



Twiggs and Cinnamon

A folk tale about
**The Little People of the Ozark Mountain
Book Three**

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

by

Tom Gnagey



BOOK FOUR:

TWIGGS and CINNAMON

A folk tale about
The Little People of the Ozark Mountains™

A story of love, family, and contentment
among the cheerful and charitable
Little People of the Ozark Mountains™

by

Tom Gnagey

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Family of Man Press

Book One: Ring of the Farjumpers

Book Two: Man of the Clan

Book Three: Ambassador and the Touchperson

Book Four: Twiggs and Cinnamon

Although it not necessary to have read
books one, two, and three in the
Little People of the Ozarks Series before reading this one,
most folks will find it more enjoyable that way.

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Dedication

*This book is dedicated to
the hope
that
positive, rational,
inclusive values
will become the dominant
driving force within
human society,
so that we may survive
as a species.*

**The Legend of
The Little People of the Ozark Mountains™**

*In the folklore of the Ozark Mountains,
there are fleeting references to
The Little People -
tiny folks, about as tall as a grape hyacinth,
possessed of magical powers, good cheer,
and just a touch of the imp.
Legend has it,
that they busy themselves
watching over the mortals of the area,
performing good deeds
and granting wishes to those in need.
Only rarely do they let themselves be seen,
and then,
only by those who believe in them,
and in the powers of love,
unselfish generosity,
and the basic goodness
that resides somewhere inside all of us.*

CHAPTER ONE:
Love, taken to its highest plain through marriage, is truly remarkable.

"And on the first Sunday following his seventeenth birthday, a young man of the Clan Dewgoodabee shall be wed to the young woman of the Clan Callbackabee who the Wise One has pre-ordained to be his bride. It shall be a time of great joy and celebration, accompanied by the Festival of Life. So be it now and forever more."

So read the Scriptures of the Little People of the Ozarks.

And, so it was that on that beautiful, early September morning, with the sun rising behind them, and flanked by their parents, Twiggs and Cinnamon, stood atop East Mountain, ready to pledge their eternal love, before an overjoyed gathering of both clans.

Cinnamon wore the traditional long scarlet dress with short, puffy sleeves; a wide green, bronze buckled belt; with the collar and long, tightly cuffed sleeves of her bright yellow blouse peeking out from underneath. Her shiny, red shoes glistened in the morning light.

Twiggs was dressed in his usual, brown, flopped-over, pointed hat with its long red feather and green band. He wore his unbuttoned, crimson vest over a loose yellow shirt with long flowing sleeves and wide cuffs. His baggy brown pants had been washed and pressed for the occasion. On his feet, he wore ruby red, pointed, cloth boots which his father had made especially for the occasion.

The ceremony was simple. The words were those

which had been uttered in exactly the same way for so many thousands of years.

As was their custom, Twiggs spoke first.

"Cinnamon, my beloved, of the Clan Callbackabee, from this moment forth, and for all of eternity, I am your loving husband."

"Twiggington, my beloved, of the Clan Dewgoodabee, from this moment forth, and for all of eternity, I am your loving wife."

Then, they turned to face their own parents. Twiggs kissed his father and then his mother. He spoke to them quietly:

"Thank you for having given me life and for having raised me up in such a fine fashion. Here, in the presence of the Wise One, I pledge, on the honor of my family and my Clan, to do the same for my child when I am so blessed."

Cinnamon then did likewise with her parents.

The young couple turned and faced each other again, this time touching fingers at arms-length. Twiggs turned his head and smiling, nodded toward the gathering.

At that, the congregation, in unison, began a quiet, slow, deliberate, clearly reverent, clapping of their hands. Twiggs again looked into the face of Cinnamon, and ever so slowly, began drawing her closer and closer to him. With each of her tiny, deliberate, staccato-like, steps, the tempo of the clapping picked up - faster and faster - until, at last, he held her close, and placed his arms tightly around her waist.

As they kissed for the first time as man and wife, the Clansmen broke into spirited applause. The men, waving their hats in a sea of red and brown, called out their congratulations. Predictably, the women smiled happily through their tears, from time to time, flitting their damp handkerchiefs in the direction of the young couple. The band began playing a wonderfully cheerful air. Everyone began dancing, allowing the newlyweds a moment of privacy. (Well, as much privacy as was possible amid a hundred pair of prying eyes!)

As Twiggs and Cinnamon lingered over that most special of all kisses, their parents renewed their own marital kisses. The Festival of Life had begun. The newest

generation had been properly and forevermore woven into the fabric of the Clans, and the two Clans, themselves, had renewed their pledge of mutual support and corporal rejuvenation.

"There'll be an eternity for kissing, Son," Twiggs father said, tapping the lad on his shoulder. "Everybody is waiting for you to lead the Festival Dance."

With one more short peck on the lips, and then one more for good measure, their faces parted and Twiggs led his bride down the hill into the center of the closely cropped meadow below, encircled by table upon table of food and refreshment. As they approached the band stand, the music stopped and again, everyone applauded. Once there, and with more than a little flair, Twiggs bowed deeply to the crowd and then to his wife. He held her close, the band began, and they danced the lively Festival Dance.

For some time, everyone stood back, just watching and smiling and clapping gently in rhythm with the sprightly tune. Presently their parents joined in and very soon all were dancing and laughing and talking about what a handsome couple this was. Twiggs loved to dance, and before the day was over, he would have danced with all the women and Cinnamon with all the men.

They ate, they talked, they related stories, and swapped yarns. It was a celebration of love and life and family. It was a time for catching up and for renewing inter-clan friendships. It was an essential moment in time that reaffirmed tradition, and nourished their spirits. It was a momentous, once in a quarter century, event.

As the day turned to dusk, the women packed away the dishes, and talked among themselves. The men lifted Twiggs up onto the bandstand and he dutifully fiddled and jigged, and made the expected spectacle of himself. He obviously enjoyed every minute of it. Cinnamon, catching what glimpses she could from the company of the other women, was hesitant in her approval of his foolishness, but delighted that he was having such a fine time.

As the sun tarried there on West Mountain, it became Cinnamon's turn. Girls of the Clan Callbackabee were known to possess beautiful voices, and as evening blossomed, she

proved it true again, with song upon song. Everyone had taken seats on the ground before her. With Twiggs at her feet and the evening sky, like a gently undulating golden curtain behind her, Cinnamon sang the most beloved of the traditional folk tunes from both clans.

As it came time for her final number, she reached down and drew Twiggs up beside her. With his strong arm around her waist, and his gaze focused ever lovingly on her face, she spoke to the gathering.

"I have one more song this evening. It is about life, love and devotion. Although I have written it as my special gift for my husband, on this, our wedding day, it has been inspired by our truly wonder-filled friendship with Twiggs' very special Mortal friend."

She turned and faced Twiggs. "So, while I present this song to you, my dearest husband, I dedicate it to your very best friend in both of our Worlds, our beloved, Jay."

She raised herself up on tiptoes and gently kissed Twiggs' cheek. He smiled his love deep into her being. Taking his two hands in hers, she began:

Where love abounds, the breeze blows free,
Through leaves, it weaves its melody.

It is that place where faces smile,
With ample time to chat awhile.

Where love abounds. Where love abounds
There's ample time to chat awhile.

Where love abounds, the streams run clear,
The lark, the squirrel, the cricket, hear.

The morning sun, with majesty,
Paints wondrous views for all to see.

Where love abounds. Where love abounds.
Are wondrous scenes for all to see.

Where love abounds, kind words are spoke,
Renewing trust, devotion, hope.

The children grow and learn and play,
And know they're cherished every day.

Where love abounds. Where Love abounds.
All know they're cherished every day.

Where love abounds, young lovers kiss
And join their lives in wedded bliss,
A place where dreamer's dreams come true,
All this, my dear, I wish for you.
Where love abounds. Where love abounds.
All this, my dear, I wish for you.

It was one of those rare times when that extra moment of silence at the song's conclusion, ordained it as having been an exceptional performance. Presently, the more than ample applause began. It melted into the long line of personal congratulations from each and every one there present.

Twiggs and Cinnamon shook all of the hands and returned each expression of kindness with their own words of appreciation. As the moon rose into view over East Mountain, and the last of their friends and families had finally gone their way, the young couple was left sitting alone in the dusk on the lush green hillside.

They talked of many things - of the wonderful day it had been, of how fortunate they were to have so many fine friends and such extraordinary and loving families, and of their wish that Jay would have been able to have shared that most special day with them.

"Oh, he shared it with us, you can bet on that," Twiggs said most resolutely, as he glanced back over his shoulder. "He's probably still perched up there in the big oak tree on West Mountain, peering out in our direction. Just because he couldn't see us, doesn't mean he wasn't with us."

But that was in another realm and at another place. It was another friendship and another kind of affection. Now, there in the World of the Little People, it was their time together – their first time alone together as man and wife.

"I was determined not to let myself get nervous about tonight," Twiggs said to Cinnamon. "But, I must admit that I am."

Cinnamon lowered her head and coyly batted her eyes up at Twiggs.

"Me too. I suppose that's how it is - how it's supposed to be, I guess. We both want it all to be just right, you know."

"We can stay out here a while longer, and just talk, if you like," the ever gentle, ever considerate Twiggs said, patting her hand.

"As betrothed, we've just talked for four years," Cinnamon said softly but firmly.

"Talked and kissed," Twiggs added, his wonderful smile beaming down at her. He kissed her softly on her forehead and then leaned his head close against hers. Together they surveyed the clear, night sky.

"Yes, and kissed," Cinnamon added, as if correcting herself. "After four long years of talking and kissing, I'm ready now for us to move on and explore those special things that are ours in marriage?"

Momentarily light headed, Twiggs took a deep breath, silently calling upon the Wise One: 'Surely you won't let me faint on my wedding night, will you?' Then, voice cracking just a bit, Twiggs answered:

"Oh, I'm ready, too. You know how long I've been ready!"

Cinnamon giggled again.

"Yes, you've never been shy about indicating that."

Twiggs swallowed.

"So. I guess it's time then," Twiggs said.

"Yes, it's time," Cinnamon replied, touching his face and giving him a short, tender peck on the lips.

A moment later they were together in the privacy of their new home, which had been so carefully crafted by Twiggs, himself, up there in the branches of that tall, strong tree, atop Twiggington Point.

The night was everything, and so much more, that the two of them had dreamed it would be. Love, taken to its highest plain through marriage, is truly remarkable.

CHAPTER TWO:

Twiggs wasn't entirely sure what married life held in store for him, but he was eager to explore all the possibilities.

The next morning, Twiggs just lay there for the longest time watching his Cinnamon sleep. Although, like his bride, the sun would not stir for some hours yet, Twiggs, himself, was always up before the birds - a plight he humorously blamed on Jay.

'My, she is beautiful,' he thought to himself. He wanted to reach out and gently feel her soft shoulders, and slowly run his hand through her long, golden hair, but more than any of that, he did not want to disturb the lovely lady he loved so much. So, he was just watching - well, watching and revisiting those extraordinary images of their wedding night, that danced ever vividly, in and out of his thoughts.

With a long sigh and chivalrous shrug, he carefully left the bed and quietly made himself ready for the day. Once down the ladder, Twiggs looked longingly toward Jay's meadow. Thinking better of it, he took a seat on the ground, and leaned up against the eastside of the big oak tree to await the sunrise.

Cinnamon's land of Harmony lay just beyond the hill. From her village, the faint sounds of her clansmen's ever-present music were hitching a ride on the gentle, morning breeze. It wasn't a foot-tapping tune, but it did fill Twiggs' soul with contentment, and kept a smile on his face.

He made some mental notes and planned his day's activities. Since the day before had been consumed with the doings of the wedding and Festival of Life, he had need to make up two Mortal Goodakts. In the process, he figured that he could check on several earlier ones, which had portended

dubious outcomes right from the git go, as Jay would have phrased it.

Once the light of day began displacing the blackness of the night, he nearported his book manuscript from upstairs, and tried to get to work on that. After writing, Cinnamon - wife of Twiggs, several dozen times in various styles and sizes, and filling the rest of the page with doodles which closely resembled long golden tresses, he closed the book and set it aside, smiling up at the house.

His gaze was momentarily diverted by a pair of passing Blue Birds, the male attempting amorous advances and the female ignoring her mate's flirtatious designs. Twiggs wondered how he would know when he should and should not try to make such passionate advances of his own.

It had long been obvious to him that at absolutely every moment of absolutely every day he did, in fact, absolutely want to be making those moves. Now that he not only had the Wise One's blessing and permission, but also the marital obligation to do more than just crave them, how was he to properly go about initiating it all? The night before, such things had been just a foregone conclusion. But what of this morning's urges and tonight's? He had not given that enough consideration. He and Cinnamon would have to talk about it.

He considered rocking the bed a bit to awaken her, but then just smiled and imagined her lying there in her quiet beauty. He had handled these impulses before and he would find a way to work it all out now.

His more immediate problem that day, he thought, was the relentless, though good hearted, morning-after-the-wedding-night-type, ribbing he would receive from the men of the clan later that day, as their paths would cross down in the village.

'Best to just get it over with,' he told himself. So, nearporting a note to the pillow beside Cinnamon, Twiggs set off toward the general store - the early morning gathering place for the other early rising men of Bountiful. On the way, he had an awesome, Jay-like, inspiration. It related to how he could handle the teasing, and most certainly deserved a bit of the jig.

As he entered the front door, he was ready for them,

and it was a good thing. It began immediately!

"Well looky who's here this morning, fellas - it looks a whole lot like Twiggs, the new bridegroom."

"She must have kicked him out early this morning," one of the men joked.

"Kicked me out. You mean I was supposed to spend the night with her," Twiggs came back, eyes sparkling?

The men laughed and nodded their approval. Twiggs had handled himself more than satisfactorily, and received a full round of slaps on the back, handshakes, and the offer of a fresh mug of chinkapin coffee - a beverage reserved just for the old married men of the clan.

After an appropriate period of conversation, several games of barrel-top domineckers and red reunion, Twiggs said his goodbyes.

"See ya in the morning, Twiggs," he heard someone call as he closed the door behind him. He had arrived a bridegroom, but left one of the old married men. It made him swell with pride and put an extra spring in his step as he began making his way back up the hill toward Twiggington Point. He could hardly wait to tell Cinnamon, even though he knew she would not fully understand its actual significance to a young man of the clan Dewgoodabee.

Determining that his bride was still not stirring, Twiggs detoured by his father's cobbler shop. No one was there when he arrived, so Twiggs just walked around admiring the shoes and boots, and enjoying that wonderfully familiar smell that only existed there in that workshop. It brought back many a childhood memory - especially those in which he had envisioned himself and his father working there together, side by side.

Well, that dream was not to have been, of course, since Twiggs had been appointed Ambassador to the Mortal Realm, instead. Nothing in his job description, however, prevented him from dropping in occasionally, and giving his father a hand.

"Son, what a wonderful surprise," his father said as he came through the door. "I'm sure your mother would be happy to whip up a batch of griddlecakes if you're in the mood."

"Oh, I'm in the mood. I just imagine it would be best if I

waited and let Cinnamon fix breakfast for me this morning. She's a very late sleeper, you know. Anyway, I can only stay a few minutes."

"Got a big day planned," his father asked, neatly avoiding any reference to the wedding night thing.

Ignoring all of that, Twiggs said what was on his mind.

"It was just as wonderful as you said it would be, Dad. I wanted to thank you for all the talks and help, and all your patience with my dozens of questions and concerns about it all. I guess that's all, but I wanted to say it."

"And thanks for saying it. You know, Twiggs, it was such a compliment to me that you felt you could talk with me about those things. I could never have wished for a better son."

"Nor me, for a better father, Father."

There was no hug, although it would have been permissible. It just wasn't needed. Their love needed no physical documentation at that moment.

Twiggs stuck his head in the back door and said good morning to his mother, who did require and receive a big and lingering hug, punctuated by a quick peck to her cheek. Twiggs noted, but just ignored, her teary eyes, realizing they were to be expected on such occasions, but, as a man, never in an eternity would he be able to truly understand why.

"Love you guys. Gotta get home, now," Twiggs called as he headed off on a trot, up the hill toward his new house in the big oak tree.

Although his mother knew it was right, and that it was time for her son to make and treasure a new home for himself and his bride, it still brought an additional tear or two that first time she heard him refer to it as, home. His father swallowed hard and began cutting on a new bolt of fabric. Their life was beginning a brand-new era as well. It would be fine because they would work to make it fine.

Twiggs looked at the sun and determined he just had time enough to stop by Gramps' place and see if he was keeping his usual early morning vigil, there in the rocker on his front porch.

"Well, if it isn't the old married man," Gramps said in greeting - never having been one to just beat around the bush

on such matters. Then, looking him over from stem to stern, commented: "You look no worse for the wear this morning!"

They both chuckled. Twiggs sat on the steps looking at his fumbling hands and blushing just a little.

"She's a late sleeper. I left for a while so I wouldn't disturb her. I stopped down at the store for a while."

"Got that over with in a hurry, huh?"

"Yeah. Thought that would be best. Actually, it went pretty smoothly. Then I went by the house and saw my folks. They seem ok."

"Ok? You know they are delighted for you, Twiggs. They love Cinnamon. We all do. You have a wonderful life ahead, Son."

"Oh, I know all that. It's just sort of hard to realize that it has finally come to pass, you know?"

"Yes, I may be as old as the hills, but I do remember how it was."

Twiggs flashed his brilliant grin up at Gramps and nodded.

"It was every bit as remarkable as you and Father said it would be," Twiggs said, for some reason moved to share at least that much with his dear old friend.

"And, believe it or not," Gramps whispered, leaning just a bit closer toward Twiggs', "It only gets better with practice."

At that, Twiggs got to his feet, an unexpected feeling of embarrassment welling up in his chest, and a new, unfamiliar pain, tweaking him in his lower back.

"I'd best be getting on home, Gramps. I have a really big day ahead of me. I'll drop by tomorrow."

It was a wonderful feeling to want, so very much, to be with the one he loved. Monday or not, he farjumped to the base of the tree. As he climbed up the long ladder, Twiggs wasn't entirely sure what married life held in store for him, but he was eager to explore all the possibilities.

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CHAPTER THREE:
**Given time, comfortable and familiar old ways do give
way to comfortable and familiar new ways.**

As much as they yearned to spend the day together, Twiggs and Cinnamon each had other important responsibilities. It was Cinnamon's day as an Echolian. Soon, she would need to be off to the hills near Harmony to help fulfill her clan's sacred obligation of keeping the World alive with beautiful sounds, and to call back to the mortals, the sounds of their voices so they could hear themselves as others hear them. Twiggs was several days - and multiple Goodakts - behind in fulfilling his obligations to care for the mortals there in the valleys surrounding Bountiful. They both had busy days ahead.

So it was, that at precisely seven twenty nine that morning, they were in each other's arms, there on their porch, lingering over one last wonder-filled kiss, before parting for the day. Not surprisingly, Twiggs was lingering a bit too long and a moment later, found himself puckered up only to the morning breeze, and caressing nothing but a ray of bright, warm sunshine, as Cinnamon had poofed herself on her way. He shrugged his shoulders and looked around sheepishly as if to see if anyone had witnessed his foolish - and, perhaps, somewhat selfish - behavior.

As had become his custom over those past three years since meeting his Mortal friend, Twiggs began his search for Mortals in need of his assistance, there in Jay's bedroom. The little bulletin board above Jay's desk was always plastered with newspaper articles and hand scrawled notes that had

been placed there partly to remind himself and also, partly left for Twigg's benefit - just in case his Little Person friend ran out of things to do.

Twiggs smiled as he looked around that room. It was strewn from end to end and back again with all those things that reminded him of what an energetic and caring boy, this mortal friend really was. A note pinned to the lampshade read: "Make sure Petie gets back to see Doc on Tuesday for his tetanus booster." Around the neck of a half-finished papier-mâché dinosaur hung another note: "Must help Dave finish his diorama for science by September nineteenth."

On the wall, over his bed, hung a picture that Jay had painted of the big Oak tree up on East Ridge. Viewing it brought back a rush of memories of the many fantastic days they had spent together there in the meadow. However, knowing the picture's true purpose, Twiggs flipped it over in order to view the beautiful, centerfold-type woman Jay had painted on the other side. Slowly, but genuinely, it dawned on Twiggs, that now since he had Cinnamon as his wife, that picture was not nearly as intriguing as it had once been. He chuckled out loud when he noticed the tiny note, scrawled in Jay's handwriting and taped to the bottom of the picture: "Shame on you, Twiggs! You're a married man!!"

