

This is the full text of the book, The Gift by Kevin Hogan. This is our special gift to you. Feel free to pass along the text of this book to anyone you would like. At the bottom of this page, you will find ordering information if you would like to give "The Gift" in book form. Enjoy!

The Gift

**A Discovery of Happiness, Fulfillment and Love
Kevin Hogan
A Heart Warming New Message of Hope and Inspiration**

The Gift:

A Discovery of Happiness, Fulfillment and Love

Kevin Hogan (1961-)

Network 3000 Publishing

3432 Denmark Ave. #108

Eagan, Minnesota 55123

(952) 707-1898

Copyright 1998, 1992, 2000 by Kevin Hogan

All Rights Reserved

Printed in the U.S.

Acknowledgements

The Gift was written shortly after the birth of my daughter Jessica. Now it is being reprinted shortly after the birth of my son, Mark. Both of these wonderful children have helped me discover and re-discover love every day.

I want to thank my wife Katie and our friend Joel Weiss for meticulously editing the original manuscript. Their advice and editing helped turn a good book into a truly wonderful story.

Chapter One

John approached the house he had visited so often as a child, but hadn't returned to in the last six years. He thought, "I should have taken the time to drive up and see Gramps before he died."

Gramps had loved John dearly. Of all the grandchildren Randolph Weston had, John was the most special to him. In Randolph Weston's eyes, John could do no wrong, at least as a child. Randolph's vision for his eldest grandchild had been great. Now Gramps was gone.

To be sure, if all the Bible stories Gramps had read to him as a child were true, Gramps was now in heaven. How often Gramps had taken food and clothes to the overnight center for the homeless. The love he had for so many people was unlike any John had witnessed. He had tried to love as his grandfather had loved. John's love always seemed to be met with rejection. His love, it seemed, had always brought him pain.

John turned his beat up car in to the driveway of his newly inherited home. It had taken less than two hours to get to Lake Forest from his dingy apartment in Niles. "I could have made the trip last month and Gramps would've been here," he thought.

He got out of his car and looked over the house. John couldn't believe that Gramps had left it to him and him alone. The other kids certainly weren't forgotten, but this home was worth a quarter of a million dollars. It was not gaudy in appearance; it was unassuming, yet elegant. The lawn had not been cut in at least a month, but, other than that, the place was picture perfect.

He fumbled for his keys. The door was not locked! He tried turning the knob. Fear struck him. His gut turned. Was someone inside? Was the house being robbed? He didn't know if he should run or go in.

"John Weston, is that you?" A voice rang out from next door.

It was old Mrs. Pullen. John hadn't seen her since he was a teenager. She hadn't changed a bit. She must be at least eighty-five now.

"Shh," John whispered loudly, a finger to his lips. "The door's open, someone's inside."

Mrs. Pullen laughed. "Oh, go in Johnny, no one's in there. Your grandpa never locked his doors. Come over for tea later," she said, and disappeared in to her house.

"Never locked his door?!?" Then he remembered his grandfather telling him one day, "If they need it that bad, Johnny, let them take it." His fear abated, he walked in.

How could such an old man have kept his house so tastefully decorated? So clean? So comfortable? It didn't feel like an "old person's" house. In fact, it felt great. All the memories were there. They were all good.

John walked through his new home. He carefully examined each room. So neat and tidy. He walked upstairs to his grandfather's favorite room, the study. Opening the door, he looked around. The antique roll top desk, the cabinets filled with hundreds of volumes of books. "Gramps sure loved to read," he thought. He himself hadn't read a whole book since high school.

He pulled back the chair at the desk and sat down. As a child, John would sit on Gramps' lap in this very chair. It was in this odd place that Gramps would read to him for hours. He remembered Bible stories, tales of great men like Lincoln, Ford, Carnegie, Gandhi, Churchill. Hefty stuff for a twelve year old. John loved being with his grandfather, no matter what story was being told.

Now, at age 37, a grown adult, John simply had been unable to face Gramps for so long. He was ashamed of himself, and felt there was no way his grandfather could be proud of whom he had become. John had dug himself deep in financial debt, couldn't hold a job, had no savings, couldn't find anyone who would marry him. He had turned out to be the opposite of his grandfather. And he had turned out to be the opposite of what Gramps had thought he would become.

As John reclined in his grandfather's chair, his gaze turned toward the window and the back yard he had played in so often, more than two decades ago. As he remembered the good times, he fell in to a sound sleep.

Chapter Two

The envelope was sealed and was addressed only to "John". It sat on the top of a pile of envelopes in the center drawer of the roll top desk. The drawer was very disorganized and most unlike the order of the rest of the Weston home.

John hesitated as he began to break the seal on this envelope meant for him. After reconsidering, he finally opened the envelope. It was a letter from his grandfather.

Dear John,

It has been a long time since I've seen you. I want you to know how much I love you and wish we were close again.

I have a wonderful gift for you. There is a small island among the Fijian islands. (There are hundreds of islands in Fiji. Most of them are uninhabited.) The island you must go to is called Vata Lavuana. It is not on most maps because there are only a few people who live on the island. This island has a treasure buried there that will allow you to live in ways you could only have dreamed of. It is this treasure that I leave buried for none to dig but you. This treasure is the gift I leave you.

At the harbor in Newport Beach, California, is a boat that will take you to the island. The captain is a wonderful friend of mine, Nick Pappastigious. He will take you. You must bring no one with you. Tell the captain who you are and you will be off.

Happy sailing my beloved grandson, Happy sailing.

Lovingly Yours,

Gramps

John sat staring at the letter. It all seemed so improbable. Buried treasure in Fiji? When was Gramps ever in Fiji? No way. How did the letter get written? Gramps left the letter in his desk drawer for however long, and he left it on top? It made no sense.

John grabbed the phone on the desk. "Operator, give me Newport Beach, California. Nick Pappastigious. Thank you." When he was connected, he said, "Hi, this is John Weston calling from Lake Forest, Illinois. I'm the grandson of Randolph Weston. He recently passed away and..."

A thick Greek accent cut him off. "You were supposed to come to Newport Beach, not call Newport Beach. You'll never get anywhere sitting on your backside, boy. Take action, get a move on." Click.

The man sounded to be in his seventies. He seemed to be expecting the call.

"I can't go to Fiji. I have no money, no vacation time, and I don't know how to speak some weird language," he mumbled to himself.

He truly had nothing...but now he had his grandfather's house. He could sell it and be fairly wealthy indeed. Unlike the rest of his brothers, sisters and cousins, he received no money in his inheritance. He was willed the beautiful home, the mysterious letter, and now a bizarre beckoning from Newport Beach, California, which just might lead to a desolate island on the other side of the world. The whole idea was frightening to him. Sailing in a boat to some island, which might not even exist. Was this letter really from Gramps? Was the island really there? How would he find a treasure without a map? Even on a small island, you could dig forever and find nothing.

Pacing the study, John considered his options. He thought about his virtually wasted life at thirty-seven years of age. He hated his mediocre existence. He was lonely, bored, and hated his new job of five months.

He felt in his back pocket, pulled out his checkbook. Peeking inside the register, he saw a balance of \$347.23. He picked up a phone book off the floor, flipped a few pages and dialed the phone.

"Hi. My name is John Weston. I need a ticket from O'Hare Airport to Los Angeles tomorrow...make that today."

Chapter Three

The cab driver turned down a busy street, not really a highway, although it was called a highway. What was he doing here in Newport Beach, California? A wild goose chase, no doubt.

"I don't have enough money to even get back to Los Angeles if this is some kind of stupid joke," he muttered to himself. "I've really blown it this time. I never do anything right."

"Harbor ahead, buddy. That'll be sixty two dollars even," barked the cab driver.

The cab stopped, John paid the driver and saw that he had only twenty dollars to his name. Twenty bucks. He shut the door, and the driver pulled away. He just stood and looked around.

The beach was beautiful. Everyone seemed so happy and tanned skinned. The boats in the harbor were like nothing he'd ever seen on Lake Michigan. These boats were beautiful and big. Sunshine, eighty degrees...and twenty bucks.

Chapter Four

"You Nick Pappastigious?" asked John, walking up to a weathered, but trim and fit-looking man wearing a captain's hat and standing on the boat called Her Lady.

"That's me. Who's askin'?" said the man.

"John Weston. Randolph Weston's..."

"Grandson. 'Bout time you got here," Nick interrupted. "Come aboard. You're welcome here."

"Nice boat," John remarked.

