. She would not have run away,” Theseron said.

“If she hadn’t run ... I would never have known how beautiful and dignified the Mayak people are.” I said, and Theseron translated. I held up two fingers joined together, the gesture Ursya made to signify the One Great Tribe Clan.

Adla cried then embraced me. Just then the warrior that guided me to the camps threw open the flap of the tent opening.

He yelled at Theseron.

“He says you have to leave. There are others who know you are here now, others that wish to kill you, or hold you for ransom. You must go. They will put you on a pole. Now go!”

I was rushed out of the tent, but not before one last look at Ursya. My heart was torn in two, but still had a will to survive. I did not think. Soon I was on Nanui and riding hard to the south as instructed by the guiding Mayak warrior.

“Go for two days. Hide in the caves.”

Perhaps he referred to the caves Ursya I once lived in, or to another more obvious location, I did not know. I just rode; however, the sound of pursuing mehras trailed me.

My head throbbed, as my body was still weak from the previous night’s journey. I had not eaten for days. Nanui pressed on ferociously for at least an hour. I began to fade, the sound of hooves behind me, of yips and yipes of an enthusiastic death squad behind me. I wondered how bad death by impaling would be. After all I now had no strength to worry, none whatsoever.

The white snow on the ground somehow seemed to envelope me, blot me out, take me into its eternal maw. I felt myself fall, float down the lingering downside of a cliff, poor Nanui falling over me, her sounds blending with mine, the cold sting of snow against my skin, of branches snagging and tearing my clothes, all of it, the chaotic melange of it going on for some time before my body hit something hard at a bottom.

I felt nothing then. I only heard things, water, a brook running, footsteps in the snow approaching. I thought I rose, was on my feet, the sound of steel against steel, the sound of bodies hitting the ground, dreams of the form of the asp, of the ape, of the tiger, and then it was quiet, so quiet, followed by sharp deep cold pain.

Was I dead? Was this the end of my story?

No, not yet. Then I heard rustling, a grunting, felt a sensation of being lifted, moved, of being a sack of grain on someone's strong shoulders, or perhaps across the rump of a mehra, carried and through all of that, a red stinging thread of sharp pain. I had hoped I would definitely die before they took me back to *that pole* to be displayed as a trophy of hate, but I understood. I would have killed my own brother to save my Ursya. I would have run him through to protect what I loved—reveled in my hate to proceed with it. I knew this was me. I did all of this, therefore payment was due. I understood the viscous circle of it. It was my time to die.

The Master was right about me. I was no longer an innocent boy chasing butterflies, but a man chasing dreams, and demanding Ashuta's light to flicker and shine on my terms.

I, too, like all of us, invested more into what appeared and less into the deeper truth. Oh what a game! What a tricky game.

I chased my desires rather than hold to him. This would be my fate, I thought.

Then I heard more rustling, the snapping of twigs, the crunching of more footsteps, and then digging. Perhaps already dead then, and I would be buried, I thought; *did Mayak bury their dead?*, but I could not remember if they did. Then time was a long thin black line, and then I felt cold, wet, and then warm and dry, and I smelled dirt. I then felt a great deal of pain in the center of my chest and could then smell fire and smoke, then I heard a throat clearing and the tinkering of things, and then sleep released me after an awful and helpless eternity, and my eyes focused and took in a small thatched interior and over my face I saw a pair of eyes staring back at me.

I smelled tea, and then tasted it. The face above winked at me.

I grinned, winced in pain. Before me was Master Paen!

The Master's Discovery

We were silent for days as I could not talk. I traced a finger along my chest and felt a grisly scar, a deep cut across it, which travelled upward along my neck and to my earlobe. The Master had stitched me up. He noticed the curious wanderings of my index finger against my wounds, and he said;

“Be careful you! We don't want to reopen that.”

“What happ ... *erghll*, “ I gurgled, cut short by the pain.

