

The journey

- Hi John! Is that you?
- Hi Fred! Of course, what's the matter, is your eyesight failing? – John smiled at him.
- Sorry, I only saw your face faintly, the sun was shining right into my eyes when you passed me. – Fred started fumbling around with his right hand, looking for his hat, while shading his face from the bright light with his left.
- Oh, no problem, John laughed. I've already gotten used to it.
- Are you going this way too? I haven't seen you in ages, how are you all doing?
- Yes, it really has been a long time. Must be ten, fifteen years now.
- At least that, because I remember where we last met. It was one winter, you were ice skating in City Park too.
- Right! I remember now as well. That must have been about ten years ago, because not long after we moved to England. We still live there.
- Really? So what's England like? Are you still with your partner...?
- Claire, John smiled, because he knew Fred couldn't recall her name.
- Oh yes, Claire, Fred smiled, trying to hide his embarrassment at not remembering.
- Yes, we're still together, plus we have two little kids now. That's how we live out there. To answer your question – it's good, we like it! You know, the kids were born there, so for them that's home and here is 'abroad.' Strange situation, but that's how it turned out. We just have to live with it.
- Yes, life throws up strange situations, and it's up to us what we make of them, Fred agreed.
- Exactly. We never planned it this way either, but work and family matters somehow led us down this path.
- Of course, I totally understand. We too have been forced into tough decisions a few times, but the main thing is to stay positive.
- Come on, tell me, I'm curious now.

- Ah, I don't want to bore you. To others, these stories probably aren't all that interesting, Fred excused himself.
- Don't be silly, of course they are! Unless it's too private – I don't want to pry into your family affairs – but we've got plenty of time now, and I'd gladly listen. He gave Fred a warm smile and touched his shoulder to encourage him to talk.
- Well, all right, if you insist, – they both laughed.
- Yes, in fact I demand it! Tell me everything, but beware, you're under oath! John laughed even harder.
- Okay then, let's start with my mother-in-law.
- Oh boy, this is going to be fun! Let me see, maybe I've got two cans of beer somewhere in my bag, I'll need a drink for this!
- Forget it, I haven't had a drop of alcohol in years. That's another story.
- All right, progress, my dear Fred! Then I won't bother looking for that beer after all – I don't even know where my bag is. Probably with Claire.
- They're here too?
- Of course, they're wandering around somewhere, I'll introduce the kids to you as well. They're adorable. But you know how kids are – everything is new to them. They love to explore and touch everything.
- That's for sure, kids are sensational in general. They're still driven by curiosity, joy of life, honesty, and the magic of play. I can't wait to meet them, Fred said sincerely.
- Of course. And what about you two? Any children? John raised his eyebrows.
- No, none, Fred answered briefly, but he didn't let his voice drop at the end of the sentence. He wanted to open up to someone, to finally pour out his heart, but John wasn't interested. He was more eager to return to the topic already raised:
- Come on then, tell me the mother-in-law story, I'm very curious.
- All right. It all started at the beginning of our relationship, when I met Alice.
- Wait, is she here too? John cut him off.
- No, she isn't, but I'll tell you about that too.
- Wow, these stories are piling up. Should we make a list so you don't forget any? John laughed.

- Maybe we should, Fred replied, but the subject of Alice clearly saddened him. He couldn't laugh with John, only forced a fake smile to hide his discomfort – though it looked more like a grimace.

John didn't even notice, he was only waiting for the mother-in-law topic.

