

SAMPLE PAGES FROM CHANGELING'S RETURN

FOREWORD BY HARVEY KUBERNIK

It gives me great pleasure to announce *Changeling's Return*, and introduce Travis Edward Pike, the man who made it possible for readers and/or listeners, to escape into a supernatural world of magic, myth, and music unlike any hitherto known. Born and reared, like the hero in his novel, in Boston, Massachusetts, Pike provides two approaches for listeners, readers, or both to experience the wonder of his 1976 musical screenplay *Changeling*, optioned, but never produced, and now released in a music album he calls *Changeling's Return: a novel musical concept*, and this book, *Changeling's Return: a novel approach to the music*, both happy results of his more than half-century career in music, film and literature.

Listen to the mysterious music and song composed for the unrealized movie; read the occult fantasy exploring Western mythology, folklore, and the supernatural, woven together by the music of the spheres; both, individually and jointly, providing a window on a supernatural world where the survival of humankind is being weighed in the balance, and the outcome is still uncertain.

In a pre-Beatles world, Pike, a twelve-year-old student at Boston Latin School, was censured for writing poetry and short stories in study halls. Two years later, while waiting to speak to Travis' father, filmmaker James A. Pike, American journalist and author John Gunther, renowned for his sociopolitical books about various parts of the world, read some of 14-year-old Travis' short stories and poetry he found on a coffee table in the Pike's parlor, asked to meet Travis, told him his writing showed promise and encouraged him to consider a writing career.

But Travis was also interested in music, and at fourteen, he became lead singer for a teenage rock band. He had just turned eighteen when he composed his first movie title song for *Demo Derby* in 1963, later penned ten tunes and starred in the pop musical *Feelin' Good*, shot on location in Boston, Massachusetts, and in 2017, "Watch Out Woman," one of his songs from that film was finally released on a vinyl 45 in the U.K., and made it to #3 single on *Shindig!* magazine's *Best of 2017* list.

It is no coincidence that Pike's fictional main character in *Changeling's Return*, Morgen, was reared in Boston, became the lead singer, songwriter, and front man for Beantown Home Cookin', a fictional band, drawn from the author's own musical adventures in that city where Travis Pike's Tea Party was formed and performed in the sixties, making Pike both witness and participant in this musical sci-fi fantasy.

In his portrayal of heathen ritual, Pike explores the light and dark spaces between the equinoxes and solstices, and introduces us to the colorful shadow people spotlighted in his ambitious, nutritious, peripatetic out-of-body adventure, not preaching, but teaching and reaching listeners and readers with his expressive musical and literary style. In *Changeling's Return*, "songs are spells, going 'round and 'round in your head, even when there's no music to hear."

I embarked on Pike's fantasy-adventure, secure in the knowledge that the composer, lyricist, novelist, and tour guide, would not abandon me inside the Tomb of Every Hope, but wherever we might roam, would bring me home through his non-fear-based approach to the characters and situations encountered in his supernatural realm of otherworldly music and megalithic shrines.

Changeling's Return is Pike's invitation to explore a world where mystery and destiny are forever intertwined. Having sipped from *Changeling's Return's* Cauldron of Inspiration, I emerged from its Stream of Consciousness with renewed hope and a firm belief that humanity can and will learn to understand our planetary environment as it is today, and resolve to live in harmony with Nature's Laws.

Harvey Kubernik is an award winning author of 15 books. His literary music anthology *Inside Cave Hollywood: The Harvey Kubernik Music InnerViews and InterViews Collection Vol. 1*, was published in December 2017, by Cave Hollywood. Kubernik's *The Doors Summer's Gone* was published by Otherworld Cottage Industries in February 2018, and was been nominated for the 2019 Association for Recorded Sound Collections Awards for Excellence in Historical Recorded Sound Research.

EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER ONE

The BBC interview started well enough, especially since April 29th had been a busy day for Morgen, and he'd been awake for the entire Virgin Atlantic night flight from Boston's Logan Airport to Heathrow, researching British May Day festivities and traditions, including May Eve, aka Walpurgis Night, April 30th, the same night for which his first live TV concert broadcast was scheduled. He'd planned to catch some z's before the concert, but he'd barely had time for brunch when he was picked up by a BBC limousine and taken to the radio station. Morgen, a veteran interviewee, was fully prepared for the typical ice-breaking questions interviewers ask: when and how Beantown Home Cookin' came together, did he really write all their songs, and so forth, but the first question this BBC interviewer asked was why his name was spelled with an "e," instead of an "a." He'd thought Morgen with an "e" was a variant used for a girl's name. As off-the-wall as that was to start an interview, Morgen was prepared for it, because he'd been hearing variations of it ever since he'd started elementary school.

"That's generally true," Morgen replied. "Morgen with an 'e' or an 'a' are both names given to children of either sex, but as far back as first grade, my teacher tried to correct my spelling from Morgen with an 'e' to Morgan with an 'a.' I began spelling it the way the teacher told me to, until my mother saw it on a paper I brought home from school, and told me it was incorrect, and my name was spelled with an 'e.' As you might imagine, that led to my first visit to the principal's office and a follow-up visit with my mother, resulting in it being officially changed back to Morgen with an 'e,' because that was the name, in fact the only word, scrawled on the note attached to my blanket, when I was found outside the entrance to the hospital."

"Really? You were a foundling?"

"I am a foundling. It's not something you outgrow."

