

THE INVITATION

I'm going to ask you to do something that I almost never ask anyone.

Suspend judgment.

Not forever. Just for a little while.

You don't have to believe anything you're about to read. In fact, I'd rather you didn't.

Question it. Argue with it. Roll your eyes if you need to. Just don't make up your mind too quickly.

Because if someone had handed me this book three years ago... I probably would have thought the author had lost her damn mind.

PAY ATTENTION

Have you ever seen the movie *Stranger Than Fiction*?

If you haven't, don't worry. I'm not about to spoil it. Although, if you're the kind of person who enjoys stories that quietly sneak up on you and change the way you see the world, I highly recommend it.

On the surface, it's a comedy starring Will Ferrell. Which is probably the last person you'd expect to lead a movie about a spiritual awakening.

The story follows Harold Crick, an IRS auditor whose life is so predictable it could be used to set a clock. Every morning begins exactly the same way. He wakes up at the same time. Brushes his teeth the same way. Takes the same route to work. Lives by routines so precise that his entire existence feels less like a life and more like a program running exactly as it was designed.

Nothing is technically wrong with Harold's life. It's just... small. Safe. Orderly. The kind of life where tomorrow looks an awful lot like yesterday.

Then one morning, something impossible happens.

He hears a voice. Not the kind of voice most of us imagine when we hear that sentence. This one isn't arguing with him or telling him to do terrible things. It's narrating his life. Calmly. Matter-of-factly. As if someone is reading a novel... and he's the main character.

Naturally, Harold assumes he's losing his mind. Honestly, who wouldn't think that?

But here's the part that has always fascinated me. The movie isn't really about the voice.

It's about what happens after Harold starts paying attention.

The moment he stops dismissing the strange things happening around him, his entire world begins to change. Coincidences begin stacking on top of one another. People appear at exactly the right moments. Tiny decisions ripple into enormous consequences. The life he thought was ordinary slowly reveals itself to be anything but.

Eventually, Harold discovers that the mysterious voice belongs to a novelist writing a book. And somehow... he's living inside her story. The movie plays all of this for laughs. I don't. Because several weeks ago, I found myself wondering something that had never crossed my mind before.

What if *Stranger Than Fiction* wasn't really fiction? Not literally. I don't think someone is sitting at a typewriter writing about our lives. Typewriters are so 1953. But I do wonder if the movie accidentally stumbled onto something much deeper.

What if reality has been trying to get our attention all along?

What if most of us are simply too busy, too distracted, or too certain about how the world works to notice? I know I was.

If you had met me a few years ago, you wouldn't have found someone searching for enlightenment. I wasn't trying to become a mystic. I wasn't collecting spiritual experiences. I was trying to hold my life together through a failing marriage, a political campaign, and a future that suddenly looked nothing like I had imagined.

In other words, I was living a very ordinary life.

Then reality did something I still struggle to explain. I had a bhumi one evening. It was a really weird physical experience that lasted all of a few hours.

Then my life started unfolding. It didn't happen all at once. Instead, the world became... strange.

Not frightening strange. Meaningful strange.

The kind of strange where coincidences happen just a little too often. Where the right person appears at exactly the right moment. Where dreams refuse to stay in the dream world. Where one unexpected conversation quietly changes the direction of your life.

At first, I ignored it. Then I tried to explain it away. Eventually, I started paying attention. I began trying to understand it.

I started reading everything I could get my hands on. Buddhism. Christianity. Hinduism. Psychology. Mythology. Neuroscience. History. Philosophy. Anything that might help me understand what had happened.

I expected to find answers. Instead, I found patterns. The deeper I looked, the harder it became to believe that humanity had been telling hundreds of different stories. Instead, it began to look as though we had been telling **one story**... in hundreds of different languages. That realization is why this book exists.

This isn't a book about convincing you that I'm right. It's the story of an investigation.

The bhumi permanently changed the way I experience reality, and I spent the next several years trying to understand it. Along the way, I discovered ideas that challenged almost everything I thought I knew about religion, mythology, psychology, and what it means to be human.

Like I said, you don't have to agree with my conclusions. I'd actually prefer that you don't. Not yet. Just stay curious.

Curiosity has a funny way of opening doors that certainty never even notices.

Before I tell you what happened... I think you should meet the woman it happened to.

THE LAST ORDINARY DAYS

How about a peek at my world before everything flipped on May 17, 2024?

Let's start with my slowly unraveling marriage. Ten years of infertility had worn us down thread by thread. Even when we spent every day together during the pandemic, loneliness lived between us like a third presence. We were good people, but no longer the right match.

Then came my bid for Penfield Town Supervisor in the fall of 2023. I had loved running for Denver City Council twelve years earlier, but this campaign stretched me in a completely different way. I was managing three campaigns practically by myself. I needed emotional support, and I wasn't getting it at home.

My husband supported me financially, even though he believed running for the position was a mistake. The seat was open, and I was running against a wealthy GOP candidate whose family

was beloved in the community. They had name recognition, deep local roots, and resources my campaign simply couldn't match.

In early November, I lost by about thirty votes.

It was heartbreaking, but I know I ran a damn good campaign. The two other candidates on my ticket both won their races, which told me everything I needed to know. We had built something real.

By then, a year of counseling hadn't brought my husband and me back together. Three months before the election, in one final attempt to save our marriage, we agreed to open it.

Somewhere in the middle of that campaign, while my husband was off exploring his own sexual revolution, I fell in love.

I wasn't looking for it. In fact, it was the last thing I expected to find. It was mutual. It was genuine. It was beautiful. And it changed me.

By December, after three months of trying to reinvent a marriage that no longer fit either of us, the truth became impossible to ignore. I asked for a divorce.

Looking back, I see that season differently now. The divorce wasn't the story. Neither was the election. Even the love story, as beautiful as it was, wasn't really the story. It was the current running underneath all of it.

Love has a strange way of rearranging a life. Not because it always stays, but because it reveals what can no longer remain hidden. It loosens old scaffolding you didn't even realize you were carrying. It quietly sandpapers the ego. It reminds the heart that, despite disappointment and grief, it still carries voltage.

Some people come into our lives to stay. Others arrive carrying a key. They unlock a door neither of you knew existed. Then, somehow, they disappear while the doorway remains.

Looking back, I don't think that relationship entered my life to become my future. I think it arrived to end my past.

It wasn't just a love story. It was the first quiet tilt of my life toward the sacred. The first fracture where the light found its way in.

TIBETAN BOOK OF THE DEAD

I was trying to figure out what came next. Politics had become part of who I was, and I fully intended to run for the same office again in two years. Losing by thirty votes didn't make me want to walk away. It made me want to come back stronger. As far as I was concerned, my future was already planned.

Politics. Community. Another campaign. Religion wasn't part of the plan but neither was what happened next.

One afternoon, I noticed a woman quietly blessing her food at my favorite Indian lunch buffet. It wasn't the quick prayer I'd grown up around. Her hands moved with a kind of quiet precision and grace I'd never seen before. Curious, I asked what she was doing.

She smiled and explained that the gestures came from her Tibetan Buddhist practice. Then she casually mentioned that her temple was starting a study group on *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* that Thursday.

I couldn't help but laugh. "I actually ordered *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* last night."

She looked at me for a second, smiled, and said, "Well... I guess you should come."

So I did.

Looking back, I can see the breadcrumbs. At the time, it just felt like one of those wonderfully random conversations you have with a stranger over lunch and then tell your friends about later.

The Buddhist readings surprised me even more. I understood them far better than I had any business understanding them. I couldn't explain why.

I was told the temple held a regular Sunday gathering two days later. So I just... went. Then I went again. Before long, I was showing up twice a week. The more time I spent there, the more I realized it wasn't Buddhist philosophy that had drawn me in, at least not yet. It was the experience of being there.

