



The Magentarian Flute

A Tale of Music and Madness

Windelf

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(A Tale of Music and Madness...)

by Windelf

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1. The Visit

The half-moon rose above the misty hills as a gentle breeze rustled through the leaves of the tall lemon-scented gum trees. "Mopoke, Mopoke," came the call of the boobook owl from somewhere in the distance. The owl's soft call mingled with the notes the flutemaker played on his latest creation. He smiled and was pleased as the sound of the flute combined with those outside and drifted off into the night.

The flute maker was working late into the evening. He liked tinkering with his flutes at night, a time when the world was quieter, more still, more conducive to the fine-tuning of his flutes. Some nights he would make himself a cup of tea and wander over to his rather disorderly workshop and sit and look at his half-finished projects. Some nights seemed to be perfect flute making nights. He could never explain how or why they were, he just knew they were. Tonight was one such night.

He was focusing on reworking a flute that did not seem to sing as well as he would have liked. He found that if he put such flutes aside for a while and came back later, he usually knew what he needed to do to find that missing something that would allow the flute play to its full potential. He had never figured out if the mere passing of time had affected the flute or himself or both, but it always seemed to make quite a difference somehow. He was focused on sanding the bore of the small fipple flute. For this procedure he used some 60 grit sandpaper that had

been tightly wound around and then tacked to a length of 10mm wooden dowel rod to enable it to perform as an effective, makeshift round rasp.

"Ah, Beautiful sounds and a beautiful evening it is, Master Flutemaker!"

The flutemaker jumped at the sound of the voice behind him, though he had already guessed who it was by the time he turned around to face the elf sitting on a box by the doorway.

"I hate the way you folk just appear out of nowhere, scaring the hell out of me!" he exclaimed with a little annoyance.

"Ah, that we do Master Flutemaker. We are like the shooting stars that blaze across the sky on a clear August night. If you are lucky you may get a glimpse of us, if not we are gone before you even knew we were there" replied the elf as he casually brushed some leaves from his vest.

It was not the first time an elf had visited the flutemaker in his workshop. He was that sort of flutemaker. He lived in that sort of place. Sometimes they would turn up and give him some helpful advice on a flute he was working on. Other nights they would drop by on their way to wherever it was elves went at that time of night. They would suddenly appear and say hello and have a chat. Just as suddenly, they would disappear in what the flutemaker often considered to be the middle of a conversation. He was also aware that they would only ever visit him when he was alone in his workshop. He liked how they often used lyrical metaphors in their conversations. They never told him their names, so somewhere in his mind he began to think of them as his P.E.s. He could not remember if the initials P.E stood for poetic elf or playful elf, though

he hoped it was not phantom elf.

The flutemaker had not seen this particular elf before but as usual he felt uplifted by the presence in his workshop. He noticed that he was short even for an elf and his green vest looked more well-worn and battered than those worn by most of the other elves who had visited. "A well-travelled fellow" he thought to himself. His visitor's eyes sparkled with that clear, timeless sense of certainty and clarity that he had noticed in all the elves who had spent time with him in the past.

"Welcome to my humble workshop and what can I do for you?" he asked, now feeling a little guilty about his outburst.

With a smile in his eyes the elf replied, "Ah, the point is more of what I can do for you, Master Flutemaker, for I have a gift for you." Unwrapping a brown cotton bundle that lay beside him, the elf handed the flutemaker a rough looking wooden flute.

The flutemaker accepted the flute and examined it closely. The first thing he noticed was how warm and comfortable it felt in his hand, like the forgotten touch of an old friend. He felt his body relaxing, instantly releasing some subtle tensions that he had been oblivious to. The flute looked old, real old, but the flutemaker was not sure if that was truly the case or if its aged appearance was merely a consequence of many years of neglect. It was end blown with only five holes. It was about 60 cms long and knotted and gnarly at its lower end. A couple of long cracks had been inexpertly repaired with some glue and binding that was beginning to fall apart. One thing was sure, whoever did the repair job was neither a flutemaker nor an elf. The flutemaker once again felt a strange, warm

sense of ease come over his body as he examined the flute... “May I have a play?” he asked, still unsure of why he was being given the instrument.

“To be sure, that’s what it was made for.” replied the elf playfully.

The flutemaker carefully placed the curved blowing edge to his lips and blew into it with a calm and confidence that comes from having performed the same intricate action thousands of times before. To his surprise, no noise came from the flute. He minutely adjusted his embouchure and tried a few more times. An expectant silence filled the room as the elf gazed placidly up at him.

The flutemaker took the flute from his lips and looked closely down into the bore. It was clear, smooth and surprisingly shiny. He examined the cracks to see if they could be leaking air and in doing so stop the flute from playing. He concluded that though the repair job was rough, it was highly unlikely that the small cracks would be causing the flute to make no sound at all.

He again placed the flute to his lips, made some more subtle adjustments and blew and blew, all the while making numerous ever so minute changes that had always enabled him to find that desired ‘sweet spot’ in all the multitude of flutes he had played in the past.

“Mopoke, Mopoke,” came the owl's call in the distance, piercing the silence in the workshop. The silence that now seemed to the flutemaker to be loud, annoying, and embarrassing.

The old flutemaker had made a lot of flutes in his time and played a whole lot more. There were some that were a bit hard to play. There were others that were never going to sing a very sweet song but at least he

could always get them to make a noise and play a few reasonably melodic notes. No two were ever exactly alike. When he first began to make flutes, it could take him quite a while to find the unique sweet spot of each one. But these days it usually only required a few unconscious subtle movements of facial muscles or lips and perhaps a relaxing or tensioning of various parts of the body. In microseconds, these small adjustments would enable him to find that elusive spot where each flute could reveal a glimpse of its possibility and potential. But tonight after a few more minutes of trying every subtle and not so subtle technique gained from years of blowing into all sorts of hollow tubes, this flute remained as quiet as a stone...

“Whoever made this needs to come to me for a few lessons, it's a complete dud.” he said to the elf in a voice that did little to hide his frustration and disappointment.

‘Ah, that may be, but this flute is also one of the finest ever made in all the human and non-human realms. It was made by hands and hearts that could perceive mysterious, elusive details far beyond the senses of mere humans or elves...

This flute was made so its sound would lure people to it like honeybees to a lotus flower on a delightful spring morning. And when they stop and listen to its sweet music, even for a little while, all their worries and concerns, all their fears, anxieties and trepidations will fall away like maple leaves coming down in a gentle Autumn breeze. As they are enveloped in its enchanting sounds, all the incessant chatter of their restless minds and the unfulfilled longings of their hearts will grow calm

and quiet. Calm, quiet and still as the deepest mountain lake on a tranquil winter's night. As they continue to listen and are touched by the flute's magical voice, the delicate sounds will open their hearts and their eyes. Many for the first time will perceive the world as it truly is ... a world so full of inherent beauty, magic and wonder! Thus their world and therefore the whole world will never be quite the same again!"

As the flutemaker listened he seemed to be lulled into a strange dream by the elf's words. He began to remember a time in his past when he had wanted to effect or change people, to make the world a better place as he saw it. His flute playing and making had often been a reflection of that wish. As he grew older, he came to realize that world mostly did not change much, despite what he and others thought about it. Instead of trying to fix or improve the world, he had decided to accept as it was. He let the world get on with its business and he got on with his. Which for the most part was staying home and making flutes. This meant that to many who knew him, he appeared to be a bit of a cynical old man who had given up on life, but this also was of little concern to the flutemaker.

For a few moments the elf's words touched and stirred an old longing that still lingered somewhere within him. Hearing the elf's soothing tone and seeing the sense of clarity and optimism in his smiling eyes seemed to ignite that old longing and pain even more.

But the flutemaker ignored these inner stirrings as he remarked, "Nice try, young elf!" (smiling at his own joke as he was fully aware the fellow before him would be at least a few hundred years old) "but I can't

even get a sound out of your wonderful flute, so you might as well take it back to where it came from.”

“Actually, it is now *your* wonderful flute. If you take it to Magentarian where it was made, all will be revealed. Revealed, like the morning flowers reveal their sweet nectar anyone who is eager enough to find it.

“Magentarian!” scoffed the flutemaker, “Everybody knows that is only a place in children’s fairy tales. It doesn’t exist!”

“That may or may not be the case.” replied the elf with an evasive grin.” It’s your flute, your story, your life. I am just a messenger. Like a mother bird dropping off a tasty morsel to her chicks in the nest. They are free to choose if they want it or not. But who can ever resist a tasty morsel?”

Many thoughts raced through the flutemaker’s mind as he looked again at the old flute in front of him. ‘I have got flutes to make, orders to fill, work to be done. No way am I going to go on a journey to some place that doesn’t exist, to learn to play a flute that I can’t even get a noise out of, just because some crazy elf thinks it might be a good idea.’ He turned back to the elf to voice these thoughts, but the elf was gone.

“Yeah I know, like those shooting stars!” muttered the slightly annoyed flutemaker to himself.

Some time passed as the flutemaker sat in silence and stared at the elf’s flute. He picked it up and again noticed how warm and comfortable it felt in his hands. Slowly, carefully he raised it to his lips and gently blew across the blowing edge. Only the sound of the wind rustling

through the gum trees could be heard.

“I’m going to bed!” scowled the frustrated flutemaker to himself.

“Mopoke, Mopoke” came the call of the boobook owl from far away.

2. The Reluctant Decision

Now the flutemaker was a man who loved going to bed at night. He loved to sleep. “The highlight of my life.” he would often quip to anyone who was unfortunate enough to be around. Most who heard him were unsure if this was just a sad reflection on his unsatisfactory waking hours or an indication of the high quality of his slumber. But most had learned to not take too seriously anything the eccentric flutemaker had to say. (Rumours had already spread how he sometimes talked to elves when he was alone in his workshop at night “Funny how they only ever appear when he’s alone.”) Usually he would go to bed early, read for a little while before turning out the light and drifting off into deep, contented sleep. He would then awaken around the first light of dawn, feeling fresh restored and happy.

But this particular night, he lay in bed wide awake, thinking about that elf and the flute. Maybe that elf was one crazy elf. Maybe he didn’t really know what he was talking about. Maybe he was having some sort of elf joke at the flutemaker’s expense. Maybe he was just plain lying. Though he had never known an elf to lie before and he doubted if they were even capable of it. Some who had appeared in his workshop over the years were definitely strange, elusive, unpredictable and mischievous, but he had never known one to lie.