"No, of course not," the interviewer said. "When did you first learn that's how you came by your name?"

"I was there when the counselor explained it to the couple adopting me. It was particularly important to keep the spelling, because it was a bit unusual, and might be my birth mother's name, or my father's name, or even a family name that might help to identify me if anyone ever came looking for me."

"And has anyone come looking for you?"

"Not yet. At least, not to my knowledge."

"How old were you, then?"

"I was five."

"That must have been tough for a five-year-old to hear."

"Not when the five-year-old is about to go home with a father and mother of his own."

“I must say, you seem pretty well-adjusted to me, for being abandoned at birth. Does a thing like that haunt you?”

“Not really,” Morgen replied. “I don’t remember much from before I was adopted, but once I was taken in by my adoptive parents, I enjoyed a wonderful, loving, childhood that got me started in music.”

Morgen thought that setup would lead to a discussion of his career, but the host either missed his cue, or wasn’t ready to move on.

“Amazing,” he said. You’ve named your band ‘Beantown Home Cookin’, a reference to your home town, Boston, Massachusetts. Are all the members from Boston?”

“I didn’t name the band. They were already Beantown Home Cookin,’ when I came aboard, and wherever the band members came from, we all lived in Boston, and most of the guys had gone to the Berklee College of Music in Boston, and that should certainly qualify them as a Beantown band.”

Are the Trashbabies all Bostonians, too?”

“They all make their home in Greater Boston,” Morgen answered, “but they’re not only cosmopolitan, they’re international. Their families, like almost all American families, emigrated to America, some when we were still British Colonies, but several more recently, displaced by wars, famine, poverty or persecution in other parts of the world, to enjoy the freedom and opportunity that has made the United States famous around the world as a melting pot of cultures, making the Trashbabies a sterling example of the unique diversity and opportunity that makes America great.”

“Spoken like a true patriot. I guess that’s to be expected from a Bostonian, but isn’t it true that to avoid harassment, all the ladies have to go by stage names?” the host asked.

“I know them by their stage names, and I understood stage names afford celebrities some protection from harassment, but are sometimes also part of the act. What about your Spice Girls: Scary, Sporty, Baby, Ginger, and Posh, if I remember correctly.”

The host laughed, then said, “That sounds about right, but everyone knew their real names, too. Today, Posh Spice is better known as Victoria Beckham, wife of Manchester United’s outstanding former football player, David Beckham. But the Trashbabies all have secret names, like something out of *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats*.”

The Trashbabies were the nine gorgeous singer-dancers featured in Beantown Home Cookin’s traveling stage show, but if there was a question in the host’s prattle, Morgen had missed it. Broadcast radio doesn’t tolerate dead airspace well, so when Morgen failed to answer, the host prodded, “T. S. Elliot?”

“What about him?” Morgen asked.

“I believe he came from a distinguished line of Bostonians, didn’t he?” the host ventured, starting to feel as lost as Morgen, but blessed with a prompter’s voice in his headset suggesting he stay with sports, and ask Morgen what he thought of the Patriots stunning, final two-minute, come-from-behind, overtime win over the Atlanta Falcons in Superbowl 51.

“What am I thinking?” the host blurted. “You’re from Boston. How did it feel to see the Patriots’ spectacular comeback Superbowl victory over the Atlanta Falcons!”

“Atlanta Falcons,” Morgen corrected.

“And a fifth Superbowl ring for your quarterback! What’s his name?”

By then, Morgen felt like he was witnessing the interview from the other side of Alice’s looking glass. As for the name of the quarterback, he drew a blank, but tried to fill the empty airspace with what he knew of the quarterback’s family history, gleaned from local newspaper and radio interviews.

“I can tell you this much,” Morgen stalled, hoping his mental review would reveal the quarterback’s name, “and he wasn’t born in Boston, and only became a New Englander when he came to the Patriots, but his family originally emigrated to Boston during the famous nineteenth century potato famine, and his name isn’t Sullivan.”

Prompted by the voice in his headset, the host exclaimed, “Tom Brady!”

“Right!” Morgen concurred, “I knew that.”

The host laughed and said, “Jet lag will do that to you.”

Later, sitting in the back seat of the limousine taking him to the ruined abbey where his live U.K. premiere concert broadcast was to originate, he shuddered. How could he possibly have forgotten Tom Brady’s name, with five Superbowl rings, easily the most famous name in New England since JFK.

“And his name isn’t Sullivan,” Morgen groaned aloud.

Morgen saw the limousine driver glance back at him in his rear-view mirror.

“Just thought of something funny,” Morgen explained. The driver grinned and turned his attention back to the road.

“How long before we get there?” Morgen asked.

“An hour, possibly a bit more if we run into traffic. Do we need to stop?”

“No,” Morgen answered. “I’m fine.”

He settled back into his seat, and stared out the window, but everything whizzed by so quickly, it made his eyes tired, so he closed them, and thought about how he’d come to this day, lead singer and front man for Beantown Home Cookin’, an American pop star from Boston, Massachusetts, riding in the back seat of a limousine, on his way to his first live concert telecast, the first stop on a six-week European tour that would end on the same day he’d been fired from his dishwasher job in a Cape Cod rock and roll joint three years ago.

EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER FIVE

The din on the convertible roof was deafening, more like a waterfall than a rainstorm, and the car’s windshield wipers hadn’t been able to penetrate it, forcing Morgen to pull over to the side of the road, where he turned on the car’s flashing emergency lights and

hoped, if anyone else was on the road, they'd manage to stop before they plowed into him. Then, as suddenly as it started, the deluge stopped.

