

## [ Prologue ]

I become.

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God holds me, and turns me, and shows me when and where to be born. If I can be patient, God will show me the course my life will take and save me from wandering in confusion.

But I blindly rush in.

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I'm born, a girl. My dad and mom hold me close and I tingle and laugh. I nurse in my mother's arms and fill up with scents and flavors. Then I lie in an afterglow and drift into sleep.

In my dreams I rise to Heaven again. Awake, I'm planted on Earth. Wavering between Heaven and Earth, asleep and awake, my soul and body firmly join. I become human.

My name is Mo.

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Now I'm three. My parents are Bram and Lani. They teach me to make silence, like them. Every day at dawn we wake and stretch, and sit up in our shared bed. Then we close our eyes again and meditate. I'm not asleep, I'm awake. But quiet and still. On my closed eyes I feel the sun shine brighter as it rises. The world and I fill with light.

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I'm five, and now I realize what 'tomorrow' and 'yesterday' mean. This is *time*. Then today in the middle of meditation, Bram's voice speaks in my mind: *travel*...

Everything stops. The room is silent. Even with my eyes closed I see perfectly that nothing, anywhere, can move. Except me.

Lani's voice comes to my mind: *forward*... and she and Bram gently carry me a small distance forward in time. Vibration surrounds me. Time *reacts* to me and my motion.

I'm a spider dancing on a web, tiptoe in the center of time. The web's threads spread into the future and past. Other creatures are stuck forever, but I cross the strands lightly. I can stop or go as I please. I can choose moments to travel to, skip outward to the edges of time, forward and back, and return to *now* in the middle.

Then we stop...

Then I breathe...

Then the world moves again. And I hear sound again. I open my eyes and ordinary sight enthralls me. I'm amazed I'm still a human girl. I look up at Lani and Bram, beaming.

Lani says, smiling, "You see."

"This is our gift — our family's gift," Bram says, "To travel in time this way. It's ancient. And fun."

Lani says, "But you see how time is connected?"

Oh, yes! My slightest movement makes the web shiver; creation vibrates in tune to my step. I say, "Everything moves when I move?"

"Yes," Lani says, "It's delicate, so only travel when we are with you. Soon you will make short journeys on your own, safely."

I sit back and watch the morning's sunlight spill through the window, lighting the room warm and bright.

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My life becomes a river dropping from a high waterfall. My first taste of time travel transforms me. I'm carried to a deeper, more fundamental level of life where everything on Earth is fascinating and fresh.

Now I have direction and motion. I am rushing and bubbling joy, and flow wherever I want. But each moment brings a bend in my river and leaves its imprint on me. Every instant in time gently molds and guides me. The shape and course of my river is gradually set. Each touch laid on for the unique purpose of... what?

## [ Part One ]

I jump out of bed and race outside onto the wide veranda that completely encircles our home. I run inside, outside, inside, outside, and around the circle of the veranda in endless loops. The roof protects me from the hot sun, rain, or snow. So I play here in all weather. I am inside and out at the same time.

Bram's garden surrounds our home, spreading and rambling in every direction to fill our huge hundred acres. It's a living embrace growing all around us. When I run my loops I race as fast as I can so the mixed colors of Bram's flowers, plants, and trees blur in the edge of my sight. In a burst of joy I dive off the veranda and into the garden, rolling and playing in the flowers, crawling and sniffing like a small animal.

I like to climb to the top of the hill on the west side of the garden. From here, I can see everything. Our land is a perfect square, hundreds of yards on each side, with our home in the exact center. Bram's garden paths start at the veranda's steps and wander outward through the garden until they reach a tall fence. Lani made the fence from straw she threshed and bundled into sheaves. Now it holds Bram's enormous garden in its arms. It's a solid wall all around, except for a single gate set in the center of the east side. Lani rough-cut the gate from branches, so the first light of the rising sun pours through, catching the morning.

Standing here on the hill at times like this, at dawn, I love to watch the sunlight spread. I'm the top, the highest point, and I'm illuminated by the dawn first. Then the sunlight slides down my arms, chest, and legs, touches my toes and spills down the hill, brightening the garden and our home.

Behind me, our pond is cradled between the hill and the western run of the fence. The sun hits the water and I spread my feet apart, planting them in the earth. I raise my arms and my star-shaped shadow lays over the pond. The water is unruffled, quiet and hushed, waiting in silence until I want to play in it.

Then I turn back east and the jumble of the garden tickles me. I dive into the flowers to explore the garden again and again.

I try to find some order in Bram's garden, but it's impossible... he changes it day to day. He will stoop wherever he happens to be standing and plant whatever he happens to be holding. Yesterday's paths are grown over and Bram has opened new ones. Despite his lack of planning, Bram's plants all seem well and happy with their neighbors. He isn't worried. He knows everything will be fine together.

It's a strange adventure wandering the garden paths. I never know what I'll discover because anything can grow here. I can even plant broken toys and new ones will bloom. Bram says he finds them when he is out harvesting, repaired by the garden. Happily, I leap over the flowers, young cornstalks, saplings, and herbs that Bram grew — even in the middle of walkways — and get lost in his maze of plants.

Now I look for tulips I saw before, but I can't find them. Frustrated, I complain to Bram, "Daddy, where are the tulips? I want them back."

"They aren't there?" he says, but he's not surprised. Bram reaches into the deep canvas

bag he always has slung over his shoulder. The bag is full of seeds, flower bulbs, seed-cones, tree cuttings — anything he chaotically harvests from the garden or discovers in the market. He sifts through the mixture and pours a fistful of tulip bulbs into my little hands, more than I can hold. Many of them fall on the ground and Bram deftly buries them with his foot where they land.

“They’re so small,” I say. “Are they really tulips?”

“Yep. But right now they don’t have any petals... or stems... or leaves... or roots...”

“Oh, Daddy!”

“Have another,” he says and drizzles several more into my hands.

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Every Tuesday morning our family travels to work. Unless it rains. Then we take a holiday and let the rain wash the garden while we rest. Daddy says he never wants to go to work when its raining, or on a Monday.

But when we work, we sit on cushions at a low table on the veranda and write notes to ourselves. We write to ourselves in the past, to last-week’s Bram, Lani, and Mo who will travel forward to today. We write to advise them, to improve their week to come, our week just past. Lani and Bram write about their investments and small things that make life sweeter. Once, Lani prepared a surprise birthday gift for Bram — exotic flower seeds for his garden — but Bram accidentally found them. At work the following Tuesday he wrote a note to himself: *Don’t go into the pantry!*

I like drawing pictures instead of writing notes. I hide them in the garden for last-week Mo to find when she is here, visiting. I already know what the pictures will be and where I’ll hide them... because I already found them last week when I visited to *now*. So *this* week, for fun, I draw the pictures differently and hide them somewhere else. It makes me laugh.

I finish drawing and hiding my pictures, and Lani and Bram leave their notes on the table, one corner tucked under the bowl of flowers. Our work is only half done.

We go inside and sit on our bed, and meditate. In the silence Lani or Bram guides us ahead one week. If it is raining next week, we close our eyes again and travel forward an extra week. On the veranda table in the future, we find the notes left by our next-week selves, one corner tucked under the bowl of flowers.

Lani and Bram take their papers to the cushions overlooking the garden. They sit and read the advice and plan together. I run around the garden and search for the pictures next-week Mo hid.

I think about her... the other, future Mo... the one who is inside. Except, she isn't there. Today is a work day, and she is traveling into her future. Does she think of me, I wonder? Did she change these pictures I found? What happened to the pictures *she* found when she was *me* last week? And where are those pictures, the ones she found? And where is the Mo who drew them? I don't know, because *my* next-week Mo drew *these* pictures.

And what about *last-week* Mo, one week younger — two weeks younger if it rained — what will become of her? Will she do what I did last week? What do I tell her?

Soon it is time to go home. We close our eyes and travel back to where we began. Back to our own time, in our room, on our bed. This work of ours fills me with joy, but it makes me sleepy. I lie between Lani and Bram, the rhythm of their breathing in harmony with mine.

I'll look to see if last-week Mo found all the pictures I hid for her... later... and fall asleep.

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Outside and in. My outward motion balances the inward silence of meditation, and this is my life: I play in the garden, work with Mom and Dad, meditate, travel time...

“These are rituals,” Lani says, “a riverbank. A new river creates any path. It flows wherever it wants, at first. But in time it carves its image into the earth. So the river creates its own riverbank, its rituals. In return, the banks hold the river to its course. The two play against each other, pushing and yielding. They create and strengthen each other.

“Your life creates your rituals and your rituals guide your life.”

She pauses, then says, “Avoid rituals that don't change with you as you grow. Those rituals become dry riverbeds, empty of life.”

Lani is an expert on rituals. She was Teacher's scribe in the years he dictated the encyclopedia of Utopian rites. In return, Lani became an authority herself. “I am a riverbank, holding Teacher's river of wisdom,” she laughs. “Mo, I remember Teacher taught me a saying about rituals: *Kahawai, Kahakai*. Which means in Hawaiian: *River, Shore... two halves of the same.*”

Our family flows in Utopian rituals.

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I get to the family reunion before anyone else. Now I am ten.

It's just before dawn and the reunion grounds are empty. I lean back against the giant sequoia tree in the exact center of the field and close my eyes. I travel through the upcoming day and see the relatives, the food and fireworks, but especially the game of Waterfall we'll play. I am certain I can compete with the best travelers this year. I'm determined to win.

When our family plays Waterfall, we travel ahead in time to see where the ball will be thrown, and travel back just in time to intercept the catch. Of course, the other players see the interception coming, so they throw and catch differently to prevent any interference. Everybody jumps forward and backward in time, influences time and counter-influences, anticipates and

intercepts. Its hard to keep track of the threads of actions and reactions.

A non-traveler, watching the Waterfall game from the ordinary flow of time, would see the game end quickly. From the first toss at the sequoia to the final catch outside the game circle, only a minute passes. But that is just the final version of the game, filled with the flicker of players who appear and disappear as they travel. But to the players — and everyone at the reunion plays somehow — the strategies, moves, and countermoves last all day.

There will be only one winner, but along the way players form teams and alliances, and then break them. Persuading people and negotiating are as important as making an athletic throw or catch. But the winner is the traveler who builds the subtlest chain of events, leveraging time to the best advantage.

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But now, before anyone else arrives, I travel in time back and forth across the reunion day, studying the Waterfall game. I'm the time spider. I check each thread of the web, and follow each path from the center. I try to find my win. But each path I follow leads to someone else's win. And my paths crisscross the other players' threads, making bundles of threads too tangled to see through. I can't concentrate enough. I can't see the combination of events that lets me win the game. I slump down at the foot of the sequoia, unable to think.

I try something new. Instead of following the countless paths to see if they turn into victory, or instead of jumping ahead in time to see the other players' moves, I think to myself to simply go to my win. Go to my win. Wherever that may be, I'll travel to my win. Once I land there, I'll find the path I need to take, and trace backward from the end. I turn myself over to the event of the win. If it is out there, I go there now. Now!

A pause. A silence. A nearly imperceptible feeling of reorientation, of disengagement. Not

time movement, not really. No, I'm seeing anew. I'm *separate* from the spiderweb. The moment hangs in anticipation, waiting above time...

Then I'm there. At the win. It *does* exist! I look at the time path leading here — one path only. I see it. I know I'll win. My win can't be prevented. With my strategy, they won't be *able* to intercept the ball or beat me to the catch. No matter how much the other players hop back and forth in time, they can't keep me from it. Their usual techniques won't work.

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The sun is up and the family gathers. They come from all places in the world, and from all times past and future. The reunion each year is well attended, since people can leave their own times when it is convenient for them, and still arrive today. It's a powerful day. Our reunions charm us, and it isn't unusual for the same people to come to the same reunion from many times in their lives.

Lani and Bram come and join me. Bram grins broadly and laughs. This is his favorite day of the year. He says, "Reunion is a celebration. But it is also a time to renew the family mind and spirit." A family has a single evolving soul, carried through generation after generation. He puts his arm around my shoulder, and says, "And it flows in you, too."

Long-gone ancestors and not-yet-born descendants flock to reunions. The day is filled happily reconstructing lineages and pedigrees, telling stories, playing together, and learning how our family has transformed. All this will inspire someone to make a side trip in time to find missing cousins, broken links in our heritage, and bring them to the reunion. These side-trip searches can last for months for the travelers, but to us they are away for a few short seconds. Some people occupy their entire lives renewing links. Because of them our family soul is strong and rich.

*Heke-tutu*, Lani's grandmother, sees me, "*Aloha*, Mo darling! Why not come along with us? We're traveling to visit the first Dalai Lama. His abbot was an ancestor on your father's side. Lovely man."

"His rabbit?"

"No, the Dalai Lama's abbot."

"The dolly's llama has a rabbit?"

She smiles at me and says, "Come dear, you'll see."

But I decline.

"No thank you, *Heke-tutu*." I have a Waterfall game to win.

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I'm anxious to get the game going! I nag everybody and jump around until, after an eternity, enough people are willing to start. They assume I'm excited because this year I'll make the first throw, to start the game. They don't know what I know, how I'll win. They can't see my win from where they stand in time.

