

2.

Nicholas Dodge sat silently sensing the sun slanting onto the Selkirks on the far side of the fjord-like lake.

He had been meditating on this rocky perch for almost two hours, beginning well before the dawn had started to scabble over the ridges of Loki and the other tall peaks of the Purcell Range at his back. He was enjoying the usual blissful buzz he felt at this stage, as sensations slowly began to slink back into his brain, his awareness moving from *nothing* to *something* – the sound of a fly, the previously ignored chill flowing from the 300-million-year-old chunk of granite he was sitting on into his ass, the mixed scents of cedar, pine, stone and fish, the fresh caress of breeze on his brow blown up the buttress from the southern end of water fifty clicks away near the fragrant fruit orchards of Creston.

Dodge allowed his eyeballs to swing up against the backs of his eyelids, keeping them closed as he savored the sensation of rising to the surface of another day, letting the growing glow from the other side of the lake bounce back against his lids, warming his eyes like a couple of free range eggs sunnyside up on a skillet set on simmer.

Reluctantly blinking his eyes open, he took a couple of cleansing breaths, arching his spine slightly to work the kinks out, then raised his arms over his head, bringing his palms together in a gesture of silent but no less appreciative applause at the largesse of the universe in general, and this particular part of paradise in particular. Lowering his arms to his side, palms down on the cool, lichen-stubbed rock, Dodge uncrossed his legs from the lotus position and hopped lightly to his feet, straightened, then went into a *Pandangusthasana*, otherwise known in the tongue of Shakespeare as the Big Toe Pose, letting his nose nestle gently between his knees.

He slowly rose, imagining each vertebrae liquidly flow into its proper place, as perfectly aligned as the stars above two high school kids on a sweet summer night's first date. Erect, he let his arms once again reach for the blushingly bluish sky while he rocked gently up onto the balls of his feet, extending the gaps between those vertebrae stars just a lightyear or two, for good measure and overall tantric health.

Retaining that position, Dodge tensed his body while he inhaled deeply. Holding tightly to both tension and breath, he told himself,

I am created by Divine Light

I am sustained by Divine Light

I am protected by Divine Light

I am surrounded by Divine Light

I am ever growing into Divine Light.

He then ever-so-slowly lowered his arms, exhaling, relaxing arms, shoulders, then the rest of his body. As he did so he imagined himself standing in a stream of stunning white

light, saw it pouring down over his head, flowing through his entire body, from stem to stern. Once again he tensed and inhaled, this time without raising his arms, instead keeping them tightly pressed against his sides like a Mountie at attention on Remembrance Day. Again, the invocation:

I am created by Divine Light

I am sustained by Divine Light

I am protected by Divine Light

I am surrounded by Divine Light

I am ever growing into Divine Light.

For a second time he exhaled and relaxed, now concentrating on the cozy warm glow triggered by the light flowing into every nook and cranny of his being. He suspected that if anyone was watching, he probably looked like a two-legged lava lamp at the moment.

Pushing aside this distractingly cynical thought, Dodge silently acknowledged that at this nano-second, every cell of his body was suffused with divine light, every corner of his

consciousness illuminated with the divine glow that can only be generated by great gobs of goodness. He had become a tantric torch, a soulful searchlight, a burning bush.

He felt good, like he knew he would. His cosmic cup runneth-ed over, he felt an impossible-to-ignore urge to shine a beam on some other poor, benighted soul – so naturally his thoughts turned immediately to his go-to gal pal, Geneva Breeze, that saucy little strumpet from south of Salina, that peppy prairie pup now languidly languishing in a lush stand of larch deep in the dark alpine woods of the Pacific Northwest.

She was definitely not in Kansas anymore.

Keeping his eyes firmly closed, Dodge searched his personal image bank for a suitable snap of the lovely Geneva.

There she was, shimmering into internal view, clad in parka and climbing harness – no, that wouldn't do, too lumpy. He swept that image away, replaced it with a shot of her lying in a

rumpled bed, her sleeping form hidden under the covers, a tangle of long, wildly curly auburn hair spilling out over the pillow – nope, not specific enough.

Next.

Blankness.

Then she appeared again, snapping into focus, standing in the lake with water lapping at her lower legs, wet and wonderful in the late afternoon sun, her hair slicked back and away from her angular, freckled face, head cocked to one side, hands on hips, water beading on the undersides of her breasts, forming little glowing, glistening globs on the neat patch of near-red hair between her ivory legs... *ah, that's more like it*, Dodge thought to himself.

Focusing on this picture of his little Kansas meadowlark, he reached down for the handles on the blast furnace doors of his heart, wrenched them open and let the molten light within leap out like a shot in the dark, skipping across the

known universe only to splash into the chilly water at Geneva's feet, sending up a roiling cloud of saintly steam as it scooted down to her cute little toes, then swiftly wrapped itself around her ankles, picked up speed as it splashed out of the water and circled her waist clockwise like a garish Gucci belt, ever onward and upwards, right through the top of her perfect head, spiraling up towards the clouds at a clip that would put Jack's beanstalk to shame, just missing an Air Canada flight out of Calgary at 30,000 feet, out of the atmosphere, through the stratosphere, well beyond fear itself, whizzing past the International Space Station on its ultra-rapid one-way trip to infinity and beyond.

Dodge took all this in at a glance, noticing that Geneva had begun to blur. As he watched, fascinated, she batted her baby blues, flashed him a quick, quirkily quixiotic grin, then reached up and gave a little tug at an invisible cord, in a blink becoming one with the light.

Mission accomplished, he thought as he relaxed, always happy to help a fellow traveler.

Exhaling as he slowly opened his eyes, he let his arms return to daddy, realized he'd been standing on the balls of his feet, so lowered them back to full granite contact, and smiled goofily at the still-snowy-in-the-springtime Selkirks across the lake. He wasn't sure if Geneva would get a jolt out of the exercise, but he certainly did.

Damn it was good to be alive.