

The Angel with The Broken Wing

by Jann Burner

I first caught sight of her peripherally, from the corner of my left eye. Starveling, pretty bones Indian girl in a deer skin dress. She was tall and thin, and in her hands, she held a small clear bowl of dream liquid which she had just filled from the Lake of Illusion. She rose from the shore gracefully, in preparation to lead me on. Within the small bowl, ideas and images darted around and about like tiny colorful fish. At first, I mistook her for a deer. She had that look and feeling about her: totally fearless and yet ready to spring and fling herself away at first sound or sudden movement. She was not like the other illusions I had witnessed floating across the lake. She was obviously very real, in fact, much more real than I was. She peered out of her large eyes like a great spiritual presence, peeking momentarily through a lens, into another, smaller world of creative interaction. Totally without prejudice, completely without judgement--*"just looking"*, her expression seemed to say.

As my kayak touched the shore I sat there watching her, my goals and destination suddenly forgotten. She was like a perimeter guard for an advanced race of beings who looked human but were somehow para-human entities focused only temporarily within this dimension.

Around her waist, she wore a belt of whitish metal conches and whenever she turned, the light would catch and shoot off reflected beams in all directions. At that moment she was looking directly at me and one of the beams, reflected from her silvery belt, fell full upon my face. I could feel a small circle of warmth where I was touched by the Light.

"Are you an Angel?" I wondered, "I've heard of Angels."

She stood upon the shore slowly caressing her small bowl. Her eyes looked directly back into mine. She smiled. "I'm an Angel with a broken wing," she seemed to say. And her lips never moved.

Waves of blissful feelings began to sweep over me like a narcotic, washing away the jungle grime of the imagination. I could feel myself being cleansed and burnished beneath her gaze. I felt myself being pulled toward her, like a fish caught upon a heavenly line. And this was only as it should be, for she was the mistress of ultimate compassion and her only desire was to fulfill the needs of others.

As my small boat touched the shore, it took root, blossomed and threw off its seed, all before my feet touched dry land. The Indian woman blinked her large dark eyes and within a twinkling, we both stood knee-deep in a field of white roses. For as far as I could see there were white roses standing like fields of wheat on a mid-western prairie. She casually picked one of the long-stemmed flowers and tossed it to me.

"Welcome to Paradise," her expression said with a simple smile.

I caught the flower with practiced precision as if my entire life had been mere preparation for this single exchange. She turned and began to move off across the field of white, cradling her bowl of human dreams in both hands like a precious object while I brought up the rear, holding the single rose before me like a magic wand, or a royal scepter. Soon the Lake of Illusion was a forgotten dream as together we moved through the fields of roses in search of the miraculous.

We traveled quickly and I was glad because the heady aroma from the flowers was about to make me ill. As we walked, the landscape appeared to slide beneath us effortlessly and yet it was obvious to me that my feet were on the ground because whenever I turned to look back over my I shoulder, I saw my footprints following. I slid into Paradise as innocently as a child on a carnival ride, trusting and ever blissful across whole fields of ripening consciousness.

"I think I'm going to like this place," I thought to myself.

My guide turned and smiled. "You'll love it," she said with a wink. But, of course, her lips never moved, for in Paradise all is

experienced directly and no thing is increased or made more meaningful by verbal comment.

Soon we were beginning to move into the foothills and in the distance, I could see the beginnings of a mountain. As we moved into the high country, we were treated to an ever-enlarging perspective as the kingdom of emerald green forests and sapphire blue seas spread out around us in all directions. Soon we were in the mountains and the very fibers of my inner ear began to reverberate with the sounds of music and yet no such sounds floated upon the air. As we moved along a path and up the side of one particularly rocky mountain face, I began to notice certain spots upon the rocks. These were strange transparent spots where the very surface of the rock had been worn away and become like a small clear window covered with downy pearlescent hairs. She informed me that these small hairs were in fact the chin whiskers belonging to a very rare breed of mountain goat which inhabited the area. The mountain, if not the entire area, I was led to believe, was of such a high order of idealized thought that the mere action of a goat, scratching its chin upon a rock, served to wear away the thin veneer of materiality and to reveal the innate transparency of the underlying concept.

