

TIMSHEL'S CHOICE

By Gary Marks

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“I have come to feel that man is a very important thing—maybe more important than a star. This is not theology I'm talking about. I have no bent toward gods. But I have a new love for that glittering instrument, the human soul. It is a lovely and unique thing in the universe. It is always attacked, and never destroyed— because ‘Thou mayest.’”

-- East of Eden / John Steinbeck

Part 1

If we could look down upon the illusion, make it small as if we were a free bird, or a high cloud, we would see two cities, vastly different, separated by the Valley of Blue. And if we were a mist we would curl around the valley's sky blue trees with their star-shaped flowers, and rest upon thick white bushes with leaves of amber.

From the southern city we would see the Great Tower rising up out of the dense valley to the north. The Tower had been worshipped and mythologized even from the oldest of recorded history, but no one really knew how or when it had come to be.

Most people in these modern times gave the Tower very little thought as they carried on with their daily affairs, focusing instead on their individual dreams and desires. But a few became obsessed by it. They hungered to examine and explore it, chart its age, discover its beginnings, and give it a proper date of birth. But all attempts to do so had failed.

For many years the city paid the curious and adventuresome to map and make inroads due north through the valley, so as to inspect the Great Tower close up, but so far not even these rugged foresters and scientists could find their way. Only the old went without confusion.

Though each in their youth could hardly believe one day they would walk into that strange densely forested valley alone, there would inevitably come a time when they would find themselves at The Age of the Taken. They would lead themselves to one of the thousand paths and never return. No one left behind knew for sure if any of them made it to the Towerland. But once a year the lights of the

Great Tower would come on and flash in soft-colored sequences through the night.

Timshel Ishall was two hundred thirteen years old. He had lived a full life, a normal life by his city's standards, but why he had not yet been taken he could not know. All of his friends were gone ten or twenty years. Did they just decide to go one day? He stood at the edge of the forest where the city pavement drifted off into rock and damp moss. He stood staring at a dense path before him, trying to set his feet in motion.

Timshel sighed and began to turn back as he had many times before, but then a strange feeling overwhelmed him. He saw the way, become confident. He wanted to turn to look back at the city one last time, or at the people who might be watching, but he could not, did not want to badly enough somehow.

Behind him, uniformed, with hand held machines and mechanized trail blazers, came three paid scientist adventurers. They followed Timshel into the deeper parts of the forest. A man named Lesam was the senior member and the lead trail man, and he tried, as he had so many times before, to keep up with The Taken One. But despite recent technological advances, despite their newly updated hand held devices and cutters and compasses, the trail thickened before them and Timshel calmly disappeared.

Lesam retraced his path back to the city and headed for home. He turned the corner and came to his walkway with its rows of silver flowers. Down the stairwell he stumbled,

legs burning, exhausted, frustrated, falling into bed. As his body came in contact with the pressure sensitive mattress the lights faded out.

Somewhere far beyond both cities a great machine changed focus and with a tireless eye turned again toward the Valley of Blue.

Some branches had to be pushed away and brushed behind him, others just seemed to disappear. Timshel was walking right through them. There were no edible plants here, no water, no fruits, no way of knowing which way was the right direction. But he felt no fear.

He walked on for days and nights needing no sleep, stepping lightly through the purple and orange underbrush, through fading brambles and huge blue trees that rose far beyond his vision.

Timshel presently stopped at the sight of a strange group of flowers. He hadn't seen anything like them before. They were yellow and shiny, and appeared to be the first of many thousand generously spaced on the path ahead. He knelt down to touch one of the soft petals and felt a strange feeling, almost like a dizziness. So he pulled his hand away. As he walked on, each glowing petal he came to seemed to recall a day. Most of his entire life had come and gone unremembered before this. Only a few main events recalled in a still-life picture, or a particular nostalgic smell or taste remained alive in him. But now everything was flowing slowly by him day to day, month to month, from the day of his birth.

After many months of walking he reached the first flowers of his 213th year. Then he saw the day his journey through the Valley of Blue began. He watched as he recalled seeing the first yellow flower before him, and began to remember remembering his life. Then came the present day. It was a very quiet, motionless moment he found himself in. It seemed as if all the things in the forest had stopped. Time stilled. He looked down at the last golden flower and everything around him began to shimmer. Slowly it formed an image of The Great Tower. He now stood before its gates. It was surrounded with dazzling white trees and a knee high sea of golden petals gently swaying in the wind.

Timshel with his next step found himself in a long hallway. A stranger led him to a waiting room and they sat across from each other. The stranger's face was calm but stern.

"Timshel Ishall," the stranger said in a clear level voice. "Let it be known to you now, every being has an image, a way of creating death. But no one ever really dies. Here in The Great Tower, we exist in a reality free of disease and free of death. You have returned to the roots of the civilization to which you belong. Long ago our ancestors learned to slow "biological time" and thereby control our true rate of physical deterioration to a point of biological immortality."

"I am not dead?" Timshel heard himself say in a dream-like fog.

"No. And you never will be," the speaker said. "Life is finally yours."

