

A photograph of a pond with several green lily pads floating on the water. A single raindrop has just fallen, creating a series of concentric ripples in the dark water. The text is overlaid on the image in white.

LIKE  
*Raindrops*  
ON  
*Water*

The Novel that  
Wrote Itself

As strange as it sounds, LIKE RAINDROPS ON WATER wrote itself.

Many of the characters and ideas arrived during Ayahuasca ceremonies.

The story line arrived while working with the sacred Andean coca leaves (not to be confused with the cola drink or the white powder derived from these mystical leaves).

And the jungle adventure was delivered by the magic of the Peruvian jungle which breathes inspiration with every gust of air.

It came together as a collaboration of a group of friends from around the world, each adding their own special input.

At one time, it was even being edited by candle light, in a hut, in the middle of the Amazon jungle!

My part was to coordinate the things that happened, and to bring it into being, for you to read.

Jann Di Paolo

LIKE  
*Raindrops*  
ON  
*Water*

A LOVE LETTER TO THE WORLD

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Marion, Peter and Drew

## **WHAT WAS IT LIKE, MOLLY?**

Jonathan swung gently in the hammock, leafing through one of Molly's antique books. It had an old smell about it and he liked the feel of the paper pages. Almost everything he read these days was on a flat electronic screen but holding the book he felt he was living a part of history. It was a book of Shakespeare's sonnets and love quotes. Molly was now convinced he had fallen in love with his very beautiful and intelligent girlfriend, Belle.

It was a Saturday morning and they were sitting on the balcony of her small, third floor apartment that overlooked a magnificent park. On the balcony was a tiny but flourishing garden of edible plants with a splash of colorful flowers. One little bush was covered in tiny white flowers and buzzed with bees collecting pollen.

Molly was sewing, making a small alteration to his favorite shirt. She had just turned 105 and had lived through many more years than Jonathan, who was just 23. But, to him, she felt more like an older sister. She had been a friend of Jonathan's family since before he was born and, after his parents died so suddenly, they had always spent time together. There was a strong bond between the unlikely friends.

"These textiles are terrific. So soft, but this shirt will be good for years," she said.

He looked at her face while she concentrated on her sewing. It was a face that had seen many smiles, but she had surprisingly few lines, and her skin was bright and full of color.

"What was it like, Molly, when you were young? Tell me more. I love hearing how things have changed."

He often asked this type of question. He was always researching and studying, but what he liked best was to hear the stories from anyone who had lived in the time before so much had changed.

His parents had been investigative journalists. It must have been in his genes. His mother was the writer, his father the photographer, and together they had exposed some shocking human and animal rights issues. They were courageous and fearless about what they brought to light. But it often took them to dangerous places. When they found out they were expecting Jonathan, they hung up their traveling hats and worked close to home and concentrated on raising the boy. It was a cruel twist of fate when a huge landslide at a nearby beach engulfed them both. The horrible irony was they were researching an article on whether or not the beach was safe when the sands collapsed on top of them.

Jonathan was nearly four at the time and went to live with his grandparents. They loved him dearly, and many of his parents' friends stepped in to help raise the boy and share with him what they knew. That's when Molly started seeing more and more of him. He was taken under the wing of many talented and clever people, from many walks of life. It was a rich and varied education, but nothing could fill the place of his parents.

His grandfather taught him how to work with wood, and Jonathan was fascinated by objects with moving parts. In his teens, a musician friend taught him how to play the guitar, but music wasn't one of Jonathan's greatest passions. He set about building a robotic guitar player that would play the instrument for him. The final version was a beautifully constructed piece of art made of wood. His grandfather taught him how to select the finest pieces of timber, how to carve and polish it to create a living artwork from the precious material. The mechanical fingers formed the notes and plucked the strings. They moved like the legs of a huge insect, and it was mesmerizing to watch the wooden creature play. It was also the start of a promising career in robotics for the young man. He built a mechanical drum and various wind instruments, but the guitar player was the most beautiful to watch. Jonathan was never much of a talker, but the music helped him to socialize and was a big success with his friends. The family room became a music studio. It accumulated all sorts of instruments and became a favorite place for friends to gather, talk and play together. His grandmother often joined in playing piano, but "in the traditional way," she always said.