"That rascal," Twiggs said to himself. "And somehow, he'll know I looked, you can bet on that!"

Twiggs returned the picture to its more innocent offering and turned his attention back to the bulletin board. Tacked there were a series of articles about a new dam that was being built on the creek – Jay's creek - but down stream about a mile, just west of old man Purdy's place. On more than one occasion, Twiggs had done a Goodakt or two for Mr. and Mrs. Purdy. They were a wonderful, elderly couple, still trying to eke out a living on their very small, rocky, farm. They raised fruit and vegetables, mostly. During the Summer and Fall, they sold them from the back of their old black truck, on the square in town. It seems that during the past several years the Purdy's tomatoes, cabbages, and apples were much in demand, being the biggest and tastiest in the area. As if by magic, their soil had become dark and rich, and the rocks had sunk out of sight, deep into the ground. Twiggs had to smile

again at the good feelings that memory brought back.

In the margin over one of the articles, Jay had written, "How will the Purdy's survive if the water is cut off by this new dam???"

"Aha! Now I see what's going on here," Twiggs said. "I'd best go out and take a look myself."

With a magical poof, Twiggs farjumped first to Jay's little dam which he had helped Jay remodel in order to make their swimming hole larger. The spillway needed a few repairs, but knowing how Jay disliked him using his magic to achieve things that 'good old fashioned mortal sweat could achieve,' he refrained from any major restoration. With his trademark shrug of the shoulders, Twiggs nearjumped up to the ridge so he could get an overview of the whole situation.

It appeared that the old Rakes Farm, recently purchased by a newcomer, Jake Vileman, was crescent shaped, with its southern boundary following the ridge of the hills to the north of Jay's meadow. Jay's place was oval shaped, one side of which was nestled inside the arch of that crescent, butting up against those hills. The stream began on the Rakes farm to the west. It then flowed through Jay's meadow, and, upon leaving the meadow, again crossed the wrap-around east-end of the Rakes farm in the cusp of the crescent.

Since the stream's source was a spring on the Rakes farm, it seems the owner had the legal right to dam it up and keep its water for his own use. And, that was just what the new owner, was about to do. He would let it flow through Jay's farm because he needed the water to irrigate the east forty of his own place.

Twiggs nearjumped to the ridge above the new dam site and watched the men at work, there, with bulldozers, dump trucks, and a huge steam shovel. They were digging out a large lake-like area and using the dirt to build an earthen dam. During the winter, when the water was not being used for irrigation, there would probably be some overflow from the lake that would pass on down the creek bed to the Purdy's. During the dry summer months, when they would need the water most, it would be pumped out of the lake and used by Jake Vileman to irrigate his sorghum fields, with none left over

for the Purdy's.

Although Twiggs was again amazed at the ingenuity those Mortal folks had - having invented such immense and specialized equipment - he also had to reflect on how selfish and uncaring some of those same Mortals could be.

Well, he understood the situation and he would just have to wait and see how Jay and the others were going to go about fixing things themselves. If they needed help, he'd be there, but of course, a Little Person would never use his magic if he saw that the Mortals could handle things among themselves.

Twiggs farjumped farther downstream to look in on the Purdy's. It was apple-picking time, and he knew that each year that job was becoming a more difficult task for the old couple. Surely that morning he would be able to help them. Then he could mark off at least one of the several Goodakts he needed to make up that day.

Well, you can probably guess what he saw going on there. A dozen of the kids in Jay's Goodakters Club were already on the job, picking the apples, crating them and carrying them to the old Ford truck. And of course, nobody was working harder than the Jay-man, himself. The valley was filled with laughter and the sounds of happy young voices. Mrs. Purdy kept the lemonade coming and Mr. Purdy was overseeing the entire operation.

Though beaten to the punch that morning in the Goodakt department, Twiggs felt more than a little pleased to see mortals helping mortals - after all, that was the way it should be.

Invisible or not, the imp in him just had to let Jay know he was there. So, as Jay would pick an apple, Twiggs would remove it from the basket and reattach it onto the limb. After a few minutes, Jay realized that he had been picking those same four apples over and over again. He broke into a big grin and lifted his arms in the now famous V for friendship signal, letting Twiggs know he realized he was there watching.

As was their custom, when Jay made the signal, all of his friends followed suit, so soon, all of the young arms in the valley had momentarily ceased picking and were happily raised high in the air. (None knowing precisely why, but that

didn't seem important!)

Immediately, the youngsters broke into the school fight song. Just how that had become attached to the V-signal, neither Jay nor Twiggs fully understood, but they agreed it did add a grand and dramatic touch. Twiggs made a mental note to suggest that Jay write a special song just for the Gookakt Club. He would bring it up at their next Ambassadorial Meeting.

Jay took out his pocketknife and cut a small cone-shaped piece of apple, leaving it in the crotch of the tree. He then looked away and got back to work.

A few moments later he glanced back and saw that it was gone. He smiled to himself and climbed down the ladder to add his apples to the crate below.

Twiggs perched himself back atop the ridge overlooking the farm, and enjoyed a delicious fall-apple treat. He had to wonder just what Jay had in mind for solving the dam problem (pardon me, perhaps I should have said, 'the problem about the dam!'). Twiggs would keep tabs on it and even decided to bring it before the Goodakt Council back in Bountiful. It seemed wise for the Little People to develop a backup plan just in case Jay's might not work. It just wouldn't be conceivable to let the Purdy's suffer for lack of water.

Before leaving, Twiggs surveyed the Purdy's buildings. He replaced a ripped leather valve in the hand pump in the kitchen, and mended a slowly cracking beam in the barn - things the mortals could not have realized needed attention. He also added a quarter inch of rubber tread to the truck tires - something he found was necessary about four times a year. Needless to say, Mr. Purdy was sold on Zeus All Weather Tires - his had lasted more than three years and hardly showed any wear at all!

With one last look around - and a simply marvelous feeling of fuzziatiousness caressing his heart - Twiggs returned home, alighting on his front porch.

He was so proud of that house in the tree, which he had built by hand - the Mortal's way - for Cinnamon and him to live in. It was like no other in the realm, since everyone else occupied stump houses in the tradition of the Dewgoodabee Clan. He had to admit that sometimes he did miss the more

familiar surroundings of his parent's home, and especially the gray wooden walls of his old room - the comfortable old room in which he had spent the first seventeen years of his life.

He assumed that someday soon their new place would come to feel like home, and he mused over the idea that, to their own child, this tree home would hold all those same safe and familiar feelings that he had for his parent's stump home. In a society where things really never changed much from generation to generation, he thought that was probably a healthy thing.

That was Jay's influence, speaking, of course. Twiggs knew that Gramps and the other Elders were still not fully convinced of the positive side of such things - like change and progress, in particular. There were moments when Twiggs, himself, was not fully convinced.

His relationship with Jay had changed from playmate and best friend to - well, he wasn't just sure to what. Cinnamon was now his best friend - and, of course, much more. It was with her, who he really wanted to do things. He still loved Jay and treasured their friendship, but it had changed. It was one of those changes about which Twiggs still felt uncertain and it filled him with questions - something Jay would say was great, of course - but Twiggs wondered.

At any rate, at that moment he was certain that he was both hungry and in need of a little mothering, so he jogged down the hill and around the bend to his parent's home.

They were delighted to see him and soon a tasty noontime meal was under way.

The delectable aroma of his mother's dandelion green soup filled the air.

"Did you ever notice how important smells are," Twiggs asked his parents, all quite out of the blue?

"I mean like your kitchen, Mother, always smells just like your kitchen and nobody else's. And your cobbler's shop, Father, has a smell like no other shop in town. And my room - well, I have to admit it, I miss the smell of my room here in this house."

His parents looked at each other knowingly, and his father spoke.

"We certainly understand about that, don't we, Dear."

he said, patting his wife's hand.

"You do?" Twiggs said, as if perplexed.

"Sure, we do," his mother agreed. "Why when we were first married, I thought I'd never get used to living in a stump of all things. My home in Harmony had been a neatly constructed rock house, and believe me, rock and mortar houses smell a whole lot different from stump houses."

There had, of course, been more conversation that noon, but later in the day, as Twiggs was chopping wood for their fireplace, he would only remember the reassuring responses he had received to his main concern that morning. Given time, comfortable and familiar old ways do give way to comfortable and familiar new ways.

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CHAPTER FOUR: Puppies aren't so annoying once you understand them!

It had been an extraordinary week - that first week of marriage - and Twiggs' love for Cinnamon seemed to be growing beyond belief. Just when he figured there was no way to be more in love, he would experience some new and even more wonderful aspect in his feelings for her. He wanted to shout it from his porch, for all the World to hear, but of course it was a private thing so he didn't.

He wanted to find new ways of letting her know how precious she was to him. He picked her fresh flowers every morning and laid them on the pillow beside her beautiful sleeping face, so they would be the first thing she would see when she awoke. He wrote her poems about her smile, her hair, and her inner beauty. With greatest diligence, he tried to meet her every need and he stayed by her side every possible moment of the day. The very sight of Cinnamon filled his being with a blending of passion and tenderness he had never dreamed possible. This love he felt for her, made fuzzi-latio-nous seem mild - practically dull.

"Being so much in love is truly remarkable, yet terribly frustrating," were his first words to Gramps there on the porch, in the still dusky blackness of that early morning.

Gramps fully understood, but, sensing that Twiggs needed to talk it out, fostered the conversation by remarking:

"Frustrating? How so?"

"Well, when you are friends with someone you just hang out together and do things together and you both know you'll always be there for each other. And that's enough. You

don't have to prove anything because there aren't all these other feelings. Like with Jay. I do love Jay and I'd do anything for him. I know he feels the same way about me, but neither of us needs to prove it.

"But with marital love - this awesome feeling I have for Cinnamon - I'm somehow compelled to just keep letting her know how much I cherish her, how she means more to me than life itself. And frankly, it's exhausting! I'm a wreck, Gramps! One week into our marriage and I've run out of new ways to let her know."

At that point, Gramma appeared on the porch with sugar toast and honey tea.

"I thought this might tide you over 'til breakfast," she said, placing the tray on the little table beside Gramps' chair.

Gramps gently patted her hand as he looked up into her radiant, time worn face. No words passed between them, but as their eyes met, Twiggs sensed a flow of love like none other he had ever sensed before. He had seen it all before, but not until that moment had he understood the message.

"I'll leave you gentlemen to your business. Call if you need more tea."

With that, she once more looked that very special look into Gramps' face, and went inside. When they glanced into each other's faces it was as if time itself ceased for that brief moment. It was as if their universe was one huge whirling mass of affection and devotion. It seemed as though something real and solid passed between them. Twiggs was beginning to understand.

Love was so much more than passion and desire - not that passion and desire didn't play important and wonder-filled roles in it all - but love itself was simply the ultimate in caring. It was quiet, tender and ever present, never waning, never fading, and always the solid underpinning of the relationship.

Flowers and poetry were not so much a way to prove one's love to the other, as they were ways of relieving one's own frustration about communicating that love and affection to that one very special person.

Once again, dear old Gramps had spoken volumes without ever opening his mouth. A long and special look passed between Twiggs and Gramps as the sun broke

through the darkness that morning. It said: 'Thank you Gramps for again sharing your wisdom with me.' It said: 'My son, there is no greater pleasure and privilege in my life than to share with you any wisdom, which I may have acquired through the years.'

* * *

[At that same hour of the morning, across the hills, in a kitchen, in the village of Harmony:]

"I do love him more than anything in the universe, Mother - I truly do - but he's driving me stark raving mad! He's always underfoot. He's always taking care of me. He's always at my side. I feel like I'm drowning in a sea of love and affection. I feel so guilty. Whatever can I do?"

Cinnamon's mother poured more honey tea for the girl.

"Husbands!" She said, with a smiling sigh.

They both broke into laughter, shaking their heads, and taking each other's hands across the table.

"As I recall your father didn't let me out of his sight for the first two months we were married. I used to hide out in the bathroom just to get away. It's just their way of letting us know how precious we are to them. It is exhausting, I know, but it's just one of those things."

"I guess I knew that, but it's good to have you confirm it. How do I handle it? I can't just stay in the bathroom for hours at a time. He is so sweet. He brings me flowers every morning and he writes verses for me. He is so tender and caring. He is so careful not to make me uncomfortable in any way. He fluffs my pillow. He kisses me every time I turn around. He tells me how beautiful he thinks I am. He tells me he loves me ten dozen times a day. I do like to be with him. Being his wife is the most wonderful thing I've ever known. But ..."

Her mother smiled. "But!" she repeated with great emphasis. "I'll tell you the secret my mother told to me when she and I had this same conversation twenty years ago."

Cinnamon's initial look of surprise soon turned to one of understanding. Her mother continued.

"Just think of Twiggs as a new little puppy. When they are first able, they follow you everywhere. They're in your lap

when you're trying to sew. They're in your path as you try to walk. They're licking your face way before you want to awaken in the morning. When you leave the house, they cry and whimper feeling totally lost until you return.

"But as time passes, they find other interests. It isn't that, as an older dog, they love you less, they are just more secure about the relationship and therefore are more able to share you with the rest of the World. They know that when you leave, you always return. They know that when you are busy you will soon be free. They understand that you enjoy doing things that 'dogs' don't care much about doing, themselves. They learn to be more patient. They become less possessive. And so it is with Husbands. In time, he'll be able to share you with the rest of us again."

"A puppy, huh? Yes, Twiggs is acting just like a brand-new puppy. If I would scratch him behind his ears, he'd undoubtedly pant and drool."

At that, they broke into more laughter. Cinnamon's father entered the kitchen.

"What's a goin' on here? Let the old man know what's so funny."

"We were just talking about - puppies," Cinnamon said, giggling through her words.

"Oh, I see. Twiggs is still underfoot, is he?"

Cinnamon seemed surprised. She looked at her mother and then back at her father.

"Well, after two months of panting and drooling I just finally had to tell him," her mother said.

They all had a good laugh. Cinnamon felt much better, and she wasn't even sure why it had all seemed like such a big deal. It had been good to be there with her parents for a little while, but she already missed her little house in the sky. Most of all, though, she missed her puppy - sorry, I mean her Twiggs!

* * *

"Where you been?" Twiggs asked pleasantly as Cinnamon poofed into the living room, only seconds after he himself had arrived.

"I needed to spend a little time with Mother this

morning. Tell me about what you've been up to while I fix breakfast."

"Oh, I went over to Gramps for a little while. We watched the sun come up and talked a bit. How are your folks?"

"Oh, they're fine. How are Gram and Gramps?"

"Oh, they're fine, too."

The conversation wasn't sparkling, yet they both felt comfortable and close, and very much in love.

"Let's take a picnic lunch over to Jay's meadow today," Cinnamon suggested.

"Sounds great. I'd like to check on the dam anyway and we can see what Jay's been up to this week. We have to be back in time for the Saturday Festival this evening, though."

"Going to dance me into exhaustion again this week, are you," Cinnamon chided?

"That's always my goal!" Twiggs grinned back.

Cinnamon pulled him close and looked into his face.

"I really do love you, you know," she said, planting a big, wet kiss on his chin.

"And I you," Twiggs answered, just a bit baffled by her choice of words.

She reached up with both arms, and, smiling, - perhaps just a bit more than usual - she scratched Twiggs behind his ears. His shoulders raised and he broke into a broad grin. He slowly rotated his head this way and that, cuddling his ears into her fingers. His breathing became more rapid - almost as if panting! He moved his own moist lips toward hers, passion flowing throughout his being. She giggled, but eagerly returned his amorous advances. The picnic was delayed.

Puppies aren't so annoying once you understand them!

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CHAPTER FIVE:
**Twiggs sometimes wished for a life without obligations
and effort-filled mandates from the Wise One.**

The picnic had been great fun - just the two of them up on the sun-warmed steps of Jay's cabin. Twiggs had observed that the gold of Cinnamon's hair matched the brilliant hues of the gorgeous golden mums in Jay's flower garden. The gentle breeze whistling through the trees, and the syncopated chattering of the squirrels above, lent a well-orchestrated background for the soft, repetitive serenade from the nearby meadowlarks. It had been the most relaxed time they had spent together since their wedding.

After lunch, while Cinnamon took her customary noon-day nap - this time curled up on the soft green grass in the shade of a large, purple crowned thistle - Twiggs nearjumped into Jay's bedroom to check his bulletin board. The headlines were not reassuring: NEW LANDOWNER REFUSES WATER RIGHTS. 'Perhaps Cinnamon and I need to get to know this Mr. Vileman,' Twiggs thought.

To kill time while his beloved Cinnamon napped, Twiggs nearjumped to Jutting Rock and sat there in the sun, watching the ripples in the water below and listening to the gentle splashing of the stream as it made its way over Jay's dam and into the creek beyond. That was the very water which, one day soon, might not be allowed to make its way on down to the Purdy farm.

"What to do? What to do," Twiggs asked himself out loud.

* * *

It took three separate nearjumps for them to find the Vileman's farm house, but presently Twiggs and Cinnamon were safely perched on a limb, high in the lone elm tree in the big yard which surrounded the large white house. Several things were immediately obvious to them. Mr. Vileman was wearing a suit and tie - not looking the part of a farmer at all. As he came out the back door, the dog that had been lying there, got up and slunk off away from him, head down and tail dragging - not at all the behavior of a well-treated animal. There was no pickup truck - the ever-present sign of a farmer in those parts - only a shiny, long, white car with a large silver ornament on its hood.

The man looked mean, well perhaps just unhappy - it was often difficult for Little People to tell the difference when trying to read Mortal's faces. He got into his car and recklessly sped away toward town, leaving behind a cloud of red dust that just hung there in the still, dry, September air. Twiggs and Cinnamon had not received a very favorable first impression, but Twiggs had a word of caution about it:

"Remember, we still really don't know him. We must not rush to judge him."

"I know you're right, but at this point, he certainly doesn't seem to be a very likable person."

"That's the way he struck me too, but first impressions aren't always correct. Who knows, maybe that was really a pained expression because his bathroom isn't working and he had to rush off to find one," Twiggs joked.

"Or maybe he just got a phone call and learned some family member is ill or hurt or something."

"Gee, I sure hope that's not the situation," Twiggs added, most sympathetically. "Let's go down to the dam he's building and see how it's coming along. We can check back here later."

The dozer was dozing and the trucks were hauling. Twiggs was impressed with the huge amount of dirt and rock that had been moved since his last visit. The lake was going to be gigantic. No wonder there was to be no water left over for the Purdy's. The dam itself was over half finished. Soon the water would begin backing up and filling the lake.

They moved on down the creek to the Purdy's place.

Mr. and Mrs. Purdy were just returning from town in their old black truck. All of their apple crates were empty, so Twiggs figured it must have been another good morning for them at market. Mr. Purdy opened the truck door for his wife and she went immediately into the house. He snatched up a wayward sprig of alfalfa and began chewing on it as he walked out to the edge of the now nearly dry streambed. He sat down on a log and silently surveyed the situation, sadly shaking his head.

A tear trickled down Cinnamon's cheek as they watched. Twiggs tried to reassure her.

"You know we won't let anything bad happen to them."

"I know that and you know that, but right now he doesn't know that. He seems so sad - so frightened. Can't we do something right now?"

"Well," Twiggs said with some reservation in his voice, "I suppose a good soaking rain on the orchard for the rest of the afternoon might help him feel better for a little while. It has been quite dry these past several weeks."

Before Twiggs could even finish his suggestion, Cinnamon summoned up a cloudburst that would last for hours. Mr. Purdy seemed delighted, though obviously perplexed as to why it sat so specifically just above his grove of apple trees.

"It might present fewer questions if it covered just a tad more territory," Twiggs patiently suggested to Cinnamon.

She immediately saw the sense in that, and soon the entire Purdy farm was being bathed in a grand summer shower. Mr. Purdy beat a quick retreat to the front porch where he and his wife just stood, smiling, chattering and pointing up at the sky. They young people were pleased they had been able to help in that way, although they fully realized the larger problem was far from solved.