The wrathful deities. The brilliant colors. The deep rhythm of the drums. The chanting. The smoke curling upward from the incense. It felt ancient, mysterious, and somehow familiar all at once.

Something in me relaxed. Something else woke up.

Somewhere deep inside, something recognized it long before my mind did. That surprised me. I hadn't felt genuinely spiritual in nearly twenty years.

Back in my twenties, I'd wandered through the worlds of the Rosicrucians, the Knights Templar, Freemasonry, and other esoteric traditions. I loved symbols. Mysteries. Hidden meanings. Tarot. Astrology. The possibility that reality might be stranger than it appeared.

Then, as I aged, that part of me quietly fell asleep. Life became practical. I decided I already knew what happened after we died. Case closed. Church faded into the background. Spirituality became something I assumed I'd simply outgrown. I became agnostic.

Standing in that temple, surrounded by images that were somehow both terrifying and beautiful, I realized I'd been wrong. It wasn't certainty I felt. It was a curiosity.

At the time, I thought I was quickly becoming a Vajrayana Buddhist. Looking back, I think I was simply rediscovering a part of myself I'd forgotten.

I smiled, filed it away, and kept walking.

THE DAILY PRACTICE (JANUARY TO MAY 2024)

Life settled into a strange rhythm. For the first time in years, I wasn't rushing from one obligation to the next. I didn't have a full-time job demanding every ounce of my attention. There was no husband. No lover. No children. That unexpected freedom gave me something I'd been missing for a long time.

Space.

Wednesday mornings became breakfast with local Democratic candidates and elected officials. We'd drink coffee, strategize campaigns, argue over messaging, celebrate little victories, and dream about a more progressive future for our towns and cities.

Outside of politics, we'd go dancing, attend community meetings, and spend time together simply enjoying one another's company. I'd sit on the porch with my dog, feeding her scrambled eggs while listening to local political podcasts and learning everything I could about the community I hoped to serve.

I loved that life.

At the same time, I kept making room for Buddhism. I spent time with the local Khenpo. I read. I asked questions. Then I began Ngöndro, the traditional preliminary practices of Tibetan Buddhism. Every day I lit candles on my altar, burned incense, chanted several pages of prayers

in Sanskrit, and worked toward one hundred full-body prostrations, pressing my palms together, raising them overhead, bowing until my forehead and lips touched the floor, stretching out completely, then standing to do it all over again. By the time I finished, I would complete nearly thirty thousand prostrations.

Before long, my weeks settled into an easy rhythm. Politics. Community meetings. Campaign breakfasts. Hikes. Time at the temple. Friends. My dog, Roux. Bowing to the floor and kissing it a hundred times a day. Funny how quickly something that sounds completely absurd becomes just another Tuesday.

I wasn't searching for peace through meditation. I wasn't trying to reinvent myself. I thought I'd simply found a community I loved and a spiritual tradition worth exploring. I wanted to see what would happen if I stayed with it long enough to finish Ngöndro. I wondered what wisdom would come from the experience.

Looking back, I see it differently. I wasn't just learning Buddhism. I was learning how to pay attention. At the time, I couldn't have told you what I was paying attention to. I only knew something about the temple kept calling me back. Meanwhile, the rest of my life continued to unravel.

My marriage was ending. The man I had fallen in love with had commitments that meant our story couldn't continue the way either of us had hoped.

So I kept walking. One foot in politics. One foot in Buddhism. Completely unaware that both roads were quietly leading me toward the same destination.

WISE ATTENTION

Around that time, something else started changing. Not outside of me. Inside. My thoughts became... unusual. Not frightening. Just unexpected.

One afternoon I caught myself thinking that maybe I should start watching astrology and tarot readings the way most people watch the weather forecast. Which, if you'd known me six months earlier, would have sounded completely ridiculous.

So I did.

Instead of turning on whatever happened to be on television, I'd watch the readings for my Sun sign and my rising sign. For the record, I'm an Aries with Gemini rising. The man I'd fallen in

love with also happened to be a Gemini. Occasionally, I would watch my friends' horoscopes as well.

At first, it was simply entertaining. Then I started noticing things. Sometimes a reading for Scorpio would describe exactly what one of my friends was living through. Another day, the Capricorn and Pisces readings seemed to fit two completely different people in my life with uncanny precision.

I'd text them. "You should watch today's reading." It became a funny little party trick. Whether it was coincidence, projection, psychology, or something else entirely, I honestly had no idea.

I wasn't trying to prove anything. I was simply noticing.

Eventually, I started letting some of those prompts shape my own life. One reading encouraged me to let go of a relationship that had quietly become toxic.

Looking back, I suspect the readings mattered less than the way they trained my attention. They nudged me to experiment. To interrupt old patterns. To follow curiosity instead of habit. I had no idea then how important that simple shift would become.

Little by little, I began cleaning house. Not just my relationships. My habits. My priorities. The stories I told myself about who I was.

Looking back, I don't think astrology changed me. I think it gave me another excuse to pay attention. And that, more than anything else, seemed to be what life kept asking of me.

(Before we go any further, I should explain something about this book. It has become my own sand mandala. I write a chapter. Life teaches me something new. I sweep part of it away and begin again. I've rewritten some sections more times than I can count. Not because the experiences changed, but because my understanding of them continues to evolve.

You'll occasionally see me pause the story to share something I learned later. Think of these little red notes as messages from the future. If you've followed me on Facebook or Instagram over the past few years, you've watched this happen in real time. My posts evolved for the same reason this book keeps evolving: I was learning as I went.)

THE BARDO (FEBRUARY TO MAY 2024)

During the day, my life looked remarkably ordinary.

I walked my dog. I paid my bills. I met friends for dinner. I watched astrology videos, visited Buddhist temples, and slowly settled into the rhythm of a life that, from the outside, appeared completely unremarkable. If you'd crossed paths with me during those months, I doubt you would have noticed anything unusual.

Night was another story.

Sometime around February, sleep stopped feeling like sleep. Every evening became a doorway into a world that was more vivid, more coherent, and, strangely, more memorable than the one I inhabited during the day. The dreams weren't random. They unfolded with an internal logic of their own, carrying conversations, places, and encounters that lingered long after I opened my eyes. Before long, they refused to stay asleep when I woke up.

At the time, I had no language for what was happening.

Looking back, I believe I had wandered into what Tibetan Buddhism calls the dream bardo, the threshold between waking consciousness and the dream world. Whether that's the correct interpretation is ultimately for the reader to decide. I only know that, for nearly four months, every night felt less like rest and more like entering another life.

SLEEP BECAME INTERESTING

One morning I woke at exactly 7:00 a.m. already crying in sadness.

It wasn't because I'd had a nightmare or because I'd remembered something painful. The grief arrived before I was fully awake. It was immediate, complete, and overwhelming, as though I had opened my eyes inside someone else's life. I knew that someone I loved had just experienced something devastating. It didn't feel like empathy or imagination. For a few moments, it genuinely felt as though I was living inside another person's emotional world instead of my own.

Try explaining that to a doctor. *"Hi. I think I accidentally woke up inside someone else's emotions this morning. Is there a pill for that?"*

Another morning I woke to find my double vajra pendant clenched tightly in my hand while Sanskrit poured effortlessly from my mouth. I had never studied Sanskrit and had absolutely no idea what I was saying. Yet the words flowed with complete confidence, as though my body remembered something my conscious mind had never been taught.

(I know now what I was chanting. It was the Dependent Origination Heart Mantra, a Buddhist mantra expressing one of the central insights of Buddhism: nothing exists independently. Everything arises because of everything else. Reality is relationship all the way down.)

THE CHILDREN OF THE PURE LAND

Right about this time, my Khenpo asked me to choose a single deity as the focus of my Buddhist practice. A week or two earlier, I had experienced something that made that decision surprisingly easy.