It was still raining steadily, but the squall had passed, and through the windshield wipers, Morgen could see the road ahead. Deciding he'd had enough adventure for one night, and it was time to turn around and go back to the great house, he left the emergency light flashing, and drove cautiously out onto the roadway, the soft purr of the motor underscoring the steady, gentler rhythm of the windshield wipers.

Peering through the rain, exhaustion finally began taking its toll, and hypnotized by the drone of the motor, the rhythmic swish of the windshield wipers, and the Trashbabies' chorus from "The Stranger" playing in his head, urging him to an ever-deeper sleep, Morgen began to blink and nod. He thought he heard a woman's voice gently call his name, opened his eyes briefly, and as they began to close again, heard her call more urgently. He raised his head, but his eyes remained closed. The third time she called, louder than before. He opened his eyes and saw, standing in the middle of the road ahead, a doe, frozen in the glare of his headlights!

Morgen hit his horn, stood on the brakes, and swerved to avoid the doe, crashing through a patch of Rhododendrons and landing, miraculously, right side up on a narrow country lane. Now, wide awake, he looked into his rear-view mirror, but the doe was nowhere to be seen.

The final verse of the song that had nearly killed him, played on in his mind, and his confidence soared.

"I'm The One, *The Stranger*.

I'm The One. I make your dreams come true.

I'm The One. *The Stranger*.

Listen, and I'll put my spell on you."

The windshield wipers stopped with the rain.

Morgen climbed out of the car, and inspected it, but apart from bits torn from the Rhododendrons he pulled from the front bumper and grill, and a bit of mud he was able to brush away, was relieved to see the car was undamaged.

Morgen walked back to the rural road, but finding no trace of the doe, began to wonder if there ever was a doe in the road. For all he knew, he might have dreamed it.

The air was especially fresh and cool, bracing, as the natives might say. Unsure where he'd picked up the expression, he guessed he'd probably heard it on some British TV show he'd seen on WGBH. Above, the moon shone brightly, and the sky was clear enough to see millions of stars, until they were suddenly blocked from view by a ghostly barn owl that silently flew over him and disappeared into the woods, making it, in all, a wonderful night to be alive.

He put the top down. Fresh, cool air would help keep him awake, and by now, Rodney, the media guests, the band and the Trashbabies would be wondering where he'd gone.

When he put the car in gear, he realized the wind-chill in the moving car, was too cold for comfort, but rather than put the roof back up, he turned on the heater, laughing at himself for driving with the top down, and the heater going full blast.

The rain had stopped, but the roads were still slippery, so he drove slowly. Trees formed a canopy over much of the country lane, and he was hit by rain falling from the branches overhead. He thought that would help keep him awake, and where the trees parted, he saw a beautiful star-filled sky.

Suddenly, he thought he saw something moving in the woods, and through a break in the trees, saw a magnificent white stag, looking back at him. He stopped to get a better look, but it turned and majestically walked away, disappearing into the denser woods as if, having shown itself, it had fulfilled its duty and could now move on. It was a magical moment, and the thought struck Morgen, that perhaps it came to thank him for avoiding the doe.

Not much further on, Morgen came to a narrow, arched stone bridge, but as he approached it, three statuesque beauties in fantastically wrought body armor, designed more to provoke than to protect, rose into view over the top of the bridge, any one of them, if they had the voices and the moves, physically qualified to join the Trashbabies.

Morgen stopped the car, and as they came down his side of the bridge, rose to sit on the back of his seat to show himself, and ask for directions.

They eyed his car as if they'd never seen one before (and that may well have been so, at least not one as fine as this), and he greeted them with a big smile.

“Good evening, ladies,” he said. “Late night?”

In that instant, a huge, brindled mastiff emerged from the Rhododendrons on the far side of the car and barked a warning. Morgen quickly slid back down into his seat and said, softly as the first beauty drew near, “Big dog.”

“What brings you here?” the first one snarled.

Obviously, she didn't know who he was, but he had done nothing to offend her. Whatever was eating her, had nothing to do with him, and he needed directions, so he smiled and answered, “You want the truth?”

The brindled mastiff came right up to the far side door and still standing on all fours, stuck his enormous head inside the open car, sniffing Morgen, studying his face, effortlessly invading Morgen's comfort zone.

“That is slyly spoken,” the second one answered.

“Like a deceiver spoken,” the third volunteered in a nasty, accusative tone.

“Intended, perhaps, to mislead?” concluded the first as she passed by.

Still in need of directions, and intimidated by the enormous dog in his face, Morgen hoped they were practicing for a U.K. Comic-Com, putting on their attitudes the way they put on their costumes, and with one eye on the dog, Morgen answered, gently and reasonably, “Perhaps the truth will serve me?”

“Truth serves not,” the second stated empirically.

“It is its own unbending master,” said the third with finality.

“The Tomb of Every Hope,” said the first, dismissing him, and killing any hope of help these three might ever offer.

The ladies having passed without incident, the brindled mastiff released Morgen from its baleful gaze, and trotted off after the three women.

“Then I shall serve Truth,” Morgen said, loud enough to be heard, but eliciting no response. Vexed, and dumbfounded by his idiotic final remark, Morgen watched them in his rear-view mirror as he began driving slowly up and over the hump-backed bridge, tilting the mirror to keep them in sight as he crested the bridge and started down the other side.

