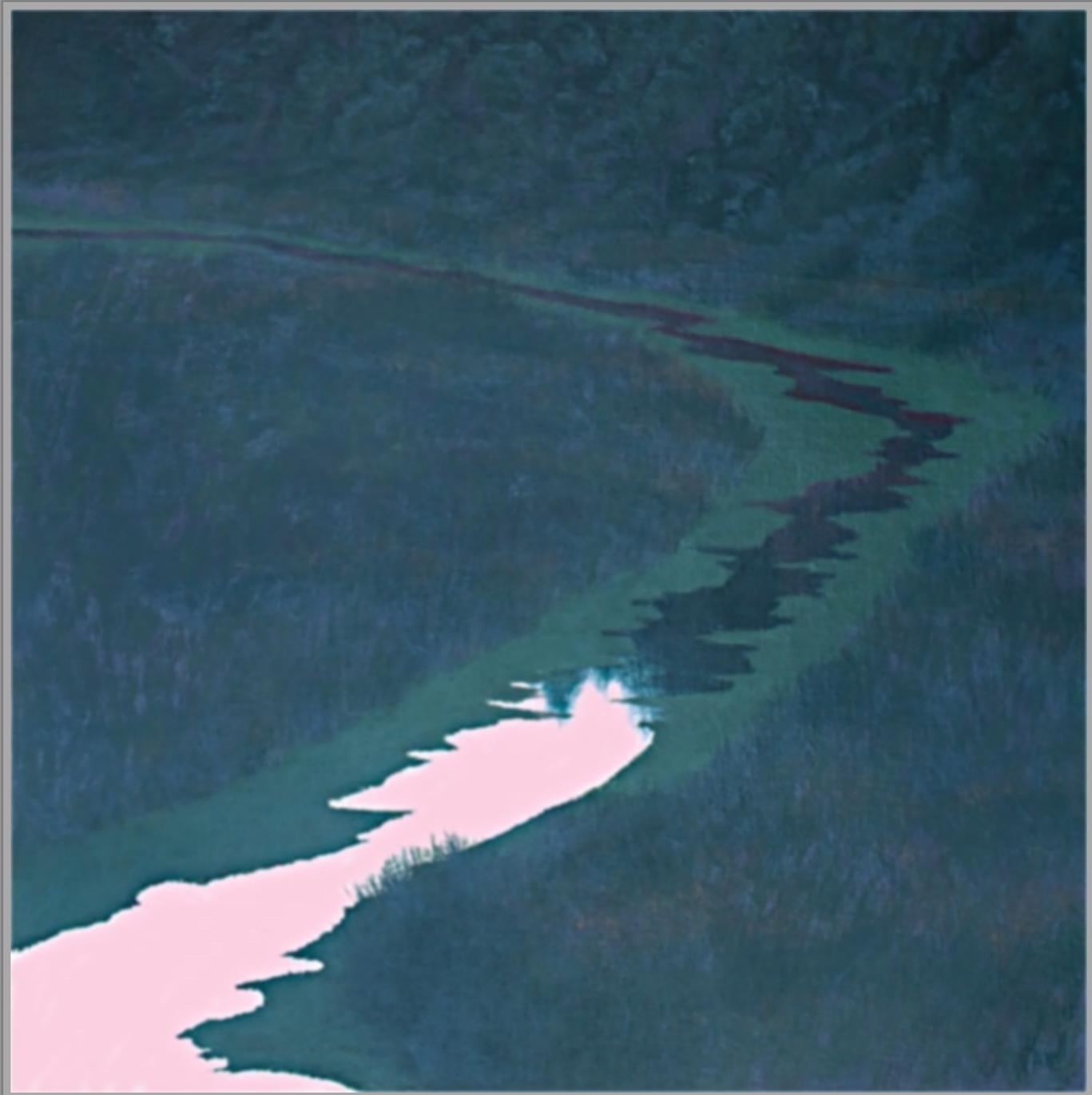




The River Of Time

JAMES MAXWELL A SHORT STORY





The River Of Time

Go ! That was the signal. With care I stepped down onto the worn wet paving stone, gained my balance then tried again for the firmest spot to place my other foot. That one was darker, greener as if covered with a dripping moss.

"Let me know when you reach the bottom." She said, her Swiss accent piercing the darkness.