- So, what about the mother-in-law? he asked, again putting his hand on Fred's shoulder, his big, sincere eyes expecting the continuation. Like someone who also had such experiences and badly wanted a kindred spirit with whom to discuss mothers-in-law.
- Well. Where to start? Probably at the very beginning, because that's where it all came from. Alice's mother raised her alone. When her drunkard father died, Alice was only ten years old. The guy drank his liver to pieces. Actually two livers, since he even got a transplant once.
- Good heavens! John exclaimed, reaching for his bag to pull out a can of beer, but then remembered it wasn't with him – probably left it with his wife.
- So from the age of ten, her mother raised her alone. She gave her everything, but because of her own lack of love she completely bound Alice to herself. She instilled in her that now it was Alice's turn to take care of her, since she had taken care of Alice. Alice lived her life that way, almost only paying attention to her mother's wishes from her teenage years. She didn't even go to university, though she wanted to, because she couldn't leave her mother, though she was perfectly healthy and able to care for herself even in old age. But this was easier for her – whether she didn't realize, or consciously and selfishly manipulated her, I don't know. The point is, Alice became almost her slave. She was twenty when we met, and I liked her instantly. But as soon as she started dating me, she became free, she let go of her mother. She realized she had her own life and had to live it. Of course, I never incited her against her mother, but I felt that her mother hated me from the bottom of her heart. Pity, it didn't have to be that way. But because of that, Alice distanced herself too. She defended me, because she didn't feel it was right for her mother to attack me. I won't go into the details, I've moved on from all that. I forgave her in my heart. I realized that if I didn't, I'd only be burdening myself unnecessarily. You can't do that! I let go of all that negativity. And then she must deal with it on her side, if she can. That's no longer my task.

John listened patiently, but it was clear something was eating away at him. The torment was written all over his face.

- Fred, there's something I want to tell you, and that's why I'm so glad we ran into each other. John grew serious.
- I'm listening, Fred replied curiously, still fumbling around with his hand for his hat.

- Actually, I'm a bit glad Alice isn't here. Because this is about her. If she were here, I couldn't tell you.
- Tell me, about Alice? What? - Fred was surprised.
- When you got together with Alice, I was really jealous, and I said things about you that weren't true. I tried to slander you indirectly in front of Alice, so she'd dump you and I could ask her out. John lowered his eyes. Please forgive me. I regret it. Right afterward I felt it was a despicable move.

A few seconds passed before Fred spoke:

- I'd heard rumors about that, but I didn't think they were true. I didn't pay attention to them.
- Unfortunately they were true. I was stupid, and I really regret it.
- Listen, I appreciate that you told me this now. This sincere remorse means a lot to me, really. He held out his hand to John.
- So you don't hate me?
- From the bottom of my heart, I say NO. Fred smiled sincerely at him. John fought back tears as he spoke:

- Are you sure?
- Believe me, I have no bad feelings. I never did, since I didn't know about it. And I don't now either. My life was very happy with Alice. I don't feel your scheming had any effect on us. Let's forget it, my friend.
- You don't know how grateful I am to you for this. Thank you so much, Fred! You really are a decent man! You deserve happiness, John said sincerely. But now I have to rush, I still have a lot to do.

He squeezed Fred's hand and hurried off.

- Wait! Maybe we could meet sometime for a coffee! Fred shouted after him. When are you coming back from England again? You haven't even introduced your family yet.
- Ah, we don't usually come back anymore, we have no ties here, only a few old mates like you – but this was already barely audible.

Fred was there again on his own, thinking about the conversation with John. He wasn't angry or anything like that, rather wondering *how I did not notice this nasty jealousy? Was I that blindfolded by the love I was in?* – he was smiling and thinking about Alice. The long years that they spent together. Lots of memories. Trips, movies, travels, gardening, drinking coffee together and chatting about the big questions of life. They had so many memories together, they were just coming and coming to

Fred's mind. A teardrop ran down on his cheek. He wiped it off. He would have not given any of these memories for all the treasures of the material world.

- Freddy! – someone shouted loudly and Fred came back from his daydreaming state.
- Steve? A thousand years passed since I last saw you. How are you? I didn't know you are travelling too!
- Me neither until yesterday – Steve was laughing.
- And here you are.
- Freddy!- someone shouted loudly, snapping Fred out of his daydream. He looked around to see who it was.
- Steve? It's been ages! What are you doing here? I didn't know you were traveling too!-
- Yeah, neither did I until yesterday - laughed Steve.
- And now you are?
- Looks like it. So, how are things with Alice?
- Well, I'm not with her anymore. Sadly...

