

CHAPTER ONE

Window in the Narrow Cove

The day before yesterday, Brother Narrative conveyed to me in confidence a most interesting account. After hearing what he had to say, I asked Narrative to reconsider the matter of confidentiality. Instinctively I felt the brothers should hear the story.

I also recommended that he put the account in writing. Narrative said he'd let me know the following day, which was yesterday. Today I received a note, along with a written document outlining his experience.

First the note:

Brother Story,

Much thanks for our time on Wednesday. Everyone needs a good listener.

I'm sure there's more to this saga than meets the eye. Just what, I'm not quite sure.

In keeping with your request, I submit, in writing, the essence of what I conveyed to you in person. Please feel free to share the following as you wish.

Peace,

Narrative

Next, Narrative's written account:

Quite late Tuesday night, I rose from my desk and peered out the leaded window in the narrow cove. As I neared the window, a cool stream of air seeped around the latched frame and fluttered past my cheek. Silently I stood gazing out from the cove.

The view of Port Estillyen never disappoints. The sight from my third-floor room always deposits something harmonious in my soul. I'm often drawn to the cove late, when the monastery sleeps. On Tuesday night I heard not a single creak, cough, or patter from the floors below.

I only heard the sound of wind softly whistling against the window, as if wishing to enter. My focus centered on the pools of light below the slender lampposts, lining the cobblestone street. My mind drifted from pool to pool, as it had so many times before.

Through the misty fog, the lampposts looked like stalwart sentinels. They appeared so upright, so dutiful, like guards riveted in place. A motionless scene I observed, except for a single soul who entered the first ring of light at the bottom of the lane. Aided by a cane, the lone figure walked with an elderly gait.

Slowly, on his way to somewhere, he passed through the luminous rings. Eventually he disappeared in darkness at the end of the lane. I wondered about his identity, his route, his reason for passing at this late hour. "Strange," I thought, "he looks like a discarnate soul, not an actual person." I wanted to see his face, say hello, but on he went to where he went.

While continuing to gaze upon the scene, I also noticed raindrops land on the diamond-shaped windowpanes. I studied how some drops would cling to the glass briefly, then let go and disappear along the leaded strips. Others moved in zigzag patterns, as if resisting the fall.

I thought, "Why do I think as I do?"¹ I reflected on our work and my good fortune of discovering the Order. Unwittingly, surprisingly, I had become a message maker, weaving words of stories old into works new. I thought, too, of Estillyen's inspirational setting, how it uniquely befits a storyteller.

Yet, I also felt perplexed, due to the fitful fray I had with words earlier in the day. Words of worth did not flow. Nor had they flowed for days that stretched back for weeks. Repeatedly I scrapped lines and phrases, along with scribbled pages. Through it all I began to question myself, my ability. I doubted not only my thoughts, but equally my doubts.

As I stood before the window, a line from King Lear came to mind: "Who is that can tell me who I am?"² A faint smile crept upon my face.

Why I smiled, I don't know. I confess, a tinge of lunacy touched me. I saw my face reflected in two of the innermost windowpanes. A strip of lead ran diagonally across my right cheek. The strip sliced my portrait in half.

With my smile cut in two, I smiled the more and managed a soft chuckle. Consequently, I bent my knees and framed my face in a lower pane. The lead strip had gone, but the wavy glass transposed my chin into an elongated V. So I rose and centered my face in an upper pane. No longer distorted or slit in two, my face appeared perfectly framed. However, another strip of lead severed my head.

I decided to disregard my fractured image in the panes and once again focused on the lights along the lane. The pools of light on the vacant cobblestone street provided a perfect backdrop for a mind in need of repose. Then into the quiet moment, the foyer hall clock sent forth strikes that echoed up the stairs. Strike followed strike until the twelfth had struck. I knew Wednesday had arrived.

Not wanting to move amidst the chimes, I waited for silence. When it arrived, I stepped from the window and returned to my desk. Despite the hour, a steady stream of thoughts continued to race through my mind. I determined to wrestle on, to pen them down.