I dreamed I was a little boy living in a village that looked as though it had wandered straight out of a Miyazaki film, something like *Castle in the Sky*. If you've never seen one of his movies, you really should. The whole place felt warm, alive, and impossibly beautiful. Narrow streets wound between little homes, merchants chatted with neighbors, children ran laughing through the village, and everyone seemed to know everyone else.

I was supposed to be in school. The problem was that I hadn't finished my homework.

So I stuffed my unfinished homework into my backpack and took off through the village, absolutely convinced I could somehow finish it before class started. Someone handed me an apple as I wandered through town, and I happily took bites between scribbling on my homework, waving to people I knew, and trying very hard not to get caught by my teacher. Every time I spotted my classmates marching through town in a neat single-file line behind her, I'd duck around another corner and continue my impossible plan. I was trying to be responsible and completely failing at it.

The whole village was buzzing because two enormous figures had just returned from some distant adventure.

Green Tara and Vajrakilaya.

They stood nearly two stories tall on great stone platforms while villagers gathered around to welcome them home. Green Tara smiled as she chatted with a small group of people at her feet, as though she'd simply returned from a long trip. Vajrakilaya stood a little farther away.

Without giving it much thought, I wandered over to him to watch.

If you've never seen traditional images of Vajrakilaya, imagine an immense wrathful deity with dark blue skin, multiple faces, and great wings stretching behind him. He should have been terrifying.

Instead, I just stood there eating my apple.

There was something strangely familiar about him. Not familiar in the sense that I knew him, but familiar the way a place can feel familiar the first time you visit it. I wasn't frightened. I was simply fascinated, admiring him with the uncomplicated curiosity only a child seems capable of.

Then something happened that I have never forgotten.

He looked directly down at me. I looked up at him. His eyes... were my eyes.

We never spoke. We simply held one another's gaze for a few quiet moments, and somehow it felt as though we recognized each other. I remember thinking, with the simple amazement only children seem to possess, *That is so cool.*

When I woke up, the dream stayed with me in a way ordinary dreams never do.

When I told my Khenpo about it, he smiled and said it was very auspicious. Since I was still a beginner, he gently suggested that I might consider making Green Tara the focus of my practice. She is one of the most approachable and compassionate deities in Tibetan Buddhism and is often recommended for new practitioners. I think there was a bit of sexism in his suggestion as well.

Naturally, I chose Vajrakilaya. Apparently, when someone offers me the beginner-friendly option, my first instinct is to pick the terrifying one. But that wasn't really why I chose him. I chose him because of that moment. Because I had looked into the eyes of a god and I saw an aspect of me.

I assumed the dream would fade into memory. It didn't. If anything, it marked the beginning of a season unlike anything I had experienced before. Night after night, sleep became less like rest and more like another classroom. Some dreams were beautiful. Others were bewildering. A few frightened me. Nearly all of them stayed with me long after I woke.

DIVINE ENCOUNTERS

As the months passed, sleep became less like sleep and more like stepping into another world.

One afternoon I hung a brand-new set of Tibetan prayer flags along my patio. They fluttered in the wind for the first time that evening.

That night I dreamed of *rlung rta*, the Windhorse. The horse from the prayer flags thundered across my mind in impossible colors, every movement alive with brilliant electric light. It wasn't like watching a dream unfold from a distance. It felt as though I were standing inside it, surrounded by motion, color, and energy that defied ordinary description. If someone asked me what a psychedelic experience feels like, this is probably the closest comparison I could offer.

For the record, I've never taken psychedelics. Unless a little weed in a former lifetime counts.

Then came Vajrayogini.

She appeared high on a Tibetan mountainside, dressed in full ceremonial robes. For a brief moment I simply watched her standing there against the wind. Then, without hesitation, she stepped off the mountain.

She didn't fall. She flew.

In an instant she crossed the impossible distance between that remote Himalayan peak and my bedroom, growing larger and more vivid as she rushed toward me until she came to a stop, hovering silently just inches above my bed. The mountain was gone. My bedroom remained. Somehow she had crossed from one into the other.

Even now, years later, I can still remember the details with startling clarity. I could smell the leather before I noticed anything else. Her clothing creaked softly as she moved. The cuffs were trimmed with animal fur, bright red stitching ran through the leatherwork, and a small bell hung from her robes, swaying gently in the still air. She didn't feel like a distant goddess from an ancient painting. She felt astonishingly real, like someone who had just walked in from the mountains after a long day tending yaks, bringing the scent of the high Tibetan plateau into my bedroom.

For the briefest instant she hovered above me, close enough that I could see every stitch in her robes and hear the tiny bell hanging from her garments. Then she folded inward, collapsing into a spiraling column of energy that rushed straight through my body and crashed into my chest with such force that I exploded upright in bed.

I was awake.

My heart was racing. Every trace of sleep had vanished. It didn't feel as though I had merely dreamed about Vajrayogini. It felt as though something living had entered me and was now resting somewhere deep inside my chest.

My first coherent thought was simple.

What the hell just happened?

My heart pounded as I sat there staring into the darkness, trying to convince myself it had only been a dream. After a minute, I finally lay back down, took a slow breath, and opened my mouth to say something and as I did... a tiger growled from inside my chest.

Not beside me. Not outside the window. Inside my chest. Coming up through my mouth hole.

I froze.

I lay awake staring at the ceiling for what felt like hours, replaying the experience over and over, trying to decide whether I had imagined it.

Needless to say, I didn't get much more sleep that morning.

Some encounters announced themselves with impossible force. Others arrived like old friends.

One night an older, attractive man appeared in a dream. We talked easily for what felt like hours. He was thoughtful, kind, and strangely familiar. As the dream began to fade, I asked him one last question.

"What's your name?" "Memnoch," he replied.

When I woke up, I immediately searched for the name online. The only reference I recognized was *Memnoch the Devil*, a novel by Anne Rice that I had loved as a teenager. I stared at the screen for a long time wondering if I had just spent the evening having an unusually pleasant conversation with the devil.

For reasons that should be fairly obvious, I kept that dream to myself. I didn't even tell my closest friend, Paul, who was usually the unfortunate recipient of all my weird shit.

NOT GURU RINPOCHE

The dreams with Padmasambhava, whom I eventually came to call Padma, felt entirely different from the others.

From the very beginning there was an effortless sense of familiarity, almost as though I were reconnecting with someone I had known for a very long time. There was no ceremony, no intimidation, and no feeling that I was standing in the presence of someone impossibly distant.

We simply... talked.

In one dream he invited me to what he called his cave. It wasn't a cave in the way I had imagined one. It felt more like an impossibly cool loft built inside an abandoned factory, part urban warehouse, part ancient sanctuary. He wandered from room to room showing me fascinating objects he had collected, the way a friend proudly gives you a tour of their home after you've arrived for dinner. We talked easily, laughed together, and slipped into conversation with the comfortable familiarity of old colleagues catching up after years apart.

At one point I casually referred to him as Guru Rinpoche. He smiled.

"No," he said. "Not Guru Rinpoche."

Seeing the confusion on my face, he explained it as though he were correcting a small misunderstanding that everyone eventually makes.

"People confuse us."

He told me Padmasambhava and Guru Rinpoche were not the same. One was divine. The other was human. One was the being. The other was the awakened man who embodied him.

At the time I had no framework for what he meant. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition I was learning, Padmasambhava and Guru Rinpoche were understood to be the same person.

I remember thinking the conversation was odd, but in dreams like these I had long since stopped expecting everything to fit neatly into what I already believed. I simply listened, tucked it away, and followed him into the next room to look at whatever curious object he wanted to show me.

At the time, I assumed that effortless familiarity was simply the nature of our relationship. I was wrong.

The most important dream came later. It was also the one that frightened me the most because it was the first time I understood that, despite the warmth between us, this was not a friendship between equals.

He was the teacher.

