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THE GREEN LION MEDICINE SHOW

By Justin Patrick Moore

“And that’s it for *Ecollage*, your source for low-voltage doses of esoteric radio activity,” Jacob spoke into the microphone before handing it over to Benji, host of *The Village News Hour*, the next slotted show on station WXEN, voice of New Delphos, Ohio.

One by one Jacob rolled the three hand cranked phonographs back into the far corner of a studio crowded with radio equipment, battery arrays and a tangle of cables under its slanted ceiling. He was careful not to bump their antique horns as he’d gone through hell to procure and get them working again. Then he took the vinyl records into the library room adjacent to the studio.

Though there were no new records being pressed, not that Jacob knew of anyway, he had amassed a sizable backlog of old music from the 20th century preserved on vinyl. Compact discs were obsolete, useful only to make hanging mobiles or other shiny decorations; but vinyl, if you had a hand-cranked phonograph, was still playable. Jacob had salvaged three such devices and with some ingenuity had adapted the needles from more recent record players to work on the far older machines. In this manner he was still able to mix recordings together, playing two or three records at a time, giving new life to what would have otherwise remained frozen in wax. And over top of these mixes he would start rapping in a strange rhythm, what old Williard, the master librarian he was apprenticed under, had taught him the Druids of old called *Tenm Laida*, or Illumination through Song. Jacob tranced out during these rap sessions, and the lyrics that came through him were often surprising and oracular. Into this turbulent froth he would even sometimes add melodies from the libraries collection of low voltage electronic instruments, some of the circuits of which he’d soldered and bent with Williard’s help.

But he was still working on his ability to scratch.

His weekly show was a favorite among many of the old timers. They sat and listened in their rocking chairs while sipping watered down whiskey or moonshine at the end of the long workday. They remembered recorded music more than anyone else. It didn’t matter to them so much that Jacob often spun the stuff at the wrong speed. Most other music programs on WXEN pooled from the strong talent of live playing local musicians. Jacob’s show, in using pre-recorded material, was tinged with nostalgic anachronism as he tried his hand at recreating the old fashioned art of the DJ alongside his inspired and improvisatory raps.

After filing the records away he walked downstairs. The Johnston brothers were sweeping up the debris of grist on the floor. It hadn’t been ground into the finer corn flour for the breads, tortillas and polenta they also made, but would be used in making a mash for the family’s line of Straight Ohio Whiskey.

The town's radio station was on the top floor of the water mill. The same power that chaffed the grain also turned the alternators that in turn sent a flow of electricity into the transmitter, human voice and music over the ether, and into people's homes.

"Will I see you at the Green Lion Medicine Show?" Jacob asked the brothers.

"Sure will, soon as we get the grist in the tubs and splash the dust off our faces", Ryan said. "By the way, your show tonight, it was a real doozy. We liked it a lot."

"Thanks Ryan. I think I was extra keyed up, excited to see what the Medicine Show has in store for us this year," he told the brothers as they swept. "And it's cool that Davy is going to take the remote rig down to the field and broadcast it live."

Davy, an avid radio experimenter, came on the air just after dusk, the same time the handbills and broadsides announced the Medicine Show to start. Printed in viridian ink, the emblem on the flyer was of a lion swallowing the sun. It was announced they would provide an evening of music, mirth, mummers and magical elixirs.

The fact that the Green Lion Medicine Show was pulling into town had most of the town in a state as keyed up as Jacob was. Even with his reservations, he had allowed himself to be swept up in its contagious tug. The memories of what had happened last year, were still there though, gnawing on his nerves, but he was trying not to let them bring him down.

Jacob lived with Williard and his wife and most of his work at home was done for the week. At the New Delphos Library he'd finished the putting the mends on Miss Woods' copy of *The Holy Books of Thelema*, transferring the weathered paperback into a durable hard back binding. It had been a pleasure to bind that book, a work of love and will, as he'd really only read *The Book of the Law* before, and now he was beginning to have a better grasp on Thelemic cosmology. Not that he himself was a Thelemite. Many in town were, especially those men and women who were members of the lodge, but not all. Williard was eclectic in his own approach to religion and the spirit world, being a librarian and all, though he did have a special penchant for the Norse pantheons, and a large place in his heart for the Celtic. Jacob didn't know exactly what religion he was. An apprentice librarian himself, he was interested in everything, and was learning from Williard's how to take what worked, and leave what didn't. One thing Jacob was confident of, sure of, for certain was that he'd left his Dad and his Dad's church behind him.

