

Master Bonsai and the Dance of Eternity

Master Bonsai Fails But Triumphs Anyways

Master Bonsai always pissed on the potted trees. No one could understand why his piss didn't kill the bonsai trees. The miniature trees always thrived under Master Bonsai's care if you could call it that. He never even noticed the trees, he was skeptical of any tree that was well tended but not allowed its commanding growth. His students so loved the bonsai trees and credited him with the spiritual flow or chi or power to keep them flourishing. They fussed over the bonsai collection in which there were over 200 trees—the same number of students that could stand to stay under his tutelage at any given time. All his students grew to love his bonsai trees more and more and in due time could stand him less and less. Yet, they were all reconciled to the fact that his pee kept the trees alive, strong and healthy. Master Bonsai himself was not a particularly healthy specimen. He ate whatever he liked and didn't like and accepted whatever he didn't like, declaring, "This food tastes like garbage even a skunk would refuse. Give me another helping!" He was a very difficult man and his teachings were even more difficult to understand. He never wrote any books on his spiritual wisdom and no one, not even one of his students (even smart ones) could fathom what he was actually talking about. Sooner or later they would all just shrug their shoulders and say, "We are in it for the trees." They may have originally been students of Master Bonsai, but they all ended up becoming truly and completely devoted to the potted trees. They put up with him because they loved the trees and for some strange reason the trees flourished under his yellow stream.

No one knew Master Bonsai's actual name. They called him the Bonsai Master to his face and behind his back they called him weird, insane, and a joke. There was one woman, a young woman in her early twenties who had her suspicions about Master Bonsai. She believed that she was his daughter and there was a strange resemblance between them. Underneath his unkempt appearance there was a family profile that matched. One could see it when they were standing side by side. He always smiled at her, just briefly—he didn't make a show of it. He called her Yea-she, Yeashe, and so that was the name she went by. She had grown up in Master Bonsai's ashram. She had everything she needed, a lot of personal freedom, came and went as she pleased. She liked drawing and watercolor painting, but didn't care for the bonsai trees like the devotees of Master Bonsai. She did spend a lot of time in the garden. She had no adults to whom she had to answer and yet she was friendly, private, and at times reserved. When she was fourteen, she heard a couple of devotees of Master Bonsai complaining about their teacher's lack of instruction on meditation. How are we going to get enlightenment if our teacher doesn't teach us how to meditate? They wondered. Oh, what is this enlightenment they are talking about? She wondered. She asked Master Bonsai about it one day when they happened to be alone together in his back yard. He had greeted her with his smile that always read to her, "Happy to see you." She had smiled back and called him her name for him, "Koofy".

"I heard your students talking, they were complaining that you don't instruct them on meditation for the sake of their enlightenment, Koofy. What is this enlightenment they are talking about?"

“Yease, I don’t know nothing about this meditation thing or this enlightenment thing they are talking about.”

“But, Koofy, why do these people stay around you.”

“For the trees, for the trees! A tree needs to be in the earth, not a pot! People have strange ideas, trees in pots—and Yease, enlightenment is another one of their strange ideas.”

“But, Koofy, why are they looking to you to instruct them about enlightenment?”

“I don’t know, it must be my animal magnetism or my piss that keeps those damn trees alive. They’re in it for the piss!” He laughed, “And the trees.”

Yease sighed and gave him her look that they both knew meant, “This is not a real, plausible answer,” They both laughed and Koofy said, “Try some of the eggplant, it’s just terrible!”

There was an understanding between them—don’t ask and I won’t tell. Yease never asked her Koofy if he was her father. When Master Bonsai felt that the question was coming his way, he always dodged the arrow and the point and the target was never reached. He himself was not sure, though he could see some resemblance. She looks more like her mother, he reasoned. He had slept with a lot of his female devotees in the early years when he had taken up teaching and gathering devotees more seriously. Now-a-days he never acknowledged any of the spiritual titles that were given to him in the past. In his early days of teaching he was a human dynamo given to shows of his siddhis. There was a dispute among devotees whether one of his siddhis was the seduction of all the women who came to him. He must have bedded every woman who came to him. Women came and went from his bed. Women fought over him for his attention. Only one woman refused his advances. She just wanted to meditate. This made Master Bonsai desire her more. He actually tried to court her and give her presents, which made all the other women jealous and mad. Saman always refused the gifts.

One night on her own volition, she went to his bed and had sex with him and left the next day for parts unknown. About ten months later a baby girl was left in his bed. He did his best (which wasn’t all that good) to care for the girl and called her Yease. His women devotees, seeing his predicament, felt sorry for both their master and the baby, and cuddled with Yease, fed her and saw that she had the love, nurturing and protection a child needed. At times Master Bonsai was a little jealous of their attention to Yease, and that’s when he started to piss on the bonsai trees that his students gave him. He felt disillusioned with his life as a spiritual teacher and began to act out with strange behavior. Being once a gentle man, he became rough with his men students. A crisis was reached and his students met with him and asked him to stop acting crazy and to be more considerate of their flaws. He only laughed at their request and tried to chase everyone away. Many people, including some of his strongest advocates from the beginning, left. People who had paired with another under his tutelage left to begin families and pursue other interests and destinies. Master Bonsai kept to himself more and more, looked after Yease from time to time. When the dust settled and all the tempers were cooled, devotees noticed that their gifts of bonsai trees to their master were all thriving and they felt that was a sign of their master’s authenticity. They noticed that the bonsai trees attracted people to come see them and that’s when they took up their own way of trimming and pruning the miniature trees as their form of practice.

When they noticed that their master often peed on them and that instead of killing the trees, it helped them thrive and grow more interesting and beautiful, they felt this was a sign of true divinity appearing. Their master was nicknamed Bonsai Master and they put up with his lack of etiquette toward them and his lack of teaching and instruction. The twisted, beautiful miniature trees were a source of pride for them and evidence that they were truly on the spiritual path, whether anyone could understand their teacher or not. There were only a few devotees who ever even talked to the Bonsai Master. They talked mostly about the trees and he only grunted in reply. There was one woman devotee who still looked out for Yeashe and him at times. He never said much to Karole, they had an understanding—one that he never spoke of. He was never harsh with her, yet he never extended any familiarity or affection. Karole's heart was in the right place, she was not spiritually ambitious and she had the innate ability to accept life graciously as it played out.

Karole was a fiercely loyal person. Once she accepted you in her heart, she would never throw you out. Yeashe respected Karole and loved her and gifted her with her watercolor paintings. No one conformed, confined, or disciplined her, not even Karole. Yeashe could feel when Karole's heart was heavy, and would cook her dinner—and they would sing and make up chants. Karole had a beautiful, sweet voice. When she sang, people would be attracted to sing back what she sang and she lead them in a chanting session from time to time. The musician devotees began to bring their instruments to accompany her. Yeashe like these sessions and sometimes brought her sketch pad and sketched the form of the devotees as the chanting became more and more ecstatic. Master Bonsai collected her discarded sketches and saved them in a drawer in his bedroom. Yeashe didn't know about that drawer of her discarded sketches. She did see his form come to the window when the sessions were in full heat, when the clapping and stamping were the heaviest and loudest. She saw him gaze down at the group and she thought she could see a smile on his face. What she couldn't see from her vantage point was his feet tapping to the beat and his hands moving quickly into different mudra forms. He enjoyed the sessions from his room and when there finished, he laid down on his bed and drifted past the realms of struggle and found himself in another room, in another bed. In that realm, he was younger, he was with Saman and they were living a life of gaiety together. There was a forest that surrounded their room and he and Saman would wander there after their lovemaking.

The path through the forest shone the light of the day. The trees resembled the bonsai trees with strange and beautiful twisted shapes, but unlike the bonsai trees in his ashram, they were free of any potted constraints. They grew to great heights, maples dogwoods, cypress, junipers, manzanitas and oaks, many kinds grew in this forest. He and Saman loved the forest and had many excursions. She called him "Koofy," like Yeashe called him in the other realm, where he is old and unfulfilled. In this place with Saman, he was fulfilled—a loving partner, full of creative gestures that were a source of great heart fun for Saman. In his "other" play, the realm of the constrained trees, he was rigid, like a petrified stick, and was reluctant to show any warmth to anyone, except Yeashe, but even that was handed out sparingly. When Master Bonsai woke from his excursions into the other realm where he lived with Saman, he did not remember a thing. His heart ached and he felt constrained. Everyone annoyed him and the bonsai trees felt his anger release on them when he peed on them. But the trees did not wither from the waste products of his body or his anger, they accepted it and made use of it because they knew his heart could never really punish them. They knew it wasn't in him. Master Bonsai did not see at that time who his true devotees were. He would come to know when he needed to know the most.

Would anyone call Master Bonsai a happy man? Did anyone understand his freedom? Did anyone see why he let his devotees restrain him? Did he blame anyone for his confinement? He endured his whereabouts and almost never left the garden. Sometimes he was seen in his torn robes and worn-out flip flops, shuffling to the end of the driveway to the property limits of the garden. He would throw out whatever had accumulated in his pockets—old wrappers from the ginger candies he liked to chew on—into the road. He unlocked the mailbox and reached in for the mail. Most days the mail was advertisements for bonsai fertilizers, some art magazines that Yeashe liked to look at, and sometimes a personal letter from what he believed to be an aggrieved family member. Sometimes there was an inquiring letter to meet him, but he hadn't seen any of those in years. Today there was a curious letter addressed to Master Bonsai written in what he perceived to be a woman's handwriting. He thought of throwing it into the street, rejected that impulse and then held the letter to his forehead. An image of a young woman with long, very curly locks, beating a drum, appeared in his mind's eye. Master Bonsai was always (he felt) being disturbed by his psychic openness, but the image attracted him. He held the letter to his heart and, god forbid, his heart actually ached and unfurled into a smile. He put the letter into his deep sleeve pocket and walked back up the hill to his cottage. Time for some matcha tea.