Everybody knows that Magentaria is just a made-up place in some kid’s fairy-tale. He had once heard a story about a ring that had to be

returned to where it was made. Everybody knew about all the trouble they got into! Go on a journey with a flute that he couldn't play! He had a thousand better things to do! There were strawberries ripening in his garden, bananas waiting to be picked, the jaboticaba tree had just set its third crop for the year, the jackfruits were starting to look healthy and plump and in his mind he was already figuring out ways to pick those that were hopelessly high up in the tree. Then there were those endless cups of tea to be drunk on his back veranda. There were all sorts of important things that may not have ranked very high on most people's priority list, but were of great relevance to the flutemaker. Sure, there may be a world full of beauty, magic and wonder to be found. But there was also a world of pain, suffering and struggle. A world where the nature's radical unpredictability had created a species genetically encoded with a fear of impending turmoil and chaos. A world where petty conflicts could easily be used to justify self-righteous brutality and a callous indifference to the suffering of others. The magpie's beautiful melodious song was also a shrill battle cry claiming its territorial domination to all potential rivals. "Perceive the world as it truly is". What rubbish! It wasn't any of his business if anyone did or did not perceive the world as it may or may not be. He didn't care if playing that old flute could solve all humanity's problems for the next 100 years. It wasn't his job to fix anyone's problems. He had gladly resigned from that self-appointed role long ago. He loved the quiet and comfortable life he had created for himself. As far as he was concerned, people who believed that getting out of their comfort zone may somehow benefit their body

and soul were fools who had not read their history books properly. He wasn't going anywhere! This was where he belonged, and this was where he was going to stay!

He lasted one week...

Daytime was usually ok. He could keep himself busy with his flute making or pottering about in the garden. He took to hiding the elf's flute in strange places so he might stop thinking about it. But at least two or three times a day he would dig it out from its hiding place and hold it in his hands. It always felt so warm and cosy to hold. Inevitably the blowing edge would find its way to his lips and he would hear the sound of his breath blowing over the top of the flute. He would then curse a little and put the silent flute back.

Night time was much worse. Around 2 am every night, he would be lying in bed wide awake thinking about that irksome elf and his flute. He imagined he could hear the flute calling him "Come let's go on an adventure and play together!" as if it were his best friend instead of his worst enemy. But at 2 am the flutemaker wanted neither adventure or play. One night in sleepless frustration he found the flute and threw it into the glowing embers of his fireplace. But he quickly retrieved it in a panic, realizing that if he had allowed it to burn he may have to live the rest of his life with a haunting regret about the lost possibilities.

For 6 days and nights he did his best to keep busy and ignore the flute. He worked long hours in his workshop and became unusually sociable, paying surprise visits to friends he had not seen for many months. "A visit from the flutemaker something very strange is going

on!” He drank way too much of his jaboticaba wine, but nothing seemed to distract him for long and his thoughts would soon wander back to the elf and his flute.

By the seventh day he knew he was beaten. He pulled his dusty backpack from the cupboard beneath the stairs, checked that the mice had not eaten too many holes in it and began making plans. Plans to take a flute he couldn't play to a place that he doubted really existed. If he did happen to discover this mythical place, he may or may not find someone who knew something about his silent flute. ‘That elf has a lot to answer for!’ he thought to himself as he gathered together some clothes, food and flutes for his journey.

He finished up his last orders, cleaned and organized his small workshop (a rare event indeed) and told everyone he would not be making any more flutes for a while as he was going away on a ‘holiday’. Most of his friends knew he had been acting a bit strange lately but this was extraordinary.

“A holiday? But he never goes anywhere!”

The flutemaker had actually travelled quite a bit when he was younger, but these days rarely had any desire to go anywhere apart from his home, his flute making workshop and the local shop for his basic supplies. His idea of variety being the spice of life was deciding whether he should have ginger or mint in his morning cup of black tea. He had once tried to explain to his friends how it all had to do with that morning cup of tea on the deck and the view of the valley below. He loved to watch the sunrises and be touched by the ever-changing alluring beauty that

each new day revealed. He had been gratefully appreciating that same view for over 30 years but still had this nagging feeling that there was something more. Something very subtle and sublime hiding amidst all that beauty but he was somehow missing it. He figured if he looked at it just a bit longer, in just the right way, or maybe at just the right time of day, he may catch that elusive missing bit that he was not quite getting. For the flutemaker every day away from home was seen as a lost opportunity to find it (even though he had no idea what that 'it' actually was).

He had given this quite a bit of thought and figured there were three possibilities.

Possibility 1... No matter how much time he spent looking at that view he was not going to find anything else as there was not anything else to find and he was merely a deluded old man.

Possibility 2... There was indeed something else to be found by looking at the view, but he was never going to find it as he was too thick and insensitive and out of touch. No matter how much more time he spent looking, he would never find anything different. Especially as long as he was looking for it.

Possibility 3... There was indeed something else to be found and it was all working as it should and he only needed to spend some more time on his veranda and drink more tea and that wondrous something he had been missing would indeed eventually one day be revealed.

The flutemaker liked the third possibility the best and figured that was most likely the true one. When he had shared his reflections with his

friends they informed him that there were at least two other possibilities.

Possibility 4... You are crazy....

Possibility 5... You really need to get out more ...

The flutemaker did not like either of these possibilities.

He asked his neighbours to keep an eye on Eli (his very capable and confident teenage son) while he was away. Eli was a highly intelligent young man and both he and his father knew he would eventually be doing more interesting things with his life than making flutes in these remote hills. He was at that uncertain and exciting age where life beckoned with a myriad of alluring possibilities. For his part, the flutemaker was very grateful that Eli had grown up in a time of peace and prosperity. Unlike so many young men of other eras, Eli did not have to go to war to prove his manhood. Instead his teenage daydreams were free to roam in luscious fields where a diverse array of more life-enhancing hypothetical futures blossomed.

Ten days after that strange elf had come to visit, the flutemaker stood in the doorway of the ramshackle octagonal home that he had built over 30 years ago. He adjusted his hat and the straps of his backpack and warmly hugged Eli goodbye. “Take good care of yourself. I love you.” he said as he picked up his two walking-staff flutes and tentatively stepped onto the road.

“I love you too. I will be alright, I have lots of friends here.” replied Eli. He paused and watched the eccentric old man walk down the road. This eccentric old man who was going on a crazy journey with some ‘magic’ flute that he could not even play. This eccentric old man who also

happened to be his father. Eli had grown up watching his father spend hours and hours in his flute-making workshop. Some mornings he would tell Eli a story about some mysterious elf that had visited the previous night to help him with his flutes. Eli knew that there was not really any elves or magic flutes in the world, but he also knew that once his father got some weird idea in his head you just had to let him run with it. He thought of some lines from a book that his father liked to quote ... How did it go? Yeah that's it....

'A man needs a little madness. Or else he never dares to cut the rope and be free.'

'Whatever,' thought Eli as he turned to go back inside and check out the chocolate situation in the cupboard, 'He will probably be back in a few days.'

3. The Journey

The flutemaker walked quickly to the edge of the village. He had left early and taken a side track in the hope that he might avoid meeting any neighbours along the way. He definitely did not want to have to explain his journey to anyone. He was about to turn off the track and onto the open road when he met his old friend James. James was a popular man in the village, being the baker, part-time blacksmith and general help-anyone-with-anything sort of person. As long as it was not too complicated. James liked simple things.

The flutemaker had made many walking-staff flutes for James over the years. James would go on wild camping trips with some of the fathers and boys of the village. The idea was the boys would leave as boys and come back as young men ready to take their place in helping with the smooth running of things. Much to the flutemaker's surprise, it often worked out just that way. James would usually take a walking-staff flute on these camps and James being James, would invariably give it away to one of the young lads because, as he would later explain to the flute maker "He just had to have it." James and the flutemaker talked a while about the bakery and how the family was doing. James being a big family man. Sure enough, it was not long before James was kicking at the dirt and muttered "You wouldn't happen to have a spare walking-staff flute, would you? I seem to have misplaced the last one."

"You know James, sometimes being too generous can be a problem."

quipped the flutemaker as he swapped a walking staff flute for some of James's delicious bread.

“True, but not as big a problem as talking to elves, old man!” replied James with a laugh as he sauntered away playing his new flute.

The flutemaker walked towards the last houses of the village as the sun was rising over the distant mountain range. He reflected upon the many years that he had spent in his village. As a young man he had always figured that he would become wiser as he aged. But as an older man he found that being alive was more of a strange and somewhat bewildering experience than it had ever been. In his younger days he had confidently travelled through life, bathing in the comfort and rightness of a variety of strongly-held beliefs. But as he grew older most of these beliefs seemed to have slipped away somewhere. He had no idea where or how they went. It was as though they had somehow attached themselves to those grains of sands and fell through that metaphorical hourglass and disappeared. As such, far from feeling wiser, he noticed that his journey through life had delivered him with far more questions than any concrete answers. Somewhere within him sat a hard-to-ignore feeling of a profound and fundamental ignorance. The flutemaker found such ignorance both liberating and disturbing, often at the same time.

It was a beautiful spring morning. By the roadside a pair of green and red king parrots munched on the seeds of the zigzag wattle while high above them a flock of rainbow lorikeets chattered noisily amongst the golden-yellow flowers of the silky oak trees. He paused at the last house, feeling a little unsure. He felt the temptation to turn back and

forget about the whole thing and curse that crazy elf the next time he saw him. But he was also aware of another long-forgotten feeling stirring within him. That sense of adventure and memories of bygone days when he had felt the lure of the unknown.... “I’m going coddiwompling again.” he chuckled to himself as he walked briskly past the small lychee and mango orchards that lined the dusty road on the outskirts the village.

As he looked to the east he could see the outline of a mountain range in the distance. He had heard rumours that somewhere beyond the range lay a strange place called Magentaria. He had never met anyone who could verify those rumours, nor could he remember when or where he had heard them. In fact, he could not even be sure that he had not made them up himself. Or maybe an elf had mentioned it long ago. But he had always wondered about that mountain range and what may lay beyond.

By noon the flutemaker was hot and tired. He stopped and rested by a small creek, eating some of James’s bread with the cheese he had brought along. After eating, he unwrapped the flute the elf had given him, the Magentarian flute, as he now called it in his mind. He looked at it closely as he had often done since he had first seen it. Once again, he enjoyed the warm feel of it in his hands. He thought of James and was grateful for the many fine friends he had shared his life with. He blew into the flute like so many times before and to his astonishment some sweet sounds came from the lower few holes. Sweet, soft and to the flutemaker’s ears, wondrous, heavenly sounds. The notes lingered in the air as a subtle tingling sensation moved through his body, instantly heightening his senses while simultaneously relaxing his body. Inspired

and excited he blew some more but now there was only the sounds of his breath as it crossed the blowing edge. The flute had returned to its mysterious silent self. The excitement and joy of having heard a few notes outweighed the flutemaker's subsequent disappointment as he carefully re-wrapped the flute and lay down to indulge in one of his favourite pastimes ... an afternoon nap.