"I guess we'll see you there," Raynard said. He was Ryan's twin brother and the two of them had taken over the bulk work of running the mill now their Dad was moving closer to his end.

"I'm going to go have a beer at Quinsbees first," Jacob said. "Stop by and join me if you finish up early. Otherwise I guess I'll see you at the field."

"Aye, will do." The brothers nodded to him as he walked out the large wooden doors.

It was Jacob's custom to have a late afternoon beer at Quinsbees Tavern on most days, especially after his radio show. Today that beer was taking on an added dimension for him. As much as he was excited, he was also nervous.

Nervous that his Dad would show up at the Green Lion Medicine Show with a bunch of other wackjobs from the cult his old man led up in the husk of what was once a mecca of manufactured goods; the huge old mall standing in a field of rusty cars and half

starved weeds struggling up from the broken asphalt. It was also the headquarters of Prophetic Prosperity Church, and his fathers flock all lived under its leaky roof in squalid communal arrangements. Jacob had fled when he was a teen, four years ago.

He was still a teen, barely. Twenty lay just around the corner in mid September but his Dad's ministry still hung over him like a cloud of desolation. As he grew further and further into his manhood, reconciliation seemed farther and farther away. His upbringing in the cult of prosperity had driven him on in ways he was just now beginning to realize. It had pushed him ever deeper into the *ecosophic* research his father despised. He'd found a place in the Library Guild and Williard's guidance had given further shape to the person he was becoming.

But somewhere inside Evan, his Dad, was a good person. He was charismatic and intelligent, even as he clung to the old ways and prayed for the return of cheap oil and the kind of extravagant living that had only been afforded to America at the height of the Imperium. Evan himself had been born during the Imperiums decline, to parents and grandparents who were no better off than anyone else, but who still believed unlimited wealth could be granted to the person who truly believed, that a mysterious law of attraction would bring an individual whatever it was he thought about all the time.

Jacob thought it was bullshit, and this deep point of contention between father and son had been the main reason he left home, to build a life he felt was more in line with the realities of a world where there weren't unlimited resources of fossil fuels. To build a life in a world where comforts and good living were possible, but were made by hand and sweat, were the result of applied efforts, and whose long term success was enforced by the limits of nature.

Jacob never made it to Quinsbees. When he stepped out into late Augusts bright afternoon sun he was nearly blinded, the inside of the mill being a dark and humid place. Squinting, he almost ran into Wendy. While Jacob was eloquent on the air, in front of her cascading brunette hair and toothy smile his tongue turned to rubber.

"How was your show Jacob?" she asked.

"I think it went alright," he said. "The Johnston brothers liked it. Did you listen?"

"I caught the beginning of it, but I had to leave to come up here. Are you going to be at the Medicine Show?" She needn't have asked. Most everybody would turn out for it, mayhap the too old, sick, or young. The Green Lion Medicine Show was part entertainment, and part sales pitch. Their medicines worked though, and people often stocked up on their herbal phials and tinctures for the winter.

"Yeah, I'm going."

"Since you didn't ask me yourself, I'm going to ask you."

His heart fluttered. She spoke again.

"Do you want to go with me?"

He'd asked her out to Ulrich's Fourth of July barn dance. They went and had a good time. Jacob had such a good time he got sick off the wheat ale and corn whiskey. She ended up having to escort back him home, holding him up most of the way, as his head spun and he rambled and he puked. It certainly hadn't gone the way he thought and never did get that good night kiss. Since then, they'd both been awful busy, she didn't ome into the library as often, and he wasn't sure where they stood.

"Well sure, of course I'll go with you. I was going to go to Quinsbees for a pint or two. What are you doing now?"

Jacob looked at her then looked down at his feet, standing on what remained of the sidewalk. As the concrete cracked, the people of New Delphos replaced it with fieldstone and flat rocks from local creek beds. His palms felt sweaty and he was annoyed at himself for being anxious around Wendy.