I scribbled away, filling and bending pages over the top of the pad. After a while I quit and pondered what I had scrolled. Somehow I felt assured that the lines would read better in the light of day, swiftly approaching. At that point, the tall clock dispensed its double strike. So I rose, clicked off the light, and navigated to bed.

Comforted by the weight of the covers, I closed my eyes, slowly exhaled, and fell fast asleep. Then, near half past three, I awoke to a stream of light dancing on the ceiling. The light stretched across the ceiling and part way down the wall. The streaming light emanated from the window in the cove and widened in proportion to its distance from the window.

The spectacle I had witnessed before. Yet this time tree limb shadows dueled away in the stream of light, creating a mesmerizing effect in the darkened room. After a moment or so, I peeled back the covers and slipped out of bed. As I stepped toward the window, the stream of light on the ceiling

steadily retreated with me. Ultimately the light illuminated just the window and my frame.

Staring on, out of the corner of my eye I saw something move. To my surprise, the lone figure that had appeared earlier reappeared. Just as before, one by one, he passed through the rings of light. Although instead of disappearing into the darkness at the end of the lane, he stepped into the final ring.

There, in the center of the ring, he turned around and looked up at the monastery, directly toward my window, or so it seemed to me. Next he raised his cane in a sweeping motion, as if signaling someone to follow. No one came forth because no one followed. Again he signaled with his cane, but this time with a motion more hurriedly.

I thought, "Surely his gestures have nothing to do with me." To assure myself, I whispered, "Surely not," only to respond by asking myself, "Why not?" Clearly he continued to stare in my direction. For a third time he offered his sweeping motion. I could almost hear him say, "Come on, come on."

I shut my eyes, thinking I had dreamed the sight. Then the inexplicable occurred. When I opened my eyes, I saw myself hurriedly exiting the monastery's front entrance. Believe me, even if you don't. I'm telling the truth.

While still in the cove, I watched myself move into another sphere. I had become both witness and participant. In the first person, I acted; in the third person, I observed.

Insane, I know. Nevertheless I swear that I watched myself race from the entrance. I had a curious look on my face, rather resolute. I swiftly moved along the path, but by the time I reached the pools of light, the stranger had gone.

I called, but no one answered. Consequently I passed through the final ring of light, thinking I'd still find him. At the end of the lane, I entered the darkness, only to find it lit. I had stepped into a sphere beyond, a world I knew well, yet not at all.

All that I experienced would take too long to tell. So, succinctly I'll summarize. When I entered Port Estillyen's high street, the thoroughfare swelled with visitors mingling among the locals. At the west end of the street, a vendor from Fields and Crops sold chips, but no fish; no one asked for fish. Chips alone seemed perfectly normal. I felt an insatiable appetite for fish.

I moved on to McGowan's Flower Shop and Bakery. I'd never seen the shops so packed. Strangely, my senses operated both inside the premises as well as out. As I watched customers sniffing roses at the flower shop, somehow I could smell what the sniffers smelled. At the bakery, when a shopper picked up a loaf of bread, my fingers felt the crust. It seemed totally unreal, but not at all frightening.

I continued on, making my way through the high street hubbub. Each scene appeared as real as day, except for the time of day. Oddly, I couldn't distinguish day from night. The entire panorama appeared backlit.

Further, no one seemed to notice me, or me noticing them. Like at a carnival or fair, people stood along the high street listening to vendors calling out to the crowds. People eagerly moved along, swapping places.

At the three main attractions, people pressed in close to hear and watch the staged presenters. These attractions drew hundreds of spectators. Although the exhibits ran right next to each other, the sound from one did intrude on the other. Again I thought, "How odd."

At the edge of each crowd, people gathered in little huddles, chatting incessantly. The intensity of speech struck me, as if everyone spoke at once, without listening. I tried to grasp words and lines, but conversing lips moved too swiftly. I caught a few phrases now and then, but not the meaning conveyed. Communication didn't really matter. Chatter for chatter's sake served both the means and the end.