He spent the first night of his journey camped in a paddock by the side of the road. Before he drifted off to sleep he took out his Magentarian flute and softly blew across the edge silence. "I must be crazy," he muttered to himself as he put away his flute and lay down in his sleeping bag and gazed up in wonder at the countless stars in the clear sky above. The beautiful million-star motel, as he had once heard it called... 'Maybe not so crazy', he thought as he drifted off to sleep.

Thus, the flutemaker began to pass his days on the road. He would stop in the towns or villages and play his flutes in exchange for some food or perhaps a bed for the night. A small crowd would sometimes gather as the villagers enjoyed the novelty of a traveller bringing some music into their lives. He never minded if he was given anything or not, for he enjoyed the rest when he stopped and played his flutes. He also liked watching the folk as they responded to his flute playing. Some would stop to enjoy and appreciate the unusual break in their day. He would often notice a softness come over their faces as they listened and relaxed awhile. Others would hurry along like they were far too busy for such folly. He would occasionally receive a glare of contempt from someone that was obviously meant to convey that he should be doing

something more important or constructive with his life. The flutemaker didn't mind how anyone reacted to his flute playing. He would just keep playing for as long as he was enjoying himself.

The flutemaker soon found that he preferred the roads that meandered through the countryside rather than the more busy, direct roads... The *slow roads* as he called them. Slow because it always took a longer time to get anywhere and slow because those who lived on them seemed to move at a slower, more relaxed pace than those on the busier roads. Slow also because he was often asked in for a cup of tea and a chat as he wandered by. The flutemaker liked his cups of tea.

After a cuppa he would often take out one of his flutes and play. He noticed that when he played to these folks on the back roads they nearly always listened. Really listened, listened as though the sound of his flute was the only thing in the whole world that mattered to them. They weren't just sort of listening and sort of thinking about what else they could be doing or what may happen tomorrow. After playing for a time, the music slowed and softened, and the last notes of the flute lingered in the air and slowly faded into the silence. The flutemaker loved that silence. A part of him could always still hear the residual sound of the last note as it drifted further and further away, and he felt himself standing in a gap between two worlds. The world of the music and sounds in which he had just been immersed and the more tactile and strangely harsher world that he was about to re-enter. He loved to linger longer in that quiet space between the worlds. Mostly the folk on these back-roads didn't seem to mind either. These were people who were used

to living in a world where not every gap needed to be filled. They would often sit together for a little time in that precious space till a glance or smile or a word broke the spell and they all knew that they were back in the 'real' world. The world where work needed to be done and children needed attending or a myriad of other activities beckoned. Soon the flutemaker would be back on the road with a spring in his step and a lightness in his heart.

Sometimes when he was unsure of which road to take, the flutemaker would take out his Magentarian flute and hold it in his hands. It always felt warm and oddly reassuring. His doubts would disappear as the way forward became obvious. It was as though the flute knew where to go even if he did not. He quickly learned not tell anyone that he was taking a flute to Magentaria as the response had always been the same. "Crazy old man, that place only exists in fairy tales." The flutemaker occasionally wondered if they were right but the flute or his craziness did seem to be leading him somewhere. On this particular afternoon that somewhere was through some paddocks and on to a copse of casuarina trees near a stream at the base of some well wooded hills. A fine place for a camp for the night.

4. A strange dwelling on the hill

After a restful sleep the flutemaker woke early and dipped in the cold fast-flowing water. Feeling alive and refreshed, he ate a light breakfast and started following a track that meandered its way up the hill, enjoying the early morning magpie songs and warm sunshine as he walked. In a couple hours he was almost to the top of the hill when he came upon a small clearing with a peculiar looking house nestled amongst the trees.

Everything about the house seemed odd to the flutemaker. How it stood there all by itself, almost but not quite on top of the hill. How it seemed to lean over the edge of the hill like it would not take much to push it over altogether. Did it have 5, 6 or 7 sides? The flutemaker could not tell as bits of it came off at different angles to the rest. It looked as though 10 or more people had come together and decided to build a house and they could not agree on anything, but each went ahead and built a bit anyway. Built it out of poles from the forest and whatever they could find or buy from the surrounding villages. A large deck which had holes cut in it to allow two tall gum trees to grow through jutted out to the north with a fine view of the valley below. The trees provided shade from the mid-morning sun which was already a bit warm for the flutemaker's liking. 'Sure looks like a relaxing place for a cup of tea and some flute playing,' he thought to himself as he wandered closer.

Hearing some voices from within the dwelling, the flutemaker was

now curious to see who would live in such a place. He had noticed in his travels that strange buildings usually meant strange people which could mean a good adventure or maybe a not-so-good adventure. “Hello, is anybody home?” he called out, making sure he announced his arrival well in advance.

From out of one of the ill-fitting glass doors walked a strange person indeed. Strange mostly in that she was not in any way the sort of person that the flutemaker had expected to find living in a ramshackle house high on the edge of a remote hill. Her plain clothes did little to hide the graceful and alluring beauty of the woman who greeted the slightly awestruck flutemaker. The three children who warily followed out the door behind her looked as though they could have materialised from some picture-perfect children’s book.

“Hi, I’m Ellendia,” she said in a soft voice as she twisted her long wavy black hair through a blue hair tie. Realising that he had been staring in stunned silence way too long for comfort, the flutemaker slowly muttered “I’m a flutemaker and I’m on a bit of a journey and a mission.”

Ellendia didn’t quite understand much of what he said. (The flutemaker had a rather annoying habit of muttering incoherently at random times.) Intuitively she replied that she was just about to put on a cup of tea and asked if the flutemaker if he would like one.

Thinking about how much the sound of her mellifluous voice matched her exotic beauty, the flutemaker nodded his accepting reply.

“You can sit on the deck and play a tune while the water boils,”

Ellendia added casually as she noticed his walking stick flute.

He sat and gently played his walking stick fipple flute, inspired by the blue sky and tall trees towering above the mists that still hung in small pockets in the valley below. No doubt also inspired by the woman inside making a cup of tea. But somewhere within his mind he felt uneasy ... something didn't quite fit ... this beautiful woman and those 3 kids up here by themselves in this weird looking house ... Something made the flutemaker unsettled. Maybe she was really an evil witch and the children were her black cats or hobgoblins doing a bit of shape-shifting. This would be a perfect place for an old witch to live and pretend to be a beautiful woman just to catch a stupid old flutemaker off-guard. He had heard stories of that sort of thing happening

He was thinking of how he had better be wary when Ellendia appeared with a cup of tea in her hand. Her clear hazel eyes smiled innocently as she glanced at him while passing the cup. 'They can do weird things if you look them in the eyes ' thought the flutemaker as he sipped and enjoyed the flavour of his hot spicy tea.

The last of the morning passed into afternoon. Ellendia helping the children with some school work in between some quiet conversations with the flutemaker. He put down his flutes and allowed his body and mind to be soothed and massaged by the peaceful atmosphere and the serene view of the valley below. Suddenly he felt tired, really tired and with a weary and wary smile, dozed off.

It was late afternoon when he awoke to the sound of children laughing and the whistling of the kettle on the gas stove. 'Sweet music,'

thought the flutemaker as Ellendia approached with more tea. She sat and leaned on one of the brushbox trees that were healthily growing out of holes that had been cut in the deck.

Slowly she sipped her tea and stared into the distance before turning and addressing the flutemaker. “Being a flutemaker you must be pretty good with your hands. I have quite a few things that could do with a bit of fixing around here if you want to stay awhile. I'd like to make the most of another good pair of hands.” Her voice was soft and inviting but also carried with it a carefree tone that made it clear that it was of little concern as to whether the invitation was accepted or not.

‘Certainly sounds very tempting,’ thought the flutemaker to himself. But in seconds other thoughts also crossed his mind. Thoughts of his flute and his journey to Magentaria. The need to complete what he had started. The lure of stopping and resting up awhile. If she was a witch she was darn good at her disguise, but then again, they probably all are. “Life is full of possibilities,” was all he could manage to stammer from his mass of jumbled thoughts. He picked up the Magentarian flute from his pack hoping it might give him some guidance, but it was cold and quiet. Obviously the choice was all his. Ellendia stared curiously at the flute. “That’s a strange looking one,” she commented in an offhand manner.

“I guess strange is a fair enough description of it. Have you seen one like it before?” asked the flutemaker.

“You need to decide if you are staying or going and I need to get some dinner together. You can start chopping some wood for the fire.” came her terse reply as she moved back inside.

The flutemaker stayed. Of course he stayed. A week passed by. Then two weeks, maybe even three or four, he never really knew. The elasticity of time often seems to prevail in such places. Places such as that rickety house on the side of a steep hill where mystical morning mists covered the green valley below and the clouds shone in splendid hues of orange and crimson as the sun set behind the nearby western range at the close of each day.

Somewhere in the back of his mind the flutemaker was waiting for the witch and her imps to appear as they always do in such fairy tales, but they never showed. Just the wondrous, easy-going Ellendia and her three children pottering about their home and garden. The flutemaker was kept busy fixing things. Like many such places that he had seen, the more he looked the more he saw things that needed some attention. And naturally Ellendia had given him a list of her own. A table that did not quite stand straight, doors and windows that looked like they had not closed or opened properly in a long time, walls with many gaps to allow the cold westerly winds to blow through, a roof that leaked (“only when it rains” as Ellendia had informed him). He appreciated the familiar feel of having tools in his hands once again... Though the ones he had available were not the best he had ever used, they were more than adequate for the current jobs. He had grown to enjoy and respect all tools over the years. They gave him a certain sense of purpose and creativity and somehow an innate connection with the whole history of humanity as each generation had ingeniously developed its own varied assortment of tools that enabled it to evolve and in doing so transform their world.

The days and nights passed. The flutemaker repairing and renovating. Ellendia schooling her children or some days receiving visitors who came to her for healing. The flutemaker guessed she was some sort of healer as he always felt alive and well when he was around her. He was not surprised when he learned that some of the locals came to her for healing massages and general healthy living advice. 'Witches are good at that sort of thing,' he reminded himself.

The flutemaker was often surprised how well Ellendia had adapted to living a happy, uncomplicated and graceful life in that basic, run-down home on the side of the hill. As time passed a quiet, simple easiness began to develop between the flutemaker and Ellendia and her children.