Jonathan had been coached, inspired and encouraged by some exceptional masters who had taught him how to learn and think for himself. He had won a place at Sean's Academy, considered the most innovative college in the world, and after graduating, was now teaching robotics there. He had an

inquiring mind and listened well. "It was in his genes," his grandmother would always say. She felt deeply for her grandson, growing up without his parents.

He was especially fascinated by Molly's stories. She was from a different era from many of the other friends who had formed his family. And she shared with him the stories from her travels, which gave him a sense of the world and a taste for adventure.

"What was it like? Well, once upon a time..." Molly laughed, then paused and reflected on a world that she had seen change dramatically. She put down her sewing on the small bamboo table by her side.

"In many ways, life was pretty much the same as now. Human beings have done much the same for millennia. We eat, sleep, chat to friends, watch the sun go up and down, fall in and out of love, have babies, wash the dishes.

"There was so much that was good, in so many ways. But all sorts of things were going wrong with the world. The weather, our animals, our forests, rivers, seas and lands. It seemed like an endless list.

"And things were far from perfect for the human race. Many people seemed to have everything they needed and lived well, but too often it was a stressful life full of drama and panic, disconnected from what was really important. A huge number lived in poverty. Millions didn't have enough food to eat or clean water to drink. There were people who were homeless, without security or shelter. There was disease, crime and corruption, and horrible wars were still raging. The quality of our food had dropped, and people got sick from preventable diseases like diabetes. And it wasn't only the poor. It affected everyone.

"Our environment was toxic: the air, the water and the way we lived. The plastics that we used for so many things were poisoning us. It had been marvelous at first, of course. We thought it very convenient and used so much of it to store and serve food. But the news started to spread that our precious plastics were toxic and linked to all sorts of illnesses. It was causing infertility, problems with our immune systems, asthma, diabetes. There was a whole list of horrible illnesses. The toxins were leaking into our water and our food.

"And the pesticides that we'd used for years to produce such quantities of food were turning against us. The chemicals were destroying our bees. We nearly lost them, and many other insects for that matter. Without bees, much of our food wouldn't be pollinated. And if the bees were suffering, what were the pesticides doing to us?

"There was such resistance to change. Research was gagged, and evidence ignored; so much was controlled by a few. The bees were a close call, Jonathan, but we saved them. It started with a few that spread the word, and it gathered momentum. People started to take action and have their voices heard to make changes. It seems incredible that it was all kept secret, but of course when it all came out a few years ago, the situation had been corrected in any case. And our precious little honey bees were saved."

As if on cue, a honey bee landed gently on Molly's hand. She greeted it with a smile.

## ***IMAGINE THE FIRE FOR CHANGE***

“It had seemed like an overwhelming, impossible task. Some thought it would just fix itself. Some thought it was already too late. Many people found it hard to imagine how things could change, really change in the way that, deep down, we knew it had to. It was easier to get on with our lives and leave it to our leaders, although they seemed to be a big part of the problem. Many of those who could make the changes did nothing, or worse still, took actions out of fear and self-interest. I guess we will never know the full story behind it all, but at the time, it certainly seemed that many solutions were being ignored.

“But something happened. There could have been many reasons. We were obsessed those days with looking for reasons, or better still, THE reason.

“Humankind had been set on destruction. We resisted making the changes for too long, so it was forced on us. It was a turning point that could have gone either way. Thankfully we evolved in a constructive way. The mystical laws of the universe, as always, were in charge.

“Maybe enough people came to believe in the possibility of a better world, creating a critical mass that made the shifts happen. Maybe it was the new generation, or intervention from beings from other galaxies, something in the drinking water or music in the air. Who knows?

“It seems so difficult to explain. But it’s because there are no words to describe it. It came from something that has no words. We had been looking and waiting for a dimensional shift, an enlightenment. We thought it would feel like an awakening. But it was different, and none of our words can describe it. The moment we tried to explain or understand it, it disappeared. We had to hold onto something completely new and inexplicable to retain it. All we knew was that it felt right. Comfortable.

