

# Chapter One The End of the World

The day that Joseph's wife died, the world ended.

The third worst thing about the end of the world, was that no one noticed it had happened. Everywhere in the neighbourhood, people went on waking up in the morning, eating breakfast, taking the children to school, going to work or to the market, coming home at the end of the day, watching TV, as if life were just going on as before.

The second worst thing, was that Joseph himself still existed, still found himself having to go through the motions of existing. He couldn't sleep, he didn't feel like eating, but somehow he was still expected to get up in the morning too, to walk about, to sit in front of untouched plates of food, to go to bed at some hour of the empty night, to lie for hours in darkness and then get up again.

The worst thing of all, was that his Hildegard had - what? Gone? Disappeared? Ceased to exist? Clever, funny, beautiful, practical, down-to-earth, sensitive, creative, loving, pious, spiritual, motherly Hildegard, the woman who had shared his life and his bed for the best years of his life: the place she had occupied in the universe was empty, a no-place.

He had only gone out to post a letter and buy a loaf of bread. When he came home and opened the door, he knew at once that something was wrong, there was already a ghastly wrongness about the way the house felt. He found her lying on the kitchen floor, her eyes staring without comprehension, a little pool of vomit beside her head, he couldn't tell whether she was breathing. Then there came the blur of fear and rush and panic. His stupid attempts to remember how you did CPR, the 999 call, the sirens and flashing blue lights, the paramedics filling the room, the questions he couldn't answer and wanted to ask. Sitting with her in the ambulance, helplessly holding her hand, as they rushed through the morning streets to the hospital, sitting outside the emergency room while incomprehensible things went on behind a closed door through which medical people with anxious faces came and went.

The young, serious-faced woman doctor who came out with the Sorry already pressing on her lips. We did everything we could. It was an undiagnosed aortic aneurysm. It could have burst at any time. It all happened very fast. She probably didn't know anything about it. It would probably have been inoperable, even if she had known about it.

The children, whom he had somehow managed to telephone during those hours of numbed waiting, had not even arrived by the time they let Joseph into the room, and he was sitting by the bed holding her hand again, staring at her face from which the light had already gone out, her skin shrunk and pallid. The chill already spreading through her still veins.

Where? How? Why?

It was something near to forty years they had been married: Joseph was always embarrassed that he could never remember exactly how many, always had to work it out by adding the years from their wedding date. That he could remember, the date formed part of one of his internet

passwords.

His parents and many of his English friends had always thought it a strange and unlikely match, though for many of their later friends in Esperantujo, it was just one of those things that happened all the time. Joseph was a sixth-former when he first learned the international language, Esperanto. He had a passion for languages, and was already working towards a career as a language teacher. Still, he hadn't expected to be travelling to Bulgaria to attend a conference in the language: the 63rd Universal Congress of Esperanto, held in the city of Varna in 1978. By then Joseph had just completed his first year at Oxford, studying German and Latin. He had, much to his own surprise, fallen in with a political set who were still idealistic enough about Marx and his system to want to travel in Eastern Europe. One of their number was a fellow Esperantist - in those days they were not as few at Oxford as they became in later years - who persuaded a couple of the others to sign up for the Universala Kongreso, as a cheap way of getting to see something of Bulgaria in the days when communism was supposedly still working and producing economic improvement for the people.

Let's just say, Joseph used often to say afterwards, that the UKE changed my life. It had been a shock to arrive and find himself among 4,413 people from 51 different countries, most of whom didn't speak each other's birth languages, but all of whom were able to communicate to a greater or lesser extent through the constructed language they had learned. Joseph's conversational skills in it weren't that great when he started. His heart had been stirred with all the rest when they sang at the opening session Ludwik Zamenhof's idealistic anthem:

En la mondon venis nova sento,  
Tra la mondo iras forta voko...

Into the world there has come a new feeling,  
through the world a strong voice is calling...

But when it came to the sessions on the conference theme: "Internacia lingvo – internacia edukado", he had struggled. Fortunately, the theme wasn't actually the point for many of those attending the conference. They had come to party, to have a good time. In the conference halls and corridors, in the excursions and in the city squares, there were always people of different countries, in pairs or groups, excitedly talking, making new friends, renewing friendships from previous international gatherings. Joseph was no prude, but he was shocked to hear the gossip about some of the by-no-means-young couples who were pointed out to him as '*kongresedzoj*' - congress 'spouses' - who had come from different countries, leaving their legitimate spouses and children behind to attend the conference each year and resume their long-term, long-distance affairs.

And each evening there were concerts, pop music and dancing, joined in by young and old alike, which kept especially the *junuloj*, the members of TEJO, the Tutmonda Esperantista Junulara Organizo, dancing into the small hours. And there was this incredible Lithuanian girl, whom all the boys wanted to dance with and, if they were lucky, take to somewhere private later on, who

amazingly and wonderfully wanted to dance with Joseph and be with him as much as he wanted to be with her.

International language - international education. Yes, it was an education for Joseph, who thought he had been in love before, but was still young enough to discover, when it happened again, that none of those earlier loves had been the real thing. This, at last, was it. When the Congress ended on 5th August, and the participants broke up to go their separate ways, Joseph and Hildegard clung to each other more than physically. They promised - in Hildegard's fluent and Joseph's less halting than it had been Esperanto - that they would not forget. That their hearts were joined for ever. That whatever happened, whatever Iron Curtain hung between them, they would find a way to be together.

Back in the UK, Joseph didn't dare tell anyone about those promises. He knew they would laugh at him. How many young people have fallen in love, enjoyed a holiday romance, made lifelong vows, and seen those promises melt like a snowflake in summer? Even he half believed that was how it was bound to be.

But - again incredibly - it didn't happen like that. He and Hildegard exchanged letters and postcards. Over and over they told each other their hearts were as one - *niaj koroj estas unu* - and that they would be together - *ni vere estos kune*. But how could a girl from Lithuania, a country which had known independence for only 22 years in the last God-knows-how-many centuries, ever be with a boy from Britain?

Then a day came when the morning post brought Joseph a letter addressed in a well-loved hand, but with an American stamp. With trembling hands he opened it and read that Hildegard's parents - known intellectual dissidents though they were - had somehow been allowed to travel to the United States with their family, and had been granted asylum there. Brezhnev's Soviet Union had had too much of them, and where in earlier times they might have been sent to Siberia or simply disappeared, now there was a policy of just throwing them out, pulling the thorn out of the body politic and letting it go where it would. Suddenly the impossible had become possible.

Hildegard came to the UK to study. She and Joseph fell in love even more, in spite of the removal of the obstacles in the way of their love. They became engaged. And on a day, they were married in the Luther-Tyndale Church in Kentish Town.

She had always said she wanted six children, and she had a way of getting what she wanted. They brought them up to speak three languages. First they were *denaskuloj* Esperanto-speakers, because even after Hildegard became fluent in the language of her adopted country, she and Joseph still mostly spoke together in the language which had been the first heart language of their love. But Joseph also spoke to the children in English, while their mother spoke to them in Lithuanian. It was a dream of a truly international family, that would be a symbol and model of the peace and understanding they longed for for all peoples, from East and West:

Al la mond' eterne militanta

Ĝi promesas sanktan harmonion.

To the eternally warring world  
it promises sacred harmony.

The children had grown and gone, seeking lives of their own. Some of them were still happy and proud about their strangely cosmopolitan upbringing, and continued to speak Esperanto with the dwindling number of fellow-speakers they encountered. They had even been known to spend time with TEJO voluntarily and for themselves, and attend the occasional Universal Congress. Lithuanian was a different matter: most of them had forsaken it long before in favour of the English that was spoken at school, in the wider culture and in the world generally. Their parents' dream of the international language with its internal idea of world peace and linguistic justice, had become increasingly quixotic and even irrelevant.

Even when they were gone, Joseph and his wife still joked, and laughed, and exchanged news, and made love, in the language that had first brought them together. And now she was dead.

Esperanto can be used for anything and everything, its enthusiastic advocates claim. International communication, making new friends, meetings and scientific symposia, making love, raising children.

Joseph found it was not so good for mourning. Especially when no one around him spoke it.

## Chapter Two Dust to dust

Joseph woke up from another night in which he had not slept, and wondered how it could be possible to dream you were awake all night, and not gain any benefit from the sleep in which you had dreamed. The space beside him in the double bed was empty and cold, and once again he was overwhelmed with rage. Grief and panic and fear and rage.

His life with Hildegard had always felt singularly blessed. Nothing Really Bad had ever happened to them: no miscarriage, stillbirth, cancer, serious injury, rape, redundancy, violent assault, the death of a child. These were things they read about or heard about that happened to other people, and they always breathed a silent thank you, to Providence or something, that they had been spared those things. Now it was as if Everything Bad had suddenly come upon him like a bullet in the back, and the one person with whom he might have been able to bear it, was the one who wasn't there any more. Who had become the black hole which was Everything Bad, into which all that he had ever loved or held dear was being sucked. But again, no one noticed. Because the end of the world was only what happened to one person in every marriage, if they stuck at it and lived long enough. That was, after all, what they had promised: till death us do part. No one had ever pointed out to them on that day: Death *will* come between you, you know. You've just said so.

Youngest Daughter was still sleeping in the next room. She was the only one of the children who was still staying with him, the others had jobs to go to, families to look after. She had taken time off

work to look after her Aged P, as she annoyingly called him when she talked to her siblings. Joseph quietly got up, washed and dressed without shaving - if you couldn't appear to the world unshaven when your wife had just died... - and made himself a cup of coffee.

If the end of the world had an upside, he thought, it would be that you would never have to make any decisions about anything, ever again. Instead of which, it turned out that people had not stopped asking him to make decisions. What would he like to eat? Did he want a cup of tea? Did Hildegard want to be buried or cremated? (Neither! his mind shrieked back at him. She wanted to be alive!) What sort of casket did he want? What sort of service? What hymns? What readings?

It was the morning the vicar was coming to talk about the funeral arrangements. Joseph knew the man quite well: he and Hildegard had been regular worshippers at their parish church, and in their younger days, before family and work responsibilities had become too great, they were quite active in 'leadership'. That was years before the present vicar came to the parish, but somehow the new vicar had never stopped giving the impression that he thought they were just having some kind of sabbatical, and would - or should - shortly be stepping up to run the church again. Well-meaning and ineffective, he was just enough younger than Joseph to be annoying. He was a staunch advocate of the theory that the Church should change and become 'modern' and 'relevant', and that the Christian faith and the Bible needed to be 'brought to life'. My God, Joseph thought, if even the vicar thinks they're dead, we really are in trouble. What would a revived Christianity look like? and he fantasised visions of a monochrome Boris Karloff in a clerical collar standing in the pulpit and declaiming the message: "Friend! Good!"

One thing there was in his favour, and that was that he was punctual. On the dot of half past ten, the door bell rang and Youngest Daughter ushered the vicar in. Joseph caught a glimpse of himself in the wall mirror and thought he was looking greyer than he had meant to, and also suddenly wished he had shaved after all. Youngest Daughter looked as if she thought so too, though she hadn't said so earlier. Rage began to lick around him again, like little waves on a beach. So that he found it hard to pay fullest attention to what was being said. Mugs of coffee appeared. The vicar, looking ill at ease, was talking. Words presumably intended to comfort, Joseph guessed from the disjointed phrases that he understood amidst the sound of the blood rushing in his ears like the torrent of High Force, which they had visited on a holiday in Northumbria.

It was a tragedy that she had been taken, when she was still so relatively young, still might have looked forward to so many expected years of happy retirement, he seemed to be saying. God's ways are mysterious, inscrutable, but still we can be sure that he loves his people, ultimately his purposes are good. Hildegard was a woman of such faith, such goodness, we could have no doubt about her being now safe with the God she so firmly believed in.

The platitudes sunned themselves on the sand of Joseph's thoughts, apparently blissfully unaware of the tsunami of rage that was rising to break upon them and sweep them out to sea. He had believed this stuff! Or something possibly like it, very like it perhaps. Now the words were hollowed out, empty of all meaning and even of the compassion they were meant to be the containers of. Did the vicar really believe them? Or was it another article of the faith that was so dead that it needed

'bringing to life'? Joseph caught the vicar's eyes, which hurriedly flicked away from his, and thought he saw a flicker of guilt. Perhaps the vicar not only knew it was dead. Perhaps he was the murderer?

Somehow the business that had to be done was done. The vicar had done his pastoral duty of comforting a bereaved parishioner. He had helped the bereaved family 'plan the funeral service'. Hymns and readings chosen. A family member or members to deliver the eulogy. All to be invited to refreshments afterwards in the pub opposite the church. All satisfactory. The vicar took his leave, venturing to give Youngest Daughter a small kiss on the cheek, and Joseph an embarrassed and shortest possible manly hug.

"Well, Dad, I did think you might have been a bit more helpful, a bit more forthcoming. We needed you to make some decisions, and I pretty much had to make them all. I just hope the others will be happy with them, I think they were what we discussed while they were still here. You could at least have given us some idea about whether they were what you want. What Mum would have wanted."

What Mum would have wanted, was to be alive. But he didn't say it; there was no point adding to Youngest Daughter's grief. He had let a lot of his emotions out in the last few days, had shed lots of tears together with the children. Now there were some things he must carry alone.

"And you didn't really help the vicar either, after all the years he's known you and Mum. You might have responded a bit more to all those kind words he was saying."

"Were they kind? They seemed a bit, you know, *empty* to me. I was kind of waiting for him to bring them to life, if you know what I mean?"

"Oh, *Dad*! You're being a bit hard on the poor man. He must be very upset too, losing such a wonderful member of his congregation. He was only doing his best."

"Was he?"

INEXORABLY, BUT MUCH too slowly, the day of the funeral came. The rain fell heavily from first light, all through the morning. The hearse drove up promptly on time and stopped in front of the house. The funeral director came in, a young woman in a smart black suit, business-like and yet somehow communicating more real comfort than the vicar had done. Joseph and his children went out to the waiting limousine, a daughter on each side of him holding an umbrella and feeling as if they were holding him up in case he collapsed or blew away. A part of the rage still flickered inside him: I may be the widower here, but I'm not frail or senile, you know. They drove the half mile to the church, following the hearse, the rain still falling and dripping heavily from the trees that lined the streets like silent neighbours paying their respects.

Joseph was surprised, no, not surprised, when they followed the coffin and bearers into the old church he had loved so much, and found it full of people. Family, friends from church and work and the local community, even a few from Esperantujo. He was touched by their grief, their love for him but especially for Hildegard, that had brought them here today. The service began. It was, you might say, and many people did, a lovely service. The hymns were some of his favourites, lines that had meant something sometime in the course of their lives. The words of St Paul hung in the air:

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,  
Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Eldest Son delivered the eulogy, Middle Daughter read a poem she had written, Joseph himself said a few words, the vicar preached on the words of St Paul. And it all seemed empty.

*One who knows does not speak, thought Joseph; one who speaks does not know.*

The service ended and they went out, still huddling under umbrellas, to the far end of the churchyard where an open grave lay beside a pile of earth, covered in green matting. The bearers set the coffin down on the trestles, passed the webbing underneath, lifted and lowered it into the hole. A wooden box, that now contained all that physically remained of the wife of his youth, the delight of his eyes.

Joseph had insisted on the traditional words of committal, in spite of the vicar's initial objection that he preferred a modern version that would bring them to life.

"In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succour, but of thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased? ... Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts; shut not thy merciful ears to our prayer; but spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not, at our last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from thee."

If only, thought Joseph, I had thought to get the choir to sing Purcell's setting of that in church. It would have happily replaced all the spoken words we heard.

Rain dripped into his eyes as he stepped forward to cast some soil upon the coffin. But as he looked up, he saw that in front the sky had grown bright and the sun was shining. Instinctively and quickly he turned from the grave, so quickly that his daughters who had been afraid he might topple into the hole flinched. But then they turned too, and saw what Joseph had expected and looked for. A dazzlingly bright full rainbow hung in the sky above the church. One end of it probably just above his home. The other end?

## Chapter Three Aspirations

Joseph began to dream. At least, he supposed he dreamed, though it seemed to him that he still slept hardly at all in the course of the long lonely nights.

He sat up in bed and there was Hildegard, standing at the side of the bed. Not as he had last seen her, cold and still in a box in the funeral director's Chapel of Rest. But as he remembered her from their very first meeting in Belgrade in 1978: a slim maiden with almost silver blond hair, and a smile that reduced grown men to stammering callow youths. He stared at her for a full minute, expecting

the vision to fade. Still she stood.

"What do you want, Joseph?"

It wasn't what he would have expected his dead wife to say; though on reflection it was hard to imagine what he would have expected. He had never expected to see her at all.

"What do you want, Joseph?" she repeated.

"What do you *think* I want? I want you to be alive! I want you not to be dead!"

She shook her head sadly, and vanished.

And it seemed to Joseph that he dreamed a second time. He sat up in bed, and there was his wife Hildegard, standing at the foot of the bed. No longer the teenager he had first known in a faraway country under communist rule, but the stunning bride, radiant and full of hope, her dreams of freedom fulfilled.

"What do you want, Joseph?"

The tears prickled in his eyes, but he somehow sensed that the same, obvious answer was not going to be the right one now, either. What *did* he want? He had suddenly, at a stroke, lost the person he loved more than anyone in the world. The category of wanting had at that moment become void. What else was there to want? He wasn't even sure he wanted to exist. Surely, grieving was a season of not wanting anything, ever again? Of simply surviving, battling through, enduring what could not be endured, except that there was nothing else.

"I want - everything to be better."

This time she smiled a small smile, before once again shaking her head, and disappearing from his sight.

Then it seemed to Joseph that he dreamed a third time. He sat up in the bed, and Hildegard was again standing at its foot, but a little further away. She looked like the earth mother she became, the fruitful mother of children, with the round belly that showed another child was on its way. Joseph had always marvelled at how such a slight woman could contain so much life, looking in each pregnancy as if she was preparing to give birth to at least triplets.

"What do you want, Joseph?"

His heart emptied of all emotion, and thought. He who had always had so much to say, who was always so full of ideas about anything and everything, now had no words left.

"I don't *know*!" It came out like a cry, a desperate wail for help, for anything.

She smiled a smile of such love, such longing compassion. But she was gone again.

And it seemed to Joseph that he dreamed a fourth time. He sat up with a start, as if he had woken



from deep sleep and was afraid he had missed the alarm on a morning of urgent appointments. Hildegard stood in the doorway of their bedroom, She was the mature woman, whose children had grown and left home to make lives for themselves, a woman who was at peace with the world and looking forward eagerly to the birth of a grandchild. Wearing the extraordinary exotic dress with the Chinese design, almost the last dress Joseph remembered her buying. She gazed at him for a long time with a wistful smile.

"What do you want, Joseph?"

It came back to him that his last words to her in life had not been any of the things he would have wanted to say - had even, in morbid moments, planned he would say, though he had always imagined it would be he who would be on his deathbed, saying them. Those last words had not been: I love you more than I can say. Thank you for all the wonderful years. You have made me the happiest man in the world. His last words had been, "Just going for the bread then, see you in a bit."

"What do you want, Joseph?"

"What should I want? What do you want me to want?"

She smiled, just the way she had always smiled at the children when they answered correctly.

"The things we have always wanted..."

She didn't vanish this time, as if she were some kind of spirit or apparition. She merely smiled, and turned, and walked out of sight.

And - if Joseph had dreamed - he awoke.

All the following day he wrestled to understand the dreams, or night visions, or whatever they had been. He longed to talk to someone about them, he had always done his best thinking when he thought aloud, sharing his ideas with others. But who? The vicar? Joseph could all too easily imagine the poor man's panic at the possibility his parishioner had gone mad, or worse than that, had had a real experience of a world of spirit that there was no place for in his philosophy, his business-like, modernising Christian world-view. His children? He imagined Youngest Daughter's horror at the thought of the Aged P seeing her dead mother around the house, and imagining he had actually talked with her. The older children might have been less horrified, but they would surely have been equally bewildered. His friends at church? Some of them might have been less troubled in their orthodoxy than the vicar would have been, but he was afraid most of them would nevertheless try to offer comfort or advice, rather than help him understand the message he had been given.

HE MUST HAVE BEEN sitting that way for several hours when his mobile phone rang.

"Hello, Joseph, it's Pete. Listen, I don't know what you think about this, tell me if it's out of line, you might not feel up to it yet anyway. But me and the boys wondered if you'd like to come for a drink tonight, at the Hen and Hammock."

Not many hours before, Joseph would have agreed that yes, he didn't feel up to it yet anyway. But at this moment it felt like a gift, a true act of friendship. 'The boys' were some of his non-Church friends, friends from work or the defunct Esperanto group, or somewhere else in his past life that he could no longer recall, drinking buddies he had kept in touch with over the years and would meet up with every few weeks for a drink and to put the world to rights.

More than once during the afternoon he changed his mind and was on the point of phoning Pete and cancelling, and even on his way to the pub, walking through the darkening streets, he felt like turning back. But in the end the shame of going back on his word, and the secret he carried in his mind, a message from beyond the grave that he needed help to fathom, carried him across the threshold of the Hen and Hammock. There were enough people in the bar, who knew about his bereavement, to cause a momentary silence to fall as he walked in. Like the unknown stranger, or the known gunslinger, walking through the saloon doors in the western movie. But only for a moment, before the buzz of conversation resumed. Pete, David, Woody and Tom, had all had the common sense to be there a half hour earlier than the time they told Joseph, so that he wouldn't be arriving and having to sit alone in the bar waiting for them, waiting with his thoughts and his grief. He was grateful for that, as he was grateful for their naturalness during the evening, their lack of forced or embarrassed sympathy, their willingness to listen if he wanted to talk about Hildegard, and not to raise the subject if he didn't.

It was a healing time, and he breathed a heartfelt thanks to the Universe for it, as he returned home and unlocked the door of the empty house. He had even - though he wasn't sure he was going to - told them about the night visions, the message he had been given. He had asked them how they remembered Hildegard, and what they thought she - and he - had 'always wanted'. It was an interesting, and a moving list.

She had always wanted love, they told him. And they didn't mean that she wanted to receive it. She wanted to give love, and she had a heart big enough to give love to everyone, it seemed, even their acquaintances that Joseph found impossible. She loved freedom, and wanted everyone to be free. She passionately desired justice, and raged at the inequality of wealth and opportunity she saw everywhere around her. The earth, for her, was a generous Mother, and what she gave was meant to be shared by all of earth's inhabitants. She couldn't bear dishonesty or corruption: it was why she was constantly cancelling her membership of political parties or other organisations, when they failed to live up to their promises or commitments, or compromised their beliefs for the sake of power or profit. Like any mother she was dedicated to her family and children, and would probably take on the whole world single-handed if it threatened them. She hated the intolerance and prejudice, the ignorance and propaganda, that had entered into the news media and political debate. She hated the apathy and indifference of people who shrugged and said What could you do about it, anyway? She believed everyone had a duty, as a human being, to desire knowledge and truthful discourse, and she expected everyone to work at discerning what was true and what was false. She believed that science and intellect and human resources should be used to create weal, and not woe; and hated that the world's leading industrialised nations relied, for so much of their prosperity, on the vile trade in arms. She was for peace, without compromise or deviation.

"And you *know* what she always wanted, Joseph," said Tom. "She wanted you and her to live out your beliefs, with complete integrity."

It's good of you to say that, Joseph thought to himself. Right now, I'm not sure I know what my beliefs are, any more.

As he lay in bed that night, he didn't know, either, if he was praying, or talking to a woman who wasn't there.

"I don't know what I did to deserve you. But thank you for loving me, for being there for me. I've forgotten what we really want, now you're not here to tell me. Help?"

## Chapter Four Drumming

In the morning, Joseph didn't know what was happening to him. He sprang out of bed and opened the curtains: the sun was shining, and somewhere nearby birds were singing. He washed, shaved and dressed, went downstairs and made himself coffee. He *enjoyed* two slices of hot buttered toast and marmite. If he hadn't been in deep mourning, he would have thought he was... well, happy.

Shortly afterwards he found himself sitting in the kitchen, the washing up done, drumming on an upturned plastic bucket, and singing at the top of his voice one of the old songs he had used to sing with Oldest Daughter, when they were doing the washing up together.

"Nothing came from nothing, nothing ever could;  
so somewhere in my youth or childhood,  
I must have done something good."

It sounded pretty good with an upbeat reggae kind of rhythm. Though he said it himself.

And that was how the vicar found him, when he came to pay his post-funeral pastoral visit. Joseph was suddenly aware that the kitchen door had opened, and a concerned-looking face above a clerical collar was peering round it.

"I hope you don't mind me coming in? I knocked on the door but there was no answer, then I heard singing, so I came round and let myself in."

"But you were drumming and making a noise?" he asked, after Joseph had stopped drumming and singing, and invited his visitor to come in and sit down. It was clear from the way he said it, that he thought this behaviour unusual if not inappropriate in a man who had just buried his wife. Perhaps bereavement insanity really was a documented condition, as he had occasionally thought?

And at that moment Joseph burst out laughing. He had remembered his dream. It was not a dream he would have thought to tell the vicar about, and probably not his friends of the evening before, either. To his surprise, now that he thought of it - perhaps it was abnormal, though he had never read anything about it in the various helpful booklets on Dealing with Bereavement that he had

been given - he had dreamed he and Hildegard were making love. It had been a *cosmic* coitus, the kind you would expect to be accompanied by Roberta Flack singing The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face. Not the love-making of their first months together, fumbling, hasty, unsure and full of questions. But the love-making of their maturer years: confident, relaxed, passionate, the love-making that came from knowing every centimetre of their partner's body as well as they knew their own. Knowing how and where to touch, the exact moment to press on or to hold back, the urgent and the leisurely, the teasing and the release. And in the dream, it lasted not the half-hour or hour before sleep, but days, months, years, while Governments came and went, wars were fought and walls tumbled. The climax they reached together was the bursting of stars, the singing of spheres, the unfolding of galaxies.

And I knew our joy would fill the earth  
And last till the end of time  
My love

You're wrong, Roberta. Last night I knew our love and our joy would fill the *universe*, and last till the end of time, my love.

You really can't tell the vicar that kind of thing.

Instead he found himself saying, "Have you ever heard of Chuang Tzu?"

"Don't think I have. Some kind of Chinese writer?"

"His wife died, and when his friend Hui Tzu came round to console him, he found him banging on an old tub and singing, like you just found me. He asked why he wasn't weeping and mourning, as he had expected. And Chuang Tzu replied that he *had* wept initially; but then he had reflected that his wife's whole existence, since before she was born, had been a series of natural changes, one after another. Now she had just passed through another transformation, and was dead. Now she was at peace, and if Chuang Tzu were to sob and weep, it would show that he had failed to comprehend the ways of destiny. Do you know, I'd forgotten that story? It only came back to me when you looked so surprised to find me singing."

The vicar looked far from convinced. It wasn't the kind of Christian comfort and hope he had wanted his parishioner to be reflecting on, which would have been something more about heaven and the blessed hope of the resurrection to eternal life.

"So, is that how you're feeling?" he asked.

Not exactly. Joseph grasped that the vicar would feel happier if he expressed some more conventional attitudes of grief, so he obliged. It was always good to tell the clergy what they liked and wanted to hear. So he said he supposed his grieving was following a normal course. It was all very up and down, some days better than others, of course he missed his wife terribly, the children were being a great help, he was looking after himself physically, as well as he could, he wasn't going

to hurry about making any decisions. Yes, his faith was a great help and strength. Etcetera etcetera, blah blah. He felt especially proud that he suffered the vicar to pray - at more length than Joseph thought strictly necessary - before he left the house.

Joseph breathed several sighs of relief. And turned round to see Hildegard standing in the doorway, her shoulders shaking with silent laughter.

"Good God!" (He hadn't meant to say that.) "Are you going to keep popping up like this? I mean, don't you think people are going to think I'm going mad?"

"It was a bit mean of you, telling the vicar that story, don't you think? But never mind: I like it. And no, I'm not going to keep popping up like this. Only when you need it, or if I have something to say. Oh... and last night was *great*!" She blew him a kiss, and left.

Joseph sat and reflected. He didn't know how it had happened, that at least for this one morning, gratitude for Hildegard and all he had shared with her, had eclipsed the blackness of grief that she was no longer there. He hoped the feeling would last. Or did he? Something in him felt guilty about the gratitude he felt. *Shouldn't* he be feeling wretchedly bereft? Isn't that what widowed older men should feel? He wasn't sure Chuang Tzu's philosophical acceptance of the natural transformation from life to death was what he shared, or even wanted to share.

What did it mean, that he was dreaming about Hildegard? That he was even having visions of her when he was awake, for God's sake? Was she - or his subconscious - trying to tell him something? If so, what was it? How was it that he had forgotten what he, or she, or both of them together, had always wanted?

He remembered what Paul Fettes, the president of the Universal Esperanto Association, had said at the opening session of the UKE in Nitro:

Sed Esperanto ne estis elpensita nur por doni ĝojon kaj ĝuon al tiuj kelkaj parolantoj, kiuj sukcesas trovi monon kaj tempon por vojaĝi al la kongreso. Ĝi estas rimedo por ŝanĝi la mondon.

But Esperanto was not devised only to give joy and enjoyment to those few speakers, who have been able to find the money or the time to travel to the congress. It is a means of changing the world.

In their younger days, he and Hildegard had dreamed of changing the world! Until the day when she told him the story of the old sage who had set out to change the world - after many years had realised it was an impossible task, and resolved instead to change just those in his immediate circle - after many more years had given up on that also, and decided to spend his remaining years on seeking to change himself. "If I had set out with that intention from the beginning, I would not have wasted my life," he concluded.