Then, firmly gripping the steering wheel with his right hand, he braced himself and rose in his seat for a last look at the trio, but in that instant, the steering wheel spun to the right, and trying to regain his balance, Morgen’s right foot came down hard on the accelerator. The motor roared. The car lurched forward. Morgen spun, dropped back into his seat, cut the wheels enough to clear the stone wall on the bridge, and stood on the brake. The wheels locked, but on the wet, slippery road, the car skidded to the edge of a watery ditch on the right, only coming to a stop when the front right side dropped to the ground, leaving the car suspended over the ditch, its right front wheel hanging uselessly, its elevated left rear wheel, not touching the road.

For a moment, time seemed to stand still. Morgen sighed with relief, a half-second before the rain-soaked side of the ditch upon which the right side of the car had come to rest, gave way, and the car suddenly lurched sideways and thudded into the ditch, with just enough of a jolt to cause the driver’s airbag to explode in his face.

EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER SIX

Morgen recognized the iambic pentameter, but not the source. He’d read *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* during the summer break between seventh and eighth grade, what he saw on the screen hadn’t been in it, but he’d never read any of Marlowe’s plays of the same period, and knew he also wrote in iambic pentameter. At least, the mystery of the ill-tempered iron-clad women was finally solved. They were obviously method actresses, playing Furies, determined to stay in character, even between takes.

The lights came up. The figures at the table were teenagers. A lady dressed in sensible country tweed, her long hair exquisitely braided and pinned up to give the appearance of a business-like cut, emerged from behind the projector, walked to the front of the room, and raised the screen to reveal a blackboard, upon which was a circle with a horizontal line running through it labeled “threshold.”

The lady wrote something inside the circle above the line and something below, and speaking with her back to the room, began, “What do the characters . . .”

Morgen was about to stand up and make his presence known, when she turned, saw him, and finished her question with just the slightest hesitation, “. . . represent?”

It was her, the singer, the woman who sang “Morningstone.” He quietly sat back. She’d seen him, might have asked who he was, or why he was there, but didn’t, and as long as she allowed it, he was content to sit and listen quietly.

“Nature deities,” a boy called out.

“The Ninefold Muse,” a second boy answered.

“The denigration of the goddess,” a girl called out.

“Oh,” the singer ventured, “Why do you say that?”

“Well, ever since society became patriarchal, men have been putting women down. The embodiment of the female principle, the mother goddess, is reduced to a bevy of ineffectual, bickering, departmental nymphs.”

One girl must have made a face. The singer asked, “Comment, Calypso?”

Calypso said, “What Barbara says may be so, but in this instance, I think it is safe to say that the fragmentation of the goddess is a device of exposition, used to reveal the crisis dramatically through a confrontation between various aspects of her character.”

“Who are the Furies?” the singer asked.

Barbara quickly volunteered, “Goddesses of vengeance.”

“Force of Nature opposed to humanity,” the third boy suggested.

“The obstacles to be overcome,” the second boy said.

“The guardians of the threshold,” offered the third girl.

The singer turned and doubled the horizontal line on the blackboard. Then, obviously into her topic, she spun back to her class and asked, “And the Muses?”

The second boy was on top of this one. “Goddesses who seek to inspire Man,” he said.

Calypso followed with “The keepers of the cauldron.”

“The Cauldron of Inspiration,” the singer said, obviously pleased at how engaged her pupils were. “What about it?”

The first boy jumped on this one. “It’s the reward,” he said.

Calypso had a completely different take on it. “The womb through which the enlightened one becomes the twice born.”

Morgen thought he’d been keeping up pretty well, but Calypso threw him a curve. Fortunately, the third boy brought him back on track when he said, simply, “Enlightenment.”

“Enlightenment,” the singer repeated as she turned and added it to the half-circle below the threshold. She turned back to her class. “What about the Fates?” she asked.

The first boy’s answer was “The Past, Present, and Future,” but the third girl saw it differently. “Impartial Nature,” she said. “What shall be, will be.”

“What are they doing?” the singer asked.

The first boy answered, “Weaving the thread.”

The excited singer snatched that one up. “The thread! All right. What about the thread?”

The third girl spoke up again. “It’s short,” she said.

“And thin,” the first boy added, and then they all joined in to say, “It calls for skill!”

The singer had them, then, and she knew it. “It calls for skill,” she repeated thoughtfully. “What does it symbolize?”

“Time,” the first boy answered.

“More than time,” the third girl said. “There’s an implied threat in the delicacy of the thread. It could snap.”

But the second boy nailed it. “Doesn’t the thread,” he asked, “the strand of the Muse’s hair, doesn’t it represent the hero?”

“The hero!” the singer exclaimed. She was glowing as she turned to the blackboard, scribbling “hero” above the line.

“The key! The Chosen One!” she continued, then turned back to her class.

Morgen suddenly felt dizzy. He’d slept fitfully, only minutes at a time, during the long, cold night, and had nothing to eat for hours. The room started spinning. The last thing he heard, just before the lights went out, was the singer saying “The single hair upon which all depends.”

EXCERPTS FROM CHAPTER NINE AND TEN

In the utter darkness, Morgen could not see his arms stretched out before him, and only his weight on the ground beneath his feet, provided a point of contact with the world he knew. He felt the dog rub past against his leg, and grabbing it by its tail, followed it until he collided with a wall of stone, that the dog passed through, and only the receding sound of the animal’s claws, scraping on stone prevented him from panicking. Groping his way down the wall, he discovered a low opening, and feeling around inside, discovered two walls, a ceiling, and floor of stone slabs, a reinforced shaft which he then entered, following the dog on his hands and knees.