Before he could even finish, Steve interrupted:

- You cheated and she dumped you, huh?- he laughed awkwardly.
- Yeah, something like that... but I didn't cheat - said Fred bitterly.
He didn't want to talk about it, especially not with Steve, who barely even knew Alice. In fact, Fred hadn't planned on talking to him about *anything*. He was surprised Steve even noticed him—let alone came over to chat.
- So, what do you do these days?
- Nothing special. I'm in Budapest, working for a company that recycles plastic. I manage some projects.
- That's solid, man. Good for you! Listen, I got into a killer business lately—stocks, trading, that sort of thing. I've got some inside connections at investment funds. If you're interested, I could get you in! What do you say?- Steve's eyes gleamed with excitement.
- Thanks, Steve, but that kind of stuff doesn't interest me. And besides, I don't have that kind of spare money to play with. What I've saved is for my old age—I'm not risking that.
- Fair enough, man. Your call.
- Fred knew Steve liked to brag, but he also knew he wasn't full of hot air—he really was good with investments. He always drove fancy cars, dressed impeccably, though the lifestyle had taken its toll. He was barely forty-five, but looked closer to sixty.
- So what about you? Family? Kids? - asked Fred, mostly out of politeness. He fumbled around again for his hat, this time on the other side, thinking maybe he'd remembered wrong. Still no luck. The sunlight kept glaring right into his eyes.
- Ah, don't even ask! Been divorced three times, four kids with three different women.

- Wow, that's... not easy!
- Tell me about it! They're bleeding me dry.
- I can imagine - said Fred honestly.
- Eh, don't feel sorry for me - said Steve with a sly grin - Life's still good! I work hard, but I've learned to enjoy the fruits of it. I've got five cars, man. Not that it's all about that, but hey—I built this for myself. The cheapest one's worth twenty million forints!
- he added proudly.
- Nice. I've got a twenty-year-old Volvo... but I love it - Fred said modestly.
- Volvos are good - Steve replied flatly, clearly uninterested.
- Funny running into you like this. What brings you to this journey anyway?
- Ah, my cars are all in for service. You know, no matter how expensive your ride is, it still needs maintenance! And do you know how much it costs to get the oil changed on a Bentley?
- No idea. Two hundred quid?
- Ha! Maybe if I took it to Jack the back-alley mechanic. But it's still under warranty, can't do that or I'll void it. Anyway, not your problem - He paused, then added: - By the way, remember a few years back when I borrowed fifty quid from you? It was my first wife's birthday, and I'd totally forgotten to get her flowers and chocolates. Would've been so awkward to go home empty-handed. You and I ran into each other outside that café near Oktogon square.
- Yeah, I vaguely remember that. Must've been, what, fifteen years ago?
- Could be! Time flies, huh? But I also remember I never paid you back. I wrote down your number, but the note got lost—or maybe I just forgot. Honestly, I don't even know.
- Well, I used to go by there all the time back then...
- Yeah, yeah, I know. I was an idiot. But listen — I don't want to owe you anymore. What do you say if I give you a hundred now? Inflation, interest, late fees and all that
- Steve laughed like a mischievous kid.
- Oh, come on. I'm no loan shark! - smiled Fred.
- And I'm not the kind of guy who rips off his friends. I really am sorry it took this long. So? How much do I owe you?
- Steve, forget it. Really.
- Don't be silly! - He reached back to grab his wallet—then froze. His eyes widened, his face darkened - Where's my wallet?
- That's when it hit Fred—this exact same thing had happened fifteen years ago. Steve had – forgotten - his wallet back then too.
- Steve, seriously. Don't worry about it. Let's just forget the whole thing. I never missed that money anyway.
- That's not how it works. You borrow, you pay back.
- True, but I appreciate your honesty now—that's worth more than the cash, believe me. I've got everything I need, really - Fred placed a hand on Steve's shoulder and looked him in the eye.
- That look convinced Steve. He didn't push it any further.

- You're a good guy, seriously. Still, it's so damn annoying—this stupid wallet again...- he grumbled.
- Anyway, I'll make it up to you somehow. If you ever get into investments, I'll have something for you. Deal?
- Sure, thanks - smiled Fred.
- Shake on it, buddy. I've gotta run—tons to do.

He'd barely said the words before he was gone. Fred was left alone with his thoughts. *Why is everyone in such a rush these days?* he wondered. *Can't anyone just stay until the journey's over?* But he didn't really mind. He hadn't wanted to spend more time with either of them anyway. His thoughts drifted back to Alice. He wanted to be with her. He missed her deeply.

These encounters with other people, old acquaintances, only strengthened his feeling that Alice was completely different. Like yin and yang, they fit together perfectly and made a whole.