"Your grandfather must've thought mighty highly of you to give you the GIFT. You must be a mighty special young man. It's quite a treasure. Soon as our crew gets back from lunch, we'll be on our way. Quite a trek ahead of us."

Nick Pappastigious was in his seventies, yet youthful in his physique. Trimmer and healthier than John, who was half his age.

John asked, "How long will it take to get to Fiji, anyway?"

"Oh, with good weather, we can make it in a couple of weeks," answered Nick.

"Wouldn't it be quicker to fly?"

"Yep, how much money you have?"

"Twenty bucks."

"We sail in an hour." Nick disappeared below.

It had been a ridiculous thing to say, John thought to himself. Twenty bucks, what an embarrassment.

The crew of seven came on board together, seemingly jubilant and anxious to set sail. John wished he felt the same. As he looked out over the guardrail, everything he saw was beautiful, yet he felt so alone.

"Well, my boy," Captain Nick offered. "We're just about ready. Should be quite an adventure. It's been years since I've been to Fiji."

John, not knowing anything about the Captain, couldn't think of anything to say to this mysteriously kind man. Finally, he asked the obvious. "Why are you doing this? I mean, why are you taking me to Fiji, for free?"

"Your grandfather never told you about me, eh? That doesn't surprise me. He never was much to tell stories about himself."

"What do you mean? What stories?"

Nick laughed. Then he answered, "Son, your grandfather saved my life."

John was amazed. He urged Nick to continue.

Nick went on, "It was during the war. Back in forty four. We were on an island hopping mission for the Allies. Our boys were scouting out an island. It was dead quiet. Your grandfather, behind me by twenty yards or so, saw one of the bad guys. He couldn't say anything to warn me, of course, or we'd both be dead, so he took off running and jumped on top of me. While he was in the air, he took a bullet in the leg. It was a bullet meant for my heart. That very day I promised him I'd return the favor to him someday."

Nick paused. It was obvious that retelling the story brought back deep emotions for him. He continued, "Your grandfather told me about you when he was out here twenty five years later on vacation. He wanted you to have something special he left on Fiji his last trip there."

"Last year he sent me a copy of a letter he was leaving for you to open when he passed on. There's a lot more to the story, but that's all you need to know, my boy. I've got to get us on our way. You've got a room down below. Go on and put your bags down there. Next stop, Fiji."

Chapter Five

The island was lush, thought John, as the crew cut the engines. The island was not on the map that Captain Nick used. Yet here it was. It was beautiful. It was beyond beautiful. A mountain majestically rose from the back of the island. On both sides of the mountain were mounds and mounds of green. Palm trees and greenery of every imaginable kind. Birds of every color soared through the sky and flitted from tree to tree. The weather was much like it was when they had sailed from the harbor at Newport Beach. The water was a crystal clear blue and it was easy to see the fish underwater as they schooled curiously around the sailing vessel.

"When you meet someone on the island, say 'Boola Boola'. Basically, it means 'Hi, great to see you, love ya lots' and all that," advised Nick.

"Boola Boola?" questioned John.

"Boola Boola," said Nick.

"What else should I know about this island?" asked John.

Nick answered, "Well, you'll be looking for an old man named Niragi."

"Niragi?"

"If he's still alive."

"What if he's not?"

"Hmm," said Nick. "I don't really know. I'm sure you'll figure something out. One of the reasons your grandfather was such a respected man was his creativity in problem solving."

A small lifeboat was lowered in to the water. "OK, you're all set John," Captain Nick said.

"We do wish you well in finding the GIFT," said one of the crewmembers.

"What!" exclaimed John? "You're going to leave me here all alone! How am I going to get home? What will I eat? All I have is a suitcase full of clothes and a few other things."

"Very good. It's important to travel light. You'll manage. If we were to stay, all we could do is help you. You've got to find the GIFT on your own,"

encouraged Nick. "Godspeed, son. Oh, yes, one more thing. Only one thing can stop you from getting your treasure. FEAR. Remember that fear is not real."

The crew helped John in to the lifeboat and gave it a shove off. John sat feeling helpless in the boat thirty yards from shore. The sailboat was quickly out of sight and John was stranded in the middle of nowhere. For what? Buried treasure. Worse? Not a person in sight.

"Easy to say, 'Fear is not real,' when you're a millionaire in a sixty foot schooner with a crew, fuel, and food. I'm sitting here ten thousand miles from Chicago in a lifeboat with two changes of clothes and a toothbrush," he thought out loud.

Chapter Six

John pulled the lifeboat onto the shore, not believing where he was. He had to admit to himself that the island was beautiful. He had never seen anything like it. Yet, while he stood in awe of this tropical paradise, he realized all too clearly that he had no food, water, or anything for survival. The treasure was the last thing on his mind. He'd be thankful for something to eat and drink.

The island was shaped like a hot dog, near as John could figure. He was on one end. From the lifeboat, it didn't look much wider than three or four miles, or much longer than fifteen or twenty miles.

"Standing here on this shore will do nothing to get food and water," he thought to himself. "In or around?" He decided to go straight in.

The trees created a surprisingly dense forest of tropical shade. Though not extremely hot, it was a warm and humid day. The shade provided an important block of the sun's hot rays. The white sand was cool under his feet.

The island was beautiful, exotic and lush, yet John did not enjoy his vision. He was scared.

He couldn't survive long without fresh water. Why hadn't he insisted on going back with Nick? To live the life of a boring, cowardly person would be better than winnowing away on this deserted tropical island. The more John thought about this, the more his stomach churned with fear.

He collapsed against a tall palm after roaming toward the center of the island for over an hour. He probably had covered only half a mile since his coming ashore. The only signs of life were the beautiful birds of all colors singing their exotic songs. As happy as the birds were, John was afraid. He stared in to the clumps of trees and was deep in fearful thought.

From immediately behind him came a voice, "Hey, mister, what are you doing sitting there?"

Startled, John jumped up and grabbed what was an obviously defenseless boy of no more than twelve.

"Who are you?" John asked. He loosened his grip, letting the boy go.

"I am Ranjee," the boy answered.

"Ranjee, I need water and food. Can you help me find some?"

"Sure. There is a spring over the hill. You can pick some fruit from a tree."

It hadn't occurred to John that there might be fruit on the trees. He had never bothered to look up. A fresh-water brook was just over the hill, not a hundred yards from where John had decided to give up looking. Nick was right, he thought, fear is not real.

"Ranjee," John asked. "What is this island? I mean, you don't live here by yourself, do you?"

"The island is called Vata Lavuana. The island of love and miracles. I live with my family by the mountain," Ranjee answered.

They cupped their hands and drank some of the best tasting water John had ever had.

"Why are you here?" Ranjee asked John.

"I'm here to find a treasure."

"What kind of treasure?" asked Ranjee, eyebrows raised in interest.

"I honestly don't know," said John, shrugging his shoulders.

"Well, where is this treasure? Do you have a map?"

John said, "I have no map, no idea where it is. I don't even believe I came here. I'm supposed to find an old man named Niragi. Any idea who he is?"

"Niragi is the Guide, the Teacher of Miracles."

"Ranjee, can you take me to him?"

"Mister, he doesn't live anywhere. He comes to you."

"Can we get a message to him?"

"He comes when you are ready. Here, eat this, mister."

The fruit Ranjee gave to John was delicious and sweet. The boy looked curiously at John and asked, "Why did you quit looking for water and food? Would you not have died without them?"

John paused as he thought about it. "I was afraid. I had looked for an hour and found nothing. Until I saw you, I thought I might die here on this island."

"The water was only a few steps from where you gave up. You passed many trees with fruit. The Guide has taught our people to Haleej, Nira, Nigala, Livana, Ranepa."

"What does that mean?" asked John.

"See, Believe, Begin, Continue, Finish. It means see what you desire in your mind's eye, and believe that you will get it. Begin your quest, and continue until you finish. We are taught that most of the time, the only thing that can stop you is Nava, fear."

"Sounds like that positive thinking stuff they talk about back home."

"No, mister, it has nothing to do with positive thinking. It is just everything. When I found you, you were already doing Haleej, Nira, Nigala, Livana, Ranepa."

"Huh?"

"You saw yourself dead on our island. You believed you were going to die. You began to die by giving up the search for food and water. You continued your quest for death by being afraid and becoming depressed. You would have finished if I would not have come. You are a very lucky mister."