Her dad Collin was a big man in town. He'd lead the work crews that were responsible for reopening the section of the Miami and Erie Canal between New Delphos, alongside the Auglaize River, and the Wabash and Erie Canal, due north. This expansion was a great boon to the farmers and craftsmen of the area, who in turn fed the gentle rise of merchants that now trekked back and forth between the port markets of Toledo selling and trading wares. Traffic between Cincinnati and Toledo had also increased during the months between spring and fall, providing inns like Quinsbees with a steady trickle of extra income. Collin's household made off well. After the canal was operational he became one of the town's key merchants, offering transport services for goods and travelers between New Delphos and Toledo.

"I was headed down to Hester's Rock," Wendy said. "I've got a bit of bread, dill cheese and a bottle of last year's blackberry wine I snagged from the cellar." She clutched her satchel. "Maybe you'd care to join me? We can head over to the field afterwards for the show."

Hester's Rock was a quarter mile downstream from the mill on the Auglaize. Most people didn't go there anymore. It was once a swimming hole and kids used to love jumping off the large slab of granite into the water. Until Hester drowned. Now the hole was said to be haunted. People lit candles and left offerings of squash and pumpkin on Halloween, but generally it was left alone. There were other places to swim. But for whatever reason the teens of New Delphos liked to hang out there, smoking tobacco or pot, drinking alcohol, and when they could, making out with each other.

A lot of babies could be traced to Hester's Rock. Jacob wasn't unaware of the fact.

"Thank you. I'd be delighted." Jacob blushed. Maybe he'd get the chance to make up for his previous mishap.

"So what have you been reading lately?" Wendy asked him.

There friendship had grown over the years, from casual conversing whenever she visited the library, on to being invited to dinner with her family, to his asking her to the dance. Yet in the back of his mind Jacob had always thought she was way out of his league. A librarian would never be as prosperous as a merchant, relying as they did on the town stipend and dues from the guild. It was a living wage, but nothing like what Collin had. He didn't have anything to offer a girl like Wendy. In his view she already had all she needed and a little more. But she still came up to talk to him about books. Books were a shared passion. Even for a merchant, books were a luxury, expensive. The library held more than any one person in New Delphos could afford, and so Wendy always had a reason to visit.

Wendy was still waiting for him to answer her question. She poked him in the ribs and he made a clumsy attempt at brushing her hand away. "So what have you been reading? I know your head is full of books."

He rubbed the growth of stubble on his chin. He'd never grow a full beard, but it was enough that he had to shave on a regular basis, or suffer the irritation and look less than presentable. "Hmmm. I have this problem, working at the library. I mean, it's a good

problem to have so I'm not complaining. But I'm always finding something else to read. So I have to discipline myself to actually finish a book. This past month it seems like I've been reading six different books at once."

"I think that's hot," she said just under her breath. She had never come on to him so direct before. She added "But that still doesn't answer my question," a little louder.

As he warmed up to the conversation the rapid beating of his heart started to slow. "Mostly I've been reading stuff that's part of the Librarian Guild's curriculum the past few months. My apprenticeship is almost over and Williard is about to give me some of the preliminary tests so as I can become a journeyman. So I've been studying some radio handbooks. I've got to take a practical test for contacting the eleven other libraries in Ohio who are part of the guild."

"But you already have some radio experience under your belt."

"Yeah I do, but FM broadcasting is different than working a transceiver. Williard suggested I start out on WXEN to get comfortable talking on the air so that parts not a problem. I've also been helping Will when he makes his contacts to the other libraries on the amateur bands too, so I think I'll do alright there. It's my test on the Art of Memory that has me concerned."

"I've heard of the Art a little bit, but what is it exactly?"

By the time Jacob had mused on how best to explain the Art they had reached Hester's Rock. Dapples of sunlight flickered through the leaves of the tall cottonwoods whose roots drank deep down by the river. The day was humid and they had both worked up a light sweat.

"It has a long history. It reaches all the way back to classical times," Jacob started to say, but Wendy had put her satchel of wine and cheese down on the ground, and was taking off her shoes. Her plaid skirt had the tartan pattern of her father's clan, the warp and weft being purple and gold. It hung down to her knees but she had started to shimmy it off. On top she wore a simple lavender chemise. In and of itself, it left nothing to the imagination. It was removed in one elegant roll, her hands pulling it up over her head.

"Well don't just stand there in your clothes," she said, shaking out her hair, "take them off and join me for a swim. It's been a long day and I need to cool off before the show."

Wendy climbed up on top of the granite slab and jumped into the chill water of the Auglaize letting out a little scream as she did so.