He remembered a time in their life when he had been seriously trying to deepen his spirituality, to explore and discover his true self. He'd lost count of the books he'd read, the quiet days he'd attended, the different techniques of meditation he'd tried. In the end it was Hildegard who rescued him, as she so often did.

"Your true self is not to discover!" she complained. "It's to *be*! All this spiritual stuff is just a lot of self-indulgent mumbo-jumbo! Read Chuang Tzu and shut up about true selves."

Chuang Tzu, it turned out, was a great sceptic and debunker of spiritual gimmickry. The idea of not searching for your true self but just being it, was definitely the sort of thing he would say. As so often before, he found himself wanting to ask his wife, How do you know all this stuff, anyway? But the fact was, she just *knew*. Now she wasn't here, he supposed he would just have to start knowing it for himself.

He knew he was not supposed to make any sudden decisions, all the books said so. But he was going to make one anyway. He was going to make a journey, a pilgrimage if you will, to walk with and for Hildegard, to be his true self, to walk the walk he had always tried to, or wanted to try to, walk. They had occasionally talked about walking to Santiago da Compostela. When they had a bit more time. When they had both fully retired. When, when. And that time had never come. But now it could. Now he could do the walk for both of them. Woody and Tom from last night, had both talked from time to time about walking the Camino. They would go together: three men on the Camino. It would be a laugh. Something to worry the children, give him something to do while the grieving took its course. And maybe make the vicar feel that he was approaching the whole thing in a proper Christian way.

Yes, that was it.

## Chapter Five Overtaken by events

So that was the plan. The three men would fly to the south of France, pick up the Camino, and cross the Pyrenees and northern Spain, along the famed and ancient pilgrim way to Santiago da Compostela.

That was, or had been, the plan. Joseph wondered, years later, how the world might have been different if the plan had actually come to fruition. If, for example, they had booked their flight a day or two earlier. If they had actually made the flight and set off on the pilgrimage. Would everything else have happened? If a butterfly can flap its wings on the far side of the ocean, and set currents in motion that cause a hurricane on the other side of the planet (a hypothesis that Joseph doubted, but also acknowledged that didn't make it untrue), would their absence from home have prevented what happened that week?

A volcano erupted in Iceland. The roiling fire under the mountain, constrained for so long like some Nordic god bound in chains, broke from its place and burst through the crust of earth above. With an explosion that broke windows in the nearest town, and was heard throughout the country for

hundreds of kilometres around, jets of fire and molten rock were thrown thousands of metres into the air. Clouds of volcanic dust and smoke covered the sky, and, carried by the prevailing winds, began to spread south-east towards Europe. Instantly all commercial air flights were cancelled until further notice. Joseph and his friends, already sitting in the departure lounge at Gatwick, waited and listened to the announcements, and were eventually told their flight had been cancelled and they must return home.

They sat in the Hen and Hammock lamenting what they thought would be the temporary disruption of their plans, and went home at the end of the evening to their own homes, to find their own ways of filling the days until the volcanic cloud settled, and the airports were opened again.

It would be a long time before normal travel resumed.

In the last few months of her life, Hildegard had often shaken her head in dismay and disbelief over current events. "These are horrible times to be living in, Joseph," she would say. "And I know: I grew up under Soviet occupation and dictatorship. I never knew freedom until after I met you. But the times that are coming upon us will be even worse, believe me."

Joseph thought she was being unusually pessimistic, for a woman who had always been so full of life and hope. But later he was thankful she had not lived through the events of the months that followed her death, if only because he was afraid that even she might feel compelled to say, "I told you so." That would have been so uncharacteristic of the Hildegard he knew and loved.

Three days after the volcano erupted, and three months after they had laid Hildegard in the ground, the Restitution began. The Dark Lord Marduk, plotting all those years in his Dark Tower in New Amsterdam, took advantage of the No Fly order that had brought so much of Europe to a virtual standstill, to launch his coup in the endangered island of Britain. He had come to hate the little island because of its age-old tradition of freedom, tolerance, fair play, independence, and what had once passed for democracy. For years he had schemed and toiled to undermine all of that, through his control of the media. News reporting in the Press and broadcasting, and the whole culture of triviality, greed and the worship of celebrity, had done much to undermine those ancient liberties. Already the notion of democracy was severely attenuated. There was a sense abroad in the land that our enemies were no longer without, but were those of our own people who did not share the views promoted by the popular press. They must be vilified, branded as traitors, removed - it was not specified how. But things had not been moving fast enough. The politicians and leaders of opinion who did his bidding, had not been assiduous enough. They lacked the lust for his power that he required of them. They must be removed, and replaced by his own creatures, who would be even more amenable to his will. He did not have time to wait for things to take their slow natural course. He was old, so old and tired, and the search for the Elixir that would give him immortality, immunity from the only enemy he feared, had not yet been successful. With total control of all the resources of Britain, and the power that he expected soon to extend into Europe as well, he would be able to expedite the only Quest that really mattered.

Historians still argue about the almost incomprehensible speed and efficiency with which the coup was carried out. No doubt the Dark Lord had spent years, decades perhaps, infiltrating the

institutions and systems of Government. The military would surely not have supported him? Would they not have remained loyal to the old Idea of Britain? Yet when it came to it, the revolution was almost bloodless. You would have thought there would be people who would be prepared to stand up and fight for what they could very soon see they would lose. But most historians agree that the people of good will were so astonished, so taken by surprise at the course of events, that they could not resist. They had simply never planned for what would have been inconceivable, and by the time they realised plans must be made, many of them were already in detention.

Within the first days after Marduk's arrival in the capital, the Government fell, and one of his own puppets was sworn in as Prime Minister. In a rump Parliament, for many members of the loyal Opposition had already failed to appear in the House for reasons unknown. Soon afterwards the Monarch abdicated, and a biddable popular minor Royal had ascended the throne. The Archbishop of Canterbury had resigned and been replaced by a cleric who would tell the nation that whatever the Dark Lord prescribed was the undoubted and manifest will of God. Most of the editors of the popular press, and broadcast news services, did not need to be replaced. The Dark Lord already owned them.

By the time all this had happened, Joseph had left the island. While so many of the population either carried on with their lives as if nothing untoward were happening, while those who were concerned spent hours sitting helpless and bewildered, waiting for news... In fact, real news was already in short supply. TV and radio news programmes had been reduced by overnight fiat to a few minutes' reporting of scandal and gossip, while the rest of the schedules were filled with reality shows, chat shows, and re-runs of Strictly Come Dancing and British Bake Off.

On Day One of the Restitution, Joseph had indeed turned on the TV initially to see if there was any news of the Volcano, and a possible resumption of air flights. Nothing happened: the screen stayed blank. He poked the remote control at it, pressed all the buttons he could think of. He went over to the set to check it was plugged in and give it a slap. When that was unsuccessful, he stood up with a curse to go and check the fuse box... and there was Hildegard.

"It's time to go," she said. "The world is changed. I feel it in the water. I feel it in the earth. I smell it in the air. Much that once was is lost, for none now live who remember it... Joseph! Wake up! I am not Galadriel. But dark times *are* coming. This is not a time to stay in this country. If you value the things we stood for, the things we always truly desired, you must leave now. This will not be safe for anyone who does not consent."

If ever there was a time he wanted to ask her what she meant, this was it. But she had already gone.

He had sensed enough, from the little news that had been released before the clampdown, that Hildegard was right. It took a few phone calls to his friends to issue a summons to the Hen and Hammock, where they drank that lunchtime and talked in low voices about what might be happening, and what might happen. Pete and David, for all the misgivings they shared, felt they were not able to leave their families or homes, no matter what. Woody and Tom, still geared up to the attempt on the Camino, were more of a mind to try.



"But what about *your* family?" Woody asked Joseph. "Six children? And (I've forgotten how many) grandchildren? Are you really going to leave them and go running off to Europe?"

Joseph's face fell. He hadn't forgotten the family. But how could he persuade them of his fears, his conviction that Britain was no longer a safe place for people like him to live? Or perhaps - he could be deluded about whether a new regime would think him a threat to be removed, in spite of his views that were well-known in the local community - it was no more than a place they would not *want* to live? How could he expect them to leave their homes and such security as they might still have, to cast themselves upon the shores of other countries? A day might come when they would have to risk all and do just that. But that day was not today.

They went home to make their preparations. Joseph did, indeed, phone the children to tell them he was going abroad - for a time, he said; to maybe walk the Camino in memory of their Mum, he said. He spoke about his concerns about that day's turn of events and how they might develop, but even though they shared his anxiety, they were not anxious enough to think of flight. Mostly they tried to talk him out of the idea, which seemed to be a slightly unbalanced symptom of his present grieving state. Youngest Daughter even ordered him not to do anything of the sort, and she would be there after work that day to check on him and make sure he was all right.

Sadly, Joseph packed some clothes in a large backpack. He put in two books - no three: two slender volumes and a more substantial one - and said a sorrowful farewell to the other shelves that lined the walls of the house. Then he turned off the water and electricity, locked the door behind him and walked away down the path. One look back at the home he had shared with Hildegard for so many years. Then he turned and left it behind.

Woody was waiting at the end of the road with his battered old VW camper van, the Delta Flyer. They picked up Tom and set off on the road for Hull. They rightly guessed that it was wise to avoid the South East, where ferries would be more crowded because flights were cancelled. Even Hull was worryingly busy; but they managed to persuade the relevant person to give them the last remaining place on what would turn out to be the last ferry to Rotterdam.

## Chapter Six On the Road

Joseph stood on the shores of the mainland, a continent where nations had borders one with another, where they had learned through bitter pains to live on the same land mass and not to war. They had done it in part by teaching and learning one another's languages, by making the effort to understand each other. By forming a league by trade and treaty, that would oblige them to talk together, to work together to live in peace. Ludwik Zamenhof's dream had been in part fulfilled, yet much remained to be done.

As he sat with his friends in the hotel bar in Rotterdam that evening, they talked about the road ahead.

"So... we're still making for the south of France? Is it still the Camino?" Tom asked. "According to

Google Maps that's an 11-and-a-half-hour drive, so in the Delta Flyer it shouldn't take more than two or three days, if we're lucky."

"Great," said Woody. And Joseph, "Hmm... that *was* the plan. It's just, I keep trying to understand why the plans we've made so far have been derailed, one after the other. What does it mean? if it means anything? I'm not keen on rushing ahead without waiting for further instructions."

"Further instructions? Where from? Who from? You don't mean...?"

They were more than a little sceptical about the idea of waiting for Hildegard to drop by and give Joseph the order of the day. But then again, when had she been wrong? They had both been a little bit in love with the Woman from Lithuania. The fact that she was dead wasn't necessarily going to change that.

Joseph said good night and went to his room. He sat for hours looking at a map of France, conning the route they would take if they drove to St Jean Pied de Port, where they would leave the Delta Flyer and start on the 769km walk to Santiago da Compostela.

"Is that the right way? Is that where I should be going?" he asked the empty room.

The room remained empty. There was no voice. No glimpse of his muse and guide, the one he had thought he had laid to rest, and who now wouldn't leave him alone, it seemed. Had she missed the boat, and not been able to come with them to the mainland? Could ghosts even *cross* the water? If a ghost is what she was? He had never thought the word before, and it certainly wasn't right for what she now was, whatever that was.

Some time in the middle of the night, when his body had given up trying to stay awake for her, and he had somehow slept in the chair so that in his dream he was aware of a nagging discomfort in his neck and shoulders, it was as if he opened his eyes and saw her sitting on the side of the bed.

"Don't wrestle, Joseph. I'm not going to come when you try to make me. I'm dead, remember? You were the first to say it."

"But I *need* you! I need you to tell me what to do."

"Then you must stop needing me. I won't be here much more to point the way. You'll be on your own, thinking for both of us."

She picked up the map he had been looking up, and for a brief beautiful moment spoke in their own heart-language, the love-language that had first brought them together.

"Sed mi legos ĉi tion. Ĉi tiu ne estas la vojo; ne estas *nia* vojo. Trovu vian propran vojon, karulo mia, kaj piediru ĝin. La vojo trovos vin, do piediru tiel kaj tien."

("But I will say this. This is not the way; this is not *our* way. Find your own way, my darling, and walk it. The way will find you, so walk in that way and to that place.")

I will walk it, I will walk it, he said as he dragged himself into the bed and slept uncomfortably until morning. The way will find me? How was he going to break it to Woody and Tom that there was no clear instruction to share with them, just some hokey gnomie utterance that might have sounded real on the lips of Yoda, but not from a 21st century retired language teacher?

"So here's the thing," he tried over breakfast. "I *did* have this dream, but she wasn't telling me to walk the Camino. The whole point of that, for me, was to do something Hildegard and I had never been able to do together. It would be a kind of pilgrimage of grieving, or healing. But that's *not* the way she said to go; she told me a different way would find me. I think, because we've landed up here in the Netherlands, it's a way to the East, not the South. It's a different way, perhaps it will take me towards where Hildegard originally came from? It's about rediscovering the things that first brought us together, all those years ago. I think. So... are you with me? Or are you set on Santiago da Compostela?"

"Let's say we're with you for the time being," said Tom. "OK, Woody? I'm ready to give you the benefit of the doubt for now, or maybe it's the lovely Hildy I'm giving the benefit of the doubt to. At least until we see a bit more clearly how it's all going to work out."

Woody nodded his head in agreement. "So let me try and get this straight. We've come from the West, so we're not going back that way, into the lands of the Dark Lord. And you've said, not to the South. So, it's East, then?"

Joseph stood up and felt his head spinning, as if he were a compass trying to find its true orientation.

"No. Wait. *Not* East. First we go North."

They checked out of the hotel, packed their things in the Delta Flyer, and set off north on the A13 towards The Hague, guided by Joseph's inscrutable inner compass. Somewhere there, to the north of old Amsterdam, was a place he had once heard of but never visited, a place that meant something in the history he and Hildegard had loved and known.

152 km, said Google Maps. Two and a half hours by road, in normal traffic. But nothing was going to be normal. How could they drive past Amsterdam without stopping for a couple of nights and taking in the sights and enjoying some Dutch beer? So it was on the third morning after landing in Europe, that they gathered for breakfast, preparing to leave town and head north.

The headlines of the previous day's English language newspapers, available in the hotel lobby, were variations on the theme

## CRICKET BANNED

The new Government headed by Sir Michael Grove today issued a decree that the sport of cricket is to be banned with effect from the beginning of next month.

Cricket is condemned by the Government by dictate of the Lord Protector (see *Comment* on page 10: We welcome Marduk's proclamation as Lord Protector of the Imperial United Kingdom of Greater Britain) as unpatriotic, treasonous, and likely to inculcate and promote non-British values of fair play and sportsmanship. It has recently been discovered by researchers at the University of Wapping that cricket is not an English invention, as foreign propaganda caused us to believe, but was in fact imported from the Indian sub-continent. Invented by immigrants trying to take service in the Imperial British Army of the Raj, it was brought back to England by dissipated half-caste soldiers and quickly spread throughout the English shires by foreigner-loving intellectuals and their sympathisers.

Anyone found playing cricket after the end of this month will face severe penalties, not excluding imprisonment or deportation to the colony for a second offence. A general amnesty will apply until 31 December this year for the surrender of all cricket-related articles: bats, balls, stumps, pads, score books, and copies of the banned book *Wisden's Cricketers' Almanack*. Rewards will be offered to anyone reporting breaches of this order.

Long Live The Lord Protector!

"Makes you want to go out and buy a Wisden, doesn't it?" said Joseph, who had never owned one.

## Chapter Seven The Island

North of Amsterdam, at the north-eastern tip of the Netherlands, between the North Sea and the Waddenzee, lies the island of Texel. It was here that Joseph led his two companions in the Delta Flyer. You take the A10 north out of Amsterdam, then the A7 to Wieringerwerf, and the N99 and N250 to Den Helder. There you have to wait for the ferry, and the 31 minute crossing to the island. It was around lunchtime by the time they parked in the streets of the small town of Den Burg, pretty much the only settlement of any size on the island.

But Joseph would not think of eating, before he had found what he had come to see.

As if following a voice in his head - for he truly had never been this way before - he led them a little way out of the town centre. There where Kogerstraat meets De Zes, there is a small square where un-cared for and uncut shrubs surround a six-metre tall brick pillar: the Texel Esperanto monument. The brick structure is topped by a metalwork sculpture of a faded and rusty green star in orbit around a globe. The word ESPERANTO is picked out on each face of the pillar, and there is a relief portrait of the inventor of the International Language: Doktoro L. L. Zamenhof, 1859-1917.

Joseph stood in silent contemplation of the monument for long minutes, while Tom and Woody gave him time to look.

Then, "OK, tell us the story," they asked.

"Well. Back in the 1920s and '30s, Esperanto was phenomenally popular here. It was a time, in the decades after the Great War, when many people really believed that an international language that all could learn and speak, really was the way to world peace. When the League of Nations was formed, there was even a movement for them to nominate Esperanto as one of the official languages of the League. It was a motion that the French vetoed: they thought French should be the world's lingua franca.

"There were two brothers living here on Texel: Gijs and Johan Duinker. They owned and ran the local newspaper. They had learned about, and picked up Esperanto, during their travels in Europe. Thanks to their enthusiasm and influence, a quarter of the population of the island learned the language: about 2,000 out of 8,000 inhabitants. The brothers paid for this monument to be built in 1935, and the whole town turned out for a procession, speeches, and a picnic when it was inaugurated. Look:

INAŬGURITA JE LA 30A DE MAJO 1935

"People were sitting in the upstairs windows and on rooftops to watch the spectacle; can you imagine? There were Esperanto flags: green with a white rectangle in the top left corner, on which is a five-pointed green star, like that one up there. Zamenhof used to call it 'the only flag never to be stained with human blood'.

"When the Germans occupied the Netherlands in 1940, they tore the monument down. Hitler had condemned Esperanto as 'a language of Jews', and so any sign of it had to be eradicated. The Duinker brothers also lost their lives in the Holocaust.

"But after the War, the local community rebuilt the monument as part of the way they cleansed their memories of the terrible years of occupation. Some of the residents of Texel had saved the star and other parts of the monument when it was demolished, so they were able to reconstruct it almost exactly as it had been.

"I wonder if there's anyone around who remembers any of that, and still speaks it?"

A young couple were just walking along the street, the young man carrying a blue plastic bag of shopping, both of them wrapped up against a cool breeze off the North Sea.

"Saluton!" said Joseph. "Ĉu vi parolas Esperanton?"

They looked blankly at him, then the young woman asked, "Espanol? Italiano? English?"

"You don't speak Esperanto?" replied Joseph.

Her English wasn't that brilliant, but possibly better than her Spanish or Italian, and certainly better than her Esperanto. "I never heard of Esperanto, what is it?" Joseph's eyes flicked to the top of the brick pillar, and the inscribed word there. How often had this young woman walked past this place, and either never looked up at it, or never wondered what it was about? If this really was part of the history of the place she lived, could it be she knew nothing about it? Clearly it could.

The three companions walked back towards the centre of the little town, Joseph leading the way, with the others trailing behind. He stopped several passers-by with the same question: "Ĉu vi parolas Esperanton?" but they all greeted his words with the same look of incomprehension, a similar response from the many who knew some English. Finally, in a small supermarket where Woody was compelling him to let them all buy something to eat, the older woman behind the counter said, "Esperanto? No. But I've heard of it, lots of people here used to know it. You should ask old Jost, who lives out on Wilhelminalaan."

"We really must eat first," complained Tom, so they went into De Kastanjeboom for lunch, which Joseph ate impatiently, constantly wanting to ask other customers and staff if they knew where old Jost could be found on Wilhelminalaan.

They did, eventually find him. Not in the Kastanjeboom, but by asking several people in the street itself, until they came to a small house where Jost himself was trimming some flowers in the front garden. He was a tall, erect grey-haired man with spectacles, wearing a blue-checked shirt and jeans. He must be in his middle to late-seventies, if not a little more, and looked like nothing so much as a retired teacher or local government official.

"Saluton!" tried Joseph again. "Ĉu vi parolas Esperanton?"

The man froze, as if he had heard the whisper of a ghost. "Mi forgesas... Estas tiel longa... Mi ne aŭdis iajn vortojn de la bela lingvo dum jaroj, multaj jaroj."

He seemed so distressed by the question, or at least the sound of the international language, that Joseph reverted to English for the old man's, and for his friends', sakes. He explained, as simply as he could, that they were interested in the monument they had seen, and wanted to learn more about it.

Jost insisted that they go back to Kogerstraat, rather than talk in his front garden. He took from his house a small bundle of green cloth, and set off across town at what was a brisk pace even for the three Englishmen. When they reached the monument again, Jost stood still, looking at it, for several minutes in silence. His face looked drawn and grey, his lips pressed together in something like pain.

Then he said, "My wife and I met at the Esperanto class. She died three years ago. I've not been to look at that monument since that day."

Then he unfolded the green cloth he had brought with him. It was the flag that Joseph had described to his friends: green, with a white oblong in the top left corner enclosing a five-pointed green star.

Jost swallowed hard, and said, "Everyone who speaks Esperanto has this flag, with la verda stelo - the green star - here. Green is the colour of hope. And years and years, on the Queen's birthday, that flag was hoist up that steeple. Once a year."

"Does it still happen?" asked Woody.

"No, no, nothing. Ja, only the monument remembers us to Esperanto and nobody speaks it. The English language has won."

"What did you say?"

"Dat het Engels heeft gewonnen. As world language was English now the language, and not Esperanto. And the years before the War, everyone believed that Esperanto would be the world language."

He began to screw the green flag up into a bundle, ignoring the neat creases along which it had been folded. He swallowed hard again, and tears brimmed in his eyes. Joseph's heart went out to him, and he shook his hand with the squeeze of a fellow-widower who would no longer hear his karulino's sweet voice speaking love-words in the special language that had been their own, yet which they also shared with others who hoped for a world that would be united in communication, mutual understanding, and a working for peace.

"Dankon," he said. "Ie oni ankoraŭ parolas la lingvon internacian. Eksistas ankoraŭ espero. Do, esperu ankoraŭ, mia amiko."

But Jost turned away and hurried off down the street. Joseph's friends watched him go.

"Well, that worked well," said Tom. "Or maybe not. I hope this pilgrimage of grieving or healing or whatever you want it to be, isn't going to turn into a major grief-fest, re-opening wounds across the continent. Oh, I'm sorry, Joseph. I'm talking about your wounds, too."

Hope, disappointment and disillusionment. Love, and loss. Grief, and joy. How insubstantial the veil between them, thought Joseph. Perhaps the Way meant, holding all this together, letting the opposites that were so close know one another, feed into one another and dissolve into One, that was the fulfilment and containment of both? Did he even understand what that meant?

"Where to next?"

"I think we must rest after all the emotion of today. And tomorrow: yes, I think now we head East."

## Chapter Eight Sophia's Palace

Words continued to come and go and come again in Joseph's mind:

"Dat het Engels heeft gewonnen. As world language was English now the language, and not Esperanto. And the years before the War, everyone believed that Esperanto would be the world language."

And words that Zamenhof - or had it been someone else? - had spoken in the Golden Years about Esperanto:

"We will proudly unfurl our green banner of hope, the only flag never stained by human blood. And

round our flag will gather all those forces who not only say, but deeply believe, that human beings are before all else human beings, and that the earth can be a comfortable and well-lit home for all races, for all nations, for us all."

No doubt there had been many times during the long years of the British Empire, when men and women crossed the world with genuine idealism and altruism, believing that they were bringing true civilization and hope to the dark places of the world. Missionaries. Colonial officers. No doubt they had often brought light and truth and peace. No doubt the darkness had been great: tribe constantly at war with tribe, eating their defeated enemies and raping their women, burning widows on their husbands' funeral pyres, dooming young girls to a life of prostitution to honour their idols. The English language would become the vehicle of civilization... But everywhere that idealism ventured forth, colonialism and greed followed close on its heels. There came contempt for native cultures, even when they were good and wholesome. There came exploitation of indigenous peoples, plundering their resources, and in the end there was no lasting resolution of the problems that had preceded Empire. As soon as the colonial lords departed, the bitter tribal rivalries resurfaced. Now colonialism seemed indeed to be no more, but often it had only entered a new phase and assumed a different form and mask. Was the darkness any less, now that the weapons of war were stealth fighters and smart missiles, Kalashnikovs and ground-to-air missiles, barrel bombs and land mines? Girls and women were still raped and forced into sexual slavery, people were still trafficked and reduced to slavery, or killed in new and more inventively efficient ways. All the talk of, and campaigning for, human rights had still failed to free the world of the lust to slaughter defeated enemies, if you hated them enough, and to torture those who threatened the interests or security of the ruling powers.

As much as ever, the world needed to rally around a flag of hope, which still was innocent, unstained by human blood. Whose followers still aspired to create that better world, that would be a safe and peaceful home for men, women and children of all races and colours, no matter what heart-language or mother tongue they spoke, no matter how they chose to worship their God, or even if chose not to worship any God at all.

The drive that Google Maps predicted would take around 5 hours, took the Delta Flyer several hours longer. After waiting for the ferry to take them back to the Dutch mainland, they drove south then east, crossing the IJsselmeer by the 32 kilometre long Afsluitdijk causeway, then on to the German border and beyond, arriving on the outskirts of Hanover by late afternoon. They took rooms at the Hotel in Herrenhausen, where they ate, drank several lagers, and slept.

## SPORTS EDICTS

The Ministry for Leisure has released further details of bans on foreign sports and pastimes. Proscribed activities now include polo, fencing, and all forms of eastern martial arts: including judo, karate, aikido and tai chi chuan (complete list obtainable online, or from all Mardukpost Offices). Yoga, mindfulness, and similar psychosomatic practices have also been made criminal offences. Bowls, despite its similarity to French



petanque, is permitted because it was played by Sir Francis Drake. Encouraged British sports include soccer, rugby, boxing and quarterstaff. From 1 January all schoolchildren will be obliged to learn the longbow.

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Woody put the newspaper down with a loud humph, and an exclamation that sounded like "Laughing stock of the world, not just Europe!"

Then, "OK, Joseph. This is Hanover. You haven't yet told us why?"

"Because of Leibniz. Gottfried Ephraim Leibniz. I don't know all the whys and wherefores, but this is the place my sense of the Way was telling me. It looks like Hildegard isn't going to be around to tell me each new step - she told me I had to make it up for myself - and this is where, after Texel, my heart or instinct or whatever was telling me."

"And what is it about Leibniz? Wasn't he some kind of great mathematician? Had an almighty row with Newton about which of them really invented calculus?"

"I think so. But it's no use asking me about the maths; I'm a language teacher, not a mathematician. All I know is that he was also a philosopher, a polymath, a member of the Royal Society, interested in just about everything, and at the forefront of a good many of the disciplines of the early Enlightenment: modern scientific research methods, physics, technology, philology, as well as anticipating later developments in probability theory, biology, medicine, geology, psychology, linguistics, and computer science. It's the philology bit that brings me here, I think. He had this idea of a universal language which he called *characteristica universalis*, which was supposed to be a system of symbols to communicate scientific knowledge between people of all languages. It's often thought it was going to be something like the idea of Chinese characters. You know how speakers of different Chinese dialects or languages can read and understand the characters, even if they pronounce them differently, and have difficulty understanding each others' spoken language?

"About that time there was considerable interest in the idea of a universal language: John Wilkins, a Bishop of Chester, worked on the idea for years, but not much came of it, it was all too complex. But the whole thing is often regarded as being a forerunner of what Zamenhof did, when he invented Esperanto."

"And why Hanover, then?"

"Oh, didn't I say? No, I guess not. Leibniz spent quite a bit of his life living and working here. His chief patron was Sophia, the Electress of Hanover. She was a daughter of Elizabeth Stuart, AKA The Winter Queen, and *she* was daughter of our own James VI of Scotland and I of England. Sophia married Ernst Augustus, the Elector of Hanover. For a time, when Queen Anne was unable to produce an heir, Sophia even became heir to the throne of England and Scotland - in her 70s, mind you! But she died in 1714 only a few months before her sickly cousin Anne, so it was her son who came to the British throne as King George I. Her daughter Sophia Charlotte, by the way, married

Frederick I of Prussia, so all the later Prussian kings were descended from her."

"Humph. Well, how do you know this stuff, anyway? I thought you were a language teacher, not a historian?"

"Yes, but I also read novels. Haven't you ever read Neal Stephenson's *Baroque Trilogy*? [You should, you know](You should, too.). So," Joseph concluded, "today's agenda is: We visit Sophia's palace here in Herrenhausen, on the trail of Gottfried Ephraim Leibniz."

Schloss Herrenhausen is the summer palace of the Elector Sophia and her husband. Largely destroyed by Allied bombs during the Second World War, a decision to rebuild the palace was not made until 2007, and the reconstruction was finished in 2013. Part of it is now a museum, with exhibits of many of the famous historical figures connected with the palace and its occupants, including Leibniz.

What's not to love about a polymath whose Christian name means 'God's peace', and who spent much of his energy trying to promote ecumenical relations, as we might say; or as he might, trying to bring healing to the divisions of the churches of Christendom?

Joseph and his friends walked to the palace and its gardens, paid their entrance fee, and spent the morning looking round the museum, with the crowds of other tourists and visitors. It was disappointing and unsatisfactory. Interesting, of course, and informative. But Joseph - who didn't know exactly what he was looking for in any case - kept shaking his head and muttering. "Not here, this isn't it, he's not here."

