

MICROSTORIES



DANIEL BRAKO

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by

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FEMME FATALE

She was a femme fatale like no other.

When she came calling, most would follow. Although her calls took on many different forms, there was always a common thread—this seductress promised so much. Her promises never lasted, but her hold did. And then the real journey began.

Beyond the initial excitement and ecstasy lay a different experience. She would usher her captives through isolated fields. Away from family and friends, these were desolate places, devoid of companionship. Here, she was the only companion. It brought new meaning to the word *alone*.

Along the way she would teach the fine art of denial. Engrossed in this, few even noticed the valley. It ran as deep as the deepest despair. In this dark and dismal place, hope became a distant memory. If only she would block out the pain. Instead she kept leading the way into it.

At the base of the valley was something worse. It was an abyss called hell. Into it she would walk, exerting her pull. Although many wanted to break free from her grasp, few understood that the first step in doing so was to call her name. Even fewer knew what that name was, for her disguises were so grand. Her name was Addiction.

The first step in dealing with addiction is acknowledgement. **Self-honesty is a priceless gift.** It is a platform upon which great things can be built.



THE DRAGON

Everyone on the island knew about the dragon. They knew it patrolled the ocean in search of sea vessels. They knew it breathed fire and would kill anyone who crossed its path. Finally, they knew it was stealthy. It was so stealthy that no one had ever seen it, but they knew it existed.

Because of the fearsome dragon, the islanders never ventured beyond their island home. To do so would mean death, so they remained where they were. Although this paralysis blocked them from moving forward and experiencing new things, many considered it preferable to being dragon food.

But one brave explorer begged to differ. Her resolve, in the name of discovery and growth, was so strong that she decided to leave the island or die trying. In search of better things she was prepared to face the dragon head on.

As she rowed out to sea her heart pounded. But she did not stop. Nor, strangely enough, did she encounter any dragon. There was no painful death—only a beautiful ocean and the thrill of the unknown. It all awaited one very brave explorer.

Monsters of the imagination come in all different shapes and sizes. **Face your fears today.** Don't create monsters where there are none.



PERCEPTION

The dream seemed so real. A lady who looked like a witch/shaman was saying something. Perhaps it was a curse/warning. The dreamer woke in terror/peace. That was when she smelled the smoke.

Although she was able to save herself, there was little she could do about her house. Watching it burn she latched onto a single thought: *I'm homeless/alive and so angry/grateful because of that.* This repeated in her head.

With her house in ashes, the victim/survivor knew she would have to relocate. So began her journey through the woods. In truth, she considered the woods to be a God forsaken/inspired place, swarming with native flora and fauna. As she walked she noted the many weeds/flowers that grew aside the path. This occupied her mind.

She soon found herself lost, alone and afraid. Many of her prayers began, “I curse/beseech you God ...” In the back of her mind she denied/embraced the belief that everything happens for a reason. This added to her despair/hope.

Lost in the woods by/with herself she knew she had to become self-sufficient. Fortunately there were plenty of berries to eat, and she could drink water from the stream. This would be the only way to make it through this nightmare/challenge.

After a few days hikers found and rescued her. She told them all about her adventure/ordeal. After all, this woman was a jaded/better person because of it.

Events can be seen in vastly different ways. **Attitudes and beliefs determine perception.** How do you see things?



THE SCHOOL

“Why is there so much pain and suffering in the world?” a disciple asked his mentor. “And why doesn’t God do something about it?”

“Let me tell you a story about the silent school,” the sage responded. “Its pupils were boisterous, loving to frolic and explore. Whether playing sport or practical jokes, their lives were dynamic.

“Although they enjoyed freedom and independence, it came at a cost. Loud voices, for example, engendered sore throats. Practical jokes often backfired. And sport sometimes resulted in bumps and bruises, even broken bones.

“As it happened, one day a new headmaster arrived. He imposed a strict set of rules, forbidding students to joke, play sports, make noise and so on. They were no longer allowed to do the things that were a part of being human.

“The new rules transformed the school, emptying the sickbay. There was an eerie silence. The headmaster was thrilled. But then the students started to become lethargic and ill. Their sickness could not be healed.

“Why do we have pain and suffering in the world? Because we inadvertently create it every time we make poor choices. Why doesn’t God stop pain and suffering? Because doing so would restrict our free will.”

The sage leaned forward on his chair. “To reduce pain and suffering, choose wisely in life. Choose acts of love.”

Pain and suffering exist as a by-product of choice. **Choices create consequences.** To restrict choice is to restrict freedom.



VAMPIRE

Carl was a vampire! Despite looking human, he was a parasite who fed off others. Although he was embarrassed by his lifestyle, he was accustomed to it. For this reason he continued to hunt on a regular basis.

Of course, discretion was called for. From an early age Carl learned to hide his antisocial behavior by masterfully blending into the background. His victims were always unsuspecting.

When it came to choosing victims Carl wasn't fussy. Sometimes they were young, sometimes they were old. It didn't matter whether they were male or female, black or white. Carl was simply out for his fix.

Carl never imagined he would be caught, especially not by his sister. That's exactly what happened the day she caught him laughing at someone less fortunate than he was. Emotional vampires don't feed off blood. They feed off the hurt, pain and misery of others.

Putting others down to lift yourself up never works. **Self-esteem is wallow sensitive.** You can only lift yourself up with love.



GREENER PASTURES

The grass, in Sid's opinion, was definitely greener on the other side. Although his fellow sheep were content, Sid was tormented. There was something about the grass in that other field. It beckoned.

A barbed-wire fence stood between Sid and his goal. Refusing to be denied, Sid forced his four-legged body between the razor sharp spikes. After ending up bloodied and bruised, he made it to the other side.

"Baaaah." (Translation: "Oh God no.") To his horror Sid realized the grass, which had appeared so lush from a distance, was tick infested. The bloodsucking arachnids were everywhere. Worse, they enjoyed the taste of mutton.

After returning home Sid noticed a grazing area beyond the lake. Although the lake was freezing cold and contained jagged rocks, he decided to take the plunge. It was a miracle he emerged on the other side.

