

LAST TAKE - BOOK ONE

By M. S. White.

Chapter 1.

“The purpose of human endeavour is the pursuit of personal self improvement.”...Author Unknown.

.....and as I absorbed myself in the moment, I recalled the evening when this new journey first began.

It was on the second anniversary of my great loss when I slipped into the hospital grounds unseen by any but the waning moon and entered the underground tunnel way that had been originally built to link the Operating Theatres with the outside surgical wards. It wouldn't really have mattered if a dozen people had seen me in the area because as an employee of the hospital I had every right to be on the grounds and as such was well acquainted with most of the staff and therefore familiar with the layout of the premises. Since the construction of the new Operating Theatre Block several years ago the tunnel way had been locked and placed off limits to all and sundry and virtually forgotten about. By means more foul than fair I had secured a copy of the key that enabled me entry at my leisure. After a few previous exploratory trips into the tunnelled corridor I decided it suited my macabre purposes perfectly. On the evening in question I used torchlight to guide me to where I had secreted a thick cushion, a blanket and a small kerosene candle lamp which I quickly fired up and instantly weird shadows caused by my movements came to life on the cream white walls. After adjusting to the tomb like atmosphere and silence of my concrete burrow I reached for the bottle of Teacher's Whiskey from my small backpack and quaffed a cheery mouthful and savoured the liquid warmth of its welcome.

With relish I studied the extensive graffiti on the facing wall and had to suppress the urge to laugh uproariously as I reread some of my own work from a week earlier when I had entered the tunnel, smoked a joint and worked furiously with cans of black and red spray paint and set to writing abuse and accusation directed at certain working staff in particular and the Bureaucratic system in general upon the flat enamelled canvas of the wall. In three hours of emotional venting I had written a great deal of poetic vilification against those I considered deserving of attack. I had scribbled in felt pen the personal secrets that I knew about certain people who had slighted me in the past, leaked private Union and bureaucratic business that needed to be exposed and basically did a great job of character assassination on those whom I perceived to be my transgressors and enemies. The affair proved to be quite a therapeutic exercise in neurotic emotional venting and now all that remained was for me to put my signature to it, which I got up and did with relish before seating myself down again to the task at hand.

I quaffed of the scotch and felt it run its fiery fingers through my stomach and up into my brains and waited in the cave like silence and contemplated what it was that I was about to do. Then when I was ready I strapped and tightened a cordon of rubber lashing around my left arm just below the armpit. I liked the feel of the tourniquet's constriction, it felt as I did, secure and sure of intent. Beside me on the floor shielded in a spectacle case slept a hypodermic syringe fully loaded with a dose of high grade street heroin.

As I waited for my mainline artery to thicken I fondled the weight of the loaded syringe and thought how supremely glorious it would be when months from now the stench of my putrid remains would necessitate a baffled exploration and I chortled mentally as I imagined their alarm at the discovery of my decomposed corpse and the corridor walls alive with the vibrancy of my last insulting message to them and to the world. I would go down in hospital history and generate a round of eternal gossip that would ensure my legendary status forever. There was no doubt that I would have the classic last laugh. And just in case the stench of my decomposing remains didn't reach to the outside world, I had it arranged with a mate of mine that after several weeks he was to post my self written letter to my employers alerting them to my decomposed presence in their midst. After a most satisfying chuckle I turned down the brightness of lamp and spent several minutes reviewing the circumstances that had brought me to this imminent act of suicidal closure which began just over two years ago with that defining dream of my beloved mother's death.

Chapter 2.

“The dream prophetic begged for my attention, but blinkered eyes cared not to see, nor curiosity explore”.....Luana Maxine Moy.

That prophetic dream begins with my mother and I shopping at a large supermarket centre. We are slowly pushing a well-stocked trolley along the shiny linoleum floor, idly looking into shop front windows as we exchange smiles and small banter regarding their products and we chuckle at the sheer lunacy of what some people think they need in life. Although we are indoors there is a definite sense of outside air brushing pleasantly over our bare skin and there is a strong outside smell of open bush land. Casually mother and son make their way to the outside area where we find the bus stop. My mom sits on a space between two elderly ladies and they quickly set to making conversation, something my mother has never been afraid to do.

I gaze about the hub of suburbia and spot a couple of teenage girls walking past rows of sunlit shinning cars and note their bodies waltzing with a sensual pride born of youth and freedom...and my loins tingle as the imagery of sweet kisses and nubile bodies tumble through my sexual lens. Then a bus pulls up like a sleepy ghost; it is soundless and strangely intrusive and I instinctively know it's not the one for us. I throw my glance towards the two girls but they're gone and for a moment I wonder about whom in the future will delight in the fruits of their gifts as they wander their way through the stretched and shrunken moments of what will constitute their lives.