As he crawled forward, inside the dark shaft, the sound of the incantation quickly faded, making it possible to hear the dog’s progress ahead.

“Slow down, big guy,” he called, “I’m coming!”

As he advanced, the shaft became lower and he hit his head against the stone ceiling more than once before he gave up and dropped down to crawl forward on his belly.

“If you can fit, so can I,” Morgen muttered, but now the immediate sound of his own exertions made it difficult to hear the dog’s progress, and Morgen stopped several times to listen, to be sure he could still hear the dog, ahead.

In that total darkness, Morgen had no sense of time, no sense of distance, and when last he stopped to listen, could not hear the dog leading him on.

He bellowed, “Yo, dog!” but the shaft was so close, it sounded to him as if he shouted inside a closet. . . or a coffin.

All at once an enormous bark rang out, echoing from a near and obviously much larger space.

Morgen began to crawl forward as fast as he dared, not wanting the dog to get any further ahead of him. “This better lead to something more than a bowl of dog food,” he muttered, and suddenly, the floor seemed to fall away at the same time the mastiff rose before him and slobbered all over his face!

“Ahhh! Down! Get down! Sit!” he shouted, and the dog obediently sat. Filtered light dimly illuminated the cavernous Tomb of Every Hope, but compared to the shaft, it was like finding himself in Times Square. The shaft ended some two feet higher than the new floor. Morgen pushed himself out of the shaft and tumbled head first onto the floor of the huge chamber. He wrestled himself free of the mastiff’s greeting and rose to take in his surroundings.

The interior was cavernous, easily as large as most man-made cathedrals he’d seen in Europe when he was in the navy.

Its floor was made of irregular stone slabs, and down the center of the floor, a swift shallow brook flowed through it. Its irregular walls provided balconies and walkways, and dim light entered through a natural oculus high overhead.

A torch ignited, lighting a ledge high on the far wall of the underground chamber, illuminating the Fates and their tapestry of destiny, that reached all the way to the floor below, where all its past ages lay in a crumpled heap. The first Fate, spinning, without looking up from her work, spoke normally, but her voice clearly reached Morgen’s ears.

“She’s yours, to do with as you may. Behold!” she said, and a torch ignited on a stone wall formation closer to Morgen. By its light, he saw the mastiff, sphinxlike, guarding a wretched nude figure curled up in a ball and chained to the wall.

“Before you is a mystery revealed,” said the second Fate, as she wove thread from the first Fate’s skein into the tapestry.

Whatever the locals were playing at, Morgen decided they’d gone too far. The question was, how should he deal with it? Were they planning to ruin him, blackmail him, or worse? He addressed them, while his mind was racing, still trying to fathom a way out of the mess.

“I must admit, you put on quite a show,” he said, disgusted by the fact that he had become part of it. He tried to dismiss the idea that he’d been deliberately targeted, because they could not have known he’d go for a drive, get lost, and crash into their ditch . . . unless, of course, the Fates were really Fates, and if so, did that make everything better, or worse?

“Go,” said the third Fate, derailing his train of thought.

“Look you close upon your former love, whose limbs embraced you; kisses brought you joy,” said the spinner.

“Here, fettered, scourged, polluted by your lust,” finished the weaver.

That never happened, he thought, as he moved toward the chained figure, determined not to do anything that might compromise himself. The mastiff backed away as he approached the chained figure. In the flickering torch light, Morgen saw the tortured woman, covered with welts, her nudity hidden in part by her long, golden hair.

“Laura?” Morgen said softly, but the figure didn’t respond. Abandoning his resolution to stay away, he went to her, wincing sympathetically, as he gently parted her hair and saw her bruised face.

“Laura?” he said, his voice beginning to tremble with anger. She opened her eyes and looked up, apparently without recognizing him. As he leaned in closer, Laura’s face twisted into a mask of rage. She screamed and launched herself at him, teeth bared. Morgen leaped back, out of her reach.

The mastiff leaped to its feet, the fur on its neck and back on end, barking furiously. Her charge arrested by her shackles; Laura began to laugh maniacally.

Horrified, Morgen staggered to his feet and shouted, “What the hell is this?”

“Is she not Nature, harnessed to your will?” the third Fate asked. “Through your abuse, unbalanced,” added the spinner.

Suddenly, torches ignited on both sides of the stone slab shaft that had brought him there, and by their light he saw it was now guarded by the scornful Furies.

“Now hear us!” shouted the first Fury. “His perverse nature, Nature now perverts.”

“And courts annihilation!” howled the second.

“He must die!” shrieked the third.

And the first, calling on the natural forces of creation and destruction, held her hands before her, curled like talons about to seize their prey, and raged.

“Now, let the mountains quake and spew forth fire,

That by the Earth he scorned, he’ll be consumed.”

The stone slabs beneath Morgen’s feet began to slide apart, revealing molten rock below, and the brook that ran through the tomb flowed into the fiery chasm raising a column of steam, and fiery blast that cast weird shadows on the walls as the slab tilted down, threatening to tip him into the molten pit.

Morgen clung to a nearby rock formation, and as the frightened mastiff slid by him, instinctively grabbed it by the scruff of its neck with his free hand, saving it from a fiery end.