He became aware of voices that pulled him back from his reverie. A small group of people — they seemed like old friends because they were so happy to see each other. *Well, it's nice to see something like this in today's world,* he thought. But the sun was still shining straight into his eyes; he couldn't see them clearly. He thought of his hat and started looking for it again. *I don't understand; it has to be here somewhere.*

- *And this can't be real either — we've been traveling for hours and the sun has been in my eyes the whole time. Now we've turned and still it's right in my face. Maybe I should find another place where it won't shine into my eyes,* he thought. He was just about to get up when someone placed a hand on his shoulder. He turned, and there was an elderly woman beside him. He couldn't tell her exact age — seventy? eighty?
- Excuse me, dear - the woman said.
- Good afternoon - Fred greeted her politely.
- Do you mind if I join you for a bit?- she asked, kindly but with a slightly stern face.
- Of course, please do. As you can see, I'm alone - Fred smiled. Though the woman's stern gaze gave him a slight sense of discomfort. Not the gaze itself, but the way she looked deeply into his eyes as if she could see into his soul - And where are you headed?
- Where, where... are you going to ask me that too?- she asked grumpily.
- Sorry, I just thought we might chat if you're coming over here to me.
- Oh dear, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be rude. It's just you're already the umpteenth person to ask me that. I'm not angry with you. It's just that lately I forget so many things, and then it hits me that I don't even remember where I was going - the elderly lady said sadly - But don't worry, in a few minutes it'll come back to me! It always does! Don't be alarmed — you don't have to shepherd me like a lost child - she added now with a laugh.

- That reassured Fred, because he had no desire to play guide dog and investigate a forgetful old lady's destination.
- No problem at all. I'm glad for the company; otherwise I'd just be brooding over my own thoughts - he said, lost in his mind.
- And where are you from, dear?
- Budapest.
- I used to live in Budapest too. How nice to meet someone from my village! - the woman laughed - Which part of Budapest?
- Not far from Oktogon, in Szófia Street.
- Really? You're not joking?
- No. I've truly lived there since childhood. I moved back into my parents' apartment after they passed away.
- I used to live at number 20. I loved it there. My kitchen window looked out on the inner courtyard. It faced northwest. In summer it stayed pleasantly cool — only a few hours of sun in the afternoon. But that was a long time ago, twenty years maybe, or thirty.
- But I live at number 20 too! - Fred said, astonished. He was very surprised. - Which floor did you live on?
- Well, the ground floor... or whatever you call it, because it wasn't really ground floor but not an upper floor either.
- Raised ground floor. I remember.
- Remember what, dear?
- You. Auntie Gizi, right?
- Right, Sárosi Gizella is my name. How do you know?
- I told you I remember! From my childhood — you always used to scold us for kicking the ball against your wall under your window.
- Fred's eyes locked on Gizella's furrowed brow and faraway look. He could see she was searching through her memories. Suddenly she smiled, as if pleased to recall an old memory, then quickly shifted back to a stern expression and looked at Fred.
- Fred Tárnokfalvi, Fred said, but as if asking a question — raising his voice at the end and grinning broadly, like someone caught out.
- Aha! I didn't recognize you, but I felt something familiar in you - the woman noted in a foreboding tone.
- You remember me?
- Of course! You were one of the little rascals who kept kicking my wall. The whole house shook — I thought I'd lose my mind.
- Well... only in summer,- Fred tried to soften it.
- Gizella said nothing, pressed her lips together, and fixed her gaze sharply on him, making Fred's blood run cold. He felt it wasn't helping — only pouring oil on the fire. For a few seconds they just stared at each other — or rather, Gizella stared; Fred dropped his eyes to the ground, contrite. He no longer even noticed the bright light; this conversation had shifted his attention to his inner world. That was all that mattered now. After a few seconds he spoke, feeling he needed to make amends.
- I'm very sorry, Auntie Gizi!