He was to meet with Yeashe today. She wanted to talk to him about something. He thought he had successfully gotten her off the track of asking him questions about enlightenment. At this point in his life, in his advancing years, he didn't feel that enlightenment could be taught or talked into. He had felt that his devotees had not benefitted by him, his teaching, his transmission, or even any ordinary presence, in their lives. If he had any effect, he felt that he had given them false hope that they could and would wake up. He disliked them, was always annoyed by them, but lacked the courage to leave them and live without them. When he was around them he felt he wasn't good enough, he had failed them, and he hated that they had made him feel that way. He had always been a gentle person, but he had never known that he was a coward too. That bothered him the most. So, every day when he walked to the edge of the property to get the mail, he wanted keep walking past the neighborhood, down the long urban blocks—he wanted to walk all the way to the desert and live out his days under a rock ledge looking at the desert sky. He always returned back to his cottage and his 3 o'clock tea.

Yeashe watched him plod up the driveway. She thought his steps were heavier than usual. He hadn't noticed her watching him and so his usual kind smile was absent from his face. Yeashe studied his form and face like a true artist would and saw the sadness that she usually didn't discern because he shielded it from her. Koofy, what is wrong? She wondered. Her heart went out to him and she wanted to soothe him, to cheer him. She remembered when she was younger, he would get up from his chair and spontaneously make up very bizarre dance steps that he would ask her to imitate. This would end in many big guffaws. Whenever Karole came into the room, they would fall dead silent and erase any signs of the previous hilarity. Yeashe was struck by how frail he looked and heavy hearted. When he noticed her standing there he smiled his usual comforting smile. "Koofy, tea is ready along with your favorite shortbread cookies."

Uncharacteristically, Yeashe linked her arms into his and he did not show her any sign of approval or enjoyment, but he did not pull his arm away. Before she poured the tea, Koofy handed her her two watercolor magazines—one on how to paint portraits and the other on how to paint still objects. She noticed a letter in his robe pocket. He pulled it out and put it on the small table by his chair. Her attention was drawn to the letter and Koofy noticed that.

“You wanted to talk to me about something?” he asked. He intuited that Yeashe was yearning to make her way past the garden, out of the forest of his students and the bonsai trees and into the bigger world, into the jungle of humankind.

She surprised him with her request, “Can I paint you? Can I do a series of watercolors of you?”

Koofy grunted, “Why would you want to do that? There are all the bonsai trees here that people come from around the world to see. You probably could make a decent living selling your paintings of the bonsai,” he added.

“Oh, Koofy, the bonsai are great and I have sketched and painted many of them. I want to paint you. I want to see you, I want to understand you more.” Yeashe felt vulnerable, she didn’t know how Koofy would reply—probably his usual dismissal.

Koofy looked down. His flip flops were coming apart. He had forgotten to take them off upon entering his cottage. He had never forgotten before. He wiggled his feet from the tattered flip flops. He looked up at Yeashe and noticed her nervous anticipation. He didn’t turn away and gazed deeply into the eyes of the young woman whom he had never acknowledged to be his own daughter. Yeashe felt a deep stillness and a depth of that stillness ignite in her. The man and the woman met, the father and the daughter recognized each other in a way that Yeashe had never met anyone before. In that meeting she felt herself as she is. Whatever relationship she had with this old man was a connection that transcended form.

“Yes,” Master Bonsai simply said. He turned away from his gaze with Yeashe and sipped his matcha.

She had prepared herself for his big, blunt, flat no, not his agreement that came so easily.

“Can we start tomorrow? The morning light in the garden is beautiful.”

“Yes, yes,” replied Koofy. “What should I wear?”

Yeashe laughed, “Oh, wear what you have on now, what you always wear.”

Koofy smiled. “I suppose my wardrobe is limited, I might have to do something about that.”

Yeashe laughed. “I could take you shopping.”

Koofy waved his hand in dismissal of her suggestion. Yeashe was already thinking about the spot in the garden that had the best morning light. She might need a few more sketch pads and watercolor paints. She was thrilled that the Bonsai Master would let her paint him. She almost danced out of the room without giving him her usual parting greeting of palms together.

Master Bonsai grunted goodbye and as she closed the door behind her, he reached for the letter he had left on his table. As he didn’t see a return name or address on the left hand corner of the envelope, he was trying to decide if the letter deserved to be tossed into the wastebasket. He usually never read any of the mail, passing it to Karole instead. After giving in to Yeashe’s request, he realized that a mood of giving in, of being open to new possibilities, was upon him. Must be a strange configuration of the stars and planets. He struggled to open the envelope as it was well sealed. Finally he just ripped it open and a small picture fell out with a short letter accompanying it.

He looked at the picture of a young woman. She reminded him of someone, a look-alike of someone who had once been his devotee, a look-alike of an actress, maybe? He liked the face, her eyes shined with a confidence that you don't often see in young women. And she was smiling, a big smile. She appeared to be delighted at the time someone snapped this shot of her. He put the picture down and unfolded the brief letter.

Dear Master Bonsai,

I want to meet you and learn about enlightenment from you. I am ready and willing to do anything you ask of me. I heard that you are not teaching anymore, I hope this is not so. Please accept me as your student.

Love,

Brima-ful

Master Bonsai picked up the picture again. He studied the picture of the girl. He saw that her heart was strong and her sense of self was not wrapped in entrenched egoic patterns. He drifted into a psychic reverie where he saw her in many roles, in many times, and the one dominant theme was her deep attraction to what is True Reality. He knew that he would accept her as his student. He felt a hope and a relief, an expectation that he could transmit and reveal to her what he truly is and in that revelation she would be revealed to herself. Master Bonsai, at the age of 78, would return to the arena of teaching to serve once again. He was nervous about being called into service again. He finished his shortbread cookies by dipping the last crumb into the last gulp of the matcha tea. He called out to Karole who was in the kitchen chopping vegetables. "I will be giving meditation tonight."

Karole dropped her knife and it bounced on the cutting board, and if she hadn't jumped it would have stabbed her big toe. Master Bonsai had called for meditation after 17 years of no invite.

The devotees were puzzled at the call to meditation. They weren't enthusiastic about it, some doubted the intentions of the guru. Some devotees had never even meditated with the guru. They thought the old man was someone's grandfather, an eccentric that they called the Bonsai master for having lived in the garden longer than anyone else. Most of the devotees hadn't meditated or practiced meditation for years. Their life was centered around the bonsai trees. Sometimes they talked about their practice, but it was always about the trees. "I pruned Bodhi today," (they came to name each tree) "and he was beaming. I could feel the energy of his delight." Some devotees had their favorite trees and revered them like they were their living deity. They fussed over them, dreamt about them and didn't like being away from them for even a day. So a call to meditation by their teacher was met with a lot of mixed emotions. Why is he doing this? Will this change anything? Will this change my relationship with the bonsai trees?—were some of the questions that were on their minds.

Karole was happy that she would get to sit with her guru again. Yeashe wondered what had changed in Koofy that he was willing to sit with his students in meditation. She couldn't remember what kind of teacher he was. She knew she had grown up around him being revered (more than he is now) but for many years he hadn't given much attention or regard to any of the people who had

come (initially) to be around him. She wondered what it would be like to sit in silence with Koofy and all the other students.

The gong sounded at 7:00. Master Bonsai entered the room and sat on the chair Karole had provided for him in the front of the room. She noticed that he was wearing a robe that was not worn at the elbows, a newer robe, and she realized that she had given it to him five years ago. She never saw him wear it until this night. Master Bonsai bowed from the waist to his students and closed his eyes. His breathing became slowed and deep and this led everyone to match his example. Yeashe felt her mind quiet and thoughts only flittered by and did not come to her attention to be explored or further thought. She felt simple, uncomplicated with nowhere to go but here and nothing to get but to be here as is. A smile came to her lips and she felt happy for no reason whatsoever, and she knew that unreasonable happiness didn't have to make sense and that it had to come from somewhere. She opened her eyes and looked at Koofy. She saw him without his usual discontentment. She felt him without the sense of being confined that she felt he suffered. He was an old man who had lived his life without an ego of fulfillment, and Yeashe felt she understood his dissatisfaction better. He was not discontented nor dissatisfied because he wasn't able to succeed at what he wanted. His dissatisfaction had more of a noble impulse behind it. He had wanted to give everything away, but no one noticed what he had to give, so no one could accept the true depth of what he had to give. Yeashe felt compassion for Koofy, that a heart as big as his had been confined like the bonsai trees that his students were fascinated by and attended to with so much regard. Yeashe felt that their regard had been transferred from whatever they couldn't understand or accept about their teacher to the trees that they could control and take charge of. His bristle exterior was his way of protecting himself from their tending to him in ways that they could possess him and "grow" him toward their personal satisfaction and success. Yeashe's heart could feel Koofy's suffering and she felt she could understand him better. This made her want to paint him more, she wanted to see and feel the man more. Painting him would help her see Koofy and she so wanted to see him as he really is. Her impulse was of a true artist, to reveal what is hidden, to reveal the sacred in us all.

She wanted to paint Koofy more than anyone else because he was the one person who had the most to see, the most to reveal. This made Yeashe giddy for the work he would allow her to do.

Master Bonsai opened his eyes. He almost smiled, almost. He pushed his feet into his flip flops and walked across the room. No one moved right away. People were finding their way back to the familiar, familiar agendas, familiar attitudes. Karole wiped the tears that had been freely flowing from her eyes. She had remembered something that she hadn't thought about in years. She knew she still had it even though she hadn't looked at it in years. It was tucked into a small plastic box that contained what she called sacred mementos. It was a letter that Master Bonsai had written to her after she had professed her very personal love to him many years ago. She had felt hurt by his reply to her love and had filed the letter away with other small items that he had given her—a Prasad of dried rose, a scribble that he did of the Bodhidharma, and Yeashe's birth certificate that named him as the father, though she was not sure if that was actually the case. She thought of the letter again, and when she thought of the letter she always felt the burn of his rejection of her. She decided to take out the letter again, after all these years, her heart didn't know what to expect, it fluttered but she needed to read the letter again, to set aside her personal hurt feelings to see what Master Bonsai had written to her. So after many years she opened the letter (again), the letter that had broken her heart and confined her to her existence and way of life that she knew all so well, a

life ordered by duty, ritual, and pattern. The page had yellowed a little and the writing was a bit faded. It was still readable. She read it out loud, “Your love for me is a reflection of your own desire for fulfillment, I cannot accept it. Your personal love is only your call for disappointment, so be disappointed.”

