

First 4 chapters only – this was an experiment, to just sit down, without a story or idea and see what came out. This is the result – some people will hate it, some will like it, hopefully you will find it at least interesting...**read it if you dare....**

Droolings of a mad woman

Beneath the skin (formerly the Skin Beneath My Bones, which was formerly The Skin of My bones)

Chapter 1: *Invisible Eyes*

Somewhere I am without understanding of a wisdom that seeks my peripheral vision. I look to see, but see nothing. I long to hear, but hear only the silence of my soul. I dance a dance unseen by many. I know not the ways of the road, yet I follow. Invisible eyes on an invisible road.

Hmmm, I think I see now - that I see nothing and know even less. What is that? An abstract subtraction? Zero multiplied by Zero equals Zero. I don't see the point of the equation; others might say I've missed the point and I can't really argue since I've gone numb from the desensitisation. That means I've eaten too much emotion then got sick from the Heartburn. Burp! Excuse me, I repeated a bit of my left over calamity. What a shame because it wasn't that good the first time. Ha! And you loved me.

The me so lost I got small. You planted me and I grew, but my leaves could not shade you. You got burned. My branches grew - in all the wrong directions.

Sorry. Had I only known that the part of me that you knew would leave, I would have stayed longer.

Why is the beginning always the end? Hmmm, to eat emotion, not humble pie - perhaps pride on a breadstick. Stuff it all down into that bottomless hole of

infinite disaster. Hmm, yep, I *can* believe I ate the whole thing. I would have eaten more but there was nothing left - a few crumbs of self-pity. I could do without those. I drank some tears to wash it down but it only floated on top like a sea of self-doubt. I've looked into that sea too many times, my reflection among the sharks. Sorry boys, no meal for you tonight. I've drained the pool.

Blondie smiled and shook my twigs of imagination. She called, I hung up. I couldn't afford the charges. She rang again, but then I couldn't even be bothered to pick it up. What does that make me? An invalid. An emotional cripple? ... Let me hobble to the emergency room. When I get there, the nurse gave me a tissue.

I said, 'I couldn't walk to the phone and I hobbled into here. Why did you give me a tissue?'

She said, 'You should wipe your eyes.'

I said, 'Wipe my eyes?' I can barely walk and she is concerned about my eyes? 'Was it raining?' she asked.

'No, why?' I replied.

She paged a doctor and I became nervous.

'Please follow me,' she said. I did.

When the doctor came I was tired. 'You've had a long journey,' he said reviewing my chart.

'Have I? It didn't seem so long.'

'It never does with your type,' he said.

My type? I thought.

'We're going to have to run a few tests...does this hurt?'

'Nope can't feel a thing doc. Been that way for years.'

He smiled and said, 'Yeah, I know what you mean.' Then he left to blow smoke up someone else's ass. It said "NO SMOKING" everywhere I looked. They lied. Someone was always smoking. Sometimes I'd get dizzy from the invisible smoke, still deadly - you can choke to death on someone else's bullshit, then eventually it turns into ear muffs protecting you from the truth. The truth can hurt. Cripple you even.

I'd rather hear the bullshit than the piercing actuality of the truth. The doctor is back and he brought another. They travel in herd, these types. Always consulting each other, heads lowered, murmuring.

'This is Doctor So-n-So. She'd like to ask you a few questions in regards to your condition.'

'Could I have some painkiller first? Some reality and emotion are starting to creep into my awareness...'

'Oh, well we can't have that...by all means and how would you like that administered? Orally? Anally?...'

'Ventriloquially please,' I interrupted. And he gave the female doctor a Valium. Upon effect she began her questions.

'How long have you been like this?' she asked.

'Since I woke up tomorrow and remembered today.'

'Mmmm, I see...and do you remember yesterday?'

'Sometimes in my dreams I remember a day I'd forgotten, then it makes its appearance.'

'So you suffer from deja vu?'

'Yes, but not often,' I told her. 'More like I have bad cliché days.'

This seemed to make her laugh. The other doctor reminded her that laughing was forbidden. Shit, another emotional outlet they've suppressed. She winked and went on.

'Are you regular?'

'Absolutely not,' I replied. 'I refuse to be any such thing.'

'So you're not normal?'

'Well, sometimes I pretend to be, but I take pills you know...aphrodisiacs, and give them to all my friends. And well, they're fine with it.'

'Are you currently on medication?'

'I refuse to answer that. On the grounds I may incriminate myself. Look, I just came in here because I couldn't bother answering the phone when Blondie called...and now my legs...they just don't work properly.'

She turned to doctor 1 and mumbled, 'I thought she was in here because of her eyes?'

He in turn gave me a baffled look.

What? What is it they see that I cannot? You know if they'd just quit smoking and took off there ear muffs...

'We're just going to make a phone call...won't be a moment.'

And ****Poof**** they were gone. Leaving me to stare at a sterile ceiling that was stained with years.

I hate libraries and hospitals. They are both filled with tormented souls and suffering. People who can't see past their own covers. And I don't blame them. It's a sick world full of deluded fools. Don't know why I came here. For comfort? For the cold, complacent attitude that always awaits you in places with automatic doors - the doors that swoosh open so invitingly and then lock you in.

All those magazines that pry into your life with all those spying eyes looking up at you from the covers, they are crazy those magazine editors. Try to wrap you up with a hug of family and friends...make you believe you are one of them...then swat you like a fly, wrapped up in a bundle of lies. Deception, rejection - 'You'll never be one of us,' smiles the model, 'But buy the magazine and you're almost "in" the club. We'll tell you how to be beautiful...oh, oops, we forgot we can show you all the tips and tell you how to dress, but with that face, and that body what's the point? You couldn't sell shower curtain rings to a naked shower curtain salesman standing in a shower curtain less shower.'

They are not smiling they are laughing. Give me a magazine and a felt tip pen and I'll show you some creative writing! I'll make those anorexic babes sing off the pages. Put the lines under their noses and the needles in their arms. Ever wondered whatever happened to the beauty queen? She's really a high priced hooker, who pretends to be a model. But really just does sleazy ads on late night TV, dubbing a voice that glistens red lipstick to, 'Call me, call me now. What are you waiting for?'

Mmmm, let me think, a chainsaw to suddenly find your artery wall? All the fat cells you don't have to suddenly explode? A sudden rash case of canker sores to expel itself on your face?

How rude, I've been interrupted. The doctors are back.

'We had to take drastic measures. I know it seems harsh now in the light of day. But when you get home and have a good think about it, you'll understand that it was the only way.'