“And try not to talk. I will tell you everything but first eat this.” And he fed me a kind of soup, spooned it into my face.

“It’s a good thing I happened upon you. When I did, you were fighting fiercely for your life. You are tougher than you give yourself credit for, Jeshibian. Even though you took quite a fall, you manage to best two of the five men who were on you.”

I had no memory of it whatsoever.

The Master’s eyes lit as he elaborated on the story.

“I came upon you at the point where one of your five pursuers cut you nearly in half. He was about to finish you off. I couldn’t allow for that so...here we are.”

“Nanui,” I whispered.

“Well... She’s fine, only a chipped horn, though I don’t think she’ll be inclined toward a joy ride with you any time soon. Rest. Sleep.” He instructed.

And I indeed slept, for an immeasurable amount of time, all the while conscious of the pain in my chest and neck, in my gut and in my heart. Sadness hovered above me, as I dreamt of Ursya, only to awaken to the reality that she was gone. Paen fed me more and one morning I awoke with regained strength, only to again fall back to sleep.

The cold seemed to have broken somewhat. I saw Paen seated, legs folded before the entrance of our low-ceilinged shelter, which let in a shaft of light onto the dirt floor.

Master Paen was quiet, his attention gathered into him as his eyes looked out into the distances I imagined were before him reflecting off his hazel eyes. I watched him for some time—scanning intently—before his voice cut through the silence.

“This has been the worst snow storm this region has seen in years.” He said I cleared my throat but could not speak yet without feeling a sharp pain.

“Welcome to the highlands, Jeshoya. I suppose before you left home, you did not realize you were quite underdressed. I suppose love does that, motivates a man beyond reason, beyond sanity.”

I drifted back to sleep.

I found later at one point that I could sit up finally, and speak. We ate together in quietness, and in the warmth of our tiny shelter, as the winds raged outside.

“Why so glum? You survived quite an ordeal.” The master then asked, trying to cheer me up.

I told him my story, of how I searched for him in the foothills below, and how I met Ursya. I told him about our time, of how much I loved her and why, of our time, and of the events that led to her death. And at that conclusion I found it hard to speak the words to describe her leaving me. The Master placed a hand on my neck, then my face and he said with such warmth and compassion,

“Ohhh ... my my my. What a story. Oh ... Jeshibian ... I am so sorry for your loss. Losing a lover is so difficult. It will be difficult, but you will heal and you will see there is so much left to live for. You are alive, and you have so much growth to look forward to.” I nodded and managed to smile as I looked into those eyes of his.

I remembered his lesson about my mother, and in my heart I agreed. I did not avoid the pain life dealt me this time. I was happy that I could manage that, even though I was so disappointed. I wanted to be a

warrior like Paen, not a mere soldier, but the warrior Paen was, seeing, hearing, unafraid to love, tireless in it, unafraid to feel, and most of all compassionate, strong in the ways of the heart.

“It will be at least two weeks, I say, that this damned snow will clear enough before I feel it safe to travel. The rocks are too icy for old Quanon.”

I knew his concern was for me. I was healing but the master did not want me to suffer the journey down, “So ... you traveled deep into the highlands to find your love! What an amazing story, my friend. “
“Master,” I said, “I could not live without her. I did not think twice.” And in my heart, I was sad, but so happy that I knew love was *that*, that I would have surely died for her.

Knowing that about myself made me happy.

“And you traveled against odds that would normally keep a boy at home, at the skirts of his mother. I wonder what that says about bravery, what inspires it, hmm.”

I recalled my self-doubt as a boy. It seemed clear that the love of another is what made men brave, and was not a self-manufactured quality.

“Now you get it.” Paen said.

And so I began to wonder, did Ashuta play this all out for my sake? Was she leading me about the chapters of my life, dangling hopes and desires from a string so that I could learn these truths?

I asked the Master this as I cleaned out our shelter after serving him a meal.