The words still cut her, but after all these years of serving him and existing alongside him, she was able to face them. She felt the depth of the sting of his words, but underneath those words she felt him not just as a rejecting lover, she felt what he was offering her. She laughed right out loud and realized that she had enough of being disappointed! Enough! She said over and over like a mantra. She realized that she had conformed her life to live in a room of disappointment. She was not alone in this, she realized that all the devotees that had left and those that had stayed had designed the rooms that they lived in by their disappointment that their Master’s enlightenment would not give them a single damn thing, nor would it save them from the fact that life would always disappoint in giving them the fulfillment they all so craved. She saw that Master Bonsai had no course but be confined by everyone’s disappointment, how this must break his heart, she thought. And yet he stayed and lived with us, even as we disregarded him more and more. He lived an ordinary life with us. He didn’t reject us, me, he let us construct and create the lives we wanted, but we couldn’t let go of him completely. We confined him into a potted life, all the while mistaking our ability to do this as a creative drive, a success in owning beauty for our own sakes, for our own sense of spiritual attainment. What an awful sacrifice, she felt. And all these years I blamed him for his rejection of me. She was done with being disappointed, with living in a room designed by disappointment.

“Master,” she called out, “Your love is your sacrifice and your disappointment cuts my heart. My love will no longer confine you. I will try my best to make sure it gladdens your heart in enjoyment.” She put the letter back into the plastic box and laughed, and declared, “Now, I finally got that lesson!” She knew love could never reject, no matter how much it hurt. She realized that her need for confirmation of her personal love for Master Bonsai had confined her heart into the small container of her body-mind of ego and personal pride. She knew he was free and wild and his heart was bigger than all the restraints that desire could put on it. And she knew that her heart was not her own, it too was wild and unlimited and now she was ready—ready to love.

Madden stopped by the bonsai garden after the meditation with his Master Bonsai. He talked to the trees as they were his friends. He had given some of his favorite trees names. His two favorite cypress he called Vedanta and Nonduality. The persimmon trees were called Bodhisattva and Bodhidharma. He had a fierce pride in those trees and private tree lovers and investors had contacted him to buy the trees at an exorbitant price. A lot of money was being offered, money he could leave with and justify starting his own garden ashram and continue on with his own bonsai garden. He had approached his teacher Master Bonsai about the possibility of selling some of the trees, but Master Bonsai did not respond—only his usual grunt and dismissive wave of his hand. This angered Madden and when he was ready to make his move toward his own independent life and to set himself up as his own authority of Enlightenment, he would proceed privately. Only Karole would notice anything unusual happening with the trees. He knew of Karole’s deep loyalty and love towards Master Bonsai, that she had been with him from the very beginning. He wooed her in his own way, flattering her virtuous traits and deferring to her respectfully. Madden didn’t know why Master Bonsai chose to meditate with his students/devotees after all these years. He had never meditated with Master Bonsai in all the years he had been living at the ashram, which had now

totaled 15 years. He didn't feel much towards the master, the meditation was okay. He didn't have a spiritual experience, see gold in the room, or the master (or himself) burst into light. He was a bit bored by the whole experience and suppressed any thoughts he had about his plans for making his break and selling the trees to start his own ashram—just in case Master Bonsai could actually read his mind or hear his thoughts. He felt he was more luminous than his teacher and would be a better teacher of Self-discovery. That old guy has given up long ago, he thought. He had studied the great wisdom teachings and drew together his own teaching based on what he felt were the best elements of each. Some of the other, younger students gathered with him to hear him expound on the spiritual wisdom he had gathered from other sources (even including Master Bonsai's ecstatic poetry of his awakening). He always presented this esoteric wisdom as his own insight. Madden believed that through his extensive study of great wisdom, he had acquired it as his own and he believed that his understanding through his acquisition made him a true knower—an actual Self-Realized being. The younger students looked up to him and he envisioned when he was ready to make his move towards creating his own ashram, these younger students would follow. He was worried about Master Bonsai showing up at this late date to meditate with them again. But he felt confident that he could stand up against Master Bonsai if it came to that. He did not use confrontation much to get what he wanted, he used other devious devices. He discredited Master Bonsai with his subtle put downs to create confusion in the students' minds. He wore away their loyalty and reverence towards Master Bonsai and avowed the great work of growing the bonsai trees into beautiful specimens and credited them (and himself) with that work. He made fun of the students' belief that it was Master Bonsai's piss that grew the trees into astounding shapes. He credited them (and himself) with the works of art that the trees became. He made them believe that the success of the trees to grow into the unusual beautiful specimens they became was a result of their own spiritual work. He had created a place to put their energies and the result of this work was the evidence of their spiritual strength and maturity. Some of them, despite all his work to train them, still respected Master Bonsai and loved him, though Madden couldn't imagine why they would. Master Bonsai didn't give them the time of day. To Madden he was washed up and living a retired life in the midst of his own great efforts. Master Bonsai was not unaware of Madden's drive and ambitions, and what effect they would have on him, his devotees, and his ashram. He watched, he waited, each man or woman would choose their destiny according to the depth of their understanding at the time of the crisis that he knew would be coming.

The fateful day came for Brima-ful. She had received an email from a woman named Karole who represented Soratio Sowee, known as Master Bonsai. She was invited to attend the Master's meditation session occurring each night at 7:00 pm. Brima-ful couldn't believe her luck. She had given up hope of hearing from Master Bonsai. Upon googling him, she had heard that he was all but retired and was not accepting new students. Today would be the fateful day. The drive to the garden/ashram would only take her ten minutes. She had driven by it almost every day for the last four years on her way to her college classes. She was always drawn to the garden but never dared to drive past the no-trespassing signs that were posted at the beginning of the driveway. Today she was sure she was not trespassing; today she was invited. She was nervous and excited. She also had the sense that an older, more mature version of herself was looking out from behind her eyes and smiling, encouraging her to meet her destiny—that she would learn everything she needed to learn to meet her True self, her True nature.

She noticed devotees walking towards a meditation hall with zafu cushions in their hands. Older students were carrying meditation benches. The women were wearing yoga pants and the men looked like they were comfortable in Japanese-style pajama pants. Brima-ful was wearing a loose skirt with an oversized blouse. She did not bring a cushion of any sort. She had taught herself how to sit in a full lotus for an extended period of time. She was quite proud of that accomplishment. When she went into the hall she noticed that the men sat on one side of the room and the women on the other. She did not know if this was some kind of rule—she thought it might be, so she sat in a space she found in the middle of the room on the women’s side. She sat in the full lotus and internally acknowledged Master Bonsai. When he came into the room she noticed that everyone bowed from the waist so she did the same. Master Bonsai did not look into the room but immediately closed his eyes. Brima-ful did as well. She watched her breathing slow down and deepen. She felt a presence in front of her and she wanted to open her eyes to see who it was, but she was firm in her resolve to keep her eyes closed and to just meditate. After a few minutes the presence in front of her called her, “Open your eyes!” She stayed even firmer in her resolve and kept them shut. The presence became more adamant, “Open your eyes!” Was this some kind of strange testing she was going through? She wondered. Finally, she decided to obey the voice and opened her eyes. She was in a strange forest of many kinds of strangely beautiful, distorted trees, some of their distortions defied gravity. They were so bent over, surely they would break. There were lotus-looking flowers blossoming on the branches and some of the bark was covered in a luminous moss. What is this strange garden? She wondered. She followed her impulse to walk among the trees and she could see a woman sitting in meditation. Her entire form was luminous. As she was drawn to approach her, a man’s hand caught her and said, “Not so fast, in due course.” She stopped and looked into the man’s eyes. Those eyes! She thought. Those eyes drew her into his heart, she knew it was Master Bonsai. As soon as she recognized him, the meditation was over and she could hear the other devotees stirring. She saw that Master Bonsai was leaving the room.

She was the last one to leave the hall except for another woman about her age—maybe a little bit older—who was gathering her brushes and pad. She awkwardly dropped the pad. Brima-ful picked it up and offered it to her. “Thanks,” the woman answered. “Can I help carry anything for you?” offered Brima-ful. Yeashe wondered who this woman was. She had never seen her before. “Yes, that would be good.” Brima-ful followed Yeashe, holding the large watercolor pad. “I’m Yeashe.” And Brima-ful relayed her name. “I haven’t seen you here before. Is this your first time sitting in meditation with Master Bonsai?” asked Yeashe.

“Yes, I was invited to come by a devotee of Master Bonsai.”

“Karole, I believe?” asked Yeashe.

“Yes, do you know her? Are you a devotee of Master Bonsai?”

Yeashe wasn’t sure how to answer that. “I am painting him. Karole is a friend, more like a mother figure to me.”

“How long have you been with Master Bonsai?”

“You could say my whole life. I only remember growing up here.”

“What’s it like, to study with Master Bonsai?” asked Brima-ful.

“I don’t know how to answer that. I grew up here, Master Bonsai is like a father figure to me.”

“Oh, you grew up in the company of an enlightened master. How fortunate you are!”

Yease laughed, “I guess I always just wanted a normal life.”

“What’s he like?” Brima-ful asked.

Yease laughed again, “Koofy, I mean Master Bonsai, is a rarity. He is both deep and distant, vulnerable and hard to understand. He is human in all the ways we are scared of being. He is entirely present here but at the same time his life can be blown away like a leaf in the fall. I’ve always thought of him as an ordinary man with flaws and faults, but there is another picture I am trying to see—that is why I am painting him.”

Brima-ful felt into what Yease had described to her about Master Bonsai. Most of what she said puzzled her. She wondered if each devotee saw their master in their own private way.

“Thanks for helping me carry my art supplies. Will I see you another time?” Yease asked.

Brima-ful nodded her head. “I’ll be coming tomorrow night for meditation.” And every night after that, she thought, she knew.