Finally, they are ready. I take the ball and run to the sequoia. The other players start to travel, to anticipate the game. I let them go but don't travel myself, otherwise the vibrations of my time-movement might give away my plan. They play for hours, moving and dueling across time. The players weave in and out of time and their complexity is beautiful to watch. I admire how creative and devious they are. The elders are especially able to fool the players and lead them down false paths. Well, they all can have their fun; I'll be that much more satisfied when I beat them.

Finally, *I* am ready. I stand at the exact eastern point of the giant sequoia and do three things at the same time: first, I toss the ball — straight up; second, I jump off of the ground as

high as I can — straight up; third, the ball and I disengage from time and space. I don't time travel with the ball; that is against the rules in Waterfall. And this isn't time traveling without control, the ordinary flowing forward on the tide of time that non-travelers do every day of their lives.

No.

What we *are* doing, for a tiny moment, is completely *not* traveling. Time passes without us. The universe, stars, and planets move slightly without us. While we dangle in the air, the Earth turns on its axis without us, and the tree and players spin away. I land first, just outside the circle. And the ball drops into my hands.

Game over.

No one has ever won Waterfall this way. The other players are dazzled by my mastery. The elders are silently impressed. People who visited this reunion before, now stare at me shocked... this is the only time I've won, they say. But I'm strangely separate from their reactions. Time pulsates for me... I've dropped a boulder into a still lake and started a flood. Enormous waves spread through time and space in every direction. Time reverberates in my spiderweb and agitates me and my future... and past.

I stumble back to the sequoia, lie down, and gaze at the sunlight through the branches. The tree seems to dance with the vibrating waves of time. I watch it, dance with it, and let myself get caught up, the spider snared in her own web. I catch a glimpse of myself whole in time, aged and young: I'm one hundred twenty, I am sixty, forty, twenty-five, seventeen, fourteen, twelve, ten, five, three, newborn, in Heaven, and infinite.

## [ Part Two ]

Seven years pass.

I'm asleep, dreaming of my winning Waterfall game. Then I'm awake, traveling to that unbelievable reunion day. Wavering between the two, my dreams and travels merge. I become a reflection of myself, a ripple on a wave.

Dream-traveling to the reunion, I watch my younger-self from different vantage points on the playing field. I keep my present-self hidden, not yet ready to be seen by her. I don't want to diminish this glorious day for her... and... and... I don't know if she will be happy with who we became. No doubt she'll think my body's curved softness is ill-suited for playing Waterfall well. But I know what she can't, how my demeanor has softened. What has become of that scrappy girl, that Mo? I still feel distortion from that day, as well as some comfort, strangely. I have not yet absorbed it all.

Awake in the present I'm seventeen again. The sun is not yet risen and I'm still in my bed. I push myself up and watch Lani and Bram sleep. I sigh. A breeze lifts the curtain and I smell the dawn approach. I slip out of bed and walk outside. The moon is up and bright, the springtime air cold and fresh. I stroll through the garden, among the young shoots of the early flowers, and think of how they will look later in the year. I don't travel forward along their time

paths; I prefer the surprise.

I finished my core schooling, and now I must choose what to do next. Bram and Lani left the decision to me. For that, I'm grateful. And insecure. I thought it would be advantageous to travel forward in time a little, to get my bearings for my life. And I *tried* to see what my future brings. But all I found is that my paths are muddled and ambiguous. There is too much to choose from, and the options overwhelm me.

If my friends learned that my family has this gift of time travel, they would hound us. They'd want to know their fates. Of course. But they wouldn't understand our refusal to help. My own path is so unclear, that I don't feel I'm withholding some special knowledge from them. Still, I want to help my friends. I don't want to keep my gift a secret. This... this is the most painful lesson I've learned so far... this responsibility that comes with knowledge of the future.

I pass near the open bedroom window and listen. Mom and Dad are still asleep, so I walk off of the veranda through the garden, crest the hill, and see the pond. I take a step toward it and remember...

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I'm twelve. My friends and I show off our dives, leaping headfirst off of the boulder bulging out of the deep water in the middle of the pond. Kib clowns at the edge of the boulder, standing on one foot like a flamingo, flapping her arms.

It's hot and we play in the sun a long time. I travel forward to the following day and see us all sunburned and in agony. I travel back and say, "We better be careful, we might get burned. I'm going to take a break in the shade." They see the sense of it and follow me out of the water, onto the shore of the pond.

It's at that moment I become aware for the first time that I could lead my friends safely

into the future. I could scout ahead in time for them, warn them of dangers, and report back what to do.

I try it. For each of my friends in turn, I travel their path to the end of the day to look for something to advise them about. Most of the paths are uneventful, except Kib's. From the moment I step on her thread I know something terrible will happen to her. This evening she comes back to the pond to swim alone. She slips from the boulder, falls awkwardly, goes under water. She's disoriented and struggles. She swallows water... she's drowning! Kib!

I scream, now back earlier in the day. My friends stare at me. Kib laughs, "Mo? You look like you ate a moth! What is it? What do you..." She pauses. "Are you OK?"

I jump up, rush to her, clutch her. I cry, "Promise me you won't come here alone to swim, especially not at night."

"Why would I do that?" she says, and pulls back from my grip to look at me queerly. "Although, now that you mention it, an evening swim sounds fun." She puts her hands on her hips and snickers, looking sidelong at the others.

"Don't joke!" I yell.

"Mo?" calls Lani. She is coming over the rise that separates the pond from the garden.

"Just a minute... please..." I call, and say to Kib, "Promise me. Don't joke... promise."

Kib drops her hands and faces me, serious at last. "It's a weird promise. But, OK."

"Mo..." Lani says, next to me now. "Mo, come help me a moment. Bram and I have a picnic lunch prepared. I would like you to help bring it out."

Shaken, I seem to answer yes, but I stare at my friends' faces one by one. They are concerned, and wonder what strangeness got into me. I turn and walk vacantly home with Lani.

She puts her arm tightly around my shoulder as we walk. "Mo, I know what you saw,"

she says quietly. "Kib will be safe."

"Yes..." I say, "She promised me she won't come."

"No, she *will* come," Lani says, "And perhaps only because you suggested it to her. Now Kib is curious."

I shriek, "Kib will die because of me!" I turn back to my friends at the pond, but I can't see them. The hill blocks my view.

"No." Lani says firmly. "No. Kib will be fine and alive. She will be terrified but she will not die. Come travel with me, I'll show you."

We walk to the veranda. Lani sits on her cushion and takes me on her lap. Closing our eyes we travel to this evening. We're at the pond... Kib lurches and falls. She struggles, drowns — no, she is up, and grabs a handhold on the boulder and keeps her head above water. She is retching, coughing, gasping, breathing... living.

Lani and I stop and travel back. I sob as Lani rocks me on her lap. "I'm sorry," she whispers, "Kib will have the scare of her life."

"Mom, I had the scare of my life, too."

"Yes, I know," says Lani, "I'm sorry that you had to wake abruptly to these dangers of traveling."

"Why don't we prevent it? We can stop me from planting the idea in her head. We can stop Kib from swimming tonight. Why don't we travel *back* to the pond before I travel *forward* and see her drown? We could write a note at work."

Lani stops rocking and looks at me gently, her gaze caressing me. Bram walks up from the garden, brushing soil from his hands. Lani smiles and says, "Some moments must be lived."

Bram adds, "The art is in the choosing."

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I'm seventeen again, lying at the edge of the pond. It, and I, are perfectly still. I touch the surface of the water once with the tip of my finger and the ripples roll out, away from the center of the disturbance I make. The waves diminish as they flow away until they become too tiny to follow. I pause, touch the water again, once. And then...

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I'm fourteen.

I don't understand why Lani and Bram refuse to help people who they *know* will be hurt, to prevent the hurt. At first their reasons seemed so profound. But now, Kib's fright doesn't feel like the art of choosing. Today, at this moment, I can't see the sense in letting her — and me — be scared to death. Even these two years later I *still* feel the urge to go back and prevent Kib from making her near-fatal error. Was it really better for Kib to be terrified that summer evening? And me... I was more afraid than at any time I can remember. How can that be better?

After that evening, Kib changed. She is more cautious and less flighty... that seems more grown up, I think... But is she now too timid? Is she afraid to be bold when bold would be good? And what about me? Because of Lani and Bram, I hesitate to change time for *anybody*. As they intended?

Was this why Dad and Mom didn't prevent the sequence of events that afternoon? Did they let me plant the suggestion in Kib so she would be scared, so I would be scared, so she would be more cautious, so I would be more cautious? Did Kib and I need to be scared to learn these lessons? Couldn't we have been taught without the pain?

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I'm seventeen... I lie at the edge of the pond while my hand chops the water with each

question and turn of thought. The waves crash into one another and break in unpredictable directions. I force my hand to freeze in midair and the chaos gradually subsides. Then eventually the waves calm down into ripples and the pond is still again, but I can't stop crying.

I found the center of my turmoil: Were Mom and Dad wrong?

They live a life that barely moves. They rarely leave our home and I've never known them to travel more than a week or two to work. And their work creates the slightest of impacts on the world. I suppose I've been happy enough growing up here, but they are so timid! I can't be like that.

Suddenly, a thought comes to me — a quote, “Give me but a place to stand and a long enough lever, and I can move the world.” I ponder that and travel in time to find its origin. It is a long time away... is it Newton? No. I found him... it's Archimedes. He is in his room, gazing out the window at his garden near the sea. Loosely in his hands he holds a sheet of parchment covered with drawings of levers, fulcrums, and weights. As he muses, I can hear his thoughts. He knows the larger the lever, the larger the effect. “These levers... could move a mountain... the Earth... given a place to stand...” My awareness of him is keen, and my body begins to take form in his room, in his time. He senses my materializing presence and turns toward me, but I back off from the moment. I don't wish to disturb his flow of fate. I want to travel alongside his life, but only as a spectator.

I saw enough. Archimedes gazed into the infinite and drew it into his mind. Did he catch a glimpse of the spiderweb of paths that lead from his levers?

In that moment I learned what I want my life to be: I want to move the world. A thrust on the time-lever to lift the future of the universe. I tasted that power winning Waterfall, and controlling Kib's future.

And I *liked* it.

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Lani and Bram couldn't possibly understand. They love their lives *here*, but I won't stay. The sun's rising. They must be waking by now. I jump up and quickly walk back, straight into our bedroom. I stare at Lani and Bram while they sleep until, soon, Lani opens her eyes and can see the storm in me.

"Bram," she says, and runs her hand on his back. "Wake up."

He mutters, "I am awake. Only, my eyes are still asleep."

I grit my teeth and turn away to the window. Lani says, "Bram, stop joking. Mo needs us."

Bram rubs his eyes and sits up. They both watch me pace. "Can this wait until we meditate?" Bram asks.

"No," Lani answers, anticipating me.

"I can't stay here anymore," I burst out. This isn't going as I planned. I wanted to make my point more gradually. "I feel trapped, that nothing I do matters. I can't tell my friends that I travel... there is no one here like me." I surprise myself... I didn't know I felt *that*. "We have this gift, but we don't *do* anything with it."

"Like what?" Bram asks, sincerely interested, but yawning.

"We don't go anywhere, or explore time... not even for fun. *Heke-tutu* travels all the time, all over time!" That isn't what I meant to say. "We could help the world. We could prevent pain, give insight, teach... anything! But we don't. I know it can be dangerous. But I can't stay here paralyzed with fear."

Bram looks down, Lani touches his hand. He says, "Mom and I are proud of our lives..."

“Oh, Daddy, I’m sorry! I didn’t mean...” Why didn’t my notes to myself from next week’s work warn me about this?

“I know,” he says, “I’m not insulted that you want something different from us. That’s all right. But you should understand us if you can.”

“I tried to understand,” I say. I think of all the tiny things they putter with while they stay here and never leave: our garden, our home, and our work of traveling one week into the future... all the silly things we write to ourselves each week, trying to minutely make our lives better, message after message, week after week, while our lives slip away in meaninglessness.

“Your investments...” I say, scowling at them. “Is that worthy of pride? Don’t you take unfair advantage of other people who can’t travel like you? They lose their wealth so you can win it. I can’t understand the honesty in that.”

Lani says, “This is how we maintain our lives.”

Bram says, “We know the future of the market for certain, and we use that certainty to make our profit. The other people don’t know the future of the market, and they are unsure what will happen. Maybe they have faith that God will sustain them, which is good, but mostly they gamble, and bet that an unknown future will fall to their advantage. Does their lack of knowledge make their profit cleaner, more honest, than ours? We earn enough to be comfortable, but we don’t take more than we need.”

“Of course,” Lani says, “we don’t need to worry about the future as they do. So, we don’t hoard a fortune to take care of us in case some unforeseen disaster comes. We keep enough to meet our needs, now.”

“We like to live simply. Do you understand?”

I think about what they said, briefly. “Mom, Dad... we should use our gifts to help

everybody, not only ourselves. To have this power and to not share it is... well, selfish." I turn away and look out the window. "I can't be this way. Humanity can be relieved of its pain, if we shared traveling with —"

"No," says Lani firmly. "Humanity would suffer greater pain if we teach them to use this much power. This isn't the time for it."