Timshel was given a quiet room where he fell into a deep and dreamless

Part II

As Timshel adjusted to his new surroundings, he was stunned at what he experienced day to day.

Machines were built right into the walls of the tower. They flashed in soft colors, changing slowly, subtly, for reasons he couldn't imagine. He was shown a number of different living quarters for his choosing. One overlooked the hillsides to The North and the forests beyond. Another had views of the sunset on the Western Ridge. There was a room with an Eastern Sky view, especially beautiful at night. But no window faced South Before, toward his homeland.

One thing amazed him more than anything else. As soon as he saw his reflection in a mirror. He was young again. Maybe thirty. He felt thirty. Or twenty. He would soon find out everyone, including his ancestors, looked young and fit as well.

As in his past life, trees bore fruit and died and new seeds grew. There was no immortality for the trees and animals. Leaves turned blue and crimson and star-white, vermillion and silver through the changing seasons.

His first years in the Towerland were filled with reunions of friends and family. It was a sweet existence. Work was voluntary yet everyone seemed happy to do more than their share, envy and personal politics seemed unnecessary, games were plentiful, laughter was plentiful as well. Worry seemed to abate as time had been transformed from an enemy to an ally.

The "true" reality, the whys and hows of things, were spoken of infrequently. Most of Timshel's family and friends were in no rush to inspect eternity by "scratching at it with

their fingernails." Most of them were not bound by doubts, or loyalties to reason. They could have wandered away for a century before coming "home," none the better or the wiser for their travels. What would it matter? Everyone was happily resigned to enjoy each pain-free day, with the days rolling in like endless waves.

Timshel felt differently. After a few restless years he decided to journey to the Western Sector where he had heard there were scientists and great teachers.

Before he left, many of his friends and family said to him, "We all felt restless for awhile, a few decades, until we realized the present here is all that matters. All we can learn by leaving are useless facts and figures. Historical data. In the end, what's the point?"

But Timshel was not persuaded by their reason. If there was an infinite amount of time to return, why not explore? And question? This was his nature. He, perhaps naively, thought finding answers to things brought him one step closer to freedom. Before his "death," he thought only freedom was eternal. That was his emotional intuition. Now he knew better.

During his journey through new and distant tower halls he stopped from time to time to look at slowly moving ice-colored gears behind thick frosty glass; the lifelines of the tower. After zigzagging through endless kilometers of halls he at last came to a large arched doorway and through it stepped into the hillsides surrounding the tower. Heading toward the Western Sector his pace quickened. Questions began to unfold before him. The scents were sweet from the knoll. It's golden-colored leaves reminded him of the journey past - from his world of birth.

He finally entered the Western Tower, where the hallways were made of crystal. This sector was crowded, and humming with conversation. There were machines fantastic in size. There were paintings that may have taken a hundred years to produce, using lighting or distance as part of their performance.

He asked for someone who might help him. It was at this juncture he was introduced to the newest teacher of the Western Sector, a well respected researcher from the world before, who had arrived only a year ago. His name was Lesam.

Lesam Aro was a thin small man with a slightly hooked nose. He had come from the same world, had lived in the same town as Timshel, but they had never met, until the day Lesam had tried to follow him through the Valley of Blue.

After Lesam's time had come to walk through the valley to the Towerworld he immediately immersed himself in the acquisition of knowledge; this was so much his nature. An old friend had guided him to the Western Sector within the first days of his arrival, where he became a scientist, then also a teacher.

Timshel sat directly across from him now, gazing at the innumerable books in Lesam's glass library, where books were not so much opened as they were turned on. Words appeared in lights instead of ink. And when books were closed the light disappeared.

Timshel began by speaking of the golden flowers. Yes, Lesam said, the golden flowers are a transitional image

common to our particular culture. It was by no means universal. Some cultures use great fear, tunnels of light, images of flight. Our culture chose “the memory flowers.”

Then Timshel said, “This life is ‘forever.’ That’s what I’ve been told. But I have no internal feeling of immortality. Even my oldest relatives in the Southern Tower don’t.”

Lesam nodded. He sat back in his chair folding his arms. “We have completed the process of deathlessness. But the realities here are very complex. We are immortal beings with inherently mortal minds. We are not *truly* immortal because we have cheated time, the unknown, the void. We were not born to be a natural part of eternal things. It seems to me the questions you ask, Timshel, are not about your physical immortality, it’s about your mind trying to come to terms with the implications of immortal time: what to do with it all.”

Lesam leaned forward and continued, “There comes with mortal minds an essential question of purpose, individual purpose as well as our purpose as “the race of the living.” It’s a question of destiny as well. Can there still be a purpose to life even if it’s never ending?”

Timshel nodded. This was indeed what he was struggling with.

“So what do *you* think?” Lesam asked.

Timshel shrugged, “I searched for truth and purpose for over two hundred years when I lived on the other side. I found the answers to be arbitrary. Infinite knowledge with infinite combinations. Maybe the need for a purpose, or a meaning is as archaic as the gods and saviors of the old books.”