"Baaaaaaaah." (Translation: "Bloody hell.") This new field was full of underground rabbit burrows. Like a minefield, it made walking perilous. In this place Sid couldn't move, he couldn't be himself.

Sid the sheep learned his lesson, or so he thought. Before too long his wandering eyes noticed yet another pasture. Again, not content with where he was, he made the move. This time he braved four lanes of traffic, at peak hour no less.

"Baaaaaaaah." (Translation withheld.) This new pasture was plastic. On closer inspection Sid came to realize it was one of those human contraptions, littered with yellow balls and painted with white lines. This pasture was an illusion.

Having found out the hard way, these days Sid is quick to offer advice to others. When translated his wisdom is both learned and simple. “Although the grass may look greener on the other side, beware illusions, hidden traps and things that bite!”

Whenever the green-eyed monster strikes, beware! **Jealousy invites trouble.** Gratitude is the first step in getting what you want.



DARKNESS

The Cartwrights were a close-knit family consisting of father Wayne, mother Julie and four-year-old son Zac. Life was going well for them, until everything went bad.

It happened on a Sunday. One moment Zac was playing happily, the next moment he was gone. They couldn't find him in the house.

“Could he have gotten outside?” Wayne asked.

An outdoor search provided the heart-wrenching answer. Zac's tiny body floated facedown in the backyard pool. He couldn't be revived.

Over the following months Wayne and Julie went through the usual grieving process, rehashing the nightmare again and again. They both asked, “What if ...?” They both lamented, “If only ...” It was like living in a pit of darkness.

After months in the pit, Julie gradually vacated the darkness. Instead of viewing Zac's death as a senseless accident, she embraced the belief that his passing was part of God's unknowable plan. This was a contentious issue that often set Wayne into a rage.

“Zac was too young,” Wayne insisted. “No child should have their life take.”

“Perhaps it wasn’t taken so much as *given*—given back to God.”

“God?” Wayne scoffed. “Where was God when our son died?!”

“God was helping him to leave his physical body, thanking him for his time spent on earth, and taking him to a better place.”

“That’s bullshit, Julie!”

Wayne remained in the pit. Julie transcended it.

Physical life is part of a bigger picture. Despite appearances, **death comes by design.** When someone dies, know that it was their time to depart.



DRAMA QUEEN

Once upon a time, in a distant land called Make Believe, there lived an ardent queen. The world she inhabited was dramatic, exciting and intense.

According to inner-circle gossip a prominent couple were on the verge of a break-up. The court advisor was drinking again. Someone was pilfering from the coffers. With her husband away, the General’s wife was fooling around. The priest was doing less than priestly things. And on it went.

The queen made certain she was privy to it all, and what a mess it was. Infidelity. Scandal. Turmoil. Placing the back of her palm to her forehead, the queen sighed. After all, what was a queen to think? What was a queen to do?

As it happened, one day a traveling wizard entered the land. Upon hearing about the scandalous events, he offered his services in exchange for temporary lodgings. The queen graciously accepted.

The next day the proficient wizard set to work. Weaving powerful magic he cast a spell designed to end crisis. Sure enough, the chaos ceased and the wizard left the land.

Despite the new peace, or perhaps because of it, the queen cried. She was inconsolable.

Constantly in other people's business and full of gossip, **drama queens attract drama.** Change the focus. Learn to say, "Not interested!"



THE GARDENER

Gary was a gardener. Instead of working at the local nursery, however, his role was to look after mystical plants that were imbued with human qualities.

Each plant was named according to the quality it possessed such as love, courage, pride and so on. Every quality had an opposite, like a complimentary twin. Happy and sad. Responsible and irresponsible. Generous and greedy. They were a microcosm of life.

At first Gary wondered why the creator of the plants would risk releasing negative qualities, such as sadness or jealousy, into the world. He surmised that polar opposites provide comparison. Without sadness, for example, people wouldn't be able to fully appreciate happiness.

Polar opposites, Gary realized, also provide choice. As the gardener he could choose which plants to nurture. Although his mystical plants could never truly be killed, even if starved of all nutrients, those that received little attention remained saplings, whereas those that were nurtured became tall and strong.

Whenever Gary nurtured a plant, that quality tended to show up in his life. There was no right or wrong in the garden. There was only choice and, as the gardener, he had to deal with the results of it. Gary did so marveling at the plants, the system and their ever-so-wise creator.

Each time you embrace or demonstrate a quality it grows. **Whatever you grow you reap.** The garden of life depends on the gardener—you.



MISTAKES

Making mistakes, in Michaela's opinion, was for losers. Rather than risk making a mistake, she would simply ignore the task, avoid it or move onto something else.

During childhood Michaela was considered talented and smart. To maintain this image, she started avoiding difficult tasks. This strategy initially worked well, sparing her from the failure and embarrassment experienced by her peers.

Then Michaela noticed a change. The more mistakes her classmates made, the more they seemed to improve. Michaela had never considered this. She simply assumed they would give up. Although some did, many persisted. They eventually excelled.

There came a point when those struggling to keep up with Michaela suddenly surpassed her. Of course, years later, she refuses to admit that her mistake-avoiding strategies may have been a mistake.

How can she when she still believes that making mistakes is for losers?

Mistakes teach you what to do and what not to do. **Mistakes help you grow.** Don't be afraid of making mistakes.



COMEBACK

The shopkeeper sold the talisman to Rylan, claiming it had the power to influence the lives of others. And so began his journey.

Rylan's intentions were good. He wanted to help his three sisters. The eldest, a poet, was experiencing a lull. The middle sister, an aspiring dancer, longed to perform. As for the youngest, she had too many pursuits to keep up with. And so Rylan called for inspiration, fame and peace respectively.

Sure enough the wishes came to be and the sisters enjoyed the benefits of each. But then something unexpected happened. From nowhere inspirations flooded Rylan's mind. At first it was a novelty. But it quickly became an unwanted torment.

Rylan shared his predicament with some close friends. Suddenly word spread. In a matter of days Rylan was the talk of the town. Ironically he was now famous. But this too was unwanted.