Then I turn my head back to the bench and I am momentarily perplexed to see that my mother is no longer sitting there. Her two bench mates are still thick with babble between themselves and our shopping trolley stands incongruously unattended with its several stuffed plastic shopping bags. I look about me and then scan the length of the bus windows until I spot her looking vacantly through the window at me. I go to board the bus but there are two other large women blocking my access so I'm forced to shoulder past them softly as I tell the bus driver that my mother has stepped on the wrong bus and that I'm going to get her. He twists a frown upon a weathered and impatient brow and mutters “Be quick about it, I'm already behind time”. For a stretched moment my brain puzzles with the concept of getting behind time. How does one do that? Does one have to travel at well over the speed of light to a moment far into the future and then view it from a present that has somehow mysteriously become the past? Then of course there is dying...no surer way than that to “get behind time”.

I reach my mother and tell her that she's on the wrong bus. She looks at me with puzzlement and I realise that she is acting as if she has never met me before and I rationalise that she's being the actress again, which for decades has been an eccentric behavioural pattern between her and I. However I insist that the bus is the wrong bus and the driver is a grumpy old fart who doesn't want to get any more 'behind time' than he already is so let's get a move on, shall we. But she insists that this is the right bus, and that in fact she has been waiting for this bus a whole lifetime. Her last remark informs my defence system that things are not quite right. I sit beside her and wrap an arm around her

shoulder and tell her that we have left the groceries behind and that we must get off the bus, retrieve them and take a taxi home instead. I begin to pull her up gently from the seat and feel her body stiffen as it begins her first round of resistance.

Cajoling I pull her forward down the length of the aisle despite her insistence that she has no desire whatsoever to get off the bus. Her hesitancy disturbs as she protests to the other passengers and I assuage their doubts by a roll of the eyes to indicate that she's a bit old and loopy and not to pay her any attention. The driver (realising that this woman is the cause of his being behind time) jumps to my rescue and using what remains of his dwindling patience assists me to get her begrudgingly down the bus steps to the footpath. As soon as her feet touch terra firma, the 'whooshee' of the bus door hisses and the driver flattens the accelerator in his zealous pursuit of "lost time".

My mother anxiously watches the bus speed away with tears glistening in her eyes and it breaks my heart to see her cry. I hug and comfort her by saying, "it's all right, we're going home now", but she just sobs and says, "That *was* my bus and you had no right to stop me from going home. What am I going to do now? Wander around like a lost soul?" she demands with unveiled venom and I know for certain that something's not right. Then she breaks my embrace and starts to walk with a step that step that is surprisingly strong and determined towards a treed roadway where the shopping centre ceases and suburbia begins. I follow by maintaining her steady gait while trying valiantly to question what it is that she thinks she is doing.

Then suddenly she halts in her tracks, cranes her head to the right and gazes up with a wide-eyed look of disbelief and joy. I turn to see what has attracted her so and I notice we are alongside a large four-story apartment block with each apartment sporting a small balcony facing down upon us, and that on each balcony there are groups of people mostly aged in their early thirties. I also notice that there is an obvious harmony of colour in the arrangement of their clothing which soothes me in a most indescribable way and I am compelled to observe further.

There seems to be a great deal of energy coming from each balcony and there is a splash of surreal light across the whole apartment face. Then suddenly all the people start laughing and calling out to us with arms waving and faces full of warmth and welcome as if greeting the arrival below of a pop group or well known celebrity. My mother smiles and waves back and I sense a sudden wave of supreme happiness wash through her. Then she spots one balcony in particular and waves furiously and calls out names I'm somehow familiar with. I look towards where her gaze is focused and I find I am zooming in upon the balcony scene in question. I briefly spy the gleaming faces full with cheer before the reality of the unreal scene explodes into bizarre explanation...the familiar faces are those of my own relatives and various family friends who are deceased.

Instantly I recognise both sets of grandparents as I remember them from photos of their early youth...and then I see my God parents looking exactly as they had looked when I saw them last as a nine year old boy. I see children's faces wild with the wonder that only childhood can convey and immediately spot Stephen Emingham, a dear boyhood friend

who was lost to us early in his life as a result of muscular dystrophy. As my fractured awareness absorbs this macabre incongruity I'm suddenly made aware of the phenomenal energy and magnetism which is emanating from these balconies of people.