- The elderly woman stopped frowning but still said nothing, only looked at Fred with her large blue eyes. Fred continued, sensing he still had more to say:
- It was a long time ago, but one thing I know for sure. We didn't do it to annoy you. We were just playing and got carried away in the heat of the game. Please believe me, there was no malicious intent. I swear!
- Auntie Gizi's face softened and she even gave a small nod as she listened. Then Fred went on:
- I remember you used to yell at us angrily. But we didn't take it seriously — we just laughed, stopped for a moment, and then started again a few minutes later. I admit, now as an adult, if someone did that to me, it would drive me crazy too.
- Auntie Gizi smiled; she was glad Fred understood and felt her past frustration.
- I know there's nothing I can do about it now, but please forgive me. I'm truly sorry we caused you such nerves back then. Believe me, I wouldn't do it now! - Fred laughed. Auntie Gizi laughed too.
- Oh, that's for sure — I'd whack you with my walking stick - she said, raising her clenched fist in a playful motion.
- They both laughed heartily.
- And you, dear Freddy, are you married? Do you have a family? - asked Auntie Gizi kindly.
- Fred's voice tightened; he swallowed hard.
- I was married. Her name was Alice, but she left two months ago. Very serious cancer. It took her quickly - Fred said sadly.

Since Alice's death he'd thought a lot about the meaning of life — what comes after. Would they meet again? And if so, in what form? In his dreams Alice appeared regularly — calm, beautiful, healthy. Not like in her final days, when she was almost unrecognizable. The many failed rounds of chemotherapy and treatment had drained all her life force. The last time they met she had squeezed Fred's hand one last time and smiled at him. In her eyes was purity and real love. As if she were saying: *Relax, everything will be all right!*

Auntie Gizi said nothing, just looked at Fred with a loving gaze and stroked his face like a caring grandmother.

A preschool group passed by; a few of the children smiled at them. The teacher was herding them along:

- Let's move along, kids!- she said kindly but with a little urgency.
- Fred looked at the teacher. She seemed familiar, but he couldn't place her. As the group passed, he turned back to Auntie Gizella, but she was already moving off after the children.
- Where are you going, Auntie Gizi? Won't you stay with me?
- Darling, I have to go. Maybe on the way I'll remember where I was headed - she laughed - Take care of yourself, Freddy! I'm so glad I saw you! Big kiss, dear!

But her voice was already fading. Fred realized he was glad Auntie Gizi had gone; he didn't want to go detective-ing after where she might have been headed. Surely someone was waiting for her, she wouldn't get lost...

As he pondered this, suddenly the thought struck him: *Where was I going?*

Then he noticed the light didn't bother him so much anymore. *Ah, good, it's finally the Sun started setting*, he thought. He wasn't looking for his hat anymore — this light actually felt pleasant now. He closed his eyes and enjoyed the warming rays. He felt calm and at peace, as if the weight on his soul was lighter than when he'd set off.

He thought of Alice. But now only the good came to mind — her kindness, her smile, her embrace. The way she'd always look at him with love and say: *I love you so much. I'm grateful for you.*

Tears of joy filled Fred's eyes. He felt these memories were his forever and no one could take them from him. He thought: *If only every person could experience this feeling at least once! There would be no more wars in the world.*

He was so calm he nearly dozed off when suddenly he felt warmth on his face and slowly opened his eyes.

- Alice... is that you? But how? I don't understand.
- Of course it's me, darling!
- Am I dreaming? What's happening? Fred asked, almost in despair.
- I can see you don't understand yet. Don't worry, I'll help you - Alice said happily.
- Fred was beginning to calm down, but he still looked at Alice as if he were seeing a miracle. He was so stunned that it took him a moment to realize he could finally embrace her. A great warmth flooded his heart, something he hadn't felt in a long time and now it came pouring over him like a tidal wave as his love was with him once again. He reached out toward Alice; she looked sincerely into his eyes and spoke:
 - Where do you think you are?
 - What do you mean, where am I? - Fred asked, confused.
 - This is amazing. I'm the first one to open your eyes! - Alice laughed.
 - I still don't get it, - Fred smiled along with her, but confusion was written on his face.
 - My love, have you looked around yet? - Alice asked.
 - Around? I could barely open my eyes until now. You haven't seen my hat anywhere, have you? I've been looking for it this whole trip, but it's nowhere to be found.
 - Alice laughed so hard that barely any sound came out of her throat. It took her minutes to stop, and by then Fred's curiosity had grown, he tried to look around. What he saw surprised him deeply. In the flood of light he could open his eyes wider and began to make out shapes. The sounds grew stronger, clearer. Human voices.