"When, then?"

Bram and Lani look at each other tenderly. I feel a thrill I dimly recall from my infancy; the bliss of them holding me close. "Mo, travel and explore on your own. Go find your time." Their smiles are enigmatic and I don't understand just then, but I feel a part of my confusion lift from me. I am enchanted by the possibilities, to be able to go wherever and whenever I want. Lani and Bram come to me and we hug.

This is why my next-week notes didn't warn me. I won't be here to write them.

• • •

Later that day, I'm prepared for a long trip away from home. Briefly I thought I would come back each day and sleep in my own bed near Lani and Bram. But I know the purpose of my traveling is to separate myself from my well-known place and time. If I need help, we have family spread across the ages and I know how to find them. I can easily travel myself out of danger. I will be safe.

I'm ready to begin. I stand on the veranda and stare at the east gate. I feel — something — about it I never felt before... Bram comes to me and says, "Mo? Are you going?"

I pause, then say, "Do you wonder about your future... your own death?"

Bram says, "Not any more."

"Aren't you curious?"

He says, "Let me ask you... if you knew how and when you will die, what would you do differently, now?"

I think, then shrug. I give him a quick kiss and walk into the garden.

• • •

I follow Bram's meandering paths and let my mind wander. The garden's capriciousness helps me disconnect from the familiar progression of events. I close my eyes and disengage from this time... I let myself wander forward along random time paths.

For fun, I follow the lives of the plants and flowers. Observing the garden from this out-of-time perspective, I see an orderliness to how it evolves, with Bram's life path providing a counterpoint. It is like a dance he has with his garden; sometime he leads, sometimes the garden leads him. I drift again, now to Lani's life path. Hers is a constant. She will be at Bram's side. She serves him in a way, giving him strength and stability, but he returns his service to her with playfulness, illuminating her. They are *Kahawai*, *Kahakai*... River, Shore... powerful together, going on into the future.

I loosen my traveling from their paths and turn toward the marketplace. Hundreds of lives interact here and the convergence of time paths is rich with possibilities. I observe the people's lives, unseen, from my perch outside of time. The courses of their financial fortunes are strong here in the confluence of the market. Money dominates the future. But I'm surprised how little the value of their present wealth influences the size of their fortunes to come.

A young man's life eventually leads to great wealth. It is curious to see him here, innocent of his future. Then his fortune arrives. The paths of riches converge on him... he is a man of destiny. Riches find the young man without any effort from him. Yet he strains to make it happen, losing his innocence, believing his labor alone brings him greatness. He cannot know that

regardless of what he might do, his fortune is too large to be missed. Will he always be as lucky? Later on, will his efforts receive support from the Fates?

I wonder, Bram and Lani must have seen this perspective before. How do they use this knowledge as they act in the market?

But these places and lives are too familiar. I unwind my thoughts from them and let myself travel into the future by larger steps. The marketplace grows and changes. Great buildings are raised, filled with thousands of lives for a hundred years and then demolished. The seats of power migrate across the world where the pattern of growth and destruction repeat, then migrate again.

What is the sense of these changes? The world moves on without improving. Lani said that this isn't the time for teaching the gift of time travel. But when, then? Humanity is suffering a sickness embedded in its nature. Eons have passed without a cure. Waiting longer — for the future — won't help.

The answer is suddenly obvious. It is too *late* in the world's life for it to be healed. I must travel into the past. That is the time and place, before the world's ills began.

• • •

I stop and examine the root of humanity's disease. Traveling slowly backward into the past, I follow the spiderweb's threads to the disease's causes. The seeds of today's pain are buried in the troubles of previous civilizations. Farther back, these civilizations' troubles are rooted even deeper, embedded even earlier.

To move this world, I must go much farther back, to the start of life.

I rush backward in time. Earlier than the civilization of my birth time. Earlier than Archimedes. Earlier than the matriarchs of humanity. Now to an unevolved time, when people

are less than human. These creatures are not animals, who follow their nature innocently. Nor are they human, who are fully responsible for the suffering they create. These ancestors of mankind are something in between innocent and responsible.

This is the right place to begin. Somewhere near this time is the moment when the seed of mankind's pain is planted.

But what do I do? How do I change this time to lessen suffering in the future? I realize I only need to perform one small action. Like a wave spreading outward from a stone dropped into a pond, an enlightened act *now* will spread outward from the roots of humanity and grow as a healing wave forever. I could prevent all war, poverty, and starvation through one instant of kindness, now.

I let myself lift above the spiderweb. I look for the right action. When I won Waterfall, I found the *win* and walked the spiderweb *backward* to the action. But now I look for the action that will lead *forward* to a future I do not know.

I'm confused. I see no simple *win* for the world, and that makes me uneasy. It was foolish of me to think I could fix humanity. Worse, my unease disturbs the spiderweb and the future distorts around my confused thoughts. I *am* causing an effect that spreads to infinity. An ill effect.

I force myself to stop worrying. I meditate, dropping into silence, not traveling. The threads of the spiderweb relax. This silence is an action that helps the future, perhaps. But all I accomplish is to correct what I've hurt, I hope.

I travel ahead to my home time and place. The world is already different. My *worry* in the past deformed the *now*. Vast tracts of forest wither under a gray sky. The soil is pale dirt, devoid of moisture and nutrition. The world is strangely silent, without birds. And my home.

There is no fence and the pond is dry. Our home is a remnant of its original beauty. And it is unoccupied, Bram and Lani gone.

I've seen enough. I tried to play with humanity, but this isn't Waterfall. This game is dangerous.

I lift myself above the spiderweb and travel backward along my own, personal, life's thread. I crisscross time until I return to where I was, before I traveled back to the dawn of human life.

I see myself. That other Mo is pondering the roots of humanity's illnesses, preparing to travel back to the beginning.

I call to her, "Mo!"

"Mo?" she says.

"Mo, don't go back in time. Don't search for the cause of this suffering."

"Did you find it, the cause?"

"No, but the cure was worse."

"How?"

I think of the desolation of the world I just left, and what my anxiety caused. I look around at the lovely beauty that's been restored, but shadowed by the pain that remains with me.

She looks into my eyes. I shiver. She sees the saddening change that has fallen over me, a loss of innocence that is unnecessary for her to lose. I realize now that even though I've watched myself at reunions before, I never met myself as intimately as this. It feels strange, and yet somehow, it feels fine. "Don't worry about it," I say. "That's it... don't worry. Please trust me, a living work-note from your future... the past isn't where we want to be."

She hugs me.

“What will you do?”

“What would *you* do? If you were me, that is...”

“I *am* the you that is.” We laugh at that. “I’d travel in the other direction.”

“All right... me too.”

We pause.

“See you there.”

• • •

I disengage from time and travel forward, taking large leaps. For millennia, civilization expands and contracts, washing across the globe, transforming everything it floods. When I travel faster, humanity’s rising and receding tide becomes a rhythm. Faster, the rhythm becomes a vibration, a hum. The hum stretches from the past into the future, on this world and others, an infinite song of the universe.

This is what I witnessed on the day of my Waterfall win... this moment of clarity. My spiderweb spins softly, a wheel in time. I float above it and search for a place for me to be. Glorious places and times arise, but none fulfill me. None are *me*.

I let my thoughts drift, hoping I find a place of... what? What will the place be? What is the *win* for me now? The win for my life?

My win is a place and time of greater peace. Of more love, even greater than Lani and Bram’s exquisite love for me. A place to learn more profoundly, a place where my life is useful. A place more beautiful, more energetic than I have known. That is where I want to live my win.

Then I see it, and move.

### [ Part Three ]

My first sense is the fragrance of a flower. Unlike any smell I knew from Bram's garden, this flower's scent washes into my mind and body. I am enchanted. The fragrance finds tight and locked places in me and gently unfolds their clenched fists. Every molecule of the scent of this flower embraces a molecule of my body. My mind drifts wherever the scent goes. My spirit watches, entranced.

My other senses become aware. The flower's flavor touches my tongue. The taste becomes a word I want to speak, subtle and light. I trust the wisdom in this flower. It knows what I need and will give it to me if I let it.

In time, I notice I am lying down. Slowly, I open my eyes and see the sky... blue, clear, perfect. And now I see the flowers I've been savoring. They are small, but dazzlingly beautiful. Their petals are dappled like butterfly wings, in a variety of colors and patterns, yet somehow coordinated with their neighbors.

I reach out and feel the strong and supple stems. I feel the softness of the petals. They feel fragile but do not shrivel when I touch them. I let go and the petals spring back to their original shape, undisturbed by my exploration.

I notice the flowers have a voice of their own. The breeze flows through them and they

vibrate, creating a whisper, a whistle, a song. I try to pick one flower but can't break the little bloom's grasp of the earth. I realize it wants to stay here where it grew, to keep growing. I apologize to it. My voice sounds rough compared to its subtleties.

I stand up carefully to avoid trampling these little beings. All around me is a vast field of the flowers. Grouped together, the blossoms' colors form a larger pattern — a mosaic. They make a path for me with their colors as easy to follow as a footpath along the banks of a river. I look around. It is not an illusion... the flowers want me to go a certain way.

I take a step on their path and the breeze rises and lifts the flowers' song.

I stop and close my eyes, intending to travel on this flower-path's future life, to see where it will lead me. But as I do, the breeze dies and the song stops. Surprised, I open my eyes... and the breeze and the hum of the flowers begin again. Surely, these flowers will have their way, and will lead me where they wish, in *their* own time.

I relax, satisfied to follow their path, not knowing where the flowers lead. Their scent, colorful image, and song are pleasant companions for my walk in this strange time.

I crest a hill and suddenly, in the far distance, I begin to see a perfect circle of giant trees, surrounding low walls of, perhaps, a building. The path leads there.

The flowers lead me on and I walk for nearly an hour, descending the hill and crossing the meadowy plain. Finally, as we — the flowers and I — approach our destination, the path widens and blends into an orderly garden outside the circle of trees that now tower overhead. Well-kept walking paths run straight through the garden, through the trees, and through the building's walls. On the paths, a few people walk alone or in small groups. They are unalarmed by my appearance. As one might notice a leaf falling into the garden, it seems natural to them that I am here.

• • •

One person is tending the garden: a short, older woman flits from place to place, watering and tidying arrangements that are already flawless. She talks to the flowers, shrubs, and trees as she moves. “Stand up straight, little one! You want to be perfect, to grow tall like your big sister, don’t you? Shake off the dust and dirt. Teacher will be here soon. There, that’s better. Oh! Here is a guest!”

She is looking up at me. This is the first time anyone directly noted my presence.

“Hello,” I hear myself say.

“Are you here to see Teacher? Of course, you are. Everyone who comes is here to be with Teacher. Me too, I suppose, but I spend most of my time tending these dirty-faced flowers!” The flowers rustle in response. “Do I know you? You seem familiar... well, it will come to me I’m sure. Are you tired? Do you have a place to rest, yet? Of course not... you only arrived a moment ago. Come with me! I’ll show you the way.”

She takes my arm, her head at my shoulder, and leads me on a path into the circle of trees. Their branches make a canopy, hundreds of feet over my head. On the ground, stones form the walls of the building. At first they appear to be placed haphazardly, one atop another. But as we walk on, they take shape and rise tall. What seemed to be a low building from a distance, is actually lofty, but dwarfed by these giant trees. The walls are open to the sky, uncovered except for the soaring ceiling of branches.

Places like this — but so strangely different — exist in my own time. Walking in an ancient forest one might come across the tumble-down stone walls of a manor, destroyed long ago. I’ve seen this myself traveling along the life-path of great kings, viewing the ruins of their castles. But here — so different — here the forest and stones aren’t in ruin, but are clean and fresh. And this

building is no castle fortress. This is open, inviting, and grown from the earth.

We pass through a series of archways in the stone walls and come to a clearing... a grassy courtyard where sunlight bursts through the canopy, partly, and makes beautiful and intriguing designs between the bright light and shadow. Much of the courtyard has low platforms covered with mattresses and soft cushions filled, I perceive from the scent and touch underfoot, with pine needles and down, fragrant and soft.

“Here we are!” she says. “We sleep here. Come lie down.”

The shadow-play draws me into a dreamy reverie but I say, “I’m not tired after all. Thank you just the same.”

“Oh, you *are* polite. Well, all right then. You can find your way to the garden.” This is a statement of fact, not a question. Even though we passed through many walkways, the layout of the building is clear and natural. It is impossible to get lost here.

I say, “Should we go there now?”

“If you wish. Teacher will be there soon. But I need a nap. Oh! My name is Neeva-Dita. Call me Neeva.” She brushes the dust from her feet — I hadn’t noticed she is barefoot — and she hops across the mattresses to a spot in the shade, lies down, and within seconds is lightly snoring.

I smile, and turn back to the way we came.

• • •

I wander about the halls and trees, and take my time before passing outside to the garden. The building is simple and beautiful. And everything here is functional, without paintings or sculpture. There is no need for decorations. The stones, trees, and flowers are as subtle and graceful as any artwork.