“And it happened quietly, within people. More and more of us started to see that everything in the world was connected. We changed our own small worlds, little by little. It was subtle and in some ways we hardly noticed it, but we saw the effects. Outwardly things seemed much the same as before. But slowly, people seemed to gain a new perspective both of themselves and the world. We started to understand what was behind energy and vibrations.

“It started with a few, and spread, like raindrops on water that ripple out gently. And it was a fire that soared high and strong, like an eagle lighting up the sky.” Quietly Molly started singing.

They both gazed out over the park.

A grand old tree just inside the gates of the park caught Molly’s attention. She had been watching it over the last few weeks and couldn’t understand why it was dying, and why it was dying so quickly.

“Let’s go outside for a walk. I want to have a look at that tree over there,” she said. “And I’m going to introduce you to the Professor. He’s bound to be in the park at this time. He can tell you more about all sorts of things!” said Molly, rising gracefully.

Jonathan followed and, on the way out, picked up both his own electropack and hers, in case they decided to glide round the park.

## **WALK IN THE PARK**

The spring morning was starting to warm up, and people were out and about in the street. A few glided or cycled past, while community buses on the outer lane took people further afield. The buses and electropacks were silent and there was only an occasional squeak of a bicycle due for a touch of lubricant. They could hear the birds in the park, the whistling of a man walking in front of them and the wind rustling the top leaves of the trees.

Jonathan swung the electropacks over one shoulder, faced the solar panels outward to give them extra charge, and lightly took Molly's arm as they walked down the street.

"So tell me," said Molly. "How is young Belle?"

"She's wonderful. We're going to a ballet performance tonight with some of her friends. I must admit I'm not sure about ballet, but she loves it. I do think she is so very beautiful." he said and then suddenly looked embarrassed by his declaration.

"What's she doing today?"

"Experimenting with her latest snacks. Maca-rooms! They are so delicious and give you such an energy boost. She wants to take some with us to the ballet for taste-bud testing on the final six in the range."

They waited briefly for a break in the transit lanes, then crossed over and walked through the park gates. The park had been there for hundreds of years and was full of beautiful old trees. There were many new areas built in the last few decades that were used both for recreation and growing food. Molly loved this park. It had a small community area for fast-growing foods, but was mainly a place to relax, take in the sun and pass the time of day. She had lived in the area a long time and knew many of the people in the community. She liked to introduce people to each other, and especially liked to present her favorite people to Jonathan whenever she had the chance. Molly worried about her young friend. He was sociable and had plenty of friends, but he was reserved, as if he was waiting for something. She often wondered what else she could do to help him break through whatever was holding him back.

They stopped at the dead tree. It had been beautiful, one of the largest and oldest in the park. But now there was a large sign on it, saying that it had been poisoned and asking for information on who could have done it.

Molly was shocked. How could someone poison a tree on purpose? She looked back and saw the terrace of an apartment block right across the road from the tree. From the terrace there would be a magnificent view of the whole park with the city landscape as a backdrop, once the huge old tree was gone. It reminded her of a beachside suburb she had lived in years ago, where trees had been poisoned to allow a sweeping ocean view from a residential building, and it saddened her deeply that this could be the same reason for the fate of this tree.

Jonathan had recently bought a new camera made by his favorite inventor, Merlin, one of the early graduates from Sean's Academy. It was lightweight and small enough to fit in his pocket, but with such a strong zoom lens it doubled as binoculars. He pulled it out of his pocket and took pictures of the tragic tree from different angles. His love of the camera was more than a hobby; it gave him a connection to his father. And he felt secure behind the camera lens. He could look without feeling self-conscious and disappear for a moment into a world where only he entered.

"I'm worried, Jonathan." Molly said. "Life has been good, really good, since you were born. But lately I'm seeing and feeling things that haven't happened for years."

## **GLIDING**

“Shall we glide?” Molly suggested.

“Yes, I’d love to” replied Jonathan.

The park was big, with a huge variety of plants and trees. Molly always wanted to see as much of it as possible. She also loved to glide, just for the sake of it.