Lesam laughed, “Yet that *is* why you came here to the Western Sector, to find out *something*, yes? Or did you come here to simply find out facts about the Towerworld that you couldn’t find in your local sector’s computer files?”

Lesam became more somber, “One can fly around like a comet for just so many thousands of years, let us say, but eventually it must *ask*. Even if it feels there are most likely no answers. Because somewhere deep inside of us all is a desire to control our destiny.

“I believe there *are* answers, Timshel. We have learned vast amounts from The Beyond and The Plane of the Observers, and that is certainly what our conversations will turn to if you’re still interested in the coming days and months.”

Timshel began to ask more but Lesam asked him to wait until he returned.

Timshel shook Lesam’s hand and watched him disappear down a corridor.

He stood up and looked out Lesam’s window but saw only the thoughts and questions in his own mind reflected back.

Lesam made his way back about thirty minutes later. Instead of sitting back down at his desk he put on some music -- strings and voices weaving softly. Timshel felt its beauty invade him, distract him. But he was steadfast in his not so rare ability to ignore the present. “So what is, ‘The Beyond,’ Lesam?”

Lesam was more than willing to re-engage. “To answer your question I must first speak about the process that keeps us all alive. In very general terms ‘biologically controlled

time' is the ability to make the internal mechanisms of the body generate and degenerate in incredibly slow motion.

"The Beyond came into existence from another invention, which puts the mind into a state of higher potential while keeping the biological rate in its slowed state. The effect of this increased mental ability throws one into an altered reality. From there the journey becomes totally personal.

"Most people who dwell in the Towerland do not wish for their minds to be so dramatically disturbed so we get very few requests to go Beyond. It does not help in the practical, physical sense of surviving forever. But it's a chance to further one's search – to gather a deeper understanding of the self, and to further clarify this altered reality we've created. It is our truest mind in a sense, bearing witness to as large of a picture of things as we can take in, without the filters.

"As for those who have stayed to observe both worlds, here and the Beyond, like myself, the data has become more and more startling."

"What have they discovered?"

"It's mostly what we've deciphered from The Plane of The Observers' communiqués. They are the missing link in our conversation now. Lesam offered Timshel to walk with him, complaining his legs would have atrophied long ago if they were ignored at the expense of endless speculation.

It was early in the evening, everything was still.

Lesam breathed deeply and walked at a brisk pace. Timshel lagged slightly behind him. To Timshel's surprise they walked in silence.

At one point Timshel looked up to the sky. It seemed as if the stars had been painted perfectly upon a silk black dome. The trees lining the path stood like miniature towers, sculpted and set in exact rows like they were part of a scene in a play. He was caught up in questions, isolated from feeling anything in particular.

He ran a few feet and caught up to Lesam, "What is the Plane of the Observers, Lesam, and what have they found?"

"Of course," Lesam said, "Well, since the beginning of the Beyond world many scientists and philosophers have chosen to go there in order to increase their mental capabilities. While no one can go Beyond with anyone else, nor is it usual to cross paths with anyone familiar at first, it seems their instinctual desire to observe the world merges some of them into a common plane of reality.

"Over the years they came to gather their resources on this plane. They've created great machines with their now far superior minds, and are now sufficiently capable of observing many worlds at once, the one we're in, our old world, and other Beyond realities, as if they were living in a parallel dimension to all of it, as if they were a cloud, or the more accurate analogy would be a mist, since they see people and events in great detail.

"The information we receive from them is usually quite perplexing and wondrous. It especially was at first. It was difficult for them to contact us.

"But I want to introduce you to a very old friend who can explain the rest of this better than I."

They entered a new section of the Tower and walked through another maze of corridors.

“What was the most startling message ever received from the plane of the observers?” Timshel asked excitedly.

“Turn down, dear boy.”

“Do you know it, Lesam?”

“I have it memorized.”

“Then tell me. I don’t like mysteries, or waiting.”

“I can see that. . . . Maybe Abrann would have expected you to know it already.” He looked at Timshel who had slowed his walk to a stop, “Alright. It said this:

**“Every cloud, every valley, the Towerland itself,
are symbolic worlds, made real only because
life and consciousness have converged.”**

Lesam was walking quickly now. Timshel ran to catch up. “All this? Every machine, every step I take is a crazy little dream? Is that what we’re all about, Lesam?”

“No. That’s tunnel vision, Timshel. There is so much more in the message than that. I knew I’d confuse you. Talk with a master.”

Lesam turned a corner and knocked on a door.

Timshel was worked up now. He didn’t like imagining his entire life as an illusion; everything he saw, felt, thought. There had to be more to all of this.

He was ready to pounce on this new teacher, demanding explanations about these symbolic worlds and the Plane of the Observers, but as the door opened his thoughts were sidetracked.

“Timshel, this is Abrann.” She stood up to shake his hand.

“I bid you farewell,” Lesam said suddenly. “I’d like to return to my work now. Timshel, you’re in good hands. Ask away.”