Jacob's instincts kicked in and he unlaced his shoes, shedding his trousers and underwear in a heap, unbuttoning the top few clasps of his cotton shirt to reveal the bony rib cage of his stick figure before climbing the rock and jumping in. Embarrassed, he did this as quickly as possible, before she could see too much of him uncovered by clothes or water.

An anxious young man, and given to superstition, he said a quick prayer to Hester asking their forgiveness for jumping off her rock and swimming in her pool.

The water was deep and cold. The pair felt an immediate invigoration. Treading water next to each other he looked into her grey blue eyes and smiled.

"Aren't you afraid of the ghost?" he asked.

"Nah. She might haunt these waters, but I've never seen her. Besides, Hester was my dad's girlfriend once upon a time. He was planning to ask for her hand in marriage,

but then the swimming accident happened. If she hadn't of died, I never would have been born. You know what the other weird thing is?"

Jacob was speechless.

"My mom was her best friend."

Then Wendy splashed Jacob in the face with water and he splashed her back, both laughing. They swam back and forth between the banks, flinging moss and algae at each other, Wendy drawing out the playful nature of the somber young bookish man who had run away from home. She always knew there was a playful kid inside him, just beneath the ferocious intellect she also admired. Swimming, grabbing onto each other's ankles and knees, tickling each other, the two stopped, light glimmering between their eyes, poised for a kiss.

The day was forking off into an unexpected direction, a very pleasant one Jacob hadn't foreseen on waking.

Then two little boys, who shared the same Brunette hair as Wendy, darted out from behind a copse of honeysuckle, throwing large rocks into the water, startling the swimmers. Wendy stood up in a shallow part of the river, crossing her arms over her breasts. Jacob stood up in front of Wendy to protect her.

The boys shouted, "We're telling dad you were skinny dipping with the library boy!" They laughed with mischief and threw Jacob's clothes into the river.

"You little brats! Don't think I'll forget this," Wendy yelled at them as they ran off snickering, "and you better remember, it's not me who's going to be getting in trouble!"

Jacob's clothes were soaked. Scowling, he grabbed them, wrenched them out, and flung them crumpled on the rock.

Wendy came up behind him and put her soft water wrinkled hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry Jake -can I call you Jake?" He nodded once. "They won't say anything to my dad. Really, they adore me, and will do just about anything I tell them to. Especially if I threaten them with no stories for a month."

Her hand comforted him even as he was afraid of being torn a new one by the gruff figure of her dad, even as he was angry that his shirt and britches were soaking wet.

"Besides, my dad likes you."

He was still hoping for that kiss when she got out of the water and pulled out a small blanket from the satchel.

"Why don't you cover up with this while your clothes dry and we drink this bottle of wine," she said. The sun had already baked Hester's Rock throughout the day and it had about an hour left to help cook out the moisture.

He got out and covered himself up while she got dressed. She wasn't shy or coy at all but matter of fact about it and self-assured. So as not to stare over much, Jake busied himself with opening the bottle and taking a long pull. He wasn't very experienced with women but he hoped that would change soon.

"Swimming is thirsty work," he said.

Dressed, she sat down next to him on the ground, both leaning against the sturdiness of Hester as they took a swig from the bottle. "Here's to that," she said, tipping the bottle back, "and to our friendship." She passed the bottle back and he drank.

Boy, it was strong stuff. He didn't know if they ought to finish the whole thing between them, or he might not be able to walk to the field and he wasn't trying to repeat

past mistakes. He moved the bottle over to his other hand and then took his free hand and caressed the smooth down of light colored hair on Wendy's forearm, before clasping her hand in his, their fingers twining into a knot.

They cuddled in silence for a few minutes, and then drank some more. Then he told her of the Art of Memory. She listened as the words fell without effort off his tongue.

"It's an ancient art that can be traced all the way back to classical times. It's a way of being able to recall information by building up images in the mind, usually in what is called a Memory Palace, but the librarians of the guild call it the Museum of Mnemosyne. You see, Mnemosyne, or Memory, was mother of the Nine Muses, and way back a long time ago in Alexandria, the library was part of the great museum, or Temple of the Muses. One of the things a master librarian in the guild has to do is to build inside the temple of his own mind or soul, a Museum of Memory. From this we're able to recall not only information from our substantial reading but also tap into the memory of nature herself. Not that I've gotten that far yet, but I'm working on it. The great poet Yeats noted that the borders of our memory are always shifting, and that if we expand those borders we can gain access to the one great memory. Being able to drink from the fountain of water at the entrance to the Museum of Memory is a vital step towards restoring original knowledge to ourselves."