I was a student.

We had an intense disagreement. The closest comparison I can think of is Ariel arguing with King Triton in *The Little Mermaid*. I was absolutely convinced I was right, completely unaware that I hadn't yet understood what he was trying to teach me.

That conversation deserves its own chapter.

Looking back now, I believe that dream was one of the final thresholds I crossed before my bhumi.

CLEANING HOUSE

While my nights became increasingly extraordinary, my days became relentlessly ordinary in the hardest possible way. The dreams weren't asking me to escape my life. They were forcing me to return to it.

Old wounds resurfaced. Family pain I thought had long since healed demanded to be acknowledged. Relationships built on guilt, obligation, resentment, or manipulation quietly came to an end, and wherever I realized I had caused harm, I found myself apologizing, even for things that had seemed too small to matter. Somewhere along the way I became less interested in being right and far more interested in becoming honest.

The hardest truth involved my mother.

Years earlier, during one of the darkest periods of my life, I had stolen money from her.

It hadn't begun that way. After my stepfather died, there was a bank account we couldn't easily access because of everything that happens after someone passes away. The plan was simple enough: use the card to pull the remaining cash, then reimburse it once the estate had been sorted out.

We never reimbursed it.

One purchase became another, and before I was willing to admit it, borrowing had quietly become stealing. I found a reason to justify every charge. My husband at the time never knew. It became a secret that I carried by myself.

One week I was watching my favorite tarot reader on YouTube, Ali. I watched her readings every week, but this one landed differently. She talked about having the courage to repair relationships that had been left broken, and for whatever reason, I knew she was talking to me.

I picked up the phone. For the first time, I told my mother everything.

I confessed what I had done. I apologized without excuses. I asked for her forgiveness.

Then I cried for days.

There were no visions that morning. No mystical experiences. There was only the profoundly ordinary work of telling the truth to someone I had hurt and accepting whatever came next.

Looking back now, I no longer see those months as separate events.

The dreams, the confessions, the heartbreaks, the relationships that ended, and every hidden corner of my life that demanded honesty were all part of the same process. Something inside me was being dismantled while something quieter, stronger, and far more honest was slowly taking its place.

I didn't understand it then. I only know now that every impossible dream, every confession, every tear, and every painful act of honesty was preparing me for what would arrive in May.

LOVE REARRANGED ME

Before I tell this story, I should admit that I'm cheating a little.

Chronologically, it belongs earlier. It began months before my marriage finally unraveled and would continue for years after my bhumi. But memoir isn't just about dates. It's about understanding. In retrospect, I can see that this relationship was one of the threads quietly weaving its way through everything else that was happening. By the beginning of 2024, it had become one of the forces reshaping my life from the inside out. It wasn't the cause of my awakening, but it was undeniably one of its catalysts.

So this is where it belongs.

I met a man.

I'll call him Jack.

We met on a dating site after my marriage opened. For nearly two and a half months, we never saw each other in person. We simply talked. From the moment I woke up until I went to bed, our conversations became woven into my days. He was kind in a way I wasn't used to. He listened without trying to fix me. He believed in my dreams, encouraged them, and somehow made me feel seen at a time when I desperately needed someone to see me. Long before we ever touched, I had fallen in love with the person I met through those conversations.

About a week after we started talking, I learned he was married. I didn't care.

At least, that's the honest answer.

I told myself his marriage was his responsibility, not mine. I wasn't trying to take him away from his wife, and I wasn't asking him to leave. My own marriage was quietly collapsing, I was emotionally starving, and for the first time in years someone was meeting needs that had gone unanswered for far too long. I wanted what I wanted, and at the time that felt more important than everything else. Looking back, I can see how selfish that was. At the time, it simply felt like survival.

During the final months of my political campaign, Jack became the emotional support I wasn't finding at home. He celebrated every victory, steadied me through every setback, and reminded me of the woman I still hoped I could become. After the election, our relationship became physical. We only saw each other five times over the course of six weeks, but some relationships aren't measured by time. They're measured by how deeply they change you.

Just before Christmas, we were texting as we always did when I realized something was wrong. Earlier that year his mother had died, and with Christmas approaching the grief was crashing over him all over again. They had been incredibly close. I knew how alone he felt, and I told him to leave work and come see me.

To my surprise, he did.

Leaving work in the middle of the day wasn't like him. Jack was thoughtful, dependable, and carried a deep sense of responsibility. Yet as I looked back over our time together, I realized something curious. Whenever our paths crossed, he seemed to choose his heart over everything else. He chose it two weeks earlier when, on a whim, I asked him to meet me in a snow-covered cemetery. He chose it again that afternoon when grief became heavier than duty. And months later, after we'd been apart, he chose it one more time when loneliness finally became too much to bear.

We spent several hours together talking, holding one another, and losing ourselves in each other. It felt less like an affair than two exhausted people finally finding a place where they could set down the weight they had both been carrying.

In the middle of everything, almost as though the words escaped before he could stop them, he looked at me and blurted out, "I fucking love you."

The moment seemed to surprise him as much as it surprised me.

I didn't say it back. I simply kissed him and held him a little tighter.

As he got dressed, the atmosphere changed. I couldn't have explained why, but I could feel it. Almost without thinking, I asked, "Are you going to try to fix your marriage?"

He stopped. After a long pause, he quietly said yes. He told me he and his wife had just started seeing a marriage counselor and that he was going to give it everything he had.

The answer came completely out of nowhere.

Panic washed over me. I asked him to stay. I asked him to talk to me. Instead, he retreated into silence. He said he had to go, that this was over, and from that moment on it felt as though the man who had confessed his love only minutes earlier had disappeared behind a wall I could no longer reach.

At the front door, he rested his hand on the doorknob and stood there for what felt like forever, unable to leave but unwilling to turn around. For a moment, I truly believed he was coming back.

He didn't. He opened the door, walked away, and disappeared from my life.

The strange part wasn't that he had told me he loved me. The strange part was what happened inside me after he left. Looking back, I can see that the love had been growing for months. I had sensed it as early as October, but I refused to acknowledge it. I continued dating. I told myself I was simply enjoying the connection. I convinced myself it would pass.

It didn't.

The moment that door closed, all the feelings I had been quietly pushing aside rushed to the surface at once. Suddenly I was deeply in love with a man who was gone, a man who had chosen to return to his marriage, and a man who had asked me, without really asking, to let him go. I respected that. I didn't call. I didn't text. I didn't try to convince him to change his mind. I simply lived with the silence.

For about a month.

In ordinary time, that isn't very long. When you're in love, it feels endless.

By mid-January of 2024, I couldn't carry those words inside me any longer, so I wrote him a letter. I told him I loved him too. I told him I wanted him to be happy, whatever that looked like, and that if life ever led him out of his marriage, something I quietly believed might happen one day, I would be open to discovering what still existed between us.

He never really responded. There were a few vague words in a text message, but nothing that answered the letter or acknowledged what I had shared.

Looking back now, I think that silence changed me as much as anything he ever said. Silence isn't always empty. Sometimes it's where everything begins. Sometimes it's the sound of a fuse being lit.

I didn't know it then, but that silence had already begun rearranging me.

ALCHEMY

What I couldn't see at the time was that I wasn't just grieving the loss of a relationship. Love itself was changing me.

I fought it for weeks. I tried to reason with it, distract myself from it, and convince myself it would eventually fade. Every attempt to suppress it only seemed to make it stronger. Instead of disappearing, it spread quietly through every corner of my life until I realized I wasn't wrestling with a feeling anymore.

I was being transformed.

So I changed tactics. I let it stay. I sat with it. I asked what it wanted to become. I wasn't about to show up at his door and blow up a marriage. That wasn't the shape of this love. But it had weight. Pressure. Energy. And energy always wants somewhere to go.