“See you tomorrow, then. Goodnight!” Yease was happy to have met Brima-ful. Her respect for Master Bonsai (Koofy) gladdened her heart. He deserves it, she thought. She was surprised at her protective feeling towards Koofy. She was not sure who Koofy was, she was learning what he meant to her. It gladdened her to heart to see Brima-ful’s respect and admiration for him. She did not feel that regard in the politics and positioning within the community, except for Karole. Her sketches and watercolor paintings of Koofy were coming along. She was excited and anxious to show them to him. He had sat formally for her a few times, once under his favorite magnolia tree by his cottage, and once in the meditation hall. That one proved difficult to focus on him. She swore that his form was shining so she depicted his form with a white hot aura around it. She showed him the painting and he laughed, saying, “The more you focus, the more I disappear.” She also sketched him in informal circumstances, when he was weeding or strolling down to the mailbox, when he read his favorite books. The more she sketched, the more she wanted to see him as he actually felt himself to be. She saw the grumpy man. She saw that he loved all the plants and flowers in the garden. She saw his deep frustration with the ego plays in the community. What the study revealed to her was his childlike innocence and his sensitivity to everything around him. Though he appeared (at times) callous, aloof, Yease could see that was his act to protect his heart that cared too much. She wondered how she could make his life happier for him. In her meeting with him to show her paintings, she asked him, “How can I help you to be happier, Koofy?” He held back his usual grunt and looked at Yease with his bright, tired, achey eyes. “Yease, you always are.” That was the closest thing she had ever heard to a term of endearment coming from him. She smiled back at him and he cleared his throat and spoke up. “I’ve always had an ambition for love and an ambition for happiness. That’s why I gathered devotees to me, to come live with me in this garden.” Yease thought it strange that Koofy used the word ambition instead of the word sacrifice or gift that other spiritual masters used in representing their urge to teach.

He continued, “Unfortunately, most of my devotees also have ambition, but their ambition is for a personal kind of happiness and love. They want to acquire and possess happiness through their ego strategies of winning. Thus, someone always loses, thus, they lose.” Yeashe decided to remember Koofy’s words and to include them in her paintings of him.

“Koofy, I met a new devotee of yours. I like her, she has a respect for you that I don’t often see in your other devotees.” Yeashe was able to speak frankly to Koofy, he welcomed it. She immediately regretted speaking to Koofy in that way. Maybe I should be more diplomatic with my choice of words, she thought.

Koofy laughed and grunted at the same time. “Who is this new devotee?” he asked.

“Her name is Brima-ful. She has been coming to the meditations for the last few nights. She helped me carry my art supplies after the meeting.”

“Yes, I noticed her,” answered Koofy. “Invite her over to our tea tomorrow.”

Yeashe was surprised at this invitation. He had never invited anyone to their tea time before.

Brima-ful was met by Yeashe at Master Bonsai’s door at 4:00 pm sharp. Brima-ful appeared nervous and excited and relaxed when Yeashe met her.

“Yeashe, good to see you. I brought some cookies for Master Bonsai—for the tea.”

“That’s kind of you. Come, he is waiting. We can’t be late for matcha. Koofy, Master Bonsai, loves his matcha.”

Yeashe saw that Koofy was dressed in his newer meditation robe, not the old ragged one that he usually wore around his house. Yeashe folded her hands in greeting to Koofy and Brima-ful copied her gesture.

Koofy pointed to a seat that Brima-ful could sit on and Yeashe sat in her usual place, a chair close by.

Yeashe spoke up, “Koofy, I mean Master Bonsai, this is Brima-ful. Master Bonsai smiled at Brima-ful and said to both of the young women, “Please call me by my true name, which is Soratio Sowee.”

Yeashe was stunned. She never knew that Koofy’s actual name was Soratio Sowee.

“Master Bonsai had never been my name. Certain students began to call me that many years ago for reasons they have justified. I don’t care for it. Master Sowee will do.”

Yeashe was still stunned. How didn’t I even know that? My name is Sowee too.

Master Sowee looked at the two women. “Let’s drink the matcha,” he announced. Brima-ful raised the cup to her lips and the warm, green fluid passed into her belly. Master Sowee sipped slowly and glanced over at Yeashe. He could read her dilemma. He smiled at her and very uncharacteristically winked at her so only she could see it. Yeashe wondered, is all this some kind of act? But when Brima-ful spoke up and said, “Master Sowee?” she noticed he went along with the new name.

“Could I tell you about myself, Master Sowee?”

Master Sowee nodded and added, “Speak freely what is in your heart.”

Again, he turned and winked at Yeashe, a wink that only she could see.

“I don’t know how to say this. I felt compelled to see you, to come here. As a child I used to pedal by this garden and I knew someday I would live here. People told me about the bonsai trees and the Master here they called Master Bonsai. I was always attracted this place and when I was around 16 and started to drive, I drove by here. I almost turned up the driveway many times to come here.”

“What stopped you?” asked Master Sowee.

“One time I did, but I was met by some adamant male devotees of yours who said this was private property and I was trespassing. If I didn’t have official business here I should leave immediately.”

Master Sowee reflected on this.

Brima-ful continued, “After that I began to dream of the bonsai trees. I dreamt I was wandering in their forest but these bonsai trees were potted in huge underground pots and the trees grew tall. As I walked among them they spoke to me and told me I could stay with them and they would show me how to meditate on the master. I asked them who was their master and their leaves shook and whispered, “Master—our master, we are rooted in the heart of our master—we are the bonsai.”

Master Sowee reflected on this too.

“Finally, I mailed you my card. I want to learn enlightenment from you.” Brima-ful folded her hands toward Master Sowee.

Master Sowee cleared his throat and took another sip of his matcha. “I cannot teach you. I cannot give you or reveal enlightenment to you. No one can.”

Brima-ful was disappointed. Yeashe studied Koofy’s face. She could see that he was being himself, being truthful. He was not winking.

“But why am I compelled to be here?” she asked.

Master Sowee smiled, “I am also compelled to be here. In the beginning it was my ambition to teach that held me here, but when that ambition failed me and I let it pass, I thought I would leave here, but I felt I was destined, compelled not to leave here. I had no other place to go, so I stayed here. I have been here many years, and even though I am free, I am compelled to stay here as you are compelled to be here, you see, some force in play does not let us go about our ordinary business. So you see, being free can also be bound.”

Brima-ful was not sure she understood. She was touched by Master Sowee’s confession to her. What kind of teaching is this? She wondered.

Yeashe felt into what Master Sowee had revealed about himself. I, too, am compelled by some force to stay here in the garden of the bonsai and with Koofy. She looked at Brima-ful and

thought, all three of us are compelled to be here. All three brought their final sip of matcha to their lips.

Master Sowee wiped the cookie crumbs from his robe and stood up, “So, we are all in this together,” he laughed and left the room.

Karole came in to clean the Master’s cup. She had heard everything from the kitchen. She felt the dignity in Master Sowee’s humble confession. I too cannot leave here. I too am compelled to be here, and she knew that there was neither a master nor a devotee, she knew that one could not exist without the other—we are all in this together. They were not pursuing destiny, destiny was living them. She felt her roots dig deeper in the earth of her heart. She felt their nourishment and also felt her freedom in being bound. Her heart gladdened.

Madden felt his edge slipping. His acolytes were talking about Master Bonsai not in judgmental complaints—some remained silent when caustic jokes were made at the expense of Master Bonsai. His ambition was pressing him to press forward to realize his dreams. A woman from the East had contacted him about buying the most beautiful bonsais, Vedanta, Nonduality, Bodhisattva, and Bodhidharma. She was offering a great price, even more than he had dared to ask for. How would he justify selling the trees? He had already moved the trees to a more private viewing area, telling the other gardener devotees that the trees were suffering and in decline. He moved four other trees that everyone considered less spectacular and placed them in the most prominent viewing area. He took the juniper that was called Hridaya Shakti and placed it on the center pedestal in the garden. He did not realize that he had made an auspicious move by moving the tree that was called the movement of the heart to the center or the heart root of the garden. Hridaya Shakti was not his favorite tree, he had never attended to it. Karole had attended to it for many years. She would be pleased that the tree would be placed in such an auspicious setting. That would (he hoped) distract her from noticing the displacement of the other trees that usually held prominence. It was springtime, the devotees had finished the essential pruning and the new buds and blossoms were beginning to show. He put the more spectacular blossoming trees next to Hridaya Shakti. Everyone was please and expressed their spiritual pleasure in seeing these trees being shown. Ms. West would be coming by at 2:00 to see the trees she was eager to purchase. He was ready to escort her to the private garden area to present the trees. She drove up the private driveway and Madden’s assistant (devotee?) greeted her. Madden had put on his most spiritual robe, a knock off of Master Bonsai’s robe, but made with the finest fabrics embroidered with his favorite bonsai, Nonduality, on the back. He very much looked that part of the Master of Bonsai.

Ms. West was also wearing a robe, but very modern so it didn’t take on the appearance of being a spiritual uniform. She looked beautiful and dignified and Madden was attracted to her.

“Ms. West,” he bowed.

She smiled and he noticed that she was enjoying the garden. “I’m very excited to see the trees. Could you bring me to them?”

“Yes, yes, of course,” agreed Madden. “They are in the private showing area.” He led her around the entrance path to an area behind a curtain, behind the nursery building.

“Here are the four trees you were interested in.”

Ms. West walked around the trees. Yes, Nonduality stood firm and its foliage was healthy. She inspected the other trees quite closely. Madden could see that her interest in the trees was authentic. “Interesting names these trees have. How did they get these names?” she asked.

“These trees were named after great religions and their teachings.”

“Oh, why would anyone name them after that?” she asked.

Madden was flustered. He thought she would be impressed. “Of course, if you are interested in them and want to purchase them, the names can be changed to what please you.”

Ms. West walked over to the tree called Bodhisattva and asked, “What would you like to be called? Does such a fancy name suit you? Doesn’t bodhisattva mean a compassionate enlightened being who serves others to awaken?” she turned and asked Madden.

“Yes,” Madden confirmed. “I named these trees,” he added proudly.

“Oh, you wouldn’t happen to know a bodhisattva, does one live here?” she asked.

Madden grew uncomfortable. He smiled, hoping she didn’t really expect an answer to her question. She was still looking at him, eager to hear what he would say.

He was struggling, his fear and his conscience met with his ambition—his ambition won. “That is why I am selling the trees, to grow the garden of enlightenment for new devotees.”

“So you are the master here? You must be called Master Bonsai then.” she added with a hint of merriment in her manner. Madden was having a hard time reading her. Did she really want the trees?

“I love this garden and these trees have provided the devotees with meaningful service.”

“Yes, these trees are really quite something. I have travelled around the world, collecting, buying bonsai and I have not seen such beautiful trees. The devotion the devotees must give them must be reflection of the love they have for their master.” Again, she smiled at Madden and he thought he could denote a slight attitude of merry sarcasm. “I would love to have these trees as the center of my garden, but I’m not sure if these trees would be happy to be separated from the Master, the Master Bonsai. They seem to thrive on devotion.”