He stood for many minutes in front of the largest of the portraits in the main gallery. It showed a quintessentially late 17th, early 18th century man in a black scholar's gown, and wearing a large wig of black curls. He seemed to have a larger head than most ordinary mortals, and certainly a larger nose than anyone would find flattering in a portrait. But still: "He's not here. I was so sure I would find him, find some word or sign..."

In deep disappointment, Joseph led the way out of the big house. He felt almost like weeping. How could his sense of the Way he should be going prove so wrong? Where was his wife when he needed her?

Looking once more at the plan of the grounds they had been given as they entered, he suddenly noticed the words Leibniztempel. Could that be it? With renewed hope he set off towards the left, past the garden theatre and one of the designated public picnic areas, crossing An der Graft and making for the ornamental lake on the other side. There, on a promontory beside the lake, stood the circular pavilion building, its Ionic columns holding up the cupola roof.

They climbed the steps and stood beside the plinth holding the bust of the great thinker. It's not the original, of course: that was removed for restoration, and is still kept in controlled conditions to preserve it from further damage or decay. Even the copy which was put in the temple in its place has suffered seriously at the hands of climate and vandals. Currently Herr Doktor Leibniz is missing his nose, a large enough trophy to satisfy the most ambitious vandal. The city council is still

discussing details of a potential repair.

"He's near, he's near," murmured Joseph. "Somewhere, there must be a way? Is there anyone in view?"

Most of the year round, the Temple is surrounded by sightseers and visitors. But by lucky chance, at that moment the only other visitors in view were several hundred metres away.

"Quickly, quickly," said Joseph. "There must be a..." He felt hurriedly all around the plinth, pressing the stones with eager hands. "Yes!" One of the stones suddenly felt loose, moved, let itself be pressed in. There was a scraping of stone on stone, the plinth moved to one side, and a hole opened in the ground with steps leading down.

"What the -!" exclaimed Tom, but already Joseph was leading the way down into the dark void, pulling out a torch from his pocket.

They found themselves in a chamber built under the temple, and even as they stood looking about them, the stones closed again above their heads.

"Well, I hope you know how to get us out again!"

In the middle of the round chamber stood another stone plinth almost identical to the one above it, and on it they saw a wooden casket, slightly bigger than an old-fashioned Gladstone bag. It was perfectly finished with polished sides and a rounded top, but with no apparent lid or lock.

"There must be a way of opening it. He wouldn't have brought us here, if there was no way of getting into it."

He? thought Woody and Tom.

Again, Joseph felt all around the casket. In vain. For ten minutes he felt, pressed, stroked every square centimetre of its polished top and sides. Nothing. Tom and Woody watched, fascinated and appalled and excited and bored by turns.

"Try two pressure points at once?" suggested Woody after a while. "A man's got two hands, after all, and with two locking places it's less likely to open accidentally."

"Yes!" Joseph tried again. Still it took several minutes of pressing different places on the smooth sides simultaneously. But suddenly there was a satisfying click, two almost invisible parts of the case slid inwards, and the lid of the casket opened.

A strange light rose from it. There was a shimmering in the air above the box, and what appeared to be a figure the size and shape of a man emerging from it. It looked like nothing so much as a genie appearing from the lamp, on a pantomime stage.

A man in a black gown and black wig stood there.

"Bitte, geben Sie die Art des mathematischen Notfalls an," he said, in a German accent that sounded strangely different from any that Joseph had encountered before.

"Good God!" exclaimed Tom. "It can't be! It looks like... it looks like a hologram!"

The figure looked around and appeared to notice the three Englishmen for the first time. A look of surprise came over its face. "Wer sind Sie? Englisch? Was bedeutet dies? What means this? Have you come from Sir Isaac? What does he want now?"

"Not Sir Isaac Newton, no. He died nearly three hundred years ago. But how...? Are you a hologram?"

"I do not know this 'hologram'? If you have found the way to see me and to talk with me, you must have discovered how to open the casket. This is what I call my Mathematisches Notfallsganzgleichnis. Wonderful, is it not? Three hundred years is Sir Isaac dead, you say? Then, the year must be - what?" The figure seemed to reel and wobble momentarily. "The year must be two thousand and something?"

"That's right. Two thousand and something. I don't know how to begin to explain what has happened, or what we are doing here. How long can we talk with you? Do you only have - I don't know what to call it? - a limited amount of time or power that your Ganzgleichnis can be sustained."

"Ha ha!" that is my brilliance, do you see? All the times I have tried it, it can be sustained almost indefinitely, so long as the casket is in contact with something that touches the ground, from which it draws its power. And of course the Gleichnis cannot move more than a few metres from the casket."

"Incredible! But, are you willing to come with us? Then we can explain, oh, so many things that will interest you."

"Why not? I had wanted the Princess and Sophie Charlotte to be the ones who would make use of this... but they must also be dead long since. I must have 'slept', as it were, so long. Yes, close the casket - you remember how to open it again? - and take it with you. I look forward to this learning about the three hundred years that have passed..."

## Chapter Nine Educating Gottfried

Leibniz had said, "Everything that is possible demands to exist."

Joseph found it hard to believe that things like the Emergency Mathematical Hologram could actually even be possible, still less that this meant they had to exist. But he could not doubt the evidence of his own and his friends' eyes. They had seen Leibniz or his likeness standing there in the underground chamber with them. It had not been a dream. And they had got out of the Temple and returned to their hotel, carrying the casket with them like a gang of guilty looking seniors, but without challenge or detection.

What they had not given any thought to, was just how demanding the hologram of a seventeenth century polymath could be, when it had not been activated for three hundred years. The first thing they found was that they needed to change their hotel accommodation and find rooms on the ground floor: "in contact with something that touches the ground" did not include anything above that. Then, when Leibniz was activated again, he demanded to know everything about everything that had happened since 1716. Which was substantially more than Joseph or his companions were able to provide. But: where there's a will, there's a way.

Tom, the retired computer programmer, was able to learn enough about how the MNG (pronounced EmEnGay - EMH just sounded silly) worked, to make some minor modifications so that Leibniz could be connected directly to one of the laptops they had brought with them, which in turn was connected to the World Wide Web by the hotel wifi. This at least saved them the burden of answering the thousands of questions that Leibniz wanted to ask them every hour. His thirst for information was prodigious, insatiable. In the first day, he had completed a crash course in how 21st century computers worked, and was planning how to transfer his program from the polished wooden casket into Tom's laptop. Tom was barely able to prevent him, by demonstrating that the battered old MacBook he had brought with him was rather outdated technology and would not be able to do justice to the MNG and its memory demands.

Then came a faster-than-light survey of developments in maths, physics, biology, theology and politics between 1716 and two thousand and something. Joseph wondered more than once whether Leibniz had really studied the whole of Wikipedia during those days. And that was just for starters. He went on to a careful study of eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century history, and the many changes of the world map during those centuries. At the end of five days of 24-hour activation, while the friends took it in turns to keep watch in case the wooden casket overheated and burst into flames like a Samsung Galaxy Note 7, the hologram was looking tired and grey. He had long since taken off his abundant wig, revealing a skull covered with prickly, almost white stubble.

"I must rest and - what is the expression? - *process* what I have learned," he told them. Please do not reactivate me for at least 48 hours."

So it was that their stay in Herrenhausen lasted longer, and cost much more, than they had planned.

At the end of the 48 hours, when Joseph pressed the switches to open the casket and activate the MNG once more, the figure of Leibniz appeared, looking grave.

"Your world is truly miraculous and admirable, but also completely fucked-up," he began.

What? thought Joseph. He's been on social media as well? It turned out to be true: Leibniz had indeed become an avid user of Facebook and Twitter during his more relaxed moments of the past week, to the puzzlement of those who had friended and followed him

"Your Great Britain is still trying to tear itself away from Europe and civilization, and has now fallen

under the dominion of the Dark Lord Marduk; and the States of America also falling rapidly deeper into barbarism... If only someone had found out how to activate me during those years, if only I had been able to advise and guide the leaders of the nations... But, perhaps it would not have been, even so. For indeed, I did all I could to guide the Electress Sophie and her daughter, and so often they ignored me, or were unable because of circumstances to implement my advice...

"But, all is not lost. Ekzistas ankoraŭ espero, kiel diris Doktoro Zamenhof."

"Esperanto!" cried Joseph. "You know about - I mean you've learned - the international language?"

Leibniz shrugged. "It is, of course, a bizarrely primitive and inadequate invention. But it appears to be the only and the best attempt to apply some of my thoughts about a means of communication between people of all races, all languages. My *Characteristica universalis* would of course still be better, but alas, your knowledge has not yet caught up with the possibility, it is still an idea ahead of its time. Moreover, it would make communication entirely possible between the savants, the scholars, the intellectuals. And I have found that those people are despised in most of your modern so-called advanced societies. No, Esperanto may be a poor thing, but it can at least be learned and used by people of quite small intellectual attainment. It remains perhaps the last best hope you have."

Joseph, after almost a lifetime of involvement with the Esperanto movement, felt more than a little crushed, until he remembered that he was, after all, talking to one of the world's greatest geniuses of all time. Hologram he might be, but he still had the weaknesses, as well as the strengths, of genius.

Leibniz appeared to remember that he was speaking to men of inferior ability, for he suddenly perked up and told them, "But! Do not be dismayed! Do not fear or be despondent! I am here now to assist; all will be well in this best of all possible worlds. At least -" He paused, and a shadow that might almost have been a moment of doubt, appeared to pass over his face. "Of course, without my presence, how *could* it be the best of all possible worlds? Now I understand! But here I am, and here we are. The West may yet be delivered from the Dark Lord and his cohorts. I have analysed all the data, all the coefficients, and I see the way forward. But it will involve risk, danger. It will demand courage and perseverance. Are you ready? Do you have what it takes?"

Woody was clearly excited and roused by the call to arms. "We are," he cried. "All for one, and one for all, eh, chaps? We are the Three Musketeers, and old Leibniz here will be our D'Artagnan!"

Joseph was less than convinced, but his Inner Voice spoke gently to him telling him to go with the flow.

"Then good!" exclaimed the MNG. "We leave for Aachen!"

"Aachen? What on earth is in Aachen?"

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In Aachen, of course, was the Crown of Charlemagne.

When the Delta Flyer arrived in Aachen towards evening, the three musketeers judged that it was already too late to begin their investigation of the city and its Cathedral, especially as the MNG had not yet told them what it was they were investigating for. So they took rooms in a hotel, hid the precious casket under Joseph's bed, and went out in search of something to eat and drink. After a good meal and several beers they felt much better. It was even a relief to be away from Leibniz with all his demands for information, his commentary on the state of the 21st century world, and injunctions about how it needed to be put right.

Next morning they explored the ancient city, and especially the 8th century Romanesque cathedral, the oldest cathedral in northern Europe, constructed by command of the Emperor Charlemagne, and the place of his burial when he died in 814. None of them had been there before, and they marvelled along with all the other visitors at the Carolingian octagon, or Palatine Chapel, the throne and the shrine of Charlemagne, the elaborately decorated western facade. Here was the place where Frankish and German kings, queens and emperors had been crowned for more than half a millennium. The sense of momentous history was heavy in the air of the place.

And this was where, on the instruction of their hologram mentor, the three English adventurers returned in the stillness of that midnight.

## Chapter Ten The Crown of Charlemagne

You wonder how it's possible to get into a locked and security-alarmed World Heritage site after hours? Don't ask me: ask the Mathematisches Notfallsgeheimnis.

Joseph, Tom and Woody had dressed the part, pretending to be SAS commandoes clothed all in black, and with blackened hands and faces. They activated Leibniz just beside one of the small side doors of the cathedral that looked as if it was permanently unused, but which was in fact the master security entrance. They had wheeled the casket up to the door in a 'borrowed' supermarket trolley, so that it would remain in contact with the ground from which it was still drawing its mysterious power. Tom had toyed with the idea of buying a new, high-powered laptop, and transferring the MNG programme into it so that it would run on battery power and be more portable, but so far Leibniz was still unwilling to forsake his 18th century casket.

Standing at the security entrance, the hologram pressed his hand against the keypad for a few seconds, then punched a sequence of keys, and the door swung silently open. Quickly Woody pushed the trolley inside, and the four of them entered and keyed another code number into the alarm control panel. With a sigh of relief, they began to look around the dark interior.

"Very interesting, no doubt," the holographic voice of Doctor Leibniz broke the silence. "But we have no time to enjoy the sights. Let us proceed to the Cathedral Treasury."

There they stood wondering at the display cases in which lay the Ottonian Cross of Lothair, the jewelled bust of Charlemagne and the Persephone sarcophagus. Beautiful, priceless works of

medieval art and craftsmanship, all of them; but they were not what Leibniz sought. He searched the stone walls of the room, much as Joseph had examined the Leibniztempel not many days previously, but with much more knowledge, speed and success. It was only a few minutes before he smiled, pressed the stones in some occult way, and watched as the stone slid gently back, exposing the void within.

"There," he said. "Now, Joseph, bring it out. Here is a treasure that has been hidden from the world for even longer than my Ganzgleichnis, for untold centuries. Here is the symbol, the talisman, that will reunite Europe in peace and power, and restore your island to its rightful place among the peoples of this continent."

"What -?" Joseph reached into the dark hole, felt around and put his hands on an object covered in ancient, dusty fabric. He brought it out into the room, and placed it on one of the display cabinets where Woody shone a torch on it. Gently and hesitantly, Joseph took the object out of its cloth wrapping and held it up. Jewels and gold glittered in the torchlight. The crown was octagonal, made up of eight panels, four of them jewelled and four enamelled. Crystals, pearls and quartz, rubies, amethysts and malachites: two of the jewelled panels each carried twelve of the largest gems, one panel symbolising the twelve tribes of Israel, the other the twelve apostles. The enamelled panels were decorated with pictures of the great kings of Israel who preceded and prefigured Christ: David, Solomon and Hezekiah, and the fourth with an image of King Christ himself. The tallest of the panels was topped with a cross, with jewels on one side, and on the other an engraved image of the crucified Christ.

Tom and Woody found themselves instinctively kneeling, and the holographic Leibniz himself also knelt. "The Crown of Charlemagne," he said. "With this holy thing, the emperors of the Holy Roman Empire were crowned. With replicas and imitations of it, the later kings of Prussia and Germany were crowned, even Napoleon of France crowned himself with such an imitation, when he wished to claim dominion over the nations for his own short-lived reign. And now: the hour has come for us to find the rightful heir of Charlemagne, wherever he - or she - may be, and to unite the peoples of Europe under his (or her) suzerainty."

In the awe-filled silence that followed this quasi-hieratic pronouncement, there was a sudden tumult, a rush of confusion and noise as the small room filled with black-clad figures, surrounding Joseph and the others. He remembered hearing Leibniz cry out the words, "Deactivate MNG!" and the next moment there was darkness as someone shrouded his head with a black bag. His arms were held in a vice-like grip, and his wrists handcuffed behind him. Then he was dragged away, too shocked and surprised to struggle, and hearing Woody and Tom's own grunts, scuffles and muffled exclamations, as the same happened to them.

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OUT OF CONFUSED and shocked unconsciousness, the awareness of being carried in a vehicle, somewhere, bumped and shaken about in the darkness, Joseph returned to consciousness when the bag was removed from his head. Blinking in the sudden light, he looked around at another room filled with black-clothed figures, in which Tom and Woody were both tied, as he was, to chairs



bolted to the floor.

A masked figure peered closely into his face and demanded in a slight European accent. "Who are you? And where is the fourth who was with you, the one who somehow escaped? I warn you, you had better tell the truth quickly, or we shall be forced to find painful means of extracting it from you."

Joseph could not tell where the inspiration or the courage came from, but at that moment he followed the prompting of his Inner Guide and heard himself saying, "Just a minute. I can tell you're not the police or the authorities, certainly not the Archbishop of Aachen's secret hit-squad. You had no more business in the Cathedral Treasury tonight than we did. And we are the ones who found the Crown of Charlemagne. I think it's you who should tell us who *you* are."

His inquisitor drew back his arm with an oath, looked as if he was about to punch Joseph in the mouth. But then he paused, and a short laugh escaped him.

"You English!" he said. "Always the stiff upper lip! Always the courage in adversity!"

He stepped back and held a short whispered consultation with three of the others in the room. There seemed to be some disagreement, but in a moment he appeared to make up his mind, and returned to face his prisoner.

"All right. In a moment I will tell you who we are. We will - perhaps - conduct an exchange of some small pieces of information. But you may have noticed that, for the time being, it is I who hold the cards. First you must give me something. Why were you in the Aachen Cathedral Treasury?"

The Inner Guide proposed some truth-telling. "We came looking for just what we found: the Crown of Charlemagne. The world is in a mess: in the Middle East, in Africa, in Europe, in Britain and beyond the Atlantic. We have come to believe that only the Crown can put things right, by giving authority to an heir of Charlemagne, who will renew the Holy Roman Empire and unite the peoples of Europe."

"And how is it you have come to believe this, exactly? Your Britain was never a part of that Empire."

"Some of us believe that has been our everlasting misfortune and loss." (Well, there was nothing wrong with making that much up, it felt like the kind of thing that might go down well in present company.) "Had it not been for the Normans and their wars of aggression, who knows if our kings might not have brought us under the rule of Charlemagne's successors?"

"Hmm, you speak wisely - though you are the first I have heard who has ever expressed that view. Isn't your wretched little island infamous for wanting always to be independent, separate from every other Christian nation under God's sun? But I will allow it for now.

"Then know, in return, that we are the Karlsbruderschaft, the Brotherhood of Charlemagne. We believe also that Napoleon (of evil memory) did the world a great harm when he abolished the Holy Roman Empire, however impotent it had become through the folly of those who should have been

more worthy of the Crown. It is our mission, too, to restore the Empire and the world peace it brings. We are within days of identifying the true heir to the imperial throne. We came here tonight to try yet again to find the Crown that has been lost for so many years... and what do we find but three meddling English who have succeeded in one day in doing what we have failed to do in generations of searching."

"Well, only too glad to be of service."

"But you have not given an answer: Who is the fourth who was with you? And where did he go?"

Time for a bit of lying. "I don't know where he has gone, or how. He was only our guide, a hacker we hired to get us in to the Treasury so we could look for the Crown."

Would the leader of the Brotherhood believe this? He looked doubtful, but then apparently decided to leave the subject for the time being, and proceed to decisions about what was to be done.

An uneasy alliance began to be formed. Joseph and his companions had found the fabled Crown of Charlemagne, but the Brotherhood now had it, and them, simply by virtue of force majeure. They could, if they chose, simply steal the Crown and eliminate the three Englishmen. But though they were fanatics, they were also idealists and, to a degree, humanitarians. So they decided to make introductions and see if a mutually agreed way forward could be found.

There were six members of the Brotherhood who had surprised them in the Treasury and overpowered them.

Dieter, their leader, was a former political activist in his mid-40s, who had become disillusioned with the failures of the progressive parties to bring about real change in society. He had then experienced some kind of spiritual or religious 'conversion' that had persuaded him that a restored Holy Roman Empire was the great hope of Europe and the world.

Giovanni-Carlo, whom they called GC for short, was the intellectual among them. He it was who had become the tutor or mentor to Dieter after that 'conversion', and had instructed him in the legend and lore of the Carolingian throne. They had researched the history of the Crown, come to believe that it must still be in existence somewhere, hidden away until a rightful claimant could come forward to claim the throne and unite Europe.

Hans-Joachim, an ex-soldier who was the practical one among them. Late 20s, an athlete, ruggedly handsome, the weapons expert of the Brotherhood. "We are not really planning an armed takeover of power," explained Dieter, "we think that with the Crown and the rightful heir it will not be necessary - but just in case."

Alice was the youngest among them, a Swiss seminarian and romantic, who had joined the Brotherhood solely out of idealism. And maybe, because she was just a little bit in love with Hans-Joachim.

Thomas was a journalist who had been writing an article for the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

about about lesser-known political groups which most readers would regard as weird and wacky. In the course of his research he had learned about the Karlsbruderschaft and realised that he had found his own political-spiritual home at last.

The last of the six was Thomas's wife Ingrid, a recently qualified doctor who was working part-time in a local medical centre while continuing her studies in field medicine, in case there was going to be a need for campaigning at any time. When the Time came. Which they now believed, with the discovery of the Crown, would soon be upon them.

"But surely," said Joseph, "the six of you will not be enough to restore the throne of Charlemagne and the Empire?"

"Of course not, there are hundreds more around the main countries of Europe. We have been working and planning for years - for centuries, since the Brotherhood was established in 1806. They are waiting only for the word to act, and we will move."

Woody had listened to everything that had been said with a growing look of awe and wonder. An amateur historian, he had once been considered (at least by his friends at the Hen and Hammock pub quiz, where he was a leading light of the team sometimes known as the Boring Old Farts), something of an expert on European history, and the Holy Roman Empire.

"This is amazing, wonderful!" he said. "But, who is the Heir? And where is he? Does he know that he's the Heir? Is he part of the Brotherhood? Is he really a descendant of the last Emperor, Francis II?"

A shadow passed over the faces of the group in the room. They looked to GC to answer: "Sadly, no. She doesn't know. Her name is Jade Clarke. She's - er - a single mother, living in Basildon and working as a receptionist in the town hall."

"In *Basildon*?" snorted Woody. "Basildon in Essex, in bloody England?"

"Well, *near* Basildon. It's actually called Dunton Wayletts."

"Well, whatever. I'm not surprised she doesn't know she's the Heir to Charlemagne! Is she really the best you could find? What about the royal families of Europe - there are some left, you know. Surely someone among them could be found with a better claim to be descended from the Habsburgs or whoever they are?"

GC and the others still looked slightly embarrassed by the turn the conversation had taken.

"It's a long and complicated history... but we have proof, it's all on my laptop and in the various archives of the universities. The fact is (I'll make it as short as I can) the Habsburgs were always disputed holders of the title. To find the true lineage we must look much further back, to the 14th century. After that time the true Heir was forced to flee from Germany during the Thirty Years' War. He fled to England, where he settled, married, became thoroughly English and his descendants forgot he was of royal blood in the land of his birth. He is the one from whom Jade Clarke of

Basildon is descended, and since her father died last year, she is indeed the Heir of Charlemagne."

Woody was stunned. "Well, I can see how that might be a problem for you..."

"But no!" said Dieter. "Everything is changed, now that we have the Crown. Thanks to you, all will be well. The annals of the Empire are clear about this: the prophecy states

The brethren shall find the Crown  
and the Crown shall find its owner.  
In those days the throne will be set up anew,  
and will govern the Empire in peace.

"I know it is not for nothing that you are the ones who have found the Crown at this time. You are from England - land of darkness though it has become. You are the ones who will help us go there and find the Princess Jade. When she sees the Crown, she will understand and know for the first time who she is. She *will* know, and assume, her destiny!

"But enough, now. We have told you what we know. We ask you now to decide. Will you help us? Will you let us use the Crown, and help us to travel to Essex and find the Heir?"

"Yes!" cried Woody, and "Yes!" said Tom, and "Yes?" said Joseph.

## Chapter Eleven The ways divide

Joseph tossed and turned on his bed. In spite of the fact that he had been awake all night, in spite of all the excitement and fear and surprise, after the Brotherhood had taken him and his friends back to their hotel, he could not sleep. By late morning he gave up trying, sat up in bed - and there was Hildegard, sitting in the chair by the window.

"Gah! I mean, hello. But - I thought you said I wasn't going to be seeing you again?"

"That was before you started getting yourself into such a mess." And she lapsed into the love language. "Josefo, Josefo. La Sankta Romia Imperio? Vere? Ne Josefo, ĉi tiu ankaŭ ne estas la vojo, kiun vi devas iri. Via vojo, *nia* vojo, kondukas orienten."

She gazed at him with that amused look that he knew so well: the one that said, I can't be disappointed with you in spite of what many people would think was slow and stupid; because you make me laugh, you've always made me laugh, and I love you so very very much.

And, with a last shake of her head, she added, "Kaj - ne forgesu ŝarĝi vian poŝtelefonon!"

What? Don't forget to charge your mobile phone?

Joseph searched his pockets and found his mobile. Sure enough, the battery was completely dead. He searched through the drawers and all the places he might have put the charging cable for safekeeping, found it in the last place he looked, and plugged it in. Was there some missed call he

needed to know about? An important voicemail message to listen to?

It took a few minutes before there was even enough charge in the phone to switch it on. When he did, there were no missed calls, no notifications of voicemails. What there was, was a shimmering, coruscation of light... and there stood the MNG, the holographic Leibniz.

"Na, endlich!" he said. "I thought you were never going to turn this handy on. What has happened? Tell me everything, since we were attacked in the Treasury."

It took a while. Especially as Joseph was slow on the uptake about understanding that Leibniz generally had no way of knowing what was going on while he was in a deactivated condition. When Joseph had finally satisfied the philosopher-mathematician's curiosity, Leibniz said, "Good. Now, the first thing I require from you is that you obtain a larger device of this sort. It is verdammt narrow in there, I have what would be a crick in the neck, if I had a bodily neck to have a crick in."

"Hold on a minute! What do you mean? The last time I saw you, you were living in a polished wooden casket. How did you get into my mobile phone?"

Leibniz's face had a distinctly smug expression on it, as he answered, "Brilliant, no? It is an idea I was working on and preparing for some time. I feared there would be problems if and when we actually found the Crown of Charlemagne, and you might not be capable of always carrying that box around, or placing it in contact with the ground. I needed something portable, something you could easily carry with you at all times, and something with its own power supply - though it is not as innovative as my casket's, which draws its energy directly from the earth. This device - this mobile or cell phone? - seemed the obvious recourse. It has as much computing power as the system I devised for my Ganzgleichnis; it is only the storage, the memory, you call it? that needs to be enlarged. This model appears to be the best for my specifications."

And he held up a holographic image of one of the latest mobile phones which he had obviously been researching during Joseph's downtime.

"Yeah, it's also about the most expensive currently on the market."

"How can you put a price on having me with you as your guide? There is so much for me still to do."

"You mean, you want to go with the Brotherhood, and rebuild the Holy Roman Empire?"

"Pah! There will be ample time for that. I know this Brotherhood, I have researched all about them on your Web. They will go on their way. But as for you: listen to your wife! Your way is a different way, and that is the way I will go with you. I do not yet know why, as you do not. But enlightenment will come as we go onwards. We will make the way by walking."

"I don't think Tom and Woody are going to like it. They seem pretty excited about taking the Crown back to England and finding the true Heir. All for one, and one for all, remember?"

"That is why we must go now, before they hear about this plan, and try to dissuade you, or worse

still, get the Brotherhood to prevent you and take you back to England by force."

And so it was that Joseph packed his backpack and slipped out of the hotel without a word to his companions. What had come over him? He could hardly believe he was treating two old friends so badly; yet at the same time he could not deny the logic of Leibniz's words. This was not a time to take the chance of being prevented from following his own Way. And it was clear from Hildegard's latest intervention, that returning to England on the imperial mission, would be a serious departure from that Way. But it would not be without heart-searching and doubt and questioning. This is mad! I'm deserting two flesh-and-blood friends I've known for years, and a group of committed people with who knows what resources, and a worthwhile (possibly a worthwhile?) plan, and setting off on an unknown path on which my companions are - the apparitions of a dead wife, and an impossible 18th century hologram.

Wake me up, somebody. This must be some surreal dream, I must have eaten some very dodgy mushrooms without knowing it.

Joseph's first stop that morning was the Telekom Shop on Holzgraben, where he bought the latest, most expensive Android phone, with the highest specs, the biggest memory and fastest processor. He went round the corner to the Cafe Milano where he bought a coffee, sat at a table, unboxed the phone and got it up and running. He left his old phone next to it, while he drank his coffee. A notification popped up on the screen of the new phone: from Leibniz! How was he even *doing* that?

ALL DONE. THAT'S BETTER, I HAVE ENOUGH ROOM TO BREATHE. TALK LATER.

Joseph smiled grimly at the thought of the verbose old philosopher learning the terse communication style of the e-connected world of text messaging. He drained his cup, pocketed his two phones, shouldered his pack, and left the cafe.

So. Where was he going now? The way lies eastwards, Hildegard had said. The theme for the way, as far as Joseph could make it out, was something to do with their shared history, with all that they had really wanted and worked for all their lives. Joseph walked the streets of Aachen; all that he knew was that he was heading towards the eastern suburbs. Where was he going after that?

It was as he was standing on the inner ring road, waiting to brave the constant flow of traffic and set off down Adalbertsteinweg, that he suddenly thought, I don't have to walk! No doubt Herr Doktor Leibniz, if it *is* he steering, has forgotten about railways. And he turned right, making for the Hauptbahnhof.

On the way, he suddenly knew where he was to go. It was in search of another place connected to their heart language.

## Chapter Twelve Esperanto Stadt

Some ten years before, Hildegard had come to Joseph in great excitement, holding a copy of an Esperanto magazine she had been reading.

"Listen to this! There's a town in Germany that has such an active Esperanto club, that they've persuaded the town council to call their town the Esperanto-stadt, or Esperanto-urbo. They advertise themselves as that, and their street signs are in Esperanto as well as German, and the shops have signs saying 'Esperanto spoken here'... "

Joseph was going through one of his more cynical phases about the Language. "Huh, I suppose they're hoping to attract some of the thousands of Esperanto speakers who are roaming across Europe looking for sympathetic ears?"

