

The Girl

The Raiders

The girl was collecting herbs in the forest when the raiders swept through her village. They killed everyone.

It is such a simple act to close one's eyes.

From the forest's edge, she couldn't help her father or mother or any of her friends.

She couldn't even help herself.

It is so easy to close one's eyes. It is such a simple thing. But from the the hill overlooking her village, she couldn't do even this.

The Mystic Departs

The Mystic stood, and turned, and walked out the door. One moment he was breaking his fast at the inn, the next... he was leaving. He neither questioned this impulse, nor resisted it.

He found himself on the road leading out of town. He didn't know where he was going—nor why—but he went anyway. He had done this before and he would do it again. He knew not to fight.

Life is simpler when you just let go.

The Mountain of Tears

Three days later, the girl stood up.

She buried her father and mother and friends.

The Mountain of Tears loomed on the horizon. Across the miles, it beckoned. On the wind, it called.

Come to me. Come to me and end your sorrow. Come to me and end your grief. Come to me and be free.

All around her... death and ash and despair.

Come to me. Come to me and be free.

The girl turned. She gazed at everything she had known... at everything she had lost... at everything she had loved. On the wind, she heard the call, the *promise*, of the Mountain. She turned and gazed at the ruins—at the destruction—looking for some sliver of hope. All she saw were memories. All she felt was loss. All she knew was pain.

Come to me and be free.

She heard the call and she listened.

She heard the call and she left.
Life is easier when you just let go.

The Mystic Awaits

The Mystic returned to where it had all begun.

He sat on a rock—the same boulder his mentor had sat upon so many years ago—and he waited.

Their First Encounter

High on the Mountain of Tears, the girl stood on the Cliff of Sorrows. She looked down at the drop. At the Void. At the promise. At the end of all her suffering.

Come to me and be free.

She stood where many had stood before. She saw what they saw. She felt what they felt: the inner calm; the certainty; the clarity. She saw the End.

She heard the Mountain's promise. The whisper on the wind rising up from the Void.

Come to me. Come to me and be free.

Such a relief.

She took a deep breath, savoring its sweetness—its finality.

"Death's not going to help."

She whirled. On a rock behind her sat a man. A man who'd been there all along. A man she hadn't seen before.

The Mystic shook his head sadly. "Death's not the end you believe it to be. It won't ease your pain. It won't soothe your suffering. It won't set you free."

He paused. "It's not the relief you yearn for."

When he saw her confusion, the Mystic felt hope. "If you die today, you'll come back to life—a new life—and suffer the same fate all over again. The same fate... or one even worse."

Recovering her composure, the girl replied, "You must be a fool to believe such things. Reincarnation? The Scholars reject such silly notions. They teach us that death is like a dreamless sleep, a timeless blackness, a big nothing. Death is the end of everything. It is the end of suffering."

The Mystic had heard it all before—her words were nothing new—but she spoke them with such certainty, such conviction. He knew he was lost. *The Scholars*. When will they ever learn? When will they ever *see*?

Accepting defeat, he sat up straight and stared into her eyes. "Remember this and remember it well: *The smart have their theories, but the wise have their scars.*"

She shook her head at the crazy man. A crazy man sitting on a rock in his robes, trying to save the hopeless and the lonely and the depressed. A crazy man seeking to convince the determined with his lies and his fantasies. "Remember this and remember it well?" What a fool! All she wanted to do was *forget*.

She turned to the Void. She took her last breath.

Life is easier when you just let go.

And she flung herself over the edge.

And she plummeted.

And she died.

The Woman

The Raiders

The young woman was collecting mushrooms in the forest. Her mother was watching her son. Her husband was tending to the hogs. A typical day.

Then it wasn't.

Sweeping in over the knoll, the raiders attacked. They killed everyone. They stole everything of value. Then they left.

It is such a simple act to close one's eyes.

From the forest's edge, she couldn't help her son or her husband or her parents. She couldn't help any of her friends.

It is so easy to close one's eyes. It is such a simple thing. But from the hill overlooking her village, the young woman—the new mother—couldn't do even this simple act.

She couldn't close her eyes.

The Mystic Departs

Before he even knew what he was doing, the Mystic found himself leaving town.

He neither questioned this impulse nor resisted it. He had been down this road before.

Often life is simpler when you just let go.

The Mountain of Tears

Three days later, the young woman stood up.

She buried her son.

