



Man of the Clan

A folk tale about
The Little People of the Ozark Mountain

*Stories of an adolescent past,
retold for grown-ups, who still
cherish the magic of those days gone by!*

by

Gary Hutchison



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The Little People of the Ozark Mountains™

Book Two in the Series

Stories of an adolescence past,
retold for grown-ups,
who still cherish the magic of those days gone by!

As told to

Tom Gnagey

[The only known living confidant of the
Little People of the Ozark Mountains™]

Although not entirely necessary,
it will help to have read
Ring of The Farjumpers
before perusing this volume.

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated
to
the child dwelling within us all:

May it survive the denials
of adolescence,
temper the cynicism
of young adulthood,
and
bring smiles and a sense of universal kinship
to our more senior years.

- TDG

**An Opening Word from Jay:
Certain milestones in life just have to wait until the time is
right**

Much to my surprise, I was neither lonely nor sad during those first four months following Twigg's ascension to manhood. That was, I suppose, partly because I had so many fine memories of our summer together. I would replay them over and over again in my mind, admittedly sometimes changing certain parts to make me appear more accomplished or to look more like the hero that every nine and three quarter year old boy longs to be. Mostly, however, I think it was because I took comfort in believing that although my tiny friend was no longer allowed to let himself be seen by a mortal like me, he was, still and all, quite often right there beside me.

I could imagine him standing in the shadow of a cluster of grape hyacinths, arms crossed, the tall point of his brown hat drooping down over its rim, ready to magically jump his way here or there, depending on my activity at the moment. I could imagine him admiring his new red feather of manhood, sprouting backwards from the band on his hat, and see him proudly brushing off his new crimson vest. Sometimes I would see the grass rustle when the wind had been stilled for hours, and I knew it had been him scurrying away.

Occasionally, I would feel the weight of his tiny body on my shoulder, as if, once again, he were perched there as he had been so often in the past. I would stand uncharacteristically still and savor the closeness until the weight lifted and I knew he was gone. More times than I would like to admit, I would suddenly find long lost objects just

sitting there all quite openly in the most unlikely of places. No, Twiggs had neither forgotten nor abandoned me - nor me, him, of course!

I wished there were things I could do for him, but what can you do for a magic guy? Just letting him see me being my usual, happy, helpful self, and doing the things we once enjoyed together was about all I had to offer. I was sure that Twiggs would appreciate that. Occasionally, when I felt sure he was nearby, I would cut a tiny cone of apple with my knife and leave it on the stone step in front of the cabin. When I would return, it would be gone. I'm sure that some would tell me it had been taken by a passing mouse or squirrel, but I choose to believe it had been thoroughly enjoyed by an appreciative Twiggs.

Later on, most all of these occurrences would be verified by Twiggs himself, but that really wasn't necessary. I knew my friend so well I could pretty well imagine his every move. Most of what I will relate here is a blend of what I imagined and what he later reported to me as fact. I shall try to be particularly careful about indicating which is which. If it appears, from time to time, that I am being personally boastful, please remember that I am only recalling these events as seen through the eyes of Twiggs - and sometimes he saw me as being bigger than life.

Looking back on that Autumn - so many years now past - I suppose I spent far too much time fulfilling dreams about my own future, by living them through Twiggs, but certain milestones in one's life just have to wait until the time is right.

Chapter One: One's first kiss lasts forever

It was almost six pm - time for Twiggs and his folks to leave home and head toward the town square to begin the second night of his week-long Ascension celebration.

"I'm as nervous as a mortal," he muttered to himself, as he fussed to secure each and every obstreperous hair into its proper position. He knew he really didn't have to worry about impressing Cinnamon, but yet he did. He had bathed twice, brushed his teeth three times and was again examining them in the mirror, considering a fourth flossing as he heard his mother's call from the kitchen:

"Time to leave, Twiggs."

Yielding to the pressure of the hour, he put down the floss and, instead, squeezed a dab of toothpaste onto his tongue in one final, breath freshening gesture. With one more, quick glance in the mirror, and a more or less self-satisfied shrug of his shoulders, he blew out the candle, patted his big brass button for luck, and joined his parents on the back porch.

"It's such a nice evening, lets walk to the square instead of farjumping," Twiggs suggested.

He truly wasn't sure just why he wanted to put off meeting her, because Cinnamon was just about the only thing he had been thinking about all day. He had written her name in the dirt as he had waited, in hiding, for Jay to appear at the swimming hole. He had carved her name on the big oak tree near look-out point. He had even slipped away early that morning in order to secretly watch her from the grove of

mushrooms behind her home, as she helped her mother hang the family wash on the clothes line.

It had seemed that his heart had been marching at double time all day long. He wondered how you could both want something so very much and yet still make every attempt in the book to put it off for as long as possible. He knew Jay would have had some words of wisdom for him on that subject - Jay had words of wisdom on every subject, of course, whether he knew anything about it or not - but that particular topic had never come up in their many philosophical conversations. Twiggs smiled and shook his head as he remembered about his good, and absolutely unique, mortal friend.

"Tonight's the big night, I guess, isn't it Son," Twigg's mother said, in her ever direct and undisguised, 'how do you really feel about meeting for the first time the girl who will someday become your wife,' manner.

Standing behind her, his father looked down at Twiggs, smiled, shook his head, and shrugged his shoulders as if to say, 'What can I tell you? Your mother will be your mother, you know.'

"Big night?" Twiggs responded as a question with all the nonchalance a red-faced, hyperventilating thirteen-year-old boy could muster.

He felt his cheeks grow hot and he knew he was blushing - not a good thing for someone who was now already two days into manhood.

"Meeting Cinnamon, you rascal," she explained, reaching out from years of habit to muss his hair, and then stopping short as she realized her son was now supposed to be beyond that kind of playful affection.

"Oh, ya. It should be very interesting. Very nice."

He stepped out ahead of his parents so as to hide his ever-reddening complexion, hoping upon hope that the backs of his ears were hidden by his hair.

'Why couldn't she just let it be? Didn't she remember how difficult this whole thing was? Of course, she did, but she was a mother, so, no, she couldn't just let it be.'

Twiggs smiled at that realization, and sighed deeply, shrugging his shoulders and rotating his head in an attempt to

relieve some of the tension. (Little People did a lot of shoulder shrugging!)

It was a beautiful evening - warm enough so no wraps were needed and yet crisp enough so Twiggs would be able to dance the night away without breaking a sweat. His parents sensed an extra spring in his gait. They clasped hands and their eyes met, a smile of pride and understanding passing between them. Their little boy was indeed a little boy no longer.

As was the tradition, most of the town's folk had already gathered in the Bountiful square, awaiting Twigg's arrival. As they saw him and his parents round the corner, they applauded and whistled. That was the signal for the band to start playing, and within a few moments, the quiet gathering had been transformed into a bustling, joyous, frolicking party.

Twiggs dutifully smiled and nodded at each and every one he passed, but his eyes searched the crowd for Gramps. Gramps would be with Cinnamon and her parents and he was the one who would make the all-important introduction. Casually cupping his hand to his mouth and extending his lower lip, (if, indeed, that can be done casually!) Twiggs exhaled upward toward his nose, trying to detect any hint of bad breath. He was sure everyone there was watching his chest palpitate from the now runaway pumping of his heart. He felt light headed.

"Oh no! I don't dare faint. Please, Wise One, don't let me faint!"

Then, immediately ahead, he spied the ever-smiling Gramps, slowly strolling toward them, arm in arm with Gramma. When they met, he and Twiggs hugged in manly greeting, and Twiggs kissed Gramma on the cheek.

That was when he saw her, standing there between her parents, just behind Gramps. She was gorgeous! Her long golden hair glistened in the flickering light from the street lamp above. Her normally pale cheeks were as red as his own. That made him feel considerably better, though he was sure she wore that hue far better than he. She just stood there, hands behind her back, eyes looking down - all quite proper according to tradition - awaiting the introduction.

Although Twiggs had realized there would be no

privacy involved in the meeting, he was taken aback a bit by the hush that fell over the square as all eyes turned his way. You would have thought he was about to receive a stock market tip.

"It is my great pleasure," Gramps began, at first speaking more to the townsfolk than to either Twiggs or Cinnamon, "To introduce these fine young people, who will, in the years ahead, become the parents of our next generation of Bountifilians."

Twiggs thought to himself that Gramps could have talked all night and not have had to mention the reproductive aspect of the thing. How embarrassing! What was he thinking? By that point, Twiggs was certain that the red of his face was an exact match to the crimson of his vest, but what does a guy do at a time like that. He just stands there smiling and nodding, feeling like a trapped and totally ignorant fool.

Then, after a ten second eternity, while the crowd again applauded, and Gramps bowed as if it were all his doing or something, he finally spoke again.

"Twiggs," he said, turning his rotund form sideways so as to allow a view of Cinnamon, "It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you, Cinnamon of the Clan Callbackabee, daughter of Garnet and Sapphire, and soon to be Novitiate of the Order Echolian."

Still taken by her beauty and the rush of the moment, Twiggs just stood there, needing a gentle prod in the back from his father to begin the expected response.

"How ... how do you do. I am honored to make your acquaintance. Please meet my Father, Woodington, and my Mother, Magnolia."

"I am likewise honored. These are my parents," Cinnamon responded, quietly, looking Twiggs in the eyes for the first time.

His heart melted. Her eyes were green - the color of the softest, newest grass of the early Spring. Again, Twiggs just stood there. The ensuing long and awkward moment of silence seemed to go unnoticed only by Twiggs and Cinnamon, and was eventually broken as the parents shook hands and made those first predictable attempts at conversation. They moved away, leaving the two, young

people together there in the light of the street lamp.

When the band began once more, Twiggs at last realized they were alone - well, as alone as you could be with five dozen adults milling around only yards away. Determined not to say something dumb, Twiggs opened his mouth and, of course, said something dumb:

"I saw you hanging up your Father's underwear this morning."

Cinnamon blushed, but understood.

"I know. I saw you out there in the mushroom grove."

"You did! How did you know it was me?"

"Who else would it have been? Between the two clans there are only four of us young people you know. Besides, last summer sometimes I would watch you and your mortal friend playing in the meadow."

"Really. You did that? How ...er ... nice," he said, somewhat haltingly.

What he was really thinking, of course, was, 'How totally embarrassing if she saw us skinny dipping at the swimming hole.'

Sensing his discomfort, she quickly explained:

"Sometimes when I was up on Echo Point, I would look down into the meadow and see the two of you running and climbing trees and things like that ... way off in the distance of course."

Nice try, Twiggs thought, but then, more than ever, he was convinced she had seen him in the altogether.

"Hungry?" Twiggs asked at length, his voice soaring to high C, while attempting to move the conversation in a less sensitive direction.

"Sure, sort of, I guess," she answered, thinking that eating was something which she at least knew how to do a whole lot better than talking to a boy - well a man.

Not knowing if he should take her hand like his parents did, or put his arm in hers like Gramps and Gramma, he just turned in the direction of the tables of food and walked off, hoping against hope that she would follow. She did.

It turned out to be a good move, Twiggs thought. As Jay had once demonstrated to him, when your mouth is full, you aren't expected to talk!

Gradually they did begin talking. Talking led to walking, which led to hand holding, which led to dancing and laughter and singing, and eventually, a very pleasant and comfortable evening, indeed. It was as if they had been made for each other. (Well, they had, of course, but you know what I mean.)

Before either thought it possible, the bell in the steeple was tolling the midnight hour - time for the party to wind down. Sitting in the shadow of the band shell, they watched the last of the blazing fireworks bedeck the heavens above. Then, they silently gazed into the last of the embers from the bonfire, valiantly flickering there, in and out of life.

Although, by that time, they were both thinking along the same lines, it was Twiggs place to put it into words. He wasn't about to just let this moment pass. His throat dry and his heart pounding, Twiggs mustered all of his courage.

"I would very much like to kiss you," he said, choking on each syllable of every word, but nonetheless forging ahead.

"I would very much like you to kiss me," Cinnamon answered, looking into what she had come to think was the most handsome face in all the land.

It was then, they each realized they had no clue as to how a boy and girl actually went about kissing. Oh, Twiggs and Jay had practiced, using apples as substitutes for the girl's lips, and Cinnamon had likewise done her own version on the back of her wrist. Apples and wrists aside, now, it was time for the real thing.

Twiggs moved his face close to Cinnamon's. At least that much he was sure needed to be done. He looked into her eyes. He recalled a discussion with Jay about whether or not one's eyes should be open or closed, but he figured he'd likely miss her face entirely if his were closed. And then there was that nose thing - so he tipped his head to the side a bit. Their lips touched. Hers were so moist and soft. Twiggs hoped his were not harsh or dry or unpleasant to her. He had not thought to prepare them in any way.

Unbelievable as it was, they both seemed to know just what came next. In an all too brief, though wonder-filled moment, it was over, and yet in all of eternity it would never be over, because as everyone who has ever kissed remembers,

one's first kiss lasts forever.

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Chapter two: Each of us must come to define love for himself

It had been a grand week of celebration. Saturday was the final day, and it found Twiggs up with the sun. He was to spend the day with Cinnamon and her family over in their beautiful village of Harmony. It would be his first 'official' visit ever to that little community, even though it lay nestled in the broad valley just beyond East Mountain. Although the two clans were friendly and cooperated in all necessary ways, they maintained very separate ways of life, each pursuing its own mission that had, centuries before, been decreed by the Wise One, himself.

The Dewgoodabees, Twiggs clan, had been given as their mission in life, the job of caring for the mortals in the surrounding Ozark Mountains. It seems that quite soon after the Wise One had created the mortals, He realized, that since they had no magical abilities, it would be necessary for the Little People to watch over them and come to their aid from time to time. So, each and every day, each and every Dewgoodabee past the age of eight, was expected to perform four goodakts – two for their fellow clansmen and two for the mortals. That assignment kept them very busy, and it was the focus of much of their attention and discussion.

Each goodakt had to be something the other person really needed, and it had to be something that would be good for them and others in the long run. Also, what was done for one, could in no way be harmful to any other. The Clan Council, of which Gramps was the leader, kept meticulous

records of these goodakts and each Little Person was expected to check back from time to time, and make sure that things had worked out as well as had been expected. Goodakting was a huge responsibility that Dewgoodabees took very seriously.

As a Man of the Clan, now, Twiggs was expected to perform more complicated and far reaching goodakts, well beyond those which he had been allowed to practice as a child. More than Twiggs had ever imagined, this took a great deal of careful planning and consultation with the wiser old men of the clan. It was so hard to predict just which things would provide long term benefits for all, and which might not.

His typical adolescent idealism prompted him to want to save the mortal's world all by himself. He was, however, gradually tempering that urge, as he learned more about the time proven approaches Gramps called Facilitators. These were Goodakt methods which enabled folks to come to be able to help themselves. There were still times when the Outrights were appropriate too, of course. Outrights were the more direct goodakts or wishgrants that provided some thing or feeling or skill to the person immediately, right there on the spot. They were the kind of goodakts he had been allowed to perform as a child, so he was still more comfortable with those. When he had healed Jay's stubbed toe that very first day the two boys had met, Twiggs had performed an Outright. When he had tried to help Jay and Sammy move the rocks to the dam site, easing their load, that was also an Outright.

Gramps had once illustrated the difference to Twiggs in this way. When you fill a child's toy chest with playthings - that is an Outright. When you give him the desire and skill to make his own toys and games, and in other ways to create fun for himself, that's a Facilitator.

Twiggs was coming to see the values in each, yet still struggled against his first, kind-hearted inclination to just make things easy at the moment for someone by doing an Outright, even when he knew a Facilitator would be of more value in the long run. This, being a Man of the Clan thing, was not easy, but Twiggs was determined that he would do whatever it took to learn how to become the finest, most competent Man, that the Clan had ever known.

The mission of the Callbackabees was not all that clear to Twiggs. He vaguely recollected that it had something to do with the sounds of the universe. He was eager to find out more, and felt sure that on this special day in their village, he would do just that.

Impatient to get on his way, and fully realizing it wasn't entirely proper, he had settled for doing two fairly easy Outrights for the mortals that morning.

One of Old Mr. Cravens' cows had had a calf the night before and the little fellow was too weak to follow his mother all the way back to the barn, so Twiggs had farported it back to the barnyard.

Then, the night before, young Matt Glover had left at the fishing hole, the new rod and reel his parents had just given him for his birthday. He would have been in for more than a tongue lashing that morning if Twiggs had not returned it to its proper place on the back porch. Mind you, Twiggs fully understood that had not helped Matt learn anything useful about being responsible, but it had probably saved a few centimeters of hide on the lad's behind. Sometimes mortal parent attempted to help their children in the strangest and most incomprehensible of ways!

He would handle his goodakt obligations to his clansmen when he returned from Harmony that evening. After a delicious breakfast consisting of two stacks of pancakes and a rick of sausage, Twiggs was ready to leave. He said his good-byes to his parents, and raced off toward Gramps' place where he would receive precise instructions for the day.

Since meeting Jay, Twiggs typically ran from place to place around Bountiful, rather than using his magical nearjumping ability. The townspeople just shook their heads as he would dash by - some obviously thinking it humorous and enjoying it all, while others scowled, clearly indicating a far dimmer view of the young mortal's influence on Twiggs. Some of them had even been heard to mutter phrases of displeasure, such as: "Teenagers!" and "What's this younger generation coming to?"

Undeterred, Twiggs sped on, smiling and waving to all he passed. Twiggs credited Jay with teaching him the value of smiling and waving. "Smiles are every bit as contagious as

the flu, and far more pleasant and helpful," Jay would say.

Gramps was waiting in the rocker on his front porch.

"Good morning, Gramps," came Twiggs' cheery greeting, as he trotted up the path.

"And good morning to you, Twiggs," Gramps replied, an undisguised chuckle in his voice, always tickled to see his grandson on the run.

Gramma opened the front door, offering a dish of freshly baked muffins.

"Got room for a few of these, Twiggs," she asked, knowing full well that the young man was perpetually hollow from head to toe.

"You bet, Gramma. Thanks."

She returned inside, leaving the men to take care of their important business.

"Ready for your big day," Gramps said, not really asking, of course - just getting the conversation underway.

"Boy, am I. Tell me everything I need to know. I really want to make a good impression on Cinnamon and her folks."

"Actually, I have just two pieces of advice, Twiggs. First, resist your urge to ask questions. They will tell you what they want you to know and they respect those who respect their right to privacy. Observe and listen and you will learn all that you need to know."

"Okay," Twiggs said. "That won't be easy, but if you say so, I'll not ask questions. What is the second thing?"

"Just be yourself, Twiggs. Don't try to be more grown up or act smarter or make yourself out to be anything but what and who you are. You are a fine young man - one of finest I have ever known - and that is all you ever need to be."

Flattered and overwhelmed, Twiggs pondered that second directive for a few moments. Since he was not at all sure just who or what he actually was - now that he was struggling to fulfill his new role as a Man of the Clan - he wasn't sure he knew how to go about being himself. Gramps sensed the problem.

"Just do what feels right at the moment. You'll do fine."

Twiggs took some strength from that, though significant doubts lingered.

"You and Cinnamon seem to be getting on well,"

Gramps commented after a moment of silence.

He was obviously fishing for more intimate information, which, on that morning, Twiggs was ever so willing to provide.

"Oh, yes Sir, we are!" he replied, suddenly overtaken again by those special feelings he had only recently begun to experience and still did not fully understand.

"It's just like you said it would be. We like the same things and we never seem to be at a loss for topics to talk about. I can tell she really likes me and, Gramps, I love her so much I can't find ways to tell her. I guess if anything is wrong, it's that - I just can't find words or ways to tell her how much she means to me."

"I'm sure you are doing just fine, Twiggs. It is a grand adventure - courtship. Learn all you can about her and share with her all she wants to know about you. There is just nothing in all of life, like the closeness and openness that flows so freely and honestly between two people in love for eternity."

"It's different, all right, Gramps. You know that Jay is the best friend I have ever had or ever hope to have. I love him. Sometimes I feel that same way about Cinnamon, like she is also a best friend. But then, this love I feel for Cinnamon is somehow very different from how I feel about Jay. It's hard to understand so I can't really explain it. It's very different from what I expected - how I thought I would feel. Right now, it is still all quite confusing, but sometimes I just say, to heck with the confusion, I'll just enjoy it."

Gramps smiled and tweaked his beard.

"I am glad to hear that you think of Cinnamon as a best friend - that needs to come first between mates, I think. If you don't truly like one another first and take time to find that you have lots of things in common, then regardless of the romantic feelings you develop and share, married life will be very difficult."

"But, the Wise One made her and me just for each other - that's what the Scriptures say. So we just have to have a good marriage, right?"

"That is true, of course. Your life together will be all that marriage can possibly be. It is still well to understand how and why that comes about, however, so you can be more

helpful to the mortals who do not have this foreordained privilege of perfect relationships."