The Glide was one of the most popular inventions from Sean’s Academy. The small solar panel on the electropack provided power to a set of rollers in the Glide soles that were strapped on to the wearers’ regular shoes. The stop, start and speed controls were held in the hand and the rollers adapted to uneven surfaces, so it could be used almost anywhere. It was cheap to buy, cost nothing to run and needed little maintenance. It came with a Carry-Glide, a collapsible basket with wheels that could be hooked on, to easily transport small items. The best thing was that the Glide was light enough to be carried, so it took a huge weight off the transport system. Walking and gliding had become great pleasures for most people.

Jonathan strapped the small panel onto Molly’s back and helped her slip into the Glide soles. He made sure the brake was on and plugged in the cable. Then he did the same for his own Glide. He took her arm and they both switched on. Gently increasing their speed, they joined the other gliders.

“Oh, this is glorious!” exclaimed Molly, as they passed large trees, flower beds planted with color, and a small lake full of birds. Jonathan clicked the camera to catch a few images as they moved.

At the far end of the lake they met Henry’s great grandmother. Henry was a longtime friend of Jonathan’s. He introduced her to Molly and they chatted briefly.

“Isn’t she amazing, Molly? She’s 120 next month. She puts it down to good food and a young husband. It’s so sweet. Her husband, Henry’s great grandfather, is 115! He’s still very fit too and walks everywhere. He says it’s all due to having such a gorgeous wife! Wonderful to think we can live such long and healthy lives. You’d like him, Molly. We’ll have to visit one day.”

## COMMUNIPLUG

In the middle of the park was a collection of buildings. Its official name was The Service Station, but people had jokingly taken to calling it The Gas Station, as a reference to the old service centers that sold gasoline for the now-defunct petrol cars. Some people also joked that it was because people stopped there to talk. There you could recharge your electropack, collect messages, stop for a juice or a light snack, and pick up groceries and fresh produce from the small shop. It had its own multi-story greenhouse growing fruits and vegetables, both for sale and for the juice bar.

They stopped at the CommuniPlug to pick up messages on their wrist-cells.

Years earlier, cell and mobile phones had been phased out. Scientists had finally proved that it was harmful to hold receivers so close to the body. And there was conclusive evidence that the frequencies of the radio waves that were emitted, over the huge network of towers and masts, had played a part in the disappearance of bees and other insects.

A new technology emerged where messages were relayed via shielded cables. It was a return to 'wires' and used fiber optic cables. Airways were reserved for messages marked as urgent. People plugged in their devices to send and receive all other communications as and when it was convenient. Except for emergencies, the days of instant messages were over, and people started to enjoy the more relaxed way of communicating. Being constantly contactable and 'on demand' had been stressful, and everyone was happier communicating when they had time to concentrate properly.

Molly and Jonathan plugged into the fiber optic cables and unrolled the retractable screens on their wrist-cells. Molly's wrist-cell was so old there were now retro versions that looked the same. It had been one of the first, but still worked perfectly for everything Molly wanted.

"I'll leave it to you in my will," she always told him.

"Dah, you'll outlive the lot of us" he always replied. He knew that Molly could easily expect to live another 15 years or more. But he also knew that one day she would be gone, and gliding round the park with her would be a memory.

Jonathan downloaded a message from Belle, a reminder from his calendar about the ballet at 7:00 pm that evening, and a snippet of the latest song from his friend Henry Hatsoff and his band Mickey Mad Hat.

"Message from Henry. What a coincidence; we've just bumped into his great grandmother!"

Henry Hatsoff, his stage name, was a crazy musician who had been Jonathan's friend since their early school days. Jonathan had been one of the first to buy crypto-shares in Henry's band to help launch them. It was always good to hear what the prolific band was up to. Their latest was a glorious mash-up of traditional African rhythms and trombone, combined with a triple-tone acoustic flute invented by one of the band members, all mixed up with the distinctive Mickey Mad Hat up-beat Latin tempo.

Molly hummed along, completely out of tune, bopping her head and smiling. She liked Jonathan's taste in music and it kept her up to date with what was new. She read her own messages. A parcel had arrived at Centro for a hat ordered as a surprise gift for Jonathan. Mickey Mad Hat were playing their first important live show, and all the crypto-shares supporters of their initial launch had been invited to the "Wear a Hat" party afterwards. Jonathan thought it was a bit silly. Hats were the band's special trademark. He hated wearing them, but Molly said it was a good party ice-breaker. She had ordered a collapsible top hat that he could tuck away if he wanted to. She thought he would look splendid.

