

I've Been Waiting For You

**Thomas J. Murphy Jr.
September 30, 2019**

On March 17, 1845, in his 70th year, Johnny Appleseed blew out his bedside candle and fell asleep for the last time in his life.

This Massachusetts native, born in 1774, spent his adult life planting apple seeds and spreading the word of Swedenborgian Christianity across a large part of the Great Lakes region of The United States. The orchards he planted assisted the settlers of the "West" to lay claim to ownerless property which necessitated the planting of fruiting trees. In spite of being a man with considerable wealth, Johnny lived as an ascetic, often shoeless, wearing burlap sacks and rags as clothing. To Johnny, this was the correct way to live life as exemplified by Jesus. Like Jesus, he lived a celibate life. Unlike Jesus, he professed that he had been visited in his dreams by female spirits who told him that they would be his wives in the afterlife.

During Johnny's last night of sleep, a female spirit entered his dream revealing herself as all who had visited him before. Tonight she would fulfill her promises. She carefully mounted Johnny and brought forth his ecstasy. As she dissipated into the ether, Johnny whispered with his last breath the name of his lover: "Panacea." She departed with the last of Johnny's seed, successfully sown.

At some point after her intimacy with the mortal Johnny Appleseed, Panacea's pregnancy began to show. One day, Panacea was sitting with her friend Eris, the goddess of strife and discord. There were many gods in Olympus who raised an eyebrow at the cozy relationship between the goddess of strife and discord with Panacea the goddess of universal remedy. Eris, in a tone certain to cause discord, commented to Panacea, "Putting on a few extra pounds are we?"

"Your rudeness knows no bounds Eris," Panacea shot back. She sighed. "If you don't already know, I am with child."

"Who's the lucky God?" asked Eris.

"The beloved father is not a god. He was a human," answered Panacea.

"Was?" inquired Eris.

Panacea lowered her head in sadness. "He died shortly after we conceived."

"That is unfortunate," consoled Eris. "Who was he?"

Panacea sheepishly answered "Johnny Appleseed."

Eris twisted into inappropriate laughter. "Why in Zeus' name would you choose a mortal, much less the disheveled Johnny Appleseed when there are so many great men from whom to choose? Got a little fetish for tin pot wearing wanderers?"

Panacea responded. "Johnny Appleseed was a great man. First of all, the apple trees he planted aided my interest of promoting remedy and health. Secondly, he accomplished this in The United States of America, the most powerful nation to have ever existed on Earth, a nation built upon the ideals of mighty Athens. Common phrases in his land are 'An apple a day keeps the doctor away' and 'As American as Apple Pie'. He was and is a fundamental part of the identity of that great nation. He was my kind of guy."

Eris sat quietly for a moment, wrestling with the jealousy rising within her. She ached once again for the only child, a son, she had lost. She thought of his smile then said, "I am pleased for you Panacea. I wish you and your child health and happiness." Eris rose from her seat, turned to leave and whispered under her breath, "And may your child be of the mortals more than of the gods so that you Panacea will understand the folly of hope."

So it came to pass after the gestation period of a goddess that a boy was born in good health with a ruddy face and ready smile. Panacea named him Johnnyson after his father. He was a happy and lively young demigod, if not a particularly bright one. One of the consequences of being a demigod on Olympus was that you would be considered an idiot by the full blooded children of the gods. They teased Johnnyson incessantly about his father's appearance, clothed in burlap and rags, shoeless, wearing a tin pot on his head.

Johnnyson was embarrassed. The others only knew of his father by his image, not his deeds. Every attempt to defend his father's reputation, and by association his own, was met with derisive laughter and frequent fists to his gut. He knew he was not as smart as the other children, but he also knew he did not deserve their hate.

From the time Johnnyson was born, Panacea had told him stories of his father, about how much he had done for the image and identity of the greatest nation of the Earth, about how he had labored intently for the well-being of others. He felt safe and loved as she lulled him to sleep with these stories. One night he asked, "Mother, will I ever be rid of the these horrible children? Will I ever be smart?"