John marveled at how a young boy could have such wisdom. Ranjee was right, thought John. During his entire life, he had been stuck in this same cycle. He had never used this patter to his advantage, only to his failure. To be enlightened to this way of thinking by a child was very humbling to him.

"What is in this treasure you have come here for?" asked the boy again.

"I don't know that, either," said John.

The boy pondered for a moment before asking, "For someone who seems to have no faith in himself, you have really stepped out on faith to find a treasure you know nothing about. Why?"

John answered, "My grandfather died last month. He left me a letter telling me to come here and find a gift. It's in the treasure, I guess."

"You must have had great faith in your grandfather. Great love. This explains why you came here even though you were afraid."

"You are something," said John to the boy, still wondering at the child's wisdom.

"Let's go, mister. I want to show you something."

John's thirst was quenched, his hunger filled, and he saw no reason to stay at the spring any longer. He followed the boy. They walked quickly on weaving paths through the sands and the palms until they came to an abrupt change in terrain. They stood in front of a chasm about half a city block wide with a quiet river thirty feet below. This was a most unexpected sight to John. The sand had turned in to a solid volcanic rock. The scene was reminiscent of a trip John had once taken to the Grand Canyon.

Without hesitation, Ranjee stepped onto a wooden plank which connected the two sides of the mini-canyon. The plank was no more than two feet wide and seemed to bow in the middle of the chasm. Ranjee was walking at his normal pace.

John froze at the foot of the chasm. There was no way he was going to get on a plank of wood two feet wide and five hundred feet long!

Ranjee walked out one hundred feet, then realized that John was not following. He turned and saw John staring at him, frozen in fear.

"Mister, you must come," Ranjee called.

"No way! I'll fall in!" yelled John.

"Mister, remember, Haleej, Neera, Nigala, Livana, Ranepa. I promise you will make it across. Everyone makes it across."

"I can't swim."

Ranjee sat down on the plank and laughed a tremendous laugh.

"Mister, you would not survive the fall." He couldn't stop laughing. "Mister, your fear is not real. The path you walked for the last hour to get here is thinner than this plank and you did not fall. Now, because you could hurt yourself, you lose confidence in your ability to walk! You have many bad pictures in your mind." He finally quit laughing.

John stepped out onto the plank. His stomach churned.

"Stop!" Ranjee, suddenly serious, shouted. "Mister, you are still afraid. You don't believe you can do it. You will fall. Step back until you are positive you will be walking as if you are on the sand path coming here. Your fear is not real. It is an illusion. Trust yourself. Now, step onto the board and know you will come across."

John again stepped out. For some reason, his tentativeness was gone. Ranjee was right. John felt exhilarated. He had broken through his fear. He had

never felt so good. As he walked, his admiration for his wise, courageous host grew.

A couple of minutes later, they took a step off the long plank and looked back over what John had accomplished. As he took a few steps toward the new path, John stumbled to the ground. His right hand hit the ground hard enough to dislodge some dirt. As golden glimmer shown through the dirt. He pulled it out. It was a large key. Etched onto the key was this phrase:

Fear is an illusion

"What's this?" asked John.

"It is a key, Mister. Maybe a key to a box of treasure. Whatever it opens, Mister, it is true that you have found a golden key for success and happiness."

Chapter Seven

Ranjee stopped at the top of a hill. Higher in the distance, was a steep grade leading to what appeared to be an inactive volcano.

Ranjee pointed and said, "My home is just over there to the east right on the beach. That is Mount Paravaloon. In your language that means 'wisdom'. Many years ago it was an active volcano. It has not erupted in over a century. At the base of the mountain facing the other side are the light caves."

The light caves? What are the light caves, John thought. But he was concerned for Ranjee. So he asked, "Shouldn't you be getting on home for dinner or something? Won't your parents worry?"

"My family does not worry about me. They know I am able to care for myself most of the time. Mister, I will take you to the light caves."

"Do you think I might find the treasure there?"

"I don't know, Mister. I do know one thing. It is not here on the top of this hill."

Ranjee led John around the base of the mountain about half way around. They paused for a break. The path had been rocky and it was no easy time. John looked up. The mountain was remarkably steep. He ventured a guess of at least a few thousand feet to the peak.

"Ranjee, what's that over there?" asked John, pointing to a hut, about half the size of a small house.

"That is the Vilanoala," said Ranjee.

"What does that mean?" asked John.

"Vilanoala means reflection mirror," explained Ranjee.

"What's inside?" John's curiosity grew.

"When you go inside, you are inside."

"Sounds strange. Can we check it out?"

"I will take you there," said Ranjee, cutting through some brush to make a path to the hut.

The hut was not far from the hilltop. As they approached the Vilanoala, John had an uneasy feeling inside.

Ranjee stated, "I cannot go in with you, Mister. In Vilanoala, each person's thoughts are revealed in a way that few have ever seen and fewer understand."

John asked nervously, "What do I do when I get in there?"

Ranjee answered, "Put each hand in one of the small bowls you'll see. After that, you'll know what to do."

John walked hesitantly in to the Vilanoala. It was dark. Only a few glimmers of light shown through the cracks in the roof. There was a table with three bowls on it. The bowl in the middle was much larger than the other two. He stood in front of the three bowls and placed one hand in each of the two small bowls. The water was warm. As he stared at the large bowl of water, a calm, peaceful feeling flowed through his arms and then the rest of his body. He looked in to the bowl without wanting to look away. His reflection appeared in the bowl.

Somewhat startled, but not fearful, John saw a picture of himself at his most recent job overtake the reflection of his face. The picture moved, but there was no sound. He saw his co-workers, the problems he had had to deal with, and the look of depression on his own face.

The picture faded in to another moving picture, this one of the job interview he had had with his current boss. He remembered how much he told the man he had really wanted the job, when in actuality he loathed working there, and knew it even as he sat there telling this man the opposite of what he knew.

The moving picture faded in to his preceding job. It was the day he got fired. It had been his third day being late for work. The picture faded in to a vision of him asking the woman in human relations for the job. She was shaking his hand, congratulating him.

The picture faded in to another moving picture. It was Kristine, his former girlfriend. There were tears in her eyes. It was the day she broke their dating relationship. That day was one of the most painful of John's life. He began to realize that he had given Kristine only what he had wanted to give her, not the things she had wanted and had needed so much.

The moving picture faded to good and bad memories from John's childhood. He was being enlightened in a way he could have never dreamed. The theme of the pictures was clear. John had always thought that he had been dealt a bad hand, that life had treated him unfairly. But in most of the moving pictures, it was the decisions he himself had made, as much as anything, that

had determined whom he was to become, what was to happen to him. He began to sense what his ultimate destiny would be.

The final pictures of his childhood faded in to a picture of a wise-looking, brazen colored old man atop a mountain, writing on a scroll. The man looked up and saw Ranjee and the shadow of another. The picture faded.

John was not fearful, but his heart was racing. He was excited, enthusiastic, enlightened. He took a deep breath, hoping to see more, but he had seen all there was to see. He glanced away from the bowl toward the table in front of him. There lay a golden key. He pulled his hands from the water bowls, picked up the key and turned it over. There was an inscription.

The inscription read,

You are the creator of your world

John clenched the key in his fist. To no one in particular he whispered, "Thank you."

He closed his eyes, reopened them, and left the Vilanoala. Ranjee sat waiting on a large rock. He smiled as he saw John. No words needed to be exchanged. John had found the second key.

Chapter Eight

The two had been walking slowly back to the path they had been on originally. Ranjee knew the experience John had been through in the Vilanoala was a powerful one, and left John alone in his silent thoughts.

"Ranjee," John finally said. "What about when something happens to you and you have no control over it?"

"Mister," he answered. "Sometimes on the islands, it rains very hard. The floods come and some huts are destroyed. Some sheep die and some people die. For those who live, they must decide what they will do. We are taught that it is good to grieve the bad things. But, then it is time to rebuild the huts, and rebuild our lives. It is considered an honor to those who have gone before us to return to the path we have chosen for ourselves. We are taught that most often when something bad happens, there is a seed planted that will someday sprout something good, but only if we provide the tending of the seed."

John asked, "Ranjee, how do you know so much about all this?"

Ranjee answered solemnly, "When I was nine, my father died in a great storm. He died saving a man's life. A man who had come to see Niragi. My father was this man's host, as I am yours. It is my path to become a Guide like Niragi. My father never became a Guide, but he was host of hosts. It is in following my path that I have chosen for myself that I honor my father."

"What exactly is a Guide?"

"A Guide does many things. A Guide is a teacher of love and miracles. For you, I must help you find your treasure."