Most evenings were uneventful with dinner, some stories and early bedtimes for all. Just as the flutemaker liked it. Sometimes around sunset, friends of Ellendia would appear. The flutemaker could never quite work out where they came from or how they got there. Usually on such occasions there would be a simple dinner. Conversation was often brief (Ellendia's friends mostly not being the big talking type). After the meal some bottles of jaboticaba or carambola wine and musical instruments would be produced. Some of the instruments were homemade with variety of strings, looking and often sounding as eccentric as their owners or makers. Others were of the more standard kind, guitar, cello, deep recorder. And of course, the voices.

The flutemaker watched as a single instrument would begin then more would join in. At first there was a sort of hesitancy as each player made plenty of room for the others but as time passed and the

instruments got to know each other, there was a joining and a flowing. At times coming together and uniting, at times drifting apart but all with that sense of ease that naturally arises from the absence of any expectations or desire for some result. As each player got more lost in their own instrument there came a blending and harmony as all parts joined to create the whole ... Like children or lovers play wrestling together and abandoning themselves to the present moment...

As the hours passed, the conversations and music ebbed and flowed till it reached a natural point where it all wound down into a sleepy mellowness. The glow of the firelight lit the warm faces of those who had stayed. Stayed simply to enjoy the tranquil act of sitting around a dying fire, celebrating the silence and stillness together.

The flutemaker pulled out one of his fipple flutes and played quietly as the neighbours said their goodbyes and drifted away into the darkness.

On one such night the flutemaker was left out on the deck wrapped up in his sleeping bag by the fire. As the intoxicating smell of the nearby night-scented jasmine flowers wafted by on the cool breeze, he stared up at the stars with a smile. Despite all the injustice, misery and stupidity in the world, nights such as this always managed to reassure the flutemaker of one simple fact. *Being alive is a great gift.* So simple, yet sometimes so easy to forget. 'Maybe I have just drunk a little too much jaboticaba wine,' he thought to himself. In his half sleep state other thoughts also stirred. Thoughts of how he liked it here. It was a cosy feeling, too cosy, too close, too much of an I-could-stay-here-forever feeling ...unless that

witch puts in an appearance ...life can't really be this good and easy... and then there is the Magentarian flute and the elf. Yes, the elf...

“Delightful life you have here, Master flutemaker, lazing about like a python that’s just eaten a juicy possum on a hot summers night!”

The flutemaker snapped out of his pleasant reveries and opened his eyes to see the elf sitting on the deck, warming his hands by the glowing embers of the fire.

Yes of course, the elf! “A delightful life indeed” he muttered as he shook off his drowsiness.

“No hurry, no worry, as they say.” continued the elf cheerfully, “It's all your choice, Master flutemaker. You are free to stay here in your blissful bubble and that flute will remain silent till it slowly dissolves back into the earth from where it came. You are also free to move on and discover its secrets and release those sounds that would move the hearts and minds of the gods themselves. It's all your choice, but she knows, Master flutemaker, she knows

“Knows what?” asked the flutemaker awake now and listening closely to the elf.

But the elf, he was gone. ‘Like those shooting stars, once again’ he thought as he lay now wide awake and staring into the night sky. Was he really even there or was I dreaming? The remainder of the night was a rough time for the flutemaker as he drifted in and out of sleep, turning over the elf’s words in his mind.

To go or to stay?

He awoke early and had two cups of tea ready as Ellendia rose from

her bed. (He had already become the primary tea maker, a role he seemed to readily adopt wherever he went.)

The children/goblins were still asleep. ‘Now is as good a time as any for some honesty.’ thought the flutemaker.

“The elf says you know,” he blurted out as he handed a cup of tea to Ellendia.

“Nice cuppa.” she replied as she sipped the brew and stared sleepily at the flutemaker.

“Can you run that by me again. I’m still waking up.”

“The elf, he says you know. I guess he means you know all sorts of things about me, my Magentarian flute and my journey. But he didn't tell be if you are really a witch or just an amazingly beautiful woman that you appear to be. But he says you know.” Now that he had said it, the flutemaker was strangely relieved that he had unburdened himself of his craziness.

“Haven’t seen an elf in these parts for a while.” Ellendia replied passively but the flutemaker could not tell if she was serious or making fun of him.

“Yeah, sure I know some things” she continued, “just like everybody knows some things. I first saw that strange flute of yours in a dream I had not long before you arrived. When you pulled it out of your bag and tried to play it that day I saw that it had elves and spirits and weird magic stuff written all over it. In that same dream I saw you coming here and staying and helping out and relaxing and enjoying and feeling at home and all of us getting used to it. Then I saw you leaving again because you

had some ‘important’ magical, musical business that needed to be sorted out. Yeah, sometimes I know things, sometimes I know way too much. Like here we are living in this beautiful and bountiful paradise, but it's not enough, it's never enough because there are always other dreams to pursue, other fantasies to be fulfilled, other amazing magical, mystical adventures to be had. Like a silent flute that will play the most wonderful tunes ever heard. As long as you go somewhere else to find it. And you can so easily call it magic, the lure of destiny, the call of the wild, the grand pursuit of your own freedom and liberation. You think you are so free and making your own choices, but all I see is discontented people who are forever slaves to their own hopes, dreams and fantasies while the truly precious, truly simple magical moments of each day of their lives are dismissed as some sort of irrelevant background. This is not enough, it's never enough! That's why soon you will be leaving and all of this reality, my children and myself can be tucked safely away in your box of happy memories that you can open up at your convenience. Yeah, sometimes I feel I know way too much about men and dreams and magic and all that crap!”

‘That’s the trouble with starting an honest conversation,’ thought the flutemaker, ‘sometimes you can end up with way too much of it.’

He had never heard Ellendia speak so passionately. He guessed that she rarely allowed her inner wounds to bleed into the conversation. Faced with her exasperation, he was at a loss to find a response. Somewhere inside he knew she was right, that indeed he would be back on the road sometime soon. The flutemaker realised again that no matter

how happy and peaceful his life may be, he could not ignore the lure and call of the Magentarian flute. To do so would mean spending the rest of his life with regret and wondering ‘what if? That ‘what if’ question that would create a gnawing hole somewhere within him that would eventually grow large enough to devour him. He had seen the sad result of too many others who lived their lives with regrets and ‘what ifs’. In that sense Ellendia was right. He really had no choice in the matter.

It seemed to the flutemaker that it was indeed a regretful, often tragic paradox that what was humanity's greatest asset was also its greatest curse....The extraordinary imagination that allowed us to dream and hope and often even physically realise our wildest fantasies was usually fuelled by a discontent that caused us to negate and ignore the beauty, magic and wonder that lay all around us every moment of our brief life. After spending most of the last 20 years focusing on enjoying the serene comfort that comes from appreciating the simple beauty and pleasures of life, he met that darn elf who had come along and pushed him into a hole of discontent. That pervasive and persuasive lure of something else, somewhere else.

The flutemaker stared open-eyed at this beautiful woman and finally knew for certain that she was no witch, and this was no fairy tale but the simple, fortunate reality of his life. Although he had trouble believing it, this was in fact merely another precious gift presenting itself. Tentatively he reached out and embraced her....

“Mum, I’m hungry, what’s for breakfast?”

He knew the moment had passed and that woman who had opened

to him would now be transformed to a mother who needed to feed and nurture her children.

It was never quite the same after that morning. A strange spell had indeed been broken but not the spell that the flutemaker had assumed. It was more the sort of spell that gets broken when reality inconveniently comes along and interferes with one's fantasy. It was indeed not long before the flutemaker was walking down the road with his pack on his back and walking stick flute in hand. He had said his goodbyes the night before and awoken at first light, hoping to leave before anyone else was awake. But there she was standing at the door as he guessed she would be. When he was about a hundred meters from the house he turned to look back on the strange dwelling overlooking that beautiful mystical valley ... one last look for his box of memories.

5. On the Road Again

Once the track entered the forest, the flutemaker walked quickly, feeling that if he put enough distance between himself and what he had left behind, turning back would not be an option. After a few hours he laid down under a large red cedar tree, feeling tired, confused and an aching sense of loss. After a disturbed rest he sat up and took the Magentarian flute from his pack as he had done so many times before. Sometimes when he looked at it, it seemed to be just a very ordinary beat-up old flute, other times it had a strangeness about it that he couldn't figure. Maybe it was that warm cosy feel of it in his hand, maybe it was the way it seemed to be triggering some old forgotten memories, memories of some other time long, long ago.

“Am I crazy or are you one crazy flute?”, he said aloud. There was no reply, so he put the flute tentatively to his lips, remembering now that it had been quite a while since he had tried to blow on it ...quite a while since he had even wanted to look at the Magentarian flute. As he blew there it was again, a sweet, warm sound, sending an unusual feeling of both excitement and relaxed tranquillity throughout his body. He also found himself sinking into a deep sadness. The sounds of the flute seemed to break down any resistance he had to that sadness. Instead of the usual pushing it away he could stay and sit with it in silence. He eventually blew again, but the sound was gone as the flutemaker suspected it would be. As if the flute was telling him. “Yes, I am still here

and no, we haven't finished our journey and yes, I know you are hurting".

"You win flute, you win" said the flutemaker as he placed it back in his pack and continued down the track through the forest. The flutemaker wandered once again, unsure of where he was going, allowing the flute or his craziness (he was still not sure which) to lead him.

One day he came upon a large, spread-out and rather busy town. The noisiness contrasted harshly with the quiet pensive days that had recently passed. He found a spot on the grassy verge near a fountain in the centre of town and played some of his flutes. The foot and vehicular traffic was both loud and constant and most of the townsfolk walked quickly by as though they had neither seen nor heard the unkempt flute-playing stranger. Many of the faces that passed bore the signs of a harsh life of too much struggle and too little joy. The flutemaker took out his vibrating reed flute. It was only a small flute, but the reed flute made a much louder, wilder sound than his other flutes. Soon he had attracted the attention of some of those passing by. A colourfully dressed young woman appeared with a goatskin drum and began beating out a rhythm in time with the reed flute as a few of her lively friends began dancing and clapping along. Her long black hair fell from side to side as her slender body moved with the rhythm of the drum. Now and then her mouth would open, and her face would come alive with wide-eyed joy as she revelled in the movement and freedom while her hands stepped up the tempo on her drum. A tall wiry man who was obviously a friend of the drummer, produced a dulcimer-like instrument and created some more lively rhythms. When he turned around the flutemaker could see

that A=432 was emblazoned on the back of his blue vest. An odd equation, thought the flutemaker as he blew his reed flute a little louder . Soon a small crowd had gathered and the flutemaker was pleased that he had found some music that had reached and perhaps lightened the lives of the busy townsfolk... He was also glad to see some coins dropped into his hat as supplies were running low. After the crowd had dispersed the woman with the drum introduced herself as Belinda. With an aliveness in her voice and a shine in her eyes, Belinda explained how much she enjoyed drumming and dancing. How it allowed her to find and express a world within herself that was untouched by the usual day to day worries of her life. Along with her friends she shared some snacks with the flutemaker. Her young friends suggested he should stay around awhile and offered to find a place for him. They told him they had loved his flute-playing and that they thought he was very funky. The flutemaker had no idea what being very funky meant but he suspected that his old life back in his village was not very funky. He missed that life. The simple pleasure of sharing the music, food and companionship with his new friends had bought with it an unexpected longing for his old home. He thanked them for their kind comments and offer but by late afternoon he had bought more provisions and was walking past the last row of houses and out into the countryside again.