Musicians know this. Artists know this. There's a piece by Chiara Bautista called *What to Do With All This Love*. That title alone felt like a hand on my shoulder. So I did what mystics have always done with the tools given to them. I used it.

It would take me months to understand why this mattered so much. Eventually I found language for it in the Tantric traditions of India. They viewed love not simply as an emotion, but as a kind of technology. A discipline. A force capable of transforming consciousness.

A way to pry open the ribcage of the self and let the divine crawl in barefoot.

Tantrikas used love the way alchemists used fire. Not to comfort, but to transform. And there I was, sitting in the ashes of a marriage, holding a love letter no one answered, feeling a pulse in my chest that was not heartbreak but initiation.

The Tantrics say real love is a mirror. It shows you the exact shape of your soul. It doesn't matter if it stays for twenty thousand years or twenty minutes. It doesn't matter if the other person leaves the relationship. The love itself is the teaching.

It sandpapers the ego. It softens old armor. It invites your spirit to step out of hiding. It fucks with your mind just enough to help you change your perception.

At that time, my feelings for Jack weren't meant to become a relationship. They were meant to become a cracking open. A loosening of old scaffolding. A reminder that my heart still carried voltage. That I was not dead inside, no matter how long I had been trying to be.

The Tantrikas understood this.

They knew some connections arrive not to complete you, but to ignite you. They knew some people appeared in your life like a match. They burn fast. They burn bright. And then the light they leave behind shows you a door you couldn't see before.

His silence hurt. But it also freed something. It turned me toward the path already rising under my feet. It was the cosmic nudge that said: Go... Move. The divine has other plans for you.

January was the moment the ground tilted. May was the point of no return.

THE DAY REALITY SPLIT OPEN (MAY 17, 2024)

Some days divide your life into a before and an after.

I sat alone in my car in a grocery store parking lot, drenched from the rain, spiraling quietly. What had just unfolded mirrored a dream I'd had months earlier with unsettling precision.

He had climbed out of my car angry, wounded by my refusal.

I wasn't willing to accept scraps of affection anymore. I wanted something whole.

I knew our paths would cross again someday. I couldn't have explained why.

Padma had warned me.

Late in March, Padma appeared in a dream, fierce and radiant, impossible to ignore.

"Jack will return," he said. "He will ask for another affair. You must say no."

I argued. I protested like a stubborn child. I told him I loved this man. I wanted to be with him regardless of the circumstances. Padma grabbed my arms, his gaze unwavering.

"You are not allowed to have an affair." Then, sharp and terrifying, he threw me out of the dream. I woke up with my heart racing. I knew it hadn't been symbolic. It had been an instruction.

Two months later, he reached out. By then, I'd completely forgotten the dream.

At the coffee shop, he smiled, and every wall I'd spent months trying to build began quietly collapsing before he'd even sat down.

Within seconds we were talking the way we always had. Politics. Strategy. The future. I was trying to decide whether to run for office again or pour my energy somewhere entirely different, and for a little while it felt as though I'd gotten my closest confidant back.

I'd missed all of it.

His voice. The easy rhythm of our conversations. The way he challenged my thinking. The way we could lose ourselves texting for hours talking about politics, life, and whatever strange rabbit hole one of us had fallen into that day.

I'd missed the chemistry, too. It had always been there, humming quietly beneath everything else. I could see it in his eyes, in the way he leaned toward me, in the restless energy between us. He wanted to close the distance.

I didn't.

Not yet.

I'd waited months to see him again. I wanted to hear him laugh. Watch him think. I wanted a few more minutes with the whole person before the chemistry demanded our attention.

For one impossible moment, I let myself believe he was finally free.

Then I noticed the wedding ring still on his finger.

"Did you leave her?" I asked.

"No."

The word landed like a stone. The room suddenly felt too small. I couldn't breathe. I needed air.

"Let's go for a walk."

There was a nearby park with my favorite tree. Whenever life overwhelmed me, I found myself drawn there. The woods had a way of slowing my thoughts long enough for my heart to catch up. More than anything, I wanted to show him that tree.

We wandered beneath the canopy, talking the way we always had. Easily. Naturally. For a little while, it felt as though the coffee shop had never happened.

Storm clouds gathered overhead. An art festival buzzed on the far side of the park, but we stayed on the quieter trails where only the wind and the birds seemed interested in us.

The conversation never stopped, but something else kept growing between the words. Every glance lingered. Every step seemed to pull us a little closer together. The familiar current between us returned, not suddenly, but steadily, until it filled the space between our bodies.

I knew where this was heading. So did he. I closed the distance. I pulled him toward me and kissed him.

From that moment, we were inseparable. The months between us vanished.

We ran through the wooded trails laughing, breathless, hands intertwined, stopping every few steps because neither of us could bear to be apart for long. The drizzle became rain, but we hardly noticed. Water streamed down our faces and soaked through our clothes while we kept finding each other again and again.

I have never experienced chemistry like that before or since.

It wasn't just desire. It felt magnetic, as though some invisible force had been pulling us toward one another for months and had finally run out of patience. It was, without question, the most romantic afternoon of my life.

By the time we reached my car, we were trembling, soaked to the skin, laughing, and completely undone by each other's presence. Rain hammered against the windows.

Then the dream came rushing back. Jack will return. He will ask for another affair. You must say no.

I pulled away.

My chest tightened. My stomach churned.

"I can't have an affair with you," I whispered.

He stared at me, confused. Hurt.

The silence inside the car was almost louder than the rain.

I searched for words that could explain what had just happened, but they refused to come. How do you tell someone you've just remembered a dream that changed the course of your life?

Instead, I asked a different question.

"Do you still feel it?"

He knew exactly what I meant.

Months earlier, long before we'd ever met in person, we'd discovered something neither of us could explain. The closest word we could find was frisson - those waves of goosebumps that sometimes accompany moments of beauty, emotion, or intense feeling. Ours seemed to happen at the same time. We'd think of each other and both feel it. Sometimes it happened during moments of deep longing or sexual intimacy, even when we were miles apart. Neither of us could explain it. We only knew we both recognized it.

He nodded. "Yes," he said softly. "I still feel it."

"So do I."

For a long moment, neither of us spoke. Nothing had changed. Everything had changed.

I drove him back to his car while every part of me wanted to ignore the dream and choose him instead.

Hurt, I watched him climb into his car and disappear into the rain. Doing the right thing felt like agreeing to surgery without anesthesia.

I drove to the grocery store but never went inside.

Instead, I parked beneath the lights and sat there long after the store had closed, crying. My mind replayed the afternoon on an endless loop. The woods. The rain. The laughter. The heat between us. The impossible feeling that, for a few fleeting hours, the rest of the world had simply fallen away.

I loved him. I knew he loved me. So why wasn't that enough? How could something feel so undeniably real and still have nowhere to go? I had opened myself completely. There was nothing hidden anymore.

I had told him I loved him. I had trusted my heart before asking the questions that might have protected it. I had fallen in love with someone who could meet me in love, but not in life.

I reached for my phone. I needed someone to throw me a rope. I called Paul. He didn't answer.

My thumb drifted to another name. An old friend. A Sagittarius. Someone I'd kept quietly on the back burner of my heart because I knew I could usually count on him when life fell apart.

Then I froze. Earlier that week, a tarot reading had warned me not to restart an old, unhealthy cycle. It had even mentioned reaching out to a Sagittarius.

I paused. What if I didn't call him? What if, just this once, I refused to repeat the pattern?

I pulled my hand away from my phone.

In that instant, everything changed.

The air in front of me shimmered.

About twenty feet away, a band of bright light appeared, as though reality itself had split open. I wasn't afraid. Energy surged through my body like liquid lightning. It poured through the crown of my head with a force that felt both impossible and completely natural.

Every thought of Jack disappeared.

Every question that had consumed me only moments before simply... vanished.