Madden was stumped. He tried to reassure her that the trees would be happy in her garden. “I will miss the trees but the garden must grow and make room for new trees...”

“And devotees,” Ms. West interrupted.

“Yes,” answered Madden.

“I do want the trees very much. So, Master Bonsai, I will return tomorrow with my check. Have the trees ready to be transported.” She held out her hand to shake his.

Madden sighed in relief. “Thank you, you will be very happy with the trees, and the trees will be happy with you.”

Ms. West laughed, “Oh, I hope so.”

Madden walked Ms. West to the center of the garden to show her the bonsai that were blossoming and on display. Ms. West stopped in front of Hridaya Shakti bonsai. She surprised Madden by folding her hands in front of the bonsai. “The heart is moved,” she said out loud and he thought she was reliving a fond memory.

“Let me give you this tree, gift you this tree. It will be ready for you when you come for the other four trees tomorrow.”

Ms. West turned to Madden, “Are you sure you can give me this tree, that it is your tree to give?”

Madden assured her. She thanked him. Tomorrow, his dream would meet the light of the day. He would be free of Master Bonsai, he would be out from under that crazy coot. His true work would begin.

Madden couldn't sleep, he was too excited contemplating his future as master. He dreamed, imagined his new garden and his devotees sitting around him. This excited him more and more and sleep eluded him. The more he thought of buying his own land to set up his own ashram garden, another feeling, another thought began to take hold. Why can't I have this garden? I am the one who cared for the trees. I took responsibility for their survival and growth, not Master Bozo (a nickname he gave Master Bonsai, Master Sowee in his mind). The devotees have all turned to me for instruction (not Master Bozo) in caring for the trees. The more he thought about it, the more he convinced himself that he was the true master of the garden, the garden was his. He would use some of the money he would receive from the sale of the bonsai to have a fine house built for himself on the property. He would call a meeting of devotees before tonight's meditation with Master Sowee. He would reiterate Master Bonsai's flaws and failure to instruct them and his usual disregard for them, the trees and the ashram altogether. He would ask for a vote to discharge Master Bonsai from his title and ask that Master Bonsai be sent packing. He felt it was obvious to that the devotees would see him as their new, True Master. After he felt contented with his plan, Madden fell asleep.

Master Sowee woke up early. He scratched his usually itchy belly and rolled his legs over the side of the bed. His old body ached and he usually felt glum waking up into it. Today his body ached more than usual, but his heart felt lighter. He remembered a beautiful dream that he had had. He was walking in a forest of great trees and as walked his body felt light and free from all aggravations of old age. He noticed that the trees were indeed grand, old, and vibrant with wisdom. He felt the trees were creating a canopy for him as he walked by. He felt a soft hum coming from their bark and he listened and hummed with them. He saw the old, grand trees as his friends—old, true, deep friends—and he was gladdened to see them in their grandest form, growing fiercely and in a deep unification of their sacred beingness. He felt his love for the trees and respected them for what they always gave him. Their love was true and deeply intertwined and rooted in the bright, living force of the heart. Here, with them, he could feel the purity and innocence of his heart lived freely. He felt saddened that he had not been able to live freely and

happily in his ashram garden of the bonsai. He hoped he had not failed these great trees, these great devotees, in his life of Master Bonsai.

As he walked he saw one tree, and this tree's leaves shined with a halo that was very attracting. He recognized this tree. It was the Hridaya Shakti tree, the tree that Saman had given him many years ago. It was the most fierce and beautiful tree of the forest, very much like Saman, he thought. He bowed to the tree and a flower detached from the tree and floated into his open, cupped hands. The tree whispered, "The Heart moves, the Heart moves in you, soon you will be free."

Master Sowee bathed, shaved and dressed. He went to the drawer of Yeashe's paintings of him and of the garden. He looked at them and was touched by the grace of her lines and her subtle washes of color. He saw the pictures of himself from another viewpoint, hers, and he could see her love for him in all the strokes. For the first time in years, tears welled up in his eyes and he let them flow. He put on his flip flops and began his usual walk to the end of the drive. Yeashe watched him making his way down the walk and she an urge to go be with him on this very fine day. As he reached his final steps to the mail box, she called out to him, "Koofy, Koofy." He turned and smiled and she couldn't resist linking her arm with his. He smiled again, "Well, my dear Yeashe, it is a fine day." Yeashe beamed with happiness and said sweetly and lightly, "Yes, father." He turned to her and nodded and made a pantomimed gesture of taking the next step, like he was moving into the forbidden. "Shall we?" he asked.

At that moment, Brima-ful pulled up and saw her master and Yeashe linked arm in arm, beaming at each other. She rolled her window down and asked, "Would you two, my master and my friend, like to go for a ride?"

Master Sowee did not grunt in dismissal, instead he chimed, "Yes, let's go to the forest, let's go to the wilderness! I am tired of this garden." They stepped off the private property together and together their hearts moved with their bodies and Brima-ful drove further and further out of the city. Karole went to care for the Hridaya tree at her usual time, 10:30. She had added a little liquid fertilizer in the watering can. She was a little concerned about the tree, it didn't look as healthy. She was surprised to find that the tree was absent from the center pedestal where Madden had recently placed it. She found Madden preparing it to be shipped. Her anger rose and erupted when she discovered that her favorite tree, the Hridaya, that she had cared for as long as she had cared for Yeashe, was being shipped away without her knowing about it. She fought with Madden over the tree. What right did he have to sell it or give it away? Did he think that the bonsai trees were his to do as he pleased? She criticized him. To placate her, he gave her the Hridaya tree and warned her, "There are changes coming here. You have to decide who you are with."

Karole ignored Madden's implications and took the Hridaya tree and brought it to her room. She knew she had to leave this home, her garden of many years. She had to warn Master Sowee of Madden's intentions. She searched for Master Sowee and Yeashe and did not find them anywhere in the garden. She didn't know what to do. She knew that she had to protect those that she loved, that was what she decided.

Ms. West had her new, recently purchased bonsai trees unpacked. Her gardener was struck by their beauty. "Master Gardener, these trees are perfect, they have been attended to with the utmost care."

“Yes, a great master loved these trees. Let’s get them prepared for their place in the garden.” Ms. West’s gardening students gathered around to admire the new trees. They didn’t understand the names that had been given to the trees by the previous owner or master. “Would you like to name them?” asked Ms. West. “How about we call this one Buddy instead of Bodhisattva?” asked a young woman. “Can we call this one Friend instead of Vedanta?” The other trees were called Companion and Beezone. The trees settled into their new garden. Instead of devotees attending them, they were cared for by their new friends who enjoyed and loved them for their weird shapes. Sometimes they weren’t pruned to emphasize their great form. Their new friends weren’t as skilled or obsessive about them and their care, but they enjoyed the gaiety of their new caretakers, their new friends. Sometimes they missed their old caretaker, Master Sowee, but their new life here was fun and since they weren’t free to grow into their full potential of height in their true home of the forest, they were happy to live as pets in a garden. Sometimes they dreamed of living in a great forest as a grand old trees, and sometimes their Master Sowee would come to wander and speak to them about what was in their hearts. Their hearts were always in His.

Master Bonsai: Another Look

Master Bonsai's upbringing was unconventional, to say the least. He was always dancing the dance of eternity. When he was a little boy, he would have moods of swaying his arms back and forth in big, exaggerated movements. He loved to do this while he was walking with his mother through the forest. His mother loved to walk, especially in the forest, and she often brought him and would never carry him, even when he begged her because his legs were tired. He found that when he swung his arms back and forward, slow at first, then faster and faster, his legs wouldn't feel tired anymore. He told his mother this and his mother laughed at the strange logic of her little boy. The trees in the forest didn't laugh. They knew that the boy was on to something—that the swaying of their branches always released the tension in their roots. They kept notice of this little boy and always enjoyed his swaying of arms when his mother dragged him on yet another and another walk.

When he was a bit older, but not old enough to be on his own, his mother still walked a lot and brought him on walks. Sometimes they would drive a distance to visit, to walk in other forests—sometimes oak forests, which were plentiful, other times redwood forests, which he particularly liked. They would have to drive a long distance of 2 hours to get there, as they were not as plentiful. Now that he was older, Soratio's legs were stronger and he could endure longer walks quite easily. He still liked to sway his arms from time to time. He felt that it pleased the trees in some way, and when the trees were happy it made his own heart happy.

When he got his license, he wanted to drive to the big city of San Francisco to see the sights. He walked the Golden Gate Bridge and had his sandwich at the beach. It was a cold, windy day so he had to eat his radish sandwich quickly. He drove through the Golden Gate Park and decided to walk through the botanical garden. He enjoyed the floral and pruned trees in the Japanese garden area. After having tea and cookies at the tea garden, he got the urge to lay down under the flowering Japanese maple. He did not fall asleep, instead he was very relaxed, all his senses were tingling and his heart felt contented. He knew that it was possible for him to never ever have a care in the world. He didn't know how he knew this, it was just obvious to him. He loved being in the garden and felt that he could live here forever without a care in the world.

When he drove away, he decided that he would get a job in a garden or in a forest. He didn't know what work he could do, but he was confident that he could learn. When he told his mother of his decision, she just smiled in her knowing kind of way. Not long after that he met Satya, who was the master gardener at the nature preserve garden forest that was being developed. Master Satya was very enthusiastic about the project of developing the preserve into a place where people could come to feel and be enlivened and restored by the nature there. He also wanted to plant a garden with the help of volunteers. He could only afford to hire a few people as the backbone of consistent workers. He saw the potential in Soratio to work hard and he immediately liked the boy. He was thinking of having a few bonsai trees as part of the prominent part of the garden and asked Soratio to research them as he had little experience with them.