The grounds of the building, trees, and garden occupy an expansive area. Each tree is a few yards across and would require a dozen people to surround any one. I count eighteen trees, and estimate the circle holds at least ten acres within it, elegantly divided by the orderly walls of the building. Outside the ring of trees, the garden spreads outward for a half mile in each direction, covering hundreds of acres, before blending into the rest of this world.

I return to the garden and contemplate the uniqueness of time travel. This place I came to... when in time does it exist? Where? I had closed my eyes and traveled here without following a path. For all I know, I could be in the past or future, or in the present just over the hill from where Lani and Bram are now, at home.

But somehow I know this isn't my home time, the era I was born. This time is far removed from the center of my spiderweb. This time is magical. The perfection of the trees, sky, and garden could not exist in my home time. The era I left has too much strain and unhappiness to allow such beauty as I see here. This place is untouched by war or sadness. Poverty, lust for wealth or power, must be unknown here.

Not that my life with Bram and Lani was brutal; our home had no deprivation or warfare. But I *knew* that such things existed in that world. Even the knowledge that such pain *could* exist was enough to diminish all life there. But here, even fearful memories are...

Of course! I know where I am... I found Utopia, Teacher's home! The same place where Lani served as Teacher's scribe while he dictated the Utopian rituals. Is that now? Will I see Lani here, a young student? Or was that long ago? Is this where Bram fell in love with Lani? Strange, I don't know where Mom and Dad met. Was that here? How different this place is from Bram's garden. But I feel as much at home here as there.

"Home is home is home is home." A man is speaking to me. He must walk silently... I

didn't hear him approach. "Listen."

I cock my head. The flowers' song is a chorus of voices. A hum, then an exultation, then a hum, then an exultation, alternating over and over. They sing the complete range of sound, from quietest to loudest, lowest to highest, smallest to largest. I close my eyes and expect to travel, led by their song. But instead I feel a complete sense of being centered, timeless, motionless. With some effort I open my eyes and see the garden vibrating. It is pure joy to be here, now.

I ask, "Teacher..."

"Yes."

"Teacher, I've known this hum, this song, before. I feel this when I make silence."

"But it fades?"

"Yes... yes it does."

"No more. This song is alive in you now, always. Awake, asleep, adream... permanent."

I listen. This sound *has* always been in me, but I wasn't aware of it before. When my spiderweb quivers under my step, my web vibrates this song. This is the song of me, of my life. Mmm — the hum. Oh — the exultation. Mmm-Oh, my life, my name:

Mo.

"Now you know who you are, Mmm-Oh." He smiles, a smile of pleasure, eyes half closed. "Enough. See you tomorrow. Enjoy."

•••

And time passes unnoticed. The seasons change, I suppose. Snow or rain, sunny or dark, warm or cold. But these don't lend a feeling for time passing. These changes happen as a playfulness of nature, as nature evolves. There is no hurry. We have all the time we want, and we have no want for time.

And as the unmeasured weeks and months pass, I unfold my hidden places. The knots in my mind and spirit relax. Teacher appears when I need him. My questions are answered by his words. And my unasked questions are answered by his silence.

Teacher fits this place as it fits him. Both are fresh and robust with life, but ancient and settled. He must be old, but his motion and gestures are fluid and supple. His hair is thick and full, but completely gray. He is beardless, and his face never has stubble or shadow; his smooth skin is soft like a child's who doesn't need to shave. But his eyes have ancient wrinkles and shine with wisdom.

I slyly try to discover his exact age. "Teacher, these trees, these giant trees around your home... how old are they? They all seem to be the same age... were they planted at the same time?"

"These trees, these giant trees around my home... how old are they?" Teacher enjoys acting coy, repeating my questions. "I planted them all, eight hundred years ago."

*Teacher* planted them? Eight hundred *years* ago? I stare at the trees, then kneel on the ground. I pick up a handful of sequoia seed cones, surprisingly small to give birth to such greatness. "Is this..." The question sticks in my throat. Teacher grins at me, his bushy gray eyebrows raised. He knows my question before I ask it and I know his answer before he speaks. But I press myself on. I want to hear him say it himself. "Is this your first crop of trees?"

"My first crop? No... hundreds of others. You are a traveler, Mo. Travel and see the crops and harvests yourself. Take these cones with you."

I close my eyes, hands full — overflowing — with cones.

"Wait," says Teacher, "Travel with eyes open. Begin again."

In an effort against the habit of fully closing my eyes, I manage to keep my eyelids halfway

open. I travel backward on the time path of these old, old trees. The seed cones feel warm in my hands. With my eyes open, the image of the world wavers. It all appears to be painted on the surface of water, and my intent to travel causes everything to ripple.

As I travel backward the world undulates, breaks apart and re-forms itself younger. Still the time spider, I walk the web, but now each thread is a fleshed out reality. With my eyes open, the details of the threads shine clearly, more than I thought possible. Instead of remotely observing the web as a sequence of events — like a story briefly told to me — now I feel what creation felt as it passed along these paths. I live *in* the threads, and know each moment myself. The events are more real and personal than I imagined they could be. These are no longer someone else's path... they are my paths.

I arrive at the infancy of Teacher's giant trees. I enter this time and see him exactly in the spot where I left him in the future, eight centuries from now. His appearance is the same... full gray hair, bright eyes, old but young face. His ancient and venerable hands rest on his hips and he looks left and right. He is deciding where to plant his trees.

I approach him and speak. "Teacher, may I help?"

"Mmm-oh, you can help. I have seed cones to plant. Inside or outside the garden? What do you see?"

"See? Teacher, I see them inside the garden."

"Do you see cones or trees?"

I hand him one of the seed cones that future-Teacher gave me and say, "I saw the trees already... but looking at the seed cones I still see trees..."

"They're so small," Teacher says, "Are they really trees?"

"Yep. But right now they don't have any needles... or trunks... or branches... or roots..."

“Oh, Mmm-Oh!”

“Here are some more,” I say and pour several more into his hands. One falls to the ground and he deftly buries it with his foot where it lands.

• • •

“Mmm-Oh, take this cone and visit its parent. Visit the parent's parent. Travel back to the beginning of the trees. These trees want you to journey to their start. They want to teach you. Go.”

• • •

I hold the sequoia's seed cone in my hands, cupped in the creases of my palm. As I give it my full attention, the hum of my name, of who I am, the permanent hum of “*Mo*” fills the cone. I travel back with the seed cone to its birth on a high branch. The cone shrinks back into the branch, into the trunk, and into the roots of its parent. The roots in turn become a seed cone, fallen from a branch, grown from a trunk. The branch, the trunk, the roots... all withdraw and transform into seed cones hundreds of years past. Again and again.

As I travel, the trees are always with me. And my hum, my name, is carried along in the thread of the history of these trees and their ancestors. I don't understand why, but I become certain that these beings — these giants, these trees — they know me. They are aware of my presence and *help* me travel back. Not since my earliest trips with my parents, when Lani and Bram directed us to work one week ahead — two if it rained — not since then was anyone with me on my travels. But these majestic trees and their humble and potent seeds are beside me, guiding me.

And they defer to me as one would honor an ancestor. “*Kahawai, Kahakai,*” they say as I pass. They wish to escort me to a place in the past, a time where they want me to be, thousands

of years ago, hundreds of thousands of years ago.

But I don't want to go; Utopia is slipping from me. The purity of Utopia is becoming too distant and I want to be with Teacher.

I force myself to stop. I turn around and travel back to Teacher's home. The old trees don't try to stop me — they know how to be patient and will wait for me to be ready. I return to Utopia's time, the time when Teacher taught me to travel with my eyes open, the time where Neeva tends Teacher's garden. This time is still important to me. This is the time of my life's win.

Why? I could have come to Teacher whenever I wanted. But I didn't, I came now. Why?

Teacher says, "Your eyes are open. Good. You can learn much, traveling with your eyes open. Neeva is coming."

I'm speechless and dazed from my trip. Teacher puts his arm tenderly around my shoulder and guides me toward Neeva in the garden, outside the circle of trees. She surveys me and says, "You are at Teacher's home, Mo. I am Neeva, this is Teacher. You have been in Utopia for many months."

Teacher studies my face and says, "Neeva, Mo has been traveling with eyes open, aware. But she knows where, when, and who she is. She does not travel like your son, Riyadh... this place did not change for her... she knows where she is and who we are."

Relieved, Neeva says, "Teacher, Mo needs rest! Come with me, come inside."

Teacher says, "Neeva-Dita, is *nap* the answer to everything?"

Neeva says to Teacher, "Even *you* will get tired, someday."

Teacher shakes his head and laughs. Neeva takes me around the waist and directs me to our sleep area. A few others are there already and I notice it is dusk. It is late, I think, and lie down

and sleep. As Teacher promised, the hum of my name is alive and aware in me anyway.

• • •

This night I dream:

I stand waist deep in a lake. I hold a seed cone cupped in my hands. I slowly dip the backs of my hands into the still surface of the lake until the water spills over the walls of my fingers, and drenches and floats the cone. I lift my hands and let the water drain through my fingers. Fill and drain, I water the seed cone thoroughly.

Concentric waves rise and fall and ripple out from my hands. Higher waves, in small circles near me, taper to low ripples in huge, wide, circles far from me. In the distance the waves are a vibration, a barely evident shimmer, making the clouds' reflections a slight blur on the water's surface. Yet even at that distance I can still see my motion's influence.

In my dream I stop dipping my hands and a small white spider appears on top of the seed cone and looks at me. I drop my face down to the surface of the water to get nearer.

"It is good you are awake and aware while you dream." It is Teacher's voice speaking from the spider. "Look up."

I look, and spun from the center of my hands, an intricate spiderweb grows in every direction. It forms a flat web across the surface of the water, but also upward and outward. A hemisphere of web spreads into the sky. The breeze catches the web and creates waves in the threads. "With you in the center," says Teacher, the spider.

• • •

In the morning, when my eyes pop open, the sun is not yet up but the sky is brightening through the branches overhead. I stretch and walk to the garden to watch the sunrise.

Teacher is there already, facing east, arms spread wide, absorbing the morning. He exhales

completely, then inhales deeply. I join him and imitate his position, my fingertips nearly touching his, and try to match his breathing. His breaths are slow, and mine are like panting by comparison. Eventually I manage to slow my breath so I breathe three times to his one. It is a victory for me and now I am in harmony with him, although not his equal.

The sun rises and other people join us. We slowly stretch our bodies, moving into ancient postures, inhaling the freshness of the dawn, welcoming the sun. Complexities dissolve and I wonder at my confusions. Where do the doubts come from? They seem foreign now, here in this place where I only need to breathe and dream.

It is so simple here.

We all end our sun-salutations and walk inside to Teacher's space in the exact center of the trees. His place is plain, set in the middle of his home, in the middle of his trees, in the middle of his garden — in the middle of his Utopia, really. Just a small clearing carpeted by Utopian flowers, with low one-person benches set in a semicircle facing a single seat for Teacher. The flowers are especially soft, allowing someone to silently walk in and sit without disrupting the peace of those already here. We sit comfortably cross legged on the benches made from the wood of Teacher's trees. They are ancient and worn smooth from use. Some tree, I realize, was harvested hundreds or thousands of years ago to allow me to rest here, now.

From behind me, spaces between the trees' trunks allow the sunrise's light to fill the clearing, illuminating Teacher's face.

We sit together and meditate, just as Lani and Bram taught me long ago... long ago in my life, and long ago in the world's life. And as I meditate I feel the hum of my name join with my thoughts. The hum rises while my thoughts sink, like a swelling tide in the ocean meeting the falling waves. Both smooth out, simplify, calm, and join. Then silence. The ocean is silent. I

an ocean, that is all.

It is so simple here.

I don't know how much time passes in the world while we are like this, in silence. But eventually the thought of activity charms me. I finish, we finish, and lie down on the flowers to gently rest. After a time, Teacher begins to sing softly, an unadorned tune. Each change in pitch or change in color of a note is large against the background of the silence and quiet from our meditation. It's charming to hear his voice, and I let myself lie with eyes closed to follow his voice upward into activity.

Finally, my eyes want to open, they demand to open and be used. When I let them see, their first sight is a man, somewhat older than me, hair slightly grayed, carefully dressed and sitting discreetly to the side. He has a soft somber expression, but his bottomless-soul eyes watch me attentively. I hear Neeva say, "Mo, this is my son, Riyadh. Riyadh, please meet Mo."

• • •

Without a doubt, love at first sight exists, and it is like this. It is a clear knowledge that *What I Am* harmonizes *What You Are*. This is what I know when I see Riyadh.

• • •

But I push away from my feelings. I tell myself that I have only begun my journey. I don't want to stop for another person. I do not want to mesh his presence and his needs into my plans. I want to be selfish. That's it. I want to dive into my *self*. Later, I think, later I will take the self I found and formed, and *then* let it be attached to someone else.

I cannot even greet Riyadh. I know that if I began that path with this serious man, I won't be able to stop. I'd rush to him, open myself to him, and do whatever is necessary to be with

him, to give him what he needs. But I won't go to him now. My self is *mine* and will not be shared — yet. I can see a broad path into the future with Riyadh at my side. But I turn away without speaking. Even without looking at him, I know that his solemn expression does not change.

I know.