Before long, I left the chattering behind and worked my way into the first of the main attractions. I maneuvered into the crowd, but soon pressing bodies locked me in near the middle of the mass.

Next to me, a mother stood with her teenage daughter. We faced the front, with a good view of the raised stage. A bold red banner with white lettering stretched tightly across the rostrum. The banner read "Platform Building."

Within a couple of minutes, a bald-headed man stepped forward, wearing high-riding gold trousers, a white shirt, and a dark green vest. The man's presence instantly galvanized the crowd. I looked around to see bulging eyes and attentive faces, as a hush settled in.

The speaker approached an old-fashioned metal mic, clutched the stand,

and began to speak. “Hello, folks,” he said. “Good to see you here, at this particular place. You’ve arrived perfectly on time. No moment, of any hour, could be better than the moment now. Fate has found you, brought you.

“So don’t be shy; press in close and even closer still. I’m not here to obfuscate the truth. I’ve come to illuminate the wonders of technopoly, how technique can think for us.³ Come near, all who feel disenfranchised and benched by life. You must get back in the game, and get in to win, which you shall.

“I speak to you today of good fortune—your good fortune. Yes indeed, benefactors of fortune; that’s who I see standing before me. What’s that you say? Continue, continue—I shall, don’t worry. Your presence emboldens me and reassures my conviction.

“My mission is a matter of utmost importance. I offer not a hocus-pocus elixir, but words. Yes, certainly, substantive words that will undergird and lift you. I offer you my word, in words. What more can I say? Two words, I suppose, the words I now propose. Two of the most important words you’ll ever here: *Platform Building*.

“Please, listen up; reject not the waves that resonate in your zone of hearing. I’m speaking to you about *Platform Building in the Age of Technopoly*. Yes, that’s it, the very title of my most recent book. Technopoly, you ask, what’s that? ‘Technopoly is a state of culture. It is also a state of mind.’⁴ The focus is grand, not granular.

“In our modern age of technopoly, the grand instruments of technology aid us in aiding them. With technology we coexist, coevolve, and codevelop the world of tomorrow, which is here today. We now live in the era of digital narratives, which are creative amalgams of ‘human intuition and emotion with machine logic.’⁵

“Technology helps us authenticate and authorize our cultural quests. Technology brings out our true potential, lifting us from peasants to potentates of human trajectory. As a late scholar once said, ‘We find our satisfaction in technology, and take orders from technology.’⁶

“So right, so very right it is. Which would you prefer, an ill-tempered, shortsighted, know-it-all boss with ulcers telling you what to do, or a reasoned glass cube that offers options? Forget the days of roulette wheels. They

are as outmoded as cornerstones and rock foundations. Forget, too, those who run around saying we live in an age of information glut. Do you feel gluttonous by what you know?

“Take it from me; we are destined to proceed in the manner we have been progressing. We must proceed ‘under the assumption that information is our friend, believing that cultures may suffer grievously from lack of information, which of course, they do.’⁷ Build your unique platform on cubes of glass that process information as fast as light chasing light. Face the facts, ‘The deck is stacked, economically and emotionally, in automation’s favor.’⁸

“Don’t worry about all the vicissitudes that arise in the age of technopoly. A model for the new world is now emerging. Our species is trending toward Neom, a future new.⁹ Not a future chained to the pessimistic past, but a breakaway future led by technological advancement. ‘Neom is a place for dreamers who want to create something new in the world, something extraordinary.’

“With the right platforms to aid you, make you, you can crest the waves of the future new with great agility. You must, however, learn the proper techniques of platform building. You must be known, not unknown. You must steer clear of sentimental bogs and mossy, retreaded legends.

“Listen, please, I know full well what it means to be tired of being you. I, too, was like you, tired of being me, in a manner handed down by history. Weighed down by life’s gravitational force, I trudged along in boggy valleys of death, where the sun sets but never rises. Unseen, unknown, alone, you trudge through the boggy valley facing death, but for what?