What are they on about? A curtain is drawn back. And there standing in the harsh light of reality and glaring fluorescent...BLONDIE.

'We will let you be alone. We will check back with you in a few moments. Take all the time you need.'

****Poof**** Doctors are gone and I am standing there, no make that lying there, looking at Blondie looking down on me.

'Hi,' I say.

'Hi, I tried to call,' she begins.

'How did you know I was here?'

'Oh, Jason told me.'

'Jason?'

*****Mental Note***** When time, think of ways to kill Jason using felt tip pens, hookers and magazines...and if time permits work in fluorescent lighting. Someone, who I can't see, has come into the room and is slowly sucking all the air out. I begin to take small gasps to try and conserve what air is left.

'Are you alright?' Blondie, the idiot, says.

I can't answer. It would take up too much valuable oxygen. Blondie. If Blondie would quit talking and breathing...how much time would that give me? Another four minutes? Three?

'Should I get a doctor?'

I nod. Good, she's gone. At least two minutes left. Should I write a will? Is there time to diet?

Doctor comes rushing in, Blondie behind him. Shit, there goes my air. What is the doctor doing? Where did he get that mask?

Hyperventilating?

'Take deep breathes. Try to calm down.'

Okay doc, you're right. I'M ONLY DIEING! But I'll try and calm down, for you. I want your job to be easier. This mask is shoving pure oxygen into my lungs. I could leap tall buildings in a single bound, not that I want to but I am sure I could! How much pure anything can my impure body take? I rip the mask off; my body needs impurities - like grass needs sunlight. What was this doctor thinking?

'Are you all right?' he asks.

Is everyone an idiot now? I think maybe I would like to reconsider my having come here. Can I go back now? Instead of deciding to come here and save myself, can I throw myself off a tall ravine? Into a ferocious ocean perhaps, beating itself ravishingly against a craggy rock coast?

I say, 'I'm fine, much better now.'

'You're really sick, aren't you?' Blondie says.

One more stupid question from bimbo here and we're going in - that's right, prep pre-op. What seems to be the problem? Exploratory surgery. What will we be looking for? A *BRAIN*. Any sign of intellectual life. I know we've been looking for it out in space. It's not space I'm worried about, it's Blondie. Maybe someone from outer space took her brain, but I for one am quite certain she has none.

Chapter 2: *Phabier*

(pronounced Fobber which rhymes with slobber, sort of)

Where is that mahogany, macramé, macadamia nut teapot holder my mother made me?

'Is anything wrong?' Phabier asks.

'Is there anything that isn't wrong?' I chide.

I busy myself making breakfast, which consists of one piece of slightly burnt toast. I throw it in the blender. I toss in a glass of milk, an apple (stem and all), a half a tablespoon of Promite, which is a milder version of the Australian Vegemite, and two heaped spoonfuls of Life Extension vitamin mix. I get the butter out then glance guiltily at Phabier who scrunches up his nose, in that dragon way of his and shakes his head repulsively. I put the butter back, turn on the blender and watch everything flip into oblivion.

When did I first meet Phabier? Who can say for sure? One doesn't remember the actual event, if you can say it was an event at all. I just remember him always being there. Even before I saw him, I knew he was there. Well, I guess I can't really remember him *always* being there. There was a time when things were different than today, but it was so long ago it was somebody else's life. He snuck in really. He just didn't appear out of nowhere. He sort of merged into my consciousness, first a leg, then an arm. He was murky at first, unclear, like something you see out the corner of your eye, then when you look full on there is nothing there and you wonder what it was you thought you saw. Then one day, one minute, one hour he was just there slunched over sitting in my green chair smiling at me.

He says he has always been with me, I just hadn't seen him until then.

How can I describe Phabier? It's not an easy thing. He appears bigger than a normal sized man but only from a distance. When I get close to him, he is smaller than me in width and height, but when I sit across the room from him and sip my tea, he seems enormous and it defies logic how he is able to sit in that chair. He told me once he was a direct descendant of the mythical dragon.

Which isn't hard to believe when you see him. He looks like a cross between a gargoyle and one of those demon monsters you see in bad horror films. You would think I would have been horrified and frightened at our first meeting (whenever that was) years ago. But just the opposite happened. I was at home with him instantly. He told me once he had injected me with a serum in a dream, an "Anti-Phabier drug," which would enable me not to fear his presence. It must have worked because I don't. It is hard to say what Phabier is to me or me to him. A normal conversation with Phabier would be something like this:

'Why can I see you and nobody else can?' I ask.

'Because you want to.'

'I thought dragons were really just dinosaurs.'

'A common misinterpretation.'

'So, dragons were not dinosaurs?'

'That is correct. Dragons were not dinosaurs.'

'So, what happened to dinosaurs?'

'Nothing happened to them.'

'Well, you don't see them anymore.'

'You don't see dragons either.'

Today though, I was irritable. The whole Blondie episode had me frazzled and I wasn't in the mood for Phabier. He never helped. I don't really know what he is or why he's here, but I am pretty sure he has never helped, not once, with anything.

'Why is it again, you blend your food?' Phabier queried.

'Because it's easier.'

'For your digestion?'

'For my indigestion,' I say between sips of my breakfast and sips of my tea.

I poured Phabier a cup of tea and watched him with good humour try and pick up a cup he could not touch. Once he went with me to Marcia's house. She was going to read my tarot cards, but I could not stop laughing long enough for her to concentrate. Phabier was trying desperately to disturb the fish in Marcia's fish tank. Over and over he swung his arms and kicked at the tank. Not a ripple, not

one fish noticed, but I think I ruptured something laughing so hard. Marcia has never asked to read my cards again.

I finished breakfast and still felt hungry.

'I'm still hungry. Are you hungry?'

'No.'

'If you were hungry what would you eat?'

'Fruit from the tree of knowledge.'

'Is it any good?'

'Quite satisfying.'

'Want an apple?'

I tossed him an apple, he made to catch it, but it passed right through him and hit the wall instead. I laughed.

'You have a good time at my expense.'

'No, no, it's not that you can't catch it that amuses me; it's the fact that you even try. I thought you would have known better by now. What do they eat in Ethiopia?'

Phabier is from the Country of Ethiopia and lives in the State of Grace.

'Bread, and other items that you have. Just in another form.'

'You ever wish you could eat what I eat?'

'I would like to break bread with you, but not for the sake of eating your food.'

'That would be nice. Us, sharing a meal together instead of you watching me eat all the time. Maybe you could take me to Ethiopia with you some time?'

'That would not be possible.'