“Life all happens to purify, to move attention toward her, Jeshibian. There is not a soul she does not play, no man, woman child, or creature in the wild.”

“Master.” I said, “When I left, I was really looking for you, but . . . I got distracted” “There you go again. You are *always* looking for Me, Jeshibian! You mustn’t feel guilty for following your attractions, my friend. The problem stems from the possessive assignments you make—*my journey, my mother, my lover, my bravery, my loss, my gain*. Who has these things?” “You still don’t understand. By not asking ‘*who got distracted*,’ and by not becoming obsessed with answering that satisfactorily enough to where you really connect with it, you **contract** as a self who is objectified in the manner of the mythic character *Jandee*, and who then struggles with *Mandee*, the others who oppose or attract a You— to *your journey, your mother, your lover*. You must see how this reinforces your sense of being separate from me. There is only ONE that stands as all that attracts you. That One Is Me.” And I was quiet, happy with his good news, his teaching that I had again forgotten so easily.

“You were looking for Me when you wanted to be a centurion and ride in the army. You were looking for Me when you happened upon your next distraction, your new love. You wanted to be a lover, a father, right?”

“Yes.” I said

“Nothing wrong with that, and that may happen again, later.” He said, stretching his hand out, “But ...” he prompted me.

“But I was not truly satisfied.”

“And was it the fault of war, or of Ursya? No, but as beautiful and loving as Ursya was, and how wonderful your life together may have been, your heart yearned to know something else, something at

greater depth that you could not locate if you had *only* lived out your life here in the mountains, away from *your* worries—in your private kingdom, eh?”

I struggled with this, because I did not want to reduce my experience with Ursya, but at the core I knew that as events unfolded then, though in a sort of bliss with her, I became troubled, doubtful.

“Is it because, whatever happens, it cannot deeply satisfy?” I asked.

“Your thirst, your true Self, comes to you in dreams to rattle your cage, and destroy everything that lay between it and you, until *it* and *you* are reconciled. So, it seems to you that there is always some unsettled business, all the time, everywhere, somewhere, somehow. And why does it seem this way?” He asked.

“All attainment is all for naught. It’s based on illusion Master.” “Ok. What is the illusion?” He challenged.

“Me?” I finally said and then, “And so all my loves cannot satisfy to the core, because... I don’t know myself to the core.”

“What do you mean? How will *you* know yourself to the core? Who will know it? Who is IT?” He leaned toward me, his eyes bulging comically to give me the answer.

“No one can know this One, I... I speak only of an idea Master. There’s only devotion to you.” I said.

“Well, finally you can manage to say these words, but it sounds only like the right words. I recommend devotion, but *who* will do this devotion? You cannot know this deeper One that I know you to BE by doing anything, because you cannot locate the *person* that you vaguely refer to—that is my point, Jeshibian. Investigate the idea that you speak of. You must simply be Me, so that I am recognized to actually Be you, understood completely. That is the devotion that is required, the devotion of keeping your hands open. I AM that open handedness.”

And so I did not recoil into thoughts, wondering, and shifting internally. Instead I quietly was HIM, my beloved Master *as is*, gazing at the thawing country side in silence by his side.

Later, I cut up meat that I trapped, a rabbit, and prepared it, my head bent beneath the low ceiling, as the master began to talk again.

“So much is changing.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“I am Her instrument, but it seems the pattern is really about to change. I don’t know how yet.” I then became afraid, looking at Paen who flashed his wordless glance at me to stop what I was doing. I let it go. I obeyed. He then said.

“Don’t concern yourself with it. You just stick with me, and do as I say. Remember the tree analogy? I almost had to bury you, remember?”

I stared blankly at him, then nodded. He clapped his hands and beckoned me to continue with my cooking. “I’m starved.”

“Master?” I asked, “Why did you leave Arkaya?”