Twiggs sat back against the porch rail and settled in to listen and learn from the wise words of his dear old friend.

"Friendship is a two-way street. Two people agree that there are things about one another which they each enjoy enough to pursue a relationship. They enjoy the same activities or ideas or just enjoy one another's company. Sometimes a friendship just stays at the level of like and that is fine. Sometimes, as for you and Jay, it moves on to the level of love. Friendships may just be short lived, lasting only as long as some event or situation lasts, or they may last a lifetime.

Love, however, unlike friendship, is a one-way street and lasts forever. Love is something one person freely feels toward - gives to - another, without expecting or requiring anything in return. When both parties in a relationship - like you and Jay, or you and Cinnamon - each feel love for the other, that is a wonderful added extra. Such mutual love is the most powerful social bond there is. However, love for someone must never require love from someone in return. If it does, it isn't love. We never ask to be paid for our love. Many mortals get into big problems because they fail to understand that."

"Wow! That's a whole new idea. It makes sense though. It explains a lot of things. That's why a mortal boy might say he loves a girl even though she doesn't love him back, but he would never say that he is friends with someone who was not also friends with him. Friendship is two ways and love is one way. Wow! Jay would call that a 'mind-buster', Gramps."

"But how is it that sometimes mortals seem to fall out of love," Twiggs asked?

"Most likely, I believe," Gramps tried to explain, "They were not truly in marital love to begin with. Perhaps their relationship was based either just on mutual romantic feelings or even maybe on romantic feelings and friendship. Those two more surface kinds of affiliations often combine to masquerade as love. A marriage based only on friendship and romance, without love, is a fragile urn that often cracks

under the pressures of the normal problems that necessarily pour into any marital relationship."

"How can I help that from happening for Jay and his wife?"

"Children who come to experience genuine love at home learn that it is a freely given commitment for all eternity. It seems to me that Jay certainly has grown up knowing that kind of love. Jay has also been taught to be a fixer, not given to just tossing out that which is in need of repair. I sincerely doubt if he will experience problems in that area, Twiggs. If he should, just find some way to remind him about the differences in commitment between like and love. He'll understand."

"Like allows for throw away, but love requires repairs."

They sat in silence for a long time - a state of affairs that never bothered either Twiggs or Gramps. They had experienced many such quiet, thought-filled times back when Gramps was preparing Twiggs for his Ascension to Manhood Ceremony. Jay had said that he thought quiet times with a friend showed how you respected each other's rights to have private thoughts and that you trusted your friend enough to just let those thoughts stay undisturbed where they were there inside his mind. Twiggs and Gramps certainly believed that, also.

Twiggs finally spoke. "There must be different kinds of love, aren't there, Gramps?"

Gramps just smiled and waited for Twiggs to go on thinking it out on his own.

"I love Mother and Father and you and Gramma in one kind of a way. I love the other people here in Bountiful, also, but that is a different kind of a feeling. Then there is how I feel about Jay. Up to now, that has been the most special kind of love, I think. I mean, I love my relatives because, well, they are my relatives, and I love the townspeople because they are all precious to me, as is all life. Those are both sort of, well, sort of built-in kinds of love. But I got to choose to love Jay. He wasn't a relative or a neighbor - he was someone I didn't have any built-in reason to love. Jay was the first person I got to love just because I chose to. Does that make any sense?"

"Makes a lot of sense to me," Gramps replied with a most reassuring nod of the head.

"But now with Cinnamon - I do feel she is my friend. I enjoy being with her and doing things with her. She is precious to me like Jay is and yet she is precious in some other way that is different. I can't put my finger on it yet. I know I enjoy the fact that she is a girl - I mean, I really, really do enjoy that! I like to feel her soft hands and cheeks and I certainly like to kiss her. But those are things I like about her. It doesn't seem as if that is really about love. That is more about, I don't know, romance, I guess, is the word you use. ... See, Gramps, it's pretty confusing, still."

"Seems to me you're well on your way to getting it all sorted out, Twiggs."

"So, you're not going to clear up all of these questions for me, are you," Twiggs said, flashing his impish grin up at Gramps' smiling face, and realizing that deep down inside, he had known that all along.

"I couldn't give you the answers to your real questions even if I wanted to," Gramps suggested. "Each of us must come to define love for himself."

Chapter Three: It was a wonderful beginning to a wonderful love.

Twiggs finished off the remaining three muffins, wiped the crumbs from the corners of his mouth with the back of his hand, and was ready to begin his visit to Harmony. He chose to nearjump to the ridge overlooking the town, rather than farjumping right into the grove of mushrooms behind Cinnamon's home. That gave him a little time to make final preparations, which mainly consisted of repeating to himself, 'I will not say anything dumb. I will not say anything dumb.'

One last check seemed in order. Hair slicked back, vest buttoned, and feather smoothed to a perfect point, he was finally ready. He was more nervous than he had expected to be. Up to that moment, his mind had been focused on seeing Cinnamon, but now as the time arrived, the reality of visiting a foreign territory began to set in. He must make a good impression not only to impress Cinnamon and her family, but also to make a good showing as a Dewgoodabee ambassador, of sorts, to all the citizens.

He crossed his arms and nearjumped into Cinnamon's back yard - territory which he had to admit was not entirely new, as he had made several clandestine visits there in the past. He checked his hair one last time as he approached the back door.

Cinnamon had seen him arrive and, smiling her splendid smile, met him on the porch. Twiggs reached out and took her two hands in his, pulling her close and giving her a quick peck on the lips. His suddenly palpitating romantic side really wanted to administer an all out, hold-her-very-

close-and-mingle-their-tongues-heart-activating-lingering-mouth-to-mouth-transfusion, but he thought that would be inappropriate the first time on her back porch.

He was proved right, as at that very moment her father stepped out onto the porch to greet him.

"Well, come in. Come in. Breakfast is a waitin'," he said, motioning the two youngsters inside.

It was a pleasant cottage - much like Jay's house in fact. Unlike Bountifilians, who traditionally hewed their sturdy, yet cozy homes from tree stumps, the citizens of Harmony built their homes from pebbles, mortar, and lumber.

The kitchen table was spread with every imaginable breakfast delicacy, including some dishes unfamiliar to Twiggs. As they ate, Twiggs relaxed, and by the end of the meal, he felt things were going very well. The fried eggplant had been delicious and the rhubarb-strawberry syrup was out of this World. Although the red-eye gravy was not immediately pleasing, Twiggs figured he could learn to like it if required. He was not at all shy about letting Cinnamon and her mother know how much he had enjoyed the meal.

At that point, Garnet, Cinnamon's father, and Twiggs excused themselves to the front porch, while the women did whatever it is women do in the kitchen after breakfast. Twiggs glanced back longingly at Cinnamon as the front door swung closed. Garnet sat in a chair hewn from oak logs - well oak twigs, actually - and puffed on his always unlit, long, fancily carved pipe. Twiggs took a seat on the floor, propping himself up against the railing, much as he had done earlier at Gramps. For the first time in a long time, Twiggs actually felt full! It was a strange sensation but not one he had time to long contemplate.

Twiggs wondered if this was going to be some kind of birds and bees talk, or perhaps one of those 'you'd-better-be-good-to-my-daughter-declarations' he had heard mortal father's often give to the boys who court their daughters. Beginning in awkward silence, it turned out to be neither.

"That's a fine-looking pipe, Sir," Twiggs said, trying to get started, whatever was about to transpire.

"Thank you. It's a mint pipe. It came from the Old Country - across the sea - you know," Garnet explained,

holding it away from his face, and surveying it with a proud and thoughtful expression.

Twiggs wanted to ask much more about the pipe and how it had come to be Garnet's, and if he, himself, had lived in the old country or if it had been passed on to him by someone else, but, remembering Gramps' advice, remained silent. It flashed across his mind that not asking questions about things, and just being himself, were mutually contradictory, but, for the time being, he would try his best to follow the 'no questions edict'. He made a mental note to discuss that interesting conundrum with Jay someday. During that split second, he sorely missed his good friend.

"At noon, there will be a reception of sorts for you down on the square. You can't imagine how eager all of the Harmonians are to finally meet you. They'll probably put you through the wringer good and proper, but not to worry, they're delighted that Cinnamon has finally met her betrothed. It seems she has been bragging about you a bit. It'll all only take an hour or so."

Then, with a wink and a wonderfully reassuring smile he asked, "Think you can you maintain that charming smile of yours, and engage in totally meaningless, repetitious conversation that long, my boy?"

"Oh, yes, Sir," Twiggs said, breaking into his own patented grin. "Seems I've had lots of practice at all that this past week."

They chuckled and nodded. Twiggs liked this man. No pretenses. No beating around the bush. He reminded him a lot of his own father - intelligent and caring, with a dry sense of humor.

"Tell me," Garnet continued, looking a bit more serious - perhaps nostalgic describes it better. "How is old Woody Woodington really doing these days? I was sorry that I didn't have much chance to talk with him when we were in Bountiful."

Twiggs's mind raced with unaskable questions. How did he know his father's nickname? Why did he speak of him with such fondness in his voice? Why did it appear they were somehow friends?

'Bite your tongue,' Twiggs reminded himself.

"Father is quite fine. He's the shoemaker for our village, you know. Everyone says he makes the finest footwear anywhere. I wanted to be his helper but the Council made me an Ambassador instead. He likes to go fishing. "

The more he rambled on, the dumber it seemed, so he stopped.

"And Gramps? How is my dear, wise old friend, Gramps?"

Advice to the contrary, this was just too much.

"Gramps is just great. I spent some time with him this very morning. But, how ..."

Before he could continue, Garnet cut him off.

"Gramps was my Ascension Instructor as well, did you know that?" Garnet said, as if beginning to answer Twiggs unasked questions.

"Yours. How could that be? ('Whoops!')"

"I am a Bountifillian by birth - just like you - a Man of the Clan Callbackabee and member of the Ring of The Farjumpers. When I wed, it was decided by the two village Councils that I would come here and live among Sapphire's clan. Your father was my best boyhood friend. It appears that you didn't know that, did you?"

"Wow! No Sir, I didn't!"

What an unexpected turn of events. Surely, he wasn't about to tell Twiggs that he, too, would have to live in Harmony, was he?

Twiggs tried to find something else to say in response, but nothing but gurgles and wheezes seemed able to rise from his suddenly knotted vocal cords. Garnet sensed the immediate uneasiness in Twiggs and came to the rescue.

"During my generation, it was the man's turn to switch clans, just as in yours, it is the woman's. I take great comfort in knowing that my daughter will be living among my own people - especially as the wife of my best friend's son."

What a relief that was, and yet a kind of sadness begin to set in. Twiggs had not given any consideration to the loss that Cinnamon or her parents would feel when she left Harmony to become a part of his clan. A feeling wave of unfairness washed across his consciousness. This was a situation he needed to investigate more thoroughly. Such an

unjust state of affairs just did not seem compatible with the generally positive and helpful philosophy Gramps had taught him.

With that problem duly noted, Twiggs spoke.

"I'm glad you can feel good about your daughter's future, Sir. I assure you that I will do everything within my power to make a wonderful life for her. I truly do love her, Sir, very, very much. I hope you understand that."

At that point, Cinnamon and her mother appeared at the door.

"I guess that's the cue to begin our stroll through Harmony," Garnet said, rising to his feet and rapping his pipe clean, against the heel of his boot. He reached out his hand and helped Twiggs to his feet. There was an unmistakable message in that grasp. It said, 'Yes, Twiggs, I can see how much you love her, though it's not the thing for me to say out loud now that she is here'. The two men were rapidly growing close. It was a good feeling. It was a family feeling.

Beaming at the very sight of her, Twiggs moved toward Cinnamon. With no apparent thought involved, their hands touched and clasped. Twiggs wanted very much to kiss her, but hesitated - never before having kissed her in the presence of her parents. It was a very awkward moment, noticed by no one but Twiggs. Gramps had said that Twiggs was to be himself, so he mustered his courage and gave Cinnamon a soft, gentle peck on the cheek. Again, it in no way qualified as a genuine, thorough going, romantically satisfying kiss, but it established a precedent, and that, after all, had been the purpose. Cinnamon returned the kiss. Her parents averted their view, but seemed pleased. That over, they began their tour of Harmony.

Twiggs immediately recognized that this village was more compact and more organized than Bountiful. Being able to build wherever they wanted, rather than having to settle for the stumps where they sat, allowed for straight streets and a kind of closeness. Twiggs wasn't sure he would want neighbors only a few yards away. Having lived his life in the wider, open spaces of Bountiful, this seemed an uncomfortable arrangement to him. He made another mental note to discuss Cinnamon's feelings about it.

There were some obvious advantages. One was the idea of a main business street where all the shops were placed in two rows facing each other. It would certainly make shopping more convenient. In Bountiful, all the shops were in, or close to, the proprietor's home. When folks needed new shoes, they stopped by the workshop, housed in the log behind Woodington's home. When they needed supplies from the general store, they stopped by Mr. McVay's back room. It was certainly different - not better or worse, Twiggs thought - just different.

The main difference between the two little communities, of course, was immediately obvious, even before one actually reached the city limits. In Harmony, there was a continuous flow of music in the air. Mellow and resonant, it seemed at once primitive and sophisticated. Primitive in that it was drum like in its simple, individual, though unpredictable, staccato sounds. Sophisticated in the rhythms and harmonies and ever changing melodies. It was not loud or in any way overpowering. It was as if coming from some huge wind chime, ever stirred by the gentlest of breezes. It was just always there - cheery yet calming in its over-all effect. It made Twiggs want to dance, and seemed to add a sprightly spring to everyone's step.

Twiggs tried to discern its source, but could sense no particular direction. It was just an all-encompassing, quietly present backdrop to this new and fascinating realm. He thought it was a wonderful addition to life and had a zillion questions about why and how and by whom, but those would need to wait.

From time to time, the echoes of voices and the natural sounds of the forest could be heard coming from the distant mountains. Twiggs was taken with the fact that back in Bountiful, and even in Jay's meadow, such echoes were heard only occasionally, and often had to be artificially forced - like when calling into the hills from Echo Point.

Presently, they arrived at the town square. Noon time had come and so had a large crowd of Harmonians. They clapped politely as Twiggs and Cinnamon approached. Twiggs removed his hat and nodded in a slight bow, to acknowledge their kind attention. That obviously impressed

them. Actually, it impressed Twiggs, as well.

'Where in the name of St. Bountiful, did that come from?' he asked himself. It just seemed the natural thing to do. Perhaps Gramps had been correct in his advice about just being himself and doing what seemed right. More than a bit pleased with himself, he exaggerated the nodding just a tad and held Cinnamon's hand high in the air. That was met with wild applause. 'I'm really pretty good at this stuff,' he had to admit to himself.

As long as he was on a roll, there, he took what seemed to be the next logical step - he kissed Cinnamon on the lips - gentle, yet a slightly lingering kiss, that was likewise, well received by the crowd. It only whetted Twiggs' appetite for more, but he knew when to stop, and did. He momentarily fanaticized about the benefits of an immediate cold shower.

Soon the feast began. Twiggs calculated that over that past week he must have eaten enough to fatten a small calf for the winter. Somehow, he hadn't gained an ounce. (Oh, to be a teenager again!)

After the food, there was dancing. He learned some of theirs and then taught them some of his. He took a turn at the fiddle and presented himself very well. The townsfolk were obviously delighted with Twiggs. He had a special presence that somehow immediately endeared him to others. It had always been there, but he had just never before been among strangers so he could discover it.

By afternoon's end, he had shaken the hands of, smiled at, and made small talk with every citizen in Harmony. Cinnamon could hardly contain herself, she was so overjoyed with what a fine impression Twiggs had made. Garnet just nodded, apparently not at all surprised that the son of Woodington should possess such a captivating manner.

Twiggs was - well, as usual, Twiggs was confused; pleased at how well things had gone, yet uncertain as to how he had been able to accomplish it. He liked what he had seen himself doing, and yet had no idea how he seemed to have come by those skills. He wondered which was the real Twiggs - the one who worried about whether or not he had bad breath, or the one who seemed to have all the right social moves. More things to talk over with Jay and Gramps and

Cinnamon. Interesting! Cinnamon. It was the first time he had thought of her as a confidant and source of counsel. How grand!

As the day came to an end, Twiggs and Cinnamon were alone at last, strolling together in the woods behind her house. They stopped in a small clearing, and there, in the shadowless moments of dusk, lay back on the velvety green grass, and watched the stars struggling to come alive in the heavens above.

With the strains of beautiful music softly present in the background, they recalled the day just past, and dreamed together of those not yet theirs. Twiggs was ever gentle in his romantic overtures. Cinnamon respected him for that. They touched and kissed - all quite properly - and then touched and kissed some more. They spoke of the wonders of this love they were exploring together. It was a wonderful end to a wonderful day. It was a wonderful beginning to a wonderful love.

Chapter Four: **Even dessert tastes better when you feel good inside.**

It would be two long weeks before Twiggs could see Cinnamon again. The time was at hand for her to complete the final study for her Ascent to Adulthood - her clan's equivalent of Twiggs' recent Ascension to Manhood. She, her mother, and her instructor would spend those weeks together in seclusion, somewhere on East Mountain, where Cinnamon would receive the powers and practice the skills necessary to perform the Mission of her Clan. That mission remained a vague and ill-defined charge, since its exact nature had not yet been shared with Twiggs. Perhaps the answer would be contained somewhere in the leather-bound tome Garnet had presented to him at the festival on the square. The book was titled, simply, Callbackabees, and weighed a ton (well, ten quibbits at the very least - that's equivalent to five Little People's pounds).

That morning Twiggs was up well before the birds - he was getting as bad about that early rising thing as Jay! He was eager to begin reading the big book, partly because of the mystery surrounding their mission, and partly because he knew it would make him feel closer to Cinnamon while she was away. It was amazing how much one could miss someone he hadn't even known just one short week before.

Twiggs wanted to find the perfect place to do his studying. It needed to be private, comfortable, and close to a food source.

"The big oak tree on West Mountain," he said aloud, to himself.

He farjumped to within a few yards of that very special, memory filled tree, and hid himself in the tall grass until he had made certain Jay was not around. Then, he joyfully loaded his hat to overflowing with a selection of the best, early autumn berries, (early autumn berries which, of course, had never existed before he yearned for them that day!), and settled into a comfortable perch about half way up the tree, just below where he had earlier carved Cinnamon's name.

As he surveyed the Jay-less meadow below, it dawned on Twiggs that the mortal's school had begun again. He could relax his vigilance until late afternoon, and perhaps, even work in a brief, solo, dip in the swimming hole during a study break.

Twiggs soon realized that the information in the big book held many features in common with his own Clan's Scriptures - in fact, many sections were identical. Upon reflection, that wasn't really surprising, considering that in the Time Before, both clans had dwelled in the same land across the sea.

What was especially interesting, though, was the Callbackabee's mission: "To fill the heavens and the Earth with the music of the universe, and to help the mortals discover the grand powers of the soul-soothing harmony they each possess deep within themselves."

As he read on, he discovered that the Harmonians were responsible for imbuing the winds with their winsome whistles, the streams with their tender trickles, and the rivers with their raging roars. Most interesting of all, to Twiggs, was the responsibility they had been given to, 'help the mortals hear themselves as others hear them'. The book went on to explain that until one fully understands how he sounds to others, he cannot temper or modify his approach to make his attempts at communication more exact - more acceptable or more precisely meaningful. It made sense, but how could that be done? He read on.

"Ah ha!," Twiggs said aloud, at last. "The echoes of their voices. Of course!"

Twiggs had been baffled by the fact that when he and Jay had been up at Echo Point, and Jay would call into the mountains, his words would be repeated over and over again, until they gradually wore away in the distance. Twiggs' words,

on the other hand, were never echoed back to him. Jay had postulated that was because Twiggs' voice was either too soft or too high pitched. But now, Twiggs understood.

It was really the Callbackabees, calling back, reflecting to the mortals how they sounded, so they could hear themselves as they really were - as others heard them. But, when a Little Person called out, there was no need, no mandate, to call it back. Suddenly it all made sense. Harmonians. Echolians. Callbackabees. Yes, it was all coming together.

"Absolutely fascinating," Twiggs thought, again saying it out loud.

'So, right now, Cinnamon is out there somewhere learning all about how to do all those remarkable things, isn't she?' he continued thinking to himself.

Somewhat ironically, perhaps, at that very moment, the breeze picked up, and through the gently swaying limbs and softly rustling leaves of the trees, began sending its magically musical message.

'Perhaps that's Cinnamon practicing,' Twiggs thought.

Right or wrong, it made him feel close to her during that long moment until the breeze, again, died down. He looked toward the East, half-way expecting to see her. No such luck. He sighed, not really surprised, and ran his hand across her name, carved there just above his head. Then smiling to himself, he returned to the book.