"Don't be like that! You *know* there are Esperanto-speaking travellers and tourists - we've done it ourselves. *Pasporta servo*, remember? Just because we've never signed up to be hosts ourselves - it's another one of those things I often thought of doing, but with all the children we never quite got around to it.

"And it says here they're twinned with a town in Poland called Gora, and both towns have found Esperanto a really useful means of communication when they visit each other. It's so much easier for people to learn than either German or Polish, for quite young children as well as adults. Esperanto is actually taught in the schools, in both towns. Herzberg am Harz, it's called... 'Heart Mountain'. Wouldn't it be good to go and see it, one day?"

But it turned out to be yet another of those things on their list, which they had never done together.

So, standing in Aachen Hauptbahnhof, Joseph suddenly knew that the next stop on his pilgrimage, would be Heart Mountain. Whether or not it would bring healing, he didn't know and couldn't say. But he was learning where his own heart tended, and for now, this was it. He went to the ticket booth and bought a ticket to Herzberg am Harz. It wasn't the most straightforward of journeys. It took five and a half hours, and involved changing trains at Cologne and Hanover (Hanover again!) before boarding a slower local train for the last stretch.

Several times that afternoon, as he travelled north-eastwards on the Deutsche Bahn, his mobile phone rang. When he looked at the screen and saw it was Tom or Woody calling, he declined the call. When the phone beeped to tell him there was a voicemail message, he listened to increasingly urgent appeals.

"Where *are* you, Joseph? The hotel people say you've checked out. Where are you going? What's happened to 'All for one, and one for all'? Aren't you coming back to England with us? I thought you were in with us and the Brotherhood. What are you thinking of?" And so on. He couldn't bring himself to call back. Instead, after at least a dozen calls, he relented and decided at least to text them to say he was alive. Hadn't been arrested by the Aachen police for breaking and entering at the Cathedral. Or by the Vatican police for sacrilege. Or by some unknown enemy of the Brotherhood, who had learned of their conspiracy and acted against one of their members.

He texted:

CHANGE OF PLAN. HILDEGARD'S INSTRUCTIONS, YOU KNOW? DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME, I'LL BE IN TOUCH WHEN I KNOW MORE.

That would have to do, for now.

The train rolled into Herzberg station, and he stood in the streets of the Esperanto-urbo. A short taxi ride brought him to the half-timbered Hotel Englischer Hof where he took a room. He probably could have walked from the station, but he suddenly felt very tired, and after a meal in the hotel restaurant, he retired early to bed.

THE FOLLOWING MORNING after breakfast, he went out to explore the little town (population 13,059). It was a charming, sleepy little place, on the edge of the Harz Mountains and Harz National Park, overshadowed by the Welfenschloss, the castle built in the 16th century by Duke Philip I after the older building had been destroyed in a disastrous fire which nearly cost the duke and his family their lives. Not far from the hotel was the Juessee, a tree-lined lake which was a favourite haunt of walkers in the town.

Joseph had been delighted to find that Esperanto was spoken at the hotel, and he was happy to pose as a fluent Esperantist, so as not to have to confess to his equally fluent German. At breakfast that morning the hotel landlady had eagerly tried to learn more about this enigmatic Englishman who had arrived so unexpectedly, and who spoke an international language when everyone knew that the English were only interested in making the rest of the world communicate in the English language. She also told him, with great delight, that he had been lucky to book into the last available guest room in the hotel, which was otherwise fully booked because of The Wedding.

"The Wedding?"

"Yes, for Herzberg it is the wedding of the year. Jakob, the son of our mayor, is today marrying the daughter of the mayor of our twin-town of Gora in Poland. It is an Esperanto-romance! Both the young people learned Esperanto at school after our two towns became twinned, and on one of our exchange visits of the young people, these two met, and - boom! - they fall in love. It's the first marriage of young people sealing the relation of our towns in a new way. We are all very happy, and I think the whole town will be celebrating today. You must join the party, too."

And in spite of Joseph's protests that he, a stranger and visitor, would not dare presume to crash the wedding party, the landlady insisted. "How can you not come to the celebration? Fate has brought you to Herzberg on this day of all days! People here would be offended if you would not share in our happiness for Jakob and Klaudia, especially the young people's mothers and fathers. You must come! I'm sure you will be asked to take a place of honour."

In the event, Joseph was required to accept even more than that. As a curiosity, an English Esperantist visitor, he was invited or rather compelled to make a short speech and propose a toast. To the young couple; to concord between the peoples of Europe; to the international language which had helped bring them together, and which they would speak in their new home, since neither of them knew more than a very few words in each other's mother tongues.

Joseph could not believe all that was happening. It was as if what he was seeing, what he was living through that day, was some kind of mirror image, or re-run, of his own history of meeting an exotic



beauty from eastern Europe, communicating with her by means of Dr Zamenhof's constructed language, falling in love, and getting married. Esperanto, the language of one who hopes, was once again creating unions of love and understanding between people of different cultures, who otherwise would hardly have any means of understanding one another.

He sat and watched the couple: Jakob tall, broad-shouldered and earnest, looking capable and skilled with his hands; Klaudia shorter, slender, like a young willow tree, with a smile on her lips for everyone she saw. They made a point of coming to Joseph to thank him for his words, and for being there. It was with some emotion that he tried to tell them something of the fullness of his own heart.

"Mi ankaŭ renkontis mian edzinon per la internacia lingvo. Vi scias ke mi estas el Britio; kaj mia edzino estis el Litovo. Ni geedziĝis dum preskaŭ kvardek jaroj..."

Klaudia's face was shadowed with concern at the catch in his voice.

"Via edzino... ŝi ne estas ĉi tie kune kun vi?"

"Ne. Bedaŭrinde ŝi mortis antaŭ kelkaj monatoj..."

They expressed their sorrow and concern; but their happiness was too great to be interrupted for more than a moment, and Joseph himself could not be sad in any way that would cast a shadow over their day. He smiled at them, joined their hands together and blessed them, wishing them all the love and the happiness that he and Hildegard had enjoyed.

JOSEPH STAYED FOR several days more in the Esperanto-urbo, chiefly because he felt so strangely at home there, but also because the party atmosphere went on for several days more. There were visitors from Gora in Poland, the bride's family and friends, as well as the German friends and relatives, still enjoying the happiness of the occasion and, for those who knew how, practising their international communication in Esperanto.

It was good for him to be among people who had no expectations of him, had not known Hildegard, and who therefore took him simply as he was, a reasonably fit and active man in his 60s, who was interesting but not overwhelming, who was willing to have a conversation but not needy and overbearing. And it was good for him to be able to be alone, too, with his own thoughts and agenda.

Most days he would walk out of town and climb one of the nearby hills. His favourite destination was a hill the summit of which, unusually, was not thickly wooded. On the contrary, it was mostly bare except for a single tall oak tree, centuries old. Joseph would sit at the foot of the tree, gazing out over Herzberg or towards the Harz National Park, and take stock of what had happened to him since Hildegard died.

Find your own Way, she had said. The Way will find you, as you walk it.

Was that really *the* Way? he wondered.

He pulled from his pocket the other slim volume he had packed on the day he hastily filled his rucksack and fled from benighted Britain. The ancient book of Chinese wisdom, the *Tao Te Ching*, sometimes rendered as *The Book of the Way and its Power*. He had not fully understood why that would be one of the few books he would take with him, except that somehow it resonated with Hildegard's talk about the Way he should find and walk.

Without going outside  
one can know the whole world  
Without looking out of the window  
one can see the ways of Heaven  
The farther one goes  
the less one knows

He smiled. What point, then, was there in this journey across Europe, from back there to - who knew where? Would staying at home have been just as effective and worthwhile? Would it have healed the ache in his heart, the fear and uncertainty that gripped him when he heard the events that were unfolding on both sides of the Atlantic, in the English-speaking so-called democracies of the world?

The questions revolved in his mind day after day, like the turning earth that brought another dawn, another noon, another nightfall.

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step

That was the one that everyone knew. He supposed it was an incentive to the hesitant to begin whatever they had to do, even though the size of the task was daunting and they didn't know how to go on with it.

Just start! And the journey, the work, will teach you the way to go. From wherever you have got to, the way forward is another journey, it too begins with a single step. Get going! Iru! Ek!

But, everything has its time, its moment. Was this resting time in Herzberg the time for taking the first step of the journey, or the time for sitting at home and knowing the whole world?

Joseph couldn't say.

## Chapter Thirteen A Dream of Peace

At the wedding celebrations, Joseph had been introduced to a balding, bespectacled, round-faced man called Peter Zilvar. He was president of the Esperanto Society of South Harz. Joseph met him several times in the following days, and was interested to learn whether he had been responsible for Harzberg being nominated as Esperanto-urbo.

Only partly, was the reply. Esperanto really became well-known in the town, because of the work of Joachim Gießner. In the mid-60s he had begun to teach and advocate for the international language. He wasn't the only Esperantist who was also a railway enthusiast (It's either railways or bloomin' cats - or maybe even both, thought Joseph to himself, remembering some well-known British esperantists he had encountered) and had been president of the German and International Esperanto Railway Specialist Group. For decades he had worked in the town and the surrounding villages, teaching and encouraging the use of Esperanto, and helping set up local clubs and groups. He had translated hundreds of songs, operas, operettas, books and articles into Esperanto.

So often it only takes one really passionate and committed individual to achieve hardly imaginable things. Is this also what it means, that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step? The Herzberg Intercultural Centre had become the home of a collection of Esperanto materials which drew visitors from all over Germany, as well as further afield. All year round there were language courses in the town, training programmes for teachers of Esperanto, and other educational events. The exchanges between Herzberg and their Polish twin town had been so successful in bringing together young people from both communities (evidence: this week's wedding!) and enabling mutual understanding, that they were planning to extend the idea to invite teenagers from other countries, especially Italy and the Baltic States.

Zilvar was fascinated to hear a little, as much as Joseph was prepared to tell him, about his own Esperanto history. His interest as a young man, his participation in the UKE where he had met his Lithuanian beauty, his marriage to Hildegard. He shook his head, as had so many of the Europeans whom Joseph had encountered both before he left England, and in his subsequent travels, over the unaccountable and insane decision of the British people to cut themselves off from the European Union.

"I had almost decided, with the death of my wife, that I had no more time for Esperanto. But the more I saw the way my country was going, the more I began to feel it was no longer my country. The ideal of international meeting and understanding and sharing has never been more important than it has become this last year. And it would be so easy to despair, to give up all hope - yet so important not to do so. That's why I set off on this journey. Not only to escape from Britain, not only to work through my grief, but also to say loud and clear: There is still hope, and I am standing up with, standing alongside, those who hope: the esperantoj, the esperantistoj."

They drank another glass of beer. And soon afterwards, it was time for Joseph to return to the Hotel Englischer Hof for the night.

There he switched on his mobile phone, and the MNG appeared.

"So, what have you been doing all day?" Joseph asked him.

"Ach, you know. There is so much history for me still to learn about what has happened in the world in the last three hundred years, so many things to understand, and to find out that they are wrong, and to know how to correct the mistakes. And I have become more and more anxious about the Karlsbruderschaft and this quest of theirs to find the Heir of Charlemagne. I fear they may have

made some mistake with their genealogical research. I do not know whether this Princess Jade from Basildon is indeed the true Heir. But how to stop them? Must we contact them and tell them the truth?"

Tomorrow, thought Joseph, as he fell into bed.

## TERRORIST INVASION FOILED

### EUROPEANS ARRESTED AT MALDON

Last night, in a joint operation by Essex police, the coastguards and Border Force, an attempt by a European extremist group to invade Britain and overthrow the monarchy was successfully foiled.

Coastguards detected the motor boat *Hoffnung* as it sailed up the River Blackwater towards Maldon. When challenged, the boat tried to turn and escape, but was boarded by the coastguards and its eight crew and passengers were all detained.

They are thought to include two Englishmen and a selection of foreign nationals from various countries of the so-called 'European Union'. The terrorists are being held at Essex Police HQ in Chelmsford.

No further details have been released, but it is widely thought that the eight suspects pose a real and present threat to national security.

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"So is *this* the moment we have to turn back and try to help our friends?" Joseph asked Leibniz when he had read the news report and put down the paper. "Back to Essex to put our heads in the lion's mouth and do battle with Border Force?"

"I think not," replied Leibniz, scratching his head where his holographic wig seemed to have provided an ideal home for some holographic headlice. "I have been studying this book of Lao Tzu you so thoughtfully brought along with you, along with the *I Ching* also. Did you know how much I studied these works when I was in Herrenhausen with Princess Sophie, in particular the fascinating binary structure of the sixty-four hexagrams? But no, enough of that for the present. The main thing is, the wisdom of Lao Tzu. He says

To become learned, gain daily  
To obtain Tao, reduce daily  
Reduce and reduce again  
all action is reduced to non-action  
Then no one is left  
Nothing is done

nothing is left undone

"I know all that," protested Joseph. "*Wu-wei*, the principle on non-action, getting things done by not-doing. I've always thought it was overrated, and I really don't see how it's going to help our friends."

"So you would hurry back to Essex, and there would be two more terrorist arrests? *One* more, since I can't imagine even Border Force trying to charge a hologram with terrorist offences. Trust me a little longer, my friend, and all will be well. It is indeed by *wu-wei* that everything will be done. But non-action does not mean we sit here in our cell, or simply remain here continuing to enjoy the delights of Herzberg. It is time to move on. Perhaps you know where to?"

"I didn't even know we were moving on. How can I know where to?"

"Think, Joseph. This pilgrimage, or Way, or whatever it is you are following. The Way will find you. It's your Way, Joseph's, and it's your Ways, Joseph and Hildegard's. Think about your wife. You've been exploring the international language that brought you together. What else is their about this Beloved of yours?"

Tears swam in Joseph's eyes. Even though it was their shared love language that had brought him to Heart Mountain, even though he had seen their own story mirrored in the young couple whose marriage he had attended, he had thought little since the day of the wedding of everything else that Hildegard had been. She had not appeared to him, spoken to him at all, and he had begun to think that meant he was on the right path. Now he suddenly feared it might mean he had strayed so far from it that he had lost her, that she had gone off in another direction at a parting of the ways.

As he thought back over their life together, he began to think increasingly of that other side of his beloved Hildegard: the believer, the mystic, the woman of faith. He packed his bags, checked out of the Hotel Englischer Hof, and walked to the station where he bought a ticket for Dresden, and boarded the train.

When the train pulled in to Dresden five and a half hours, and several changes of train later, Joseph gathered his things together, walked through the station, and came out onto the Wiener Platz. He was suddenly surrounded by ghosts in a way he had never expected, or experienced before. Dresden was one of the most beautiful of German cities, teeming with life and culture. And it *had been* one of the most beautiful of German cities, teeming with life and culture. The nights of February 13th to 15th, 1945, swam in Joseph's mental vision, the nights when 722 RAF and 527 USAAF bombers dropped 2,431 tons of high explosive bombs, and 1,476 tons of incendiaries on the city. Most of the Altstadt and inner city were destroyed, and tens of thousands of civilians, mostly women and children, died in a storm of fire and falling buildings. Nazi propaganda reports said that 200,000 people died. Later reputable historians put the total between 18,000 and a maximum of 25,000. Some groups still claim the figure was possibly 500,000.

Eighteen. Thousand. Or Five. Hundred. Thousand. Who knows? Just a single child, a single woman, dying in terror and flames, incinerated by bombs dropped on them from the sky by another human

being, is too many. Joseph's heart swelled with anger and compassion. Suddenly he found that his steps, leading straight ahead into the Altstadt, had brought him in view of the Frauenkirche, the Church of Our Lady. Destroyed in the bombing of Dresden, its ruins had been left for fifty years as a memorial to the dead, a stark reminder of the horror and the cost of war. Then, after the reunification of Germany, it had been rebuilt along with the surrounding parts of the old town.

Joseph walked in through the west doors and stood inside the great echoing space. There was a small 'Room of Silence' set aside for prayer, or whatever other form of reflection or meditation a visitor might be drawn to, and that was where he went and sat. The Coventry cross of nails came to his mind. Neither side in war has a monopoly of guilt or innocence. The beast of war devours all - that was the meaning of the second of the horsemen of the Apocalypse with his sword, taking peace from the earth, that they should kill one another. The evil of war consumes and possesses all: none is guiltless, all are punish'd.

One of the church attendants saw Joseph with tears streaming down his face, dripping onto his jacket. In concern she came up to him as if to ask if he wanted help, but he waved her away, and shortly stood up and walked back out to find a lodging for the night.

All those years before the holocausts of the Great War, and the Second World War, and all the other wars of the Century of Blood, Ludvik Zamenhof had constructed his international language in the hope that it would enable communication, and lead to understanding between nations and peoples. Communicating with one another, and understanding one another, they would seek to work together for the good of all, turning from hatred and competition that led to armed conflict. Was he right? Had his idealism been proved to be totally flawed? Perhaps people understood one another all too well: You are different from me; therefore you are my enemy; therefore I will seek to kill you before you kill me.

## Chapter Fourteen The Lord's Watch

In 1738 a thirty-five year old Anglican clergyman by the name of John Wesley travelled from England to Herrnhut in eastern Saxony. He sailed from London to Rotterdam, and walked much of the rest of the 800 kilometres to his destination. What led him to take that journey, was his own spiritual quest for deep heart-peace about his own relationship with God. During his years in Oxford, he had already attracted a reputation for Christian zeal, forming with his brother Charles a group called 'the Holy Club', and gathering around themselves a number of other young men who sought something deeper than the dull, dry formalism of much of English Christianity in the early decades of the 18th century. Already they gained the mocking nickname of 'Methodists' because of their carefully worked-out rule of life, a life of prayer, study, and good works. Still he did not have peace.

He had sailed to Georgia, across the Atlantic, to serve as a missionary chaplain among the colonists there, only to be driven out by the opposition of some of his congregation who could not tolerate what they perceived as his unnecessary and fanatical strictness. He had tried to bar a young woman from receiving the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, because of her vanity and lack of seriousness in religious observance. The very idea! Truly, it was not to be tolerated in polite society.

Still Wesley did not have peace.

During those years, Wesley still wrestled with his sense of inadequacy. How could he *know* he was a true Christian, a child of God? How could he have the depth and certainty of faith that he sought? Among his fellow-passengers on the transatlantic crossing was a group of Moravian Christians, leaving their European home and travelling to the New World to escape religious persecution, but also to find new fields in which they could proclaim the Gospel. In the midst of an ocean storm that threatened to overwhelm the ship, Wesley was shaking with terror, yet the Moravians, gathered together in prayer, showed a serene trust in God. They firmly believed God would save the ship in answer to their prayers; and even if he did not, still their trust in him was fearless and absolute. Wesley longed to know faith of that sort, that strength. He spent hours in conversation with a young Moravian missionary named Peter Bohler, learning from him, still seeking to share the younger man's assurance.

Just weeks before his journey across Europe, Wesley had attended a meeting of the Moravians in Aldersgate-street. He went very unwillingly, as he later confessed to his journal, and in truth, the proceedings were dull indeed compared with the evangelistic and worship meetings known and loved by 21st century believers. Someone was reading aloud from Martin Luther's preface to his commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Romans, when suddenly Wesley's life was turned upside down.

About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, in Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.

Wesley's prayer and preaching now came to feel real to him, in a way they had not done before. And though there were many who had appreciated his preaching before, now people were beginning to respond to it in a new way: their lives too were being transformed. He longed to know more of the Christian society who had helped him to this discovery of a living faith; and so it was that barely four weeks later he resolved to make that journey to the home of the Moravian Brotherhood.

The place was Herrnhut, which can be translated the Lord's protection, the Lord's guard, the Lord's watch. It was the name of a village on one of the estates of Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf. The Zinzendorfs were one of the most ancient noble families of Lower Austria. Nicolaus, as a young man, felt a similar thirst to that of Wesley for something more than the dry dogmatism that characterised much of contemporary Lutheranism. and under the influence of Pietist Protestants, he too came to a living faith.

It was still a time of religious ferment and dispute in the countries of central Europe. Although the Thirty Years' War had ended more than 70 years before, it was still remembered with horror as a time when the population of the German lands declined by at least one quarter: war and disease

and famine had stalked the lands. Perhaps it was a reaction to the fanaticism of creeds that had wrought such destruction, that led to the rationalistic forms of theology which were in the ascendant. Believers who dared to express their faith with greater zeal and enthusiasm faced distrust and even persecution from religious and civil authorities. So it was that a small group of those persecuted believers, from Moravia and Bohemia, came to rest on Count Zinzendorf's estate of Bertelsdorf. The pious young count, then only in his early twenties, had compassion on them and granted them asylum, allowing them to build a village on his estate, which he named Herrnhut.

They were not the first, nor the last, community of Christian enthusiasts to suffer times of trial when internal divisions threatened to tear them apart. Some of them even accused the Count who had given them refuge of being the Beast of the Apocalypse. Zinzendorf had to go and settle among them himself, and use his own authority to resolve their divisions and create order.

What followed was an extraordinary thing. To restore harmony, the Herrnhuters entered into a solemn 'Brotherly Agreement', a voluntary discipline of Christian community living. They agreed to live out St Paul's injunction to 'pray constantly' by setting up a prayer relay, members of the community relieving one another to pray day and night, a constant vigil of prayer which lasted for over one hundred years. It was a New Pentecost. The Moravian Church became a power-house for Christian prayer and mission, sending hundreds of missionaries all over the world throughout the 18th century and beyond, one small body of believers setting in motion the great Protestant mission work of the following centuries.

The Moravian Church still exists, and is still an inspiration to many Christians who belong formally to other churches and denominations. Not through its power or wealth or influence upon the stage of the World Church and its councils, but through the *Losungen*. Joseph had first heard of these when he was a student, exploring his own faith, and studying German language and literature. One of his heroes at that time was the German theologian, pastor and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, a slim volume that Joseph read over and over, Bonhoeffer frequently makes reference in the letters he wrote to his parents and his friend Eberhard Bethge to what the English translation calls the 'Daily Texts'

For example, on August 24, 1943 he writes: Then early this morning the Moravian *Daily Text* moved me strangely: "And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid." Lev. 26:6a; in Bonhoeffer's Luther Bible, a pencil mark appears next to this verse.

Bonhoeffer had used these regularly and faithfully nearly every day of his life since he was a teenager. A single short passage of Scripture, often no more than a verse, provided for the reader to meditate on or pray with in their personal prayer, or to carry in their mind through the day. The Moravian brothers and sisters began using these as part of their way of life in 1728, and the practice has continued. The word 'Losungen' is related to the idea of drawing lots, but it is also translated 'watchwords': these were indeed the watchwords the community chose to identify themselves, to guide them and give them a common focus for their prayer and obedience each day.



Bonhoeffer valued them for his own spiritual practice, but also advocated their use to the student pastors of the Confessing Church, whom he was training in his secret seminary of Finkenwalde during the years of Hitler's power.

The *Losungen* are still available in a small booklet published annually by the Moravian Church, from their <http://www.losungen.de/die-losungen/> - or as an app for iOS or Android. They claim the booklet is still one of the 'silent best-sellers' in German bookstores, and judging by the piles of them I saw, they could be right.

There had been times during their years together when Joseph and Hildegard had used the *Losungen* together, though their practice had lapsed in recent years. His European 'pilgrimage' had made Joseph think of them again. He had even looked up the watchword chosen for the year:

Gott spricht: Ich schenke euch ein neues Herz und lege einen neuen Geist in euch.  
Hezekiel 36.26

God says: I give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. Ezekiel 36.26

His old heart had died with Hildegard, when the world ended. But perhaps, as he travelled the way, the path she was encouraging him to travel, he would find a new heart and a new spirit.

At any rate, it seemed to him that the next part of his pilgrimage must be travelled on foot. It was about 80 kilometres: not too far in his relatively unfit condition, but far enough for him to use it for reflection as he walked, still trying to understand what he was doing here, and where the Path should lead him.

It took him three days to complete the walk. On the morning of the second day, not long after he had set out from the guesthouse where he had spent the night, he saw ahead of him a young couple who seemed to be walking the same way. Several times during the course of the day he saw them again, passing them as they rested, or being passed by them when he had stopped. Each time, they exchanged a smile and a short greeting, no more.

About the middle of the day, when he was thinking of stopping for something to eat, he saw them again sitting at a table outside an inn by the roadside. This time, the couple smiled and waved him to join them. The waitress came to bring a menu, and while Joseph was reading it, the young woman asked him, "Where are you walking to?" Before he could answer, however, she suddenly spotted the little badge Joseph had found that morning at the bottom of his rucksack, and pinned to his jacket. He had forgotten all about it, even wondered whether he had ever known it was there or put it there - it was one of those odd happenstances that seemed to be occurring more and more often. The badge was the Esperanto Jubilee symbol, created in 1987 to mark the centenary of Zamenhof's first publication of his *Unua Libro*. Sometimes called the melon (melono), egg (ovo) or football (rugbea pilko), it is in the shape of a green oval made up of a rounded Latin E touching a

Cyrillic Э.

"Esperanto!" she cried. "Ĉu vi vere parolas Esperanton?"

The question Joseph had asked so many people days earlier in Texel; now he was being asked the same. Suddenly he felt tongue-tied: the language he had spoken with Hildegard, which had first brought them together, at this moment felt in his mouth like a private love-language of their own, and it came awkwardly speaking it to this young couple, who looked as if they in their turn were very much in love, who in some way reminded him of themselves when younger.

Nevertheless, with a slightly stumbling start, Joseph began a conversation with the young couple in the international language. He didn't want to go into detail about all he had been doing since the spring. There was no need to make them think he was completely insane. He told them simply that his wife had recently died, and that in her memory he was travelling to places in Europe which meant something to them, either because they had visited them together, or because they had never visited them, but always planned to.

Is it good to live so as to leave nothing on that list of 'Things we want to do one day'? Or better to always have at least one item still on that list? There's a question.

The couple's names were Jaco and Hilly. Hilly was from Bristol. She had started learning Esperanto online with Duolingo, when she had been trying to learn German and found her lack of progress so frustrating that she just clicked on the first thing in the menu of other languages - in this case one she had not even heard of. She soon fell in love with it, and in contrast to her experience of German, she soon felt confident enough to attend an international TEJO meeting. That was where she had met Jaco from Romania. After the end of the gathering, they corresponded for some months, their friendship deepening, until Jaco decided to travel to Britain in search of work, and to be nearer to Hilly. They moved in together, in spite of her parents' misgivings. Then came the Brexit referendum and the chaos and confusion that followed. Jaco felt increasingly unwelcome in Britain, and fearful that he would be deported.

They had decided to leave Britain - only a week before the Restitution began. They travelled with *Pasporta Servo*, the scheme by which Esperantists offered accommodation either cheaply or free of charge to fellow speakers of the language. And here they were. Travelling to Herrnhut, because they had read about it in Pete Greig and Dave Roberts's book *Red Moon Rising*, and wanted to see the place for themselves.

So the three of them walked on together, and when they came at evening to the hosts who had promised Hilly and Jaco a bed for the night, it was the easiest thing in the world for their kindly and generous [*samideanoj*](Literally, same-thinking people. An expression used by many Esperantists to describe fellow-Esperantists.) to find an extra bed for Joseph to sleep in. They ended up staying two nights. It was just too hard for them to escape from the hosts who were fascinated to meet them. Imagine! *two* English people who had learned to speak Esperanto, when it was well-known that the English only ever expected everyone else to learn and speak *their* language. Joseph tried to resist telling them that, actually, he was fluent in German also and had studied and taught it. When he

finally gave in and confessed to them, there was much hilarity around the table.

As Joseph prepared for bed in what had originally been built as a granny flat on the side of the farmhouse, the MNG appeared from his phone.

"Synchronicity!" exclaimed Leibniz with great glee. "It is just as our Herr Doktor Jung wrote: 'My preoccupation with the psychology of unconscious processes long ago compelled me to look about for another principle of explanation, because the causality principle seemed to me inadequate to explain certain remarkable phenomena of the psychology of the unconscious.' Here it is: you have been crossing Europe with your conscious and unconscious mind full of Esperanto, which you have both been thinking and unthinking about. There can be no causality between that and your meeting these two good young people and finding that all of you are making for Herrnhut. And yet, you meet. Coincidence? No, there is here the inevitability of the synchronous!"

Joseph, in his best Bah, humbug! mode, told the philosopher to shut up. But Leibniz only crowed with delight. "Ha! I'm sure you have noticed, though, and are pretending not to notice, that Hilly and Jaco are yourself and your own Hildegard?"

But Joseph buried his head under the pillow and tried to sleep.

And so it was on the fourth day, after they had left their kindly hosts with profuse thanks and walked for hours in steady drizzle, that they came down into the town of Herrnhut, the Lord's Watch, the home town of the worldwide Moravian Church.

## Chapter Fifteen Watchwords

For some people, coming to Herrnhut feels like coming home, to a home they have never known. It is a serious place on serious earth, a place where prayer has been valid, where men and women have sought for centuries to model their lives on Christ. Many have succeeded, as far as it is possible for anyone ever to succeed in such an enterprise, which is tolerably little. And so many of the most vaunted or praised attempts to live that way have had a devastating effect on the people those 'models of Christ' have had to do with, as evidenced by the churchy in-jokes: "The definition of a martyr, is someone who has to live with a saint," and the like.

Which accounts for the way some other people feel on arriving in Herrnhut: oppressed by the monolithic holiness and zeal of the place. Some have even reported that they found breathing difficult, so dense was the atmosphere of piety about everything in the town.