He sighed, then said “No one sees me, Jeshibian. I Am here, I Am true, I Am the One everyone wants to appear, the One unfettered, the Master with diamond eyes, but no one wants ME. They want me to be their friend, their ally, their political advisor, their personal slave but no one wants me—God”

“I wander the lands of a world of souls who do not see Me. It is very difficult to live among children, who do not wish to grow, who only want more and give less. So I left to enjoy the One Great Land as I see it naturally, the land not cut up by lines of ego conquest.”

I knelt before Paen, bowed and said, “I will do my best Master. I do not wish you to go.” His eyes fell on mine, he smiled and he said.

“I know. That is why we are here.”

The weeks passed on, and soon there were only small patches of snow against the grassy mountainside. The Master whistled loudly, and our mehras, Quanon and Nanui came trotting along. Happily we descend the mountain and in four days we arrived at Arkaya.

Before we were seen, the Master said this,

“One thing.”

“Yes,”

“Your brothers, whatever wrong they have done you, you must forgive them for all of it.” He commanded.

I looked at him, and met a serious gaze.

I sucked in a breath, and agreed.

“Yes, master.”

Dream Darshan

Being Paen's disciple, having taken the giant leap of faith and to be given away to his new master Mediha, Jeshibian struggles with doubt. He cannot see beyond ego. He still worries, and tends to view himself failing despite the amazing event's that have unfolded before his eyes. The conceit of his ego cannot fathom it. It is a slippery fish, his activity that leaves him participating this way, still participating as a one separate from his Master. It's a trick of the light!

I fell asleep and directly into Her sphere. Amon the guardian stood before me, powerful, his skin striking indigo, glowing with each inhalation. He was massive, muscular, wearing only a silver skirt and sandals. He held his hammer by his side, the head resting on the floor, and the long golden handle held like a cane, his hand resting on the end of it.

He looked at me with two black eyes, with alert white pupils, sharp, but expressing the deepest heartfelt gratitude as he knelt on one knee and beckoned me to approach him.

I did, one step close after which he pulled me in and held me to him. He rose with me in his arms, pressing his heart against mine, throwing me upward into the air, catching me, and hugging me. His voice was like a lion. He only said,

“Khoorlrhan” He would not release me, nearly crushing me in his thanking me, and I loved him, happy in the most Real embrace of a loving brother.

He put me down, and there was another, a smaller man, hair long, tied at the top of his head, wearing a full toga. In my heart, I heard his name, Dolji. He was perfectly quiet, gentle and attentive, and again in my heart I heard, *Come*. Tiela was present. We embraced, held hands and followed Dolji.

He held out his hand and I took it with my free one. He placed his hand against my cheek, lovingly gazed at me and we disappeared beyond the subtle antechamber and deeper to Niehembreth, the name for it, heard in my heart. Before me was Mediha. She was no longer a child, but now a strong, fully grown and strikingly beautiful woman. I fell to the floor weeping, kissing her feet.

She picked me up. Lifted my chin, and encouraged me to look into her face, a face so beautiful that I thought I would die looking into her, as my heartbeat quickened with unfettered attraction and as the bright light refracted against her jeweled indigo skin. She kissed my cheeks, and then my lips, deeply and held me to her. I died in her embrace, walking past the fearful propaganda of death as presented by the twin snakes, was outshined, and was held to her.

I awoke next her, at her feet in a sitting room, her name beating in my heart.

She then stood, wearing a toga, and sashed around her was a large weapon, a heavy rifle. Amon and Dolji stood by her.

Mediha in my heart only said, *very good*, nodding as they disappeared.

I awoke knowing that she could never be forgotten.

The G-150 was attached to the Corsair's belly, close to the engine, mounted at the bottom. It was a small short-range stealth craft, designed for a crew of our number, no more. After my ordeal in learning to fly the 100, Lieutenant May taught me everything about this craft. I could see the hull of the craft through the thick glass panels in the floor of the Corsair.