"That's interesting what you say about the borders of memory, because I find something similar happens to me when I dream," she said, squeezing his hand. "I've never told you before, but you've been in a lot of my dreams."

"Is that why you just happened to be passing by when I left the station? Were you planning to meet me on my way out?"

"I don't know, what do you think?"

"Either way I'm glad you did."

Together they looked at the sun. It was almost down, and the Medicine Show would be starting soon. His clothes were damp, but he could wear them. It was a small price to pay for the company of such a beautiful lady.

"I'm excited about the show," Jake said, "but can we do this again? Come here alone?"

"Here or somewhere else. I see us spending a lot more of our time together."

Walking the trail they shared the dill goat cheese and crusty corn bread, washing it down with swigs of wine. Merriment filled their hearts, and they could hear the trill of pipes as they approached from the riverside the old field on the edge of town. It was more rock and clay than dirt and so had never been successfully tilled or farmed. It served instead as a gathering place for festivals, or as a campsite for the groups of migrants (Asian, Mexican, Californian, Texan) who often traveled through, making their way from west to east, trying to escape the perpetual droughts of their former home. The field was dry and dusty this time of year, but when the fall rains came it would transform into a massive mud puddle.

As they got closer they could hear the deep excitement of the crowd. There was laughter yes, but also shouting, outrage, anger and argument, as Jacob feared. Coming up from the woods by the river he could see his father and his flock forming a barricade,

holding up signs with a mixture of bible verses, new age slogans and messages of hate scrawled across them, trying to bar the townsfolk from entry to the show.

Most of the townsfolk ignored the protesters, but as they got closer Jake and Wendy could make out the vile words and fiery bitumen the congregation of Prophetic Prosperity Church hurled at the show goers. His fathers voice topped them all. In his hand he had a copy of *The Green Lion Almanack*, waving it around.

“Those who take part in this show take part in the work of the devil,” he screamed, spittle flying from his lips. “And if you take part in the work of the devil you won’t ever enter the kingdom of heaven! If you want to be cured of an illness, focus your mind on being cured. The snake oil these voodoo priests sell won’t help you any!”

The entertainment acts and sales pitches were performed in a makeshift horseshoe ring made up of the wagons and carriages of their travelling caravan. Davy, from WXEN, was running some wires and making some final tweaks to the remote unit he was going to use to broadcast the event. Three elders from the Medicine Show were milling about on the other side, behind the wagons talking amongst themselves.

One of the roadmen was taking the companies horses down to the river for a long drink. He was about Jacob’s age and was passing them on his way to the water.

Jake stopped him. Wendy petted one of the mares as the two men spoke.

“What are you guys going to do about the protesters? Last year they ruined the show.”

“Blind Mojo Moses knew they’d be causing trouble again,” the man said pulling a comb from the back of his faded jeans and running it through his thick afro. “He’s got a surprise lined up for him. But we’re waiting till he gets good and fired up before we go and do anything.”

“I’m sorry you have to deal with him,” Jacob said. “He’s my dad.”

“Don’t worry none. Many is the bright apple that has sprung from the bad seed.”

Jacob grunted. Inside he was seething mass of conflicting emotions. He wanted to do something. He needed to do something.

“Is there any way I can help? I don’t want him burning up copies of your *Almanack* and broadsheets like he did last year when you all came through.”

The Green Lion Medicine Show was based out of New Orleans, heading back from their excursions north in late summer. New batches of their potent potions were prepared over fall and winter.

As if to spite Jacob his Dad had lit the pages of the *Almanack* on fire with a Zippo. “These words were inspired by Satan’s spirits! They won’t bring you into the true Prosperity of the Lord! Only if we all renounce the evil of Satan will we be able to get the cars back on the road and reopen the holy shopping malls of the past!”

