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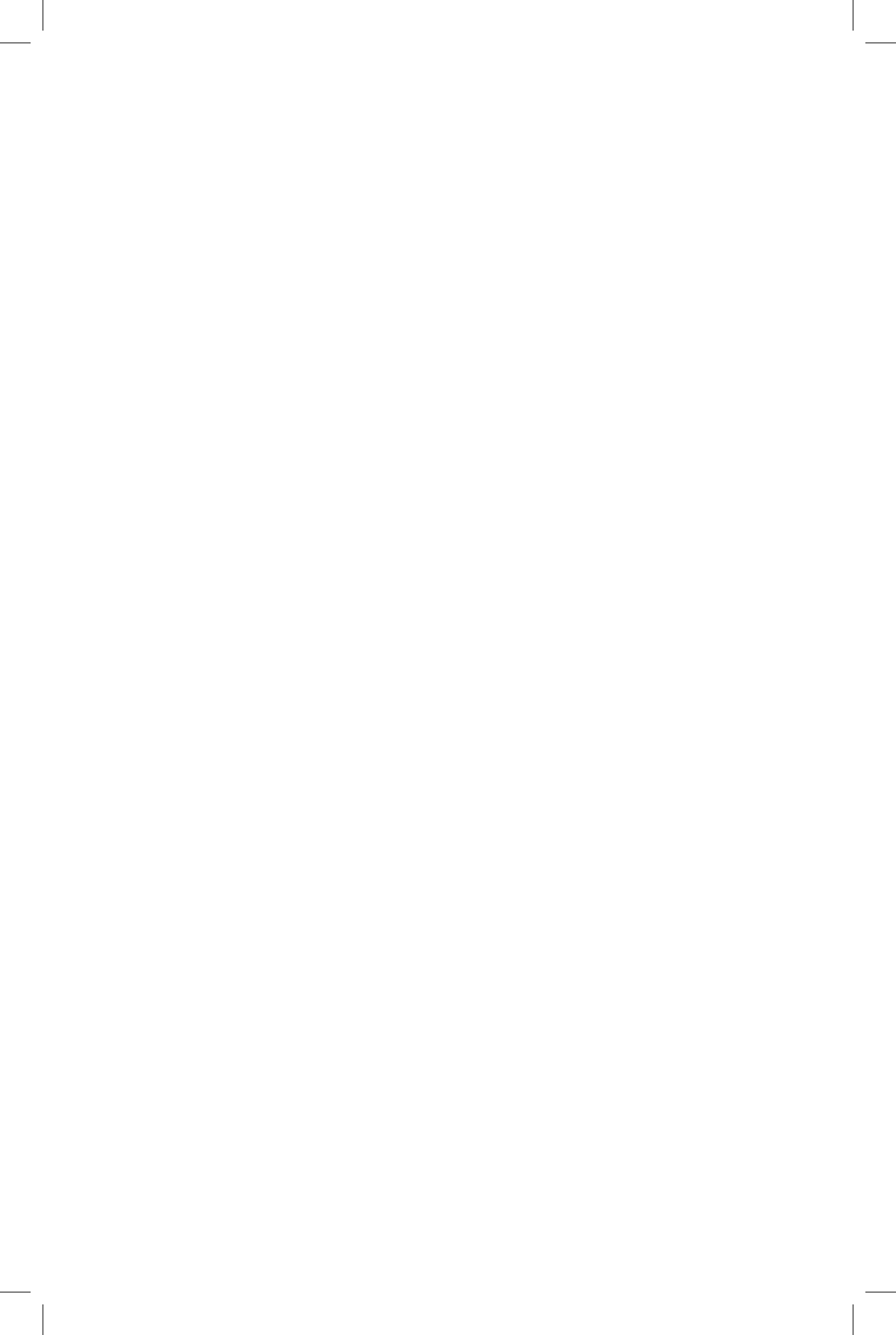
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## Part One

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# Reconciling with reality



## In the beginning

Do you believe in ghosts?....

Joshua did not, and yet they seemed to play such a pivotal role in his short life. Dead people always followed him around, rather chillingly at times. He had no choice in the matter; that was just how it was.

It probably started that winter's day in the pub when he was engaged in a heated argument with a group of idiots who believed in everything from ghosts to aliens to the damn Loch Ness Monster! They were arguing over the existence of ghosts. Joshua's short temper was tested to the limit with the argument nearly being settled in a fist fight. Instead it ended with him storming out of the pub shouting:

“Seeing is believing!”

A command which would come back to haunt him....

I am about to tell you a story of someone who against all odds, and rather involuntarily, ended up seeing ghosts. It is a story about the remarkable experiences he had with ghosts, or people who have already died if you like, that led him to unravel one of the greatest mysteries:

The mystery of death and what happens to you thereafter.

If you want to hear the story of how Joshua did this, I suggest that you make yourself comfortable and be still, but aware, as you never know who or what might be peeping

## When You Die

over your shoulder, reading and listening along with you. Don't allow a creepy feeling, a cold shiver down your spine, sudden drop in temperature or the odd unexpected sound, movement or light breeze in the room get to you. They can't help it, but you can help by relaxing and allowing them to experience this story along with you.

I knew Joshua's family from before his birth and got to know him well. Joshua lived a short but fascinating life. He was well known, so his untimely death came as a shock to many.

