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# Back to the Garden

## a frame of mind

Lying somewhere within a quarter of a mile from the coast of mainland Britain lies a granite island outcrop, separated by nature from the mainland for several millennia yet still connected by an ancient stone causeway. The island is a place apart, peaceful and unspoiled.

Unexpected evidence of late Neolithic communities have been uncovered on the island which indicate the inhabitants lived comfortable lives and enjoyed basic material wealth due mainly to creative and practical textile skills that rivalled anything across Europe. The islanders were sailors and farmers and it is highly probable that even in ancient times, all the earliest technical discoveries were the work of these seafaring people who were rather independent, having their own culture, who knew the world was round and who had great navigators. It was from these people these came such devices as the hoist and the crane, and that the first real houses had been overturned boats.

Trading brought the cross-fertilization of different civilisations and different cultures, and it was manifestly the result of sea-going that developed the necessary machinery for such maritime exchange. After all, they were dependent on technology developed by human beings and were the result of a very high form of applied intelligence since sailing is a direct example of mankind and nature in co-operation.

The islanders produced delicate fabrics made from processed natural plant fibres which were similar to modern cloth and once again, it was their connection with the sea that helped them develop trading which in turn enabled the island to connect with exchange routes that stretched across Europe as far as the Baltic, Africa and Asia and as a result this meant that whatever they could not make, they they could acquire.

They used sophisticated farming methods and remnants of metal tools such as

sickles, socket axes, leaf-shaped arrow heads and spear heads; pottery shards, woven goods, textiles, fishing nets as well as jewellery, necklaces, glass beads and even beads made from ostrich eggs have been unearthed by villagers. Gradually, complex, systematic ideas were developed which slowly transferred their struggling world into one of peaceful co-operation..

The present population approximates five hundred islanders living in gatherings of stone built roundhouses, each with a central hearth, slate or thatched roof, drainage and their own individual well. The main village thoroughfare is under ten yards wide and with the village being on a natural slope, unwanted water drains away with ease. To this day, families often encourage a natural shrubbery garden with flowers, vegetable and fruit cages. Some islanders live a little away from the village, in homes sprinkled about the shoulders of the slopes overlooking their mother, the sea, and like those who live in the village, they eat well on a trustworthy diet of vegetables, fish, fruit, oatmeal and a moderate glass or two of local red wine and in the main, are healthy and relaxed.

During the mornings islanders like to stroll along the waterfront mingling with the fishermen mending their nets and unloading their catches, sometimes they pause for a coffee, or perhaps buy fresh-from-the-oven bread, enjoying a breakfast then letting the day unfold. No one wears a watch, and most clocks are either fast or slow, or ignored. They enjoy a slower pace of life which allows them to linger over and savor family activities, long meals and small pleasures. The islanders love food, and they love gathering with family, friends and community members. So naturally, it's their tradition to bring people together for healthy meals, 'Eating dissolves the separation between strangers'. This is the island way, as it is with the family, to feed people, to show love and attention through dishes like Stargazey Pie and Squab Pie. At the table, the mother mends old differences and makes new friends. She reminds her family that excluding anyone is simply denying yourself an opportunity to grow, and to live.

They firmly believe in afternoon naps, an evening stroll through the village or along the seashore with an open door hospitality offering a meal and a bed to visitors. Over dinner, visitors are often advised to slow their pace of life to that of the locals, to chat, read a good book, bathe and snooze. The wise old elders believe stress and

unhappiness are not the result of external events, but rather the product of our own internal judgments, and that, therefore, happiness too, can only be found within. That the one way to happiness is to look within; to 'cease worrying about things which are beyond the power of our will'.

The most important community ceremonies, such as the celebration of the Seasons, the Equinox, the Solstices and Formal Joining Ceremonies are performed at the stone village circle, together with all country anniversaries, thereby helping the community to flourish by working together in a bonded relationship without strong leaders or forceful individuals.

Everything is managed within a communal sense of purpose. There are no temples or churches, no palace or pastoral ruling class. The people do not depend on a thorough definition of Good or Evil, much more upon remaining alert to happiness and sorrow caused by deeds, words and thoughts. As is the custom, the island is referred to as 'The Garden', although practically the farming islanders have been as successful as those who are sea-faring merchants, trading goods across the seas, socialising with other countries and civilisations. The typical way of life, its beliefs and customs continue to be founded in the complete acceptance that all islanders are interdependent.

The Garden island, including the people and the village, might at one time have been considered by the occasional visitor as not very advanced economically, although that may have been a concept not necessarily based on fact. It depends upon one's outlook, and there may even have been a certain amount of poverty, though no evidence of destitution or homelessness has ever been traced.

Nowadays, the inhabitants live scattered around a sublime landscape of roughly 800 acres and throughout the island settlements, every family has land, livestock, a weaving loom and can meet most of its needs. Education and health care are freely available, along with country walks, swimming, country dances, and all the usual pastimes where the people sing as they sow seed, reap grain, stroll the roads and tracks, all happy within and without, and sometimes just sitting on the hill slope behind the harbour and listening to the sounds and smells from all around.

The island has always had a small group of four or five elected villager guardians

who continue to supervise decisions as to the shepherding of the island's guidelines and one, Edlyn, is the most recent to be chosen as overseer and organiser of the most important gatherings, those of the Spring Equinox and the Midsummer's Day Celebrations.

### Sean Flynn

Throughout his earliest years, one particular Garden inhabitant, Sean Flynn, was enchanted by his gifts from The Garden. He lived a carefree, happy childhood shared with his mum and dad, his Nanny and Grampa, several chickens and a cockerel; two beautiful apple trees, a variety of fruit trees, an allotment vegetable patch, flowering hydrangea and rose bushes, nasturtiums, day lilies, countless strange insects and all kinds of colourful and fragrant delights. And as he grew he became aware of the clusters of innumerable stars, of tame and wild creatures, of words, games, not to mention the small grassy area in front of their stone, slate-roofed cottage where he could play or sit on an old bench beneath an arbor of honeysuckle and read his books and comics in the comfort of its shade.

Sean came out of the world and into this life by virtue of the loving union between Lilian and George, his parents. George Flynn was born in Liverpool and moved south to work in London for a Fleet Street newspaper. It was during his investigations into the decline of the fishing industry, so essential to villages around the coastline of Great Britain, examining the prospects and possibilities of the island, that he met Lilian, the love of his life. They began going for long walks, exploring the island, and sharing their hopes and dreams until, step by step, they fell in love. They cherished each other's company so much so that eventually and naturally they were drawn into taking the next step, of coming together in the island's traditional Summer Solstice Formal Joining Ceremony. Then one fine day Lillian gave birth to Sean, their only child, and a short while later George was offered a job nearer home which meant he could retire from



working in the capital and instead become a family man in The Garden. He was able to relax, because after his initial flush of excitement from working in a city newspaper office, it didn't take long to register that the highly trusted media marketing bazaar was not all that it seemed, was drawing him in and clouding his moral judgement.

Gradually, he had begun to become aware that the sole ambition of almost all newspapers, was simply to enrich the owner by selling as many opinions and adverts as possible which was not quite the same as a desire to provide unbiased, truthful information. Eventually, George realised the media industry is not a charity and has no actual intrinsic value, and yet its readers succumb to the power of its owners and shareholders and pursue only those reports that reaffirm their own various prejudices and reassure their own particular points of view. In fact, all versions of media are transitory in the life of the average individual since we beings come and go then come and go again and again no matter what the headline in the news.

And so their life in The Garden became more positive, full of warmth and fun and on one rare occasion, after George left to visit his family in Liverpool, his mother told Sean that there was a surprise from his father on its way. However, he had first to go and stand in the shadows of the staircase by the front door, eyes tight shut, be silent and wait. He did as he was told for a while then, just as he was settling in to drawing faces on the wall, there came a loud rapping at the door. As soon as it was opened by his mother, and Sean had recognised his father's boots, instantly he yelled, "DAD!" and Lillian and Sean were swept into his father's arms, covered in kisses and hugs until they almost fell over with happiness amid squeals of delight.

Every day, Sean's gentle Nanna spent countless hours helping him make up jolly little tunes on his xylophone while encouraging him to draw and paint, read and write, show good manners when required, and how to hide behind the curtain in the living room when watching the neighbours and strangers walking by, guessing who was who and who did what. While, dear Gramps was an avid gardener who recognised the basic connection between all things and events and not just in their garden nor their allotment down by the stream but throughout the whole of existence. He would mumble and chatter his theories as he trundled along in his hob-nailed boots between the furrows, planting seeds with a

complaining Sean shuffling along behind, stumbling along with constant chatter and forever complaining about the drizzle or the mud, the worms or the bees. As for Gramps, their garden was more than an average plot of land, it was his heart and soul. Yes, Gramps was full of wonderful stories about Nature being in control of everything and telling of how he had once won a top gardening trophy to the acute envy of a jealous fellow competitor who had accused him of being a secret gardening professional. But as soon as Gramps looked upon the trophy as being Nature's way of showing gratitude for all his support, the accusation became a treasured compliment.

There was one day when Sean had been sitting inside the wicker hen coop studying the chickens when the cockerel came in, took umbrage, and chased him down the length of the garden until Sean slipped on some loose pebbles and was immediately pecked on an eyebrow by the cockerel. Gramps was furious with him, "You silly boy! Another inch and he would have blinded you! From now on - stay out of the chicken run!" And this essential piece of advice was to stay with Sean for the rest of his life.

However, over the days and months that passed, Sean's mother grew increasingly slight and weak as her health deteriorated more and more. Then one day, Lilly passed away after a lengthy fight with cancer when he was only nine years old. However, being so deeply loved by every member of his family and being so young, Sean found warmth and comfort, strength and courage from every member of his family which helped him ease the loss of his mother's love and special attention. His Nanna told him, 'Your mother will always be by your side, you know. She will never leave you.'

Then, following many a thoughtful and tearful family discussion, it was decided it might be best for Sean if he and his dad move back up to Liverpool where he could mingle among cousins his own age amid the warmth of a large and caring family and experience a wider range of opportunities. Just before he left the island, he wrote a message to his mother, 'I feel you with me', and wrapped it inside one of her scarves that he had found inside a drawer, then carefully buried it in the back garden to say something to her about her passing which to him had been so mysterious yet not so devastating as it was to everyone else. It almost seemed acceptable to him that now that she was gone her terrible illness was over and she could rest in peace.

Each Easter and sometimes for the duration of summer holidays, he and his Dad would travel back to their Garden, stay with his grandparents and for the time they were there Sean would surprise everyone by briefly losing all trace of his Liverpool accent.

One Christmas Eve in his Liverpool home, Sean decided to play a trick on Father Christmas. He had always wanted to meet his hero face to face but somehow he never woke when his presents came into his room. So that year, just before he climbed into bed, he jammed a heavy pillow behind the door so if anyone tried to come in they'd have to push hard to get the door open and the noise would wake him up and that way he would meet the magic man and maybe have a chat at last. He was fast asleep and dreaming when he heard the door pushing against the pillow. He sprang up in bed and turned to see but imagine his disappointment when all he saw was his Dad looking trapped and embarrassed. "Dad, Dad! Get out quick! Father Christmas will be here any second and you'll frighten him away!"

Sean was never at a loss for things to do or places to go. Sometime around his eleventh birthday he met and befriended a local lad who was to remain his closest friend for the rest of his life. The boy's name was Jim Dempsey and although Sean was never at a loss for things to do or places to go, Saturday afternoons were always saved for him to join Jim in music and singing. Jim played guitar and slowly his music encouraged Sean to sing along and join with him in the harmonies, even if they were sometimes a little off-key. But that didn't matter because the main mark of their friendship was their infectious Liverpool humour and their growing confidence which helped Sean develop his flourishing personality.

Sean made lots of new friends and every time there was a school trip, he'd plead with his Dad to let him join expeditions with his chums, and these in turn became several camping trips in Wales and at least twice, a school pilgrimage to the Catholic shrine at Lourdes in the Pyrenees. One of these trips was in the horsebox belonging to a local garage owner, known as a country gent and school benefactor. The other was by train when he slept in the luggage rack.

And he loved his school, except for the controlling punishments and the physical beatings doled out by the monks using canes and leather straps which always seemed



rather excessive since he was supposedly a pupil under the supervision of a caring educational religious brotherhood. Gradually, he began to regard religion as just another school subject and the last time he tried to show interest by asking where exactly was the eternal home for human bodies, the very place they had told him his mother was living, he wasn't at all surprised when they wriggled out of a direct answer by promising to explain some time in the future, "When you're a little older and the explanation of Heaven will be a little less complicated for you to grasp." That same night in bed, a flash of enlightenment woke him with a start, one which made him sit bolt upright and say out loud, 'Ha! They don't know! The whole thing's an invention!' And from then on, along with a growing group of fellow students, he grew more and more convinced that all religious anecdotes were inventions and a simple means of controlling the masses.

Nevertheless the rest of his schooling was fun. He wasn't a genius yet he enjoyed his classes and was very popular. His school chums lived scattered all over the city and its suburbs and he would take bus rides to visit them on Saturdays before his music session with Jim. Sean was unlike the average city teenager in that he was not the slightest bit competitive or ambitious and so had little interest in sports and games except, like every other teenager, he began to develop a taste for music. Yes, he was inclined to be naive and gullible, yet he had a sharp sense of humour which helped when making friends. Music was his real love, and not just TV and radio pop but music from all around the world. His father's brother, Uncle Freddy was a sailor, and he would often come home from sea with several records under his arm and sometimes an occasional musical instrument like a banjo, an accordion, a ukulele and once even a pair of maracas. Sean learned to play along with each of them, then plonk away for hours on the piano in the parlour. He would try to write words to explain his feelings and so his music became the definition of his life.

On a visit to The Garden for his sixteenth birthday, Sean sat with his grandparents in their back garden, and while his grandmother trimmed his hair and his grandfather potted some plants, he let his eyes wander and take him back to when he was a boy. Across the back of the garden he could see the chicken coop still there but no

longer any sign of chickens. As usual, on the left were the two sheds and two greenhouses. He could see a small pond he'd never noticed before but there were the apple trees, one either side of the path, and the eucalyptus tree, now taller than ever, and then the grassy area where he used to play, with its benches, table and chairs all still neatly arranged next to the vegetable patch with its huge boulder in the corner of the garden. Occasionally, as Nanny clipped away, from somewhere in the sky came the indistinct mutterings of pupils answering questions and the voice of their teacher commenting and sometimes even laughing with them at their replies.

Suddenly a man appeared through the gate, smiling and waving a large bottle of wine and carrying one of orange juice for Sean. 'Hello everyone! It's me, Barry,' and into the garden came the man Sean recognised as the local publican.

'Mr. Briggs, Hello. Hello. Good to see you.'

'Hello. I heard you'd be here for your birthday, so I thought I'd pop over and wish you all the best. Have some orange juice.'

But it was Nanny who took over and soon they were adding memories to life's solutions and enjoying the mood in the garden.

'I don't know how you grow so many poppies, Barry. Mine all die away with the frost.'

'Oh Lucy, it's not just the frost, poppies need poor, sandy soil or better still, a couple of acres of scrubland. Add to that a dead cat and an old rotting tractor covered in bindweed and there'll be poppies growing everywhere.' He beamed at Sean, 'You've grown haven't you, boy. You were the smallest and youngest drinker in my pub,' said Barry, 'and it was always good to see you there with your mum and Dad in those days. We were all so sorry when she passed away.' Sean told of how he'd drag his parents in for some soft drinks whenever they walked by. He began to recall one particular walk with his parents where they were speculating on the life of bees and ants and how superbly organised they all seemed. He thought for a moment, then asked, 'Nanna, do you think there are still people who believe human beings are superior to everything else on Earth?'

His Nanny inhaled deeply, 'Well, an awful lot of people think they are although I'm sure our cats would disagree.' She had two cats, a brother and sister, Theo and Ebby,

and they were lying fast asleep on the grass until she spoke and that's when together they sighed, yawned and rolled over. 'But people do think like that, although I've no idea why, considering the way some of them live. It's not very superior just to make money the sole purpose in your life, or to create wars with people you don't even know, or to destroy the very atmosphere we need in which to breathe, or to poison the oceans with discarded plastic or allowing the media and self-appointed people to completely control your life as though they had inherited some kind of moral superiority. But that's exactly what we do. I think we're evolving into subjective and controlled robots.'

Barry nodded as he filled the glasses placed on the table by Gramps, 'She's right. When we talk of evolution, I think we mainly talk in terms of what we regard as the most advanced forms of life and the status inherited by different sorts of beings,' he said. 'Some people think that above us there are angels, and then gods, then the rich and famous and all sorts of echelons inheriting our wonderful human establishment. And that below us are inferior mammals, perhaps demons, tiny monsters in bacteria without even considering plants or rocks, right down to the murky depths. So they pack themselves on the back and tell each other how great it is to be a human and not to be a cat, not to be a rose, and not to be a fish. Some even try to imagine how much better it will be once they become angels. They can't wait! Yes, some humans either completely lack faith in themselves or are very conceited and think they can get up there and be gods.'

Grampa joined in, 'Know what I think? I think we think we know everything but all our thinking depends on what we know and, believe me, I think that's all out of focus so we can't know everything. We think we do, but we don't.' He moved a little further into the shade of the Fuchsia hedge, stared at the vegetable patch and wiped his forehead, 'But how do we know we're superior to spuds, say? What do we really know about spuds anyway? We probably have never really studied spuds beyond knowing how to cook and eat them. That's probably about it. But have we ever thought how a potato feels? Most people would say it doesn't feel because it's only a potato, because it has no feelings. But someone once proved that if you put a lie detector on a potato, it registers, and its readings change when you do certain things. If you prick the potato, or swear at it loudly, you'll make it jump. As a matter of scientific fact, and this was on the telly, once we

learned how to turn on our alpha waves, then went and sat beside a plant, we found it could pick up those alpha waves, so maybe plants are not so stupid after all.'

Nanny smiled. 'Some would disagree and argue that because potatoes don't have houses or cars, computers, or iPhones, and definitely no religions, then they can't possibly be part of a civilization. But the potato might argue that humans are the poor, uncivilized beings because we have to have all this rubbish around us so we know who we are and what life's all about. The potato might point out that we are messy and inefficient, cluttering up the planet with our culture while, in fact, they have it all built into them already. Of course, most people would say that's impossible because potatoes are stuck in one place all the time so how can they know what's going on in the world? But the potato doesn't need to go running around because its sensitivity extends all over the place and they might even offer to introduce us to a few other things like their neighbour, the dandelion seed. The dandelion gets around because it has tiny seeds with white down sticking out at the top like a flower, and when the wind comes these seeds float off into the air. Then there's the sycamore tree with its little helicopters that it sends off to spin in the air and fly away. And what about the apple tree with fruit so delicious birds like to eat it. They eat the apple and swallow the seeds, then they fly away and in their poo is the seeds which is then plopped on the ground below.'

Nanny sat back, blew some hair from her comb and smiled at Sean, 'Keep still and listening. It's Grandad's turn.'

And Grampa could hardly wait to get a word in on his favourite subject, 'That's not all,' he said, refilling the glasses. 'Nature is full of incredible evolutionary wonders. Apart from the potato, others have burrs that stick in the hides of deer, and the deer carry these seeds around. Perhaps it is one of the ways they get about and spread their people so they aren't all crowded together and don't strangle themselves. But, Sean, this is only the beginning of their extraordinary evolution. They all have vibrations going on inside their fibres that are quite as good as anything invented by Mozart, Bach or The Beatles and I'm convinced they enjoy their vibrations, and although we may think they are not doing anything because they just sit around all the time, they are vibrating and they are in ecstasy, humming to the great hum that is going on everywhere.'

I believe that all vegetables understand this, and so from their point of view they are simply very highly evolved. They probably don't consider us as inferior beings at all but just something different. In general most people are very prejudiced when it comes to veggies.'

Nanny took over, 'It's true and it just shows a lack of compassion we have towards them. If we can show compassion for vegetables, or for flies, or mushrooms, or viruses, what it means is that you have put yourself in their position. Then when you begin to really sympathise, you see they think of themselves as people, and they have just as much right to think that they are civilised and cultured as you or I do.

Yes, plants may be in such an advanced state of consciousness that unknown to us, an incredible source of wisdom may be growing in the flower pot at your door and unbeknown to you, they may have a great deal to do with the way you think.'

Barry stood up, 'I wouldn't blame people for thinking it ridiculous to consider the humble fly as extremely intelligent too. With all those eyes, it must see through a window of different shaped glass pieces and different angles, and along with their ability to walk upside down on the ceiling they might have lots of different points of view, too. Who knows? Why do flies buzz? What is that all about? We don't know because we don't even know how to begin to study them.'

'Exactly,' said Grampa. 'It took years and years for us to find out that bees communicate with each other by dancing, and then that was such a shock to some so-called *learned* people that they chose not to believe it at all.'

'And it's a shock to find out that dolphins may be more intelligent than people,' said Nanny.

'Or that the so-called *killer whales* are a very intelligent kind of dolphin,' said Gramps. 'Look at those creatures. They are mammals and it is said, although we are not quite sure it's true, that they once lived on the land. On the land! Believe me! Apparently they decided that being on the land was a pretty stupid way for a mammal to live, and so decided to go skin diving.'

Barry gave a loud belly laugh. 'They probably realised they didn't have to do much for a living, so they might as well dance and and sing and play. That must be why

dolphins spend most of their time simply messing about – and they mess about in very complicated ways. If we were dolphins, we would call this entertainment!'

'Aye,' said Nanny, 'Even when humans practise art, in a way we are just messing about.'

'Wow! This amazing! So what about the astronomers' idea of an organised universe?' asked Sean.

'Think about it in human terms for a minute,' Grampa took a deep breath. 'For one thing, most people we call primitive are far less vicious and cruel than we are in our so-called advanced society. They live more peaceful lives, and even though the tools they use are not as developed or as complex as ours, they are very dignified, civilised people. They are certainly not savage.'

Nanny took over, 'Most primitive peoples look upon us with deep concern. They don't regard us as civilised at all. Instead they regard us as a very, very serious menace to the planet, and that's because we ignore the ecology of nature and tend on the whole to be pretty miserable.'

'That's true,' said Sean. 'Sometimes when I'm wandering around the city I see all these so-called businessmen and merchants all looking so serious and down in the mouth because even with their loads of money, they are always worrying about their health, their taxes, riots, politics, or losing their bankrolls.'

Barry stood up, 'You can always worry about something if you are the worrying type, and it doesn't matter how well-off you are or how broke you are. But mark my words boy, there is absolutely no reason to assume any of us are superior to other forms of life.' He looked up at the sky, 'Gosh, the day's flying by. I'll have to get going. Sean, see you next time you're here. You could come out to my place on the beach with these two. You may not have heard but I've handed the pub over to my lad, Barrington. He'll be running it from now on.'

'Well, thank you Mr Briggs. I'd love to come and see you. I'll pop over next time.' Then Sean put his arms around his grandparents, 'I love it here. Hey! Is it OK if I make us all a pot of tea for before Mr. Briggs leaves?'

Only two months later Sean's grandfather passed away peacefully, followed a few



days later by his Nanna, diagnosed with having died of a broken heart.

### The Pikkins

Sean's father, George, was a keen dancer and it was at the local Grafton Ballroom that he met Antoinette and following many a gentle, but deepening, romance on the dance floor, she became Sean's step-mother, a lovely lady and someone he loved dearly. She was a nurse who would later be diagnosed as having diabetes and there were times when Sean would help with her insulin injection which was more scary for him than for her.

Straight after their wedding Toni and George set up home with Sean in Orrell Park, a part of town where, by pure coincidence, he found himself living around the corner from some of his classmates. The main thing they had in common was a love for music. And because there was very little work about, by the time Pip, Wally, Ged and Jim were in their middle teens they would all gather in whoever's home had a little spare space to sing and practise music almost every evening for the next half dozen years. Sean sang the the melodies while Wally played lead guitar, Pip played bass, Jim played rhythm and Ged played drums as they all sang tight harmonic backings.

Every few weeks Sean and Jim would go to the barbershop when school let out to have their hair trimmed and styled, not that it was necessary just a part of their 'thing'. The barbershop was also a meeting place for a few retired 'gents' and as the boys sat beneath the snap and crunch of scissors, watching tufts of hair join the refuse gathering on the floor, they became included in the chatter and listened to tales from the old boys' life memories, "No one goes to Wales these days. Too wild. Far too dangerous. Up in the mountains the men have tails and they all eat babies." "Aye, and down in the valleys whole families live and work in the coal pits never seein' the light of day." These tongue-in-cheek murmurings would be accompanied with winks and nudges as they all began to chuckle.

During one particular session at the barber's, just before their Easter break, an

excited Jim and Sean agreed they owed it to themselves to get a tent and go hitch-hiking into Wales and take Wally and his guitar along too for safety, even though Jim had found an engineering job in a factory and was about to start work. As soon as half term arrived they took off, first by ferry across the Mersey and then south on foot hitching down the Wirral then on into Wales.

They were away for a week and when they got back Jim was first to say he would never forget the 'thumbs-out-trudging' along the edges of roads in single file with quarter-to-three feet Wally leading, then pigeon-toed Sean behind and bringing up the rear, himself, bow-legged Dempsey. The one thing about their trip they valued more than anything else was the warmth, camaraderie and kindness shown by absolute and trusting strangers who gave them lifts in all sorts of vehicles, business, private, old and new, over miles and miles asking nothing in return except friendship, companionship and often just silence.

They returned to Liverpool full of ideas about their music and during one practice session in Wally's front room, Pip mentioned that his cousin had arranged a booking for the band at a factory club in just two weeks time and that perhaps they had better give the band a name. Was he joking? No he was serious. Sean was stunned. Then even more stunned when Wally suggested he change his name from Sean, 'It's so uncool for a Rock and Blues singer. Think of something else.'

Ged suggested Sean call himself Fly, short for Flynn. 'What?' said Sean and from that moment on he was known to everyone, even himself, as Fly. 'And we need a name for the band,' he looked at the silent faces. 'What shall we call the band?' Once the whoops and screams of laughter at the various suggestions had died down, at last they picked, 'The Pikkins', inspired by an old US country song called '*Pickin' Time*', and from then on they were in showbiz.

On stage they just did as they always did and let the instruments play themselves and the voices do the singing. There was no choreography, moody poses or fluttering arms, and their appearances always went down a storm. Their first booking went so very well that they were re-booked for six more weekly shows and that is when the ball started rolling. Even when they began to find jobs, they would continue to play in clubs several times a week under the close scrutiny of at least two hundred and fifty other rival

Merseyside bands throughout the Northwest including North Wales and even as far south as Solihull Ice Rink. Then one day, they passed an audition in London to cross the channel and tour France and Germany. They did it for fun, without any egotism or expectation and floated along on the time of their lives. Over the following six months they lived as they travelled, squashed like sardines in their tin can of a van until there came the day, as the result of being so continually close, that they realised they had just enough confidence to take the most obvious next step, they had to make a record. So they moved to London and one of the last things Fly's dad said to him before he left Liverpool was, 'Good luck, boy. Enjoy yourself and remember – the only time is now.'

In the capital they were not at all successful in finding a manager they could relate to until, out of the blue, they were introduced to a Sicilian business man called Signore Antonio Vincenti, a friend of a friend of a friend and someone who seemed not a great deal older than themselves. He took control and within weeks they had made their first record entitled, 'I'm More Alone Now Than You're Home (Than When You Were Away)', written in a moment of hilarity by Sean and Pip. Vincenti put it on the internet, and even gave it away to anyone who wanted it. Somehow, he had it played on local radio stations all over the country and day by day it became a favourite towns and city clubs. It was even picked up by a new record company executive, an associate of Vincenti, who was looking for fresh talent and suddenly they were everywhere and their record was even released in Europe and played on Radio Nova of Paris and Radio Rouge in Italy.

Once again, they toured France, Italy, Hungary and Germany, which gave them their first European hit and one morning they woke up in their tiny flat to the news that they had made it into the US charts and were being played on Rock Radio USA.

Signore Antonio Vincenti signed them up and became their official manager. He polished and prepared them for bigger things until the day came when they realised they had a string of hit records, promotional deals, world tours and fat bank accounts.

Now, they were cool.

For almost two decades the band enjoyed successes large and small and could do no wrong until, as anticipated by some, their lives on stage became rather repetitive and even monotonous on some occasions although not so much to their fans, more to

themselves. Often, while singing, Fly's thoughts would drift to other things, to childhood memories, favourite movies and TV shows, to one night stands and dates with girls he'd loved and lost. He was like a child absent-mindedly singing ditties while playing with his favourite toy, the audience.

For many years The Pikkins had been a highly successful and influential group of musicians until individual members became so obsessed with their ever growing bank balances that the music became secondary and life became a contest to see who could make the most shrewd and successful investments. There grew secrets, suspicions, envy and even jealousies as gradually, they sold their solidarity for cash. Repeated lethargic performance brought an inevitable withering of interest which in turn brought apathy and restlessness within the band until inevitably after a time, The Pikkins began to disintegrate and in the end, Fly and his old school friends, went their separate ways.

## Vincenti

Gazing across the London skyline from the balcony of his thirty-fifth floor executive penthouse office stood Antonio Vincenti, CEO of Vincenti Productions, renowned Sicilian business agent and wizard music entrepreneur. Elegant, suave, charming and highly regarded by most businessmen, on that particular day he was balancing on the tip of a dogged problem.

With the break up of world renowned musical group The Pikkins, Vincenti had devised a simple plan that would restore his losses and even expand his riches. The only problem was, he would have to persuade Fly, the band's lead singer, his demoralised protege, into becoming incognito in order to provide the perfect opportunity to announce Fly's death to the world media and thereby make a fortune by re-releasing his back catalogue of popular music. However, in spite of the subsequent guaranteed treasure trove, he was convinced Fly would be outraged and horrified by the idea of deceiving his fans and unconditionally reject the scheme outright. Vincenti had always considered Fly

as someone of childish naivete and so, without the slightest sign of any foreseeable resolution, he had to be prepared for the inevitable silent stand-off. Yet this was not the first time, and as usual, after a little time Vincenti would think of a way to convert his boy wonder.

Behind him sat Fly, disappointed and downhearted. When his band broke up, Fly had continued writing his music and performing solo until it became quite obvious he had lost both his motivation and charisma leaving his audiences no longer so passionate nor enthusiastic. Nor did it take long for him to realise he was drowning in a tide of serious confusion about what to do next. 'I just don't understand what's wrong with my stuff. People used to love it and now, no one's interested!' He would shake his head and sigh.

'Hey, don't worry,' smiled Vincenti. 'Perhaps you just need to back away and take stock. Look, why don't you get out of the city and just go somewhere you can be nobody? Somewhere no one knows you. Take some time out and keep your head down. You deserve it! Find some friendly faces, beautiful surroundings, beautiful women. Why, it'll freshen you up and before you know it you'll get your mojo back where it belongs.'

'You think so?'

'Of course, mio amico. You just need some new horizons. And you'll get plenty of those once you're out of the rut. Let your hair grow long or shave it off. Grow a beard or a moustache – or both. Just relax and try something new. Come on. You know you can do it.'

Fly thought for a moment then leaped to his feet, 'OK Antonio, I'll do it! Somewhere far away, like Mexico or Hawaii or Venice – maybe all three. OK! I'm off! See you as soon as I get back - or some time in the future! Ha!'

Antonio Vincenti wrapped an arm around Fly's shoulders and smiled, 'Wait!! Hey bro! Wait! Calm down. Think! You have achieved so much in your life for someone so easy-going and melodious. You should take a bow. It is possible that we might have to accept that the show is over. That it's curtains for you,' he shrugged. 'Fly, it happens. Look, you know I've been like a big brother to you ever since we met...'

'Antonio! Hang on! Are you kicking me out?'

'No. Don't be stupid. No. I mean, I'm not just your manager, I am your friend and

I worry about you. But facts are facts. I'm so very sorry. All the same, maybe it's time we moved on. It's no big deal. We just have to accept it.'

'So you keep saying! But I don't want it to face it. I wouldn't know what to do with myself.'

'Let me finish. All the biggest rock stars who've passed away have continued to make a fortune long after they've gone. Even to this day, Elvis is the biggest selling singer of all time. Being dead can earn you a fortune. You know what happens. You and your music become memorabilia like valuable antique collectables. It's a sure-fire way of re-selling your product...er...talent. Fly, listen, I have a plan. You could be another Lennon or Bowie. You pretend you're dead, we rework your hits and Boom! We re-release them. It's bundles in the bank.'

'Pretend to be dead? Dead? How? Antonio, are you kidding me?'

'Now you're not listening. Although these stars are dead, their popularity is even more marketable as current entertainment. My God! What can I tell you? In plain English we, that is you and I, could make much, much more money if you were dead than you can at present.'

'Oh, I see. It's not about the music. It's about the money. We've got to get it rolling in again. Antonio! Is that all you ever think about? For me it's not about making money. What about writing music? It's my self-expression, my creativity - but then that's of no interest to you, is it? You'd rather I was dead!'

'Don't be stupid, Fly. It's just that if you pretend to die we can re-sell all your old music and clean up. It'll give you time to put your feet up and recharge your batteries.'

'Be that as it may! That's no way to treat my supporters. It is just a cheap scam and if people found out I was still as fit as a fiddle - or guitar, there'd be mayhem.'

'That's if they find out. I know it's not what we planned my friend, yet we have to adapt. You're far too high up the ladder for celebrity TV games or guest shows. There's just one way to keep you alive and that's for you to die.'

'Whaaaa?'

'I'm talking posthumous sales here.'

'Right.'



'You have no idea what posthumous sales are, have you?'