Before he realized it, the sun was telling him three o'clock - a time-telling skill Twiggs had learned from Jay. He stretched, rubbed his eyes, and closed the book - now over half finished. He then near jumped to Jutting Rock, overlooking the swimming hole.

Moments later he was in the water. Finding it just a bit chilly, he warmed it up to an even eighty degrees - the temperature he and Jay had determined was ideal for summer fun. Feeling certain that Jay would soon be along to enjoy his own swim, - cold or not - Twiggs fixed things so that every time Jay entered the swimming hole, the water would be exactly the right temperature. He giggled to himself with great satisfaction at the whole impish arrangement.

Twiggs hitched a few rides on the bluegills - who, by

the way, seemed delighted to see him again - and performed a few cannon balls for old time sake - something he had never really mastered the way Jay had. He figured that had something to do with the slimmer design of his own posterior equipment. He felt momentarily sad that he and Jay would not be doing those things together that day, but soon shrugged it off with memories of the many hours of good times they had shared there earlier in the summer.

Twiggs then stretched out on the big flat rock to dry off in the bright, still warm, sunshine. He could have just magically dried off, of course, but that would have interrupted the flow of wonder-filled memories. As he watched the clouds above and listened to the happy splashing of the water, dancing its way down the other side of the dam, it hit him that Cinnamon just might be there, practicing her happy splashing sounds. In a sudden rush of modesty, he quickly turned onto his stomach.

'Actually,' he thought to himself (as teenage boys are wont to do!), 'It really wouldn't be at all unpleasant - even though in no way proper - to let Cinnamon see him that way, after all, someday she would be his wife.'

The whole idea unleashed a wave of adrenalin that surged throughout his system, leaving cold, prickly, goose flesh in its wake. Mere moments later, however, that exhilarating reverie was dashed, as he realized that her mother might also be present. He immediately turned his back on East Mountain, and quickly donned his clothes.

Jay would have been fascinated by the idea that Twiggs' modesty was a situational, rather than a more general attitude, but Twiggs was just content to get back into the comforting privacy of the big oak tree. As it turned out, he had taken leave of the swimming hole just in time. There in the distance came carefree Jay, galloping across the meadow, whooping and hollering as usual, and personally greeting every bird and little creature along his way.

Watching Jay from across the big, leather book, a fascinating idea began to form in Twiggs' mind. He would write a book about the mortals - one that would preserve for the Little People all that he had learned. As time went on, he would update it, adding things he would discover during his

upcoming meetings with Jay. It could become a basis for decision making about just which kinds of goodakts and wishgrants would be truly most helpful. What an excellent idea! He rushed home (a two second far jump) so he could immediately get to work on it.

Although the task seemed simple enough, Twiggs had great difficulty getting started. After supper, he would go over and talk with Gramps about it. Gramps always had a way of cutting to the quick on such matters. Easy or difficult, it had rapidly become a calling that Twiggs was determined he would complete. It seemed to fit in well with his position as Ambassador to the Mortal Realm. Perhaps, during his meetings with Jay, Jay would have some suggestions. Well, there would be no perhaps to it. Jay always had suggestions!

Suddenly Twiggs felt a new purpose - something he had been lacking since his Ascension. The more he thought about it, the more sense it made. He was so excited that he even politely turned down a second piece of youngberry pie in order get on over to Gramps' place.

Gramps agreed that it was an important idea but stressed the grave responsibility involved - nothing Twiggs hadn't expected to hear, by the way.

"It must be a completely accurate account," Gramps said. "There can be no place for undocumented opinion, except where carefully noted."

Twiggs could tell that Gramps was proud of him for originating the idea, and even suspected that Gramps, himself, had never considered such a project.

"I think the Council made a most wise decision when it appointed you our Ambassador to the Mortal Realm," Gramps said, at the conclusion of their talk.

The parting hug seemed especially fine that evening - as if more between equals than ever before.

Twiggs entire being swelled with pride. Gramps was always kind and thoughtful, but not overly generous with complements. This, then, had been a most special moment. Twiggs savored it all the way home and well into his third slice of youngberry pie. (Moms have a way of knowing!) As he ate, Twiggs found himself having a Jay-like revelation: Even dessert tastes better when you feel good inside.

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Chapter Five: Nothing, save wildfire, spreads faster than Goodakts

Cinnamon had been away for an entire week. Twiggs not only felt lonely, he felt downright helpless. He wanted so very much to be assisting her in her studies, and yet he knew there was not one single thing he could do for her. He remembered Jay expressing a similar feeling more than once during Twiggs' own preparation for Ascension, but its full implications were not truly clear until that moment.

To compensate, Twiggs had been performing a multitude of extra goodakts each day. That kept him physically busy, his mind occupied and his hormones - well, no, actually, it didn't do a single thing to temper his hormones.

Under normal conditions the Council would have frowned on so many goodakts - it might well make the local mortals suspicious, and there is nothing worse than a suspicious mortal - but recognizing the situation, it was allowed to pass with only minor counsel about care and forethought.

Twiggs had spent the previous day completing a survey of various needs, desires and wishes expressed by the mortals who lived on the edge of Spring Meadow which was nearest Jay's country home. Spring Meadow was a small town by mortal standards. The population sign read 433 - actually it read 439 on the west side of town and on the east side it said 429. Regardless, it was almost five times the size of either Bountiful or Harmony. Twiggs had to wonder if merely having to live so close to so many people may have contributed to the mortal condition Jay referred to as being out of sorts - being plum out of sorts in the most severe cases!

During his months with Jay, he had never witnessed his friend being afflicted in that way, but suspected that Jay's father had been on at least several occasions. Jay had explained that the whole, out-of-sorts-thing, was something you just had to get used to and ignore.

After giving the condition due consideration, Twiggs was not at all convinced that was correct. He made a note to bring it up at his first ambassadorial meeting with Jay. In the meantime, he would carry out his own little experiment, and that was what he was about on this particular Fall morning.

He had been carefully observing several dozen people and had determined that six of them were much higher on the 'out-of-sorts-scale' than the others. Only one, however - old Miss Primm - reached the magnitude of being plum-out-of-sorts most of the time. Twiggs would begin with her. He had learned from Jay that there was nothing like a good challenge!

He noticed several things about her house. It was overly tidy - very unlike either his own or Jay's room. He figured she must have a lot of time on her hands. Also, she had no pictures of people on her walls or dresser or end tables. No one ever came to visit her, and when she went down town to shop - which occurred precisely at nine o'clock every Tuesday morning - no one greeted her as she passed them on the streets. Even the store keepers made no more than the required conversation.

Since she never appeared to smile, Twiggs considered the possibility that she might have some facial deformity. When small children would approach her as she swished along the sidewalks, she would tell them to scat and motion them away with quick, ill-tempered gestures of the back of her hand. She treated them as if they were mangy, begging, little alley cats.

Whereas the mortals seemed to think of her as mean and disagreeable, Twiggs thought her to be a very sad lady. That made her a good candidate for his experiment which was aimed at testing, well, more accurately, disproving Jay's theory that all one could do was just get used to the out-of-sorts-condition, and try to ignore it. Those reactions were contradictory to all Twiggs had been taught about living a good and helpful life, and Jay's ready willingness to just

accept it all, completely baffled him. Perhaps Jay had fallen prey to some tradition of non-thinking about such irritating things.

So it was, that Twiggs found himself there in Miss Primm's attic that Tuesday morning. He had once heard Jay's Grampa Doug say that unspoken dreams were locked away in the attic of one's heart. Perhaps that maxim had its basis in reality. He hoped that her attic would reveal important things about Miss Primm's unmet or long lost dreams.

The thick layer of dust confirmed that she had not recently ventured up there. He discovered most of the same kinds of things he had seen in Jay's attic when they had played there on rainy days. There was an old rocking chair with a cane broken seat, curtain rods sticking out of an otherwise closed box of frilly old curtains, a tiny version of a baby carriage cradling a cracked faced doll, and dozens of cardboard boxes and wooden crates in a wide variety of shapes and sizes.

In one box, Twiggs found pictures - some just loose, some framed, and others pasted in an album. One picture appeared to be that of Miss Primm as a frilly-dressed teenager, standing smiling, with a young man's arm around her waist. He put that one aside for future use. In an ornate gold frame was a picture of two adults, old fashioned in appearance - probably her parents, Twiggs surmised. He also kept that one out.

In one of the small wooden crates he found books - Little Women, lay on top, and just underneath that, a book with a clasp and lock - it must have been a diary. He removed those also. Standing across the room in one corner of the attic, rising up from a single metal rod, was what appeared to be a model of the upper half of a woman's unclothed body. It seemed more interesting to Twiggs than he thought it should. He resisted the urge to touch its various intriguing areas. Around its neck, however, was a pink scarf - not a bulky winter scarf, but a delicate, lacy, very feminine silk scarf. Although very much unlike Miss Primm, perhaps it was filled with some useful memories, Twiggs thought. He temporarily reduced it in size and stuffed it into his hip pocket.

Resting for a moment on the top of a crate, Twiggs

surveyed what he had found and decided it painted a very different picture from the bitter old lady who lived down stairs. Presently he heard the front door open and close. It must be nine o'clock, as she was on her way down town. Twiggs got to work.

With a wave of his hand, he cleaned the dust from the objects he had selected, and farported them down stairs. The scarf, returned to its original size, he placed at the bottom of her under-garments drawer. Again, he found his interest lingering just a bit too long there, so he quickly moved on. He slipped Little Women into the bookcase, right next to her Bible, the book that seemed to be the most well-worn. The diary he placed at the back of the drawer in her writing stand - a beautiful old, ornate, maple secretary, with a lid that opened down to form a desk top, and hinged, metal handles that clinked in a most delightful way when they were moved.

Thinking better of the scarf placement, he retrieved it and stuffed under the cushion of the couch, and the unframed picture was slid into the diary, carefully allowing one corner to protrude a bit. The picture of the parents went onto the closet shelf. Looking around the room, Twiggs nodded in satisfaction.

He left the house and caught up with her black clad figure just as she was about to lay siege to the small corner grocery store. Two young mothers with preschool children were there ahead of her. She glowered at the children, sending the unmistakable message that they were to keep their distance. They did! Miss Primm's reputation preceded her!

Now, for all of his good intentions, there was a delightfully impish side to Twiggs' personality - a side which at that moment he would both enjoy and use to what he hoped, would be Miss Primm's eventual advantage. He stealthily plucked her wallet from her large, open purse and allowed it to drop silently onto the floor in plain sight of one of the small boys. Without hesitating, the lad picked it up and took it to her, holding it high above his head, saying, "Here, Lady, you dropped this."

Scowling over her small, square, wire framed glasses, Miss Primm looked down into the lad's smiling, freshly

scrubbed face. As she came to understand what was actually transpiring, Twiggs caught the slightest suggestion of a smile breaking there between the corner of her mouth and one of her powder laden cheeks.

A curt, though not entirely unpleasant, "Thank you," was pronounced, with the barest indication of a nod in the direction of the boy's mother. She then quickly went about her business in the store and was soon on her way.

When the boy's mother stepped to the counter with her goods, the storekeeper whispered, in obvious amazement:

"Miss Primm purchased this gum ball and asked that I give it to your son after she left."

Again, without prompting, the lad ran to the door and called after her, "Thank you, lady. Thank you fow the gum ball."

Without missing a beat in the military-like cadence of her otherwise proper, lady-like stride, she smiled, all quite openly, to herself, and moved on toward the drug store. Twiggs, of course, was the only witness to that facial milestone - well, Twiggs and Miss Primm. He wondered how she felt about it. Personally, it tickled him down to his risables! (Jay's Aunt Clairabelle used that term. No one had ever actually defined it for him, however!)

As Miss Primm continued on her way, Old Mr. Lukus was moving up the sidewalk toward her. As was the custom of his generation, he tipped his hat and smiled - having years ago, given up trying to initiate small talk with her. Much to his surprise, this day she nodded back and said, "Good morning, Albert." Once past, he turned, scratching his head in obvious astonishment, as he watched her turn into the drug store.

Inside, Miss Primm presented a short list of her needs to the pharmacist.

"Just a few things, this week," she said, her nose just a bit lower than usual. She then quickly added, "No big hurry. Take your time." Her tone was becoming markedly less grating by the minute.

Mr. Murphy did an obvious double take. Miss Primm hadn't spoken to him in twenty years. She always just handed over the list and waited, making her impatience conspicuously obvious.

"Yes Ma'am," he replied, looking down the list. Responding out of years of habit, he added, "This really won't take long."

As he gathered the items from the shelves behind the long counter with the thick wooden top, she busied herself by browsing among the things set out on tables, and peering through the glass front display cases at things to which she hadn't paid attention for longer than even she could remember. At one point Twiggs caused a box of perfumed bath salts to fall over on a nearby table. She picked it up as if intending only to right its condition, but then, after a long, memory filled look, kept it, taking it to the counter with her, as Mr. Murphy announced that her order was complete.

By the time she had left the drug store, her stride had slowed a bit and she was taking time to look into the windows as she passed - even stopping on several occasions to give some item there, her careful once over. Townsfolk took cautious second looks, as if their first glance must have somehow deceived them into thinking it had been Miss Primm.

It was progress, but Twiggs knew he didn't dare stop at that. His impish grin - more accurately than the cartoonist's light bulb - revealed a new plan. He giggled to himself from his perch on the awning above the barber shop, as he unraveled a thread on her coat, making a big, black button fall, unnoticed, to the sidewalk. A few moments later, Mr. Applebee left the barbershop. He spied the button and, having seen it for the past ten years on Miss Primm's only fall coat, knew exactly to whom it belonged. He looked up and down the street but, Miss Primm had turned the corner and was out of sight.

Putting it in his pocket, Mr. Applebee went about his business for the rest of the morning. He would have forgotten it altogether if Twiggs had not seen to it that he pulled it out, rather than a quarter, as he paid for his lunch at Marty's Diner. Before the afternoon was over, he had made his way to Miss Primm's front porch.

Unaccustomed to visitors, she was more than a little startled by the knock on her door. Hat in hand, Mr. Applebee, greeted her with a carefully measured dip of the head:

"Good afternoon, Miss Primm. I don't mean to bother

you, Ma'am, but I found this button on the sidewalk this morning, and I was wondering if perhaps it was yours."

Miss Primm recognized it at once, and immediately felt embarrassed that she would have let a button become so loose that it could have fallen off in public. That was not at all like the picture of efficiency she held of herself.

Twiggs had great difficulty comprehending how a loose button could possibly be so devastating to her self-concept, but nonetheless, it obviously was. He had certainly not intended any such thing to happen. 'Mortals!?' he thought to himself.

"Thank you so much," Miss Primm managed to say at last.

Unaccustomed to conversing with her those past few years, Mr. Applebee allowed an awkward moment to linger on.

"I just made myself some fresh lemonade. Could I interest you in a glass? For this time of year, it has become a most warm afternoon."

Amazed at the invitation, but even more amazed at his own reaction, Mr. Applebee found himself accepting, and stepped inside. No less astounded had been Miss Primm, herself!

After he left, Miss Primm busied herself washing the glasses. It had been most pleasant to have a visitor, she thought - not at all the inconvenience she remembered. It had been unbelievably nice that he and the lad at the store had been so thoughtful to her that day. Best of all - and this was most puzzling to her - was how good it had felt to reward the youngster and to sit and talk with Mr. Applebee. Much to her surprise, she found herself humming. As she passed the hall mirror, she peered in, stopping to fuss a bit with the tightly rolled bun perched like a Gothic gargoyle on the back of her head.

Twiggs thought it was time to leave, and allow her to discover the treasures from her past that he had so carefully planted around the house. He would check back in a few days.

As Twiggs sat in the crotch of a nearby tree, contemplating the rest of his day, the paper boy - his first day on the route - cautiously, and with obvious trepidation,

approached Miss Primm's front porch. In the past, she had been known to give all new paperboys very strict, if not downright harsh, instructions on just exactly where and when and how the paper was to be placed, and through the years had regularly complained to each and every boy's parents about how their sons had failed to properly perform their duties. It was no wonder, of course, that growing to dislike her as they did, each and every paper boy had often, and all quite intentionally, delayed, misplaced, or even mutilated her paper!

This day she met him at the door, asked his name, where he lived, and said how glad she was to meet him. There were no complicated instructions. There were no ill-tempered threats about noncompliance. She offered him a cookie from a napkin-covered plate, and made long unpracticed attempts at civil conversation.

It was not at all what the lad had been led to believe he would have to endure. In fact, she seemed really nice, though he would be cautious about admitting that to the other guys. He would, however, be happy to make the effort to place her paper within easy reach of the front door.

Twiggs felt so unrighteously pleased with himself, he could not contain his spirited enthusiasm. He danced a jig and yearned for his fiddle. Gramps had been right: Nothing, save wildfire, spreads faster than goodakts

Chapter Six:
If this was love, how truly
extraordinary wedded bliss must be!

The trees were just beginning to don the golds, browns and reds that signaled Autumn was winding its way South across the Ozark Mountains. The noon time sun was warm, balancing, somewhat, the still crisp nip of the gently stirring air. The touch of morning frost had long since gone to wherever morning frost goes, and, all in all, it was the perfect moment for a Fall picnic up there on Echo Point.

Cinnamon had been back from her Echolian training and Ascension Ceremony for nearly a month, though, to Twiggs, it seemed only a week. Both being adults now, they were suddenly busier than either had dreamed possible. Time together had been more than a little hard find.

Twice each week, Cinnamon was required to take her turn somewhere in the depths of West Mountain, echoing back to the mortals, the words they called into the hills, and helping to maintain the many melodious natural harmonies of that little corner of the World. (I say somewhere in the depths of West Mountain, because, until they were wed, Cinnamon was not allowed to share such specific details with Twiggs, and being a mortal, I never felt it proper to come right out and ask.)

Twiggs was busily engaged in collecting and organizing data, and writing meticulous notes for his book about mortals - a better starting point than merely sitting down to write, Gramps had suggested. He worked on his book first thing each morning while his mind was fresh and the ideas flowed freely. Then he would have breakfast with his parents, usually

followed by a conversation with Gramps or one of the other Elders of the Council. They would discuss and gradually define his role as Ambassador to the Mortal Realm, and assist him with his questions about goodakting and wishgranting.

But, back to the beautiful Autumn day beneath the tall Scotch Pines up on Echo Point. At long last, both Twiggs and Cinnamon had arranged a day away from their duties, and had just spent a marvelous morning together. They had hiked the hills, cavorted with the butterflies in the meadow, and arranged the colored leaves to paint a beautiful Fall picture on the hillside just below Jay's log cabin.

Cinnamon had brought a picnic lunch, obviously prepared to please the love of her life - from cheese balls rolled in almond slivers, to apple torts swimming in his mother's special glaze, the basket held nothing but Twiggs' favorites. It made her feel so good inside to be able to do such nice things for him. How lucky she was, she thought, to have been foreordained to spend eternity with this uncommonly bright, good looking, and ever considerate young man.

Whenever she even thought about his tender touch, it raised goose bumps from head to toe, so one can only imagine the pace of her response as Twiggs actually held her close and kissed her, as, not unpredictably, he had done more than a few times that morning.

Twiggs had given it much thought. Kissing Cinnamon was without a doubt his very favorite of all activities. He had also concluded, however, that even if for some reason, he would never again be able to kiss her, he would still want to remain at her side forever. Apart from the unlikely occurrence of a humorously envisioned lipectomy, he felt fairly safe in that decision, but he was completely serious about his devotion to his lovely, loving, ever-smiling, Cinnamon.

"That's Alabaster," she said, breaking into their quiet, private thoughts. She was referring to the wailing whistle from above, as the breeze suddenly picked up. "She does the best pine tree whistle in the whole clan."

Twiggs smiled broadly, about to laugh, but then immediately contained that inclination as he realized Cinnamon was being completely serious. He listened more

closely, and agreed it was beautiful, though felt quite ignorant about such matters and, because of that, more than a little bit left out of an important part of Cinnamon's life.

The cheese balls, sandwiches and torts soon gone, Twiggs lay with his head in Cinnamon's lap, as she sat, back against the trunk of a long since fallen tree. Earlier, he had shed his bright red vest and golden-yellow shirt, somehow feeling more masculine that way, though, never to be admitted, just a bit chilly.

Cinnamon liked to see him that way, and gently rubbed his strong, tan chest - well, tan at least, and perhaps strong, if being compared with other, barely thirteen-year-old males. At any rate, young love was thrilling and they each knew full well, that physically, that was as intimate as their relationship could and would get until they were wed.

Cinnamon leaned down and administered a quick peck to Twiggs' lips, ruffling his hair in the process. As she pulled away, Twiggs raised his head after her, hoping to manipulate it into something more lingering and personally satisfying. He gave in easily, however, and relaxed again, head, full weight, back onto her lap.

"You'd never recognize old Miss Primm," Twiggs suggested, totally out of the blue.