Under Satya's guidance, five bonsai trees were potted. Besides his other duties of establishing trails through the forest and paths through the garden, Soratio had to water, trim, and fertilize the bonsai. He liked working in the forest better, where he would still dance for the trees. Caring for the bonsai was tedious. They seemed sensitive to any variance in the temperature or water. The trees in the forest were hardy, accepting all conditions as their way of life. Master Satya always emphasized

that the bonsai would attract people to the preserve who would enjoy them and value the garden and the outlying forest. Soratio learned what he could about the bonsai, but he never danced for them. After a while he began to enjoy the bonsai and on the days where he didn't feel a care in the world, he could sense that they were talking about him. Soratio was sensitive to the voice and workings of the natural world. He thought everyone could sense and see what he did. Surely the master gardener Satya could. They never talked about it—Satya was always very busy with the plans for improving the garden and attracting people to the preserve. They did work together happily in a reverential manner towards the plants and trees, as well as to each other. Satya never saw Soratio dance the dance of eternity in the forest. Nor did Soratio see how Satya worked with the energy flow by using his hands to dance in communication with the plants and trees. Satya was the “Master” gardener—not some ordinary man/boss who welcomed familiarity. Both men did like each other and at times Satya would encourage Soratio to buy plants and plant them in creative designs. Both men had a communication with the trees and plants they tended, but didn't share what they heard and felt from the natural world.

Within five years, the garden and the forest preserve were thriving. Soratio had learned a lot from Satya and Satya welcomed Soratio to take on more responsibility for the upkeep and development of the preserve. Soratio spent all his time at the garden preserve, whether he was on the clock or not. Eventually he was appointed as the guardian of the preserve and a small ready-made house was provided for him. Satya had other projects and preserves to prepare, so they saw less and less of each other.

Soratio still danced the dance of eternity in the forest and the garden. He couldn't start his work of tending the garden without it. It was his way to honor all the living forms in the garden preserve. The trees always waited for him and swayed with him, even if there were no winds to move them. They swayed deep inside their bark and their roots tapped under the earth. There were two trees that Soratio always bowed to with folded palms. One, a tall, aged oak, wide with heavy-set branches, and the second in the garden, a hearty juniper bonsai. He acknowledged them by touching his heart, and when he did this they felt his heart touch theirs and they felt a heart as a heart. This gladdened the trees to feel his love and it gladdened Soratio to feel their love. Very few people got to feel or know how much and how deeply a tree can give love and respond to love. Soratio knew and felt this and was very happy living in the garden preserve. It is a very weird story how he became not just a master gardener, but recognized as an awakened master. A story he still doesn't understand to this day, nor did he feel it was his choice, as he was very happy as the gardener in the garden preserve.

Credit, then, must be given to the tall, wide oak tree that Soratio danced with and bowed to every day. This great oak was known by the other trees in the forest as the First or the Old Number One. Number One was the first tree to grow in the forest preserve and had outlasted many, even junior trees. He was responsible for being the great, great grandpappy of many of the trees that were growing in the preserve. He was a very caring, great tree and gave protection and advice to the other trees and creatures that lived in the forest. He was also responsible in dreaming the dream to inspire Satya to make this land and forest that is his community into a preserve to protect it from being used by man to build more buildings on it. He had a long history and was witness to many an interesting event, but none was as curious and got his attention as much as Soratio's dance of eternity. When Old Number One saw Soratio dance for the first time, his heart thrilled and in Soratio's dance he felt for the first time that there was a man who he could really communicate

with. Number One welcomed Soratio to come every day and every day Soratio danced the dance of eternity. Every day Old Number enjoyed the dance and revealed to Soratio the wisdom that was inherent in the dance. He was amazed how easy it was for Soratio to absorb his wisdom. No words were ever spoken, yet Soratio was able to receive the transmission of how livingness is lived, how each living thing is a being of radiance that dances into form as it enjoys the radiance of livingness. Number One, surrounded by his forest family that he loved dearly, had to meet this weird-looking form called a man, and it was this man—his Soratio—who could receive and hold the dance of eternity, of his wisdom, the best. Blessing to such a one. The other trees, Old Number One's family, called Soratio Young Number Two and also looked forward to Soratio's dance.

The juniper bonsai that Soratio revered was also an instrument in serving the transition from Soratio master gardener to master awakened gardener. Soratio had named this miniature tree Pointer because its branches reminded him of fingers, and the finger branches always naturally wanted to point to the left. Pointer was pointing the great forest that lived outside of his pot. He had hoped that one day he would live among the great trees there and even though his roots were bound inside his pot and did not touch the roots of any other tree, his pointer branches got a whiff of the sweet sway of Old Number One. He tried to listen in when Old Number One's branches sang in the breeze and he knew that the root of Number One's wisdom was very deep. Pointer knew that Soratio danced for Old Number One and the entire forest. When Soratio began to dance in the garden he was thrilled, and through Soratio's dance Pointer understood and felt his own radiance. He felt his oneness with the Great Tree Master and the living forest. He also felt Soratio's wild freedom, these strange creatures that could travel by themselves on their roots, he felt Soratio through his dance connecting him with this movement from here to everywhere. Pointer became the pointer of this radiance, and of Soratio's movement for the newly establishing bonsai that came to grow in the garden. In the garden of miniature trees he was recognized as master by the other potted plants, but he always pointed to Old Number One as the Great Master of happy revelation, and revered Soratio for dancing the dance of eternity.

At times Pointer was a tease. He would purposely drop too many of his needles so Soratio would worry about him and tend to him more. Soratio would fuss over him and try different practical remedies. None worked and Soratio grew a little despondent—he couldn't bear to see any of the trees suffer, and Pointer, he knew, was a special tree. He had become a very dear friend of his. Pointer went on dropping needles until he was almost completely naked of them. Soratio felt that desperate measures were called for but he did not know what to do. He was frustrated and at the end of his rope. No tree had ever died on his watch. "Pointer, what is it, buddy?" he asked. "What do you need? What can I do for you?" He thought that Old Number One might know what to do for Pointer. He carefully carried Pointer on a plant cart and escorted the potted tree to the forest. Pointer was thrilled, "I am finally going somewhere, to the forest!" Soratio placed Pointer's pot at the base of Old Number One. He danced the dance of eternity around the big tree and around the small potted tree. He danced till he was exhausted and then danced some more. Pointer was ecstatic and Old Number One smiled and felt how big the little tree's radiance was. Size does not matter when it comes to living radiance. This little tree shines big. It was somewhere or sometime in the dance that both trees acknowledged Soratio and bestowed upon him the transmission that lived and realized him from being a master gardener to the awakened master gardener.

Soratio knew not of this transmission or gift and his new title. He was only trying to help his beloved friend stay alive. He felt that it was Old Number One who had restored Pointer to his previous healthy state. All his needles came back and Soratio could see that Pointer's branches were pointing even further to the left, in the direction of Old Number One. He did feel different—a bit different—he was always happy in his life, in the garden, and he went about his work, which he really thought of as play without a care. Oh, he did care deeply about the forest and the garden, and of course the bonsai, but he did not have the burden of the sorrow of life and others. Over time he ran the garden with his dance, with his careful carelessness and the dance of radiance attracted people to his preserve. People came not only to be rested from their sorrows and worries by the natural beauty of the preserve, they began to notice Soratio as one who lived without a care, and they wanted to be always happy like him. They came to be with him and to learn from him how to be happy and how to dance the dance of eternity, to live their radiance as livingness as the forest, as Old Number One and Pointer did, to study with their master, Master Bonsai.

Whatever happened to Satya? He had always been aware of Soratio's potential to be both master and awakener. He had brought all the ingredients together to make the soup cook. Just give it some time and sure enough, he saw Soratio come into his life's work. Soratio was tending to the garden of humankind. Satya was proud of his disciple and blessed him with the gift of the preserve, which he had always owned. Satya was a great teacher, knowing when to provide and when to sit back. Satya had asked Old Number One to look after Soratio, which Old Number One was very pleased to do, as Satya had always sung so sweetly to him, songs about magnificence, songs about the heart and home of the forest. Some say that the Divine works in mysterious ways, but I think that Soratio would say that the Divine plays in natural ways. Anyhow, that is how Master Bonsai got his start. The beginning is always full of great promise and the middle sets up the trials that must be endured to come to the rich ending when all is learned and understood. Do we ever get to the end?

Part 3: Why did Saman Leave?

Satya was also responsible for the cooking of the soup that led Saman to Soratio, Master Bonsai. Satya had gathered all the ingredients from the flower garden, looking for the unique seed that had the potency to grow and realize its beauty as living radiance. His heart had searched high and low for such a seed. He was looking for a seed that could grow into the dancing flower with star in hand. The dancing flower could dance into being the universe, and the dancing flower would come to sprout and then flower and then dance in the form of Saman.

Saman was a plucky girl. She loved to run and jump and her favorite place was the garden of flowers that her mother grew and tended to. As a girl she helped her mother weed the garden and her mother had to stop her from plucking all the flowers. Her favorite was the sunflowers that often grew to six feet tall. Saman loved the sunflowers the best. She loved how they raised their heads towards the sun to take in all the living warmth and nourishment that the sun provided. She also loved the delicious seeds that made up the face of the sunflower. She often hid in the tall flowers and listened to their leaves swaying in the breeze. She felt the flowers enjoying their rapid growth, their livingness, and the radiance they absorbed from the sun. She always imagined that she would grow up to grow her own garden. When she was seventeen she met the master gardener Satya and he recognized her right away as his unique seed. He encouraged her dance, her work in

his garden. She tended to and planted the flower garden that was near the path that led to the bonsai garden. She planted all kinds of sunflowers, and they thrived under her care. He could see that like Soratio, she was dancing in her own way in the garden of beauty and delicious smelling flower fragrances. But unlike Soratio, she had a religious mind and a need to know and learn, so besides living within the radiance of the garden, she questioned everything and wanted to know the answers. She had questions that ran deep. Questions like, why are we living? What is aliveness? Why don't we always feel joy in living? Why is there death? She asked much of livingness, she was serious about understanding. She was ferocious in her quest to know life, to know herself. So it was a somewhat strange destiny that Satya understood, that to help her answer all her questions she needed to meet and study with someone who never asked any, someone who didn't care, or was emptied of all cares. She needed to be with the Master Bonsai, Soratio.

Satya knew when the soup needed to simmer—it was his cue to leave the kitchen, the garden—and let the next act appear. He encouraged Saman to learn about the flowering bonsai trees and that there was a good gardener of the bonsai—he was called Master Bonsai—that she could go to and learn from. She was not at all interested in leaving her own garden, but when Satya dropped hints that Master Bonsai was not only a master gardener, but an awakened gardener, her curiosity and her need to know was aroused in her. Satya pushed her plan to go and learn from Soratio by promptly announcing his retirement. Without Saman's knowledge, he wrote to Soratio and asked him to accept Saman as his devotee if Saman was so inclined. When Soratio received the letter from his old friend he was surprised at Satya's recommendation to accept Saman as his student. Even though he had evolved into Master Bonsai and had allowed a group of student devotees to gather around him, he wasn't sure he was really qualified for the title, the task, or the responsibility. He was just living the radiance of livingness—there was nothing special about him. He sent a short note back to Satya that expressed his happiness about hearing from his old boss and friend. He wrote that he would live his best, be himself as radiance of livingness to help and support Saman in her own dance of eternity.