John stopped walking. Ranjee's father had died helping someone like himself. What if he had given his life for a search for treasure, just like John's search?

"Ranjee, how many times have you been a host?" asked John.

"You are the first, Mister. We are almost to the light caves."

"What's in the light caves, Ranjee?"

"What's inside you, Mister?" Ranjee asked, looking directly at John.

John was puzzled by Ranjee's riddle, but was certain it would become evident in time. The search for buried treasure still entered in to his mind, but John was now convinced that there was a greater treasure to be found on this island.

Chapter Nine

"Mister, I think I'm beginning to get an idea about where your treasure is buried. I cannot be sure, but I think we will find it," said Ranjee thoughtfully.

"For now, Ranjee, I'm excited to learn about the light caves. Ever since meeting you, my friend, I've felt so much better about everything."

"You don't see the old world anymore," said Ranjee, nodding. "You are seeing a new world. As you go in to the light caves, look around at the darkness. Remember the keys you have. Listen carefully to all you hear. Listen to your inner thoughts and to the sounds out of yourself. Your world, your future, your destiny all lie within you and your thoughts. Listen to your inner voice."

John nodded to Ranjee, then entered. The cave and was quickly enveloped in darkness. He heard all the noises of the island quite clearly and he could hear Ranjee's voice. "Mister, go straight ahead ten steps and you will find a pillow to sit on. It is soft and comfortable."

John did as the boy told him. Even though he was in pitch blackness, he easily found the pillow. For some reason, he could not see the cave entrance or the outside. All four sides were totally black. John sat down and rested. A few minutes passed by and then John heard a new voice. "John, I am your Guide. You sit here in a dark cave thousands of miles from your home because of love. Your grandfather had such a deep love for you, he wanted you to have a wonderful gift. On this island, there is a treasure buried in the ground and the treasure is yours to keep should you decide to do so.

"Your grandfather was here during World War Two and it was then that I met him for the first and only time. It was as a soldier that the young Randolph Weston learned of love and miracles. He returned once some twenty years ago with your grandmother. It was at that time that they left a treasure for you. I did not see him on his visit here then.

"It was on his second visit that your grandfather decided he wanted you to come here. He could have left you money to secure your future, but then you would not have come here to experience the island of love and miracles.

"The light caves have much to teach you. Right now the cave you are in is dark. It is like your inner self. You are a confused young man. You have learned much since coming to the island, and now you will learn a great lesson.

"As your inner world brightens, your outer world brightens, too. Each person has the ability to be a great light for others to see by, a beacon for the

world. We continually attack ourselves and others with our thoughts. John, think of all the people and things you have been angry at and about. As you think of each of these, notice how your thoughts attack these people.

"After each instance, whisper to yourself, 'I forgive this person. I choose now to love him instead. I forgive this person. I choose now peace for him and myself'.

"When we attack others, we attack ourselves. When we send peace and forgiveness, we receive peace and forgiveness for ourselves. It is this peace and forgiveness that gives us pure love.

"This is the kind of love your grandfather had for all the people he knew. He wanted you to bring this same love to many. Please, experience these thoughts now."

John thought of all the people he had ever been angry with. He thought of events that had frustrated him and unkindness that people had sent his way. After each of these thoughts, he would whisper to himself, "I forgive you. I send you love now instead. I forgive you. I choose peace for both you and me."

At first this was awkward, but soon dozens of things John had been angry about were spewing forth from his memory and he sent out true feelings of peace, forgiveness and love for each. More and more memories were being changed, updated. John's heart began to feel light for the first time since he was a child.

As John continued, he noticed something fascinating happening. As he sent his messages out, the cave began to mysteriously become lit, brighter and brighter. Each time he took an adverse thought and corrected it with forgiveness, the cave brightened. Finally the cave was as bright as a sunny day.

John noticed a stand with a pillow on it deeper in the cave. When he finished thinking of all the anger and the frustrating events that had been pent up inside him for a lifetime, he got up and went to the stand. On top of the pillow, there was a golden key. The key had an inscription on it. It read,

Forgiveness is the seed of peace, love and happiness

Chapter Ten

John clenched the newly found key in his fist for a few moments, then placed it in his pocket along with the other two keys. As he turned to find the entrance of the cave, and find Ranjee, he heard the voice again, "John, you have done well."

John turned and saw an old man, brazen, with a beard. He was sitting on a pillow deeper yet in to the cave.

"Are you Niragi?" asked John, incredulous.

"I am he," replied the old man.

"I don't know what to say. I...I..." stammered John.

"You are discovering who you are, the purpose of your life. You came looking for coins and now are learning the mysteries of life.

"John," Niragi continued. "When you forgive, do not mark the deed and pardon it. The God who made you does not do so."

"God? You mean there is a God?" asked John.

"Of course!" answered Niragi. "As I was saying, when God forgives you, He does not remember the deed. It is as if it simply never happened. When you forgive someone, you let go of the thought of anger completely. It is as if the sin or error was never committed. By doing so, you will seldom feel angry, hateful or frustrated. Instead, you will be happy most of the time, and like the light you gave this cave, you will become a light to all those in the world around you."

This spoken, Niragi vanished in front of John's eyes.

Chapter Eleven

"Ranjee! Ranjee! Ranjee!" yelled John excitedly.

He raced for the cave entrance. It wasn't there before, at least he hadn't seen it before. There was Ranjee, waiting.

"Ranjee," sputtered John. "I met Niragi. I talked to him. He spoke to me! It was great!"

Ranjee asked, "Did you ask him where the treasure is buried?"

"The treasure? The treasure! I forgot! I'm sorry!"

Ranjee laughed. "That's OK, Mister," he said. "It's your treasure! Tell me about your experience inside the cave."

John told him all that had transpired, every detail. He told Ranjee how incredibly happy he was, how light his heart felt, how ready he was to face the next challenge.

"In your happiness, Mister, you did not begin your next challenge, as you call it. I will accompany you on your next journey. Come, let us go in to the cave together."

The cave was dark, but as they walked in, it illuminated around them as if they were light. The pillow, the stand, all John had seen before had vanished. They proceeded to where John had received his key and they looked deeper in to the cave. It was as they walked further in that John saw the three paths leading them from the main cave. Each of these were dark and did not illuminate as John and Ranjee approached them.

"Which one shall we take, Ranjee?" asked John.

"The cave we are in is now your present," began Ranjee. "It is bright. This means you have learned much. You have much love. Each of the three is an entrance to your future. Each takes you to a different place. It is your decision which path you must take and where you are going. If anyone were to choose for you, it would be someone else's idea of where you are going."

"But Ranjee," said John. "I have no map. I don't know where the caves go."

"In life," said Ranjee, "most people have no map and don't know where the decision they make will take them. You must be different."

"Ranjee, we have no map and....," John's thoughts cut him off.

His whole life had been like this. Nothing he did was for any reason. There was no purpose to his day-to-day living. Every day, he was getting up, going to a job he didn't enjoy, coming home every night and doing the same thing over and over and over again. All without a destination in mind. He was driving in circles and going nowhere.

Now, today, on this island in this cave, John became an enlightened individual full of love and growing wisdom. Yet, it would mean little if he could not be a light for others. It would mean little if he did not do something purposeful with his life. A wild thought occurred to him.

"Ranjee, is there a piece of paper and pencil in this cave?"

"Mister, you are learning quickly," said Ranjee. "Look here."

John turned. There appeared a small book and a pen.

Ranjee picked them up and handed them to John. The book was full of blank pages, nothing written on them at all. John sketched the cave, including the three paths. On the next page, he sketched a picture of the mountain outside. Then he sketched their current location in relation to the rest of the mountain. He then drew a path from the cave to the top of the mountain. He remembered looking at the bowl at Vilanoala. It was Niragi he had seen in the reflection. Niragi, he ventured to guess, would be at the mountaintop when he and Ranjee got there. He completed his sketch, arbitrarily connecting the path to the middle entrance of the cave.

"We'll use the middle path, Ranjee."

They entered the middle path and as soon as they stepped out of the main cave, the illumination disappeared. It was pitch black again. It would be impossible to walk, for neither could see his hand in front of his face.

"Let's go back and try another entrance," said John.

As they stepped back in to the main cave, it was illuminated and bright once again.

"This is weird, Ranjee, what's going on?" asked John.

"The three tunnels lead to your future. This main cave is bright because of who you are now," answered Ranjee.