"I suppose not," Cinnamon said, a bit of the imp showing in her own manner, "Considering I have no idea who she is!"

Twiggs smiled up at her, realizing and accepting the fact that he had been had.

"Okay! Okay! Well, let me explain."

Including every grim detail that he could recall, he described for Cinnamon the Miss Primm everyone had grown to despise over the years, and told of his goodakting experiment.

Then, with more than a little self-satisfaction showing in his words, Twiggs told her about the Miss Primm of today.

"Every afternoon, now, as the little kids get out of school, she serves lemonade to them in her backyard. Yesterday, when I went by to check on things, she was wearing her pick scarf and humming hymns as she prepared hot mulled cider in her kitchen - a menu change instituted, I

suppose, by the chillier weather."

"And all of this came about because of one single goodakt," Cinnamon questioned?

"More like a badakt," Twiggs chuckled, covering his mouth as he thought out loud, "And actually it was several tiny ones."

"See, it all began when I made her drop her wallet in the grocery store. Actually, my goodakt was a whole series of, well, I don't know anything else to call them - badakts, I guess."

"I really don't like that term, Twiggs. You and Gramps better come up with a new one."

"Wish I could talk to ol' Jay about that. He'd have a dozen new terms spun for us before drawing his second breath."

Twiggs smiled faintly, a distant look momentarily reflected in his eyes.

"I wish I could know your Jay," Cinnamon said, running her fingers through Twiggs' hair and suddenly becoming quite serious. "In a way, I sort of do know him, I guess."

"How's that?"

"Well, the way you describe him, he appears to be a whole lot like you, my dear."

Twiggs craned his neck so he could look her in the eye. She was, indeed, serious. He relaxed again, a look of pride and contentment washing across his face. That was about the nicest complement Twiggs thought he had ever received.

"Like me. Like each other," he said, some asking and some confirming. "I like that. I wish you could get to know him, too, Cinnamon."

Then silence set in for quite a spell, finally broken by Twiggs' sudden revelation. Rolling off her lap, he turned onto his side, supporting his weight on his elbow.

Looking up at Cinnamon, he said: "You'll have to read the notes I've made about Jay - notes for my book. That'll help you get to know him better. He would like to have you know all about him. If there is one thing that stands out about Jay, it's that Jay is just Jay, all day, every day, Jay is Jay, no sugar coating, no pretenses. He'd like for you to read my notes. I'm sure of it."

That settled, they both seemed to feel somehow closer. Sharing things like that always drew them together. It was like giving some special - previously secret - part of themselves to the other, and therein becoming more like one. It was difficult to explain that particular wonder-filled experience.

Twiggs pulled her down onto the grass beside him. He looked deep into her eyes (well, if you've ever done it, yourself, you know there really isn't any better way to say it!). He played with her hair and slowly slipped the back of his hand, back and forth across her smooth, soft cheek.

"Do you have any idea how much I love you," he asked?"

"I think so, but I do enjoy having you tell me," she said, half serious, half teasing.

"Well, let's see then ... I love you a zillion-times more than this:"

He tenderly placed his lips against hers and embarked on an extraordinary kiss that lingered on, uninterrupted, for many, many wonder-filled minutes.

As he at last gently parted his lips from hers, she looked up at him smiling, and asked, quite simply and lovingly, "How much did you say?"

No cue was ever acted upon more immediately or diligently. Carefully gentling his weight onto her reclining form, he took her lovely face in his hands and continued what was for them, the kiss of all kisses - the most passionate, yet tender, that they had ever known.

Moments passed and love grew. Unnoticed, the sun dipped low in the western sky. The air chilled. It had been an absolutely splendid day together there in their hills - one they would remember always. If this was love, how truly extraordinary wedded bliss must be.

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Chapter Seven
Facts can be learned. Wisdom must mature.
To understand this distinction, allows responsible
behavior.

Twiggs was convinced that life as an adult would have been far easier if wisdom, like general knowledge, could have been acquired through magic. By the time he was ten, he had been able to accumulate, through magical means (mindtawk), most of the facts and information he would ever need to know in order to survive, and, in fact, live quite comfortably and productively as a Little Person.

He had felt great compassion for Jay, who, year after year, had to keep attending school, studying hard to accomplish the same thing. His own study for his Ascension to Manhood had centered not on facts, but on how to apply what he knew, and to make certain that he understood the essentials of right and wrong, good and bad, beauty and aberration, selfishness and altruism.

Lately, it seemed, every day was like another round of Ascension training.

When will I finally be wise?"

That was his first question to Gramps that morning. It was delivered in an agitated tone of exasperation and impatience, and was accompanied by a barrage of other self-derogating comments.

Twiggs slowly paced Gramps' front yard - head down, hands in pockets, shoulders slouched, feet kicking aimlessly at the sticks and stones in his path. He continued with a deep sigh:

"I never seem to do anything right anymore. I try to do goodakts that will be helpful and they end up doing just the opposite. I make wishgrants and then I'm told it was foolish to have wasted them on such trivial matters. The Elders all think I'm a dunce. I know they do. I'd just like to find a cave and live there alone forever. Then I couldn't ever hurt anybody again."

Silence set in. Gramps made no response. Twiggs had not really expected one and that was just fine, since he had not yet finished his spirited tirade.

"And another thing," he continued, "How will I ever be able to be a good husband for Cinnamon if I'm such a disaster at this wisdom thing? I'll just ruin her life as well. I know I will. What in the name of the Wise One can I do about all this?"

Using the name of the Wise One in that way, caused Gramps to raise one eyebrow. Twiggs noticed and apologized.

"I'm really sorry, Gramps, but I'm at my wits end over this. Can't you just wave your hand like you used to do when it was time for me acquire some new kind of knowledge, and boom, there it would be?"

More silence, and even less hope on Twiggs part that even the seed of an answer would be forthcoming from Gramps.

"What's wrong with me Gramps?"

Now, at last, there was a serious and legitimate question, and Twiggs would camp on Gramps' front porch until he received an adequate answer.

Somewhat surprised - well, absolutely and completely amazed, better characterized it - Twiggs saw that Gramps was going to respond.

"What's right with you, or what's normal with you, or what's just what we all expect with you at this age? Those would be more accurate and useful questions, my son."

As was his style, Gramps just dealt those comments like cards in a game of Red Runion, and then sat back to let Twiggs make sense of them.

Eventually Twiggs grinned and began to relax a bit.

"You just laid one huge facilitator on me, didn't you, Gramps?"

"See, you're not so dumb," Gramps replied, his eyes sparkling and his head cocked expectantly, unmistakably waiting for Twiggs to follow up on his previous comment.

Twiggs, who, all this time had continued to pace back and forth in the yard (as folks do when they can't get headed toward a solution), sighed deeply and took a seat - legs crossed - on the porch in front of Gramps. He removed his hat and fiddled with the feather which he observed was sorely in need of some long overdue smoothing.

"I'm starved!"

Those were Twiggs' next words - not expected, though certainly not uncharacteristic. On second take, Gramps figured an improved appetite was undoubtedly a good sign. Twiggs had become so upset with himself earlier that morning that he had skipped - well, forgotten, actually - his breakfast. (Now that's upset!!)

As if on cue, (and it probably was!) Gramma appeared, bearing fresh blueberry muffins with honey-butter and jam. Twiggs thanked her and downed them as if, indeed, ravished by days of hunger. Gramps watched, chuckling to himself, for a moment seeing himself as a young man, sitting there confused and bewildered before his own old counselor and friend.

"Well now," Gramps said, as Twiggs brushed the last crumbs from his mouth, "perhaps you're ready to tell me what is really on your mind."

Having thought that he had been talking about what was really on his mind, he paused a moment to regroup his approach to the matter. Then, as his forehead smoothed, Gramps knew they were about to get to down to the real business at hand.

"It's responsibility, isn't it? All this responsibility! I had no idea how much of it adults had. I mean, day in and day out, every single thing I do now, I have to do responsibly. I have to plan ahead and try to see into the future before I do anything. I can't just do what I want to do for a good time, anymore. I have to think about how that will affect everybody else - Mother and Father and the people next door, the mortals in the hills and now, Cinnamon, of course."

His voice immediately mellowed as he spoke

Cinnamon's name. Gramps noticed and smiled.

"I guess I really don't mind where Cinnamon is concerned. I do want to do everything just right for her. I want to learn how to be a good husband for her - the best husband that ever was - and I know, that means I have to learn how to be responsible."

More silence.

"Life was a whole lot easier back in the meadow with Jay, I'll tell you that for sure," he added, as if he were actually advancing a wish for the present.

"You mean you didn't have to act responsibly in that relationship?" Gramps added, having waited patiently for just that exact opening to arrive.

"Well, no. I mean sure we looked out for each and we always came through for each other, but ..."

For some reason, no words seemed to fit after, but.

"I suppose it was because life was so much simpler. It was just the two of us, and our plans mostly just covered the next hour or two - a day or so at the most."

"And that was good practice, wasn't it?" Gramps added, being uncharacteristically directive.

Practice was the key word. Twiggs realized in that instant that while he had been enjoying his childhood, he had also been practicing for adulthood. When he had made mistakes in judgment as a child, it was usually no big, long term deal. The patient people around him understood that errors and misjudgments were an important, perhaps essential, part of growing up, helping him learn how to become the fine kind of person they were grooming him to be. They had given him - in fact, probably carefully arranged for him - wide range in terms of the kinds of things he could try.

Twiggs sat back against the porch rail, gradually relaxing a bit more and certainly ready for the mug of hot honey and milk tea Gramma brought them. It was Gramps' favorite cold weather drink and tasted remarkably similar to that which Jay's Grandma Mary made for Jay. Twiggs was sure there was some connection there, but he would explore that later on.

Gramps cleared his throat. "Tell me Twiggington, have I or any of the other Elders or your parents recently

reproached you for any of your mistakes in judgment? Have we been the ones calling you - what was your term - a dunce?"

"No, of course not. I'm the one doing all that. It's just that some days I get so tired of having to be reliable and dependable and conscientious and ... and punctilious." (Punctilious was a term he had picked up from Jay. It meant conscientiously adhering to correct procedure - an expectation from many of the adults around Jay that distressed the young mortal no end!)

"What do you suppose would happen to the way you think about all of this, if, instead of saying, having to be all those things, you would begin saying having the opportunity and skill to be all of those things?"

At that, and without allowing Twiggs to either fully contemplate the question or attempt an answer, Gramps rose to his feet and bade Twiggs good-bye.

Twiggs hated it when Gramps did that, but he also knew it had always been done for some wholly good reason. Twiggs just did not yet understand what it was. He accepted the conclusion of the conversation, yelled a thank you through the door to Gramma, and was soon on his way down the path toward the mushroom grove.

There was a spring in his step that had not been present earlier. He held himself more erect and found himself looking up rather than down. He could feel the pleasant tug on his cheeks from the smile gracing his face. What a difference those few simple things made in the way he felt.

At that moment, Twiggs determined that he would never again allow himself to slouch or scowl or shuffle along. He even coined a phrase to describe those depressing positions - postural downers. When you act down, you feel down. When you let your body look down, you're sure to feel down. It takes over your entire being.

"Not bad. Postural downers! Jay would turn summer salts over that one."

(Being a mortal who tended to think in terms of opposite pairs, Jay would have also immediately added a second new phrase to describe the positive side of the coin - postural uppers - meaning things like standing erect,

shoulders back, head up, breathing deeply, bouncing along at a quick pace, smiling, and looking people straight in the eye. Twiggs understood the remarkably rejuvenating aspects of the condition, of course, he just had not felt the need to name it. Perhaps he was just less punctilious than Jay.)

Thinking back about Jay, Twiggs realized that he had undoubtedly already discovered the concept. Twiggs could not remember a single time that Jay allowed a slouch or a slump or a shuffle engulf him. Regardless of the situation or the problem at hand, the ol' Jay-man just forged on, head erect, shoulders back with determination showing through his smile.

'Perhaps Jay's model is just now seeping into my own, thick coated, brain,' Twiggs thought, as he mounted one of the smaller mushrooms in order to sit atop it and enjoy the warmth of the early November sun. In one way, he was glad at that moment that Cinnamon wasn't there. Being alone, he had no hormone driven urge to remove his shirt, so he would not have to sit there, shivering in sexy silence!

In most other ways, he yearned for her, but this was her day as an Echolian. He was getting better at recognizing when the sounds around him were being orchestrated by her. The gentle plunking and pitter patter of the water in the tiny nearby waterfall was definitely Cinnamon. There was always a gentle quality in her work. It would even show through the sounds of the fiercest thunderstorms and gale force winds. In her work she got to be gentle, but in his, he had to be - that is, he had the opportunity and skill to be - responsible.

"Ah ha!" thought Twiggs, followed immediately by a rare and always meaningful, carefully measured, double whammy - "Ah ha, AH HA!"

Anyone could make a thunderstorm sound scary, but Cinnamon, in her assigned undertakings, had the ability and the desire - the opportunity - to make it into something reassuring as well. Most any free man could go through the motions of making decisions, but Twiggs had been given the gift - the opportunity - to learn how to make responsible decisions. It wasn't that he just had to, but that he was able to. Dear old Gramps.

He vaulted down from the Mushroom, leaving the old,

responsibility-burdened Twiggs behind. He was determined to match his new upbeat, positive carriage, with a new outlook on life - suddenly appreciative of the awesome possibilities within himself. What a wonder-filled adventure it would be to discover just which possibilities those were going to be!

Once back in his room he made a note for his book:

'The truly responsible man, strives to become all that he can become, and in so doing, meets the many responsibilities of his life as wonderful challenges, rather than seeing them as burdens.'

He put down his pen a new man.

Jay, not being present to do the honors, Twiggs, himself, turned the summer salts! (Okay, so he put down his pen, a new man-in-the-making!) A great revelation needs celebration. Facts can be learned. Wisdom must mature. To understand this distinction, allows responsible behavior.

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Chapter Eight: Jay's apples always tasted best.

Twiggs wished upon wish that he had not been present when she had said it. Life had been complicated enough before, but now ... !

Twiggs had anticipated that when he told them, the Elders would just take care of it in their usual way, by saying something like:

"That's impossible," or, "Ridiculous!" or "Twiggs, it's time you began living in the real World."

But no! This was the moment they chose to say:

"We believe that you are now fully capable of making those kinds of decisions, yourself. Whatever you decide, just go ahead and do it."

How often, as he had been growing up, had he wished his parents would have said that!

"May I have a second piece of pie?"

"Whatever you decide, Dear, just go ahead and do it."

"May I stay all week at Jay's cabin?"

"Whatever you decide, Dear, just go ahead and do it."

"What to do? What to do?"

He paced Jutting Rock, wishing he could share the problem with Jay. He'd have some good advice - well, at least he'd have some advice, and that was more than he could pry out of anybody else. Jay was long on outrights and short on facilitators at that point in his life, and a good outright was just what Twiggs yearned for.

It all began on Sunday morning, while Twiggs was making the rounds, looking in on those mortals for whom he

had performed goodakts or wishgrants the week before. It was just as he was peeking at Miss Primm from around the edge of her garishly flowered cookie jar, that he heard it.

"My how I wish I could just make all these good people here in Spring Meadow forget about the hateful way I used to be. I am totally embarrassed each time I pass one of them on the sidewalk."

Her eyes were red. Her handkerchief, damp. Miss Primm was having a most distressing morning.

On the surface, that was not really a very difficult Wishgrant. A few carefully placed waves of his hand and all memories would be changed. On the other hand, Miss Primm's life seemed to hold a good lesson for the young people, and hope, as well, for the grown-ups.

'Would it be right to just whisk all that away?'

It soon became obvious that this was a far more serious and difficult matter than it had at first appeared to be. Though, in the long run, wisdom safeguards and improves the quality of life, in the short run, it sometimes complicates the process of living.

It was a basic rule among the Little People that all mortal wishes uttered in their presence, must be given serious consideration, so you can see why Twiggs wished he had arrived just several seconds later.

"Would it be good for all concerned?" That seemed to be what it boiled down to. It would certainly ease Miss Primm's painful embarrassment. The townspeople would no longer have to worry about whether or not she might soon revert to behaving in that same, unpleasant old way again. The small children she had frightened, would no longer have to be frightened of every large, black-cloaked figure they saw bustling toward them.

On the other hand, it seemed such a fine lesson in how Goodakting begets more Goodakting. Here was a case of a miserable old lady, spreading that misery around to everyone she met. But when people started treating her nice, she seemed all quite primed and ready, herself, to be that way to them, in return.

'The fact is,' Twiggs thought to himself, a bit exasperated, 'almost everyone truly is ready in that same way,

but somehow many thick-skulled mortals have for some totally bewildering reason, not yet made that plainly patent connection. And, when their first attempts fail, they are more than willing to take that as proof that the whole idea is invalid.'

Twiggs paced in silence, rerunning in his mind the pros and cons of the transformation.

Instead of referring to her as, "Old Miss Grim," and playing fiendish pranks on her, the younger boys and girls of the town were now happily dropping in on her every day, helping her with small chores, running errands, and enjoying her lemonade and sugar cookies.

When Tony learned to ride his two-wheeler, it was over to Miss Primm's house that he rode first. She applauded for him with great enthusiasm. When Jimmy broke his arm, it was her signature he wanted to be first on his cast.

But still, when asked who used to be the meanest person in the whole town, they all remembered - and with no doubts about it. It's hard to change the past, except through magic -

"Or is it," Twiggs said aloud, another of his Jay-like revelations beginning to take shape. Jay always talked about seeing all the options, and this was most certainly a case for alternate options.

"All it will take is changing a 'b' to an 's'," he thought out loud. "How difficult can that be?"

Poof, and he found himself in the Spring Meadow village park where the smaller children gathered each morning to play. He jumped around from group to group, waiting for the right topic of conversation.

In the process, he learned that a delighted, three-year-old Martin, had stayed dry the night before, and that Suzie's little brother was finally getting potty trained. Tommy's big brother finally got caught pounding on him, so a long-term grounding seemed to occupy young Tom's immediate future. Johnny had a quarter, a full nickel of which he was willing to spend on Beth if she'd kiss him. Life seemed good!

Presently, there on the teeter totter, it happened. Aimee and Billy were talking about Miss Primm. Aimee was speaking.

"Oh, she doesn't seem to be so ..."

Twiggs waved his hand and stopped everything in midsentence for a split second. It was time to replace the 'b' word - 'bad' - which was about to be uttered, with the 's' word. He twinkled the necessary thoughts toward the little girl and then waved his hand in reverse.

"... sad anymore, does she?" Aimee continued.

"Sad?" Billy said. "I thought you were going to say 'bad'. That's how I thought she used to seem."

"Well, maybe not," Aimee went on somewhat defensively, trying to salvage her slip of the tongue - as well as her tarnished self-esteem - by turning it into something sage.

"Who knows, maybe she really was just sad all those years. Being sad could make you act bad, you know. Look at your sister, Brenda. When she gets sad she acts bad."

"When she gets sad she really acts bad," Billy added, nodding huge nods, in order to make sure there was no doubt about the true extent of that situation.

"What could Old Miss Primm have been sad about, I wonder," Aimee asked?

"Mom said that she was left at the halter. I don't know what that means, but maybe that could have made her sad," Billy added, trying to help.

"Let's see what else the other kids know about her," Aimee suggested. They carefully slipped off the teeters, so neither would suddenly end up, all too suddenly, end down.

Before long the whole playground was abuzz about poor, sad, old Miss Primm. Suddenly she was no longer an ex-villain, but had become an object of sincere pity. It quickly spread around town and within days, climbed its way through each of the several generations.

(Although Twiggs could not have known it at the moment, from that day on, Miss Primm did, indeed, sport a brand-new past! The facts stayed the same, of course, but the new spin - the new perspective - the new option - made it all quite different. No doubt about it, it was a new past!)

Twiggs was pretty proud of himself, and rightly so, according to the Council of Elders, who told him just that, when, the very next week, he finished his report on the matter to them.

"At last, I have actually done something right," Twiggs was heard to say under his breath – overheard by Gramps, actually, before he had left the council chamber. It sounded to be a mixture of relief and disgust, with, perhaps, just a touch of hope hanging around in there somewhere. Gramps smiled, and put his big arm around Twiggs shoulders as they left the huge room together.

"Perhaps it's time that young master Twiggington changed his own past," Gramps muttered, ostensibly to himself and the ceiling above, but obviously just loud enough for Twiggs to hear.

Without so much as another word, Gramps gave Twiggs a big hug, and then stepped off in the direction of home - the prospect of a fresh peach pie in the forefront of his concerns.

Twiggs shook his head as he watched the beloved old man turn the corner and disappear behind some recently waning hyacinths.

"That old man!" Twiggs muttered right back, sounding more than a little peeved. He just pushes and pushes and pushes ... and then, all of a sudden, ... somehow ... I know what it's all about."

His scowl eased into the slightest slip of a smile, and then, shortly, into his more familiar (and comfortable!), ear-to-ear grin.