## [ Part Four ]

The seasons change. Years pass. I help Neeva-Dita tend Teacher's garden and learn the beauty and value of Utopian flowers. They are strong, self-sufficient creatures, but they happily give themselves to us when they know we truly will honor their remains. Neeva shows me how to harvest and prepare them: we make their blooms into food and healing herbs; the strong stems and leaves become hundreds of useful items: cloth, paper, baskets, rope...

Above all, the flowers bequeath the most by simply existing in the garden, exhaling peacefulness and healing. More and more, I find myself gazing into their petal-faces, drawn into their depths. However much my spirit evolves, these little flowers help me find more and more. And more and more, I find myself staring into the distance, acutely aware of... being.

• • •

Teacher is speaking to me. He is saying, "Devotion is next."

I say, "I love you... Teacher. What I have seen here is what I believed could exist — but doesn't — in my birth time. This place, here with you, is pure."

"But?"

"But?" I say, "There is no 'but' that I feel."

"No?" says Teacher, "No more to be known?"

“No.”

“Then, next is devotion.”

“I devote myself to you,” I say.

“Devotion to me is not enough... for you.” Teacher stands and motions to me to follow. He leads me outside of the circle of trees and outside of the garden, following the flower path back to the spot where I first appeared in this time. Is he making me leave him?

He says, “This place is good for beginnings for you. Come look closer.”

He gestures to a small depression in the field. The ground falls away some, enough to make a hollow a few feet deep, and tucked into the slope is an opening, a passage leading underground. The opening is tall enough for me, but narrow. Teacher says, “Stay here until devotion is clear.”

Alone, I squeeze in through the little opening. Inside, the path slopes down, turns, and opens up into a cave. Dozens of candles light the inside, illuminating a clean place to sit covered with a soft white cloth, a warm blanket nearby. I understand. I look back at the cave's mouth toward Teacher, but I can't see past the turns, and I realize Teacher is gone.

I go to the seat someone lovingly prepared and wrap the blanket around me — it's cool here, underground. For hours, days perhaps, I sit and watch the candles burn down to pinpoints of light, until they all burn out, but one. I gaze at that one tiny flame and ponder devotion.

• • •

Devotion, I think... devotion. What could devotion be?

I understand gratitude. I am *grateful* to Teacher, he showed me my name. And his trees... his trees hold something special for me.

I understand love. I *love* Bram and Lani. They gave me my human life, loved me, taught me silence and travel.

I understand Riyadh. Riyadh is... is for the *future*.

But devotion? What could devotion be?

My inner hum, this sound of my name... it's always with me... is it *devoted* to me?

Always there, attending me like the flame of this last little candle, calmly shining its light until it expires? Having no purpose but to serve me? If that is devotion, I think, then devotion means surrendering myself to someone else's path, to their destiny. Giving up my desires for theirs.

Why would I do that? I have my own plans and ambitions; I want to move the world! But I don't know exactly where my desires lead. So, is *confusion* a good reason to turn my life over to someone else... because I don't know?

Attaching myself to someone else's destiny would relieve me of the responsibility of finding my *own* destiny. I could be like a non-traveler, floating forward without seeing the future.

Unbidden, my time web appears. The threads are rich and alive. I let myself drift in time and flow without direction or destination pre-planned, looking for the answer. As I float along, I let myself be tossed by the swirls and knots of the web's possibilities. At random, I float forward or backward in time until, at length, I settle back into *now* in the center.

My little vigilant candle burns out and leaves me in darkness. It bided by me until it fulfilled its purpose, then left me without regret.

I close my eyes and meditate.

How did I come to be here? Meditating, time drifting, sitting in darkness in a cave in Utopia, a hundred millennia from the moment of my birth. The swirl of events in my life amazes me. But even more, I'm amazed by the events of the millions of billions of creatures' lives on this earth, and the innumerable beings spread across the universe. Why should I be devoted to my one tiny life? Why *not* choose any of those other lives to be devoted to? Is there any life

more unique, more special than my own, to better deserve my devotion?

Confused, I can't know what Teacher wants me to know. I can't see what devotion he sees. How could I? Teacher is Teacher and has been Teacher forever. He never was without devotion, it seems. Born devoted. So surely, he is devoted to his life's purpose. How many thousands of years has he taught, patiently shepherding disciples toward their future? As he shepherds me. He is devoted to me, teaching me bliss. As he was devoted to Lani and Bram, when they found him. As he is devoted to God.

Shall I ask God?

So, God... dear God... what is devotion? You, who are the goal of devotion so often, must know. But first, tell me why I should add my feeble offerings to you. What purpose is served? Do you *need* my devotion? Would the creator of all beings, in all times, even notice my weak, flickering attention? Is it possible that my devotion would mean anything of significance to you?

And yet, would devotion to anyone lesser be worthy? No, I admit, only God is worth my time. I wouldn't be satisfied with less. The truth is what it is — only God is worthy.

I surrender to the inevitable, only God is worthy.

I surrender my questions.

I surrender my self.

I surrender.

I...

• • •

Silence. Unbroken, peaceful, beautiful, timeless, silence.

• • •

Without questions.

• • •

Eventually, I become aware of the infinity of silence. It's momentous that I am aware *of* something, beyond being simply aware. Quietly, faintly, I feel *warmth* in my heart... God answered me. Not with the fruit, but with the planting of devotion's seed. Nurturing the seed, I will grow devotion entirely, my own way.

I stand, unsteady, and feel my way in the dark to the opening of my cave, and slip outside. In the predawn quiet, the hum of my name is alive. The hum arises in a song so vivid it enlivens all my senses. I hear the song of my name become a thousand-voice chorus. My heart feels awash in red, orange, and yellow. And my fingertips radiate the heat of my new devotion.

In the rising light, I notice my hands. They are different, older. They have aged... I have aged. How old am I? How long was I in silence? How much time...? I stare at my hands for long minutes, discovering whose they are. Light flows in the space between them and radiates up my arms into my spine, down my legs and into my toes, into my heart, into my mind.

I am a thunderbolt! I am lightening!

I run to Teacher's home, the Utopia-flowers' path racing to keep up. I find Teacher performing his morning sun-salutation with Riyadh at his side, as I hoped and wanted. My — years? — in the cave set the direction of my devotion. Now when I look at Riyadh the warmth in my heart throbs. My lightening light rushes across the garden and into him. He smiles. *Now* I know I can honor my love for Riyadh and not lose the honor due myself.

"Ah!" says Teacher.

• • •

Later, I hold Riyadh in my arms. *I have aged*. I shed my childhood.

Riyadh says, "Mo?"

“Yes?”

“Mo, let me tell you about *my* family’s gift. It is not unlike your own. We are travelers too. But not time travelers.” He pauses. “You say you are like a spider on a web of time, or, like a river flowing toward some destiny that you cannot see.

“Yes.”

“Ah. Hm.” Riyadh clears his throat. He says, “Before he died, my father, Thomas, and mother — Neeva — taught me to travel across *possibilities*. Sideways, tangent, to your web... other webs exist. Webs of creations that *could* be, if we knew them.

“Most people are unaware that these other potentials exist side by side with the lives they live in. You travel back and forth... I travel side to side.”

He stops. For a moment, I think this is the only explanation he will give. But I’m learning to wait for Riyadh’s words.

“Right now,” he says, “In the web next to ours, another version of Riyadh and Mo hold each other, he explaining himself to her. But something is different. They make some other choice, something small and insignificant. Small *now*. But you know, don’t you Mo, how a choice will lead to vast differences, given time?”

“Yes,” I say, remembering.

“Ah,” says Riyadh, “I see you do. So, my gift... I... I have the gift to know and visit the other universes created by these other choices, these other webs.”

I say, quietly, “And do you still love me in these other possibilities?”

He smiles, briefly. I adore these glimpses of joy that he occasionally lets out. “In a multitude of them, yes. But the choices are infinite.”

“And knowing these other choices, you choose to be with me here, now?”

“Yes.” He pauses. “I choose to follow this river, even though I know other rivers.”

After a long time, I say, “And do you know where the other choices lead in their future?”

“No, Mo, No. That is *your* gift.” Then Riyadh asks, “Is it possible for you to take me time traveling? I... want to meet your parents, Bram and Lani. Could you take me to that time?”

I hug him so tightly I take my own breath away. “Yes, I believe I could,” I say.

• • •

Before we travel home to Lani and Bram, Teacher calls us to his room, his space. He says, “I will not see you again before you go. I prepared a gift.” On his lap he holds a wood box, about a foot long, carved with the image of a sequoia tree. The tree's trunk is delicately etched with hundreds of animals. He lifts the box's lid and tenderly takes out a scroll of parchment.

“I remember a poem from your era, Mo, beautiful and useful to study. I transcribed it here and added my commentary. This poem is wise. Each phrase carries timeless wisdom to help live God's will. This teaches that *joy* is the nature and purpose of life. This speaks pure wisdom, easy for anyone to learn.” He hands the scroll to us.

“Teach this poem to children,” he says.

We unroll it and read:

*Row, Row, Row Your Boat  
Gently Down The Stream  
Merrily, Merrily, Merrily, Merrily  
Life Is But A Dream*

.....

*The first line teaches us to be active in life. 'Row' means Action. It says three times the importance of Action. While we are human, Inaction cannot bring success. We want to avoid Inaction, since Inaction is **not doing** what **should** be done. But we shouldn't confuse Inaction with Non-Action. Non-Action is complete silence, as we experience in meditation. Non-Action is a communion with God.*

*'Boat' means human life, the vessel of the soul. The first line teaches us to row 'Your' boat. Meaning, follow your own destiny and not another's. Devotion to others allows us to enjoy their destinies while honoring our own destiny at the same time. But first, we must devote ourselves to row our own boat, and fulfill our own destiny, the one God gave to each of us alone.*

*The second line teaches us to live 'Gently' and not struggle in life. Struggle is unnecessary. God doesn't struggle to create, so God's creation needs no struggle to receive God's blessings and support. The 'Stream' of life carries us where we need to go, as fast as is needed. We only need to let go of struggle.*

*Perform action, devoted to your own destiny, without struggle. Struggle is the opposite of God's intent.*

*The third line exults in the joy of life. 'Merrily' is repeated four times, a chant, to praise God and all creation in song. Life is joy.*

*The last line teaches a subtle and sublime lesson. From this poem, we first learned the importance of Action, Non-Action, and Devotion; then we learned to let life Flow; and then learned Joy. We now learn that creation is a dream. It will fade when the dreamer awakes. What then, is the purpose of life, if we know it will dissolve?*

*The answer is this: the purpose of life is the growth of happiness. That is all. Remember 'Merrily, Merrily, Merrily, Merrily'! A child who builds a sand castle enjoys the time spent building, even though the tide washes it away. Was her day in the sun wasted? No, because the purpose was not the sand castle. The purpose was her happiness this day.*

•••••

*Let's praise the author of this poem. All wisdom can be found in it.*

• • •

In the morning, Riyadh and I follow a path the flowers create, leading us away from Teacher's home. We walk for hours, and eventually we come to a hilltop where we feast on an uninterrupted view of Utopia.

"Here. We should travel from here," says Riyadh.

I sit on the grass and look at the scene. In the far distance Teacher's giant trees are tiny dots at the edge of our sight, fading in and out of visibility. Utopia is as populous as the world in my own time, I've learned. But I can't see settlements, even from here where our view stretches for dozens of miles.

Utopia has no cities as I knew them: humans densely packed into small areas separated by wide expanses of uninhabited land and ocean. In Utopia, people are evenly spread over the world they have cultivated and perfected. People in my time crave wilderness apart from their crowded lives. But here, now, the world itself satisfies anyone's desire where people already live. Whatever environment one could want exists here. If not, Utopia happily responds to the new desire, creates a new place, and harmoniously blends it in with what already exists. Every home fulfills the needs and wishes of the people within, completely, instinctively, and spontaneously.

And so, our vista appears to be an unspoiled landscape. But we know there are thousands of people's homes within our sight. Somehow Utopia has absorbed them into the natural flow of the land.

"Ready?" Riyadh asks.

"Yes. Come sit on my lap." He's reluctant to wrinkle his clothes, but I grab him and hold him like a child, as Lani and Bram held me when I was young and traveled with them.

He laughs.

I say, "Close your eyes and meditate. Be as you are when you travel sideways to other possibilities." After a minute, his thoughts are in mine. I see his universe of alternatives! And he knows my web of time.

I think, *travel...*

• • •

We arrive at the reunion grounds, surprising me. I intended to travel to Bram and Lani, but we appear to be alone. "It must be a reunion day," I say, "But people should be here by now."

We walk to the giant sequoia. Then I see Lani sitting silently with her back against the tree, holding Bram in her arms. They are old... at least one hundred ten, or one hundred twenty, maybe more.

They look up, see us, and smile. My heart overflows with love for them. A dozen years passed for me, but for them fifty years or more must have gone by... without me!

I rush to them and hug them tight, not wanting to let go. "Mom, Dad... this is Riyadh."

Bram and Lani grin enigmatically and a glance passes between them. "Hello, Riyadh."

Riyadh has a distant look on his face. Not understanding his expression — I know he will explain later if he can — I say, "Uh... Riyadh, these are my parents, Lani and Bram."