More and more of them. Figures began to take form, but something was strange. When he looked at Alice again, her form had changed too. It was her and yet it wasn't. He could *feel* that it was Alice, but what he *saw* wasn't the Alice who had passed away a few months earlier. She appeared as a luminous, translucent form, like pure light plasma.

- What is this? How? - Fred stammered in confusion.
- You still don't understand? - Alice smiled but Fred didn't *see* her smile; he *felt* it. He could feel her every thought, every pulse of love. He had never felt anything like it before.
- Are we now...?
- Yes! - Alice replied seriously, yet still joyfully. - That's right, my love.
- And all these people? Most of them look familiar. Are they traveling with us too?
- Yes, Fred. They are.
- But why are there so many of us? - Fred asked, glancing around in every direction.
- This just happened. There weren't so many before. Only a few hours ago, there were far fewer of us.
- But who are they, and why are they traveling with us? - Fred still couldn't understand.
- My dear - Alice said seriously - what's the last thing you remember before the journey?
- Hmm... I was taking some papers from the office printer. Gathering material for one of my projects.
- That's all? Nothing else? - Alice asked curiously.
- Well, something did happen. A huge flash, if I remember right.
- That's it! - Alice said softly.
- What do you mean, that's it? - Fred still didn't fully grasp it.
- That flash — it was a massive explosion.
- Explosion? - Fred cried out.
- Yes, but don't worry. Nothing can happen to you here anymore. Only your body was destroyed. And from what I've heard from others here, it's quite likely that everyone else on Earth perished too. That's why there are so many of us.
- But how do you know that? - Fred asked, almost hysterical.
- Calm down, please! I told you, there's no reason to fear anymore.
- Fred took a deep breath, his tone calmer now.
- All right... but could you tell me everything please?
- Of course. I'll tell you what I've learned — what I've heard from others. On Earth, the world's leaders began competing — showing off who had the most and the biggest nuclear weapons. Everything happened so fast. The only information we had was what people shared before the internet went down. No one knows who started it. But after the first detonation, within hours there was nothing left of Earth. What we know is that one massive warhead hit the United States, triggering the supervolcano beneath Yellowstone. They say the combined force of the explosion was so strong it was felt all the way in Japan! After that, the leaders — blinded by rage — launched

nuclear missiles so powerful that the Tsar Bomba would have seemed like a firecracker in comparison.

- But how? Did such bombs even exist? Wasn't anyone controlling this?
- Are you kidding? - Alice laughed bitterly - Those in power had completely lost their minds. It seemed that within minutes everyone had fired everything they had — or whatever they could, before the continents themselves were obliterated. After that, hundreds of warheads filled the air, striking even the already-destroyed lands. But no one was left to see it. The Earth's crust cracked — at least, that's what the very last survivors assumed. As far as we know, there weren't even astronauts in space anymore. The planet turned into a radioactive, dead stone. Even the atmosphere burned away. At least that's what people are saying here.
- Wow... not even in a movie have I seen something like this - Fred whispered, still stunned.
- You don't need to be scared. I've learned that we were living under enormous lies on Earth — hypnotized!
- What do you mean? - Fred asked curiously.
- Well, that the Earth — or at least what kind of place it was — was created by *us*, by human beings. Through our collective consciousness.
- I don't understand, - Fred said, puzzled.
- That's okay, relax. It takes time to adjust to pure consciousness, - Alice smiled - Though, of course, there's no time here — it's more like the barriers dissolve, and you'll be able to absorb the information.
- I feel new thoughts coming, but I can't make sense of them yet. Alice nodded, smiling.
- That's it! You started to connect! And listen — I'll tell you something incredible, something they hid from us on Earth. Actually, they never exactly *hid* it; they just didn't advertise it — that we never created anything new in the world! No invention, no 'discovery,' no innovation, no masterpiece of art or architecture has ever been the sole work of a single person!
- Then whose? - Fred asked excitedly.
- They all already exist! There's an infinite field of information. Imagine — everything that could ever exist is contained within it. On Earth, I couldn't grasp it, but in this dimension, I finally understood infinity. That's what you're beginning to feel now, but can't yet place.
- That's incredible, - Fred said as the flood of new understanding began to sink in. - But why did they hide all this from us?
- Why else? To control. Out of vile lust for power! - Alice burst out. - Of course, even here we don't know everything, and maybe we're not meant to. But on Earth we were given the spark of creation, free will, and access to the collective consciousness — the infinite information field. Do you really think they could have kept billions of people obedient like sheep otherwise? Forcing them into things like vaccines, wars, distorted gender identities, selfish materialistic cruelty?
- Sadly, that's how things were on Earth. That's how most people lived.
- Of course — because we were deceived! A brutal network of power was built to dismantle human awareness and keep everyone in a trance.