Abrann had auburn hair and large blue eyes. She was dressed plainly. She had slightly boyish movements, Timshel noted. He found her quick bouncy step slightly amusing, as she walked from her desk to greet him. He wanted to laugh aloud for some odd reasons but knew it would not befit the circumstance.

Back home, far from the Towerland, spouses were assigned. Timshel’s wife was arranged for him at the age of twenty. They never became particularly close. Children grew up communally. Attraction to physical beauty was discouraged. So he tried to ignore what he immediately felt when looking at this new teacher.

Abrann pointed to a comfortable chair and proceeded to sit across from him. Her manner was formal as she began to speak. “You are obviously here to find out more about the Observers. Lesam has probably answered some of your inquiries, and I’m here as well to tell you whatever I can.

Timshel remained silent. So Abrann said, “Sometimes half of one’s entire life feels like a prelude. I mean to say I, like you, have had the natural inclination to care and wonder about the social script: the history of the Towerworld, the Beyond, Absolute Truth, Absolute Realities. But the only way answers like that can be comprehended is by *apprehending*, using all your life experiences. Though some experiences may seem unimportant to you, without them the rest of the story really has no perspective. So any answers you’ve heard are just

Chapter I, Timshel. Before you reach out any further, or give up in confusion or despair, the first answer is to know this: The Plane of the Observers has given us the ability to know certain things. It would have taken us thousands of years, if ever, to find them on our own. Slowly we are better understanding what life is, and what it can be, and where destiny is leading us.

“Now we might rather say – where we shall lead destiny, because it is slowly becoming our choice. We have power, the power of eternal life, and it is a card to be played. To not use it is a choice too, but none the more natural at this point. So we have begun to assimilate our new knowledge with as much depth and care as possible.

“The Plane of the Observers has told us that consciousness can exist within almost any framework it chooses. But there are common moments of great Revelation. And these Revelations now are the events which have attracted the most interest from our scientists here. They seem to be common threads of truth and growth. They speak to all of us.”

“What are they?” Timshel responded. He was relentless and restless by nature. Even as a child he hated to be confined to one idea or place or group. He cherished his individualism in a culture that didn’t respect it or encourage it.

“The process began a relatively short time ago. So far, we are receiving mostly information about the way consciousness operates. . . .”

Timshel’s eyes opened wide and he stood up and started pacing. “More words. Forgive me for speaking freely, but is there something *real* anywhere, or is there not?”

In the end this just sounds like inspecting randomness in a mirror.”

“Timshel, I understand your frustration. And I encourage it. I do. But right now everything is appearing as merely theoretical to you. It’s not. Don’t run by the script looking for the end of the book. Surely there’s no ‘end’ in that sense of the word. After all, we’re talking about eternity. There is no ending. But there is *vision*.”

As night began to creep in through the windows Timshel asked Abrann if she might walk with him. They looked at the stars in the clear night sky and breathed in the cool air. In conversation he found that she and Lesam were both originally from the same town he himself grew up in. Lesam and Abrann actually knew each other there. So that was a friendship spanned two worlds. Timshel and Abrann spoke of their old culture, its art, its heroes, and the Tower’s annual flashing lights. “What were they all about?” Timshel asked. “What was the point of that?”

“Consider it a gesture. A beckoning of curiosity and adventure. Something to raise the possibility of another world beyond the only one they, we, had ever known; to awaken and challenge us to not simply believe the ways of the culture we were trapped in as the only way. And it did a good job on you,” Abrann laughed.

“Thank you,” Timshel said, blushing momentarily. He was proud of his independent mind. “But where are we now? *Really?* Abrann, we grew up believing what we thought were obvious truths – we were the second planet circling our sun. There are three other planets in our solar system, with countless galaxies beyond. It’s vast to contemplate, but was also real somehow. It gave us a place, a reference point. . . .”

“Yes, we need that, don’t we?”

“Yes, of course! But now I’m here, wherever ‘here’ is, and everything I question has scientific answers, rational answers, but without any solid meaning or point. At least not in the old sense of things. Remember in our old world when we would look at the stars and wonder who or what was out there? Now I’ve learned it’s all illusion, just a billion symbols floating in a void. . . .”

“Timshel, stars are. . .” her voice softened as she weighed her words. “I believe they are, in their ultimate form, beyond illusion. And I sense it so faintly sometimes I too begin to believe they are just part of the illusion. But my intuition says no. There are fools, and then there are those who believe they are fools. The latter is no less a fool.”

“I don’t understand.”

“To not know the truth is one thing. To grasp it and not believe it, for fear that it may not be the truth. . . .” She looked into his eyes and her hands became animated, “No! I won’t become that kind of fool if I can help it. The stars, the air, the trees and animals all around us, they are not just symbols. There is an essence. Right here with us if we could only. . . I can’t explain it. But *can’t you feel it*, Timshel? Look at the stars. *They’re alive!*”

The air was chilly, and smelled thin and fresh. They sat down together in the cool grass. He looked past Abrann’s eyes, skyward. Then found himself laying back. The stars sparkled in the vast endless blackness. He kept staring. And though his mind resisted at first he tried to concentrate on the power and the freedom he was witnessing. Then he let go of words to define and felt an internal expansion. The stars began to grow and take on colors. Glowing green, red, blue. They pulsed larger, smaller. Then finally for one long

moment the barrier snapped. He *felt* them. Or he thought he could, and nearly began to cry. But he stopped himself. Then the feeling ended. His eyes returned to Abrann's.