"Ah, yes... yes. Hello Lani... Bram. Mo described you, younger, but perfectly. I would recognize you at any time." He hesitates. "I'm sorry for my confusion, I have never traveled in time before... it is much... different — sorry, I must not be making sense."

Lani says, "Riyadh, we understand. We knew your parents, Neeva-Dita and Thomas, when we were with Teacher in Utopia."

I'm thrilled. It never occurred to me that, in all the millennia Teacher must have taken

students, our four parents could possibly have been with him at the same, overlapping, time.

“Mo, it’s good you came today,” says Bram. “I wouldn’t want to leave this Earth without seeing you again, young like this. But you’re no longer a child, are you?”

“Dad, oh!” I realize, finally, why they are here at the reunion tree. Not because this is a reunion day, but because it’s the time Bram selected to drop his body... to die. “Riyadh, how did you know?”

“I didn’t know, Mo. You chose the moment. But I suppose... I suppose I chose the possibility.”

“The art is in the choosing,” Lani says.

Bram says, “Mo, help me up.” He is more fragile than I imagined. I help him stand and he leans his frail weight against me.

“Take me to the hill,” Bram says.

“No, Daddy, I can’t.”

“It’s all right, child. Come, you know this is the right time. You know it is.”

I cry softly as Bram’s time slips through my fingers. “Yes, I know,” I whisper.

“Then, come. Let’s go.” He stands up straighter and laughs robustly, just long enough to comfort me, then he sinks against me again.

• • •

Reluctantly, I carry Bram in my arms up the hill to a sacred place, a clearing where he says he first traveled in time. I lay him down and Lani kneels alongside. Riyadh and I turn away and begin gathering wood for the pyre in silence. But I can barely see through my tears. When I return, Lani and Bram are locked in a celestial gaze with one another and do not notice me. I pause, and begin laying the sticks in a pile.

Without another word spoken, we raise the wood mound. It is ready. Bram looks away from Lani — he is ready too. Together, we lift Bram up and sit him on top of the wood. He looks at each of us in turn and smiles.

Then he lies down, closes his eyes, and sighs.

Bram is gone.

Each of us lights a twig and lays it in the tinder at the base of the pyre. The thin sticks catch, then the thicker branches, until the whole wood pile with Bram's empty body is absorbed in flame. We stand as close as possible, allowing the heat to singe us, timelessly allowing the day to pass around us, until all that is left is fine ash, cool enough to touch.

Lani kneels in front of the remaining ashes, and with her hands she scoops out a deep hole from the soil. She has Bram's canvas bag of seeds and bulbs and cones, and she tenderly empties everything into the hole. She covers it all with Bram's ashes, and then soil, working with her own aged bare hands.

"Bring water," she says. Riyadh looks around, and quickly strides off to the nearby creek, stripping off his shirt. He returns in a minute with his shirt tied into a makeshift waterskin, full and soaking. Lani takes it and gently drizzles the water over all she has planted, and soaks the ground all around.

She stands and smiles.

Riyadh asks, "Lani, what will you do?"

"I will go be with Teacher. I have more work to do there — more rites to write — until it is my time to join Bram again. That will not be long."

We hug tightly, Lani holding my embrace as long as I want, until I'm finally ready to loosen my grip. Then she takes a step back, shimmers, and disappears into Utopia.

• • •

*“Dad, do you wonder about your future... your own death?”*

*“Not any more.”*

*“Aren't you curious?”*

*He said, “Let me ask you... if you knew how and when you will die, what would you do differently, now?”*

• • •

“Riyadh, my intensity couldn't be more... my intensity of devotion... for you and Lani and Bram, even Bram still, even now... I know Teacher wants me to follow this... this love. I want to have a child with you, I want your life — our life — to be inside me. I want our devotion, our love, to grow more and more — more and more. And Riyadh, love, I want our child to know his grandparents, all of them, the way children in Utopia do, raised by us all, the way a blessed child should... our blessed child! Oh, Riyadh, my heart couldn't hold more feeling. My tears, these tears, come up from my heart, overflowing. This is what I want: I want our child to be born in Bram and Lani's time, years ago when they were still young enough to be vibrant and alive for our baby, and for me! — *I'm* not ready to let them go. I want to live more years with them. They were young then... I was only a child! Let's go back, let's travel back twenty years — no, forty years — that's how old they should be — they are — if I had never left. *I* skipped ahead forty years, not them. I want — I need — to go home. Let's go back and live. Let's be united *then*, you and I, let's have our child *then*, let's live *then*, at Bram and Lani's home, at my home. It'll be *our* home, as it was for me long ago, but now it will be with you and me and our baby and Lani and Bram. We'll find Thomas before... before he died, and bring him and Neeva-Dita... will they come? Oh, Riyadh, dear, let's go now, let's go!”

## [ Part Five ]

Lani, Thomas, and I float in the pond. The water buoys my bloated abdomen and relieves the weight of the baby inside me.

I say, "Lani, when I was born, you were older than I am now. How did you manage with this weight?"

"I felt young carrying a baby. The weight didn't bother me."

"But did the wait bother you? To be without a child for fifty years before I was born? My longing for this child is intense, I can't wait to begin."

"That was what I felt when I carried you, Mo... you wanted to rush out, to get started. I felt that."

Treading water nearby, Thomas says, "Ah, Mo, baby inside is feeling how? Awake? Comfortable? Ready to come?"

"Awake, comfortable... snug," I say, caressing my stomach.

"Ah. OK. Snugly. Not ready to yet come, then. But you? Is mommy Mo ready for baby to be coming?"

Lani says, "Thomas, this is how you pestered me when I was pregnant with Mo. I wanted Mo to come out just to make you stop asking me questions!"

“Ah, it’s true. I should be woman. I like the babies. I regret I am not able to be making my own. Maybe next time.”

I say, “You like babies only because you haven’t felt the discomfort of carrying one inside of you.”

“Or the pain of pushing it out,” Lani says, glancing at me.

Thomas says, “Ah. You think I am not knowing. But I feel them. I feel all the babies and the mommies I deliver. They feel me too.” He laughs. “They are knowing me when they come out before they are knowing you. The first mommy they are seeing is me, not you!”

Neeva, Riyadh, and Bram stroll over the rise and down to the edge of the water.

Bram says to me, “You have been in there for hours! Come out now. We walked through the garden and picked the food for dinner. It’s your turn to chop the vegetables.”

“Cabbage?” I say, “Again?”

“Sorry.”

“Then I’ll stay here and float,” I say.

Lani says, “Pregnant ladies think they can do whatever they want.”

I don’t answer, except to smile and float on my back, leaving my belly protruding above the water line. I refuse to look at them and shut my eyes.

Thomas says, “Ah. Well. OK.”

• • •

When they disappear over the rise their laughter and chatter recedes. I wrap myself in the quiet. But after a minute I feel I am being watched, and open my eyes. Riyadh stands on the bank of the pond, observing me silently, thoughtfully, reminding me of the first time I saw him in Utopia.

He says, "You are much fuller, Mo, more than I've ever seen you."

"No kidding."

"I don't mean your stomach... I mean *you* — your soul." He wades into the water, fully clothed. Ripples of water spread from him out toward me as he walks deeper and deeper. "Mo, I didn't think it was possible, but your devotion to this baby, and to me, fills you with grace. This family time somehow makes you richer inside." He is in water to his chest and starts to swim gently toward me. "You are unfolding in special ways, Mo. When I travel to other possibilities, few versions of you are as beautiful as this one." I smile. "I am surprised how unique *this* possibility is. More than unique... *central* somehow."

Riyadh is beside me now, and I turn my head and kiss him. I say, "I drew you into my spiderweb, my fly. You are seeing my time web, of course with me in the center. My past and future stretch in all directions from my present."

He floats onto his back beside me and takes my hand. He says, "Yes... but the side webs *I* see react to you here, now, as a center as well. This path you are on..."

"*We* are on..."

"No. *You* are on... this path is unique among a universe of uniqueness."

"You, my love, are biased."

"Thank God."

• • •

We lie on the pond's shore, drying in the late afternoon sun.

"Riyadh, tell me more about these other possibilities."

"No, there's no purpose."

"They are a part of you, Riyadh. I see it in your face, sometimes. A strangeness, a

disorientation. Teacher and Neeva mentioned it once, before I met you.”

“Ah. It has been a problem for me.”

He pauses, then says, “OK, listen... when you crawl your web, you see things that might be, or would have been. I think you visit different possibilities, too, yes?”

“Different *future* possibilities, yes.”

“And,” Riyadh asked, “Different past possibilities that lead to now?”

“My spiderweb has *now* at the center with an infinite number of threads and paths leading to it from the past.”

“Hm. Yes. But don't those different pasts create different *nows*? If there can be different *futures* then, to someone from the past, our *now* is just one of many possible *nows*.”

“I... I suppose that's true.”

“OK. This is where my traveling is different from yours, my love. I can't see forward into the future, like you. And I can't visit the past except, of course, in my memories back along the one path I took. But this moment, this *now* between the past and the future, is wide and multifaceted for me. I can see clearly into the other *nows*, and travel to them.

“Imagine the peripheral vision of an iguana. Eyes on both sides of his head? Great for looking sideways, but not much good for seeing what is right in front of him. And worse than the poor iguana, I see *several* other possibilities simultaneously. Sometimes the differences are jarring.”

He stops speaking for a moment. I stare into the distance, not seeing directly. Instead, my peripheral vision takes all of my attention. His description of his traveling has enlivened my own sideways senses. “I think I'm beginning to understand.”

“Hm. Yes,” Riyadh says. “And there is one other important difference. When you travel,

your life runs tangentially to the paths in your spiderweb. In a sense, you are only *visiting* those strands of time. Because inside you, for you alone, your time moves ahead along its own timekeeping. Regardless of the paths you visit and take yourself to, you have one, overriding, path that moves into the future — *your* path, from *your* past, into *your* future — one step at a time.”

“Yes, that’s my river.”

“And this is the other difference for my traveling... I do not just visit. The other possibilities that I see are present here and now and full. When I see them, I live them. I am not moving tangentially, I am moving inextricably bound to these other possibilities. Just as surely as I live *this* possibility here and now with you, I live the *other* possibilities as well. The difference is where I choose to be focused.”

I consider what he says. “Riyadh, why do you go? Why focus on the other possibilities?”

“Ah. Yes. It’s simple, you see. Traveling sideways lets me live my life without the consequences of my mistakes. If I don’t care for how this *now* is going, I just... ah... leave. The separation between possibilities is thin and delicate. It is easy to slip sideways, away from unpleasantness.” He pauses, then says, “I have struggled with this all of my life.”

“Why is that a struggle?”

He winces. “I have learned — painfully — that I can’t turn away from my responsibilities. Even though I am *able* to focus on more agreeable possibilities, I always see the less-agreeable possibilities in my sideways vision. I know that I have left behind unresolved mistakes and problems. That, for me, is unbearable, being focused away from — ignoring — the suffering of people I love.”

I lie silently for a long time, then say, “Riyadh, you honor me. Of all the possible places

you could be focused, you are here with me now.”

“My pleasure, truly. I focus here without regret.”

“Riyadh?”

“Yes?”

“When we were with Bram, before he... died... what did you see? You looked uncomfortable. Not disoriented. Confused, maybe? What did you see?”

He doesn't speak at first. I believe he is looking sideways at other possibilities to decide how to answer. He says, “I saw our baby, grown up, there with us. I knew, somehow, that he was our child. Other people were there that weren't with us before, I believe they were family. What — confused — me was not that another potential reality existed. That is normal. But I was certain I saw a possibility I will live *in addition* to living this one. But next time the other possibility will be my focus.”

“Déjà vu?”

“More. I now believe that I saw the future... our future. A future with our son... a son who grew up knowing his grandparents. Now I know this future will come only because you and I traveled back to this time to live, and grow, and be together. So, it was a possibility, and a future, all together at once. And even more, even more, this new possibility could not exist at all except you made it so. You created this new, wonderful possibility for me because you changed the *past* of that future. A new *now* will exist for me — for us.

“Mo, you lead a powerful path. The flowing river of your life is a mighty force and it is a privilege to walk at your side.”

The enormity of his gift and insight moves me. This long flow of words has been difficult for him. And now I realize I've been selfish these months. We came here because of my desire,

but Riyadh has his own needs too. He has his own desires. I say, “What you gave me is magic. I want to give you back some magic.”

The sun is low and we sit on the grass watching the coming sunset. I say, “Love, you traveled with me a few times, but this time will be different.” Riyadh slides over and looks dubiously at my stomach. I laugh, “I’m afraid I’m too large at the moment for you to sit on my lap! But come close and hug me. We won’t travel anywhere this time. We’ll just hover over my time web. Come see and feel what it is like.”

We close our eyes and his mind meets mine. I spread out my web and let us become unstuck. We float in non-time... not traveling and not attached to the time web. I feel Riyadh’s mind exult at the freedom and absorb the scenes in the web below. I let his mind steer us wherever he wants, for as long as he likes. And when he is ready, I drop us back into our time and stop.

I whisper, “You can learn to disengage yourself, like this, from your sideways vision. It will help you be more comfortable. I’m sure of it.”