There were days when the flutemaker would almost forget why he was on the road, allowing himself to be absorbed in the act of walking and noting each moment of his life ... the uplifting songs of the birds as dawn broke each morning, the ever-changing hues of the nature around

him, the feel of the grass or the dirt road beneath his bare feet, the sweet taste of the water as he quenched his thirst. By playing his flutes at such times, the story of who he was would loosen its grip a little. It was as though the sounds had immersed him in the life all around, so he would feel a little less separate from it all. He noticed the importance of his own story and dramas dissolving a little and another, bigger, more undefinable and nebulous story taking its place.

One quiet, hot afternoon he passed a large black-bean tree by a creek. Its orange and black flowers had created a soft carpet over the grassy ground and the shady tree seemed to be inviting the flutemaker to stop and rest awhile. A slight breeze rustled through its leaves and he could hear and occasionally glimpse the flighty bell birds high up in the top branches. Nearby a catbird let out its eerie, haunting cry. He took off his backpack, sat down and taking out his favourite flute, the long mellow shakuhachi, played slow and softly, joining in with the sounds of the nature around him. As often happened when he played this flute, he felt his body relax and as he relaxed his breath naturally became more even and flowing, creating a cycle of ever more mellow sounds and deeper relaxation. The wispy, opaque clouds drifted lazily across deep blue sky. As he continued playing he felt himself drifting into a vague, sleepy daze.

“Lovely flute playing, old man.” The flutemaker turned to make out the figure of an old woman sitting close by. He tried to open his eyes wider to see more clearly but the hot afternoon seemed to have created a stupor that he was unable to shrug off. He could make out a wiry old

woman in a faded brown tunic. Her long auburn hair was matted, and she seemed to blend in with the hues of the strangler fig that grew behind her. The colour of her clear blue eyes and that of the bright green bird on her right shoulder contrasted brightly with the hues of brown and grey. The flutemaker recognised the bird as a catbird, one of those creatures that he had often heard but rarely seen. “I was not expecting anyone to be here,” the flutemaker managed to say through his brain-fog.

“I could well say the same. Not many travellers wander into this part of the world.” replied the old woman. Or at least the flutemaker thought she had said it. The words that came from her lips seemed to have the same lilt and tones as the bell birds and wind and other noises around. It almost felt as if the flutemaker had somehow grabbed them out of the air as they passed by. “I am looking for Magentaria.” the flutemaker heard himself say before he had time to think.

“I know, and you have something from there. Can I see it?” once again the words seem to pass by on a breeze. The flutemaker felt trusting of the strange old woman and took out his Magentarian flute and handed it to her. As she held it lightly in both hands he saw her body relax deeply and her eyes shine a little brighter as she muttered, “So warm, so full of life. You are very lucky to be carrying it. They create things of such wonder and beauty!”

Surprised and uplifted to meet someone who actually believed in Magentaria, the flutemaker asked “Can you play it or take me to where it was made?”

“Oh, I am afraid the answer is no to both of your questions,” came

back the melodic answer on the wind. It's not for me to play, it was not made for me, but it is a joy to hold and absorb a little of its possibilities. I cannot take you to Magentaria. It only exists in fairy tales though it is also everywhere around us and nowhere at all. You cannot possibly find Magentaria but if you are very lucky it may one day find you. I can't show you the way, but my dear friend may be able to help." Her voice began to trail off till the flutemaker was not sure what were her words and what was the wind and birds in the trees. Her outline also seemed to become more blurred with the background. 'Great, finally meet someone who believes in Magentaria and she sounds even more crazy than me' was the flutemaker's final thought as he lay back down and drifted off into another long sleep.

He slept fitfully through the rest of the afternoon and night and awoke at first light. He lay on his back with his eyes closed and allowed the dawn chorus to wash over him. Sometimes he loved to start the day this way. Quietly lying there listening before all those 'important' thoughts vied for the mental space. This particular morning the symphony consisted of many soft small bird noises, occasionally interspersed with the sharp crack of a coach whip bird or the staccato call of a Lewins honeyeater. Sometimes all of it was overridden by the outrageous laugh from a kookaburra. He relaxed deeply as he received the little gift from the bird world before slowly opening his eyes to start his day. His pack was where he had left it, not far from his head but the Magentarian flute lay on a rock a little further away. On the end of the flute sat the bright green cat bird he had seen on the old woman's

shoulder in his dream. Or was it a dream?

The catbird turned his head and looked steadily at the flutemaker as if to say, "Are you coming or what?" The bird flew to a nearby branch and sat patiently as the flutemaker collected his flutes and had a dip in the stream. The catbird let out its unmistakable cry to make sure it was noticed as it flew along further upstream. "I guess I may as well follow you as go anywhere else," quipped the flutemaker as he headed in that direction...

Thus the morning passed. The catbird flying from one branch to another, turning around to see if the flutemaker was keeping up or sometimes letting out a call if he had not been spotted. After following the stream for most of the morning, the catbird came to a lush shady glen with the ground mostly covered with large mossy rocks. Here the bird turned away from the creek bank and flew up the dry creek bed between two hills. Progress was slow as the terrain became steeper and the flutemaker took care not to slip on the loose rocks. 'Easy for those of us with wings' 'thought the flutemaker as he used his walking stick flute for extra stability while manoeuvring over the rocks. The cat bird flew onto a branch off to the right of the creek-bed and a bit higher up the hill. The flutemaker noticed him land on the branch of a craggy looking tree and then the bird was gone! He slowly made his way to beneath the tree and looked around. He could hear the catbird's cry seemingly coming from within the hill itself. Then he saw it. A small fissure between the rocks a little way above the tree. He climbed up the steep bank that led to the opening. Once there, he could more clearly hear the distinctive catbird

calling from within. Taking off his backpack, he threw it and his walking stick far inside the opening. The flutemaker then took a deep breath and made himself as thin as possible so as to squeeze through the gap. He struggled between the sharp rocks for about a meter before exhaling sharply as he fell over his backpack and found himself on the smooth moist ground of a large cavern.

6. Inside Magentaria

Picking himself up the flutemaker noticed a light emanating from an opening to his left. Gathering his backpack and walking stick he hesitantly walked through the opening into another dimly lit almost circular cavern about 15 meters wide. The uneven stone walls seemed to have a polished sheen about them. A white sphere placed up high every meter or so emitted a soft dull light. To the right of where he entered the flutemaker could see a gangly vaguely human-like figure sitting behind a desk, seemingly drawing in a large book. He wore a well-worn brown vest over a thick green shirt whose sleeves seemed a bit short for his long arms that rested on the desk and ended in fine bony fingers. Most of his facial features were concealed by the long fine brown hair that reached to the desk as the hunched figure concentrated on his task.

As a way of announcing his arrival the flutemaker took out his Magentarian flute, walked over and placed it noisily on the desk. The drawer ignored the intruder and continued to be highly focused and absorbed in what the flutemaker could now see was a strange array of lines joining what appeared to be symbols and small sketches. When he had obviously completed the task to his satisfaction he looked up. The flutemaker felt exposed and uneasy as the wide clear blue eyes stared at him. The eyes seemed to look at the flutemaker but also into and through him as though no detail or secret could ever be hidden. The unblinking gaze shifted to the flute on the desk, then back to the flutemaker and

once more glanced at the flute before finally resting his unsettling eyes once again on the visitor. His stare revealed little, as in his mind he computed the implications of the stranger before him and the flute on the desk. Many seconds passed in this silent limbo with both figures unsure of what should happen next, until the creature at the desk slowly blinked and muttered “of course” under his breath. Seemingly convinced that he now fully understood all the implications of the flute and the stranger standing before him, he picked up his pencil and began to refocus his energy on his drawing.

As he redirected his attention back to the large book he began muttering in a deep, dismissive voice “No good, no good bringing it back here, pointless, useless, it will never play, pesky elves always pinching things and tricking people, wasting time, my time, your time, everybody’s time, no point, no good, you may as well go back home ...”

The flutemaker was unsure if the mutterings were actually directed at him or merely a voicing of random thoughts out of some strange habit, but he knew he needed to say something before the creature became fully reabsorbed in whatever it was he was drawing.

“I can’t just go back home. I never wanted to leave in the first place, but this flute has entranced me and now that I have finally found this place, I can't just leave again.”

Without taking his eyes off the page, the figure again muttered in the same gruff, offhand manner. “Sure you can, you can just walk out the way you came and forget all about it. Why should I waste my precious time telling you about that useless flute that doesn’t belong to you or that

thieving elf who gave it to you? Go home, flutemaker, go home while you still can. Some things are best left unknown.”

“I just need to know why anyone would make a flute that is impossible to play and why it sometimes plays a few notes and then they are gone again!” exclaimed the flutemaker hurriedly.

The creature carefully placed his pencil down on the table. He raised his eyes and once again looked at the flutemaker, looked at the flute on the desk, looked at the flutemaker again before responding. This time in a clearer, stronger voice he asked, “You say it made some music for you sometimes?” The flutemaker detected a mixture of both annoyance and curiosity in his voice.

“Yes, some beautiful notes at certain times or when I was feeling certain things or in certain places. I could never figure out the how or why of it though.”

The creature looked down at the flute and once again reverted to muttering to himself “They shouldn’t make any noises, shouldn’t play at all, shouldn’t be any good to anybody, not once we have finished with them and thrown them away.”

Encouraged now that at least some limited form of communication seemed to be happening, the flutemaker asked. “But why make a flute if it can't be played? That would be crazy.”

Still looking at the flute, the creature muttered in a quieter, more distant voice, “Why was it made? Hmm, why was it made? It was made because that’s what we do here. We make things. We make the very best of the very best. Maybe I could tell him all about it and make sure he

forgets, just like we make sure all the others forget. I haven't talked to anyone about it in a long time. Yeah, maybe that's what I will do. I could do with a bit of fun!"