I feel compelled to share his short story with you because it would be sad to allow it to die with him, as it is a story with eternal value.

Although Joshua was as stubborn as a mule and at times quite arrogant, we eventually became good friends. I was much older than him so I had time on my side and as you know, with time comes wisdom. I was always available for giving advice and enjoyed sharing my insights. Although young Joshua had many opportunities to ask for guidance, he seldom did. He wanted to live life his way. I took his defiance on the chin as I realised how important it was to make mistakes. That is how you learn, isn't it?

What makes Joshua's life story so significant is that it not only led him to discover what happens when you die, but more importantly how to live life, and most important of all, how to get to heaven.

Yes, when you die, you go to a happy place lovingly referred to by many as heaven. Religious people, no matter what religion, will agree on that. They do, however, disagree on how to get there. If you happen to be of a scientific mind and do not believe in God and heaven, then pardon me for suggesting that you are wrong. If you think that when you

die, nothing happens, you are mistaken. A lot happens when you are dead.

Getting to that happy place has been topical since the beginning of time. Ancient Hindu texts and masterpieces such as the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* and the *Bardo Thodol*, or *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, are testament to that. Joshua managed to find that secret route and even managed to assist countless people along the path. It might therefore be useful for you to hear what he has to say.

Unfortunately, the reality is that when you die, you could end up in a not-so-happy place; no not the place of fire and brimstone, called “hell”, that place is just a mindset. Confused? You are not alone. The afterlife theme has confused people since ancient times, so bear with me as I disentangle these mystifying concepts.

As you know, death is real and unfortunately cannot be candy coated. It takes courage to look death in the eye. Reconciling with death is not easy, especially when you lose someone dear to you. Unfortunately, the secrets to understanding death, and life for that matter, are well hidden. To get a brief glimpse into those secrets, all you need to do, is be patient and follow Joshua’s story as it unfolds. Take it slowly, as there is a reason why every word is written. Alternatively, like millions of people across time, you may miss the point completely and still have no clue as to what happens when someone you love, dies. You too may fear that inevitable moment, the moment of your own death, which will happen, whether you like it or not.

One of the most important truths that Joshua discovered was that everything that you are exposed to in life holds clues as to how to succeed on that afterlife journey. The first

clue lies not only in your time and place of birth but also in its history.

So let's begin Joshua's story, before the beginning.

Long, long ago there was a beautiful tropical paradise located on a small piece of coastal land somewhere on the south east coast of Africa. Throughout history, various groups of people had believed it to be their promised land and that belief led to bitter conflict. These groups insisted that it was their God-given right to own the land. It was a land for which they were prepared to die and many of them did.

In ancient times a peaceful hunter-gatherer people living by the rhythms of nature, called the San, inhabited that beautiful land. They peacefully enjoyed its fruits, until Central African tribes who had migrated south, searching for lands that were more promising, drove them out.

In the late fifteenth century, a Portuguese navigator, who reached its shores on a Christmas day, named it "Natal", which is Portuguese for "birth of Christ".

In the early nineteenth century, a small African grouping calling themselves the Zulu, developed into a fierce kingdom and claiming that beautiful land as their own, named it KwaZulu.

At about the same time, some of the Dutch who colonised the southern tip of Africa, chose to trek northwards into Africa by ox wagon, in a similar way to how colonisers won the American West. The exodus came to be known as the Great Trek, and they were called the Boers. They defeated the Zulu at a place that came to be known as Blood River and claimed Natal as their God-given land. In time, the



British invaded from the sea and pushed the Boers out. They brought in shiploads of Indians to serve as cheap labour. Racial and cultural segregation gradually became the norm under British rule, because they did not consider the blacks, Indians and white Boers worthy of association. These diverse peoples did not unite, which led to more wars between the Zulu, British and Boer. Greed, sparked by the discovery of gold, drove the British, with their brutal concentration camps and scorched-earth strategy, eventually to win.

The Boers, who came to be known as Afrikaners, later successfully fought for independence from Britain and created an apartheid state. It became a system of racial segregation, whereby the whites systematically oppressed all other races with the aim of establishing and maintaining domination over them and justifying it as self-preservation.

The oppressed races inevitably resisted. Eventually a young black lawyer, Nelson Mandela, came to symbolise the growing opposition to the apartheid regime. The Afrikaners deemed Mandela a threat to stability in their promised land. He was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1964 and his voice was silenced.

It was also the year that Joshua was delivered to that beautiful coastal paradise, albeit a paradise fertilised with blood.

Although Joshua's parents were white and considered privileged in apartheid South Africa, their home was a tiny two-roomed outbuilding in the back of someone's yard, which was all they could afford. Life was difficult for them but they were not going to allow their circumstances to get them down. They were happy people.

Joshua's mother had to work until late into her pregnancy with him. Then, finally, during a hot spring afternoon, her

waters broke and she was admitted to the local clinic. By early evening, the doctor noticed that not much was happening and confidently predicted that she would go into labour in the early hours of the following morning. He was the only doctor in the small coastal town and was something of a rough and seasoned man who believed that he had seen it all. Although he was supposed to be on duty at the clinic that evening, he decided, as was the norm, to go home for dinner. After all, this was a small community where nothing much happened. Home was a short trip by bicycle down the dirt road that only took him five minutes. By the time the doctor returned, Joshua had already been born.