"I am the Reader," Abrann said. "The Plane of the Observers has a message for each of us individually. And I am used as their interpreter. The reading can help you in your search if you decide to go Beyond someday.

"You can request your reading any time you wish, but I suggest you wait for some time to pass, Timshel. Incorporate what Lesam and I have told you with what you feel. Then I'll come to you."

They were sitting near a small but sturdy young tree. She wrapped her hands around a low-hanging limb and pulled herself up. "I'll see you," she said softly, touching him gently on the shoulder.

The sun was beginning to light the sky by the time he thought to move. He pulled himself up like she had done and began slowly walking back to his room in the Western Sector.

Part III

Many days later Abrann came to him. She led him to a small room off the main hallway. The sun was setting and the corridors were emptying from another busy day. Timshel was glad to have this quiet time with her.

“The reading is ready,” she said.

“I’m ready to be read,” he said with a slight smile.

“You’ve *been* read,” she smiled back.

“I don’t understand.”

“There’s no great machine to lie under,” she exclaimed. “It’s not an examination. It’s a study of who you’ve been, what you see, what you think of, from as far back as they can observe you in your past to as far as they can see into your current possible futures.”

He waited for her to continue, trying to envision the strange world and abilities of the Observers. How could they “see?” And how would they now interpret the whole of his life?

“Your reading is this,” she said:

**“Your memory of the Tower lights
can lead you to freedom.”**

“A riddle!” Timshel said. “I can’t believe they’d give me a riddle!”

“They give everyone a ‘riddle,’” Abrann replied. “It can help guide you through a great moment of change by giving you a foreshadow of probable symbols from your own mind that will key a Revelation for you. The Tower lights are not an uncommon image. But it is interesting they used the word ‘freedom.’ I told this to Lesam this morning and his eyes bulged. It’s the first time they’ve used it.”

Timshel looked perplexed. He had expected so much more.

“I wouldn’t think too much about it until or unless you decide to go Beyond,” Abrann offered.

Her eyes sparkled and Timshel was drawn to them. “What’s yours Abrann?”

“What’s my ‘riddle’?” she laughed.

“Yes.”

“It’s this:

**“North is the beginning; South is Past;
West Return; East, Death.”**

He looked at her slightly unkempt reddish hair, deep-set eyes. The last remaining sunset sprayed an iridescence across the room. He thought about her reading more seriously than he was willing to think about his own.

“They mentioned the word, death.”

“Yes. Lesam’s eyes bulged at that too when he first heard it.”

“This is crazy!” Timshel wailed. “They remind me of fortune tellers back home. Remember people selling fortunes

on the street with silly little sayings stuffed inside Ashguar roots?"

"Well fortune telling isn't quite the word I'd use, Timshel. Maybe I'd call it fortune guidance. Certainly it's abstract. It's meant to elicit more than just the first meaning you think of. They tell us that not all travelers are helped by their reading. Because they can't recognize the moment when the time comes. But it's the best they can do given the randomness of the mind; living choice."

She stood still, statue-like. Then the perfectly horizontal line that was her mouth parted with what seemed to be a caring smile. His eyes closed to the outside world, and the distance between them was somehow diminished.

Together now with Lesam and Abrann, Timshel studied the latest Communiqués, hiked along the Tower ridge, and debated ideas. Abrann went on with her teaching and Readings. Timshel learned all the facts he could, and in time he himself became a teacher. Lesam was the purest scientist of the three, and for the last many months he had been considering the possibility of going Beyond. He had waited a long time, trying to understand more about the meaning of his Reading before committing to his inevitable journey on.

"I imagine," said Timshel, "going Beyond is a bit like a death and a rebirth."

"Technically it's more like going from one dream to another," Lesam replied. "The syntax of the mind stays the same but reality's form changes with the perceptions of the

dreamer. Death is so much more final. It would take a tremendous effort, I think, to truly die there.”

“You speak as if dying could be something noble,” Timshel said. “I think it would be an escape. The true effort is in the living, and the searching.”

“Abram, you’ve turned him into a philosopher. . . .”

“But not one I necessarily agree with.” She turned to Timshel, “The first night we met, when you looked at the stars, I asked you to try to *feel* the great beauty of it all. You seemed to have felt it. But you still feel a distance from any definitive truth, a distance in your own mind as to what is purely real. The entire argument against living eternally as I see it is an eternal separation from what is real. Because even if we ‘realize it,’ and know it, we can’t be *in it* permanently. It keeps throwing us back into a dream.”

“Yes,” Lesam added, “but consciousness is what makes being alive so worthwhile.”