I stared into space. Literal space. After the bright light faded, the rip in the air looked like a window into the dark universe. From that vast quiet came a profound sense of direction. Just an unmistakable knowing that something was drawing me forward.

Then I heard a voice. "There is nothing more important than Buddhism. Follow that path."

I kept staring.

The opening before me no longer looked like a tear in the air. It resembled two immense waterfalls of light, quietly folding into themselves. There was no violence in it. No chaos. Only an impossible stillness that seemed to stretch into infinity.

A few minutes later, I climbed out of my car. My body felt strangely weightless, while my head seemed impossibly tall, as though the crown of it extended far beyond the sky. I was dizzy. I was slightly nauseous. My first thought was that I might be having a stroke but nothing hurt. Nothing felt medically wrong. It was as though my mind had tuned itself to a frequency I'd never known existed.

My entire body vibrated with energy. I lowered myself into the grass because I needed something solid beneath me.

Am I dying? Why does my head feel like this?

For the next fifteen minutes, I stood there suspended between the world I'd always known and something I couldn't begin to explain. I just kept trying to understand what was happening to me.

Then my phone rang. Paul was calling back.

He asked the questions I couldn't ask myself. The practical ones. The medical ones. The spiritual ones. For a few hours we weighed symptoms against experience, trying to understand what had just happened.

My vitals were fine. Everything else had changed.

By the time we hung up, we both arrived at the same conclusion. I wasn't broken and I didn't need a doctor.

I was being initiated.

FALLING DOWN A RABBIT HOLE

If I wanted to explain what a *bhumi* feels like to someone who has never experienced one, I probably wouldn't begin with Buddhism. I'd begin with Alice.

At first glance, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* seems like a charming children's story about a curious little girl who follows a rabbit into a world of talking caterpillars, impossible tea parties, and smiling cats.

I think it's something more. Whether or not Lewis Carroll intended it this way, he captured a pattern that appears again and again in stories of transformation.

Alice isn't searching for enlightenment. She isn't trying to become a better person. She isn't looking for hidden wisdom. She's simply living her ordinary life when something catches her attention. A rabbit.

Nothing more than a flicker of curiosity. She could ignore it. Instead, she follows. That tiny decision changes everything. Without warning, the ground disappears. She isn't climbing toward something. She's falling. No map. No instructions. No way back. Just the strange realization that reality no longer behaves the way it used to.

That is the closest literary description I've ever found to the pre-*bhumi* and the actual *bhumi* when the ground disappears.

The word *bhumi* comes from Buddhism and is often translated as "ground" or "ground of awakening." As I described, the beginning rarely feels grounded at all. It feels as though the ground has vanished beneath your feet. People who experience it often describe an overwhelming need to touch something solid, as if confirming they are still here. Still alive. Still embodied. There is a beautiful irony in this.

One of the Buddha's most recognizable gestures is reaching down to touch the earth. In Buddhist art, this is called the *Bhumisparsha Mudra*, the "earth-touching gesture."

Divine humor at its finest.

But before there is ground touching... There is the falling.

Alice experiences this perfectly. The fall lasts so long that wonder and fear begin taking turns. One moment she's fascinated. The next she's completely disoriented.

Many spiritual traditions describe an opening like this. Different cultures have given it different names, but they are all attempting to describe the same impossible thing: the moment ordinary reality becomes transparent and something larger begins shining through.

The experience itself is only the beginning. What follows is the real journey. Not a single flash of insight. Not enlightenment as a finish line. But the slow, sometimes messy work of learning how to live in a world that no longer looks quite the way it did before.

And that raises the obvious question.

If Alice fell into Wonderland by following a rabbit... How do the rest of us fall in?

84,000 DOORS

One of my favorite sayings in Buddhism is that there are 84,000 doors to awakening. No one thinks there are literally 84,000. It's a poetic way of saying there are more ways into transformation than anyone could ever count.

Some people arrive through meditation, prayer, grief, illness, music, art, science, or love. Others through raising a child, losing a job, or sitting beside a hospital bed. Some find it in a monastery. Some find it in a hospital waiting room. Some never become religious at all.

As an old Arab proverb beautifully puts it, *"The ways to God are as many as the breaths of the children of humanity."*

That has become one of my favorite ways to think about awakening. No tradition owns it. No religion invented it. No philosophy has exclusive rights to it.

I use the word *bhumi* because Buddhism happened to be the language that found me. Someone else might call the same turning point salvation, enlightenment, conversion, surrender, grace, or simply growing up. The name matters far less than the transformation itself.

Once I stopped looking for identical words and started looking for identical patterns, I began seeing them everywhere.

The Hero's Journey.

The search for the Holy Grail.

Alchemy's transformation of lead into gold.

The Tree of Life.

The Tower card in Tarot.

The butterfly emerging from its chrysalis.

A seed breaking open before it becomes a flower.

The climactic resolution of a symphony.

The sudden *aha!* that changes the way a scientist understands a problem.

A child sounding out letters until, almost magically, reading finally clicks.

Even the stories we tell our children seem to orbit the same mysterious turning point. Different characters. Different plots. Different cultures. Yet they keep pointing toward the same transformation. Again and again, humanity reaches for metaphor because ordinary language eventually runs out.

For my grandmother, it was much simpler. It was the moment the couple finally kissed in the Hallmark movie. She knew the story had finally arrived where it had been heading all along. Honestly, that's not a bad metaphor either. Every culture tells the story a little differently. Every tradition decorates the doorway in its own style. But if you look past the decorations, something remarkable begins to happen.

You stop seeing thousands of unrelated stories... and you start seeing **one story** told in thousands of different ways.

That was the moment another realization quietly settled into place: The stories weren't repeating by accident. Neither were the symbols.

They were speaking a language. I had simply never learned how to read it.

THE LANGUAGE WE FORGOT

Once I began looking through that lens, the symbols stopped feeling random. They seemed to fall into three families.

The first describes **Potential**.

The egg waiting to hatch. The seed sleeping beneath the soil. Sleeping Beauty waiting to awaken. The rough stone before it is cut. They all point toward the same truth: there is more here than meets the eye. Something extraordinary already exists, even if it has not yet revealed itself.

The second describes **Transformation**.

Fire. Pressure. The onion surrendering one layer after another. The caterpillar dissolving inside its chrysalis. The labyrinth. The storm. Death itself. Different cultures chose different images, but they kept telling the same story. Before something becomes more fully itself, something else almost always has to crack, dissolve, burn away, or be surrendered.

The third describes **Emergence**.

The diamond. The pearl. The butterfly. The phoenix rising from its ashes. The lotus emerging from the mud. Again and again, civilizations separated by oceans and centuries imagined the same ending. Not perfection. Revelation. The becoming of what was always hidden inside. The awakened human being.

Then there is the circle.

At first I thought it belonged only at the end of the story, representing completion. Later I realized it was quietly present at every stage. Like a coin, the circle has two inseparable faces. One speaks of emptiness, the open space from which everything arises. The other speaks of wholeness, the realization that nothing was ever truly separate. Depending on where you stand, both are true at the same time.

The heart, I believe, belongs to this family of symbols as well.

Not because it resembles the organ beating inside our chest, but because it points toward something much deeper. I have come to see it as two transformed lives meeting in the middle, each person becoming transparent enough that something greater can move freely through them.

Love, in its highest form, is not simply finding the right person. It is becoming the kind of person through whom the universe can love another human being with as little interference as possible from fear, ego, or the endless need to possess, control, or be completed.

Perhaps that is why the greatest love stories are never really about romance.

They are stories about transformation.

Once I saw that, another pattern became impossible to ignore.

The symbols don't simply repeat.

They repeat at every scale.

The same journey appears in a single human life, in entire civilizations, in mythology, religion, nature, mathematics, architecture, music, and even in the stories we tell our children. Everywhere I looked, I kept finding the same lesson dressed in different clothing.