“Mmm... Oh...” he says, still glowing from the trip. Perhaps it is the light of the sunset?

“Yes, I’m sure of it,” I say. But I feel something else. “Riyadh, our baby son wants to come out now.”

• • •

Thomas and Neeva prepare a birthing place on the veranda. It overlooks a part of the garden that Bram — for the moment — planted with the tulips I love.

My labor comes and goes several times. Thomas tells me “walk, walk, walk.” When I’ve had enough — more than enough — walking he tells me “sleep, sleep, sleep.” On the veranda I lie as comfortably as I can on my side, trying to sleep. Failing that, I close my eyes to meditate.

“No traveling during birth!” Thomas chastises me. “This is one thing you will not to be skipping ahead to the end. Eh, OK? If you are wanting my help you must be staying where I am.”

I keep my eyes open, and think of the baby. Immediately his mind comes to mine. I've felt his moods and feelings before this, but for the first time I know his clear thoughts. He is patient and strong, this one, like a powerful animal in an ancient forest. Carefully, he waits for his moment, prepared to move quickly and forcefully if he must. But he will come out when *he* is ready.

His thoughts are beautiful. He is still seated in Heaven, but his eyes are fixed on Earth. He sees me in his thoughts and I feel his attention fall on me. The patient ancient forest animal is ready to be released. I inhale sharply at his power.

“Tightening? A contraction?” Thomas asks.

“No...” I try to answer. The baby's thoughts are focused on conquering my birth canal. I assure him that the way is open and I welcome him into the world. “Please come,” I think to him, “We want you here with us. It is a good place to be.”

• • •

And our baby is born, but Thomas is not the first to see him. After endless naps and endless laps around the veranda, the *baby* decides it is time. I am walking with Riyadh in the garden when our baby picks a spot inside the eastern edge of the fence, as the sun rises. He breaks his water and his mind tells me that he is coming now, no more waiting. The contractions are steady, regular, and powerful. I hold onto the trunk of a small tree and Riyadh lowers me to the ground. We know we will not go back to the veranda... the baby wants to be alone with us here. Then our son, wet and strong, bursts into the world, wriggling into the soil among the soft

flowers. Riyadh lies next to me, the baby in between, and we're scented by earth and flowers, glowing in the sunrise.

Bram discovers us and calls the others, "Look what's bloomed in my garden!"

"Ah! Hey! A baby."

Thomas and Neeva and Lani and Bram lie down, hugging and encircling us. It begins to drizzle a warm rain, turning the soil to mud. Riyadh and I hug the baby closer to keep him warm.

Thomas asks, "What name for baby?"

Riyadh and I think for a moment and say simultaneously, "Bear."

Then Bear's grandparents dance around us celebrating, smeared with mud and rain.

"We all need a nap," says Neeva.

• • •

The years pass quickly. Bear grows and Riyadh blossoms, smiling frequently and becoming playful, especially with Bear. Lani, Bram, Thomas, and Neeva are parents for Bear as much as Riyadh and I. Bear learns to time travel and possibility travel, and makes friends and playmates in several times and threads of possibilities. Bear merges the gifts of our families inside him, and masters them. He is at home wherever and whenever he is.

Family reunions overflow into our home, and this becomes a gathering place for people from many times and possibilities. We are enriched and alive. When I grew up here, this was a place of quiet and peace. But now our home is a dynamic caucus. Guests — family — come and go. They stay with us for days or weeks or months. Years ago, Thomas and Neeva seemed like guests to me, but they have become part of the permanence of our lives. Now this is their home too.

One day we are strangely alone, the seven of us, eating and laughing. We're rich with

history, future, potential, and possibility. I discover we're surprisingly human. Bliss and satisfaction and fulfillment glow inside me and I know that this is what I wanted when I traveled back here with Riyadh. Inward, my Mmm-Oh name hums and exults. Outward, my devotion blossoms and yields this vibrant fruit of life.

I have not traveled for months, nor have I felt the need to. Everything I desire comes to me on its own. I finally understand Bram and Lani's life choices.

I say, "Mom? Dad? Long ago you said you are proud of the lives you lead. That you feel you use your gifts of time travel well. I didn't understand then."

"But now you do?" says Lani.

"I'm happy being here, now."

"Good," says Bram, "But there is more to it. We're not inactive. We are extremely active in creation, but centered. From this moment flowing outward, peace and joy radiate in every direction in time..."

"And possibility..." says Bear. Riyadh and I look at him proudly.

I say, "I tried to change the world by traveling far back in time. Millions of years ago I tried to make one small thing better, to prevent stress and disaster today — to keep the pain from growing at all. But my mere presence disturbed the balance. It was frightening."

"You weren't prepared to take responsibility for the future of humanity," Bram says.

Yes, that was true... then. But today I *am* prepared. I've become so much more than I was: Riyadh gave me wholeness... Bear leapt from inside me and became a beautiful young man. They are magnificent and I know I can do no wrong. I know it. I can create anything. Not because I am perfect or arrogant, but because when I survey the world and its future, I see — humbly — that there is no such thing as "wrong." *Every* future is as beautiful as another. God

spun *every* thread of the web. *Every* thread is blessed. And I have free will to follow any thread I choose.

And yet, even though every thread is blessed, I still have preferences. I prefer to be with Riyadh and Bear, with Bram and Lani, and with Thomas and Neeva. I prefer to have known Teacher.

How strange for God to have a preference, to place me here and now. In all of God's infinity, is this the one most beautiful thread for me to live in?

It *is* difficult to imagine a more beautiful life.

But a tickle at the back of my mind tells me that more *must* exist — God's universe has no limit. And ever since Teacher sent me on this path of devotion, I *did* find more and more refined beauty in creation. I suppose I *always* knew God would offer me more to find, if I knew where, and how, and when to look.

And if God has put this... this... *more*... this greater thing I am to find... if God already has this available, then I should be able to find it. I just need to turn my attention to it, to wherever and whenever it is.

The spiderweb of time is suddenly bewildering. Why has this never occurred to me? Changing the future is indistinguishable from merely moving my awareness to a different thread! Nothing actually has changed, except my attention. The threads leading into the future that I did *not* take, still exist. I only moved my focus away.

What is this? Its not traveling, not exactly. It's... it's...

“Now *there* is an expression I have never seen on *your* face.”

I look up at Riyadh, questioning.

“Confused,” he answers.

“I... it’s nothing, Riyadh, love.”

“Hmm. OK. But let me know when the ‘nothing’ becomes a ‘something.’ Yes?”

• • •

Years pass. Bear is mature now and considering his future. Riyadh has recaptured time with Thomas and Neeva. Bram and Lani are aging... but they are not nearly old enough to want to drop their bodies. Everything is as it should be.

Except, my ‘nothing’ does not go away. Some seed planted itself inside me. It’s dormant at first but it swells, shifts, turns. What is this? Some desire for more? More what? My heart already overflows in tidal waves, humming the music of a hundred voices. Angels seem to surround us here, praising and blessing our lives. We live with the gifts of saints, and yet I desire more?

Finally, the family rescues me from my confusion. One evening, they surround me and Lani speaks for them. She says, “Mo, you need something more, something we cannot give. Go see Teacher, alone, and let him guide you again.”

“But...” I begin.

Bear says, “Mo, Mom, Mother. Go.”

[ Part Six ]

Kneel. Dig. Plant. Cover. Water. Move...

Kneel. Dig. Plant. Cover. Water. Move...

Kneel. Dig. Plant. Cover. Water. Move...

Kneeling in Teacher's garden, I see my hands planting, in the simple act of making flowers grow. I have been in Utopia with Teacher for twelve years, tending his garden. I do only what he wants and serve him completely. My desires are his. My breath is his. My touch, my sight are his.

And now I see my hands. They are shining and alive, all that I touch is shining and alive.

I see the garden and flowers and blossoms and leaves and stems.

I see the trees and bark and trunk and wood and roots.

I see the outside and color and texture and shape.

I see with refined vision.

I see fragrance.

I see sap rising.

I see molecules, atoms, particles, and inward beyond.

I see I am a speck on a planet, floating in a vast space, in a galaxy of stars, in a universe of

galaxies, in the firmament of universes.

Creation is bright, painted on a delicate cloth curtain with the sun shining behind, illuminated by God. The curtain's threads are each connected, nothing separate from another, everything created from the same cloth, created from God.

The moment is still. I inhale and exhale. My breath makes the cloth flutter and I delight at the delicate and subtle tapestry of creation. Teacher says what is simply true, "Mmm-Oh, look at yourself. Look at your *self!*"

Suddenly I am the curtain. I am creation. All of creation is me. Whatever I thought I was before, was illusion. This is reality. I am reality. The illusion of the curtain no longer blocks my view. I see God in full light...

I tell God, "*What I Am* harmonizes *What You Are.*"

Truly, life *is* but a dream.

Teacher begins to hum... "*row, row, row your boat...*" The notes make me, the curtain, ripple. The flow of his song tickles me and my laughter tugs the threads of creation. The fibers are strong and I thrill at my power and delicacy.

As Teacher spins his melody I try to unstick myself from the time web. But the web is woven into the fabric of creation. The future and past are more curtains of illusion. And Riyadh's possibilities? They are woven here too, each possibility is another layer of cloth fastened to the next, held in the folds, rolling and billowing in the same ripples as this, each reality nearly the same, yet so subtly, so profoundly, different.

Teacher says, "Mo is Mo is Mo is Mo?"

My eyes open wide with realizations about Teacher. I hug him breathlessly and my words spill out, "Oh! Oh, Teacher... can there be anything left hidden? Can there possibly be more to

live for? My life goes on, even though I merged with God. What more can there be beyond this? Why have I not... died?" The word sticks in my throat, and we laugh like children at the fiction of death.

Teacher asks, "Mo, do you want more?"

"No. I have no more to want. Every want ends here."

Teacher is silent. And he waits.

I exhale. The Earth turns on its axis. A tree creaks in the breeze. My eyes close, then open; a blink. I inhale and say, "OK. *Now* I want more."

Teacher laughs a deep rich laugh, and says as he giggles, "Then there shall be more. After *knowledge*, and *devotion*, and becoming your *self*, then comes *action*. Create!"

• • •

Create? How can I create more than this? All that there is, and can be, is already here. The illusion that prevented me from seeing the connected threads, is gone. But I *do* want more.

This desire for more, even after I am satisfied, is an angel's gluttony. But I cannot stop. Everything I was and learned before has only *prepared* me for my future. My desire is too powerful. My desire to explore, and to play, and to create in this new place with this new vision must be satisfied. I must go on.

"Humans everywhere in all times live with illusion," I say, "Even here in Utopia. I want to remove illusion for them all. How?"

Teacher smiles and answers without words: I cannot force people out of their illusion, they must come to it on their own. As I myself did. Anyone can grow into this, but not everyone is ready. Teacher laughs with me at my insight.

I say, "How can I *help* them come to it on their own?"

Teacher's unmoving eyes penetrate me. He knows that I already know the answer. I've lived close to the answer all of my life. It's what Lani and Bram do. It is what Teacher does. It is what God does every moment for eternity. They simply live it themselves. And wait.

But I won't *wait*. I must *move*. I must *push* people toward this, this vision. I must *do* something. If I had the lever and the place to stand, I could raise the world higher. Everyone would be lifted closer to God. The thought of it fills me with a greater energy and a greater impulse to explode than ever before. I'm as I was as a child, ready to throw myself off of the veranda and into Bram's garden.

I ask myself, 'how? and where? and when?'

I ask Teacher, "How? Where? When?"

Teacher says, "I am honored that your family — and you — want me to teach you further. And I have helped you know more than they themselves ever knew. For them, the curtain of illusion is still drawn over their sight."

"What? I assumed they saw this... my parents for certain..."

"No," Teacher says, "And they won't in this lifetime." After a pause he adds, "Lani might, perhaps."

So I wait. Teacher knows what I want.

He says, "I know another teacher who helps. I cannot give you what she can."

I think it's impossible that Teacher cannot help. But I trust. He touches my hand and says, "Let me take you to her. Travel!"

• • •

I never traveled before with Teacher leading. A quick melting and reshaping and suddenly we are there. I sense we traveled farther and faster than I ever went before.

We arrive at a sea shore. On the beach an old woman sits on a carved wooden bench, alone, watching the waves caress the sand. Teacher says, "There. Go to her and I will come for you later." Teacher flickers and disappears.

I slowly walk toward her, taking one step and then stopping, and then another step. This scene of her is perfect. She is joined together with the shore, and I don't wish to disturb a thing. Even my footprints in the sand seem to lessen the purity. I approach and then notice behind her, beyond the beach, growing right up to the sand... millions of Utopian flowers. They completely fill the landscape to the horizon.

She sees me, smiles, and gestures for me to come closer. I say, "I am Mo." And she answers, "I know. I am Mo, too." I look again at her face and see *my* face. She is me, but much older. She says, "Mo, I'm nearly one hundred twenty years old."

"You are the teacher, someone who helps?"

She says, "I can help *you*. Come. Sit."