“Maybe,” Abrann responded. “But maybe the definition of ‘alive’ is a lot broader than we imagine. Our bodies are essentially controlled by scientists. Our minds are being watched by Observers as though we were pieces to a puzzle. Maybe death is the only way we become truly alive by being fully connected to nature.”

“What exactly is ‘nature?’” Timshel challenged her, as he often did. “I’m still not sure nature really exists outside the mind. Maybe there’s nothing; non-existence, pure and simple. We have a chance while living and growing to develop a hyper-conscious state. Maybe consciousness is all there is.”

“Maybe consciousness is intrinsically blind, or at best myopic,” Abrann replied. “Unfree and unaware that it’s unfree.”

“To create any inner world you choose is *freedom*,” retorted Timshel. “To see, or to love, in any way we choose, or to hate! Maybe there is no nature, no ultimate destiny. No ‘force.’ Beyond the mind there is nothing. Or, conversely, the mind is everything.”

“Beyond the mind,” Abrann replied, “there is death! For better or for worse. And it still casts its shadow upon us all. It will forever. We are all still aware of it, even though we have eternal life, because there’s always a chance something might happen to our eternal life, because it’s held together by chemistry and machines.”

They both looked at Lesam. He was smiling, shaking his head. Finally he said, “There is still the question of purpose, destiny, even if the ultimate reality of death is total non-being; nothingness. Given an eternity’s worth of time and chance, at some point even nothingness eventually formed some small spark of beingness. That’s how we all got here in the first place. Right? Yes! This occurred! We are its proof. And in time, even if all conscious life as we know it died away, it would likely occur again, spontaneously, as it did with us. And won’t, in the end, the same question always arise, just as it has now? The question of what to *do* with the gift, the incredible force and responsibility of awareness?”

Part IV

Despite the differences between them, and maybe too because of those differences, Abrann began to feel for Timshel what he had felt for her all along. They seemed to meld their divergent dreams together and found something that could only be called love.

Eventually they also talked Lesam out of going Beyond. Logic would never have won the argument. But Abrann told him that Timshel and she loved him too much to bear the pain of his absence, or the loss of his wisdom. Lesam's heart was stolen.

The three of them then spent decades more sharing their knowledge and affection and friendship, until, eventually, Lesam again felt his perceptions at a standstill.

So it seemed for Timshel and Abrann as well.

But Lesam felt their sense of stillness was cushioned by the added dimension, the completeness, of their love for each other. It was very rare that two beings in the Towerworld felt such affection for so long. Lesam felt that for the most part they could bear to overlook the abysmally slow pace of knowledge in this reality. Waiting for half of eternity for a breakthrough Communiqué began to seem to him like a waste of his immortal time.

Lesam hoped if he went Beyond he could find the Observers and merge with them there. He craved to review all the knowledge thus far too unsubstantiated to be passed on by Communiqués. He wanted to witness firsthand the revelations of those in the Beyond, or at least experience his own personal revelations. This time Timshel and Abrann did not protest.

During his last night with his friends Lesam jokingly pointed to a particular gust of wind that lifted the leaves and said, "See that wind moving through? Maybe that's my new home. The plane of the crazed and tired old minds waiting for some new life. I'll figure out the answers to all their questions and then everyone can get a good nights sleep, eh?"

Their thoughts were spinning as they helped Lesam make his final plans. They became quiet and sat for many hours. Then Lesam walked away alone.

When he returned he found Timshel and Abrann laughing wildly, looking ghostly pale, shaking their heads. Sit down, they said. After a silence Abrann broke the news. She and Timshel had also decided to go Beyond.

Though no one could go Beyond with someone else, there was a curious desire now to go Beyond at the same point in Tower time as their dear friend. It seemed poetic, funny, deeply right.

For Timshel and Abrann to separate, Lesam thought, was impossible. But they explained they felt their life was complete together, and could become no more perfect than it was, unless they now searched further within themselves.

The night was swept away and the morning came quickly. They bid goodbye to their fellow colleagues. Then they bid each other a nervous and passionate farewell. Then they were each alone.

Thoughts, emotions, experiences, all turned inward. Each of them began gathering together all the random images of people, truths, and cores of knowledge amassed over many hundreds of years.

They lay outside, each in a place of their choosing, under their separate patch of golden flowers. The same kind of golden flowers that had brought each of them here so long ago. And with great excitement and trepidation each soon disappeared, and stepped gracefully deeper into their own mind.

Abrann found herself split asunder. Finally her body and mind came to common ground.

She looked around and found herself in a beautiful room made of dark Uhruba pine and green brick. She searched for a door but found only a window. She saw an old tavern across the way, its lights blinking weakly in the morning gray. She looked for an opening once more and saw the outline of a door hidden discretely in the shades of the wood. She pushed and thereby entered another room. There was a little girl sleeping in a small-framed bed. The girl rubbed her eyes and lifted her body up from under the covers, her soft red hair falling over her eyes. "Hi, Mommy."

Abrann could not move, could not breathe. There was no mistaking the bond between Abrann and her child.