There was a message with an interesting recipe for stuffed caigua, the vegetable they call the slipper cucumber.

"Jonathan, we need to pick up some things at the shop. I'm going to try out a new recipe. If you like, drop by with Belle for an early dinner before the ballet."

Jonathan messaged the invite to Belle. She was home so bounced straight back, "I'd love to, Molly. See you at 5. I'll bring some of my new Maca-rooms for you to try."

All the messages were done. Molly said, "Let's have a juice while we're here."

They glided over, braked at the door and switched to walk mode.

## JUICE BAR

The juice bar was a bright, friendly place, full of natural light. They sat at a small table near the door. The menu changed often depending on what was ready in the greenhouse for harvest, but they always had a good selection.

Molly chose a carrot and beetroot juice from the electronic menu and tapped in her order for the shop: six caigua, a small packet of macambo and some crusty bread rolls. Jonathan ordered what he called green slime but that the menu showed as “Greens of the Day”. You never knew what would be in it until it arrived. They read through some online publications and talked while they waited.

The young waitress brought over their drinks. Only minutes before, the vegetables had been growing. They'd been pulled from the ground, shuttled through to the kitchen, washed, juiced and delivered. She also brought over the groceries Molly had ordered from the shop.

“Hello Molly, hello Jonathan. How are you both?” The waitress, Jeni, bent to give them both a kiss on the cheek.

“Jeni, hi! What's in the slime today?” Jonathan said, laughing.

“Today we have lots of spinach and celery and, of course, spirulina. It's Popeye day today,” she beamed and made the strong-arm imitation of the recently revived cartoon.

“We grow our own spirulina now. It's a huge success!” She loved working in the juice bar and was involved in the gardens, and the new ideas for improvements. She was part of the collective that had started the whole thing five years ago.

While she chatted, she carefully packed the groceries in Molly's Carry-Glide. “There you go Molly. What are you cooking?”

“Thanks Jeni. Stuffed caigua, but you know me, I never follow the recipe. How are the new purple carrots going?”

“Ready next week, we hope. Interesting strain of purple *daucus carota*. The leaves are especially delicious. You know the origins of our cultivated carrots are rooted in the purple carrot. Rooted in. Hee hee hee,” she laughed at her own pun. “All we've done is let our orange friends lapse a few generations and they've reverted back to their ancestral types. Wonderful, hey? They are so sweet. They'll be a big hit, Molly. We had a bit of a setback when the main greenhouse was broken into and the control panel and front wall were smashed. Who would have done that? Anyway, we've repaired it more or less. Drop by next week for the launch of the purple carrot!” She scooted off to deliver the next order.

The taste of the super-fresh juices was out of this world.

## **VIKTOR**

Molly looked up and waved to a tall, dignified man with light brown skin at the far side of the juice bar.

“Viktor!” she called out. He saw them, picked up his own strangely colored juice, and came over to join them.

“Jonathan! More handsome every day,” he said, as he grasped Jonathan’s shoulders and squeezed the young man’s hand, nearly crushing it. He hugged Molly, holding her longer than usual. She felt he was trembling slightly.

“What’s happened, Viktor?” Viktor always had a huge, infectious laugh - a giggle, a whoop and a howl combined, while his shoulders and torso jiggled up and down. Today, though, he had none of his usual jolliness.

“It’s Linorio. He’s disappeared. He’s gone.”

Molly felt a wave of shock pulse through her. “What happened?”

“Nobody’s seen him for over three weeks, not even on the Connect. He’s always wandered off for a few weeks every year, but this is different. His granddaughter went to his apartment last night. It’s all closed up. Apparently, he’s resigned all his official and community positions. He’s left his wrist-cell and given away his plants.”

“It makes sense now,” Molly said. “What he said the last time we spoke a few weeks ago. He said that the fame had got too much for him and he wanted to become anonymous again. And he said it was his time. Oh Viktor, I had no idea he was planning to disappear. He’s older than me, Viktor. We may never see him again. I may never see him again.”

“I know. He said something similar to me around the same time. It crossed my mind, but I should have known for sure when he gave me all his yellow oleander trees.”