At a loss to understand his fluctuating fate, Rylan suddenly remembered the three wishes. Just when he thought he couldn't take any more, he recalled the essence of the final wish. It brought a relieved smile to his lips, the first smile in many days.

Be careful and mindful of what you give to others because **gifts return to sender.** This can be both a blessing and a curse.



THE SOUL

The sage studied the ocean before turning to his disciple. “Take the empty bucket and fill it with water.”

When the disciple returned from his task, the sage said, “When you place ocean water into a bucket, it retains the same properties and qualities as the ocean. The two remain one.”

Next the sage retrieved a tiny glass and filled it with water from the bucket. “The bucket represents your soul, and this glass represents your personality. It represents you.”

Reaching into his pocket the sage withdrew several more glasses and began filling each. “Your soul gives birth to many personalities. These personalities form your past and future lives. Each incarnates, gains experiences via choices, then returns to the soul.” He emptied the contents of each glass into the bucket.

“Can you guess where your soul will one day return?” the sage asked.

He and his disciple both studied the expansive ocean. It was beautiful to behold.

You are only one component, one tiny segment, of your soul. **The soul is expansive.** It is not limited by time, matter or space.



FORGIVENESS

One day a mysterious stranger entered the village. His only possession was a rucksack, spun from golden threads. Dugan, the local merchant, knew such a rare item would fetch a huge price. But the stranger would not sell. This prompted Dugan to adopt a different approach.

When everyone was asleep, Dugan crept into the inn and stole the rucksack. Like a tailored garment, it proved to be incredibly light and a perfect fit. However, to Dugan's horror, he was unable to remove it from his back.

"Tis the devil's work!" Dugan's only option was to flee his beloved home, lest he be discovered as a thief.

Journeying from village to village, it didn't take long to realize the rucksack had other qualities. Whenever Dugan got angry, the bag got heavier. Of course, he blamed the devil, the miserable weather, the people who incited him to anger ... anyone but himself.

The heavy rucksack caused Dugan's back to hunch. Everyone shunned him, except for a little girl. Their friendship was tested one day when the girl accidentally spilled boiling soup on him. Instead of embracing anger, however, Dugan chose forgiveness. To his shock the rucksack became lighter.

Dugan strove to put the lesson into action. Before long the rucksack slipped from his shoulders and he was a better person because of it. When asked by the little girl why he was leaving the village, Dugan responded, “Others need to learn the lesson of lightening the load.”

With those words, he retrieved his rucksack and walked off into the sunset.

Negativity is deadweight on your shoulders. **Forgiveness provides freedom.** It frees you from an otherwise heavy burden.



MEDIOCRITY

Lola’s life could best be described as comfortable. This description had nothing to do with wealth. Rather it was comfortable in terms of being familiar, safe and known. Lola would have it no other way.

When it came to her job, on good days, she considered it to be okay. Occasionally she imagined doing something better. Of course, that would mean a new start. Everything would change. It might even involve a period of discomfort.

Lola had a boyfriend. They’d been together for six years. She cared for him, but she wasn’t in love with him. When Lola admitted this to friends, they asked why she remained in the relationship. She told them it was easier to stay than leave.

This resistance to change applied to all areas of Lola’s life. It affected everything from where she parked the car when she went shopping, to the items she placed in the trolley. In each instance comfort, or familiarity, was sought. It ruled!

In fairness it should be said that Lola's life wasn't bad. It was however mediocre. It could never be more than mediocre because comfort came first.

If you want more out of life, be prepared to **move beyond your comfort zone**. If not, mediocrity will be your prize.



THE ENVIRONMENT

Drifting high above the earth's plane was a solitary cloud. Her name was Cilouise. Whenever she cried, the storms came. At first this was infrequent but then things happened to make Cilouise wail.

Cilouise was responding to humankind. They burned things that polluted the air. They cut the trees that maintained the balance. They destroyed the ozone layer that was her friend. They did so many foolish things.

The tears that fell were tears of pain, after all, the evaporated water that returned to her tasted acidic. But that was not why she cried. Cilouise cried because of loss. She cried because of destruction. And she cried because of what was to come—the devastating effects of environmental warfare.

While she longed for improvement and change, Cilouise knew the outcome was beyond her control. It remained in the hands of humankind.

If only they could see her tears.

The environment is not only an important resource, **the environment is a living system.** To hurt the environment is to hurt oneself.



THE SOURCE

A traveler was climbing an isolated mountain, in search of spiritual answers. On the third day of her journey, Jesus appeared to her.

“I am the way.” Jesus smiled and faded from sight.

Contemplating his statement, the traveler concluded that Jesus was the true path to the source of all things. No sooner had she decided this than Jehovah manifested.

“I too am the way.” Jehovah smiled and faded from sight.

Contemplating his statement, the traveler decided that western religion in general was the true path. Just then, Buddha appeared.

“Eastern religion also holds the answers.” Buddha smiled and faded from sight.

Contemplating his statement, the traveler decided that the correct path was signified by a male deity, regardless of which one. That was when the Goddess materialized.

“I am female and I am also the way.” The Goddess smiled and faded from sight.

With so many claims, the traveler was confused.

Glancing towards the peak of the mountain, however, she realized there are many paths to the summit. While different pathways offer different scenery, they all eventually lead to the same place.

There are many pathways to, and representations of, the Source. **Don't limit the limitless.** Stop trying to place the Source in a box.



SECRETS

Janice had a secret. She kept it hidden in the back of her closet, buried behind all of the clothes and under some of the boxes. It was pushed to the furthest, darkest corner where no one would see it.

Janice was always weary when her parents came to visit, when the housekeeper cleaned, and when friends dropped by. She was worried that someone might discover her hidden secret. The thought petrified her.

To avoid this happening, Janice invented elaborate stories to assuage others. To those closest to her she upped the ante by revealing partial truths. These titbits of information were based on what she thought they could handle.

In the beginning Janice's tactics worked well. Unfortunately after a while she got confused between the lies and half-truths that were circulating. To make matters worse, people began asking probing questions.

The dishonesty, and the fear of how others would react, was a constant burden. In the meantime, the closet kept deteriorating. Unfortunately, on the day Janice held a party, one of the rusted hinges broke.