"Guess I have some hard thinking to do before nightfall."

Twiggs sighed.

"Gramps undoubtedly thinks I'm ready for some sort of mental something-or-other. He only ever mutters to make a point. What would I do without dear old Gramps?"

Twiggs farjumped to his favorite thinking spot, West Mountain, (East Hill, from Jay's point of view). With his back against the familiar big oak tree, he sat and watched the sun set, hoping for some wondrous revelation. Before long, he had thought himself to sleep.

A short catnap later, he awakened with a start, as a nearby cricket, suddenly began tuning up for the imminent evening serenade.

As he stretched his arms and sat up, searching the

ground with his eyes for his hat, something rolled off his lap - a neatly cut, tiny cone, of late fall apple.

"Jay, you rascal!" Twiggs shouted at the top of his lungs, immediately poofing himself into invisibility.

Had Jay stuck around, (which of course he had not, considering the previous, sacrosanct arrangement that forbade Twiggs to intentionally allow himself to be seen by mortals), he would have seen a tiny, yellow-shirted arm reach out of nowhere and snatch the cone of apple back into nothingness.

That tidbit would most certainly not be left behind, because to Twiggs, Jay's apples always tasted best.

Chapter Nine: Life is nothing if it isn't about helping one another

It was that, 'absolutely necessary,' phrase in the guidelines that continued to throw Twiggs. There it was, still staring up at him from page seventy-seven of the Sacred Manual of Magic Utilization:

"When Goodakting or Wishgranting, use no more magic,

and give no more help, than is absolutely necessary." It seemed easy enough - easy enough until he got out there in the World, trying to abide by it.

For instance, that very morning he had been skipping stones on the creek just west of Jay's Grampa's cabin. He was beginning to make some progress on his contemplation of Gramps' mutterings a day or so earlier, when, he spied several mortal boys about his age, fishing and having a world of fun just a bit downstream. They were soaked from head to toe. Something hilarious had happened because they couldn't stop laughing. One rolled on the ground hysterically. The ends of their poles drooped into the water, and no fish in their right minds would have come within thirty feet of them. Clearly their outing was not really about fishing.

At first it just brought back grand memories of the past summer with Jay - the fun, the laughter, the - well, the camaraderie he supposed.

At about that moment, the larger of the two boys slipped and fell, hitting his head on a log and sliding, unconscious, into the stream. The smaller boy was quickly into the water, tugging and pulling and screaming for help.

There was no one else within miles. The current carried them further from shore and soon it seemed quite certain to Twiggs, that they required his help.

'What are my options,' he asked himself? Ideas raced through his mind. 'I could nearport them both out of the stream onto the grassy bank, but that would come under the lofty heading of an unexplainable phenomenon (page forty-four warned about always avoiding that kind of thing). 'I could give the smaller lad the strength he needed to complete the rescue. I could run a log out into the stream ahead of them so they could use it in some way.'

The latter became his first choice, and it was done in a blink - literally! Twiggs watched from above, perched there on the limb of a nearby tree. Sure enough, the smaller boy caught hold of the log and managed to position his friend's arms across it. After great effort and a good five minutes of terror, they were back on land.

Both were, by that time, cut and bleeding and the larger one had still not regained consciousness. The smaller one had taken on much water and had absolutely exhausted himself. Still he worked on, to care for his friend. A half hour passed. Then an hour. Finally, after two hours, the bigger boy woke up. Not long afterward, they began attempting the long trek back toward town, having to stop every few yards to rest. Twiggs monitored their progress until he saw them safely into the hands of several adults.

Twiggs had so wanted to heal the cuts and bring the boy around immediately. He had wanted to quicken the rescue process and reduce the sheer terror of the ordeal. At one point, he had even considered backtiming, and sending them off to school earlier in the day so they would have been where they should have been all along. Then none of that would have happened in the first place.

But that phrase, no more than absolutely necessary, didn't allow for any of that. He felt good that he had been there, and that he had helped them help themselves, so to speak, but continued to be bothered by the idea that he had been required to allow all that pain and panic, when it could have quite easily been avoided. It was a tormenting kind of quandary.

And then, take the day before. Old Mrs. Steven's cat was up the tree again - a weekly occurrence. Normally, Twiggs would not have even considered helping with something so trivial, but on that day a terrible thunder storm had blown in, and lightning was flashing here and there throughout the village. It distressed him to see that nice old lady standing out in that downpour, having to be so terribly upset. The cat, while undoubtedly uncomfortably wet, had, of course, no way of knowing it was in danger.

What in the name of St. Bountiful, did 'no more than absolutely necessary' mean, in that case. Twiggs had opted for a prank, of sorts, perching himself close to the cat, and barking like Lucky, the dog next door. In an instant, the cat propelled herself down the tree and like a flash from the heavens above, shot between Mrs. Steven's legs and into the familiar, dry recesses of the house within.

Twiggs giggled gleefully each time he thought of the wide-eyed look of surprised alarm on the cat's face as he had begun barking at it. The problem though, was that he really had no way of knowing if the cat might hurt itself, or would just refuse to move, or might even fall to its death. If the cat had been falling would it have been okay to somehow cushion its landing and save its life? He'd have done it, right or wrong, but for sure, he'd have not truly known ahead of time if it had been the thing he should be doing. No more than absolutely necessary was, you see, becoming an all-consuming dilemma for Twiggs.

That day, Twiggs still had one special visit to make. Mr. Porter, the chair caner, had been ill for several months. He and his family were poor even in the best of times. The chairs to be repaired sat unattended in his workshop. In their kitchen, the cupboards grew emptier and emptier. His wife had tried to fix a few of the chairs, and though her work was acceptable, she had neither the needed speed nor the time.

Being a proud man, Mr. Porter would not ask for help and made certain that his illness was kept from others.

"No more than absolutely necessary, huh!"

Jay had once read Twiggs a fairy tale - as the mortals called such stories - about a shoemaker and the elves that came to his shop at night and did for him the work that he was

unable to complete during the day. It was a happy story, about happy elves. It had a happy ending and Twiggs, ever so much wanted to be like the elves in that story. He wanted to go into the workshop and fix those seats all by himself. It would have given him that fuzziatious feeling inside, but that, of course, would be one of those unexplainable phenomenon - a strictly forbidden, No-No!

He didn't want to betray the man's pride - inappropriate as it may have seemed. What could he do? He paced the peak of the roof above the workshop. At about that time, who should happen by but, (well, after all this is a folk tale!) the Jay-man himself. Twiggs would have to think and act fast.

He swung open the door to the workshop. Twiggs knew Jay would not be able to pass up an open door and the opportunity to chat with one of his old friends.

As he entered into the uncharacteristic daytime darkness of the shop, Jay called out, "Mr. Porter, are you here?"

He flipped on the lights and at once saw the stacks of broken chairs needing Mr. Porter's special attention.

"This is weird," he said out loud. He began fiddling with the canes the way Mr. Porter had shown him a year or so before when he had spent a lot of time there. Before he realized it, an hour had passed and two chair seats had been repaired.

Deciding that Mr. Porter was not going to be coming to work anymore that day, Jay turned out the lights and carefully closed the door. He headed toward the Porter's house. Once on the back porch, he overheard them talking, and soon, Jay had the whole story in focus.

Undaunted by such things as pride or forethought, Jay just waded in. He knocked on the door and was invited inside. Now, Jay had an uncommonly quick mind, particularly when it came to, shall we say, scheming!

"Well, I won't take up much of your time, but I just wondered if you might be able to help out this - this - this club of mine. We are all trying to learn things about various trades and jobs, and, well, I was just wondering if maybe you'd let us try doing some chair caning - just to sort of get a feel for it, you understand."

Even with the little stretches of the truth here and there, Twiggs thought he could live with the plan. Neither he nor Jay himself knew just how this club was going to be whipped together in time, but that bridge would be crossed later. Mr. Porter agreed, confiding at last that he had not been feeling real well lately and would appreciate the help. His wife and Jay could supervise.

"Well, then," Jay said, "That will work out just fine for all of us, won't it!"

On that note, he left to somehow assemble the necessary afore mentioned club. Within that next hour, he had convinced a half dozen kids to help, and arranged for their mothers to drop in on the Porters with breads and casseroles and such.

Jay hoped he was doing the right thing. As he trotted home that afternoon, he did some major thinking of his own. 'So it hurts his pride a bit. He'll get over that and, after all, they do have to eat. And who knows, maybe one of the kids will like caning enough to actually take it up as a profession.'

With that, he was satisfied that he had made the right decision. It wasn't until a bit later, when he got into his room and saw his tattered old copy of, *The Elves and the Shoemaker* sprawled, all quite inappropriately, there on his desk, that Jay realized he had had an unseen accomplice in all of it. He smiled and didn't even bother looking around the room, knowing full well he'd not really see his old friend. But, as usual, just knowing for sure and certain that Twiggs was about, made him feel warm and wonderful inside.

That night Jay dreamt of the summer past and of a special friend who had taught him so well, that life is nothing if it isn't about helping one another.

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Chapter Ten: You only seek praise when you're unsure of yourself

'Seldom has so little effort accomplished so much,' Twiggs was thinking to himself, as he looked back a week to the Porter thing with Jay. 'All I did was open a workshop door, and let nature take its course. Now that was truly a case of using no more anything than was absolutely necessary. Gramps will really be proud of that one.'

And Gramps was proud. In fact, Gramps was proud of all the Goodakts Twiggs had to report to him that week. Proud, but, true to his style, not overly complementary.

"You're really getting the hang of this thing," Gramps said.

"It's not as easy as I used to think it would be," Twiggs said.

"What's not as easy?" Gramps asked.

"Being a Man of the Clan. All I used to see were the things that seemed exciting, I guess. Farjumping, crimson vests, appearing before the Council, getting married, going to work every day - things like that. I didn't realize it all took so much planning and training and thought, I guess. It all just seemed to be so easy for everyone."

Making a task look effortless is the sign of an expert," Gramps explained. You can always spot an amateur by how much strain he exhibits. As one gets more proficient, one strains less."

It made sense, although in some ways Twiggs disliked the idea of giving up the sympathy and support others had shown him when they had seen he was struggling. How often had he ever heard anyone say, "Good going"? Didn't even

know you'd started yet," or "Wonderful job. No one even noticed you were doing it."

Perhaps to need such praise was wrong, but Twiggs liked it and even thought he deserved it. Suddenly, it had become a burning issue. Twiggs would do some investigating on his own.

With pencil and paper, he designed a form. Across the top, he printed several column headings, under which he could record the events and behaviors in question.

Task | Amount of Effort | Reactions of others | Reaction of Doer

Clipboard in hand, Twiggs set off to make some observations. He began his investigation in the Bountiful Square, perching himself inconspicuously atop the railing around the band stand. (Well, as inconspicuously as possible, being that he was the only thirteen-year-old in town, and was sitting there, openly taking notes on a clipboard!)

He spied his first case: Mrs. Bark, far larger around her midsection than anyone else in the village, had dropped a bundle onto the sidewalk. She attempted to bend over and pick it up, but bending and Mrs. Bark were incompatible concepts. Since magic was not to be used to help oneself except in dire emergencies, she had a problem.

Almost immediately, however, three gentlemen moved in to be of help. Old Mr. Reed was the first on the scene. Gingerly deliberate, he bent down to fetch the package, and with clear effort, finally stood up again. With a tip of his hat, he presented her with the parcel.

Seeing how difficult it had been for him, and being somewhat embarrassed that, at her younger age, she had been unable to help herself, she thanked the old man profusely.

He made excuses for her, "Come now, a young lady such as yourself should never have to stoop in public."

She blushed, thanked him again, and hastened on her way. The other, younger men, patted Reed on the back as if he had just saved the village from flood or famine.

"Let's see," Twiggs said.

TASK: to pick up dropped bundle

EFFORT: too much for Mrs. Bark
quite a bit for Mr. Reed

REACTIONS: overdone by all parties

At that point, the breeze picked up and blew the hat from one of the younger men's head. He chased it down, almost joyously, brushed it off and re-planted it, quite firmly, on his head. It was like all one graceful set of well-planned movements - like something he had done every day of his life.

TASK: chase down hat

EFFORT: apparently little. Seemed to enjoy the activity.

REACTIONS: those who watched said nothing. The man himself smiled broadly, not letting it interrupt his activity.

Twiggs left the square and farjumped out to the Porter's, where he knew Jay and his 'club members' would be helping fix the chairs. Hiding on a rafter, Twiggs observed Jay doing a fine job - his movements were smooth and he seldom seemed to have to stop and think about what to do next. No one seemed to pay much attention to what he was doing.

Georgie, on the other hand, seemed to need a lot of help from Mrs. Porter. He was also told frequently what a good job he was doing - good for him perhaps, but not good in any way related to being a truly good caner.

It all seemed backwards to Twiggs. Why would folks want to become good at something if, when they did, others stopped paying any attention to them? A quandary!

TASK: caning chair seats

EFFORT: Jay - very little.

Georgie - a great deal.

REACTIONS OF OTHERS: To Jay - hardly any

To Georgie - a lot of flattering remarks.

REACTION OF DOERS: Jay - whistled happily.

Georgie asked a lot of questions, like; "Am I doing good on this part?"

Perhaps he was observing the wrong kinds of tasks, Twiggs thought to himself.

Even before his recent interest in the topic, Twiggs had noticed that mortals often confused excellence of effort with excellence of performance. Not long ago when he had been

trying to find Jay at his school, Twiggs happened into a first-grade room by mistake.

At the conclusion of a little boy's halting - atrocious, actually - attempt to read a page from the primer, the teacher told him what a fine job he had done. Now, he had stuck with it right to the end, even though it was plainly a most difficult and unpleasant task for him. Twiggs could see how the teacher might compliment him for his willingness to keep at it - that seemed quite legitimate - but to indicate that the reading itself had been adequate, seemed a most unfair, if not downright deceitful, fabrication. See, she had confused excellence of effort with excellence of performance.

Twiggs could tell from the expression on the youngster's face that his overall humiliation, stemming from having to read in front of the class, was multiplied even more by the teacher's implausible praise. Twiggs could just hear him thinking: "Who does she think I am? Just because I can't read doesn't mean I'm some kind of fool?"

Aside from the size thing and the magical powers and immortality, Little People and mortals were different in several other very basic ways. He and Jay had often talked of it.

Honesty was certainly one of them. Twiggs was especially intrigued by the special category of permissible dishonesty the mortals referred to as little white lies. Probably, the teacher would have classified in that way, what she had just done (though to the lad, there had been nothing little about it).

What old Mr. Reed had said to Mrs. Bark was different from a white lie, Twiggs thought. When he had said that young ladies should not have to stoop in public, he was sort of building in a legitimate excuse for her so she wouldn't have to be embarrassed. It was not a lie, it was a way to help her save face - to feel better about herself.

'What would that teacher have said if she had been a Little Person,' Twiggs wondered? 'She might have said, "You know, I really admire you for the way you hung in there and kept trying. I know reading is really hard for you, but still, you didn't give up." Yes, that's the kind of thing a Little Person would have said.'

Twiggs thought the boy not only could have accepted

that, but that it was honest and would have made him feel better because it was honest. Reading in front of the class would then no longer have to be a feared and humiliating affair, but, rather, a chance to prove something good and strong about his character. Even Jay agreed that many mortals had a lot to learn about honesty. Twiggs was really proud of how far Jay had come. (So was Jay!)

And then there was selfishness. It was such a far-reaching phenomenon that mortals had to have a whole list of words to cover its many nuances: self-centered, pompous, egotistical, greedy, self-indulgent, stinginess, vanity, conceit, narcissism - well, the list went on and on. Jay had pointed out that Roget's Thesaurus had twenty-seven entries under the term.

The Little People had just one similar word - fuzziacious. It had no good literal translation into the mortal's version of the English language, but it meant that wonderful warm feeling folks get inside themselves when they know they have been able to be of some benefit to another. It is, perhaps, like selfish, in that it is a feeling everyone seeks to create inside themselves because they so enjoy experiencing it. It is unlike selfish, in that the focus or the recipient is always some other person.

A mortal teenager might be heard to say, "I sure would like to have a date with Cathy tonight." The Little Person counterpart would more likely be heard to say, "I sure would like for Stumpy to have a date with Cathy tonight."

Twiggs could not remember a time when he truly wanted - perhaps coveted would be the more applicable term - something he really didn't need. He often wanted nice things for others - things that would make their lives somehow easier or happier or more productive. Perhaps it was because all of those folks around him also wanted those same things for him, that he had no truly important unmet needs. Such a way of life made good sense to him. They were all ever mindful of one another's needs, and just took good care of each other. Seemed simple enough to Twiggs.

He remembered when Jay had given him his magnificent brass button. Although Twiggs admired it, he was truly pleased that Jay was the one who had it. That gave him

a fuzziacious feeling from head to toe. When Jay ripped it off and gave it to him, Twiggs was quite embarrassed to think that he might have implied that he wanted it. He truly had not wanted it for himself. Now that he has it, it is one of his all-time treasures, of course. It is precious, partly because it was given to him by his best friend, and partly because it was his first indication that this mortal he was getting to know, just might have a touch of the fuzziacious in him as well.

And why not. After all, back before the Wise One separated their ancestors into Little People and Mortals, they did all share the same background - the same genes and all other aspects of their makeup. Certainly, somewhere deep inside these mortals there must still lie a touch of the fuzziacious waiting to be rekindled.

Twiggs was becoming quite the philosopher; a state Gramps had once said got forced upon one when satisfactory answers to the important questions about life and the universe were not easily found. A social philosophy, such as that of the Little People, based on the concept of fuzziaciousness, seemed far superior to Twiggs, to one built on a competitive, must win, self-centeredness.

That night in his notes he took time to comment on his revelations:

"It seems to me that we Little People, and a few mortals - like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jay - live our lives in terms of us, while a great many mortals live their lives in terms of me. And one thing more, I think I've figured out this praise thing. It's like Jay said once: You only need praise when you're not sure of your own worth. When you know you are trying your best, when you know you want what's best for others, when you know that to make an honest mistake is in no way a personal put down, then you don't need reassurance, and it doesn't matter what others say to you or about you - good or bad - because, like the Jay-man says, you only need praise when you're not sure of yourself.

Chapter Eleven

Dreams without schemes, are like barbers without scissors

Since Jay was Twiggs very best guy friend in the World - well, in the two Worlds, actually - Twiggs thought it was time for Cinnamon to become better acquainted with him. What better way to do that, then to follow Jay through an entire day!

Cinnamon was not used to arising at four thirty in the morning, but on such a special occasion she was up and ready well ahead of the time Twiggs landed on her back porch. Her mother had breakfast ready - just in case Twiggs might be hungry. He ate his second fill of the morning and they were off into the World of the Mortals.

It was a few minutes before five when they arrived on the top of a fence post in Jay's back yard. Exactly on cue, Jay flew out the door at five am. It was somewhat strange, seeing him bundled up in a jacket, gloves, and boots, but the extra garments didn't seem to slow him down nor dampen his enthusiasm.

Though still dark at that hour on a late November, Ozark, morning, the moon above was all the light Jay needed. In the familiar manner that belonged only to the Jay-man, he galloped across the frost covered grass, whooping and hollering, announcing to the birds and other little animals of the meadow that, regardless of the tardiness of the sun, it was, indeed, time for them to rise and shine.

"No place for lazy creatures in God's World this morning," he shouted. "Wake up and enjoy a brand-new day!"

That pretty well summarized Jays philosophy of life!

Twiggs shook his head and waxed a bit philosophical to Cinnamon:

"I can just see him when he's ninety-nine, hobbling across the meadow and shaking his cane at all the animals. He'll be doing it, too, you just wait and see!"

The thought that Jay would one day become old and infirmed, momentarily saddened the immortal Twiggs, and he grew silent.

This was the closest Cinnamon had ever been to Jay, and she thought him a very nice looking lad - though far younger than she had expected. His age had just never come up in her discussions with Twiggs.

"It's amazing that a boy so young can be so wise and inventive," she said.

"He's both of those for sure, and more compassionate than most adults," Twiggs added.

Jay headed straight for Jutting Rock and the swimming hole, which Twiggs had earlier arranged to keep warm for him all winter long. No sooner there, then he began stripping down for his usual early morning skinny dip. Twiggs had anticipated this, and had planned an alternate activity - "Plan B," as Jay termed it - to keep Cinnamon occupied elsewhere.

"While he takes his swim, why don't I show you the cabin that Jay and I fixed up last summer," Twiggs suggested.

Obviously relieved, Cinnamon happily took his hand and together they nearjumped up the hill to the front step of the cabin. Once inside, Twiggs began recounting all the mortal-type effort the two of them had put into refurbishing the place. Jay had allowed very little magic, and then only when mortal sweat absolutely couldn't get the job done.