John looked at his sketches. They were good. They provided a map. He remembered that the three entrances represented his future. He opened his book to a new page. John stared at the blank page. This blank page was his future. He had never seriously considered this page.

John had always dreamed of being more than he was currently. But in the past several years, he had pushed those dreams aside for what he felt must be reality. He wrote down what he really wanted to do with his life.

"Mister," advised Ranjee, "as you write down your dreams, remember the Vilanoala."

"The Vilanoala?" paused John. He vividly remembered the lessons of the Vilanoala. He especially remembered the fact of cause and effect. He knew this to be what Ranjee was hinting at. He wrote down what he would do to realize his dreams. He wrote a complete plan covering everything he could think of to make his dreams come true. Finally, after filling many pages, he was done.

John rose and signaled for Ranjee. He was ready to enter the tunnel. Ranjee slowly rose, but was not ready to enter the tunnel.

"Mister, can you see your dreams? Are they real, or are they a story of someone else?"

John contemplated what he had written. Did he really believe all that he had written? Could he see himself living his dream? Was he willing to pay the price he had planned for? It would be difficult. Sacrifices would need to be made. Then he laughed. Every day of the last twenty years, he had scarified. For nothing. He certainly could make some sacrifices to make his dreams come true for the rest of his life.

"Ranjee," he smiled. "Yes, I am ready. Let's go."

They slowly entered the blackness of the tunnel. It was at this moment that John looked inside himself and saw that the new future he had designed for himself was indeed good. He finally had control of his life. The tunnel brightened.

At last the tunnel was completely illuminated. There was a slight upgrade that ended at a stairway. At the base of the stairway was a small box the size of a cigar box. John stooped to pick it up. Opening it, he saw that there was a key inside. He pulled the key out. Turning it over, he saw that on it was an inscription.

The inscription read,

Design your destiny daily

He read the inscription and clenched the key in his fist. He looked at Ranjee.

"Mister, your life is like a garden. You must tend it daily. You must water it daily and continually be pulling weeds. If you ignore your garden, the weeds will always take over and strangle the seeds, which you have planted. We are taught to move toward our destiny every day, to check if we are on the right path and not allow anything to take us off the path."

John listened thoughtfully to the young boy he had grown to admire. After drinking in the wisdom of Ranjee's words, John stepped to the stairway and began to climb. The stairway was illuminated as they walked and finally the illumination was taken over by the sunlight. They had reached the mountaintop. It was virtually flat, a hundred yards across. On the far side sat a man writing on a parchment of some kind. It was Niragi.

Chapter Twelve

Niragi smiled as the two approached him. The view from the mountain peak was breathtaking. The crystal blue waters all around were simply stunning. John could see many other islands of Fiji. It was a sight to behold.

"It was you I saw in the bowl at Vilanoala," said John to Niragi.

"It was me," Niragi affirmed.

"I have found these four keys," said John. "What will I do with them?"

"The keys will help you to unlock your treasure," replied Niragi. "John, it is evident that you have undergone a major transformation since your arrival here at the island. You have been enlightened to many of the truths of yourself and of the world. In your short time on Vata Lavuana, you have taken in much. But you have only tasted a drop of water in the ocean of life. How happy are you with your life?"

"Until today, it has not been very good," John replied.

"Are you doing what you want to do for your sustenance?" asked Niragi.

"You mean my job? No, jobs are hard to get back home. I have just tried to find something that puts food on the table," John said humbly.

"It is good that you eat! Have you ever thought of creating a destiny where you are not at your job?"

"Well, I did see a wonderful vision of my future in the light caves, but it seems a fantasy. I work fifty hours a week and I get home exhausted. I don't feel much like creating anything when I get home."

Niragi smiled. He was thoughtful for a moment and said, "John, you have for nearly twenty years been exhausted coming home. In these twenty years of work, have you set aside money to care for you and the family you will one day have?"

"Well, not much," he answered.

"How much have you set aside for the years when your younger days are behind you?"

"Nothing, actually."

"If you were to continue on your present path, would you love your life in another twenty years?"

John grimaced and said, "It would be dreadful, Niragi. But, thanks to you and Ranjee, that will change."

"Excellent," Niragi exclaimed. He paused, looked to the ground, then to the sky. "John, what knowledge did you gain in the light caves?"

"I learned a lot," John began. "First, when I got in the main cave, I learned I was not such a loser after all. I'm a really good person and have a lot to offer."

"What do you mean, 'a lot to offer'?" Niragi inquired.

"Love, Niragi. Forgiveness, happiness, peace. I've never given these things to anyone else, at least not since I was a child."

"But," Niragi cut him off, "you have in the past felt you were loving, no doubt, hmm?"

"Well, yes, but not in this sense. I used to tell people I loved them. What I really think I meant was that I cared for them and needed to be cared for, too." John thought hard as he tried to explain. "But, now, now I know love is giving. There is no need to have the other person obligated to match my giving. I will love no matter what the other person says or does."

"No doubt," Niragi said knowingly, "you will experience pain on occasion when someone special does not reciprocate your love. You are leaving yourself defenseless, aren't you?"

"Well, yes, and I think that is part of what love is. I've always tried to protect myself in a shell from being hurt. But that same shell has hidden the joy I had as a child as well, Niragi."

"How will you deal with attacks on you? With no shell, you are exposed?"

"Niragi, I would make a lousy light if I were covered, wouldn't I?"

Niragi smiled. Yes, he thought to himself, John had learned much in the light caves. John had the seeds of greatness within him and he would be a light to many, Niragi forecast to himself. "John, what will you do differently when you get home?"

John answered, "I think I will begin by taking responsibility for my actions. I've always blamed everything from myself being too stupid, to my parents, my country, even my grandfather for problems I created for myself."

"Go on," Niragi encouraged.

"Well, I know now that for many things in my life, it's been my choice how things turned out. I really never paid attention to it, but most things that have happened, happened because I caused them." John paused again. "Niragi, I really have created a very mediocre life. I'm not going to do it any more. From now on, I'm going to think about what the results of my actions and especially my inaction will have on my life."

"Very good," Niragi confirmed.

John was quiet.

Niragi spoke, "John, you have many talents. You have buried them for so long, you have forgotten them. Now I'm sure you are rediscovering some of the things you enjoyed about life. I believe you are rediscovering talents you have been given. To bury our talents is to waste our life. It is when we use those talents that we begin to give life something back for what it has given us. This is to love."

Niragi again paused to allow John to consider the lesson. He sensed John had understood, and then continued. "So many people let their talent lay hidden, buried. A life that could be full and joyous becomes monotonous and mediocre. The mystery is that when you discover your talents and follow your true path in life, you find a garden of weeds. It is so because no one has tended the garden where talent has been buried under."

John was riveted by Niragi's words. Niragi went on. "When you begin to utilize your talents and follow your path, it begins with many challenges and often the rewards are small in the beginning. BUT!" He stopped in dead silence. "BUT! John, after the garden is weeded and the seeds allowed to spring, they burst forth in to a beautiful flowering garden like you could never have dreamed. This is one of the mysteries of life."

Niragi turned to Ranjee and said, "Ranjee, you must continue to help our friend John in his search for the treasure his grandfather left him."

"Yes, Niragi. I will need a map to help us find the spot where the treasure lies."

Minutes before their arrival on the mountain tope, Niragi had prepared the map. He pulled it from his robe and handed it to Ranjee. "Ranjee, this map will show you exactly where the treasure is buried. If you need me, you know what to do."

"Yes, sir," Ranjee humbly replied.

"Have a valuable journey, John," Niragi advised.

"Thank you, Niragi," said John. "I hope I will see you again."

The old man nodded, smiled and waved.

Ranjee looked at the map as they headed back toward the stairway and in to the cave. He knew precisely where they must go.

Chapter Thirteen

The path down seemed much further than it was up, John thought. The journey was well illuminated from the glow of himself and Ranjee. Reaching the bottom at last, they found that the tunnel back to the main cave was sealed off.

"Ranjee, something is wrong. Isn't this where the tunnel to the main cave is supposed to be?"

The young boy seemed equally as puzzled.

"Yes, Mister. You are correct. Let us go back up."

Immediately, as he said that, an opening in the side of the cave produced a seal to the stairway leading to the top of the mountain. They could not return up the stairs. The light from the two began to dim.

With no alternative, the two moved to the right toward a very narrow tunnel, no more than a couple of feet height. They both dropped to their hands and knees and began to crawl. They were both nervous, but both could remember worse times in their life. They finally came to a square room. It was a few yards long on each side. The tunnel they came through sealed behind them. They seemed to be trapped in the room. Whatever was going on, it was definitely not an accident.