The closet door fell open, exposing her secret for all to see.

If your closet is too full, things will pop out! **Embrace truth and honesty** because lies and secrets have a way of revealing themselves.



KARMA

Effie and Costa were siblings.

Able to think ten moves ahead, Effie was the strategist. Given any situation, she always knew the best and most appropriate response. Costa was the observant one. He was sharp. Together they made an awesome team.

Costa got his big break when he was tasked with some undercover work. He simply had to observe the activities of a target individual and compile a report. A covert operation complete with adventure and intrigue. This was exciting stuff.

Like her brother, Effie also had a part to play and she played it well. Armed with all the surveillance data she too compiled a report. Using her unique talents she recommended a course of action, befitting the target's needs.

Years on, Effie and Costa still have the same job. In fact, they are now famous. Haven't heard of them? I'm sure you've heard of their pseudonyms: Cause and Effect.

Everything you think, say & do is a cause. **Every cause generates an effect.** Even if you're unaware of it.



KNOW THYSELF

After their lesson on the beach, the disciple asked the sage, “How can I know myself?”

The sage was impressed. “It begins with self-honesty and self-reflection.”

“And I achieve that by ...” the disciple asked.

The sage wished a few cryptic answers would suffice. “You achieve that by asking questions of yourself.”

“Questions?” echoed the disciple.

“The central question you need to discover is who am I? To know this, try asking: What are my intentions? Why? What are my beliefs? Why? What are—”

“So basically, I have to pay attention to my thoughts,” the disciple interrupted.

“Yes. Become aware of your thoughts but become aware of your actions and words also. By becoming conscious of each choice you make, and the reason behind it, you will start to develop a greater sense of self-awareness. When the answers come without having to ask, you have succeeded in knowing yourself. You are living consciously.”

Make a conscious and genuine effort to search within. **Discover the real you** by looking beneath the lies, conditioning and unconscious acts.



WORDS

Albert had no tongue. He could neither sing a song of beauty nor utter a vile chant.

From the time he was born Albert was forced to lead a life of silence. But that was fine by him. Albert suspected that words, especially when misplaced, might lead to experiences unwanted. Time soon proved him right.

One cold winter's morning, a traveling wizard entered the town. He had just come from a distant land called Make Believe—but that was another story. The wizard was in need of food supplies, water and a horse. In return he gave the townsfolk an ear-shaped crystal that had the power to manifest spoken desires.

It was truly marvelous. One had to only speak about whatever it was they wanted and it would magically appear in their lives—clothing, jewelry, cattle, wealth. All manner of treats were called into being by all people. All except Albert. Since he was mute the process did not apply to him.

As more and more treasures appeared, people started to gossip. “Did you see what she was wearing? Look how fat he has become! She makes me sick ...” This was followed by insults, lies and further criticism. And then the physical effects came.

Unfortunately the wizard had neglected to mention that the magic applied to *all* words, not just desires. The judgments, insults and lies produced an array of consequences, varying from physical illness to external problems.

The only person spared from this was Albert. He was spared the effects of a wicked tongue.

Over time, habitual words tend to manifest as experiences. **Words contain power.** Be careful of the things you say about yourself and others.



ONENESS

Mimi was bleeding badly. Although Indera stood nearby she was unable to help. She never really liked Mimi anyway.

Indera and Mimi grew up together as neighbors. From a young age they began working together, due to necessity and circumstances. Although they made a good team, Indera believed she didn't really need Mimi. That was her first mistake.

There were many mistaken beliefs. In truth, Indera and Mimi shared so much more than proximity. They were uniquely bonded. The existence of one benefited the other. Working together, nothing was beyond them. Although they seemed different on the outside, deep within they were essentially the same ...

Although these facts could be applied to all humans, Indera and Mimi were not themselves human. That is to say they were not human in the complete and traditional sense of the word.

Indera and Mimi were digits—the index and middle fingers respectively. They were unquestionably linked, and unquestionably ignorant.

Despite the illusion of separateness, despite the experience of being alone, **every-thing is one**. It is all a manifestation of Spirit.



PRETENDING

Sheila liked pretending. Unfortunately, since she didn't know where to draw the line, she was unprepared for the consequences.

It all began in childhood with innocent games of role-playing. As a natural actor Sheila was always convincing. One day she decided to extend her talent beyond the stage, feigning sickness to be excused from school.

On another occasion Sheila had everyone believing her leg was injured. Although she enjoyed the attention lavished upon her, when she really did injure her leg a few days later, the attention lost some of its shine.

Sheila's habits remained with her into adulthood. After inheriting a large sum of money, her skills were put to the test. When people started asking for handouts, instead of saying *no* to their requests, Sheila said *poverty*. It was very convincing.

With honed acting skills, Sheila claimed she needed the money to pay off debts incurred from her mysterious illness. She even bought expensive medication, placing it throughout her house for all to see.

At first Sheila was thrilled that everyone believed she was sick and poor. However, several months after beginning the charade, she really did fall sick. Although she survived, the illness depleted much of her wealth.

It also brought truth to her claims.

The human mind is both powerful and far-reaching. **Pretending leads to being.** What you act as if you are you become.



THE LABYRINTH

The labyrinth was vast, stretching out in all directions.

Forming a network of passageways and twists, some hedges held doorways. Although closed doors forbade access, open doors encouraged entry. Of all the paths and doors, some led to dead-ends while others resulted in advancement. Along the way, there were surprises and treasures aplenty.

Due to the labyrinth's design, no matter where one stood, there were always multiple choices. Do I choose this path or that path? Do I walk through this door or that door? If one particular door is closed, do I wait for it to open or do I try another? Should I retrace my steps or try something new?

The labyrinth was full of rules and patterns. Choosing a certain direction, for example, would consistently result in getting lost. As for the doors, whenever one closed, another always opened. If a person paid attention to their choices and the corresponding results, their path was made easier.

Overall the labyrinth could be exciting, dull or harrowing. It all depended on each person's perception and how they played the game. Similarly, it could be easy to under-

stand or completely perplexing. This depended on a person's knowledge of the rules and attention to detail.