'Against the rules, eh? Do you have a set of rules or just make them up as you go along?' I snapped.

'You *are* in a foul mood today.'

'I know. Sorry. It's this damn woman, she won't quit bothering me. I had to go to the hospital yesterday.'

'Was anything wrong?'

'Yeah, she found me. And quit acting like you don't know any of this. I know how the system works.'

'Yes, Blondie is it? She is attracted to your energy.'

'I had a hard time getting out of bed this morning - what energy?'

'It's not *that* energy I am speaking of. It's the energy that surrounds you. Your life energy, of which you have an unlimited supply. She is now in your gravitational pull, like a planet around the sun.'

'Well, get rid of her. I don't want her revolving around me. She's already put me in the hospital once.'

'Phone phobia back?'

'No ... Oh! You know already...why bother asking me?'

'I thought we were over that?'

'Maybe I should eat a phone.'

I had a phone phobia, or should I say I had a fear of answering a ringing phone. Or better yet a ringing phone, when I knew who was ringing and did not want to talk to them phobia? Yes, that would be more accurate.

But I also have, among other problems in the medicine chest, a fear of spiders, commonly referred to as Arachnophobia. Phabier has been helping me to eliminate both phobias in his own warped way.

"Maybe I should eat a phone", is a direct insult to Phabier in regards to one, obviously his phone therapy didn't work as I am avoiding ringing phones again and two, he has been telling me I will not overcome my fear of spiders until I eat one. Hence, the sarcastic comment, "Maybe I should eat a phone."

Which brings me to the vegetarianism argument, which I am sure I will never get resolved.

I was a strict vegetarian, no red meat. It was me, a part of who I was. The argument came about, one day out of nowhere. It was probably something to do with what I was having that day for lunch, a blend of alfalfa sprouts, ginger root, barley nuts, pecans, broccoli and one chicken thigh.

One should note that Phabier can only visit me between the hours of 11:00am and 3:00pm, as his so called "laws" dictate - more on this later but suffice to say it is usually around my lunchtime.

Anyway, the visit started out well enough.

'Why do they call this a chicken thigh?' I asked.

'Perhaps because it is a thigh from a chicken,' Phabier responded matter of factly.

'Smart-ass. No, really. Here is a chicken leg.' I said, showing him the leg.

'Now if my memory of anatomy is correct it should follow that this thick part of the leg is the thigh, yet...' I held up the cooked chicken carcass and pointed at the missing part of the chicken being used for my lunch, 'this is what we call the "thigh," it's the ass is what it is. I guess we can't go calling something we eat a chicken ass.'

I then proceeded in my best British accent, 'Yes, I'll take two chicken breasts, a couple of legs and one chicken butt, please.'

Then back to my normal voice, 'Although we do have "rump" as in rump roast. We could call it a chicken rump I suppose.'

'You only eat chicken don't you?' Phabier piped.

'No, I eat vegetables, fruit, milk, cheese, beans...'

'I mean meat. I have never seen you eat red meat.'

'I eat turkey, chicken, fish. That is my meat.'

'Why only these things?'

'Because I don't like red meat, I don't enjoy eating it.'

'Do not lie. I can smell a lie, even half-lies leave an odour.'

'And I stink?'

'Yes.'

'Okay, but promise not to laugh or think I'm stupid.'

Phabier raised his right webbed-claw and placed his left one over his heart. 'I promise.'

'I can't eat anything that can look me in the eye and understand me...It's like eating a friend.'

'So, eating red meat reminds you of eating a human?'

'No, it's deeper than that. I actually feel closer to animals than humans.'

'So, you would rather eat a human than an animal?'

'No, of course not, I just feel closer to animals, connected, you know?'

'It is noble but not really justified.'

'How can you say what is right for me? It is how I feel. I cannot eat flesh. The flesh that is part of me, diverse in all creation.'

'Ahh, I see. It is spiritual nobility you seek?'

'I seek nothing out of it. If I seek anything, it is a release from the burden of eating flesh that is like mine.'

'So, it is not carnivorousness that is distasteful, but cannibalism?'

'No, that's not it - maybe partly. Cows and pigs don't eat me...so why should I eat them? They don't wear me for clothes, they don't make necklaces out of my bones.'

'Maybe if they did it would be in celebration, to celebrate their sacrifice for your hunger.'

'And I suppose you're going to say butchering a small lamb has some sort of spiritual connection. Well, I don't buy it. It's a baby lamb for God's sake. We don't need to kill it. There is other stuff we can eat and spare its life. Why does man find so much pleasure in killing? It makes us such savages. I won't partake. I refuse! Besides you're not human, you have no idea how it feels to be repulsed by your own flesh.'

'And you have no idea how it feels to be a lamb,' Phabier responded.

'Tell me, Phabier, does the lamb have a soul? You have told me much regarding the spirit and the soul. Does the lamb have a bigger self? Can it become something more than it is?'

'Yes, I know where you are going with this. But suffice to say that you are, when you eat it, fulfilling its goal to some respect. You are helping it's Bigger Self...you transform it. All things are givers and receivers.'

'You mean killers, thieves and their victims,' I mumble.

'No, I mean a mutual harmony in nature that only works towards one goal - Creating.'

'What am I creating by eating a baby sheep? A lot of misery on the part of the poor lamb, and as far as transforming, I'd rather be a frolicking lamb in a field somewhere than another flush of sewage down a drain.'

'Then I am afraid you've missed the point.'

'And I am afraid you can't relate to the question. Not really, you don't eat real food and you don't know what it's like to be me, to feel the way I do. Maybe I can't explain my thoughts and feelings in words so you can understand. I don't want that lamb to sacrifice for me, I never asked it to, I don't want it to. Not when I can eat something else and it can live.'

'But it won't live any longer because you eat chicken.'

'Are you trying to ruin me completely? Is that your aim here?'

'When you go to the store and you see all the meat in the meat department, the lamb, the pig, the cow: It's already dead. By not eating it, you are wasting it. Now the animal has died in vain, it can not fulfil its higher objective.'

'Its higher objective is to be eaten by me? I don't buy it.'

'Yes, I know. And in doing so you are not saving one animal from slaughter.'

'Yes, I am. If everyone stopped eating red meat, they would stop killing and everyone could live out a nice life, quite nicely.'

'No one will ever stop. It is natural. It's a natural process. You are trying to feel as if the animal was human...it is not. But you eat it and it can see through your eyes and know what it is like to feel human. To have a knowledge it could not obtain otherwise.'