'Of course I have. They're the ones with those big blue stripes you see on the front of yachts, aren't they.' Fly was frustrated and angry.

'Fly! Be serious. Look. Imagine you want to live a peaceful life, not having to worry where the next penny is coming from and doing everything you've ever wanted.'

'I'm already doing everything I've ever wanted!'

'Don't interrupt. I keep telling you, this bits over. So if we want to keep on keeping on, we've got to remarket and relocate. Fly, do what I say and in the end people will forget you ever existed and you won't even care. You'll be the latest equivalent of Sinatra, dear old David Bowie or...er...Thingy. You'd be your own boss and never have a care in the world.'

Fly had had enough, 'Wow! I could grow a beard!'

'Oh, Fly, please, consider. My point is there are many ways to win the game. Everybody bends the rules when they want to win.'

'I could stop wearing shades!'

Vincenti smiled the smile he smiles when he alone knows he's winning, 'OK. Even stop wearing sun glasses.'

'Even at personal appearances?'

'Your only personal appearances would be in the obituaries.'

'No thanks. One boy band was enough for me.'

'Fly, c'mon. Stop with the jokes. All you have to do is go somewhere out of the way and keep a low profile, that part is essential, then be patient and wait for the money to come rolling in. Is it a deal?'

'No thanks.'

'You are not serious, are you?'

'Please, Antonio. Look, I have money. More than enough. I don't need any more, OK? My childhood was the most enlightening period of my life but living in this sad city is like waking from a peaceful dream into a continual winter storm. Antonio, I know what I want to do with my life. I know what to do and what not to do and the first thing I want to do is dump all the city illusions.'

'What do you mean?'

'Happy is a frame of mind. Money is not essential for contentment. It has no value if you're not happy. And if you are happy your needs are basic.'

'Oh, come on, Fly! Wherever you go, you'll need money to make yourself comfortable.'

'I know of a place where it is quiet, easy-going, natural. And I think it's where I want to be.'

'Has it got a name? You did tell me once but I've forgotten now. And where did you say it was?'

'No name, it's my birthplace - it's an island some call The Garden.'

'Do you still have friends there?'

'No. I left when I was nine. I started life in the village on that island, and its traditional beliefs and customs maybe miles and miles from anywhere else yet they have pretty much protected me to this day. We used to play in the coves, go swimming and climb the hills and lounge around in the open air all the time. Life was so simple.'

'Fly, my boy...that...er...sounds like a real...er... faerie land. Why don't you go there now before you change your mind? C'mon! Get your skates on! Go!'

During the word play of their verbal exchange, two things occurred to Vincenti. The first was that now he knew where Fly would go. The island off the south coast. It didn't have a memorable name but it was known as The Garden. The second point was that should Fly disappear from public gaze and hide himself away on that island, then his colleague need never know should Vincenti carry out his somewhat improper plan and bank all the money for himself.

'Well, that's an amazing idea, old chum. Back to your roots. Courageous. I wish you all the luck in the world.'

'Even so, I'd like to keep in touch, Antonio. Just to see how you were and how things were going.'

'Nothing would please me more...but first settle in your hideaway and then I'll be in touch before you know it. Who knows, I might even come and surprise you.'

By the time he got to his apartment, Fly no longer felt at all at ease about a cover up that would force him into hiding and lying low in order to squeeze more money out of his loyal supporters. He was just not that kind of person.

He knew that if he accepted Vincenti's plan, no doubt they would make easy money, on the other hand he'd be living a lie and he knew full well that a scheme so corrupt and distressing would be dishonourable. The thought of betraying the trust and support of so many loyal fans who had made him such an acknowledged success made him cringe. And even though the scheme might work and yes, they might make serious money, there was always the chance that there might come a time when they would be exposed and the shame would destroy him to the core. He was so disappointed by the way Vincenti thought he might accept this plan that he was beginning to think he wanted as little as possible to do with the man in future. Anyway, already he knew that no amount of valuable material possessions or resources guaranteed anything. His big house, his fancy cars and all the foreign holidays just served as ego food. OK for a while and then he'd grow hungry again and need more.

No, Fly was convinced something deeply shady was afoot and anything as dishonest as Vincenti's plan would be asking for serious trouble. Definitely, it was time to get back to where it all began.

## Decisions

Most Saturday mornings, Fly would watch from his apartment as over a hundred artists transformed the opposite side of the street outside into an open-air art show of original works while befriending wandering visitors enjoying rare moments of unhurried imaginings among thousands of different exhibits. Paintings in oils, watercolours, pastels, acrylics, pencil drawings, in fact, pictures in countless substances, sizes, and subjects, from contemporary abstracts and traditional landscapes to miniature flowered embroidery.

To Fly's delight, among the drawings on display, although not for sale, there was always the one of his mother serving dinners to the pupils at their village school. What you cannot gather from the drawing is how she would be singing to herself while spooning out the food, although the children knew, of course, and they loved her. The picture had been created by Fly's friend and guru, Alan, old friend of Fly's father, and that morning, as usual, he could be seen among the artists, lost to the world, engrossed in drawing a young lady sitting on one of the seats he'd made from old wooden beer barrels that he kept in the back of his van. Fly thought he'd go over and perhaps have a brief chat and maybe get some advice on where to go and what to do next with his life.

When the time was right, Alan took some time out and invited Fly to join him and on one of the barrels beneath the shade of sensitive old trees sharing a flask of camomile tea, chattering on as usual about time and space, the surreal and the everyday until it came to Fly that perhaps he should open up about the lack of success making him so paranoid. When he did, his friend understood.

'Flynn, success is personal. No one can tell you you are a success, only you know. And no, it is not dependent upon the market place or how much money you are making. Maybe you should get away, find somewhere quiet, somewhere you can rebuild your self-confidence. It's all down to you and you alone, my friend.'

'As a matter of fact, I am thinking of going away for a few weeks while I sort myself out.'

'When are you off?'

'As soon as possible, I'm not quite sure when. It'll be a long drive so, with any luck, sometime early tomorrow.'

'Excellent. You remember how, many years ago, I needed to get away from the city so I went to see your Dad on his island and it was so refreshing I ended up staying a couple of months. Everything was reassuringly natural and genuine, not manufactured. Here, everything has to be squared off, ironed out and in straight lines. But through the natural atmosphere and restful shapes of the island, my approach to interpretation was influenced for the better. That's when I first met you and your dear mother. The paintings I made of your family, the school, the village, its people and their easy way of life had

such a realistic and sensible pace that even the air seemed different. It makes me smile now just to think of it all.'

'I haven't been there since I was sixteen and even though I've been living up in Liverpool most of my life I bet it still hasn't changed much. I think it's fortunate how the village cannot be seen from the mainland and so the majority of passing people see the island but don't realise the village exists. I bet it still feels quite liberating just to gaze across the causeway and, with the swelling Spring tides, even more ideal. So let's not ever tell anyone it is there. Let's keep it a secret.'

'Oh, don't worry, it's a special place and I couldn't tell a soul. Anyway, I hope you get some answers and please, don't go wasting your money on sending me expensive souvenirs!' They exchanged winks, laughed and wished each other well.

But Fly's mind was spinning. He could not relax in bed. That night, down in the darkness all was normal with the clattering traffic, drunken voices, marching footsteps, the chiming bells and, of course, the distant alarms and sirens from fire trucks, police cars, ambulances and all the usual sounds he'd grown to accept whenever he tried to get some sleep. But worst of all that night were the momentary silences. He grew fearful and no matter how often he changed position, the bed felt lumpy and his feet were cold. Tossing and turning, he just could not get comfortable. Vincenti's scam had filled him with anxiety, and any involvement with shady associates and racketeers whether real or imagined, rattled his imagination. And so, after storing some basic necessities in his trusty backpack, and with every determined nudge coming from solemn old Big Ben, he decided that as soon it felt right, no matter what the time, he would get in gear and press on home toward The Garden.

### Time to Leave

Within hours he was climbing aboard his dependable old camper van. His life in the plastic city, where everything is so deranged and designed just to make money, was

over at last. He felt so inspired to see again the rolling hills, the waving trees, acres of green pastures, farm lands, streams and rivers, and of course the widening, bluing sky, that even when it turned grey and started to rain a little it might well have been raining confidence.

And the money, what was all that money for? Why are we taught to bow before those with piles of money? And why do we have to be the best at everything? Why can't we be just good? And why was life so serious? Life wasn't serious. People made it serious. Where was the unaffected, innocent existence? Cities were filled with traffic fumes, pollution, self-interested corporations, cynical politicians and shameless media barons with bland expressions manipulating our lives with their lies and deception.

Priorities were unbalanced. Social conditioning was artificial, blinding razzle-dazzle and fireworks. A big con. The whole set-up was a money-mad machine, a money culture, operated by narcissistic megalomaniacal automatons with all their hypocrisy and brutal disregard for our planet and simple humanity. All it offered was snobbery, elitism, top-hat gambling and every form of acceptable skulduggery that goes on behind closed doors in the city in the guise of big business and banking, in the name of making the country great. Just the thought of it made Fly shudder and more determined to reject it all, and wash his hands of everything megalopolis.

His guts rumbled causing him to burst out laughing. As his seafaring uncle used to say, 'Can't adjust the wind but *can* adjust the sails to get me where I'm going.' Well, it had taken a while to adjust the sails and now the time had come to sail away and the moment his ignition sparked some magic into his engine, a startled blackbird across the road soared from the telephone wires and disappeared into the safety of the trees.

Fly smiled to himself at the irony.

One more day and it would be the Spring Equinox, perfect timing for a new beginning with a new season. It was his personal duty to stay alert for safety's sake. That awakening morning, the motorway was lethal with its zooming, complicated, competing week-end traffic and even though he was well on his way, he could still sense the dominating draw of the city. The rigidity of the roads was city. The aches and fatigue he got from hustling on the motorway was city. The drivers on their iPhones, the heavy



goods vehicles, the police cars and the careless, impatient drivers blaring their horns just because they thought he was driving too slow, this was all city. Worst of all was the growing number of oncoming party cars that gave no signals as they returned to the madness with their dangerous disregard for overtaking on blind bends. And then the bustling service stations where he queued to pay and always seeming to be behind unsteady motorists dropping bits and pieces at the pay desk with the sales assistant snickering at him, 'You look just like my daughter's favourite singer, mate. You've got a double! Ha! Ha! Ha!'

As he drove, he began thinking of how his growing up on a remote peninsular had given the young Sean a compassionate insight to life and his surroundings. As a young boy he had grown close to the countryside and during long and winding walks across the stubble and grit with his mum and dad, if ever he asked where they were heading, his father would lower his voice and whisper, 'Ssh! To a secret, secret place where the sea waters bathe you, the winds comb your hair and the beaches cradle you to sleep in their lap,' and then he would burst into song, laughing and winking at his son.

On these expeditions, Sean would listen to them talk of ancient local settlements and cliff-top walks they had yet to take. They would point to strange flowers, shrubs and plants growing off the path as they passed and draw his attention to the high flying kestrels and falcons, the long-eared rabbits, the bushy-tailed foxes they glimpsed in the woods and sometimes when they crossed the fields, they would be encircled by swirling swallows with their shiny dark blue backs as they hunted, zipping inches above the wild grasses. His mother would tell tales of pirates and plunder, wreckers and smugglers, kindness and love, tales she'd been told by Nanna as a girl. And when his dad began telling his ancient Celtic legends, the highest point on the island came not a moment too soon for the yawning young Sean. Here they would sit with smiles, refreshing on home-made pastries and drinks while scanning the the whispering sea for seals or dolphins and sometimes even spot basking sharks voyaging far below. In his dreams, he would be wandering his coastline of coves and caves, the wide sandy beaches, looking down from old castle walls and along to the isolated stone houses almost toppling into the sea from from the steep and rocky cliffs. They lived in Norbury Cottage, the same cottage in the

same village across the square from the venerable tavern house which would sometimes ring with music and song as late into the night as nine o'clock on some nights.

In just a few more hours he would arrive at the tip of the peninsula in full view of a piece of land a little further out to sea that is almost surrounded by sea except for the narrow strip of raised cobbles that joins it back to the mainland. During each spring tide that causeway becomes seriously submerged and the outcrop becomes an island once again.

Fly was nervous - yet determined. He had to go there right away, whether he was late and had to stride the causeway or cross by water taxi, he didn't care. His home was beckoning and he'd swim if he had to. Modern society and its concocted illusions belonged to somewhere else and as soon as he spotted the road sign for Fickle Creek, he pulled away from the busy roads until, little by little, he drove unrushed along the wooded old lanes that stirred and entertained him with their arty borders of violets, orchids, bluebells and stitchwort until the domineering goosegrass, wild knapweed and overgrown bracken all became so tall it felt like he was driving through a tunnel.

### Haydn Peel

Cruising down a fairly straight stretch of road he was bemused when his headlamps settled on the unmistakable figure of a man striding along some way ahead into the darkness. Fly tooted his horn, slowed to a crawl then, drawing alongside, lowered his window to ask the man if he needed a lift.

'Er...I'd, er, I'd be most grateful. Thanks.' The man put his backpack inside and climbed onto the passenger seat holding out his hand and smiling, 'Haydn Peel, sir. And here's to a brand new day.'

'Hi. I'm Sean Flynn though everyone calls me Fly. How far are you going?'

'Well, as you're probably aware, tomorrow's the first day of Spring, and each year at this time I like to find a spot where I can witness the sun showing up at the start of the

day. The Equinox has become one of my special events, something to look forward to and this year I was hoping to catch the sunrise a little further south, maybe from the top of one of the moors where I can set up my tent and make camp although I think I'm a little behind time.'

'Well, relax. I'll drop you off wherever you like,' and Fly pressed on his accelerator as down the road they went.

As the road wove its way across the moorland, strong gusts hit the camper from time to time making it sway as it went. 'Blow me!' chuckled Fly. 'Even you'd be blown to bits if you were out in this,' and they burst out laughing.

'Actually, as they said in the old days, 'Go against nature and you'll always find a problem,' and Haydn began to chuckle.

With the van rolling and rocking over the rutted bumpy road, from time to time Fly would glance at his passenger, enjoying his company and bemused by his gentle eccentricity as the man chatted away without a break.

'At the moment my home is in Bristol. I'm a park gardener by description although once I've got my fingers in the soil I see myself more as a caretaker and try to keep the gardens as natural and peaceful as possible. I even allow in some 'friendly' weeds if they're pretty and not too invasive. Hoeing the flower beds and clipping the shrubs, it feels good to nourish everything and give them the care and respect they deserve because then they grow a little more enthusiastically. Some visitors to the park see me as a bit of an old hippy, and that's OK. I like chatting to strangers, encouraging them to relax and enjoy it all. I even have a script. When they greet me with, 'How're you? Alright?' in whatever language, my usual reply is, 'I'm amazing!' or I say, 'I'm working on it', or 'fab and groovy', and then they come back with, 'Amazing? You're amazing? Ha! Haven't heard that before!' Although some just stare, searching for the irony, unable to fathom what I mean. And if they complain about the weather, sometimes I'll grin and say, 'There's no such thing as bad weather. You need weather to know that you're alive.' The kids all think it's hilarious and giggle and stare as if I'm from another planet. Some laugh, some don't, often they just wave and smile before they're drawn away by their confused parents and I'm left to myself.'

As they began to relax in each other's company and began to talk and tell of their feelings and frustrations with life, Fly told Haydn about the mistaken schemes of his manager and the implications for himself if he were to become exposed, 'What would you do?'

Hayden's reply was straight forward, 'Hmm, I'm sorry. You see I don't think it would be right for me to advise you on what to choose because I don't know anything about you.'

'Oh, that's alright. Just thought I'd ask.'

'...although, as a teenager working in my father's investment company, I did find myself in a very similar situation. I felt as though I was in a hole and didn't know how to get out and not wishing to insult my father after the opportunity he'd given me, and not being qualified for anything else in particular, I felt trapped! And then one day, sitting in his garden watching a bee buzz from fuchsia to dandelion to daisy to fuchsia, it came to me! I made a snap decision. Since there was no point in considering this and considering that because it's impossible to consider every single piece in the jigsaw, for goodness sake, I mean, how far do you have to go back? I thought I might as well toss a coin. The single thing to consider was the fact that I was in a rut and wasting my life in chasing a non-existent future with the promise of some non-existent crock of gold! So, I dropped everything and walked away from that life, waking up one day in Bristol supported by my savings while keeping my eyes and ears open until the opportunity arose for me to consider the job of Park Gardner when the previous chap told me he was leaving.

Dad and I discussed the problem. He knew of my obsession with plants and he amazed me when he said in his gentle way, 'Listen my boy, you, and only you, can decide how to live your life. It's all yours. No one can tell you it isn't - so take control!' Even now, he has his doubts although he seems happy enough to let me believe in myself and the result is I am more than content, living by the day, nurturing and caring for the gardens.'

Their conversation turned to music, jokes and funny experiences until Fly realised his passenger had fallen asleep. He drove on in silence until a little later Haydn woke with a start, 'Hey! Where are we? Sorry. Gosh, Think I must have fell asleep. Any idea of

the time?'

'Just after ten.'

'Ah, good. As a matter of fact, I can see where I want to go so you can drop me off anywhere around here. This'll do fine.'

Fly was dumbfounded, 'Hang on. We're in the middle of nowhere.'

The man smiled, 'Well, it feels like it's been here a long time, just like the open moorland, so I'll take a chance. Anywhere up here's a good spot to watch the sun come up, wouldn't want to miss tomorrow's daybreak for anything. I think from time to time, it's good to ignore conventions, drop all the pretense, get out of the game, and set off with just my bedroll, a bite to eat and something to drink, perhaps find somewhere outdoors along the way to spend the night. Once before I'd been sitting, eyes half closed, just watching the movement of my breath and body, ignoring the few thoughts trickling through the back of my mind, when somehow I must have eased my attention into a wider context because without any intention or expectation, I was suddenly fully conscious of a strange, limitless space and with one wide sweep of awareness I could take it all in – and I mean its entirety. The perfect Universe. And in place of my usual experience of seeing everything with myself as separate from everything, at that moment for a change I was a part of everything, like an atom or piece of the jigsaw in the vast vastness of a boundlessness that was somehow vibrating. It was an encounter with eternity sort of thing and I was a speck within it all yet comprehensible and aware of everything, and everything was aware of itself somehow. It was just like I was a leaf connected to a forest, part of the Entirety. I was the Universe. It left me feeling quite giddy.'

'Wow! That's amazing, though are you sure you just didn't invent it all?'

'Well, I've always been a dreamer so at first I did wonder if I was just recalling some old dream about space and time, then I realised it hadn't been my intention, and my experience had taken me by surprise. I had no idea I'd be catapulted into a vast space that was itself sitting and contemplating.' He cleared his throat and looked a little embarrassed, 'Sorry for prattling on.'

'Do you travel much, Hadyn?'

'I used to. Though now, well, whenever I can get away. Come to think of it, I've been travelling for most of my life. It was through my experiences when mingling with people of different cultures and beliefs that I became convinced that the human species is interrelated, regardless of colour, language or beliefs. We're all the human species. And a little bit loopy.'

'So what was it that first sent you off, just curiosity or something more serious?'

'I think my first visit to a foreign country came at a time when I needed some reassurance after a particularly depressing period in my life, a time when everything I valued seemed worthless. I was a teenager and felt stifled with city living and I was confused. I was lost. I needed to stand back, to find some perspective, to get away from that environment and find myself again. It was just at that moment that a friend suggested I join him and some friends for two weeks in Greece and it seemed the perfect solution. Sorry, would you rather I shut up?' He gave an embarrassed smile.

'Not at all. Please. You've had quite a life already and it's good to hear your tales. You make me think because you have different angles on things other than the ones we're taught. I'm tired of playing the *Social Game*,' at this they both began to laugh, although Fly was deadly serious.

'It was during that first visit that I had my sparkling moment. One day, in good humour and beautiful weather, my friends and I sat down to lunch in the garden of a small estiatorio on the outskirts of Gouvia, a village on the island of Corfu. Everyone was talking at once, jokes were flying, the excitement grew and since we had almost finished eating, I began to feel just a little cramped so decided to move to chair, a little over to one side. I happened to lean back on my chair and look up through the tall, positive poplars at the open blue sky and, believe it or not, I became aware of something happening to me. And then, just as I watched the sun reappear from behind some thunderous heavy clouds, I remember smiling and becoming aware of a feeling, a gentle reassurance and a meditative calm that just grew and grew and grew. A quiet confidence spread through me, and with it came a bright clarity and an awareness that there is a positive interdependence between all things and then I knew, with a widening grin, that I am one with absolutely



all there is. Nothing paranormal, just a natural connection to it all. And that's when I began to see life as it is. I think that's when I realised that the meaning of life is just to be alive. It is so plain and so obvious and so simple and yet, everyone rushes around in a great panic as if it were necessary to achieve something beyond themselves.'

'So how long have you been a philosopher, Haydn?'

'A what? Gosh! You think I'm nuts, don't you? Look, it's time to get going and get out of your way. So thank you very much for the lift. I hope I didn't bore you too much.'

'Not at all. Listen, are you sure you don't want to come with me down to the coast? You'd have a clear picture of the sunrise?'

'No thanks. I'd better not. I have to get back to work in a couple of days and I don't want to be too far away.'

'Well, you're a good man and I've enjoyed talking to you. You made me see things more optimistically and I really hope we meet again sometime.'

'Well, I have my niece further down this way and I'll be seeing her in a few months. She lives on the island they call The Garden. So I might see you then if you're in that area.'

'Yes, Hadyn, I know the island. In fact, that's where I'm heading. Like you, I needed to get away from the city and return to reality.'

'Oh, I understand completely. Fly, before I go, and I prefer not to give advice, yet I have to say I have some personal conclusions of my own that I have learned to trust and they have become a framework for a happy life. Just have a think, aim for peace of mind, open your heart and you'll find your own conclusions one day.'

They shook hands.

'Anyway, bye for now.'

## Insights

He needed to let it all sink in, though once settled into the soothing sounds from outside, he closed his eyes and became unmindful of his body and instead began to float within that spacious darkness and comfortable silence, content and free from anxiety and tension and without any idea, or need of knowing, which way was up or down. Then he seemed to be climbing wide, bright, shiny metallic steps towards a radiant sheer white light glowing from within a small doorway. Silence. Not a sound. Not even from outside. Not even the sound of his breathing. Once inside the doorway, beyond the dazzling light, the brightness dimmed to comfortable glow and he became conscious of someone several feet before him, smiling and beckoning him forward.

At first Fly was wary and dared not move until a calm and cheerful voice reassured him that no harm would come and that he could leave at any time he chose. He relaxed somewhat then stepped forward and as far as he could tell they were alone.

'I am life. You are life. All existence is life,' said the voice. 'And all life is interwoven. When your mother reached her sub-conscious maturity in her sixteenth year she was presented by myself with the opportunity of contributing to our fight against the negative and destructive tendencies in humanity. She was a peaceful and loving person who taught you all she could before being rewarded when you were nine years of age.'

'But she died when I was nine.'

'When her life ended your mother's energy was reabsorbed into the eternal energy that is this Universe. She no longer needed her body and, like your mother, since you have little or no ambitions for material wealth, wanting just to love and be loved, you can help humanity improve. It is time for you to realise you have reached your level of maturity and with that comes a choice. We can show you how to contribute to the true way and be free from the slavery of acquisitions and ambition, or you can return to everyday life, frustrating though it is. How do you feel about this?'

'Of course, I want to go your way.'

'Very well. For this you will always be conscious of the perfect peace, happiness and love that I am about to show you. As a gesture of this omnipotence I will take you to

the place your subconscious most desires, and if you are ready we can leave forthwith.

'I am ready.'

At just that crucial moment Fly was brought to his senses by the aggressive growl of a passing tractor so close that it seemed to be inside his camper van. He glanced at the clock on his dashboard. As usual, hardly any time had passed at all since he had closed his eyes, yet it seemed much longer. And then, with a knowing smile, and the overwhelming sense of optimism and purpose he always felt as a result of that spacious, recurring dream, he opened a window and listened. No more grind or lash of traffic, no toxic fumes and no sense of the 21st century – just natural tranquility. He sat rested and calm, then gently eased the door ajar until he could step down into the dense forest floor, almost immediately to be welcomed by a cobweb trailing across a cheek. As he stood there inhaling the faint breeze, there came a distinct rustle from somewhere in the daygreen underbrush that brought an uneasy apprehension, once again shuffling his childhood memories. The tension faded as he listened, once more reassured by the ordinary sounds of the woodland. The robins and the blackbirds, the crows and the gulls, and the pig-like grunting of the distant muntjacs. He had missed these once-loved, isolated rural sounds. They were weird and wonderful and always some seemed so much quieter in the country than the town. Sweet smells of juniper, jasmine, moss and pine came to him, along with some not so fragrant wafts. And with the dampness came the aura of earth, the occasional creak of the trees and then, quite close enough to be too close, the eerie, prolonged shriek of a distant cockerel which aroused another long-forgotten shudder from his childhood. For a second he was back inside the chicken run of grandfather's garden. He looked up and sighed a sigh like the one you sigh when you flop onto a very comfortable bed and something told him that all is so much more than what we are taught and what is understood. He knew it was time to stand back and look again at what was important to him in this world.

There was still quite a way to go so with just one place in mind he drove on and, as if to welcome him, there was the gift of another welcoming memory, it was the sight of dear old Brownlow Hill. At long last his trusty camper began the final steady climb up that gentle mound that took him home. Past fields overlooking the island from the

mainland that every year covers the prominent point with glowing yellow gorse and daffodils. Below him lay the welcoming shape of shadowy Sandy Cove, its old cobblestone stone pathway leading across just below the surface of the water, shushing and whispering as ever, all the way to the island's woody coastline and the gentle haven beyond.

The highest point on the Island is a forested landform, somewhere between a very high hill and a mountain, with hedgerows alive with wildlife and whispering becks tumbling down to the sea and a foreshore strewn with green, red and blue serpentinian boulders and rocks. Its small, pebbly coves, crags and grottoes have been dazzling traders and travellers since Paleolithic times and Ancient Greeks are known to have moored their vessels on its foreshore on their way to Ictis to trade for tin. Over time the forest above the foreshore has been swallowed by the encroaching sea and now has become a marshland with reed beds, a home to emigrating butterflies, herons, warblers, sea ducks, sparrowhawks, and all manner of visiting creatures. Fly had no idea where he would park or for how long, then again he saw no reason to worry. While he was away the hill would be a safe enough home for his camper among a row of rusty old bicycles, one with a 'D'-shaped front wheel, some old lorries and several other dilapidated vehicles that looked as though they had stood along the hedge for centuries.

He made his vehicle secure, put on his backpack and took a look over the edge where he was presented with a view he remembered from childhood and one most likely unchanged for quite some time – if not longer. Down and over on his left, he could just make out the dark shape of the contrasting hull and super-structure of an eerie sunken freighter lying dead on the seabed which his father had once pointed out to him years before. That day the flickering silverburst surface of the water was so dazzling it was impossible to get more than an occasional glimpse but even so, it moved him just to see it there so still.

Swifts and swallows were flitting and flurrying, white horses were chased by the steady chilly gusts, but even so, wherever he looked he saw no sign of man's design. No stress or tension. All was there. The veil was gone and once again his spirits rose, recharged by the energy of nature. He was free and felt encouraged to take part. His mind

was unruffled. He looked across the space between, shook his head in wonder and whispered, 'Hello again. How I have missed you, dear island! '

The track down from the crag was daunting and dramatic even in the afternoon sun. The steep descent was sloped and uneven and hostile to the inexperienced Mr. Flynn and more than once he slipped and slid and stumbled whenever his foot lost its grip on the shingly shale, often bringing the edge of the drop a little too close for comfort. The safest way to steady himself was by testing then gripping any stems of shrubbery and bush that came within reach as he passed on his prickly approach to the almost inaccessible beach.

Across the narrow shoreline, he could hear the trilling rivulets through the reeds as they trickled to the waters edge and once there, he soon found the old cobbly setts stretching in the shallows and knew it would not be long before the Spring tides took away that access and reassured the island. He had to get a move on and be careful because trundling along across the shiny wet stones without a care in the world could well snap an ankle. Then, in what seemed like minutes, he reached the other side and feeling so much more confident, he traipsed up the bank toward the trees without looking back, then forward along an overgrown, weedy trail until he caught the welcoming smokey aroma of wood burning cottage fires from the edge of his village home. The air was filled with the sounds of birds and the smell of cattle slurry.

Not much had changed at all.

### Thistle and Penn

Back in London, Antonio Vincenti was engrossed in compiling a list of Fly's greatest hits when the sudden buzz from his intercom shattered his concentration. Into the intercom impatiently he sighed, 'Yes, Jane?'

Jane was more than just his secretary, she was like daughter to him and they often

shared their coffee breaks with each other and sometimes he would accompany Jane and Paul, her boyfriend, to dinner or the theatre. She was a sincere, respectful, efficient personal assistant and someone he could trust and rely upon.

'Mr. Vincenti, there are two, er, gentlemen who wish to speak with you on a matter of some urgency they say. They do not have an appointment, sir.'

'Do they look like paparazzi?'

'No, sir. No weatherwear and no cameras. In fact, almost quite smart. They say they have some information that they believe will be of interest.'

'Wait one moment,' Vincenti crossed the room to his latest gimmick, a 'Fly Away' shrine. With the press of a button, lights began to glow above a small statue of the ex-celebrity turning on a little dais while whistling an excerpt medley of his hits. A plasma screen showed a variety of candid shots of the star in his hey-day. Right on cue, Vincenti's eyes began to moisten, 'OK, Jane, ready. Better show them in.'

Two rather bright and respectful young men entered the room greeting Vincenti with great deference, 'How do you do, sir. Thank you for taking the time to speak to us. We hope it might be to your advantage.' One held his hands behind his back while twisting his fingers and trying to relax, though both were embarrassed and unsure how to proceed.

Vincenti looked them over, and left them standing in silence while he settled in the huge chair behind his desk and fired up a fat cigar, 'Good afternoon, gentlemen. No doubt, as you are aware, I'm a very busy man, so please be brief. I hear you're going to make me an offer I can't believe... er...sorry, ...can't refuse.'

The men were earnest and exchanged glances before one began explaining their proposal, 'Yes sir. Of course, Mr. Vincenti, sir. My name is Bob Thistle, and my colleague is Jim Penn. This is not something we are accustomed to, so please forgive our stumblings.'

Vincenti was surprised and impressed by this admission. 'Interesting,' he turned to face the men and smiled, 'so please continue.'

'Sir, first may we say how very sorry we were to hear of the sudden death of Mr. Fly. We were fans of his music. His sudden departure has brought a great many people to

realise how much he meant to them, and yet, something has come to light that has saddened us both. May we continue?'

Vincenti, felt more than a little wary. Did they suspect something? He tried to guard his feelings by blowing a pathetic smoke ring and turning his luxury office chair to face the window, 'Mr. Thistle, please don't waste my time with innuendo and tittle-tattle. This is a most trying time for us all so please get to the point.'

'Sorry sir, but if you please sir, we have an acquaintance, well several, who hold positions of certain responsibility in fossil fuel distribution facilities, and...'

'Are we talking about a Motorway Service Stations?' asked Vincenti.

'Well, as a matter of fact sir, they are all Directors of Vehicle Arrangement.'

'So, they are car park attendants.'

Penn, a little confused, broke the tension and turned to Thistle, 'Bob, are you talking about Robbie?'

Thistle tried to cover his embarrassment at being exposed, 'Sorry Penn? Yes, yes. Now please! Er...well anyway, we have received messages and calls from some of our associates overnight and into the earliest hours of this morning, and with their businesses being strung along motorways between here, there and everywhere some are convinced - indeed, positive - that they have seen someone either at the pumps or at the payment areas who was the perfect image of your Mr. Fly. One in particular was convinced because his daughter, being a great fan of Fly, has bedroom posters, fancy tops and even copied his hairstyle, and so he knows exactly how Fly should look. He is convinced the lookalike was at the service station late last night and when he drove off, he was southbound.'

Vincenti raised an eyebrow, 'Is that it? Is that the big reveal? A spitting image? I don't understand. What's the big deal? As you can imagine, obviously Mr. Fly had countless admirers and any that looked at little like him would be sure to exaggerate that look. It's not unusual, is it? This suspect could be one of many.'

In the background, Penn was investigating the fish tank, standing over it. His tie about to dip into the water. As soon as he saw what was happening, he pulled it out but as he did this his sunglasses dropped from his brow into the water with a distinctive plop.

He spun round to see if anyone had noticed. The shades lay on the bottom of the tank.

Thistle spoke again, 'Sir, I too would ignore mere rumours and tittle tattle, a lookalike could take advantage and make quite a lot of money from his personal appearance, yet when Mr. Fly's er...'doppelganger', as I believe they are known, was seen near Plymouth, another acquaintance...'

Vincenti was confused, 'Another Service Station attendant?'

Thistle shot a glance at Penn, 'Who's privacy we shall respect...'

Vincenti winced, 'OK. Stop right there. Are you sure you're not just making all this up?'

Thistle looked offended, 'I would not be so rude, sir, believe me. Er, I promise you, another acquaintance, a farmer down in Devon, sent a text to say that your Mr. Fly look-alike was sighted in a lay-by in a country lane and he appeared to be climbing into the back of a camper van to have a nap.'

Without rolling up his sleeve, Penn plunged his right arm into the tank to retrieve his shades, pulling them out by an arm and giving them a shake. The arm snapped. The glasses returned to the bottom of the tank. Without thinking, he plunged his dry left arm into the tank to salvage the glasses. He put them on, dripping. He looked a little unsteady.