“He just popped out,” the nurse explained to the astonished doctor.

She was still shaking from shock after having to deliver her first baby, her face covered in blood as she had tried to wipe off the sweat with her unwashed hands. Joshua’s mother, a devout Christian, was as surprised as everyone else, and was endlessly grateful to the Lord for blessing her with such an easy birth. No one could quite put their finger on it but they all knew that something special had happened there that day. Joshua’s mother instinctively knew that this child was different. Her child was born into an imperfect world where ill-informed people made poor decisions and at some level her motherly wisdom knew that he was going to do something about that.

She chose to name her baby Joshua, after the biblical figure who led the Israelites into the Promised Land.

His father was elated with joy and pride and invited the entire neighbourhood to celebrate the arrival of his son. Although financially challenged, they spared no expense for the feast. Expectations were high and he could not wait for

the day when he could teach his son how to experience life to the full. Joshua's parents soon noticed, however, that he was very different indeed. He was an extremely peaceful and very quiet baby. He never woke during the night or fell ill like everyone else's babies did. He was way too quiet. By the age of two he had not yet uttered a single word. He just lay there, absorbing the world around him with his big eyes. Although his mother was grateful to God for blessing her with this child, she gradually became more and more concerned about the possibility that there was something wrong with him.

What she did not know was that Joshua was born with extra-sensory abilities. He could see, hear, smell, taste and feel way more than the average person. The world he saw around him consisted of multiple layers of colourful activities that criss-crossed his field of vision all at the same time, one level of existence seemingly completely unaware of the existence of the other. The colours were mostly translucent and bright and spanned the spectrum of the rainbow.

There were all sorts of interesting beings in that world. There were fairies and angels and other little colourful creatures. There were lots of children running around and playing. They all seemed friendly and were a pleasure to see and engage with. He was mesmerised by the colours and shapes, the unique smells and the harmonious movement of everything. It was so beautiful, so playful and so innocently peaceful. There was a wonderful variety of rose smells present, especially when no humans were around. Then there were the humans. He experienced their energies to be denser and grosser, some of their energies did not smell good at all and even left a bitter taste in his mouth. They always seemed to be in his face, wanting his attention.

When they arrived, the beauty and tranquillity would be completely disturbed. Fortunately, they were surrounded by a colourful, oval-shaped light that differed completely from person to person, with some people's lights brighter than others. All the colours of the rainbow would swirl around in there. People also had various small colourful whirlwinds coming out of them, sometimes connecting with the little whirlwinds coming from others. His mother had particularly beautiful golden and soft pink colours coming from her chest that seemed to brighten up every time she came near him.

He found the light above their heads to be the most beautiful of all though. This was a ball of predominantly golden-yellow and silver glittering light, interspersed with dashes of different rainbow colours. A silvery beam of light extended down from the ball above their heads, through their bodies. It turned violet as it entered their heads whilst turning red towards the bottom, extending deep into the earth. The beam also radiated upwards from the ball in shining gold and silver and went up higher than even his eyes could see. It looked as if every being was permanently connected to something higher up via this cord of everchanging, pulsating light.

Joshua could sense the humans' feelings and could hear their thoughts. He still had a faint memory of the beautiful place where he had come from, where the state of being was unconditional love. He recognised that same state of being in humans from time to time but noticed it to be scarce. He loved re-creating it in them whenever they came near him, by smiling lovingly at them with his deep shiny eyes. There were many other states of being that he discovered. He could feel them in his chest. Some of them gave him the jitters or caused a burning sensation in his tiny chest.

Joshua enjoyed being on his own because everything was so beautiful when there was silence. He was happy living in his own world, a world containing beings only he could see; a world where physical speech was not a form of communication. He loved that world where everyone was harmoniously happy and healthy and clean.

His mother, who saw nothing, became concerned because everyone else's babies had started speaking by the age of two. She prayed a lot but respectfully could not understand why God was not answering. She eventually contemplated sending him for a psychological examination but her fear of the unknown and belief in the Saviour always motivated her to delay the appointment a little longer.

Then the big day finally arrived. It was just before Joshua's third birthday. To everyone's amazement he suddenly broke out in speech.

He spoke full sentences fluently and to top it off he spoke both of the local languages to which he had been exposed at home. His relieved mother did not mind the extensive chatter that followed. He excitedly told her of his world with all the colours and wonderful beings, and often uttered words of great wisdom, not that she really listened to what he was saying, because what do babies know? She was just thankful that by the grace of God there was nothing wrong with him; he turned out to be perfectly healthy and normal after all, and that was all that mattered.

By age four, his mother's and father's hard work started paying off and the family could afford to move into a house with three bedrooms. It had one main bedroom, one for his two elder sisters and a small room adjacent to his parents' that he had to himself. By then the colours and images had faded because nobody believed what he was telling them. He

started believing everyone else instead. Joshua was taught to become fearful. He was taught to be afraid of climbing and jumping and sticking his fingers into things. He was taught to be fearful of strangers, and even the neighbour's bigger kids next door. He did not like this world with all the fear, but once it got hold of him, he could not shake it off. So from time to time, he would start noticing beings in the invisible world that would scare him as well. At times, he would wake up during the night only to realise that there was a man in the room. He did not like that man. The man would just stand there and look at him. The man confused and scared him.