His father was way out of touch with reality. But he wasn’t the only one who longed for the old ways, when work wasn’t done by human hands, but was cranked out by mindless machines. When food was prepackaged and microwaved instead of cooked with fire. When desires were satisfied instantaneously with a wad of cash or the click of a mouse. Minds were kept numb and oversaturated by a guile media and by a medical establishment whose answer to psychological crisis was the dulling of emotion. Minster Evan taught it could all be brought back if only people were willing to believe. If only they concentrated hard enough on being righteous and upright God would reward them with unlimited wealth. But God had deemed it necessary to punish America for turning

their back on him. And so the Imperium had fallen, and the gates had shut on an Eden of sleeping treasures. Every night his flock prayed and meditated for divine intervention, for a reopening of the oil wells.

When Jacob started questioning the faith his father extolled, seeing as how it didn't line up with what he saw in the world, he himself was punished. Beaten by fist and lashed by tongue. He hadn't been the only one to flee into town or elsewhere, either; because no matter how hard the people prayed the long days of leisure and convenience that Evan kept promising never showed up.

The horse keeper pointed to where the elders of the Medicine Show were holding council, even as the first act, a trio of clownish jugglers, attempted to sway attention from the increasingly vehement voices of their protestors. "Go over there and tell them Damien sent you."

Jacob shook his hand, said "Thanks" and went running. Wendy was quick to follow. They came to a halt, panting as two old men, and one old woman conferred among each other in quiet voices.

"What you need boy?" Blind Mojo Moses said from behind a pair of ancient sunglasses held together by duct tape. "Can't you see we is talking?"

Mojo Moses was old. The wrinkles in his deep black skin were like grooves in a record, only they contained more history and wisdom than any old piece of vinyl. "And not only are we conferring amongst ourselves, we're conferring with the spirits. You gotta show some respect."

"I'm sorry sir. I meant no harm. I just came over to offer my help. You see, my dad is the one whose been causing all the trouble and, and..."

"And you'd like to settle you're score with him?" The old lady offered. Her accent was thick, unlike anything he'd ever heard. "Well don't you worry none, cause it's the frogs own tongue that does the betraying."

Another man, nearly as ancient looking as Mojo and Lady Lisette, said "His frog legs are already getting boiled in the cauldron, but we can't let him cook to long or he'll spoil the gumbo."

He was right. The townsfolk were showing their anger to the zealous protesters. Mrs. Hambrick, a stout elderly lady, hurled an old potato at the line of men, women, and children from Prophetic Prosperity Church. "I need my medicine you ingrates!" she yelled.

A couple of the church folk started to give worried looks. One of the deacons rubbed his head. He had a bemused look on his face, as if he didn't know if he was on the right side of the confrontation anymore.

Then six New Delphos constables rolled over the ridge on their bicycles and into the field. They skidded to a halt between the groups, kicking up a cloud of fine dust into the face of Evan and his flock.

Then yelling out over the top of the crowd was a booming voice. "Wendy! Get over here! I need to talk to you." It was Collin, her father.

Jacob's face blanched. Wendy gave him a searching look, pecked him on the cheek, and squeezed his hand, before going over to her dad.

Then the Johnston brothers came running up to Jacob. His head was spinning. The field was exploding into action and he felt like his feet were stuck in quicksand, an inner sinking feeling he struggled to escape from.

“We missed you at Quinsbee’s buddy,” one of the twins said, before raising his fingers to the Green Lion elders in an informal salute.

“I got distracted”, he said.

The other twin looked at Wendy who was now arguing with her dad. “I bet you did. We all done wondered when you two was gonna disappear together for awhile.”

Lady Lisette came over to him. Davy was with her. “I think your time is now,” she said. “Speak your truth.”

Davy handed him a bullhorn. He noticed the bullhorn had a wireless microphone connected to it.

“That’s attached to our radio system. Your voice will project out from the speakers on top of the wagons,” Davy said.

Jake looked and saw the wooden speaker cabinets mounted on top of the caravans. This must have been what Davy was setting up before.

“Just talk like you did before when you was on the radio,” Blind Mojo Moses said. “We heard you this afternoon while we was setting up. I ain’t heard nothing like that in a long time. You did good. You can do good again.”

A breeze started blowing in and three rays of light flashed through his mind. Then he felt tasted milk and honey on his tongues and lips. He was ready to speak. He held up the bullhorn and strode out into the center of the horseshoe ring.