“The time has come for you to climb up out of that boggy, shadowy valley. *Platform Building in the Age of Technopoly* will teach you the art of making yourself known. Discover the true art of building an image of yourself, which is not yourself—and needn’t be.

“Everything is different now. Being known for what you do is far more important than what you do. In fact, that’s the most important thing to do. Become known; free yourself from anonymity and the servitude bogs laid down by man. Blog!

“Consider your image; care for it. It depends on you to promote it. In turn, your image can do more for you than you can ever do for you. Ask not

what you can do for your image. That's the old-school way, the way without reward. Instead ask what your image can do for you. It's so right that it nudges toward righteousness. My words underlie the truth of reciprocity.

"Let us be clear. I know each of you shares the grief and sorrow of the poor and needy among us. We must grieve with the grievers, mourn with the mournful. It is meet and right so to do, and a joyful endeavor too. However, hear this, and hear it sure: the very best you can do for the least of these is to model what they, too, can be. Model their dreams. Build your platform for the world to see.

"Hear me, my friends; this is the age of technopoly, of social connections without needless communicative interjections, of companionship without the demands of communion.¹⁰ Intense dialogue has its place, but in many quarters it's now passé. From your platform in the social sphere, your image can soar with lighthearted flight. Boundless are the spheres awaiting you.

"Know this: I'm with you in this redemptive quest. I live for you, whether you're for me or against me. My aim is to complete my course and run the race destiny has prescribed. In sharing the efficacy of platform building, each day I rise and my pace quickens. Weariness shall never catch me.

"I've expended my all, so to speak, in setting forth the wonders of *Platform Building in the Age of Technopoly*. Yet I've done so delightfully, despite much hardship and pushback from taskmasters of rotting narratives. To know that I've contributed to the betterment of mankind shall be my reward, my only reward. You are my reward, if you are willing to be rewarded.

"Yes, you've heard correctly. So hear! 'The world of the ear is more embracing and inclusive than that of the eye can ever be.'¹¹ Despise not sage advice that resonates in your eardrums and seeks to settle in your soul. Depart, I tell you, from your selfish, myopic, private, self-serving ways. Instead devote yourself to your platform. Serve it with an un-timorous heart.

"The central tenant of my philosophy is clear. Lay down your burden of self, and fix your eyes on your platform. Serve it, nurture it, and let your image go where you shall never go. And get this: your image will have followers, scads of followers following, and followers following them. It doesn't matter where your image goes; the point is being there.

"My book will teach you how to harness the perfect apps for building

your unique platform. You owe it to your image; don't enslave your hopeful projection. If you are for your image, and your image is for you, who can be against you? Even the undertaker can't take you under. Your image will be bequeathed to you in a manner of reciprocity.

"My friends, today if you have ears to hear, despise not your rendezvous with destiny. Wait no longer; time is ticking; today is the day of platform building, now is the accepted time. What you are waiting for is waiting for you. Pick up a copy of *Platform Building in the Age of Technopoly* and follow me. Surrender yourself; build your platform.

"You haven't a moment to lose. This morning, in anticipation of your eagerness, I received a ready supply of my new book. How many do I have? I'm not sure, but enough. We'll crack open the crates and let you have at 'em. You shall not go away empty-handed, and you'll not be refused. Now, just step over to the right of the stage where my assistants . . ."

As the green-vested man carried on, I freed myself from the crowd. Stunned, and jarred emotionally, I tried to make sense of what I'd just experienced. As I broke free from the audience, I paused and closed my eyes. I thought the insanity might wash away. I breathed slowly; it felt good to breathe. I had to breathe.

When I opened my eyes, what I saw took my breath away. Shocked, I found myself in the middle of the adjacent crowd. Everyone jockeyed for position, trying to get near the stage. En masse, the crowd pressed forward.

A tall, skinny man sporting a wireless head mic suddenly appeared. With velvety ease, he moved to the center of the platform and positioned himself in front of a large assortment of blank screens. Arrayed on boxes and stands, the screens covered the entire width of the platform.