Nothing would make this man go away. At times, little Joshua would be so paralysed with fear that he could not even get his voice to scream. All he could manage was a barely audible cry, which would bring his mom, or sometimes dad, to the rescue.

They would switch on the light and a pale-faced Joshua would anxiously tell them about the scary man. After a while they started a ritual whereby they would go around patiently searching for the man. First they would look behind the curtains, showing a petrified little Joshua, curled up in his bed clutching his little blanket, which was pulled right up so that only his eyes were visible, that there was no one behind the curtain. Then they would look out of the window, open the cupboard doors and show him that the man was not there either. Finally they would look under the bed and confirm that there was definitely no man in the room. Dad would give him the talk about how brave men don't cry and then Mom would settle him in and eventually switch off the light; only for little Joshua to wake again later to see a man in his room.

In his parents' defence, they grew up in a world where

## In the beginning

access to information about everything was strictly controlled by the state. Apartheid restricted everyone, including his white parents. You only got to know what the state wanted you to know. They got you to believe that they were right and everyone else was wrong or were terrorists, including Mandela. So when it came to the topic of ghosts, Joshua's parents were hopelessly ill-informed as well.

Anything that they did not understand, whether it was written in the Bible or not, was deemed evil and the work of the devil. Ghosts fell into that category. Their brains were wired in a way that would not connect the words "invisible man" to the word "ghost". To them ghosts did not exist, and even if they did, they were of the devil, and God would never allow the devil to come near a child. There was, therefore, absolutely no possibility that they would ever have been able to figure out that Joshua was seeing ghosts in the room. He ended up spending many nights in his parents' bed until his overworked and sex-deprived dad ran out of patience. Joshua's dad got tired of his complaints about the man in the room and had no choice but to take action.

Fortunately for little Joshua, he could not remember what action his dad took, but what he could remember was that he ended up sleeping in his own room again and that the man in the room along with everything else in the invisible world, disappeared.

## Confusing appearances

Armed with his father's zest for life and his mother's stability, little Joshua grew up to become a sociable and happy young man.

During his school years he loved both academics and sport and excelled as a natural leader. He had many friends and was popular with the girls. Due to his parents' hard work and persistence they advanced in their careers and were able to afford a good education for him. Unfortunately, Joshua had adopted the values and norms of a society built on narrow-minded philosophies and ideas. The apartheid state had successfully indoctrinated him to believe that God and white people were great, that Christianity was the only true religion and, by default, that ghosts did not exist. Nobody ever questioned the opinion of the doctor and the priest and, of course, the politicians knew exactly what was best for the country.

Like most people the world over, Joshua had also become what history moulded him to be.

The man in the room and everything else in that beautiful invisible world stayed away all that time. As a matter of fact, Joshua had no conscious memory of those incidents he had experienced as a young child.

Fortunately, while studying at university, he was taught



to think independently and to question everything before accepting it as fact. He ended up applying the scientific approach to everything. He was a hard worker like his dad and successfully climbed the corporate ladder. He eventually became self-employed and earned good money. With the money came self-perceived power and with that power came arrogance. He was also blessed with good looks, so alcohol and girls took centre stage in his social life.

At the workplace he started connecting with black people who impressed him. They were kind and joyful. Most of all, they had warmth about them, a kind of rhythm that felt welcoming. Although he was from the group of the white oppressor, they reached out to him and invited him into their circles. At first he was confused as he was taught that they were not supposed to be like that. The confusion turned to anger and he soon started questioning the sense behind racism, apartheid and everything the apartheid government stood for, including religion. Joshua came to believe that religion was nothing more than an inhumane plot designed by a few greedy and ignorant individuals to manipulate the masses for self-enrichment. God, the devil and everything in-between were created by man and he was not going to fall for all those mischievous lies anymore.

Although I had reached out to him on numerous occasions, Joshua seemed oblivious to my existence. At least I found solace in realising that he was being well equipped to manoeuvre through the maze of challenges and contradictions that was to be his future. The time was right, however, for me to make my presence felt. His idea of life, love, and who he was, did not quite match up with who he was born to be.

Let's pick up the story where Joshua finds himself at the

bar counter of one of his many favourite pubs, patiently waiting for a friend who was notorious for being late.

Joshua was deep in thought, nursing his beer. He was in a serious and somewhat concerned mood. His best friend Mike, who was a happy and bouncy guy, finally arrived. They greeted and Joshua ordered him a drink. Mike seemed extra perky and excited and the two of them quickly started catching up on the latest local gossip. It did not take long for Mike to notice Joshua's dull mood, and he insisted on knowing what was wrong. Joshua kept saying that there was nothing wrong but Mike, who knew him better than that, harassed him until he reluctantly agreed to spit it out.

Looking deep into his beer glass, as if to find encouragement from the rings of white foam stuck to the translucent glass, Joshua started telling Mike how he and a beautiful girl ended up half-naked in his room.

She was lying on the bed on her stomach and he was leaning over her, giving her a slow, sensual back massage. His lightly oiled hands slid from her narrow waist up her back along her spine and then gently around the shoulders. He enjoyed noticing the goose bumps on her back that appeared every time his smooth hands made their way down and along her soft sides and back to her beautiful waist. They were both mesmerised by the experience.