It took a moment to let my eyes accustom to the eerie blue/black light. The next stone appeared, darker, wetter, more slippery than the last. When balanced, I had to direct my foot in the darkness to reach, then make a firm connection with blind trust leading to my next step. Sand, I connected with sand. Both my feet were firmly stationed in sand. Dry sand. It was as dark as charcoal. "I'm here!" I called back up to her.

"Can you see some light?" Brigitta's voice filtered down to me.

"Wait! Yes, something dim quite a ways off."

"Head for it." She sounded casual.

Curious, I trudged toward a glow that grew as I approached. It turned a light washed out blue, I stood in the opening, I called up to her, "I think I'm here."

"Good." She said, "You are now deeper than you have ever gone during all your sessions in hypnosis."

For six months I worked with Brigitta as my hypnotist. I was not making the kind of progress I wanted with my talk therapist. I have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD (Military service I imagine.) I joke, aggravated by life. So, I sought out Hypnotherapy. I had heard results that hypnosis was more immediate. So, I took the plunge.

An hour into our first meeting Brigitta said, "The subconscious is a frightening place to visit without company."

I said, "Ok. Let's go."

At first, two sessions a month was all I could handle. The impact of discovering my inner life had characters that inhabited my sub-conscious informed me. I needed time to calm the disturbing contradictions I discovered. Like Al, the character who comforted me when I fucked up. We gave him another job. Al would only comfort me now when I did something worthy of praise. I no longer fucked up then go for comfort. He was eager to please with his new assignment. Within two weeks I understood the value of my last journey. I looked forward to the next. My talk therapist said that alone was a huge step, he would have had to take weeks.

What I intend, Gentle Reader, is to take you through is my most significant session. One where there were twelve people in the room at the time. Brigitta's husband, George, also a hypnotherapist, and ten in all clients, those who had previously been hypnotized many times. This "Intensive" would focus on each individual's concerns for as much as three hours. This particular

weekend was called the Mother's Day intensive, "An Empowerment." We arrived Friday evening and left Sunday afternoon. We would sleep over in accommodations reserved for guests.

All the other participants had had their time before I got my turn. I told them I felt I was out of touch with why I wasn't content. How I sensed I had lost my purpose, didn't really know what to do next. I was not happy.

This particular hypnotherapy session would be where I found the seeds to what drove me to ask for psychological help in the first place. I have not been the same since that deep down discovery.

"Look at your feet. What do you see?" Her voice reached me as if from an out of sight speakerphone, disembodied, a far away touch with the outside world where my body lay hypnotized on her massage table, at the center of her living room.

The sandy soil beneath my feet was composed of small stones and ceramic shards. Adjusting to the soft blue light, I picked up what appeared to be a broken piece of a Chinese Willow Ware pottery, in green. Carefully painted on it was a small wooded island with a dock. It floated in space, appeared as an emerald green drawing in a sea of foggy blue.

I told Brigitta what I had found, described the image in detail. "The shard is no bigger than my thumb."

"Good." She said, "That's where we'll go."

"Where?"

"To the River of Time of course."

I looked back at the shard and was enveloped into its image, hovering over that emerald green island.

"I want you to call your guides to you." She said, "You are going to need every ounce of help you can get. You will need all of them. This will be a perilous voyage for you; we must travel back before you were born. Back before you were in your mother's womb. Back when you signed the contract that allowed you to be on this earth." I remember my heart beat speeding up. "You will read the pact you signed to be alive, then we'll see if you have fulfilled that contract in this life. Or, we'll know the reason why you haven't. Do you understand what this means?"

"I – I no . . . how?"

"Call your guides to you, do that now."

I had come to love my guides. They were real people to me; more real in this surreal world, for they loved me unconditionally. There was Bill and Bob who I met during my first introduction into my sub-conscious when I was working on my relationship with my undemonstrative father. Bill protected me with language and reason, Bob with simple actions. They were there for me, at my side in a scary confrontation with my distant father. Al was willing to die for me if need be. Remember, Brigitta facilitated a new job for him to comfort me when I succeeded. I was amazed how my life shifted after that. The Golden Man was there as a personal goal, an ideal I wanted to be like. The King of Hearts was an authority on love. I even had a respectable architect, on first introduction I was confused, he felt like my real father. There were some shadowy female figures there as well, undefined at this time. All the guides came forward. They all stood together, at the ready for me in that blue/black light.