And then, after trekking for days along goat paths in the high country, we rounded a rather steep precipice, and there, in the distance, stood buildings: signs of human habitation. It appeared to be a large village. It stood in the distance, in a low valley surrounded by a perpetual snowfield. The village was as white as the purest snow is white, with many translucent domes, ivory towers, and streets of cobbled turquoise. The windows within the buildings seemed to be constructed of faceted opal and even the knobs upon the doors, it seemed to me, must surely be precious stones. I was truly moved as we drew closer for the total design of the town was so clean and precise that it literally sparkled and squeaked with clarity. It seemed to me so perfect, that the screws which held the separate concepts together must be diamonds and the hinges upon which the individual components swung would have had to be constructed of the purest Eastern jade. According to my Angel, this

was the *City of Light*, the *Crystal City*, which lay securely centered within the core of the Earth, like an exquisitely crafted watch in the hand of God. The citizens of this place were the first sons and daughters of *The Dreamer* who had moved beyond the pale.

I immediately wanted to enter the city and meet the inhabitants, but one admonishing glance was enough to cool my ardor. This place was far beyond the realm of mere desire, her mind seemed to say to mine. And human goals, no matter how lofty, were best checked at the edge of the *Lake of Illusion*, like a dusty cloak at the door of a very special house. But why then, I wondered, was I even given this glance of the *Crystal City*?

Well, she seemed to reply, her mind to mine, perhaps it has been found in the past that it helps questors to know of such a place. It seems to sooth and console them when they find themselves stuck and all alone in some outback of peripheral consciousness. It is comforting, when lost, a thousand miles from nowhere, in the darkness and the black, riding a high ocean swell in a Southern wind, to recall that somewhere in the high country, there is a place so conscious that it actually glitters with the many faceted light of twinkling realization.

I nodded as if to myself. But what do they do, I wondered? What is it that makes them so different from the rest of us?

She looked from my face back toward the village glowing in the distance. "They have no questions and are in search of no answers. They are neither for, nor against, and they do not explain themselves, for they hate good sense..." And her lips never moved and no sound floated upon the air.

It was only with the greatest reluctance that I let myself be led along a circuitous route which skirted the Crystal City and eventually brought us out onto a wide flat plateau. Behind us loomed the huge mountain with its secret place, while before us, beyond the plateau, stretched a wide lush valley. At the very center of the rocky shelf sat two round stones, and between the stones was a hole in the ground from which rose warm fragrant vapors that turned to steam

as they lazily trailed upwards into the sky. I learned from my Angel that this was the place of sitting together.

She sat on one side of this strange vent from the inner world and motioned for me to seat myself on the other side. As soon as we were both seated on the stones facing one another, the angel with the broken wing, as she referred to herself, placed her container of human dreams over the hole in the ground and then removed her hands. The small bowl of multicolored forms hovered in the air above the opening, turning slowly like a balloon riding a column of air. She looked directly into my eyes and held out her hands. Without uttering a sound or thinking a thought, I extended my arms, one on either side of the floating bowl. The rock seats were situated so that with arms extended only the very tips of our fingers touched. As I touched her skin I was shot through with a sensation of utter and absolute peace. My body sagged slightly as if a great weight had been removed from my shoulders. It was as if my head had somehow been most pleasantly removed from the bulk of my body and allowed to float free between us at this place of sitting together, exactly like the small bowl of human dreams. The being that faced me was graced with such an expression of utter poise and contentment that I felt myself begin to flow into her and I felt her begin to flow through me and though it felt as if tears of gratitude trailed from my eyes, I knew there was no trace of moisture upon my skin.

It seemed as if our intertwining entities succeeded in creating a unified pool of being and upon the surface of this pool there was not the slightest ripple. All thought, all reflection, all recording, all processing ceased. Like twin stars orbiting a black hole in deepest space we moved, circling slowly, and then more rapidly around the center of gravity that hovered between us like a point of celestial punctuation. We soon accelerated to such a level that for all intents and purposes we appeared to be absolutely still, a mere point of light on an otherwise moonless night. Together we constituted an invisible stitch in a seamless garment. Our extended fingers continued to brush against one another like eyelashes tracing the subtle undulations of earth itself while in the center, between us, the

small, slowly revolving bowl of human dreams was beginning to empty.

"Yep! That's what I said! Three days out. Only three days. Do you hear me?"

She eyed me gently with compassion, like a once beautiful woman viewing herself in an early morning mirror.