My mom turns and tells me that she's all right now and that this is where the bus was supposed to bring her and now she must say goodbye to me before entering the building to be with her "people". Her statement is said with so much certainty that I immediately become very anxious. Then she points with excitement to another balcony which is set squarely in the middle of the apartment face and it becomes instantly conspicuous because it is acutely empty and I wonder that I had not noticed that before. Something powerful insists that I stare at it and after a few moments the emptiness of that balcony becomes almost agitating, but I cannot break the spell of allure that it has over me. Then suddenly the sounds of gaiety and activity ceases and an eerie silence ensues as the residents of the apartment block place their focus upon this lone and empty balcony.

My mother's shrill and excited voice shatters my perplexity. "He's coming, Marty," she says with joyous anticipation.

"Who's coming?" I ask anxiously. She doesn't turn her gaze from the balcony as she says quite flatly and with obvious impatience, "Gavin, you dork."

"Gavin?" I repeat by way of shocked question, wondering simultaneously where she picked the "dork" bit up from. Effusively she points upward and I look to see a young man enter the stage of his central balcony and then the profound awe of that moment engulfs me. I can't explain how I know; I just know that the young man in question is my deceased brother Gavin who died as an infant of cerebral malaria.

The grown up Gavin smiles and waves to her and I with utter joy. When he speaks he speaks normally and by projecting his voice he is heard with clarity by us below. "Hello, Momma. It's good to see you didn't get lost. Who's that drongo you've got with you who keeps leading you astray?" He smiles especially for me and I feel his love roll over me like a thick liquid tremor. The dream is beginning to take on a weird kind of reality. I can actually sense that I am dreaming and that I am in my bed beside my darling Polly who is snoring like the sweet pig she is. The giddy portion of my ego which is drugged by sleep on one hand wants to awaken, but on the other wants to hang in there and follow the experience deeper, and for a fleeting moment I truly sense the validity of two realities at once.

Without intending to I shout out to Gavin "This is weird man, what's happening?" His smile is embracing and he informs me that I need not talk per se, but rather mentally think the dialogue and it will be conveyed and understood. "Use mental telepathy Sprite," he says calling me by some ridiculous name I've never heard of. "Thinking is talking without having to raise your voice," he tells me telepathically along with an equally sound telepathic chuckle. This is truly weird, I think to myself...and what's with the Sprite business, I wonder?

"Sprite is the nickname I would have given you had I stayed around to become your older brother," he said telepathically answering my question.

“Why didn’t you stick around, big brother?” I asked vocally rather than waste time trying my hand, or rather my mind at telepathy.

“That’s too complex an explanation to get into right now,” he replies telepathically, “but soon into your future a very sanguine woman will come into your life and clarify that issue for you...in the meantime there is much at hand.”

My dream brother then informs me that our mother’s time on earth is nearing its completion. She unconsciously knows this and has been coming to the new realm in her dreams quite often of late and in so doing is familiarising herself with the death process. “The influences and energies are perfect for her easy entry,” he says and an icy shiver convulses through me just before I tell him that I am not ready yet for that to happen again. After all I’d already lost her once for two years while I was away at boarding school and the thought of experiencing such a loss in a permanent sense would be more than I could endure. It seems I protest vigorously for a long time until I find a thought that sobers me quickly. I suggest to Gavin that if anyone should be “taken” it should be the old man. After all he doesn’t have the emotional involvement with us like she does; and he’s always been an island unto himself, somewhat cold and detached for reasons of his own making, whereas she’s our guiding force, our adviser and our sanctuary when our fears come hunting us out. “Please for God’s sakes, take the old man instead,” I blurt out urgently.

Suddenly the ramifications of my statement reduces me to uncontrolled tears and all I feel is huge chunks of me breaking away from something sad and solid that has lived inside me for a long time like an unknown tumour, benign but still invasive...and that dark pulsating tumour is all the guilt of all the lifelong anger and confusion that I have focused unconsciously and consciously upon my father, and I realise that in spite of my self proclaimed psychological astuteness I have long fed to a secret well the waters of my repressed bitterness.

It was Gavin who came to my rescue by focusing me on the immediate situation. His telepathic voice was smooth and soothing. “The old man offered,” he said, “but that does not suit the overall purpose of your combined Soul identity. Mom has new purposes to pursue now. And though her absence will cause great pains it will also provide invaluable gems of learning and wisdom for the Soul family. Nothing, irrespective of its beauty or ugliness, love or fear, is without meaning and purpose. You must let her go now that she is ready. If you hold her back she will be forced to create new circumstances which may only serve to make her eventual exit more difficult than it need be. The time is ripe now my brother...you must let go with both love and longing. Do you understand, Sprite?”