We met at the image, now real, on the little dock, all of us. Suddenly there was a red sailed Chinese junk we were to board. The sails were billowing. I was both on the deck of the boat with my friends and in the sky. We flew high towards the horizon following the River of Time.

I became over anxious. I called to Brigitta.

"Are you in danger?"

"No."

"What do you see?"

"I'm sitting crosslegged on the deck in the center of the boat. All my guides are standing up around me. I can't see anything except their legs; I can't see the banks of the river. My back is stiff with fear."

"Why don't you look over the railing?" She asked.

I crawled over to the rail, got to my knees and looked out at a huge flood of white water crashing toward us. I was frozen to the spot. I started to sweat, my throat closed in fear. I felt we would be overtaken at any moment. One of my guides tapped me on the shoulder and suggested I look where we were going, rather than where we had been. I turned to look the opposite direction, the river was like glass before us. I told Brigitta what had just happened to me.

She must have whispered to someone in the group, then to me said, "That fits." I heard her husband, George ask for a pencil and paper. There was a delay, then I heard her say something about writing something down. There was a long pause.

I was on that river.

"Now stay focused." She told me, "I want you to look for an imposing building. It is the library where the contracts are kept that everyone who has ever lived have signed. It is high up on a cliff over the river. There should be a dock at its base. You can pull the boat in there."

The boat was rocking, moving along tall cliffs on both banks, the river must have been very deep; I couldn't see any ripples.

I pointed at the ancient fortress first, high up on the top edge of the cliff, dark against an orange sky. The stone dock appeared next. We headed for shore. All of us were standing ready to disembark when the boat softly bumped the dock. We made a line walking up the narrow path on the cliff. I was at the lead but did not feel like a leader.

It appeared to be a deserted ruin when we reached the top, an ancient stone abbey, a dark crumbling landmark, but I saw it as neglected. In the shadows a figure appeared. Completely covered in a hooded robe he stood defiantly in front of the abbey's entrance blocking our way.

"Max, what's happening?" I heard Brigitta's voice.

She brought me to my senses for a moment. "Sorry! We're here. There's this guy who won't let us in."

"He just probably wants to know why you're there. May I speak with him?"

"Sure."

"How do you do." Her voice was respectful, as if she had made this request many times before. "I'd like to introduce my friend, Max. He has made this journey to the library, for he has forgotten what it was that he signed as a

contract to be alive. You can see he has made considerable effort as he brings along all his guides for he is quite sincere in seeking this information. Do you think it would be possible for him to meet whoever is in charge to make his appeal?"

The figure turned and disappeared into the darkness of the ruin. I glanced around at my guides, their faces open to anything. Two figures similarly hooded appeared and waved us to follow them.

"It's a go." I called up to her.

We were ushered down into an old stone chamber. There were many corridors off this main room. A figure dressed as the others stood in the center. I knew he was in charge.

I said, "I'm named James Maxwell. James Edward, actually. Somehow I have forgotten what I had promised to achieve in my life. I'm confused by my forgetfulness and wondered would it be possible to see my contract so I can go back into my life and be clear what I'm supposed to do, my calling. I do want to do this life right."

The room filled with hooded figures who streamed into the room from the many corridors. All were dressed the same, hooded and no faces. But I seemed to recognize one from the many figures. He stepped forward and led me and my guides down one of the corridors. At large wooden double doors he stopped and told me I could take one of my guides in with me to witness what was in my contract. Only one. I chose Bill, he was the most adept at language. We stood before the doors. The throng of robed figures at our backs.

As he swung open the doors, I lost my breath. I had never imagined such vast space, cliffs that reached from the depths of darkness to a vaulted sky.

Space seemed to go on forever. The sky was a brilliant sunny blue, but the cliffs in dark shadows. Large birds soared so high above, they looked tiny, and there were birds circling far, so far below from where we were standing. I described the scene to Brigitta and the group of people back around the table and my body. But I really was there, next to that chasm.

The hooded figure took the lead. Bill and I followed along a path that clung to the dark cliff face. I felt a cold wind on my cheek. A chasm deeper than any earthly canyon kept me hugging close to the wall. My fear kept us moving slow. The figure stopped before an old distressed wooden handle in the cliff face, he pulled out a drawer two feet long and a foot tall. A rolled up parchment filled the compartment. The air felt like we were in the mountains. My contract.