“This is a trial,” the third Fate said, and cut the thread the second Fate had been working into the tapestry.

“Let cooler heads prevail,” said the spinner, and the floor of the chamber was restored, sealing off the fiery chasm, re-establishing the course of the brook.

“Such cooler heads bring icy thoughts to mind!” screamed the defiant second Fury.

“In deathly cold, we’ll see his race entombed,” and a freezing cold wind howled into the chamber through the stone slab shaft, its icy vapor instantly freezing Morgen, the mastiff and the brook.

“And what of other creatures?” the weaver responded, indicating the mastiff, and drew that thread out of the tapestry.

“Nature weeps,” said the third Fate, and as Laura sobbed below, the howling wind subsided, and the frustrated Furies watched as Morgen, the mastiff and the brook all thawed.

The mastiff shook itself from head to tail, while Morgen rubbed his arms to restore his circulation. The first and second Fury’s sentences, summarily dismissed by the Fates, made the third Fury more thoughtful, as she addressed her sisters.

“Lest every living creature share his doom, might we not work a pestilence for Man?” she suggested.

The first Fury quickly embraced and expanded upon the idea.

“A plague, specific to his hateful race.”

“That other creatures spared whose lives are lived

Obedient to law,” came the second Fury’s endorsement.

Having experienced Robert Frost’s fiery ending and icy entombment, Morgen realized, however unjust, he was on trial for all the transgressions of humanity, and within the tomb, he was no longer in the real world, but somewhere apart from objective reality, wherein gods and demons held forth.

He saw the Fates had stopped weaving. Horrified to think they might consider the Furies’ final solution, he dared not take a chance that the third Fury’s option might carry.

“What law is that?” he raged. “Does no one speak for Man?”

And his rage summoned the Muses from the shadows within the Tomb of Every Hope, and they stepped out into the pale light from the oculus, high above.

“You loved her, once,” the first Muse said.

“Her scars and angry wounds may yet be healed,” said the second.

“Through your devotion, Nature be restored!” said the third, and the spinner said, as she threw him a key, “The chains are yours.”

Morgen caught the key and stared at it. Did they mean for him to set unbridled Nature free? And if so, was it a key to humanity’s survival or destruction?

“To do with as I may?” Morgen asked.

“Divorce from Nature is a strange conceit, indulged by Man, alone, and to his shame,” said the weaver as she, her sisters, and the torches that illuminated them, dissolved in a veil of silvery moon dust, leaving the grim Furies, steadfast in their hate, and only the Muses to assist Morgen.

The first Muse told Morgen, “It’s not too late. Your vows you may renew.”

“Your husbandry attune to Nature’s law,” the second Muse volunteered.

The third Muse begged him to “Release her! Dedicate your life anew, and sing her song for everyone to hear.”

Laura rose and held her shackled arms out to Morgen.

“Let Nature take her course? Am I a fool?” he asked.

“An honor rare bestowed on mortal head,” Laura replied.

Believing Morgen had failed his test, the second Fury addressed the Muses.

“Nature’s balance is a sacred trust,” she said, and the third said, as the Furies vanished, “Survive or die, the outcome will be just.”

Laura stood in the light of the single remaining torch, a dark silhouette, still holding out her shackled wrists to Morgen.

“The thread is short and thin,” the first Muse echoed.

“It calls for skill,” said the second, and the third said, her voice filled with sadness, “We’ve done all that we may. Do what you will,” and the Muses, too, dissolved away.

The mastiff whined, but Morgen continued to stare at the key, weighing his fate, and the fate of humanity, should he fail the test. And Laura stood, holding out her shackled wrists, as the final torch dimmed.

For millennia, humanity had sought to harness Nature to its will, domesticating animals to supply food, hides, wool, fur, or feathers, and now, farming the sea.

Humanity also dammed and redirected rivers, cleared woodlands, and hunted creatures to extinction that threatened its livestock or crops, destroying less-desirable strains, preserving or artificially enhancing more desirable ones. If Nature was unfettered, what would happen to his world?

He’d witnessed Nature’s fury in avalanches, blizzards, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, droughts, wildfires, earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanoes, and seen their horrific aftermath, admittedly on TV, but now, within the Tomb of Every Hope, he had been selected, for reasons still unknown, to represent humanity and must now answer for all humanity’s crimes against Nature, but as he considered the pros and cons of action and inaction, the sound of Laura’s shackles hitting the floor echoed through the Tomb of Every Hope.

Morgen turned quickly to her, holding out the key, but she was already walking away, deeper into the darkness of the underground chamber, and from what he could see in the dim light that entered through the oculus, her scars and angry wounds were gone, her beauty, fully restored.

EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER FIFTEEN

George asked Morgen how he would compare the Amazons of *Wonder Woman* with the Furies of Morningstone.

“Well,” Morgen began, “in *Wonder Woman*, the Amazons are the good guys, and in Morningstone, at least as far as humanity is concerned, the Furies are the bad guys.”

“Okay, fair enough,” George said, “but are the Amazons more beautiful than the Furies?”

“There are a lot more Amazons, so they have a lot more beauty contest candidates, and although the Furies were mean-tempered, I can’t say they were ugly, but I never saw them really smile or attempt to look attractive, either.”

“That’s one for the Amazons,” George said. “Who do you think would win in a knock-down, drag-out fight?”

“There wouldn’t be one,” Morgen said.