For Hildegard's sake, Joseph was prepared to give the place the benefit of the doubt. When he and Hilly and Jaco walked into the town, they made their way to the welcoming office for overseas visitors, where they were quickly registered as a kind of pilgrim, come to explore the spiritual riches of the Moravian Church, the *Unitas Fratrum* as they had first been known, in German Brüder-Unität or Brüdergemeinde. They were given simple but adequate accommodation in the Moravians' guesthouse, and welcomed to attend the different church services and prayer meetings during the coming days.

Was there an Esperanto-speaking section or group within the Church? The woman who welcomed them thought she had heard of such a thing, but she herself was not an Esperanto speaker, and the person who would most likely know about it was away on some mission or other. She would try to find out for them, and let them know.

The text for the day was

Lass sich freuen alle, die auf dich trauen.

Psalm 5,12

Jesus Christus liebt ihr, obwohl ihr ihn nicht gesehen habt. An ihn glaubt ihr, obwohl ihr ihn auch jetzt noch nicht seht, und jubelt in unaussprechlicher und ungetrübter Freude.

1.Petrus 1,8

In Esperanto:

Ekĝojos ĉiuj, kiuj fidas Vin

and

Jesuo Kristo; kiun, ne vidinte, vi amas; kiun kvankam nun vi ne vidas, tamen, al li kredante, vi ĝojegas per ĝojo nedirebla kaj gloroplena.

There had been times in Joseph's life, during all those years when Nothing Really Bad had ever happened to him and Hildegard, when he had found it easy to trust in God, or to feel he was trusting in God. It became much harder after he returned home that day and found her dying on the kitchen floor. He guessed he was not the first person who had always thought they were a believer, only to come to suspect they might only be a 'fair-weather Christian', believing well so long as the going was easy. Like the accusation that Satan made against the righteous Job when YHWH was boasting about his piety: "Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face."

Was everything that had happened since that day the outworking of some monstrous heavenly wager? Is that what suffering is all about? Satan's attacks, with the permission of some Tyrant-God that his servants should be afflicted and tested in that way?

Joseph felt sick at heart at the thought. That was not the kind of God to whom he could give his allegiance or love. Yet there had been many people throughout history - quite a few, even, whom he had met and known - who seemed to believe exactly that about the cause of suffering. Other people's suffering, mostly.

Since Hildegard died, he had grown increasingly impatient with anyone who tried to persuade others to believe as they did, or to give an account of what they were pleased to call 'the problem of suffering'. When some in his local church shared the news of common friends or acquaintances who were going through the grinding mill of the bitterest experiences of life, or when they prayed for them in church or prayer groups, there was often a hushed air of it not being quite decent to talk about it - usually some kind of horrible cancer or wasting illness or dementia. There was a sort of bleating whining when they spoke or prayed about what was happening to these sufferers, as if they hoped to wheedle some favourable outcome from an omnipotent but capricious Monarch.

To his relief, there was no such attitude or tone among the Moravians and their prayers. Their speech to God was direct, straightforward, honest and robust.

"One must speak only the Truth to him," explained one of the leaders, when Joseph tried to put words to what he was feeling. "He knows what is in the heart anyway; what would be the point of pretending?"

Truth. It was one of the values dearest to Hildegard's heart. Joseph found himself wondering whether he had always been as true himself. True to her, true to himself, true to their children, true to God, true to the universe. Without Truth, how could he ever know the answer to that question? If you did not have Truth, it would be so easy to deceive yourself and probably others - Joseph thought of the lies that had been routinely propagated by politicians and the media in recent elections and in political discourse in general. Falsehood, rather than Esperanto or English, had become the *lingua franca* of humanity. Could it be that he too, who had always claimed to abhor it, had also become a fluent speaker of it? Maybe not to others - he thought he still had the habit of outward honesty when he spoke to others - but to himself, in the conversation of his own heart-and-mind.

Somehow he was coming to believe more and more that the Way he was supposed to find, or the Way that Hildegard had told him would find him - had a lot to do with the Truth of his life.

Day by day Joseph attended prayers in the church in Herrnhut, usually led by some of the officials of the Moravian Church who worked in the impressive baroque Vogtshof, the seat of the Board of the Church, and the place where each year the *Losungen* for the coming year were chosen. Sometimes others were asked to lead: members of one of the groups visiting the town at that time, or sometimes individual 'pilgrims'. Each time of prayer would invariably include readings of the text for the day, and often some comment on it, or a verse of a hymn, with lengthy intervals of silence for reflection and prayer. Joseph was finding these times increasingly the most fruitful and rewarding parts of prayer.

On the first day, when he had left the church and was taking a short stroll in the park across the street, he was surprised to see a short middle-aged man going through the slow, stylised movements of Tai Chi. He was a Chinese wearing loose-fitting tunic and trousers, and an expression of serene contentment on his face. Joseph walked on: he had always found it difficult to watch people performing the form, as if it were intruding upon some kind of personal private devotion.

But the man was there the following morning too, and Joseph noticed that he was present in church for the prayers as well, sitting to one side in an attitude of complete, composed stillness during the silences of the service. Afterwards he searched for one of the members of the community who had offered assistance when they first arrived, and frequently stopped to ask him if he was comfortable? If he had everything he needed?

"Who is the Chinese man I have seen in church, and doing Tai Chi in the park?"

Jens laughed. "Ah, Magister Liu! He is our visiting Taoist. He has been staying here now for several months."

"I was surprised to see him. What can you tell me about him?"

"We were surprised also, when he first arrived. It is unusual for the adherents of eastern religions to come to Herrnhut. It's not as if we were like the Benedictines or those other contemplative orders, which frequently have conferences or symposia that include Buddhists or others. In fact, there were some of us who wanted to ask him to leave: they consider Taoism to be a heathen religion, thinking they are polytheists worshipping many gods. But Magister Liu is so peaceful, so joyful; he seems to have many of the characteristics we seek as the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and so forth. Many people have said they simply feel happy when he is about, there is something about him which communicates a sense of peace to others. Often, when there is opportunity, he will make some very short comment on the text of the day, which is always profound and full of insight. And so, here he stays: we don't really know why, or for how long."

Joseph began to smile at Magister Liu when he saw him in church or outside, and to raise a hand in quiet greeting; and Magister Liu would smile, and with a nod return the greeting.

It was the following week when the text of the day read out in church was:

Ich will dich unterweisen und dir den Weg zeigen, den du gehen sollst;  
ich will dich mit meinen Augen leiten.

Psalm 32,8

Saulus aber schnaubte noch mit Drohen und Morden gegen die Jünger des Herrn und ging zum Hohenpriester und bat ihn um Briefe nach Damaskus an die Synagogen, damit er Anhänger des neuen Weges, Männer und Frauen, wenn er sie dort fände, gefesselt nach Jerusalem führe.

Apostelgeschichte 9,1-2

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye, mused Joseph. Is this me finding the way, or the way finding me, or some Eternal One picking me up by the scruff of the neck and kicking me out in some direction or other? And this 'new Way' that Saul wanted to exterminate: will a new way in life always meet with mistrust and opposition? Will

*my new way?*

As he left the church, still deep in thought, he almost collided with Magister Liu, who smiled and beckoned him to follow to the side of the path while others of the congregation left.

When they were alone, he said to Joseph, "It is said, When the pupil is ready, the Teacher will be found."

"What do you mean?"

"I know you are seeking a Way, a Path for your life. Something has changed for you in the last months - I do not need to know what it is. But my heart-and-mind tells me that you may be the one for whom I came to Herrnhut: the one for whom I can be the Teacher that they need."

"But -"

But it was clear he was not to be given time for questions or objections. Magister Liu was already turning away.

"Come," he said.

And Joseph followed, hurrying to keep up with the little Chinese. Who was not walking quickly.

## Chapter Sixteen Finding the Teacher

Magister Liu led Joseph through the grounds to the place where he was staying. It was a small wooden cabin in a corner of the park, and on a board beside the door was pyrograph-stencilled the word *POUSTINIA*. Inside there was a single room, furnished more sparsely than any monk's cell. There was a low bed in one corner, a small table, a prayer stool, a cross on one wall.

"Sit," he said to Joseph, indicating the floor on which he also knelt down.

Joseph had persuaded himself that his days of sitting on the floor were past, but he did as he was told.

He waited for Liu to speak, but for a long time the other just looked at him, seeming to gaze deeply into his eyes as if searching, searching for something Joseph wasn't sure he wanted to be seen. He turned his eyes away.

"What is it that you want?" he then asked. "What do you *really* want?"

Joseph remembered the last person who had asked him that question: Hildegard, when she appeared to him in his series of 'dreams' or night visions, back at home in England. His throat filled with a huge lump, his eyes with tears, and he broke down in sobs that shook his whole body, over and over and over. And told this almost-stranger, from whom he had wanted to withhold his innermost secrets, everything.

He wasn't sure if his story took hours, or a whole day. The Chinese listened, without asking questions or even making a sound, just continuing to look at Joseph with that searching gaze.

At last Joseph's story was exhausted, and his body and mind along with it. He wondered if his sorrow could also be exhausted, but past experience made him think it could not be. Still, he felt strangely at peace, simply to have found a listening ear.

"So," he concluded, "I don't know what I want. It's like I've been searching, travelling across Europe searching for it in the places that were important to Hildegard and me, or that represent the values and aspirations we held together, or the places we loved together, or never had the time to visit together. I'm looking for it, trying to find what I want or what I need. A course for my life, now that everything about it has changed. But everything eludes me. It's as if the answer is somehow always just in reach, but when I think I can take hold of it, it's not there."

Magister Liu sat in silence still, until Joseph felt he couldn't bear it any longer, was afraid he might be on the point of jumping up, taking the little man by the shoulders and shaking him, shouting "Say something, for God's sake!"

"When the pupil is ready, the Teacher will be found."

"You said that before. I don't know what you mean. How can I be the pupil? You don't know me. How can you be the Teacher?"

"One who speaks does not know  
One who knows does not speak"

"Please," said Joseph. "Please..." He looked helplessly at Liu.

"Very well. I will try to put into words for you, what cannot be put into words. The Tao cannot be named; it cannot be understood, or known, or described. That is where you Westerners, with all your scientific curiosity and need to change the world, are mistaken. The Tao simply *is*. It is not 'out there', a thing to be found. It is within you, or you within it; it is all things.

"Listen! What does this mean: 'When the pupil is ready, the Teacher will be found'? For today, for now, it means that *you* are the pupil. The time has come in your life when you are ready to learn Tao, which is sometimes translated as 'the Way'. And because you are ready, I am here to be found."

"But how can that be?" protested Joseph. "You came to Herrnhut before I had even thought of coming here. You knew nothing about me! How could you have known that I would be here, or that I would need a Teacher?"

Liu smiled. "Always the wrong questions! These are the questions those people of yours - what do you call them: Calvinists? - might ask. As for me, I did not know. The Oracle of Change caused me to make my journey here, but I did not know. It is as your Guide has already told you: your Way will find you. We make the way by walking. Walk, then!"



"And you will be my Teacher?"

"You say so."

Joseph half-ran, half-stumbled, from the room and returned to his room, his mind a ferment of grief, bewilderment and hope.

HE WAS NOT sure whether the pupil should subsequently seek out the Teacher for instruction, or wait until the Teacher sought him out. So in the mean time he did nothing, following the rather similar advice about the Tao he had received some time previously from the Leibniz hologram. (Was the universe conspiring against him? Were Hildegard, Leibniz and Magister Liu all in league to turn him into a Taoist?)

And he continued to attend the daily services and prayers of the Moravian Brotherhood. It was at one of these, that he had what he could only describe afterwards as a spiritual experience.

The watchword for the day was

Nach dem Wort des HERRN brachen sie auf, und nach sienem Wort lagerten sie sich.  
Solange die Wolke auf der Wohnung blieb, so lange lagerten sie.  
4.Mose 9,18

Liebe Kinder, ich bin noch eine kleine Weile bei euch. Ihr werdet mich suchen. Und wie ich zu den Juden sagte, sage ich jetzt auch zu euch. Wo ich hingehge könnt ihr nicht hinkommen.  
Johannes 13,33

All through the prayers and the silent times of meditation, Joseph had occasionally found himself noticing a woman of about his age, sitting several rows in front of him. He could not see the features of her face, only the back of her head with its silver-blonde, well-kept hair. Just like beautiful Hildegard's hair, the hair he had so much loved to smell, to stroke, to feel as he ran his fingers through it.

When the time of prayer came to an end, she remained in her seat while many of the congregation around her stood up to leave the church. Joseph also remained sitting, suddenly watching her intently with a wild surmise. She stood up, and turned, and looked at him. It looked like, it could not possibly be, it was indeed, Hildegard. Just as real as she had been when she appeared to him, who knew how, in his dreams. She fixed him with her eyes for a long moment, then smiled, her whole face transfigured with warm affection. Then turned and walked away towards the sanctuary. Too stunned to follow, Joseph still sat. By now they were almost alone in the church, everyone else had left except a verger who was straightening chairs and doing the bits of unpredictable tidying-up that vergers do. Hildegard stepped within the sanctuary, turned again, smiled once more and gave a little wave with her right hand, before passing out through a small door in the side wall.

Joseph jumped to his feet. "Wait!" he said, as loudly as he dared in the sanctified hush of that holy place. He hurried forward, reached the door and turned the handle.

It was locked.

MAGISTER LIU CAME and knocked on his door. He didn't need to say anything, he simply looked at his pupil and raised a quizzical eyebrow.

Joseph stood up and nodded. "I think it is time. I think what has happened is - that she has left me. Or, moved on. Or, something. I thought that would be terrible. I never expected to see her again after... After. I thought that was just something people said, about constantly expecting to see dead ones they have loved walk through the door. But then I came to depend upon it, to expect to see and hope to see her, so she would tell me what to do. But she has said goodbye. And, you know? that's all right. It's almost as if she brought me here to you."

"May be," said Liu.

What does a Tao Master teach his pupil? It may be that there are as many answers to that question as there are Taoist Masters, or as there are Taoists, or as there are people in the world. Seven and a half billion? it's reckoned.

The essence of my teachings is this:  
See with original purity  
Embrace with original simplicity  
Reduce what you have  
Decrease what you want  
(Tao Te Ching, 19)

For Joseph, it seemed that a lot of the teaching he was getting involved just sitting. Sitting, he was expected to remain silent, ask no questions, not expect to be told anything. When sitting became too uncomfortable for him, he was allowed to leave, though always with a sense of the Magister's disapproval. These Westerners! They don't even know how to sit still! These, Joseph imagined, were supposed to be lessons in meditation practice.

Then there were the lessons on physical practice: Tai Chi and Qi Gong. These were easier to the extent that they involved *doing* something, and Joseph could more easily understand this. Though he struggled because Liu expected him simply to watch and imitate: there was never any explanation or description of what was to be imitated. Passers-by who caught sight of the Teacher and his new pupil in the park, doing their morning exercises, watched in amazement at the sheer flow of the Teacher's movements, and the pupil's clumsy attempts to follow. One or two thought it was a public event and tried to join in, but Liu ignored them and most of them did not stay or return.

And there was some book learning as well, which Joseph as a schoolteacher himself thought he

understood and would be able to cope with easily. For this reason, Magister Liu warned him not to read for more than half hour each day. The reading list was two books only: the *Tao Te Ching* of Lao Tzu, which Joseph had brought with him anyway out of some strange foreknowledge or happenstance, it now seemed; and the *Book of Chuang Tzu*. For the time being, Joseph could read whatever he wished from these two classics, provided that he honoured his promise to read for no longer than 30 minutes and then to spend at least as long in reflection. He was also allowed - no, required - to continue to attend the daily prayers of the Brotherhood.

## TERRORIST INVADERS REMAIN SILENT

The foreign invaders apprehended last week by Essex police and Border Force are still being held in Chelmsford Police HQ on suspicion of endangering national security. They were arrested near Maldon by the coastguards, while attempting to make a secret landing on the Essex coast.

The invaders have not yet been named, but they are believed to be an Englishman and up to seven European nationals, two of them women. It is believed that a second Englishman was also aboard the motorboat *Hoffnung*, but that he escaped in the confusion of the arrest, and may be still at large somewhere in Essex. This has not been confirmed by police.

The suspected terrorists have reserved the right to silence, in spite of this week's campaign by a number of MPs, supported by the *Daily Mail*, to use all means, including torture if necessary, to make them speak. Foreign Secretary Horace Jobson said, "This is not yet a time for a general repeal of the laws assuring freedom from torture to all criminal suspects. But in the case of foreign terrorist suspects, His Majesty's Government may be forced to consider exceptional measures."

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One Englishman? thought Joseph as he put down the paper. Could that be right? If so, what had happened to the other? And was it Woody, or Tom, who was 'at large' in the Essex countryside?

In the moments when he was allowed to speak to Liu and asked questions, he told him about the news, and about his concern for the friends who had come to Europe with him and whom he had abandoned to continue on his own way.

"I want to know: is it now time for me to try and rejoin them? I know that the *Tao Te Ching* is not only about sitting still and being the whole universe; it is also instruction on how to rule a country. Is this the time for us to act to save Britain from the darkness?"

"Let us be patient a little longer," said Liu. "This is still the time for non-action. It is a time of darkness and danger; all the more reason for the wise man to seek out the right teacher and to heed him. This you have done. Now you must go on learning. Who knows where the Tao will lead?"

# Chapter Seventeen Gathering

Joseph woke with a start to find the baleful stare of the Emergency Mathematical Hologram boring into him.

"Ahem," said Leibniz. "It *is* possible, you know, for a hologram to feel neglected. To be lonely, even. After three hundred years of inactivity, I need some human company, and to be usefully employed."

"What?! What time is it? What's happening? I didn't activate you! How...?"

"Suffice it to say, I have found it necessary to activate myself, in view of the egregious neglect I have suffered this past week. But, if it is so important for you to feel that you are the one in charge of this enterprise... Make sure you reactivate me immediately. De-activate Emergency Mathematical Hologram." And he vanished.

"Oh, very well," grumbled Joseph. "Activate Emergency Mathematical Hologram."

Leibniz appeared. "Bonvolu indiki la naturon de la matematika urĝaĵo."

"There is no mathematical emergency! You *told* me to re-activate you! What do *you* want?"

"I've been thinking of changing my description anyway," grumbled the hologram. "It seems that in your time there are fewer purely mathematical emergencies than I anticipated. Perhaps it is philosophy that I should offer emergency help with?"

"I don't think so. You'll find that even with what we are pleased to call 'thinking people', there are not that many what you might call emergencies, in a philosophical sense..."

"What about metaphysical emergencies? Theological? Biological? Philological?"

With each suggestion, Joseph shook his head. "Here's the thing. It seems to me that... Well, let's put it like this. It may well be that the Star Trek series contributed to the development of the iPad, but I wouldn't say it has yet done much for teleportation, or for the use of free-standing holograms. You're just - please don't get sulky, I'm not trying to hurt your feelings - you're still an idea whose time has not yet come. And anyway... did I hear you speaking Esperanto?"

Leibniz's expression turned from his hurt-feeling face to his smug feeling-pleased-with-himself one. "Yes! I have become fluent in Dr Zamenhof's invented language (during all these days you have failed to take any notice of me). I have also been learning Chinese. See: 普通话 Qīng shuōmíng shùxué jīnjí qíngkuàng dì xìngzhì? What do you think of that?"

"Well, it sounds like the kind of thing you might have just pulled off Google Translate. I couldn't possibly comment on how accurate it is. No, don't get all upset again, I'm sure it's brilliant. It's just I've never studied Chinese, couldn't even tell if what you just said was Mandarin, Cantonese or whatever all else."

"Well, let it pass for now. But tell me: what *have* you been doing these past few days, since our last conversation?"

Joseph told him. The whole story of his meeting with Magister Liu, his departing vision of Hildegard which had felt like such a spiritual milestone, his becoming a Taoist student. Leibniz was interested, and pressed him with questions, insisting eventually that he be introduced to the Teacher.

Joseph had his doubts. "I don't think I *can* take you with me. It's not easy to do Tai Chi with a mobile phone in your pocket, you know." But Leibniz was not to be denied.

So when Joseph went to the Poustinia at the agreed time that morning for his next instruction, he began by telling Magister Liu that he had a friend who very much wished to be introduced to him and make his acquaintance. The Teacher consented, and Joseph activated the MNG.

Now, most early 21st century people, even Trekkies, would probably still be fazed by the appearance of a life-size, walking, talking and somewhat argumentative hologram. Not Magister Liu. For him, all was Tao. Including phenomena that were plainly impossible. He and Leibniz were still deep in conversation two hours later, when Joseph had long become bored with an exchange that was frequently over his head, to say nothing of being conducted in languages that he did not understand.

"I'll just get myself a coffee, then... OK?" There was still no reply, so he went.

When he returned after an hour, he found Magister Liu sitting serenely on the floor, with Joseph's mobile phone on the edge of the table.

"Your fascinating friend disappeared in mid-sentence," he explained. "He was just expounding the concept of a new imaginary number he was working on, when - pouf! - he was gone."

Joseph picked up his phone and saw that there was no power left in the battery. In his enthusiasm and search for new knowledge, Leibniz had talked himself out, and there was no electricity in the Magister's cabin, and in any case no charger for him to connect with.

So Joseph's interrupted instruction for that day proceeded. Sitting still, Tai Chi, Qi Gong, and reflection on a chapter of the *Tao Te Ching*. When Joseph had had enough, Liu said to him, "I learn from your holographic friend that he and I are also *samideanoj*..."

"What!? You are also an Esperantist? How come you never told me this before? It's so important a part of my whole life, my life with Hildegard, the whole story I told you about...! How is it you didn't tell me?"

"It was not necessary for you to know. But yes, of course I speak Esperanto. It is one of the ways I have been able to communicate with people in many different places of the world, people of many different races and languages. Surely you know that China is one of the countries where *la lingvo internacia* has been most actively promoted by the Government? It has used Esperanto since 2001 for daily news on [china.org.cn], as well as in China Radio International and for the internet

magazine *El Popola Ĉinio*."

"Well, I knew that. But there are a lot of people in China, and didn't I read somewhere? only about half a million of them speak Esperanto. What were the chances you would be one of them?"

"All of these discoveries are part of Tao," said the Magister. "Our task is to follow and see where they lead. This morning I have consulted the *I Ching* and the Judgment says, A Destination Profits. Tell me, what Destination did you think to take, after Herrnhut?"

"I hadn't really thought. But, I suppose I was thinking of travelling further to the East. Hildegard told me, 'Via vojo, *nia* vojo, kondukas orienten.' It might have led me to Lithuania, to revisit the places where she was born and grew up, where she was living before we met. It might have been, to revisit Nitra, the last place we travelled together for an Esperanto Congress..."

"Yes!" said Magister Liu. "Perhaps that is the place: for the name of the hexagram I cast is *Cui*: Gathering. Where is this Nitra you speak of?"

Nitra, called in Esperanto Nitro, is in Slovakia, about 90 kilometres north-east of the capital Bratislava. It is the oldest city in Slovakia, with a history dating back to the 9th century, when it was the centre of the Slav kingdom of Great Moravia. To this kingdom, at the invitation of its Prince Ratislav, there came in the Year of Our Lord 863 the missionaries Cyril and Methodius, to bring the faith of Christ to a heathen people. They also brought with them something just as miraculous and far-reaching in its effects, a system of writing which they had devised for the Slavonic languages, and which took its name from one of the two missionaries: the Cyrillic alphabet. It arose from their conviction that the Scriptures and the Faith should be communicated, not in its original languages of Hebrew and Greek, or even in the world's as well as the Church's then *lingua franca*, Latin, but rather, in the language spoken by the common people. For this conviction, they had to fight with priests, kings, bishops and popes; but they did not waver in their determination. The Christian Gospel was given to the human race to unite all peoples, all nations, into one family: the household of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God. No remote language of an intellectual or priestly elite must be allowed to stand in the way of people's hearing and understanding that Truth.

In human terms, it might be said that Cyril and Methodius failed in a large part of their intent, for their followers were driven from Moravia, and for centuries the Latin Church prevailed. But their introduction of an alphabet bore fruit in the flowering of language and literature among the eastern Slavs, which is still written in alphabets derived from the original script of Cyril and Methodius. Behind their achievement lies the idea that language is a means of bringing together and empowering ordinary people, and that well-thought-out linguistic invention has vast potential to change the lives not only of individuals, but of whole nations.

Ludvik Zamenhof's invention of Esperanto carries the same sense of the importance of language and communication. It was never intended to replace any human language; on the contrary, by attempting to be a neutral second language for people of every nation, it aimed to preserve even threatened or minority languages from becoming extinct before the imperialism of the language of

conquerors. In the countries of eastern Europe, where many different ethnic groups spoke their own languages, and many individuals were indeed competently polyglot, there was nevertheless sufficient lack of understanding of 'the other' to lead to prejudice, mistrust, oppression and all too often, outright persecution. It was, then, in this crucible that Esperanto was formed, and for this reason that knowledge of Esperanto was always far greater in these lands, than in the Anglophone world. Indeed, where Russian was the imperialist second language being imposed for so many years by Soviet power, learning Esperanto became a small and popular act of resistance.

There is a lively national Esperanto movement in both Slovakia and the Czech Republic (who, after all, speaks those languages, outside their natural borders?) For this reason, it was decided by the UEA, the Universala Esperanto-Asocio, to hold the 101st Universal Congress in the city of Nitra.

"I'll go and inquire about train tickets to Nitra," said Joseph.

But Magister Liu shook his head. "Fervojo ne estas la vojo de la Tao. Ni ne vojaĝos trajne, sed ni piediros!"

And so it was to be.

Joseph, who had never attempted a real long-distance walk - in this case of 440 km - in his life, was surprised at how easily he acclimatised to it, and how easy it was to walk for hours at a time with Magister Liu. The Teacher somehow took from his pupil all the stress and anxiety about the route, the weather, how long it would take them to arrive, where they would spend the night. They simply put one foot in front of the other, over and over again. Joseph, when he stopped to think about it, could almost imagine that he really was learning to be and to walk in the Tao: that he and the universe were one.

On the tenth day, they saw in the distance the distinctive tower of the 12th century Cathedral Church of St Emmeram. They had arrived at the place of the last great Esperanto Gathering that Joseph and Hildegard had attended together.

## Chapter Eighteen A Time to every purpose

### TERRORIST FUGITIVE STILL ON THE RUN

While the seven suspected terrorist invaders detained at Maldon, Essex three weeks ago are still being investigated, the manhunt for an eighth suspect is still going on.

The missing suspect is believed to be a white Englishman in his late 50s or early 60s, with long unkempt fair hair and scruffily dressed (see photofit). One of the witnesses who claimed she saw him making off across the marshes when his confederates were arrested, described him as 'dead shifty-looking, like. You really wouldn't want to meet him on a dark night. The thought that he might be still out there somewhere really gives me the willies.'

Reported sightings of the suspect have been received from as far afield as Milton Keynes, Glossop, Fowey and Shetland. All are being followed up by Border Force.

Some reports indicate that the suspect may be carrying an object of great value to the terrorists, the precise nature of which is as yet unknown. There is some speculation that the terrorists may belong to an extremist group, for whom the unknown object holds some symbolic or magical power. Alternatively it may be some kind of weapon, possibly a dirty bomb or some other kind of weapon of mass destruction. The fugitive is considered to be extremely dangerous and should not be approached by members of the public. Anti-terrorist units have been ordered to shoot on sight if he is spotted.

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THE 101ST UNIVERSAL CONGRESS of Esperanto was held from July 23 to 30, 2016. The conference theme was *Socia justeco — lingva justeco: Social Justice - Linguistic Justice*. As soon as Joseph stood in the streets of Nitra, and especially in front of the main buildings of the Slovakian Agricultural University where most of the conference activities took place, he found himself transported back to those hot summer days he had spent there with Hildegard.

The Congress had brought back so many memories for them: of the first Congress they had attended, Belgrade in 1978, where as students from either side of the Iron Curtain they had met and fallen in what seemed like miraculous, impossible love. All the Congresses and international Esperanto gatherings they had attended since then - fewer during all the years of raising a family, but none the less precious for all that, and becoming more frequent again when the children were grown. It had even been possible, when the UKE was held in Europe, to persuade some of the children to attend once or twice. Those who had agreed to do so, and had experienced the youth culture of the Congress, were those who had always remained keenest to continue their use of the language - not surprisingly, because they had experienced its value for making friends of other young people from many diverse cultures. And having fun!

Because fun was one of the great, sometimes it seemed most closely-guarded, secrets of the Esperanto movement. Their Congresses and meetings, which outsiders feared would be so mind-alteringly, crushingly dull and boring, were actually places of laughter and delight. Yes, there were speeches from the main platform, committee meetings, business to be transacted and motions to be passed; but most of this went on out of sight, away from the majority of Congress participants. For the rest, there was laughter, the excitement of making new friends, meeting people from many countries and learning about their lives and cultures. There were concerts, outings to see some of the sights of the host city and its surrounding area, presentations of Slovakian national music and costumes.

The Congress theme, which sounded so serious, was also a subject which had stirred their enthusiasm and passion. At the same time as the UKE, another conference had been held in Nitra to mark Slovakia's presidency of the European Union. Its subject was *Perspektivoj de lingva komunikado en EU: Perspectives on linguistic communication in the EU*. It looked at three major



areas that were perceived as being problematic for the EU: Linguistic problems of citizen-participation; Linguistic problems of economic integration; and Foreign language education in the EU. It was at this conference that Vytenis Andriukaitis, the Lithuanian European Commissioner, addressed the assembly in Esperanto, a language he himself had learned as a little act of rebellion during the years of Soviet occupation of his country. At the conclusion of the Conference, the delegates had issued the Declaration of Nitra, which recognised the problems related to the supremacy of the English language as the world's principal second language, and declared multilingualism to be a 'basic European value' and 'a basic value to secure the equal rights of every EU citizen'.