Phabier continued, 'An analogy: the wind blows though the trees though the trees do not ask it to. An apple tree bears fruit and surrenders it. Why? Because it has to. It would become fruit laden and weighted down and would surely die. It must give to live. When you eat of its fruit, you do it a favour, you waste not the fruit of its labour and in turn it provides you with healthy essentials that your body needs. And you do the apple a favour, one that only you can provide. You allow it to be human, to merge with your consciousness, to feel human. When it is eaten by a bird, it learns to fly, when eaten by a worm it knows what it is like to live in the dirt and soil that feeds its mother tree. You provide it with knowledge it could not otherwise obtain.'

'But an animal is not an apple,' I respond. 'It can think and feel already. It can know pain. I don't want it's suffering on my head. Apples and animals are different. You can't compare a pig with an apple surely?'

'Nature may come in many guises but the process is the same. The same laws apply. You fight nature but nature will win in the end.'

'Probably, but I still can't eat red meat.'

But I must admit his point pushed my argument's limits. I may reconsider my finding after I digest all the information. Until then, I fight nature. It's my nature to fight. It's as simple as that. The phone was ringing. I was so lost in my thoughts I didn't even notice it until Phabier mentioned it.

'Are you going to answer it?'

'Uh? Ah, no. Not right now, maybe later,' I said.

'Avoidance will get you nowhere.'

'Yeah, well at least it puts off the inevitable.'

'Which is?' Asked Phabier.

'Oh, you know...pain.'

'How is being friends with this person painful?'

I fiddled with an ironing board, though no clothes were wrinkled. I plugged in the iron, added water and watched it grow steam.

'You say she's attracted to my energy. Any way I can turn it off momentarily, just until she's gone? Then we can turn it back on again.'

'No, it's not a flashlight. You can't merely turn yourself on or off.'

'Well, okay then. If she's stuck in my orbit, my gravitational pull, like the earth around the sun, couldn't I knock her off her trajectory? Yeah, couldn't I have a big meteorite smack right into her? She'd be knocked right out of my atmosphere.'

'Yes, you could do that, but then you'd probably have to go before the Counsel.'

The Counsel of Weights and Measures? Oh, God no! They are worse than the Committee: The Committee of Reason and Impeccable Logic. I never want to go in front of them again. Those damn Do-Gooders, won't let you get away with anything.

'Oh God, don't want to do that!' I reply.

They would hear my case and I could put on a good one, show how I didn't need Blondie, how her influence in my life would probably be brief, to slight, to nothing at all. Perhaps I could argue that she would even have been a bad or negative influence on me. She has no brain, so no intellectual gain could be involved. She's pretty, okay; I'll give her that. But attraction is deeper than skin. It must preclude an anonymity with "The Archives." The Archives being: that she is either every other woman I have had before which only led to torrential suffering, agony and pain. Or she is none of the other women I have had before and therefore can only lead to torrential suffering, agony and pain.

'Nope, you can't do it. I mean you could hit her with a meteorite. Which, if I am to accurately translate your meaning, you are saying you would become friends with her knowing how she feels about you and then introduce her to one of your "desperate to get laid" friends, even if you kid yourself that you are doing them both a favour. The Counsel would never approve.'

'I think I could put up a good defence.'

'No, you couldn't and then they would find you guilty and you would be sentenced to have a meteorite of equal or greater strength hit you, probably throwing you out of the trajectory of the one person you will, as you grow older, decide was probably the "One."'

'I hate the Counsel.'

'They are a necessity.'

'They are prejudice and brutal.'

'What are you so afraid of?'

'I'm not afraid! I just don't like her.'

'Because she likes you?'

I don't reply.

'Just out of curiosity. Who was going to be the meteorite?'

'Mmm, I don't know. Marilyn, Josie ... may be Carmen.'

'All ex-lovers of yours, interesting.'

'Well, she wouldn't be bored with Josie. Marilyn would mother her to death, and Carmen...well, I don't know what about Carmen.'

'You still have feelings for Carmen?' Phabier prodded.

'Feelings? I feel nothing for any of them...'

'I sense a "but" coming on...'

Smiling, I continued, 'But...Carmen and I had a lot of nice memories. She was more than the rest. She dared to peek in. Most don't even know where to look.'

'And what did she see?'

'Not much, but enough. Enough to send her running scared to death into Marilyn.'

'What ever happened to those two?'

'They both slept with Josie. Not together mind you, but separately at different times behind each others back.'

'How long did that go on?'

'Long enough for them all to compare notes about me and just long enough for each to find out about the other. So, not long really. I mean after all they are all women, and women can sense another woman as long as her own legs are closed.'

Phabier groaned.

'Good ol' Josie. Always moving. So much going on in her life. How can anyone hear with all that noise, all that constant commotion? She moves so fast in all directions at once, I am surprised she doesn't run into herself.'

Chapter 3: *Three Miles to Countdown*

Absolute Resolution

Narcoleptic Insomnia

The world, our planet is aligned with other planets that revolve around the Sun. We are a ball, among other balls, revolving around a Bright Ball. We don't know it, we can't feel it or see it happening. We can see its effect, but it means not much to us. It doesn't change our ordinary lives much, not really. The things we cannot see are the things that affect us most and yet everyday we work so hard to buy one more thing.

When I die, I don't want to be buried or burned to cinders. I want to be mummified and placed in a tomb, like an Egyptian Pharaoh. I want to be placed in a secret compartment locked away millions of years under the sand. I want there to be gold, silver, gems, opals and stones placed in there with me. Some herbs and spices along with a mummified dove and maybe a lamb. What I couldn't have in life, I want in death.

And in a million years when they discover my crypt and use scientific DNA analysis to discover how "new" I am, in comparison to the really old mummies, it will baffle them. I will be some unsolved mystery they'll write movies and books about.

Wherever I am I will laugh. Even if I am one of the scientists taking part in the discovery, even then a part of me will laugh at being baffled at my own death. According to Phabier, the dove and lamb will laugh also.

I once asked Phabier what he does when he is not with me. I know his laws only allow him to be with me for a limited time, so I was curious as to what he does with the rest of his time. Sometimes he is very calculated with his answers, almost as if he has prepared them ahead of time, knowing I would ask. This was one of those times. He can also be vague and confusing. He was these things as well.

Apparently, in Ethiopia, or wherever he is from, his laws or instructions are fairly explicit as to what he can or cannot say to me. In other words, there is

information available to him that is available to me. And there is information available to him, but not available to me and of which he is not allowed to pass on to me. I have hit walls with him before, gotten into conversations with him about things or items that he simply isn't allowed to talk about with me. He is not able or willing to divulge any of his known secrets either. I know these things and it is a game I play to try and work my way around the walls he has so constructively built. I have yet to actually break through his fortress, but it doesn't stop me from trying.