Suddenly, a fire burst to life in the opposite corner of the room. It spread closer and closer toward John and Ranjee.

"Ranjee, what's happening here?" demanded John.

"Mister, I don't know. I've never seen this before."

"Is there any way out?"

"I don't know, Mister. We must think fast."

The two huddled in the corner on the opposite side of the room from the fire. The fire grew in height and began to approach them.

"Ranjee, stay low to the ground."

John's heart was beating wildly. The fire was no more than three feet from John. He felt the keys in his pocket with his fingers. An idea struck him. "Ranjee, I have an idea. If I'm wrong, I'm sorry. Get on my shoulders."

Ranjee climbed atop John's shoulders. John raced in to the fire, throwing himself and Ranjee onto the wall. They fell through the wall and onto the path outside the cave.

The wall and the fire had been an illusion. Whether they had been in any real danger, John did not know. The illusion had been conquered.

Had this same thing happened a week ago, John knew he would have died a hideous death. He would simply have lay on the ground waiting for the flames.

John had learned much. As he and Ranjee sat staring at the mountain and the cave, a great sense of relief came over them.

"Mister, look, another key is on the path."

Ranjee handed the key to John. It bore an inscription. John read it aloud,
Persist even in times of great adversity

They both laughed. "Mister, that was it."

John laughed heartily, and then thought of something seemingly unrelated. "Ranjee, you don't have to call me Mister. My name is John. John Weston."

"I am Ranjee, son of Juran. Boola Boola."

John laughed.

"Boola Boola is our way of saying..."

"I know," interrupted John. "Hi, great to see you, love ya lots and the like."

"Close enough." Ranjee smiled.

John put his arms around Ranjee and they followed the new path toward the treasure.

Chapter Fourteen

Ranjee led the way in silence as they both reflected on their most recent adventure.

John spoke. "Ranjee, I keep thinking that you could've died back there in the cave and it would have all been for this treasure. I couldn't stand it if anything ever were to happen to you."

"Mister, uh, John, you have chosen your destiny now. I have chosen mine. With both of our destinies there is risk as there was for my father. I sense your love for me. It gives me happiness. Do not fear my death. All of us must leave our bodies someday. I do want to stay here, though, as long as I can!"

They both laughed. The bond that had developed between them was growing stronger. John knew it would be hard to part when the time came.

After a while, John asked to stop and eat. Ranjee directed them to a tree whose fruit was magnificent in its taste. There was a price to be paid for this fruit, however, Ranjee knew. The fruit was high in the tree on branches that were many feet off the ground. The climb was always hard on the hands and feet.

As they arrived at the foot of the tree, Ranjee thought of an idea that might spare his hands and feet. "John, could you lift me to that branch?"

"Hmm...We'll not quite make it. We'll need something to stand on," said John.

They moved a boulder to the spot directly under the branch. John stood on the boulder and picked up Ranjee. Ranjee stood on John's shoulders and picked five pieces of fruit. That would be enough to curb these adventurers' appetites.

They sat down, broke open the fruit, and began their feast.

"Ranjee, without you I would have missed all that I have learned. I would have missed your friendship. Thank you for helping me," John said with heartfelt appreciation.

"You have become my friend. In the cave, you saved my life. You were so concerned for me. Even though I may never see you after you leave, I will always remember you."

"Ouch!" John bit into something hard. He pulled the object out of the fruit. It was a key. There was an inscription on it. It read,

Two or more in harmony are boundless

John read the inscription to Ranjee.

"We are taught that two people or more who work together toward the same purpose will achieve their results much quicker than one alone. We are also taught that two or more people who work in conflict or disagreement do not achieve their results and may as well be alone," replied Ranjee.

"That explains why so many marriages fail," said John.

"Have you ever been married, John?"

"No, I haven't. I'd like to someday. Hey, how did this key get in here, anyway?"

"This is the island of love and miracles."

"This really is an incredible place. It's hard to imagine how all these things have happened in the last couple of days."

"It is exciting to live here," agreed Ranjee.

"I don't see any wires. That means you have no television, electricity, telephones, nothing. How do you manage?"

"John, back in America, you have those things. It's hard to imagine how you survive these interruptions and intrusions in life!"

"I've never thought of it that way," John replied.

"In Fiji, especially here, knowledge is one of our people's highest values. We are taught that where you live, people sit in front of a box to receive entertainment and stimulation. We are taught that after your people leave school, very few continue to learn and educate themselves. Is this true?"

"Pretty much," answered John. "There are some good things about entertainment, but I think you're basically right. We waste a lot of time on it. What do you do for entertainment?"

"We read books, share stories, create new games, swim with the dolphins, climb trees, play with the wild animals, listen to the birds, write our own stories so

they can be retold when we are old. We are so busy it is nice to rest one day each week."

John contemplated this simple yet obviously wonderful lifestyle. Plus, these people had mastered something he had only dreamed of - miracles. Amazing things had happened since he came here. How did it all happen?

Chapter Fifteen

"Ranjee, can you perform miracles?" John asked.

Ranjee stared at the mountain for several minutes. Then he turned his gaze to John. "John, what happened to us with the fire in the cave was a test. It tested both of us. It was not a miracle. It was an illusion."

"What's the difference?" said John.

"Remember the first key you found?" asked Ranjee.

"Fear is an illusion," answered John. He pulled the key out of his pocket to look at it.

"There are many illusions," Ranjee continued. "Fear is one of them. An illusion is something we see or feel that is not real. A miracle allows us to see what is real."

John was somewhat confused, but had a glimmer of understanding. "Go on, Ranjee," he urged.

"A miracle makes something right that was once a mistake. A miracle is like your glasses. Without them, your vision is fuzzy and unclear. With your glasses you see clearly."

"Ranjee, when I was young, I was taught about a man who healed the sick, made the blind see and cured all sorts of diseases," said John. "What have you been taught about this?"

"I know that we all live and then we die," Ranjee stated, and paused in thought. "We are taught that a miracle will allow the dead to live again someday to correct the mistake of death. I believe this to be true. I have seen many sick people with diseases healed, and I have seen many sick people die. I have not been taught all there is to know of miracles, but there is one more thing I do know about them." Ranjee looked to the penetrating deep blue sky, then continued. "When people pray for a miracle, they have the seed of faith they need for the miracle to occur. It is like when you were going to cross the canyon, but had to go back because you really did not believe you could do it. You could not see it happen. The miracle is seeing truth and what is possible."

Ranjee looked down in thought and paused for a few moments. "There is one more thing," he said.

"What, Ranjee?" asked John.

"Forgiveness. Miracles dwell in forgiveness. As we forgive ourselves and others for the mistakes and problems we perceive, we experience a miracle that gives us happiness," answered Ranjee.

John was taken aback by such words of wisdom from one so young. Ranjee's training and education must be phenomenal. At age twelve, he was more aware of what matters in life than most anyone he had ever met, except his grandfather. "Ranjee, you are unbelievable."

"I will take that as a compliment. I have something for you," said Ranjee. He pulled a key from his bag. He handed it to John. There was an inscription in the side. It read,

Miracles dwell in forgiveness, ignite in faith

John clenched the key in his fist. "Ranjee, I have seven keys. How many are there altogether?"

"You are the only person ever to come to the island and receive keys, John."

"Each key has an inscription, a lesson. Are these lessons you've learned before?" inquired John.

"Yes," answered Ranjee. "The adventures you and I have shared are among the many lessons we are taught here."

"How many lessons are there?"

"There are hundreds of lessons. They take a lifetime to learn."

Chapter Sixteen

"Ranjee," asked John, "with so many lessons in life, how is it that I've got less than ten keys?"

"What do you mean?" Ranjee was curious.

"Well, if there's a thousand lessons and I only learn ten or so, what am I missing?"

"John, the keys that you have found, achieved, and been given are for those lessons that your grandfather wanted you to have."

"Huh?" asked John, confused.

"Your grandfather had certain lessons he wanted you to learn. Your grandfather wanted you to learn the lessons on the keys you have because those are the keys to happiness, love and achievement and he felt you would benefit most from these."

"How did he select the keys?"

"That I do not know for certain. My guess is that he had help from his Guide. The Guide would probably want you to have a taste of all the areas of life that are important. We are taught that balance is important."

"What do you mean, Ranjee?"