We all sat in the circular enclosure of the main cabin of the Corsair, drinking Champaign from plastic cups, smuggled aboard by Ansa. We toasted the mission and to change. If we were successful, the Banxisithine would have struck its first major blow against the enemy—the enemy I had not yet even seen, only heard stories about.

Bren bragged about his encounters, and in his telling framed the Trikes as fierce fighters. I could not help but feel a profound sense of dejavu as I listened, seeming like I've had this experience a countless number of times. My attention drifted and I tried to trace back to when I felt this duplicated sensation, replicated moment. I then recognized the memory, of my being ten, listening to Minot tell about his taking on my father's guards in the palace—an exciting story.

I tripped along a thin thread of insight.

Since there was only one sound of the heart, and thusly I, by Mediha's grace, could hear the sameness of expression masked by language, there is only One Free Being expressing and masked by a kind of slippery idea. I could not go there. It was a slippery fish, popping out of my grasping hands just like how Paen illustrated to me by the calm lakes as he reeled in his catch, and as I tried to see beyond, journey beyond this *partition* that obscured the depths of the most root memory, leaving only behind a subtle taste, the insight vanished and I again refocused to hear the conversation taking place.

"The time is ripe," Ansa May said, "She will not balk." "Jolel and their squadrons are ready. She'd be bat-shit crazy to balk." Red said.

"I will be surprised if the King resists. The *rains of his unpopularity* have been beating down on his shoulders for nearly fifty years." Ansa mused poetically, leaning on one shoulder, crossing her legs, her black cropped hair a straight line hanging to the floor, her face a hearty grin.

"Oh believe you me that asp of a daughter of his will fight." Red said, crouching, leaning forward, engaged enthusiastically.

"Yes, but alone. Her own army won't defend her against an *essentially* Pal-Jalian ground force. It will all be fought politically. That has been the idea. It's over. Right now Jolelian forces are no doubt transporting Auntie's troops into the capital, while Parliament *encourages* the King toward a clean abdication."

"Whal man, don't be surprised *whun weh* get back, things are all *fooked op* and *yer farniture* is laid out all proper on the lawns o'tha great house along with an eviction *nautice* signed by the Dauphiles!" Red hollered, laughing.

"You bastard, Red," Ansa chuckled.

"A wager then, man?" Bren said, smirking, leaning back.

"Nah," Red replied. I know better than to bet against myself. I'm just sayun, ya never really know. You might *wanta* crash at my place for a while, lay low, you know after we take care of this little errand."

"We really need to succeed in this little errand," Liuetenant May said, "If we can gut that star liner, it'll buy us the time, leverage, and..."

"And cover my ass?" Bren asked, looking out of the small grey room and out into the yellow light flooding in from the walk way.

"If we fail, *and* Red's right, then an eviction notice will be the least of my worries," He sighed.

"Oh nah, nah, nah! Come on! I'm Joshin Breny. We're good here. You're Aunt, the Countess, is rough as rusted nails, a *fookin* Edgewood eh. Hey, Ansa's right, I am a bastard, but I can't help it, cause... *sigh*... I just am." Red laughed waving his hand at Bren's show of insecurity. He slapped Bren on the back.

"Obviously the mission is still a go. I think Bain has bigger priorities than to chase after the man who leaked a few sealed documents?" Ansa said reassuringly.

"Agreed," Bren said taking in a breath. "I suppose they would have sent bigger guns after us back there." Then Red laughed. Everyone looked at him.

"Look atcha, so lovely in the center of yer own universe! You thought those darts were after *you* eh, sweetie?" He asked, "No, they were... errand boys of *an old friend*. *Thas* why I wanted us to leave straight away. Now let's get a look at this craft o'yours."

“I should have thought twice before hiring you, eh?” Bren sneered.

“As I recall you asked me to this dance when I was drunk. It’s I who feel taken advantage of, a bit swept off my feet, but...” Red parried.