I usually get responses like, 'I can't say for sure. It is beyond your comprehension.' Or the famous Phabier line, 'Of these things I know but can not reveal.' Also, the 'Of these things I cannot speak. Do not jeopardise my coming here with questions I cannot answer.'

Another famous line I hear often, 'I know not of these things.' I get that one a lot. I'm not sure if he just says that or if in fact he really doesn't know. As far as I know Phabier has never told me a lie, and it just may be that he cannot lie. I don't know, but I do believe that if he cannot lie, then he must tell the truth and this weakness may be his very own downfall.

For when it comes time for me to break down the barriers between Dragons and Lesbians, both mythical caricatures, he and I have shared a past both dark, fascinating, frightening and bizarre; and we have spent many long hours being mysterious and magical, but when the time comes for me to break through his barriers, the fact that he cannot lie will be the key to unlocking the door of his secrets.

'FE FIE FO FUM, I smell the blood of a Lesbian!'

'Phabier, that's not funny. I cut myself!'

'Hurry, put it in an urn and burn it.'

'Burn it? Gross...I'm going to put a bandaid on it.'

'And waste all that good blood?'

'Good blood? A part of me is dripping out onto the carpet, a very vital part I might add. I need every drop. So, if you don't mind I'm going to stop seeping out now.'

'It is indeed yourself and you are indeed wasting it! If wasting is for wanting...'

He then got down and looked closely at my blood on the carpet, making me very worried about him, but I was in crisis.

'You must burn it. Let it become one with the ether. It is very significant. Will look good for you in the Book of the Just.'

'What is wrong with you? You want me to eat red meat and burn my own blood. Something is wrong with you.'

'Everything I tell you is the truth.'

I finally managed to bandage my wound.

'Yes, but you don't tell me everything.'

Then I witnessed a very strange thing indeed. Probably one of the weirdest things I'd ever seen with my eyes. Phabier lifted my blood up out of the carpet. It was but a few drops. I probably wouldn't even have bothered to wipe it up it was so unnoticeable. How he was able to do this I still don't know, as he is unable to *touch* anything. He in fact, didn't touch it, but rather it rose out of the carpet and I could tell by his concentration on the matter, that he was doing it by means of his great desire to do so. And what he did next was nothing less than miraculous. The small dots of blood separated into four smaller dots and then Phabier breathed them in. He took one big inhale, and then he calmly and softly exhaled in my direction. I didn't see anything come out, but rather I felt it. Somehow he gave me back the blood. I don't know how, but he did. It gave me a bit of a rush. I felt a bit high at that moment. Not because it was a side effect of what he did or that he changed my blood somehow (because he didn't), but because it was one of the nicest things anyone had ever done for me.

'Thank you, Phabier.'

'You are quite welcome. I am quite serious about the importance of what you call blood. It is more than a red liquid that keeps your body alive. It is your Spirit, your spirit in physical reality. If you are going to waste it then at least burn it so it may return more closely back to its original source. It will of course come back to you but I bypassed the evaporation and condensation process - you merely got it back sooner.'

'Well, whatever. Thank you, it was very nice. Phabier, what are you really? Why do you come here and spend your time with me? Do you have to for some reason? Are you working off some sort of debt? Is this your job? Why are you here?'

'I am your Advisor,' answered Phabier.

'You're my Teacher then?' I queried further.

'I am your Advisor. You are your own Teacher and your own pupil,' he replied.

'What is Sebastian?'

'He is your Guardian Angel.'

'Do I need protecting?'

'Of this I can not say.'

'Who is Infinian?'

'He is your Spirit Guide.'

'Where am I going that I need a Spirit Guide?'

'One is always going somewhere.'

'What is the difference between an Angel and a Spirit. I never understood that. Aren't they the same thing?'

'Yes, sort of. Spirit is that which is non-physical.'

'So, an Angel is Spirit?'

'Yes, but not all spirits are Angels.'

'What is an Angel?'

'You have what you call military forces, army, navy, marines...'

'Ah, I get it...Angels are like the Army of Spirits.'

'Something like that. Sebastian is a Guardian Angel, but there are many different types of Angels.'

'And Infinian, he's what...like a travel agent?'

'No, he would be somewhat like a teacher, so much is lost in the translation of physical and spirit. You are spirit before you are born and you return after you are no longer physical. However, there is a constant cooperation between the two spheres. He is like an interpreter between the two lands. You are not a foreigner to either land; you simply cannot translate the language between them.'

Therefore, Infinian helps guide you, helps you do a lot of physical things you would otherwise not be able to do. All, and I repeat ALL knowledge that has ever been known can be accessed. Ever wonder how you can tear apart a computer and put it back together when you have never done so before? All, and I repeat ALL things physical were first in spirit form. Nothing exists that wasn't first spiritual. Your scientists call this the law of matter and anti-matter. So, you are a marvel of electronic manoeuvring although you have never taken an electronic course. Many geniuses get their inspiration from the ability to tap into the hidden spiritual spring of knowledge. You should consult Infinian more.

'I have never seen Infinian or Sebastian. I did wonder about that, how sometimes I just know things that I have never learned. Not sure, but I think that would mess up our whole system here. If we didn't have to go to school and we could just tap into some Spiritual Library. I think it would mess us all up. Plus, I mean, if everyone knew everything we'd all be the same wouldn't we?'

'Well, I am almost certain that no human being could obtain all knowledge. Your lobes are far too small to disseminate all that information. Your brain is not equipped to hold and store it, to make so much information readily available. However, because everyone is different, their focus is different, you only learn what is interesting to you specifically. All knowledge is inherently interpretive as well; you would be amazed at the diversity of your species. Ask ten people to draw the same picture and you would get amazingly different pictures - none I might add that would be wrong.'

'Are you Spirit?'

'Technically, I am Amphabian.'

'What do you do when you are not with me?'

I could be wrong and excuse me if I am, but I believed I had just about seen everything until I saw a Dragon blush. If it's possible (and I'm not saying it is or isn't) I believe Phabier blushed. The pinkish oracles around his two large nostrils turned blue and he couldn't seem to look at me for a moment. I am sure this was for a Dragon, the equivalent to a human blushing.

'Is this embarrassing, me asking you this?'

'Absolutely not. I just wasn't expecting it so soon.'

'The question or the blushing?'

'Blushing? I do not blush.'

'Sure looked like a blush.'