She buried her husband.

She buried her father and mother and her friends.

She had loved them all, but her son....

The Mountain of Tears loomed on the horizon. Across the miles, it beckoned. On the wind, it called.

Come to me. Come to me and end your sorrow. Come to me and end your grief. Come to me and be free.

She stared down at her son's grave.

Come to me. Come to me and be free.

The young woman turned. She gazed at everything she had known... at everything she had lost... at everything she had loved. On the wind, the Mountain called. There was nothing left for her here. Nothing but memories. Nothing but loss. Nothing but sorrow.

Come to me and be free.

There was nothing here for her at all. So she left.

Life is so much easier when you just let go.

The Mystic Awaits

The Mystic returned to where it had all begun.

He sat on a rock—the same rock he sat on twenty years ago, the same rock his mentor had sat on—and he waited.

Their Second Encounter

High on the Mountain of Tears, the young woman stood on the Cliff of Sorrows. She looked over the edge. At the Void. At the promise. At the end of all her suffering.

Come to me and be free.

She stood where many had stood before. She saw what they saw. She felt calm. She felt certain. She felt relief.

A gentle breeze arose from the Void. On it, she heard the promise of the Mountain, of the Cliff, of her fate.

Come to me. Come to me and be free.

She took a deep breath....

"Death's not going to help."

She whirled. On a rock behind her sat an old man. A man who'd been there all along. A man she hadn't seen before.

Speaking slowly and precisely, as if careful with his words, the Mystic said, "Death is not the end you believe it to be. It won't ease your pain. It won't soothe your suffering. It won't set you free."

He paused. "Death will not provide the relief you yearn for."

"If you die today, you'll come back to life—a new life—and you'll suffer the same fate all over again. The same fate... or one even worse."

Recovering her composure, the young woman stared. The Priests had talked of a soul, but not reincarnation. The Scholars rejected the soul, rejected it as just an extension of the ego—and the ego was the source of all ills.

"You must be a fool to believe such things," she said, more harshly than she intended. "Reincarnation? The Scholars reject such things. A thousand years ago the War of Two Egos destroyed most of mankind. The ego is an illusion, the Scholars say, and the soul just a projection of it. The Scholars teach us that death is the end of everything: the end of the ego, the end of all thoughts, the end of all suffering."

The Mystic listened carefully. Not to what she had to say, but in the way she said it. Was he detecting doubt? Was she just reciting what she'd been taught. Was she as certain in her heart as she was with her words?

The Mystic smiled and sat up straight and confident. "Remember this and remember it well: *The smart have their theories, but the wise have their scars.*"

The young woman shook her head at the crazy old man. She turned once more to the edge, inhaled deeply, and... paused.

The smart have their theories, but the wise have their scars. She was certain she'd never heard the saying before, but....

She turned and looked more closely at the old man—his robes, the way he was sitting on the boulder. She knew she had never met him—she was sure of it—but he seemed so *familiar*.

The Potion

The young woman stepped away from the edge. She faced the old man and stared at him in silence. *What do I have to lose? I can always jump later.*

"Do I know you?" she asked.

The old man smiled, the tension in his body visibly relaxing. "We met on this spot twenty years ago. Twenty years ago today in fact."

She signed in disappointment. "Now I *know* you're crazy, old man. I'm only 19 years old."

But the strange old man only continued to smile. There was something about his eyes... they seemed to look *into* her. They were confident and sure. Not like a crazy man's at all.

"And yet you remember me," the old man said. "You remember me and you remember what I said to you twenty years ago."

The smart have their theories, but the wise have their scars. She *did* remember it. *I don't know how, but I do....*

The old man reached into his ragged robes and pulled out a small vial. "Drink this," he said, "and you'll remember *everything*."

She stared at him a moment. There was something about his presence. Something *clear*. She shrugged. *I've lost everything. What more can I lose? I can always jump later.*

She drank the potion in one gulp.

The Vision

The world *shifted*.

One moment, she was looking at the old man, at the Mystic, and the next there was a shifting, a tremor and where the Mystic sat, now sat a *glow*. A *man-shaped* glow.

She turned and looked around her. Within everything, the trees, the rocks, the plants, ... everything was filled with this glow. With a soft, pulsing light.

She stooped down and peered at a fallen leaf. Within the leaf—what should have been a dead leaf—the glow undulated softly. It was as if the leaf were *breathing* the light.