'Gentlemen, this is all very confusing and very unsettling! You see, it happens you are not the first to give me this news today. Sightings of my boy, Fly,' he crossed himself and sighed, 'seem to be coming from all over. A trusted friend of mine has told me not half an hour ago that a lookalike has even been spotted on an island off the south coast. No doubt because the less-knowledgeable country-folk down there are more gullible and therefore perhaps more openly deceived than we city-dwellers, although perhaps this particular double maybe just a travelling fan, a complete nobody. Who can say?'

Thistle leaned on the desk, 'Mr. Vincent, are you willing to accept that risk? If it were myself, I'd be more wary. You see, we think we know what's going on. The fact is, your Mr. Fly's wide open.'

Vincenti checked his trousers. Thistle caught sight of a wet Penn behind Vincenti and winced, then smiled, 'We have resolved this curiosity.'

'So go on Mr. Thistle. What do you think you know? I'm all ears.'



'We're pretty sure a grifter's working a scam on you, Mr. Vincenti.'

'A who?' asked a confused Vincenti.

'A what?' asked a confused Penn.

'No. A sting, er, a con trick. To put it straight, there's a look-alike pretending to be the real Fly and well, we're not sure how, he might, perhaps...er...take advantage of the moment and thereby make a lot of money out of it! Your money!'

'You mean this lookalike, posing as Mr. Fly, is going to use my boy's unique popularity and reputation, to swindle people? I cannot believe it!' Then a fraction of a second later, 'How?'

Thistle, 'Well, we don't know for sure, though for a tiny consideration and some expenses we're willing to trace this cowboy's whereabouts, confront him and report back to you on what he's concocting. What you do with him is not our concern and despite that, I will say, Mr. Vincenti, you are assured of our complete discretion, which, of course, includes not talking to the media. I'm sure you will be interested, sir, even if for no other reason than to honour the memory of the late Mr. Fly.'

'Even so, this is outrageous! Immoral!' cried Vincenti. 'To think that someone would jeopardize closure for fans of Fly across the world and plant the seeds of suspicion and mistrust in his management! It will bring grief. It might even blur the truth. To think that a look-alike would plagiarise and distort the honour of the late Mr. Fly for their own ends, fills this old heart of mine with sorrow and indeed, causes grave concern.' He looked thoughtful for a moment then looked at each in turn, 'May I ask if you are professionals or are you just jumping on the bandwagon? Be honest with me or this stops right here.'

Thistle looked at Penn and Penn nodded to Thistle, 'Mr Vincenti, we are unemployed in the acceptable way and have been travelling along the motorways looking for jobs. We are quite short of cash and need to find employment. When we heard about this con man from our friends on the roads, we thought we might come to some arrangement whereby we act on your behalf to shut down this creep and then, perhaps, you might reward us however you please. That is the truth, sir.'

'Gentlemen, I'm grateful for your offer.' He looked across at the shrine, 'OK. You

have my consent. I want you to get on to it right away. You will be paid for your work and if you do find him, wherever and on whatever outcrop, make sure he stays where he is and that you keep me informed at every stage. And now, if you'll excuse me, I have work to do. Good evening, gentlemen. Please keep in constant communication.'

Then, with outstretched arm, he shook their hands in turn as they departed and as he closed the door behind them, already he was forming another plan. He would go there himself, incognito, and his camarilla need not know.

Vincenti leaned toward the intercom, 'Jane? I'll be out of the office for the next few days but, as usual, I'll keep in touch. Now no further interruptions, please. Thank you, Jane.'

Muttering to himself and smiling, Vincenti walked over to the Fly shrine, passing the fish tank on the way, 'Now, as long as these innocent gentlemen can keep Fly under cover, out of sight of the media domain, my little game will proceed as planned.'

His feet squelched on the wet carpet. He was smiling and humming again.

### The Garden Village

Yes, Fly was happy to be back in his village, strolling among the sights and sounds that brought him dusty memories, and all he had to do was find a place to stay. As far as he could see, little had changed except for a few more boats in the working harbour, and more piles of fishing nets on the quayside, still made from knotted thread by the looks of them. Around the square and outside the ancient tavern, elder stragglers filled the benches and chairs, with or without things to drink, yapping and chatting, telling jokes and falling about in the late afternoon sun as they told of all the silly things they did when they were young. But the main thing that attracted his attention and making him feel right at home was the old stone circle standing in the centre of the square where all traditional local events were held and, weather permitting, where often he would sit and listen to his father's tales of his growing up in Liverpool. His father's teenage years had

been spent working in a grocery on the rim of a main road that took heavy vehicles in and out of the city through the Mersey Tunnel whereas, in contrast, his own home had been very much in that island village and all very much safely out of the way.

By early evening, the lamps were being lit around the square and very soon it would be flowing with streams of happy families waving and smiling to one another while enjoying the traditional Equinox Eve village stroll to the gentle accompaniment of the much-loved village band playing cheerful island melodies.

He sat among a growing group of villagers all taking time to natter and chat while waving to the lumber man, homeward bound, chewing on a piece of grass, waving from his horse and wagon laden with tree trunks and chopped branches. Another wagon, clomped and stomped along behind him heaped high with what appeared to be sacks of vegetables topped with a black and white Springer Spaniel puppy. Fly's sense of belonging began to grow and occasionally he would close his eyes and imagine his being part of everything he could hear.

Across from where he sat he could see The Lonely Sole fish shop with its usual teatime queue of locals, hungry and thirsty for its delicious fresh fish, shellfish, home grown produce, loaves, cakes, ice cream and yoghurts. And passing by after clearing up for the day, was a line of hedgers and roofers strolling towards the forest each carrying long sticks and dragging a cart between them while joshing and joking and telling tales about their friends. And in the shadows of an open shed, he could see some teenage girls and boys, chattering and whispering away while closing down their looms, all this in the busy little market place and it would not be long before silence would fill the square again and yes, indeed it was a different world.

At least, his heart and mind knew where they belonged.

Overlooking the square, the village has a large, wood and stone, barn-like structure long ago established as a meeting place where people could mingle with local fieldworkers, seafarers, overseas traders and, in fact, anyone visiting the island. It has been known as The Hole in the Head since times distant past and has been called by many other names before that but whatever its name it has always been famous as a

place open to all, a place to rest and relax and as soon as it came into view, fond memories came flooding back to Fly.

His mother and father would go there with him at least once a week and afterwards he would casually mention to his friends, 'Oh, yes. I often go to the tavern with mum and dad for a drink and a game of chess.' Even if his drink was always just an innocent orange juice. He remembered one afternoon sitting in The Hole in the Head with his parents and listening in on a conversation between some of the seniors on the next table talking about the origin of the present name of the pub.

One of the men spoke loudly to whoever could hear him, 'Many, many years ago, and I mean thousands, there were some islanders who believed that by scraping a hole into a human skull using a sharpened piece of flint, evil spirits could be allowed to escape from the mind. They realised the safest medical procedure to achieve this result would be by carefully making a small hole in the skull and so this operation became popular to several of the ancients here in the pub. It became known as Trepanning. This has also been performed as a cure for headaches and other abnormal activity in the brain, though it has never been proven to work. In truth, the hole made in the head is not refilled, and the skin around the skull is allowed to reform over it. Anyway, that's how the tavern became known as 'The Hole in the Head.' Honest.'

And that's when the room filled with laughter.

And as soon as he stood before it, the old stone building seemed to recognise him, rising with its usual air of gentle friendship. Nothing had changed at all. He was pleased to see it just as he remembered it and as soon as he saw the time-worn welcome sign creaking in the arch over the door he realised that if there was a room to let anywhere, it would be there.

The Hole in the Head is where the mainly senior members of the village gather to while away the afternoons by playing cards or backgammon, reading their books, telling yarns, sipping spirits or simply commenting on the state of the crops and the fishing haul, though sometimes just for the pleasure of talking, and although conversation isn't always necessary, companionship is all and dress code is entirely optional. In fact, the more workaday the better. Despite that, within those hallowed walls there beats the heart of

village life. Usually, it is groups of old friends, retired, widowed or widowed, who readily acknowledge the stranger with a wave of the hand and a smile and this means you are accepted as one of the flock. If ever someone offers the stranger a drink it will signify they are warmly welcomed and from then on they may even be acknowledged anywhere in the village, in public, and when this happens you are walking with the gods.

To the visitor, the Hole is not the sort of place one visits for the repartee, the subservient nature of the staff, or the fragrances from the kitchen. No, you visit the Hole just as you would drop in on the friend of a friend where it becomes obvious that happiness and satisfaction are not proportional to wealth.

Some like to sit out of the way to sip their drink and let the atmosphere eddy and flow around their wooden chair. It doesn't matter that they don't follow a single word of what is being said because most have heard it all before or said it all themselves, and now they have little left to offer except the occasional bow. Sometimes they get a little squiffy and you can spot the slightly damp patches on their clothes or the glistenings in their handle-bar moustaches as they make fun of each other or shake a stick. Should someone begin a sad old song, all will join in until the laughter or the mockery begins and then they start talking all at once because someone's forgotten the words. Occasionally, there are long moments of silence only shattered by a sigh, or a difference of opinion, or the click of a game piece yet whenever a regular crosses the threshold then it's all change with hospitality and courtesy draped around their shoulders like a cape.

When Fly arrived, the innkeeper of The Hole was a gentleman called Barrington Briggs, son of the previous innkeeper, Barry Brigg. Barrington was a chicken farmer who would often introduce himself as 'the egg-man' simply because since the day he took over the inn he had been applauded for supplying all the visitors that popped in with fresh free-range eggs every early morning before he opened the bar. In fact, if he had any left over by evening, he gave them away to his regulars as they made their way home.

All in all, there is something about the homeliness, the family photographs, the confined space, the unpretentiousness, the broad minded acceptance of total strangers and

perhaps simply the overall gracelessness of the place that draws people in and makes it so popular.

Fly swung open the door and made his way through the gathering to the bar, smiling and excusing himself as he went, aware of the clanging and thumping of barrels and the crashing of crates coming from somewhere down below. At last, there came a series of resounding clomps as approaching footsteps came climbing the cellar staircase. A man appeared, wiping his face on a handkerchief as he came behind the bar, apologising to one and all, 'Sorry folks. I'm a little short of staff these days,' greeting all and sundry with open arms and with a welcoming smile for Fly. 'Hello! Hello! What can I get you, Sir?'

'Oh, nothing much, just a glass of ale, thanks. Actually, I'm trying to find a room for the night, somewhere I can stay in the village. Do you have any vacancies by any chance?'

A hush fell over the other conversations as the bar faded to whispers. Fly felt a little awkward as the publican spread his hands on the bar and he gave him the once over, 'Not at the moment, I'm afraid. Is it just for one night, my friend, or are you on holiday?'

'Well, I'm hoping to stay a little longer. I was born in the village. So maybe I'll just stay the one night or maybe stay a little longer, not sure yet. It's such a special place for me.'

'And we'd like to keep it that way. My name's Barrington. Welcome to my tavern,' he said, placing Fly's drink on the bar as they shook hands.

'I'm Fly. By nickname, er, not by nature, I'm glad to say. I used to come here with my parents when I was a boy and your father, Barry, often came to my grandparents' cottage across the square. I was a fan of his.'

'Well, welcome home. You must be glad to be home.'

'How much do I owe you?'

'Have that with me.'

'Well. That's very generous of you. Cheers.'

'As you probably are aware that we get the high Spring Swell here in the earliest hours of tomorrow, so by about nine in the morning we'll be cut off from the mainland

again. Happens every year, so you might well be staying a little longer than you thought, 'caught in the arms of nature', as they say. The sailors and fishermen over on the mainland call this lump of land, 'The Island' because it's possible to sail any boat all the way around it every year at this time. However, as you must know, we prefer to call it, 'The Garden'. Anyway, you were asking...somewhere to stay...er, I should think the best place to ask is The Elysian Fields round the corner. You can't miss it. The owner is Edlyn. I'm sure she'll let you have a room if she isn't having an early night.'

'Cheers! Edlyn, hmm. Good job I asked. Thanks for your help, Barrington.'

The snug returned to the buzz of good-humoured banter and the drinkers returned to the chatter, the sad stories and the taking of the mickey. Sipping his drink in between eavesdropping, laughing to himself and generally being nosey, Fly became enchanted by the wide variety of entertainment for the lone visitor encouraged when his gaze fell on the young couple a little way along the bar from him. Entranced, the girl sat on a stool, staring up into the eyes of her man, mesmerised and bashful in his presence, and smiling as she was wooed. She and her Romeo looked at each other, pining and exchanging sweet nothings, whispering and giggling. Absentmindedly popping the occasional smoked anchovy nibble into her mouth from the small bowl Barrington had placed on the bar between herself and another couple.

The other couple, however, were not so entranced. They were quietly quarrelling and snapping in hushed tones. The girl was very angry, smoking like a barbecue and already becoming rather unsteady. She and her man exchanged barbed insults and whispered accusations as she flicked the irritating ash from her cigarette into the same little bowl of anchovy nibbles between herself and the other girl. Neither was aware of anyone else on the planet.

Fly looked away and smiled at the ceiling.

Above the throng there came the fascinating cut and thrust of a variety of comments and conversations flying around the room. One young man mocked his mate, 'You liar. You liar! I saw you do it with my own bare hands!'

And one very pretty young lady with hand on hip, turned to a farm boy in mud-

stained dungarees and wellies, 'Look boy, the only strong thing about you is your smell, Ha. Ha. Ha!'

Then an ageing lady in the corner was telling the latest news to her friend, 'Anyway, I was filling out the medical registration form in the doctor's, going down that registration list where they ask if you have anything wrong with you like bronchitis, arthritis, high blood pressure and so on, and I was ticking 'No' to everything, and by the time I'd answered all their questions with a 'NO', I began to feel so healthy that I abandoned the surgery, jumped in Davy's taxi and as soon as we moored in the harbour, I jumped out again and came straight in here for a drink.'

'Excuse me Barrington, do you have any coleslaw?'

'Yes. I've had one on my lip since Tuesday.'

Standing quite close to Fly was a local farmer surrounded by his friends, 'So, old Tom says to the incomers, 'I wouldn't have one of them mobile chicken coops if I were you.' 'Why ever not?' says they. 'Damn fluddin'!', warns Tom. 'Flooding?' says they, full of doubt and mistrust, 'Never!'

'And of course they take no notice. So old Tom waits and waits and waits. Then ten years later, there's a flood and their chicken coop is washed away and all the chickens are drowned. The very next day, yes, the very next day, you've guessed it...old Tom pops his clogs and leaves everything behind, well satisfied he was right after all!'

The friends made serious mutterings into their drinks.

A Labrador wandered in and out of the toilets. Children sat reading books while munching crisps and drinking local fruit juices. There were no fruit machines and no muzak. One of the boozers slid off the bar, a little tipsy. Fascinated by all the goings-on yet trying not to be too obviously nosey, Fly collided his drink with his nose then completely embarrassed said, 'Whoops! Thought I was taller than that.'

Barrington, drying some glasses, gave him a knowing wink and a smile.

A local lady in the throng protested, 'It's true, honest as pasties. It were last Winter Equinox and cold enough to kill an ox it were and they were having that Mobile Invalid-Chair Race up Horizon Hill to the Off-Centre Centre and down again. Edna went and won a big cup and now this year she's got to defend her title. As I say, last year it were



freezing so she's having a leather jacket made with metal studs - and leggings!'

As Fly was drawn into these whisps of light conversation he found himself relaxed and pleased to be included, acknowledging the ensemble as he became a part of the gaggle. He finished his drink and caught Barrington's eye, 'Thanks for that. Saved my life. Just round the corner you say?'

'Can't miss it. Out the door, over the lane, past the chippie, turn left and up Knacker's Track about a hundred yards and it's right in front of you. It's the only house in the track and it's called, Elysian Fields and don't forget, the lady's name is Edlyn.'

'I won't forget. Many thanks. See you soon. Cheers.'

### Edlyn and Kevin

Edlyn's Elysian Fields was the heart of peace and calm. It was a sanctuary, part hewn from the cliff face and part homebuilt with rooms of gentle light and natural sounds. One wall in the main room held a mural of the stone circle almost covering the entire space and illuminated by an irregular recurring glow. Placed here and there around the room, trees and shrubs grew in planters and pots and the whole floated in the sounds of the wash from a gentle stream. Above, the ceiling glinted with stars mapping the solar system and below, scattered rugs covered the floor.

Edlyn was sitting on a cushioned chair engaged in sorting a handful of fragrant onions she had harvested from her garden while wrapped in a vague concern that someone, or something, was not quite right. Could the village be under another growing threat from outside? There was no reason she could imagine, yet something was in the air and she knew not from where. She gazed through the window at a robin, as round as an orange, and smiled. 'Nature's always in control,' she said out loud. Then the doorbells chimed and she called out, 'Come in, it's not locked.'

The door eased ajar showing the tanned and smiling face of a handsome young man, 'Hiya Edlyn. I'm back!'

'Oh my goodness, Kevin Coverack!! Is that you, Kevin? Where on earth did you spring from? Welcome back to reality!' It had been quite a while since she had seen him.

Kevin dropped his backpack and rushed over to her. They hugged as he kissed her on both cheeks, 'You're more beautiful than ever Edlyn. I mean that. Look at me, a grown man, and you haven't changed at all.'

Edlyn raised a sceptical eyebrow, 'Then again, neither have you. You just look a lot more drained. Come here.' Once more, they held each other close.

Kevin's gaze swept the room, 'Crikey O'Reilly! Wow! This is all so weird. 'Elysian Fields', so this is your gaff. They told me at the inn that you'd moved off the boat and even so, I didn't expect an inner sanctum like this. What are you doing with yourself these days?'

'I'm all grown up with responsibilities,' smiled Edlyn.

Kevin saluted, 'Ah yes, your village.'

'Well, not my village, *the* village. I always wanted to protect our island and now I am one of those who do.' She looked concerned, 'It's not easy, but we're sort of doing alright, so far.'

'Well done. You deserve it.'

Edlyn stepped back to inspect his T-shirt. It was emblazoned with the word 'KING' picked out in sequins, 'Hey! I love your T-shirt.'

'Thanks. I had it made to measure.'

'Why?'

'It's part of a set. There's a King, a President and a Dictator.'

'Does this mean you've got a job?'

'I wish. In truth, it should have a question mark. They're adverts. At last I have an idea of what I want to do with my life.'

'What, be a king?'

'Or one of the others. You never know. You could be in a strange country, in a strange pub, when a stranger might come up and say, 'I know a country that's looking for a strange king. Had any experience? Got any references?' and before you know it you're a monarch.'

'Be serious, you cow pat.'

'Oh, alright!'

They laughed. 'I thought I could do a pretend apprenticeship here, then maybe find my own kingdom....maybe even find a queen.'

'So now we get down to the truth. You haven't come home looking to settle down, to find the one you want to be with, have you?'

'That would help.'

'Kevin, I know you. You're the sort of person who regards infidelity as a virtue!'

'I'm looking for a rich girl with a bad cough and if I don't find one, I'll have to get a job.'

'Ah, ha! Now we're getting somewhere. And where might you be staying?'

'Er, well, I was hoping...'

Edlyn, gives a loud wail, 'Oh hang on! Kevin...'

Kevin leaped over the back of the sofa and made himself comfortable, 'I love this place. Nice and soothing, roomy.'

'Now don't go getting any ideas. You're jumping to conclusions again.'

'It's my only keep fit exercise. Har. Har.'

'That, and running out of money! Har. Har.'

'I've been here just two minutes and already it's like old times.'

'With old jokes. And that's as far as it goes.'

'Nevertheless, they said at the inn that as well as being High Priestess sometimes you let people stay overnight if they have nowhere else to go.'

'Well, just to put you straight, they wouldn't say I'm a High Priestess, I'm more of an adviser and to be clear, I'd rather no one was staying here at the moment either.'

'Why not?'

'Oh, as I said, responsibilities. It's like I'm always under siege. Last week one of my cousins was out fishing and he thought he saw a beautiful mermaid and although it was really a seal he fell in love with it anyway. So now he wants to live with it out on Folk Rock - you know, the one offshore - take care of Sally - that's what he calls the seal - and give up fishing all together. Except he has his eye on using this place as a frequent

drop-in centre.'

'Would that be Perko?'

'Yes.'

'Likes a drink?'

'And unreliable.'

'Typical - 'though I thought he was into a monkfish.'

'Well, he was until Sally ate the one he had his eye on.'

'And that's when...'

'Right. Love at first sight. Then another cousin David, was talked into getting a vasectomy by his girlfriend to help her feel safer should they ever have sex and once that was agreed he went all the way to the first city on the mainland and had it done in private.'

'That's a long way.'

'Right. And when he came out post-operation, he was so sore...'

'...he wasn't looking forward to the three hour cycle ride home and had to stay with you.'

'Right! And now, for the very first time ever, word seems to be spreading over on the mainland and there are tour operators sniffing round, gathering information and making notes.'

'So? Wouldn't a few holidaymakers be good for the village economy?'

'Dear Kevin, as long as we villagers work together in mutual respect, the village will take care of itself. We don't need, or want, tourist development. We are different. We live in the real world, one that hasn't been transformed into data and digits. It's the same in similar societies throughout the world. What we are today is as we have been for millennia. We are content. We are nature and to separate ourselves from our essence would be madness, unthinkable, impossible. There is no alternative. And yes, to outsiders no doubt we appear weird. Freakish.'

'Weird? Freakish? Sounds ideal.'

'Anyway, I just haven't got time. I'm busy taking care of the village.'

'I could help.'

'Kevin. Whenever you offer to help anyone they always run for cover.'

'You didn't say that when I pretended to be your boyfriend.'

'I was desperate. And being harassed. You were sweet.'

'Sweet? We were at a party on a huge yacht. Lots of pretty girls. And you ask me to guard you while you slept. That bunk was very cramped.'

'I know. And all you did was stretch out and twiddle your thumb,' she gave him a knowing look.

He became embarrassed and defensive, 'Hey! I was sixteen years old! Come on!'

'No wonder you were so restless.'

'So can I stay? Please? C'mon, Edlyn. You owe me one.'

'I'll think about it. The best thing you can do if you do want to stay is to find some way to contribute, if you made an effort to find yourself something to do that would sustain the village as it is. And don't suggest being a King!'

'It's a deal. Where can I stash my bag?'

'OK! OK! OK! So tell me, you weirdo, what else did you get up to on your travels? Meet lots of interesting people Sky diving? Prospecting? I'm all ears.'

'Well, adventure was the intention, though being a coward and having no particular talent, I was pretty restricted.'

'So what did you do?'

'I went to Art College.'

'College? What you? Study?'

'Don't be silly! I said I went to Art College, Edlyn. Art College! Never said 'study'! Come on!'

'That's more like it. What happened?'

'They kicked me out for spending too much time in the college bar. I almost had a bed in there. At least I knew where I was whenever I regained consciousness.'

'Bet you pleased the bar manager.'

'Oh, yes! Often...though I never asked her name.'

'Well, you wouldn't want to get personal, would you?'

'You could even wake up from a coma and realise you were in a college bar and,

to be fair, that's what most people do.'

'Most college bars are like theme bars. They all have things in common, like the ads on those disorganised notice board offering cheap trips to Amsterdam and the flat-shares with psychos.'

'I think most people drop out as a direct result of those ads.'

'You're so right. At Art College, first year conversations are all about Monet, mummy and money.'

'Second year students wear dad's old paint spattered and ragged dungarees and talk about holidays, partying and sex.'

'Third years wear last year's paint-spattered designer casuals, worry over their finals, or their pregnancy, or the dose they caught from the psycho on the Amsterdam trip.'

'I know. I know. And they're so riddled with infections, under normal conditions they just drink penicillin with lemonade and a slice of lemon over ice.'

'Anyway, as soon as I left college, I wandered round the country, for the most part working in bars.'

'What was that like?'

'I won't bore you.'

'What else would you do?'

'Had to do something. I got a job in a brasserie.'

'Don't tell me. Bottle-green paintwork and sepia-tinted framed pictures of obscure poseurs on the walls?'

'However did you guess? I didn't stay long. Even the darling Piaf can sometimes become a strain.'

'Don't forget the chequered tablecloths.'

'And I had to wear a stick-on ponytail, speak like Dracula and help the over-worked stressed-out pregnant art student cook in the kitchen.'

'Further education.'

'Wait! Wait! The best one was in the Biker Bar near Oxford. it was called the Greasy Nipple and everyone seemed to be wearing padded leathers and incontinence

pants.'

'I bet the snug was stuffed with rotting corpses.'

'Smelled like it. And guess what? The barman hummed Born to be Wild while he filled the ashtrays with butts for those on benefit.'

'No way. Did they have toilets?'

'Oh yeah. And there's always the unmistakable aroma of skunk in there to disguise the embarrassing smell of Patchouli, left over from the days when someone thought it confused sniffer dogs.'

'I went to one once where there was no graffiti just serious ads for bike parts and Bank Holiday outings.'

Edlyn fell silent and Kevin could sense a slight uneasiness growing between them until he asked, 'Edlyn? What *will* you do about possible holiday homes, development and all that tourism thing? How can you stop this happening?'

'Don't know yet.' She tried to look casual, 'Any ideas?'

'Open a biker bar. Or maybe try sabotage.'

'Like what?'

'You could take down the road signs. They already spin in the wind as it is.'

'Maybe you're right. Perhaps we need a little more chaos.'

'Maybe. Look, I am so sorry Eddie, but I'm drained. Mind if I take a nap?'

'No, no. Not at all. Take the room on the left.'

'Hey, thanks for letting me stay 'til I get sorted. And, don't worry. Something's bound to turn up, they always do.'

'By the way, you could try the tavern. I hear Barrington, the chap who runs the place, is looking for a bar assistant. Why don't you ask him?'

'Hmm. I'd be grateful if you asked him for me. He'd listen to you.'

'OK. First thing tomorrow – after the ceremony.'

They hugged and as he gave her a wink, she gave him a gentle slap on the back of his head, 'Off to bed with you, lad!'

Then, just as Kevin entered his room, the front door chimed, 'Want me to get that, Edlyn?'

'No, it's OK. I'll get it.'

## Edlyn and Fly

Edlyn opened the door to a young man who seemed to be rather startled to see her. Realising at once that he was a stranger in the village, her first thought was that he might be looking for Kevin, or a local, or perhaps a room for the night. She smiled, 'Hello. How can I help you?'

As soon as he saw her, Fly felt he almost recognised the lady standing before him but had no idea from where. Then, as he stammered his hello, a voice in his head said, 'Oh, my goodness! That's definitely her! But who?' and he could only stand and blink as though he was trying to think of something to say. At last, he spluttered, 'Hope I'm not interrupting anything and, oh...er...I really am very sorry to interrupt you, and...er...I realise it's getting late but I saw your sign and was wondering if you might have a room to let? I've come quite a long way and am totally confused.'

She was impressed by his courtesy, 'Have you tried The Hole in the Head?'

'A what?'

'The tavern! Have you tried there?'

'Oh! The Hole! Yes, Barrington suggested you.'

'Well, I have got a spare room but it's a little cramped and it's the attic.'

'I really don't mind. Anywhere would be fine.'

'Actually, you might like it. Both my upstairs rooms have skylights but there are no other windows so they're a little dark.'

'Even better. Sounds great, restful. '

'Look, why don't you come in, I'll show you the room and you can have a think. Please try not to make any noise, I have a friend sleeping down the passageway. And tomorrow is a busy day in the village.'

'Ah. The Equinox. I remember it from when I lived here as a boy.'



'You were here when you were little?'

'Yes, I moved up north with my Dad when my mother died. She used to be a dinner lady at the school. Her name was Lilly.'

'Wasn't she the lady who used to sing as she served the children?'

'You remember her?'

'Oh, how could I forget! But I'm so sorry to hear she's gone.'

There was a moment's silence then Edlyn led Fly along the shadowy passage and up a few steps before opening a door, turning on a light and standing back, 'Here we are, what do you think?'

The room was a tastefully lit, beautiful space that raised his spirits even more, 'Wow! Shangri-La!'

'Actually, I do have another attic room if you prefer and you can call it what you like - Valhalla, Nirvana, Paradise, Utopia...but I have to warn you, it can get a little chilly sometimes, it's carved out of the rock face.'

'Great title for an album. So, what's Utopia like?'

'Well, as you'd expect, everything in the right place, and no one wants to stay there.'

They both laughed.

'Weird...No. This is brilliant. If it's OK with you, I'll take it right away.'

'You're welcome. My name is Edlyn and you are?'

'Sean Flynn, or Fly for short.'

'Fly. OK. Pleased to meet you.'

'Excuse me interrupting, Edlyn but somehow you seem a little familiar to me. Have we met before?'

'Well, not unless you've been to Nepal, or here in the village over the past four years.'

'No, neither of those I'm afraid. Must be from somewhere else or maybe you have a look-alike.'

'Or perhaps you sense my aura or charm or charisma – only joking.'

'Well, after all the anonymity of city life, it's really good to meet you. And if I may

say so, you're a breath of fresh air.'

'Hmm. Thanks. I'm sorry but if you'll excuse me, I have to call it a day because in the morning I shall be holding the dawn gathering and still have to work out what I am going to say, so, do you think you can organise your own breakfast, either from the kitchen or perhaps a little later at the tavern, but for now it's time for me to say goodnight.'

'Yes, the Equinox gathering. An important, new beginning.'

'Are you here for the gathering?'

'Er, I'd like to be. Would that be OK, me being a stranger and all that?'

'Of course. You'd be more than welcome. We get together just before daybreak so if you like I'll give you a knock early in the morning and you can come along with me. Now, I'd better leave you to get some sleep. Goodnight again.'

'Goodnight, er, Edlyn,' and a cheerfully weary Fly gently closed the door to his room then, with a sigh of relief, flopped onto his bed.

Downstairs, Edlyn turned to gaze through the window overlooking the stone circle and with a tender smile of thanks to Mother Nature, she whispered, 'Thank you.'

And at last Fly could relax in the comfort of the room. He lay on the bed, calmly roaming the universe through the skylight as sleep came to join him. Then with tired eyes, he allowed his body to drift and it wasn't long before the earth was a jewel fading fast in the vast and permanent inky blackness. Time constellations and galaxies sparkled and amused him as he smiled in wonder at their beauty and simplicity. He had a sense of unimaginable speed. He could see nothing and feel nothing else. Then there was a sense of himself strolling along the beach of a lagoon bordering luscious jungle with exotic trees and flowers. The waters were warm and he could see several gentle fish and submarine plant life. Wild animals roamed in peace and from a branch a young monkey sat watching and blinking at him in mild surprise. Unperturbed, it continued to pluck fruit and gaze about. Fly chose pieces of delicious and thirst quenching fruit as he wandered and felt at ease and at one with his surroundings.

Among the shrubbery of his dream, he beheld a golden skinned, dark haired lady

who gave a gentle wave as she approached. He recognised her as she came closer. He felt they shared a deep empathy for each other and that they made each other happy. They sat together holding hands and chatting for a little while until it was time for him to go. When the time came for him to leave she looked into his eyes and said, 'Believe me Sean, I might not always be at your side but please know, I will always be with you, my dear, dear boy.'

### Cap'n Davy

Nonetheless, to one particular pair, that silent night was not so peaceful as it was for those enjoying the welcoming comforts of the Elysian Fields.

Thistle and Penn had arrived among the coastal creeks completely exhausted and not terribly delighted to be in a strange wilderness. They had hoped to regain some energy by dozing in their car for a couple of hours but that made little difference, and now they were wandering in the deepening darkness, sometimes stumbling far too close to the water's edge and always without the safety of railings and street lamps and protection from the strange and freakish noises. They felt vulnerable with only the hidden consolation of being together and walking closely side by side, in pushing on through the darkness through unknown dense thickets beneath enormous, creaking trees stuffed with uncertain intimidating silhouettes that made unfamiliar noises, not to mention the ubiquitous owl, forever hooting for its missing lover, such alien sounds to these frazzled city-dwellers. At least that sense of a shared apprehension brought a secret shadow of comfort.

Then just when they began to adjust and relish their togetherness, through the dusk loomed a towering dark shape that startled and astonished them. It was an old boathouse overlooking what appeared to be a shadowy narrow sheltered waterway right at the end of the trail and it stopped them in their tracks. In all the impenetrable nightness, a single dim light shone from within like the eye of a Cyclops. They weren't at all sure

what to do.

Penn held the torch as Thistle traced the area, 'According to this map, we've arrived at Ficklebank Creek, "The first and last mainland port of call for anyone sailing to and from the island," and we are just in time to watch that boat over there, in all likelihood the last one tonight, chugging across the open sea, leaving us stranded in all this weirdness on the mainland.'

'Probably a pirate who lives on that little island over there. You can just make out its lights against the sky. And if that's where the con man is, well, it looks like a bit out of the way, if you ask me. '

'It is. Although a good place to hide if you don't want to be found,' nudged Thistle.

'Of course! Of course! Ideal if you're in hiding,' said Penn, mouth open and eyes wide.

'Could be. Although, it's a bit of a swim and not even we can swim that far,' said Thistle, failing to skim a pebble across the water.

'Look!' said Penn. 'The sign over this door - Destiny, The Island Ferry – might that be a water taxi?'

Thistle laughed, 'They're fishing boats, I think, so they could be, you know, like water taxis round here so maybe we could go by boat tomorrow and have a gentle delve. And anyway, it looks like a great place to kick back and relax after all our journeying.'

'Dear Mister Vincenti's not paying us to have a holiday, is he?' said Penn.

