**The Spirit and Alien Party PART FIVE**

In the real, human world, Holly, was answering the front door. I woke on my sofa, empty crushed beer cans all around me, and an ashtray overflowing with cigarette ends and ash. I had a hangover worse than any I could evear remember. Oh No! I don’t smoke! What happened? I thought. But beginning slowly, and then rapidly gaining pace, I realised that I do, and I drink like a fish. My memory of myself, serious about people, sober, somewhere close to sane, and on a mission, rapidly dissolved. The last thing I thought was that I really must make notes when this happens. The first note would be, where do I, me, the one I know, go? In micro-seconds the last vestiges of my life faded and I was in this new alternative one.

I reached for a full tin of beer, the last one, I noticed. Holly followed Tim, my friend and neighbour in. Previously, Hakim would have allowed his spirit to sip a little while I slept at night, and Harrari would definitely have diverted him, as a human, away from my front door. Previously, I despised him. He, previously, was the exact opposite to me, fuzzy in logic, dishonest, and completely oblivious to himself and others around him. But not now, I was like him now.

This had happened before, at least five times. Everything was always exactly the same except for little details that each time I accepted as the correct and only reality. Somehow though, I still retained the hyper-vigilance in every instance, and anomalies presented as bright beacons that were the dots I always had to join up. Hakim was nowhere to be seen.

Holly, the alien I discovered in the wood I once lived in, in a tent, went into the kitchen.

‘You’re an idiot.’ Tim’s patient contempt was always annoying to me.

‘My hackles rose. ‘Don’t start, Tim. I am not in the mood.’

‘You are one hell of a clumsy fool, aren’t you?

I thought maybe he was thinking about last night. A period for which I had no memory.

‘Hakim is still there, you know. You have to go back. Why do you do that?’

‘What?’

‘You know what I mean.’

Realisation filtered across my mind. In times of extreme stress I live a safe alternative existence. One where I can drown in seclusion simply by reaching for a bottle or, in this case, beer. I knew I was on a mission, but really couldn’t care less about continuing it. I reached for a cigarette. Holly stopped me. My desire for it waned and I forgot I wanted to smoke.

In films, when someone with a hangover needs to be ‘sharpened up’ they are ‘forced’ to drink coffee and thrust under a cold shower. It works, but Holly can do it by herself. She knew that I had been to spiritual court, and knew I had been pierced and would have the wound of open emotion until I could please the court that I was reformed in my ways. She could sober me up, but she couldn’t remove the barb that still remained in me. I remembered now why I had gotten drunk. Some things you just can’t get away from. Smoking, though, was a mystery to me.

Tim let himself out. I didn’t notice and didn’t remember he was ever there.

I found Hakim in a souvenir shop in the same town we had been in. Well, I was attracted to his whereabouts. The spirits were ignoring him. It seems impossible to me that we could ever be separated; how the cord that binds him to me could be broken. Yet, I suppose, it never is. There is just noise in the system. Any sussuration, or the sound of the radioactive cosmos on an untuned FM radio, if it is loud enough, will drown out our special link; it will do this to any link beyond human interaction.

‘You look terrible.’ he whispered.

‘Any news?’ I asked.

He looked at me more closely. I heard him think, ‘Oh no.’

‘Court.’ I admitted. But he already knew. It was one of the few times he was not with me, and a rarity that there was no explanation.

‘Again?’ He picked up a small black figure holding a trident in one hand and a spear in the other.

I nodded. I could hear an indistinct voice that belonged to no-one, and never did, saying, ‘You’re an idiot.’ and ‘You’re one hell of a clumsy fool, aren’t you?’ Without an owner, I had to claim it as my own.

The clock on the souvenir shop wall, which when I first looked showed 06:28, now showed 05:28. It seems we were taking our own time with us. I wondered what time it was for the shop-keeper.

Many years ago, shop-keepers of small shops used to leave their shops unattended and do something out the back; the washing up, watch television, who know’s what. They would be alerted by a small bell hung above the door that rang when the door hit it as it opened. It is a friendly, and not at all invasive, sound. This souvenir shop had one. I always heard the bell as, ‘Hello, how are you shopkeeper? I have just come to browse a little.’

The bell sweetly rang. Hakim and I turned to look. What I can only describe as a crested figure filled the doorway, holding a trident in one hand and a spear in the other, just like the little figure that was still in Hakim’s hand. Like the free-standing gargoyle figures in the cathedral and church precinct, light only just managed to reflect from it. It was black, black, black; deep black with only hints of highlights.

It lowered its head to pass under the lintel above the door and stepped in, ringing the bell with its crest as it passed. Behind it, the man who had been, earlier, staring at us with patient contempt in the cafe, followed it in. He studiously ignored us. Strangely, the creature gave way to him and stepped aside. Even more strange, it did it a little clumsily, as though it had not known that someone was there and was surprised. That was when the man looked at Hakim and I. We took the hint and crept past the fairie, while it was off-balance, and out the door. What we had just witnessed was similar to me phasing out and away from Hakim, and into a temporary alternative life where Harrari was Holly carnate, and where I liked my neighbour. The sudden changing of the time displayed on the clock on the wall, a few moments ago, still made no sense to me, but I stored it as an important and relevant anomaly; another dot that would need to be joined with others. I didn’t expect that the creature would be dazed for an hour, so Hakim and I carefully, slowly, and quietly fled, while we could. We needed to regroup with Harrari, this just wasn’t working.

The village above the twee valley was still there, but finding it without going through the cathedral and church precinct and the belligerant priests proved problematic by another route. Somehow, I knew the name of the village I knew as home but had never lived in, and Hakim and I tried to follow fairy-tale-like wooden signs that pointed to different villages. Just as I started to read them and understand the words, they changed. I was tempted to ask for directions from the few loiterers we saw seated on benches with nothing to do but watch us, but eventually we got there. The lovely, elderly lady was there, unsmiling.