Understand what? That I was having a dream in which conscious dialogue was taking place; that my dead brother was about to receive my mother into the arms of death and dissolution? No, I did not understand. And what did he mean by, “it not suiting the purpose of the overall Soul identity?” I had encountered this type of esoteric philosophy where it was conjectured that the individual soul itself was also a functioning part of other souls, who in their turn were all part of the overall identity, the Oversoul, which was itself an individual part of an even greater Oversoul in a maddening lineage of endless mutating

replications. It's true that fractal science hinted at this possibility, but it was still only a philosophically hypothetical postulation. Dreams may seem real, but they are not reality.

Again Gavin asked me if I would agree to let her go. I refused flatly and he knew from my telepathic intent that I was not going to yield on this issue and in an instant I could feel his deep disappointment. He was quiet in thought for a few moments and then he said resignedly, "So be it...this then is *your choice*." It was the highly energised tone of "your choice" that sent another icy chill through me and I distinctly knew that a potential burden had been placed upon my shoulders as a result of my decision.

My attention was then drawn toward my mother who was speaking urgently. She was saying that it was time for her to go and be with her friends and family in the apartment block. Then she turned to face me and I saw that her features were alive with the youthfulness and vibrancy of a woman much younger than she actually was, and I knew she felt as happy as she could ever hope to be. But all I could think about was my dread of having to say goodbye to her and that fear alone was too great for me to face in that moment. "I'm going to go now, darling," she said, smiling with absolute love.

Oh Christ! Curse the world for being so cruel. Those were the very words she uttered to me a long time ago when as a child she and I said our first farewell at the poolside after my enrolment in a catholic boarding school which would separate us by thousands of miles for the next two years. That period of incarceration and the emotional and physical abuse which I suffered so acutely suddenly frothed into recall and inundated me with the agony of it all; and I recollected the solemn vow I had made to never allow myself to be parted from her again...until death we do part, I had sworn. And yet now with the advent of her departure, I still refused to say goodbye. "Mamma, I can't let you go," I said flatly as I fought to restrain tears of grief.

She smiled and said, "Don't be so silly, they're my family...that's where I belong." "You belong with me...they can wait," I told her sternly as she threw her eyes urgently towards the building.

"But *I can't*," she replied with a warming smile as she took me in her arms and brushed her lips loving across mine before beginning her advance towards the building. "Mom, you're staying with me," I snapped as I lunged forward and grabbed her arm by way of restraint, in spite of which she still managed to drag me a few paces toward the building. "No, mom," I begged as I placed a firmer grip on her other arm and pinned her in place. "Marty please," she begged, "let me go, darling. Let me go."

Her imploring so frightened me that my embrace upon her involuntarily tightened as I urged her not to worry because I was here and that I would always look after her. But she shook her head in a defiant gesture and tried to break from my hold. I was dreading an increase of the struggle between us when Gavin came through the apartment block entrance and stood by the open double doors some twenty feet from us. I felt my mother attempt to lunge forward towards him, but my arms greedily held her back. Oh Christ what was happening? Why couldn't I just wake up from this fucking nightmare! Urgently I looked to my brother for some kind of lifeline, but he just stood there and dowsed me

with an incredibly compassionate and loving look and then he spoke to my mother vocally instead of telepathically.

“I know you want to come, mom...and we want you to,” he said gesturing to the balconies above overflowing with cheery smiles and waving arms, “but Marty’s great love and fear of loss is holding you back. He’s still deeply attached to the pain of desertion that he felt when he was sent away from home, so it’s understandable that he wants to keep you with him. Why don’t you stay a little bit longer and by doing so make up for that act of abandonment on your part? Don’t worry my darling, there’ll be another bus coming along for you soon enough; and we’ll still be here waiting.” He smiled so affectionately that I felt that he now too was undergoing the very same pain of departure that I had endured as a small boy. “Would you be happy to do that?” he asked in an encouraging tone.

For a long moment I felt myself to be in a vacuum and then I saw her head drop in some gesture of resignation and then lift up to slowly nod her consent. My brother smiled a congratulatory smile and then solemnly told me to make the most of what little time remained as a result of this reprieve and then with a healing smile he said, “God Bless you Sprite,” and casually walked into the disappearing depths of that strange building.

Suddenly the sound of traffic became painfully apparent and I could smell the pollution in the air and I felt that the worst was over. Then unexpectedly I felt my mother’s body become limp in my arms as she sagged with her full weight dragging me downwards. At first I thought she might have fainted as I eased her bulk gently onto the grass and propped her head upon the thigh of my outstretched leg. But she hadn’t fainted as such; her eyes were wide open and full of tears and a glazed agonising sadness and I knew she felt betrayed and that she was blaming me for holding her back when it was her wish to go...and a piece of heart broke away like a rogue bull elephant that’s no longer fit to travel with the herd he has loved for so long.