'Senor Vincenti wouldn't have to know and anyway, I would have thought we're allowed one day's leisure.' Thistle was so tired he could not wait to sit down, 'I'm drained. We'll have to have another think tomorrow.'

Penn was whistling to himself as they walked back to the car, then, 'First day of Spring tomorrow. We should celebrate. Hey! Shall we get a B&B? Just for one night?'

'Where? There are no houses here and not even an inn. We'd have to walk back to that farmhouse or we could sleep in the car and claim for a B&B. And what's Spring got to do with anything? I've got a funny feeling this little job is going to take longer than we expected. By the way, I'm in the back.'

Penn whistled on as Thistle consulted the map. 'Standing Stones? Hey Penn, what

are Standing Stones?'

'Don't ask me, old fruit,' snorted Penn.

'So what are standing stones?'

'Well, according to folklore they are ancient fertility monoliths or astral doorways.

Perhaps both, though more likely, neither.'

'I thought so. Being in the countryside's like being on the flippin' moon.'

'Weird noises.'

'Different weather too.'

'Nowhere to go either.'

'Correct. Unnatural...'

Penn was horrified. 'Oh no! Look! The car!'

'Don't tell me it's been clamped,' groaned Thistle without opening his eyes.

'No. it's been tied to a tree.'

An old fogey in sou'wester and oilskins stepped out from the boat house and waved his stick at the car, 'You can't moor there, lads. Not allowed.'

'Why not?' shouts Penn, miffed.

The old chap began to inspect the car inside and out, as though he wasn't quite sure what kind of boat it was, 'You're on double ley lines, my dears, and your bows are out!'

'Double lines? No parking? How the hell were we to know? Where's the signs? This is insane!'

As he disappeared into the darkness, the man pointed his walking stick at a nearby ruin and shouted, 'Not just double lines, you idiots! I said 'Ley lines!'

'Golly! What on earth does he mean? What in goodness are ley lines?' Penn was befuddled.

Thistle put an arm around his friend's shoulders, 'Ley lines, old fruit, are hypothetical alignments of a number of places of geographical interest, such as ancient monuments and megaliths. However, it gas to be stressed, they are hypothetical.'

'Well, thanks for that. OK. It's just that I've never seen one.' Driving back up the lane Thistle looked about for somewhere to safe park. He was glum, 'God, How I hate

nature. It's so bloody green.'

Penn looked at the sky, 'And dark.'

'I bet nothing ever happens here.'

'It's like a stage set.'

'Scary.'

'Unreal.'

'I told Mr. Vincenti we'd ring about lunchtime tomorrow.'

'You'd better phone him now, I think.'

'It's a little late. He'll be in bed.'

'Yes. I think you are right. Still, ring anyway. It'll sound more urgent. Then we can park along here somewhere and get some rest. Last time we kept driving and you were rabbiting on so much you almost got us killed.'

'Hang on! You just said I wasn't driving that time. You were!' screamed Thistle.

'Yes, dear boy, despite that you were talking. You always distract me when you talk while I'm driving. Same thing.'

Then the engine cut out just as Thistle tried to make contact with Vincenti. The car rolled to a halt. 'Penn, there's no need to pull over, we've lost power. it's cut out. And so has our mobile.'

'Merde! Er...pardon my French, mon ami. Blame those damn ley lines!' Penn looked straight ahead, 'Well, here we are, broken down in the middle of the night, in the middle of some bloody nowhere and miles from the nearest pub. What on earth are we going to do?'

'Haven't got a clue. Any ideas?' said Thistle.

'What *can* we do? Are you mad, Thiss? What choice do we have? We're going to have to sleep here. Can't even ring for a taxi.'

Thistle was fuming, 'I think we're going to have to walk back to the boat house and ask that old fogey in the oilskins if we can sleep there till we can arrange a lift on his ferry to the island. A day on that island might help us think straight before we use someone's phone to report our progress - or lack of it!'

'Have you got any money Thistle?'

'No. Although I bet you have. You've always got a few notes sewn into your gussetry, *'in case of emergency'*, as you often say.'

They tapped on the boathouse door. There was no sound from inside. They tapped again, a little louder, and then were quite startled when the voice of the old fogey came from behind, 'How can I help you gents?'

'Oh, hello. Sorry to trouble you so late. We're in a bit of a pickle. You see, tomorrow we would like to cross to the island and in the meantime, having nowhere to sleep for the night, we wondered if you might allow us to spend the night in your boathouse. Er, if not, of course, we'll understand.'

'Well, I'd be glad to take you across to The Garden though I have to warn you, my cygnet is a little past its best and sometimes I think it's just about held together by the tenacity of its barnacles. Then again, if you're willing to take a chance, well, we could go now and have a drink over there. It only takes about ten minutes. And yes, you're welcome to stay the night in the barn. The other thing is, there are no berths in there. You'll have to make yourselves comfortable however you can.'

They liked him and he liked them.

'Can you give us an idea of how much you charge? We are a little short of cash at the moment.'

'Oh, there's no charge, mateys. You see, some many years ago, I qualified as ship's captain and went for a ramble on the island of Sumatra far, far away in the south seas. Mariners had long since told me tales of their own adventures down there and I was falling under its spell. 'Tis an island of extraordinary beauty, bubbling with life and vibrating with the power of nature. Eruptions, earthquakes and tsunamis; steaming volcanoes brew and bluster while standing guard over lakes that lap the edges of craters. Orangutan-filled jungles host not just our red-haired cousins, there are tigers, rhinos, elephants and cuckoos. And down at sea level, idyllic deserted beaches are bombarded by barrels of surf. You can see why I just had to go to the wild and wondrous land of Sumatra.'

Thistle and Penn were fascinated. The man was a Travelogue.

'I'd been there just a few days when I set off to uncover whatever I could, then out

of the blue came the realisation that I didn't have a clue where I was. I was lost and didn't have an inkling as to what to do next or where to aim for. And then, out of nowhere, the sound of music came drifting through the wilderness and that drew me even further into the wild where I came across a tiny settlement in the middle of a clearing and asked a man if I might stay on the outskirts until my strength and confidence returned. The man looked confused, deep in thought for a few moments. Next day, he reappeared at the foot of my sleeping bag and took me off to introduce me to a small hut the villagers had built for me to sleep in. I just couldn't believe it. I put my stuff in there and stayed about a month.'

Thistle and Penn exchanged glances again.

'Do you know, every morning, outside the door, they'd leave a small basket of fruit, some water and some bread. it was like being on holiday. When the time came to head home, I asked the man how much I owed him, 'cos I had quite a few pennies tucked into my socks, as you do. The man smiled, put a hand on my shoulder, looked me in the eyes and said, "My friend, I can understand your need for food and shelter, but please tell me, what is the money for? I don't understand that." So you see, whenever I can I just pass on what was given to me and it would be good if you might do the same.'

'So we can stay the night?'

'Of course you can! Cap'n Davy's the name! Follow me!' and so, chuckling, they followed him into the boat house, glad to be safely indoors.

### A Way of Life

The following morning Fly was woken in the darkness by a gentle tapping on his door and a whispered, 'Good morning. I'm off to the stone circle in about ten minutes for the Equinox, I'll wait for you if want to come with me.'

'Won't be a sec,' and Fly was dressed in no time.

Very gently, Edlyn closed the door behind them as they left her home, 'My old



friend Kevin is still asleep and it's still a bit early for him. We started school together and we've been friends ever since. He's just arrived out of the blue after about ten years travelling, or should I say 'wandering', so you'll meet him later. The ceremony doesn't get under way for about another about half an hour so we can sit and have a chat till then.'

They exchanged broad smiles and Fly instantly warmed to their new familiarity as they strolled through the narrow streets together, him watching their shadows, so close together on the ground and it just felt right. Edlyn asked him all the usual questions she liked to ask of people when they came to stay, such as where had he been living and what he did for a job, his likes and dislikes. He told her he had been in a band but recently his attachment to the city had finally come to an end. That city life just was not him and he had come away to find himself again. She smiled. There was a sense of ease between them, comfort in each other's company, and he felt he had known her all his life. She looked so familiar but as much as he tried, he just could not place her and then, his jumbled brain almost forgot where they were going and why. When they arrived at the square, as expected, the circle was empty and the sky was dark and still. Strangely, he sensed a strong, growing attraction to Edlyn that he could not explain.

'Edlyn, are you from around here?'

'Yes, well, I am more permanent now. I travelled back and forth because my father was from Nepal, actually Lumbini, and Mum was from here in The Garden. They met at uni studying Psychology and like you I was born in the village and naturally, when my parents moved to India, they took me with them. I came back to stay about five years ago.'

'Gosh! Having a psychologist for a mum must have cramped your style a bit.'

'Very funny. No. Mum and Dad had studied Eastern philosophy and realised the value of a positive attitude to any community. She had always wanted to bring a high quality of life to the people of our garden island, one that didn't depend on money and acquisitions. To our great sadness, she passed away here five years ago when I was with her on a return visit to the island and I promised myself I'd stay and devote myself to helping build that very quality of life for the people in her memory. At present my father's still a leading lecturer in Nepal.'

'Oh, Edlyn, it is saddening to hear about the loss of your mother. And I think both your parents would be reassured by your dedication in helping the islanders. I think I read somewhere once about a calm state of mind without ego helps you be more healthy and content. In fact, they say it's the backbone of a happy society. And as a boy looking out at the world, I thought everyone had the same easy-going social attitudes that we had here. I took them for granted. And then as I grew older and travelled, I realised that major governments of the world seem to be in some form of competition, forever fighting for gain or victory and it all seemed such a risky thing to do. Our governments have such a lot to learn. But then, I've hardly been back a minute and it is so obvious that our village is different, special. And already I'm beginning to understand why.'

'My mother had a theory,' said Edlyn thoughtfully, 'that as a result of travelling to foreign lands for hundreds of years, trading with foreign peoples and accepting peoples' differences, our seafarers and merchants adopted ideas and embraced different ways of trading that were originally unfamiliar to them. Then, as time went by, they realised respect for differences was the basis of successful communication between people and it was this frame of mind that helped them develop better relationships with other peoples. Naturally, they brought this peace of mind home to the island.'

Fly watched her strange green eyes sparkle as she became more and more inspired.

'She told me that sometimes emotions are like the weather, unpredictable and beyond control and growing up in India, I learned that by keeping our feelings within reasonable bounds we can remain relatively calm. The problem is, some people in the West tend to think they control the world and if some ideas are foreign then they don't belong but, believe me, they positively do. I mean that just by being open-minded and optimistic we can calm the vital energy and the ego, even help the circulation of blood and improve our health. This was one of the basic facts I learned at college.'

'It is quite amazing to think that good health can be strengthened so naturally.'

'Or is it? It only means that the quality of one's life depends on keeping a positive, happy state of mind. As is well known, anxiety and anger are not good. There can be no mental balance when anxiety, grief, joy, and anger exist. So we should subdue desire and

disorder. Simple. Happiness and good luck will arrive on their own if there is enough space in our hearts. We should aim for peace and happiness, clear anger and resentment from our minds. Then, by avoiding angry moods and a troubled state of mind and by cultivating optimism and happiness, we can enjoy longer lives within a sound body which will be stronger and more resistant to ill health. Happiness and cheerfulness calm the mind. Good health is always based on happy and calm moods.'

'Gosh, Edlyn. It all makes so much sense, and seems so obvious - and normal.' Fly was fascinated by this lady of ladies and absorbed her every word. He felt he was drifting in space again, his anxiety had melted away and once again, he felt positive.

'Another thing, Fly, to remain happy, we should be able to tackle a problem calmly. Don't worry about a problem before it has actually revealed itself and don't worry too much after it has gone and don't cling to what has passed. Instead, we should adopt a detached attitude towards checking all emotions such as anxiety, delight, wanting, fury and concern. That is the way to health and vitality.'

'But how do we do that with so much constant bad news in the media that makes us so feel so dependent and so involved in everything? Almost every news programme begins with bad news.'

'Oh, ignore the media. Please! One guarantee of keeping an optimistic frame of mind is by cultivating a wide variety of everyday interests and hobbies. Such as reading books, meeting friends, travelling, fishing, going for walks, sitting in the countryside with friends and loved ones, painting, greeting strangers, singing, learning to play musical instruments, watering flowers, whatever.'

'Our island has an unusual, calm sort of atmosphere. Did you say that came from early traders?'

'Well, there is quite a lot of advice handed down from our travellers, telling us that such activities as I mentioned can bring on a cheerful mood and cleanse our feelings. It says that we should always enjoy simple pleasures such as sunshine in winter or shade in summer, beautiful scenes on a bright day, walking cheerfully with a stick, watching

fish and ducks in a pond, listening to birds singing in the woods, drinking a cup of wine or playing a stringed musical instrument. What they were suggesting was that we should relax the mind, choose and work on our own hobbies, and always increase our interests in life so that comfortable feelings, a stability of mind and cheerfulness will result. All of which contributes to good health and a long life.'

'So open-mindedness and optimism are important principles for calming the mind and that leads to good health? It's so simple yet we are never encouraged to believe this. It should be taught in schools.'

'Our ancestors did not concern themselves with reasons for living, instead they encouraged stillness and emptiness of mind. Their way of health care gave them quite a long life. It shows us that people with good health care should not do anything they don't want to do, keeping free from weird and shifty thoughts, keeping a cheerful and happy mood, enjoying a wide variety of interests, leading an easy, simple life, with a relaxed, happy, open, and optimistic frame of mind which all leads to a happy environment. Unbelievable I know. And so simple, but all this has given the present atmosphere and frame of mind of the island.'

Fly was mesmerised. She was lovely. And everything she said made perfect sense.

'Sorry, Fly. I tend to go on a bit. But it all means so much to me. I feel there is so much more than we do to enjoy a truly contented life.'

'Edlyn, you're amazing. All you say is so clear and possible and I feel really optimistic now. Thank you.'

'Well, at least now I have my speech a little better organised at last. To me, it is important to bring the words from the heart, if you know what I mean.'

'Like writing lyrics and poetry,' without thinking, he took her hand and gave it a gentle squeeze then looked shocked and let it go again. 'Sorry. Didn't mean to step out of line.'

Edlyn, smiled, slowly took his hand again and, looking into his eyes, said, 'Fly, I feel we can be friends.'

'So do I, Edlyn.'

And they shared a comfortable silence.

### Ceremony of the Spring Equinox

Little by little, and right in front of them, a faint glow was colouring the sky above the seaway to the East. It was the approaching day's beginning and with it came the villagers, unhurried and hushed. In no time at all, they were grouping and gathering and filling the silent circle. Such a special day and by its end the Equinox would have passed.

Edlyn felt a little nervous, but then she always did as the ceremony was about to begin. The breathtaking myriad of stars that make up our galaxy continued to spread before her eyes and as usual one shone brighter than the rest. She began to wonder how the birds and wildlife would react to the changes in light and shade, the silence and the warm, warm air. Yet at the back of her mind, she was still aware of a growing concern for the future of the island and just did not understand from where it came or what form it might take.

Then, as the earth turned, it brought the time for her to begin.

The celebration of the first day of Spring, is a time of change, of growing light, optimism, rebirth and renewal; a time for flowers and dancing, for bonfires, feasting and fun.

By then, within the wide stone circle in the centre of the community, there stood the large gathering of villagers quietly chanting the name of their village guardian, Edlyn, as very slowly she ascended the steps of a small lectern on that typical radiant day. In one hand she held a thin sprig of wild honeysuckle.

Edlyn was the guiding light of the village. Her love and compassion encouraged the villagers to continue living in harmony, with optimism and kindness influencing their survival, development and evolution. Yes, their Edlyn was a strong and confident woman and as an essential member of the village, she would call upon the villagers at this time

each year, to come together in their oneness with nature and recognise the moment of the Spring Equinox. Facing the imminent sunrise she stood, eyes aglow with expectation, hair ruffling in a gentle breeze with raised arms in appreciation, slowly turning and smiling upon the entire assembly.

She raised her face towards the first blush of light, and smiled, 'This new beginning brings the day we call the Vernal Equinox. It is the first day of Spring and once again we come together in The Garden before the natural elements of Earth, Wind, Fire, Time and Space and show our respect to Nature. We, the children of this island, thank Nature for the earth and all its gifts. We thank Nature for our wisdom and the benefits, the happiness and the protection that our island brings. We thank Nature for the values that have freed our minds from the narrowing effects of fancy and fluff. We have learned our truths from personal experience, from rejecting the whisperings of those who would steal our spirit. We thank Nature for this vital basis upon which we build our gentle lives.

We know that by our very nature we are vulnerable. We sense the creeping greed of ravenous materialism slithering across the cobbled causeway and soon it will be oozing at our door again. It needs to feed and it has its eyes upon our island home. We beg you, dear Mother Nature, please let us know how to prevail. We call upon you to guide us. Now, please everyone, relax.'

She stood and listened to the silence. 'Let's begin by listening. Please, just close your eyes and simply listen to the heartbeat of the village. Just listen to the general pulse of our island as if you were listening to an expression of beauty and emotion. Hear the sounds of the sea, the incoming breeze and how it rustles the leaves. Hear the bird calls, the waffle, waffle, waffle of flapping pigeons, the mocking quacking from the ducks, the cheerful chuckling of the waterfall and don't forget to listen to your own body breathing. In other words, let your ears hear all they want to hear. There are no good sounds or bad sounds and it doesn't matter if somebody coughs or sneezes or drops something, it's all just sounds. Regard your thoughts as noises. And soon you will find the outside noises and the inside noises become the same. You will discover that everything that happens is all the same. There is nothing to be afraid of because you are everything and everything is you. When you look around, everything you see is you, because everything in nature is

connected and nothing exists independently. Nothing. You are born of the total energy of the Universe. You are that energy. You are this Universe. You are not a stranger here.'

The first rays of sunlight brightened the landscape and the entire congregation softened into silence while Edlyn reviewed the throng, 'Oh people of our island, let's show our gratitude to Mother Earth for all that we are. There is no need to worry. Believe in the goodness of yourselves and be positive. It is the Equinox and goodness will always prevail.'

A leading member of the circle came and stood before Edlyn and waited with patient, undivided attention. She looked into his eyes and smiled as they exchange bows. She lowered her voice, 'Barry Briggs, good morning. You alright? You look concerned.'

'Please excuse me my lady, but some of the boys are wondering if there's any chance of getting away early to watch the gig racing down at Shady Cove.' He looked hopeful.

'Of course. I think we've come to the end of the ceremony, so go with your friends and enjoy yourselves. Oh! By the way, before you go, could you ask Barrington if there's a bar job available for a friend of mine? I'd be very grateful.'

'What's the name?'

'Kevin Coverack.'

'Kevin Coverack. OK, leave it to me. I'll twist his arm!'

Edlyn descended the steps of the lectern and made her way out of the circle as the gathering parted like a wave before her, smiling, thanking and embracing one another.

Facing a slight breeze, she was looking forward to seeing Fly and maybe sitting down in the harbour for a little while to perhaps simply enjoy each other's company. She felt more at ease now the ceremony was over and had really enjoyed their talk together before the dawn. It had helped and she had sensed something warm and pleasant between them on that special morning. Unfortunately, she had been so busy meeting village members, reassuring some, giving advice to others and generally wishing all of them well, the first day of Spring was well under way and Fly was nowhere to be seen, not even when she got home. Her house was silent. Although the end of the ceremony, she thought she had spotted Fly walking and chatting to Barry Briggs while making their way

through the throng from the edge of the circle towards the square, but by the time she got there they had disappeared. Through the open door to his room she could see his bag on the floor and the usual odds and ends spread about the dressing table but no sign of him.

'Perhaps he's gone to the tavern for a Barrington breakfast, or with Barry Briggs to watch the gig racing. Perhaps I should have gone with him.'

### At Home in The Garden

In The Hole when Fly asked Barrington if he was doing breakfasts, he received a bright, welcoming smile which meant the publican could hardly believe his ears,

'Breakfast? Of course, my friend. Please, sit anywhere you like and I will prepare for you my famous omelette and toast. Just give me ten minutes and you'll have the most important meal of the day. Would you prefer tea or coffee?'

'Tea, please. By the way, earlier on, after the ceremony, I bumped into your father again, and after all this time he still remembered me. Last time I saw him was over at my grandparents. Nice chap, invited me over to his cabin for a chat.'

'Yes, he lives alone now enjoying his own company for a change. He loves his cabin, and I can't say I blame him. As you probably know, he used to be the innkeeper here but being on call seven days a week can wear you out so he passed it over to me. Now, I'm starting to feel a little in need of slowing down myself. We'll see. Anyway, your breakfast is on the way. Oh yes, could you tell Edlyn to ask her friend, Kevin, to drop in and see me about that job? Anytime will do.'

Fly took a seat by a window at the side overlooking the shallow valley down below and as he surveyed the peaceful scene, his worries about the Vincenti fiasco seemed to belong in the past. His mind was filled with thoughts of Edlyn and her talk of a cheerful, tranquil life. The moment she had opened the door and stood before him, he knew he had made the right decision to come home.

Down below, he could see a villager walking with a donkey foal along an old worn track and taking great care because the animal could barely walk on what looked



like soft and crumbly feet. The man kept stopping, whispering to the donkey and coaxing it to take a few more paces. He was touched by the man's consideration, because each time they stopped, he would put his arm around its neck, whisper in its ear and give it a kiss. Then Fly smiled to himself when he saw two ladies standing in the shade of a tree, one of them adjusting her headscarf and brushing down her dress while trying to appear interested in the gossip from her friend before pointing to the man and the donkey and pulling a sympathetic face and saying, 'Aaah.' And apart from the children squealing and playing madly in the square, there were no other sounds except for the banter from the locals there in the tavern. Right across the breezy room over near the bar a group of men were playing backgammon until they stopped and wished him, 'Good Morning'. Such a different, easy way of life, one where people exist by choice without the dictates of finance, fad or fashion, where schedules and data have hardly any weight.

Except for the even flow of his breath, all was still. His mind had come to rest and he was more convinced than ever that of all the places he had ever been, he had no memory of anywhere more calm or peaceful than that of his gentle garden island home. It felt good and it felt right to be in an old country tavern embraced within a community of few shops and no traffic. Here, where 'the sea waters bathe you, the winds comb your hair and the beaches in their lap cradle you to sleep'. A place so isolated, you are assured of direct contact with nature and tranquility.

Further along the track he could see to where isolated cottages snuggled among the trees spreading over the spine of a hill towards a ruined castle which in turn overlooked an old anchorage and a narrow beach. He could trace a track that snaked down from the castle for quite a way before it straightened out parallel to another neat sprinkling of cottages. Half way there, among the trees, something that looked like a pretty little cafe sat back off the road right opposite a bridge that led through scrub to another, semi-secluded, beach. It was all very tempting and after breakfast he decided he needed a casual stroll to allow this huge change in his life-style to become real, to become him. At least the wind had dropped, the outlook was positive and the sky was blue.

He was brought back to his senses by the sudden appearance of Barrington carrying his breakfast on a tray with a pot of tea, 'Here's your breakfast, Mr. Fly. I'll be behind the bar should you need anything else.' And Fly's breakfast was beautifully presented with ample portions on a very warm plate. He was impressed. It was exactly what he needed to restore his personality after the long drive from the city and the excitement of meeting Edlyn. And once he began, this most important meal of the day, he ate with his eyes closed, seduced by the full homely sensations of taste and smell and being almost dizzy with delight. He didn't want his meal to end and when he finally put down his knife and fork, he felt restored, energised and with one look through the window at the greenery beneath that old dependable sky, the deep flawless, never-ending, always dependable sky with the points of a rocky outcrop and part of the castle behind them, the scattering of homes and their weird-shaped smokey chimneys, he knew he had to go back for his swimming gear. He was going to take a dip after his stroll.

Above the castle, buzzards drifted and sailed through the air with at least two gold crests and countless noisy sparrows and by then Fly's body wanted the sea and wasted no time in taking shortcuts along old work tracks through scrub and bracken, while taking care to avoid slipping on the cow dung and horse poo, down to the secluded beach until at last it crunched onto the pebbles and apart from the mask and snorkel and fins, he slipped naked into cool waters and launched forward into the silent whispering bay above a dappled sea bed, home to countless ancient sailors swimming in their own magic world.

Below the surface, clouds of living colour meandered above the creamy sand against the purple, blue and yellow flora, and the rocks. He was floating in the living organism that is the sea, back to the beginning, childlike in joy and freedom. Swimming into caves and coming eye to eye with larger fish, the one sound was of his own steady breathing and the clicking of his snorkel. In time, he cruised parallel to the shore and came to a satisfied rest, peeling off his mask and fins, and clearing his sinuses with a snort, slipped and slid, crunching his way among boulders and scratchy undergrowth along an ancient river bed running through the cranky old gorge with the heady scent of thyme accompanying the gentle smell of the wonderful whispering sea.

As he dressed he wondered if there might be a track up towards the castle and so he searched for a toe hold or anything to support his climb. To his surprise, he found some overgrown weathered steps among the rocks. A scramble led to a narrow path past a little cabin and beneath an arbour of olive trees joining the track at the bridge. With every twist and bend on the steep way back to the village, the trudge became more arduous and by the time he reached the school he was quite breathless. Then just as he was about to sit on a stump to regain some energy, the kids gathered at the gates and urged him on, shouting and giggling, cheering and grinning like the supporters they were.

When he got there, the village square had been decorated, as were the usual surrounding homes, shops, stables, the school library and benches in wide displays of spring flowers and plants. At the centre was a large paved area where the children ran madly about, squealing, racing and playing on their favourite day away from school. Within its low walls, geraniums grew among roses and even courgettes among the shrubs and almond trees and when the kids left for home, they simply abandoned everything. All their toys and bags and balls kicked under the benches until next time. He sat and marvelled at the simple joy and oneness of their feelings. Kids seem to have the capacity to experience the world as it actually is without the intervening filter of labelling that passes for knowledge in adults. It was there within us all when we were children and then, as time went by, our education replaced our primal innocence and it was time he felt, to recover that naivete if we want to enjoy the world in the moment.

On the south side of the square, grew five huge palm trees bombing those seated beneath with oily palm nuts through the lemon, bougainvillea and pepper trees. There was also one lying on its side that looked as though it had just fallen over. The tiny Jenny Wrens sounded, madly wild and excited probably because there were clouds of tiny flying things that gave a nip like the prick from a pin and he was pretty sure the birds thought them delicious.

Fly clambered over a stile, and up towards a track that ran along the ridge above him. It had started to shower a little. The path followed a farm track across a field and

along to another old arrangement of stone slabs that allowed people but not animals to climb over a deep ditch. A large herd of sheep turned to stare as though they have never seen a human before then, losing interest, ignored him and casually carried on with their busy lives. A heavy tractor had left deep grooves, hatched with the marks of coarse tyre treads in the sloppy, slippery mud.

Within a short ten minutes, a horse and cart pulled alongside, 'We're going to the North shore if you want a lift,' called the driver. It was a family outing that had squashed together to let him on to the horse cart bench and so, on he squashed not expecting the bombardment of questions from the young boy and his sister. Then the little girl started humming a jolly tune and the boy joined in with the words and then the mother and father joined in and when they came to the end they all burst out clapping, and soon they were all laughing and having fun together. They dropped him off at the beach and then went on to grandma's for lunch, 'Maybe see you tomorrow,' shouted the children waving and laughing and Fly guessed he had been on the carriage for about an hour yet it had only seemed like minutes.

### Barry's Interval

Along the track that ran past the beach stood the old brick cabin and allotment with its beautiful natural arbor of leaves and plant stems interwoven over a plaited willow arch exactly as described by Barry. Over the door was the name, 'Faithful Cottage' and as Fly approached, he could not help but sense the warmth in the basic simplicity of the cabin's design and just as Barry had said, 'nothing frilly or lavish'. Here was his home, his uncomplicated sanctuary and through its green rustic shuttered windows he could not help but notice how compact and dark it was inside beneath the traditional, beamed ceiling. Covering the walls were countless framed drawings and some of the paintings he'd made himself now that he had the time. There were seascapes, shorelines, the woodlands, family and self-portraits and there, through the flowers, candles and treasures on the window shelf he could see a table and four chairs, a cushioned sofa and a lovely

old brick fireplace with a basket of logs next to some brushes, iron pokers, a couple of shovels, a fire guard and a pair of tongs. The complete kit.

Then came something completely unexpected. In the furthest corner of the room he could just make out Barry slouched in an armchair sitting quite still and gazing at his slippered feet. He seemed to be deep in concentration. Fly tapped on the window, 'Hello Barry. OK if I come in?' But Barry made no move, so he tried the door. It opened easily. The room was absolutely still with one rare beam of streaming sunlight. At first Fly thought Barry was sleeping with his eyes open but then became worried once he noticed how pale and lifeless he was. With a rush of emotion, he realised Barry was resting in peace. His hero Barry was dead, or as the islanders would say, he had 'gone on'. In front of him on the table was an envelope addressed to '*my boy Barrington*'.

Fly knew he had to get help right away and so with envelope safely in a pocket he set off back to the village to try and find Edlyn. She was at home and pleased to see him until she saw the envelope addressed to Barrington, and she knew it was something serious. Fly, still in shock, described his sadness in how he had found him.

Edlyn covered her eyes and slowly lowered her head onto Fly's chest, 'Barry. Oh dear. Such a truly lovely man.' Fly put his arms around her and she held him close, unable to speak until Fly whispered, 'The poor man. He must have been very lonely living so far from the village.'

'No Fly, Barry was never lonely. He spent his entire life supporting the island and it meant everything to him. One way or another, he was connected to everyone and many years ago, as our innkeeper, people realised time and again what a good man he was. Well loved and respected by all and even though lately he chose to live more out of the way, people saw him as a local sage, a modest, kind, a very deep thinker. Always there, always willing to listen and offer advice. He loved his solitude, growing his own fruit and vegetables, with the village guardians providing fresh drinking water as they do for everyone and like most people he had no aching needs and didn't waste a second in just doing what he loved, enjoying a simple life.'

'Edlyn, will you come with me to let Barrington know his father has gone on?'

'Of course, but I think he expected Barry's going was drawing near. Barry told me himself, they'd had a long talk early last evening when they were together at The Hole.'

As usual, the tavern was quite busy at lunchtime with a relaxed and friendly gathering of people deep in conversations, discussions and sharing old memories in lowered tones and laughing. It was quite unusual to see Edlyn and Fly together standing in silence at the kitchen end of the bar. Through the windows in the door they could see Barrington inside talking to one of his helpers but as soon as they caught his eye he came out and before they could speak, a shaken Barrington placed a hand on Edlyn's forearm, looked at each of them steadily then whispered, 'Dad's gone on hasn't he?' And he lowered his head and looked to one side. 'We had dinner together last night and talked of old times. After a while, I could tell Dad knew he was going. In fact, he had been expecting to die for some time and last night he told me the time had come.'

Edlyn put her arms around him as Barrington read the note and when he began to weep, he excused himself, handed back the piece of paper then withdrew to the cellar for some privacy.

Edlyn and Fly read Barry's message, 'My dear boy, my time has come to let go. This has been a lovely time and from the moment you came along, I have known what love is. You have nothing to worry about. My own father told me long ago, when I asked him about life and death, that dying is a natural intermission in the constant cycle of life. We come and go and come and go just like the seasons. The interval in between winter and spring is what we have been taught to call 'death' but it is only a pause, an interval. We are all simply an expression of nature and that is why I am not frightened of the pause. I believe I will be back. I don't know when but I do know that one day I shall have another new spring.'

They were about to leave when an excited Kevin appeared in the doorway, saw them and hurried over, 'Edlyn! Thanks for telling Barrington I was looking for a job. I'm

going to ask him now and hope he gives me the thumbs up.' He was excited and beaming.

Edlyn, put a patient finger on her lips, 'Kevin, please calm down and come over here for a minute.' Then, taking him by the elbow she guided him to one side. Fly could not hear what was said but he there was no mistaking the look on Kevin's face when they came back. 'While we're waiting, let me introduce you to your new housemate. Kevin, say hello to Fly. Fly, this is my old friend, Kevin.'

But before either of them could acknowledge the other, Barrington reappeared and was just about to go upstairs when he turned and whispered, 'Excuse me a second, if you're Kevin Coverack and you can start immediately, I'd be grateful. I'll see you later, Kevin.' Kevin was dumbfounded and stunned as Barrington left him to it and disappeared upstairs.

#### Edlyn and Fly Sit and View

Fly was sitting on a bench overlooking the little bay and although the afternoon was shining without a single cloud in the sky, he did not feel cheerful. The last twenty-four hours had left him drained. So many mixed emotions and mixed emotions made hard to take everything in.

Then Edlyn appeared with some bottles of water and handed him one as she sat alongside, 'Barrington's gone to his Dad's to go over the bits and pieces and try and sort things out. How are you, Fly?'

'I'm fine,' he said, looking at his shoes, 'Just so glad to be here. A little stunned if anything. Anywhere else and I would have been a mess.' Fly sighed as they stared out to sea.

Time went by as they sat in silence watching the view before them.

'This is a beautiful spot, Edlyn. Good surf. I love to surf, and sail.'

She nudged him and smiled, 'Have you ever noticed how everything to do with the seaside begins with the letter 'S'?''

'Not really.'

'Sea, sand, gulls – I mean seagulls, sail, sailors, er, salty, streams, sun, swifts, sandwiches, swallows, suntan, er, suntan lotion, sunburn lotion, shallows and shandy.'

'Er...swimmers, shades, sunglasses, er, sweat, shimmers, sunbathers, sunshade, sky, er, ski, surf, snorkel and sunrays, sea shells and sea mist..er...spritzer..'

They laughed a little then fell into a silence again.

'Thanks, Edlyn. I needed that.'