'It is hard to say for sure if you will understand,' he said changing the subject, 'But I will try and explain the best I can. Every notion, every thought, every idea, every choice you ever had became real. Somewhere in a place very much like this you lived out all those thoughts. You followed them through to the end. The impetus that gave them life was the original thought or the choice. For instance, you went to the store because you wanted to buy salt. So, the impetus was the original thought, "I want salt." You may have never had the thought so there is a You that never wanted salt. An original thought is only such that it implies an action and at the same time implies a non-action or not existing thought in the first place. Are you following me?'

'No, but continue.'

'Okay, that part's a bit tough. But let's pretend then that this Original thought, that you need salt, pushed you to go to the store, again a thought that implies a non-thought. There is a you that didn't want salt, never thought about wanting salt and didn't get salt. There is a you that thought about salt but didn't get the urge to go to the store. The fact that you did go to the store implies that somewhere there is a you that didn't go to the store. Get it?'

'Sort of...not really.'

'Well, that's okay, you don't really need to know that, but I thought some background on original thought might help.'

'It's okay. I sort of get it.'

'Well, that's a start. So now off you go to the store and on the way to the store you pass people on their way to somewhere that will enable them to have ideas, thoughts and choices. Some of the people you pass as strangers are really people that the You that didn't go to the store or want salt, had over for dinner...'

'I wonder if some of them wanted salt?' I interrupted.

'Yeah, maybe.'

'But if I am out getting salt, how can these people be having dinner with me? What, am I having a dinner party? You know I don't particularly care for social events.'

'I am using it as an example okay? And the you that is out getting salt, passing the people having dinner with you, are all people who exist somewhere else.'

'So, they are the same people or they aren't the same people?'

'That's very complicated, but for the sake of the example let's say they are the same people.'

'Okay.'

'So, now there is an uncountable amount of things that can happen to you on the way to the store to get the salt.'

'I could get hit by a car.'

'Yes, you could but Sebastian would probably not allow it. But yes, it could happen.'

'How is Sebastian?' I interrupted again.

'Please, let me finish.'

'Okay, okay.' But I can't help but interrupt again. 'There's a million possible things that might happen. I might stop and give a woman directions to a restaurant. I might stop and get a paper, which would mean that somewhere I did the exact opposite, and did not buy a paper. Would this be the same me that didn't buy salt? Who knows, but I see what you're saying.'

'Good, okay. But you're wrong on the number...'

'What number?'

'Millions. And "might happen". Nothing *'maybe'* happens. Everything does happen and the possibilities are limitless. No number can signify something so immeasurable.'

'I see my mistake. So, what do all these possibilities have to do with what you do when you're not with me?'

'I am always with you. When I am not here, I am somewhere else with you.'

'That's nice. So, when you are not with me you're really with me. Can all mes see you?'

'No, not all, some.'

'How can you be with so many mes? There would simply not be enough yous, according to you, to go around.'

'As you are more than you thought you were, I am not all I seem either.'

'So, there would be an uncountable number of Phabiers running around taking care of an uncountable number of mes?'

'Yes and no, but the biggest difference between the uncountable mes and the uncountable yous, is I am all of the mes on a conscious level and know and speak and exchange information with all of the mes that exist. Where as you can do none of these things.'

'You could teach me! I bet I am a doctor somewhere. Ha! Wouldn't that be great if she went to school and I got all the knowledge? Wow. Please teach me, Phabier. How great would that be? I would be the smartest person alive if I knew all the stuff that all the uncountable mes know!'

'Of these things I know, but cannot reveal.'

'Why? Why can you tell me all about these other mes and the fact that you have other yous, which you talk to and pass information back and forth? Do you ever get together and talk about me?'

'You are always the topic.'

'Well, it's not fair. There must be a You somewhere that will tell me how to talk to other mes.'

'Yes, there is.' Phabier said grinning.

'Who?'

'The inconceivable me,' replied Phabier.

I don't like what I can't control. Many of my fears come from this statement. I don't like answering a phone when I can't control the outcome - who it will be, what they will want or what they will want to tell me. I don't like spiders. And I really don't like knowing the fact that I know something somewhere else but am not allowed to know it just for that reason. And I really didn't like the fact that I

knew Phabier could help me, but refused to do so. Why can't I be the me that never knew there were other mes? Why can't I be the me who knows about other mes and can exchange information with other mes? See, I know what Phabier was saying, I understood it perfectly, may be too well. Because, if there is a person, another me that can't do something according to the way it works, there is a me that Can do it. Why couldn't I be the Me that doesn't meet Blondie and lives a happy and fruitful life?

'You can't be something you're not,' answered Phabier when I asked him that last question.

'That's exactly what I am! You told me so yourself. You said if there is a Me that got salt, then that implies there is a me that didn't get salt and vice versa. I want to be the Me that never met Blondie, and the me whose universe she didn't get sucked into.'

'But you are that person. You already met her. You cannot undo that.'

'Yes, I can and you told me how to do it.'

'When?'

'When you told me about time, and how it doesn't exist. That life implies death. I am dead and alive at the same time and that 'ing' on the end of words is past tense even as I say it. And being such, I think there must be a way to go back and undo all the "ed" words, because really "ing" = "ed" and if "ing really does equal "ed" then where am I really? I am neither dead nor alive, I am neither alive nor dead and there *is* a way to go back and you know it. You're just not telling me.'

'Why is this Blondie so important to you? Is she worth risking everything to avoid? Is she so terrible a person?'

'I can't bear losing myself again, Phabier. I may never come back if I let her in. I may lose you, my memories of you, Sebastian, Infinian. She could take all you guys away from me and what would I have then? I would be one of them. I want to be one of you.'

'You are one of them.'

'I am not. They live in a cold, synthetic world of paper cuts and computers. I live here with you and I like it here.'

'Freedom is not a place to find. It is the You being unfettered, unrestrained, glorified in your own uniqueness. You are so afraid of being average, being considered "normal," that you never show the real you and in doing so never fly, never surge, never know freedom that is yours, your rightful heritage. You are human, capable of a full range of emotion, including love - prone to error, but also prone to learn from your errors, to grow and become a fully satisfied person. You deserve to be that. In surrendering to who you are, you let the freedom to be who you are, free. You shackle yourself to a freedom you cannot attain, you are a slave to your dreams. The bigger dream is your life, not what we have here. I will never leave you, though you may not see me always. Sebastian, Infinian, the Counsel and the Committee - we are always here. You will feel our presence and see our outcome. You know we exist, this is more than most of your race.'

'I am not normal.'