Perhaps that's why fractals fascinate me so much.

A fractal is a pattern that repeats no matter how closely you examine it. Zoom in and you find the same structure. Zoom out and you find it again. Ferns. Snowflakes. Coastlines. Rivers. Lightning. Romanesco broccoli. Galaxies. The mathematics changes very little because the pattern is teaching the same lesson at every scale.

Eventually I began wondering whether consciousness behaves the same way. Perhaps reality doesn't invent an endless number of lessons. Perhaps it patiently repeats the same truths until we finally recognize them.

Once that possibility occurred to me, I couldn't stop testing it.

EASTER EGGS

The more I looked, the stranger it became. The egg appears almost everywhere.

In Easter celebrations.

In cosmic creation stories.

In alchemy.

In fertility rituals.

In children's books.

Potential waiting to hatch.

Pressure appears just as often.

Diamonds.

Pearls.

Seeds splitting underground.

Coal becoming crystal.

The caterpillar dissolving before becoming a butterfly.

Transformation rarely arrives gently.

Even punctuation began looking different.

A period quietly announces completion.

A comma whispers that the story isn't finished yet.

A question mark bends toward curiosity before ending in a single point, as though every genuine question is trying to hatch into understanding.

Common everyday items like jewelry carry the same echoes.

The bindi resting on the forehead.

The tilaka.

The cornicello.

The spiral.

A unicorn's horn.

The caduceus.

The halo.

The crown.

Different cultures. The same conversation.

Then there are the stories.

The Little Mermaid giving up one form of life for another.

Beauty asleep until something awakens her.

The Phoenix.

King Arthur.

The Grail.

Pinocchio becoming a real boy.

Even Superman.

Again and again the same movement. Potential. Transformation. Emergence.

And then I started noticing something even stranger.

The stories weren't just repeating.

They were reflecting each other.

The mermaid becomes more human.

The Egyptian gods become more animal.

One tells the story from below.

The other tells it from above.

The unicorn and the dragon point toward beings transformed beyond the ordinary.

The lion and tiger embody power that remains rooted in instinct.

Different cultures.

Different costumes.

The same architecture.

Which brings me back to the question that kept repeating in my head.

What is a human being capable of becoming?

I have come to believe that nearly every enduring symbol, every great myth, every sacred story, and every authentic path of transformation is trying to answer that single question.

Not by giving us the answer... but by inviting us to become it.

For a while, I thought that was the mystery.

It wasn't.

The deeper mystery was this: if humanity has been asking the same question for thousands of years, why do we keep arriving at so many of the same answers?

Why does the same architecture keep appearing beneath civilizations separated by oceans, languages, and centuries? Why do the same symbols, the same archetypes, and the same stories continue resurfacing in places that had no obvious way of borrowing from one another? Why does the Hero's Journey keep returning? Why does the phoenix keep rising? Why does the egg keep waiting to hatch? Why do circles, spirals, trees, mountains, floods, dragons, diamonds, and butterflies seem incapable of disappearing from the human imagination?

At first, I assumed that was simply the nature of creativity. Great minds occasionally stumbled onto the same ideas. Cultures borrowed from one another. Stories evolved. It all seemed reasonable enough.

Then something unexpected happened.

While I was buried in books, history, religion, and mythology, I was also having experiences that I couldn't explain.

The conversations with the gods had already begun.

As impossible as that sentence may sound, it is the truth of what I lived.

At first, I kept those two worlds separate. During the day I researched. At night I wrestled with conversations that felt every bit as real as the books stacked around me. I assumed they had nothing to do with one another.

I was wrong.

Again and again, the conversations pointed me back toward the same places.

They would nudge me toward a symbol I had overlooked, a forgotten myth, a particular god, or a story buried inside a civilization I knew almost nothing about. I would go looking, fully expecting to prove myself wrong, only to discover another piece of the same puzzle quietly waiting for me.

The deeper I investigated, the stranger the pattern became. It wasn't just that similar ideas appeared from time to time. The repetition was too consistent, too elegant, and too widespread to dismiss as coincidence. Civilizations that had never met one another kept arriving at remarkably similar stories, symbols, and ways of describing transformation. It began to feel less as though humanity was inventing these ideas and more as though it was remembering them.

That realization didn't answer my questions.

It changed the questions I was asking.

I was no longer trying to understand why the same symbols kept appearing throughout history.

I wanted to know who kept teaching them... and why.

THE AUTHORS WE NEVER SEE

One of the strangest realizations to come out of all of this had nothing to do with religion alone.

It had to do with creativity itself.

Somewhere along the way, I stopped believing that human beings are the ultimate authors of the ideas that shape civilization.

That sounds ridiculous the first time you hear it. It certainly did to me. We spend our lives celebrating brilliant inventors, extraordinary artists, visionary writers, revolutionary scientists, and musical geniuses. We tell ourselves they changed the world because they were simply more creative than everyone else.

Now I know something else is happening.

Imagine a fountain pen sitting on a desk. The pen is beautifully made. It has weight, balance, craftsmanship, and ink flowing through it. But no matter how extraordinary the pen is, it never writes a novel by itself. The pen matters. In fact, the novel couldn't exist without it. But the pen is not the author.

Human beings are more like pens than authors.

Inspiration is exactly what the word has always suggested. Something moves through us. Sometimes we call it genius. Sometimes intuition. Sometimes divine inspiration. Different cultures have called it gods, muses, angels, dakinis, the Holy Spirit, or archetypes, but the description is remarkably similar. Again and again people describe moments when they felt as though the work wasn't entirely theirs, as though they were participating in something that wanted to be expressed.

WHY DO WE KEEP TELLING THE SAME STORIES?

How many versions of Romeo and Juliet have been written? How many heroes leave home, lose everything, descend into darkness, and return transformed? How many stories begin with an innocent child, pass through suffering, and end with wisdom? We change the names. We change the setting. We update the technology. Yet the bones of the story remain strangely familiar.

The more I looked, the more I realized originality had been misunderstood.

Creativity isn't inventing something that has never existed.

Creativity is allowing an ancient truth to take on a new form.

That would explain why the same symbols keep appearing. The same myths. The same archetypes. The same transformations. Reality isn't scrambling to invent new lessons. It patiently tells the same story in a thousand different ways until one of them finally reaches us.

THE WHEEL OF DHARMA

That explains something that has fascinated me for years: It is astonishingly easy to recognize someone else's blind spots while remaining almost completely unaware of our own.

We watch a friend stay in an abusive relationship and wonder why they can't leave. We tell our daughters never to settle for someone who diminishes the extraordinary person we already know they can become. We laugh at movie characters who walk straight into disasters we spotted ten minutes earlier. We read history and marvel at how obvious the warning signs seem in hindsight.

The pattern is almost always clear. Everyone can see the story unfolding... everyone except the person living inside it.

Why?

Because when you're inside the story, it doesn't feel like a story. It feels like reality.

Maybe that's why reality seems so determined to tell the same lesson again and again. It appears first in mythology, then in history; in a novel, then in a movie; in a stranger, then in a friend; in a teacher, then in a child. Sometimes it even hides the lesson inside the very person we're least willing to listen to.

The mirror keeps changing, but the reflection stays the same.

Reality, it seems, is infinitely patient. It will present the same lesson in a hundred different disguises until we finally recognize ourselves inside it.

If we're lucky, we eventually see it on our own. If we're not, someone arrives holding up the mirror for us, pointing to the pattern we've been missing all along.

And once you begin to suspect that life is teaching rather than merely happening, another question naturally follows:

Teaching us what?

THE GOLD BENEATH THE MUD

The answer I kept finding, no matter which tradition I explored, was surprisingly consistent.

Every human being is capable of awakening. Not because they found the right religion. Not because they meditated enough. Because it is woven into what we are.