Call it a labyrinth.

Call it life.

Like a labyrinth life has many rules, pathways and patterns. **Understand how life works** and your journey is made easier.



DENIAL

Frustrated by life, Maisie approached the town's inventor. "There's so much ugliness in the world," she complained. "Why should I have to witness the pain and suffering of others? Please, can you help me?"

The inventor produced a pair of glasses. "These glasses will make the unsightly appear beautiful." Next he offered her a pair of earplugs. "These ear plugs will transform curses into music. Enjoy."

With false perception, everything transformed. The homeless were not only adorned in beautiful garments, they sang sweet melodies rather than begging. Flowers flourished instead of weeds, and decrepit buildings looked new and inviting. It was exactly what Maisie wanted.

The absence of truth seemed a small price to pay for the absence of ugliness, so Maisie decided never to remove the glasses and earplugs again. She kept this promise for

years, during which time she was blessed with a wonderful husband and equally wonderful children.

One day, while out walking, Maisie noticed a distant commotion. A group of people were playing what looked like a lively game. It was only later that she learned the apparent *game* had in fact been a vicious attack on her sister Rita.

The shock of this revelation, mixed with guilt, caused Maisie to pass out. When she awoke, minus her glasses and plugs, it was to a world of truth—an abusive husband, out of control children, mounting debt and so much more that was previously ignored.

Maisie wanted to go back to sleep, closing her eyes to the truth, but that was how her problems began.

Focus on positives rather than negatives, but not to the point of denial. **Denial holds a sharp sting.** To avoid the sting, look for and to the truth.



THE KNIFE

He wielded an unusual type of knife. Although it was incredibly sharp, the knife was not physical. Instead it was psychological and emotional in nature. This did not make it any less potent—just the opposite.

The assailant would strike without warning, using an array of different attacks. Sometimes the damage inflicted was superficial. *Prick*. More often the assaults pene-

trated deep into the psyche. *Stab*. Perhaps fast. *Slash*. Sometimes long and drawn out. *Tear*.

Whatever the method of attack, targets were always chosen with care. They were typically people who were different and/or perceived as a threat. By attacking them the assailant attempted to maintain power and control.

It was now time to hunt again.

Lost in conversation, the two targets were unaware. The knife lashed out wounding the first. With even greater speed it moved towards the second individual. Then the unimaginable happened. The knife struck an invisible force field and was deflected.

The assailant—Discrimination—was left impotent.

When you strengthen yourself, you weaken adversity. **Discrimination cuts deeply.** Avoid such cuts by loving, honoring and cherishing yourself.



THE WELL

The landscape was barren. There was nothing but a desolate sea of sand sculpted by dry and hot winds. Ramón traveled though this harsh environment, with his camel and supplies.

After a few days of traveling Ramón found an oasis where he decided to rest. Here in the midst of an unrelenting environment grew lush plants and trees. This meant one thing. Beneath the land was an ample supply of water, the drink of life.

As it happened, Ramón had only recently finished the last of the water that he carried with him. For this reason he decided there was no point in digging a well because he wasn't thirsty. Instead he was content to sit, relax and do nothing. How wonderful it was.

Unfortunately it didn't remain wonderful. After a few hours Ramón was thirsty, his mouth dry. Hastily he began digging a well. Ramón found that digging was hard work which only increased his thirst. It caused the dehydration.

Having left things too late it occurred to him that he could be digging his own grave.

Don't wait until you're thirsty before digging a well. **Do what needs doing.** Ignorance and/or laziness are poor excuses that lead to trouble.



BELIEFS

She was always going to be a nobody. She knew this from an early age. She heard others say this about her, whispering in secret. Some people, the bold ones, even said it to her face. She chose to believe their words, accepting and embracing them as the literal truth. The fact that she lived in poverty, came from an uneducated family and couldn't imagine herself doing any different, only cemented her beliefs. Since she was going to be a nobody, she didn't bother studying at school. No one was surprised when she failed. Nor

were they surprised when she dropped out. There was no point in looking for a job. Why waste the time? After all, who would want to employ a nobody?

He was her twin brother. Coming from the same family of nobodies, others said he would fail. He chose not to believe this. It wasn't easy. In fact, it was a constant battle between what he believed and what others were trying to impose upon him. He fought it by means of journaling, praying and studying. He not only sought to educate himself academically but spiritually too—in order to better empower himself and take control. Surrounding himself with positive people helped, as did affirmations. He even found some time to help others. He was always going to be a success, anyone who knew his belief system could tell you that.

Not only do beliefs decide actions, **beliefs affect the physical world.** What do you believe about yourself?



THE GENIE

Unee was a genie. He wasn't just any genie, he was the most powerful genie ever. While most of his contemporaries served only one master, Unee served many. As a general rule, he brought them whatever they spoke of. By doing this Unee far exceeded the customary three wishes. He offered an endless supply.

In truth, Unee didn't care for the word *wish*. In many ways it was an invitation to laziness. After all, if a person was wishing, they were not doing. Unee favored a more shared approach. It was simple really. He rewarded those who helped themselves.

As far as Unee was concerned, actions, words and thoughts were all powerful tools to be used in the creation process. To emphasize this, Unee would manifest habitual thoughts, words and actions. He rewarded repetition.

Overall, the people who received most support from Unee were those whose actions, words and thoughts were all working together, all in alignment. In such instances it was easy to grant their wishes without the term *wish* even entering into the picture.

Continually manifesting habitual patterns, **the Universe is alive and responsive.** You are the cause. The real genie lies within.



LOVE THYSELF

Sid was an unhappy sheep. Initially he tried to fix this problem by seeking greener pastures. Since that didn't work he was forced to find a different approach. It was called loving thyself.

Before Sid could love himself, he knew he had to accept himself. He dreaded this because it involved accepting all the mistakes he'd made in the past. He strove to put

them to rest by seeking the forgiveness of others and, more importantly, forgiving himself.

One of Sid's biggest challenges was to honor himself. This meant doing what he instinctively knew was best for himself, and doing so consistently. They were things such as being honest, trusting intuition, keeping commitments, only associating with sheep who were positive influences and so on. This was about accepting responsibility.