Back in Bountiful, they stopped by Gramps' place.

"Do you think this is a grave enough matter to bring to the attention of the Goodakt Council, Gramps?" Twiggs asked, after having explained the situation as best he could.

Never having been one to make foolishly quick decisions, Gramps gave the matter quiet consideration. At last he spoke.

"It would appear that since so many Mortals are involved in this, that it would be appropriate for the Council to consider it. What is your friend Jay doing about all this?"

"I'm not really sure. I haven't seen any signs that give me much of a clue. You can bet he's working on it, though."

"Well, just the same, a backup plan from the Council still seems in order to me," Gramps observed. "By the way, the rain thing was a nice and thoughtful touch, kids."

That relieved Cinnamon, because she wondered if she might have acted a bit impulsively.

As they made ready to leave for home, Cinnamon kissed the old gentleman on his forehead. 'What a nice young lady Twiggs has there,' he thought to himself as the momentary blush faded from his cheeks.

"What a wonderful Grandpa you have there," Cinnamon commented as, hand in hand, they alit on their big front porch.

"He is a very special person, that's for sure," Twiggs readily agreed. "Let's get to work on the proposal for the Council. We can present it to Elder Stone at the Saturday Festival tonight. By the way, you're parents are coming over later, aren't they?"

"Oh, yes! They wouldn't miss it."

"I think this plan to allow our two clans to get together more often is a good one, don't you," Twiggs said thoughtfully.

Cinnamon didn't hesitate in her reply:

"Maybe it's just selfish on my part, because I want to see my parents more often, but, yes, I think it's great. I'm still not sure how you got the Council of Elders to agree to it, though. We've been such separate communities for all these thousands of years."

"Well, I'm sure if it seems to be ruining anything - traditions or ways of life or things like that - the Elders will be wise enough to put a quick stop to it all," Twiggs added, content in the wisdom of their leaders. "It just appears to me that we have lots of good things to share with one another - things we can learn from each other - that will make us both better clans without having to give up our individuality."

"That's one of the reasons I love you so much, you know," Cinnamon said, reaching out and touching Twiggs' face.

"What's one of the reasons?"

"That you're always thinking of ways to help improve things - like learning from the Mortals, and Mortal Monday's, and now this increased contact between the clans."

"It's Jay's influence, of course," Twiggs added, immediately giving his Mortal friend, full credit.

"I know that, but it's you who has had the good sense to apply it to us Little People, and that is you and not Jay," she observed. "That's my wonderful husband, Twiggington, man of the Clan Dewgoodabee."

"And don't forget, Master in the Ring of the Farjumpers," Twiggs boasted whimsically, trying to make light of it all.

A kiss seemed in order. Those days most any event seemed good enough reason for a kiss!

They spent the rest of the afternoon preparing the background information about the dam problem (oh, well!) for Elder Stone. Cinnamon baked Apple Spice cookies as they worked. At dusk, they donned their party clothes and set off for the town square and the Saturday Night Festival.

It was a weekly event all year long, but the clansmen never tired of it. There was dancing and singing and chatting and, of course, eating. That night would be the first time that the clan Callbackabee had been invited, so the women had been especially busy preparing double the usual amount of refreshment. The next week, Twiggs' clan would visit Bountiful. It all seemed to ignite a new level of excitement - not a common experience among the Little People of either clan since they had settled there in the Ozark Mountains so long ago.

While Cinnamon delivered the cookies to Mrs. Bark, Twiggs made his way through the gathering to the East edge of town to greet the folks from Harmony. He didn't have long to wait. Soon the faint sound of a chorus of voices drifted up the trail to meet him. Within minutes, he spied the entire, smiling, Callbackabee clan leisurely making its way toward him.

He spied Cinnamon's parents almost immediately, and moved to welcome them. Twiggs had to admit that the immutably unhurried approach to life of the Little People, did,

from time to time, get on his energetic young nerves.

This was again, no doubt, due to Jay's influence - Jay's approach to living defined pure, unadulterated, motion, during every waking moment. Twiggs remembered how quaint - no, how downright odd - that had appeared to him upon first meeting Jay. Why work so hard at living, when it can all just happen so easily and naturally?

So, it was that, time and time again, Twiggs found himself setting too rapid a pace as he led her parents toward Cinnamon. After hugs and kisses all around, Twiggs' parents, and soon, Gram and Gramps arrived. Nothing would do but that Twiggs have the first dance with Cinnamon's mother. What a show they put on - Twiggs still sporting an entire evening's reserve of youthful energy, and Sapphire not about to be outdone for a single moment by this handsome young specimen of a son-in-law.

Everyone just stood back and watched, clapping in rhythm and then applauding enthusiastically when they finished. After a deep, hat in hand, bow from Twiggs and a most lady-like curtsy from Sapphire, Twiggs returned her to Garnet and, himself, moved immediately to Cinnamon's side.

From then on, they danced every dance - well all of those for which either Twiggs wasn't fiddling or Cinnamon wasn't singing. They had become quite the favorites during that past several years - partly due to the novelty of their youth and partly because they were just the most likeable couple the clans had ever known. The Saturday Night Festival was a time of renewal - a time of fellowship and communion - a time that regularly reminded them how wonderful it was to be a Little Person of the Ozark Mountains.

Life among the Little People was Eden exemplified. Save for that fortuitous meeting in the meadow, some four and a half years before, Twiggs' life could have gone on being just that - idyllic.

However, coming to know and appreciate Jay, had visited upon Twiggs a profound social conscience and deep sense of responsibility toward the Little People of his realm as well as the Mortals in those nearby Ozark hills and valleys. On most days, Twiggs would have had it no other way. At carefree moments like this, however, moments with his

beloved Cinnamon in his arms and the ever-present love of their clansmen pervading the realm - Twiggs sometimes wished for a life without obligations and effort-filled mandates from the Wise One.

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CHAPTER SIX: Sometimes the best way to help, is not to help at all.

The Goodakt Council had been in session for almost an hour before the Twiggs and Cinnamon proposal was addressed. It seemed the citizens of Bountiful had many sticky, Mortal-related, situations to be resolved that day. At last, Elder Stone spoke to the problem of the dam.

"Will you please give us a status report on the problem, Mr. Twiggington," came the Elder's request.

"Yes Sir, and thank you all for listening. It appears that a newcomer to the valley, Mr. Vileman, has decided to dam up the creek that originates in a spring on his property. Although this is within his mortal, legal rights - that's mortal not moral rights - it will cut off the main water supply used by the Purdys to irrigate their small fruit and vegetable farm. It seems important to Cinnamon and me that we help find some way to supply them with enough water to meet their needs. The Purdys are elderly and very poor and could not survive without their crops."

Both the concepts of elderly and poor were still quite confusing to the Little People, because neither existed among them. Since money was not used, poor had no meaning to them, and since the Little People were immortal, elderly carried no connotations of feebleness or helplessness. The Elders turned to one another and mumbled quietly among themselves for several minutes. Elder Stone then turned toward Twiggs and spoke again.

"Do you have reason to believe that the Mortals will find a suitable solution to this themselves?"

"At this point we have no way of knowing. I'm sure that Jay is working on it though."

The Elders all nodded their heads as if in relief. They were well aware of the Mortal boy's ability to find solutions and make them work.

Twiggs continued: "Even though we all respect Jay's skills in such matters, this one just may be too big, after all, the Mortals' laws are on the side of the apparently evil party in this case."

There was more mumbling among the Elders and then Elder Stone asked, "So, you are requesting our approval for a back-up plan just in case. Is that what we are to understand?"

"Yes Sir. That is exactly what we are requesting.

"And do you have any suggestions?"

"We have several, but feel they may all be inadequate. That's why we requested this meeting with you wise counselors - to help us develop a better plan."

A few chests expanded slightly, and several elbows quickly left the table.

"Well, let's first hear what you have."

Twiggs cleared his throat and unfolded the paper on which he had made some notes. Suddenly he felt very Jay-like.

"We could cause an underground channel to flow from Mr. Vileman's lake bed to the Purdys pond, but Cinnamon and I feel like that would be stealing water that really didn't belong to the Purdys."

The Elders looked among themselves and nodded in immediate agreement with Twiggs' conclusion.

"Another plan would be to cause it to rain every week on the Purdy's acreage, but that would be difficult to explain during the dry summer months."

Again, the Elders nodded in agreement, effectively ruling that one out of consideration.

"Then we thought that perhaps we could dig the Purdy's well deep enough so that it became an artesian well and flowed by itself all the time. Sitting between the tall hills like it does, an artesian well is certainly a realistic possibility. That should provide enough water for them."

"But ...?" Elder Stone inquired as if waiting to hear the

less evident downside to that suggestion.

"But ... we would have to go about it in such a way as to make its sudden transformation seem plausible - like having the well be struck by a bolt of lightning, or causing a small earthquake, or something like that."

With surprisingly little mumbling and nary a single dissenting shake of the head, the Elders approved the third option.

"But," Elder Stone cautioned, "such an intervention is to be used only as a last resort, after you have allowed the Mortals every conceivable way to solve the problem among themselves."

"Oh, yes Sir! We do understand that, Sir. Thank you all for your time and assistance."

Elder Birch rose and added a somewhat cynical note.

"I know I speak only for a minority on the Council, Twiggington, but since I truly doubt that these half-witted, self-centered Mortals of yours are capable of finding a peaceful solution, I suggest we go ahead and do the well-thing immediately. No reason to put the old couple through any more distress."

Elder Stone thanked him for his minority opinion and added:

"Elder Birch's concerns are appreciated and noted, but we shall proceed according to the original consensus of the council."

Twiggs bowed and Cinnamon curtsied as they left the chamber. The young couple would have been both embarrassed and yet quite pleased had they heard the Elders' kind and generous comments about them, a few moments later. Even Elder Birch and his more pessimistic colleagues agreed with that.

"That went very well, I think, don't you," Cinnamon said, removing the traditional large red bow of respect from her hair.

"It was excellent," Twiggs said enthusiastically.

Cinnamon beamed up at him.

"I certainly admired how you just stood up and talked to the Elders like .. well ... like you had done it dozens of times before."

"Well, I have done it dozens of times before, my Dear.

Many of those visits didn't turn out quite so favorably, however."

They laughed, recalling some of the more harebrained proposals Twiggs had made when he had first become a Man of the Clan.

"What's next, my Darling," Cinnamon asked, putting her arm around her beloved's waist and resting her head on his shoulder as they walked along the path away from the Great Chamber Hall.

"Every time I meet with those guys, I get this uncontrollable urge for Gram's Cranberry Bread with peach preserves," Twiggs answered without a moment's hesitation!

"How lucky it is then, that this path just happens to lead to Gram and Gramps' place," Cinnamon said, joshing with Twiggs and repeatedly prodding his ever-ticklish ribs with her pointing finger.

He giggled uncontrollably, as his mid-section countered by gyrating, this way and that. Cinnamon quickly slipped away from his grasp and disappeared into the nearby pansy patch. Twiggs, intentionally keeping his distance, chased after her. They scurried through the stand of lavender hyacinths, played dodge-em among the mushrooms, and presently fell, in mock exhaustion, onto the porch at Gramps' feet.

Still laughing and with tears of joy streaming down their faces, they just lay there, trying to catch their breath.

"You'll never guess who just dropped in," Gramps called through the door to Gram. That caused the giggles to begin all over again.

"Is it a bit of honey tea or cranberry bread that you are a needin'," Gram asked, joining into the game, with a whimsical exaggeration of her natural, old world, silky, brogue.

"Cranberry Bread and peach preserves," called Twiggs, through his giggles.

"You must have just come from the Goodakt Council," Gramps observed. "That bunch always causes me to crave goodies, too!"

They had a fine time there with Gram and Gramps. Cinnamon recounted Twiggs' presentation and Elder Birch's reservations. All in all, she made her husband out to be some kind of golden tongued orator. Twiggs' blushed but did take

advantage of the opportunity to kiss her.

Good-byes over, they were off to Priscilla Primm's basement - the newly redecorated headquarters of Jay's Goodakt Club. It was time for their weekly meeting to get underway, and Twiggs thought that might be the best way to find out what Jay had up his sleeve in the Vileman case. He was right, for as they poofed into the basement, landing unseen behind quart jars of black berry preserves on a shelf at the back of the room, they heard suggestions already being discussed.

Jay listened to each and every proposal before speaking.

"It appears that we have two general options: Get Mr. Vileman to change his mind, or, find some alternative source of water for the Purdys. The second option doesn't seem very promising, and the first - well it doesn't seem a whole lot better."

The group became silent, as if waiting for divine inspiration. Jay stood up and began pacing back and forth. Rotund young Billy had a third sugar cookie. J. J. twisted her long black hair.

"You know," Jay said at last, "I reckon we've been so busy not liking Mr. Vileman since he arrived here about that we forgot to give him a proper Ozark welcome to our valley."

If a hush can fall over a silence, it did!

"I don't get it," said Betty.

"Me either," the others chimed in.

"Ok. Listen up," Jay began. "What do we usually do when a new family moves in around here?"

"We go visit them."

"We take them cookies or a cake or something like that."

"We offer to help them get their place in order."

"Bingo, Jesse," Jay said. "And what have we done for Mr. Vileman since he arrived?"

"Well, nothing, I guess," answered J. J. "But even before he arrived we already knew about his plan to cut off the water supply. He announced that months ago."

"Yeah," added young Petie, pulling an ever-wayward coverall strap back up over his slippery little shoulder. "We

knew he was a no good, dirty, scoundrel even before he set foot in the county."

The others nodded and even vocalized their support for that point of view.

"The fact remains," Jay continued, "We really haven't treated him the way we usually treat newcomers, right?"

The others had to agree he was correct.

"So, what could we do to welcome our newest valley resident?"

Someone humorously mumbled something about tar and feathers. At that, Twiggs giggled out loud. Cinnamon clapped her hand over his mouth and sternly shook her finger at him.

"The fence around his house yard is pretty dilapidated. Maybe we could fix that for him," J. J. suggested.

"Yeah," added Billy. "We have nails and whitewash left over from when we fixed up old man Clyde's shed last month."

"I heard he left back for the city this morning," said Jesse. "His foreman says he won't be back 'til late Sunday afternoon."

"Sounds like a plan," Jay said. "We'll meet here at sun up on Saturday morning. J. J., do you suppose your dad can take us out there in his truck?"

"I'll see to it," she answered.

"I'll have a picnic lunch ready," Miss Primm called down the stairs, from where she had been eavesdropping.

"I'll bring a saw and everybody needs to bring their own hammer and paint brush," Jay said. "That's a good start until we can come up with a next step. Now, what other business do we need to take up today?"

At that, Twiggs took Cinnamon by the hand and they farjumped out to Jay's cabin where they could talk.

"It's the Primm Plan," Twiggs said, thoughtfully, as he paced back and forth across the goose down pillow.

"The Primm Plan?" Cinnamon said, a question in her voice.

"Yes. They've gone back to basics. That's good. Show Vileman what nice people live around here and begin to work him into the community. Show him they care about him. That's a very good approach I think."

"Do you think it will work with such a hard-hearted person as Mr. Vileman?"

"It worked wonders on the hard-hearted Priscilla Primm a few years ago!" Twiggs explained. "It's like planting a few clover seeds. You have to be very patient, but before long your efforts are rewarded, as the sweetest smelling blossoms known to man fill the world with their pleasing fragrance."

"I truly don't see how all this is going to change his mind about the water," Cinnamon fretted. "His whole reason for buying that farm seems to have been built around the irrigation plan."

Even so, Twiggs seemed suddenly relieved.

"I think it's safe to just sit back now and wait to see what develops. I'm sure the ol' Jay-man has more up his sleeve than meets the eye. Remember the admonition from our Sacred Scriptures: Sometimes the best way to help is not to help at all."

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CHAPTER SEVEN:

Although it's sometimes hard to see the positive sides of unpleasant events, they are often there.

They had worked on it all week. Twiggs had played it over and over on his fiddle. Cinnamon had sung it in a variety of different ways. They wanted it to be exactly right. It didn't dare offend either Clan and, in fact, needed to please them both.

"Perhaps we have finally taken on more than we can accomplish," Cinnamon said at one point.

"Poofberries," replied Twiggs. (That was as close as any Little Person ever came to cursing!) Just because it's never been done before in all of history, and just because neither of us happens to have any experience at doing it, doesn't mean it won't all come out just fine - no, not fine, magnificent!"

Cinnamon appreciated her husband's Jay-like confidence, but quite honestly, was not nearly so certain, herself.

They were working on a musical medley that interwove folk songs from both Clans. It was to be their special way of thanking the Clans for giving them such a memorable wedding several weeks earlier. It had taken a great deal of thought and planning.

For example, they had had to address questions such as: Which Clan's song should come first? Which last? Since Callbackabees preferred the zither to the Dewgoodabee's fiddle, how would they accept Twiggs' instrument? You see, it had not been easy.

Since both Clans had several melodies in common, they had decided to begin and end with one of those - that way neither Clan could be offended. Cinnamon would play the zither along with Twiggs on several of the tunes. It appeared that all bases had been covered. Time would tell.

"It's probably a lot of worry for nothing, you know," Twiggs said at last.

"What do you mean, for nothing?" Cinnamon asked, her own misgivings showing through her tone.

"Well, think about it. Can you ever remember a time when anybody in either Clan ever actually got upset about anything? I mean I think we are beginning to picture ourselves as if we had Mortal characteristics." (That revelation sent a cold, unsettling, shiver up Twiggs' spine!)

Even so, once that had been said, much of the pressure disappeared. Still, they both wanted their gift to be very special, so they continued to practice, making minor changes right up until it was time to leave for the Saturday Night Festival over in Harmony.

The residents of Bountiful had been abuzz about the festival all week long. It was the only topic of conversation at the men's early morning get-together at the general store. Hardly anything else had come up at Cinnamon's Monday morning quilting group. The other ladies had a myriad of questions for her to answer about the people and customs of Harmony. That made her feel both like a welcome member of Twiggs' Clan and yet, somehow still like an outsider. It was a very strange combination of emotions, but nothing she would visit upon Twiggs until later.

The Dewgoodabees gathered at the Bountiful square, (actually a more or less kidney shaped, grassy area across from the general store) and then, still chatting together about the big event, made their way across the valley, over the hill and down into the beautiful village of Harmony. The closer they got, the more nervous became Twiggs and Cinnamon. At one point, Cinnamon was gripping his hand so hard that it hurt more than a little bit, but ever-loving Twiggs just smiled down into her face and didn't even mention it.

As they arrived at the center of Harmony, it suddenly hit Twiggs. With the ever-present music of that realm competing

there in the background, how would their own songs sound? What if they clashed? What if they sounded off key? What if, after what if, raced through his mind.

He wondered why Cinnamon had not brought it up herself, since she had undoubtedly dealt with it many times before. Soon, there was no more time to worry.

Councilman Sage, the Clan leader of Harmony ascended the bunting bedecked platform and addressed the large, cheerful gathering.

"Our own beautiful Cinnamon, and her most handsome husband, Twiggington of the Clan Dewgoodabee, tell me they have a special treat for us this evening - a thank-you gift for us all, if you will. So, let us not wait another moment. I give you Twiggs and Cinnamon."

He bowed toward the young couple - well, mostly nodded, his vast mid-section not being easily given to bending - and motioned them up onto the outdoor stage. It was complete with a white lattice backdrop, covered with multi-colored, night blooming morning glories. (Things didn't necessarily have to make sense in Harmony - they just had to be beautiful!)

With a smile as wide as his face, and to everyone's applause, Twiggs eagerly led Cinnamon up the steps. Twiggs had long ago admitted to himself that he truly did love to be in the spotlight. Whether that was a decadent trait acquired from his mortal contacts with Jay, or merely a latent trait passed down to him from before the time mankind had been parted into Mortals and Little People, he could not be sure. Either way, he assumed it was permissible since he had never tried to hide it, and the Council of Elders had never cautioned him against it.

Cinnamon sat on the floor, carefully spreading out her skirt in a flowing, scarlet arc. Twiggs stood beside her, his feet slightly apart and firmly planted on the wooden planks. They farported their instruments into their hands and, with a duet of deep breaths - which was noticeable only to themselves - began their program.