Joseph and Hildegard, valuing their linguistic pluralism as they did, and proud of their EU citizenship which was already seriously under question since the disastrous EU referendum that had been held in the United Kingdom just four weeks previously, had thrilled to what was coming out of Nitra, and wondered if Brexit could possibly mean the end of the hegemony of the English language.

All of this, and much more, came back to Joseph as he stood on the plaza in front of the Agricultural University. It was as if he was transported back and could see the colourful costumes, the performers on stilts, the balloons and banners, the local children singing. If he had thought about it beforehand, he would have expected this to be a moment of grief, bringing back happy memories of a time and a person he had lost. But as he stood there he felt exactly the opposite: only joy, gratitude for all that he and Hildegard had been given, hope for the future, in spite of all that had happened that seemed to crush all hope, determination to work all the harder for a juster, more equal world in which peace would always prevail over those who sought to make war.

He led Magister Liu inside, into the hall where the opening and closing ceremonies of the Congress, as well as most of the plenary sessions, had taken place. Liu looked about him with interest, as if he were able to see Joseph's thoughts, as if he too could see in his mind those scenes that were being re-enacted before Joseph's inner eye.

This was where the president of the Universal Esperanto Association, Paul Fettes, had given his opening address in which he reminded his audience that Esperanto was not devised just to be a hobby for language nerds, not just to give joy to those who were rich enough to travel to these international gatherings. No, "Ĝi estas rimedo por ŝanĝi la mondon! (It is a means of changing the world!)"

How they had longed to change the world! The world with all its wars and evils and injustices, and now the insanity of Western democracies voting for the very things that would destroy them. How had it come about, that the masses of many who even bothered to vote, had become so disenchanted with the 'political classes' that in protest they had voted for unknown and unknowable futures: plans for the economy that no one had ever imagined; leaders of nations who were so much outsiders that they had no experience or understanding of how politics actually worked?

And their desire to change the world was no longer the idealism of youth, which had inspired them so many years before. Now it was the determination of their mature years, the growing sense that

their generation had fucked up the world for their children and grandchildren, and they must now use the years left to them to undo the damage they had caused, For Hildegard, there would be no more years left to her. Joseph, then, would have to work for both of them.

Deep in thought, he left the university hall and walked down to the river, hardly aware that Magister Liu was still walking at his side.

"Teacher," he said, as they sat by the water's edge looking across to the opposite, willow-lined bank, "you have taught me that to follow the Tao, you must give up all attempts to change the world. You must accept the world as it is, and know that you and the universe are one: that is Tao."

Liu smiled. "Lao Tzu also says this

The best of all rulers is but a shadowy presence to his subjects.  
Next comes the ruler they love and praise;  
next comes one they fear;  
next comes one with whom they take liberties.  
When there is not enough faith, there is lack of good faith.  
Hesitant, he does not utter words lightly.  
When his task is accomplished and his work done  
the people all say, 'It happened to us naturally.'

"Remember! The *Tao Te Ching* is also written as an instruction for those who rule. It is true, as you say, that you must not seek to change the world by force. Did you not once tell me how your wife reminded you of the story about a man who learned that he could not change the world, all he could do was try to change himself? But the Tao is also about *constant* change: nothing remains the same, all is change and change is all. One must be so at one with Tao, that the change one works for is the Tao-change. Then all will say, 'It happened to us naturally,' or 'We did it ourselves.'

"Remember too the words of your own Scriptures (these are also words of wisdom, words of Tao): 'To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.' Perhaps this is the time the world will change. Perhaps this is the time to move with the change, to do what needs to be done? Think about these things."

As softly as if he had not moved, Magister Liu was no longer there. Joseph sat alone by the River Nitra. All around him was the warm air of summer, the distant sounds of traffic and the noise of the city, the cries of birds and water fowl, the hum of insects, the ripple of water, the voices of children and parents walking along the riverside paths, the firm ground beneath him, the scent of flowers and leaves. It was as if there was merely the thinnest of barriers between him and the ten thousand things, that is, everything that exists under Heaven. It was no thicker than a veil; if he reached out and touched it, he would feel nothing, his hand would merely pass through it. Beyond that veil he would find Hildegard; yet not there but everywhere. Beyond that veil he would find himself; yet not there but everywhere.

He stood up, and stepped through.

Then he turned, and walked slowly back to the student hall of residence where he and Liu were staying. He knocked on the Teacher's door. When Magister Liu saw him, a look of surprise crossed the little man's face, but only for a moment before it was followed by an expression of intense delight and pleasure. Liu bowed to him in deep respect.

"So... you have found Tao. Or it has found you!"

"But, I don't know any more of it than I did before," protested Joseph.

"Exactly."

"Then," said Joseph, "I suppose it is time. The time for change is now."

## Chapter Nineteen Return

### HOME OFFICE NAMES TERRORIST-LINKED GROUPS

The Home Office yesterday published details of a number of groups with links to foreign or terrorist groups. This follows weeks of investigations by the National Security Agency which has collected convincing evidence that these groups either give active support to subversive organizations, or are in broad sympathy with their aims. Measures are being put in place to ban these groups, or compel them to register with the Home Office and submit complete lists of their membership for security vetting.

The following have already been banned:

- The Labour Party
- The Green Party
- The Socialist Workers' Party
- The Co-operative Party

The Home Office also announced today the immediate dissolution of the Marylebone Cricket Club. Since the game of cricket has already been banned, the other social and charitable activities of the MCC have also become unnecessary. They have therefore been taken over by the Marylebone Rugby Football Club, and the Lords' Cricket Ground has been renamed The People's Rugby Football Ground.

For some time the Home Office has been considering the issue of the use of languages other than English in Great-Again Britain. Under the proposed Foreign (Non-English) Languages Act, to be introduced in the current session of Parliament, only English will be used in official publications. The use of Welsh, Gaelic and Manx will be phased out, with an immediate cessation of tuition in schools throughout the country. Homes in which other languages are regularly spoken will have to be registered with the Home

Office. Also, persons wishing to study other languages for the purposes of trade will be required to obtain a Foreign Speakers' Licence, to be renewed annually, on completion of re-submission of the Oath of Loyalty to Great-Again Britain.

The Home Office has ruled that the constructed language Esperanto poses a real and present danger to national security, as it enables people from other countries hostile to British interests to communicate with disaffected British subjects and stir up unrest. For those wishing to learn more about this, please refer to the Home Office publication (sponsored by the Daily Mail): *Esperanto: language of the Jewish world conspiracy*.

Consequently these groups have already been banned with immediate effect and their assets confiscated:

- The Esperanto Association of Britain - The Scottish Esperanto Association - The Welsh Esperanto Federation

All local Esperanto groups and clubs, whether defunct or still active, also fall under the ban and are required to hand over their assets.

A number of individuals known to the authorities for their activities in international Esperantism, including attendance at the so-called Universal Congress (believed to be a front for the international conspiracy) have been taken for questioning, and we believe some have been detained pending further investigation and possible charges for offences of sedition or treason.

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"IT IS TIME," said Joseph. His friends were at risk. He did not know whether Woody and Tom were both in custody in Essex, or whether one of them was the 'suspected terrorist' at large somewhere in the English countryside.

He focused his thoughts for a while on the great Tao. Then dialled Woody's mobile number. The phone was answered almost immediately, there was a strange clicking noise like a machine being turned on, and a voice Joseph did not recognise said, "Who is this?"

Joseph said nothing, and the voice demanded again: "Is that - Joseph? Identify yourself!"

Joseph ended the call, and instead dialled Woody's home telephone number. The phone rang and rang, until Joseph had almost given up and was about to press the red button to disconnect, when the phone was picked up. After a second or two, a soft voice said, "Hello?"

"Woody?"

"Joseph? Thank God - is it really you? Where are you?"

"I'm sorry mate, you first. I need to know you're all right, and not surrounded by police or Border Force guards or something. I've been reading that you were all arrested, but then there was news

that one of the English suspects was still at large."

"Well, not exactly at large. But I'm not in the hands of the police or spooks at least."

"You're at home?!"

"Yes. It seemed like the last place they would look. They didn't know my identity - we managed to keep all that from them. So I thought that rather than be on the run in the middle of nowhere, or try to find somewhere else to hide, I'd come here and at least be able to sleep in my own bed. So far it's been OK: only one trusted neighbour knows I'm here, and has been smuggling in supplies. And I've kept my head down and so far stayed under the radar."

"What about Tom and the others of the Karlsbruderschaft?"

"I can't get any news of them, apart from what's reported to the public. As far as I know, they're still being held. In Chelmsford, I think, though it's possible they may have been moved somewhere more suitable for highly dangerous terrorists."

"And the Crown of Charlemagne?"

"Well, that's the weirdest thing. When the coastguards surrounded us - we had actually just got ashore, they didn't board the boat like the newspapers said, that was just to make it sound more dramatic and resourceful than it actually was - there was so much chaos and confusion. It was almost pitch-black, and they were trying to use spotlights so everyone got blinded. No one could see anything, everyone was wearing black so we didn't know who was on whose side. I grabbed a backpack I thought was mine, and just legged it as fast as I could. I knocked some poor bugger flying - he felt like he was just a young lad, so probably the bloke in charge - and while some of the others were trying to help him, and others were trying to catch the rest of us, I managed to get away. I spent the whole of the next day hiding out under an upturned boat, covered as much ground as I could when it got dark again, and on the third day I was just far enough away to take the risk of using public transport. I was pretty lucky really - can you believe the police have started stopping people in the streets and demanding to see ID papers? But since they didn't know that I was the person they were looking for, they didn't ask too many questions."

"I got back here; and blow me, when I looked in my pack I'd picked up the one with the Crown in."

"So you've got it safe! Where is it now?"

"It's under the floorboards in the garden shed..."

"Good! Right: I'm in Slovakia, a place called Nitra. No, don't ask, I can tell you later. But it's time for me to return, and for us to get this sorted out. Are you ready?"

"Well, I can't imagine what you think we can do. Things are bloody crazy over here, the whole world has gone stark raving bonkers. But I'll do my best to hang on here and not get discovered till you get here."

"Good. We'll be on our way."

THE *LOSUNG* FOR the day:

Gott steht auf; so werden seine Feinde zerstreut, und die ihn hassen, fliehen vor ihm.  
Psalm 68,1

Und ich sah den Himmel aufgetan; und siehe, ein weißes Pferd. Und der darauf saß,  
hieß: Treu und Wahrhaftig, und er richtet und kämpft mit Gerechtigkeit. Und seine  
Augen sind wie eine Feuerflamme, und auf seinem Haupt sind viele Kronen; und er trug  
einen Namen geschrieben, den niemand kannte als er selbst.  
Offenbarung 19,11-12

That'll do nicely, thought Joseph as he planned the journey from Nitra back to Britain. Once upon a time it would have been possible to take a train to Vienna and fly from there straight to London Heathrow. Try that now, especially as a known Esperantist accompanied by a Chinese national, and he was probably risking immediate arrest and some very searching questioning. The way across mainland (and still civilized) Europe was straightforward enough. They reached Amsterdam on the same day they set out from Nitra.

When they had booked into a hotel there, Joseph activated the Leibniz Hologram. The ancient polymath was still sulking about what he perceived as the lack of respect he had been suffering. But he soon perked up when Joseph told him, "Look, you can see the state the world is in. There may be a day of peace, a day when an Emergency Mathematical Hologram is needed; but that is not this day! This day we are required to do great things. To liberate Britain! Unite Europe! Establish harmony and tolerance between all peoples! Establish a National Library of Europe! I am hereby asking you to change your parameters accordingly: from now on we need you to be the Emergency Political Hologram! Are you ready!"

"Jawohl!" cried Leibniz with visible enthusiasm, not to say a tear in his eye. "I am ready: for this noble calling, I am your hologram!"

The first step, then, was to make contact with such of the Karlsbruderschaft as remained. You might think this would be a difficult task, and for ordinary mortals such as Joseph or Magister Liu, that would indeed have been the case. But not for the EPH. For him, it was the matter of very few minutes to track down the names, addresses, and mobile phone numbers, of this secret organization, and to connect a call from Joseph to the deputy leader of the group.

Her initial suspicion vanished when Joseph introduced himself as the mysterious Englishman who had been the one to find the long-missing Crown of Charlemagne in its hiding place in the Treasury of Aachen Cathedral. She listened to what Joseph had to say, and then agreed to summon as many of the Bruderschaft as she could mobilize, to gather in Rotterdam on the following day.

There was no time to lose, and fortunately the Karlsbruderschaft were well-trained and (some of

them) in peak physical condition, having prepared for the day when they would be called to action. They also had a network of contacts ('Miscellaneous') that might be of use in many different possible and likely or unlikely eventualities. Like, smuggling an English Esperantist, a Chinese Taoist and an emergency hologram into Fortress Great-Again Britain. It turned out that the contact they needed was none other than old Jost on Texel.

He had been a keen amateur sailor in his younger days, and his small boat was still seaworthy and well-maintained. He seemed like a changed man when Joseph and his companions arrived on Texel: he had heeded Joseph's parting words bidding him to hope still. He had heard from the deputy leader of the Karlsbruderschaft that he could play a role in taking a *samideano* across the North Sea to England, the home of the language he so hated because he believed it had stolen Esperanto's preeminence as the world language. He could strike back, by aiding a group which planned to overthrow the present British regime, and restore it to a union with the peoples of Europe that would be not privileged, but the relationship of one among equals to which the *Esperanto-movado* aspired.

As darkness began to fall they set sail from Texel, with a gentle east wind carrying them across the North Sea. Undetected by the patrolling ships of Royal Navy or coastguard, now constantly on the alert for fleeing members of proscribed or registered groups, as much as for potential terrorist invaders, Jost's little boat made landfall, and Joseph and the others crept through the shallows and came ashore.

There were seven of them in the group, not counting Leibniz. Joseph, Magister Liu, the deputy leader Sonja, three young men chosen for their physical strength and military training - Sven, Kurt, and Arnold - and the other woman in the group, Hanna-Laura from Buxtehude near Hamburg.

Jost begged to stay with them. "Old I may be, but you, Joseph, have revived my heart. I can help in so many ways..."

But Joseph had to refuse. "Listen, *mia amiko*, you have already helped us so much. And we may require your help again if there is need of urgent and secret transport across these seas. Go home, and wait for our word. If we succeed or if we fail in our enterprise, you will surely hear. But be ready for the call if we need you. Keep your boat provisioned and ready!"

With a firm embrace ("*Brakumu min!*") they parted, and watched the old man hoist his sail and begin to tack away from the shore into the growing light of dawn.

## Chapter Twenty Release to the Captives

During Leibniz's First Life, money had always been inseparably linked to bullion, the precious metals of silver or gold. There was no exchange of goods or services, without the exchange of money in the form of coins, minted by due authority. The great sovereign states, as well as smaller principalities and even ecclesiastical authorities, minted their own coins. In times of economic decline the coinage could become debased by the admixture of corrupt or base metals, but this

was not a good long-term solution to economic problems, since it weakened confidence in that state's currency, making its trading options similarly weaker.

Judge, then, the surprise and fascination of the Leibniz Hologram to discover in his Second Life, that money had become completely imaginary and fictitious. No longer connected in any way with precious metal or bullion, it now consisted entirely of binary digits, bytes in some computer system somewhere.

"Did you know," he had asked Joseph one day, "that private banks don't hold reserves of gold to match the funds they claim to have? They simply *create* new money by crediting customers' bank accounts with figures in the form of loans, which the customer is then required to repay. It's a form of selling your future self and your labour into a kind of slavery whereby you work for the banks, so that they can increase the wealth of those who are already the wealthiest in society?"

"I did know that, actually," said Joseph grumpily. "But I think you'll find that not many people do know it, including people who are supposed to be the politicians making decisions about the economies of nations."

See [[<http://positivemoney.org/>]][Positive Money]]

The Emergency Political Hologram was also amazed to discover that in the 21st century system of money, finance and economies, it was possible to be a billionaire, declare bankruptcy twice, still be a billionaire, boast about not paying any taxes for years and years, and instead of being treated as a criminal or at least a person of no moral worth, be lauded for your smartness and get elected to the most powerful office of state on the planet.

"So," he mused, "it must be possible for anyone with the necessary abilities to simply access some computer system somewhere and credit themselves with as much money as they want, in the form of those digital bits and bytes..."

"I think you'll find that the banks and other financial institutions go to considerable lengths to prevent that kind of thing from happening."

"Pish!" said Leibniz. (No, he really did. I've never heard anyone say it, but Leibniz actually did.)

"You're going to need transportation now that we've arrived in England, and it will be too risky to travel by public transport, with the police on the alert for foreigners. See, I have already gained access to your bank and made you a millionaire. Now you'll be able to buy two vehicles for us to get to wherever we plan to go next."

Joseph wondered if buying two large people-carrying vehicles would look suspicious, but following Leibniz's advice he went to a car dealer and presented himself as a merchant banker who had recently been made redundant, and wanted to set his son up in business as a private transport company. He and Sven (playing the role of the son in this scenario), together with Arnold, drove away with three hardly-used ex-showroom models, fitted with sat nav and every conceivable



computerised *umu*<sup>[fn:9]</sup> you can imagine, leaving behind a very satisfied salesman.

<sup>[fn:9]</sup>Esperanto for thingumajig, doover, or whatsit.

The problems of money and transport had been solved. The problem of remaining inconspicuous was still a real one. Three people-carriers travelling in convoy with eight passengers are likely to attract attention and be remembered. So they travelled separately to Joseph's hometown and parked in different places, some distance from Woody's house. There Joseph called, as if passing by on a whim, in the middle of the afternoon. And there the other members of the invasion force arrived one by one after dark, each climbing over the un-overlooked rear wall of the property, and knocking with a pre-arranged signal for admission.

Although Sonja was the acting leader of the Karlsbruderschaft, during Dieter's enforced absence, she and all the others found themselves looking to Joseph for instructions. There was about him an unsought air of authority and command, as if they knew that he had somehow, by the banks of the River Nitra, attained enlightenment. Upon him had been conferred, by Tao or by Heaven, the role of leader in their enterprise. Joseph himself, who had so often been hesitant and doubtful of his capabilities, felt a strange power within. He was not proud of it, he did not claim it as an accomplishment or achievement of his own. In humility he knew it was a Gift, perhaps even a Burden, that had been placed upon him for this moment in history.

He sat and looked around at the group, inviting them to be in silent contemplation while they prepared for what was to be done. Woody in his favourite armchair, Magister Liu seated cross-legged on the floor, Leibniz hovering beside Joseph, and the five members of the Karlsbruderschaft seated around the dining table: Sonja, Sven, Kurt, Arnold and Hanna-Laura. All waited in expectant stillness and attention.

It was Magister Liu who broke the silence when Joseph nodded to him to speak. "So, now we are nine. This number in Chinese thought is a propitious number: it sounds the same as the word *jiǔ*, which means long-lasting. It is strongly associated with the dragon, the symbol of magic and power. Nine is also significant in other ages and cultures. We may think of the nine ranks of angels in the Christian celestial hierarchy, the nine Muses, the nine worlds of Norse mythology, the Nine Worthies of medieval legend, who personified the ideals of chivalry..."

"I like that," said Woody.

"...and the nine members of the Fellowship of the Ring, which fought against the world-conquest plans of the Dark Lord Sauron. Now we live under the threat of a new Dark Lord, and we are called to follow our Dragon," (he bowed to Joseph) "to overcome him."

"But what can we do?" asked Sonja. "We who are so few? Tolkien's story is only a fiction, but even in the fiction, there are great armies fighting for Good against Evil. We are in real life, and we have no armies, hardly even any weapons. All the weapons and armies are against us. How can we overcome?"

There was a buzz of agreement, and fearful uncertainty. But all fell silent as Joseph roused himself

and answered.

"We have the Crown of Charlemagne, whose power we do not yet know, but I surmise that it is great. And we have Tao. I believe it is firmly on our side. The changes of this world, the succession of *yin* and *yang*, have brought us to this place of great chance and danger. Freedom, harmony, tolerance, and truth, a love of that which is good, have all been supplanted in our national life - in the life of nations and societies - by fear, mistrust, prejudice, lies, and hate. Is it fated that we should swing all the way from humanity to depravity? The world stands upon a knife-edge. But we can still turn it back, we can avoid what might seem the inevitable fall into chaos and the end of all good.

"And it is my will, and hope, that we shall do all this without bloodshed. In the hearts of most ordinary men and women, and children, especially children, there is the sense that all is not well with the world. That what we need and desire is the Good, the love that moves the sun and the other stars, the harmony of Tao. Even the Dark Lord was once a child. Who knows? Deep in his heart there may still be that spark, which perhaps he has forgotten, ignored and tried to hide for so long, even tried to extinguish forever, but which can yet be kindled. Let us seek to make a human being of him again.

"But first, let us free our comrades. They have been held by the Enemy long enough. Brother Leibniz, can you locate them? Are they still being held in Chelmsford Police Headquarters?"

"No, I have been able to trace their whereabouts from electronic communications between the Police and the Home Office. They have been moved to the high security unit at Paddington Green Police Station. I have studied the top secret blueprint of the building's security arrangements, and I believe it will be quite easy to liberate them."

They set off without delay and drove to London. Police checkpoints had been set up in numerous places on major routes, as an anti-terrorist measure; but they were relatively static, so that it was easy for the hologram to identify their locations. He gave instructions for the drivers to make short detours when necessary, so that they reached their destination without being stopped by security forces.

Arrived in London, they parked in the streets as near as possible to Paddington Green Police Station. Once again, Leibniz's skills were invaluable, in identifying available parking spaces and then fixing the parking meters so that there was always time remaining, no matter how long they would need to leave the vehicles there.

"Now, we simply use the back entrance, with these swipe cards... And because it is a back entrance, and 'perfectly secure', we can be sure there will be no guards placed there."

He was not quite right about that: one of the guards from the floor above had come down to use the toilet on that level because the first one he went to was occupied, and his need was urgent. He began to shout a challenge at the intruders; but Magister Liu stepped forward, without even seeming to move, and felled him with a blow as light as a feather kissing a leaf, and as stunning as a

bolt of lightning.

"Don't worry," he said, "he's not dead, Dragon Lord. You said you wished no bloodshed. He is only unconscious; he will regain consciousness after we have left the building and remember nothing of what happened."

They came to the sixteen high security cells under the police station, used for the detention of terrorist suspects. Here Kurt kept watch at the end of the corridor while Joseph went with Leibniz, connecting to each of the cell door locks and making them swing open. The astonished occupants of the cells looked weak as might be expected of prisoners who had been interrogated for many hours, variously threatened and sensorily deprived, though mercifully not yet the victims of more extreme means of torture.

"Quiet! Quickly - this way!"

They fled back down the corridors, most of them expecting an alarm to be raised at any moment. Only Joseph, Liu and Leibniz seemed at ease and confident that all would be well. They passed the unconscious guard, exited by the unguarded rear entrance, and returned to the vehicles. Dividing the sixteen adults between the three people-carriers took only a short time, before they drove off into the night, leaving the capital far behind them.

"Can we use our mobiles to communicate?" asked Woody. "Won't the police be able to monitor our calls?"

Leibniz explained patiently. "Encrypting telephonic communications so that they cannot be hacked by the rather amateurish methods used by your security forces is child's play. Feel free to use your phones without anxiety."

So they exchanged details confirming their rendezvous after getting out of London. Leibniz had taken the liberty of renting a furnished country house in the Middle of Nowhere, Essex, as a hideout. And here the three cars arrived shortly after three o'clock that night.

## Chapter Twenty-One The Three Towers

### TERRORISTS AT LARGE!

Last night the seven terrorists seized in Essex last month while attempting to invade Great-Again Britain escaped from Paddington Green Police Station, where they were being held in the high security anti-terrorist unit. Police are still investigating how the escape took place, but it is thought the terrorists must have had inside help and a sophisticated degree of technological expertise to by-pass the station's security.

("Well, der..." said Leibniz, who was regrettably studying modern street idioms. "Of course they were sophisticated! I'm, like, the Houdini of electronic escapology. Hell, I'm the *Leibniz* of it!")

A nationwide manhunt is under way to trace the whereabouts of the escapers and their accomplices. The public are warned not to approach them, as they are believed to be armed and are highly dangerous. Armed response units are on alert, with instructions to shoot to kill."

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ON THE TOP FLOOR of his Dark Tower, the highest building in London formerly known as the Shard, the Dark Lord Marduk raged at the hapless Prime Minister, Sir Michael Grove. He was not known for gentleness of expression, so that for half an hour Grove had been subjected to every curse, insult and oath known to the English language, as well as many that were not.

"You are an incompetent bloody idiot, a goddamn waste of space..." Marduk concluded in gentler tones. He fell silent, and his silence was worse than his raging as he stepped close, his face inches away from Grove's, as if he were about to open his mouth and suck him into his hideous maw.

"Now, get out, and get your incompetent police and security forces doing their job. I want those foreign bastards found, and this time you can bring them here to me. If your people are too weak or lily-livered to get information out of them, I am not. Go, knobhead!"

Grove slunk from the room. Even in the days when he had been slapped millions of times a day on the Internet, he had not felt this small.

Marduk walked to the window and looked out across the city. His city, his London. His England, and little island Britain which he daily delighted in humiliating with the official name Great-Again Britain. Fortunately for them, for these crawling vermin in the land, he still had need of them. There were skills, resources and wealth he had not yet sucked dry, not yet controlled utterly. He needed the scientific and technical skills of their universities, under-funded and weakening by the day as they were, to find the Elixir by which he would avoid Death for ever. He hated that he was so old, that unless he succeeded in his desire, he must soon meet the Death he had courted all his life for others, in the hope that he would buy it off from demanding himself. His toadying Head of Research assured him that they were getting close, very close - was he lying just as the wretched Grove-creature lied to him?

But if they were close, if the Elixir was within his reach...

Once he had it, once he knew that it worked, then he would crush this island and its people. They had so often insulted and ignored *him*, making fun of his foreignness, his accent, his lack of education, his wealth, his many marriages to much younger wives, the stupidity and vacuousness of the media he controlled. He would show them! When every institution they had ever treasured was destroyed and ground into the dust, when democracy was gone, and the monarchy revealed as the empty sham it had long been. When every green thing in the land was withered and dead, when every bird and animal was diseased or dying, when every mineral resource was exhausted, every factory and school and hospital falling into ruin. When every sick or elderly or handicapped person had been purged, and children were dying of hunger in the streets. When people froze to

death in their homes, and dared not drink the polluted water that gathered in filthy puddles outside. Then he would leave them, and move on to the next country he would destroy. Or maybe take a long holiday first: perhaps a few centuries to enjoy his renewed youth? But no, even he knew that would soon lose its charm: it was Power that was the drug he craved, the only one that would satisfy.

He smiled joylessly. Yes, he would get the Head of Research in here to give a report of how the Work was going. And he had better not be told any lies.

JADE CLARKE OF BASILDON in Essex looked out of her kitchen window across the bleak rooftops of the houses on the other side of the Southend Arterial Road. She had recently had to leave the lovely little flat she was renting in Dunton Wayletts, just outside the town, when the landlord raised the rent to a figure she couldn't afford, and the Council had rehoused her in this depressing tower block. Someone in the town hall had pulled a few strings for her, and she wasn't yet sure whether they would expect some favours in return. She hoped the favours expected wouldn't be too repulsive, but from what she had heard from some of the other girls at the office, she feared they might be.

She looked at the clock on the wall. Oh, bloody hell! "Come on, Leo!" she shouted to her 5-year old son. "Get out here and eat your breakfast! It's time for me to take you to Gran's."

Always the same soul-destroying struggle, day after day after day. Get herself out of bed and dressed, do the same for the boy too, get him to her mother's house, go to her boring job at the town hall. Mum would take Leo to school, collect him at the end of the day, grumble at Jade when she picked him up at the end of her day's work to take him home. Feed him, put him to bed, collapse into a chair in front of the telly. She didn't even have any friends any more, except the girls at work. They were always going out on the town having a good time, but she could hardly ever join them. Mum didn't want to baby-sit ("What?! I have to bloody look after him all bloody day! Don't expect me to look after him in the evening as well!") She certainly didn't have a boyfriend. All the decent men were already taken, and of the rest, though there were plenty who gave her a second look - she wasn't that bad-looking, she thought - most of them never came back when they found she had a kid.

It hadn't been meant to be like this. She had had dreams. She wanted to be a writer: her teachers had said she was good enough to have a go. Maybe start out as an office girl at the local paper, work up to being a reporter, maybe a proper journalist for a proper newspaper. But really, she wanted to be a novelist. Not writing any of this young adult stuff, or Twilight, or chicklit. She would write *literature*. Beryl Bainbridge, or Muriel Spark - they'd had their struggles in life but overcame them.

She looked at Leo, his T-shirt crumpled and his hair a mess as he played with his cereal, humming a tune from his favourite TV cartoon. Some women she knew would have thought it was the child who was the problem, if only she'd got rid of him, she would have been free to do whatever she wanted, whatever she dreamed of. She had felt sick to the stomach when she learned she was pregnant, as if the whole of her life was draining away down some kind of cosmic plughole. But

never for a moment had she thought of getting an abortion. And she loved him. The bloody little tyke.