Bren handed Red a small disc, and Red loaded it into a receptacle that was attached to the metallic table that he was hunched over. A hologram appeared in the center of the room. It was a rendering of the Triken star liner *Narswa*. It had the appearance like that of a strange fish, with two small fins flared straight outward, and a giant one protruding from its belly, a massive hull. As it turned, I saw the back end as a diamond shape enclosing four massive engines.

“My oh my.” Red said, “What a sight. Is this thing a big as I think it is?” “Quite big, like nothing we’ve ever seen.” Bren replied, “Imagine packing the entirety of the Red fleet away and transporting it to any star system you’d like.

“It’s like... a do-it-yourself kingdom maker. Conquer-o-matic!” Red marveled. Bren suppressed a laugh.

“Bren, I never go the background files. Where did we get data?” Ansa asked.

Bren half grinned.

“You were not supposed to, yet. Until we were underway, I thought it best to hold onto what I’m about to tell you. “

Ansa stared blankly, and nodded her head for it.

“The information that BSS has enjoyed from the past ten years has come to us by way of an actual Triken source.”

“Wait, you mean, like an *asset*?” Ansa queried, shocked.

Bren stared blankly at Ansa, and nodded his head.

“Well... who knows this? Does BSS know this?”

“They suspected, but only I *know*,” He said and then explained, “As you know, I’ve been the one gathering intelligence on Narswa during my missions at Arcana. That is where I made contact. However I was not sure what I was onto, and so reported vagaries. I only verified the existence of the mole, a high ranking officer in their fleet, many years later while stationed on Sten. There, I actually communicated with our mole’s colleague who was also rift side. The details on Narswa were provided to me along with pieces of intel that saved our skin in last battle for Bain, something most don’t know. I held onto information and doled it out as I saw fit to gain leverage with BSS who were hanging me out to dry so to speak. They thought well to reinvest in me once I produced a photograph of planet Walayan along with coordinates to the Triken star system. We now know *something* about them, where they live.”

“This was your card to play against BSS.” Ansa said.

“Quite so, otherwise they would have handed my contacts over to younger, more impressionable agents, and imprisoned me no doubt for my wavering in regards to the Nadthsade missions.” Bren said.

Red shook his head in disgust.

“So, what we know from our source, a Triken General, is this: Narswa is the third of her kind—a... super carrier designed to deliver their entire fleets quickly into theaters. This is why their navy seems to keep

coming, more than likely why the first Black fleet offensive was caught off guard last time around. We have a good reason to believe the other two like Narswa are committed to other Triken wars. Narswa is for the deepest deployment, and always far *far* behind their offensive. She's only to keep the front supplied with ships. She is not agile, and while deploying, must be defended as you can imagine offloading her is time consuming. Also, and most interesting is that these ships travel faster than light, tech that we do not have."

"Bren," Ansa called, "What is it that this source wants? I mean, what's in it for him?" She asked "I don't know yet. I can only speculate dissatisfaction with the current regime. I'm hoping we can find out if we make it that far." Bren said candidly.

"They really know how to bring home the bacon, don't they?" Red joked.

"A certain lust for war, definitely." Ansa said.

"What the hell is a Narswa, anyway?" Red asked."

"It means *the Justified*," I answered, "Our once-ever sighting of her was actually an error on their part. We were never supposed to see her."

"Yes, good. Narswa came out of light speed too close to Arcana, and our instrumentation within the Black fleet picked up on the signature. That's when I got orders to get closer, monitor, and report, and nearly ten years later here we are."

"I take it won't be so simple this time, getting sight of her." I said.

"No, she'll probably not appear anywhere near Arcana. Still something that big will not be invisible to sensors. She'll leave a detectable radiation signature. We have at least a week before she turns round, back to the mother world."

"To begin our sweep, we'll be shooting well beyond Arcana," The Lieutenant said, "Almost beyond the second quadrant, where we'll hide the Corsair, *here*." She pointed at pink and purple clouds in holographic space, the shadow of her gloved fingertip falling across my eyes.