“But you said the Furies were dangerous and wore armor?”

“They were and they did,” Morgen replied, “but they carried no weapons. They don’t need any.”

“How so?”

“Their powers came not from conventional weapons but from the forces of Nature they are able to wield like weapons,” Morgen explained. “One caused the earth to open up, and tried to dump me into a pit of molten horror, another called up a freezing wind so fierce, it would have frozen all life on Earth, and the third proposed releasing a plague that would wipe out the entire human race, but leave all other creatures immune.”

“Well, how do you fight that?” George asked.

“You don’t. You can’t. It leaves us where we always were, at Nature’s mercy. I saw Nature, shackled, and was given a key to free her. If humanity’s shackles are intended to harness Nature, and keep her in check, they don’t work. Even shackled, or perhaps because she’s shackled, Nature seems to have no trouble inflicting wildfires, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanos, droughts, and diseases, at will.

“I was still thinking about whether or not I should free her, when her chains fell away. She set herself free to go where she willed, and do what she willed, with or without my consent or approval, and that’s when I realized I wasn’t a *test*. It was a *lesson*. Humanity’s control over Nature is an illusion, and our civilization has come so far, we’re dependent on technology.

To survive, we must understand the world as it is today, accept it, and learn to live in harmony with Nature’s Laws.”

They rode in silence the rest of the way back to the estate, but as George pulled to a stop in the driveway, he asked, “What if it’s already too late?”

“It’s not too late,” Morgen said. “The verdict is still out. Inside the Tomb of Every Hope, on trial for all the crimes committed against Nature, I wasn’t condemned. I was allowed a sip from the Cauldron of Inspiration.”

“So now you know how it will all end, right?”

“It doesn’t work that way. It’s not a vat of knowledge. It contains inspiration, which, in my case, encourages me to go on, and provides insights I never had before, and allows me to see things differently than most others do.

“My being alive proves to me there is reason for hope. But hope, without supporting action, is nothing more than wishful thinking, and that is why it is vital that we get the word out as far and wide as we can.”

George countered, “Not discounting the Furies fire and ice, if the third Fury represents plague, it may be too late. Before I flew back from England, I heard about NASA reports that the melting permafrost was exposing carcasses of dead creatures, thousands of years old, exposing us to viruses that predate human evolution, and for which we have no immunity.

“We’ve had thousands of years to deal with the threats of fire and ice,” he continued, “but have never encountered these ancient, super viruses before. And I can’t help but wonder if the third Fury has already launched her attack.”

“Our new album is an attempt, on both conscious and unconscious levels, to convince humanity there’s still time to make the necessary adjustments to survive as a species. If it’s too late, why was I sent back?” Morgen replied. “Doing nothing is a choice with terrible consequences for humanity, because by doing nothing it proves we’re unwilling to compromise and deserve extinction, whereas by accepting the hope and the challenge, we might yet deliver ourselves from the dismal result of continued neglect.”

“I don’t know,” George said. “I find it all rather bleak. Once, dinosaurs ruled the earth, and now they’re gone.”

“Dinosaurs never ruled the earth,” Morgen countered. “They walked the earth, but never ruled it.”

“And now, we walk the earth,” George said, “and we don’t rule it either.”

“Never have, and never will,” Morgen agreed, “but unlike the dinosaurs, we are aware of our danger, and unless there’s an asteroid speeding through space on a collision course with Earth, if we have the will, we can learn what we need to know, and work out a joint-venture partnership with Nature.”

“If it’s not already too late,” George concluded, and quietly drove away. It had been a long day, and Morgen was glad to finally climb into bed.

EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

“ ‘Peeping Tom’ is Homeric simile. ‘Even as’ one person or thing is or was, ‘so is’ or was, someone or something else,” Morgen interrupted. “It’s at the root of all sympathetic magic, including the infamous Rite of Spring, where promiscuity is intended to increase the herds and provide bountiful harvests. One might argue sympathetic magic is at the heart of the Lord’s Prayer in ‘Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven’.”

Alan reddened, but carefully measured his reply. “One might,” he agreed, “but one damn well better not! To compare The Lord’s Prayer to some licentious heathen ritual may be more offensive than ‘Peeping Tom.’ And it doesn’t matter how innocent or clever your motives may be, the song has to stand on its own, without you explaining

it, and as of now, it comes across as celebrating, even encouraging, outlawed violent behavior targeting women.”

“That’s not...” Morgen began, but Alan cut him off.

“I’m your A&R man. My job, Morgen, if I still have it, is to develop you and your repertoire, and help you choose songs with hit potential.

“‘Peeping Tom,’ or any attempt to defend ‘Peeping Tom,’ would be a distraction that might hurt all we’ve done so far.”

Theresa, easily the quietest of the Trashbabies, said wryly, “I’m not really comfortable with it, Morgen.”

Then Sylvia spoke up. “If we don’t need it, why do it?”

Sophie added, “Especially if it’s going to hurt us.”

“Fine,” Morgen said, his support falling apart, “Scratch it!”

EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER NINETEEN

Monday morning, October 23rd, the day before the show with Morgen was to be taped, Nanette reported to Angela.

“Good morning,” she said, as she stepped cautiously into Angela’s office, carrying a thin, zipped padfolio document bag in her left hand and a hardbound copy of Robert Graves’ *White Goddess* under her arm.

Angela greeted her loudly and anxiously, saying “Good morning, Nanette! What have you got for me?”