Molly asked Jonathan “You never did meet him, did you?” He shook his head.

## **LINORIO**

“Linorio was such a pioneer. He showed us how to safeguard the jungles. He’s a tiny man, but with a huge permanent smile, even when his mouth is closed.”

She told Jonathan that Linorio had been born and raised in the Peruvian Amazon jungle. As a young man he’d moved to a remote part of the area to work as a wood logger.

“Linorio, his wife and his little daughter set off. They found a beautiful spot, high on the river bank, which would be above the maximum flood line. The rivers could rise anything up to 10 meters during the wet season. They were hours by boat from the nearest town.

“The only other person in the area was an old man, and together the two of them logged the magnificent trees. There was a wealth of valuable timber. The jungle and river provided food to eat and plants for medicines, and they could sow a few fast-growing crops in the fertile soils of the river banks when the water subsided during the drier season.

“They would cut the huge trees, float the rafts of wood down the river to the lumber mills and sell their precious goods. It took a day and a half to get there. They were there two years, alone, before friends from town started to join them. Their second child was born there, miles from anywhere.”

Viktor continued the story. “Linorio had been there about four years by the time I joined him in the tiny community. It was a hard life, but we did well and made money. We built houses, had children and even set up a basic school.

“Most of us were wood loggers. Some were hunters and killed animals such as monkeys, alligators and turtles, both to eat and to sell. And of course, there were fish. I was the boat driver, mostly. They called me ‘The Captain’! I knew those rivers like the back of my hand, even when they cut new courses and changed their banks. Sometimes trees would fall in the water and block the way, so I had to know what was under the water as well as above it.

“We collected the turtles’ eggs too. They sold well and were easy to transport. Damn near used up all the eggs though. We didn’t know it at the time, but we took so many of their eggs we nearly killed all the turtles.

“Then, about 10 years after I arrived, everything changed. The government included our area in the huge national reserve. Commercial logging of timber was banned, and wildlife was protected. We could still use the natural resources for our own purposes. Subsistence, they called it. But we couldn’t sell anything. About half the community returned to town. Those that were left had to rethink what to do. We wanted to stay but we had to make a complete change of direction.

“And change we did. We went from being wood loggers to caring for and protecting the forests. We changed from hunters to conservationists and started breeding programs to increase the wildlife. We had to live in harmony with our surroundings instead of using them.

“It was a dramatic change, and a fast one. ‘A leap of faith’ is what Linorio always said we’d taken. We learned new ways and how to organize ourselves. We took only our quota and helped the animals we had once hunted. Regulations enforced by the authorities were nothing compared to those the community set. Anyone found breaking the regulations was banished from the village for two years. We looked after our own, looked after our neighbors and cared for the future of our jungle.

“25 years passed, and we were doing OK. Trees were growing old again and animal populations were increasing. There were many more sightings of the animals we had driven into the deeper jungle, especially Molly’s beloved jaguars.”

Molly saw Viktor had started to falter, and she took over the story.

## LIONS

"It was then that Linorio became famous. An accidental hero," said Molly proudly. "It was suddenly announced that African lions in the wild were extinct. It was a total shock to all but the few who had been warning about it for years.

"Lions were the only big cats that weren't protected as an endangered species. The experts said that lions had 'slipped under the endangered species radar'. They suffered such loss of their natural habitat and were still hunted by trophy killers. They lived in some of the poorest countries in the world, and they were being killed by the locals to protect their livestock; locals who had rifles and poisons.

"The king of the beasts, and the symbol of Africa, was lost in the wild.

"When it hit the international news, the whole question of big cats became huge. The whole world wept for the loss, more with shame than anything else. How could we have let this happen? But, finally, people were prepared to make sweeping changes.

"I have a theory, Jonathan," she paused to let Jonathan nod his agreement that she could share one of her theories. Molly was always careful when it came to express her opinions. She knew it was impossible to prove or apply reasoning behind many of the things she believed. They were simply her theories. But Jonathan always wanted to hear them.

"The great king of all beasts sacrificed itself. Sacrificed itself to save other species," she sighed.