Then there was purpose. Sid knew that everything in existence—animal, mineral or vegetable—had a purpose, otherwise known as a passion or calling. Since Sid was actively living his purpose, by keeping grass neat and providing wool, he could skip to the next step.

Sid's last challenge was to master his words and thoughts. He stopped saying anything bad, negative or unflattering about himself and others. He also made an effort to let go of anger, blame and self-pity. He worked hard to change his mindset.

The more Sid loved himself, the more peace and happiness he found. What's more, while focused on his internal environment, his external environment started to change also. Sid was relocated to a larger, greener pasture where he met like-minded sheep and that special someone.

The single best thing you can do is to love yourself. **Find ways to love yourself** and everything else will follow.



SPIRIT

See me in all you see for I am there. Hear a sound and know I am that. To embrace me, embrace gratitude and reverence. Not for an idol—a distant, demanding God. But for small things. A beautiful flower. A smiling face. A ray of sunshine. Find simple pleasures, and you have found me.

I do not reside in a church. I reside in a temple. A temple called body. A temple that is you. Only when you surrender your expectations of what I look like will you stop searching and start experiencing. To find me, find yourself. Know yourself. Accept yourself. Love yourself.

I am one with you and feel your pain. I know your fear, your confusion and dread. But I know it in the context of the truth. I await for you to see the power of free will, the transitory illusions it creates, and the power of love to heal all. I am love. I have not abandoned you. I am the rock upon which you stand.

I am the high of mountains and the canyons deep. The hot of fire and the cold of ice. I am the freshness of nature and the chip of concrete. See me in all you see for I am there. Hear a sound and know I am that. Touch an object and you are touching me. Smell a scent and know that I am the wind that has carried it to you, I am the scent, I am in you. Taste me in all you taste for I am sustenance. I am life.

Use your senses in a new way. Look, touch, smell, hear, taste, **perceive the world anew.** Perceive it as a manifestation of Spirit and act accordingly.



NEEDINESS

There once was an isolated village, nestled on a mountain plain. Although its name was forgotten, given the people who resided there, it was known as the Village of Neediness.

Living up to its name, the Village of Neediness fostered learned helplessness, because its inhabitants were expecting others to come along and fix their problems. Many residents were unemployed, for example, looking for benefactors. A few residents lacked humor in their lives, so they were looking for clowns. Some of the clowns were tired of being funny, so they were looking for bookworms. Several bookworms had neglected their fitness, so they were looking for bodybuilders. And so on.

Trying to help oneself financially seemed too hard for the poor, just as joking seemed beyond the serious. Heaven forbid that a clown should pick up a book, or a bookworm should visit a gym. Learned helplessness, it seemed, was a difficult cycle to break.

By looking to others to fulfill their needs, the inhabitants began to wither, and their needs began to grow. Whenever a need was fulfilled by another, more often than not it proved to be a short-term solution, ultimately making matters worse.

Unable to help themselves, the Village of Neediness ceased to exist. It became a memory, and hopefully a lesson.

Try to be, embody or do the thing you seek from another. **Always start with yourself.** Act as if you are your own salvation.



RUNNING

Peta was running. Instead of running a physical race, she was running from herself. Her would-be marathon began in response to the taunts.

Sounding somewhat masculine, Peta had a deep voice. Others made fun of this, speaking to her in deep, mock tones. At first Peta hated their imitations. After a while she simply hated her voice. She didn't know it but she was running.

Another bane was her appearance. Peta's nose was crooked and, in her opinion, far too large. Because of this, beauty seemed absent. Just about every magazine enforced this belief. At first she hated those unrealistic ideals. Then she simply hated herself.

These issues weren't Peta's only concern but they were typical of the problems she faced. In most instances she had two options—to seek external changes or to accept things as they were by focusing on self-love.

Of course, in some circumstances external changes could be beneficial. It came down to a simple question—what is genuinely best and most appropriate for me? This question had nothing to do with placating others, and everything to do with honoring oneself.

Peta couldn't honor herself because she was running.

Change is great only when it's for the right reasons. **Don't run from yourself.** To change yourself for others is to run an unbeatable race.



THE MAGICIAN

The traveling wizard had finally reached his destination. It was a magnificent crystal castle, home of the humble and judicious magician.

The wizard entered the castle bracing himself for battle.

Although surprised to find his rival waiting for him, the wizard felt confident of victory. “Magician, they say you are the most powerful magic weaver in all the lands. I’ve come to test that claim. I challenge you to a duel!”

The magician replied, “In a distant land called Make Believe your spells fixed the symptoms but neglected the cause. In a chattering village you brandished an ear-shaped crystal but neglected to explain it properly. Neglect follows you.”

The wizard was both unnerved and incensed. He was unnerved that the magician knew so much, and incensed that anyone would insult him. Summoning all of his power the wizard unleashed his considerable might at the magician.

In a furious and unnatural tempest, a battle of energy and magic raged.

It was a war the magician was sure to win.

When you attempt to prove yourself you languish. **Arrogance breeds neglect.** When you attempt to improve yourself you grow.



HELP!

It began as a small, almost inconsequential, matter. The old dam was starting to leak—again! Although this was nothing new, the appearance of multiple leaks meant more work than usual. The repairer, Marcus, needed help.

Perhaps due to pride, perhaps due to stubbornness, Marcus decided not to ask anyone for help. After all, he considered *help* to be a nasty four-letter word. And so he set to work, trying to undertake several jobs at once.

Since the leaks were too numerous for one person to fix, those that were unattended got bigger, while more hairline cracks appeared. The scenario unfolded like a domino effect. One crack would facilitate another, and so on.

As the leaks worsened, Marcus tried harder to patch them. But he still resisted seeking help, because he considered it a sign of weakness. When the dam eventually burst, the frigid water swept him away.

An onlooker on dry land yelled, “Ahoy! Do you need help?”

Although Marcus couldn’t swim, pride stopped him from responding. Perhaps that was why he sank.

Stubborn pride tends to create more problems than it solves. **Don’t be shy to ask for help.** This is not a sign of weakness but humility.