Somewhat mysteriously, but most enchantingly, the music of the realm immediately blended itself into the special medley, and provided a grand and fitting, ethereal

accompaniment.

From the immediate ocean of smiling faces and tapping feet before them, they both knew all was well. It moved Twiggs to such confidence that, from time to time, he would - out of the blue - throw in an extra foot stompin', hand clappin' solo, totally unanticipated by Cinnamon. She loved it as much as everyone else and just sat by patiently, waiting for him to get it out of his system and back to the program, as planned.

Now, Twiggs was without a doubt the most cuddly, huggable person in the two realms, but never before had he experienced the sheer volume of pecks to the cheek, hugs to his middle, shakes to his hand, and pats on his back, as after that performance. Since he never took anything he didn't repay in triplicate, Twiggs was virtually exhausted, before the festival itself, had begun.

Oh, he didn't miss a dance and didn't overlook an opportunity to fiddle or jig or make a spectacle of himself, he just did so with a bit less gusto than was the usual case!

He didn't want the evening to end. It had become an extraordinary moment in his life. Cinnamon, too, delighted in every minute. Suddenly, in the middle of an energetic Rustic Reel, it came to her, that everyone there was her family - now twice as large as it had been before her marriage. What a wonderful realization! What a marvelously secure and enduring sense of belonging!

Well, at last, the evening did come to an end and they both realized there would be many, more wonderful times still ahead for them. They felt somehow closer than before. It was as if there were a bond even greater than marriage. It was impossible to put into words but they both sensed its presence.

At home, that night, momentary passionate thoughts, quickly gave way to their exhaustion. So, contented, they soon drifted off to sleep, Cinnamon tenderly cradled in Twiggs' strong, ever protecting arms. They dreamt of smiling red shoes and dancing green fiddles - of applauding morning glories and white lattice dresses. (Well, you know how dreams go!)

Surprise of all surprises, it was Twiggs who was awakened by Cinnamon that next morning.

"Hey, sleepy-head," she said, sitting down on the bed beside him and running her fingers through his rumpled hair. "The sun is up and Farmer Clay's rooster has long since grown quiet. Are you going to sleep the day away?"

Twiggs opened one eye and cocked it in her direction, not really believing what he had been hearing. Verifying that it was, in fact, mid-morning, he gradually, though begrudgingly, stirred himself to life.

"It's our anniversary," she said, jostling the bed for emphasis.

"You mean I slept eleven months?" Twiggs said, his head still not completely clear of the nocturnal cobwebs.

"No, silly. It's our one month anniversary," Cinnamon replied. Let's celebrate. We both have the day off."

"I'm always up for a good celebration. What ya got in that devious - though may I say extremely attractive - head of yours?"

"Oh, I don't know, but it needs to be special - really special."

"Well, we could go into Jay's village and watch the Mortals go to church. You always like to see the lady's pretty clothes."

"And you always like to see the pretty ladies," came her abrupt reply!

"See! A good time for both of us!" he added, his impish grin all quite uncontrollable.

At that, Cinnamon flung herself at him, playfully attempting to hold his outstretched arms down against the bed. That, soon failing, she settled for some major rib tickling, which, predictably, sent Twiggs into fits of writhing gyrations and breath-blocking laughter. A few moments later he had freed himself from her clutches and was up and on his feet.

Cinnamon lay back on the bed, still laughing and wiping away the tears.

"You are gorgeous, you know," Twiggs said, looking down at her.

"Don't you, 'You're gorgeous,' me, Mr. Twiggington, Cinnamon said, as she sat herself upright and quickly scooted toward the edge of the bed. "Whenever you start with that gorgeous thing we end up - well - we end up taking far to long

to get to wherever it was we were going. Get dressed and we'll be on our way to somewhere wonderful."

Twiggs settled for a close order hug and lingering kiss.

"There are lots of extraordinary things I've never shown you in the enchanted meadow," Twiggs said, suddenly realizing how very important this all was to Cinnamon and therefore wishing to get serious about it himself.

"The enchanted meadow?" she asked, brow slightly furrowed.

"That's what Jay and I used to call the big field behind his house where we first met and played and grew to know and appreciate each other. It just seemed that there, all our wishes came true. It was the place Mortal befriended the Little Person. It was - well - like an enchanted place and time."

Suddenly, Cinnamon understood that Twiggs wanted to share with her one of the most dearly held spots in his life. She was touched. She, of course, shed a tear. Twiggs, of course, asked what was wrong. Cinnamon, of course, said, "Nothing." Both, of course, pretended to understand what was going on inside the other. Neither did, of course. They moved on.

It was a wonderful morning - or what was left of one. Twiggs taught her how to skip flat rocks on the quiet waters of the Duck Pond. He helped her climb the bramble bushes by the cabin. He demonstrated his bareback riding prowess on a cooperative young silver furred squirrel. They flew with the butterflies and soared with the eagle. They helped a mother robin feed a much-to-late-in-the-summer nest of huge mouthed babies. Cinnamon tossed sticks into the air and Twiggs tried to hit them with stones. (One out of the first ten tries without magic. Ten out of the last ten, with. Cinnamon quickly figured it out, but never let on!)

It was while they were sitting on Jutting Rock, drying off in the sun after Cinnamon's first ever skinny-dip, that they heard the terrifying, quiet shattering, screech and crash.

Dressing in a flash, they nearjumped to the top of the north ridge to survey the area and see what had happened. There it was, the long white car on its top, wheels still spinning. Immediately nearjumping to the scene, they found Mr. Vileman inside, unconscious and bleeding.

Twiggs moved to feel for his pulse. There was one, but Twiggs had no idea how strong it should be in a Mortal. Since he was breathing regularly, Twiggs assumed the man was in no immediate danger.

"Cinnamon," he directed, "You stay with him. Slow down his bleeding. If you sense he's in mortal danger, use your powers. Otherwise, wait until I get back."

Cinnamon's, "Where are you going," came too late, as he had already farjumped out of sight.

Twiggs knew that Jay and his family were momentarily due back from church. He headed right for Jay's room. No Jay-man yet. Finding the map they had, years earlier, drawn of the surrounding area, Twiggs placed it on Jay's bed. Hastily, he scribbled a note. Taking a thumbtack from the bulletin board, he attached it to the point on the map where the accident had taken place. The note simply read: "First aid kit - Here - Now!!!"

Shortly, Jay entered his room, belting out a favorite hymn. He was already out of his white shirt and rapidly - all quite casually - losing his trousers down around his ankles. With a well-practiced flip motion, his Sunday shoes were soon under his bed. It was then that he saw the map. Curiosity soon turned to grave concern.

With no time for V-signals, he said out loud, "I'm coming. I'm on my way!"

Quickly into his old clothes, he picked up the first aid kit and slipped out the window - no time to obtain parental permission. He didn't know what could have happened, but for Twiggs to break the Sacred rule and communicate with him - if only in writing - meant something terrible must have occurred.

He ran full speed across the meadow to his dam. As if walking a tight rope, he carefully moved across its rocky top, making it safely to the other side. Then it was on up the hill and down the other side to the curve in the road.

As he trotted into view of the accident, he noticed that someone had already stopped to help. It was the Purdys, themselves on their way home from church. Old Mr. Purdy was unsuccessfully trying to pull the man out through an open front door.

Jay was soon on the scene and with his help, the two of them dragged Mr. Vileman out onto the grass beside the road. In the meantime, Mrs. Purdy had opened Jay's first aid kit and was soaking a gauze bandage in alcohol. She used it to wipe away the blood that suddenly began pouring from a gash across his forehead.

"Pressure," Jay said. "Press on the cut to stop the bleeding."

Very soon, the bleeding was under control. Jay felt the man's pulse.

"It's really weak. We have to get him to the hospital right away. We'll have to lift him into the back of your truck. Think we can do that?" Jay asked Mr. Purdy.

"All we can do is try, Sonny."

They found him surprisingly light, for his huge size. Twiggs knew that Jay would not chastise him for using his magic to help on that occasion.

Jay rode in the back with Mr. Vileman and in less time than one might have thought, they were backed up to the emergency entrance at the hospital. Once the attendants had the man on a stretcher and were moving him inside, Jay had time to look around and give a somewhat feeble, V for friendship sign to Twiggs.

Twiggs and Cinnamon had monitored the whole undertaking from the top of the truck's cab. Cinnamon was as concerned for Mrs. Purdy as she was for Mr. Vileman. Her worry was put to rest as she watched Jay go over to her and help her sit down on a bench in the shade. A nurse brought her a cup of water and her husband stood close, putting his arm on her shoulder.

"I wish Elder Birch could have seen this," Cinnamon whispered to Twiggs. "Half-witted and self-centered indeed! These are truly caring Mortals and he should know about them!"

Twiggs patted her hand and they jumped into the emergency room where they could watch and listen. Once satisfied that Mr. Vileman was going to recover, and giving one, last, fond, look toward Jay, they farjumped back home.

"Will Jay be okay?" Cinnamon asked.

"Jay thrives on the three P's: predicaments, problems

and pickles, as he would say. Jay will be fine."

After a moment's silence, Twiggs continued in a thoughtful vein:

"You know, my Dear, something good may come of all this, yet."

"I've been thinking that too, but it was such a terrible thing to have to have happen first."

They continued to sit silently, legs dangling off their porch, wondering and hoping. Although it's sometimes hard to see the positive side of unpleasant events, they are often there.

* * *

As the golds and iridescent reds of the twilight sky, blended imperceptibly into the blanket of autumn colors, gently rippling across the trees atop West Mountain, Cinnamon cuddled close to Twiggs and asked, ever so softly, "Now what was that you were saying earlier in the day - something about gorgeous, was it?"

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CHAPTER EIGHT:
**Our purpose as Beings, is to always, and under all
circumstances, be here for each other**

After several months of marriage, Twiggs and Cinnamon had developed a comfortable routine. They had times apart, times together, times to carry out their vocations, and times to help others.

Cinnamon enjoyed both her calling as an Echolian, and being the wife of her beloved Twiggs. She delighted in learning to quilt and to become acquainted with the people and the ways of her new Clan.

Most days Twiggs spent some time working on his book about Mortals and making notes about important topics for him and Jay to consider at their next ambassador/touchperson meeting, which was coming up in late December. He performed many more than his required share of Goodakts for the Mortals in the surrounding hills and valleys, and still had time to needle the Council of Elders from time to time about what seemed to him to be antiquated traditions. And of course, there was Cinnamon - the love of his life, friend of all friends, and confidant above all others. Life was good - actually it was excellent, and just seemed to be getting better each and every day.

If Little People had held the concept of fairness (which they didn't) it would have seemed quite unfair to Twiggs and Cinnamon that their life could be so wonderful, while those of so many of the Mortals they knew, were so effort-filled and painful. It had certainly become a point for contemplation by Jay, but that will be another story.

Mr. Vileman had recovered his health but the experience had not done much to change his appalling outlook. He had complained to the children's parents that he had planned to paint his fence green, and asked that they be disciplined for having damaged his property. He pressed on with the dam and lake, which, by that time were nearly finished.

The creek had completely dried up beyond his dam. Had it not been late Autumn, when no crops were in the ground, the situation for the Purdys would have been critical. As it was, their well provided more than enough water for their immediate needs. There was worry on their tired faces, though, as they wondered what would transpire, come Spring.

Jay - "that boy genius mortal of yours," as Gramps had fondly dubbed him to Twiggs - continued to go to the University half days and to eighth grade in his own school with his friends the rest of the time. At the rate his studies were going, he would have a Ph.D. before he formally graduated from high school (not a common accomplishment!). Twiggs regularly looked in on him to make sure all was well. It always was, but it was a good excuse to just be able to watch his good friend for a few minutes every day or so. Jay's bulletin board continued to be a source of ideas for Twiggs' Goodakts.

In general, the Little People of the Dewgoodabee Clan were becoming more and more interested in learning about the Mortals, and Twiggs, as Ambassador to the Mortal Realm, held regular get-togethers for any who wished to come and learn or ask questions. Initially he had thought the more his people knew about the Mortals, the better able they would be to help them. Recently, he was having second thoughts about it all, and that was on his mind that early morning on Gramps' front porch.

"You've seemed to be more pensive than usual, these past several weeks," Gramps commented, knowing just how to help Twiggs begin talking about his dilemma, without ever really asking or trying to guess what it might be.

"Yeah, big things to ponder, Gramps."

Gramps just sat quietly, giving Twiggs space and time to develop his thoughts.

"You know, Gramps, how we agreed that some of the

things I have brought back from the Mortal Realm have been helpful to us Little People?"

"Yes, I do."

"Like, Little People's Pride Day, every Monday, when we attempt to do things the Mortal ways rather than using our magic. We walk from place to place rather than nearjumping. The women cook and bake. The farmers plow and reap. We mow grass and build with hammers and saws. All of that was supposed to have given us a new sense of worth - of self-esteem I suppose Jay would call it. That has been good for us, hasn't it, Gramps?"

"I gather you are having doubts about it," Gramps replied, keeping the conversation going without ever interjecting his own private opinion into Twiggs' reflections."

"Well, all of that still seems pretty good to me, I suppose. I know how great I feel after accomplishing something using my own physical skills. Cinnamon says the same thing, and it must do the same for others, since they seem delighted to give it all a try every time Mondays roll around."

"But?" Gramps asked, realizing the whole picture had not yet been painted.

"But, if the Mortal customs can influence us in good ways like that, might they not also be able to influence us in unfavorable ways?"

"I see," Gramps said, nodding in understanding. "These are big things to ponder! Do you think that Jay's influence has been in any way unfavorable on you?"

Twiggs looked Gramps in the face, donning a look of surprise on his own.

"My first instinct is to say, no. I'm not aware of any. Well, actually I guess I have wondered. Like, B. J. (Before Jay), I never questioned any of our traditions. In fact, I treasured them all. I would have never considered doubting any of the teaching or pronouncements of the Elders. But now, I get restless about a lot of those things. It bothers me if I don't speak my mind and it bothers me when I do."

"Sounds like you're afraid you are single-handedly going to unravel the fabric of our society," Gramps observed, putting into a different set of words that which Twiggs had

already said.

"Exactly. It's hard to know what's right sometimes now, and I never ever used to have to wonder. The way things were, was right. It was all that simple."

"What kind of evil influences do you fear?"

"I'm not sure: the whole idea of competition, for one. It seems the whole Mortal society is based on it and here we don't even know what the term means."

"Tell me more," Gramps urged.

"Well, take our card game, Red Runion. We all like to see how big a score we can run up. We just have fun playing and making sets and super-sets. It's a game, and we talk and laugh while we play. Nobody ever even thinks about comparing scores with anybody else. It's all just about each person, individually.

"If Mortals got hold of the game they'd soon find a way to have some one person come out the winner and everybody else end up losers. We don't have winners and losers here in our society. We all win, every time we do anything. No one ever is a loser. I even had to borrow those two words from the Mortal's language, since we don't use them in ours."

"So, you are concerned that if we continue this contact with the Mortals, it is inevitable that this all-consuming sense of competition will take over our society, too," Gramps said, trying to summarize what he thought Twiggs had been trying to say.

"Yes, that's one of my main concerns. I know they believe they need it to power their realm, but I believe it would soon ruin ours. Well, really, I think competition has become a big, runaway, mistake in their realm as well. It causes misery and unhappiness in virtually every Mortal, every day. They think they aren't as good as somebody else or they feel bad because they don't have as much money or as many possessions as somebody else or they put themselves down because they aren't as handsome or beautiful as others. When a boy isn't one of the best athletes in his school, he isn't even allowed to play on their teams. That must shoot his self-esteem to poofberries. And when their team loses, they all go into a big deal depression. I can't see how any of that is healthful or helpful."

Gramps sat in silence for a long moment before speaking.

"How are you feeling, right now, Twiggs?"

"Feeling? Me? I feel fine. A bit confused, but I feel fine - great - of course. What makes you ask such a question?"

"How would a Mortal be feeling after having just dealt with the things you were talking about?"

A broad grin broke across Twiggs' face.

"I see what you're doing. They'd feel angry or upset, or at least mildly vexed or anxious - four more words we don't have in our language since we never need them. Maybe the Mortals can't influence us as much as I feared."

"Can you even imagine," Gramps went on, "Any of us ever allowing one of our Clan to have the feeling of being a loser? Can you imagine any of us ever wanting to win over someone else? We don't need to win to feel good about ourselves. We don't need to make anyone else feel inferior to make ourselves feel adequate. Life here among the Little People isn't about winning and losing, it is about being good and helpful people and about assisting everyone to continue loving themselves and others."

"What you're really saying, Gramps, is that our basic values are so strong and so positive that even the little changes - like doing things the Mortal ways on Mondays, building a tree house, or even learning about the more unattractive Mortal traits - will never be able to change us in any basic sense. We will always be able to keep to our way of life, so long as we hold to our values, and holding to our values is the most important part of our, well, of our fabric, as you put it."

Gramps gave his patented single nod of the head, affirming that Twiggs had it all worked out.

"I'm so lucky to have you, Gramps."

"Lucky?"

"Sorry, I know that's another borrowed word - fortunate, would be better, perhaps. Actually, I guess we don't have a word for that, either, do we?"

"Here, we all have each other, and that is extraordinary, my Son. There is no luck or good fortune about it. It is just

the way we are - the way we will always be. Our purpose as Beings is to always and under all circumstances, be here for each other - now and forevermore."

As Twiggs made his way up the hill toward his home, that phrase played over and over in his head. For sure, it sounded like Gramps, but more than that, it sounded like Jay. And, so long as one Mortal believed it, Twiggs felt confident that the Mortal species still had a chance for survival.

Unlike some of the more dubious things that would obsessively play themselves over and over in his head, that phrase, he hoped would remain forever: "Our purpose as Beings, is to always and under all circumstances, be here for each other - now and forevermore."

CHAPTER NINE:
**Friends, family, joy and work - what a marvelous,
fulfilling, and love-filled life those four simple things
allow.**

His talk with Gramps the week before had brought more of a relief to his life than Twiggs could have imagined. It had been one of those things that had been weighing on his shoulders far more than he had realized. Cinnamon recognized the change almost immediately.

"You've sure taken a chipper turn this week," she said to him, as they sat at the breakfast table together.

"Yes, I guess I have. It was that Mortal-influence thing. I'm sure glad I brought it up to Gramps. He's a really wise man," Twiggs answered with obvious relief in his manner.

"You're not such a dunce, yourself, my Love," Cinnamon said, passing Twiggs another round of griddlecakes.

"Thanks for saying that. I have always wondered that since I have been preordained to never age beyond twenty-one if that meant my wisdom would also cease growing at that level. The Sacred Scriptures have never made that clear to me."

"If you never become wiser than you are today, I'll always feel secure in your decisions and judgments," Cinnamon said, in a most sincere and reassuring way.

"That's a great compliment. I'll always do my best to live up to it," he said, both thoughtfully and appreciatively.

Cinnamon got up and moved to a position behind Twiggs' chair. She began rubbing his shoulders, bending over

to kiss him on the top of his head.

"Oh, that feels wonderful," he said, rotating his head first one way and then another. "I wonder why it feels s-o-o-o relaxing when you touch me there, and yet sends me into spasms of chortles when you apply that same technique to my ribs?"

"When you ponder things like that, I have to wonder what proportion of your brain is really Jay's brain," Cinnamon said, planting one more kiss to his head.

Twiggs began helping her clear away the dishes, and the conversation continued, moving among many disparate topics. He always took it as a complement when he was compared favorably with Jay. He felt no competition with his friend's super brain, but still, it was most agreeable to have even vague similarities pointed out. It even appeared to Twiggs that he was able to make better use of what gifts he did have when such a comparison had been implied. It was as if he had a goal toward which to strive.

Twiggs and Cinnamon almost always did the morning dishes the effort-filled, Mortal way, rather than using their magic. It had become a most special time for them to talk and dream, and make their plans for the day. They looked forward to those leisurely minutes together each morning.

That day, Cinnamon had Echolian obligations to fulfill back in Harmony, so Twiggs decided to make the rounds of his friends there in Bountiful.