"Anyway, a feisty young reporter had read an article about Linorio and how the number of jaguars in his area had been increasing. You remember I told you about the first time I saw a jaguar with Linorio and Viktor? It was me who spotted the magnificent creature, I'll always remember it. My heart was pounding so fast I could hardly shout out to Viktor to stop the boat. There it was, standing on the shore. It was so very magnificent."

Molly's voice started to fade as she remembered that day and many more that followed in that beautiful jungle. Viktor nodded and continued the story.

"So, the reporter from this huge news corporation tracked down Linorio and interviewed him. The community and the reserve were doing well by this time and they were a wonderful example to show the world. The reporter arranged for Linorio to speak at a huge international conference.

"Linorio told the conference the story of our little jungle community that had once been part of the deforestation and depletion of wildlife. He said that, financially, we were only a little better off than before, but the community was stronger and happier. The villagers worked together and shared resources rather than acting as individuals who were only out for themselves. There was unity and people liked being part of it. He told how we had taken our ideas to other communities and helped them. We showed it could be done.

"He spoke well. He always has such a calm demeanor, so relaxed and patient. He simply told the conference what we had done and took none of the credit for himself. But we all knew that he had been the driving force behind everything we had achieved.

"He's not a big man. But with those steady eyes and his constant smile, he captivated the audience. He told them about the small lodge that we'd built for visitors who wanted to see the more remote jungle. And how 10% of all the income from this paid for the gasoline to run a boat that patrolled a huge stretch of the river, to help protect the forest and its animals. There were so few rangers, only 50 in an area the size of Belgium. We had taken it on ourselves to be caretakers, even though we had little in the way of material possessions. He asked how many there gave 10% of their earnings to protect their environment.

There were people at the conference with the influence and power to make changes. And Linorio gave them a working example to follow."

## **A CHANGE FOR THE AMAZON**

Jonathan said he had learned about this in college but was unaware it had started with Molly's friend.

"This was a huge topic at college," he said excitedly. "This was the conference where the whole of the Amazon jungle was declared an immense nature reserve. It must have been Linorio's example that they used for the entire Amazon! One of the delegates at the conference had written his PhD thesis a year earlier on exactly the same idea. It detailed everything: the phase outs, commercial farming of many plants and trees that were being sourced from the jungle, and alternatives for anything that was impossible to source elsewhere. They accepted it, almost unaltered, as the plan for the project.

"Governments made pledges there and then while the final legal issues were sorted out. Residents could still use the natural resources for subsistence purposes, but all commercial activity was outlawed. Deforestation, mining and mass agriculture stopped overnight. It was huge. Money and resources were put in place to control it and to start conservation projects, and also to help individuals and corporations that depended on the Amazon. That helped with the transition and softened the blow.

"Before the end of the day, there was a huge anonymous donation that nearly doubled the financial pledges from the governments. Nobody ever knew where it came from, but many thought it was a computer magnate who had worked quietly for years buying huge areas of land for conservation.

"Changes happened quickly, and much of it was education. As corporations and individuals moved out, many people returned to their homelands to be a part of the changes. They saw possibilities and wanted to return to their roots to help make it a success. They brought their own expertise and contacts and made good use of the financial and political support. Everyone took responsibility as caretakers. The impact on the climate was noticed after just a year. The Amazon had always been called the lungs of the earth, and this gave it the chance to breathe again. And within a few years, on the strength of the success in the Amazon, areas throughout the world were declared nature reserves."

Molly nodded. "It was a huge success, but it was more than that. It was such a massive symbol that we humans were capable of making a huge change. It made other changes seem possible.

"After that, Linorio was invited to talk at all sorts of conferences. I traveled with him for nearly two years. It was such a wonderful time. We met so many people from so many walks of life. And there were lots of parties, too!" Molly smiled to herself.

"It was always so busy and there was so much to organize, but I loved it. He always wanted to help, and he loved talking to people, but all the traveling was hard for him. And he said that sometimes he felt he was invited as some sort of lucky charm, almost as if just being there could make huge changes, which was nonsense of course. He needed to get back to his jungle and to his family. And I needed to get back to my life. But I have always loved him," she added softly.

Jonathan saw tears well up in Molly's eyes. He knew she was feeling more than the loss of an old friend and he wanted to help her. Searching for something to change the subject, he remembered hearing that there had been numerous spin-off projects, like the one that revised the volunteer initiatives.