Yes, lots of her friends would have said her life was a pile of shit. Not long ago she had thought so too, God, she'd even thought of running away, or ending it all. But not for long. Something had happened, she felt. Or, something was going to happen. Something that would change everything, she didn't know how. But she had the strangest feeling that everything was going to be all right. She didn't think she would be stuck on the top floor of this grotty tower block, or in this grotty town hall job, for very much longer.

JOSEPH HAD BEEN DELIGHTED to discover that the country house the Leibniz hologram had found for them at such short notice, had a squat little tower in one angle of what you might have called the west wing, if that had not been too pretentious an expression for what was, really, not a very large country house.

It was in this tower that he was sitting that morning, looking out across the Essex countryside. The Middle of Nowhere, Leibniz had claimed, and surprisingly for such a densely populated county, so close to the capital, that was just what it felt like. As far as he could see, there were no other houses, no roads, no sign of human habitation. Just the grounds of the house, surrounded by trees, and a vista of fields somewhere in the distance, through the few small gaps in the trees.

Joseph gazed out in the direction of Basildon. He was no longer in the least surprised that he knew where Basildon lay, even though he had never visited it, and Essex was an unknown county to him. He had even stopped asking himself how he knew. He simply knew that, in that direction, was Jade Clarke, the Heir of Charlemagne. He wondered what she would be like, and how she would react to what he would shortly be telling her. But he was not in any way anxious or doubtful. All would be well.

It was time to meet the other members of the Brotherhood, tell them what he planned to do, and give them their instructions.

## Chapter Twenty-Two The Crown finds its owner

Jade had just put Leo to bed. It had been a bloody awful day, and yet she felt strangely confident, as if some friendly Beast was seeking her through the tangled forest of her life, following some scent, moving slowly, slowly closer. She had argued with her boss and received what amounted almost to a formal warning that if this happened again, she should think about looking for another job. Her mother had grumbled about having to look after the Kid, and hinted that she might soon be moving in with a new man, and he probably wouldn't want her to be looking after her grandson; he might even be wanting her to start a new family together with him (Was that even still possible? wondered Jade.) Leo had been upset and fractious, had fought with her through his evening meal and bath time, not listened to the bedtime story she had read to him, ended up asking the question she always hated, "Why don't I have a daddy?"

"Of course you have a daddy, Leo, everyone has a daddy. It's just that your daddy doesn't live with us. He had to go a long way away."

In fact I have no idea at all where he is. In fact I'm not even sure what his full name is. Andy, a boy she met at the Glastonbury Festival she had gone to six years before, telling her mum she was going to visit a friend in Southend. He had had the most magical blue-green eyes, and a laugh that would charm the stars from the sky. Just one night it had been, one night in a sleeping bag in a dripping tent in a muddy field in Somerset. The first boy she had ever had sex with; and this. The next morning he had simply disappeared into the crowds and she never saw him again, never got his name and address, never gave him hers.

But he had given her Leo: the burden and the love of her life.

She had somehow quieted him down, waited until his gentle breathing told her he was asleep, then tiptoed from the room, closed the door and slumped in the armchair, too tired to even pick up the TV remote before she sat down.

And the doorbell rang.

Nobody came to the door at this time of night, on the top floor of the tower block. She nearly didn't get up and go to the door at all. Then she thought, it might possibly be Dawn from next door, locked herself out again and needing the spare key she had left with Jade because she was always locking herself out.

At the door stood a tanned, almost bald, bearded man in his early 60s, with a short beard and thick round glasses. With him was a small Chinese man in what looked like a black gown, and a tall Scandinavian-looking woman with fair hair and a severe look on her face as if she really didn't approve of them being there.

"What -?" said Jade.

But the bald guy said in flawless English, "Ms Jade Clarke?"

"Miss," she corrected him almost automatically, and wondered immediately why she had chosen to be so pedantic, and so old-fashioned.

"Miss Clarke, I know you have been expecting something to happen, something quite different, unusual and surprising, though you didn't know what. We are here to make that thing happen."

"How did you know that? And who are you, anyway?" Who *the hell* are you? she had expected to hear herself say, but there was something about the three strangers at the door, something almost solemn, ceremonial, hieratic, about the way they stood outside her flat, that made her withhold the profanity.

"May we come inside, Lady?"

And though she did not understand why, she stepped aside as they passed through the entrance

way and into her tiny living room.

"My name is Joseph Knecht," said the stranger. "We have come a long way, and through great danger, to bring you what is yours by right, to invite you to assume your destiny."

"What? What do you mean? I don't know what you're talking about." She felt inside a mounting excitement, but it was mixed with fear, too. Who *were* these people?

Joseph nodded to the Chinese gentleman, and Jade noticed for the first time that he was carrying a wooden casket which he now held out towards him. With care and reverence (had he actually *bowed* to the casket?) Joseph opened the box and removed what was inside. He turned towards Jade, holding something which glittered in the artificial light of her sitting room, which suddenly seemed dull, tawdry in comparison. Then he stepped closer to her, raised it high above her, and placed it on her head.

She had thought that, whatever he was about to put on her, she would snatch it off and hurl it to the ground, as she would if a great spider or a verminous beast had somehow alighted on her. Instead it was as if a thrill of joy had passed through her whole being, body and mind and soul. Soul? she had never even been certain there was such a thing. Suddenly she knew that the unknown thing she had expected, and known in some way was coming towards her, was here. She looked, and saw that the three strangers in the room were kneeling in front of her as if she were some kind of - What?

"What is this?" she asked. Not with the anger and fear that she had felt at the first when these people had burst into her life. "What is this?" She asked it with wonder, with a deep sense that whatever it was, was right. Something had found her.

"It is the Crown of Charlemagne. It was hidden from human knowledge for centuries, so that it might not be destroyed or abused. Now it is found. And we have brought it here, to find the One to whom it belongs, the One who may wear it before all peoples, and assume the throne of the Empire that has been awaiting you."

The scornful laughter with which, only yesterday, she would have greeted these words, did not come.

Instead, "Yes. Though I do not understand any of it, it's like I, somehow, *know*. Please tell me what it means. Er -" (because they were still kneeling to her) "please get up. Please sit down."

They rose from the floor, but would not sit until she herself had taken her seat. Then Joseph took from his pocket a mobile phone, turned it on, and suddenly there was a flickering of light and a fifth person stood in the room, strangely dressed in a full black wig of curls, and wearing what looked like the kind of gown her old headmaster had worn on special occasions. She could not take her eyes off his big nose, else she might have exclaimed in fear or surprise.

"Well," said the new arrival, speaking in a strange foreign-sounding accent. German, was it? "Are you going to introduce me, my brothers?"



Joseph explained. "Majesty, this is Herr Doktor Leibniz. He is a hologram. Please don't be anxious if you don't understand or believe it: I didn't either, when I first met him. But much more than a hologram, he is also a famous philosopher, mathematician, scientist, savant, and adviser to royalty. I have asked him to help you to understand what this is all about. He will do so all the more gladly, I'm sure, because for a long time he was not certain that the research our Brotherhood had carried out, had reached the correct conclusion. Now he *is* certain."

The doctor, or philosopher, or hologram - whatever he was - was not above looking pleased with the introduction he had been given. He gathered himself to his full height, and began to speak. He spoke for quite a long time. Jade was far from certain that she understood most of what he was saying, and yet she felt as he spoke that she *knew*, that all he said was right and true. He spoke about a great Empire which had once existed, which had been based on the most sacred principles of honour, holiness, justice, and truth. Of course it had often failed to live up to those ideals. It often fallen short, was weak and corrupt because of the frailty, greed and lust of the men who served it or sought it. But at its heart lay this noble Idea. Yes, it was much like the Matter of Britain, the whole web of stories and legends about King Arthur, the Round Table, the Holy Grail, which she had loved so much as a girl. So long ago. But what Leibniz was telling her now was even bigger, even more beautiful. Now I understand, she thought. The Empire has to be so much bigger than Britain - even the 'British Empire', as it used to be called, was just a counterfeit, a failed attempt to create that human rule of goodness. It was Europe, Europe, where that dream or ideal was to be created. Whenever Britain tried to cut itself off from its neighbours across that narrow channel of sea, to pretend or behave as if it were not a part of the Main, things went wrong. That cutting off led always to division, war, disaster. The Matter of Europe always reached out to and longed for Britain also. Only when this Empire, of which Leibniz spoke, embraced Britain too; only when Europe was whole; only when that unity was complete not only at the level of commerce and finance but also in the deepest heart-love of the nations, could Britain and the peoples of Europe be healed of all that was amiss.

And how could it be that she, Jade Clarke of Basildon in Essex, was the One who would have a part to play in any of this? Not a part, only. The hologram was telling her that it was around her, her alone, that all this destiny could be fulfilled.

When Leibniz appeared to have ended his account; "You tell me," she said, "that the time has come when the Holy Roman Empire will be restored?"

"Yes."

"That you have been searching for years and years for the One who will rule that Empire? And that I am the True Heir of Charlemagne, who should rule that Empire?"

"Yes."

"Then, though I still do not know how, I too say Yes. So be it."

The four others - even the Leibniz hologram - stood again, knelt before her, struck their chests with

their fists in the ancient gesture of obeisance, and bowed their heads.

## Chapter Twenty-Three Taken

In the morning, Jade phoned the town hall to tell them she would not be coming in to work that day. She would not be coming tomorrow or the day after. In fact, she wasn't coming in ever again.

The man Joseph, together with the Chinese man whom they had addressed as Magister Liu, and the strange hologram, had all left before Jade got up. The Scandinavian woman, Sonja, remained and seemed much less severe, much more friendly, than she had been the previous night. Half an hour later another woman who introduced herself as Ingrid arrived. She was going to help with Leo that day - ("Don't forget: if you are the Empress Designate, then this little boy of yours is the next in line.")

Leo was very happy to have his mum at home with him, not to have to go to his grumpy Gran's house. He was quite contented to play by himself for much of the time while the two nice foreign ladies were talking with Jade, helping her to understand more of the history of which Leibniz had given her only an introduction. They spoke about the situation in Europe and Britain. The aftermath of the strange coup that had taken place, which the new regime called the Restitution; the impending threats to world peace, the need for the Empire to act swiftly, even when they might have preferred to wait until they could make fuller preparations.

"And there is one more thing," said Sonja. "Language. The peoples of the Empire you will rule speak many different languages; German, French, Czech, Slovakian... Peoples of many other tongues will also become part of the Empire: English, as you have heard; Italian, Dutch, Danish, Swedish, Polish... many other languages, also. How will they understand each other, or you? In the beginnings it was Latin which was the common language of communication. Now, there are many who say that English, or French, should be the official language of Europe. But the Dragon Lord tells us that we must take a different course. He believes that the Empire must learn another language. Not to replace their own birth- and heart-languages: they will remain, as they always should, and indeed will be strengthened in love and value. But all should learn a second language for communication with each other."

"You said, the Dragon Lord said this? Who is this Dragon Lord?"

"The man called Joseph Knecht. We don't fully understand why, but he has come to us as the one who has led us to you. He it was who found Leibniz, and he found the Crown of Charlemagne - though it was our Brotherhood, the Karlsbruderschaft, who had been seeking it for generations. If you will have him, he will help you and guide you - as will we all - until you are confirmed on the throne."

"And what about this second language everyone should learn?"

"It is called Esperanto. It is the language of hope. Of unity, justice, equality, and peace. Would you care to take your first lesson, Majesty?"

Jade smiled and nodded. So many incredible new things had happened to her in the last twenty-four hours. Learning a new language - she who had failed French at school - might as well be another.

JOSEPH, MAGISTER LIU AND LEIBNIZ had returned to their country house headquarters, where they rejoined the other members of the Bruderschaft to plan their next moves.

Joseph ascended the tower and sat at the window, looking across the Essex countryside. A wind was sweeping across the earth, bending the trees and the grass in the meadows. He saw what was coming, near but not clear. It would not be long, now. Then he heard too, heard the helicopters coming.

Police sirens in the distance, soon drowned by the clatter of the helicopter rotors, as they circled and hovered and touched down on the lawns in front of the house. Joseph left the tower and went down to the main hall where the others were already gathered: Dieter, Sven, Kurt, Arnold, Hanna-Laura, Woody and Tom, GC, Hans-Joachim, Alice, Thomas, Magister Liu. The Nine, and the Paddington Green Seven: all of them except Sonja and Ingrid and the EPH who was currently deactivated.

Black clad figures bearing extremely serious small arms ran across the lawn. Joseph signalled to the others to stand behind him. Then with a crash the French doors were broken open and the armed men came in. For a moment they stood indecisive, bewildered by the lack of flight or resistance by the people in the hall.

Then the first man opened fire, aiming directly at Joseph.

One who embraces Tao  
will become pure and innocent  
like a newborn babe  
Deadly insects will not sting him  
Wild beasts will not attack him  
Birds of prey will not strike him

The bullets did not harm the Dragon Lord. His companions could not see if he stopped them, or simply was not there, when they passed through the space where he had stood. All they knew was that, when the short burst of firing stopped, he still stood.

"There is no need to shoot," said Joseph, and his voice held such a note of quiet yet powerful command, that the unit lowered their weapons. "We will come with you, quietly."

They submitted while their hands were none too gently handcuffed behind them and they were driven out of the house and into the waiting vans. Hoods were placed over their heads - "Don't be afraid," said Joseph to the others - and the vans set off at speed, with sirens sounding in front and behind.

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## TERRORISTS FOUND AND CAUGHT! MAJOR COUP FOR SECURITY FORCES

The Ministry of National Security announced today that the band of extremist terrorists who have been at large since last week, have been successfully apprehended. Following an intensive operation to find the whereabouts of the terrorists, who escaped from the high security unit at Paddington Green Police Station, and what is believed to have been information supplied by local informants, the fugitives were traced to a house in the Middle of Nowhere, Essex. A daring operation was launched by security forces, supported by armed response units from the local police, resulting in the arrest of thirteen suspects.

These are believed to be the seven who escaped from custody, and their accomplices who helped them escape.

The operation was a complete success, achieved with no casualties sustained by the security forces, and no injury to the terrorists. This is all the more surprising in view of the extreme danger represented by the terrorists. The Assistant Chief Constable of Essex told a press conference, "It's a mystery, almost a miracle, that the operation was completed so successfully. It's all down to brilliant leadership and the outstanding commitment and skill of our men. Because of that, these crazed criminals were taken totally by surprise and didn't even have time to pick up their weapons.

No weapons have in fact yet been found at the gang's hideout, though searches are continuing throughout the area. The terrorists have been taken to a secret location in London for further questioning. Police are still on high alert in case other members of the gang are still at large.

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THE SECRET LOCATION to which the arrested were taken, was the Dark Lord's tower on the south bank of the River Thames. Here the vans transporting them arrived in the middle of the night, driving into the underground car park, where the prisoners were led out and locked up in cells specially prepared since the Restitution, deep underground.

They were left for twelve hours without food or water, then taken separately for questioning. At this first stage, they were treated with relative courtesy and gentleness: What is your name? To what group do you belong? What are your aims and objectives? Who is your leader? Where are the other members of your group? But it was clear that there was a dark threat underlying the questions. Answer! Tell us what we want to hear, or we will find less pleasant ways to obtain the information we want.

But, as they had planned and prepared, none of them answered. It had been agreed that the Dragon Lord should be the only one to answer their questions. As he had advised and led them, so he would be the one who would speak for them all.

Joseph was taken to be questioned last of all, after Alice, trembling and on the verge of tears, had been locked back in her cell.

Handcuffed to a chair, he faced a man and woman across a plain wooden table. They looked nondescript, rather like people you would expect to see working in the boring inner office of any council building or ministry.

What is your name?

Joseph.

Joseph what?

Just Joseph.

To what group do you belong?

The Brotherhood.

What Brotherhood?

Just the Brotherhood.

What are your aims and objectives?

Peace. Unity. Understanding and cooperation between nations and peoples.

Who is your leader?

For the moment, I am the leader.

Where are the other members of your group?

I'm afraid I can't tell you.

The woman came from behind the table and sat on the edge of it, her lips pressed together like an angry teacher.

"The thing is, Mr Joseph, we think you are lying. We think you are an extremely dangerous man, some kind of religious or political extremist. We think you have come here to undermine the country, to overthrow the Government, to destroy all that has been achieved by the Restitution... To return this country to the moral chaos and confusion that existed before. What do you have to say to that?"

"Well, if that's what it takes to achieve our objectives - peace, unity, understanding, cooperation... You must be the judge of that."

The nondescript man came round the table and joined the woman facing Joseph.

"Really, Joseph, I do urge you to answer our questions and tell us just what we want to know. My colleague can get very impatient. She has some very efficient ways of inflicting pain, and believe me: she enjoys her job and is very good at it."

"Then, I am prepared to answer your questions. But I insist on giving my answers to the Lord Protector, and no one else."

"Not the right answer!"

And she began the work she enjoyed and was good at. Joseph withdrew inside the Tao. He was distantly aware of the damage being done to his body, and hoped it would recover without too much difficulty. But the pain was nothing more than a vague awareness of pressure, sharpness, contact being made again and again.

There was a momentary pause. He returned to his body. The woman was leaning back against the table, her face red and angry, sweat standing out on her skin, her hands trembling.

"What are your real aims and objectives? Which filthy foreign power are you working for? Where are the other members of your group?"

"I will answer. But only to the Lord Protector."

"Filth!" exclaimed the woman, stepping forward again.

And the telephone on the table rang. The woman stopped, her hand raised, and looked at her colleague, who picked up the phone and spoke into it. He listened for several seconds. Then,

"Yes, Lord. Whatever you say."

And so, Joseph was taken from the interrogation room, his hands still handcuffed behind him, led to the elevator, and transported to the very top floor of Marduk Tower. He was to meet the Dark Lord face to face.

## Chapter Twenty-Four The Dark Lord

A large, almost empty room, with windows to the ceiling that looked out to the north, east and west over the city of London. In front of the windows, a huge desk, with a number of phones, a pen and pad of paper, and a computer monitor on the polished desktop. Behind the desk, a wrinkled old man with an almost reptilian face. Sharp, jet black eyes that were full of hate pierced Joseph with their gaze.

The guards pushed Joseph down on a chair and stood in a half circle around and behind him, their weapons trained on him.

"You know I could crush you like a bug? Like the insignificant, disgusting maggot that you are. I could give an order to these men, and they would kill you without hesitation, without the smallest scintilla of doubt. What would happen then, to your sickening feeble plans for peace and unity and cooperation? Pah, you make me sick."

Joseph did not answer.

"You see, this is what sickens me about you people, you mealy-mouthed liberal idealists who witter on about peace and love and good will towards men. None of this matters! All that matters is Life, the Power to conquer death and overcome it. All the wealth and knowledge I have acquired, all the influence over politicians and governments and nations and the stupid small intelligences of the millions whose opinions I can sway first this way, then that, wherever I choose or please - it serves only one end. That I should conquer death. That I, Marduk, should live for ever!"

"You're wrong," said Joseph. "And because you are wrong, there is no way you can win, no way you can achieve what you desire."

Marduk's face darkened, the veins stood out on his temples and spittle flecked his lips. "We'll see about that." He picked up one of the phones, and barked into it, "Send in Mr Pockleburger."

"Mr Pockleburger is the Persuader," Marduk explained to Joseph, unnecessarily.

"We'll see," said Joseph.

Pockleburger, like the woman in the basement, did not look like the kind of persuasive sadist you are used to seeing in James Bond movies. No bulging muscles, iron fists, or steel-capped boots. Just a mind that had contemplated long and gleefully the subject of pain. And again, enjoyed its work.

The work began, and it lasted for some hours. And even though Joseph again withdrew inside the Tao, it did not entirely shut out all the pain.

Wait, he told himself. Though I can put an end to this at any time, by giving in, by seeming to give in, wait. It is no use to end it before the time is right, or all will be lost.

By the end of those hours, his clothes had been torn off and lay in a bloodied heap on the floor. His face and body, arms and legs, were covered with bruises and gashes, the marks of the devices that had been used on him. His left eye was swollen, half-closed.

Pockleburger no longer looked like a man who was enjoying his work. He was angry, frustrated that he had not extracted the screams, the pleas, the confessions or answers he was accustomed to. He had run out of ideas. He was tired. The master of pain had met his match.

Now was the time, thought Joseph. I will help this poor fellow not to lose face even more with his master. Just as the Persuader stepped closer for one more effort, Joseph said,

"Wait! Please... My mobile phone: it's got everything you want in it."

"Don't lie to me!" snapped Marduk. He had grown bored with being a spectator of what should, by rights, have been much worse and more interesting suffering. To pass the time he had made a few phone calls, gambled on a few international stock exchanges - though when he gambled, there was almost zero chance of losing - made a few million dollars. Just small change, really. He had spoken to his Head of Research and demanded progress towards the Elixir by the following day. Or else. He was getting angry.

"My best people have examined your bloody mobile. They found nothing. Stop stalling, or by God-!"

"No, it's encrypted with sixty-four digit encryption. Get them to bring it here and I'll show you."

It took only a minute for worried henchmen to bring the phone they had taken from Joseph when he was brought in. Marduk took it in his hand.

"Well? Quick!"

"It's got finger print security. Bring it here."

Even now, beaten though he was, his captors would not release the handcuffs. Pockleburger brought the phone round behind his back, turned it on, and pressed Joseph's thumb against the screen.

The familiar flicker of photons, and there stood Leibniz. "What the fuck?" cried Marduk. Pockleburger too leaped back, dropping the phone. The armed guards raised their guns, ready to fire on command.

Joseph said: "A maximum level force-field around me and Lord Marduk, if you please, Doctor."

Pockleburger and the guards hurled themselves towards him. Too late. The force field knocked them unconscious to the ground like trees before a tempest.

"The handcuffs, Doctor. Please."

Leibniz released Joseph's bonds, and the Dragon Lord stood up, rubbing his wrists and gingerly feeling a few of his bruises. Tao was wonderful, no doubt, but he had not yet mastered how to leave the body entirely. He guessed there would be some vestiges of discomfort remaining for quite some time.

He wrapped a robe around himself, that Leibniz had conjured from somewhere. A simple Chinese robe which made him look like a mandarin at the end of a long hard day.

"What is this?" screamed Marduk. Trying to pick up the phones - but they were all dead. "Don't you dare try -" He snatched open a drawer, pulled out a pistol, aimed it straight at Joseph with a hand that trembled and shook.



"Please don't try to fire that," said Joseph. "This force field is programmed to prevent any use of weapons inside it. Only, I'm not sure if that means, you won't be *able* to fire the gun, or if it means it will explode in your hand and possibly blow your head off."

Marduk threw the gun down. "What do you want? What are you going to do to me?"

"I'm sorry," said Joseph. "The Sage has no fixed heart of his own. Those who look at him see their own hearts."

He fixed Marduk with his eyes, forcing the Dark Lord to look at him, not allowing the little reptilian eyes to shift from him.

For minutes they looked deep into each others' eyes.

"What kind of man *are* you?" cried Marduk.

"The question is rather: What kind of man are *you*?"

Time stood still. While the City outside went about its business and evening drew on, while the ants' nest of Marduk Tower continued with its mindlessly purposeful activity, and no one dared approach the Dark Lord's office where he had ordered he was not to be disturbed, Joseph and Marduk looked each other in the eye.

And Marduk began to see his own heart. He had always thought he knew himself, knew his mind, knew exactly who he was, what he wanted, what he was capable of and would achieve. But he recoiled now, at what he saw of his heart: the feelings and the self that he had suppressed for almost a lifetime.

He saw the child he had been, so very long ago. A child dearly loved at first, yet who came to feel he was not loved as much or as well as he deserved to be. Who began to foster a deep rage against the world that denied him what he desired, and who resolved that he would have it, whatever the world might do to him.

At some moment during that eternity of timelessness, Marduk gasped and cried out to Joseph, "Why are you doing this to me? How are you doing this? Why are you my Enemy?"

"I am not your Enemy, Mr Marduk. There is no greater misfortune than feeling 'I have an enemy', for when 'I' and 'enemy' exist together there is no room left for my treasure. Thus, when two opponents meet, the one without an enemy will surely triumph."

"NO!!!"

But still he looked, unable to tear his eyes away from Joseph's. Still he saw not Joseph's heart, but his own. That child again, whose parents divorced bitterly, whose mother was killed in a horrifying accident of which he was a witness, whose father, stricken with remorse and guilt, refused to take him in because the new wife hated this child who reminded her daily of her predecessor. So he lived first with one pair of grandparents, then when they died, with the other. They all died.

Everyone the Child ever loved, died. He would never be happy, so long as Death was in the world.

As he grew, he killed the pain of his many losses by surrounding himself with the good things of life: money, success, beautiful women who would love him because of the money he possessed. All of it gave him Power; and power gave him the means to acquire more money, success, women, people who flattered and praised him and fell over themselves to do his bidding. Even politicians and leaders of business and industry could be influenced to frame national policies in ways that benefited his interests and enterprises, made him wealthier, more powerful. He acquired a media empire, with which he controlled the minds and opinions of millions of 'consumers' all over the world. They thought, believed, desired what he told them to.

As he looked at Joseph, however, all those achievements of which he had been so proud, the things he had come to take for granted because they were his due, that were part of the world he had created, the best of all possible worlds... He began to see the cost. To other people: the ones he had fired, or bankrupted, or driven to despair or even suicide. The nations that warred constantly, suffered plagues and famines and supposedly natural disasters, because of the exploitation he drove forward without cease. The millions of people driven from their homes, forced to become refugees, because of the fear and prejudice and xenophobia his media stirred up day after day. He began to see the cost, and he began to feel it because he saw Joseph's heart, that Joseph felt it.

He began to see the cost, not only to others but also to himself. He had become a husk of a man, a hollowed-out thing without compassion, almost without any natural human feeling except the greed and lust that drove him relentlessly. And the moment he knew this, there was a seed of compassion sowed somewhere deep in the soil of his being. He gasped again. It hurt, it hurt so much: how could people *bear* this? Much better trample on it, crush its life from it, before it could grow. But he was no longer able to do that simple thing.

All those years when he had no longer had any human enemies, for those he acknowledged as enemies were long ago defeated, and the many who merely hated or feared him, were of no consequence. Only one Enemy remained, the same Enemy he had always known and contended with. For at least the last forty years, his whole desire had been to find the weapon that would destroy Death. Not for all humanity: he knew that would be a vain hope. What, in any case, would be the point of *everyone* living for ever? One man alone would possess immortality.

Yet now, as he saw more and more of Joseph's heart, he saw too what all this had done to him. The havoc and ruin it had made of what was once a man. And it was all to no end. Even if it were possible - and suddenly the doubt that he repressed so ruthlessly burst out all over again - even if it were possible, it would turn to ashes in his soul. Life that never ended, that *could* not end, would be a prize that took all value out of everything else in the world. Only mortality, he saw, makes anything beautiful.

And as he saw, he began to weep. He had not allowed himself to shed tears, since the last of his grandparents died and he had vowed that no such weakness would ever cause him pain again. He wept. The tears ran down his wrinkled cheeks and dripped onto his shirtfront, and his frail old body shook with sobs, like a rag doll being worried by a hunting dog.

Joseph said nothing, and let the Lord Marduk weep on, until his tear ducts ran dry. There was no moisture left in the dried-up old man's body.

Then, "I think it is enough?" Joseph asked.

"No more, please! But what am I to *do*?"

"Don't be afraid: we will help you. There is much that remains to be done; but if you will come with me, we will find a safe place for you, and I will help you decide what you will do."

## Chapter Twenty-Five The Jade Empress

### LORD PROTECTOR DISAPPEARS!

PanGlobal Media Corp confirmed today that their proprietor Lord Marduk has not been seen since leaving his South Bank office four days ago. Marduk left the building in company with an unknown white male, with a heavily bruised face, who appeared to be wearing Chinese dress. After giving instructions to his staff that he would let them know his whereabouts in due course, Marduk apparently ordered one of his cars and drove off with his companion in the direction of Westminster.

The car stopped in Whitehall where Marduk told his chauffeur to deliver a package to 10, Downing Street. While he was doing this, the other man got into the driver's seat and the vehicle drove off at high speed in the direction of Trafalgar Square, and has not been seen since.

Police and security forces have been conducting a nationwide search for the missing car. The Prime Minister, Sir Michael Grove, insisted that although the Lord Protector was an indispensable part of the Government of Great-Again Britain, his temporary absence was not a national emergency. The business of Government was continuing as before, and there was no need to panic.

The FTSE index fell by 18% at the opening of trading, but recovered slightly by the close.

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IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, they all gathered to welcome the Empress Elect. Joseph had arrived in the small hours of the morning with his passenger fast asleep in the back of the car, after the emotional tsunami he had undergone in his room in the Dark Tower. They had both then slept for almost twenty-four hours. The others who had also been detained arrived soon afterwards. They had been released on Marduk's instructions, just before he left the building, and had been given two vehicles in which they drove themselves to the rendezvous.

Sonja and Ingrid came, with Jade and her son, on the following morning, when everyone in the

house had rested, washed away the dirt and some of the fear of their ordeal, dressed and eaten. Marduk was still in his room, eating his breakfast. The others were all gathered in the hall, standing, as Sonja opened the door and Jade Clarke walked in. They knelt as one.

"Oh God, I mean, oh Goodness, I can't get used to this. There's no need for this all the time, I'm not your Empress - yet, I don't think. Please get up. I mean, please sit down."

They did sit - after she had taken her seat - and waited for her to speak again.