'You are right. You're exceptionally unique. There is no other you, not anywhere, not even in any parallel universe. But all the yous come together in your Soul. They all look into the same mirror and see themselves as all one and the same. I can't make you understand that. You don't really need to know more. Your personality is so vibrant. And you waste it on me. You could share so much with Blondie, your country, your world. That is almost as sad as wasting your spirit on the carpet. How bad can it be to let her in? She may not even like what she sees. Then again maybe she will.'

'She would never understand about us.'

'I think you are more afraid that she might.'

Chapter 4: Jasmine

The Oracle

Sticks and Stones

Build an Altar. An altar? Is this going to make me a better person? Might as well ask me to build a pyramid or a tee-pee. An altar, a bloody altar! What is an altar for? For worship, for sacrifice, isn't that what they used altars for? For strapping some helpless animal or virgin or something and using some sacred rites, they would sacrifice them to the gods. This goes beyond the lamp post. Phabier wants an altar, let him build it. What would I worship anyway? I don't care, I'm not doing it. The phone is ringing. I was so mad about the altar I didn't even notice my hand finding the receiver and picking it up. It was an automatic response.

'Hello,' I mumbled angrily as I quickly picked it up.

Bloody hell, it's Blondie. I'd done so well to avoid her all week. I thought for sure she'd been demagnetised from my galaxy, yet here she was on the other end of the line.

'How are you feeling?' she asked.

My legs suddenly hurt and I felt dizzy. I sat down hard in Phabier's favourite green chair.

'Not so well,' I replied.

'Hadn't seen you around, thought you might be out sick still,' she said.

An uncomfortable silence ensued. I could think of nothing to say and secretly hoped she would take this as it was intended; that I didn't find her at all interesting and that this "uncomfortable pause" was an excuse to hang up and save us both from being eternally caught up in a swirling mix of emotion. She disrupted my calculated swirl.

'Well, I was wondering if maybe when you're feeling better we could have a coffee or something?' she gleefully chirped.

'I only drink coffee on Sundays,' I replied unenthusiastically.

'Well, we could make it a Sunday or you could drink something else, but it's up to you. Hey, I know you're not up to it but why don't you give me a call when you're ready?'

She had put the ball in my court, my next answer would be the deciding factor between the next phase of our relationship, if there would even be a next phase. 'You know, I... ah... , right now is just not a good time for me. I have a lot of things going on. A lot of things on my plate. Jason wants me to do a rewrite on *Illinois*.'

She quickly responded that she understood and then it was over. So fast, so final, so complete. I looked into the receiver as I listened to the dead dial tone. It was like a telescope, as if I could see Blondie on the other end, feeling dejected and sad. Then I placed the phone on its cradle and totally immersed myself in thoughts of Blondie meeting someone else who would sweep her off her feet and make her live happily ever after. The "someone else" being anyone but me. I suddenly felt enlightened, having decided I had done the best thing for both of us. I was a hero really and deserved to celebrate my accomplishment. I hadn't given in to foolish human weakness, like sexual attraction. I stood firm on solid ground that would leave me "life as is" - No Blondie complications. I suddenly craved chocolate and peanut butter, "two great tastes that taste great together." I would have done a wicked blender job but had neither ingredient. I could have gone to the store but then I thought of all the people I might pass on the way to the corner market, who would be going to a dinner party of mine, that I wasn't invited to. I decided to stay home and in doing so, I had the satisfaction of knowing that somewhere there was a Me that did go get that Reese's Peanut Buttercup. And I wondered if the Me who went to the store would have been the same Me who went to coffee with Blondie.

And there I was before the Counsel. Shit! No notice or anything. Just there. They came and took their respective seats. The Counsel of Weights and Measures. What had I done? Did I not give enough money to the man with his

hand out? Had I forgotten to smile at the waitress at Denny's when she gave me that extra spoon?

You know, I never really noticed until just now that the whole Counsel was made up of strange looking characters. I knew they were odd, but I never recognised a pattern until just now. Either I am getting too used to coming here or I have always been too petrified before that it never occurred to me that they are Zodiac - they are! The Counsel of Weight and Measures is run by the Zodiac! How could I have missed it before? I never thought they were *real* - real entities that walked and moved about. Yet here they were being seated in, well, by their respective elements: fire, earth, water and air. First came Aries. A big horned Ram took his seat at the end of the table, followed by two female twins housed in one dress, then Taurus and Cancer. A seat was left vacant between Cancer and Libra. That figures, Libra was the Leader of the Counsel. Then Virgo, Scorpio and Sagittarius made their way to their seats. Looks like Aquarius and Capricorn were arguing over something, and finally Pisces wriggled in. Leo, my sign, seemed to be missing. Libra began to bring the house into order.

I thought Phabier would have been there. I looked around, then when I looked back, there he was sitting beside me.

'Oh Phabier, I am so glad to see you. I am in trouble aren't I?' I asked, hoping for some comfort.

'You just had to do it didn't you?' Phabier asked somewhat annoyed.

'Do what? I...'

Libra interrupted by pounding a gavel.

'This procession will now begin.' Proclaimed Libra in a booming voice.

'What have I done Phabier? What have I done to offend the Counsel?' I whispered.

'Seems we are missing a Counsel Member,' Libra said, noting the vacant chair at the Counsel table, then glanced in my direction, 'Who is representing you?' Was she talking to me?

'Ummm, Phabier, Honourable Counsel Chairman.' I said turning to Phabier.

Libra turned to Phabier, 'You will rise when addressing this Counsel.'

Phabier rose and introduced himself to the Counsel.

'I regret to inform the Council that I will not be representing the Akleese, as I advised her not to do what she did. Therefore, I am a witness for the prosecution,' Phabier announced.

What! Phabier has betrayed me?

'I can't believe you would do this to me, after all we've been through together. You're going to lead me to the hounds,' I said to him.

He leant over and whispered to me, 'It won't be that bad. I did tell you not to.'
Not to what?

A hush came over the crowded Counsel Chamber. I turned and looked and beheld a beautiful creature. It was Leo, my star sign. Everyone in the chamber except the other Zodiacs stood and bowed with honour to this regal creature making its way through the crowd. I could almost hear trumpets sounding in the far distance, and then he stood before me, this half man, half lion - his presence almost overwhelming. His body was that of an Adonis, covered in a shimmering gold tan until you reached the neck and then it became a majestic blend of animal and man, fur and skin. The head was that of a great lion. His large cat eyes blinked at me as they bore through me. All he said before he took his seat next to me was, 'Don't shame me.'

I sat and looked questioningly at Phabier.