But then, while looking down at her, he noticed in the periphery of his vision the image of a man standing towards the back of the room. He immediately looked up, heart thumping in his chest. Yet there was nobody there. He cautiously looked around the room, but it became clear that he must have been mistaken. So shaking his head in disbelief he again focused on the beautiful naked waistline in front of him. The girl was blissfully unaware of anything, enjoying

the moment. Her relaxed state continued rubbing off on him, helping him regain his rhythm. She was really enjoying each smooth stroke and he enjoyed sliding his hands up and down her sun-kissed skin. Despite the pleasurable experience, an uncomfortably awkward feeling of uneasiness started enveloping him. It felt as if there was something in the room that was not supposed to be there. It felt as if someone were staring at him. He looked around but noticed nothing out of the ordinary. Thinking that it must be his mind playing games with him, he again looked down at her back, and continued the massage. But then from the corner of his eye he once again noticed an out-of-focus figure in the room. This time, keeping his head down, staying calm and slowing his breath, he tried to focus on the image in the far corner of the room. He had to figure this out.

His massage strokes had now become like the slow, careful footwork of a leopard stalking its prey. Sure enough, the image gradually came into focus until Joshua could clearly see the shaded impression of a man. Paralysed by fear, Joshua held his head dead still; he could do nothing but lock his gaze onto the image. Instinct took over and in an attempt to protect the girl he angrily stood up straight to confront the stranger in the room, but the man disappeared!

“How could this be?” he thought, annoyed with himself. He was absolutely convinced that he had just seen a man in the room; it was definitely not an illusion.

“What crap is this?!” he thought, doubting his sanity.

Something from within convinced him that he could not leave it at that. He knew what he had seen, he simply had to find out. The girl did not seem alarmed. He gently excused himself and slowly walked to the spot where he had seen the man, but there was no one there. He looked behind the

curtain, then out the window, but saw no one. He then looked in the cupboard, thinking how silly this was of him. Walking back to the bed he could not help but wonder what was under it. "Come on!" he thought to himself. "Now I'm really being silly, clearly I'm imagining things."

He could only shake his head in confusion and giggle at his own stupidity, wondering what could have brought this on. He gestured to the girl to roll over onto her back and started caressing her stomach and breasts. The care with which he treated her aroused them both. Joshua understood girls; he knew how important foreplay was to them.

But then the shape of a man appeared again in his peripheral vision.

This image annoyed him. He certainly did not have time for this nonsense, so he tightly shut his eyes and violently shook his head to shake the image, but as he opened his eyes, the man had positioned himself right in front of Joshua in clear sight.

Joshua froze, solid with fear, looking the man straight in the eye for what felt like an eternity. Everything else in the room seemed to have disappeared, including the girl; it was just Joshua and the man. At some point, Joshua started breathing again. He could feel his shoulders dropping and he could feel warmth return to his body. His gaze was still fixated on the man, the girl an insignificant blur.

Joshua looked at him mesmerised, his mouth dry, jaw slightly dropped. The man smiled and then slightly bowed his head in recognition of Joshua's presence. It was a friendly and kind looking man. He looked familiar, but Joshua could not place him. Ironically, Joshua seemed to experience some level of comfort with this man in the room. The fear had completely left him. This was definitely not the same person

he had seen moments earlier in the far corner of the room. The previous one instinctively irritated Joshua. It was as if Joshua had a score to settle with that one. This one was different; as if this person were a friend who wanted to be seen and Joshua felt inviting towards him.

The man in front of him was wearing a doctor's uniform. He was dressed in theatre gear ready for surgery. He was wearing surgical gloves with both hands held up chest high, palms facing towards his chest. He was a good-looking young man, probably in his late twenties, early thirties. The doctor smiled kindly at Joshua and Joshua managed a faint smile back. Although still unable to move, Joshua experienced no fear, his reaction spontaneous. There was a familiarity, as if they had been working together for years. The doctor indicated that Joshua step back. He automatically obliged. The doctor stepped forward, positioned himself directly opposite Joshua, with the girl, who came back into focus again, lying between them. Without hesitation the doctor looked directly down at her. He stuck his hands into the girl's abdomen, his hands disappearing completely into her stomach. Somehow Joshua felt completely comfortable with what the doctor was doing, it felt routine. There was no cut, no blood, nothing; his hands simply penetrated her skin effortlessly. Amazingly, the appearance of the man was more of a shock to Joshua than what he was doing now. For a while, the friendly doctor moved his hands around and then pulled them out, holding them back in the same position as before he started. There was no blood on his hands, nothing. The doctor looked up at Joshua, gave him a gentle smile, and with a mild satisfactory nod, disappeared into thin air. One moment he was there; the next he was gone. A somewhat pale and shaken Joshua immediately looked down onto the

girl's stomach but there were no signs that anything had happened at all.

It seemed as if time had stood still; the girl was still moving sensually, enjoying the massage. She definitely did not want him to stop and continued showing her pleasure. She did not seem to notice that he had stopped massaging her. As Joshua slowly started massaging her again, the girl opened her dreamy deep blue eyes, looked at him and said:

"You know, you are actually very good at this. I have never felt anything like it before. It is truly amazing; when you did those strokes over my stomach, it felt as if your hands pushed right into my gut and I could feel them move around in there. How on earth did you do that?"