The flutemaker sensed a change come over the creature as he started to smile. He looked up at the flutemaker and spread his lips to reveal a set of long shiny white teeth. The reserved smile soon evolved into a strange rolling laugh. It was as though there was a great joke happening, but it was obvious that only one of them was privy to it. As his laughter subsided he looked up and stared at the flutemaker once again. His body could be now be made out more clearly. Those wide round eyes dominated his facial features as they seemed to be almost too large for the fine boned, elongated hairless face. His long ears protruded through the straight brown hair that flowed past his slim shoulders. Though his skin seemed almost amber coloured, he emanated a healthy life force that seemed to envelop the flutemaker as he gazed at him with those penetrating eyes...

He slowly and carefully stood up and moved to the side of the desk. The flutemaker could see that he was tall but not quite as tall as he had expected. He came and stood next to the flutemaker and now warmly nudged him like they were old friends. Putting one of his long arms over the flutemaker's shoulder, he looked down at the two pairs of bare feet placed next to each other and smiled. His were longer and of a different hue, with the sinews and veins more prominent. His toes were well spread out and long in proportion to the rest of his feet. But both sets of feet had that same well used toughness about them.

His former gruff voice had completely changed to a soft, almost seductive tone as he spoke. “It is reassuring to see that you have no shoes upon your feet, Mr flutemaker. I like that. Why are you humans so afraid of touching the beautiful earth that you walk upon? Wearing those weird things on your feet all the time. Sure, you may avoid a bit of pain here and there but it’s like caressing a lover with boxing gloves on. Missing out on all those exquisite, subtle tactile sensations. We like our tactile sensations around here! Yes, it warms the heart to see you being shoeless and all. By the way, they call me Derawangi, Derawangi the Dealer, because I do the organising, the dealings, the negotiations, the fine tuning of certain contractual agreements, one might say. Come Mr Flutemaker, you and I will have a nice cup of tea and I will tell you all about what we do here.”

Derawangi moved towards an old iron stove some way back behind the desk on top of which sat a large black kettle. The flutemaker was far from sure about the warmth in Derawangi’s heart or his sudden turn of friendliness, but as always, a cup of tea was very inviting. From a drawer beneath the desk Derawangi pulled out a tray on which sat numerous small bottles, containing an assortment of dried leaves. Looking closely at the bottles, Derawangi muttered to himself “This is the one we need and maybe just a bit of this one as well.” He picked up quite a few of the bottles and added a small amount of their contents to a teapot that was by the stove. Briefly closing his eyes, he quietly murmured some words and rubbed his hands next to the kettle. What appeared to be small lumps of coal began to glow a dull red colour. It was not long before the

kettle had boiled, and the water poured into the pot.

The flutemaker noticed two immaculately carved wooden chairs near the stove as Derawangi invited him to have a seat. From another drawer he produced two cups. After letting the brew sit awhile Derawangi carefully poured the very dark tea into the cups and handed the one to the flutemaker. The hot drink tasted slightly bitter but not unpleasant. “Interesting brew” he remarked.

“Ah yes, my own concoction” replied Derawangi “a choice of herbs to help make things more interesting. Herbs can be good for that, Mr flutemaker. A pinch of jiaogulan, ashitaba and ashwagandha to help bring everything into balance, a little khat, vacha, brahmi and rauwolfia to get those mental juices flowing freely. And of course, a few others that you really don’t need to know about. We could say it’s a nebulous but not too nefarious a nectar. All in all, it should be very relaxing and perhaps it may even help us to see our world a little bit clearer. Possibly we may even perceive the world as it truly is”. Derawangi again laughed as if he had just made a wonderful joke but the flutemaker was too busy worrying about those other unnamed herbs. Though he doubted any names would have meant any more to him than the ones he had just heard. He felt a calmness come over him after the first sip of the tea. As he sipped some more and reclined deeper into the comfortable seat, all his concerns faded to mere background chatter in his mind. He felt the repressed tiredness that had accumulated in his body after all he had been through to arrive in Magentaria. Despite the weariness in his body, his mind felt clear, alert and lucid. Derawangi was obviously also

enjoying his tea as he finished his first cup with loud slurps and poured himself and the flutemaker another. After another gulp he put the cup aside, leaned back on his chair and began his story...

“Yes, that’s what we do here, we make the best of the best. If you wander further down that passageway over there you will find where it all happens. We make the best of the best because that is what you humans like. You like to be the best. But you don’t just like to be the best that you can be. No, that would be far too simple, far too humble. So many of you want to be the very best of the very best, the number one, in fact better than everybody else in the whole world. Now that’s a big task and a big ask. So we come along and quietly let it be known that we have the ways and means to help out a little

You see it's a funny thing , this being good or even being great or excellent at something. It has always required much focus , discipline , passion , love , enthusiasm and commitment. Such qualities have in turn uplifted your kind as they pursued , honed and perhaps even perfected their skills. Some of those who strove for such excellence discovered that the more skilled they became the more subtle the whole game seemed to be.. That subtlety reached a point where the only way forward had more to do with letting go than achieving, more to do with losing than finding, more to do with giving up than trying. It had to do with being quiet, still and unambitious enough to finely notice all the wondrous interactions that are going on between them and the world around them. It was the harmonizing of their inner and outer self with whatever was trying to be achieved, weather that was playing or making an instrument, or climbing

a mountain, or making sure that arrow goes exactly where it should go, or hammering that Damascus steel into the finest blade ever made or maybe even simply baking a perfect loaf of bread. In fact, any of the myriad of human activities could become an opportunity for a certain harmony and excellence to manifest itself in the physical world. Of course the pursuit of such excellence creates changes. Changes within and thereby changes without... And these wondrous, often nebulous changes and the sense of freedom, refinement and connectedness that came with them were the main reward for a lifetime in pursuit of excellence... and a highly valuable reward at that. For what else were humans to do with their mysterious, brief time here? Ah, but that which has the potential to liberate and enlighten also has the potential to ensnare and enslave. Sadly for the rest of us you have found many other things to do.

Derawangi had been looking into the distance as he told his tale, but he paused now and stared hard at the flutemaker. The flutemaker could not help but notice a smouldering anger and resentment in those piercing eyes that bored into the visitor as if searching for an answer to an unfathomable question. Though the flutemaker was unsure of what exactly that question was, he was certain that he would have no adequate answer. Derawangi then turned his gaze away and gulped some more tea before continuing...

“Ah, but that was then and now is now. A time when so many humans aspire to greatness, but not greatness for the sake of allowing

excellence to manifest itself in the world. Greatness now has its own rewards and glory. In the past, many came to realise that the sensitivity and refinement acquired through the pursuit of excellence could be used as a means of breaking free of the chains that bind. For some it even proved to be a life- saving discovery. Now, instead of being set free, most are enslaved by the lure of greatness and the rewards it brings...Now it not important to be the best human that you can be. Now it is important to be better than all the other humans, better than all those around you and for ultimate greatness, better than everybody else in the whole world.

Now with all these humans so desperately wanting to achieve such excellence, that sends out a certain signal. Of course, such discontent, such burning desire puts out its own call. And that is where we come in and do our deal. We make and do things that help those who are very good become the very best. With just a little help from us they can become better than all the rest and realise their dreams. Yes, that's what we do here Mr flutemaker. We are here to help humans realise their dreams!" Once again Derawangi burst into laughter but this time there was obvious sarcasm in the laugh as he made no attempt to hide the scornful animosity that lay behind it.

"You mean you make magic things to help people become successful?" asked the flutemaker, still a little confused.

"It may well be magic to you" responded Derawangi "to us it is nothing more than a manipulation of pulsating vibrations. That's all we have here, Mr flutemaker, pulsating vibrations, endless forms and

infinite variations of pulsating vibrations. While such knowledge may well be irrelevant to you humans, it is very useful to the likes of us. We can bend and twist and play with those pulsating vibrations on subtle levels and make sure they flow and match with the pulsating vibrations of the person involved. When those vibrations align and flow together some very, very interesting things can start to happen. To humans it may be magic, to us it is merely working with our own excellence. Sometimes we may need to finely tweak a body, sometimes we will create marvellous instrument or pieces of sports equipment. There's big call for that these days. We sort it out, whatever is needed to produce the best of the best. Want to be a great leader? No problem! A few subtle manipulations of the voice and vibrational energies and whatever rubbish is said, the crowds will be convinced it is the most sincere and profound words they have ever heard. We can create singers whose rapturous voice will bring tears to the eyes of old men who are even more cynical than you and me. Supply sports people with the right bat, club, racket or whatever and they will be unbeatable. And musicians? We all know about musicians. You wont come across too many of them who are immune to the seductive lure of a bit of fame and glory. Good business for us, those musicians.

“If it's a business what do you get in return for all these gifts you offer?” asked the flutemaker.

“Gifts! gifts! Definitely not gifts! We are traders and dealers, not good Samaritans!” scoffed Derawangi.

“We have our own wants and needs. We like our gold. All creatures like gold! We like to be around it and play with its wondrous subtle

vibrations. Once there was plenty of it all over the place before humans decided that they owned it all. They figured they had the right to steal it from out of the ground where it belongs. And what do they do with it then, this beautiful metal? Mostly they stash it away in vaults where nobody sees it and it does nobody any good. But we have our own uses for it, so we make our deals and get back some of what you have stolen from us and everyone else. And into the bargain we take just a tiny bit of inner human essence. What some of you like to refer to as 'the soul'. But we try to avoid using that sort of language around here. Such terminology is best left to those of your kind who have perfected the ancient and highly refined art of the exploitation of humanity's spiritual delusions. Never has a cash cow been milked so efficiently or effectively! But I digress. Yes, we take a tiny bit of that inner essence. Such a small bit that we don't need to tell them about it and they don't even miss it. No, they are usually far too busy wallowing in all that fame, glory and wealth. Of course, they may occasionally wake in the middle of the night with this strange niggling feeling that something is missing despite all they have achieved. But everything has a price, Mr flutemaker, everything has a price. We can do so many interesting things with our little bit of inner human essence. And you folk seem so unsure of what use it has anyway". There was a strange mixture of amusement and weariness in Deawangis voice as he delivered the last sentence.

"But if you are so good at manipulating those pulsating vibrations, why don't you manipulate some of that gold out of those vaults?" asked the ever practical flutemaker.