'After you moved away with your father, you mentioned you used to come back during school holidays, sounds like you really missed your village,' she said.

Fly drained the water from his bottle, 'That's right. Used to come here with my Dad.'

'Just with your Dad?'

'Yes. The village held strong memories for him of my mother.'

'You can't blame him.'

Fly smiled and nodded, 'He used to say never a day went by without him thinking of her.'

'Poor chap. Sounds like he really loved her. Good job he had you. But what did you want to do before you joined your band?'

'Believe it or not, Edlyn, I always wanted to be a fisherman - seining or chasing shoals. It's all I dreamed of as a boy. I had books on the different kinds of fishing boats, different fleets, fish, and countless old black and white photos of grandad's.'

'It's a very hard life, fishing round here.'

Fly cheered up, 'If I stay, maybe that's what I'll do. You know, as a teenager I dreamed of sailing the seas, visiting foreign lands, meeting beautiful women, living up to my neck in adventure and danger. They might have been euphemisms for being in a band, but really all I wanted, deep inside, was the simple life.'

They fell into a comfortable silence again.

Then Fly looked at Edlyn again, 'This is real. And wonderful. Is it always so peaceful here?'

'This is a typical springtime morning. We've got chaffinches and robins singing, a



sunny blue sky with just a few clouds on the horizon and quite a few fat mother ducks in the ponds. The sun's got nothing to do except shine and today could bring a change for us all.'

Waves stroked the shore. Edlyn let go a sigh of relief.

Fly closed his eyes and inhaled, 'So simple. You know, I really would like a little boat myself one day. Doesn't have to be big.'

'Size is not the point, Fly. You can have as much fun with a small one as a big one.'

'So they say. So they say.'

They exchanged glances and giggled.

'There was a cocky young man from round here who went sailing alone until he found himself in grave danger when he was caught without any wind. He soon learned that an engine can save your life. A small one would've done it. Some people buy big engines and big boats just to impress their friends without thinking of how they only need to push a little weight. Waste of time and a waste of energy,' Edlyn nudged Fly again but this time, spoke in a crisp local accent, 'Then there be those round 'ere who don't think nuthin' bout their woman getting wet when there's a squall!'

Fly shot her a glance and again they both laughed. He looked through narrowed eyes to the horizon as Edlyn suggested he buy a dory or small cabin cruiser.

'Maybe I will. Thanks. Hey! Look! A gull's just disappeared inside that waste bin and dragged something out. I wonder what's grabbed his attention?'

'It's a half-eaten mackerel sandwich with yoghurt and lemon juice,' laughed Edlyn.

'How do you know that?'

'Because I threw it in there last night while waiting for you, and Kenny hasn't been round to empty the bins yet.'

She nudged him, started laughing, and soon it became infectious.

In the distance, children played in the sea, as noisy as usual while others played more quietly among the rocks and boulders. A couple strolled along the wharf carrying their shoes and holding hands while gulls swooped and circled, calling to one another

way above their heads. The silent clouds were off toward the distant horizon. Edlyn sighed, 'Ah, This is so good I could stay forever. Anything left to drink? Let's go home. I feel like a calming cammomile.'

### As Regular As Regulars

Mid-afternoon and a safe and dry, rested and relaxed Thistle and Penn were looking through a window at the easy mist coming in from the sea and while enjoying the brewing odours coming from the cellar of the Hole in the Head as they waited to be served. Cap'n Davy had moored the Destiny, bought the men a drink each and now was chattering away among a group of fishermen swapping memories of their lives on the water.

Penn smiled into his drink, 'You won't believe this but last night was one of the best night's sleep I can remember and I woke up feeling healthy and in a good mood. Who would have thought that our dear old Captain Davy was such a hero, and even providing tea and toast for our breakfast before bringing us across to the island in his boat.'

'And the way he gave us his memories while standing there in his oilskins! It was like something from a stage show,' grinned Thistle. 'What a man. What a life! And I think he really should do overnight stays, there was plenty of room under that old boat, in fact I wouldn't mind doing it my self.' A completely baffled Penn turned to look at him then began waving to Kevin who broke off his noisy conversation with a group of fishermen and returned a cheery wave on his way to presenting himself before the two men with a wide and cordial smile, 'Alright, chaps? What can I get you?'

Realising that there was no choice except for the local's home produced ale, Thistle and Penn stared at the solitary pump before Penn, with a demented smile, asked, 'Well...um...er, just two pints of the house brew, please my friend.'

'Natural well?'

The visitors exchanged glances, bewildered, 'Sorry? Are we natural? Are we

well?'

'No, no, sorry. Our beer comes from our natural well, our beer reservoir below in the cellar. It is called Trelixir.'

Thistle was almost speechless, stunned, 'Natural reservoir? No way!'

'Indeed. Now, two pints, gents?' Kevin was playing with the strangers while a bemused Barrington looked on. He began to adjust to the change that had come into his life and he welcomed a new beginning.

Penn didn't waste a second with his order, 'Without a doubt, yes! Yes, please!' They stared in total disbelief as two pints of the dark brown, luscious ale were pulled and placed before them. Thistle snorted and grinned towards Kevin, glancing in the direction of Penn who was inhaling the fragrance with his eyes closed, 'So how much does he owe you?'

Kevin shook his head, 'We make our own ale from local crops which is why we call it 'natural beer'. It contains no chemicals or additives, so instead our customers make reasonable suggestions, give ideas or even make a donation for the Midsummer's Day Frivolities.'

Then Penn realized what was being said, 'No way! Are you joking? Or are you serious?'

Thistle nudged him, 'Don't argue with the man. Er, what are the Midsummer's Day wotsits or shouldn't we ask?'

'Midsummer's Day is one of our annual traditional village festivals. All local folk are involved and make contributions one way or another. It's always a success,' he pointed to an empty jug bearing the sign, 'Midsummer's Day', on the end of the bar.

Thistle nudged Penn, 'Go on then. Make a donation.' Penn stood open-mouthed and speechless.

Barrington moved off around the lounge collecting empties and happily wiping tables now with Kevin in control of the locals at the bar. In one studied gulp Thistle downed his tankard then turned towards Penn before waving at Kevin for a refill, 'D'you know, I think I'm beginning to like this place.' But before he could say another word he was interrupted by Thistle who had assumed a more confident manner while leaning in a

puddle of beer at his elbow. He cleared his throat like a teacher and lowered his voice. Kevin gave him his full attention.

'Excuse me sir, but may I ask you for your help in our enquiries?' His eyes swept the room, then from an inside pocket he produced a photograph which caused Kevin to lean forward and scrutinize the image.

'I don't suppose you recognise this man?'

Kevin recognised Fly at once but not wishing to upset Edlyn, he shook his head, 'He's not from round here.'

'Oh, we know that, and we're not even professional sleuths,' he started grinning smugly and as he held the picture up for all to see, Barrington reappeared behind them discreetly holding a finger to his lips indicating to all his locals that no one should get involved.

Thistle raised his voice a little, 'So, has he been in here in the last few days, or passed through the village at all?'

Kevin repeated, 'Passed through?'

By then the small group of other drinkers were giggling and obviously entertained by something in the direction of Thistle and Penn. Thistle was smiling with confidence, 'Well if he does come in, we'd be grateful if you'd let us know.'

Kevin and the group at the bar assured the detectives of their support, 'Be glad to', 'That's definite', 'Oh, yez.'

The new barman looked at his new regulars, all in good humour, and laughed to himself.

Thistle and Penn finished their drinks and moved around the saloon, patting shoulders with good wishes and shaking hands, 'See you soon', 'Take care now' and, 'Bye for now.'

Already, they felt as regular as regulars.

Kevin turned to Barrington, 'Er...Thank you very much, boss, but now that it's a little quieter, do you mind if I nip home and get changed? I'm a little damp. Be back in no time.'

Barrington gave him a knowing wink, 'No Problem, Kevin. So far so good just

don't be too long. OK?' Kevin rushed out through the swing doors and along Knacker's Track to change his clothes.

After their drinks Thistle and Penn sat outside the inn watching the people, 'Hey Bob, I've changed my mind. I never thought I'd feel so good being down here, so far out of the way. I don't suppose you fancy a quick dip down at the beach, do you?'

'Not really, dear chum. I'm a bit too squiffy at the moment. Why don't we go for a good old, healthy walk? There's that hill in the middle of the island, and I'd love to go up there and by the time we get back, we'll be in better shape and we can go for a swim then? What do you say?'

'Suits me. Let's go.'

By late afternoon they were beginning to doubt the wisdom of their trek. Exhausted and way off the beaten track, they staggered into a tiny group of four or five cottages overlooking the village on one side and the sea on the other.

The air was heady with herbal aromas, and the sound of someone playing a flute eased their stumblings towards a brightly lit veranda where a small group of villagers sat overlooking the gentle waves countless feet below. They collapsed into the nearest vacant chairs, hardly able to keep their eyes open, mesmerised by the blue sky melting into the sea somewhere between themselves and who knew where. From either side, the curious locals humoured them with winks and smiles and waves. They seemed bemused by the way our private eyes took off their jackets and boots amid all their puffing and panting. Clearly, they drew so much attention they might well have been aliens, although Penn supposed it likely that they smelled a bit too. They sat in silence, bathed in cordiality, enchanted.

'Can I help, my friends? You look exhausted.' He had appeared from nowhere, happy and humming to himself as he wiped down their table, 'My name is Dick.'

'Oh, hello. Good afternoon, Dick. Lovely place you have here. I'm Bob and this is my partner, Jim. Can we order some food please? We are starving. Anything will do.'

Dick gave a quizzical glance from one to the other, 'Ah, Bob and Jim, local

names. Good choice.' He smiled, 'I'm sorry, I think now there is only salad and some cheese, although my mother could make you an omelette if you'd prefer. OK?'

'An omelette would be perfect, thank you very much. Excuse me. Do you have something to drink? We are dying of thirst as well.'

'Right away!' He chuckled and shook his head as he disappeared into the kitchen, only to reappear in seconds with two glasses and bottles of ale.

'Wonderful! Thanks.'

Sipping his drink, Bob speculated that with the tavern being so out of the way, it was quite likely that visitors were rare to the village which might explain the fascination and staring of the locals when they first sat down and now the small group of children that were watching their every move. Then the food was delicious, of course, and afterwards they sat in silence, digesting the moment and feeling the strength return to their aching limbs. When they felt it was time to head back Bob asked Dick for the bill.

Dick looked puzzled, 'Bill? What bill?' He shrugged, 'There is no bill!' Then as the penny dropped, he spread his arms, 'Hah, I see what's happened! This is my home. Hey! You were tired and hungry. No problem.'

Bob's mouth fell open, his jaw hit the ground and he almost fainted with embarrassment, 'Oh, dear! We are so very, very sorry. When we saw all these people sitting here we thought you were a tavern!'

'What? Me? A tavern? No, no, no my friends. Once every few months, my wandering son comes home and all the family gathers here to surprise him. Tonight is the night.'

His lady mother appeared, grinning from ear to ear savouring their embarrassment. Then her grin grew even wider, 'Don't worry. It is nothing. And please, come back tomorrow because in the evening we will have – sardines! Honestly!'

Once in the village on their way to The Hole, Thistle and Penn passed a house

where, through a large window at the front they could see a mural covering the opposite wall which was illuminated from time to time by the irregular recurring glow from fading and emerging illuminations backed with a gradual cadence of musical tones. They were stunned by the calming effect. As as they stood and watched, a man suddenly crossed the room in front of the window and Bob grabbed Jim by the arm as they both gasped.

'It's him! That's the hustler in the photo! Jim! We've got him!' Thistle marched Penn towards the tavern steering him inside to discuss their next move.

Inside, Kevin was chattering to one of the locals seated in front of him at the bar. Expressionless with glazed eyes, chin resting on open palms, mouth ajar, he seemed almost asleep. The door opened and up to the bar marched Thistle and Penn, expecting the usual friendly greeting but the barman was too busy talking to notice them. They waited and then Thistle leaned over and interrupted Kevin's life story by tapping him on the shoulder. Kevin was startled and recognised the men right away while the local half woke, lost his balance and slid like a leaf from his stool to the floor.

Kevin gave the men a wide smile, 'Hello again. Usual?'

Thistle spoke first, 'Hi. I don't think we've met, or was it you on the other night?'

Kevin, 'Very funny. Spot on. Like it. I suppose I should be wearing 'L' plates. I'm the new bar man, so stay cool and I won't spit in your drink. OK? Ha!Ha! Ha!'

Thistle ordered a couple of pints and asked for the donation jug.

Kevin, 'Coming up, right away.'

Thistle, 'Already, this feels like our local. Great isn't it?'

Penn, 'Hey, why don't you show this new bloke the photo? He might have seen the grifter somewhere round here.'

Thistle, 'No point, old chum. New bar staff are always in a daze for their first week. Anyway, he saw it when we showed it to Barrington first time we came in and didn't seem to know the face.' They excused themselves and went outside to phone Vincenti.

'Yes, sir. We've unearthed the impostor and he is lodging in something called The Elysian Fields Guest House, we don't know yet who the owner is but will very soon. The guest house is not far from the village square tavern. One moment, please sir, this is a

very bad signal. May I suggest I phone you later when I establish a better reception?'

'Don't worry about that. I'll be there tomorrow and meet you somewhere private, out of the way. Where do you suggest?'

'On the quayside, sir. Perhaps late afternoon?'

'Right,' Vincenti turned off his phone. To think he had concocted a perfected plan that was so simple it couldn't fail where all Fly had to do was change his name, hide in some bushes miles out of the way, maybe eventually grow a beard but he couldn't even do that. Pity he couldn't draw this much attention when he went solo. Now, their chance of making a fortune was in jeopardy. He had to meet with Fly, and convince him he take the plan with conviction. Vincenti decided to set off first thing next day and get to the island by evening.

#### Edlyn, Kevin and Fly Talk

At home in Elysian Fields, Edlyn and Fly sat sipping their cups of camomile tea while discussing the effect of Kevin's new job and how it might help Barrington adjust. Kevin had plenty of self-confidence and certainly was not shy while knowing when to give space and stand back. They agreed he had served the public many times before. This made them laugh and they were still laughing when Kevin came in, his first shift complete. He was frowning. 'Barrington is very grateful for your support. He sends his thanks,' then sat down, poured out some tea for himself and looked through the window to the stone circle.

'How is he coping?' Edlyn sensed Kevin was deeply distressed.

'Oh, you know him, he'll pull through.'

'And what about you, Kevin. Are you OK?'

'Well, I don't think I could have chosen a more uncool time to start a new job.'

Edlyn and Fly looked thoughtful as the room filled with silence until Kevin leaned towards Fly, 'Good to meet you at last, Fly.' They smiled and shook hands.

'So, is Fly your real name? I've never met anyone with that name before. What



brings you to our island?' Edlyn was a little surprised at Kevin being so polite.

'Oh, Fly is short for Flynn. My Dad's surname.'

'So what's your full name?'

'Sean Flynn. My Dad's Liverpool Irish. Sean's a family name.'

Edlyn gave a little laugh, 'So, you're a Celt. Proper job! That's it Kevin! Mr. Flynn's going to be staying with us for a while.'

'I hope so. I was born here in the village but my dad and I moved up north when my mother died.'

'Wow! Sorry. That must have been quite a drag for a kid, losing your mother.'

Fly smiled, 'Yes, it certainly was.'

'Sorry about before. It was a bit awkward back in the pub.' He sipped his tea, 'So now you are here on holiday, Fly?'

'Er, not quite, no. Getting away from the city. My boss suggested I take a break, go somewhere quiet so I'm just having a look around, old memories and all that.'

'Oh yeah? Cool. For how long?' Kevin was trying to keep the conversation polite while being a little jarred by something Fly had just said because after the unsettling conversation between himself and Edlyn about property developers infiltrating their island, Kevin was a little on guard and carefully considering Fly's every word.

'Well, that depends. If I like it here, I might decide to stay.'

Immediately, Kevin frowned, 'Stay?'

'Yes. Perhaps relocate and settle down here. Maybe find a little cottage...not sure yet.'

Kevin sat upright, 'Trouble is most of the cottages are occupied by locals...you know, people who have been here since times long gone, people with connections to the island. Er, you know, descended.'

'Edlyn shot him a warning glance. She thought he was being a little rude, 'Kevin, if Fly was born here, he has every right to return and make his home here.'

'Of course. Sorry. I forgot you said you come from the village.'

'Across the square from the tavern. Norbury Cottage.'

'I think it's a Health Charity now,' said Kevin, straight-faced.

Fly was undeterred, 'Well, maybe I could find a little land and have a cottage built.' Edlyn laughed cheerfully but Kevin became anxious and looked uneasy. Fly smiled at the irony, 'Who would have thought it? Me, The Big Property Developer. Fab! Ha! Ha!'

Edlyn jumped in and joked, 'Property Developer? Estate Agents? You'd better keep your voice down. That's foul language round here.'

Kevin tried to sound casual, 'Er, anyway, why this little island? \nothing ever happens here. Wouldn't you prefer Ireland? They say it's very jiggy. Or Scotland? Scotland's cool to be sure.'

'Scotland's far too cool for me, thanks. No. It's not because of The Garden's subtropical climate, its ancient lore or the fact that it overlooks the ocean. No. I want to live in a community where people matter. It's all I need.' Fly tried to explain, 'During my time up in Liverpool, my father and I would travel back and forth during school holidays and the difference from city life was like being on a different planet. I always loved the easy neighbourly atmosphere and felt I belonged here, so the moment I left the city I knew this would be the obvious place to stand back and take stock of life.'

A stunned silence settled over the room.

Eventually Kevin came round a little, 'Well that sounds pretty fair to me.' He stood and topped up his cup at the side table, 'So Fly, we're going to be cellmates, which one are you in?'

'Mm...sorry? Oh, I was miles away. I'm in, er...Shangri-La.' The words of Vincenti came rattling through his brain, telling him to keep his head down and his mouth shut, and with all it entailed, he felt a little on edge. He tried to change the subject, 'Er Edlyn, I gave a lift to a chap on my way here and he introduced himself as Haydn Peel. Ever heard of him?'

'Oh, yes indeed. He's my uncle. Lovely man. Every year without fail he arrives with his backpack and conducts the Joining Ceremony at the Summer Equinox. It can be quite an occasion. Everyone likes him. Bit of a hippy I've heard said. On one occasion he even reintroduced the old tradition of the happy couple arriving for the ceremony on the back of a tractor and it became so popular again that it has been reintroduced. He lives in Bristol now although he used to live near here at Spindly Bush Farm. He gets that special

feeling so many people experience at sunrise on the Spring Equinox, yet despite that he couldn't get here in time this year. Perhaps he left it too late. Anyway, mark my words, you can bet he won't miss the Midsummer Joining Ceremony.'

'Oh yes, The Joining Ceremony? I've heard of it but don't know much about it.'

Kevin was taken aback, 'You're joking. I would have thought that anyone who was local would know all about it. The Joining Ceremony's ancient, goes back years. "That formal declaration of love with the heartfelt intention of blending your life with that of your loved one." Isn't that right, darling?' He placed his hand on Edlyn's knee.

'Oh, shut up, Kevin! Are you drunk?' and she pushed it away. Edlyn leaned forward, 'Fly's from this village too. He's been off travelling and came back yesterday. But only in body.'

'And from now on I'm running the bar at the Hole in the Head, and to think that when I was a kid all I wanted to do was captain a fishing boat.'

'So did I,' said Fly.

'How life changes things,' laughed Kevin. 'I used to be like you Fly, so I got a job in a kitchen, living on leftovers. Trouble with that is, you tend to get into the habit of fine dining. Like living on leftover lobster, scallops, oysters or bits of succulent fillet steak. Then when you leave, you go back to egg on toast, banana butties and the like.'

'You poor thing. Sounds like it was such an ordeal for you Kevin. Terrible,' said Edlyn, studying her fingernails.

'All was fine until I discovered the chef used to clean his fingernails by making pastry. And not just that! One of his favourite instructions was, 'Never slice meat so thick you can't see through it and if anyone ever complains just tell them you can't lift anything heavy because you have a bad back!'

'Fly, Is it true you used to be in a band? What was it called?'

'The Pikkins'.

'The Pikkins! Hey! I've heard of you. Liverpool Soul and Blues Band, right? You were really big, so why'd you leave?'

'I was writing most of our stuff and one day I just realised I'd drained the well. That's why I took a break and came home.'

'Wow! So cool! I'm impressed!'

'Oh, don't be. Now I'm stuck. Before the band I did a bit of this, a bit of that. Not qualified to do anything really,' this was followed by another resounding silence. Then, 'Unlike you, I'm hopeless in the kitchen. Different strokes for different folks, I suppose, and I'm afraid technology left me at the toothbrush too.' Fly took the tray of dishes into the kitchen and began to wash up leaving Edlyn and Kevin chatting.

Edlyn was impressed with her guest and in a hushed voice she said, 'He seems a nice guy, doesn't he? Easy going. Do you think you two will get on?'

'Suppose so,' said Kevin, 'But everything's really vague with him and I'm just not so sure about all those simple explanations. I have to say, I'm a tiny bit disappointed, Eddy. I was hoping it would just be you and me, like it was back in the old days.'

Edlyn was surprised, 'Kevin! Behave yourself. I'm sure Mr. Fly won't be here that long.'

'You say that, and yet I have to say I'm a little suspicious of your Mr. Fly.'

But in truth, he felt a little jealous of all the attention the handsome Mr. Fly was receiving from the lady he'd known for so long.

'Well, I like him. But what do you mean exactly?'

Kevin shrugged, 'Don't know, yet. Paint it any way you want and maybe I'm just being over-suspicious but it just seems a little weird that he should turn up right when there's all these rumours about hotel developers and estate agents floating round and then he blasts off with talk of buying some land. It all seems so, you know, like co-incidental and gives me the hee-bee jeebies. After that talk we had I'm a bit, well, more than a little suspicious that's all. I just hope we're not leaving ourselves wide open to being steamrolled into something we can't control, or even want.'

'This is not the first time The Garden's been under threat from developers and I don't suppose it will be the last.'

'What did you do before?'

'Usually, we befriend these people, get to know them, include them in celebrations, parties, take them sailing, generally make them feel at home. You'd be surprised how quickly they adopt our ways and relax then, mentally, they become locals.'

'Fingers crossed then.'

'Well, I'm a pretty good judge of character and I think Fly's all right. Anyway, I'm going to be bold and ask him outright. It is my house after all and I'll clear the air in a moment.'

However, before Edlyn could say another word, Fly reappeared and strode across the room and out through the front door calling over his shoulder, 'Just going for a little walk. It's great to be back. See you guys later.'

Taken by surprise, Edlyn called out, 'Oh, Fly, before you go...' But it was too late. He was gone, leaving Edlyn a little frustrated. She poked a finger at the door, 'I'll corner him when he comes home and don't worry, we'll all feel better once everything is out in the open and we know exactly what's going on. I'm sure there's nothing to worry about.'

'Edlyn, I'd better get going too. I promised Barrington I'd be quick. I'll just change out of these clothes.'

### Edlyn Suspicious of Fly

Often, when working in her kitchen, Edlyn would glide about with great care and without too many exaggerated movements so as not to startle the queueing party of blue tits, blackbirds and sparrows she liked to watch through the window as they arrived and took their places waiting for their chance to dig into a meal from the feeders hanging outside. Robins and sparrows, even the little wrens, all joined the throng and took their turn pecking away and mingling without fighting or arguing. She was filled with admiration each time she saw those beautiful creatures dining in harmony while we humans cannot even agree to be different. Just then Kevin crashed in again but this time all aglow.

'Edlyn! Edlyn! Guess what?'

And the birds scattered.

'You've got a job? Yes, I know. I was there.'

Kevin could not speak for his hysteria, 'OK...Oh, yes! Ha! Ha! But no! We're dead

quiet and Barrington's given me an hour off. I've just nipped home to tell you something. While I was behind the bar, these two guys came in and were showing everyone a picture of Fly and even asking Barrington if Fly had been in the tavern. I think they said they were snoops.'

'Ah-ha! What did Barrington say?'

'Nothing much. He was very wary, but I think maybe we should tell these guys where he is. It might be our sole chance to stop him from buying all the land and building a holiday village.'

'Oh Kevin, you're jumping the gun a bit, don't you think? But I'm not so sure. I've got a funny feeling about this. We don't know anything for definite. We're jumping to conclusions. We should wait and talk to Fly first. Get his side of the story.'

'Oh, he could tell us anything. I think we should tell these snoops he's here, just to be safe. If he's not a sham then he's cool and if he's not what he seems then we're safe anyway. We can't lose if we tell them. What do you think?'

'Well, I don't know. I suppose we have to do something. Listen, when you go back to work and if those two guys come back in just tell them that you know someone who might have some information for them and wants to talk to them in private here at Elysian Fields. In the meantime, I'll wait for Fly and get what I can out of him.'

'Are you sure you should let him know they're on to him? I mean, for warns is for arms...or whatever the expression.'

'What are you saying, Kevin? Never mind. Go back to work and if you see Fly, be gentle. Don't say anything. OK? Because if you are right and there are reasons to be wary of Fly, then I have to be certain. I am consumed with worry over the future of the village. I'm sitting here, happily putting some finishing touches to alterations on a pair of overalls for one of the ladies in the village, completely content, and then I glance through the doorway at the mural in the lounge and all I see is a place of tourism, businesses, restaurants, bars, nightclubs, yachts, speedboats and my heart sinks.' She looked so crushed, despondent, 'I can't help wondering what Fly's true intentions are. It feels like we could be under siege and so alone. Then I wonder whether you will stay in your new job or will you take off again, and what about Fly's boss up in London? Do city bosses

usually suggest their staff take a break?' Kevin had never seen her look so worried and concerned. 'What if Fly and his boss in the city are planning a positive take-over of the island? What of our islanders? Would they be forced to leave, or stay just to work for Vincenti? There would be changes in sentiment and confidence. Our people and their children would lose their faith in themselves, so strong and for so long. They would lose faith in all that has held them together. Oh Kevin, what can I possibly do to keep them safe?'

Kevin came and put his arm around her shoulders, 'Don't worry Edlyn. You always tell me to try and keep calm and now here you are, leaping into the future. It hasn't happened yet. And you are not alone, dear playmate.'

She stared towards the circle and imagined The Garden strong and simple as it had always been, with kindness and consideration shared between all. The trust and humility that grew without egotism, the strength that came from the realisation that not one single creature was alone, that their planet was one with the universe and that when they see nature in land or sea or sky, they saw themselves in all of that too.

The opening of the front door startled her as Fly came strolling in, humming confidently to himself. He was just about to climb the stairs to his room when he saw Edlyn and stopped in his tracks, 'Oh, hello Edlyn. Everything alright? You look a little uncomfortable.'

She turned to face him, 'Ah, Fly. Well I'm a rather concerned. Er, do you mind if we have a little chat? Please, come and sit down.'

'Sure. What's on your mind?'

'I'll leave you two while I make some tea,' Kevin disappeared into the kitchen.

'Rumours.'

Fly looked guilty, 'Rumours. What about?'

'Sit down Fly. This won't wait.'

Fly sat and his guilty face was set, 'What's on your mind?'

'I'd like some answers, please.'

'Er, wouldn't you rather talk in the morning? I don't mean to be rude, Edlyn, but there's something I have to do and it's important.'

'There's a rumour going round that you are not all you seem.'

'Oh, that. Oh, everyone thinks that about me. Ha! Anyway, I'll be back in a minute.'

'Er, please stay where you are. Take a seat, there are some things I need to know.'

'Sorry!'

'Fly, why would a couple of hirelings be looking for you in this almost virginal village-state lying off the outskirts of the coast? In fact, it's well known for being so remote, it almost stands outside its own outskirts.' They both smiled and relaxed a little.

'The basic, simple way of life is essential to our lifestyle and values. Please be open with me. Just what is going on? Are you planning a development of some kind? Are you in hiding? Anyway, Fly, like it or not, the people of our village depend upon open-hearted honesty. So I would like some honest answers even if I need to be prepared for change and I would like them now. Now please be kind enough to make things clear and set my mind at rest.'

Kevin reappeared with the ready tea tray, having been listening from the kitchen.

Fly thought for a moment then looked up at Edlyn, 'I'm very sorry if I caused you so much anxiety. Yes, there are things on my mind and now I am going to be open and honest with you. As I said when we met, my name is Sean Flynn.'

'And?'

'As you know, I was in a band and we enjoyed quite a bit of success, well, for a while, and then gradually we fractured, then broke up and I became this current failure. My band had been reknowned for quite a long time until they began to worship and be mesmerised by the amount of money we were making until our music became secondary to some of them. It wasn't long before our brotherly gang of old school friends, began to disintegrate and eventually we went our separate ways. I never would have thought being so famous could leave you so desolate.'

'Fly, please get to the point.'

'One day, I realised the party was over. I had to admit it to myself! It was all hopeless. I was depressed and failing fast. Vincenti, our manager, had some strong thoughts on what to do next although I couldn't accept them, so that's when I knew I had



to make a change and it seemed obvious to me that I had to leave all that behind in the city and maybe find some peace of mind down here.'

Kevin was filling the cups, 'So how did your manager take it when you left the city?'

'Oh, it was his idea. Totally. He suggested I get away somewhere quiet where I could find myself again and where no one knew me.'

'Was that all he suggested?' Edlyn began to see a bigger picture.

'Well, er, he also came up with something quite disturbing. My disappearance from the public gaze was not just for my benefit, it could give him the opportunity of announcing I had died, which in turn would give us the reason to re-release our catalogue of hits to the world and thereby continue to make a fortune.'

'Whaaaa?' Kevin was astonished and disgusted. 'That's totally repulsive.'

'I agree. I couldn't do it and told him I could never be part of such a scheme. The very thought of such sly deceit made me feel ill.'

'So what did you do?'

'I left our meeting determined to have nothing more to do with him. I came home.'

'So that is why he sent those two blokes to find you so he can make sure you don't reappear. Fly, dear chum, if you ask me, you are in danger,' and Kevin put a supportive hand on Fly's shoulder. 'But don't give in. You're one of us.'

In the cottage, Fly was coming to the end of his explanation to Edlyn, '...and so my old island home was my perfect refuge.'

'Well, I don't blame you for coming home having realised your life is at risk by being in partnership with a manic con artist. People without scruples like your money-mad Mr. Vincenti could ruin the very environment upon which we depend to survive, including the air above us and the ground below us and I have no doubt he will have some heartless enemies that are always looking for him. People like him see everything as a hunt. To him, all is there, waiting to be snatched and exploited, and by that I include the temperament of the people.'

'So how could he be a problem down here? He's entangled away in city business.'

'We are isolated here. A helpless target to someone like him and among my nightmarish visions of the future I see entertainment parks, theme parks, holiday villages, yacht havens. Why, if he ever came here, his greed would know no bounds. It would run riot.'

Fly fell silent for a while. What should he do? Edlyn was right, he had kept things to himself, not realising the full implications of being secretive. She had insisted he open up and not try to cover up anything serious that might endanger the sentience of the village. They were a relaxed people, in no way desirous of achieving success, power or useless expensive possessions. However, words and promises were not enough. He had to demonstrate his intentions openly so his village could continue its journey and not be dragged back and chained to materialism and the adoration of wealth. Edlyn sat and waited. Then he spoke, 'Forgive me, Edlyn, I need to think. Please excuse me. I'll be back soon.'

'Where are you going?'

'For a walk. I have to work out a way of putting an end to all Vincenti's plans once and for all.'

### Vincenti in The Garden

Even with the soft-top down to take advantage of the breeze, throughout the several hours' drive in his convertible Vincenti had suffered from the glaring sunshine and the heat. By the time he pulled up on the water's edge at Ficklebank Creek, he was not in a good mood. The drive had left him drained of vitality and all he wanted when he stepped out was to find something cold to drink and somewhere shady to rest. He'd followed the directions given him by Thistle but what now? Offshore he could see an island he assumed was the subject under scrutiny yet where was the car ferry or any sign of assistance? He was not happy.

There were one or two others parked alongside something that appeared to be a large old wooden barn with a sign above the door that read, 'Destiny, The Island Ferry',

yet he could see no one in charge, no seating area nor any price list or check-in times mentioned.

He groaned, 'Dear me! You'd think they'd make an effort to encourage visitors! But oh no! It's just like being in the dark ages down here!' Then as he looked about, the gradual growing grumble of an engine filled his ears as a sturdy little fishing boat slowly rounded the bend until it gently nudged the old wooden jetty and he was greeted by the over-chummy manner of the man behind the wheel, 'Alright boy? How're you doin'. You comin' over to the island?'

'Good afternoon,' returned a formal Vincenti. 'Well, I was wondering how visitors cross to that island because there is absolutely no information or advice available and no one to ask. Damned typical.'

'Well, I'm about to set off any minute, if you want to tag along. Jump aboard.'

'I'll be glad to get this trip over and done with.'

'Well you see, we're not a car ferry. We're a people ferry. The Destiny's a great little boat and ideal for cruising to and fro. They don't have cars over on the island and there's no charge, only takes about ten minutes or so.'

'Oh, brilliant! So what do I do with my car? I might as well leave the keys in the ignition for all the security on offer.'

Cap'n Davy smiled, 'There's no need to worry. People round 'ere aren't interested in cars and I'd be more than happy to accommodate drivers who turn up out of the blue.'

'Well, I've no alternative, have I?'

'Ah! Hang on a minute. Let me clear the deck first. Been off doing a little fishing, and to my surprise, I did quite well. Give me a hand with these 'ere fish.' Cap'n Davy came ashore and, treating his passenger as you would an old friend, handed him a wooden basket and a glove, holding on to Vincenti's shoulder to steady his balance in the rolling boat.