When Saman came to Master Bonsai's garden, it was a lively time. Spring was in the air and many of the plants were getting new leaves, and some were beginning their blossoming. Right away, she took note where she could plant some annual and perennial flowers. Of course, she brought her ever-tall sunflower seeds and sprouts, hoping to be allowed to plant them. She also brought Master Bonsai a juniper bonsai that both she and Satya had tended to. He received the bonsai graciously and called it Hridaya Shakti. She didn't know what the name of the tree meant, but she mentally took note and would research the name to find out if it had any significance. She was sure it did.

She liked Master Bonsai right away. She didn't like how his female students attended to him. She felt they were all in competition with each other for his attention and pleasure. This is embarrassing, she thought. She later learned that all the women were sleeping with him, and she was put off by Master Bonsai's sexual proclivity. She had expected to work alongside with her teacher like she had with master gardener Satya, but he seemed busy with the affairs of the ashram garden and the woman around him. She kept her distance and maintained a formal relationship with him even after Master Bonsai gave her one of his big hugs—his hugs lasted several minutes. She couldn't understand why master gardener Satya had wanted her to study with Master Bonsai. He never seemed to teach anything, he went out of his way to avoid any serious discussions about awakening and living radiance. He did have a wicked sense of humor and made fun of his students,

and instead of feeling put off by him, they laughed at his awkward put-down jokes. From what Saman could see, Master Bonsai was not much of a teacher or a lover, as she had heard rumors from some of the women. What Master Bonsai was good at was bonsai. The bonsai in his garden were really extraordinary. She was struck by their marvelous irregularities. They had a presence of both regality and the presence of living radiance. She swore that the bonsai were radiating presence. The bonsai that she had given Master Bonsai, the one that he named Hridaya Shakti, was thriving there. It was happy in its new home, with its new family.

So Saman tried to stay and accept her teacher Master Bonsai, and as time passed she avoided all his advances. She tended to her flowers and the bonsai. At times Master Bonsai watched her from a distance when she was working in the garden. He thought he was failing her, that she wasn't happy with him. This weighed heavy on his heart. He was growing tired of the demands of the garden and his students. He often thought of escaping his life in his garden ashram, of walking away from everything and going to live in the desert among the cactus plants. He hadn't danced the dance of eternity for a while and he could feel Old Number One missing him and waiting for him. He kept putting it off. His heart grew heavier and heavier. He forgot what it was like to not have a care in the world. His life and work were heavy on his heart. Everyone and everything in the ashram garden wanted his attention and wanted to be tended by him. He felt all this need as a burden and this burden made his caring too heavy to carry.

Old Number One could feel his friend's heavy heart. He called him to him over and over. He wanted to relieve his friend's burden and assure him of his love for him. He signaled to the bonsai Hridaya about their friend's dilemma. They both planted in Soratio not their need but their seeds of love for him. After a fitful sleep, Soratio, Master Bonsai, woke right before dawn and was stirred to see his old friend, Old Number One.

He followed the lane to the forest and sat by Old Number One. Old Number One urged Soratio to just sit and they could enjoy each other's living radiance as they used to do. Master Bonsai felt himself again, a man without a care, and he got up to dance again. He danced the dance of eternity with Old Number One. It was a wild and passionate dance, a dance of happiness and living radiance.

Saman followed her teacher and she saw him sit under the old tree. When he got up and danced, she felt the radiance of livingness coming from him. She felt his expression and communication of happy without a care, and that the old oak tree was sharing in that feeling. She thought, she felt, and she saw how deep Master Bonsai's heart and life was lived in and enlivened by the spirit of what is living all. The trees, the bonsai, know this about Master Bonsai and they love him and they experience this with their master, she thought. This is why Master Satya sent me here to Master Bonsai, she thought. Her heart gladdened and without Master Bonsai answering a single question, she understood.

The next night in the very quiet time, she came to his room. She slipped into his bed and whispered into his ear, "I am with you now." His eyes opened and he saw Saman gazing into his eyes. She had the glow of the moon on her face and she whispered, "Let's dance." He embraced her and the dance began. The dance of eternity met the dancing flower with star in hand, at the heart, where their living radiance was lived and felt. The flower was fragrant and her dance gladdened him. He could feel her bring forth an opening of great proportions and a little star, trembling and brilliant, appeared in his hands. Saman knew him as the forest, as the bonsai, and as the man. The

tree-man's roots were deep and his branches reached past the sky of mind. They met as their nature is. They were natural in their rhythm of being. Both felt the living radiance of all that is living in their union. Theirs was not a union of bodies, of male and female. Saman was not with her master to be "mastered" by him. She was with him to show him the conception of the Great Being into the lives of all. Master Bonsai felt that he had become a father that night. He had not known that's what his heart wanted.

Saman left the ashram later in the morning. She did not tell anyone of her departure. She was going to get ready to fulfill Master Bonsai's need. She felt strong, and her gift to him had not sapped her power in any way. It would be their secret, the secret of how nature bore livingness as radiance. She would give birth to a being of already happy, a being who would dance the dance of eternity not alone, but always with the dancing flower with star in hand.

Nine months later, Yeashe was born. She was birthed in the water in the moonlit night. She glided into her arms and Satya attended to them both. He held her and both Saman and Satya exclaimed how beautiful she was, and he kissed her many times, already knowing that she would be moved to be with Soratio. It had always been his job to set destiny in motion, and both knew Yeashe's destiny was with Soratio, for now and perhaps for a long time. Satya was not one given to share the details of how a life goes or why it changes. He worked to bring about the events.

A few days later, mother and baby were doing well. Saman kissed her infant and told her, "For now, I am always with you. You will always be able to feel me. Give him what his heart needs. I will see you again." She wrapped Yeashe in her swaddling blanket and handed her to Satya. Both let the tears flow. They were not sad. This little baby that Satya held in his arms, was Saman's gift and gift-giving must always be done with a happy, pure, free heart such as hers. Satya slipped into his friend Soratio's room and lay her on Soratio's pillow. He smelled her sweet fragrance and would always remember it. He slipped out unnoticed right before Soratio made his entrance into his garden house.

Saman grieved not for her child. She grieved not for herself, nor did she experience Yeashe as gone and separate from her. She was aware of her. Saman's life grew and flowered and the dancing flower that she is, gifted many lady sleepers to dance to their awakening and radiance. The accounts of how she lived that life are not known now. Maybe one day someone can come forward who can reveal it.

Madden Meets the Unexpected

On the day Madden was ready to live up to his expectations, to what he wanted for the ashram and what he wanted for himself, he was met with the unexpected: Master Bonsai's departure. Madden's plan had been to coerce Master Bonsai to retire and appoint himself as the able-bodied master of ashram. A few close friend-devotees would back him up. He had his plans ready for the improvement of the ashram. He would integrate what was of value (he considered) from Master Bonsai's work and take it to another, deeper level, bypassing Master Bonsai's obvious flaws and mistakes. He would be the exemplary teacher. He would deliver on his promise that the garden of devotees would grow and awaken. He would and could attract many new devotees. He

was high on his ambition of his righteous mission. When Master Bonsai (along with Yeashe) did not show for the evening meditation, everyone waited in silence for half an hour, and after that the devotees grew restless. Madden stood up and asked, "Does anyone know the whereabouts of Master Bonsai?"

Karole stood up, "I saw him walk to the mailbox this morning with Yeashe and he hasn't returned."

The devotees looked at each other. Some were visibly shaken. Madden spoke up, "I'm sure they'll return soon. No one has heard anything?"

Karole looked at Madden and thought, this is what you wanted, to be rid of Master Bonsai. She was distraught that Master Bonsai and Yeashe were gone without confiding in her. She had checked her cell phone many times that day, looking and hoping for a message from them. No word was sent.

The days passed and no word was heard. Karole grew anxious and angry and afraid. What if something terrible has happened to them? Madden was also anxious and excited, hoping that Master Bonsai had decided to retire himself and had permanently left the garden ashram. He saw to it that the garden, particularly the bonsai, were still attended to. He tried to appear concerned about Master Bonsai's disappearance, and hide his glee that he was gone. After two heart-wrenching weeks for Karole, Madden began to test his supreme authority and called a meeting where he declared that he would take over Master Bonsai's duties. He appeared to be very democratic, asking for a vote and assured everyone that they would always work and vote together. "We can work together and be together in a way that everyone can be happy and successful here. I have a plan how we can improve our lives here."

Karole thought, just like that we are moving on, without Master Bonsai. Her heart felt wretched. With the disappearance of Master Bonsai and Yeashe, everyone who mattered to her was gone. She thought of her options—to stay on and fulfill her duties, her practice as usual, as before, as she had always done. She thought of leaving, but where would she go? What other options did she have? A third option revealed itself to her. I could try to find them. The more she thought of this third option, she knew she had to try. What clues did she have to their whereabouts?

Something else began to occur that was also unexpected. A month after Master Bonsai's disappearance, the bonsai trees were changing. Madden noticed that they were dropping leaves and needles more frequently. Other gardener devotees noticed this too. They approached the problem of the distressed trees in the usual ways. More water? Less water? Too cold? Too hot? More fertilizer? They also tried spiritual remedies: chanting, life-affirmation mantras, playing soothing music for the trees. The trees continued to struggle, their life force in decline. Some devotees thought this was a sign that the trees were unhappy that Master Bonsai was gone and mentioned that to Master Madden (which he had asked to be called).

"Master Bonsai used to piss on them. Maybe whatever was in his piss, the trees need those nutrients," a more scientific devotee theorized.

Master Madden shook his head, "No, no, that has nothing to do with it." He couldn't imagine that the trees and Master Bonsai were linked deeply together, dancing together the dance of eternity. The trees were Madden's possessions, like the garden and the devotees, they must serve

him well if they were to be served. All, then, could be happy, that was spiritual democracy at work. He knew best, his authority was his means to set in motion his dreams of spiritual superiority. He was the only man on the ballot.