For nearly a minute, the man spoke not a word. He simply stood in place, smiling pleasantly and gazing down at crowd. As the seconds ticked away, the audience jittered with anticipation. Then the thin man glanced at his watch, stretched out his arms, and brought his bony hands together with a sharp clap. Instantly, all the screens lit up, each displaying the topic of his message: Discarnate Life.

At that, he began to speak. "Yes, discarnate life—that's precisely the topic I'm compelled to present to you today. You, me, all of us have already

grown ‘accustomed to substituting an abstract image for [our] physical being. In fact, twentieth-century man—electronic man—has lived minus a physical body for an entire century.’¹²

“Now we must progress, move on into the wondrous world of discarnate life awaiting us. Dampen neither your enthusiasm nor your expectations. Let them soar, and rightly so. You stand not at a precipice awaiting your fall. You face a most propitious way of life: discarnate life.

“As I’ve traveled throughout this fair city port, I can see that in every way you are a most ambitious people. You are the sort of people who strive, who thrive on striving. I trust that my message on discarnate life will find welcome receptivity. I’m sure it will. This new vista of augmented, discarnate life is as important as life itself. The future has arrived to gift us, to carry us where we were destined to be.

“Know this: my words rise from a well of deep conviction. I speak of our spiritual sensibilities, how your spirit innately longs to break free of its carnate cage. There can be no greater human virtue than that quest. What are virtues of love, joy, and peace without quest? Quest is twined with reach. Reach out your hands, look at them; you are more than physical.”

At that juncture he paused and looked at his hands, as someone might do in examining a rash. Amazingly almost everyone in crowd followed suit. They looked at their hands, stupefied, as if reading the pattern of their palms.

“What I say to you is this. You must transcend the here-and-now now, not wait for legendary chariots and trumpet blasts. Reach, and accept no shame in your quest for discarnate life. Discarnate life is one of the chief wonders of life. The old has gone, the new has arrived, and without quest you have nothing. Fallacious notions of limited human capacity have no domain in discarnate life. Shake free of your fuzzy faculties.

“Century after century our ancestors accepted their laborious lot of toiling and tilling in the soil, with little hope of breaking free of the spade. No longer! A new providential hand has been dealt to this generation. I shall not beat about the pauper’s patch.

“It comes down to this, pure and simple. By embracing stale narratives of the past, you have demented your ascendance. Forget it. Move on, reach,

and embrace the quest. Embrace discarnate life. Today a new defining narrative begins—live it; go discarnate.

“Yes, that’s correct—discarnate. In doing so, your vistas will extend beyond your wildest dreams. You don’t belong to the school of loony Luddites, the ‘machine breakers’ who wrongfully believed that automation impaired the human race.¹³ You belong to the wondrous age of algorithms. The wisest move we can make is to ‘defer to the wisdom of algorithms.’¹⁴

“Oh, the very sound of the word thrills me. It dissects so nicely: *algorithms*. Repeat after me that charming noun aiding discarnate life—*algorithms*.”

To my amazement, everyone in the crowd simultaneously belted, “*Algorithms*.”

“Again,” he said, and again the crowd replied, “*Algorithms*.”

The fervent reply unnerved me. I wanted to evade the thin man’s line of sight, so I hid my face behind the gentleman’s head in front of me. I peeked around his right ear, exposing only my right eye to the stage.

Once again the thin man riveted the crowd’s attention with a single, sharp clap. Instantly his image filled the screens. His every move the screens projected. The crowd looked on, enthralled.

He went on, “Today, I challenge you to free yourself from your carnate cage, your carnate state,” he said. “You belong to the age of algorithms. Oh, just the sound of the word. Repeat after me, *algorithms*.”

“You’ve not waltzed into this gathering unobserved. You have been called, chosen. Automation and reality are in full embrace, like reach and quest. They are inseparable. Advancements in technology have increased our human worth. Oh, what a wondrous time to be alive, no longer bound to a carnate cage!