"There were twelve of us left by then and we had four years' worth of pelts. A fortune, honey! And it 'twas then that they hit us! Must o' been at least twenty of the filthy heathens. Before I knew it, all hell broke loose. Screamin', shootin'! Never heard such *screamin'* and *carryin'* on, and the pain! The pain...oh, my gawd, the pain..."

"Let it go. Let it pass through. Don't try to hold it," she seemed to say.

"One of them injuns got me with his axe right here..."

I held up the better half of my left arm. "Just as I was getting up--*CRACK!* Never heard such a sound before. I heard the bone snap and I fell and rolled down the hill into a dry creek bed. Well, pretty soon I opened my eyes and everything was very quiet. There weren't no sound--exceptin' the dry rattle of my own breath in my chest like a mournful wind..."

I sat with my arms extended like a healthy tree, feeling as if I had just oozed into material form. I was one side, she was the other. Above us both, the steamy vapors from the center of the earth mingled with the steamy vapors of one man's dream.

"So, do you know what I did then?"

I was now a trapper, a hunter of skins from beyond the big sea. I sat somewhere in nineteenth century Alaska, in a frontier town, in a saloon telling stories and drinking with a half-breed barmaid. As I talked, she kept filling and refilling my extended glass with strong drink. The bar was crowded and quite loud, causing me to shout at my companion, my woman for the night. She sat quietly, passively watching this creature dream his man dream.

"No," her eyes seemed to say, "what did you do then?"

"Hell, woman! I'll tell you what I did, I didn't do no-thing!"

At this point my husky voice erupted in laughter. "Them injuns are slick little devils. I knew they was just watchin' and waitin' for me to make a noise, so they could come find me and take off the top o' my head. So, I laid there and played dead for three days in that dusty ol' creek with nothing to keep me alive but a pee-trickle of water oozing from between two rocks. Finally, the damn pain and infection got so bad I had to cut off the rest o' my arm with my skinnin' knife. Just got it off too when I heard--the horse! Jesus, I thought, here they come. I'm a dead man for sure...I was scared, I'm not ashamed to say. So, I crawled *real* careful like through the bush and what do you think I saw?"

The woman refilled my glass. "What did you see?" her mind seemed to inquire of mine.

"Well..." said the killer of animals and the collector of skins, "I'll tell you what I saw...another trapper! Just like my very own self. Can you beat that? A mountain man nosin' around among the bodies lookin' for stuff! What luck I says to my own self. Counted myself for dead and here is a horse delivered up right nice, too. So, to show my, ah, appreciation, I killed him real quick and neat. I slipped the point o' my skinnin' knife in under his left ear as he was stooped over going through the pockets of one o' my dead partners."

Suddenly I lapsed into a hacking laugh that degenerated into a tubercular cough. "Never even squealed! Just fell like a stuck hog. So, here I am, ha-ha-ha!"

The woman looked at me with just the slightest trace of a smile on her face. "So here you are," her expression seemed to say.

I looked into her eyes for the first time and dropped my glass.

The simple truth of her expression struck me like a shot and like a victim I fell. I fell from the rim of a cliff at the dawn of the age of warm-blooded creatures. I fell to the ground, victim of an adversary's arrow. I fell from the back of a galloping horse in the Middle Ages and suffocated within the confines of my own armor, drowning in my own blood. I fell from the belly of a burning aircraft and I was flushed from the belly of another with a high-pressure hose. I fell victim to countless assassins' bullets and I fell to the

ground and covered my eyes to no avail when I saw the great burst of light in the Western sky. I fell victim to countless plagues and generations of illness both physical as well as mental. I fell in all the ways that it is imaginable for a man creature to fall. I fell victim to greed and temptation and envy and hatred and resentment and sloth and anger. My entire existence suddenly appeared to be a close study into the nature of the falling phenomenon. I seemed to wake up only to fall asleep, and I seemed to stand up only to fall down. And each and every time...at the moment of ***The Hit***, I would wonder...how many more times do I have to go through this?

I looked across the table into her eyes.

Honeysuckle,

Lavender,

Delta calm.

Like the dark stone heart

Of some unbearably ancient thing:

A woman,

A cage of tears,

A ferny day.

"I'll catch you yet, lady of luck,

Cause I've baited my hook with light".

Starveling child, changeling, pretty bones

Indian girl in a deer skin dress

"Are you an Angel?

I've heard of Angels,

I believe in Angels"

"Asher is my name," she seemed to say

With the merest hint of a smile.

"I'm an Angel with a broken wing"

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