"I want to thank you for all you've done," she said at last. "You have given me so much, these past days; helped me to understand so much, though part of me still does not believe it. I know I was expecting Something to happen: Magister Liu tells me it was the Crown seeking me, that gave me that feeling; but I never had any idea of anything like this. My heart is still full of wonder, and yes, also of fear. It is an awful charge you have laid upon me, I begin to see that. But with your aid, I will be true. I will do what is required of me, so that this dream of an Empire may be realised.

"I used to think 'Empire' was a bad word, that there must always be abuse of power, exploitation of those who lived under it, by those who ruled. But you have helped me to see that there is a different way. The Empire you serve, and which you tell me I am chosen to serve, is an Empire of peace, justice, equality, in which all people and all peoples may thrive and prosper. Help me to rise to this calling, my friends. I look to you to be my counsellors and helpers as we build this new Empire that shall be a blessing to the whole human race."

They smiled upon her, and loved her. Even those who had been most doubtful, who had questioned how this young woman, living in a despised part of a despised island, could possibly be the True Heir, were beginning to believe. She had not lost her Essex accent - indeed, she never would - but she was beginning to speak like the Heir to an Empire. The Crown of Charlemagne was beginning to work its work, so that its wearer would rise to the virtue that had been instilled at its forging.

Joseph, the Dragon Lord, stepped forward at Jade's request to outline the next steps to be taken. There was much to be done, but it could not be done until the time was right, until all was in harmony with Tao. How would they know when that time came? He would watch, and wait, and tell them. In the mean time, they must continue to instruct the Empress Who Was To Come; help her in her studies of the international language that would be the shared tongue of her dominions; teach her some of the Empire's history, so that she would know to avoid its failures and emulate its successes.

Voltaire had scoffed at the Empire, that it was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an Empire. The Karlsbruderschaft would do all within their power to ensure that it would be all three. Holy: it would be dedicated to the service and obedience of the God of all people. Roman: it would maintain the heritage of the Faith that Rome had preserved - though it had done so with many errors and abuses which they would seek to avoid - but also the older heritage of the rule of law, and a government of the whole known world that should ensure peace. *Pax Romana* had always been a short-sighted and vain boast: in the whole history of Rome there had been only a handful of years

when the doors of the Temple of Janus had been closed to symbolise there was no war. But in the restored Empire, that would become reality. And an Empire: all the nations it included would preserve their own identity and customs, and laws so long as they were in accord with the laws of virtue, but would also be subject to the just and gentle rule of the Empress, under God.

At first, the membership of the Bruderschaft could not see in what way the Dragon Lord was watching and waiting for the time of harmony. He spent much of his time with Marduk, talking with him, but mostly just sitting in silence as they looked at one another, and Marduk came to see more and more of the heart of the Sage.

At last a day came when he said to Joseph, "I think it is time for me to do what must be done. I know it was a terrible mistake, to think that I could avoid death for a few years, let alone forever. I am sorry for all the harm I did in pursuing that end, and I will do everything I can to make amends for that harm. When I have done all that I can, I will be ready to die. If you will help me."

Then, Marduk began to put in motion the changes to his empire and wealth, which would cause such excitement and confusion among the nations. He first of all liquidated his vast media empire, which was the heartbeat of all he had been and done. He sold such parts of it as could be sold, but with the proviso that no part of the media he had owned would be allowed to continue the editorial policy he had imposed upon it. Instead of the lies and demagoguery that had been their hallmark, there was to be a dedication to truth, and the fostering of all that was good. No more blind pursuit of profit, temptation to lust or greed or rank consumerism, or whipping-up of prejudice and hostility towards anyone who was different or foreign. Instead the watchword was to be that of St Paul: Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

No one should lose their livelihood, just because there was no longer a job for them in the businesses that ceased to exist. Generous redundancy payments were put in place, and pension provision for those who were nearing the end of their working life. The whole of Marduk's research and development establishments, whose efforts had been directed solely towards his personal immortality, were redirected towards improving the health and well-being of the world's poorest people. It would be a trivial thing, with the vast resources of those departments, to provide clean drinking water and decent sanitation for the whole of Africa and India. With what was left over, they would provide free HIV/AIDS medicine wherever it was needed. Then the major causes of death in childhood: ante- and perinatal complications, pneumonia, diarrhoea and malaria - most of these linked to malnutrition - so that fighting hunger in the developing world was also a major area for research.

All of this, and all that remained after adequate (but not excessive) provision was made for his dependents, was to be devoted to charitable causes. A foundation was set up, to be called the St Benedict Foundation - Marduk was fully determined it would not be called anything that would identify it with himself - whose trustees would be chosen from among the leading monks and religious of the world's major religions.

The work involved to do all of this would take years. But from the moment it began to be done, it sent shock waves through the worlds of media, broadcasting and finance. Stock markets were shaken, and governments fell, including the Government of Great-Again Britain. Reeling under the shock, Prime Minister Grove resigned. The King declared a state of national emergency, and summoned a true Constitutional Assembly to produce the first written Constitution the island had ever known. The Provisional Government, under the direction of the Privy Council, would be headed by the author of the Harry Potter children's stories, J. K. Rowling. Several European Governments, weakened by Britain's disastrous withdrawal from the Union, were also shaken to the core as extremist political groups vied with the traditional political parties for power.

But before all this, when only the first seeds were being sown by Marduk's change of heart, the Dragon Lord had gathered the Bruderschaft together and told them, "The time of non-action is past. Now is the time for us to act."

He repeated the instructions which he had worked out together with his two closest advisers, Magister Liu and the Leibniz Hologram. The Seven would remain at the house to help Marduk as he continued with his work. Meanwhile, the Nine, together with Jade and Leo, would travel to Strasbourg to issue the Imperial Proclamation and Invitation. It would be as momentous as the moment when an obscure 34-year-old German Augustinian monk named Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to a church door in Wittenberg. But Joseph was convinced its repercussions would be heard even more quickly than those of Luther's challenge to the powers-that-be, because the technology, the means of disseminating news and information, were now those of the Internet age.

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT was in full session when Jade and her retinue entered the Parliament Building. There then occurred a series of unimaginable, unheard-of events, which those who witnessed them would recount to their children and grandchildren with the pride of those who can say, "You would not have believed it. But I was there."

The doors of the Assembly chamber were thrown open. Security guards stepped forward to prevent the party from entering, but Joseph and Liu brushed them aside with a look and a gesture, and led their party to the platform at the front of the chamber. They climbed the steps and formed a line in front of the officials' desks. The President leaped up to protest, but Joseph gave her a look which cut off the words in her mouth. Instead of the words of protest, challenge and rebuke she had framed to speak, she found herself saying, "Mr - er?"

"Joseph Knecht."

"Mr Joseph Knecht, you may address the Parliament."

"I thank you, Madam President."

He turned to face the astonished MEPs, and raised his hand in the ancient gesture of the Roman orator, preparing to speak.

"Madam President, elected representatives of the nations of Europe. You do not need me to tell

you that there is a sickness abroad in our world. The nations of the world are desperately diseased; there have been many who have told us that our civilisation is in terminal decline, the descent into barbarism is inevitable. Many who have stood in this very chamber and promised nostrums that would heal this sickness, were driven by insane ideas of power, force and glory. They promised that nations would be great again, if they would build walls around themselves, if they would exclude foreigners, aliens, strangers, all who were different or threatening. They have brought us, as such people always do, to the brink of war: so far we have not passed that brink. They have been judged insane. Perhaps you will call me insane, too. But I bring you something they cannot bring, something that is Old as well as New. Where they speak of Power, I propose Gentleness. Where they speak of Strength, I propose Weakness. Where they speak of Fear or Hatred, I propose Love. Where they speak of the Pride and Might of Nations, I propose Humility. Where they speak of Wealth, and economic growth which leads only to poverty and inequality, I propose Commonwealth in which all may share. Where they speak of Freedom and mean licence instead, or a false freedom for a citizenry whose lives and opinions are manipulated by wealthy oligarchs, I propose the perfect Freedom that comes from Service of what is Right. Where they speak only Falsehood and Evil, I propose all that is Good and Just and True.

"There has been a Union in Europe, since the Second World War, which for long we thought was our last best hope of peace and prosperity. Now it is being torn apart by those who are enemies of peace, who are even seeking to make it tear itself apart. But there was an older union, which for centuries, flawed though it was in every way that human beings can be, sought nevertheless, when it was true to its founding ideals, to create a peaceful union of peoples and nations. We declare to you this day, that that ancient yet new Union is restored. We are a Brotherhood who stand for its highest values and pledge our lives to ensure that those values shall reign in the councils of the nations. They are embodied here..."

He turned to Sonja, and taking from her the object she was holding out to him, raised it high above his head.

"Behold, the Crown of Charlemagne!"

A wave of noise filled the chamber: astonishment, questions, protests, some laughter and ridicule. Some of the members left their seats and pressed forward to see more closely what was happening at the front of the hall, others pushing against them in an effort to leave the chamber, others calling for the President to put a stop to this, to call security to throw these intruders outside.

Joseph ignored them all, turned to Jade Clarke of Basildon in Essex, raised the Crown high and placed it reverently on her head. "And behold the True Heir of Charlemagne: the Empress Jade!"

## Chapter Twenty-Six The Empire begins to gather

News media, radio, television, online and social media, carried the news within seconds to every part of the world. Jade and the others were mobbed by reporters as they left the Parliament Building to get into their cars and drive to their hotel. Joseph gave the briefest of press conferences,

as photographers tried to push forward and take pictures of this bizarre group of political activists, and especially of the young woman who had just been declared Empress - of what? The Holy Roman Empire? All over the world news editors and members of the general public were frantically googling, and skimming through long articles on Wikipedia. None of it seemed to make any sense.

But in the following days, as Joseph and Jade were interviewed again and again, their faces and words beamed across a fascinated world, opinion began to be formed. There were of course many, chiefly those who had the strongest vested interests in the status quo, who branded them as insane. Dangerous criminals, potential terrorists, anarchists or worse, who should be locked up before they could do any real harm, and the key thrown away. This chorus was much less than it would have been, had Marduk's news empire with its old editorial policy still been functioning. Without doubt those newspapers and networks would have led the hue and cry against them. Since they had fallen silent, there were fewer places where that hysterical outcry could be heard.

Others were more reflective. These were the commentators who agreed that there were serious problems in the way the nations had come to govern themselves, and to manage their dealings with their neighbours. Democracy had become dangerously sick - many said it was even dead, sacrificed on the altar of Mammon. Where Truth also had been slain, and popular education no longer taught people to think for themselves and discern what was true and false, how could Democracy not also fall victim. No doubt heroic measures were needed, to try and reanimate that which had been slain. But could those measures possibly include the reviving of anything as ancient, strange and foreign as this thing that was being called the Holy Roman Empire?

Yet, that Crown, the image of which had become an icon instantly recognizable anywhere in the world, had a strange compulsion. It was a true icon, because no one could look at it without their heart-and-mind being moved. Those who hated the good, found the image repellent, they longed to see the Crown ground under foot, destroyed. Those who were lovers of what was true and good felt themselves moved, drawn towards it with fascination, and a desire to see the triumph of what it stood for. These were the third class of witnesses to the events of those days, the ones who were immediately thrilled and won over by the Proclamation and Invitation to be part of that new movement.

After the Brexit vote, there had been a petition demanding that those British citizens who had wished to Remain part of the European Union, should be allowed to apply for European citizenship. It was of course a pipe-dream: how could anyone be a citizen, where they were not a taxpayer? The new Empire was different. It had no territory as yet, no Government or economy. Therefore it invited and encouraged people, organizations, institutions - yes, and nations and governments - to align with it, to affiliate, to declare that as far as possible and as soon as possible, they would become members of the Empire.

The first geographically identifiable place to do so, was the little-known region of Neutral Moresnet. Not really a place at all, it was a tiny splinter of land in Belgium. From 1816 to 1920 it had existed as a condominium of Belgium and Prussia, because as Europe shook itself free of the nightmare of the Napoleonic tyranny, those two countries could not agree about who would own the valuable zinc



spar mine of Altenberg. It had been of interest to Esperantists before and after the Great War, because they had hoped to establish there an Esperanto-speaking state called *Amikejo*: Friendship Place. After the Proclamation and Invitation in Strasbourg, the mayor of Kelmis, the principal township in what had been Moresnet, responded to the Invitation and formally requested to submit to the Empress Jade.

He had, of course, no mandate to do so. In any case, the position of Mayor of Kelmis was honorary rather than functional or political. But he was an idealist, an Esperantist, a dreamer, an enthusiast for the Matter of Europe, with its legends of Charlemagne and the heroic deeds of his paladins. His heart-and-mind were stirred by the events unfolding in Strasbourg. He 'applied' to the Empire on behalf of his municipality.

It made the news. First in Belgium, then further afield.

*TINY FORMER CONDOMINIUM SEEKS TO JOIN 'HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE'!* read the headlines.

In the febrile political climate of those days, when Belgium was the first European country to hold a general election after the declaration of the Empire, the campaigning shifted and changed its emphasis over the days, and eventually coalesced into a campaign in which a coalition for making Belgium the first state to join the Empire won a narrow majority in Parliament.

The political systems of Europe were shaken. Some of the more right-wing governments proposed declaring war on Belgium to compel them not to take this step, but wiser councils prevailed, and during the next few months other institutions and governments followed suit. The Netherlands, Slovakia, Scotland - which had never been part of the ancient Empire, but was still smarting under its mistreatment within the United Kingdom, since it had been prevented from leaving the Union and remaining part of Europe. The greatest coup of all came when the Bundestag voted to become a core member-state of the Empire. The Government fell, there was a brief campaign in which the single main issue was the Empire, and a new pro-Empire Government was voted into office. The memory and legacy of Karl der Grosse, so often claimed by both Germany and France, had triumphed.

This was the moment when the Dragon Lord judged that it was time for the Jade Empress to be crowned, in the place where every Holy Roman Emperor should be crowned: the final resting place of Charlemagne, the Cathedral of Aachen. On the first day of the New Year, Jade took her place upon the ancient throne, where the Archbishop of Cologne, the Bishop of Aachen, other representatives of the Roman and Lutheran churches, gathered around as the Dragon Lord again placed the Crown upon her head.

To fanfares of trumpets, anthems from the choir and the cheers of the congregation, the Empress stood and pledged solemnly to uphold all that she intended would become the traditional values of her Empire, a model and an inspiration for all nations, a union that would help bring peace to all the world.

# Chapter Twenty-Seven The Years of Gold

France stood out for almost the longest time, suspicious of the Empire in spite of its own national origins in the great Frankish hero Charlemagne. Germany was followed into the imperial fold by Slovakia, Czechia, Denmark and the rest of Scandinavia, Austria and Hungary, Poland and the Baltic States, Italy, Spain and Portugal.

Those early years of the Jade Empress's reign came to be known in history as the Seven Years of Gold. The Dragon Lord and his closest helpers spent many days, weeks, months, speaking with the leaders of society, and the shapers of public opinion, about what the Empire would stand for. The values of the Empire would be those of the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth: not necessarily those of the megalithic Church which had grown up in his name. They would also be the values of the Tao, than which nothing is greater, nothing more empty.

How did the Dragon Lord become such a charismatic and influential leader, teacher, adviser and mentor to those who were said to have worldly power?

The Sage lives in harmony with all below Heaven  
He sees everything as his own self  
He loves everyone as his own child  
All people are drawn to him  
every eye and ear is turned toward him

*Tao Te Ching, 49*

One of the Empire's first resolves was to create a just and equal society, instead of the inequalities which had been the inevitable outcome of the existing systems of finance and economics. Yet they had no desire to bring about their reforms by force or by legislation, only by persuasion, so that everyone would see the rightness and justice of them.

So, the Dragon Lord worked with the wealthiest in society, and though a few remained for a time obdurate, most readily embraced the reforms when they saw how greatly they increased the general wealth, health and happiness of the communities and countries where they were implemented.

The basic principle was that there was such an abundance of wealth under Heaven, that there was more than enough for everyone to prosper, provided that the wealth was able to find its natural level, becoming available to all. So, there would be voluntary restrictions on income: no one's skills and labour should be considered of so much greater worth than that of others, that they needed to be paid any more than 5 times the average income of workers.

Of the wealth that still remained in private hands, none should remain idle. All would be used to employ workers, or provide a living income for those who for whatever reason were incapable of

working. Unemployment became a thing of the past, as did homelessness when the owners of property voluntarily relinquished what they did not require for their own living needs, so that others could be housed. When work became something which was less inequitably rewarded than under the old system, there was far greater incentive for all to work. Work became more valued, more creative as people became less regimented in the workplace, more at liberty to choose to work in ways that suited their aptitudes.

Charity also blossomed in even more ways, as other men and women of extraordinary wealth began to follow where Marduk had led the way, establishing foundations and trusts that worked for good throughout the world. As the Empire's influence spread through Africa, the Americas, the Middle East and South Asia, so corruption dwindled in those places where it had long been endemic. Overseas aid from the wealthier countries began to reach the places that needed it, instead of disappearing into the secret Swiss bank accounts of tyrants or dictators. Poverty and disease became less rife, the need for war to control discontented populations became less. Fewer people were forced to become refugees to flee from poverty, war or persecution.

Many of the great European nations came to see that, now that they were under the blessed aegis of Empire, there was no need for them to preserve the national unity that had been a guarantee of strength, in the face of the different ethnic or linguistic groups they contained. The first of these groups to attain autonomy was Catalonia. They were followed by Navarre, Occitania, Brittany, Normandy, Burgundy, Prussia, Bavaria, Moravia, Wallonia, Flanders, Alsace, Savoy, Venice, Sicily. In several of these states, defunct ruling houses were discovered and revived, so that a wave of constitutional monarchies was restored, each of the new titled rulers swearing their allegiance to the Jade Empress. All of them experienced a new blossoming of their local cultures and costumes, and where their minority languages had been suppressed in favour of the official state language, these too experienced revival. Where Castilian, or French, or German, or Russian, had been the grudgingly accepted or even hated language of an oppressor, now the ideals of linguistic diversity and equality prevailed. People throughout the Empire spoke their preferred heart-languages, and the sole *lingua franca* that was used for international communication within the Empire, was Dr Zamenhof's *lingua internacia*: Esperanto.

The nations of the British Isles, though they had lost the absurd 'Great-Again' prefix, remained for a long time politically separated from the continent. They suffered turmoil, economic stagnation, and for a time near-anarchy, in the wake of the Changes that were taking place on the continent, all except Scotland which had chosen to join the Empire, and appointed James Stuart as their King, James VII of Scotland.

Then, in what seemed like a rush of new nation-forming, both the northern and southern parts of Ireland voted to become reunited. Wales chose autonomy under the rule of Owain Glyndŵr II. The nonsense of England was finally dissolved in the six new English nations of Northumbria, Mercia, Anglia, Wessex, Kent, and Cornwall. Order was restored, and these nations one by one sued to join the Empire. The Jade Empress travelled back to the island for the first time since she had left with the Karlsbruderschaft years earlier, and at a Solemn Mass in Chelmsford Cathedral, she received the vows and promises of the leaders of the English nations. They and their successors pledged

their allegiance to the Holy Roman Empire, and swore that their people would be governed in perpetuity according to the Code of Aachen.

In those seven years, the Empire became the greatest power for peace with both justice and liberty, that the world had ever seen.

## Chapter Twenty-Eight And After

Lao Tzu says:

One who gives himself to position  
surely lives long  
One who gives himself to Tao  
surely lives forever

The Dragon Lord lived well, and simply, his life filled with purpose, joy and deep gratitude. He lived long. But the Sage knows that 'living forever' may not be the never-ending bodily existence that the Dark Lord Marduk had so long desired. Joseph did not desire death, but neither did he fear it.

A day came when he knew the time had come for the next stage of his earthly way, his pilgrimage, as he had once thought of it. He set out from the Jade Empress's palace in Aachen, taking with him only his staff, his backpack with its two slim, now well-loved and well-read, volumes (leaving the thicker volume behind), and his mobile phone with the Leibniz Hologram to guide him. Through all the years, and especially after Master Liu too had died, Leibniz had remained his principal friend, confidant and guide.

He told no one where he was going, left only a package to be opened in the event of his death being reported and known, and walked off in the direction of the rising sun. He had thought when he first left home, those few months after Hildegard's death, that his way would lead him eventually to her Lithuanian birthplace. Sometimes, in the intervening years, it was as if he had forgotten that plan. Now the promise he had half made to himself, that he would one day go back to where she had come from, perhaps because it might bring some resolution to her story, some healing for his own grief, would be fulfilled.

Walking at a steady 25 kilometres a day, he walked across Germany, taking the time to reflect, to meditate, to pray as he walked, turning over in his mind the sacred words of the two slim volumes he carried, which he almost knew by heart. He met people on the way, walked and talked and ate with some, and blessed them all. Some of them recognised him from his appearances on TV in company with the Jade Empress; most did not; but there was hardly one who did not remember in later years "that man we met who was walking across Germany", and who had given each of them some special word of encouragement, praise, or direction.

His first destination was Bialystok in Poland, the birthplace of one of the men who had made him

what he was: Ludvik Ljezer Zamenhof. It was there that the young Jewish originator of Esperanto was born in 1859, the same year that saw the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*. But not for Zamenhof, the comfortable, peaceful, middle-class English life that Darwin enjoyed. Four different ethnic and linguistic groups populated the town at that time, under the oppressive rule of Tsarist Russia. Russians, Poles, Germans, and Yiddish-speaking Jews. The four groups were often at odds with each other, but three of them at least were united by the one thing they held in common: their hatred of the Jews. In the wider world this could lead to violence and outright persecution of the form of pogroms. In the local community, it was a daily cause of friction, intolerance, and minor acts of vandalism or discrimination. The teenaged Zamenhof was convinced that the major cause of the difficulties was simply the failure to understand each other. If only they could communicate with true understanding, he believed, most of the divisions and hatreds could be overcome. As it was, even if the subject peoples learned Russian, they would be disadvantaged in comparison with the native Russian speakers.

He experimented with inventing his own language, one that would be simple enough even for ordinary people to learn well enough to communicate in it. He worked on his invention for twenty years, before he thought it was sufficiently developed to present it to the world at large. And the rest is history, Joseph had sometimes said when telling the story. Though it was a long and complex and fascinating history, not least because Zamenhof had taken the extraordinary, and humble decision, to let go of his beloved baby. Instead of needing to control its development, and to be the continuing arbiter of its development, he was content to establish the very basic foundations and get his fellow-Esperantists to agree that this much at least should never be changed. And then to relinquish control, so that the speakers and users of the language were able to develop it in the ways that any living language develops.

Kaj, Esperanto estas vivanta lingvo!

It was Joseph's first visit to Bialystok, the largest city in northeastern Poland and the capital of the Podlaskie Voivodeship, so he decided to do the regular tourist thing. He took the city's Esperanto Trail, visiting the site on Bialystok Street, where the wooden house had stood in which Zamenhof was born; the park between Malmeda and Bialowny Street, where the imposing monument with the bust of Zamenhof stood, looking like some Old Testament prophet immortalised in stone. The Trail ended at the Ludwik Zamenhof Centre at 19 Warszawska Street, where there were permanent displays about Zamenhof's life, and a library of Esperanto books. All of this had grown in importance, and several extensions had been built, since Esperanto had become to medium of communication between the different language groups of the Empire.

From the Centre, Joseph dropped out of tourist mode into that of the pilgrim. He returned to Ludvik Zamenhof Square, and spent some time sitting on a bench contemplating the bust on top of the monument. Then he placed a flower at the foot of the plinth, and a pebble he had brought from outside the Cathedral at Aachen.

He lingered two days in Bialystok before he realised that he was putting off the last part of his journey, without fully knowing why. Then he checked out of his hotel and set off on the last part of

his long walk, to Birštonas in neighbouring Lithuania. It took him a week to walk those final 212 kilometres, and each day the distance seemed longer, his feet and his pack heavier. So he knew that his time in the city would be heavy with meaning.

And yet, when he came into its streets and began to look for signs of Hildegard, or to try to find any of her family or relatives who remained, he found no one. He asked in the hotels, the inns, the cafes, the libraries, the schools, and the town hall. No one seemed to have even heard of the Grinius family, who had emigrated to the United States just before the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, and whose daughter Hildegard had married an Englishman. No one knew if any aunts or uncles or cousins remained in Birštonas. It was a town in which there had always been a lively Esperanto speaking community, back when it was a small and relatively easy way to carry out some subversive act against Soviet oppression. It almost seemed as if, now that the language had become so important a means of communication in all the countries of the Empire, some of that old interest in it had atrophied. Joseph smiled grimly at the vicissitudes of the Changes.

Had his long walk been for nothing? Or had the whole idea of visiting Hildegard's hometown, in search of some knowledge or resolution, been just a mistake?

On the third day he found his way to the St Nicholas Evangelical Lutheran Church, a small, hardly visible building on the edge of the town. Joseph vaguely remembered Hildegard telling him, many many years before, that she had been baptised in the local Lutheran church, in this town where the majority of the population were Roman Catholics.

He found the church door unlocked, and went inside into the dark interior, that smelled of dust and wood polish. He sat down on a chair somewhere near the font, and composed himself for a time of quiet thought.

When he opened his eyes, he saw a young woman sitting a few rows in front of him. He could see at once that it was Hildegard: not as he had last seen her in the church in Herrnhut, but as he had first seen her, in life, at the Esperanto Congress in Belgrade. She was as beautiful to him now as she had been all those years before.

She turned and smiled at him. "So you've come. I knew you would."

"Yes, I promised myself that, after you left... After you..."

"After I *died*, Joseph. Let's not pretend."

They sat for some minutes in silence, looking at each other, then as if by agreement they stood and moved closer, almost touching.

"This way you have come," she asked, "ĉi tiu vojo, kiu estis via kaj mia vojo... kio vi pensas pri ĝin?"

"What do I think of it? It is the Way. I thought it was I who had to find the Way, after you died. But you were right - you were always right: this Way found me."

"And you have walked it, to the end. Or at least, to this end."

"I have walked it."

"Is it well?"

"It is the Way."

"I think you have become a man of fewer words. That's good. But this I have wondered: have you been true, Joseph?"

"What do you mean?"

"When I died, you often said of me that I loved Truth above all things. That we were always honest with each other, we had no secrets, there was no Lie. And when you went in search of the Tao, you were driven by that desire for truth. Tao is all things, but I do not think it can sit well with falsehood. So, Joseph, have you indeed been true?"

The question stung him like the slap of a wet switch. He went into himself, looking as deep as he could within his heart-and-mind, into the Tao that was in him. In that place had grown a wondrous pearl, a pearl of greatest price for him and for the world. The pearl that was the Empire: a path to a society of peace, justice, freedom, equality, prosperity for all; the way to build an international community which, if it had the will and the strength to continue, might promise years, generations, centuries of peace and blessing for humanity.

Deeper still he looked, into the heart of the Pearl itself. Was it true that every pearl was formed around some minute grain of grit in the oyster's flesh? What grit had been the seed of this Pearl?

And then he knew.

"For you - for us, Hildegard - I have tried to be true. Indeed, I had thought I *was* true. But what mortal man can be true and nothing but true?"

"Tell me."

"When you died... when you died, I let everyone think that our marriage, our life together, our love for one another, were all perfect. It was easy for them to believe, and it was what I was happy for them to believe; it was what I wanted to believe myself. It was not a big lie. I don't believe it did much harm. But, it was not true."

"And the truth is?"

"We loved as well as we could. We were damaged, as all people are, by our genes, by our upbringing, by the damage our parents and nurturers had suffered in turn, by the hurts others inflicted upon us, and the hurts we inflicted on ourselves. But perfect? Doesn't Story tell us that the most perfect loves that have ever been, have been the worst disasters? Tristan and Isolde, Lancelot and Guinevere, Romeo and Juliet? Thank God, our love was not perfect. We were neither of us the

lover, the husband or the wife, we wanted to be or to have. But we were good enough. We loved well enough."

Hildegard leaned towards him, and her lips gently touched his in the softest, sweetest of kisses. "Good. It is when you know that, that you can at last grieve so that your grief will heal, not harm. It was, indeed, a Lie, a little Lie, that you held in your heart for so long. But sometimes we are allowed to hold on to the Lie. For look: what a Pearl that grit made grow!"

She turned and gestured towards the sanctuary, where, as if projected on an invisible screen, he saw the forms of their children, and grandchildren, and now great-grandchildren. They were individuals and families like so many others, with all the joys and struggles and trials and triumphs that everyone else knew. But they were *their* seed, the fruit of their love. And, because Joseph's Way had led through the brink of chaos and disaster to the Empire of hope that he had helped build, there was the chance that their generations would know a peace that the world had never seen in all its history.

"Look!" said Hildegard. "Rigardu çion, kio ni faris! Look what we made."

They looked, and there were tears in both their eyes, his and hers.

After a long time, she said. "It is time, now. No?"

He nodded, and took her hand, and she led him towards the sanctuary, and within. There was a small door in the side wall, and through this they walked together.

If you had tried to follow them, you would have found it like the door in the church in Herrnhut. Locked.

## Acknowledgements

How could anyone write before the Internet? This fiction would not have been possible if I had not been able to carry out instant research, and get instant answers to my questions, from Google. I was able to plan Joseph's journeys with the help of Google Maps, and even visit cities and places I have never been, popping into Streetview and describing what I could see there.

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Inspiration and creativity are shameless magpies. Attentive readers will no doubt spot many other things lost, borrowed, stolen or strayed on their Path through this tale.