I go closer and kneel in front of her — me — and rest my hands on her knees. She caresses my hair and face. Her touch is soft and strong. Her voice reaches into me and when she speaks, her words ring inside of me like an inner thought.

Mo says, "I know what you want to know. And I'll tell you soon. I know how impatient we are!"

"That is all?" I say, "I simply ask you what to do next, and you'll tell me? Is our entire life's destiny and desire as easy as that?"

"Mo, it doesn't have to be hard. Struggle is the opposite of God's intent. But the path I took isn't necessarily the path you'll want to take. There are many possibilities. Let me tell you..."

And simply, like this, we talk. She is a beautiful soul, and intelligent, and full of joy and power and bliss... everything I will be. "And already are," Mo says, knowing my thoughts. The ocean waves wash the beach for hours more. We build wet sandcastles at the water's edge and let the sea push against them, shaping them, knocking them down. We happily build and rebuild, each wave giving us a new opportunity to create again.

Mo tells me what she did next when she was me, and of the things she did from then to now. Learning from her is easy, *gently down the stream*.

Mo says, "Before we were born, if we could have been more patient, God would have shown us the course our life would take. Just as I showed you now. We could have saved ourselves from wandering in confusion... but we rushed in."

This is where my river of life led me... back to me. As when we were children getting a work-note from the future to make life easier, better. The teacher who lifts me highest is myself.

She kisses me on the forehead and says, "You have as much yet to live as you have already lived. I am proud of you, Mo."

We smile.

"I love you."

• • •

Teacher reappears. He stands off in the distance and wanders among the flowers. I say, "Mo, I'm going. Will you be here alone?"

"I am fine," she says. "We have learned to be alone without loneliness. And we still see Bear."

"Ah?" I say, curious, then think, *What is he like now?*

"He is much older than you are," she laughs, "But still frisky. Let me tell you..." and she

pours out the story of his life. I listen astonished and we are both so proud, as only his mothers can be.

I laugh, then sigh.

Mo says, "Let's go to Teacher. We three need to attend to something before you go on your own." I step back and look at her again, at what I will be.

We walk together toward Teacher. Actually, only I walk; Mo's feet do not touch the ground as she floats lightly in the air alongside me. When we get near Teacher, I begin to hear the flowers — they are singing his name. Teacher smiles and asks, "Are we ready?"

"Yes."

"Please allow me to lead." He touches our hands and the three of us travel back in time, slowly. The flowers around us return to their seeds and blend into the past. We drift to Teacher's home and his trees shrink to their seed-cones, over and over. As when I traveled with his trees before, they guide us and honor us, reciting "*Kahawai, Kahakai*" as we pass. The last time I traveled along this path, I forced myself to stop and return to Utopia. But this time I release myself to their control.

And when finally we stop, we arrive at the end of Bram and Lani's lives, at the cremation ground. Neeva is there, and Thomas, and Riyadh, and Bear.

Riyadh says, "Welcome home, Mo," and he enfolds and clasps me to him. He is delightfully beautiful and I caress his face with both of my hands, relearning every nuance. He whispers, "Mo, Bram and Lani will soon drop their bodies..." I look at him, "...again," he says.

"I see," I say, then kneel next to Lani and Bram where they sit on the grass. I embrace them dearly.

Lani finally says, "Mo, love, it is time to gather the wood."

“No more rites to write?”

Teacher answers, “Rituals cannot contain Lani and Bram any longer.”

“*Kahawai, Kahakai*,” I say, nodding at my parents. Bram and Lani appraise me and older-Mo — another me — and are pleased by what they see.

Teacher says, “Come, Bear. Come gather wood with me.” And they go off together, to search for twigs to contribute to the pyre.

I uncurl my arms from Lani and Bram, pause, and walk to the woods too. Rejecting each branch and twig as less than perfect, my walk eventually comes to a high spot on a hill where I can look out over the world.

Far below lies our home, an oasis of peace in the clatter of the strained Earth. Lani and Bram created this haven, day after day, living simply and living in bliss. Their beauty radiates here. Inside their fence Bram and Lani made a beginning, a place where God's finger could touch the Earth. But the fence is a self-imposed limit, too. The world needs much more than Lani and Bram could give.

Humans fill a rare place in creation: evolved enough to know themselves, self-aware, but not sublime enough to be divine. This is a time tilting in the balance, humanity is tilting in the balance, with God's finger on the scale, with me on the tip of God's finger. All we need is the slightest *touch*.

I know the path I'll take into the future.

I finally know.

I turn and stride back to the cremation grounds, gathering any twigs at all — they all seem flawless to me now. By the time I reach the clearing, many more people have arrived... old people and young... relatives... family... from all ages and times and places. They are Bram and

Lani's heritage, their ancestors leading from infinity past, and descendants leading to infinity forward. This ending of my parents' lives is a reunion, a time to be together to renew and honor our family mind and spirit. They are me as I am them. I understand now that I am the first wave of many waves, flowing forward from Lani and Bram into the future. The one wave closest to them, but one wave only, a wave in the sea of our family's soul.

Lani and Bram are locked in a celestial gaze with one another and they do not notice anyone else. I pause and look at Riyadh — he isn't confused this time — then I begin laying the sticks in a pile.

Silently we raise the wood mound, huge with the sticks added by so much family. It's ready. Bram and Lani look away from each other and we know that they too are ready. We lift them up and sit them on top of the wood. In turn they smile at my future Mo, at Teacher, at Bear, at Riyadh, and at me. They bow to the ancestors and descendants, then lie down and close their eyes.

After a moment Lani and Bram reach out, hold hands, and sigh.

They are gone.

Each of us lights a twig and lays it in the tinder at the base of the pyre. The thin sticks catch, then the thicker branches, until the whole wood pile is absorbed in flame, with Bram and Lani's empty bodies. We stand as close as possible, allowing the heat to singe us, timelessly allowing the day to pass around us, until all that is left is fine ash, cool enough to touch.

I kneel down in front of the remaining ashes, and with my hands I scoop out a deep hole from the soil. Riyadh gives me Bram's canvas bag of seeds and bulbs and cones, and I tenderly empty everything into the hole. Mo reaches into the pocket of her blouse and brings out a small cloth bag. I untie the string at the top and look inside.

Seeds. Utopian flower seeds.

Tenderly, Mo drops a few of the tiny seeds in the hole. I cover it all with Bram and Lani's ashes, then soil, working with my own bare hands.

"Bring water," I say. Riyadh takes Bram's empty canvas bag and strides off to the nearby creek. He returns in a minute with the bag full and soaking. I take it and gently drizzle the water over all I planted, and soak the ground all around.

When I finally look up I see Mo as I will be, and Teacher and Riyadh and Bear and Thomas and Neeva and family from all generations and places and times. They all look at me and bow toward me and honor me.

I notice the trees, seemingly for the first time. The trees hold the spirits of my ancestors who were cremated here. Their ashes fed these trees, and became them.

One by one, the people whisper the same: "Mo, this is your time," then shimmer and travel away, all returning to their own time. Until lastly we are left with ourselves... Bear, Riyadh, Mo, Neeva, Thomas, Teacher... and me.

And Mo whispers to me, "Mo, this is your time."

And Teacher whispers, "Mo, this is your time."

And Thomas whispers, "Mo, this is your time."

And Neeva whispers, "Mo, this is your time."

And Riyadh whispers, "Mo, this is your time."

And Bear — sweet Bear — whispers, "Mo... Mom... let's go home."

Thomas, Neeva, Teacher, and Mo kiss me and shimmer away to Utopia. And Riyadh, Bear, and I walk down the hill, toward home.

• • •

We walk in silence. Bear takes Bram's canvas bag and wanders off into the woods to take a roundabout path. He needs to be alone for a while. Riyadh holds my hand, and looks at me expectantly.

"You are radiant, Mo," says Riyadh. "More celestial than in any other possibility."

I am finally in my own time, right where God showed me to be before I was born. I seem to have not traveled at all, but I am not as I would have been otherwise. The spider has returned to the center of her web, transformed.

When we come to the garden, Riyadh opens the gate for me to go in. I stop and wonder at the simplicity of that act... the swinging of a gate on its hinges... and how profound that act will be.

Riyadh and I go in together. When Bear comes we prepare our dinner and eat quietly on the veranda. I think about my life so far, and the life ahead. My elder me, the Mo on the beach, promised me that my life is not even half done. I look at Bear, the man he has become... his time is just beginning.

"Mom?" says Bear, "What will you do?"

I take out the seeds Mo gave to me. I say, "I will plant a garden. With the seeds in this little cloth bag, I will grow Utopia."

Bear says, "In Grandpa's garden?"

"Starting here in this garden... yes."

Bear looks in the bag. "These seeds are so small," he says. "Are they really Utopian flowers?"

Riyadh says, "Yep. But right now they don't have any petals, or..."

"Oh, Dad!"

• • •

I say, "I want both of you to help me. It will be simple. We can start now."

I pour even amounts of the tiny seeds into Riyadh's, Bear's, and my hands. I say, "Scatter the seeds around the garden, wherever you wish. Let them fall where they want."

Without a moment's thought, Bear strolls off to the east side of the garden, to the spot where he was born. He stands in place and turns, throwing the seeds in a circle around him, then walks on Bram's wandering paths and tosses pinchfuls left and right.

I walk west to the top of the hill. I plant all of my seeds here, where I can see the garden, the pond, and over the fence to the rest of the world.

Riyadh stands still, and doesn't plant any of his seeds. When I go to him his face looks as it does when he travels sideways across possibilities.

"Teacher is speaking to me," he says. "He asks if you still have seed cones from his trees."

In my pocket I find two cones, and hand them to Riyadh. He follows Teacher's voice and walks toward the gate.

"Here?" Riyadh asks the voice only he hears. "Ah, over there is better, farther apart... yes." He kneels and digs two deep holes just inside, and on either side of, the gate. He pours all of his flower seeds into the two holes, and on top of the seeds he drops the two sequoia tree seed cones, one in each hole.

"Like this..." He fills the holes with soil. "Thank you Teacher... God bless you." And Riyadh returns his awareness to here alone. He looks at me and bliss flows in my heart. "One tree for Bram and Lani, and one for Neeva and Thomas," he says.

Bear comes to us and asks, "Now what?"

"Now we sleep," I say.

• • •

In the morning, Bear is awake first, as always. Riyadh and I join him in the garden where he is kneeling. He is looking closely at something. Then we see what he sees: the Utopian seeds took root and are pushing shoots out of the ground already. By evening, leaves and buds form. The next day, small multicolored blooms appear.

Over the next several weeks, the garden transforms. The Utopian flowers grow and spread, and begin to shepherd the rest of the plants. They grow where they desire, leaving spaces for the other plants only where the Utopians allow them to be, shaping and sculpting. The garden evolves into a new work of art, and Bram's flowers, trees, and plants flourish magnificently. The garden uplifts our spirits and soothes our aches, cleaning and untangling.

In our garden, Utopia blooms. Quietly, the flowers begin to hum my name. Riyadh says, "Mo, can you hear it? The garden makes a sound... it sounds... it's the sound of my name! I was with these flowers before, at Teacher's home, but this is different. Something special."

"No, Riyadh, love. *You* are changing. You are becoming aware of who you are. It is good to know who you are."

Bear comes to us and says, "Have you listened to the garden?"

• • •

Soon, the garden evolves less quickly and begins to settle down. We find no signs of growth from Teacher's seed cones, but the Utopian flowers left two clearings around the places where Riyadh planted them. The cones are waiting for the proper time.

"Now we open the gate," I say.

• • •

For the next sixty years and more, for the rest of my life, the flowers do their work in the

world. They flow out through the garden gate and over the walls of the fence. They join with the Utopian flowers that stand vigil over Bram and Lani's ashes, and together they plant themselves in all places, populated or remote. They carry themselves to other continents. They thrive everywhere and happily fulfill their purpose, cleansing the world.

Bear releases his ancient inner animal nature and charges through the world, running with the front line of Utopia flowers. He learns from them and fulfills himself.

I did my work: I planted the seed of Utopia and opened the gate. Now I need do nothing but choose *this* possibility for the world and give *this* path my attention and love.

My work is God's work. My time is God's time. I do as God does: the flowers are our lever and we have our place and time to stand. We simply watch the lever move. Spreading out from us in the center, the waves of bliss stretch across the world. The flowers undermine humanity's hatred, repairing the damage, healing. From here, from now, Utopia begins, the eons guided by the rhythm of purity. *Kahawai, Kahakai*. Wave after wave pulses out, flowing forever.

Just as Mo, on the beach, promised me.

• • •

After many years, from the two clearings by the gate, the seed cones that Riyadh planted sprout and begin to grow. They will become the first of Teacher's Utopian trees. This place will become Teacher's home. And Bear will become Teacher.

• • •

Bear, Riyadh, and I climb to the cremation grounds. I am at the end. My river rushes into the sea, yet flows unbroken back to the beginning. I'm here at the finish, and here at the start.

I survey the sequence of moments since my birth, and they appear to be no more than

words written on the surface of water. They ripple briefly and disappear as soon as they are read. But now I can write my final moments in air, leaving no trace at all.

I hug Bear. I kiss Riyadh. I lie down, close my eyes, and sigh.

• • •

And become.

— **End** —