It was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen.

After a few moments (hours?), she heard the Mystic say, "What you are seeing is the Life Force. The Light within us all. Look at your hands."

And she did. And they were beautiful. They were filled with the same light. The light within everything else. They glowed. They pulsed. They *breathed*.

"Now sit down and close your eyes and clear your mind."

And though she always had a noisy mind—she sat down and closed her eyes and her mind cleared.

Back, the Mystic whispered.

And back she went.

The Newborn

She found herself nursing at Mother's breast. The warmth of Mother's skin, the sweet taste of her milk. The connection. She could *taste* Mother's happiness.

The blanket she was wrapped in was scratchy, but it was warm. Her head was cold, but not her body. She didn't like the feel of

the blanket, but she loved the closeness of it. She loved the closeness of Mother.

She felt so content.

Beyond any doubt, she *knew* this was a memory. A memory of her first days of life. And yet it was more intense than a memory. It was as if she were really there. She had never recalled anything so *clearly*.

Back, the Mystic whispered.

And back she went.

The Birth

All was dark. All was warm. All was comfortable and safe and secure. She was somehow... *vaster*. She knew Mother's thoughts. She felt Mother's emotions. She and Mother were *one*.

Then there was a shift. A terrible pressure. The softness of Mother was crushing her. Crushing her violently... *rejecting her*. Frightened now, she felt herself being pushed, pushed away. Pushed through an opening she'd never noticed before.

The light was terrible! The noise, the pain, the cold!

Suddenly the world was harsh and rough and loud.

It was horrible. She wanted to go back. Back into Mother's womb.

And as if hearing her thoughts—the Mystic whispered, *Back*.

And back she went.

The Decision

She was floating over a bed. Below, a man and woman were coupling. She knew she should feel uncomfortable, but she wasn't. It was perfectly natural. It was *required*.

Afterwards, as the man slept, the woman gazed up contently into the darkness. And though the woman couldn't see her floating there, somehow she seemed to *sense* her.

She remained there for awhile—hovering above the couple. She was deciding. *Are you the right fit? Are you the ones?* Then she moved closer to the woman—only inches from her face.

Yes, she thought. *Yes. I choose you and this man and this life.*

And as soon as she made this decision, an invisible link formed between them, and she was pulled into her new mother's womb.

This is my life now. This is required. This I must do.

Then the Mystic whispered, *Back*.

The Soul Realm

It was a beautiful place. The sky was perfectly blue, the clouds were perfectly white, the trees and the grass and the hills were perfect in every way. And her parents were here! She was ecstatic, overjoyed to see them. And they were happy too. They had been expecting her. Waiting for her.

And then she remembered....

"We're dead, aren't we?"

They smiled, knowingly, but before they could reply, the Mystic whispered, *Back*.

And everything *changed*.

The Light

Vastness. Oneness. Bliss. Overwhelming Love—pure Love, Divine Love, accepting, unconditional Love.

Radiant Love. Complete Love. Nothing but Love and Love and Love.

So perfect. So beautiful. It was beyond time, beyond comprehension. It was Love impossible to know, but impossible not to feel. Love and Light shining outward and inward. From Itself and into Itself. There was no *other*. Only the Love. Only the Light. Only the Divine.

A vast Sea of Love and Light without boundaries or limitations. Whole and complete and perfect.

It was pure.

Suddenly a dark swirling arose within the Light—within the Love. The Light vibrated and contracted and moved. It *separated*. It became two.

And she felt Pain. Horrible pain. She felt *herself*.

And she felt *Sorrow*. Sorrow for the loss of her family. For the loss of her friends. For the loss of her village.

"No!" she screamed. "No, no, no, no, no!"

"Take me back! Take me back! Take me back!"

But it was too late. They had been One... but now they were two. They had been Whole, but now they were apart.

And it was all her fault.

The Vision Explained

She awoke, curled up on the ground, crying uncontrollably.

"I want to go back!" she cried. She raged at the Mystic, "I want to go back!"

Then, softer... "Please," she begged. "Please send me back."

The Mystic waited patiently, compassionately. He remembered the first time he had been torn from the Light. The guilt. The self-hatred. He waited in silence for her tears and her rage to subside.

Gently. "Every time we die, we merge with the Light," the Mystic whispered. "We merge with the Divine—with the Love, with the One. And every time we are torn from the Light by our own desires. While one with the Divine, we are whole—complete in every way—but if we still have any attachment to this world, the Divine sacrifices Herself for us. We become ourselves, and She becomes everything else."