"If all we do all day is meditate on love, the garden does not get tilled, nor the hut cleaned. If all we did were plan our path to destiny, we would never get on the path and walk. If all we did was work on providing for a store of possessions for our future, we would never have time to love."

"My grandfather wanted me to be 'well-rounded'."

"I can't imagine he wanted you to be fat, but it is possible," said Ranjee, a bit confused.

John laughed uproariously. Tears came to his eyes. The message had not been lost. His love for Ranjee continued to grow. He had never loved anyone so much outside of his family.

"Come, we must go," urged Ranjee.

The two continued on the path. It was again approaching time to find something to eat. "Ranjee," said John. "I'm starved. What can we find to eat on this island aside from fruit and greens?"

"The only meat we eat on the island is fish."

"Let's go for it," said John.

They headed for a fishing paradise. Thousands of edible fish could be seen from the small hill over a bay they were coming upon. It was incredible how clear the water was. They could see beautiful coral, schools of colorful fish, and seashells dotting the ocean floor. Ranjee stopped and picked up a few stones. "We will use these stones to make spears for fishing," he said.

"Spears? Who fishes with spears in the twentieth century? Don't you have a rod and reel or something a little more up to date?"

Ranjee laughed. "Fish in your country are still foolish enough to bite on a hook?" He laughed again. "Sharpen the ends of these poles and you will learn how to fish with a spear."

It took nearly an hour to sharpen the spears. In the meanwhile, Ranjee gave instructions on how to use spears. He assured John they would have a feast tonight. With the spears sharpened, they moved to a point that resembled a pier on Lake Michigan, but it was made of rock, not wood. The two brought out nearly twenty spears.

Ranjee balanced a spear in his hand and waited for a school of large fish to come nearby. When it did, he took careful aim and speared the first fish. Ranjee balanced another spear and let it sail, piercing a fish that must have weighed ten pounds.

"Come on, John," said Ranjee. "Now you try."

John balanced a spear as Ranjee had instructed and let it sail. It skimmed on the water like a skipping stone and floated away. Ranjee laughed. "Try again. Aim at the fish this time, John!"

John let another spear sail and it hit a seashell.

"No fair hitting a target that does not move. The fish, John!"

The fish, fearing nothing, stayed nearby and John let a third spear sail. The spear flew in the air as he released it too early. It landed twenty yards away in the deeper blue water. Ranjee laughed again. "You are aiming at the birds, my good friend."

John aimed and threw fifteen more times, exhausting their supply of spears. Ranjee laughed and grabbed the two fish that he had speared and brought them ashore. He prepared the fish for cooking and ingeniously built a fire without matches.

John felt humiliated and did not speak a word. He watched his friend build a fire, clean the fish and cook them as if he had been doing it for fifty years. Ranjee noticed that John was unusually quiet. "John," he said. "We will eat like whales!"

The two fish were huge. There would be plenty for a dozen people. The fish was delicious. John silently ate the best fish he'd ever tasted.

"John, did you spear your tongue?" asked Ranjee.

John did not laugh.

"What is bothering you, my friend?"

"Oh, nothing," said John.

"Come on. What is bothering you?"

"I didn't even come close to spearing a fish."

"So?"

"So, I'm a failure. I've always been lousy at stuff like this."

"Stuff like what?" asked Ranjee.

"Like spear fishing. I mean, athletic stuff, things with my hands. You throw two spears and hit two fish. I threw fifteen and didn't come close. I could never match you and you're only a kid."

Ranjee was surprised at what he heard. He cracked a smile and chuckled, and then he started laughing, laughing hard.

"What's so funny?" demanded John.

"It took me two months before I speared my first fish. I hit a piece of seaweed by my second week." Ranjee continued laughing until he was almost crying. John started laughing too, realizing his insecurity.

"John," said Ranjee, regaining his composure. "You are no failure. We are taught when we don't succeed at something, we are to do two things."

"What are they?"

"First, we are taught to look at the failure, or setback, as short-lived, things will be better soon. Just because you didn't spear the fish doesn't mean you won't do better next time. Second, we are taught to look at the setback as having nothing to do with ourselves as a person, but only as a skill we need to master. Your inability to spear the fish doesn't make you a failure as a person, it means you need to practice throwing a spear!" Ranjee paused while John thought about his words. "John, we are taught that life is too important to turn a problem in to something it is not. Failure is an illusion. We can only fail when we quit trying." John was silent. He began to feel much better.

As the fire died down, John saw a glimmer of gold in the ashes. He grabbed a stick and moved it away from the burning embers.

"A key in the fire, John?" Ranjee asked.

"A key," affirmed John.

John used the stick to drag the key to his side. He let it cool, and then clutched it in his hand. The inscription read,

Setbacks are stepping stones of achievement

They smiled at each other and arose. "Let's go, Ranjee," said John. "Let's get back on the path."

Chapter Seventeen

Through the wooded area, they could see a figure walking toward them on the path. It was Niragi.

"Let us go and sit near the spring," said Niragi as he approached John and Ranjee.

Quickly, they walked toward the spring. Niragi seemed to have a sense of urgency about him. Reaching the spring, he motioned for John and Ranjee to sit. Niragi looked proudly at his two students. "It is almost time for you to discover your treasure. However, before you leave Vata Lavuana, we must consider the things of which you have been enlightened since our visit atop the mountain. John, time is short. You will be leaving soon."

John blurted while Niragi paused. "Before I leave, please, you must tell me if the fire was real."

Niragi considered how to answer the question in a way that John could understand. "John, had you stayed in the room, you would not be talking to me now. The fire would have consumed you even though it was an illusion."

"If it were an illusion, how could it have harmed us?" John asked.

"Remember when you arrived on the island and you gave up looking for food and water?" Niragi replied. "Your illusion of a lack of sustenance would have had the same effect. You treat an illusion as though it were real and the results will be real."

John and Ranjee looked at each other. The experience took on more meaning for both of them.

"You did save my life, John. I can't thank you enough," Ranjee said in appreciation.

"Yes, Ranjee, he did," said Niragi. "The lesson John learned in the room is so important to life. Most people give up and quit when circumstances are challenging. John has learned to persist in adversity."

"The fruit tree seemed to yield its key very easily if not mysteriously. Why was this?" asked John.

Niragi smiled. "The lesson of two or more people working in harmony toward a specific goal is one of the most important lessons you will remember in

your life. Not everything in life is a critical challenge. Some solutions are so easy, they are often overlooked. When people are working together in harmony, miracles can happen in ways we don't often expect. Your picking and eating fruit was a simple metaphor of the lesson, as you no doubt have conceived."

That simple thought hadn't even occurred to John. However, he'd be darned if he'd be embarrassed through admitting it!

"Much of life's fruit will come from your own work and accomplishment. The true fruit of life is sharing your work with others and sharing the fruit of reward." Niragi paused to let his message rest in John's mind. "However, there is a warning I must give you. Select people with whom you are in perfect harmony. Agree on how you will reach your objective, and just exactly what that objective is. Do not begin a mission only to find your allies have different strategies to meet your objectives. Choose carefully and you will dwell in happiness in your relationship and earn the material possessions you desire."

Once again, John was thoughtful and riveted to his teacher. Minutes passed before the silence was broken. "Niragi," said John, "since I've arrived on the island, so many mysterious things have happened. After I go home, will these miracles and illusions continue?"

Niragi smiled and laughed softly. Instead of answering directly, he chose a different tact. "John, what is an illusion?"

"Well," John answered, "something you see that isn't truly correct."

"Close enough," Niragi said acceptingly. "Now then, what is a miracle?"

"Well, a miracle is seeing what is real and correcting those mistakes that are misperceptions."

"Knowing that John, will there be miracles and illusions when you leave the island?" asked Niragi.

The answer had to be yes. Niragi continued after allowing John's thoughts to focus. "John, each key you have gained represents a facet of life that will lead to your fulfillment. This is what your grandfather wanted for you. Indeed, these are keys for all humanity. You will not, however, learn all of life's mysteries in a brief visit to Vata Lavuana. Behind the lesson of each key are many other lessons to be learned in order to master each key. After you leave the island, you will begin to experience the lessons of the keys daily."

John was beginning to understand that he wasn't only concluding his search for the treasure. He was beginning his quest for the fulfillment of his life. "Niragi," he asked, "what if I know all the lessons of the keys and still fail?"

Niragi gently laughed to himself. This was the most emotion John had seen from Niragi. Even Ranjee broke his disciplined gaze and smiled.

