

THAT'S THE STATE WE'RE IN!

A collection of Short Stories

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DragonEye Publishing

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A collection of Short Stories
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All the characters in this book have no existence outside the imagination of the author, and have no relation whatsoever to anyone bearing the same name or names. They are not even distantly inspired by any individual known or unknown to the author, and all the incidents are pure invention.

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Introduction

This book is a collection of short stories, based upon various human conditions or states. Some are just sketches, detailing what it is like to have these medical and psychological problems in your life - others are more involving. Enjoy or not as the case may be but I hope you have your thought buds at least awakened by the ideas within.

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THE LAMENTATION OF JOB*

"Why have you done this to me? Why? Why? Why?"

After a few agonised seconds, the voice went on. "Have I not served you loyally, all these years? Have I not done everything you commanded of me!?! Yet you've destroyed my family, my world and now my own flesh!

What more do you want of me!?!" The voice demanded angrily.

"You've made my life a misery and still expect 'gratitude' from me because I'm not dead yet! What kind of monster are you? Even The Devil himself wouldn't torture me this way. Lord of all things - including my pain and hatred.

Oh yes I loathe you as once I loved you. You were my God. You could do no wrong in my eyes but what right have I done in yours? You've destroyed me. You've crippled me with physical pain and emotional misery. How can any sane man do anything but hate you with every fibre of their being? How can I do anything but treat you with the contempt you've obviously poured on me?"

Suddenly a voice of great majesty and mystery boomed out.

"Oh you foolish mortal! How little you know of me and my works.

Who are you to question me and what I do? What knowledge do you have of how Creation works. Who are you really Job? Yet you stand against me, bleating like a little lost lamb. Does this not condemn you as the child you are? The world is rebuilt every day by faith alone. You foolish man - you have become lost in the illusions of this world. It is not the built that matters but the building of reality at every instant of existence. The man that holds onto wealth and power kills it, crushes it. Like sand running through his fingers, it is gone in a moment. Fear of losing it, washes it from his grasp. Woe to you, you doubter! Your sin is in your heart that you do not believe. You are lost in false pride! Where is the humility of the servant? Where is the joy in serving the greater good, through your fellow men? Lost in selfish self-aggrandisement!

Why do you no longer search for me in the wild places? Am I not God of all things, after all? Do not the trees, the plants, the animals - the very ground itself, praise me with its very existence? Yet you despise me and turn away from my goodness, my bounty for you."

Suddenly a new voice burst forth, spitting out its

deep contempt.

"You would drown your sorrows in the tavern, if you could lower yourself to mix with the other offal of society. You are tempted but won't betray this illusion of false pride, even now. You visit the Temple as a wealthy merchant - no man must accuse you of the vain hypocrite you are, oh no! You think we do not know who you really are, under this festering facade of self-righteousness? You think we do not see how black your heart really is? You spurn those you should be helping, instead falling into my hands because of who and what you are. I am God's prosecutor and you are guilty of error before him.

Have you ever turned any other man from sin, by pouring out your genuine heart to him?"

"I have given to charity."

"You have thrown worthless coinage into the gutter. Have you ever given yourself, to the hurt, the emotionally lame? Have you given hope to but one, single man?"

Job looked down at the ground shamefacedly.

"No, I thought not. This is your guilt. You've watched your fellows rolling in agony on the ground and walked contemptuously by. The prosecution rests, Lord."

Another, more gentle voice now spoke forth.

"We are not here to punish you for your sins but

to alert you to them. God isn't punishing you. We don't have to punish you for your sins - you are already doing that yourself. God didn't take your family - you let them go. You failed to protect your children that is all.'

A great wail went up to the heavens. Job realised his error and his pain.

"Oh Job, our heart goes out to you.

You are more than you think you are. It is you who has made yourself ill, with this self-doubt. Your inner turmoil is reflected in your outer symptoms. How can you claim to know God, when you don't even know yourself?

We are not here to judge you - you judge yourself. You find yourself guilty or innocent and execute the sentence upon your own body or mind. You are your own judge, jury, executioner or jailer.

Why do the righteous suffer? Why do sinners get away with murder? Because they sin by their acts and blame the outside world for the failures. Their sin, their error is internal - in their own thoughts. The righteous suffer in silence, not because they want to but because they must. The world is made by the tolerant and patient, and destroyed by those with neither of these qualities. God doesn't punish - how can he, for he is love personified?"

Another great cry of pain went up from Job as he understand what he hadn't before.