"In doing so, the Divine gives us the separation we require to help us overcome our attachment—the disharmony we felt while one with Her. She gives us manifest life, in a manifest world. She gives us a new life, a new opportunity to find our way back to Her."

"The entire Universe is the Divine. This is the Light—the Life Force—you saw within the trees and the rocks and the leaves. All is God. You saw this, the Light even within your very hands. Even you are made wholly and completely of God. She is everything."

"What pulled you apart from the Light was your *sorrow*. Not the sorrow that brought you here today, but the sorrow from your *last* lifetime—the loss of your family twenty years ago when I first met you. Your *attachment* to Sorrow is why you were torn apart from the Light. It is why you came back. You came back not to live a life without Sorrow—that is impossible—but to learn how not to *cling* to your Sorrow. How not to *own* it and make it yours. You came back to learn how to let Sorrow go."

The Offer

The Mystic grew still. He closed his eyes and he said no more.

Her grief was overwhelming. The loss of her son—of her entire family. And the vision... the Light. The loss of the Love she had experienced while she was one with the Light. It was too much.

She had sought to end it all, to end her grief, but the vision suggested something else: that death is not the end to suffering. It is just a respite.

That is... if the vision was *real*.

She looked once more at the cliff's edge. She longed for the end of this torment. She stole a glance at the Mystic. Yet he sat still as a stone—eyes closed and barely breathing.

The Scholar's say death is the end. Consciousness blinks out as we merge with the Emptiness that lies beyond all form. She looked back at the cliff—at the open air beyond. She could almost hear it calling.

"It won't help," the Mystic said as if reading her mind. "It will only make things worse."

"You chose this life," he continued. "You chose it in hopes that you'd learn to let go of Sorrow... to end your suffering. To find your way back to the Light. Killing yourself now—killing yourself *again*—will only put off the inevitable."

"Killing yourself didn't work last time. It won't work this one... and if I'm still alive in another twenty years, I'll tell you the same thing. Death's not the answer. Death's not *real*. No one has ever died."

No one has ever died. Could it be possible? Can it be true? Is her family—her *son*—alive and waiting in some invisible realm beyond?

"Upon physical death—just like everyone before you—you'll simply detach from your body and merge with the Light. But you'll remember this life and if you have any attachments to it, you'll be torn from the Light, going through the pain and self-hatred all over again. Soon you'll enter the Soul Realm and vow to do anything—*anything*—to find your way back to your Beloved—to your other half, the Divine. You'll vow to pass through Hell itself if it will bring you back to God—back to the Love and the Light."

"But how can you find your way back? In the Soul Realm we can only review our lives. We can only *promise* to do better. We can only make theories, but theories without action are just *guesses*. So you'll choose another life, another life to help you find your way back to the Divine. You'll return to this manifest world, select a mother, and start the process over again."

"The Soul Realm is filled with hope but only theories. The Manifest Realm—this realm—is filled with pain but the promise of *growth*. While the smart have their theories," the Mystic continued, "the wise have their scars. While the smart *believe*, the wise *know*."

She contemplated the Mystic's words, his logic. It made perfect sense, that only through *living life* can we truly learn. But it made sense only if the Soul Realm was real. Only if her vision was real.

"Right now," the Mystic continued, "you are wondering if the vision you just had was an actual memory, or a simple hallucination—a dream—brought about by the potion."

"When I was your age—many years ago—I sat where you sat. I stared at the Void and I yearned for it. I too doubted the vision. And as I sit before you now, the woman who would become my mentor sat where I'm sitting. She said to me, 'Come with me down the mountain. Come with me and find out for yourself.'"

The Mystic paused to allow the implications to sink in. The patterns and cycles of lives intertwined down through time.

"Was the vision real?" the Mystic shrugged. "Come with me down the mountain. Come with me and find out for yourself."

The young woman sat and stared and contemplated. Lives intertwined. Patterns repeated. The past reasserting itself in the present. Where does it end? What does it all mean? Does this strange old man have the answers?

She looked over at the edge, at the Void, at the promise. She longed for it.... *The Void's not going anywhere*, she thought. *It will still be here when I get back. What do I have to lose?*

Without another word, the Mystic stood and started down the mountain.

After a moment's hesitation, the young woman followed.