On the way into town, he stopped at Farmer Clay's. Even though it was late October, there were plots of fresh vegetables and rows of fruit trees and berry bushes just brimming over with tempting treats. In the Realm of the Little People, the growing season lasted twelve full months. The snows, when they came, carefully avoided falling on the farmland, all paths, and the sidewalks leading into residences and places of business. Although the first snow of the season had not yet arrived, Farmer Clay and his wife commented that they were more than ready for winter to arrive. Changes in seasons always seemed somehow invigorating. Twiggs agreed, wholeheartedly!

Mrs. Clay gave Twiggs a large fall apple and an even larger hug, and he was on his way. Just down the hill, and in

the center of a never diminishing forest of tiny oak trees (well, tiny to you and me, but not, of course, to the Little People), was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Chips. Chips, was the woodsman and he kept the homes of Bountiful supplied with wood to burn in their fireplaces.

Fireplace fires were probably more for affect then for warmth, although the nighttime temperature did cool off to a sleeping-pleasant sixty-five degrees. Nevertheless, every home lit their fire each evening and it became the focal point for after dark, family activities.

Most Mondays, Twiggs assisted Chips, as he delivered the wood throughout the community by hand cart - Mondays being Little People's Pride day when they all did without their magic. That not having been a Monday, Chips had already neaported a supply to every household in the village.

With one of Mrs. Chips' huge sugar cookies in tow, Twiggs made his way on down the path to the edge of town. He stopped at the candle maker's shop - Wick and his wife Waxanne. As a youngster, Twiggs had spent many a fond hour there, talking with them and watching them carefully dip the candles over and over in and out of the vat of hot beeswax until they grew to just the right size and shape. Twiggs sipped a mug of hot cider with them and discussed everything and nothing. It was a nice time with some very dear old friends.

Then it was on to the hat-makers shop. That was the only place in town that even came close to smelling like Twiggs' father's shop. He liked the scent of cloth - especially felt. It always made him feel like a little boy again and ignited recollections of the many happy hours he had spent with his father, helping him keep the villagers supplied with his beautiful shoes and boots.

The hat makers, Featherton, and his wife, Plume, were, like most Bountifilians, always pleased to have Twiggs drop in. Twiggs had a way of improving everyone's outlook on the day, and he was always helpful and appreciative of their attention. Blueberry muffins were the main-stay of that household and Twiggs devoured an ample portion, before moving on. Featherton remarked that Twiggs' hat looked like it was getting a bit small. He would begin immediately on a new one. After the measurements were taken, and Twiggs had thanked them

for the treat, he was once again on his way.

Having already been at the general store earlier that morning, he merely popped his head in and smiled a bright "Hello," as he passed.

As a boy, he always enjoyed visiting the tailor, Cotton, and his wife, Silk, the dressmaker. Their shop was usually occupied by the women from the community and Twiggs had always enjoyed smelling the unique blending of their several perfumes. He especially liked lilac and cranberry. He knew he was due for new trousers - having grown several inches during the past year - so, once again, out came the tape measures.

The shop owners always made it seem as though they were especially delighted to be able to provide something for Twiggs. Of course, that was their customary approach to everyone, but Twiggs, being the ... well, Twiggs just being Twiggs, gave them a special pleasure.

Wherever Twiggs went, he had a way of leaving smiling, happy, whistling people in his wake. That was no accident, but was entirely intentional, patterned all quite consciously after his beloved Mortal friend, Jay. Jay had astutely pointed out, that since there was no way around the fact that every time we met someone, we DID influence them, it only seemed reasonable to make sure that was a positive influence, because happy, trusting, folks made the World a whole lot more pleasant to live in. (Well, Jay probably would not have ended that sentence with a preposition and would not have rambled on for fifty-one words in a single sentence in the first place, but you get the idea.)

On his way back across town toward his parent's home, Twiggs tipped his hat to Elder Birch, chatted briefly with Mrs. Bark, and picked a bouquet of button mums for his mother. His timing was perfect, as it was the lunch hour - again, no mere accident! In a blink of an eye (literally), there was more than enough for one more at their table. His mother enjoyed watching Twiggs eat. His father continued to be amazed at how much the young man could put away without ever gaining an ounce!

Twiggs recounted his morning's activities and explained Cinnamon's absence. After lunch, Twiggs joked, "Here,

Mother, let me do the dishes," and poof, they were all, clean and neatly stacked on the shelf beside the sink. It was an old joke among the Little People, but it was one of those that always brought a chuckle and a grin.

His father returned to the shoemaker's shop and Twiggs remained to chat with his mother.

"You seem to be back to your old chipper self, today," his mother commented.

"Interesting choice of words," Twiggs replied. "That's exactly what Cinnamon said this morning - chipper self. I guess it's a good observation. I'm over whatever it was, and feeling on top of the World again."

He kissed his mother on the cheek and went in to check out his old room. It was still filled with his boyhood treasures - all of which had to be left right there, by Clan tradition. He tenderly patted the big brass button Jay had given him that first day they had met. He flipped through his diary. He looked himself over in the big mirror above his dresser, correcting a few wayward wisps of hair. He flopped, back first, onto the goose down bed, the way he had so many times before. It had a wonderfully familiar feel and yet, suddenly, a lonely presence. He smiled broadly at that realization, and bounced to his feet. It had been a wonderful room in which to grow up, but now, that was all that it was.

One more, fond pat to the button, and he left to find his father.

"I have a new pair of shoes for you," his father said, greeting him as he came through the door. "Leave your old ones and I'll re-sole them. These Mortal Mondays of yours have doubled my business, you know. Walking is a whole lot harder on shoes than nearjumping is."

They had a good laugh about that and, as time passed, about many other things as well. Twiggs and his father had always been able to find things to laugh about - most often their own foibles - never anyone else's. Twiggs helped his father cut and sew the wonderful smelling fabric for the remainder of the afternoon. How fortunate he felt to now have two families - well, actually it was three, wasn't it!

That night as he lay in bed, before drifting off, he watched his beautiful Cinnamon asleep beside him, and

replayed the wonder-filled day that had just been his. He thought to himself: Friends, family, joy and work - what a marvelous, fulfilling, and loved-filled life those four simple things allow.

CHAPTER TEN:

**Just because we live and believe differently from others,
isn't just cause for us to make them doubt their own
beliefs or way of life.**

Although Twiggs had spent considerable time in Cinnamon's former village of Harmony, he had never been given the real-life tour, as he put it. He had met all of the men of her clan and had even danced with all of their wives, but he had really never seen them going about their daily routines, and that, he thought, was the only way to truly get to know a new group of people.

He was aware that a clan-outsider, such as himself, would never be privy to the actual Echolian activities, out in the hills and that was not even his main interest. He was eager, however, to get to know his wife's clan-folks as they went about their daily lives there in the village.

That was to be such a day! While Cinnamon was performing her duties as an Echolian, Twiggs was to tour the village with her father, Garnet. Twiggs was excited, beyond his own anticipation.

"You're acting like a six-year-old about to get his first taste of honey tea," she said, as he continued following her from room to room while she made ready to leave for the day.

"I suppose. But I have so many questions. There is so much I don't know about your clan. I mean, just look at you."

"Me?" she answered, stopping in her tracks, appearing more than a bit confused.

"Yes, you. A clan that can produce a person as perfect as you must have some extraordinary lessons to teach the

rest of us."

Cinnamon lowered her head and blushed, the scarlet of her dress appearing to have intruded onto her neck and cheeks.

"You know, Dear, your clan didn't do such a shabby job of producing the young man I'm married to, either," came her ready reply.

Twiggs interrupted the tying of her apron, by spinning her around and administering a quick peck to her lips.

Slowly shaking his head as he looked into her eyes, he said:

"You truly are ..."

But before he could finish that poorly timed, passionate thought, Cinnamon playfully pulled away and finished it for him.

"... are about to be late! Hold that idea and we'll carry on from there this evening."

Gathering up her golden bonnet from the chair beside the bed and her forest green shawl from the hook on the back of the closet door, she paused just long enough to allow one last peck to her cheek, before poofing herself on her way.

Suddenly Twiggs realized that he, too, should be making ready for his day. He donned his scarlet vest, and cocked his hat into a satisfactorily, jaunty, position. While looking himself over in the mirror, he leaned close to examine his face, just on the chance a stray whisker or two might have popped forth a bit prematurely.

He really didn't mind that it had been pre-ordained that he and Cinnamon would never age in appearance beyond twenty-one, but, since men of the Little People did not begin to grow whiskers until they were twenty-five, Twiggs sometimes did long for a grand, full, beard like Gramps'. With no new discoveries that morning, he gave a goodhearted shrug of his shoulders, and nearjumped to the top of East Mountain.

Twiggs just stood there for some time, surveying the villages below - his own to the West and Cinnamon's to the East. Bountiful seemed softer to him. It had no streets to create harsh lines and intersections. It had no square cornered houses - just the naturally flowing forms of stumps and fallen logs. The paths, such as they were, wound lazily

from place to place and often to absolutely no special place at all. His village seemed to receive its tranquility partly from its free-flowing structure or perhaps from the lack of structure. From boundary to boundary, it radiated rest and relaxation.

Cinnamon's Harmony, on the other hand, had many square houses of cold looking stone and mortar with rectangular shake shingles. They were aligned in square blocks along straight, precisely intersecting paths, all leading purposefully from one place to another. The beautiful landscaping did, however, soften the harshness with bright blooming bushes and trees buffering many of the starker edges. But still, it was not the architecture or the design of the village itself that gave Harmony its innocent aura of quiet repose. No, it was the ever-present euphony - the backdrop of celestial melodies, producing the perpetual, peaceful accompaniment to the everyday goings on of these, quiet, unhurried, clansfolk.

He was fascinated the same values and basic beliefs about life and living could have developed such very differently appearing societies. Well, societies, is not the correct word at all - external trappings or physical accouterments would be more fitting terms.

Taking several big breaths - a maneuver he had learned from Jay to prepare himself for strange or strenuous requirements - Twiggs nearjumped onto the front lawn of Garnet and Sapphire's home. Garnet was the Village Gardener and that morning, even when at home, was found snipping the faded blossoms from the flowering fuchsia that shielded the foundation from view, and softened the front corners of the one story, red stone house.

"A good mornin' to ye, Laddy," came Garnet's cheerful welcome, expressed through his equally charming Old World brogue. He extended his clasped hands toward Twiggs, who responded by enfolding them with his own, in the traditional Callbackabee greeting between men.

"Ready for a big day, are ye," Garnet asked, placing his arm around Twiggs shoulders and gently guiding him toward the porch.

"Oh, yes Sir. I'm ready, all right. I've been waiting for this for a long time."

Garnet squeezed Twigg's shoulder.

"Is that Cinnamon child o' mine feedin' ya well enough? I'm a feelin' yor shoulder bones."

"She's feeding me just fine, Sir, but if you're asking if I could do with another breakfast, well, you should know by now that that's one question you never have to ask."

They chuckled and went inside where Sapphire had all Twigg's favorites ready and waiting. Garnet kissed her on the cheek - the common greeting between husband and wife in Harmony. Twiggs bowed slightly and kissed her extended hand - the accepted greeting between a man and woman in those parts.

After a delicious breakfast, accompanied by easy conversation, Twiggs and Garnet set off, on foot - by Twiggs request - to see the town and meet the people.

They made their way to the town square, around which most of the village's businesses were to be found. The general store was supplied with the staples of life, much like the one Twiggs had grown up knowing. The only things missing were the men playing domineckers. He commented about that, and Garnet explained that in Harmony, the men gathered in the park in the center of square. Not only was it the sight of festivals and other special affairs already familiar to Twiggs, but it hosted the daily balling on the green and other recreational activities.

After leaving the general store, Twiggs tried his hand at a few rounds of balling. It turned out to be a game similar to bowling, although the ball used was smaller and rubber, and was bounced along a hard, red clay path to the pins, rather than being rolled. The rules, such as they were, were quite unstructured, and seemed to just be general guidelines. Basically, the baller, called out the number of the pin or pins he intended to knock over with each toss. When successful, the baller got a round of applause. When not, he received much good-natured advice on what to do differently his next turn. Twiggs soon caught on and could easily see why they all seemed to enjoy it so. He lingered just long enough to verify for himself that they didn't keep score or have winners or losers. Like, Dewgoodabees, these folks played for the sheer fun of the activity.

Next stop was the Candle Makers - called the Wickery in Harmony. An entirely different method was in use there, from the one Twiggs had grown to know. The Callbackabees used long, hollow metal moulds with a hole in the narrow bottom, just large enough for the wick to fit through. The hot bee's wax was then carefully poured into the molds and allowed to cool. The molds were then dipped into boiling water, just long enough to free the candle's surface from the metal. When tipped over, they easily slipped out and were ready for use. It seemed a more time efficient method, but then, in the lands of the immortal Little People, time was really not usually a relevant consideration.

Twiggs thanked the Wickers for their time and the demonstration, and then he and Garnet were off toward the tailor's shop. It seemed all pretty conventional, to Twiggs - measuring, marking, cutting and sewing. The Tailors were a nice older couple and would have it no other way but that they make a shirt especially for Twiggs. Not having a supply of yellow silk on hand, Mrs. Tailor quickly fetched some daffodil dye and prepared a colored cloth that fulfilled Twiggs' exact requirements. He watched in awe at how quickly the old gentleman marked and cut the cloth and how rapidly his wife ran stitch after stitch together, all quite soon having the new garment completed - a perfect fit the first time on.

Twiggs felt a little sheepish about accepting a shirt he really didn't need - after all, he already had one - but seeing how happy it made the Tailors, he graciously thanked them and pleased them even more by insisting on wearing it during the remainder of his tour.

The hat makers eagerly examined Twiggs' hat to see how it had been made. The wide brimmed, small domed black hats of the Callbackabees were made of far thicker, firmer felt, compared to the thin, floppy brown felt used in his own. The true test of a hat in Harmony was how far and how accurately it could be tossed on the breeze. Out back, Mr. Hattier demonstrated with Garnet's own hat. He pointed to an outdoor pump some twenty pelliwigs distant. Then, taking careful aim and making several practice moves, he let fly, sailing it through the air. It made a perfect landing, spinning 'round and 'round as it was captured by the top of the pump.

"Now, that's a grand hat," said Garnet.

"Yes, indeed," agreed Twiggs.

Mr. and Mrs. Hattier grinned with pride.

Twiggs was intrigued that it was the hat that had been given credit for the feat, rather than the tossing skill of Mr. Hattier. Jay would have loved that! Twiggs would certainly remember to relate it to him at their next meeting.

After Mrs. Hattier cleaned and brushed Twiggs hat, and did a bit of color touch up on a few faded and scarred spots, Twiggs and Garnet made their way to the shop Twiggs had most wanted to visit - the cobbler's shop.

He soon discovered major differences. For instance, rather than using felt, like his father used, Mr. and Mrs. Cobbler used the strong, yet supple bark of the pliaberry tree. The person for whom the shoes were being made, had to be present for a sitting, during which Mr. Cobbler formed the rough boot around the person's foot, making sure it would fit comfortably in every respect. Then, later, he cut the bark, and sewed it together with great care. It was Mrs. Cobbler's job to stain the bark and polish it to a glistening sheen. Men's footwear was black and the women's was red.

Twiggs noted that the pliaberry bark made sturdier and therefore probably longer lasting shoes. He smiled as he realized how that would have been a major plus for Mortal Monday jaunts around Bountiful. But then, if the shoes lasted longer, his father would have had fewer shoes to make, and how would he have occupied his time?

Oh, well, clothing was not something either clan was very likely to be changing, since it had been ordained by the Wise One at the time of the Parting. Twiggs figured that the Echolian activities probably somehow required sturdier shoes. At any rate, the Cobblers seemed to stay quite busy, perhaps because it took far longer to make each pair of pliaberry shoes than those his father sewed from felt.

As they left the Cobbler's shop, Garnet asked Twiggs:

"Well, what else would ye like to be a seein', here 'bouts, Laddy?"

"What about the house builders? Twiggs replied immediately.

"House builders? Well, we actually don't have any

house builders. We only need one new house every fifty years, so the Wise One allows us to just use our powers, much like the Dewgoodabees do, when preparing a new stump house."

That made sense to Twiggs. Since only one new baby was born every twenty-five years, and every other generation would live in Harmony, only one new house would be needed in that same amount of time.

"Why do you suppose the Wise One arranged for this clan to live in stone and mortar houses and my clan in stumps?" Twiggs wondered out loud to Garnet.

"I've wondered that myself, Laddy. I imagine it may be another part of the Great Experiment. Not only did the Wise One separate humanity into Mortals and Little People, but I think he may have intentionally separated us both into several different societies - just to see what works well and what doesn't."

Twiggs thought about it, as they made their way back to the house. It made sense to him, too. At least, enough sense not to have to give it much further attention.

Later that night, Twiggs did have a Jay-like inspiration about it all, however. 'What if the Wise One's Great Experiment really wasn't to see whether the Mortal's or the Little People's way of life was best for humanity, but instead, was just to see how each way actually worked out - no value-based judgments or competition between them implied?' It was a question he would keep to himself until he could talk it over with Jay. Twiggs felt no need to rock the belief system of his own beloved people. He knew that if he brought it up, Gramps would discuss it with him, or at least hear him out on it. But Twiggs had seen the subtle changes Jay's ways of thinking had made even on the way wise old Gramps believed about things, and Twiggs didn't want to add any more doubts, unnecessarily.

Just because we live and believe differently from others, isn't just cause for us to make them doubt their own beliefs or way of life. [Jay would have added, of course, "Unless that other set of beliefs or behaviors was obviously injurious to the wellbeing or survival of mankind." It was that "obviously" concept that seemed to cause so much

disagreement among the Mortals.

CHAPTER ELEVEN:
**You never leave a friend behind. He lives on forever,
within your heart.**

It was just after two A.M. when Twiggs found himself sitting straight up in bed, his heart thumping wildly. Shaking his head to clear away the sleep, he suddenly found himself nodding. How he knew, was not at all certain to him, but he did know - Jay needed him!

Lying there beside him, Cinnamon was herself, struggling to awaken and determine what was going on.

"Jay needs me - maybe both of us - I don't know for sure," Twiggs said, bounding out of bed and zapping on his clothes.

"I'm right behind you," Cinnamon said, not for so much as a moment questioning Twiggs peculiar message.

Holding hands, they lit together on Jay's windowsill. Jay was gone, but there was a hastily scribbled note on his unmade bed: They nearjumped to the pillow. Twiggs began reading the note aloud:

"To whom it may concern. That's his way of disguising that it's for us, just in case his parents might find it," Twiggs explained, and then read on.

"Mr. Vileman's five-year-old grandson, David, is visiting him from Kansas City, and he just discovered that the boy is not in his bed. The bedroom windows open, and it looks like he has wandered off and out of sight. The Sheriff's deputy just stopped by here inquiring if we had seen him. I'm heading for the new lake. I know I don't have a wish left, but your help will certainly be appreciated. You once told me you'd always

know if I really needed you. I guess this is the first-ever test of that arrangement."

It was signed, Jay.

"I'll tuck the note under his pillow so he'll know we've been here, then we'll get to work," Twiggs said.

A moment later they were atop North Hill, surveying the surrounding territory. They saw Jay, speeding along at full trot, about half way to the Lake. Moving to the crest of West Hill, they gained a better view of the lake and dam. No youngster was in sight.

Twiggs sat to think.

"How can you just sit down at a time like this," Cinnamon asked, jerking repeatedly at his vest, as if to pull him into action.

Twiggs explained:

"Let's take a moment and think about what a five-year-old city boy might want to do out here in the country - something the adults maybe hadn't allowed him to do during the day. Obviously, Jay thinks it may be to go and investigate the Lake or the big machines parked out there. That would have been my first guess, too, I suppose. What else?"

"Food," Cinnamon suggested. "Maybe he became hungry and went to find apples or berries or something like that."

"Great thought," Twiggs said, springing to his feet. "You search the Purdy's fruit grove and I'll do the berry patches in Jay's meadow and up on the slope of North Hill. If one of us finds him, we'll mindtalk our location to the other."

Cinnamon nearjumped up and down every row of trees. Not finding him, she then searched along the dry creek. Again, no luck. She widened her search to include the fall-plowed vegetable fields, but still no little boy.

Twiggs, too, set a systematic search pattern of near jumps, and soon had the meadow covered. He had also come up empty handed. He had no better results from his search of the hillside.