“Oh, we can't do that Mr flutemaker! We have our rules!” replied Derawangi. “Rules that have to be obeyed. All creatures in all realms have their rules! If a huge pile of gold inexplicably disappeared from the human’s vault, that would really be upsetting for those humans and their precious belief systems. We can't go upsetting or changing humans or anybody else’s belief system. There is a natural order of things that needs to be respected. Humans have to find out about all things in their own good time because that’s the rules of the game. Besides there’s enough of that coming your way without our help. Meanwhile the rest of us just watch you humans and wait and shake our heads and wait and wait and wait.” This time there was no laughter, just an obvious bitterness and perhaps despair in Derawangi’s voice.

“So can I go down to where this flute was made and see what happens there” asked the flutemaker tentatively.

“You could certainly do that, Mr flutemaker” responded Derawangi reticently. “But you see, if you were to wander down there, you would most likely hop back out as a toad or some such thing. Or maybe you would not come back out at all. You see, the problem is, my friends down below there ... well let's just say that humans aren’t exactly their number one favourite entity on planet earth at the moment. Let’s just say they have a few problems with what you folk have been getting up to lately. Let’s just say that your chances of coming back here alive would be very slim indeed. But don’t let a little inconvenience like that deter you. You obviously have a compelling curiosity that needs to be satisfied. You see, the ones down below, they’re not all like me. I’m the one chosen to make

the deals, to be diplomatic and undertake the negotiations. Though it goes against my better judgement, I have spent years cultivating an attitude of compassion and empathy towards you humans”.

The flutemaker was tempted to mention some of humanity's redeeming features but sitting there in that cave he figured any such words would be wasted. Instead he remarked, “Compassion and empathy? Really? Those probably would not have been my first choice of words. Maybe ‘ridicule and scorn’, perhaps ‘contempt and disdain’ but ‘compassion and empathy’? Really? I don’t think so.”

“Oh, dear me, have I let my true feelings bubble to the surface and interfere with my professional demeanour? I am so sorry. And here I was thinking I was hiding it so well.” replied Derawangi sarcastically. “Perhaps this tea is loosening both our tongues a little. But this interaction is not exactly a business transaction, is it Mr flutemaker?... It is fairly obvious to both of us that you have neither pockets full of gold nor a burning ambition to achieve greatness. You seem to be one of those unusual humans who are blissfully and stupidly content in their mediocrity. Which no doubt makes you one of the more peaceful specimens of your species, though such lack of ambition may also make you a far more sad and pathetic representation... Such is the dilemma of your kind, Mr flutemaker. We are all bound by our history and genetics and if you want to create some more of your own history, I would advise you to exit the same way you came.”

The flutemaker did indeed have a strong desire to see where and how such an instrument could be made. But more than his words, there

was something he saw in those captivating, ever-changing eyes of Derawangi that deterred him. He couldn't be sure what he was seeing there. Was it merely a look of enlightened indifference that had little interest in outcomes, only a mild curiosity about the choices being made? Or was it the kind of look a well-fed wolf might give to a lamb who had strayed a little too far from the flock? Whatever the thoughts behind those piercing eyes, the flutemaker knew that departing would be a healthier choice. Hopefully that was still an option.

'With my flute as well I hope,' thought the flutemaker. Before he had a chance to say anything, Derawangi had taken the flute from the table where it still lay and held it tightly in both hands. He closed his eyes and was quiet and still as he held the flute for a few minutes, his body relaxing as if embracing an old friend. As he opened his eyes again he muttered "Beautiful piece of work, exquisite really, it's a pity, a real pity, so much potential."

"Sure, you can take it with you, but it won't ever be much good to you or anybody else. You see we don't always get it right. We can make these things and they appear to be perfect. In this case perfect for playing sounds that would move the hearts of the gods themselves. We can do that here but when we get down to those pulsating vibrations we find that there is no such thing as a dead inanimate object. Everything has its own forces at play. Some things like that flute are wild-cards. They are operating from somewhere that even we cannot reach. Sure, it *can* play music to move the Gods, but it's only going to play the music when it *wants* to. And when that is, is anybody's guess. And what good is that in

our line of business? So we discard such things, throw them in the too hard basket and then some pesky elf comes along and pinches one and tricks a fool of a human like yourself to come on a pointless journey. All the while deluding yourself you are doing humanity a favour. If you see that elf again tell him to mind his own beeswax or he will be in big trouble!”

“Well then I had best take my flute and be on my way, remarked the flutemaker as he reached for his pack and held out his other hand to receive the Magentarian flute.

“By the way, option three is correct but also irrelevant.” said Derawangi still holding onto the flute.

“What's that?” asked the confused flutemaker.

“Option three is correct” repeated Derawangi. “That weird stuff you go on about in head regarding your view and the possibilities. Number three is right. Of course there is more to that view than what you are seeing and of course you are too stupid or perhaps too clever to see what else is there. But that is of no relevance to anything and of course it does you good to keep looking as it is one of the better things you can be doing with your life. The important thing is not that you find out what is there. The important thing is that you don't know... If you look with eyes that don't know, you see a mystery. And a mystery, of course, is the best thing of all to see. Even if you don't think you see anything else, somewhere you do. Now there's only one other thing before you can take your useless flute back and get on your way.” So saying, Derawangi handed the flutemaker the instrument with one hand and placed his other hand

on top of his head. The flutemaker shut his eyes as he felt a jolt of energy pass through his body and heard Derawangi's voice from what seemed like far away. "We can't have you remembering any of this Mr flutemaker, some things are best forgotten.... just like bad dreams."

7. The Wild Night

The flutemaker opened his eyes to find himself lying on a rocky outcrop on the edge of a forest. It seemed to be around late afternoon. 'I must have had a long siesta,' he thought to himself as he sat up. Feeling quite energetic but a bit disorientated, he checked that his flutes and pack were all as expected. He noticed some dark clouds building up in the western sky as he stepped off the rocks and onto a rough path that led through the scraggly undergrowth of a thick forest. Though unsure of where he was going, the flutemaker was enjoying being back amongst the trees as he made his way along the vague path. It was almost nightfall when he first noticed the strong gusts of winds blowing through the canopy above. Soon the rain started coming down, coming down in large drops, splattering on the leaves above and falling heavily on the ground around him. He pulled a small tarp from his pack and wrapped it around himself as he sheltered from the wind and rain between the buttresses of a large strangler fig. "I hope you are feeling strong, old friend" he said to the tree as he crouched by its base. The treetops were now moving wildly with each gust of wind and springing back again as it eased. The rain hammered down as the dark clouds overshadowed the last of the daylight. It was through this twilight that the large rough hailstones came pelting down. Fortunately, the branches broke their fall before the hailstones landed all around the man huddled under the tree. Small branches were dropping here and there as each flash of lightning lit up

the wild scene. Hearing a splintering crack above him, the flutemaker dived out from his shelter just as a large limb above came crashing down, scraping his head, shoulder and arm on its way to the forest floor and leaving him covered in a mass of wet tangled branches. Slowly he crawled out from beneath the mess and stood in the pelting rain checking himself for damage. He felt bruised here and there, a bit of blood coming from a few scratches on his face, a bit more blood from coming from a cut on his arm beneath his torn shirt, but seemingly no major damage. The coldness of the wind and rain and the sting of small bits of hail created a certain numbness to any of the resulting pain. “Ok I can take a hint,” he said to the fig tree, “maybe it's not a night for hiding in your safety zone. If that’s the way you want it, bring it on.” So saying he picked up his backpack and headed out into the driving wind and rain, the blood seeping from a cut on his forehead being washed away and falling on the multitude of leaves and small branches that covered what had once been a fairly clear path through the forest.

He had no idea how long he walked before he reached that point where his discomfort really didn’t matter anymore. He was as cold as he was going to get, as wet as he was going to get. Whatever resistance he had to any of it seemed to have left him and now there was only the placing of his walking stick upon the ground in front of him and the taking of each step. A calm awareness came over him as he surrendered to his defencelessness and his vulnerability to the immense forces all around him. And with that calm came a new feeling of aliveness, a resurgence of energy in his body, a lightness and boldness within himself

as he placed each bare foot upon the debris-strewn path before him.

It was then that he heard it. The low drone of a flute coming from somewhere in his backpack. 'Must be the wind blowing through my flutes' he thought as the sound persisted. He turned around to face in a different direction expecting the sound to vanish but instead it picked up in volume with other notes following from the drone. Hanging onto a low branch, he stood very still and listened. Now the flute sounds could be heard clearly, despite the noise of the storm that continued to rage. His wet hands held onto the rough branch as he relaxed amongst the turmoil and felt the sounds washing over him. He knew it had to be the Magentarian flute, joining in with cacophony of sounds being created as forces of life unleashed their wildness. The Magentarian flute calling him to stop and listen to the orchestra that was continuously playing all around him every moment of his life. Sure not always this wild, this loud, this crazy but still always there any time he chose to stop and truly listen. No matter what he had been doing it was always there, but he was usually too busy making his own forms of music to hear it. He stopped now and absorbed the sounds as they reverberated through his body and mingled with his senses. Turning his back to the wind he tied his walking stick flute to his pack and took the Magentarian flute out and blew into it as the rain continued to run down his face. Thus he walked into the wild night, staying warm by walking and blowing into the flute as blood dripped down from the cut on his forehead. He was no longer sure who was playing or being played as his breath moved across the blowing edge of the Magentarian flute. The forthcoming sounds were

both an extension and an intricate part of the whole, the notes playing in and out and all around the other sounds, so they combined and flowed together in a totally unregulated melody that disappeared into the darkness.

Then suddenly from amongst the noise of the storm came the high pitch sound of another flute. A new erratic sound that grew louder as the player approached closer. Through the darkness the stunned flutemaker was eventually able to make out a vague figure further down the trail. The hump on the curved back was unmistakable as the bent figure walked along playing his flute. He stopped briefly, tilted his head and arched his torso backwards as he played the higher notes loudly into the rain.

'Perhaps this was the form the grim reaper takes when all flute-players time has come,' pondered the flutemaker as he recognised the spirit-figure of Kokopelli joyfully dancing and playing. A burst of lightning revealed his weathered craggy face and his soaked brown tunic as the figure briefly stopped playing and laughed deliriously into the night, obviously delighting in the wild unpredictable intensity of the life forces all around him. With a sharp jerk of his head he motioned for the flutemaker to follow as he walked, danced and ecstatically played his flute while making his way off the trail and into the forest. The flutemaker followed and slowly made his way through the soaked undergrowth, the surreal sounds of the flute a little way ahead guiding his direction. He climbed over a recently fallen branch and thought he caught a glimpse of the bent figure up ahead disappearing around the

side of some huge boulders. As he approached he noticed a dry safe space beneath a boulder that had wedged itself on top of two others. Shuffling in beneath the large rock, he saw a glimmer of the dawn light in the east as he took off his backpack and lay there half asleep as the fury of the storm abated.