The colour again drained from the face of the shocked young man. It looked as if he had seen a ghost.

"Wow," said his friend in the bar, "What were you guys on?" "Nothing!" said Joshua. "That's the point, there were no drugs, no alcohol involved, nothing!"

"Well, my friend," said Mike in disbelief, jokingly writing this story off as a fantasy, "next time don't just fantasise, rather give me a call, I will gladly come and join you guys, a threesome with that hot girl sounds rather appealing." "Come on Mike, did you even listen to a word I said?" "Yeah, yeah...come on dude, you need a drink!" was Mike's only reply.

And that was the end of it.

Joshua struggled to write off the experience as mere fantasy.

He knew what he had seen, it felt real to him. After all, the girl validated what he had seen. But his best friend said it was a fantasy, and Joshua trusted and respected Mike's opinion.

Soon Joshua started “seeing things” everywhere. But on closer examination he found them to be nothing but his imagination. He would, for instance, imagine seeing images move past a window, and on numerous occasions he could swear that someone had called his name. Sometimes it looked like the shadow of something or someone suddenly passing him, and yet there would be no one there. At times he would feel a cold shiver down his spine for no reason at all, which would normally be accompanied by a slight movement in his field of vision, like curtains moving or a door squeaking. Then there were times that it would feel as if someone were softly blowing onto his neck from behind. He would often get an awkward feeling of someone watching him, but then as soon as he turned around and saw that no one was there, the feeling would subside.

One evening Joshua took a long hot bath after a hard day’s work. He had rolled up a towel that he used as a makeshift neck rest and lay back fully stretched out, with his eyes closed. Soft gentle sounds were playing in the background with the warm mist being candle-lit. The warmth of the water soothed every muscle in his body as he sank into bliss.

While lying there in a state of deep relaxation, that feeling of someone staring at him started creeping up on him again.

“Not now,” he thought, as he tried to ignore it.

He knew that it was impossible for anyone to enter his home. The staring feeling gradually turned into an eerie pressure that began building up in the room to the point that he had to open his eyes to see what was going on. Right there in front of him, above his feet and slap bang between the two taps he saw a sight that shook him to his core. The image of a wide-eyed, gay man’s face was looking down at his naked body in the bath.

The image was as clear as daylight. Had Joshua's petrified heart not been paralysed, it would probably have exploded.

He wanted to kick water in the man's face and shout, "What the fuck are you doing?!"

But instead he just lay there in suffocating anguish, voice box silent. He felt powerless in the warm water. The man's eyes were strikingly adorned with turquoise-blue eye shadow, with thick black eyeliner making his big eyes look even bigger. He was bald and looked very feminine with his smooth tanned skin and full lips. Admittedly, he was quite good looking. It was only after a prolonged silent staring competition between the two stubborn men that it dawned on Joshua that the man he was glaring at looked less gay and more Ancient Egyptian!

The Egyptian did not look impressed with Joshua at all. Next thing, the man aggressively shoved his arm towards Joshua, his fist holding tightly onto a large shiny copper looking object. It looked like the cross that Jesus was crucified on, but with an oval-shaped loop at the top end. The object was beautifully decorated with hieroglyphics.

Joshua made it out to be some sort of ancient ceremonial key. The facial expression of the Egyptian between the taps clearly indicated to Joshua that he should take the object. So having regained his strength, Joshua carefully reached out, took hold of it ... and with that, and a sarcastic good luck smile, the man, fist and object disappeared. All that stayed was a naked Joshua lying in a steamy bath with his right arm stretched forward and hand made into a tight fist, clutching nothing.

Joshua had no idea what to make of that vision. It would take many years for him to figure out what happened there that day, and to understand he had been handed an ank,



which was indeed a key. All he knew at the time was that he had better get the hell out of that bath. He never told his friends why, but he preferred to shower from that day on.

Joshua was now ready for the next step, which I realised would freak him out even more, but it had to be done. He started hearing voices coming from seemingly nowhere. At first it sounded like gibberish but later he could make out full sentences. The voices mainly commented on personal matters about people as Joshua engaged with them. Joshua could eventually pin them down to coming from somewhere above his head, slightly to the right. He started thinking that perhaps he was losing control over an imagination gone wild, if that was at all possible. Something was happening to Joshua and it made him anxious. The word schizophrenia made him even more anxious. It was an anxiety that he chose not to share with anyone, not even his best friend. He could not help but wonder about the possibility that he was slowly going mad, that perhaps the neurons in his brain had started misfiring. He wondered if he should consult someone, but the fear of a professional confirming that he was going mad, prevented him from pursuing that option, so Joshua chose rather to completely forget about the incidents. But it was not that easy.

Then his conscience started playing games with him. He wondered about the possibility of being cursed.

He even wondered about the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children up to the third and the fourth generation.... He wondered what on earth his “fathers” could have been up to? Anyway, how could God be so cruel? It was unfair for him to be punished for what his “fathers” had done. God was supposed to be a God of love, a God of mercy, a God of forgiveness. To Joshua there was

not much evidence of such a God. After all, he lived in a time of apartheid. Being cruel to thy neighbour was the accepted norm.