"Jay says that it's the sweat and effort that's most of the fun. On one occasion, he even made me refrain from Goodakting, and actually had me pry a splinter out of his hand with a needle," Twiggs said, shuddering at the memory.

He then went on to point out the new logs they had cut and lifted into place close to the ceiling, and the new window panes they had installed. She examined the masonry work they had done on the fireplace and Twiggs pointed out - though did not disturb - the loose stone, behind which Jay was keeping the scroll from the Council of Elders, the belt/ring he

had given him, and the other precious mementoes of their summer together.

Just in time, Twiggs had seen, and nearported out of sight, several less than fully decent pictures of young ladies, which Jay had tacked above his bed. Seeing them brought back memories of very special conversations - the kind that only boys ever had together. He felt, momentarily, a bit sad that he now had no one with whom to have such talks. Being a Little Person youngster was in that way, a very lonely existence. Perhaps, he could work on that. Later.

After completing the tour inside, they went outside and Twiggs demonstrated his tree climbing prowess, and his skill at walking the rail-fence. He pointed out to her the signs they had carved with Jay's pocket knife - one over the door that said Jay and Twiggs, and another that said, No girls allowed.

"That one was mostly Jay's idea," Twiggs was quick to point out.

"From the looks of those pictures in there, he doesn't feel that way anymore," Cinnamon added, putting her hands to her face with a giggle and a blush, and turning away to look out over the meadow.

Twiggs blushed as well, feeling more than a little self-conscious over the whole thing.

"Guess I didn't hide them quick enough, huh! I'm sorry if that embarrassed you. It's hard to explain. It's something guys do. We don't mean anything bad by it. It's just ..."

Twiggs sensed that he was rambling again and getting nowhere even faster than usual, so he stopped talking and just shrugged his shoulders. Cinnamon nodded as if she sort of understood - even though she mainly sort of didn't!

From there on the hill, Twiggs could see that Jay had finished his swim and was getting dressed. He and Cinnamon walked down the path to the meadow, and then nearported close to a fully clothed Jay, who, by then, was busily engaged in moving about some large stones - the purpose of which was not at all clear. Knowing Jay, it could have been for the pure pleasure of just moving some large stones around!

"Watch this," Twiggs said, the impish look and high pitched giggle of a Little Person, gleefully evident.

As Jay began tugging and snorting, trying to lift the very

largest of the stones, Twiggs lightened it to the point that it could easily be moved with one finger. Jay immediately put it down. Smiling broadly and looking all around, he raised both arms in his now familiar 'V-for friendship' sign. (I know, V for friendship makes no sense, but this is Jay about whom we are speaking.)

He always did that when he sensed Twiggs was nearby. Twiggs made a mental note to ask him about it when they had their first face to face meeting, late in December.

Soon, it was back to the house for breakfast with his parents. From their vantage point atop the china cupboard, Twiggs yearned for just one small piece of Jay's mother's blueberry pancakes. He remembered how delicious they were and it had been well over two hours since he had eaten.

The big yellow school bus arrived, and out the door Jay flew, book bag in hand, waving and yelling to the driver and all the kids.

"He sure seems popular," Cinnamon commented.

"Yeah, everybody loves Jay, though some of the parents still think their children's safety may be in serious jeopardy when they are near him. He does try some crazy things sometimes - well often - most of the time, actually," Twiggs explained, succumbing to complete honesty.

It would take the bus fifteen minutes to get Jay to school, so to kill time, Twiggs took Cinnamon on a tour of Jay's room. He knew Jay wouldn't mind. There would be no indiscrete pictures there - at least none out in the open that his Mom could see.

Not totally unexpected by Twiggs, they found a saucer on his desk containing morsels of pancakes and sausage and a pie-like-sliced, round of banana.

Cinnamon found herself a bit hungry as well, and the two of them picnicked right there on the desk. Jay had things prepared. He had spread out a red farmer's handkerchief for a blanket, supplied two tiddley-wink pieces for dishes, and small lengths of flat toothpicks for utensils - of sorts. It was a fine breakfast.

While they ate, Twiggs pointed out to Cinnamon several of his own favorite mortal books - Peter Pan, The Elves and The Shoemaker, Treasure Island, and William

Penn: friendly boy. He made special note of *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, commenting that mortals often seemed to be unable to learn much of value from their own history. It was a genuine puzzlement.

"This is Jay's all-time favorite: *Walden Pond*, by Henry David Thoreau."

Cinnamon moved to examine the books, and as she discovered that it took her entire hand to cover up just one word on those pages, she began to sense for the first time how huge these mortals really were. She continued to peruse the books as Twiggs checked the desk to see what Jay's current projects might be.

He found plans for a diving tower to be built on Jutting Rock - something he and Sammy must have been working on, and a half-finished model airplane that scarcely resembled the picture on the box - Jay always had to add his own variations.

There was also a hand-written document, titled, "The Rules Governing the Spring Meadow Goodakt Club." As he read the Preamble, Twiggs both giggled out loud and felt a lump of pride welling up in his throat: For the first time he knew for sure and certain that he had, in fact, influenced Jay, just as he was so well aware that Jay had influenced him.

'We, the little people of Spring Meadow, in order to form a more perfect community, do hereby band together, to each and every day, spread happiness and helpfulness in unselfish ways to those experiencing need or sorrow. A final phrase - regardless of race, creed, national origin or other preferences - had been marked out. A comment in the margin, with an arrow pointing at the deleted passage, read: "Absolutely asinine to even have to point out such an obvious fact.'

The document went on to outline activities and approved methods for accomplishing those goals. At the bottom, it had been signed by Jay and Sammy and Georgie, and several others who Twiggs didn't know, but suspected were a part of the "Help the Porters" crusade.

As Cinnamon looked on, stunned and mouth agape, Twiggs dipped his right hand into a bottle of ink, and pressed his palm hard against the bottom of the page, right beside Jay's signature. That, he thought, would let Jay know he approved, and that he would be around to help, if such

assistance were ever needed or desired.

Cinnamon then helped him clean his hand, shaking her head in disbelief, the whole time.

"Boys are truly messy beings," she muttered.

Twiggs smiled, and worked at trying to kiss her, all the while she was continuing to rub his hand with a small piece of tissue.

"You could have just wished it clean, you know," Twiggs pointed out, after she had, at last, taken care of it.

"Yes, I could have, but then I wouldn't have had an excuse to hold your hand like this, would I?"

That was a lead-in to a long and lingering kiss if Twiggs had ever heard one. As it turned out, it was, indeed, a truly wonderful, long and lingering kiss, if Twiggs had ever had one!

Wanting much more, they decided better of it, and farported to the top of the flagpole just outside of Jay's school. They arrived just as several buses were pulling up.

"Guess which one is Jay's," Twiggs asked Cinnamon, his eyes twinkling.

"Number 7. No doubt about it!" she answered after only a moments' thought.

Bus number 7 was filled with song and laughter - two things that Cinnamon had already learned, just seemed to follow Jay where ever he went. Sure enough, first one off was an exuberant Jay, still singing at the top of his lungs and waving at everybody who were there.

At that moment, one sensed the teachers and the school building itself, bracing themselves for a brand-new day with Jay. They loved the boy, but his mere presence seemed cause for elevated anxiety and an uneasy disquietude.

Though probably witnessed by no one other than Twiggs and Cinnamon, Jay's first mission that morning was to seek out Mark, another fifth-grade boy. He was wearing a shabby coat, and had no boots or gloves. Bumping into the lad from the rear - all quite intentionally - Jay inconspicuously dropped a pair of new leather gloves onto the ground beside him.

"Hey, Mark! Sorry about that. Should have been watching where I was going," he said apologetically.

Then, stooping over and picking up the gloves, Jay

continued:

"Here, I must have knocked these out of your pocket. Come on over and let's shoot some hoops before second bell."

Mark knew what had just taken place, of course. Jay winked at him and he winked back. Later on, when they had some privacy, Mark would find a way to thank him. (By the way, Mark was the only one of the guys shooting baskets with his gloves on, that morning.)

Twiggs and Cinnamon followed Jay from class to class. Although Twiggs had done so on several previous occasions, it was Cinnamon's first experience within a school setting, and she found it fascinating. At the same time, however, she was also distressed at the pains to which teachers and students had to go in order for new things to be learned.

At one point the teacher called on a gangly, too big, in every way out of place looking boy, at the back of room. His hair was disheveled, his face was smudged, and his attention was wandering.

"David, what is seven times nine?"

There was a long and awkward pause during which the other students snickered and whispered among themselves, undoubtedly certain that David would never in a million years be able to answer, what to them seemed like a relatively simple question.

Cinnamon, without thinking and yet with all the compassion in her big heart, mindtawkt the answer into his head.

When the lad stood up beside his seat and, in a loud clear voice uttered, "Sixty-three!" the room became hushed. The teacher became speechless. The children all turned in their seats to look him. David shrugged his shoulders, as if to say I have no more idea how that could have happened than you do! Jay, of course, clapped and whistled, adding, "Good going Daviloni!"

Twiggs nudged Cinnamon and quietly cautioned her against such interference again. She knew it had been out of place, but, in her mind, no one deserved to be treated that way. The bell rang and it was time for lunch. Twiggs sighed a sigh of relief. Jay raised his hands in his V for friendship

sign - he knew Twiggs was around!

At noon, a most complex and intrigue-laden series of events transpired. In the hall, on the way to the cafeteria, Jay handed fifty cents to a younger boy who gave him a large, white rock, in return.

"That's silica sand," Twiggs whispered to Cinnamon.

Jay then traded the rock to an older boy for a dollar bill - the older boy had ordered it the day before to use in a science experiment. The dollar bill went as payment to a fifth-grade girl, for what appeared to be a lock of her hair, sealed in an envelope. Jay delivered that envelope to a sixth-grade boy, who, rolling his eyes as he smelled the envelope, gladly paid Jay two dollars for it.

Still not done with his horse trading, Jay took the two dollars to the school's bookstore and bought a supply of pencils, to each of which he hurriedly tied a small tassel of red and white - the school colors. He stood at the cafeteria door and sold them for fifteen cents each. By the time they were gone, and he was ready to enter and get his own lunch, he had parlayed his original fifty cent investment into six dollars. He counted out fifty cents to cover that, and then another fifty to cover the cost of the yarn he had used to make the tassels. The remaining five dollars went into a special brown envelope, carefully secured inside his three ring note book. That envelope was labeled - in his own, next to illegible scrawl - Start-up funds for project Goodakt Club.

Twiggs shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. There were no words to say. Cinnamon was rapidly rounding out her previously sketchy picture of this Jay-man.

"I see why you love him so, Twiggs," Cinnamon whispered. "He's really just one of us disguised as a mortal, isn't he?"

"Ya, one of us, all right," Twiggs agreed, "But look at all he can accomplish without any of our magic. For us Little People, most dreams can just magically be transformed into reality, but, as Jay pointed out to me long ago, in the Mortal Realm, dreams without schemes, are like barbers without scissors."

Chapter Twelve
Silence among friends can be
a sincere sign of love and mutual respect.

Twiggs and Cinnamon were convinced, that when it came to schemes, Jay was the all-time master. When it came to dreams, he did pretty well, also.

Once in the cafeteria, Jay filled his tray and took a seat beside Mark - the boy with the new gloves. Mark seemed to have few friends, as no one was sitting with him. That also made Cinnamon sad. She was fast coming to believe that this mortal realm, though being filled with large humans, was too often small on being humane.

Jay talked with Mark about the Goodakt Club and he beamed from ear-to-ear, just thinking that he was to be included. Then, his face suddenly saddened.

"I don't have nothin' I can give folks, like you can. I reckon I better just pass," he said unhappily.

"Nonsense," Jay said. "You have all kinds of things to give. I know you are good with tools and there are always people needing things fixed up around their houses. And you're kind to others - that's free isn't it, just being kind?"

"Well, I guess so. I didn't know those things counted."

Within five minutes Mark was an eager convert. Jay made his excuses and moved with his tray to another table, and began his smoozing all over again. (Smoozing was a word Grampa Doug used to describe exactly what Jay was doing.)

Before lunch period was over, Jay and his tray had visited a half dozen different tables. As first bell sounded, the

others at his table got up and left, all having agreed to participate in the new club. Jay, however, busied himself creating two small peanut butter sandwiches, and shredding a carrot stick into tiny strips.

Having arranged them on the napkin, he raised his arms in his friendship signal, just in case Twiggs' concentration had wandered, and, leaving the little goodies atop a cabinet secluded behind the door, he left the room.

The morsels were a welcome sight to Twiggs and Cinnamon, who delighted in every bite. As the last bell rang, they cleaned up the remaining crumbs and were off to find Jay's classroom.

They spent the next several periods watching, listening and learning about the lives of young mortals. Last period was Jay's study hall, which he spent volunteering in the room for the deaf students. Besides his good friend, Sammy, there were three others there. They welcomed Jay with open arms, each one wanting him to help them, first. Jay managed to get around to all of them before the period was over. It appeared to Cinnamon that Jay was a natural teacher.

"How does he know what to do?" she asked Twiggs.

"How does Jay know how to do any of the things he does so well?" Twiggs answered with a shrug and a grin. "For one thing, he just never considers the possibility that he won't somehow be able to figure out how to do whatever it is that needs doing. Frankly, I think he just makes most of it up as he goes along."

It was report card day, so before leaving the building, Jay stopped back by his home room to pick it up. Without looking at it, he stuffed it into his book bag and was off to tell his bus driver that he wouldn't be riding that afternoon.

Twiggs explained to Cinnamon about report cards and what they represented. Since it appeared to be important, she thought it odd that Jay hadn't even looked at his.

"Jay hasn't received anything but "A's" since he started school," Twiggs explained. "So, I suppose he has no reason to look. And anyway, grades really aren't very important to him. He's in school to learn, not to earn grades."

"Learn and socialize," Cinnamon added with a giggle.

Twiggs had to agree with that!

Jay sat on the concrete slab that held the flagpole, and waited for his merry band of goodacters to assemble. Once there, they set off on foot for the Porter's workshop at the edge of town. (The school visibly relaxed and the principal dabbed at his forehead with a tissue!)

"After today," Jay said, turning his head from side to side so all could hear, "I think we'll be pretty well caught up at the Porters. Then we'll just need to go in maybe once a week or so to take care of the new pieces that get dropped off for repair. We need to begin looking for our second project. Any ideas?"

Well, there were many ideas. Old Mrs. Stevens never did get her leaves raked and Sammy volunteered to take care of that. The fence around the town park needed painting. Jay's father had already talked the mayor into buying the paint. Mark said he'd head up the group to handle that project. Georgie's grandmother had just moved into Sunshine Manor - by any name, still the building where old folks were warehoused when their families were no longer willing or able to care for them. He asked if visiting her there would count as a goodakt. They all agreed that it would be one of the very best kind. Two of the girls said they would like to come along and get to know some of the other residents. It had been a most fruitful walk.

When they arrived, Mrs. Porter was there with cider and gingersnaps. She related that Mr. Porter had felt well enough to put in an hour at the workshop that morning himself.

"I have good news and bad news," she said smiling. "With your help, we just about have all the backlog caught up. But, your work has been so good that I am receiving more repair calls than ever from folks as far off as Bentonville and Mountain Home – even one from Little Rock."

Jay clapped.

"That sounds like a good news-good news story to me," he observed. The others nodded enthusiastically.

"Well, I suppose it is. My husband was saying that if things keep growing like this, even after he gets back to normal, he'll need to hire some extra help."

At that, Twiggs saw the proverbial light bulb begin to glow brightly above Jay's head. "What a great chance for

Mark to earn some money for him and his family,' Jay was thinking. Then a second bulb lit up - bigger and brighter! 'Or, maybe it could turn into a job for Mark's dad!' He would find time to talk to Mr. Porter about it before leaving town that day.

With only three chairs there to work on, Jay left Sammy in charge. He and Mark were off to the park to check out the fence. They walked it all around, noting repairs that would be needed before the painting could begin. Jay made notes about the supplies they would need. Mark agreed to get started on them the very next afternoon.

Jay began to realize that there was too much book keeping involved in this Goodakt Club - who was to do what, when, and what they would need and how to go about getting it. It was all revolving around him, and that would just not work in the long run. Once everyone got into the swing of things, they would have to be able to just find things and do them on their own. He wondered how the Little People handled all of that. He made another note to talk with Twiggs about it at the December meeting.

Seeing the message, Twiggs made a mental note to be prepared to talk with him about it. He was right, Twiggs thought. Somehow, each person has to come to see what needs to be done and then just go do it. Some projects would continue to need group cooperation, but mainly, goodakting needs to become a private thing. Twiggs also knew that without a Council of Elders, Jay, as smart as he was, would have to find some way to get wise counsel on certain cases. Just how that could come about, he was not at all sure.

Jay and Mark said good-bye and went their separate ways. Jay headed down Maple Street toward J. J.'s house - J. J. was a girl he really liked. He had, of course, never let her know that. Fifth grade boys almost always counted on fifth grade girl's ability to read their minds - they'd never come right out and say such things in words.

She was sitting on the porch with two girl friends as Jay approached. By the time he had crossed the street to her front steps, those friends had, of course, conveniently disappeared. Mind reading skills seemed to be in tact that afternoon!

Jay sat on the steps and they talked about nothing and

everything. Jay told her about the Goodakt Club and she thought it was a great idea and wanted to become a part of it. As romantically interested young ladies will do, she laughed too much at all his jokes and listened too intently as Jay talked on - and Jay would talk on, when given any encouragement whatsoever!

As he got up to leave, he reached out and tapped her shoulder with his knuckles - a gentle version of the bone crushing blows he and Mark had administered to one another as they had parted a half hour earlier. J. J. truly would have liked something more romantic. Even understanding that that was as romantic as fifth grade boys got, she decided to risk all. Leaning close, she gave him a quick peck on the cheek.

Jay just looked at her - speechless - and left. Once out of sight, he pounded his forehead with the heel of his hand. It had been his first kiss from a girl and he had just sat there, drooling like an idiot. Even though totally unexpected, still, he should have been prepared, he should have been more alert, he should have kissed her back. What good had all the apple-smooching been if he didn't put it to the test?

"Dumb! Dumb! Dumb!" he mumbled to himself as he took off on a trot down the street that led to the road that would take him to his Grampa's place. "Dumb, dumb, dumb, dumb, dumb!"

Twiggs and Cinnamon had witnessed the whole affair - well, 'affair' hardly applies, I suppose - and they giggled with some degree of understanding. Twiggs took it as an opening to give his lady a kiss - not a fifth grade knuckle to the shoulder or Lilliputian peck on the cheek, mind you, but a full blown, hold her close, look her in the eyes, mingle the tongues, breath through the nose, thirteen year old man-type version. (Things like that reasonably began significantly earlier than in the mortal realm, considering the early age for marrying.)

"I sure to do like to kiss you, Cinnamon." he told her at last, still surveying her face with his eyes, and brushing back her golden hair.

"I've noticed," she quipped, pecking him on the lips one more time for good measure.

"You realize it's going to be almost four years until we

get married and can do anything more than just kiss?"

Cinnamon blushed. It was the first time they had ever actually spoken about that "anything more" topic.

"Lucky for us, we enjoy just kissing, then, right?" Cinnamon managed, after an awkward moment.

Twiggs grinned and nodded, appreciating her quick wisdom. "Ya, and that's fine. I didn't mean to embarrass you, Cinnamon, but it's something I do think about sometimes - well, honestly, I think about it a lot."

"Me too."

"Really? I didn't think girls thought about stuff like that. I mean I did, but I didn't."

Once again, Twiggs was getting nowhere fast. He stopped. Slowly but surely, he was learning how to merely dig himself into small holes rather than the bottomless pits of old!

"We better catch up with Jay," Twiggs said, holding Cinnamon's hand ever so tightly. At that point a little physical exercise seemed like a very good idea to Twiggs, so, while Cinnamon nearjumped along from fence post to fence post, he jogged along the dusty road just behind Jay. Huffing and puffing, he soon realized that he had let himself get a bit out of shape recently. He'd have to put a little road work into his daily schedule.

After a twenty minute trot out Old Mission Road, they all arrived at Jay's Grampa's cabin. By then, dusk had set in - the sun having just slipped behind the low hill to the West. The windows glowed a friendly welcome and the soft white smoke gently rising from the chimney seemed to say 'follow me inside and you'll find a warm safe haven.' Jay knocked his familiar two handed knock - actually more like a knuckle busting drum roll.

His Gramma greeted him with a big hug. A few moments of catching up followed, as Jay hung his jacket close to the fireplace so it would be nice and warm when he left. He was to have supper with them, as his parents had been invited out for the evening.

And supper he had! Gramma Mary always put on a feed that included all of Jay's favorites - ham, yams, green beans, mashed potatoes, hot rolls and honey, and peach pie with ice cream for dessert. As they all enjoyed the meal and

the time together, Jay told of his Goodakt Club. Gramma Mary seemed pleased. For some reason, the usually easy going Grampa Doug seemed positively overjoyed! His eyes twinkled and his interest overflowed in an uncharacteristic fashion.