"Floating all about, and sniffing for her." Red said. "Then what?" "Once we get something we, all load into the G-150, and slowly make our way to her while cloaked." She replied, "Now the cloak which is new tech from your *asset* should keep us well hidden. It makes sense to me now why the Triken military hasn't used it against us. It's obviously tech from their rebels," Ansa said to Bren who nodded in affirmation.

"Yes. It's desperately being sought after by the Trike military," He said, "Now we have it."

"Anyhow, *our* cloak was tested against the Banxisithine blockade with *some* success. It should grant us a forty percent likelihood it will work against Triken detectors." Ansa said.

"Forty percent?" Red grumbled.

"Still it is a small stealth vessel; we should be able to get close even without it."

"How do you figure?" Red asked

"They're not looking for the approach of a dingy, but attack ships. We'll mix in nicely with all the debris scattered about from battles had in sector 2." Bren said.

“A little space–trash camouflage, eh?” Red sighed, hunching over, his wild hair spilling onto the table.

“Bren,” I said, “Once attached, how are you going to get inside?”

“I’m not sure. We will have to figure something out.”

“Well don’t candy–coat it for us, Breny. Are you serious?”

“There should be a hatch somewhere. I’ll just have to crawl to it.” “Simple as that, yeah. I see.”

“Look you damned ginger–headed–Jole, we’ll figure it out.” “Red!” Ansa exclaim, “Come now. You knew this was going to be difficult business.”

“Just relax, Carridean.” Bren said, laughing. “We’ll figure it out, relax.”

“Well.. we certainly have enough time for that,” Red grumbled. “On that note, who’s first in the freezers?” There were two suspension freezers in lower chamber of the Corsair. Though at full speed, we would arrive at Arcana in approximately four months, there was not enough food water and oxygen for the entirety of the mission, for all of us, and so in shifts, we would have to sleep for two months—two crew members up, two down.

Bren did not raise his hand to go first.

I volunteered, and then so did Red. “Well I guess that’s decided. One last meal, and then to bed.”

From the Journal of Bren Edgewood

March 6, 4186 – en route to planet Sten from Arcana, New orders given.

Space travel sickens me. It is the cryo–sleeping. Think on this: the worst way to age, is to experience nothing as you progress to your grave. Despite all this suspended time you find that you are not a wiser man. What a waste. One would think it easy to sleep for prolonged periods of time, a youth who desires two to three more hours after being roused by their alarm clock, perhaps, but after twenty two years of service to the BSS, mission after mission, expedition after expedition, sleep begins to reveal itself as another cage, no better than the fleshy mass of my body in its waking state.

Imagine the last hour of your sleep cycle, the one in which your body burns and aches for use and in which your mind can no longer drift in deep bliss, being stretched for a period of a month or more, two months, six, or god forbid nine! The cold and drugs can only be so effective for these damned two–year long stretches. The company hedges in providing enough food for more than a week aboard, and so... we sleep longer. They will not provide more than enough drugs, so our sleep is only so deep at points. Those of us more experienced are more resistant to the drugs, which is the category in which I lie.

I have bad dreams, a long string of them, black pearls stretched across the galaxy as our craft cruises along, second after second, hour after hour, day after day, week after excruciating week, perhaps a few months until the stimulant courses through the I.V., like the key turning the tumblers of the locks to free me. I wake up, only to be greeted by the old problems we forgot we had in our abandoning them in dream. We forgot who were. Now all the old concerns are restored, and we remember that we are on a dangerous mission in the name of King and Country. It is so disappointing to again remember all of these problems, the ones we escaped to be restored from sleep only to return to the agitation, the worry, and the doubt suffered within our ordinary mortal coil.