Somewhere in the back of her thoughts she knew this entire scene was just a "symbol." But this child was also as alive, and as much a part of her, as anyone had ever been. She hugged the child and touched gently her skin, trying to act calm and normal. The child yawned, "What time is it?"

"I have no idea, sweetheart. What time do you think it is?"

“Time to play!” she said with her sleepy eyes brightening. Her breath was warm and milky. Abrann was overcome with love. But she knew from the child’s reactions that to her that it was just another morning, nothing was different. Nothing had changed.

“Alright, let’s play a game then. Move over.” She curled up in the small bed with her daughter, trying to keep her voice from quivering, “Tell me everything you know about yourself. Start with how old you are, your name, who your friends are, then what you like to do. Pretend I didn’t know you. How would you tell me about yourself?”

The child hesitated, “Um, okay. My name is Timara Ishall Abra. I’m six years old...”

Abrann tried to act as if nothing surprised her: The birth of a child, what the locals called her “mental break down” after her husband died, her reclusiveness, and now her “slow recovery” back into the fringes of mainstream life.

Early on she tried to tell some the truth about the events that placed her here. But she soon felt it was bringing on more confusion and doubt about her mind than anything else. So, this now was her truth. Her daughter was the only real thing of worth to her. The only reason for existing. Yet Abrann also tried to give to her the strength to be independent from her, because she realized one day, any day, she might awaken somewhere else.

As her daughter approached her sixteenth year Abrann began to see in her many things she had failed to notice about herself. But the reflection was clear. While there was a pureness of emotion, a great love and respect for nature, a sense of truth that came as effortlessly as intuition, there was also a lack of aggression to act upon the truth she saw. Timara often had feelings of not being in touch with

something essential, but she could never place it or name it; and at times it seemed to drain her.

As the trust between them became unquestionable and Abrann's 'reclusion' became a distant memory, Abrann decided the time was right to tell Timara the truth.

She took her on a long walk to the edge of the countryside, telling her as they walked, everything she knew about her past; speaking in clear and intricate detail so as to prevent the possibility of her daughter questioning her mental faculties.

Timara was told about where Abrann was born, the Towerworld, Timshel and Lesam, the Observers, her attempt to help them each search for their own destiny.

Timara did not doubt her mother. Her love for her, and her years of experiencing Abrann's constant rationality and mental sharpness prevented any hesitations. She asked Abrann many questions about the Towerworld and the Observers but after a time she began to focus her questions towards her father.

"Your father believed in something more than the power of the mind," Abrann said. "He was one of the few people I ever met who could feel things that couldn't be answered. That gave him a spirit that allowed him to be more free and more passionate about life than anyone else I knew.

"Timara, you and I have so much in common. Your openness to love, your sense of what is true beyond the eyes, are deep and clear. But unless there is an inner strength to *act*, we will starve with food all around us for a lack of a harvest. Do you understand?"

“What is important enough to commit to?” Timara replied.

“Love. Joy. The instincts that tell you how to create more of those things! Our thoughts are the illusion, Timara. But what you *do* with your thoughts is real. What’s true is -- your actions are who you are. What you think can be as random as the wind. And it can pull you away from your true destiny at any moment you follow. But when you take a step with conscious intention you change your fate. So develop a keen sense of direction, Timara, and then *go!* Come what may!”

“Momma, I don’t want you to go away.” Timara said softly. Abrann froze with her words. “But I know you must.”

Timara continued. “I believe everything you’ve said to me. And I believe in you. You’re so much a part of me, it doesn’t even matter if you were *never* really here! I’ve often thought of you as just a dream; a warm dream of mine; the very center of me. And it used to frighten me to think of waking up without you here. But, Momma, if I’m to learn the courage to act, as you request, it’s going to have to be because I learned it watching you. We both have to find strength enough to do what we believe, don’t we?”

Timara spoke these last words in a whisper and could not continue. Abrann was bewildered with her daughter’s insight and power. She had not really intended to leave her, not *now*, but she knew this was what was being offered by way of Revelation. If she didn’t leave now, everything of meaning she could have tried to teach her from this day forward would be neutralized.

She kissed Timara, kneeled down in the grass by her feet and held her; touched her face, her skin. She felt now the

way she felt that first day she saw her, and tried not to tremble.

“Alright,” Abrann heard herself say, still holding on tightly, “I must go now.”

Timara released her arms and Abrann arose.

“Which way will you go, mother?”

Abrann looked at a great cluster of mountains rising in the distance in a grayish-blue shadow. She felt disoriented; she felt like the stranger she was here in this land. “Which way is that?” she asked.

“North.”

Lesam Aro adjusted quickly as he encountered the temporary swaying motions of his body and mind and observed their course.

When he was able he arose and walked for an incalculable length of time, observing the symbols of this present system.

He spent many long nights taking notes and sketching maps of his surroundings. But sometimes he felt an emptiness he couldn't logically justify. And during these moments he would think of Abrann and Timshel. They had become his image of the beauty of living consciousness. Through his mind he would re-examine their ways, their love. Their love for him. And he would know that, if just for them and their kind, the search was important. Even if it led nowhere, even if there was nothing, an infinity of nothingness, at least then the questions that never had any

answers would have been exposed for what they were. He could make peace with that. He just wanted to know.