Supper over, Jay and Grampa did the dishes, scooting Gramma off to her knitting, as was their custom. Also, as was their custom, Jay asked Grampa to tell him a story about the Little People - somehow, Grampa seemed to know the very best ones!

Twiggs and Cinnamon settled in on top of the ice-box (refrigerator, for the younger generation) to listen. Sitting with their backs against the cookie jar, Jay put one arm around his special lady's shoulders, and held her hand with the other. She snuggled close, and reached up with her face and kissed him on the chin. He returned the gesture with a peck to her forehead.

"Once upon a time," - Gramps was from the old school of storytelling, so he always began that way - "there was a lonely mortal boy who lived in a valley much like this one. One day, while climbing a large tree behind his house, the most extraordinary occurrence took place. A little person lad, no more than six inches tall appeared to him, peeking out from behind a clump of leaves.

"After some initial hesitation, and unqualified amazement on both of their parts, they began to converse. Discovering that they were the same age, they also soon ascertained that they had much in common." (His Grampa was the editor of a small, local, weekly, newspaper, so forgive him if he sometimes speaks in very fancy words!)

"During that summer - and in fact, for three wonderful years - they were the best of friends - comrades to the end. They climbed the trees, built a magnificent tree house, swung for hours at a time in the tire swing, and swam the summer days away in the nearby stream.

"Now all of this was necessarily kept secret from the mortal boy's parents, you understand, because grown-up mortals have a bizarre way of becoming fearful of that which they can't immediately comprehend.

"At the end of those three extraordinary years together,

they were required to part - it had to do with long standing statutes and customs of the Little People. The mortal boy has now grown to be an old man, but to this very day, that Little Person sometimes visits him - all quite invisible to the mortal, you understand."

Jay interrupted: "If the Little Person is invisible, how does the old man know he comes to visit?"

"Perceptive as usual, Jay," Grampa said. "When they were together as boys, they had a saying about wooden nickels - those are oversized replicas of nickels made from wood. In the old days, stores used to hand them out as advertising."

Gramps opened the cupboard door and took down an old green-tinted Mason jar. From it he took one, of what must have been hundreds of small, round, flat, objects about the size of a dime.

"Wooden nickels looked something like this, only much larger, even larger than this lid," Gramps explained, letting Jay briefly hold and examine it.

Replacing the jar back into the cupboard, he continued:

"Well, whenever the Little Person would pay a visit, he would always leave a hand carved wooden nickel, so his mortal friend would know he was around."

Jay's mind began to race, piecing together the puzzle that Twiggs, of course, already knew. Gramps had told Twiggs the same story months before. Gramps was the Little Person, and Jay's Grampa Doug was the mortal. Twiggs had decided not to divulge that to Jay, however. Now he wondered if Grampa Doug was about to do just that.

"So Grampa, tell me some more about those tiny little wooden nickels in that jar. How have you come by so many of them?"

Eyes twinkling, and face beaming like Jay had never before witnessed, Grampa put his big arm around his grandson's shoulder and drew him close.'

"I reckon I came by them in the very same way you came by that wonderful word, Goodakt, you were talking about at supper, earlier," he replied.

Jay looked up, telegraphing a "woops!" of major proportion. Grampa looked down with total understanding. In

the instant that their eyes met, it had all become quite clear to both of them.

It was a long and silent hug that followed. Then Grampa spoke:

"If you ever feel like talking more, you know I'm here."

"Oh, I want to talk more, you can bet on that," Jay said. "At last I have a Gramps of my own."

"A Gramps of your own?" Grampa Doug asked. "I don't understand."

"My friend has a wise grandfather who helps him through the tough decisions he needs to make about goodakting and such. Now, I can talk with you about it. You can't know how really great this is going to be, Grampa!"

"Maybe not. But I'm sure eager to find out."

It seemed to be the hug that wouldn't stop.

Cinnamon wept openly, the way girls tend to do at touching moments like that, while Twiggs blinked back his own tears, the way - well you know the drill. They each had mixed emotions about what they had just witnessed. On the one hand, it had been tender and wonder-filled, and they were happy they had been a part of it. On the other, it was as if they were intruding into a moment that should have been very private, just between Jay and his Grampa. Gramma noticed her two 'men' were particularly quiet during the rest of the evening. Jay silently popped corn in the fireplace, using the wire mesh popper he had made them for Christmas. He seemed preoccupied with the dancing flames. Grampa puffed on his pipe, blowing more than his usual quota of gently rising smoke rings.

After a while, Gramma Mary stopped trying to make conversation and concentrated on the sweater she was knitting, enjoying some special memories of her own. A wonderful, love filled, silence fell upon them - together, yet each unselfishly permitted his own deep and private thoughts.

Twiggs and Cinnamon took their leave. It had been a most constructive and revealing day for Cinnamon, just as Twiggs had hoped it would be. She now felt she really knew the Jay-man, and understood why that nickname was so appropriate. She also came away from that evening with the realization that silence among friends can be a sincere sign of

love and mutual respect.

Chapter Thirteen

Being a mortal is far more difficult than being a Little Person

Although Twiggs had, from time to time, thought it would be more fun being a mortal than a little person, he and Cinnamon had recently concluded that mortals had the more difficult lot in life. That wasn't bad or anything like that, mind you, it was just different.

In fact, all quite privately, Twiggs still often wished he could live according to the constraints and demands of the mortal realm. There was something invigorating and self-affirming about living a life without magic. To have accomplished something important through one's own resourcefulness and effort, seemed somehow more legitimate - more meaningful - than merely using magic.

In light of this revelation - or whim as it was characterized by a few of his fellow Bountifillians - Twiggs had set aside every Monday as 'Mortal Monday'. He did no more magic than was absolutely required on Mondays, and went about his life as much like a mortal as possible. He had convinced the Council of Elders that the depth of understanding, which could only come in this way, was an essential part of his training if he were to become the best possible Ambassador to the Mortal Realm.

He would walk or run from place to place and never nearjump or farjump. He would lift heavy objects himself and would carry things from place to place without the benefit of farporting. When he wanted lemonade, he would squeeze the lemons by hand rather than merely thinking them juiceless.

His major project - and one that did set him aside as eccentric, even in the eyes of the most liberal of the Townsmen - was the building of the house he and Cinnamon would occupy when they were married. Now that was still three and a half years away. A good stump home could be zapped into shape with no more than a half dozen well planned magical blinks - a thirty second project at the most. But no, post-Jay Twiggs had embarked on a three and a half year long, magic-less house building project.

It was not only that, that demonstrated his departure from clear wittedness, but he had forgone the traditional home site, for (hold onto your socks, here!) a tree house. Oh, not just a carve-out-a-house-in-the-base-of-a-living-redwood-tree, kind of house - that might have been marginally tolerable. No, Twiggs was erecting a house up in the branches of a tree.

He and Cinnamon had selected a beautiful, sturdy, big oak tree (well as big as an oak tree grew in the diminutive style of the Little People's realm). It was about half way between his house and that of Gramps', and overlooked the town of Bountiful on the West and the pass through the hills leading to Harmony on the East. An ideal spot for the two of them to spend eternity - that much everyone did agree.

It would have a large window on the East to allow the morning sun to flood the home with light and warmth. There would be an open porch on the West, on which they could sit and watch the resplendent sunsets each evening.

The living room was to be flanked by the kitchen on the North, and two bedrooms on the South. Because of the form of the tree, and the placement of the strongest, supporting branches, each room would necessarily sit on a slightly different level.

Twiggs had just put the final touches to his plan and was sitting back on his bed admiring his work. Well, final, was perhaps an inappropriate term. Since meeting Jay, Twiggs understood that nothing should ever be considered final. Most anything could be improved and, if not improved, at least just changed for the fun of it!

Carefully folding up the plan, Twiggs slipped it into his vest pocket and was off to show it to Gramps. Although Gramps had not by any means fully endorsed the project,

neither had he dismissed it as being out and out addepleted. It being a Monday, Twiggs walked along the newly worn path to Gramps' place (well, walked, skipped, hopped, trotted and scurried – it must be remembered that he had learned about this self-propelling thing from Jay!).

(I say newly worn, because, jumping from place to place as they did, Bountifilians had no real need for sidewalks and certainly no occasion to have well-worn connecting paths. Twiggs was slowly altering that, as was he creating the need for his father to find more substantial material for the souls of his son's boots.)

Gramps was (where else?) sitting on the front porch, carving another wooden nickel - a sure sign he was planning a visit to Doug, his good mortal friend who happened to also be Jay's Grampa.

"Wait till you see what I have," Twiggs called eagerly, as he trotted across the front lawn, pulling the plans from his vest pocket.

Gramps examined the paper carefully, listening eagerly to each and every explanatory and descriptive phrase that Twiggs had to offer. It wasn't that Twiggs was really trying to convince Gramps of the plan's merit - though he would have been more than a little pleased to have Gramps' blessing for the project - but more just conveying how important it all was to him.

"You may want to consider connecting a guy wire between this smaller branch and the main trunk - just until the branch grows a bit stronger," Gramps pointed out. "Duggy and I found we needed to do that when we built the tree house in his back yard.

Swallowing back his excitement at what could be construed as Gramps' partial approval, Twiggs attempted to shore up his position.

"Good idea. Anything else come to mind?"

"I don't see any way to get up there. I figure you won't want to be nearjumping like a mere Little Person, will you?"

"I had a ladder in mind," Twiggs said, his initial enthusiasm dampened somewhat by what seemed to be an uncharacteristic tone of defensiveness in the old man's expression.

"What's the problem?" Twiggs asked.

"Problem? I guess it's not so much a problem as it is a matter of soul searching," Gramps replied, cryptically.

Twiggs knew he had opened the door for a discussion. He just was not yet sure what the topic was to be. Using one of Gramps' own ploys, Twiggs remained silent, waiting for Gramps to continue.

Presently, as if on an entirely different topic, Gramps asked:

"Why did you participate in the Rite of Ascension to Manhood, Twiggs?"

"Because that is what we do - it is our way, our tradition."

"And how is it that you and Cinnamon are now planning a life together?"

"Again, it's our tradition - it is the way our Scared Scriptures decree," Twiggs answered, beginning to see where the conversation was going.

"And why have Dewgoodabees dwelled in stump homes for all these generations since we were first transported here to the Ozark Mountains?"

This is where Twiggs would take his stand!

"Because we are in a rut, Sir!"

There. He had said it. His pulse rate quickened a bit - and quickened even more as Gramps looked him directly in the eye.

Silence. Serious silence befell the conversation. Twiggs had questioned the traditions before, but this was the first time he had out and out defied them. It was a big deal and both he and Gramps felt the weight of the moment.

"Tradition defines who we are and where we have come from," Gramps said, at last. "It ties the generations together. It gives direction when reason fails us. It provides a basis for identity."

"I am a Little Person, endowed with magic, and I accept my sacred mission to use it wisely for the benefit of my people and the mortals whom we can touch," Twiggs began, with more than a slightly noticeable quiver in his delivery.

"I am a Man of the Clan Dewgoodabee, and a novitiate of the Ring of the Farjumpers. I am the betrothed of the

woman Cinnamon, of the Clan Callbackabee. I am the Sire of the new generation. I take those stations very seriously. I accept them as an important part of our tradition. They give meaning and purpose to my life, but who has ever said I am a stump person? Must I dwell in a stump to be a good person - to be able to carry out my mission and abide by our significant traditions and fulfill my sacred duties?"

More silence. The ball had been effectively dropped into Gramps' court now, so, once again, Twiggs just waited. He felt somehow taller than before - more self-assured than before - wiser than before. He wasn't entirely sure why, but, my, how good it felt!

Gramps began to rock. Although his brow remained furrowed, he began to nod ever so slightly, and he turned his gaze toward the upper branches of the Elm tree in the front yard.

"A rut you say!"

Twiggs remained silent, assuming it to be either a rhetorical question, or in the very least, a way of thinking out loud.

"When is a tradition a rut, and when is an apparent rut, an important tradition? What a delightful and yet tormenting topic to consider. I thank you for that, Twiggington. My afternoon walk shall be filled with important topics to contemplate. Now, show me again how your water supply system works for this house in the sky."

Twiggs began his explanation. That time, however, he found himself telling and not asking. He was the authority and not just a youngster presenting tentative notions. He was interacting with Gramps as an equal. How strange. How wonderful. How scary.

'So, this is how it felt to truly be a Man of the Clan.'

As he left Gramps' place that day, Twiggs had been transformed, both in his own view and in that of Gramps'. What had been easily dismissed as merely a rut, earlier in the day, now gave him pause for careful evaluation. A responsible man can't afford to merely play around with catchy phrases. He must look beyond the words and understand the

concepts. True, there was more responsibility, but with it, more of a sense of belonging - more of a belief in himself and in his ability to adequately evaluate and cope and make appropriate decisions. More of a sense of purpose, and at last, an understanding of how he fits into the greater scheme of things.

He muttered out loud to himself, as he slowly made his way toward the big oak tree in question:

"I wonder if our practice of rejecting the way mortals go about doing things is a rut or a necessary way of protecting some of our important and essential traditions?"

Because he had been able to frame that question, Twiggs realized he was no longer a reckless boy, rebelling for the sake of rebelling - questioning for the sake of making himself appear more important and insightful than he had reason to believe he actually might be - building himself up by tearing traditions down.

By the time he reached the tree, he was a new person and he felt very good about it. He climbed the tree and looked to the West, wishing upon wish that he could talk all of it over with Jay. Rather than wishing, or worrying as the case may be, he knew he needed to occupy his time fruitfully.

He took measurements and considered Gramps' suggestion about support for the smaller limb. It seemed a reasonable thing to do. He lay down on a limb just about where their bed would be and pretended for a few minutes it was their wedding night. He wasn't sure if it were proper to have those kinds of thoughts but convinced himself that some kind of mental rehearsal seemed both instructive and essential in order to make that night go as smoothly as possible.

Half way through his reverie he found himself falling through space toward the rocky ground below. Monday or not, the tiniest bit of magic seemed an immediate necessity.

"Whew! That was a close call. I must keep my mind on my business."

It wasn't long before Cinnamon, basket in hand, made her way up the hill toward the tree. She was also trying out the Mortal Monday idea and found herself puffing more than a bit as she neared the top. She was not nearly so convinced that being worn out and muscle sore was as wonder-filled a

feeling as Twiggs made it out to be, but she was trying to at least explore the possibilities.

Twiggs met her a few yards from the top, and interrupted her climb long enough to administer a kiss and long embrace.

"How's a gal to catch her breath with our lips stuck together," she quipped, playfully.

At that, Twiggs lifted her into his arms and carried her the rest of the way to the top. Stumbling and falling as they reached the tree, they lay there together, laughing and holding each other for quite some time.

"This Mortal Monday thing may get the best of me, yet," Cinnamon said.

"You'll learn to love it," Twiggs replied, enthusiastically.

Cinnamon nodded, though not truly convinced. She handed the red checked tablecloth to Twiggs, who spread it out on the grass beneath the big tree. Together they set out the sandwiches and fruit, as they continued to talk.

"What did Gramps have to say about the tree house?" she asked.

"I think he said go ahead and do it, though not exactly in those words, you understand. This is one thing that would be easier if we were mortals."

"I thought we agreed that being a mortal was more difficult than being a Little Person."

"Usually it is, but most of them don't seem to be so bound by traditions as we are. Jay just decides to do something in a new and different way and nobody thinks twice about it. I try to do something in a new way and everybody scowls at me."

"Come now! You mean if Jay decided to build a tree house to live in with his bride, no mortal would think that odd?"

"You have a point there. I guess they'd see it as odd, but it wouldn't be any big sacrilegious thing like folks are making it into here about."

"When I said, Mortals have it harder, I meant things like having to live without magic and having to always be in danger of getting hurt or sick or even dying. They constantly have to use their intelligence - their wits - to solve problems."

"Perhaps their intelligence is their magic," Cinnamon

added.

"Jay and I talked about that more than once. It's like their magic lies in their science and technology - medicines and vitamins and welfare programs and agricultural techniques - things like that.

"You mean they have to add an extra step between wishing for something and getting it," Cinnamon said.

"Right. We just wish things into existence, but they first have to wish they had something and then, like you said, using their intelligence and skills, and wisdom, they have to find ways outside of themselves to create it."

"I suppose that seems unfair to you, doesn't it," Cinnamon said, running her hand through Twiggs hair.

"But unfair to whom," Twiggs responded? "Is it fair to us that we never have to know how it is to be without, to never know the kind of joy mortals receive from working to solve problems?"

Silence set in as they pondered the differences between the two cultures. Having finished every last morsel Cinnamon had brought, Twiggs lay his head in her lap and looked up at the bright blue sky.

While Cinnamon was intrigued by the differences between the two cultures, Twiggs was obviously disturbed by them. He continued thinking aloud:

"We can't have things like races or ball games or report cards because we are all able to do those things in a blink. We never know the powerful feeling of winning or the humbling experience of losing."

"You're saying those are helpful and beneficial experiences. I'm not so sure they are," Cinnamon said, pondering Twiggs' last statement.

"What do you mean, not helpful," Twiggs said, sitting up, eager to hear her idea?

"Well, you seem to be talking about competition. Mortals seem to depend a lot on competition for their motivation to accomplish things. It becomes the winning that is important rather than enjoying the activity. Like you said, when we play pusherball, we don't even have a way to keep score so there is no way to ever know if someone wins or loses. We just play it because its fun. No one has to feel bad

when it's over.

"And their merchants seem to go to great ends to undersell one another and take business away from each other. The biggest and the most powerful businesses plan ways to hurt the little or less powerful businesses. I can't see anything right or just in that kind of destructive competition. Winning among mortals so often requires that someone else gets hurt or put down."

"Ya, that winning thing does seem to be overdone among the mortals," Twiggs agreed. "I suppose that's one reason I feel so comfortable around Jay. He could care less whether anyone else thinks he has won or lost. He just enters into everything for the pure joy of doing it. He gets good grades but not because he sets out to make good grades. He makes them because he loves to learn new things. He uses every assignment as an opportunity to discover something new. To him, that's exciting. I guess that's what I'm envious of - being able to get that excited about accomplishing things."

Cinnamon nodded, finally beginning to understand what had been a most unclear aspect of her beloved Twiggs.

"Feeling fuzziacious isn't enough for you, is it Twiggs?"

"Fuzziacious is wonderful. It will always be my main motivation," he replied thoughtfully. "Many, if not most, mortals could instantly improve their lives by accepting that idea, but I think we could also improve our lives by pursuing what Jay calls, 'The sweet smell of sweat'."

At that, Cinnamon wrinkled up her nose, so Twiggs offered further explanation.

"Accomplishment. The good feeling that comes because you used your strength or wits to accomplish something. Like the other day when Jay was moving those huge rocks. He wasn't building anything. They weren't in his way. They didn't need moving. Jay just needed to know that he could move them so he did, and when he was finished he felt that most enjoyable and self-fulfilling feeling of accomplishment."

"So, is it like a sense of pride in what you have done?" Cinnamon asked.

"Pride of accomplishment through effort! I think that

hits the nail on the head, as Jay would say. It's receiving proof through one's own efforts that you are capable. It's another way of gaining self-respect."

Cinnamon pushed Twiggs a bit further.

"Don't you get a feeling like self-respect when you goodakt or wishgrant and everything turns out right?"

"Well, maybe I do, but that's different. That's just a matter of learning how to use our magic and then doing it. There is no sweat involved, you see. It's no different from what every single other adult Little Person does four times every day for all of eternity."

"Our Scriptures say that conceit is offensive to the Wise One," Cinnamon pointed out.

"I think that maybe that has been our problem all along," Twiggs said in a leap of revelation.

"What's that?"

"That we have confused self-respect with conceit. True self-respect says, 'Hey, I'm a capable and clever person who uses those skills for the betterment of everybody.' Conceit says, 'Hey look at what I can do that proves I'm better than anybody else.'"

"You know you're about to stir up another hornet's nest across our realm, don't you," Cinnamon said with a sigh.

"Another?"

"Yes. Like the Ambassador thing did back in August."

"But that turned out okay, didn't it?"

"I think only time will tell. When you do the wonderful job at it that I know you will do, then it will have turned out okay. Many Little People are still waiting to see."

Twiggs smiled at Cinnamon. What a girl! She had such faith in him. He felt so lucky. He had to wonder if the mortal girl Jay would someday find would be as good for him. He certainly hoped so. That thought, however, brought a frown to his face.

"What," Cinnamon asked, reading his expression, and tracing the furrows across his brow with her finger.