I used to think so differently of my work, when I was young and naive. I once thought that I was escaping in my travels, into the vast endless speckled space. Now at 43, I have learned that there is no escape, neither in the nebulous heavens, nor in deep inwardness of dream. There is no place to go, and that is a revelation that deeply troubles me, for my fantasies have no leg to stand on, no fuel to burn to go on with it.

That reminds me. I dreamt of the strange blue woman again. She resembled the Nadthsade queen of the Hoctoin on planet Banx, her skin like theirs, darkly scaled, but her hair was like that of a wild gorgon full of angry snakes. She came to me her eyes red like fire, and blood dripping from her mouth. She smelled of rotted meat and the head of my father was being gripped by one of the snakes extending from her wretched head. The snake crushed it like a pumpkin and all the matter oozed along the gorgon's neck. She had me cornered, finally I could no longer run from her, but I did not care. I was tired of running, and took a step toward her. I believe, "show me now." were my words.

I looked into her eyes, and into the every pair of eyes extended from her mane of serpents that fix their gaze on me from her grotesque visage, and immediately began to be held still, stone still. She was turning me to stone! I could not move, there was only the fidgeting of my heart, which I then felt to beat its last as it too turned to obsidian and then cracked inside me. My body then shattered like marble, and I felt free! Finally free!

The overhead lamps in my sleep pod poured light into my eyes as I awoke sobbing. Outside through the windows of our craft I took in the view of the planet Sten, so large, and so green. I knew that this would be my last adventure. I would die here, and I was oddly glad for it.

I awoke from deep sleep. It was dark, only the light cast into my eyes within the pod was laying in. I shivered from the extreme cold, as the heat units struggled to warm me. I was disturbed, a long thread of dream that threatened to vanish if I did not rest a moment and try to pull it back to me. I fought back the impulse to recall my whereabouts, my inner eyes still gazing back to the bright windows of where I had just come from.

Then I remembered white light. I sat with Mediha, in Neihembreth. I remember feeling the rush of a strong caffeine coursing into me, the machines dragging me back, and in dream my trying to get up from my seated position, but being called to her to not leave, to '*stay in the room*,' she said. She was holding me to her, her gaze penetrating, loving. She shone as the brightest sun ever to be seen against 5,326,889,122 miles of perihelion darkness, of our deepest darkest space. She only talked the language of heart, of source, and so it was said only as the silent language of intuition.

She said to me *again*;

"Only be what I AM, that is what is extended beyond and survives the ordeal of your self-possession. Only what I Am reveals and outshines this gesture." I tried to again rise, only to be held as she said;

"No eyes see Me viewable in any mind room of the dreamer, but finding Me is the act of true love, of surrendering to and allowing what I Am to be revealed to you more completely. My love, stay in the room," she again said.

I lamented unable to hold to her, as I rose and began to leave. She said so sweetly, so beautifully, as if blowing a kiss to me:

“Ahhh...to *worry* that what I Am, is not found or cannot be comprehended or brought back in your mind is only a gesture based on your assumed separateness. What I Am *cannot* in reality be lost or found in mind’s light refracted & darkened rooms. Your mind, cannot survive what I Am. I say again, my love, stay with me in the room before your mind.”

And so staring into the white light that shone into my eyes, I did not rush to the problematic gestures of Joshua Korani. I did what she said.

I stepped out of the pod, shivering, vomited in the puke bucket, my body in shock, and then sat as Mediha did, in a kneeling position on a thick towel, mimicking her form, only the white noise of the ship heard in the darkness. The Corsair disappeared from me for another hour.

I rose to find Red in the main cabin, wearing only his underwear and slouched over a hot cup of espresso.

“Not enough caffeine Red?” I joked as I entered.

“Not in all the worlds, Josho. Fook, man, I’m a wreck.” He said.

“Where are the others?”

“They’re in the G-150, doin some preppin before they go under.”

“Did they leave us any eggs?” I asked, starved.

“Yah...yah, plenty, man, but the carton stuff, sorry to say. Go to it lad.” He whispered.