“I spent a lot of time on this, Angela,” Nanette said as she lowered herself into the leather chair opposite her boss’s desk.

“I expect it will be well-worth it,” Angela said, smiling brightly.

“I hope so,” Nanette said, as she placed the copy of *The White Goddess* on Angela’s desk.

“Well, let me have it,” Angela prodded.

Nanette unzipped her padfolio document bag, took several typed sheets of paper from it, and reported, “To start with, I took Morgen’s interpretation at face value, and considered my job to be verifying his assertions, based on Graves’ book, and on the face of it, I did. It is what Morgen claimed it is, a credential song—*his credential song*, and that makes it a job application.”

“A job application?” Angela wondered aloud.

“Some of his references are obscure, but judging by what I read in Graves, they’re substantially accurate,” Nanette continued. “More to the point, he’s got a lot going on in the non-conforming couplets between verses.”

“So, it’s not really nonsense at all,” Angela concluded.

“It’s definitely not nonsense,” Nanette confirmed. “The verses are all part of an impressive litany of his esoteric knowledge, but he finishes each quatrain with a couplet that reveals his true identity and motives.”

“I’m listening,” Angela said.

Nanette continued, “The first time he says, ‘Chief Bard to the ancients am I, anointed in the sacred pool. My ancestral home is the sacred grove. Honor your mentor, the Fool.’ When I read that, at first, I thought he was claiming descent from ancient Druids, and maybe he is, but the next time the couplet appeared, he claimed ‘Chief Bard to Immortals am I. O’er fantastic realms do I rule. There’s none to whom I need bend my knee . . . Honor your leader, the Fool!’”

“And . . .” Angela prompted.

“I had missed that the first time through,” Nanette admitted, “but by stating clearly that he rules over realms of fantasy, that makes the Immortals who dwell there, fantasies, too.”

“So, he admitted he just dreams them up!” Angela said.

“He not only dreams them up,” Nanette observed, “he orders their days, and says so! In his third couplet, he writes, ‘Chief Bard of the ancients am I. Wit is my singular tool.’ And that’s the real deal! Wit is his singular tool! He claims to be beloved of the Ninefold Muse, but we’d still call him a Fool. And that would likely be so. He claims to see things we don’t see, hear things we can’t hear, and experience things we’d fail to understand, and would probably reject as nonsense if he tried to share them.”

“Covering all his bases, eh?” Angela observed. “So, whose job is he after?”

“Would you believe The Messiah?” Nanette asked.

“Oh, no.”

“You’ll feel better when I tell you about my irrefutable evidence that proves he’s a fraud!” Nanette exclaimed.

“What’s he done?” Angela gasped. “How is he a fraud?”

“He claims he composed ‘The Fool’ before he read Graves’ book,” Nanette continued, “but the references he cites are all in Graves’ book, and there are far too many to be coincidental.”

“I don’t know,” Angela said. “The way he tells it, he wrote his song before he read the book, and discovered a paradigm in it that applied to his writing, as well. I saw enough in that book to agree with him, and if such a paradigm exists, how can you say his work is fraudulent? You didn’t see any of the footage we shot in Birmingham, did you?”

“No. I was buried in Graves’ book all weekend, making sure I’d found what I thought I’d found,” Nanette replied.

“Well, Morgen introduced his show with a scene he’d composed in iambic pentameter, clearly composed for current audiences, and its theme was definitely Morgen’s own,”

Angela said, embarrassed to be defending Morgen against the red-faced research assistant she'd assigned to check him out.

"I didn't say he plagiarized Graves," Nanette said. "I only said he copied the formula he found in Graves, and then wrote his song based on that formula. And now, from what you just told me, he's done it with Shakespeare, too!"

"You can't accuse someone of fraud for adopting someone's style."

"I'm not. I'm saying that the song he supposedly composed for the Trashbabies exit," Nanette continued, "could only have been written by someone who'd studied Graves. Whether you use this or not, is entirely up to you, but he used little-known ancient bardic symbolism in 'Dog, Roebuck, and Lapwing,' which is the title of Chapter Three in Graves' *White Goddess*, and goes on to write, 'your nonsense song makes my ears ring. Between the lines, I hear you sing, Dog Roebuck, and Lapwing.' Those three creatures, when they appear in ancient poetic works, indicate that a secret is concealed in the text that follows. It may not be plagiarism, but it's derivative and proves he was familiar with Graves' work."

Nanette handed the book across the desktop to Angela, and said, "I marked the page for you."

"Thank you, Nanette," Angela said. "Really good work."

"I hope you'll find it useful. It was a lot to wade through."

"It's useful, Nanette," Angela said. "I couldn't get by without you."

Nanette knew that Angela was a fan of Morgen's, and she'd been upset by her revelations of Morgen's feet of clay, but Nanette also genuinely believed it was better to unmask a charlatan than let him carry on, and was proud of her part, however great or small it might be, in unmasking Morgen.

For her part, Angela read Graves' chapter on "Dog, Roebuck and Lapwing" twice, and could find nothing wrong with Nanette's logic. She played the record, listened closely to "Dog, Roebuck, and Lapwing," and without realizing when or how, fell completely under its spell.

How long she'd stared out the window, listening to the record click it's way around and around, taking her somewhere, anywhere, or possibly nowhere, before she finally snapped out of her trance, and then, as she did every night before taping a show, went home, heated up a TV dinner in the microwave, ate, and went to bed early, more than a little depressed.

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