"Did you ever get volunteers in the early days, Viktor?" he asked.

Viktor started to laugh. "We all love to help, but it was sometimes a bit misguided, with some silly projects and ideas. There were some volunteer programs where people barged in on communities, stayed a few days, did a few things and then left. Sure, they did things or built things, but sometimes they forgot to check if it was what was needed most."

Viktor started to laugh even harder. He remembered when a group of well-intentioned volunteers had arrived at a neighboring village.

"Some local goon in the city had organized it," he chuckled. "They stayed for four days and planned on building 10 brick cooking stoves, inside the huts! They arrived with all their hi-tech tents, water purification straws and insect repelling clothes, and a big pile of bricks. Ha-ha-ho-ho-ho-huff-ha."

Viktor's signature laugh was coming out now, his broad shoulders jiggling up and down. It was a wonderful relief, and Jonathan started to laugh with him, even before hearing the end of the story.

"I went along on the last day for the ceremonial try-out. Well, it had taken them four days to build one stove. And when they tried it out, the wood was damp, so they had trouble getting the fire going. In the end they doused it with gasoline from the boat. Damn near burnt the hut down. And the smoke! Everywhere! Oh my, oh my, it was chaos. Ha-ha-ho-ho-ho-huff-ha. But we were ready, with every bucket in the village filled with water. Everything was saved, and we congratulated them for all their hard work and got them back in the boats. The cement that was left came in useful to repair the volley ball space, and the rest of the bricks got used for a pathway. Our visitors were happy; they'd had an adventure holiday. And the goon in the city built himself a new house with the bulk of the money from the volunteers." Viktor's laughter was getting louder.

"But they hadn't asked the community. What that village really needed was books and writing equipment to help the little school they had just started."

Viktor composed himself a little. "But with this new structure, the volunteers really started making a contribution. They asked first how they could help and they got the women and the children involved. Participation and education were the main things that was needed, and the children loved learning foreign languages from talking to the volunteers. They spent time teaching us how to do the things they knew, instead of trying to change the things we already did well."

This started Viktor laughing again, a real belly laugh. He was mumbling "wooden huts with grass roofs and cooking inside, and oh the smoke, you should have seen it, everyone running around." They were all laughing, including Molly. Even the other customers in the juice bar joined in from a distance, just with the sound of Viktor's infectious laugh.

## **THE AWARD**

In all the laughter, Molly had a flashback of a conversation she had had with Linorio and realized why he must have left.

“It was the award!”

As she said it, she swung round and crashed her hand into a pottery vase of flowers. The water and flowers went everywhere, and the vase smashed to the ground.

“Oh no, sorry! Look what I’ve done! Such a lovely vase!” she cried out in a panic. Jeni appeared from nowhere and helped clear up the mess.

“What award?” both Viktor and Jonathan asked in unison, while they picked up the scattered pieces of the broken vase.

“There was an award that was planned for him.” Molly was flustered and dabbed at the water around her side of the table as she remembered more details.

“Yes. It was called the Acclaimed Hero Award. I remember we laughed about the acronym and how he was finally going to have his A HA! moment. We started making up silly names for awards. But he was serious. He said he was worried we were going back to the old ways of thinking. He’d said it was the Great Spirit, animals, plants, insects, trees and all the people who had made it happen, that he was just a part. He was so worried we’d gone back to giving all the credit to one person, one reason. That we were losing connection with the whole.

“Maybe we can do something. Let’s find him and get a message to him. We can tell him we’ll organize it so the award goes to a group or something. We’ll make sure he is left in peace. I hate the thought that people have hounded him so much he’s had to vanish like this to escape. Viktor, you start it. Open a group on the Notice Space to let everyone know. Maybe we can still contact him.”

“I’ll do it. You’ll see it next time you plug in.”

Before anyone could step in, Molly passed her token transfer chip over the menu and paid the bill.

“My turn,” she said. She wanted to make her way home. There were many people to contact, and she felt like her brain was scrambled as she tried to figure out where Linorio could have gone.

“Love you Viktor. I’ll call you Tuesday. Take care of yourself and remember to eat well,” she said.

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