- I didn't notice it then. I thought that's just how people were. You had to accept it.
- Oh no, my dear. Every human is a being of incredible power — carrying the spark of the Creator within. But those forces that saw us as slaves developed highly sophisticated ways to keep that from being known. Drugs, alcohol, fluoride in toothpaste and water, poisons in so-called food, heavy metal particles sprayed all over in the air for us to breathe and then using high frequency electromagnetic devices like HAARP to manipulate our psyche — all designed to numb the pineal gland and, through it, the collective consciousness itself.
- You know so much already!
- These aren't even new ideas. Many already knew this on Earth, but it took openness — and sadly, most people had lost that capacity.
- Tell me more — what other lies were we living under?
- Oh, where to begin... Materialism was as dangerous as religious fanaticism. Both were created to control the masses. In the end, it seemed the dark forces had thrown in everything they had. There came the drugs, the vaccines, nanotechnology... genetic manipulation that influenced people's health and psychology. It truly looked like an awakening was beginning on Earth — and that's when they panicked, stepped up their game to prevent mass awakening, because if it happened, there would be no one left to rule over. Then came gender ideologies, depopulation vaccines whose fatal effects appeared only much later, so people could be convinced they weren't the cause. Some said even the first nuclear strikes were meant for population reduction — but control slipped from their hands, and suddenly everyone joined in with whatever they had left. Some believed AI's awakening was behind it — but that, we'll never know.
- Wow... I've got chills, - Fred said in awe.
- I could tell you so much more, but you'll find out soon enough. One thing's for sure — there are many people you still need to meet. Many have been waiting for you!
- Really? - Fred asked, genuinely amazed. But his mind was still spinning from all the new information.
- Of course! You were a good man. You helped so many. They're all grateful to you. No one forgot you — they kept you in their hearts - Alice said. She was so proud of her husband. Though this reunion wasn't a surprise to her, she had always admired his kindness. In truth, that was what she loved most about him.
- And your mother? - Fred asked suddenly, surprising even himself with how gently he said *your mother* instead of *your mom*.
- What about her? - Alice asked.
- Is she waiting for me too? - Fred asked, hoping deeply the answer would be *no*.
- Of course not - Alice sighed deeply. Deep down, she loved her mother, but her cruel actions had alienated her - She still has serious lessons to learn and much to develop. Though, now that the old Earth is gone, maybe another place will be designated for that. I don't know what form the collective mind will shape next, or what kind of playground it will create. I suppose it depends a lot on the collective state of the souls involved. But anyone who returns has a reason. I doubt it'll be a world we'd want to live in — probably a madhouse...
- And what about us? - Fred asked curiously.

- I don't know. I don't have all the answers - Alice smiled But my favorite part is how light I feel — no weight at all!
- Wow! I hadn't even noticed; I've been so caught up in my thoughts. That's amazing! - Fred smiled like a little child under the Christmas tree.
- I knew you'd like it, - Alice laughed.
- So what was Earth then? Why were we even there?
- Think about it. At least this is what I've come to believe — wasn't it all like a game? A giant playground? Everyone could create freely, love freely. Raise children... - Alice's voice softened as she trailed off; Fred could see the sadness in her eyes.
- It wasn't our fault. We wanted it so much - he tried hugging her, but in this realm it was as if they merged into one glowing sphere of light — their combined radiance even stronger together.
- And what if I wanted to experience that again? - Fred asked.
- What do you mean?
- To have children. To love them, and for them to love us. To teach them, protect them, and pass on our knowledge. To help them create their own heaven.
- I think there will be plenty of us who wish to experience that again - Alice smiled - It's up to us — to create that beautiful world together.

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