Bill and I lifted the document out of the drawer, he unrolled it and as I speed-read it. I remembered. It fit me like my own skin.

"There is a darkness

You must call light

Grow beauty"

I was so shaken by the sense it made I had Bill read it again aloud so I could hear it.

I heard Brigitta ask George to write it down as I repeated it line for line for George to get it right. "No commas, no periods, it is very old parchment."

She announced, "Max, say goodbye now and come back into the room here."

I was back into her living room instantly, under a blanket on the massage table. Though still in deep hypnosis, I felt no need to move or change my position on the table. I was awash with the mystery of my contract, amazed at so many possible meanings. The cool blue of the River of Time faded.

"How do you feel?"

"I'm bollixed. I don't know what I'm feeling."

"Do you feel you are fulfilling your contract?"

"NO!" That was immediate. "I can't. Something has always held me back from . . . whatever would enable me to do that. Its like I've always been side tracked, disappointed. No, I've always been wrong."

"Where in your body are you wrong?"

"Well. Where? Everywhere. Nowhere. I don't know."

"Max," I felt her hand on my shoulder. I sensed George's was on my other. "Go into your heart and ask where?"

I physically shook. My reaction jolted me as I saw what my heart looked like.

"What? Max, what is going on?"

"My heart is covered with chains. Rusty iron, and sheets of steel cover it. I don't even see anything except my blood and guts pushing through, locked in metal. What does it mean?" Sweating, I was cold beneath the blanket. Inside fear.

"Hang on there." She said. "Just a moment."

I felt them move away and the others in the room placing their hands on my body to comfort me. I heard Brigitta whispering with George.

"Max," she finally said returning to my side. "We have to go back before you were born again. We have to progress forward from there to see when the chains were put on. Then we can remove them. It must be very painful I know, but you must go through this. It's the only way."

I had no resistance. "Yes. OK."

She took me back down the familiar steps, down into that moist darkness. When I told her I saw the light, she said, "That light is now the first moment you knew you were alive in your mother's womb."

"Yes." That is quite clear. "Yes, Yes, I'm here. Wait something is wrong. There are bugs, something like insects are biting me." My body smarted with the stings. "It's like acid." My arms and hands became tense and contorted. My fingers gnarled into root-like claws. "I have to protect my self." I doubled over into a fetal position on the table. "I have to cover myself to be safe. I'm doing it. I'm the one doing it. It's the only way."

"Max, you must straighten out for us to heal you. I know it's hard but you must try to open up and relax back on the table."

I felt George patting my shoulder, the other people around the table, their hands comforting me. I settled back under the blanket but I was anything but relaxed.

Brigitta's voice lifted in command. "I ask for all my guides and the rulers of the cosmos to assist me in healing Max of this affliction, the chains that bind his heart."

Silence. I waited. Nothing. More nothing. Silence.

"Max," she whispered. "George is now going to kiss your heart. That will break the chains and you will be free to be reborn. We will all birth you into this loving room with all your new friends."

I felt George lean over me. I felt his breath through my tee shirt. I felt the pressure of his mouth kissing the spot over my heart. In an instant all the rusting chains burst apart and dissipated.

I hid it, that I was so embarrassed. I couldn't express it, but I felt it for what it was. I had been running a racket on myself. A sob story I told myself but never brought it to mind. Till then.

At that moment of the kiss on my heart, I had changed.

I cowered at my self-pity. I had no right to sentence myself so, considering my achievements in spite of life's odds against me.

Yes, it was rebirth. Yes, we all danced around happy that each one of us had been empowered to go on with their new life. Reborn. All so New-Age. I really felt fucked up.

We were all re-birthed that weekend, or so it appeared.

Yes, I won't forget the River of Time, or my contract:

"There is a darkness

You must call light

Grow beauty"

Nor, will I forget the conversation after my session. One of the other participants asked me. "Max, did your mother, during her pregnancy, did she have Toxemia?"

"I believe she did tell me often that she had. Yes. Why?"

"Well, I don't believe I mentioned it, but I'm an emergency nurse in the intensive care nursery at a Pediatric Hospital. What you described and acted out on the table was what babies act like who are born to toxemic mothers."

Curious, as I heard myself say with finality, not confused by self-pity, "Oh."

Today, I am so glad I signed that contract.

Go.

That's the signal.

The River Of Time
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