One evening, Joshua was out partying with friends. At one of the nightclubs he noticed a group of single girls on the dance floor having fun. One girl in particular caught his attention, so he started a process of systematically approaching her. To Joshua it was all about that apparently innocent, accidental eye contact. As an attractive man and charmer of note, he saw himself as a master at seduction and it was natural for him to end up naked with a girl of his choice in his bed. They both had had a bit too much to drink by then, but that was his style and an integral part of his approach. The lights were dimmed, and with incense burning and soft romantic tunes hardly audible, he thought all was perfect for the occasion. Joshua treated every girl exactly as they desired. He allowed his lovers to live out their fantasies. The young woman seemed to enjoy the experience of being naked in his attentive arms. The naughtiness of it all turned them on even more. But, although he treated this girl like a goddess, he could sense that she was strangely nervous.

As they started making slow, passionate love, his eye caught a shadow of something moving in the room.

Dreading the probable outcome, he slowly but nervously looked up, and there, in full view, stood a slender, frail old lady dressed in a light blue nightgown. Her long grey white hair had been brushed down to her narrow shoulders. She was pale and heavily wrinkled with sagging, sad eyes and an exhausted, forward-leaning posture. She stood there looking at them. To Joshua, her opinionated gaze seemed to say that she strongly disapproved of this drunken man “eating forbidden fruit”.

“Who are you...? How the fuck did you get into...?” thoughts raced through his head.

Joshua could not believe what was happening! He shook his head as if to shake the vision and thoughts, right out of his head.

“What the fuck! This is not happening!” he thought, his intoxicated mind angrily confused.

She was still there. He tried to chase her away by glaring at her and brushing her away with an aggressive sweep of the hand at the same time trying not to draw the girl’s attention to what was going on.

“Just fuck off!” he mentally shouted.

To his amazement it worked. The lady simply disappeared. Angry with himself for allowing these stupid, sick illusions to appear in his mind, especially at such a crucial time, he attempted to turn his focus to the girl again. By now he had lost his erection. The girl clearly noticed it because he could feel her discomfort and sure enough she wanted to know why. Telling her that he had just seen a ghost would definitely not sit well with her so he relied on his charm to save the moment and started caressing her again.

She insisted on knowing what was wrong and remained distant and cold until she knew. He kept saying that there was nothing wrong, that she was beautiful and that her naturally musky sweet smell excited him, but she bought nothing of that. She was obviously very sensitive about this stranger in bed losing interest in her. Mutual tension between them kept building up like hot magma ready to explode in volcanic fury. In her mind, he had suddenly turned into a devious monster.

Then she exploded....

“You think I’m ugly...is that it? You think I’m fat!” Without giving him a chance to respond she yelled:

“Fuck you, I knew this was a mistake!”

She pushed him aside, jumped out of bed and rushed to get dressed. Joshua was gobsmacked. What had just happened?

Grabbing her bag and shoes, she stormed out of the room, slamming the door on her way out. Joshua cringed at the sound of the door slamming. He just lay there on his back; defenceless, his palms covering his eyes in total disbelief. He had spent an entire evening engaged in flattery and it had cost him a fortune in drinks for everyone to get this far. He knew he was good looking. Surely no girl would storm out of a room midway through having sex with someone as desirable as him! This was a first; he simply could not wrap his head around what had just happened.

With his ego seriously dented and his mind bewildered, he lay there, semi-paralysed, speechless.

“This is not happening,” he thought, “That damned vision. What is this shit in my head?”

He again cursed his “fathers” for being such assholes.

He let out a deep sigh, dropped his arms in desperation and after a while slowly opened his eyes again... only to see the friendly, frail old lady standing there in his room, looking at him.

Joshua was livid. He looked at her with a glare that would have incinerated her had she been physical!

“I have to go and see a psychologist,” he thought, “I cannot carry on like this.”

He started slapping his head using both hands in quick succession, but that did not work either. This time the vision of the lady remained. She stood there looking straight at him.

“What the fuck do you want?!” he yelled.

There was no reaction. She just stood there, looking frail, tired, sad and yes...afraid.

As Joshua's older, wiser acquaintance, I could not allow the situation to deteriorate any further and simply had to take action.

Suddenly, something remarkable happened to a drunk, highly agitated and naked Joshua. At first, his ears started ringing. He became aware of a soft, high-pitched sound that seemed to come from inside his own head. It felt as if he had suddenly developed tinnitus. Then a tingling sensation, like pins and needles, but much milder, started flowing into his brain starting at the top of his head. He could feel it flowing to the right and then the left side of his brain, from the frontal lobe all the way back to the occipital lobe, from his cerebellum, up to his pineal and down his brainstem. He could feel the sensation going down his spine, one vertebra at a time, and from each vertebra it would flow along each nerve all the way to each nerve ending where it would explode in ecstasy. His entire body started tingling. Subtle wave upon wave of compassionate, crystalline silver light came washing over him from seemingly nowhere. It gently moved through his entire body and then rushed out his perineum and the soles of his feet. The whole room started to light up in a translucent shimmer.

Just like that, everything about what Joshua had become, changed. His arrogance, his distrust in everything and everyone, his jealousy, his abusive attitude, his fears, his inability to love...were no more. He became peaceful, non-judgemental...he realised that the character he was portraying was nothing but a roleplay as the real Joshua was someone else, someone beautiful, loving and caring. He came to realise who he really was...every cell in his being became alive.