"It is our foolishness that punishes us. In harming others, we harm ourselves. They are children in relation to the adults that rebuild this world anew each day, blessing it with their joy. Every disaster throws down this ants nest of a world and the long suffering rebuild it because they must. Those who give into the pain and misery, give up this world and drift from the path of righteousness, like leaves in the wind. They become children again - alone and abandoned by God, in their eyes own eyes at least. It is they though who have shunned the light - wandering from the straight and narrow way.

The Lord is a mirror. Turn your back on him and he'll turn his back on you - not because he wants to or does in reality but because life is voluntary. You are here because you want to be and are free to leave at any time. Give up all effort and you will drift away from life naturally. Fear the law, not the Lord.

Man interferes because he does not understand God's laws. When he does understand, he steps back and lets those laws work automatically.

Sinners are new here. One day they will realise that this world is theirs. At that point they will stop sabotaging their own good fortune - killing themselves in the tortured belief that they are killing an enemy."

At this point Archangel Michael fell silent. For Job this manifested as a high pitched whistle in his head, reflecting the emptiness he now felt that his struggle was over. In time his body healed itself, his wife forgave him and bore him a new family. He forgave his friends their foolishness as he forgave himself for his own. His life prospered again in all ways because he had returned to the fold and was his true self once more...

(*Inspired by The Sire of Sorrow by Joni Mitchell)

THE MAN WHO KNOWS EVERYTHING

So this is Wednesday or is it? Maybe it's Thursday and by some bizarre coincidence, they've put the clocks back by a day? Is it a Leap Year? What is Wednesday anyway but an artificial construct, created by somebody as crazy as me? Maybe they're not crazy though? Am I crazy? I could be I suppose but how do I know? How do I find out for sure? What is the criteria for measuring insanity? Is talking to yourself a sign of madness? Am I talking to myself now, just because nobody is visible in my vicinity? Do voices in your head reflect imagination or telepathy? Do I know the answer to anything for certain? Does anyone?

I used to think the sky was pink but somebody told me it was yellow? Do I believe them? How do I define pink? What do they mean by yellow? It's all comparative isn't it?... Or is it? What if that door over there is yellow to me but red to someone else? What if all the street doors seem to be all the same colour to me but other people see them as multi-coloured variations on a theme? I suppose I could ask them how they perceive the colours but they could lie, couldn't they? And if I asked them directly, if they saw the same thing as me, they could say yes but it may mean

something totally different to them, than it does to me. Apparently the Japanese have 83 different meanings for the word yes and none of them mean 'yes' in English. Of course I could be wrong and it might be 43 or even 42 (Where have I heard that number before and in what connection, one wonders? Maybe I haven't heard it before, just imagined I did? Isn't memory wonderful? I sometimes wish I had one!).

Yesterday upon the stair
I saw a man who wasn't there
- me I suppose!

I'm a 'Nowhere Man' but then again, maybe I'm not - just I think I am. Who can tell? Certainly not me.

My wife used to say I was a strange one...or did she? Was I ever married? I don't think so. I have no memory of it - only of having lived alone, on some vast plain, with nobody else around for miles, if at all but maybe I'm wrong on that. I seem to be surrounded by people and houses now but am I? It certainly looks like it but how can I be sure it's not an illusion? Maybe life really is like 'The Truman Show' or 'The Prisoner' and I'm caught up in some vast conspiracy, aimed at confusing me. Then again maybe I'm deluding

myself and it's not. How can you tell? Can you tell? Am I just a figment of my own imagination or somebody else's? One day I may wake up and find out I don't exist. Still that's much like any other day for me, isn't it?

Nothing bores me, more than me. I question everything because the universe is more fascinating than I am. Prancing around in front of others, pontificating as though every speck of dust on my nose hairs, meant something really, really important - that kind of thing gets really up my nose, in no small respect, if you know what I mean. I used to be like that. I was a prince or something like that...or maybe I wasn't. I've got an active imagination, with no foothold on reality, my teacher used to say. I'm pretty sure I had it once but it was the drugs that really blew my mind or was it enlightenment in that ashram? Who knows, it was all so long ago or so it seems. Maybe it was yesterday. Who can tell? Where does the past leave off and the present begin? Am I really here, wherever here is? Is here, here - does it exist or is it a mental projection of a place I once knew or wanted to know? Is it imagination or memory? Who am I to ask anyway? In fact who am I? I seem to have asked that question recently. Did I though? Does that mean I have a memory or is it that my imagination is misleading

me again? Oh God, I never seem to resolve anything or perhaps I do and don't realise it? How could I tell? I need to keep taking the pills. What are pills anyway? Do they work because of what they are physically made of or because of the effect you're told to expect and then believe in, so thoroughly that your mind makes them work? Do I really know the answer to this? No. Do I have any pills? No.