Dusk came, covering the flatlands with shadow.

Then, just as the last light fell off the hilltop, Lesam spotted a cluster of strange flowers on the ridge. They seemed spotlighted, rather haunting. He made a note to investigate at daybreak, it was too dark now to find his way there. He smelled the odor of earth and leaves as the sun disappeared, and with it he felt the loneliness of the land, which upon further inspection he realized was actually the strange mental dimensional distance between him and all other things.

In the morning he walked North for the first time since his journey began and found the cluster of golden flowers. They were here too! Here again. Why?

He knelt down and as he gently touched one of the stems for inspection he felt his mind pulling him farther and farther away. He fought it, fought the power of the experience with the will to observe the experience. He felt the petals, examining the flower's core through his semi-dream state. "I've arrived," he whispered, his eyes wide open but unfrightened.

Then he felt the power overwhelm him. The light blinded him, the heat, the brilliance of the moment engulfed him with all the power of the sun and he disappeared.

*T*imshel seemed to be in another reality of the Towerland. He had expected more, something totally different. But there seemed to be only more of what had been before.

His heart became restless, tangled, imprisoned. He could not wander through another endless time like this. He did not want to just sift through his mind forever. Timshel felt deadened; not real, even to himself. He wanted to experience something beyond knowledge, beyond events. He wanted to feel freedom as powerful as love, freedom as wild as the joy in Abrann's eyes. He wanted to search for this thing, and find it fresh and sparkling and sure.

So he decided to walk as far away from the Tower as he could, without even entering its arched doorway, wanting no confines, no borders anymore.

Through many years' journey, the cold, the wind, the rain, the powerful heat of the summer sun, pulled and twisted him until he began to feel his life moving literally moment to moment.

Sometimes there would be movements of animals, or the twisting of a leaf in the wind, that would set off mountains of emotions in him.

He would remember the time he first met Abrann, when he felt the essence of the stars, trying so hard that night to see through her eyes. He would look up then at the mist of white lights, the trillions of suns, the spiraled galaxies. The design of the universe was the most outrageous perfection his vast mind had ever witnessed. Not because of its size, or its power, or its complexity. But because it seemed beyond him. The vastness entered him like a living emotion. It felt beyond life or death. It burned with or without him in sublime madness. There it was – complete freedom exploding joyously out there in the wild.

But, still, he could not be *sure*. . . .

After walking and thinking like this for so many years, he finally reached a precipice overlooking the entire land he had been wandering. His eyes “saw” differently now. Beyond any previous type of perceptions. He looked from this mountaintop, it seemed a hundred miles high, with a combination of his new and old eyes, his new and old realities, and saw in the distance to the South the old city of his birth, and many miles away the Tower of his second life, sitting above the Valley of Blue.

To the East and West there was a vast expanse of air with seemingly nothing below it. How many worlds had he traveled through? To where? He thought for an instant of returning, journeying to his homeland beyond the Tower, or back to the Tower itself, but then he looked North.

What he saw were hundreds of Towers sparkling and swirling in mid-air, a million paths fanning towards him waiting for him to reach out, and be pulled into their sphere. He began to cry with feelings of exasperation and wonder. He felt almost like a child. He could not bear another moment of thought. He closed his eyes. There suddenly appeared an image of a bright flower. His heart ached. He saw Abrann’s face as a little girl. He felt as if he were almost her father. His compassion overwhelmed him. As she grew older, he became her friend, then her child. Everything was spinning out of time.

His eyes had been closed a very long time, and when he opened them he imagined Abrann there, running towards him. He could not bear the illusion. He was losing the last of his sanity in love, about to call out to her, feeling sure she would fade away, when she touched him.

They tumbled, alternately finding and losing each other through the pulsing circular chaos. Their concentration had to be redoubled. Any fragment of distraction, any doubt, weakened their hold on each other.

Finally, after a great struggle, their surroundings stopped swirling. They were shaking, frightened, but felt the solidarity of each other growing in time. Then there was quiet. They lay still, clutching each other tightly, until it grew darker.

Sitting up, they looked out to the West and saw at the tip of the last fading light a cluster of clouds ringed with color.

They went to the edge of the Western ridge and sat there staring into the oncoming blackness, the stars burning and whispering in the cold. Then, slowly, beautiful lights began flashing in the sky in random patterns. It reminded Timshel of the pattern of lights from the Great Tower. But at some point they did not seem random anymore.

Timshel and Abrann, seeing clearly as one, thinking of their Readings, combining them together, began to understand. It was indeed a singular Revelation.

As the lights flashed off and disappeared they grabbed each other's hand and crawled to the Eastern side of the mountain and tumbled off, into the cold infinite air, into the arms of gravity.

Somewhere far beyond, a great machine noted the event, changed focus, and with a tireless eye watched the rest of eternity take its course.

-- COMMINGUE 890