The only bonsai that stayed healthy was the Hridaya Shakti tree that Karole kept by her meditation table which had a picture of Master Bonsai on it. She talked to it, bowed to it. The tree accepted her affection as it had always done, but it knew something was wrong with Karole. Hridaya sensed her dilemma and tried to find ways to communicate with her. Karole did not dance the dance of eternity so Hridaya could not share its living radiance with her. Hridaya sent a transmission link to Old Number One.

Old Number One knew that Master Bonsai had left the garden and the forest preserve. Old Number One was the foremost tree of the preserve and he was the dreamer who called Satya to preserve this land so he and his fellow inhabitants could grow and bring together their living radiance, and it was this living radiance that brought Master Bonsai to the garden preserve. It was Master Bonsai's dance of eternity that brought alive the transmission of the radiance of living beings, all beings, plants, trees (the bonsai too). Old Number One was the seed bearer, and the master gardener Soratio fertilized and grew the opportunity for a carefree place of living happiness. What went wrong? Why did Master Bonsai leave? He, Hridaya, and Master Bonsai had a deep understanding. They knew each other as they truly were.

Hridaya Shakti, the small root-bound tree, had watched the signs along the way. This little tree had taken note of Master Bonsai's growing indifference and disinclination toward the garden. He seemed weary and seldom smiled or danced anymore. He had yearned for the master to dance for him again, but he hadn't danced for months that became years.

"Where is Master Bonsai?" asked the Hridaya Shakti tree. "Is he coming back? He must come back!" the little tree was adamant. "I am the heart of the bonsai, but he is the heart of us all."

Old Number One gestured and predicted, "He will rise again, he will dance again. His dance needs to move even beyond our garden. He has to find out how big and encompassing the dance of eternity is."

"How will we live without him?" asked Hridaya.

"We will hold on, dear little one. This is the winter of our love, spring will return, our roots run deep and our hearts will call to him as they already exist in him. I will fortify Karole, your attendant, to move on her need to find Master Bonsai. All will happen in the right season."

Karole had a premonition to go the big redwood forest that was a four-hour drive from the garden ashram. She packed an overnight bag and left a note explaining that there was a family emergency. As she drew away from the ashram, her anger increased. She felt abandoned by Master Bonsai and Yeashe, whom she considered to be like a daughter to her. She was tired of Madden's spiritual politics and his sense of entitlement and superiority. She was mad at the devotees of Master Bonsai, that they had caused the situation to become competitive and allowed Madden to use that energy for his own spiritual reasons and benefit as they had used it to feel superior and in the know. We all didn't know a damn thing, she mused. Not a damn thing! She was also mad at herself for accepting that's how things are when she knew they were getting dryer and dryer. She was mad at herself for not standing up to all the mock spirituality. She was mad that she had endured everything

and told herself that it was a noble sacrifice she had to endure for the sake of love. What a crock of shit, she yelled out as she drove up the 101 freeway. She drove the freeway shouting out about everything she was mad about. I have been possessed and oppressed by the others who said they knew. No one knows anything, no one knows shit! She declared, “Not even you, Master Bonsai, and maybe especially you!” Her anger, having been given free reign, dissipated, and Karole began to laugh so hard that tears rolled down her cheeks. She had to wipe them from her face so she could see as she turned into the national forest.

She followed the road through the forest till it dead ended in a parking lot. There was a light sprinkle, the parking lot was almost empty and as the forest was taking in the wet nourishment, everyone else, the humans, were avoiding it. Karole laced up her hiking boots, zipped up her water-resistant parka and hit the trail. After an hour of walking uphill she was hot from the effort. She felt calm, her mind and emotions had settled. She looked at the trees in the great forest and had a funny urge to acknowledge each tree with a hello, so she did. As she greeted each tree, her self-consciousness at saying hello left, and she felt each tree acknowledging her in its own way of saying hello. She imagined that the trees could talk and that they were talking to her. Maybe they are, she thought. I have been caring for trees for almost my whole life. Why haven't I noticed that they can talk if one listens in the right way? Have I been so closed off from all the life outside of myself, my own mind? She wondered. Does Master Bonsai hear the trees? Does he talk to them? Do they talk to him? She sat down on a wet redwood stump and closed her eyes. She listened to the raindrops falling on the needles and hitting the ground. She heard two birds calling back and forth to each other. She heard her breath, in and out, and she heard her heart beating. She felt her life force as a part of all the life that surrounded her. She felt herself grow tall and she could see the tops of the trees. She felt her feet sink deeper and deeper into the wet earth. She was above and below, inside and outside was the same. It was a livingness and it was radiant. She didn't know how long she sat there. She was not counting time, she was enjoying herself out of all such measures and confinement. The forest watched her and felt her enjoying her living radiance and they knew that she knew what they knew about themselves, about the forest, and how it lives to enjoy its own radiance. To feel oneself as radiance, everyone and everything is felt. Karole got up and thought, why ever leave this living radiance? She walked to the top of the hill and the forest gave way to a flowering field. She could not settle for settling anymore. She would live in this radiance. She thought of Master Bonsai. Maybe I never saw him as he really is. Maybe I just saw him through my needs and desires. She thought of Madden. Maybe he sees Master Bonsai only through his idea and what he wants. How did Master Bonsai endure us all through these years? We never looked to see him. She called out to Master Bonsai in her heart, forgive me, I so want to be with you, to see you as you are to be seen, to be felt. Her heart wanted to dance and so she did.

Master Bonsai stood still. He felt himself dancing the dance of eternity in another body, not his own. This pleased and delighted him to no end.

Yease looked at Soratio, I have to sketch and paint this moment. He is absolutely radiant. She took out her iPhone from her pocket and discreetly took his picture. This last month with Soratio and Brima-ful was like no other time in her life. She had almost never left the ashram garden and all this month they hadn't stayed in one place for long. First, they went to the desert and stood among the Joshua Trees and climbed boulders and followed Soratio in his wandering. In the ashram, he was slow moving, a man who felt his age, but in the desert he was like a kid with boundless energy. He didn't grunt, he was always humming a tune. His heart was unencumbered.

Yeasehe experienced her father as a man without a care in the world. It gladdened her heart to see him this way again as she remembered him from her early childhood. She remember him always doing a silly dance that he called the dance of eternity, and she remembered dancing along with him till they both fell down on the soft lawns of the garden laughing.

After the desert they traveled to the foothills and wandered among the oaks, buckeyes, and sycamores. Again, Brima-ful and Yeashe could barely keep up with him. Brima-ful enjoyed her time and wandering with Master Bonsai. She had had glimpses in her childhood, glimpses of enjoying her own livingness. With Master Bonsai she began to feel how big her living is and she also began to understand that she as livingness as radiance could never end, that livingness went on forever and it was very big and it was as ordinary and as natural as everything is. She was learning how to dance, to dance the dance of eternity.

When they got to the mountains they wandered and danced among the giants in the giant forest. This was Brima-ful's and Yeashe's favorite part of their wandering, and Soratio's too. It was in the Giant Forest that Brima-ful and Yeashe understood who Master Bonsai's devotees actually were. They saw how the trees recognized Master Bonsai, how they loved him and their love did not burden him. Instead, their love made him dance!

Yeasehe knew that they would return to the ashram garden. She knew that they could not go back to how they lived and felt before. Everything was open here, Master Bonsai was living and feeling all radiance here, he must find a way to live it again in the garden ashram. How would he do it? she wondered.

Madden had moved into Master Bonsai's cottage while his new house was being built. Karole was surprised at this nerve in doing that. She wanted to protest, to challenge him on his right to do that, but she did not. She knew that Master Bonsai would be returning and that he would do what he wanted and what mattered most. Madden was confident that the devotees were happy with his leadership and confident with his authority. He was even working on a book of his teachings for their benefit. Only the bonsai were unhappy, most of them were in stasis, their leaves absent like they were experiencing winter even though the warm spring days were upon them for the last month and half. Madden was concerned, but the sale of some of the bonsai to Ms. West had secured a financial cushion for the next several months. He was thinking of starting an orchid area as the center of the garden, and retiring or disposing of the remaining bonsai. He had been studying up on the more exotic types of orchids to secure some prestige for the garden.

Master Bonsai along with Yeashe and Brima-ful returned in the late evening. All were tired but refreshed from their wandering. Karole met them and she could see that Master Bonsai had returned a different man, or like the man she had known when he didn't have a care in the world. He gave her one of his big hugs that he used to give her in the earlier days of the ashram. Karole warned Master Bonsai that someone was occupying his house now and Master Bonsai knew that that someone was Madden. "So he has taken over?" he asked Karole. Karole nodded and sighed.

"I am no longer the master here, in my own garden?" asked Master Bonsai.

Karole folded her hands, "To me you are, master," she replied.

Master Bonsai smiled.

Yeashe spoke up, "Father, let's go to my cottage, if it is not occupied." She looked towards Karole and Karole affirmed that it was not.

The next morning, Master Bonsai rose early and went to the bonsai garden. His heart dropped to see the condition the bonsai were in. "Fellows, fellows, why are you in this condition? Come on, I just went away for a few months to wander in other gardens, and I come back home to see you like this? Why haven't you been dancing? Come on let's dance!"

Madden saw Master Bonsai dancing among the bonsai. He was shocked not only to see that he was back, but that he was dancing! I never expected to see this, he thought as he watched. I thought there was no life left in that old guy. As he watched Master Bonsai dance, he saw his teacher in a way that he had never seen him before. He saw his teacher not just as a grumpy old man. He saw him without a care in the world, maybe he still saw him as an old relic, but also as a living being who was radiant. He went to his master and Master Bonsai took hold of his hands and spun him around. Both men were laughing ecstatically. Madden realized that his master's wisdom was lived, not taught, not known through teachings and concepts. He realized that it was his livingness, his radiance as a natural being that he offered to all. The bonsai knew this and lived with him in his carefree state. Madden understood that he had never known his master truly, truly as he is. He couldn't stop himself from saying the words his heart wanted to say, "I love you, Master."

Master Bonsai said simply, "Yes! Yes!"

Old Number One could feel his old friend was home and he was dancing for everyone. Old Number One liked a happy ending, though he knew that there was never such thing as an ending. There was only the dance of eternity, and Old Number One never stopped dancing!