It looks like it is windy outside. Is it? Am I outside? Looking at the evidence and considering the premise, I'm not sure I am. Am I in the premises or are the premises in me? I don't know and could be wrong about anything and everything. My university professor once said that you can't be sure of anything but whether he meant 'me' specifically or anyone in general, I never did find out as shortly after he was dragged off to the local mental asylum, claiming 'they' were out to get him and you couldn't trust anyone as 'they' are all over the place. The proctor of the college I was in, said I was all over the place too and sent me down shortly after. Funny old world.

My Head Teacher told me I'd never make anything of myself and the woodwork teacher said much the same thing 'You haven't got the right tools to make anything - in fact you're the biggest tool in my workshop!' At this everyone

laughed, including me. He grimaced at me. 'You're not supposed to join in but feel ashamed at your crassness!' he blustered.

'Get your head out of the clouds - unless you want to be an astronomer or a pilot!' Was the sage advice of my science tutor.

'Stop dancing on cloud nine' the music teacher said to me.

'Wallop!' The gym instructor's shoe advised my ear.

Or is this all imagination? Was I ever really a child? Maybe I was cloned and all these 'memories' are hereditary, from the selves I used to be, will be or could be? It is all too confusing, to be sure of anything. There is just too much going on in my head and not enough in my cranium, to ground me.

A great philosopher once told me that 'must be' thinking leads everybody astray. It is believing you have the answer to a problem and that the solution 'should' work but doesn't. Your mind insists you keep trying, until somebody else with the real answer comes along and switches the light on because they have no belief about how

things should be, only how they are. Einstein said much the same thing as did Mrs Baker at number 32, when I was a kid...or did she?

Life is so shallow, so boring at times and this seems to be one of them. I sometimes think that I've found the answer to life, the universe, everything - then it simply slips through my fingers (Funny, that number 42 keeps popping into my mind). Maybe we live in a multiverse and all these characters bouncing around in my head, are me too but based somewhere, somewhere else? Who knows? Who cares? Not me today, that's for sure. So life is 'fascinating,' interesting, full of facts? God how I hate them sometimes - 'facts' that is! Maybe that's why doubt creeps into my mind all the time, just to relieve the tedium of certainty - that blank canvas, which is full of things but mentally a desert (No stimulus, no challenge - nothing to take you away from this dusty museum of relegated relics of the mind, carefully stacked, categorised and forgotten).

When I talk to myself, who is this me I speak to? Is it some vast audience of passive receivers, out in the depths of space, so bored out of their minds that they've got nothing better to do with their time, than listen to my ramblings? Maybe it's the

cells in my own body, tuning in to the dictates of their giant leader and being sadly disillusioned by their sheer inanity?

'Conscience doth make cowards of us all,' Bert the gardener told me once, which I thought was a bit deep for him. I've noticed that people with big egos, tend to tread on the toes of other people with little egos. They are just so full of themselves that they don't notice anything but their own reflections. What I believe pain is, is these little voices screaming in unison. I've been walking along, full of myself, when I accidentally step on a snail that was also full of itself, until this happened (Like a hedgehog hit by a lorry, it's now empty of itself - squashed, flattened, insides outside): Crushed shell, crushed ego. Poor snailily-wailly! Still, what do I know about fate and the destiny of the universe, in relation to this little fellow's demise? Chaos theory rules or it would, if it could hold a pencil straight.

Hmm. What is that sort of emptiness I feel? That sort of rumbling below the belt of my trousers, calling my attention? What does it mean? What is it trying to tell me? Is that vast, aching, cavernous vacuum, hunger? Should I give in to it and eat something or resist the urge? Is it right that this organ, which is only part of me, should

dictate to the whole of this thing I call 'me?'

Oh dear, now what is this? It sort of burns, like acid. Is it acid? If so, what is it doing inside of me? Should I call a doctor or put my fingers down my throat and try to bring it up? No. I remember being cautioned about doing that, if you've drunk battery acid (People on this planet seem to swallow anything - is that why they have a car boot sale, I wonder?). Drink milk - yes that was it! Where do I get milk from? A cow. Where do I find a cow at this time of day? My mind seems to be telling me to open this big, white, humming box. Is it a Tardis? Is there a whole cow inside and if so, do I know how to milk it? Oh dear, all these questions! I need to be decisive. Hello, is anybody in there? If there is I'd like to borrow some milk please - you know that yummy white stuff that comes out of those black and white things with horns. Hello? 'Bang, bang!' (He hits the door and it swings open).

Oh, it's just a fridge, full of cold things, like milk I hope. Are yes, that will do. Pour this white stuff from its plastic container, into this clear container, which I'll call a glass. Oh look, it's turning white too! Must be the milk. I'll raise it towards my head and stick it in this thing that keeps opening and closing, which I'll call my