"Toads and pollywogs!" Twiggs said aloud, excitedly! "Is that an oath of discouragement, or some wonderful insight," Cinnamon asked, as she rejoined her husband.

"A Jay-man insight, my Dear. Come with me."

In a split second (more or less!), they were at Jay's creek, making their way upstream from the swimming hole. Moments later they gave a joint sigh of relief when they spied the lad, crawling in the clay beside the water's edge. He was in hot pursuit of a playful bullfrog.

"Boys do get themselves quite filthy when they play, don't they," Cinnamon commented, her nose wrinkling and shoulders shivering.

"Get used to it. In a few years, that could be our little guy out there," Twiggs added, pulling her close and kissing her on the cheek.

"Now what," Cinnamon asked.

"Now we just make sure the little tike remains safe until the Mortals find him. I expect Jay will be along any time now. He was always big on toads and pollywogs himself, when younger!"

"I can only imagine," Cinnamon said, giggling and shaking her head.

For the longest time, it seemed almost fun sitting there together, just watching and imagining that the lad was theirs. They chuckled as the boy wiped his muddy hands on the only dry spot he could find - his hair - as he made ready to spring for the final grab at the hapless frog. Cinnamon shivered a bit more at the mess. Twiggs said, "Go get him, tiger!"

Suddenly, the fun turned to fright, as they watched young David slip on the wet mud and fall headfirst into the creek. Cinnamon resisted the temptation to mention that at least that way he would get cleaned up a bit.

He flailed around in the water, making them realize it was over his head and the under current stronger than it had at first appeared. Down the stream he went, bumping against protruding rocks and calling out in terror for his mother.

There was no alternative. There was no halfway to deal with this. The 'least-possible-amount-of-help mandate' that guided all Little People's use of magic with Mortals, would just have to give way to the most possible amount of help in this case. With one quick, though ever gentle zap, Twiggs nearported the boy up onto the grassy meadow, safely away from the swirling stream. He hoped that at five, the boy would just be confused enough not to realize what had actually

happened.

Cinnamon added a brilliant final touch. She nearjumped the bullfrog - suddenly all quite lethargic and most cooperative - into the little boy's lap. Chest still heaving with whimpers, David just sat, looking first one way and then the other, as if fully expecting his mother to appear. Soon calmed down, and seemingly content to remain there for the moment, he began petting his new green friend.

As if on cue, Jay came trotting along the opposite bank calling out the youngster's name. Spotting him sitting there in a ring of moonlight, as if spotlighted just for the occasion, Jay waded across the creek and took charge. His kind and gentle manner immediately made David feel safe and comfortable.

By then, the two of them - both soaked to the skin - were shivering in the chilly December night air. Cinnamon, being the ever-thoughtful woman that she was, managed to float two neatly folded blankets down from Jay's cabin and set them down right beside the boys.

Upon their sudden arrival, Jay looked around and smiled his warmest smile, raising his arms in the V for friendship signal. David, as five year olds will do, raised his own arms, mimicking Jay, and the four of them laughed out loud - Jay and David's laughter brightening the Mortal Realm; Twiggs and Cinnamon's the realm of the Little People.

Jay dried David off with one blanket and then wrapped the other tightly around the still upset, teeth-chattering little boy. Then, tying the wet one around his own waist, he hoisted David into the universal piggyback position, and was soon off on a slow trot toward the road, across the bridge, and up the lane to Mr. Vileman's farm house. As they jogged along, Jay sang camp songs to keep the boy's mind off the cold, and the frightening events he had just experienced. Twiggs and Cinnamon followed along, partly to make sure the boys made it to their destination safely, but mostly just to be close to their good friend for a few more minutes.

Almost predictably, Mr. Vileman's first words were:

"Where did you take my grandson, young man? You had no right to sneak him out of my house!"

Jay just shook his head, by then quite used to the fact that Mr. Vileman always seemed to perceive things in the

most outrageous and unfriendly of ways.

Just then, the Sheriff arrived, riding with the Purdy's, who had been searching the back roads in their old black truck. While carefully handing over David to his grandfather, Jay explained to them what had taken place. If Mr. Vileman had any feelings of shame or regret for what he had said to Jay, he did not express them. Without so much as a, "thank you," to anyone, he gathered David into his arms and, still in a huff, hurried off toward the house.

Jay received a round of rightful congratulations from the others gathered there. After a few minutes of reliving the rescue, and gradually regaining his composure, Jay was driven home by the Sheriff. He shared his story with his parents and then went into his room.

Still too exhilarated to sleep, he sat in the window seat, looking out over the meadow toward East Hill. He felt both proud and sad. He was proud at what he and his Little People companions had been able to accomplish together, yet sad that they could not have been working side by side, eye to eye, so to speak, like in the old days there in his meadow when he and Twiggs had been able to just be kids together.

Then his thoughts drifted to Mr. Vileman. 'Poor Mr. Vileman. I have to wonder what terrible things must have occurred in his life to make him take the unpleasant turn he has. He can't trust folks and he doesn't seem to give a hoot about anybody. Check that, tonight he certainly did care about his grandson. That's a good sign, I reckon. Maybe that's the chink in his unfriendly armor. Maybe that's the path to winning him over.'

The moon moved behind a bank of rapidly advancing, swirling black clouds. The trees started swaying in the sudden breeze. Rain began splattering in a monotonous rhythm against the window, distorting Jay's view. He moved to his bed, closed his eyes and slept.

* * *

Silently, back on their porch, Twiggs and Cinnamon sat close, arms around each other's waists, and heads together. They looked over the crest of West Mountain (Jay's East Hill), back toward the meadow. They, too, felt both proud and sad - Proud that they had been able to help their friend and the little

boy, yet sad that, through it all, they had had to remain a realm apart. In his mind, Twiggs relived those wonder-filled days when he and Jay had been carefree boys together. His smile bore witness to his fantasies, punctuated, from time to time by thoughtful chuckles, and bare-teeth grins.

Cinnamon sat quietly, tenderly stroking his hair and happily allowing him his private thoughts. She understood, and yet she knew she could never understand. She only hoped that at that moment, both he and Jay understood how, each in their own precious memories, they would always be important, ever present parts of each other.

You never leave a friend behind. He lives on forever within your heart.

**CHAPTER TWELVE:
Puppies and frogs and boys in love - there are a lot of
similarities.**

"You're becoming my new little puppy again, Mr. Twiggington, Sir!" Cinnamon said, only partly playfully, as Twiggs followed her from room to room while she was attempting to straighten up the house that morning.

"Yeah, I know. I seem to have too much time on my hands," Twiggs admitted, slouching into his favorite overstuffed chair. "I'm all prepared for my next ambassadorial meeting with Jay on the twenty third, and my book is sort of at a standstill until after that. I guess I need a new project."

"Can't you think of some new scheme to bug the Council of Elders about," Cinnamon kidded, tossing a pillow in Twiggs' direction.

Catching it unenthusiastically between his knees, Twiggs smiled faintly.

"You really are in need of something else in your life, aren't you," Cinnamon said, suddenly realizing how serious this all was to him.

"Yeah. I think I really need something else besides this Ambassador thing to keep me busy. Maybe I'm just not doing enough ambasadoring, I don't know."

"Go talk to Gramps!" Cinnamon said most emphatically.

"Good idea," Twiggs agreed. He kissed Cinnamon about the face a dozen or so times, and then added a few more for good measure on her hand and up her arm. He climbed down the ladder and off he put toward Gramps' place.

The walk was invigorating, and by the time he was

approaching Gramps' front porch, the spring was back in his step and the grin had returned to his face, so, understandably, the old gentleman was taken aback by Twiggs' opening remark:

"I got this really big problem, Gramps. We have to talk."

"And it's good to see you, too, this fine morning," Gramps replied, eyes sparkling as he ribbed Twiggs a bit for the abrupt onset of his conversation.

Twiggs grinned sheepishly and then in an intentionally exaggerated manner of proper politeness said:

"Good morning, Grandfather. Isn't it a delightful day? Wasn't the sunrise absolutely astonishing? You and my dearest grandmother are well, I hope. Have you had an interesting and rewarding day so far, Sir?"

Gramps ruffled Twiggs hair as the young man bent down to give him a kiss of greeting. They smiled, chuckled and nodded. What fine friends they had become.

"So, is this an empty stomach emergency or could it wait until after breakfast," Gramps asked?

"It's an empty stomach emergency that could be very well dealt during breakfast, I believe, Sir."

Again, they smiled and moved inside. It wasn't often anymore that Twiggs actually went inside their house. Being there, brought back wonderful memories of the many long hours he and Gramps had spent together as Twiggs had prepared for his Ascension to Manhood Rite, back when he was twelve.

Gram was putting the finishing touches on a made from scratch breakfast - it being Monday - as the men took their seats. She poured two cups of hot chinquapin coffee to occupy them until the biscuits were done.

Not wasting any time, Twiggs began:

"I'm just not staying busy enough, Gramps. My Ambassador position doesn't fill up my days. I need something else to do."

"As I understand it, you already help deliver the wood every Monday morning, and spend time assisting the other shop keepers several afternoons a week. That still isn't enough?" Gramps asked.

"Oh, those things help, but you see, they really aren't

mine to do. They aren't my special thing. They aren't a part of my ordained vocation."

"So, in helping them you still don't feel as though you are contributing the way you should be contributing," Gramps said, attempting to understand Twiggs' point.

"Right! I'm just helping the other people fulfill their vocational obligations. That's fine and I'm happy to help, but I need to feel I am actually responsible for something myself."

The biscuits were hot, and the fresh butter melted into their every nook and cranny. The honey lay on top like a golden blanket, warming from the heat below. Best of all, they tasted every bit as good as all of that had foretold.

"So, what do you want for a second vocation?" Gram asked somewhat innocently, as she joined the men at the table and strung an ample dollop of honey into her own cup of tea.

"Oh, what I want should not be important. It should be the decision of the Council, just as was my job as Ambassador to the Mortal Realm," Twiggs was quick to reply.

"Twiggs!" Gramps said, somewhat abruptly. "You can't tell me you haven't given a good deal of thought to what you'd like to do."

Again, Twiggs felt a bit sheepish.

"Well, sure I have, but I truly don't think that should be a consideration. It hasn't been a consideration for all of our generations, has it?"

"Occasionally, it has," Gramps said. "At any rate, if it were up to you and not the Council, what would you choose?"

"That's easy. I've always dreamed of helping my Father in his cobbler's shop. And it isn't as if he couldn't use some extra help, now, with Mortal Mondays - excuse me, I know we're supposed to call them Little People's Pride Days, now. All the actual walking wears out, even a superior felt sole, in no time at all."

Before continuing, Twiggs paused for a long drink to wash down a mouthful of delicious golden brown griddlecakes.

"Being the Ambassador is wonderful and important and all that, but it's really hard to see anything come of it, you know. I mean the candle makers see the glow of their candles

in every window, every night, and the tailors see their clothes on the backs of every clansman. Even Cinnamon, sees the responses of the people she calls back to, and the way they appreciate her splendid wind sounds and trickling creek water. But what do I ever really see, from all of my Ambassadoring?"

Gramps began to understand.

"You know, you are a fine Ambassador, Twiggs," Gramps began. "You keep us well informed about the conditions of the Mortal Realm and you make endless suggestions about things we should consider incorporating into our own society."

Twiggs smiled and raised his eyebrows upon hearing the word 'endless.'

"It's great to hear you say all of that, Gramps. It truly is, but, well, I'm back to being a puppy again."

It took several minutes to explain the exact meaning of that analogy, but soon everyone fully understood the situation.

"There is something in all of this that I just don't understand," Gramps said at last.

"What's that?"

"You have never before been bashful about making proposals to the Council of Elders. Why haven't you just brought it before us in Open Session?"

"Because it's very selfishly just about me, Sir. I could never do that. I did it once before when I first proposed the position of Ambassador to the Mortal Realm and then foolishly suggested that I be appointed to fulfill that role. It was selfish and I am ashamed that I did that."

"But the Council ultimately agreed that it was an excellent idea and that you were the finest choice for the position," Gramps added. "Seems to me it worked out well."

"I have always believed that it should have been you, Gramps - you and your Mortal friend, Douglas," Twiggs said. "You are older and wiser and already had the respect of all the Little People. And you and Douglas love each other so much. It should have been you two getting together."

"But I am kept fully occupied as leader of the Council of Elders - that is my vocation. We needed a new, young, fresh contact. You had all the necessary attributes. I believe that it is working out just fine."

"I'll need to think on it all some more, I guess," Twiggs said, patting his stomach and wiping his mouth with his napkin. "I think I'll just take today and ponder this whole situation."

With kisses and hugs all around, Twiggs thanked them for their advice and the delicious breakfast, and was soon on his way. Since Cinnamon clearly needed some time by herself as well, Twiggs decided to spend the day over in Jay's valley. Jay was out of school for his Winter vacation, so he'd look in on him and be his invisible puppy for a while.

He found Jay walking along the creek with a small gunnysack in tow. Closer inspection revealed that there was something moving about inside the sack. Twiggs was puzzled, but then that was not an unusual condition when it came to watching Jay.

Jay always seemed to have a dozen projects going at once. He certainly never allowed himself to be bored, and Jay didn't even have a vocation yet. Well, perhaps he did, but just not the kind Twiggs was used to. Being a student was pretty much a full-time vocation all by itself in the Mortal Realm. Being the force behind the growing number of Goodakt Clubs around the area also was a vocation-like undertaking, and then, just being the good-hearted, always helpful Jay-man that he was, often seemed like a third, full time vocation.

As it turned out, Jay was pursuing that latter kind of activity as Twiggs caught up with him. With the sack slung over his shoulder, Jay made his way along the creek, across the bridge and up the lane to Mr. Vileman's place. Young David was in the yard playing. He remained under the watchful eye of a most attractive lady in her late twenties who was sitting on the porch.

Twiggs presumed she was the lad's mother.

David ran open-armed to meet Jay as he approached. After a flying leap, and neck-busting hug, Jay knelt down and opened the top of the sack so the boy could look inside. Whatever he saw, sent David into spasms of joy - jumping up and down and throwing himself onto the ground. Twiggs had often observed that Mortal children seemed to have very little sense of personal dignity when experiencing emotional reactions.

He took Jay by the hand and tugged him toward the porch where his mother sat knitting. Twiggs moved closer so he could hear the conversation.

"The magic boy found my frog, Mama. See!" With that, David opened up the sack just enough for her to peek inside. Not fully approving, but trying to be friendly and understanding, the woman nodded and smiled at Jay.

"If you'd rather not keep the frog here, I can just bring him over for visits from time to time, Ma'am," Jay said, sensing her initial reluctance.

"Oh, no. I'm sure it will be fine. This country living is just new to me, so it will take a bit of getting used to."

"So, you and David will be living here with us, then," Jay said, carefully fishing for information.

"It looks that way. My father-in-law needs a woman around now that his wife passed away. David's father was killed in the war, so we can use a place, too," she explained, providing, in one breath, far more personal information than Jay could have hoped for.

"I'm so sorry," Jay said, then quickly added, "About your misfortunes that is, not that you have come to be our new neighbors."

The Lady smiled a wonderfully understanding smile and nodded.

"It was very thoughtful of you to find the frog for David. He's been talking about it ever since that night - and about you, I might add."

"About me," Jay asked?

"Yes. He jabbars on about you constantly. He's still confused about what happened that night. He seems to think you possess magical powers, and somehow made him fly up out of the stream and onto dry land. It was probably a dream. You know how muddled they can be."

"Oh yes, Ma'am. Dreams can be pretty strange."

In that instant, the actual events of the rescue began falling into place for Jay. 'So, ol' Twiggypin really did save the little shaver's life. I should have known,' he thought to himself.

"Lemonade, tea, coffee," she asked. "I guess I don't know what you hill folk like to drink."

Immediately embarrassed at her choice of words, she

attempted to rectify things.

"Well, I mean, I'm just not acquainted with how folks in these parts live, I guess."

"Hey, no need to apologize. I'm proud to be hill folks, and yes, lemonade sounds just great.

She disappeared inside. Jay sat on the ground and carefully removed the frog from the bag, demonstrating to David how to handle it so no harm would come to either of them.

Twiggs immediately discerned a problem - although the frog appeared to enjoy being petted, whenever free of the boy's, little hands, it hopped away as fast as its strong back legs could carry it. It seemed that at that moment in life, the happiness of that lonely little lad was more important than the frog's freedom, so Twiggs poofed a bit o' the magic in their direction. Suddenly that frog became very much like a puppy, himself, following David around and eagerly accepting all the petting and carrying and attention the boy could bestow on it. Twiggs smiled, as he momentarily saw some of himself in the frog's new behavior.

Initially Jay looked puzzled, but then, like a bolt out of the blue, came his famous ear-to-ear grin, and up went his arms in a combination greeting and thank you that Twiggs, of course, immediately recognized.

Jay sat on the edge of the porch, drinking more lemonade, and chatting longer, and smiling broader than was necessary with David's mother. Her name, he learned, was Wilma. She was a teacher and amateur artist. Soon the two of them found they had many things in common. She was warm and friendly and easy to talk with - not to mention that she was absolutely gorgeous. Jay felt quite comfortable in her presence and she, apparently, in his. Jay studied her every move and every change in expression. He noticed how the sun played off her auburn hair and how her eyes were pale blue - quite similar to his own. His breathing speeded up and his face flushed.

'Oh, oh,' Twiggs said to himself, from his perch on the trim above the window. 'The Jay-man is falling in love. He's getting a crush on this older woman. He's putty in her hands. His eyes are glassy. He has that unmistakable, doltish, moon-

eyed look that tells it all! How great! No, how terrible. Oh, I don't know. How in the name of St. Bountiful does this happen? And so quickly! One minute he's a little boy playing with a frog and the next he's a fourteen-year-old hormone factory. Mortals! Life is so complicated for them. I wonder how many times poor ol' Jay will have to go through this before he finds his one eternal love. Maybe it's not, poor ol' Jay. Perhaps it's lucky ol' Jay. Sampling, sampling, sampling! For sure and certain, it is confusing!

Then, as if lecturing his friend, Twiggs continued talking to himself, flailing his arms this way and that the whole time.

'You know, Jay, you're only going to get hurt by all of this. You're supposed to fall in love with someone your own age, you lummo. Jay! Jay! Whatever will I do with you? In this mindless condition, I'd think your personal safety would be in constant jeopardy. I'll just have to start keeping closer tabs on you.'

When all was said and done, however, Twiggs had to be pleased that, regardless of the circumstances, his good friend was at last beginning to encounter his first taste of that most remarkable of all feelings - two people in love.

Puppies and frogs and boys in love - there are a lot of similarities!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN:
**It's a truly wonderful life for any person who willingly and
consistently puts the wellbeing and happiness of others
on a par with his own**

The heavy, dark, clouds, which seemed to have become a permanent fixture in the sky that December began churning and rumbling, signaling that another downpour was on its way. Jay had just headed down the lane toward home as Mr. and Mrs. Purdy were pulling in, bearing a sack of lovingly, hand polished apples for David. Clearly, it was an excuse to check up on the boy and to make sure he had recuperated from the distressing events earlier in the week. As the rain set in with a vengeance, Jay was happy to hitch a ride home in their pickup.

At that, Twiggs decided it was time to return home, himself. Stopping off briefly at Vileman's dam, he surveyed the situation there. He hoped the huge earthen structure was really strong enough to hold the large amount of water that was flowing into the lake. The creek was higher than Twiggs had ever seen it. The overflow opening, that Jay had built into his little dam as a safety valve had been running at full capacity for several days. Vileman had constructed no such overflow system in his. Twiggs supposed he had not been aware of the ever-present danger of flash floods in those parts. At any rate, the dam seemed to be holding fine, so Twiggs nearjumped back to Bountiful and the safety of his own, dry, front porch.

"You're sopping wet," Cinnamon said as she went outside to greet him.

"Yeah, the Mortal Realm is getting another gully washer this morning," Twiggs explained.

"So, you've been over there, have you? I wondered where you'd been so long."

"I went over to check on Jay and the little boy."

"How are they?"

"The little guy is fine and the big guy, well, he's in love," Twiggs said, a tone of concern in his voice.

"In love! How grand," Cinnamon said.

"Well, maybe. Maybe not."

"How so," she asked?

"He has a crush on David's mother."