8. After the Storm

He dozed off and woke to bright sunshine and a chorus of birds delighting in the fresh clear new day. There is something a little ethereal about the new morning in the forest after a wild overnight storm has passed. The flutemaker could never say for sure what made it so. Those sharp strong smells, the vividness of the colours, the drops of rain shining like diamonds in the sunlight. It felt as though the earth had unleashed some of her pent up fury and washed everything clean in readiness for a new beginning . The flutemaker breathed deeply and allowed it all to delight his senses. He noticed that the boulders he had sheltered under were actually on the edge of the forest. Through the sparse trees he could see a grassy field not far away. Gathering his backpack and walking stick flute he made his way to where the field met the tree-line on the top of a steep hill. He took off his sodden, torn clothes and together with his backpack, placed them on the green grass to dry. Disorientated, weary and naked, he lay down and absorbed the warm rays of the early morning sun. Their nourishing radiance penetrated into the core of his being, allowing his body to relax as the earth below absorbed his aches and fatigue. Soon he again drifted off into a deep healing sleep.

“You and that flute, you and that flute were coming together and flowing along like a cool mountain stream meandering its way to the ocean” At first the flutemaker thought the words were part of a dream

but he soon recognised the laughter that followed and slowly awoke to see the elf sitting on his backpack. He had no idea how long he had slept but he struggled to shake off his weariness as he mumbled a hello greeting to his elven friend.

“Yes, that flute and you and everything else were making some fine music last night.”

The flutemaker sat up to help himself awaken and tried to remember. “I remember the storm and playing that flute and the wild night and even thought I saw Kokopelli wondering around. I’m sure there are other things, but I just can't seem to recall. My head feels kinda fuzzy. I remember you giving me that useless flute and it seems like I have been on this journey forever. But now I'm just weary to the bone. Maybe it's time to go home. You didn't tell me the whole story about that flute, did you?”

“I couldn't tell you the whole story, of course you can never know the *whole* story. Where would be the fun in that? Like finding a jigsaw puzzle that's already made. Missing out on all that excitement of trying to put all those little pieces in their place.”

“That’s just the sort of elvish answer I would have expected from you.” replied the slightly frustrated flutemaker. Maybe I have just been wasting mine and everybody else’s time. Maybe this whole journey has been nothing more than a deluded fantasy of my own degenerating mind. I am not even sure that you really exist outside of my own madness.”

“That’s a bit offensive. I definitely like to think I exist in some place

apart from your madness. Wouldn't want to be spending my whole life entangled up in that. Besides madness in its more subtle forms is both relative and subjective. Talking to an elven friend now and then is certainly fairly harmless compared to many of the so called sane things you folk get up to. Take a look at history and you will see that many concepts of madness and sanity are merely opinions based upon fickle collective agreements that invariably change with time and culture.

But still one has to be careful when cutting those ties that bind. Without those ties you may wander far away, far too far away. Wander to a place where you get glimpses of other possibilities. See too much of what could be and too little of what is... Possibilities of such beauty, wonder and splendour. Possibilities of such joy and harmony. One could even say possibilities of magical, interconnecting, pulsating vibrations. Far too many possibilities. But then one will always have to come back to earth, back to living with what is. The what-is-ness that forever throws a spanner in all those delightful worlds of possibilities. Many who cut those ties that bind and glimpse other possibilities don't just come back down to earth but fall way past the earth into a big black hole. They fall into a black hole that they can spend the rest of their life trying to get out of. That's why some people need to create. Some need to play music, sing, dance, paint, act, carve or make strange flutes. Creativity becomes the rope to climb out of that dark hole and back into those realms of possibilities. Yes, one has to be careful when cutting those ties that bind, Master flutemaker. But not too careful... If one has a bit of madness in their family history, perhaps a butter knife may be a more appropriate

the tool of choice rather than a sharp razor blade. You wouldn't know anyone with a bit of madness in their family would you, Master flutemaker?"

"History and genetics, Master flutemaker, history and genetics. They are like a naughty puppy following us around all our lives. We keep telling them to go away, go back home and stay there. But as soon as we think we have got rid of them, we turn around and there they are, smiling up at us and wagging their tails. Though then again, maybe that puppy is just hanging around waiting for a pat on the head and some sign of appreciation and gratitude for all those ancestral sore shoulders".

"You don't remember when us elves first started appearing in your workshop, do you Master flutemaker? You also probably don't remember why you stopped going anywhere, why one day you decided to just stay home and make flutes? You don't remember making a flute that you found very hard to play, throwing it away and much later trying to repair it. In those early days before you really knew how to do any of it properly. You don't remember why you started to refer to us elves as your P.E.s. We both know a poetic elf is a far more beautiful P.E. than a psychotic episode, Master Flutemaker. But you never did like all that jargon and all those labels. There are many things that you seem to have forgotten. Memories that have been shoved into a far corner of the shed like a pair of old boots that never fitted properly anyway. Sometimes it is safest if those memories just stay there. Don't go on any journeys and whatever you do, don't clean out that old shed."

The flutemaker listened in silence as the elf spoke. He had never

heard an elf talk so much and realised he much preferred it when they stuck to their lyrical metaphors and disappeared again. He didn't have much to say about any of it and decided to change the subject. "It sure was nice playing that Magentarian flute last night. I hope to do lots more of it"

"Well perhaps you will and perhaps you won't" replied the elf. People love to pick up an instrument and create beautiful music. But who is really doing the playing? The person? The instrument? Maybe a combination of both of them or maybe something bigger than either of them. People love to convince themselves they are the ones in control. I am playing the music, I am calling the shots." The elf seems to find this highly amusing and breaks into an elvish laugh. "Now that flute you have there, that flute will have none of that sort of stuff. That flute will always remain radically unpredictable. It will play or not play when it wants to. It will always remain connected to other things. Things that are obvious to its makers and sometimes to us elves but a mystery to humans. Those Magentarians thought they had failed, which they had for their purpose. But that flute will always remain connected."

"I don't know anything about that Magentaria and right now I want to know even less. I feel I just want to go back home, have a cup of tea on my veranda and see how Eli is doing. I need to eat some good food from my garden and get some life back into me. May even visit Ellendia and her kids on the way back if I can find that place again."

"For sure, life is magical and wondrous, as is that food from your garden. Full of much life and wonder. But I would suggest you adjust

your attire before you go and visit Ellendia or anyone else,” replied the elf with a smile.

The flutemaker suddenly felt naked as he realised that indeed he had been during the whole conversation with the elf. He must have subconsciously figured that clothes were optional when talking to someone of dubious existence.

9. Homeward Bound

The flutemaker stood up and stretched a bit to shrug off his tiredness. Putting on his now dry clothes and backpack, he headed off down the grassy slope. He walked for about 5 kilometers before he came upon a stream on the outskirts of a small town. He jumped into the cool waters fully clothed, allowing the fast-flowing water to wash away his weariness as well as cleaning his clothes. As he stood drying himself and his clothes by the bank he noticed some golden, grape-like fruit hanging from a large bush by the stream. He recognised it as a wampi tree. He had seen many such trees growing near his home village. As he ate the rich succulent fruit he felt nourished and energised and thanked the tree for her gift.

Feeling enlivened and refreshed he made his way to the centre of the town and found a quiet spot under a large jacaranda tree in the square. He enjoyed the sensations of the soft grass beneath his bare feet. He lay down his pack by the tree and began to play some of his flutes. He noticed his playing was somehow a little different, perhaps more slow, more flowing and relaxed. After some time a small crowd had gathered around him. The flutemaker picked up his Magentarian flute. There it was again, that warm, peaceful feeling as he held it in his hands. He held the flute and glanced at the faces of those around him. In that brief glance he saw their hopes and dreams, their innocence and loss of innocence, their past joys and sufferings, their openness and their

wounded closeness. If his glance lingered any longer than a few seconds he saw more, way more than he wanted to see.

He closed his eyes and began to play the Magentarian flute, unsure if any sounds would be forthcoming. The first note sounded tentative as he focused to fine-tune the ever-changing sweet spot of the flute. As each successive note sounded he let go of his focused attention and relaxed. He knew that such attention was now more of a hindrance than a help. His body and the flute slowly interconnected with each other. He felt a tingling in his fingers as he lost any sense of differentiation between himself and the object in his hands. As he relaxed deeper and stepped aside, he felt he was no longer the player but another listener as the sounds penetrated his being and carried him somewhere far away. Carried him to a place that he had only ever vaguely glimpsed before in his many years of flute playing. A place where the unhindered life energy flowed both into and from the flute in his hands. The resulting sounds somehow embodied both a sense of unbridled chaos and madness and the sublime serenity that lay behind and within that chaos. Those sounds carried him further into their own realm where there was the endless rising of the waves and the crashing back down. Sometimes he was riding those wave with a smooth calmness and other times he was rolled and tumbled by it's chaotic turmoil, each new wave taking him further and further as he immersed and lost himself in the ever-flowing stream.

The flutemaker had no idea of how much time had passed as he joyfully swam and played in that expansive stream. Then he heard a continuous low note. The long droning bass note of the Magentarian

flute calling him back again. He felt a tingling sensation in his fingers as he became aware of himself and the flute in his hands that was separate to himself. He could feel the enlivened life force still pulsing through his body as well as a sense of washed-out, relaxed calmness. A big part of him just wanted to stay there, eyes closed, lingering on that low note as though it were a lifeline to all that was safe and sane in his world. But he could also feel the call of the outside world, the call of life to endlessly interact with itself in its multitude of ever changing forms. Through his half-opened eyes he saw shapes formed by shimmering dots... more shimmering dots were coming from the flute in his hands and travelling and mingling with the other forms before him. Some were connecting and combining while others just slipped past each other without quite coming together. 'Pulsating vibrations, how strange,' thought the flutemaker as he opened his eyes and gazed at the still, quiet crowd before him. There were then no further thoughts in his mind as he lowered the flute from his lips and absorbed the wondrous beauty of the small crowd in front of him. There was no applause, just an appreciative (and from some a slightly stunned) silence as the residual sounds of the Magentarian flute lingered in the air and in the bodies of those who had been touched by it.

And did hearing the flute change any of them as the elf had predicted? The flutemaker never knew. It was not of his concern. He smiled as he packed up his flutes and continued on his long journey back home.

"Wompoo, wompoo" came the call of the brightly coloured pigeon

perched on a low branch of a nearby white cedar tree.