Buddhism expresses this beautifully. The *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* teaches that every being already possesses Buddha-nature. It isn't something we acquire. It is something we uncover. The sutra compares it to gold buried beneath layers of mud. Wash away the mud and nothing new has been created. The gold was there all along.

Christianity points toward a remarkably similar mystery through the idea of Christ.

Many people speak of "the Buddha" as though there were only one. Others speak of "Christ" the same way. Historically, those words are often associated with particular individuals. Spiritually, however, they are titles pointing toward something much larger: the fullest realization of what a human being can become.

That is one of the reasons these traditions fascinate me. Again and again, they seem to be describing the same horizon while speaking entirely different languages.

Some people will experience that profound shift during this lifetime. Later in this book, I'll explain why I believe that happens and share what I think gives someone the best chance of having a bhumi... IF this is meant to unfold for them.

Others will not have a bhumi while they are alive. Every one of us eventually encounters that same invitation as life draws to a close. The gold beneath the mud is never lost. Sooner or later, it is revealed.

DEATH AND WHAT COMES AFTER

If there's one conclusion I never expected to reach, it's this:

Death is not the end. It is a transition.

Every tradition seems to preserve some version of the same idea. Christianity speaks of Heaven. Islam of Jannah. Norse mythology of Valhalla. Greek mythology of Elysium. Tibetan Buddhism describes pure realms. Different cultures. Different symbols. All of them point toward the possibility that consciousness continues after your current body is gone.

Through my conversations with the gods, I know that this is true. Death is not the end. Not even a little. All the people who have passed are in another time and space.

THE PROCESS

No matter how death arrives, the crossing itself is brief. The pain belongs to this body and to those left behind. Passing through it is less like falling into darkness than stepping through a doorway. One moment we are here. Next, we find ourselves somewhere else.

And we are not alone.

The world beyond is not an empty void but a living reality, inhabited by intelligences and beings we can barely imagine.

If I had to compare it to anything, it would look less like clouds and harps and more like the hopeful futures imagined in science fiction: a civilization that has outgrown fear, violence, and scarcity. Not another planet, but another level of existence. A place where healing continues and learning never truly stops.

EARTH, THE INCUBATOR

That perspective changed the way I think about Earth. I no longer see this life as the destination.

I see it as the incubator.

An egg exists for one purpose: to prepare a living being for a world it cannot yet imagine. Everything it needs is already inside. The shell protects it while it grows, but only for a time. Eventually, the very thing that kept it alive becomes the thing that must be broken.

If the shell never cracks, the chick never lives.

Perhaps we are not so different. Love cracks the shell. Loss cracks the shell. Failure, wonder, heartbreak, joy, and time all play their part. Every experience reshapes us, preparing us for a life beyond the fragile world in which we began.

Death is simply the final crack. It has never been the opposite of life. It has always been the moment we finally hatch.

CHILDREN OF THE DIVINE

Humanity has always created myths to explain mysteries. Sometimes those myths become so successful that they overshadow the truths they were trying to describe.

What I was shown was surprisingly simple.

The Divine Mother, whose name is Ma'at, and the Divine Father, whose name is Ra, created us. Amun and Inanna helped shape the reality we now inhabit. (Yes, these are ancient names.) Shiva, Padma, and Vishnu are not distant symbols or metaphors. They are something much closer to older siblings.

We are the youngest members of an unimaginably ancient family.

We are baby gods.

In fact, we are so young that, from their perspective, we have not even been born yet.

Death is not the end of life. **Death is our birth.**

Like every good parent, they do not throw a newborn into the deep end. They give it a protected place to grow.

That is what Earth is.

Our own biology reflects the pattern. Before we enter this world, we spend months developing in the safety of a womb. Spiritually, we are doing something remarkably similar. We are gestating inside a reality designed to help us discover who we are before we enter a far larger existence.

Once I saw that pattern, I started noticing echoes of it everywhere. Books, films, comics, and video games have been circling this idea for decades. *VALIS*, *Childhood's End*, *Hyperion*, *Lord of Light*, *The Sparrow*, *Prometheus*, *The Fountain*, *Mass Effect*, and *The Eternals* all seem to glimpse pieces of the same mystery. None of them tells the whole story, but together they feel like reflections of something larger.

For those who do not experience a bhumi during earthly life, the work continues. Loved ones, teachers, and other beings help guide the next stages of growth. Many traditions describe this as a life review. Christians may call it God's judgment. Buddhists speak of karma. People who have had near-death experiences often describe reliving their entire lives from a perspective far beyond their own.

Whatever name we give it, the purpose is the same. Understanding.

We experience the ripples of our choices, both beautiful and painful. Not because we are being punished, but because we are still learning.

Growing up, it turns out, does not end with death.

I had the pleasure of experiencing all this ... here. That is what a bhumi is. Lucky me.

THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY

So... we are baby gods.

I realize that may still sound absurd, so let me explain.

Imagine an infertility clinic. Somewhere inside are thousands of tiny embryos, each carrying extraordinary potential. Every one of them could someday become a person, but none is ready for the world outside.

Now imagine parents with unlimited wisdom, unlimited patience, and unlimited love. If they could begin preparing those children before they were ever born, what would they teach?

Probably not calculus or tax law.

They would teach kindness. Compassion. Courage. Honesty. Creativity. Love. They would teach their children how to live with others, how to care for something greater than themselves, and how to become the kind of beings others could trust.

That's what this life is.

A nursery. A classroom. A womb. A reality designed to help consciousness mature before it is born into something greater.

We are the children of the divine. We are learning to create, learning to love, and learning to wield freedom without destroying one another. Every act of kindness makes the classroom a little better. Every discovery expands what is possible for those who come after us.

That may sound hopelessly naïve if you look at the world today.

Wars. Division. Loneliness. Environmental collapse. Political chaos. Distrust. It often feels as though the nursery is on fire.

Maybe that's exactly why.

The greatest transformations rarely happen when everything is comfortable. They happen when old systems stop working, when the stories we've lived by can no longer carry us forward, and when a civilization outgrows the story that created it.

This is one of those moments.

Humanity isn't approaching the end of the world. It's approaching the end of an old way of being. The question isn't whether we'll change. It's what we'll become.

OUR GENERATION'S BODY OF WORK

Across history, these people have been called many things: Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, saints, mystics, sages, prophets, visionaries. Different traditions preserved different names for the same human possibility. The names have never mattered nearly as much as the work.

Every generation inherits a civilization shaped by those who came before it and leaves one for those who come after. Sometimes the changes are small. Occasionally they redefine the course of history.

I believe we're living through one of those rare moments.

144,000 Buddhas. Here. They. Come.

If I'm right, the Buddhas won't change the world because they're special. They'll help change it because enough ordinary people will begin making extraordinary choices, like choosing wisdom over ego, compassion over fear, curiosity over certainty, and creation over destruction. History has always been moved by people who became more fully themselves. I believe we're about to witness that on a scale we've never seen before.

I realize that's an extraordinary claim.

A few years ago, I would have smiled politely, closed this book, and questioned the author's sanity.

So why do I believe it?

I believe it because something happened after my bhumi that forced me to reconsider almost everything I thought I knew about reality.

There are parts of that story I haven't shared here. Some of the most extraordinary experiences came after the bhumi itself, and they deserve the space and context of the complete book. Without that foundation, they'd sound unbelievable even to me.

But those experiences aren't where I think this conversation should begin.

The more interesting question isn't what happened to me after my bhumi. It's whether there are recognizable conditions that make a bhumi more likely in the first place.

To my surprise, I found them.

What follows isn't a promise, a formula, or a guarantee. I don't think anyone can manufacture awakening on demand.

But I do think we can become better gardeners.

We can't make the flower bloom.

We can prepare the soil.

That's where I'd like to begin.

Please read **AUDENTES FORTUNA IUVAT** next.