'Can you tell me where I park my car while we're away, please? Can't take any chances these days.'

Cap'n Davy pointed to the boathouse, 'Put it in my boat shed, 'tis plenty big enough and it'll be quite safe in there. I'll even lock the doors if you want, though we

never have any trouble round here.' He gazed at the horizon, 'Good day for sail, though we could do with a bit more breeze.'

Vincenti parked his car in the boat shed and turned to the skipper, 'That better had be safe or there will be big trouble, mark my words.'

Captain Davy nodded, 'Pity you weren't here for the festival. As always, it was bright and cheerful. And our Edlyn said quite a pleasant few words as usual, well respected and well loved as she is. Usually lets rooms to visitors but I hear she's got guests staying with her at the moment so you might have to get a room at the tavern.'

Vincenti felt uncomfortable with so much open-handed friendship and assumed the captain had been drinking. He was not amused. Then Cap'n Davy, a little embarrassed, coughed to clear his throat and looked at the sea again, his face straight for a second although it wasn't long before he was chuckling all over again.

Vincenti ignored the madness, 'Do you think there'll be room at the inn for me? I haven't booked anywhere but I have to find a place for a night or two.'

'Well, it's not a big tavern, although then again, I'm sure they'll fit you in somehow.'

'And my car? I don't want to just leave it here as easy pickings for the low life.' Cap'n Davy was too busy carrying the fish into the boat shed to reply. They climbed aboard The Destiny and sat in the stern while Cap'n Davy fired the engine and, with careful supervision, steered the boat off toward the island.

And even with the boat rolling from stem to stern, Vincenti had to admit to himself the view of the island was overwhelming. It sat there before him, ancient, unspoiled, modest and charming. The approaching view of quayside from the ferry was of an unassuming harbour with a handful of fishing boats bobbing and swaying before an ordinary harbour village. No boutique hotels or high rise buildings and no flashy advertisements lining the quayside. The view brought to his mind similar coastal wonders back in Italy's Liguria region, five fishing villages in a crescent-shaped strip of Mediterranean coastline colouring the coastline between Monaco in the south of France and Pisa in the south of Italy. Also well-known as the Italian Riviera. And that was when he had his sudden inspirational vision and murmured to himself, 'So why not here?'

He could imagine the brochure, "A unique hideaway resting off the coast in the Atlantic Ocean. This island lies with its verdant and lush vegetation, medieval hilltop ruins and panoramic vistas. A beautiful, colourful seaside village with pristine beaches, it remains one of the most underrated destinations in Europe - The Garden Island." Wow! I could make this place a gold mine. I can see it now, right before my eyes! This little venture simply cannot fail. Forget that other stuff. This place is a dream, miles from anywhere with well-guarded privacy. Definitely, a perfect resort for the mega rich, private beaches, swimming, sailing, trekking, shark fishing, coral reefs for aqua divers, beautiful weather, a trip to paradise for beautiful people seeking privacy. Fly will be delighted and now I cannot wait to see him.'

However, as they pulled in alongside the jetty, he was shocked to see it was little more than a platform jutting out into the bay and barely more organised than that at Ficklebank Creek. There would have to be a wide range of development to bring it up to scratch though nevertheless, it would still be a sound investment.

He climbed out of the boat and then had to negotiate the slippery stony slope climbing up to the nearest cottage and even then there was nowhere to sit except on the stone wall and some rickety wooden fencing. Rotting, barnacle-encrusted hulls and crab pots littered the cramped and cobbled track that rambled its way into the village.

'Excuse me, but are you sure you cannot recommend any hotels here in the village?' asked a mystified Vincenti.

The captain tried not to laugh, 'Well, there are no other places to stay in the village but since it looks like you'll be staying in the only village inn, why don't I come along with you and see if you like it? If you don't we'll ask around or think of something else. We could have a pick-me-up while we're there.'

Vincenti realised he had no better option and so followed the skipper to the inn and within minutes of meeting the innkeeper, he had a room with a view of the harbour, had showered, stretched out for ten minutes, and joined Cap'n Davy in the bar for a brandy. The innkeeper gave them their drinks on the house and even engaged with them in chit-chat until the barman arrived and Barrington could take some time off for himself, leaving Vincenti to consider the best way to get Fly involved in his latest scheme. And by

the time he arrived at the bottom of his glass he was feeling much more relaxed and even his spirits had lifted. He phoned Thistle and postponed their appointment. He had decided it was worth the scraggy rough and tumble that was the village and since he was convinced Fly would jump at the chance to partner his latest proposal it would be worth whatever it took to turn it into to wonderland and they would then be on their way to making a fortune. Yes, one day they'd be mega rich themselves and the world would be theirs. He had no time to waste. It was time for a chat with Fly.

### Vincenti visits Elysian Fields

Edlyn sat absorbed in adding last minute adjustments to the expansion of the waistline on a ceremonial gown for one of her friends, or '*emergency sewing*' as she preferred to call it. It was that time of year when women taking part in the Joining Ceremony bought or borrowed beautiful dresses and always seemed to need alterations before the big day arrived. Fly sat drawing a map of the island as Kevin was doing his best to decipher the clues in a crossword book inherited from one of his overnight guests back in his college days. Into that homely hush came the tinkling of their doorbell.

'Want me to get that?' mumbled a distracted Fly.

'Don't stir yourself, I'm almost there,' whispered Edlyn. On her way to the door she stopped and glimpsed between the curtains to see who it was, 'It's some overdressed chap smoking a fat cigar. Actually, not bad looking. Ha!'

Fly looked up, more than a little concerned. Edlyn shook her head, bemused, 'So unreal.'

Kevin laughed, 'Must be one of yo' rappin' bros dude,' he said, teasing their rock star guest.

'Let me look,' he whispered as he peered through the curtains. 'Gosh! It's Antonio Vincenti! My manager.'

Edlyn was aghast, 'You're joking! No! I thought we were passed all that. Well, I'll

let him in but just the same Fly remember, you sever your connections with this community and you sever your connections with yourself.' She shot him a warning look.

Fly stood staring, a little tense, suspecting whatever Vincenti had to say would not be an easy ride and waited behind the door just as Edlyn laid the wedding dress across a sofa muttering, 'Deep breath, Fly, deep breath,' and placing an arm around Fly's shoulders for support before she opened the door.

Vincenti raised his hat, 'Ah, good morning to you. May I speak with a Ms. Edlyn if she's at home?'

'And a good morning to you too. I'm Edlyn Peel, how can I help you?'

Vincenti looked straight into her eyes and smiled graciously, 'How do you do? A pleasure, I can assure you. My name is Antonio Vincenti and I'm looking for a Mr. Flynn. I was told he was staying here.'

Fly took the handle opening the door wide, 'Hello Antonio! Well, well, well, what a surprise.'

Edlyn glanced at Fly then glanced at Vincenti.

Vincenti smiled at Edlyn then at Fly, 'Ha! Fly my dear boy. How are you doing? You do look well. Mind if I come in?'

As they gathered in the lounge, Vincenti was first to speak, 'Well, what a delightful room, Ms. Edlyn.' He lowered his voice, 'And I have to say, Fly, I don't think I have ever seen you look so athletic. The thing is, I have a business matter I'd like to discuss and...', he lowered his voice, 'I wonder, would you rather we spoke in private, dear chap? I don't mean to be rude, then again there are one or two things that often call for us to be discreet.'

'No need for privacy or discretion, Antonio. These are my friends and we have no secrets. Is there a problem?' asked a nonchalant as possible Fly, grinning.

'Well Fly, not to beat about the bush,' he broke off, glancing at the other two, 'do you remember our little plan? The one that could help us counteract any unacceptable drop in trade should there be a downward slide in popularity? Well, forget that, because I have come up with an alternative so all is not lost.'

Fly was confused, 'What on earth are you talking about, Antonio? What are you

concocting now?'

'Ms. Edlyn, may I sit down?'

Edlyn chuckled, 'Maybe we should all sit down and relax. Sit anywhere you like. I take it this isn't a social call. You don't come all this way for fun,' she frowned and looked at Fly.

Vincenti exhaled, 'Well then, Ms. Edlyn, if you'll forgive me, that's where you'd be wrong because fun is the exact reason I have come all this way. Fly, I'm sure the alternative will appeal to your artistic ambitions.'

'Please Mr. Vincenti, before you go any further, let's get one thing clear. I have no interest whatsoever in returning to the entertainment business now that I have found all that I need right here,' Fly was putting his foot down before things became disruptive, recognising the obstinate determination in Vincenti.

'Fly, my friend, wait. I have had an outrageous idea that could make us quite a substantial amount of money and I would like you to be my partner and run the scheme at this end. It would all be above board and we would share all profits fifty-fifty. Do I interest you now?' He beamed at Fly.

Fly was horrified, 'What are you on about...?'

'I know! I know! Unbelievable isn't it? Oh, I knew you'd be pleased. Now brace yourself.' As was his habit, Vincenti spoke to Fly as if he were addressing his vassal, 'OK, now here's the plan. Imagine a colourful, star-spangled water park here on the island and apart from the usual rides, it would have a first-class entertainment complex, including a deluxe theatre and restaurant, casinos, blue-ribbon coloured illuminations, in fact everything to make it the main attraction in the world of exclusive leisure destinations. Now, you don't have to be Epstein to work out who'd be the star of the show because, my friend, it would be your choice and you, yes you, would be in charge!'

His laughter shattered what was left of the fading harmony. Edlyn, with full attention while pretending to alter the gown, casually propped an arm on the sofa and muttered, 'Don't you mean Einstein?'

Vincenti, 'Well, well, Fly. Who's this? Your prompt?' and dryly, he laughed all over again, looking from one to the other.



'Just one moment, Antonio,' Fly was incredulous. 'Now you amaze me. Do you believe in all honesty that you can come here, out of the blue, without the slightest comprehension or respect for the people of this village, people who are strengthened by their traditional courage, and expect them to forsake their unique culture, bow down and accept this mind-blowing and abhorrent idea? That you can do all this without the slightest consideration for the effect it would have on their very existence? Or their future? Antonio, to be clear, the people here thrive in a gentle way of life that they have cherished for generations. A Theme Park? It would destroy them. This rare island community could not be more content than it already is and it has become that way by rejecting all the conventions and trivial values of modern societies. Please listen, I am going to explain clearly and simply so there can be not the slightest misunderstanding. Mr. Vincenti, Antonio, we are not the slightest bit interested in anything you have in mind. This is a sensitive, harmonious island, guided by the simple love of its people. There is a happiness here that is unknown in most modern cultures. We are happy and have no wants or needs that cannot be met by the people. Sir, we are content to continue that way. On this island there's more to life than buying and selling useless distractions.'

'Dear boy,' interrupted a smiling Vincenti with an icy glance, 'I'm not trying to distract anyone. It's not what you believe, it's who you know and I'm just providing a certain class of people with they want. This would be the perfect retreat for them,' he winked and once more, theatrically laughed around the room.

'Mr. Vincenti? Please, let's not waste any more time. You've come here to make Fly a business offer which he has rejected because it is improper and therefore not acceptable. So, it would appear your discussion is at an end. With all due respect, I'm afraid it's time for you to leave.' Edlyn was not amused.

'What? This is a chance of a life time. A golden opportunity. Why, you'd all be set up for life. It can't go wrong.'

Fly shook his head and turned to face his former friend and manager, 'You and your schemes are as unnecessary as they are unacceptable. All are irrelevant.'

'Alright. Tell me then,' Vincenti had changed his tone, 'what on earth are you doing in this backwater? You can't protect it. Life is all about change and you can't sit in

a time warp forever. If not you, someone else will take this opportunity so why not grab your chance before it's too late.'

Edlyn began smiling, 'Dear Mr. Vincenti, for the last time before we are completely and mind-numbingly bored altogether, I think you should leave, make your way out of my home quickly, and this time,' now raising her voice just a little, 'I am talking about our island.'

Fly and Kevin stood to faced Vincenti.

Vincenti, 'Fine. I'm going. But mark my words, you're making a big mistake, my boy. I'm offering you riches beyond your wildest dreams, and all I get for this amazing opportunity and for spending half my life driving down, down, down to this godforsaken dead-end is to see my trusted friend and partner turning his back on me. Anyway, how I hate the countryside, it's far too hippy. A wilderness only fit for people who live like animals. If it were up to me I'd level it and build beautiful theme parks, holiday villages, a heliport and luxurious dining emporiums where everyday millionaires could enjoy themselves in seclusion. My time will come, believe me.'

Edlyn placed her hand on the door handle, 'Senor Vincenti, for the people of our village, the natural world is the greatest treasure of all and yet in recent years the human species has been the cause of its degradation more than any other with whom we share the planet. Indeed significant parts of it are in danger of total destruction.'

'Dear lady, please do not believe everything the media tells you!'

'Bye bye Mr Vincenti,. Have a safe journey,' and she held the door ajar.

Vincenti, 'Alright! Alright I'm gone. So stay here! Be safe! Just understand one thing! You've got a long ways to go. You get one shot in this life and you've got your eyes closed!'

Vincenti stormed out leaving the door wide open in his wake.

Silence. Fly and Edlyn were stunned by what had just happened. Kevin had never witness such a moment. It was so unusual to see such an intense explosion of anger and frustration anywhere in the village.

Edlyn was first to speak, 'Poor chap. He's losing his mind. He needs to calm down or he'll give himself a heart attack.'

'I've known him for years and I've never seen him so out of control,' said a cheerless Fly. 'I wonder where he's off to now? I'd better go after him,' and Fly made for the door.

'No stop,' said Edlyn, 'For people like him it is essential to appear all powerful and authoritative, but deep inside they are incredibly nervous and have to rehearse everything they say. So we must be mindful and not take offence. It might be better to allow him time to reconsider. Perhaps you'll see him if you pop into The Hole this evening.' And then she sat down, looking at the floor. She spoke quietly, 'Listen you two, I think I know what's making me feel so distressed and vulnerable,' both looked up at her, waiting.

Then Fly said, 'It's my connection to Vincenti, isn't it?'

'Yes Fly, I'm afraid so.'

'I thought so. Yet I don't understand why. I want to protect everything the island stands for by severing all ties with Vincenti and his modern city bamboozlings.'

'Fly, it's not so much that Vincenti is a past associate of yours, as the fact that you did not warn me of the possibility that a dangerous, bullying, megalomaniac, might want to come and visit you then decide to assume control and try to take over everything we love. That's what I have sensed. You brought that contamination with you. Here into my house, and that fills me with doubt, suspicion even. That is why I have felt so weak for the past few days. I've been waiting for something to test me and I had to accept whatever came along. Our positive philosophy guards our ancient traditions and has to be tested so we can reject any weaknesses.'

'What on earth are you talking about?' asked Kevin.

Edlyn looked from one to the other, 'With the coming of Equinox there have been many things on my mind and as the celebration day grew closer. The main thing I felt was that we, as a community, have grown strong enough to shine on the eve of that special day. But then I began to sense a niggling discomfort that seemed to come from a threatening outside influence, and as the days passed, that discomfort grew. I did not have a clue whether it was just my imagination or it was for real. Then I met you, Fly, and I felt stronger. I just knew that together we could face the threat and decide how to deal with it. So now it is here and even though you brought it with you, it is only you who can

deal with it. No one else. It's no good saying you will leave because the danger to our community cannot be eliminated by your departure alone. You were born here, and as one of our kin you have to rid yourself of your vulnerability before you can decide what to do. Fly, this is your home, and we want you to stay.'

What should he do? Edlyn was right in stating that he had kept things to himself although he himself had not realised the implications of being secretive. She had insisted he be always open and never hide anything serious that might endanger the spirit of the village. They were a settled people, in no way anxious. Words and promises were never enough. He had to demonstrate his intentions openly so his village could continue its journey and not be dragged back and chained to materialism and the adoration of wealth. And so, instead of bitter and fierce arguments where nothing is gained, Fly decided to be more genial with Vincenti, as he was in the old days, and demonstrate the clear benefits of being true to ones self.

When he told her, Edlyn gave her consent, 'We'll support you.'

'Yes we both will,' smiled Kevin.

### Vincenti Finds His Way

Exasperated and bitter, Vincenti strode away, leaving the village fading in his wake and not knowing or caring where he was going. How could these people not be fascinated by this opportunity? Are they that stupid, so unimaginative? And what was all that about respect for the unique culture of the village? What unique culture? And, "a community rejecting all the conventions and trivial values of modern societies?" What absolute rubbish. They couldn't exist for long like that. And how dare they call my schemes "irrelevant". Who the hell do they think they are?

He strode on along a coastal path hearing their argument over and over as he walked. His anger began to fade once he realised he was living his worst nightmare and he had to wake up. He never lost control. That was not his way. Deep inside he began to

see he was not the man he pretended to be which was why he often felt so blocked, rejected, and all of it deserved. He wanted to wake up yet he did not know from what. What was his alternative?

He knew full well that the city, any city, represents status, selfish elitism, negativity, greed, sadness, anonymity, no sense of community, silly consumer living, silly competition, silly ambitions, silly masochism, ignorant homophobia. Kowtowing before the so-called 'establishment'. Ha! Who? What? And he had to see that during his lifetime he had caused so much pain, told so many lies and had so many conflicts. His self-centred life had even led him to moments close to the point of death. He lived a nightmare and for the first time in his life, his ranting on to Edlyn, relaxher brother and Fly left him downright uncomfortable and now it was time to wake up. He had to change or go mad. How? He wasn't sure what to do.

He began to wonder if the human species were the most flawed of all. Intelligent? Yes, but even so perhaps an evolutionary mistake, perhaps the most dangerous species of life on earth it being so narcissistic, destructive, greedy, materialistic. He came to the conclusion that the simpler forms of life, such as animals, insects, fish, in fact every other species except humans, are content just to be themselves whereas, the majority of we humans, although supposedly intelligent, have accepted the insistence that we have to strive for acquisitions, cause wars, be dishonest, selfish, greedy, murderous, arrogant and often vile as long as we reach our goals. Yet, the minority have been known to be caring, considerate and loving. He shook his head, frustrated.

He stopped walking. He wiped the sweat from his face with both hands and shouted at the calm sea, 'What on earth is wrong with me?' He grew breathless. He was panting, 'I spoke to those gentle people like I was a mobster, a thug, like a domineering idiot! And that is just what I've become.' He inhaled and groaned, choking back the tears, 'Along with my reputation I have reduced my perfect business plan to worthless nonsense! An entrepreneur? HA! I know nothing! I have destroyed myself.' His insolence had lost him the respect and good will of his one friend and now he was on his own.

He sat on the edge of the cliff staring at the gentle waves, and began to sob.

After a while he gathered what was left of himself and wandered away from the

coast and down along the crunchy lanes through dense green woodland, deafening with the sound of birds, until he found himself surrounded by forest shade occasionally lit with lustrous pools of sunshine. Immersed in the shadow of the canopy he strode on through the undergrowth until he was brought to a dizzying halt, bewitched by the contrast between the sun's gleaming radiance on a few select leaves against a background of dark, impenetrable shadows. He stood and stared in beaming respect and admiration at the wonder of the greenwood and pushed forward until his steps took him through a comforting natural arcade bordered with bluebells and flowers. As he wiped his cheeks and gazed about, his anguish began to fade and instead he became absorbed by his surroundings, immersed in its open, simple, straightforward tenderness. He became aware of a strange sensation, of comfort and gentle, optimistic impartiality that might offer a slight chance to repair and redeem himself.

A startled squirrel came from nowhere, galloping ahead of him along the pathway, seemingly scared out of its wits. He stopped to watch until it turned off into the shrubbery disappearing in search of calm. Vincenti raised his chin and took a long breath with the realisation that now, he too was searching for calm and not just there and then, he had been searching throughout his life. Fly had caring, warm friends, and even dependable Jane, his secretary, was soon to be married to the man of her dreams, the two people in his life who meant something to him, whom he regarded as his nearest friends and yet neither loved him for himself. Nobody did. One or two others had tried to befriend him with invitations to parties and evening drinks and he had always kept them at arm's length if he considered them to be of lower status or if they had nothing for him to gain.

These thoughts tore into his conscience and at first he just shrugged and wandered further through the thicket, his loneliness prodding along with the growing realisation that all was his own design, and then he realised the sole profit from his so-called success was isolation. He felt desolate. Empty. He had been wasting his life fulfilling useless desires, in patting himself on the back, misleading himself, in fact the money had been his soulless reward. He was not liked for being a good man but only for being an agent between the fulfilling ambitions of others and making money. He slumped again and flopped onto a rock, barren.

Startled by an unexpected splashing, he found himself in the company of a wild deer, not more than two metres away, lapping from a stream. The moment it became aware of him, it froze. As did they both, standing firm for a moment or two unsure of what to do, the deer looking him over, blinking, without moving at all until it lowered its head and carried on drinking, unphased. Once again, Vincenti felt reassured by the beauty and the trust the beast had shown in him and with that came an overwhelming glimmer of peace until he wondered what to do next. Before he could decide, the deer had quenched its thirst, and once again trotted away into the forest.

During the ensuing silence, Vincenti took a deep breath and gazed about, at the bushes and shrubs and up through the lace work of branches and leaves at the reassuring glimpses of blue sky. He felt the strange power of the forest which had evoked this reassuring feeling and he felt safe. Might it be possible for him to rebuild his life after all? He sensed he and the woodland were becoming friends which brought some hope and with that he began to feel a little more at ease. Soothed. Never before had he been so tranquillised by wild flowers, weeds and all manner of uncontrolled greenery. By simple, beautiful wilderness.

Then a moment later, the sound of a tumbling waterfall drew him further into the depths of the wood until, from somewhere in the silence, he thought he could make out the sound of someone crying. He began to walk on until something stirred within him that made him stop and listen. Drawn on, he came to a young boy sitting against a tree, his arms hugging his knees and his head drooping as he moaned and sobbed against the comforting woodland.

'Hey, hey, are you alright? What's the matter, my boy?' whispered Vincenti as he sat down gently beside him and put an arm around the shaking shoulders. 'Why are you crying? Have you hurt yourself?'

The lad sniffed, wiping his eyes and in between his sobs he dropped his head on Vincenti's shoulder. The boy stammered, 'My Dad's gone away and now me and mum are left behind and we won't see him ever again.'

'Now, now, now. Take a couple of deep breaths. Don't you worry, my young friend, I'm sure he'll be back before you know it and then you'll be together again.'

'No we won't mister. The winter before last, Dad was washed overboard from his boat into the water and never came up again and now he's in nature where he came from and we won't be together for ages.'

Vincenti cradled the lad and gave him a comforting hug, 'Poor lad. Why don't we get you home? Now dry your eyes and tell me where you live. Down in the village?'

'No, sir. I live with my mum on the other side of the forest. There isn't a path and it's a bit of a trek over the slope.'

'That's OK. Why don't you show me the way? I bet your mum's worried sick and in a right tiz wondering where you are. What's your name?'

'Billy. Billy Dunne. Who are you?'

'Antonio Vincenti. I'm from Italy. You can call me Vincenti.'

'I'll call you Vince or Marco Polo or something,' the boy forced a smile and a little laugh as they began the walk to Billy's home.

The lad told Vincenti of his ambition to be a sailor, visit foreign lands, meet foreign people, then to be a fisherman, he just couldn't stop talking and even laughing and the man he was with felt at so much more at ease for the first time in a long time.

As they came to a clearing there stood an old, grey, lumpy stone built cottage. On a small sign outside were the words, 'Spindly Bush Farm', and with it came the welcoming, comfortable hint of woodsmoke and cooking. Suddenly, the door was whisked open by a woman with dark, shoulder length hair wearing an ankle length dress, a pinafore and a sad smile. She was on the verge of tears. Billy ran down the path and hugged his mother, 'Sorry mum. It's been ages, I know, but he's everywhere.'

'Oh, Billy! My darling boy. Are you OK? I love you so much, my son.'  
Whereupon they both began weeping as she wrapped him in her arms.

'Mother, I'm fine. This man brought me home and we had a laugh. His real name is Caesar Antonionius, or something like that,' and he gave a little laugh. 'I call him Ant.'

His mother's face lit up, her white teeth contrasting with her sandy brown skin. She touched his arm as she said, 'I'm ever so grateful to you for bringing my boy home. I can't thank you enough. Come inside, please,' and as they shuffled into the front room, Billy went straight out through the back door into the garden where he began calling out



the names of the gentle menagerie of animals wandering about the barnyard, offering them food and making a fuss. From his chair by the window Vincenti could see pigs, a couple of llamas, chickens, ducks, and two goats with curling, droopy horns.

'They're not just animals, they're his pets as you can tell,' the lady blinked away her tears and she gave a slight laugh, 'My poor Billy. He's just twelve and his father was his hero. They were inseparable and it's not surprising he's taking so long to recover from our tragedy. He's been distraught ever since I told him his father was missing just over a year ago. He has these outbursts and can be hurtful without meaning to be. He won't eat his food, he's stopped going to the school and instead he can disappear early in the morning and sometimes not come home 'til quite late. I feel to blame and keep thinking he's going to run away. It's hard to know what to do. I've tried everything to help him along, all to no avail. He knows I love him and that this is home yet since..., well, since our lives changed so much...he,' and she closed her eyes, lowered her head and became still.

For a second, Vincenti was back in his younger days and without thinking, he embraced the lady and held her as the tears welled and she whispered, 'Oh, this is what I needed.' She wiped her eyes on her apron and tried to smile but too embarrassed, she shook her head, 'I'm so sorry. Please, sit down and let me get you a glass of my Elderberry, it's the least I can do to thank for your thoughtfulness and for coming out of your way. You seem get on so well with Billy. I can see he likes you.'

Vincenti was not quite sure how to respond. He felt embarrassed. 'My name is Antonio Vincenti. I'm Italian, though I live in London most of the time. What's your name?'

'Irene.' She looked at him and smiled, 'I didn't think you were British with that accent. Welcome. Please, sit down and make yourself at home. I won't be long,' and she disappeared into the kitchen, calling over her shoulder, 'Welcome to our home in the woods.'

Billy reappeared and went straight to Vincenti, 'Ant! You staying for dinner? Great! Do you live on the mainland? Whereabouts?'

'Well, er, I live in London. A long way away.'

'Why don't you live here? We've got a cabin in the yard and a spare bunk in the attic. And, as well as the animals in the yard, we've got two horses, one's called Beau and one's called Belle, a horse cart with a hood and we've got Sally, the boat. We could go fishing and riding and all that. It'd be great, you'd love it.'

'Billy! Don't be so rude. Mister Vincenti's a busy man.'

His mother had been standing in the doorway, horrified at Billy's suggestion to a complete stranger, 'How do you know he hasn't got other commitments up in the capital?' She lowered her voice, 'So sorry, er, Anton, you see what I mean about the outbursts? Please, don't take offence.'

'Please Irene, it's not important, and anyway, out here there's so much to take in and enjoy and so much to leave behind. It's just like a big wild garden. A real pleasure to be here. I have an growing sense of wanting to live away from the city and let my hair grow, if you know what I mean.'

'It's odd, Anton, though since my husband's passing, we've avoided having visitors until now. I am so glad you're here. Already, I think you have helped us both relax a little more.'

Vincenti was touched by the empathy so obvious between son and mother, something he had not himself felt for many, many years, if at all. And, as if in a dream, he sensed a slight connection between himself and Irene. She was intelligent, brave, and protective and loving towards her son.

'May I ask about your husband? He was a fisherman?'

'Yes. His name was Andrew. He was a rather quiet man though with a sharp sense of humour and he was the love of my life. And yes, he was a fisherman, and before that he spent most of his time in the navy, sailing the seven seas until Billy came into our lives and that's when we moved here. The cottage farm belongs to my uncle and since he lives away, he insisted we live here and although it isn't huge, it gave us a perfect a way of life. Except for one thing. Yes, it made us happy for a while but then Andrew became restless again. I suppose because it's so remote here and the changeover wasn't easy for him. He began to find it hard to get travel and the sea out of his blood and that made him think again and again about his navy days. It lasted quite a while and he would go off into the

woods by himself to think things over until one day he surprised me when came home all smiles and I began to fear the worst until he said he had suddenly realised that life is like a ship moving through the ocean with its wake trailing behind. 'Yes, we can trace the past by the wake of our lives but for only so far, because sooner or later we reach a point where all the images and details fade away just like the fading wake of the ship.' One of his sayings was, 'Our past lives have as much to do with where we are heading as the tail of a dog has to do with the wagging of the dog.' He'd say, 'So when you want to stop being the puppet of the past, just make a positive change in your thinking. You are what you're doing now not what you did in the past. Simple! It's like - sit down and dump the junk!' Then we'd fall about laughing. Whenever Billy got out of hand, Andrew would sneak upstairs and put on his old pirate fancy dress costume that he sometimes wore at Midsummer parties, and then loudly announce from the doorway, '*Aye, me hearty! Oive sailed them seven seas, O yes Ha-harr! Now I'm 'ome fer moi tea!*', and at this Billy would collapse in a fit of laughter.' Suddenly she fell still again.

Vincenti was miles away as he imagined possibilities.

Then Irene spoke, 'Anton, you must be tired of hearing my old memories.'

'Not at all. Please go on. Tell me more, Irene, it's just what I need to hear. We both do.'

'Well, it became more and more obvious to Andrew that everyone, as they grow old, becomes sick and dies. Everyone suffers in some form or other. It is important to question how you want to proceed with your life. It's up to you how you want to live in the world. Everything is in constant change. These are the questions that concern us all.'

They fell silent. Billy got up and left the room. Irene watched him go in silence then looked down, on the verge of tears again, 'So, what keeps you in London, Anton?'

'Oh, just my business. With such a wide variety of powerful contacts I act as adviser to anyone who needs help in large-scale, or dominant, financial and commercial investment. The Marketing World is its other name.' He looked a little smug in trying to make light of something that was so all-embracing and consequential in his life, while Irene had no idea of the true weight of what he meant. They both laughed, but for different reasons before each fell silent.

She couldn't believe he could be immersed in something so raw. 'Forgive me, Anton but are you serious? This is what you do with your life?'

'I'm very serious, Irene. I have spent the greater percentage of my adult life making investments, giving financial support, studying the markets and sifting through marketing looking for opportunities. It's got me where I am today.'

Once again Irene fell silent, unable to follow his reasoning. She was hesitant and stared at him for a moment before asking, 'Now please don't be offended because I do not mean to be rude, but you see I've always held the belief that those who spend their lives concentrating on making money, well, they are just like donkeys being led by the carrot and that makes me sad. After all, life can be so fulfilling, and so simple.'

At first Vincenti was surprised and indeed a little offended, having been expecting some form of compliment. He cleared his throat, 'Well, let's not go into that. I'm sure you're not that interested in hearing my life story yet perhaps I owe you an explanation for why I have to seize every opportunity I can find.'

'I'm just curious. Just where are you? Because if you don't mind my saying, your life-style just sounds so cold and so isolated, I have to confess I am rather interested in your life story. Anyway, I can always tell you to stop if you become boring,' and they both began laughing again.

'I lived with my mother and father on the island of Sicily nowadays home to the Cosa Nostra, the Mafia, the Mob, in the city of Palermo,. When I was small I loved it there. I ran away because my father was in the habit of coming home drunk and thrashing me for the slightest reason. The sound of keys rattling in the front lock, would fill me with terror and I would shoot through the back door and into the alleyways. I became so scared one night that I decided to run away but by morning I found both my mother and father had already gone, disappeared, and I was left abandoned in the house with no money for rent and lost on the web of streets and alleyways where we lived. Even now, I cannot stop wondering what happened to them because there's no way of finding out for certain when you have no definite trace. It's frightening. People go missing in Sicily every day and worst of all, sometimes when they do, it is taken as a warning, a reminder, from the Mob, the Mafia, to anyone who does not obey the syndicate that it is they who

are in control. So I guess I'll never know.'

'Oh my goodness! You poor lad.'

'But I was nursed by the island. The air flowed through my blood and it gave me confidence. I honed and sharpened my life without any thought for others. I swore I would never be bullied by thugs, the law or poverty ever again. My ambition as a teenager was to amass a fortune – by hook or by crook! Palermo was a hotbed of rule by the local families, and they used threats and violence to extort almost every businessman, from the pizzerias to the fishmongers. They were very well organized cartels with a ruthless behavioral code so when I left for Roma I adopted that code and made money however I wanted and, believe me, I removed anything or anyone that stood in my way. It didn't take long before I fattened my wallet, though by doing that I became an enemy of the syndicate leaders who were not at all happy with my self-indulgence. I had become a monster and had to keep my head down.

Then one day, a young lady friend told me there were people seeking revenge for my impertinence and so I got as far away as possible and ended up in London where I built and dominated a music business empire. I controlled not just the musicians and their agents, but also some of the biggest players in the theatrical world. I fixed record deals and even radio producers - no one was exempt. I became unscrupulous. A very wealthy music lover until again, I received word that the Mob were on to me and closing in.'

His words were lost in a crackling flash of lightening followed by a deafening rumble of thunder as Billy came running back into the room, half scared and half astonished, to clutch at his mother for safety. Through the window they could see a sudden crashing rainstorm and were so taken aback that they just sat in silence for a moment and stared at one another.

'Look, I'd better be making tracks. It's getting late. You have been very kind considering I am an absolute stranger.'

'Oh, don't be silly, Anton, you can't go out in this. Instead of kitting you out in heavy weatherwear, I'd rather you made yourself comfortable and finished your story. If the rain keeps up, and if you prefer, you can stay here the night. As I said, we're used to visitors and instead of the long trek back to the village, our friends often spend the night

in the barn, or the 'cabin' as Billy likes to call it. It's not luxury accommodation but it is comfortable, dry and clean. You'd be welcome.'