I was trying to rationalise her feelings in conjunction with my own when a look swept across her face that plunged me in the deep end of the panic pool. It was the face of death and I realised that she was dying right before my eyes. Then she looked at me from far away as the life force ebbed, and with the last of her energy she raised a gentle smile of forgiveness and absolute love before she convulsed softly and slumped in my arms. The horror of that moment engulfed me so intensely that I screamed a scream so primal in its pain that it rattled my very bones and served to wake myself up out of that horrific nightmare. Polly sprung up like a mother ready to defend its young with her life only to find me a shivering, sweating, frightened and weeping wreck.

Polly Taylor was a divorced mother of two beautiful children under the age of seven with whom I had been living amicably with for over a year. Previously I had spent a great deal of my life either living with others in rented houses or renting at home as it suited. Under my belt dangled the scalps of several women with whom I had been at one time or another deeply involved; all decent and well-intentioned women for whom I still held high regard. Needless to say the failure of those relationships lay squarely with me and my inability to commit. My nature was basically self serving and it was not unusual for me to make any

manner of excuses for my behaviour in order to get what I wanted; and I could be cold and calculating and certainly manipulative with ease. But by the time of the dream's appearance I was starting to mature and understand the 'ins and outs' of human love relationships, certainly enough to consider our making a marriage. She was eager to have another child, which instead of putting me to flight with fear seemed strangely attractive and intriguing. Such was my love for her.

However I could not rid myself of the impending sense of doom that the dream in question had evoked. Usually I will tell my mom everything, but I could not tell her of this dream for fear of upsetting her. Being something of a psychic herself she would in all probability take it as some kind of omen of things to come. In any event for the following months I was slavishly devoted to spending time with her believing that I might be losing her at any moment. But then as time went by I settled down and rid myself of the dream's influence and become more involved in my own plans with Polly and soon the dream's impetus toward familial involvement faded and life went back to its well worn routines.

Chapter 3.

“My heart is a calcified rock, a tombstone upon which is brutally carved my beloved mother’s name”...Catriona Bor.

I can vividly recall the first measured steps of my mother’s decline towards her untimely death and the start of my own imminent fall into the depths of depression and detachment from involvement with life in general which heralded the slow insidious disintegration of my own outward self.

Almost a year after that dream of great disturbance my mother became ill. She started to lose weight rapidly and became tired and weak and after a thorough consultation and examination with a round of specialists she was diagnosed with a terminal and inoperable cancer. My world was shattered and the old boarding school nemesis of fear, doubt, rage and helplessness began once more to make serious inroads into my state of normalcy and well being. The shit had finally hit the fan and the fabric of my world was about to unravel and upturn me into a bundle of raw and confused loose ends.

I expect I should be grateful that my mother’s death was a comparatively quick one. She had smartly made up her mind not to linger and cause her family any additional grief and was quite nonchalant about being able to make that choice. Various medical staff had warned her to expect a period of protracted pain which of course they reassured her would be kept to a minimum with the use of painkillers. From the time of her diagnoses to the time of her death several weeks later, she held her head high, kept her composure and positive attitude and acquitted herself with a dignity befitting her basic nature.

Even in her dying she did the right thing by making sure that she had the strength and will to stay at home and enjoy her family as much as she could before having to be finally hospitalised. However, for us, her last week in hospital was a hell of emotional rude awakenings and bitter acceptances. She was often under the heavy influence of painkillers which resulted in the creation of a strange foggy incoherence on her part, which denied us of some considerable time that might have been spent more valuably. I took leave from work to be with her constantly and my vigilance at her bedside was strongly supported by my father and my sister Louise as we split shifts so that if she spoke or was rational, one of us would be in attendance to let her know that we were still there and just how much we loved her. I suffered openly with tears and bitter sadness, while my father and sister suffered in strong silence, as was their way. They had been the solid ones to make all the necessary impending arrangements while I went privately insane. And for the first time in my life I really prayed in a spiritual sense for some kind of salvation from my impending state of insanity, and if it meant clutching at fictitious straws I was happy to do so.

I was most definitely not a religious man, but I did consider myself a borderline contender for something mystical should it ever happen; and until such a state occurred I determined to remain an Agnostic. My mother had always been a devotee of Spiritualism and through her I got to be quite comfortable with it theoretically. Yet paradoxically as a teenager I had

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