THE VICTIM

Rita refused to accept responsibility for her life.

Accepting responsibility, in her opinion, was tantamount to accepting fault. Consequently, whenever things went wrong Rita blamed other people, circumstances or God. Like an observer, life happened *to* her.

One day, while out walking, Rita was viciously assaulted. Her sister Maisie was unable to help because she was dealing with her own problems—but that was another story—so Rita turned to a psychologist. The sessions went well until responsibility was mentioned.

“Rita, we need to explore the issue of responsibility.”

“Responsibility?” Rita scoffed. “I didn’t ask to be attacked!”

“Responsibility isn’t about blame, it’s about empowerment,” the psychologist said. “The people who attacked you are responsible for their actions. Just as you’re responsible for your actions and *reactions*.”

“I don’t understand,” Rita said.

“Think of it this way, a victim is powerless because they are held captive to the whims of others and life. A survivor, however, is empowered because they recognize that each choice—even if it’s choosing to walk down the street—brings certain experiences, some unforeseen. They *own* their experiences.”

“What if the experiences are bad?” Rita asked.

“A survivor chooses how it affects them—not so much physically but mentally. Do I let this weaken me or do I let this strengthen me? Do I focus on hate or do I focus on self love? Do I get stuck in blame or do I move forward?” The psychologist paused. “Since victims shun personal responsibility, their only option is to suffer.”

When life gets tough, take control by accepting responsibility. **Don’t be a victim.** Instead, recognize your power to create and/or deal with situations.



WHAT IF ...

Ellie was an elf. Unlike other elves in the kingdom, she was overly cautious, constantly asking, “What if ...” This fear of the unknown not only ruled her life, it stopped her from doing things that might otherwise bring her joy.

From an early age Ellie wanted to visit the surrounding kingdoms. Instead she kept putting it off, fearful of what may be. “What if something happens to my family when I’m away? What if other lands aren’t safe? What if I get elf-napped?”

When it came to dating, Ellie avoided romantic attachments. There were plenty of reasons. “What if I get rejected? What if I love someone who doesn’t love me back? What if I meet a psycho-elf?”

Although Ellie loved art, she chose not to become an artist. The industry was too risky. “What if my parents don’t approve? What if others don’t like my work? What if I end up wasting my time and energy?”

All of this what-ifying did not escape the attention of the chief elf. When he questioned Ellie about her inaction and inability to move forward, she tried to justify herself by offering a long supply of what-if scenarios.

After all her ranting and raving, the chief presented a what-if question of his own. “What if, on your death bed, you look back over your life and regret your inaction? What then?”

Don’t be overcautious to the point of inaction. **Don’t what-if your life away,** because you may just live to regret it.



CHAOS MONSTER

Timmy owned an unusual pet. It was called the Chaos Monster.

Living up to its name the Chaos Monster had the ability to cause chaotic life events to occur. Accidents, injuries, problems, dramas, disputes ... you name it. Almost all painful events were the result of this insidious pest.

Because it was Timmy's monster, Timmy was the recipient of all the chaos. Although he tried to placate the monster, by feeding it and tending to its insatiable appetite, the chaos refused to abate.

Desperate for the chaos to end, Timmy decided to starve the monster. When he implemented his bold plan, life events flared up because the Chaos Monster was enraged. But Timmy remained steadfast refusing to back down.

Surprisingly, after a time, the chaos eased slightly.

Then it eased some more.

At last the Chaos Monster didn't seem so frightening.

If you want to reduce pain and suffering in your life, **stop feeding hate and fear** because without sustenance life's monsters will shrink.



GAIA

Gaia cradled the earth in the palms of her hands.

Although her hands contained immense power, she noticed that opposing energies were working against her own. As she struggled to hold on, Gaia remembered God/dess and how it all began ...

In the beginning, before time existed, there was only a non-physical energy called God/dess. After creating the physical universe, God/dess divided part of itself into tiny pieces called spirits. These spirits animated physical matter. The spirit attached to the earth became known as Gaia.

Gaia cared for the earth, unimpeded in her task, for millennia. When God/dess sent life-forms to inhabit the planet, the human species began to break the balance. By doing so they threatened Gaia's very existence.

Hunting animals to extinction, bulldozing the forests, polluting the water, these were some of the ways in which the balance was being destroyed. Despite her great power, Gaia could feel the earth slipping through her fingers. She knew, should that ever happen, it would mean the end of all physical life.

From one spirit to another, she prayed ...

The spirit of the planet is calling upon us to change. **Change is always possible.** It begins on a small level, it begins with oneself.



LAWS

A wise man addressed a crowd. “If a child steals a loaf of bread, is that wrong?”

“Yes,” was the collective response.

“What if a child steals to feed his or her starving family?” the wise man asked.

There was silence before someone said, “I guess it depends on the motive.”

“What if the motive has been borne of deception, for example, rich and greedy parents lying to their offspring about their true financial situation, thereby unjustly encouraging theft?”

More silence was broken by a new voice. “If a child doesn’t know any better, then a child cannot be blamed.”

“What if the child was actually an adult?” the wise man pressed. “Can an adult’s ignorance also be excused?”

Unable to see where this was going, some in the crowd became angry. “What is the point of this, old man?”

“The law of the people is based on the beliefs of the day. It dictates what is right and wrong, and can sometimes be bent depending on circumstance. The law of the Universe is based on intention. It makes no judgments as to right and wrong, and can never be bent.” The wise man paused. “The latter is completely impartial, as it delivers karma to us.”

By operating on an impersonal system of cause and effect, **God never judges.** It is people who judge, in an attempt to determine right and wrong.



THE HOLE

The land Jake owned and lived on was actually a mound of dirt. It suited him just fine because he loved slinging dirt at others.

Jake would mix the dirt with water, and then hurl mud over his neighbors' fence. He also targeted local cats and dogs, parked cars and unsuspecting passers-by. Making a mess was loads of fun.

As a result of his thoughtless actions Jake's mound of dirt quickly became level. He was too busy slinging the stuff to even notice. The land soon became furrowed. The furrow became a ditch. The ditch became a hole.