'Irene, I'd love that. Are you sure I won't be in the way?'

'Of course not. In fact, we'll even feed you dinner. We're having fish. Like some? You're welcome to join us, you know. And anyway, you and the weather might encourage Billy to spend the rest of the evening in the cottage for a change. I'd be grateful,' she smiled.

For the first time in his life, he had told an absolute stranger, one with whom he felt some kind of harmony, the framework of his life.

That evening Billy, Irene and Vincenti sat around the kitchen table enjoying their first dinner together, gentle music playing on an ancient music centre in a candlelit dining room, whilst a growing rainstorm began thundering on the roof above. With growing concern, as Irene went outside to make sure the animals were coping, Vincenti and Billy started the washing up then above all the noise they heard Irene's voice cut through it all.

'It's coming in! It's coming in!'

They dropped everything and dashed into the front room. The rain outside was deafening and hammering on the door. It had become a bullying storm. Pouring in underneath and down the sides of the front door was an insistent waterfall, constant, unrelenting and so they gathered mops, some rags, the dust pan and brush, buckets, bowls, jugs, anything with which they might scoop up the deepening rainwater. They kept at it for all of the following five hours until the flooring became a pond. They realised they might have a losing battle on their hands when the water that covered the bathroom floor began flowing back out over the step-down and by then whole of the ground floor throughout the cottage was beneath five inches of flood water.

By early evening, after having cleaned up most of the sodden mess, along with leaves, grass, soil and twigs, they were so absolutely exhausted because they had completely forgotten to eat anything. But after Vincenti slid over carrying a bowl in the hallway and banged his head on the bottom stair, which Billy thought hilarious, they just had to stop squelching around in their bare feet and call it a day. Exhausted, they all went to bed around nine.

Next morning, Irene lit the Rayburn, they had breakfast followed by the final mop-up. The problem had been exaggerated by a leak in a drainage pipe coming from the roof plus the steady stream of water gushing down the slope from the hill and once it found its way under the gate and down along the path to the front door there was no stopping it. They chose a thick plank to always be on hand to block the gateway and Irene made some bags out of old sacking for Vincenti to fill with sand as doorway barriers, although Irene said that that was the first time Spindly Bush farmhouse had ever been flooded. She suggested that should it ever happen again, it might be easier if he lay down up against the gate to keep the water out.

'Irene, may I explain why I was wandering in the woods? I need to get it off my chest.'

'If you think it will help, then do so.'

'Well, when I found Billy the other day, I had been stomping through my brain trying to work out what I was doing here in The Garden. I had been to see an old friend in the village with what I thought was the way to fix the hole in our shared business interests. However, instead of a discussion, I had an uncontrollable explosion of anger and frustration as a result of his display of utter indifference and subsequent rejection of what I considered a fool-proof, perfect money-making plan. They had absolutely no interest in my scheme. I just could not understand how they could resist because in my mind it was an obvious winner. I felt reviled, humiliated. I was furious. I screamed and shouted until I boiled over and left.'

'Sounds complicated. I bet they were rather upset by what you said.'

'I think they thought I was mad. I stormed off into the woods to get away from myself and try to work out what was wrong with me. Very angry and distressed, I could not understand my overblown reaction. I wanted to lose this horrible man that I've become. And that's when things began to change.'

'In what way?'

'I came across a photograph taken by my father of me on my twelfth birthday looking out of the window at my mother in our yard and my mind went back to me begging on the streets of Palermo, learning to deceive anyone with money. For a long

time I hated everyone.'

'Oh, Anton, you have spent most of your life distanced from society, pretending to be in control of everything, when all the time you have been living on the edge in deep distress and emotional isolation. Deep down you have become overstressed, sad, a nervous wreck. No wonder you blew your top!'

'Irene, you are right. Often in the past, I found myself in tears, wanting to be clean again, but I didn't know what to do.'

Irene took his hand in hers, 'Anton, I promise to be your friend and help you in any way I can. In fact, I've just had a thought. If it would help, and I'm pretty sure it would, you could move into the barn, help us salvage the farm for my uncle and have someone to talk things over with. If you did move in, I'm sure it would benefit Billy and me, as well as you.'

### Vincenti's Day Off

Early next day, Irene suggested Vincenti have a day off, maybe exploring the coasts and the coves or in having a look round the Sunday market, although she wasn't quite sure what time it opened. It would do him good and he could take as long as he liked.

After some thought Vincenti agreed. So after breakfast, he wandered down to the quayside to watch the boats coming and going, and to listen to the crews shouting to one another across the water and watch the gulls constantly changing direction as they flew, something that mesmerised him as a boy. Coincidentally, life on the sea had always held a similar fascination for him as it had for Irene's husband and now it was almost on his doorstep again. Maybe he could find work on a boat or in the harbour and as he was just about to step into the Harbour Master's office to make enquiries, the door swung open and out ran a black and white moggy. Distracted, he almost collided with an elderly lady who had stopped in the doorway to search through the contents of her purse.

'Whoops, sorry,' he excused himself.



She looked confused, 'Ye-es.'

He smiled again, 'Nice day.'

The old lady stopped, 'Sorry, my dear?'

'Oh, er...nice day.'

'Oh, I know. There's a lot of it about.'

'And you look lovely.'

She looked at the sky, 'Not it's not, is it?'

'Excuse me, madam, do you know if there are any gifts for ladies that might be for sale in the market when it starts?'

The lady beamed, 'That's very kind of you. However, I prefer my own company. But thank you all the same, my dear man. Thank you.'

Just then he was heartily greeted by the Harbour Master himself, an earnest young guy who looked a little like he had just crawled out of bed - barely dressed - but earnest.

After insisting they keep the office door closed so the air conditioner would work, the young man tried a couple of times to call his boss, the Senior Harbour Master, who was well known, it seemed, for having a finger in every pie on the island and would definitely know about casual jobs. If not, at least he'd have some idea as to when the market opened.

Unfortunately, there was no answer, 'Sorry, sir. Maybe you can come back in an hour and we'll try again - he must be at sea.'

'Not to worry, I'll go for a walk,' said Vincenti.

'Well, don't go too far, sir. You don't want to miss the band. They open the market.'

Within half an hour, the band started playing and the market was under way and to Vincenti, it had everything to suggest it was more like a chaotic car boot sale than the markets he had visited before. Make-shift tables and old ship's sails spread on the cobbles covered with colourful crockery, old household items in copper and brass, framed woven pictures, flowers and plants for sale, yet it was comforting to wander in and out of old stone-floored cottages with their welcoming doors wide open to all visitors. Their high

wooden beamed ceilings and fat old wooden chairs, looking exactly like fat old wooden chairs should, sturdy and strong. Then the household mirrors, wall lamps and stairways that once led to heaven - or hell. Walls carrying old family photographs, and dotted all around the village square were the village shops, dark and smelling of everything from oil for the delightful little lamps to sacks of grain and home-made hats.

He was warming to the village. He felt safe, and completely surprised at how courteous and glad the people were to share their lives. Off the main square was an area of very old houses, narrow passageways overgrown and crumbling, full of real people in happy confusion.

The elderly lady he had met earlier was now sitting in what he assumed was the doorway to her home and at her feet lay, curled in a circle, the black and white cat, sound asleep. As he passed she gently relaxed and twinkled, so he paused and said hello. She seemed happy. She rearranged her headscarf and made herself comfortable in her chair, folding her hands upon her lap and holding a most beautiful smile. And then to his surprise, she broke down and began to weep. What happened next came as a complete surprise to him and not something he would normally do. He drew her close and kissed her soft cool cheek and squeezed her hand and tried some words to reassure her.

He apologised and just as he backed away, he bumped into the Harbour Master's assistant who had been standing a little way behind him, 'Hello. Please, don't worry about my grandma. I have come to sit with her for a while as I do from time to time since our grandfather died in the winter. She has had a hard time without him.' Then to Vincenti's amazement, the lady came over to him and whispered something incomprehensible. Then she patted his cheek before smiling again and disappearing indoors.

Once again, a wander through the village, a gaze at the boats and a stroll along the narrow cobbled streets, all presented Vincenti with the gift of easy calm in all he saw and heard. With passers-by he exchanged greetings and smiles sprinkled with, 'Afternoon,' and, 'lovely day,' until he dropped into a chair outside a small cafe on the edge of the

square.

For Vincenti, meeting Irene had made him reconsider his attitude to living and there was so much more he wanted to change. It was good to be on the island. He liked the way the islanders were happy just being, and not so interested in 'becoming' and they didn't seem to measure success in terms of acquisitions. They realised success was a personal thing and not an accolade awarded by others. He began to realise it never is the *place* so much as the *people* who show you who you are, that become part of you, that you take into your heart. And no doubt it is the feelings you feel that make the strongest impression and last much longer than the moments you remember.

At the next table he watched two men in animated conversation. Some minutes passed then one of the men looked over at him, smiled and asked, 'Can I get you anything?'

'I'd love a cold beer please,' smiled Vincenti.

The man got up and returned with his drink, placed it on the table and continued with his discussion. Vincenti drained his glass, excused himself and asked how much he owed. The man who served his drink looked puzzled and shrugged, 'How do I know? I'm not open yet, my friend.' Then, with a broad grin, he came over and sat with Vincenti, introduced himself as Byron, the owner of the cafe, and began some tales of a local hero, the deep sea explorer Jacques Cousteau. He told of the island's mythology, its waterfalls, and island life in days gone by.

When the time came for Vincenti to be on his way and as he stood shaking Byron's hand, Byron's wife called from an upstairs window telling him his dinner was ready. As they shook hands and Vincenti picked up his bag, he joked, 'Do you always go when your wife calls?'

'I like my dinner hot...', and Byron grinned.

The old defensive harbour was now like one from childhood dreams to Vincenti. He loved its smell and wondered at its depths. He sat and watched the bobbing boats, the lifeline of the island, straining beneath a bold flotilla of gulls floating and drifting and disappearing from sight towards the horizon. He was like that child again, for him the

harbour was the centre for a close-knit community who kept the tidal island running smoothly, comfortable, protective, whereas the distant horizon was dangerous and whatever lay beyond was unknown. He wished 'Good Day', to a chap on a bench who was cradling a glass of beer in one hand while reading from the book he balanced in the other.

'Excuse me, mind if I join you?'

'Not at all. Make yourself comfortable,' smiled the man, making space.

'So how's it going?' asked Vincenti stretching out his legs and letting out a long sigh.

'Oh, taking the strain, my friend, taking the strain.'

'Those boats look business-like moored along the quayside, don't they?'

'Yes indeed, and not being funny, I think they look even prettier when they're out at sea, fishin'.'

'You're a fisherman, are you?'

'Was. I'm a bit too old for it now.'

'What was the money like, if you don't mind me asking?'

'Well really, it wasn't about the money. More about supporting our cherished community.'

'I can understand that. Up in London where I've been working they wouldn't do an hour's overtime for less than a fistful of cash.'

'Well I wouldn't go to London for anything on earth.'

They fell silent, Vincenti nodding on his thoughts, 'Beautiful day.'

'Aye! Pretty as a painting now.'

'Do you think it'll get any warmer? I wouldn't mind going for a swim if it does.'

'Aye. The water's crystal clear, like a milk pond, with lots of hidden treasures. You can see right to the bottom. Lots of fishes all colours, shapes and sizes. Very strange fish, rare plants and there's the deep-water coral down there, too. Beautiful.'

'It does look nice and calm.'

'Looks nice and calm, did you say? Ha! Careful boy. Apart from the pollack and bass, the squid and the dolphin, not to mention the baskers, there be great big fish out

there.'

'Oh? Do you mean there are strangers out there? Fish that aren't local?'

'Strange fish? Not half! There be monsters out there, mark my words.'

'Monsters? Not sea monsters? Go on. Ha!'

'You might laugh, my 'ansome, and yet there's one creature that's been terrorisin' these waters since Noah was a lad.'

'Does he have a name?'

'The Malereck! Sly old Malereck rises from the deep on certain moonlit nights and travels along the pathway of the moon and woe betide any fishin' boat that gets in his way.'

'Are you serious?'

'The Malereck is the oldest and most vicious sea monster that ever lived. More vicious even than The Morgwar! I warn you!'

Vincenti cleared his throat, 'Morgwar? Malereck? I never knew. Well, I'd better get on. Nice chatting to you. See you again sometime. Take care now.' He waved cheerio and strolled on shaking his head in mild confusion.

A strengthening westerly suggested it might be time to visit the waterfall he had heard about from Cap'n Davy. It was over on the sheltered east coast and so he set off across the dusty yellow plateau until he came to the pretty, dense old forest Byron described. He tramped down and down into a dell almost entirely concealed by the swathes of woodland and there, as if by magic, came the most remarkable sound of gurgling water. And Vincenti was instantly enchanted by what he saw. Even if it was quite small, his waterfall had a life of its own, warbling from the rocks above into a pool of nature in the dell, and all enclosed by a mixture of shrub and boulders and greenery. It was right out of the fairy tales he had read about. A sacred place of faeries, of spells and legend. He felt like that child again, facing life. He had never been so close to falling water, or felt its gentle droplets showering through the air, or been so entertained by the buzzes and tweets of its creatures, or ever felt the soft and comforting isolation of a secret grotto which then came and wrapped itself around him.

Slowly, he left his glittering shadows to climb back to a path that took him past some very fine remnants of a mediaeval village, alive with shadowy ghosts and his imagination. Three or four buildings lined what appeared to have been a street and on some walls were discoloured hand-painted motifs of goods once for sale inside. He identified the remains of an eating place, a butcher's, a bread shop and over the rim of a deep and dangerous gorge he saw the distant ruins of another fortification. It was treacherous to go much further so he headed back to a stream where he could rest and watch the trusty ducks and geese parade.

That evening, as the blue faded into purplest navy with millions of stars overhead, he interrupted his return through the village, sank into a chair outside Byron's Cafe again and waited until the man himself had finished his discussion on preparing fish with a young couple and glanced through the doorway at him and smiled, 'Hello! Please, go inside and serve yourself. I won't be long.' Vincenti could hardly believe his ears.

He sat and sipped his well-earned iced lemonade, and when the discussion closed, Byron came to join him. Once he gathered where Vincenti had been, he was able to fill in some of the history of the ruined village. It was once the medieval capital on the north east coast of the island, sometime in the middle fifteen hundreds it had been sacked by the pirate, Barbarossa and the several score inhabitants had been sold into slavery. Byron was like the waterfall now and once again he warbled on about war, his friend Jacques Cousteau again, historic Britain and life in general until Vincenti's head was swirling with imagery and disbelief.

'Lovely drink, Byron. Just what I needed. Delicious. One more thing, is it really true that there is a sea monster somewhere in these waters known as Malereck?'

'Not really. Malereck is anagram of Mackerel - a local joke.'

'And Morgwar?'

'Ragworm.'

'Actually, do you mind if I get another glass after all, please? Sorry, but my throat's gone completely dry.'

Byron poured the drink, placed it before Vincenti then wandered off chuckling, to

chat to a group of regulars. Vincenti made an excuse and left some money on the table.

On his way home after his long walk, he felt a surprising sense of belonging in the community.

Back at Spindly Bush, they were fully aware that it was summer. Already June had been fine and warm and often too hot for working long afternoons although by using the shade and drinking vast amounts of water, Irene, Billy and Vince had managed to take advantage of early starts and early sleep times in the quiet quiet of the evenings. As the days rolled by, Vince had begun to feel less and less of an outsider and more and more part of the lives of Irene and Billy. There were days when they would wander through the wheat, barley, potato and oat fields visiting to neighbouring cottages, picking wild strawberries on the way or making mountain top safaris to gawp at the views and paddle or swim in the becks and brooks and, of course, down in the sea. Gradually, they became a family and as springtime yielded to summer, Irene became even more relaxed due to the times she had to herself while Billy and Vince were off sailing together, or bird watching, or exploring ancient stoneworks, or just walking.

Irene and Vince had grown closer due to his obvious love for Billy and his devotion to Irene. Billy couldn't stop talking which meant eye signals and eyebrows raised between Vincenti and Irene until it was time for him to go to bed. Billy had become her son again and now and then even asked if he stay the night with his mother again like he used to when he was little.

Irene and Vincenti had been working on repairing the leak in the roof of the barn where he slept and it was beginning to look like the whole roof needed attention.

'It's a bigger job than I expected,' said Irene.

'I know but at least the weather's fine and there's no rain forecast for a few days,' he smiled.

'Ant, if you want, you could move into the attic. It would take the pressure off.'

'That would be a welcome relief. I could gather some wood and get better organised and that would give me more time. Are you sure, Irene?'

'Of course. Look, stop working for a minute and let's sit down. There's something else that's been on my mind.'

Vincenti left his tools on the roof and climbed down the ladder, joining Irene on a new bench he had made.

'Ant, you've been here for a while now and I have to say, life has been much more comfortable since you came to stay. Anyway, er, I think it's about time you moved into the cottage.'

'Wow! I'd love to. The barn has been fine so far so if you don't mind my saying, the attic would be much more convenient when the wintry weather comes,' and he gave a little laugh.

'Actually, there's something else I want to say and since now seems most appropriate. I might as well get it off my chest while we're making changes.' Vincenti feared the worst until Irene took his hand in hers and smiled. 'We get on so well together, that I don't think Billy or I would have it any other way now,' and she looked straight into his eyes. 'I have been falling in love with you since that day you brought Billy home and I wondered if you will come to the Joining with me and Billy sometime, er, when you're ready?'

'Are you serious, Irene? Nothing would please me more. Definitely! Oh, yes! Of course I will, cara mia. That is something I have desired with all my heart since the day we met but I just did not have the nerve to ask. Irene, I am honoured. Dear lady, I've been in love with you all of my life so why has it taken me so long to find you? I bow before you,' and he actually knelt on both knees before her, took hold of her hands and kissed them with great care.

### Kevin meets Megan

Each morning when Kevin arrived at his job in the The Hole in the Head, often there seemed to be the same dark-haired young woman tucked in between the end of the bar and the wall engrossed in writing what looked like a journal or a diary. No matter what the weather when he arrived, there she sat, gazing round the room then writing, even when something or someone caught her eye, she never paused for long and



apart from occasional polite acknowledgements for the locals, no one seemed to know her and she was always alone and never holding any conversation. She did not have friends in the village or seemed to know anyone.

While stocking up and doing things around the room like wiping the windows and table tops or fluffing up the cushions, Kevin would say hello and smile that half-embarrassed smile that accompanies the raising of the eyebrows that most folk use when coming face to face with a total stranger. Yet Kevin found the young lady's calm, quiet confidence rather attractive. She never drank from 'The Well', and always ordered the local mineral water or fruit juices. Whenever Barrington appeared behind the bar, which was not very often now that Kevin was in charge, he would lean forward, elbows on the surface and exchange one or two words with her before disappearing into the cellar. At first Kevin would offer something on the house which, with great charm, she would always decline.

One quiet morning, after being refused four days in a row, he hid his hurt pride, abandoned all his usual romantic lures and tried a little reverse psychology and turned the tables by keeping busy, concentrating on his regulars, appearing relaxed by humming to himself, and tried to ignore her. When he had finished clearing the spring well, restocking the shelves, washing the floor, stacking the empty crates outside in the lean-to and slicing the lemons, Kevin settled on the bar with his book of crosswords. He managed to complete five clues before he became stuck. Tapping the book with his pen while running through his options, he heard a voice asking, 'Need any help?' He looked up and almost collapsed in shock when he saw it was the young lady, smiling and sparkling as she turned on her stool to face him and opening her pad.

'Oh, I wouldn't waste your time. I'm hopeless with crosswords though at least they keep me busy while I'm trying to remember if I've forgotten anything to do in here,' he was more than a little bewildered by the fact that she acknowledged him with her offer of help.

'OK. Read out one of your clues and lets see if we can crack it,' she tilted her head, folded her arms and looked him straight in the eyes. 'By the way, I'm Megan.'

'And I'm Kevin.'

She waited while Kevin read out the clue, 'Birds do if a bit if potato's about right.'

'Birds do, hmm, fly, sing, nest...er, lay eggs...'

Kevin watched and waited. Then out of nowhere, Megan shouted, 'I've got it!

CHIRP!'

'Chirp? How?

'Simple. A chip is a bit of potato and R is right. So *chip* about *r* is chirp.'

Kevin was inspired. 'Wow! Genius!'

'OK, next clue!'

And with her genius it didn't take long to complete the crossword, in fact some clues were solved by Kevin himself and by the time they were ready to start another they were carefree and at ease with each other, disagreeing over spellings, guessing wrong solutions, confused, criticising the compiler and during the pressure, the young lady even order a spritzer and started chatting.

He could not wait to see her next day but she wasn't in her usual place when he came to work the next day nor the one after that in fact there was no sign of her anywhere in the village. In fact, Kevin didn't see her for quite a few days and he wondered what had happened to her. He missed her there. Then a little later there she was again, head down, writing in silence.

'Hi Megan, where on earth have you been? I've been worrying about you,' but his smile soon faded when she looked up and he saw she had been crying. 'Megan what's the matter? Are you alright?' He put a gentle arm around her shoulders while she wept.

'My grandfather died last week and now my life is completely upside down. I used to go and see him in his cabin and we'd spend ages just talking, gardening or walking. We were oh, so close. He understood me completely.'

Kevin heard the footsteps clumping up the stairs from below and pulled his arm away just as Barrington appeared in the doorway, 'Ah, Kevin, I see you've met my little girl. I am delighted she has come home again to where she belongs. Won't be a minute,' and off he went into the village.

Kevin was embarrassed. He had no idea Megan was Barrington's daughter or that she was related to Barry though he hoped his boss wouldn't disapprove of their

friendship, 'Whoops! I hope I haven't put my foot in it!'

Megan turned, 'In what? I *am* allowed to have friends you know!' Her face fell.

But Kevin was delighted to be called a friend. He put his arm around her again, 'So Megan, tell me where you've been.'

'Avoiding people.'

'What? Why, Megan? What's happened?'

'Oh, I'm so sorry about all this. I've had such a change in my life. Up until a month ago I was studying Art and Literature at Winchester Uni. Everything was going great. I was researching my subjects, discovering helpful approaches and even making friends. All was good until the day I got talking to Peter, another student, and we sat next to each other. As the days rolled by, we got to know each other and started dating. Over time, I fell in love, as you do, and we began to see quite a lot of each other and he suggested that perhaps move in with each other. So we rented a flat. And then a girl on my course, who worked in a city bar told me he was seeing at least two other girls and was known for being quite a player. I felt violated, crushed and depressed and just couldn't apply myself and study anywhere near him any more. That's when I began to waste time. So last week I decided to leave Winchester and come back to the island. One thing I did learn though, was to be very careful and never to trust anyone with your deepest feelings just because of what they say and do.'

'I don't blame you Megan, and I hope you're back to the Megan I know and feel better very soon.'

'Ah, Kevin, you have been lovely, honest. A big help and I'm grateful.'

During the days that followed, Megan's grandfather was laid to rest beneath a tree in the woods down by the beach, afterwards she and Kevin went walking together and even had a little lunch in The No Way Inn as their friendship began to bloom. Megan's father was rather pleased because over the short time Kevin had been working behind the bar he had struck up quite a rapport with the locals and Barrington could tell they liked his personality. He was very popular.

## Kevin and Megan go Wandering

It was the beginning of June and the forecast was excellent. For the whole of the previous week there had been nothing except cloudy skies over the island bringing occasional showers and dark thundery weather. Now the sky was blue again tempering those sunny dispositions.

Megan and Kevin had been enjoying each other's company doing crosswords in the tavern whenever it was quiet, going for walks and slowly looking forward to being together as each day passed. Then one evening while Kevin was trying to say goodnight, Megan took his hand and whispered, 'How about you stop trying to say whatever and just kiss me instead?' So he did.

Warmly, Megan smiled, 'And from now on, that's how we'll say hello.'

Their relationship was growing regardless of their differences.

Kevin had two days leave from his shifts at the Hole and with Megan, he wanted to explore the coastline of the island without plans or expectations. In his wandering past, he would surrender effortlessly to the experience of whatever came along and he wanted to feel that feeling again - something of a meandering Garden wander. So with, sleeping bags, tent, and the usual camping gear stuffed into their swaying backpacks off they trudged through the village and into the interior down a worn-out shadowy lane and into the future. According to an old map Kevin had been given, there should be a beautiful remote beach situated at the end of a four-mile walk. With a one-mile stretch of golden sand and dunes and ancient rocky cliffs to add drama to the scene. It was well known among the islanders as a place where one might flop and recover in comparative tranquility before making the arduous return trek.

After hours of mindless plodding and scrambling up and down the lanes through the leafy trackways, along rocky, time-worn trails between home farms scratched across fields and back into the village forever serenaded by a constant chorus of crickets backed by occasional barkings from a distant dog, it occurred to them that they were both exhausted and Kevin was feeling decidedly ragged at the edges, so with an encouraging nudge and her very personal, wonderful smile, Megan suggested they occupy what

appeared to be the shell of a new cottage being built at the meeting of another track straight ahead and rest for a while.

He needed no further encouragement and soon they were stumbling over beams, hammers and screwdrivers, and unrolling their sleeping bags in fits of giggles on a veranda fanned by a delicious breeze from an elusive sea somewhere 'over there'.

They had no idea how long they slept yet from deep within the warm dark pool of his subconscious Kevin was gradually drawn back to reality by what seemed to be the steady growing buzz of a swarm of seven thousand very curious wasps. They landing on their hair, on their arms and seemed very interested in their mouths. The deafening crescendo reached its thundering climax right above their heads before gradually fading once again into the silence of the bushes. Fully awakened and fully poised for the next wave of whatever, they were blinking some sense into their nightmare when they came to the conclusion that of all the places we could have curled up for some much needed rest, they had to choose a house under construction in a wasp metropolis. More giggles and at least Megan saw the irony and was soon grinning, bemused by events.

'Well, it can only get better,' Kevin whispered with a kiss as they continued on their trek.

'We'll see,' she said, taking it all in her stride and giving him that special smile again as he swung in behind.

From the high slopes they could see wind surfers skimming and zigging their boards through the spray under a clear blue sky, like butterflies blown around a puddle, and before long they were drawing level then crunching along the beach track until they eased to a sighing full stop. It was time for a swim and a rest. And so, they shambled down towards the beach to set up camp. Off the track that led to the sands was a small olive grove right next to the Surf For Sure Inn where there were showers and toilet facilities and refreshments.

Breathless after their swim, they sprawled on the dunes, eyes closed, fingers entwined, listening the music of what sounded like a melodious basouki being played in the tavern against a backwash of the sea rolling a zillion ancient pebbles back and forth. From the kitchen wafted the mouth-watering aroma of grilled fish, rich herbs and lemons.

A little further along the shore, a visiting family were spreading themselves on the hot sand, while bristling at their unhappy little girl forced into not just wearing knickers, but also a tiny phobiotic bra to hide her chest and their psychotic decency.

A very tall senior lady detached herself from a nearby group of local sun worshippers and strolled past the visitors completely naked except for a pair of white sunglasses with leaf shaped lenses that identically matched the cut-outs in the heels of her white beach slippers. Carefully, in her left hand she held a little silver box into which she flicked the ash from a long white cigarette held between the fingers of her right hand. She posed, statuesque, strong and independent, on a rock wreathed in elegance and surveyed the horizon while the little girl's mother clucked disdainfully and drew her daughter to her, 'Come here, darling. Look away.'

A while later, hosed down and ready for a drink, Kevin and Megan strolled past the tavern a little startled as the owner pounced and embraced Kevin. He had been recognised by one of the occasional visitors to the Hole, a flatterer, payer of compliments and well-known loud irritant.

'Kevin! Mister Coverack! You are always my special guest, dear chap. Please sit down and take a drink with me. Please!'

The owner called the order to a hovering young waiter while indicating his special table on a ledge overlooking the sea. He leaned forward and confided, ' You know my wife Susanne? I think she's rather angry with me. She just walked out of the restaurant with a long face. She has recently returned from a visit to the mainland to see her mother and when she ask me if I missed her, thoughtlessly I said, 'Oh, darling! Every day I have so many pretty girls coming in to our tavern that I am now more alone than you home than when you were away! Ha! Ha! Ha!' He nudged Kevin and winked, 'It's a quote from an old song. You must have heard it! Hilarious!' He winked and grinned, 'Enjoy your drink,' and marched into the kitchen.

Then, courtesy of their host, two ultra-large drinks arrived, placed gently before them on the table. The boy waiter seemed to evaporate. And so they sat weary yet happy, watching the sunshine drifting into dusk. They were already washed out, so reluctantly, they made their way back to their little tent, bodies already complaining and demanding a

much needed rest.

They had eaten early and Kevin had had a little too much to drink. Megan wanted sleep and Kevin wanted fireworks and fun. From the table they heard some gentle drifting music coming from a group of bushes where they could just make out a small group of musicians playing to the inspired motions of a pretty lady who just hadn't been able to resist entertaining them with her wondrous gyrations. Kevin looked at Megan and she shook her head, 'No thanks. I've had enough. You have another if you want.'

Kevin shook his head and so they sat and watched and listened to the harsh wailing and squawking of the gulls as they hover-dipped at prey over the sea and beach in the fading light. From time to time, Megan would glance at Kevin and smile that smile.

A few days after they returned to the village Barrington called them into his little office and asked them to sit down. Megan had an idea what was going on however Kevin was very tense.

'Megan, since your grandfather died we have all been trying to adjust to the huge change in our lives. It has been very sad for all of us yet it has also offered some opportunities. I think it has become quite obvious that I have had enough of running the tavern. The time has come when I want to sit back and relax, maybe go fishing or travelling, and now I can because you, Kevin, have a sparkling talent for running this theatre and believe me, the tavern is all theatre. Now, Megan, my girl, if you can work with Kevin, I believe we can continue as a family business and maintain its popularity with our home brews and have a good life. What say you?'

'Oh, Dad! I'd be delighted to help the tavern continue. What do you think, Kevin?'

'Well! I was not expecting that!' He laughed. 'Barrington sir, with so much faith and trust, and with the your continued guidance, I would be honoured, sir.'

'Well, you two choose when you'd like to start, the sooner the better as far as I'm concerned. And just one more thing, Kevin. Please don't ever call me 'sir' again, it makes me feel old. My name is Barrington.'

They stood in the centre of the room laughing and smiling, hugging and shaking hands.

## Thistle & Penn Visit Edlyn

Thistle and Penn had rung the doorbell and were waiting at Edlyn's door. Penn took a mirror from his pocket and studied his reflection, breathed on his hand, flattened his hair then inspected his stained teeth by cupping a hand over his mouth and inhaling.

'Oh dear! My breath smells like silage.'

'Everyone says that about your breath. Take it as a compliment. By the way, there's a lady looking through the window.'

'Dear me, I've never done this before.'

'Me neither. Just try to look professional.'

'Why don't I wait out here in case the imposter makes a run for it?'

'What would you do then, Penn? Wave as he goes past?' Look out, she's opening the door!'

But before she did, Edlyn whispered over her shoulder to Fly, 'As I thought. Two strange men, and I think I heard London accents. Now remember, if I let them in, don't you say a single word. Not one, OK? I'll pretend you're my cousin, a villager, so let me do all the talking. They'll be gone in no time and whatever happens, just stay cool, you hear?'

Fly swallowed hard.

Edlyn opened the door wide and presented Thistle and Penn with a welcoming smile, 'Good morning, gents. How may I help you?'

'Good morning, Madam. Have you got a minute, please? Do you mind if we have a quick word? Won't keep you long.'

She stepped back, 'I'm glad to help. But don't just stand there, chaps. Do come in, I won't eat you.' Framed in the doorway, the men were dumbstruck by Edlyn's welcome, if not petrified. 'Come along, I'm just pouring some cool beer, will you have some?'

Both men stared without speaking and stumbled indoors and then, before their eyes, for the very first time they saw their suspect calmly watering some potted plants. He waved in their direction while Edlyn poured their drinks from a jug and held them out in front of the men.



As usual Thistle was first to speak, 'That's very kind, Madam. We are trying to trace the whereabouts of a Mr. Fly.' From a pocket, he withdrew the photograph of Fly and held it before Edlyn for her to examine, 'Sorry to trouble you, dear lady, but I have to ask if you have ever seen this man around the village? Or anyone pretending to be him?'

Both stared beyond Edlyn and straight at Fly.

Edlyn squinted at the photo, almost closing her eyes, 'And you are?'

'We are extra special agents acting on behalf of someone else and it's our mission to locate a missing person they are trying to find. So please tell us, your grace, do you think you have seen this man before?'

'I don't think so, although the face does look familiar. Hey Terry, sorry, but can you just put down your watering can a minute and come and take a look at this photograph. Do you recognise this face?'

Fly meandered across the room, scrutinised the photograph and shook his head without making a sound.

Edlyn turned to the men, 'You'll have to forgive my cousin. He's a mute I'm afraid. And I mean dumb, although far from stupid. He's unable to speak.'

Penn whispered to Thistle who turned to Edlyn, 'Madame, we believe that that's him. He's the very man we're looking for.'

Edlyn appeared dumbfounded, 'That's who?'

'Your cousin is the man we're looking for.'

'Can't be. That's not my cousin in the photo. It's nothing like him. Well, a lot like him except it's not him. He does look like him, a bit, though my cousin can't speak and I bet that man can. Can't he?'

'Er, well, yes,' says Thistle, more than a little confused.

'In fact, I believe he can sing too, can't he?' She looked unsure.

'He's pretty good too,' said Penn and instinctively Fly gave him a grateful glance.

'Shut up, Penn. I have to say he's not to my taste. Can't stand his voice, man.'