“Daily the rush of mediated messages propels us. Beneath the invisible cloud we move and transcend our being. We eagerly cast off everything that hinders our mediated quest, lying hold of our apps and indispensable devices.¹⁵ Swiftly we race away from the old mammoth age of centuries past, which lacked the modern accoutrements and the promise of discarnate life.

“Reach, grasp this truth, and grasp it well. We live in the era of wide-eyed expectation. The center ring of human history is ours; it belongs to

no one else. Our space in time upon this planet has no comparison. All of history has longed and waited to behold the *here* and *now* we possess, our age of mediated advancement, algorithms, and discarnate life.

“Media extend the face of man, the voice of man, and, might I say, the meaning of man. They showcase to all the principalities and powers of time and space our true carnate and discarnate potential—combined in a way the world has never witnessed. ‘The simultaneity of electric communication, also characteristic of our nervous system, makes each of us present and accessible to every other person in the world.’¹⁶ Isn’t that wonderous?

“The Urim and the Thummim have no place in our age of algorithms. Think about it. What other generations longed for, you have. Together we stand upon the summit of history, not in the lost ruins of yesteryear. We are not to be defined by the base term *Homo erectus*. If you believe you are dust, awaiting dust’s return, naturally you will be predisposed to earthy forces.

“But I say to you, there’s far more to you than ribs and sinews. You have yet to grasp your true potential. Let your aspirations extend to the heavens. Slip on the goggles of vistas new. Strap round your wrists your most treasured devices. Connect and take in the wonders of discarnate life.

“Lay hold of devices new. Never tire of doing so; they will never tire of you. ‘Technology enchants’ so be enchanted.¹⁷ Rush out to embrace them as soon as they arrive. They will comfort you, companion you, and not abandon you. When you lie down at night, your devices will rest near, recharge, and await your rise.

“When you awake, they awaken with you. They help you stream into the stratosphere. No longer are you bound by boundaries of stale narratives. Unfettered, your face will float in space. Your voice will echo among the stars. Your words will stream on and on as a testament to your liberated state. Don’t worry; your carnate being ‘is still there, tucked away somewhere, in one the locations, but it is irrelevant to the new condition of multi-locationalism.’¹⁸

“Don’t look back. Look ahead. And don’t let your hearts be troubled; the entire cosmos is your community. Algorithms will never leave or forsake you. Under the cloud, you will never want for direction. Whether you turn

to the right or the left, algorithms will speak to you, enlighten your path, telling you the way you should go.

“What’s also true is this: you don’t give up your ability to choose. Algorithms simply help you choose your choices. Hear me, friends, I implore you. Move out of your old, tired, carnal state into your new discarnate existence.”

With that statement lobbed, I felt faint, sick. I spun free of the audience. I needed air. Just beyond the crowd, I found a wooden telephone pole. I placed my back against the splintered object and tilted my face to the sky. The pole felt reassuring, solid. I welcomed the splinters pressing against my shoulders and ribs.

I could have stayed there indefinitely, but I didn’t linger long. A buzz of excitement emanated from crowd three. I felt drawn, though drunk mentally and confused. Somehow I maneuvered my way into the gathering.

I pretended to belong. Standing in the center of the crowd, I looked to my left and right, only to see everyone staring straight ahead. In no time, a white-haired gentleman walked onstage, bearing a wry smile.

The man appeared more thick than thin, slightly stout. Nevertheless the crowd beheld an imposing figure, a stern-looking man, sort of like a sergeant. His demeanor offered no comedic gestures.

The stout man stepped across the stage and halted beneath three lights spaced about a meter apart. Long black cords extended the lights from a boxed beam above. The lights had red metal shades that swayed in the breeze. Consequently the light rhythmically danced back and forth across the white-haired figure.

The man’s eyes were set deep in his face, sheltering them from the light. Their color I could not detect. Behind him, a banner the width of the stage boasted a single word: redemption. In crimson red, the noun appeared, on a white background that made it stark. Posturing himself, like a captain on deck, the man cleared his throat and began to speak.

“Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, and anyone else who does not fit that description. I welcome you, one and all. A single word defines the subject of my address: *redemption*.

“No doubt curiosity has drawn you here. And might I say, curiosity never

killed the cat; the cat died for lack of curiosity. Eventually too weak to move, the cat starved to death. Such weakness in you I do not see.

“Many have longed to see what you long to see, to hear what you have longed to hear. Billions have come and gone, without attaining proper revelation. It saddens my soul, grievously so, to see the masses suffer.

“We all need redemption, do we not? Seeking redemption is a noble aim. In time, want and sorrow make their rounds to each of us. So I say to you, do not despise the gurney that carries you from the field of battle. It can save your life, and possibly your soul.

“This day I lay before you life and death, hope and despair. Pair them as you wish; they are yours to choose. Yes, certainly you need redemption; we all need redemption.

“However, the redemption I propose is not the kind you suppose.

“The redemption I set before you is not the old-fashioned kind, parceled out by sacrificing bullocks, rams, and turtledoves. Nor is it the new old-fashioned kind, formed on that rocky outcrop called Golgotha. Those ancient narratives are for yesteryear, for time spent.

“Don’t get me wrong, the old tales have their place for certain in museums and such. Who doesn’t like to glance at an intriguing artifact now and then? I do, though fleetingly. But I ask you, what do the bones from some old ditch in Jerusalem or Jericho have to do with you? Likewise, how can an old papyrus fragment assist your earthly sojourn?

“The answer is, not a lot. The days of hand-me-down faith and old-school religion are swiftly passing. Practicing religion, rooted in bygone days, amounts to constriction of human liberty. Why should your offspring gnaw on old relics, when a smorgasbord of knowledge awaits their discovery?

“These, my friends, are the days of buoyancy, not drudgery, days of picking and choosing your preferred path via the broad path paved by information. And the path of which I speak is clearly a better way. It leads to a freer future. I speak of facts, not fantasy.

“The central point, which I’m passing on to you, is simply this—the redemption you truly need is to be redeemed from the notion of redemption. That truth, in and of itself, is true redemption.

“Oh, the vista of liberation that awaits you! Consider it: free to think,

reason, and reject anything that stands in the way of your future present. Yes, I spoke correctly: your future is present, if you have the will to embrace it.

“Friends and foe alike, I call upon you to depart from your bowing and genuflecting ways. Stand tall; breath deep. I’m here to warn you, not to harm you. Vicious wolves seek out timid sheep, particularly those known for pious, genuflecting rituals. Their antics give them away, and they end up in the wolf’s lair.

“Therefore, make up your mind, and let your mind make you. All you will ever need you already have, if only you have the reason and good sense to possess it. Think, and know, this hour may never come your way again. Shake off the archaic shackles that have bound you. Wriggle free from your chains of delusion, and be redeemed by the renewing of your mind.

“Yes, your mind and you, you and your mind—don’t you see, I propose a path of common sense. Whatever you do, do not ignore your common sense aligned with your physical being. Stick with your brains. If you allow yourself to listen to that idea of soul searching, you have fallen into the lap of the poets.

“Then what? Poets are tricky; their words always have two meanings, often more. Everyone reading poetry experiences a ‘poem differently as his or her sensibility conforms to the poetic situation provided by the poet.’¹⁹ In so doing, you have entered the land of fairies, not facts. Let your mind make you, and information make your mind.

“I say again, the only redemption you truly need is to be redeemed from the notion of redemption.

“This very hour . . .”

How long he went on, I do not know. I desperately wanted to escape, somehow, somewhere. I ran down the high street, turned down Bridgeport Lane, and did not look back. On I hurried, seeking a way out of the mysterious affair.

Eventually, I watched myself disappear in the fog at the end of Market Street. Then I snapped to. I recall nothing more.

Yet a stream of clarity flowed through my mind . . .