Before Jake knew it he had dug himself into a very deep hole. It was dark, dank and miserable. It was also incredibly lonely. Stuck in a self-created prison, Jake wondered if anyone would come to his rescue.

As wisdom has it, if you throw mud you lose ground. **Pay attention to life** otherwise you may end up digging yourself into a hole.



FAITH

Suki was faint, dizzy and weak.

After countless days lost in the wilderness, she feared that death was now upon her. That was when the angel shimmered into existence.

“If you head due north, you will find safety in a village. But first you must cross a stream,” the angel told her. “Avoid its calm section because, despite appearances, it is deep and treacherous. Instead, choose the rippled section—although it will initially require more effort, it is ultimately the best way.”

Aware that she may be hallucinating, Suki thanked the angel and headed north. She had little to lose and much to gain.

After walking for some time, she eventually found the stream.

Joy filled her until she realized the stream was indeed composed of two distinct sections. It meant that a difficult decision needed to be made.

Bracing herself Suki entered the rippled section. The water froze her body and shocked her mind. Nevertheless, Suki persevered because she had faith in the angel, faith in the process, and faith in herself.

Her faith was the reason she made it to the other side.

Spirituality requires not only commitment, **spirituality requires faith.** Faith in a higher power. Faith in the process. And faith in yourself.



GRACE

The Supreme One wanted great things for Mirna so he entrusted her with a pair of wings. These wings were so beautiful and radiant that they could not be seen by the human eye. They were heavenly.

One of Mirna's wings fluttered constantly as an eternal reminder of The Supreme One's love. Despite this Mirna was unaware of the wings attached to her back. In fact, she was oblivious that The Supreme One even existed.

Mirna's awareness, however, was expanding. She knew she lived in a world that cultivated the five senses and dazzled. She also knew she had an inner voice that was immune to superficial distractions.

Although The Supreme One wanted great things for her, only Mirna could determine her fate via the choices she made. As it happened, she chose responsibly by listening to her heart, the inner voice that transcends the physical.

Responsible choice caused her dormant wing to stir.

When the wing of *responsible choice* beats alongside the wing of *grace*, a person can fly into endless possibility. This is what Mirna did. She soared.

Despite appearances, grace is an ever-present gift of assistance. **Grace surrounds you.** It asks only that you make a diligent effort.

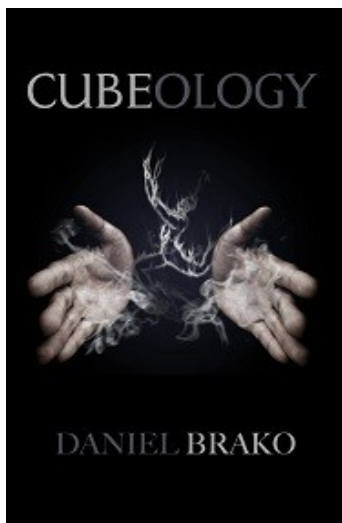


BEAUTY

And it's beautiful
But it wasn't always so
And it's beautiful
Forever, I shall know
And it's beautiful
But it used to be so bad
And it's beautiful
I rue what I once had
And it's beautiful
I used to be so lost
And it's beautiful
I used to hate God
And it's beautiful
Now I love myself
And it's beautiful

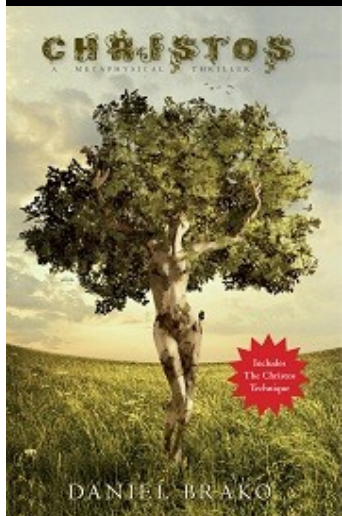
No matter where you are, no matter what you've experienced, you can **create a beautiful life**. But first you have to find the beauty within. Start today.

ADDITIONAL READING



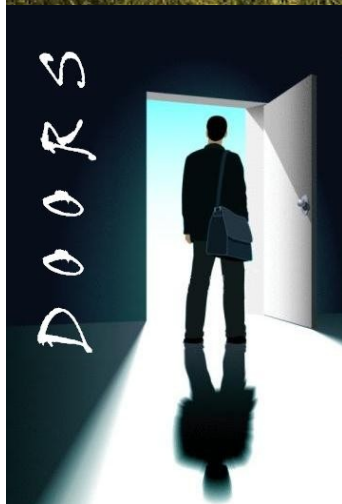
CUBEOLGY (by Daniel Brako)

The Cube is an ancient game that gives each player a different message. While attempting to exploit this enigma, Arian and several friends stumble upon the forgotten art of magic. As they delve deeper into their power, lives begin to unravel as unexpected consequences arise. More than just a thrilling tale, *CUBEOLGY* also includes the *real-life* Cube game, inviting you to enjoy an interactive experience. Are you brave enough to play?



CHRISTOS (by Daniel Brako)

In a controversial blend of fact, fiction and spirituality, Dr Kate Yves finds herself in jeopardy after discovering a metaphysical secret. Described by *Midwest Book Review* as “a riveting read,” this fast-paced thriller explores reincarnation, the afterlife, dreams, personal development and more. The actual CHRISTOS technique is also included, allowing you to explore past lives.



DOORS (by Daniel Brako)

After counseling a troubled client, psychologist David Druas starts noticing doors that others are unable to see. These doors, scattered throughout the city, lead to otherworldly destinations. The question is, are the locations real? When the client is murdered, David’s nightmare deepens because all the evidence identifies him as the killer. As the police close in, he realizes the doors are concealing a dark and tangled truth.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel Brako is a graduate of Newcastle University, where he studied psychology and philosophy. After working in the mental health field he decided to pursue a career in writing, embracing novels, screenplays and short fiction. By blending metaphysics with ‘thrills & chills’ he seeks to make esoteric wisdom more accessible to readers. Daniel lives in Sydney, Australia. For more information, visit www.danielbrako.com