"How sweet," Cinnamon said, as she helped Twiggs out of his dripping shirt.

"Sweet, perhaps, and even Mortal-normal, perhaps, but you know it has to end in heartbreak for Jay - he's only fourteen and she's twice his age."

"My Dear Twiggs, Mortal boys have been having crushes on older ladies since, well, since there have been fourteen-year-old boys and older Mortal ladies. He'll survive. It's just part of their growing up process. You told me that, yourself."

"You're right, of course, but still, I feel sad for Jay. I hate to see him get hurt, you know," Twiggs said.

"You're a good man, Mr. Twiggington, but remember, Jay himself said that's all just practice for the real thing later on. Come inside and dry off. I'll fix you some honey tea and blueberry muffins. Perhaps that will coax you back into our World for a while."

Twiggs smiled and nodded. Not only did it make sense, it was an offer he couldn't refuse. He felt better almost immediately.

No sooner had Twiggs seated himself at the kitchen table, than a large white, wicker basket appeared in front of him. It was crammed full of apples and peaches and cookies and breads and little jars of jam.

Neither Cinnamon nor Twiggs seemed nearly as surprised or startled as we Mortals might think they would have been.

"I see our Secret Pal is at it again," Twiggs said, turning

the basket around slowly so as to not miss examining a single item that it held.

"Whoever do you suppose it is this week?" Cinnamon asked, tongue in cheek.

It was apparent from the youngberry jam, that Mrs. Bark was the person in question. No one in the village made better youngberry jam and no one else in the village would overload the basket so far in the direction of out and out sweet goodies. It seemed she felt it her mission in life to help everyone gain the same full-bodied figure, which she sported with such pride.

"This does remind me that, as Secret Pals, ourselves, we need to be preparing something very special for Elder and Mrs. Birch," Cinnamon said.

"How about a pretty white basket of jams and breads," Twiggs joked, not about to actually give up one morsel. Then, in a more serious vein, he said, "I was thinking that a new December pansy bed along their picket fence might be a nice touch."

"That sounds quite grand," Cinnamon agreed. "Let's do it this very night."

That agreed, Twiggs got on with the more immediate task of downing half a dozen of Cinnamon's freshly baked golden brown muffins.

Cinnamon nursed along her single muffin, pleased that her husband liked her cooking so, but like the rest of his relatives, a bit baffled at how he just continued to eat and eat and eat and never gained so much as an ounce.

"That will have to carry you 'til mid-afternoon, my Dear," Cinnamon said at last. "I promised to help Mrs. Wick fix a dress for the Friday Night Festival. Seems she ripped it at the waist when dancing with a certain young bride-groom of the community last weekend."

"She does cut a mean rug," Twiggs said, smiling.

He gathered up the plates and took them over to the sink where he began washing them. Cinnamon kissed him good-bye, picked up her sewing kit from the counter, and was gone.

Dishes done, Twiggs then moved to his desk and began going over his notes for the next Ambassador meeting

with Jay. He noticed that much of it had to do with Mr. Vileman, and why the man continued to be so hateful and ungrateful even in the face of the concern and help and consideration given to him by his new neighbors. And how, by contrast, his daughter-in-law and grandson, seemed so pleasant and easy to get along with.

Although much of that had been answered, he still had questions about how they were going to solve the Purdy's water problem. A legal system, such as the Mortal's, that seemed to pay no heed to what was right or wrong, just what was legal or illegal, raised major questions for Twiggs about the combined wisdom of the Mortals down through their own history. He realized that since the Little People had no civil or criminal laws, it was truly foreign territory for him, but, nevertheless, he was sorely concerned and quite baffled.

Once absorbed in his thoughts and writing, the time passed quickly, and he was amazed when, at last, he felt Cinnamon's arms gentling around his neck, and her nose nuzzling the back of his ears.

Slipping a delicious sorghum-drop candy into his mouth, Cinnamon leaned over his shoulder and scanned the notes and piles of papers there on his desk. One small stack immediately caught her eye.

"What's this all about," she asked. "The Adventures of Jay and Twiggs in the Enchanted Meadow."

"Oh, that's just an idea that came to me as I was making my rounds this morning. I got to thinking that maybe my problem really isn't that this Ambassadorial thing can't take up enough of my time, but rather that I'm just not allowing it to become a full time undertaking the way it was intended."

"I still don't understand."

"Well, the way am looking at it this afternoon, an ambassador's job should go two ways - represent us to them and them back to us. Up to now, I've pretty much been emphasizing just the first half of that equation."

"And, so?" Cinnamon asked, waiting for additional clarification.

"So, I got to wondering if one way to help our Little People come to better understand the Mortals, might be to write some little stories about Jay."

"Now, that is an interesting idea," Cinnamon agreed.

"The major problem, I think, is that Jay's the only Mortal I know really well enough to write about, and he's not actually a very representative sample of Mortaldom. I mean, he's a genius with a heart of gold and energy enough to spread his Goodakts around to the entire community. In my experience, most Mortals just aren't that way. Don't get me wrong, most of them are really nice folks - most of the time - but just not such a whirlwind of conscientious virtue."

Cinnamon paused to think for a moment, and then said:

"I suppose you could make that evident as you add in other characters. I mean Jay will need to have other people to do things with in the stories, right?"

"That's it!" Twiggs said, springing up from his chair and twirling Cinnamon around the room. "You're not only, simply the most gorgeous lady in the universe, you are also absolutely brilliant."

Cinnamon knew she should have been used to hearing her husband say such things - and truly meaning them - but still, they made her blush.

"You're even more gorgeous - if that's possible - when you blush, my Dear," he said, looking her over as if for the first time ever.

"Thank you, Sir. But, will it be a bit o' the pot roast or a bit o' the gorgeous, for ye just now, my Laddy?" she teased.

"No contest!" Twiggs said. "A tasty portion o' the gorgeous always out does a table full o' the pot roast!"

* * *

Once darkness had fallen, Twiggs and Cinnamon slipped through the village to the two-story stump, occupied by the Birches. They were well beyond middle age and still aging, so their yard always seemed in need of manicuring.

The young people worked quickly and silently. Twiggs carefully turned the soil with his shovel and Cinnamon came right behind with the rake, breaking up each clod of the red clay and removing the largest of those, ever present, Ozark rocks. Laid side by side, the stones made a charming border around the flowerbed.

Half an hour later, both were on their knees, scooping out small holes with their hands and cozying the soil back

around the tiny pansy plants. In no time at all, the job was done. It being nearly ten o'clock, the customary gentle evening rain was due any minute.

With one last, fond, look of satisfaction at their accomplishment, they raised the tools to their shoulders, clasped hands, and headed off up the hill towards home.

It was a wonderful feeling they had - fuzziatiousness raised to its highest degree. They knew it would probably be no secret as to whom had done the deed, but then, the next night was the bimonthly drawing for new Secret Pals anyway, so it all seemed to have been timed just about right.

The gentle rain began right on schedule (as it always did, of course, in the Realm of the Little People). The pansies quietly unfolded their smiling faces, readying themselves to greet the Birches that next morning. The Twiggingtons, sat on their porch, feeling happy, content and fulfilled, watching the moon shining on, right through the gently rolling, silver-gray, rain clouds.

It was a truly wonderful life as a Little Person, (or, as any person, for that matter, who willingly and consistently puts the wellbeing and happiness of others on a par with his own).

CHAPTER FOURTEEN:
There's nothing like a little act of kindness to transform
a so-so day into a cloud nine experience
(for both of the parties involved!)

"Have you ever seen a real baby?" Cinnamon asked Twiggs, across the breakfast table.

"A real baby? Yes, I have. In fact, I helped one get over a sick thing once when Jay and I were visiting the food bank in Spring Meadow.

"I'd like to see one, too. After all, someday I'll have one, and, well, there sure aren't any here our realm to study," she explained.

"Study?" Twiggs asked.

"Yes, study! How else am I going to learn how to take care of our little one?"

"You mean our little Little Person," Twiggs said, teasing.

Cinnamon threw a strawberry at him from across the table.

"I'm being quite serious. I want to see a baby."

"That's fine. I'm sure that Spring Meadow is just filled with the little nippers," Twiggs said. "Well, go this very morning, okay."

"That will be grand! Hurry and finish your griddle cakes."

"You know," Twiggs went on, "The Wise One has already given you all the knowledge you'll ever need to know about taking care of our baby."

"Now you're sounding like my mother. I know that's

true, but it just seems that something this important should take some forethought and planning on my part. Can you understand that?"

"More than you might have ever believed," Twiggs said, putting down his fork and folding his hands under his chin.

"I remember back before we were married, I asked Gramps how I could learn all about being the very best husband a wife ever had. He gave me that same "Wise One" speech I just gave you, but it wasn't sufficient for me either."

"You did that for me? How sweet! How wonderful that was. You are the most special husband that ever was, and now I understand why."

Twiggs just sat there beaming, not knowing how to respond. Silence was ok between friends. He and Jay had worked that out years earlier, so he just continued sitting and eating and smiling into the face of his cherished Cinnamon.

After zapping the dishes clean and into their neat stacks on the shelves, Cinnamon and Twiggs were off to Jay's village – Spring Meadow.

"Let's begin in the park," Twiggs suggested. "That's where young mothers often take their babies on bright, sunny, Winter days like this one. Some mornings it's like a young mother round-up."

Sure enough! Several, were already sitting on park benches, and more were arriving pushing baby buggies. The two of them moved in close to watch and listen, and see what they could learn. One, baby, was sound asleep in his mother's lap. Another was crying at the top of her lungs. Several were sitting up, watching anything that moved. Still another was on his back, doing his best to grab a wayward foot that seemed to occasionally happen by.

Cinnamon was clearly delighted.

"It's really hard to see the actual baby, the way they are all bundled up for this cold weather," she noted.

"Well, then, let's go house hopping until we find one naked as a jay-bird - that's an expression Jay uses sometimes. Oh, never mind. Come on."

Soon they came upon exactly the right house. A mother was bathing her newborn in the kitchen sink. The baby was waving its arms and kicking its feet, all the time

cooing and making the happiest of its brand-new sounds. The mother was so tender, gently smoothing on the soap and then with a soft cloth, tenderly washing the delicate, pale skin. The youngster delighted in having hands full of clean warm water poured over it, as the soap was carefully rinsed away.

The mother talked to the baby in soft, sweet tones the whole time. It was Cinnamon thought much like a religious experience. Twiggs wouldn't have taken it that far, but he nodded and remained silent, intrigued by Cinnamon's intensity.

"Look at those tiny toes and fingers," Cinnamon said. "Oh, look, the baby smiles when it sees its mother's face. It will be difficult to wait a whole four years for ours to arrive."

"Not much we can do about that, my Dear, but I'll bring you back here to see this baby any time you want to."

"I wish we could have ten," she said, enthusiastically.

At that, Twiggs swallowed hard and diplomatically encouraged their immediate departure.

"Did you enjoy that as much as I did?" Cinnamon stated, more than asked, as they popped back into their own warm kitchen.

"Quite honestly, probably not, my Dear, but it was wonderful to see the babies and feel the air alive with the love their mothers had for them."

"It's so difficult to understand how any Mortal child who grew up with that kind of love and gentle attention as a baby, could ever take a wrong turn - become a criminal or other type of Mortal villain," Cinnamon added, thinking out loud.

"Perhaps the bad guys don't grow up with all of that," Twiggs said. "After all, our sample of Mortals is sorely limited to a group of pretty fine human beings right here in this Ozark valley."

That piece of philosophic musing seemed to pass over Cinnamon's head as she sank into the couch and into a wonderful reverie about that time when she, too, would be bathing and cuddling and talking to their own little boy.

"Have you decided on his name, yet," Cinnamon asked Twiggs (the naming of a child always being the duty of the father in their realm).

"Well, I'm sure you know that my first choice isn't even

a possibility. We have to stick to appropriate, nature-tied names."

Cinnamon giggled. "Well, perhaps we could name him Blue Jay."

Twiggs smiled, only wishing that could really be. He went on:

"As Jay commented the first time he learned of the names of my father, Woodington, and grandfather, Forest:

'Gee, Twiggs, you seem to stick pretty close to dense vegetable fiber names in your family, don't you?'

"In his own way, he had it analyzed just right. That is the tradition for us, so I have wondered what you would think of the name, Reed. Jay suggested, Sprout, but I vetoed that!"

"Reed," Cinnamon said, as if needing to hear it out loud. As she said it, the name took on a melodic aura Twiggs had never sensed before.

"Say it again," he asked.

"Reed," she repeated, the name simply flowing around the room. "Yes, Reed will be a wonderful name."

"Mortals have three or even more names, you know." Twiggs explained. I suppose that's because there are so many of them that no one could ever know which Jay or Doug or Mary you meant, otherwise."

"Well, one is still enough for us, and I think Reed is just exactly right. Reed, son of Twiggington, the Ambassador; son of Woodington, the Cobbler; son of Forest the Elder. See, it just sounds right!"

And it did sound just right! Twiggs was relieved, because, although it was his duty, he had wanted Cinnamon to truly approve.

It hadn't been the morning of Goodakting that Twiggs had planned for himself, but it had been an amazing and fruitful time with his precious and beloved wife.

Cinnamon was soon off for lunch with her mother, over in Harmony, so Twiggs thought he'd drop in on his own parents.

"Any leftovers for a poor relative," Twiggs said, sticking his head through the door that led into their kitchen?

It was a Jay-saying that had no literal translation in the Little People's realm, since rich and poor were unknown

concepts there.

"You know we do," came his mother's warm greeting. She didn't have to understand the terms to let her son know that he was always welcome.

Good food. Good conversation. Good family feelings. It had been a great time. He walked his father back out to the cobbler's shop, and they talked a bit more, before Twiggs was off in search of Goodakts needing to happen.

He weeded the cabbage patch behind the Stone's place and watered some fading petunias along the fence in front of the Tailor's. The types of Goodakts available for him to perform in his realm were usually pretty tame when compared with those he could find over in the Mortal's world. So, he decided to try his hand back in Spring Meadow.

Earlier in the day, he had spied a flagpole that was bending suspiciously under the weight of the huge flag. That was his first stop. It was, indeed, beginning to crack, so Twiggs made a quick repair and soon it was as straight and stiff as a - well, as a flagpole. Still, it was not a very exciting operation. He would have to look further.

At the park, he spied a small girl sitting in the grass, crying. She looked fine, so Twiggs assumed she hadn't been hurt. Perhaps she had lost something. He began a search and sure enough, a few yards away, wedged out of sight between a large stone and an evergreen bush was a doll.

"How to get the two of them back together without raising suspicion," he asked himself.

Some boys were playing ball not far away. The batter hit a pretty good one. Suddenly the wind - which seemed to come out of nowhere - caught the ball and blew it into a small evergreen plant, right in front of a large stone. Presently the left fielder caught up with the ball. Low and behold, right there was the very doll his little sister had been crying over for the last half-hour. First things first, and with a monumental grunt he heaved the ball toward home plate. Then he rescued the doll, dropping it into his sister's lap as he trotted back onto the playing field. She thought he was the hero of the hour - the week, perhaps - even though his team mates booed him, as the batter made it all the way home.

"Different perspectives," Twiggs said to himself. "That's

how Jay would characterize what just happened. Mortals seem to always perceive things as good or bad, right or wrong, in terms of their own, self-centered, needs of the moment."

Twiggs watched the little girl who was playing mother to the baby doll. He wondered if Cinnamon had ever had a baby doll. Actually, he had never even seen one in his entire realm. Perhaps that would be just the ticket to weather her through the next few years. He filed that thought for future reference.

He then jumped from one place to another looking for things he might do. He re-insulated a badly worn electric line leading into the school. He smoothed out a jagged sheet metal seam on the huge slide in the playground. He picked three large red apples, shined them 'til they glistened, and deposited them in Miss Primm's fruit bowl.

Since it was her basement that had become the permanent meeting place for Jay's Goodakers' Club, Twiggs jumped down there for a look around. On the bulletin board were the names of several local citizens who were receiving special attention that week by the club members.

"They seem to have things well under control around here," Twiggs muttered out loud. "These Goodakers are making it mighty hard for us delightful, altruistic, little, elfin-like beings to perform our selfless mission in life."

He chuckled and shook his head in delight, as he spoke that quote from one of Jay's books about the Little People.

"That's it. I'll go see what Jay's been writing these days. Then, when we get together on Saturday, I can quote him one of his own quotes as though I originated the idea. It'll crack him up when he finally figures out what I've done!"

Wading through the knee-high mess of scattered papers on Jay's desk, Twiggs dug down through old homework assignments and blueprints for heaven only knows what. Finally, he found the unfinished, final chapter of Jay's most recent book about the Little People. Twiggs was pleased to see he had titled it, *The Ambassador and the Touchperson*.

"It sounds to be of far more importance than if he had just called it *Twiggs and Jay*, though it would mean the same thing, I suppose."

On the bulletin board was a far from complete outline for the next book in his series. It was apparently going to be titled, Twiggs and Cinnamon.

'Now that's a GREAT title,' Twiggs thought.

'The only problem is that he doesn't really know anything at all about our life together. Perhaps that's his motivation. I can tell already; this next meeting will see me doing most of the talking and Jay doing most of the note taking.'

At that, Twiggs left for home, stopping off just long enough to briefly watch Jay, thoroughly enjoying a swim in his ever-warm swimming hole.

"A couple more days and we'll be swimming together again," he shouted through a tiny crack in his veil of invisibility.

Jay looked about for the source of what he thought had been someone calling out. Twiggs muffled his giggling with both hands, and jumped himself home, totally missing Jay's eventual V for friendship sign.

Although he had performed no absolute marvels of magic that day, and had not single-handedly saved the Mortal Realm from total collapse, it had been a good day. Even in the land of the Little People, not every day could be an exciting and totally fulfilling one.

That night, there on her pillow, a beautiful, golden haired, baby doll greeted Cinnamon as she entered the bedroom. Twiggs - his shoulders shrugging - silently pleaded ignorance, but she knew better. The sparkle in his eyes and the dimples in his cheeks belied his protestations. There's nothing like a little act of kindness to transform a so-so day into a cloud nine experience (for both of the parties involved!)

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN:

How wonderful it was that even the most disagreeable people seemed to have a spark of goodness tucked away, deep inside them

Jay was soaked to the skin. His feet sloshed around inside his muddy boots. The rain had not let up for so much as a moment, since Monday. Now, as midnight, Thursday, rapidly approached he and all of the other available men and boys in the valley were filling and placing sandbags atop Vileman's dam. It was a last-ditch effort to save it and prevent the destruction of the Purdy's farm, should the dam break and release its avalanche of water downstream.

Jay's spirits never dampened, of course - even in the midst of such a crisis - and he had everyone singing and laughing right through their exhaustion. Mr. and Mrs. Purdy, along with Jay's Grampa Doug and Grandma Mary, were busily distributing hot coffee and sandwiches to the workers.

Mr. Vileman, himself, was not present, having been called off to Kansas City on business well before the potential disaster had become apparent. It had been Jay and David, out on a 'rain hike' (one of Jay's, on the spot inventions, designed to give David's tired mother some time alone), who had first discovered the problem. A few phone calls later and the entire community had rallied to the cause. A van full of gunnysacks from Statten's Feed Store had been there and waiting when two dump trucks of sand from Mr. Allen's gravel pit had arrived.

Boys, armed with everything from buckets to juice cans, had been working to fill the sacks, which the grown men had

then passed along a human conveyor belt to the low edge on top of the dam. Just as it had appeared that the battle was being won, old Mr. Purdy had collapsed. Jay's father and mother had rushed him to the hospital, but no word about his condition had yet arrived back at the dam site.

As the rain abated and the moon peeked through the clouds, a great roar went up from the workers and the others gathered to help and lend moral support. Jay gave the V-for friendship sign, and much to his amazement, not only the kids, but the adults as well, all joined in. Now that was reason for an ear-to-ear, cheek bustin' grin, and that's just what spread across Jay's well-smudged face.

It wasn't until that moment that Jay paused to wonder if Twiggs was anywhere about. He looked around but saw no signs that would indicate his friend's presence.

'I guess we Mortals pulled this one off all by ourselves,' he said to himself, a feeling of great pride and satisfaction surging through his tired young body. He looked around briefly for any, even semi-clean, spot on which to sit, but, too tired to trudge the fifteen feet to a most friendly looking big log, he just lowered himself onto the thick mud of the hillside.