'Well, my brother can't speak, let alone sing, so logic dictates it can't be him, can it?'

Penn stood equally confused and turned to Thistle, 'Er, I suppose not. If you put it

like that I have to agree with you.'

'It seems clear that there's been a simple mix up.' Edlyn was positively definitive. 'You've been erroneously following the trail of my cousin over there, who has just returned from a special community college up country where he has been taking special lessons in communicative sign language designed to assist his development and now I can gauge what has happened. You might not know this but, nonetheless, there is a famous singer who goes by the name of 'Fly' and it is very well known that he is the exact image of my brother, particularly to some here in our village.'

Fly returned to watering the house plants.

'This confusion can cause us constant irritation, as you might guess. Market days, the Joining Celebration, the annual fair, in fact whenever we have an influx of strangers, things become chaotic. We cannot move for autograph hunters. Perhaps it's because of his hairstyle. As you can see, it is beautifully styled and completely trend and extremely popular with those who go for that sort of thing.' Fly glared at Edlyn as she put down her glass, 'I think there be thousands of young men with that relaxed style causing no end of grief all over the country.'

'Hmm,' intones Thistle, not yet convinced.

Edlyn stands snugly between Thistle and Penn and takes their elbows, 'Now, Mr. Thistle, Mr. Penn, I should have thought a couple of good-looking, well-experienced, men-of-the world as you two seem to be, would have been able to use your obvious talents to realise how very often one thing can become mistaken for another. Wouldn't you agree?'

Thistle smiled at Penn then gazed at Edlyn, 'Is it that obvious?'

'Is what that obvious?'

'You know, that we're gay,' Thistle grinned. 'Truly, you're spot on, my lady. And about your cousin, I had to be sure, that's all.'

'Ooh, and so did I,' sang Penn and was shot a sideways glance that could kill.

'Well, Gentlemen, if you'll excuse me, I have to help cousin bury his stag-horn in my secret garden. Can't keep our vigorous friends wanting, can we?'

'Quite right, my liege,' Thistle grinned at Penn who was delighted to be out and

proud at last. 'Just what I was thinking myself, er...my lady.'

Edlyn, guided her guests to the door, 'Of course, my dear chappies, I'm well known for my green fingers. If you ever need any further assistance just drop in next time you're passing. However, for the time being you'll have to excuse me. Cheerio, take care of each other. Bye bye for now.'

They were hardly through the door when she closed it behind them and after a quick glance at Fly, she doubled up with laughter at him crashing onto the couch, head back, hardly able to contain his laughter.

The sky was gentle, a blue-grey and there was not a cloud to be seen. The air was soft and beckoned the men to take a walk. Along the coastal path they stopped to take it all in. Neither spoke in the romantic silence of comfortable space.

And then Thistle nudged Penn, 'Hey Jim, We get on don't we?'

'Most of the time, Bob. Why? What's on your mind?'

'I was wondering, since we do like each other and certainly enjoy each other's company, I was wondering if you would ever consider, or have ever considered, er, now that we're going to live here, on this island, I mean, in The Garden, registering our partnership, sort of thing.'

'You mean, register it as a business?'

'No, you plank! I mean in the Formal Joining Ceremony. You and me - together as partners - celebrated. If you want. If you're serious, that is.'

'Bob, you know I'm serious about you - a joining, are you sure?'

'Jim, when we came here, no, I didn't know for sure how I felt. But this place gives me an unusual sense of freedom, that kind of thing, you know. There's respect and compassion for diversity and all that, and you with me has shown me where I am and it's where I want to stay. Here, or there, wherever, as long as I'm with you.'

'Bob, and I want to stay with you. Yes, my love. To have our union formalised on Midsummer's Day would be a dream come true. Let's do it!'

'You have just made me very, very, very happy.'

They embraced, then strolled along hand in hand, overlooking the ocean.

'How're we going to tell Edlyn?' Penn squeezed Thistle's hand. 'She's in charge of the ceremony.'

### Vincenti's Contribution

One morning Vincenti woke in the early hours, just before the dawn chorus. He had a vague idea that just might convince Fly he was sorry for the unhappiness and doubt he had caused and that he intended to change his ways. He finished his chores while Irene was outside feeding the animals, told Billy to be good in school, and took off into the density of the island to try and shape his thoughts. At last, he came upon the outskirts of a close-packed wooded area, surrounded by a comforting jumble of trees bordering a pleasant grove nestling on the banks of a gentle stream. He sat and looked into the clear waters and stilled his thoughts just listening to whatever he could hear in the woods. In contrast to his usual lifestyle, he felt energised by the continual feeling of belonging, of being included and connected with everything. Drop by drop, he became confirmed in the simplicity in his newfound sense of freedom and the answer was obvious. From the moment he realised he could no longer blame his childhood for his decisions, he knew it was up to him to make a substantial change in his life. He made his way back to the cottage and sat down with Irene and told her of his idea.

'Antonio, are you sure?'

'I have never been more sincere, Irene. I will be a better person.'

'Well, it won't be easy, though you know Billy and I will be by your side to help.'

'Thank you. I'll need you both to show me how to drag myself in the right direction. Thank you. One thing, do you think you could go and see Edlyn and Fly and ask them to come here so I can apologise for my stupid, crazy rant?'

'Yes, I could. Though I suggest you go yourself. That would show your sincerity. At worst, they can only refuse to listen yet, they are good people and will realise it is the most desirable thing for everyone. And that it is The Garden way.'

In the cottage, Fly was coming to the end of his explanation to Edlyn, '...and so my old island home was my perfect refuge.'

'Well, I don't blame you for coming home having realised your life is at risk by being in partnership with a manic con artist. People without scruples like your money-mad Mr. Vincenti could ruin the very environment upon which we depend to survive, including the air above us and the ground below us and I have no doubt he will have some heartless enemies that are always looking for him. People like him see everything as a hunt. To him, all is there, waiting to be snatched and exploited, and by that I include the temperament of the people.'

'But how could he be a problem down here? He's tangled up in city business.'

'We are isolated here. A helpless target to someone like him and among my nightmarish visions of the future I see a never-ending nightmare of entertainment parks, theme parks, holiday villages, yacht havens. Why, if he ever came here, his greed would know no bounds. It would run riot.'

Fly fell silent for a while. What should he do? Edlyn was right, he had kept things to himself, not realising the full implications of being secretive. She had insisted he open up and not try to cover up anything serious that might endanger the sentience of the village. They were a relaxed people, in no way desirous of achieving unnecessary successes, power or useless expensive possessions. However, words and promises were not enough. He had to demonstrate his intentions openly so his village could continue its journey and not be dragged back and chained to materialism and the adoration of wealth. Edlyn sat and waited. Then he spoke, 'Forgive me, Edlyn, I need to think. Please excuse me. I'll be back soon.'

'Where are you going?'

'For a walk. I have to work out a way of putting an end to all Vincenti's plans once and for all.'

It was still early morning when Vincenti drew the horse and wagon to a halt outside Edlyn's Elysian Fields just at the moment Fly stepped into the street and closed the door of her house behind him. They stopped dead. Face to face, standing in cold

silence. Neither spoke, each stunned by their encounter. It had been a less than a week since their meeting in the city and neither felt very comfortable in the silence that weighed heavily upon them.

At last, without any acknowledgement, Fly turned to go inside until Vincenti broke the silence, 'Fly! Wait a minute, please! I beg you. Please! Let me say something.'

Fly looked into his eyes and shrugged.

Vincenti continued, 'Look, I know now how stupid I have been, how self-centered and dangerously stupid. And not only to you but to Edlyn and to Kevin!' He was shaking, 'Fly, I swear to you all that since I have been here my mind has changed. The fool that I was is gone for good. Dead and buried. The man before you is utterly ashamed of what he was and wants to make amends. Please give me a chance because, believe me, I have changed and found peace. And I have met someone. Now, I want to stay here and live in the open. Please, please forgive me. Let me make amends.'

Fly shook his head, 'I'm sorry, Vincenti, for all that, you have proved you cannot be trusted. You have serious problems and you are a danger to this community. You need help. You need to learn to respect people, no matter what their differences, and not to take advantage of their weaknesses. I'd have to be insane to ever trust you again!'

'Whatever my life was, it's not the same as it is now. I have met someone and we want to share our lives together with her son. I swear to you, I realise I need someone to help me focus on the future and start looking at what is in front of me. All I want is a calm, simple and peaceful future with my lady and her boy.'

Fly was taken aback. He had never heard Vincenti speak with such humility. He began to see a new Vincenti, one with a changed perception. Could he be real?

'Fly, you are my one chance of redemption and with your help I will start a new life. Last night I had an idea. You know Jane, my secretary, well she has power of attorney over the sum total of all my assets, and she has been my legal representative for a long time now. I introduced you to her when The Pikkins had their first big hit and you've been in touch, one way or another, ever since. Well, I am about to call her and tell her to dissolve my business, for her to take a 5% allotment for herself, make about five per cent over to Thistle and Penn, and to start a new account for me, of also five per cent,

then release the total balance into your account. That way you would have control of quite a chunk of capital to be used for the benefit and safety of The Garden and its people. I'd have more than I need - and that would be the end of my money madness forever. What do you say?"

'As I have said more than once, I have lost all trust in you, Vincenti. So how can I believe you?'

'Look, why don't you wait until you receive the increase in your account account before you make a final judgement? Dear Fly, from the depths of my soul I am asking for your help to become a better person and with Edlyn's permission and your faith in me renewed, perhaps I might make the island my home, that is, if you'll accept me. You see, since falling in love with my lady, Irene, and having grown to know and love her dear son Billy, and as a result I have been familiarising myself with a new vision of things, a new way to manage my thoughts, of perceiving people and experiencing this new life which I have come to know. I used to regard myself as an insatiable power and money addict of which I have no doubt. But now, with so much love and consideration from these two, I just know already I have all I need. Dare I say it, but I believe it possible that I might be cured. I think I have a second chance.' He reached inside his jacket, withdrew his phone and smiled at Fly.

Once he had made contact with Jane, and explained the required immediacy of the transference to her, she wasted no time in drawing up the contracts and contacting his solicitor. Within an hour she called back to inform them that all legalities were well under way and all was safe and sure.

In matters of business Jane was renowned for her methodical planning and administration abilities and the running of Vincenti's business operations was something she relished. Nevertheless, she was taken aback, and not so much because all current and future transactions were to be finalised, but because in his recognition of her conscientious attention, she was to receive a truly large proportion of the net evaluation.

When she heard his words, she became a little befuddled, to say the least, nonetheless she soon recovered her composure and assumed the responsibility of dismantling Vincenti Productions with her customary skills, her extreme care and her

precision.

Whenever Vincenti left the office for any length of time, she felt she had to be completely on guard and alert against the misogynistic business world. She would sit and wonder at the immature attitude of so many businessmen to working women. Why on earth do women have to pay such a very high price if they want their fair share of power? It's not just about high level, international politicians and the so-called glass ceiling, that well-known yet totally unacknowledged barrier to advancement in so many professions that seems especially to affect women and members of minorities. No! It's about all women. In schools, offices, local councils, shops and canteens, in fact anyone who wants their voices to be heard, who want to be taken seriously and who don't want to have to put up with harassment and abuse when they venture on-line. More generally, Jane began to think how we in the west have come to define power and why male faces almost always seem to fit that definition better than females ones.

The time had come to get out of the city, away from the bourgeois society, to find her own true self and be that person. She was free and the time had come to fly away and live her life. Maybe even one day, she and Paul might visit Vincenti in his new home.

### Thistle and Penn Drop Anchor

Down in the harbour, Thistle and Penn were enjoying a cup of tea, no longer as visitors but more by just being themselves and watching the street scenes unfold. The older folk who stumbled and strolled, or stopped to chat and make contact, the little girl who waved from the back of her daddy's horse to the carts that park in the middle of the road whilst the drivers nip into shops for cakes and bread, the important shouting along the street to acknowledge each other and the woolly old dog that slept under the tables. There was the man with the starey eyes who looked at everything as if seeing things for the first time in his life, or the street-sellers with their table mounds of the freshest and most fragrant of vegetables and fruit in dazzling natural colours, freshened on the hour



with sprays of precious water. It was all the stuff of everyday Garden life. Respect according to age and for each other.

Said Penn, 'It makes you want to be part of it yourself when you see what a quality of life they enjoy.'

Then as arranged, at mid-morning Vincenti arrived and shook their hands, 'Bob, Jim, morning chaps. Thanks for coming.'

Thistle gave full attention while Penn watched an old, two-masted working boat ease alongside the quay.

'Well, after some very serious consideration, I've decided to let sleeping dogs lie and by that I mean that for a variety of reasons I've decided to abandon all further searchings for the look-alike. When we finish here this morning, I'll be making my way back to where I live in my office in London to finalise some connected, more important business and when I return on Friday, we'll meet again here at the same time and I'll explain everything. I'll be glad to pay you all I owe you and then you'll be free to do what you want. Thank you so very much gents, I am grateful for your tact and professionalism and I wish you both well. Keep in touch.'

'Oh, we will. By the way, the other day we went to see Miss Edlyn and her brother and we don't know if you have ever met him, because in our opinion he does bear a remarkable resemblance to the missing Mr. Fly. In fact, he is the absolute spitting image. Miss Edlyn told us they're often embarrassed by this interference in their lives and we have to say we're pleased with your decision to give them some peace and call it a day on the investigations. It's been a pleasure doing business with you sir, and we have enjoyed our time here so much, we might even stay a little longer and for that we have you to thank. So thank you for that. Mr Vincenti, sir'

'Do you have any plans should you decide to stay?'

'Well, you know Captain Davy, the old sailor who runs the Destiny island ferry and the stop-over for visitors' cars? It's just that with staying in his boathouse, sharing mugs of tea, travelling with him to and fro, he's become a friend, someone we have grown to like and between us, Mr. Vincenti, we are in negotiations with him towards buying his ferry service one day when we have the money, and maybe even turning his

barn into an overnight stopover for members of the village and visitors cars.'

'You like it here then?'

'Oh, there's nowhere like it. We'd like to live here. There's a lasting freshness in the feeling we get here that helps us feel more calm, more free. We want to settle in as soon as we can.'

'Excellent choice, if I may say.'

'Mr. Vincenti, sir, we want you to know that we are gay and from now on, we've decided to be a couple and maybe even Join.'

'And I have known you are gay ever since we met. I wish you every happiness.'

'Wow! Thank you so much! We feel comfortable and happy to be ourselves here yet there is a major snag, we have to sell our flat in London first.'

'I'm sure all your dreams will come true. I wish you both every success and if there is anything I can do to help, please let me know. Well done, men.'

Vincenti relaxed and gazed at the work boat alongside the quayside while the men and Captain Davy discussed something over to one side. He looked around taking in the different boats, the quayside capstans, the steps down the sea wall, the slope for launching, the life belts stands, the piles of fish boxes and the tiny office of the Harbour Master all communal and ship shape. Now, for the very first time, he knew he was home.

The men turned and call to him, 'Have a good trip, Sir. Cheerio', and he waved to them, sensing the beginning of new possibilities, a new life.

### Edlyn Waits for Fly

For Edlyn the hours were creeping by without any sign of Fly, which made her more and more suspicious of the sense of change that she felt. She began to suspect Vincenti was involved and what if he had conned Fly into planning their imminent invasion?

All through the day she sat in the stone circle listening for the slightest sound of his return as she tried to find a defensive solution that would protect The Garden. Perhaps

they should destroy the causeway, or maybe warn Cap'n Davy of what might be coming, nevertheless she knew that would not solve anything. She felt frustrated and at a loss as to the next step. Edlyn's gloomy sorrow was darkened with sadness as she became more and more convinced she had to expect the worst and send Fly on his way. The Garden might well be in grave danger from outside.

And then, she heard footsteps on the gravel and so she braced herself and confronted him as soon as was in sight, 'So Fly, it was all lies. You and your accomplice are planning to invade our island. How could you Fly? How could you? And don't patronise me by pretending that you care!' She held up her hand for silence, her head and heart closed tight.

'Edlyn! Please. I have to speak to you. I have something to say that is very important to you and for the security of the village. Edlyn, please?'

'More lies? What could you ever say that I could believe?'

'OK. Just listen to what I have to say and then if you want me to go, I will. I swear.'

'OK. Come into the circle and sit down and tell me straight, where you have been. You could have phoned! You've been talking to Vincenti, haven't you? What are you two up to? Just tell me!'

'Well, when I left the house early this morning, my sole objective was to find him and confront him and take a solid stance against even the slightest plan to change the people's island. As I closed the door, I almost bumped into him outside in the road. He was on his way to see me. He begged for me to listen, so I did.' She gasped. 'Edlyn, I have know Vincenti for years but as he spoke, I began to realise he is a changed man. He actually agreed with our suspicions and was not slow to admit to all his wrong doings. We talked about his insulting disregard of the people and, I have to say, he convinced me he wanted to change. Edlyn, I had to give him another chance.'

'Now you are scaring me, Fly. Have you done a deal with Vincenti's Office?'

'On the contrary. While I was with him, he contacted his secretary up in London, whom I have met on many occasions over the years. Her name is Jane, and believe me, she is an honest woman free of deceit and totally sincere. Vincenti instructed her, as his

power of attorney, and that includes all his finances, to relinquish the sum total of his financial assets and place them in the name of Sean Flynn which is to be used in its entirety for the exclusive benefit of The Garden Island and the needs of its people. Once that was in order, he then told her a share of his total business interests would be available to her, as his beloved secretary, as a wedding present.

We waited a little while until she returned the call and she said it would not take long. So, we waited for the massive deposit to appear in my account and within the last hour, it has.

Now Edlyn. I swear, since I met you, I have been in awe of your selfless dedication and concern for the people of the island. So much so, that I have found that dedication deepen in me too and although many years have passed since I was part of this community, you have rekindled my sense of belonging. Edlyn, sincerely, I know I love you and if you will have me, I want to join with you in The Garden someday. Please say you will.'

Edlyn began to speak but before she could say a word, Fly gently took her hand asked her to wait a second, 'Another thing, Vincenti put me in touch with the Chief Executive of the Land Registry for some conveyancing advice and we had a very straightforward talk which led me to do something to prove once and for all that I am committed to you, that you can believe in me and trust in the security of the people of the island.' He took a deep breath, 'For over five hundred years my great grandfather's family had retained ownership of this island...'

'What?'

'Edlyn, hang on! And just before my grandfather died, he bequeathed ownership of the island to me, yes, to me. Now please, don't speak for a moment. I want to make something crystal clear,' he cleared his throat. 'Edlyn, I have just transferred ownership to you my love, as a joining gift. From this moment it is binding. Legal. So from this day forth, the island is now under your ownership and legal protection and no one has any right to touch one blade of grass without your permission.'

At first Edlyn stared at him, confused. Then her stare grew to one of astonishment, and then as the implications of his words began to sink in, she opened her

arms and burst into tears, 'Fly, come here, tell me, what are you doing on Midsummer's Day?'

The following day, a more confident Edlyn and Fly were sitting in the Hole discussing their changing world when it occurred to her that she had no idea how to get in touch with Vincenti or where he was staying. 'Fly, do you know how we get in touch with Vincenti now? I thought he was staying at the Hole.'

'Well, he was at first then, according to Barrington, he moved out. I've no idea where he went although I'm sure Kevin will know.'

Kevin was chatting to the pretty young lady at the end of the bar as usual. They looked to be the epitome of a courting couple, laughing, whispering, and exchanging loving looks until he saw Fly, 'Hello our knight in shining armour,' grinned Kevin, 'Well, what a turn up for the books. I was flabbergasted. Sorry I haven't seen you before now so congratulations to you both. And who would have thought the signor would finally see sense? Well done Vincenti!'

'At least The Garden is in our safe hands now and we can all relax and get on with our lives,' said Edlyn. 'And about the blow up at our first meeting with Vincenti, I thought it might be most constructive to meet up with him and make amends after all he has done towards making our island so secure and since he has moved out of the Hole, we were wondering if you knew where he was.'

'Oh, according to Barrington I hear he's living somewhere up in the woods on a cottage farm. Belongs to lady called Irene. I think she has a young lad.'

'My goodness! That'll be Irene Dunne, my cousin! When our uncle Haydn decided to leave the island, he had asked her if she and her family would be kind enough to move onto his land because he needed someone who could take care of the plants and things. It's called Spindly Bush Farm. They moved in and with her dear husband being a fisherman they were very happy. Then the poor man was tragically lost at sea sometime the year before last and she has had to run the land and bring up their boy, Billy, all by herself. She's a strong, lovely lady and I admire the way she says what she thinks. Hey! In view of all Vincenti has done for us now, I think we should visit them and all spend an

afternoon together. Why don't you and Megan come with us after your shift?

Sounds good to me,' said Kevin giving a knowing smile to Megan. 'We'll meet you there this evening.'

Once Edlyn and Fly had left the inn, Megan leaned across the bar and signalled to Kevin, 'Come and sit down a minute, there's something I have to explain.'

Kevin joined Megan on a bench in a window, 'Something wrong?'

'Remember when I came back after being away for a few days, you asked me why I was so upset. I told you about how I'd found out my boyfriend from college had been cheating on me and was well-known for being a player, that is, to everyone but me.' She buried her face in her hands. 'After all that I then was told my dear grandfather, my hero, had just died. And that added to my emptiness. All the horror left me in pieces. I had always regarded myself as a strong and independent woman but the truth is sometimes I can be feeble, afraid. Anyway, I was shattered and still am. So now, Kevin, my darling, you know I love you and how much I want us always to be together but there's just one thing, I just don't feel ready to take part in the Joining Ceremony. Not yet. It's too soon. I don't want a rebound thing. I don't want to hurt you, *ever*. I have to be sure for you and for me, that I am ready. So if you don't mind not joining just yet, it does not mean we will not join some time in the future. And then, when I feel more positive and if you still want me, I know I will definitely say yes. Every day I wake up and know I'm in love with you. You are my love and this I swear to you with all my heart.'

'Megan, my beautiful Megan, even if we never take part in the ceremony, I can't be more happy than when I am with you. We respect each other and will always take care of each other. And this I swear to you my darling with all my heart.'

Megan, slowly took his hand, 'Kevin, did we just have our very own Joining Ceremony? Did we?'

Beaming, they began nodding madly to each other, excited.

## A Gathering

It had been back-breaking but much needed work and had to be done. At last the ditch at the bottom of the valley was clear and free-flowing again. Vincenti filled his cart with leaves, twigs, branches, rocks and stones and upon arriving back after dragging it up to the gateway, Vincenti was amused to see Billy throwing a ball with his mum and another lady in the yard. But as he drew closer and recognised the lady as Edlyn, he was completely overwhelmed with shame and embarrassment. Not knowing what to do or which way to turn, he stopped in his tracks, pretending to fiddle with the load and as usual, once the llamas caught sight of him, they began their humming noise which meant they wanted something to eat to calm them down and this made the women turn to see what was causing all the fuss. Irene shouted her welcome to Vincenti while Edlyn stood in silence, staring. Just at that moment, Fly appeared in the doorway carrying a tray of drinks which he almost dropped at the sight of his old boss.

Vincenti pushed open the gate and pretended to be at ease, 'Hello everyone! Hi!', and leaned forward to kiss Irene on the cheek. 'Cara mia, back in a minute, I have to take a shower,' and with an embarrassed smile to everyone, he disappeared inside.

Edlyn and Fly and Kevin and Megan and Bob and Jim gathered with Irene and Vincenti in the yard beneath the rose arbour in an uncomfortable silence with short gaps of stilted chat until Vincenti decided to come forward, yet before he could begin his reparation, young Billy stormed up carrying a bird's feeding platform in the shape of a little house, wailing, 'Ant, the roof needs replacing and I'm not sure how to do it. Ah, can you show me how you made it, please?'

Vincenti winced, then smiled again, giving the thumb's up to the boy then asked the group to wait a second. With great care he began to explain to Billy how to fix it. 'First, cut the wood for the roof in two, one for each sloping side and glue them in place over the supporting blocks...,'

'Shouldn't I use screws or glue or nails?'

'Well, you can if you want although always bear in mind that nothing stays the same forever and one day it will wear out anyway and have to be replaced,' he cleared his

throat at what he had just inferred, 'so just use some wire and wrap it round and under the frame. That will hold it in place and keep the food and the birds nice and dry, at least for a while. You have to hope for the best.'

'Wow! That's so cool! Thanks, Ant.' And with this one scene of Vincenti and the boy, the others began to feel more comfortable.

Vincenti cleared his throat and was just about to address the throng when a man appeared at the gateway.

'I hope I haven't kept you waiting too long. Sorry I'm late.' It was Hadyn, hailed and greeted by everyone with comments, laughter, hugs and handshakes.

'Sit down, Uncle, while I pour you a cup of tea.' said Irene.

'It's really good to see you all, and you must be Antonio, Billy's told me all about you and since you are about to make the Joining, I thought I'd better fill in the cracks so you know what it's all about. Anyway, oh, one sugar please, Irene.

OK, here goes, with tomorrow being the Summer Solstice, Midsummer's Day, this year at our Formal Joining Ceremony I will be joining Jim with Bob, Irene with Antonio, and Edlyn with Fly. Now please may I add, it always makes me very happy to perform the ceremony and before so many people of the village. I feel truly honoured. Formally joining your life with the life of your partner is an equal arrangement which works as long as either one does not insist that it *must* work, and that one does not treat one's partner as property because if you do, it automatically turns them into a puppet.

Now, there are three things I would have you bear in mind. The first is that as you now consider one another, you are probably seeing your beloved at their best and as we all know, all things weaken over time, then as the years go by you will experience many changes in your partner, but even so, please don't enter your joining with any ideas of improving your treasure. Growth takes place of its own accord. It cannot be forced.

The second has to do with emotional honesty. Never pretend to a love which you do not genuinely feel, for love is not ours to command and you do not choose who you will love. For the same reason, do not assume to receive love from your partner as though it is their duty, for love is given and if ever presumed it would never be true and give no pleasure to the other.



The third is that you do not so cling to one another to the point of mutual suffocation. You are not each other's chattels, and so you have to trust your partner and allow the full freedom that he or she needs.

If you observe these things, your joining will have surer ground than can be afforded by any formal contract or promise, however solemn and legally joining. However, I have to say that any couple that might object to these points should reconsider the choice they are about to make. OK?'

There were smiles and light laughter all round and a short round of applause for Haydn who blushed and bowed before the gathering.

'Sorry. I need the toilet. Won't be long.'

Once the yard had quietened down and laughter had subsided along with the tears of appreciation, Vincenti sat on the edge of his seat and opened his heart, 'Dear people, the way I spoke to you all when I first arrived was totally unacceptable, appalling. Now, only through your kindness and sympathy might I survive and continue with my new life. So I beg you, please give me the chance to prove I have changed. That the oppressive and shameful man who was so barbaric is now dead and gone. I beg you to have mercy on this ignorant fool. He looked up and noticed Billy staring, confused, 'Billy, on Midsummer's Day, with your permission and support, I would be very, very happy if you will let me bond with your beautiful mother, but only if you want me to and can accept me as your friend and guardian.'

'Wow! Great! You and Mum! So cool!'

His mother smiled, 'Billy? Yes or no?'

'That's a yes, mum, yes! A massive yes!' and he ran across the yard first to hug his mum and then to throw his arms around Vincenti.

Vincenti wiped his eyes, then looked from one to the other, 'You're all such good people. Please help me to be like you. All I want is to spend the rest of my life with Irene and Billy in The Garden. I might even grow a beard.'

Fly burst out laughing and with Edlyn, Kevin and Megan they gathered round Vincenti with much hugging and kissing. Vincenti's confession and intentions had made Edlyn realise it was up to her to give absolution and allow him the chance to change his ways and repent. She stood back and took both his hands in hers.

'Vincenti, or may I call you Ant? No wait! Joking! Anyway, one last thing I want you to know about growing up here in The Garden, is that I have learned something that we all believe in and it has become the framework for our happier lives. We believe that from the moment of birth, every single human being wants happiness and freedom and wants to avoid suffering. In this we are all the same and the more we care for the happiness of others, the greater our own sense of wellbeing becomes. Yet in the world outside, many problems are based on divisions due to ideology, religion, race, economic status or other factors. Living here, detached from those differences, we have begun to realise the time has come to think on a much deeper level and appreciate and respect our sameness as human beings.

We see humanity at the beginning of an age in which extreme political concepts may cease to dominate human affairs and so we have to use this opportunity to replace them with universal human and spiritual values and ensure that these values become the fibre of the global family which is emerging. Through anger, hatred, jealousy, it is not possible to find peace with them. Through compassion, through love, we can solve many problems.

We can have true happiness, true disarmament if we want.

At every level of society, familial, tribal, national and international, the key to a happier and more successful world is the growth of compassion.

We do not need to become religious, nor believe in an ideology. We have only to develop our good human qualities and know that love and compassion are the most essential concepts for human survival. Antonio, this is what I believe. You are one of us now so never give up, on anything. We are here to help each other. No judgements, no prejudices, just help and consideration.' She leaned forward and embraced him again, 'Antonio Vincenti, welcome home.'

Much later, when the time had come for them to leave Spindly Bush, Megan and Kevin, Jim and Bob, Edlyn and Fly gathered at the door and with Vincenti and Irene, shook hands and embraced one another in turn before stepping into the lane. 'We'll have a lovely day tomorrow and we look forward to meeting with you in the stone circle,' Irene was happy and smiling as one by one she wished them all good night.

Slowly and carefully, they made their exhilarated and happy chattering ways down the old hill track towards the lamp lit village through the moonlit woodland.

'Gosh! To think that by this time tomorrow night, all our lives will have been changed for ever!'

Eventually, they came to a clearing and stopped in total silence, gasping in amazement at the breathtaking, unusually full, deep red sun resting on a sharply contrasting wave of blue grey cloud easing its way below the pink horizon. It was an absolute joy. And there was more. The soft and starry summer's evening held a glowing silvery moon and in no time Fly was out in space, unable to tell which way was up or down. It all came from the change in Vincenti. It had graced them all and he could sense the man's determined sincerity.

Midsummer's Day brings the longest day of the year in the northern hemisphere and, as is tradition on the island, bonfires are built to ward off evil spirits, villagers gather for the annual feasting and dancing around the huge centre stone in the village square. And almost every year on this day there is the traditional Formal Joining Ceremony between partners who wish to confirm their personal relationship.

Before going to bed, Edlyn and Fly sat in the stone circle together for a little while in a comfortable silence. Edlyn noticed her friendly, solitary star glinting through the trees on the other side of the circle and it seemed to smile at her. She smiled at the star and whispered, 'Thank you,' and closed her eyes.

The thrush singing to the robin made her smile again as did the cheerful chuckling of the waterfall and her breathing grew deeper.

Eventually, when she looked about, she knew everything she saw was herself, because she knew everything in nature is interrelated and nothing exists of its own will.

She could sense the presence of the natural order and like everything else, she knew she shared its energy, that she was happy to be an expression of all.

And so the earth turns.

And for we who live in The Garden, taking life as it comes, accepting its seasons, its wonders, its marvels, all explaining how life comes and life goes, and comes and goes, we can relax.

Strolling home together in silence, Edlyn took Fly by the hand and whispered, 'Come closer. Let's always walk together.'

In Spring, hundreds of flowers, in Summer, refreshing breeze, in Autumn, the Moon. Free your mind from idle thoughts, and for you, every season will be a good season.

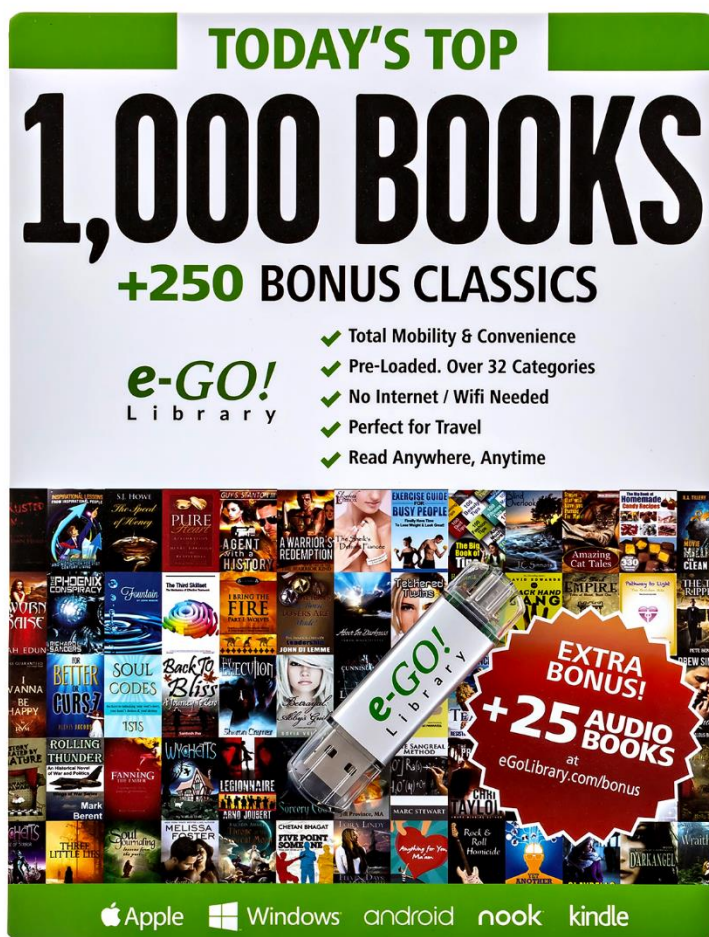
There is no need to cling to anything, we need to simply exist and live life as it comes.

THE END



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