"John, if you will master the lessons of the keys, it is impossible to fail! Remember, the only way to fail is to give up!

"Success is not a destination," Niragi continued. "Success is a journey. Your destination is merely a reward for your successful journey. You will always be setting new goals for yourself as you realize those that you have set previously. Design your destiny daily. Everything you do in your life will either take you closer to your dreams, or take you further away from them. Keep on your path. You have something when you see it in your mind, not when you physically possess it in your hand."

John thought deeply on this lesson. He had not previously understood the magnitude of it.

"John, do you have an automobile?" asked Niragi.

"Yes," he answered.

"Is it here? On this island?"

"No," said John, shaking his head.

"Do you possess it, own it?"

"Yes," said John.

"You possess it," said Niragi, "because you see it in your mind."

There was so much to learn, to understand, to conceive. John now had an insatiable thirst to learn more about miracles, love, achievement, destiny, and, indeed, all the facets of having a fulfilling life.

"Niragi," John inquired, "there is so much I want to learn more about. I feel like I'm just scratching the surface on what life is all about. How will I know if I'm being truly loving?"

"You will always be forgiving. You will correct your thoughts of anger and fear and give forgiveness and love instead," Niragi answered.

"How will I know if I'm achieving?"

"You achieve when you are moving toward your destiny and the dreams you have created for yourself."

"What will I do when others want me to meet their expectations and live life their way, when it's not consistent with what I know my destiny will be?"

"John, you will forgive them for their lack of understanding. You need not feel any negative emotions. Simply tell them that you love them for caring and appreciate their offer of help. They are trying to love but are not yet seeing correctly."

"Niragi, what things must I be prepared for in my new life?"

"Light reveals darkness," answered Niragi. "And no one likes to admit they have darkness in them. People will often attack you. Good is always attacked. All gardens draw weeds. You must always be on the look out for weeds. Always pull the weeds. Always forgive."

"As you follow your path, many will try to push you off that path. Unfortunately, many people are not pursuing their dreams and because of the sadness they feel in themselves, they will often lash out at you. Wish them peace and know you are doing what is right."

"Accept responsibility for all you do. Do not make excuses because people shoot arrows at you. Your armor of love will allow all the arrows to drop harmlessly at your side. Your destiny is your responsibility. Let no one draw you from your path. Remember it is you who chooses to do so."

"Never procrastinate. Your destiny is too important for you to grow lazy. You have too many people to love, too many dreams to live, too much joy to receive to let procrastination steal your life."

"Never try to change another person. This only creates resentment. Instead, give them love and acceptance. A person can never be happy as a slave to another's ideas. A person must choose to be a student. Once this choice is made, you will be pursued for your knowledge."

"As you attain new levels of love, enlightenment, achievement, happiness, do not take steps backward and enter in to old habits. Old habits lead you to old situations and stops. Always go forward, press onward. You would never seed a garden, and then dig up a row of seeds out of boredom."

"Finally, John, as you approach life's difficulties, life's roadblocks and challenges, ask for guidance. Go in prayer and ask. Seek out the advice of the wise to help you in your struggles. It has often been said, 'Ask and you will receive'. Sometimes, it is necessary to be patient. Prayers, and indeed, requests of your counselors are often answered with seeds that take time to grow so you can see the result. 'Have faith and you can move mountains'."

"See it in your mind, believe it can be done, begin to see it through, continue the journey and see it finished."

Niragi looked at Ranjee and addressed him, "Ranjeer, you have helped John and you have been his friend. His love for you is evident. Your work has been fruitful."

Niragi paused and smiled. "John, go find your treasure. You are almost there. I bid you well. Enlighten many, live your dreams. Farewell." Niragi raised his right hand as if to wave goodbye and he vanished into thin air.

"Ranjeer, where did he go?" John asked, incredulous.

"Niragi is gone," said Ranjee.

"But, where did he go to?"

"I do not know, John. Maybe to the mountain. Maybe he was hungry."

That wasn't the answer John was looking for, but it would have to suffice for now.

Chapter Eighteen

"Ranjee, do you think I can come back to learn more someday?"

"That I do not know."

"Well, could I come back to visit you?"

"It is possible. Once again, I do not know. Come, let us move more rapidly to find your treasure."

They traveled quickly over the rocky path of what was once lava that had spewed forth from the volcano. They moved through the forest and were once again on the sandy, soft path. After an hour's walk, they came to the site indicated on the map Niragi had given to Ranjee.

"John," said Ranjee, "it is here that we must dig."

On their hands and knees, they removed decades of sand, dirt and rocks. Both were excited to see what they would unearth. Finally, they came upon it.

The box was very old. To their surprise, there was no lock. There was only a piece of twine to keep it closed. John cut the twine and sat down next to Ranjee. He slowly opened the box.

Inside was a key ring, obviously meant to hold the keys he had found. The ring was pure gold and shone beautifully in the sunlight. There was an inscription on both sides of the ring.

One side read,

The greatest gift you can give is love

The other side read,

Give everyone you meet the gift

John understood all too well what had been missing in his life. He thought he had loved before, but not in the fashion he had learned about on Vata Lavuana.

"There is a letter here, addressed only to 'John'," whispered Ranjee. "It is yours."

John took the letter and opened it. He read it aloud.

My dearest John,

Today, you have discovered the GIFT. Since your birth, you've given me such happiness. I wanted you to possess the keys of wealth, of happiness, of miracles, of love. Keep these keys with you daily. Keep them on the ring so you'll always have them.

Every day, live your dreams and help others to live their dreams.

The true joy in life comes with sharing your wisdom with those who want to grow with you.

I wish you a long and loving life. I am so proud of you.

Lovingly,

Gramps

Tears poured from John's eyes as he finished the letter. Ranjee put an arm around his friend. Neither said anything for a long time.

Soon, it began to get dark.

Ranjee said, "Come, John, I'll build a fire and we can rest."

John quietly followed his young host. Ranjee soon had a fire blazing and they sat near enough to feel the warmth.

"How can I ever repay you for your kindness?" asked John.

Ranjee laughed and said, "You already have."

"What do you mean?"

"You have become my friend."

They smiled at each other and lay down close to the fire. Soon, both fell in to a deep sleep.

Chapter Nineteen

It was dark when John awoke. He couldn't see a thing. A dog barked. "Ranjee, check and see what that is."

John pulled a folded piece of paper from his face. The paper had blocked the dim light of the morning sun. Where was he?

"Ranjee! Ranjee!"

He called out for his young friend. He opened his eyes and wiped the sleep out of them. Stunned, he saw that he was in the study of his grandfather's house. There was no answer from his young friend. Had it all been a dream?

He flipped on the lights and scurried back to the center drawer of the desk. No letter. Just unimportant papers lying around.

The doorbell rang. Still dazed, John raced down the stairs and opened the door. His sister, Caroline, was standing there.

"Sis. Come in, come in."

"You look like you've seen a ghost," exclaimed Caroline.

"Um, no. I mean, I uh, wow have I got a story to tell you," he sputtered.

Together, they walked in to the living room. Caroline just stood and stared at John, wondering if he was all right.

John walked to the fireplace where he saw something strange. There on the mantelpiece was a gold key ring with eight gold keys. His heart raced.

He looked at his sister and smiled. There was an inscription on the outside of the ring. It read,

Give everyone you meet the gift

"Sis, sit down, you aren't going to believe what I'm about to tell you."

Fear is an illusion

You are the creator of your world

Forgiveness is the seed of peace, love, and happiness

Design your destiny daily

Persist even in times of great adversity

Two or more in harmony are boundless

Miracles dwell in forgiveness, ignite in faith

Setbacks are stepping stones of achievement

The greatest gift you can give is love

Give everyone you meet the gift

See, Believe, Begin, Continue, Finish

To order multiple copies of The Gift for your gift list,

Use the following table to determine your discounted cost.

No. of copies	Price Each
---------------	------------

1 copy	\$10.00
--------	---------

2-5 copies	8.00
------------	------

6-10 copies	7.00
-------------	------

11-49 copies	6.00
--------------	------

50+ copies	5.00
------------	------

Priority Mail in the United States. \$3.20 for the first book, .50 for each additional book.

To order send your check, master card or visa information with complete mailing information to:

Network 3000 Publishing

3432 Denmark Ave. #108

Eagan, MN 55123

You can fax your order for immediate fulfillment:

1-(952) 707-1898

To order on the internet, see our [store](#), or send your e-mail to:

kevin@kevinhogan.com

Visit our website at: www.kevinhogan.com