At about that same moment, David and his mother came along. Moving toward Jay at a full tilt run, David impacted his new friend shoulder high.

"We did it, Jay. Me and you, we saved Grampa's dam," David shouted excitedly!

"We sure did," Jay agreed, accepting the too well propelled lad into his open arms. Over backwards and into the foot-thick quagmire they went together.

From Jay, there could only be one reaction. He began laughing and kicking his tired legs in the air. David sensed the humor in the situation and rolled himself off Jay and over and over into the mud. Soon everyone there was laughing and the majority of those under age seventeen had joined Jay and David in the red-mud mire of the hillside.

When Jay's father returned to deliver the news that Mr. Purdy would be fine, another valley-filling cheer went up from the crowd.

As soon as the news of the flooding had reached Mr. Vileman, he had flown back from the city. It was at about the

moment of that thunderous clamor, celebrating the good news about Mr. Purdy's condition, that Vileman appeared on the scene, pleased, of course, to see that the dam was holding, but obviously bewildered by the goings on. Oh, it wasn't actually the boys rolling around in the mud while singing the school fight song that perplexed him the most (although that was eventually to become a difficult aspect of the evening to fully explain!). It was the mere fact that everyone he had ever seen in the valley, and more, were there helping to save his, most unpopular, dam.

Nothing was said of it. The men and their families slowly began making their way home. Many stopped, and in silence, patted Mr. Vileman on the back, as if to say: 'We're glad disaster wasn't visited upon you this night, new neighbor.'

Jay's father came over to his son and offered him a hand up - one Jay was obviously happy to take. He supposed he had been more tired than that before, but just then, had no idea when it might have been. In the moment their eyes met, a wonderful look of love and pride and understanding passed between them. It was just the way things should be between a father and son - unmistakably obvious, with no words required.

Mud and all, Jay's father drew him close and gave him the hug of his life. Together, the exhausted pair trudged down the hill, across the meadow, and onto their back porch. It had been an evening to remember but that would have to await another day. Jay was sound asleep the moment he hit his bed.

* * *

Friday morning found Twiggs wide awake well before sunup, busily at work on his first book about Jay. He was finding it so much fun that it didn't seem like work at all, but then for the Little People, work never seemed like work in the Mortal sense of the word.

It was, in fact, defining just such words as work and certain other specialized phrases that presented the biggest challenge for Twiggs. Although the Mortal's English and the Little People's English were both largely composed of the same words, many of the definitions had taken on quite different meanings over the years since the Great Parting.

Take that simple word, work, for example. The Mortal's dictionary included synonyms such as drudgery, grind, toil, sweat, and hardship. For a Little Person work very simply meant, the opportunity to serve. It was a totally positive term. Few Mortals, about whom Twiggs knew, did he think, would define work as a totally positive term - Jay excluded, perhaps.

Then take the phrase, achieving personal success. It presented even greater difficulties. All Little People clearly understood the phrase to mean, simply, 'living the virtuous and ever-helpful life.' Given that definition, Twiggs doubted if many Mortals would match it up to the phrase, 'personal success'. For most Mortals, it had acquired a plethora of extra baggage - money, power, fame, possessions, beauty, strength, top grades - none of which really had anything to do with deep down feelings of being a success as a human being.

There was one related word - integrity - that retained similar meanings in the two languages. The difference there, being, that Little People felt totally obligated to fulfill the requirements that led to a feeling of integrity, while most Mortals couldn't even define it. The realization that holding to the highest positive values and then making certain that every day one lived up to them would always bring deep down, thoroughgoing, happiness and contentment, never even seemed to enter the minds of most Mortals. They immediately sought happiness in stuff, or power or - well, that has all been said.

At any rate, Twiggs was doing his best to work around such terms or to carefully define them when the differences in meanings were relevant. As the sun peeked in through the East window of the living room, Twiggs realized it was time to head for the General Store and spend some time with the other Men of the Clan. He leaned down and gently kissed the air close to his sleeping Cinnamon's cheek, then quietly nearjumped down the hill.

The grass was still wet from the nightly shower. The multicolored faces of the pansies beside the Birch's fence were smiling a welcome good morning as he passed. Twiggs smiled and waved to Mrs. Birch as he trotted by. She appreciated both the greeting and the clandestine, dead of

night, pansy-patch-caper, very much.

The time there with the other men seemed to drag that morning, so Twiggs soon excused himself and began walking toward Gramps' place, kicking a stone in front of him, just the way he had learned from Jay. About halfway there, he was reminded that he needed to look in on Jay. That presented some fleeting purpose, so he farjumped to the top of West Mountain and up into their special Oak tree. He smiled as he saw, and touched, where he had carved Cinnamon's name, several years before.

His smile turned to a look of concern, as he peered off in the direction of the Vileman dam. Spying the sandbags atop it, he quickly moved to examine the situation. The unmistakable indications of some major Mortal activity were present all around. Although the rain had stopped and the water was just below the danger level in the lake, he ascertained that had not been the case a few hours earlier. Why hadn't he felt Jay's need for him?

"Probably because Jay didn't need me," Twiggs said out loud to himself, a faint smile beginning to form. "It looks like they handled this one all by themselves. Good going, Mortals!!"

He could imagine the hours of frantic work and the grave fright that must have filled the valley's residents. Twiggs made his way, first, to the Vileman's to check on David. Much to Twiggs' surprise, the lad was still sound asleep - not the normal condition of a boy his age at seven o'clock in the morning.

Instantly, Twiggs moved on to Jay's. Noticing a pile of mud stiffened clothing on the back porch, Twiggs verified for himself that Jay had been in the big middle of things. He peeked through the bedroom window. Jay, too, was still sound asleep. Twiggs had never known his friend to sleep past five A.M. except on those rare occasions when he had caught the sick thing.

Jay would need something to smile about when he finally awoke. Twiggs would provide it.

A sandbag, suddenly cleaned to a state of absolute tidiness, was ever so carefully deposited under the covers along side Jay. The outline of a face, interestingly resembling

that of David's mother appeared on it. Twiggs laughed 'til he cried, just thinking of what Jay's reaction was going to be when he discovered it.

Twiggs had hardly begun looking over Jay's bulletin board when it happened. Jay rolled over onto his stomach. He reached out his right arm and, still sound asleep, pulled the bag close to him, a special smile - that one seemingly reserved just for sleeping teenage boys - forming on his face. In an act of belated startle, he suddenly opened one eye to scope out just what it was he found cuddled up next to him. Although, it was certainly not the stuff from which a teenage boy's dreams were usually made, it was definitely worth a window shaking bellow of delight.

"Twiggs, you scoundrel!!!"

After another moment or two, Jay sat up on the edge of his bed, still shaking his head in delight, and looking around the room as if trying to find the appropriate target for the pillow he held poised in his hands. There would be no such visible target, of course, but just for good measure, he flung it across the room, directly at the frame atop his bulletin board.

"Gotcha!" he said, joyfully. Little did he know that, indeed, he had flattened his friend, smack against the wall. Two delighted boys, good friends, even when a realm apart.

Jay took a piece of chalk from his desk and began to write on his blackboard: "Beware the 23rd. Mortal revenge is a brewin'. J!"

The 23rd, of course, referred to the date of their next Ambassadorial meeting, at that point just a week away. Mortal revenge let Twiggs know he had not yet heard the last of the "Sandbag Mistress Affair."

* * *

Early Sunday morning both Twiggs and Jay had come upon the same idea - to visit the dam and inspect the situation. Jay had arrived first. As Twiggs entered the scene, he spotted Jay perched atop a sandbag at the top of the dam, gazing intently into the distance, downstream.

Twiggs' first observation was that Vileman had already begun work on a sturdy concrete overflow trough on his dam - something that would have prevented the entire problem several days before. He next turned his attention in the

direction of Jay's gaze. He could hardly believe his eyes. There, on the Purdy's land, were Vileman's dozers and backhoes and trucks, busily at work, digging what appeared to be a second lake with a second earthen dam just to the East.

'What is going on here,' Twiggs asked himself? He looked at Jay, who seemed to have already figured things out, and appeared quite pleased about it all.

Not content to remain at such a distance from the action, Twiggs jumped nearer. It was a dam alright, and a lake too, smaller than Vileman's but nonetheless, a lake and a dam. As Twiggs added all of that, to the new overflow trough on Vileman's dam, it all slowly began making sense to him, also.

He moved even closer and overheard the tail end of a conversation between Mr. Vileman and Mr. Purdy.

"So, I'm going to let whatever water you need flow on through my lake and it'll be caught down here in yours. That way you'll have plenty for your orchard and vegetables, and I should have more than enough for my fields. Monday, I have a crew coming out to put a fence around both lakes so the little kids can't get into them and get hurt. Can't have that, you know."

A speechless Mr. Purdy just looked back toward his wife who was sitting on the porch. He shrugged his shoulders and then gave her the thumbs up sign. He shook Mr. Vileman's hand far longer than seemed customary, but then, what of any of this seemed customary?

Twiggs went back and sat against a tree - invisible to Jay, of course on that morning. Jay thought about how wonderful it was that even the most disagreeable people seemed to have a spark of goodness tucked away, deep inside them, just waiting to be teased to the surface once things could be made to appear safe and honestly amicable.

Twiggs, well, Twiggs' topic was not so easy to define. It had to do with his inability to predict Mortal behavior, merely by the surface samples people let him see and examine. It had to do with how Jay had taught him to be persistent and never give up on people. It had to do with the way those Mortals - at least in that valley - could put aside bad feelings and come to each other's aid, apparently just because that

other person was also another human being.

He wondered just how general a characteristic that was among Mortals? Perhaps, as Ambassador to the Mortal Realm, he needed to enlarge the range of his sample. What about people way up in Joplin, Missouri? Over in Tulsa, Oklahoma? In Topeka, Kansas? What about Canadians and Mexicans and even those from his Clan's old stomping grounds in the northern area of the British Isles?

Twiggs liked best, however, that which he heard running happily through Jay's mind. "How wonderful it was that even the most disagreeable people seemed to have a spark of goodness tucked away, deep inside them, just waiting to be teased to the surface, once those around them found ways to make life appear safe and honestly amicable."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN:

Believe in yourself and your positive values, and life will shine for you like the brightest star in the heavens.

It was a fearsome thing to be called before a special session of the Council of Elders with no explanation as to why. Twiggs paced the length of their porch over and over again, trying to think what terrible thing he might have done.

Cinnamon tried to comfort him, but she had no idea what to say. Mostly, she had just been sitting, watching the love of her life, pacing and thinking - pacing and thinking. It hurt her so to see him in such a state of complete distress.

"Maybe I should have kept watch on the dam and done something about it before it became so serious. Maybe I should have let nature take its course instead of rescuing David from the stream. Maybe I shouldn't have pranked Jay, by calling to him through the veil. Maybe, Maybe, Maybe!"

Twiggs was at his wits' end and there were still three long hours before he was to appear. He wanted to just get it over with. Normally he would go talk over a major problem like that with Gramps, but Gramps was the Chief Elder, so no help there. He didn't want to worry his parents before he knew what it was all about. He couldn't talk with Jay until midnight, when their official Ambassador/ Touchperson meeting would begin - if it would begin.

Maybe that was what the Council was going to do: take away his ambassadorship. What could he have done to make them feel that was in order?

He went inside and gathered some papers together - papers that he had been working on in regard to his

ambassadorship. He organized his accounts of the meetings he had had with Jay. He added to that pile the draft of his first book about Jay and the voluminous file that contained his book about the Mortals. He gathered his notes on the Goodakts he had performed recently.

Scanning the whole of it, he still couldn't figure what terrible thing he might have done. He'd take the entire pile of material along to the meeting, so he'd have the evidence on his side - whatever the problem might be. He wouldn't just give up without a fight!

Perhaps the whole idea of having regular, organized contacts with the Mortals was suddenly being viewed as an inappropriate move. He remembered Elder Birch's reservations about the Mortals. Possibly, the Elder also felt Jay was somehow being a bad influence. Maybe the Little People's Pride Day had been reviewed and found to demonstrate too much Mortal influence. It might be the tree house and Twiggs decision not to live in a traditional stump home.

So many possibilities spun in his head. But none did he think could actually have led to such a grave meeting.

He was proud of what his contacts with Jay and the other Mortals had taught him about them and, more importantly, about himself and his beloved Little People and their values. He was pleased to see the Little People enjoying magic-less Mondays, and their eagerness to learn how to do the everyday, menial tasks the old-fashioned way. He loved his new home and thought it was a fine combination of the wooden edifices of his Clan and the angular, fabricated homes of the Callbackabees.

It seemed to him that Gramps and the Elders had given their tacit, if not outright approval to all of his recent undertakings. It was just a mystery - a gut wrenching mystery.

"Let's go for a walk and just get away from here for a while," Cinnamon suggested.

"That's probably a really good idea," Twiggs agreed. "I'd like to walk the meadow, if you don't mind. It's where I learned to think for myself, and it's still where I do my best thinking."

Moments later, they were there. Twiggs began to relax

almost immediately. They walked along the creek, and sat for a time on Jutting Rock, overlooking Jay's swimming hole. They played a half-hearted game of chase among the long grasses.

Hand in hand they climbed the hill to the cabin and spent some time inside. It was where Twiggs and Jay were scheduled to meet that very night. It was evident that Jay had already begun stowing in the supplies. There was wood in the rack, and a fire already laid, just waiting for nightfall. Chips and peanut butter, and apples and pears lined the windowsill. An ample supply of writing tablets and pencils had been unceremoniously dumped onto the bed, along with numerous marbles, small rocks and gumballs. A copy of Einstein's, Theory of Relativity, lay on the pillow.

"A little light reading, no doubt, while he's waiting for midnight to arrive," Twiggs joked.

The floor had been swept and the rug on the hearth had been well shaken.

"Jay's quite the little house keeper, isn't he, Cinnamon said, giving things a woman's once over and nod of approval.

"Jay's quite the little anything he decides he wants to be," came Twiggs reply.

They stretched out on the pillow, holding hands across the book between them. Cinnamon could see from Twiggs' expression that he felt quite comfortable there.

"Lots of great memories for you in this place, aren't there," she said, hoping to get him talking, and to free him from his grievous burden for at least a few minutes.

He chose to think about those times to himself, rather than share them out loud, but his smiles and grunt driven giggles from time to time, told Cinnamon it was working.

Presently they heard Jay coming up the path, singing some cheery Mortal melody about a yellow ribbon. Twiggs nodded to Cinnamon and said:

"This really helped. Thank you for your patience. I'm ready to go back and face whatever it is the Council has on its mind."

As Jay crossed the threshold, Twiggs and Cinnamon exited, undetected, above his head.

* * *

"The .. Council .. will .. come .. to .. order," droned the Sergeant at Arms.

Twiggs was both comforted and troubled when he saw his parents present in the chamber. As it turned out, it was not to be a private hearing in any sense of the word. It seemed that the entire village had turned out.

"It's like an old west lynching," Twiggs whispered to Cinnamon. "They've all come to watch me dangle."

As he winced and massaged his neck with one hand, Cinnamon frowned her disapproval of such an analogy and clasped his other hand tightly between hers.

Gramps, dressed in his golden robe of office, rose and stood at the center of the long table - the Elders, in Scarlet, were seated stoically to his right and left. He spoke in a deep and solemn tone:

"Twiggington, Man of the Clan Dewgoodabee, Master in the Ring of the Farjumpers, Sire of the next generation, and Ambassador to the Mortal Realm, will you present yourself to this body."

Twiggs stood, leaned down to kiss Cinnamon, as if beginning his last mile, and strode to a spot in front of the Council. Assuming a stance of confidence, with his legs planted firmly apart, he folded his arms almost defiantly, and said in a full and steady voice:

"I am here, Sir. How can I be of service to the Council of Elders?"

"It has come to the attention of this Body, and to the citizens of this village, that you have spent the past several years pursuing a most unusual and oft times unorthodox way of life."

'Here comes the axe,' Twiggs thought, still, however, not so much as flinching an eye. He'd stare the Council down to the final syllable of the pronouncement! He continued to be quite certain he had done nothing he couldn't easily support - defend, if necessary.

"Furthermore, it has been the observation of your Clansmen, that much of what you have been speaking, has been of things not customary to our Sacred way of life."

'Whew, I was afraid he was going to say Sacred Scriptures. That would have sealed my doom for sure and

certain.'

"There have been things such as tree houses, Mortal Mondays, toiling physically until you work up a sweat, walking, skipping, even running from place to place, forsaking your Divinely Ordained magical powers."

'Forsaking sure can't mean good stuff.' He gulped.

"In short, you have set upon our society new and strange ways that have ...

'Here it comes. That have what? What have they done?'

"forever improved and enhanced our day to day life in ways none of us could have even imagined a few short years ago."

'So, that's what they think I've done! Wait a minute. What was that?' Twiggs turned and looked back at Cinnamon, his brow furrowed deep, total puzzlement possessing his being.

"In light of this, Mr. Ambassador, the Council of Elders and the members of the Clan Dewgoodabee, do hereby and forevermore declare March ninth of each year, the Twiggington/Jason Festival of New Beginnings. Your attendance will be required. Congratulations my Son."

Gramps moved his ample figure around the table and toward Twiggs, who had already been joined by a tearful, smiling Cinnamon clinging to his right arm. The unexpected and still not fully comprehended words continued to rattle around inside his head.

"Unfold your arms," Cinnamon suggested, as strongly as a ladylike, through the teeth whisper, would allow. "Unclench your fists. Release your jaw. Relax! It's all ok. It's wonderful! It's all just the way it should be. I'm so very proud of you, my Dear."

"Jay! They remembered Jay," Twiggs said, as if that were truly the only important part of the whole matter.

Jay only thought that he had already set the agenda for their upcoming meeting. Little did he know that had, suddenly all been changed.

Gramps had one final thing to say to Twiggs.

"Our people have joyfully and fully acknowledged our debt of gratitude to you and to Jay for the impressive

improvements you have so gently made in our way of life. Now, this Council, is about to take the most extraordinary step ever initiated in our long and tradition-based history. We are inviting Jay to be present here with us on your special day each year - the first, and most likely the last, Mortal ever to be allowed to breach the veil between our two Worlds."

Twiggs stood dumbfounded, tears of greatest joy rolling freely and unabashedly down his cheeks and onto the, already, well-dampened, face of his wife.

What a kaleidoscope of emotions he had experienced that day. Mentally, he kicked himself for having ever doubted his own way of life and the values upon which he had based it. After all, they were the time-tested, and more recently, personally re-verified, positive values of his own precious community - The Little People of the Ozark Mountains.

Jay's tribute to Twiggs' Clan, as it appeared in the books which he had written, described the Little People far more skillfully than Twiggs himself could have done. For some reason, at that moment, those words echoed through Twiggs' thoughts.

"They are an altruistic clan, each about as tall as a grape hyacinth. They are peaceful and loving by nature, preferring the simple, uncomplicated life of days gone by. These cheerful, contented, charitable, little folks thoughtfully go about practicing their magic, in order to bring a happier, fuller life for each other, and for the mortals who live nearby. Though seldom seen, their presence is often felt - especially by those who believe. To have been aided by one, is an extraordinary blessing. To have had one for a friend, is an unbelievably precious and inspiring experience."

Presently, Twiggs' fantasy was broken, as he realized that Gramps was speaking to him.

"I know," Gramps was saying, "this news is truly too good to keep. Be gone to meet your Jay-man now. What can being a few hours early possibly matter in terms of all eternity!"

Twiggs had never before arrived at Jay's cabin with a tear dampened face, but then, neither had he ever before had such a wonder-filled, justifiable reason.

* * *

The Little People have this magical maxim which, it is said, will bring the best of life to all who repeat it three times each and every day:

"If love and trust and helpfulness,
each day, we all employ,
We then shall build a World so blessed,
All lives will flow with joy."

Try it, and you, too, will believe. You will, most likely, come to discover and treasure your very own Little Person, who regularly perches himself right there on your shoulder, ready and willing to offer counsel, comfort and courage, whenever it is desired (and occasionally, when it isn't!)

With love and best wishes,

I remain your faithful storyteller,

Tom Gnagey