"I was just thinking that here in the land of the Little People, you and I were made for each other, and I don't mean to imply that isn't truly wonderful. But for Jay, well, he is going to have to sort through dozens of possible mates before he

selects one, and even then, there is no assurance they will be totally suitable for one another. He and I used to joke about all the fun he would have doing that sorting, but now that I have grown to know you and how remarkable it is to be paired with just the right person, I realize it's no joking matter. Jay's sorting is one of the most serious things he will ever have to do."

Cinnamon added a reassuring note: "And knowing Jay, we know he will devise a way to make it all turn out just perfectly."

With that she kissed her beloved Twiggs on the forehead. He turned his head and smiled at her, for the moment content to just know that she was his and he was hers. She snuggled close, his strong arms holding her close. They lay there, side by side, looking up at the tree that would someday hold their home.

Being who they were, was a wonderful blessing, because all things considered, there was no doubt about it: Being a mortal was far more difficult than being a Little Person.

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Chapter Fourteen
**There is no satisfaction like winning the approval of
others
for something you have known was right all along.**

Prior to meeting Jay, time had meant very little to Twiggs. When you know your life will go on forever, counting the days would become an overwhelming task. In fact, in all of Bountiful there had only been one calendar and that was the Official Record of the Passage of Time, kept by the Eternal Watch Elder of the Council.

Since Jay, and especially since the ambassadorial meetings had been established, time had become far more important. Twiggs had fashioned himself a calendar in the style of the one on the wall in Jay's kitchen. Just why mortal calendars read "Connelly Feed Store" at the top, Twiggs wasn't at all sure, but he had dutifully printed that on his, also, and made a note to ask Jay about it at their upcoming meeting.

Up early, Twiggs marked off the special November date with a bold X, and then turned the page to the month of December. He noted a rush of tiny, prickly, footsteps up his back as he did so. This the month in which he and Jay would finally get to talk once more. He had already circled the date in December, but felt the need to do so again.

The realization that in only twenty-two days, nineteen hours and twelve minutes they would be together, made it difficult for Twiggs to sit down and get back to work on his book about mortals. So, he paced, thumping a pencil, held loosely in his right hand, against the back of his fist-formed left

hand.

To that point, the book had been untitled - well, the tentative title had been, *Mortals*, according to Twiggs. It suddenly came to him that perhaps he should add a subtitle: *As revealed to him by Jay*. Yes, that would make it a more accurate title, even though he had made many observations of mortals on his own. Had it not been for his experiences with Jay, none of this would be possible. *Mortals*, according to Twiggs: as revealed to him by Jay. Twiggs sat down and made that addition to the front page of his growing manuscript.

It was no use, though - trying to accomplish anything else on the book that morning - so he dressed, stuffed a half dozen of his mother's blueberry muffins into a pouch, and left for an early morning walk.

The sun had not yet awakened, and the late-night sky remained inky black, save for the pallid light from the half-moon - precariously perched on its lower tip - and the twinkling of a thousand, thousand, tiny stars. Twiggs made his way toward his tree, munching a muffin and reveling in the chilled silence of those last moments of the predawn World.

"A pretty good plan to have both night and day," he said out loud, as if giving his personal approval to the Wise One for the way the universe had been organized. Twiggs often spoke to the Wise One early in the morning. It seemed a more private, a more intimate kind of togetherness when the rest of the World was still asleep. He felt he had a better shot at commanding the Wise One's total attention before He had to busy Himself with the day to day predicaments, quandaries and afflictions of his Earthly flock - well, flocks, perhaps. A point to ponder later on.

He climbed the tree, remembering the first time that Jay had shown him how to do that. It felt good. He looked toward the meadow, figuring Jay was probably beginning to stir himself into wakefulness. He looked toward Harmony and smiled as he knew Cinnamon was still sound asleep with no intention of stirring for another three hours. He wondered what she wore as she slept at night, then decided that line of thought would get him nowhere but into a barrel of ice cubes.

So, he just sat there. He felt content - well, he felt content until he began wondering whether or not it was right to

feel content when so many problems existed in the mortal realm - burdens which he, as a Man of The Clan, had pledged to help lighten.

He replayed the day before, remembering how he had helped Sammy find his book report. (Believe it or not, Sammy's dog had actually carried it off to his dog house!) He recalled watching over young Georgie as he made his first solo attempt to walk the top of the fence around the city park.

(Twiggs had thwarted three falls - well just a bit. That had seemed permissible since success at that task appeared to be such an important milestone in every mortal boy's life, and face it, Georgie had just plain been put together a clumsy being.) When Janie was found to be down in the dumps over a boyfriend problem, he had steered her to Miss Primm's front porch for an after-school chat. (Twiggs was pleased to see it had helped Janie, but was absolutely delighted to see how it had raised Miss Primm's spirits!)

It had been a pretty successful day among the mortals - one Outright, one Facilitator and, for Georgie, well, one Half and Half, Twiggs supposed. His successes among the Little People had been less certain.

Since so many of them were skeptical, if not downright distressed about the tree house thing, he had, through some magical scheming, moved several of the older townsfolk to watch him from a distance as he began work on the project. His thinking was that if they witnessed firsthand, how much he could accomplish through sheer, physical, labor, they might be less put off by the undertaking. So, he knew they had been watching, but he had no clue as to how they felt about it all.

As light of day broke over the hill, Twiggs finished the last muffin and yearned for more. Nevertheless, he needed get down to work on the house. He was soon so interested in the activity that he even forgot about the prying eyes there in the distant brush.

His task for the day was to lift into place, four of the logs he had cut from nearby trees the day before. He had been careful to select those which he thought would be light enough, so he would be able to pull them to the tree site under his own power. Not carefully enough, however. After all, this using his own strength thing was all still pretty new to him.

He'd actually, seldom ever engaged it without Jay's able assistance.

He approached the first log, and though he could lift one end, he could not drag it so much as a pillawig ("inch" in the Little People's system of measurement). Undaunted (a characteristic his had acquired from Jay) he began postulating ways out of his predicament.

Soon he had arranged dozens of smaller and shorter sticks under the first log to act as rollers. That made it possible for him to move the log, little by little, across the hill to the tree. (He, too, saw the parallel with pyramid building.)

That done at last, he sat and wiped his brow, wishing more than ever for a second pouch of blueberry muffins. Well, you know about these Little People and wishes. Without realizing what he had done, the once empty sack, plumped full, and rolled over under the new weight, drawing Twiggs' attention to it.

What a dilemma! To eat the benefit of a wish, or to maintain his mortal approach to living that day. He soon concluded that nutrition and building were two very separate issues, and made short work of the muffins!

Refortified, he attacked the second log, and then the third and fourth. By ten O'clock that morning they were all gathered there under the tree.

"Now to hoist them up the twenty selatores (feet) into the tree."

For this important aspect of the job, Twiggs was prepared. He had devised a block and tackle, fashioned after one he and Jay had used during the cabin remodeling. He scurried up the tree and secured the pulleys to a strong branch several selatores above their eventual resting place. He then thoughtfully threaded the rope around and through the maze of little wheels. Tying one end of the rope around his waist, he made his way to the ground. He then attached one end of the rope to the log, and began pulling on the other end.

Although he knew the devise should work, Twiggs was admittedly amazed at the ease with which he was able to raise the huge logs into place. 'Another mind-boggling form of mortal magic', he mused.

Once arranged into the appropriate positions up in the tree, he used a brace and bit to bore one pillawig wide holes through the logs and into the support branches below. Then, fashioning one sellatore long pegs from scrap branches, he pounded them into the holes, securing the logs in place.

It was five in the afternoon by the time he had the final peg driven into the final hole. Twiggs was exhausted. He sat on the edge of his newly erected platform, legs dangling in the air, hair mussed and soaked with sweat. As he took his, by then, dripping wet red handkerchief from his hip pocket to again wipe his brow, he was convinced that his fellow townsmen must be quite convinced of his utter insanity. He, himself, was having momentary second thoughts as he felt the unfamiliar aches and pains shoot through his arms and legs. Perhaps it had all been just a dumb idea. After all, Little People had their ways and Mortals had their ways. If Mortals had the magic, he bet they'd not be messing around with pulleys and drills and drenching themselves with sweat.

It was a somber moment in what had otherwise been an invigorating and significant day. The mere thought that he was having such thoughts bothered Twiggs. He sighed and allowed his shoulders to sag a bit (something he had earlier vowed never to do, you will remember).

Then, much to Twiggs everlasting surprise and eventual delight, the most remarkable event began unfolding below. Suddenly the clearing was filled with Bountifilians - perhaps as many as half of the entire population. They were slowly walking toward the tree and they were (get out your own red handkerchief) clapping - they were clapping for Twiggs.

Twiggs was baffled and momentarily befuddled. What was this? What did it mean? Why ... ? For the longest time, he had no clear thoughts at all. Then it came to him. His townspeople were giving him their approval. His toil and sweat - well, his whole plan - was getting their stamp of approval.

Several of the younger men approached an as yet unused log and tried their hand at lifting it. Strain showing on their faces they nodded their further approval of Twiggs' efforts.

What an experience! What a day!! What a triumph for Twiggs!!! Suddenly reinvigorated, he stood up and waved his handkerchief over his head. Then, unexpectedly and all quite automatically, Twiggs made the V for friendship sign. To his further amazement, several in the crowd mimicked the sign and soon they were all V-ing for friendship and shouting things such as, "Good job, Twiggington," and "Nice going, kid."

Twiggs looked toward Jay's meadow and, with all the power his Little Person lungs could muster, yelled, "Thank you, my friend!"

There is no satisfaction like winning the approval of others for something you have known was right all along.

Chapter Fifteen
Being a man means you never give up
that trusting, optimistic, wide-eyed child within you.

"I hear tell you caused quite a ruckus up there on Twiggington Point, the other day," Gramps said, even before Twiggs had caught his breath.

"A ruckus? Twiggington Point?"

There was total and utter puzzlement in Twiggs' tone.

"That's what folks are calling the hill top by your tree now - Twiggington Point.

"Really!" Twiggs said, as he slid his back down the railing pole, taking a seat on the porch.

"It appears you made quite an impression up there. The whole town's a-buzz about it," Gramps went on.

"Is that good or bad," Twiggs asked, unable to decipher Gramps rendering of the events.

"I suppose that depends on your interpretation. What would you say?"

Twiggs wished that just once Gramps would provide a straight-out answer. Oh, he realized how much the round-about approach had helped him grow in his abilities to think things through, but sometimes it was exhausting, and that was one of those times.

"I'm just tired of thinking, Gramps. It seems that's all I've done since the day I become a Man of the Clan. When does my brain finally get a rest?"

Gramps chuckled and tweaked his beard, never missing a beat in the slow, deliberate, rhythm of his rocking chair.

"I'll bet it has been exhausting, hasn't it," Gramps replied, his tone suggesting at least partial compassion for his grandson's' plight.

Somehow, just knowing he understood, gave Twiggs added strength to try out a few random thoughts on Gramps.

"New ways are okay, I think," he began, "Especially when they help you grow and expand yourself in some way. I suppose too many new ways all at once could be bad or disruptive - at least hard to fit into the established scheme of things - confusing, maybe. This new Twiggington Point thing - well, I guess I kind of like that."

He paused to think, and then continued.

"It tells me they feel I'm still a Dewgoodabee, and yet I'm set apart somehow - set apart in a good way to them on this occasion. Sort of like a model for what can be."

Gramps was obviously impressed.

"If that's the quality of thinking you do when your brain is exhausted, I can hardly wait to see what it can churn out when it's rested!"

They looked at each other and chuckled. It was a proud moment for them both.

"So, what are you up to today, Twiggs?"

"Well, I'm as ready as I'll ever be for my first Ambassadorial meeting with Jay, tomorrow, so I'm just sort of taking the day off. I'm so excited I just can't keep my mind on anything.

"Since the Council selected the late December date as one of my three meeting days a year with Jay, I won't be here in the village tomorrow for the Day Of Continuance activities, so I will be spending time remembering and appreciating my loved ones today, instead. As days of celebration go, that one has always been my favorite. It's like my tie to the past and my hope for the future - taking time to appreciate those who have loved me and cared for me and adopting that as a model for my own future.

"In a few minutes, I'm meeting Cinnamon, and we are going to go Goodakting together. I need to check in on the Porters and Miss Primm, and see how Jay's Goodakt Club is coming. I got the idea he was struggling a bit about it."

"Struggling!"

"Ya. Jay likes to be in charge of things, especially when they are about one of his own ideas - and virtually everything he does is about one of his own ideas."

They smiled and nodded, silently agreeing that pretty well summed up a big part of Jay's personality.

"I got the idea that always being in charge of all the goodakt projects and plans was getting him down. I'm sure he'll find a way to shift the responsibility to others. I just need to make sure he's doing okay in the meantime."

"Mortals!" Gramps said with a shake of his head.

"Mortals!" Twiggs said with a shake of his head.

Struggling to hold a moment of silence, the two then broke into laughter. At that Twiggs stood up, said his good-byes and was on his way to the newly dubbed, Twiggington Point, to meet the love of his life.

No matter how much time they spent together, it never seemed to be enough to Twiggs. No matter how much time he spent thinking about her, that never seemed enough either. The mere anticipation of their meeting put a spring in his step - well, a bounce in his Farjump, in this case.

Arriving a bit early, Twiggs had time to inspect his handy work. He was impressed by the good job he had done. Jay had been a good teacher. All that work on the old log cabin was paying off. Who would have ever guessed Twiggs would have actually made good use of the skills he picked up while playing with his mortal friend.

"I wonder where play leaves off and work begins for most mortals," he wondered out loud? "It all seems to be the same for Jay, but I've heard a lot of other mortals fume and fret about their jobs. I guess it's all a matter of outlook.

"Jay is just determined to find ways of enjoying every minute of every day. Some of the other mortals don't seem to go about life in that same way. Where Jay is determined to talk himself into feeling great about the stuff he has to do, others seem every bit as determined to talk themselves into hating it. Mortals just don't seem to have a universal positive tradition about how they are supposed to think about work.

"We Little People are like Jay. We find enjoyment - fuzzilation - in our work. It's just the way we are. It's almost like we can't change that. It's just a part of us. We love our

work and the great feeling it gives us. That's our tradition."

At that point he felt the familiar arms of Cinnamon encircle his waist from behind. It provided an immediate rush of delight.

"Who in the World are you talking to," she asked.

"Nobody and everybody," he said, turning around in her arms and tenderly apportioning a dozen carefully executed kisses here and there about her radiant face."

"My aren't you in a good mood," Cinnamon commented, mimicking Twiggs' romantic overture with a dozen hasty pecks of her own.

"You mean I'm usually not in a good mood," Twiggs asked, a loving smile sliding across his face?

"Of course, you're usually in a good mood - just recently, a lot more serious sometimes than others, I guess."

"Is that good or bad?"

"You tell me!"

She sounded like Gramps, though her beauty and well placed curves proved otherwise. He ignored the question.

"Ready to go mortal spying," he asked?

"What a terrible thing to call it," she said, administering a playful slap to his face.

"I love it when you touch my face," he said, pulling her as close as possible.

"And I love to touch it, but that will only sidetrack us from our mission today."

She gave him one more peck on the lips for good measure and gently pulled away.

"We need to get on with things. I'm looking forward to seeing all our mortal friends this morning," she added, in a most enthusiastic manner.

It struck them both at exactly the same instant. Friends - mortal friends.

"You know, they are our friends, aren't they?" Twiggs said thoughtfully. "I don't believe that is according to our tradition."

"What in the World are you talking about?" Cinnamon asked.

"We truly think of them as our friends - though according to Gramps, friendship has to be a two-way affair. At

any rate, they have each become important to us as special individuals. Perhaps that's love - I'm still a bit confused on that issue. At any rate, my point is this: I don't believe that the most Little People let themselves get that emotionally attached to the mortals they help. They see them more like - well, like a herd of cattle they are charged with tending. They do their job joyfully and unselfishly, but they seldom really become emotional involved. I wonder if that is good or bad?"

"Seems like there is a lot of this good or bad stuff going on in your head these days," Cinnamon noted.

"You're right there! It seems more and more difficult to know the difference now that I'm a man. When I was a little kid it was all so easy. What my parents said was bad, I believed was bad, and what they said was good, I knew was good."

"I understand what you're saying," Cinnamon said, squeezing Twiggs' hand. "Now that we are able to think things through on our own, a lot of things we once thought we knew for sure and certain become blurred, don't they?"

Twiggs just nodded. Not much left to say about a subject he didn't claim to understand at all at that moment. With his head, he motioned in the direction of Jay's meadow, and a Farjump later, they were there on the big, flat, rock step in front of the log cabin.

They had overlooked the fact that it was Winter in the mortal realm, and shivered briefly as they farported jackets to themselves from their respective closets. Twiggs helped Cinnamon on with hers and then quickly donned his own.

"This is better, huh," Twiggs said, rubbing his hands together.

Cinnamon agreed and cuddled close - an added extra that Twiggs had not foreseen but was quite willing to accept. They had apparently missed Jay, though the signs of galloping footprints in the fresh snow bore witness to his earlier presence.

They made the rounds of their mortal friends. Miss Primm was busying herself making Christmas cookies for the church party that evening. She hummed carols and briskly moved from task to task in a most happy manner.

"She certainly got out of her unpleasant rut, didn't she,"

Cinnamon commented.

"And that's not all," Twiggs added, thoughtfully. "She has become one of the town's most dedicated goodacters and probably doesn't even realize it."

"I suppose that's the very best kind of goodakter, isn't it," Cinnamon added.

Twiggs agreed.

As they prepared to leave, there was a knock at the door. Miss Primm glanced in the mirror, pushing her hair a bit, first one way and then the other, before smiling her satisfaction. She then opened the door and welcomed Mr. Applebee - a now frequent visitor and regular escort.

Twiggs and Cinnamon smiled knowingly, and then moved on to the Porters where Mr. Porter, with only a modest amount of magic, had fully recovered and was cheerfully at work once more in the shop behind his house. Mark's father came in to help three days a week, and the two families were becoming fast friends.

"I suppose you could say that the tradition of poverty in Mark's family has been pretty much reversed now, hasn't it," Twiggs said.

It was the first time he had realized that a tradition could be hurtful right from the beginning. He had recently been thinking that some traditions that had begun as helpful, might, later on, become hurtful due to changes in circumstances. But this idea of harmful ones right from the git go (as Jay would say), was a new and terribly bothersome notion.

Seeing how much it concerned Twiggs, Cinnamon suggested they move on to other things. Twiggs conceded that would be best, but he would follow up on it in his talks with Jay.

At school, it was the final day before Christmas vacation was to begin. It had been proclaimed, Day of the Goodacters, (due to the efforts of you know who). Those grown-up citizens of the community, who had gone out of their way to be kind or helpful or otherwise benevolent to the youngsters of the village, were being recognized in a program in the gymnasium. Among the guests of honor were Mr. and Mrs. Porter and Miss Primm.

"This is really good," Twiggs said, as the two of them watched from the window sill high above the back of the room.

"The awards," Cinnamon asked?

"No. Look. Jay is nowhere in sight. Somehow, he got the others to do all of this. He no longer needs to be the center of the universe. That's great! Good for the Jay-man!"

As the program wore on, Cinnamon's attention wandered and she turned to peer out the window. A light snow had begun to fall. It twinkled in the sun as it fell, looking ever so much like the heavenly sky on a moon lit night.

There on the football field she saw a familiar figure shuffling through the snow in a most deliberate fashion. She nudged Twiggs and he also turned to look.

"He's spelling out something in the snow," Cinnamon said.

The words were clear. The message warmed Twiggs' heart.

Finished, Jay stood on the far side at the fifty-yard line surveying his work. As he raised his hands in his V for friendship, Twiggs read the message.

See you in nine hours old friend!!!

"I knew he'd want us to start our first meeting at midnight. That'll give us a full twenty-four hours together."

As Twiggs continued to watch his dear friend, Cinnamon watched a single tear spill from Twiggs eye and slowly make its way down his cheek. At first tempted to wipe it away, she thought better, and just held her dear one's hand extra tightly.

It had been an instructive three months since his Ascension. He had grown in ways he could have never dreamt possible that previous summer. That was partly due to the new man, that the traditions of his people had led him to find within himself. It was also partly because of the ability to continue dreaming the dreams of childhood that Jay had helped him preserve forever.

That night in his notes Twiggs wrote this:

'Traditions recount where we have come from.

Ruts describe self-defeating, unexamined traditions, blindly followed too long.

Dreams, directed by Wisdom, portray the best that we

can become.

Being a truly responsive and responsible Man of the Clan, means that you never abandon that trusting, optimistic, eager to learn, wide-eyed child within you.

The End

(The story continues in *Book Three*, The Ambassador and the Touchperson.)

I wish you a lifelong childhood, challenged and strengthened by rigorous adolescent examination, tempered by the realities of adulthood, and guided always by the wisdom gained only from the thoughtful consideration of one's blunders and successes, and of the awesome mysteries of life.

I remain your faithful storyteller

Tom Gnagey