“Citizens of New Delphos listen up!” There was a murmur and stir in the crowd as people’s eyes bored into him, as his voice projected from the multiple angles of the speakers mounted on all the wagons. A couple more vegetables were thrown at the Church folk, more soft potatoes monstrous with their pink sprouting eyes, and handfuls of squishy tomatoes ripened too long on the vine. The cops on their bikes yelled at the townies to stop their assault while also trying to keep Evans flock from doing more than spitting and hurling their righteous curses.

“In the old world, before the American Imperium started to fall, people had the freedom of assembly and the right to protest. I still uphold that right!”

People didn’t know whether to cheer or boo so they just shut up and listened. Jacobs voice was strong and commanding. Something had changed in him. Something had clicked. The words came from his heart, even as the images for them percolated and condensed downwards from the inner distillery of his memory, from the living books conversing and cavorting inside the Museum of Mnemosyne he had built in the dark cavern of his skull.

“I also don’t want to tell people how to live. If my dad and his people want to keep living in the mall like they do, let them be. By the same token, it’s not harming them any for us to have a little fun, and share in the fruits of the Medicine Shows herbal alchemy.”

He paused for a moment, and looked at the crowd.

“However, as a member of the Library Guild I oppose all forms of censorship. Those of us who are gathered here today, of our own free will, have seen the Minister of Prophetic Prosperity Church burn one of the *Almanacks* brought to us by the good people of the Green Lion Medicine Show. Now this man, my dad, is free to do with his own property what he likes. But if he is going to burn this literature he should do it on his own time and on his own property. As for now, I think he’s at least violated the New Delphos ordinance against open flames.”

They all had it beaten into them from the time they were kids. There was a Fire League but it wasn't anything like it was in the old days. They kept a running truck, powered on biofuel, but the parts for it were getting harder to replace. Fire was a serious thing and those who were reckless with it paid accordingly and answered to what law remained.

"Now he wouldn't like it if we chucked a few bibles onto the bonfire. But most of us would never do such a thing. We are a community tolerant of many philosophies and many faiths. But I don't think it would hurt Evan none to spend the night in jail. After all, his faith teaches that we each create our own reality. Look at the reality you've created for yourself dad. People have come here to have fun and to stock up on some useful medicines for the winter, and you just want to spoil the fun because their way of looking at things doesn't fit into the tunnel you view reality from. Maybe you can meditate on that tonight because I'm sure you won't be able to manifest a key to let yourself out."

Everyone laughed. The members of the Church were looking discombobulated. Evan tried to run, but Collin, who was in his path stuck out his foot and tripped the minister, who fell onto his face. Collin grabbed him by the arms and yanked him up, twisting it behind his back until he yelled out in pain. Collin worked outside nearly every day and his physique showed it.

"Let me go you bastard," Evan yelled. But he didn't until the constables strode over and tightened the steel handcuffs around his wrists.

"It's a wonder Jacob could have sprung from such as you," Clarence said. "He must have taken more after his mother. My eldest Wendy has a love for him now. And that means he has my blessing. And my back. So you and all your folk up in that falling apart mall better watch your step around him, hear?"

Evan, cowed, shook his head and said nothing as he was marched off to the edge of the field by two constables. The other four hung around watching the Prophetic Prosperity Church brethren. Some attempted to protest their leaders arrest. Others slipped off back down the road towards their mall that lay a few miles outside of town. Some diluted themselves into the crowd, eager to take part in something that had so long been held back from them. These were the same who later took refuge in the welcoming homes of family members that had long been estranged, thankful for an easy out from the cultish faction. A few others headed further abroad. Evans edifice had already been crumbling, and now parts of it were breaking away.

The Elders thanked Jacob before walking into the center of the horseshoe, Blind Mojo Moses holding the bullhorn. The Johnston brothers clapped Jacob on the back. Williard smiled at him from the crowd and Wendy ran up to him and kissed him on the lips.

His head was buzzing from adrenaline and his feet felt light.

Mojo Moses spoke into the bullhorn. "Ladies and Gentleman the show has just begun."

But before he could really enjoy himself there was one more thing Jacob needed to do. He walked over to where his dad was being held by the constables. Evan looked at him with surprise as his son spoke.

"I know you're mad at me right now, but I was thinking that maybe in the next few days I could come over to the mall. There's a lot of good stuff going on in my life right now and I want to tell you about it."

-Justin Patrick Moore
Cincinnati, Ohio
September 27, 2011