'Since I can't represent you at this hearing,' Phabier explained in hushed tones, 'He is your representative by default.'

'Oh,' was all I could manage.

Libra began the procession again, 'Here yea, here yea. Let this...' but was interrupted again as another commotion took over the chamber.

The doors were flung open and I (another Me) walked in. Two Greek Guardsmen had me by either arm and led me blindfolded to the seat left vacant by Leo at the table of the Counsel.

Taurus seemed a bit put out by all the disturbances. 'I do hope this is all of the surprises.'

Phabier leaned over and explained, 'Since Leo is your representative, he can't be on the Counsel. You have been brought in as an objective juror. Blindfolded, of course, so that You can not know it is yourself that is being prosecuted.'

'Well, that's good,' I whispered back, 'I should be on my side.'

Phabier just shrugged his shoulders and leaned back in his chair.

'What say you as to the defence of Your Akleese, Representor?' Libra questioned.

Leo stood up and walked over to the front of the Counsel table. He leaned on the table, then turned to face me.

'My Akleese,' Leo began, 'Is but misunderstood. She comes before you humble and apologetic. She meant no offence to the Counsel.'

Sagittarius piped in, 'Her arrow was strong and swift, no mercy did she show her Amilty. I am under no obligation than, to find any mercy upon her.'

Leo bent his head in honourable respect to Sagittarius and then went to stand before him at the table.

'You are right. You are just and fair. Did Akleese know that her arrow was swift and could cause emotional distress to the...?' He paused, searching his mind for the name, 'Blondie is it?' he said checking with Libra. Libra checked a long scroll and on finding Blondie's name listed, nodded in approval.

Leo continued, 'Of course she did. She didn't want to burden this Blondie woman with the hopes of a relationship that she believes will only end badly for both of them. Believing such, she is trying to save the woman from further damage by not allowing the relationship to continue. She should be commended for such a bold move. Many Akleese would have agreed to further the relationship out of their own pious needs of lust and conquest. But she did no such thing. Believing the relationship to be futile, she nipped it in the bud. Her justification is a weight.'

Libra interrupted as she placed a weight on the scale, 'But then her crime is a weight.'

'What crime?' Leo responded. 'She has committed no crime, been found not guilty of a crime.'

'I find her guilty of selfish possession of herself,' Libra said as she smacked the gavel down and added another weight to the scales.

Gemini seemed to be having a discussion with themselves, then piped 'We find the defendant guilty of intentional hurt feelings.'

Libra placed another weight on the side with selfish possession.

'I don't know I seem to have a problem.' Announced Virgo, 'The Akleese seems not to like this Blondie, and does not want a relationship with her, but yet I am to believe she wanted to spare her further pain by not allowing the relationship to continue. No, I don't believe she wanted to spare this woman's feelings. She wanted to spare her own. I find her guilty of emotional distress, pain and suffering and ask that Leo's weight be removed.'

Libra ask the others, 'All in favour of removing Leo's Weight on the defendant's behalf say "Aye".'

All members of the Counsel, including the blindfolded me say 'Aye.'

Libra therefore removes the only weight in my favour causing the scales to fall on the table.

'Leo what more say you?' Libra asks.

Leo shakes his head. 'The defence rests Honourable Counsel Members.'

What? He can't rest we are losing and losing badly. Leo comes and sits down beside me.

'I tried my best.' He whispers to me.

'Defendant please rise.' Booms Libra.

I stand.

'Do you have anything to say before we pass Judgement?' Libra asks me.

I turn to face Phabier. Then back to the counsel.

'Yes. I know it appears to you that I have been mean and selfish to a person I barely know. But understand, I, like you, weigh and measure. Know not the guilt or innocence of my actions, but the value of my life and the things I consider important. Like Phabier and the knowledge I have attained through my contact with him. If I let every stranger in how can I protect what is sacred to me? How can I protect what Phabier and I share when another person is around to lay

witness to it? If I am selfish it is for reasons that I feel make me a better person. I will fight for what I feel is right. If I never have another sexual partner or friend because I must protect my knowledge. I am willing to sacrifice some of my human needs to better myself and protect those closest to me. I might add that includes this counsel. Thank You.'

I sit back down. Certain now that I have made the argument easier for them to decide. The Counsel murmurs and then turns to the Me in a Blindfold on the counsel.

'We have not heard from our Objective Juror. What say yea if anything?' Libra asks addressing the Blindfolded me sitting at the table.

'I feel the Akleese feels she will lose herself if she becomes involved with this Blonde woman. (My God, they found the only Nerd me!) But she speaks about all the knowledge she gets from a Phabier or something and well, to me she is guilty of selfishness again. Because, what is all knowledge worth if it isn't shared. She wants to hide you as if you are hers to hide and why does she want to hide you if not for selfish reasons? If you exist for any reason it is to be shared by all, not some select group. And it's just not entirely up to her to end this friendship or whatever. She should be willing to give her a chance. I know if I had someone who was willing to go out on a limb to get to know me then they deserve to be treated with the same respect. She may be afraid this person will find out the truth about her and reject her but that person has that right. However, if she is that shallow then she will no doubt find herself in front of this Counsel.'

The Zodiacs seem to agree with My Analogy.

'What say you in recommendation of Sentence?' Libra asks the other Me.

'I find she is guilty of all that we have said. But not unfixable. I think if she agrees to give this Blondie a fair go. No sentence should be applied. But if she sabotages Blondie's attempts at friendship with lies, deceit or other unscrupulous deeds, her sentences should be severe. As now she has been warned.'

Mumbles from among the Zodiacs.

'Defendant rise.' Libra motions is my direction.

I rise. As does Leo and Phabier.

'Akleese, we find you guilty as charged but suspend all sentencing pending the outcome of the treatment you show in repairing the damage you have caused to Blondie. We seek that you become friends with her, whatever else it may flower into is not of our concern. But she seeks friendship and you will give her this unless she does something that offends the counsel. You will immediately repair the said damage. We said sentencing would be suspended but know this Akleese, what you thought you would lose by befriending her, you will surely lose if you do not remedy this, quickly and effectively. That is all. Dismissed.' Libra gives one last smack of the gavel. Everyone makes to leave but Leo turns to me before he goes.

'You will do as they have said. Or you will lose all that is sacred to you. Do not shame me Akleese. These are high stations and we have eyes upon you. It is best that you do these things. You are Leo and your pride sometimes stands in your way of reason. But mark my words, the Counsel will not be lenient a second time.'

'Why does everyone keep calling me Alkeese?' I say to no one in particular.