He opened his eyes and realised that he was naked....

A now sober and genuinely concerned Joshua slowly covered himself with the sheet, and gently asked the lady in the room, in a caring voice:

*"Why do you look so concerned? Can I help you?"* This was not the old Joshua speaking. To his surprise he heard a faint voice coming from somewhere saying: "I am very concerned about my children."

But old habits die hard, so his accustomed reality then consumed his focus again, causing him to sit up and realise that he was agreeing to have a two-way conversation with, well with himself, or perhaps...a .... He had not figured out yet what he was speaking to...a ghost?... No, that could not be, after all there were no such things as ghosts.

"Ghosts are from the devil!" he tried to explain to himself. He could not believe that he could think such nonsense.

Another wave of compassion followed, silencing his mind, relaxing him and slowly allowing him to sink back into the bed and with that, Joshua chose to simply be.

Lying there with his scientific habit still intact he nevertheless tried to analyse the situation as logically as possible, as the image of the lady refused to go away.

He knew that he could clearly see the image of an old lady in the room. He knew that he could clearly hear voices that were not his own. So he resolved that he should accept these things as they were and continue from that point of reference. If he was mad, then he was mad; and if that was the case he might as well have some fun with his madness and see where it would lead. Who would know anyway?

So he decided to continue the conversation.

*"Why are you concerned about your children?"* he thought. "They are not listening to me," she thought back at him.

*“Well perhaps it’s because you are dead!”* Joshua replied. She looked at him with a blank expression on her face. Joshua continued, having no idea why he was saying these things:

*“You have unfortunately passed away and there is nothing you can do about it. There is nothing you can do about your children. You probably died a long time ago; your children are probably grown up by now. Who knows, perhaps they may even be dead and in heaven by now, so why are you still sticking around?”*

“But I am worried about my children,” she repeated, seemingly stuck on that single thought. She had such a desperate look on her face.

Joshua could not help but feel a deep loving compassion for this strange lady; a feeling that he realised he had not felt towards anyone in a very long time. The memory of the girl who had just stormed out of the room was now long forgotten.

In a calm, patient voice he asked her:

*“Do you believe in God?”*

*“What kind of a question is that?”* he wondered, because he certainly did not believe in God anymore.

She nodded in agreement.

The words kept flowing but he had no conscious idea why he was speaking them:

*“Do you believe that God is greater than you are?”* She nodded again.

*“So then why do you not allow God to take over? Have faith in God that He will do a brilliant job of caring for your children, guiding them towards a great future.... He will do a much greater job than you could ever dream of doing.”*

Her face started to lighten up. He clearly had her attention. *“Do you believe in heaven?”* Joshua continued. She nodded once again in agreement.

*“Then go there.”*

The wisdom continued to flow: *“Heaven is a wonderful place. You will be so happy there. There are plenty of people up there who will care for you and maybe the time has now come for you to move on. Don’t worry about your children, they will be fine. You need to go home now.”*

An expression of profound peace began to radiate from her eyes. She believed him, she trusted this strange, naked boy.

Then, before Joshua could again question his sanity and new born religious values, a massive cone-shaped vortex of bluish-white light appeared above the lady. The base of the vortex was about two to three meters in diameter and looked like it continued upwards for ever, creating an optical illusion that it narrowed towards a single point at the top. It looked like a huge whirlwind circling in slow motion, but with the wider part at its base. It circled slowly and gently. It came down to near her head, but slightly behind and above it. The vortex was made up of what seemed to be some sort of bluish-white mist and rotated very slowly in a clockwise direction as seen from below. It was beautiful, with a somewhat soft and gentle feel to it. From the inside the light looked more whitish and when looking back up and into it, it resembled the appearance of someone shining a flashlight into a tunnel from the far end. It was like looking into the light. It was a soft white light though; it felt so gentle, even romantic. There was an invisible force coming from within the vortex, slightly pulling at the old lady. Joshua looked at it in awe. He had no idea what he was looking at.

“So how do I do that, how do I get to heaven?” the lady asked, blissfully unaware of the vortex above and behind her as it hovered in complete silence.



*“I don’t know,”* said Joshua, *“...just turn around and look up!”*

She looked him straight in the eye, her face now visibly relieved. After looking at him for a while, as if in deep thought, with gentle eyes and with deep sincerity, she eventually said:

“Thank you young man, may God bless you.”

She slowly turned around and looked up towards the vortex and into the light.

This might sound a bit cheesy, but she instantly started floating into the vortex. It happened effortlessly, all she needed to do was to look up. Joshua could sense her joy; her arms rose up high, her eyes fixated on the light shining from within the vortex, blissfully unaware that she had lifted off the ground. Just like a scene in a low budget movie, she kept on slowly rising up and up, with her light blue nightgown and long grey-white hair gently swirling in the wind, until she disappeared into the beautiful white light.

The vortex and light faded away, leaving Joshua alone, cold and naked in the darkened room...his big eyes wide open, his jaw this time dropped to his chest, his mind silent... again, gobsmacked.

If seeing was believing then Joshua had some tough questions to ask himself, as this was definitely not a case of believing is seeing.

He had had a taste of something that night that would have a decisive influence on the rest of his short life.