Panacea's heart constricted in anguish for her son. "All will be well my son. You will grow and be strong. You will accomplish things you cannot imagine." Johnnyson reclined into sleep against her side.

Eris had developed a deep fondness for Johnnyson. He reminded her of her own son and the delight he had brought her. That loss was still unbearable, but the young Johnnyson's cheer and innocence pleased her. She knew that the torment of the other children was in part her responsibility, being the goddess of strife. Normally she felt nothing in the way of remorse for

the effect of strife or discord, but in this case, with a child so cheerful in the face of the harshness of his life, she felt the sharpness of remorse.

Over the years Eris and Johnnyson spent many long hours together in play and conversation. She was kind to him as though he was her own. She encouraged him to disregard the negative voices of his tormentors. She loved him.

As he matured, Johnnyson grew weary of Olympus and pined to follow in his father's footsteps on Earth. Panacea's stories of Earth and his father shimmered in his mind like a bright flame dissolving the dark oppression of night. He wanted to make his mother as proud of him as she was of his father. He begged for her permission to leave Olympus and go to Earth. Panacea told him that she would ask Eris for her counsel. Eris comforted her that he would flourish on Earth, that he would fulfill his destiny. With the trepidation any mother endures when a child is about to leave home, Panacea relented. He could return to the land of his father.

A few weeks before he was to depart, Johnnyson sought Eris' advice. "What am I to do on Earth? Should I spread the apple seed far and wide as did my father?"

"No Johnnyson. You are destined to far exceed the influence of your father."

"How can that possibly be true when I am so stupid?" asked Johnnyson.

"You may be thought simple minded here on Olympus amongst the gods, my dear Johnnyson. But on Earth you will be considered a god. Your father provided a remedy for hunger and ill health in the form of the apple. It is your destiny to alleviate the greatest of all of human ills."

"Of what ill do you speak?" he asked.

"Suffering is the most basic of all human ills. All humans suffer, some from physical wounds or ailments, some from disturbances of the mind. It is the misfortune of every human to endure the pain associated with mortality. You, my sweet Johnnyson will do what no mortal ever could, not even your father. You will usher in the abolition of pain and suffering. You will raise the entire human race a little closer to godliness." Eris gently touched his cheek.

"How will I accomplish that?" asked Johnnyson.

She handed him a small silver pouch sewn tightly shut with threads of gold. "You are to search for a lost man and give him this."

He took the pouch in his hands. It felt like it contained sand. "A pouch full of sand?" he asked.

“No, the pouch contains minute seeds, gathered along the slopes of Mt. Olympus by Demeter. The lost man will know how to use them to their greatest effect. He is a genius in the ways of humans.”

“What is this man’s name?” asked Johnnyson.

“Sadly, I know not his name, nor what appearance he takes,” answered Eris.

“How will I know him, if I do not know these things?” he asked.

“You will know him by the fact that he will say that he is lost and not lost. It is this man who will lead you to your destiny.”

“Where will I find him Eris?”

“North of the great city where you will re-enter the plain of mortals,” she explained.

With expected sadness and tears all around, Johnnyson bid farewell to his mother and Eris. As he disappeared, the two goddesses embraced in sorrow and grief.

Johnnyson materialized in New York City. He stood in awe of the masses of humanity purposefully milling this way and that. As he stared, passersby asked if he was lost. “No” he mumbled to each inquisitor as he pushed past them. Dazzled and tempted by the seemingly endless array of worldly offers, he continued north until the city gave way to villages and fields.

He wandered for days looking for signs of a lost man. Would he be lost in thought or perhaps searching as though he had lost his way? Every man he approached with the question “Are you the lost man?” responded in the negative, many with curious looks on their faces. He began to wonder if the search for the lost man was simply a riddle whose solution was himself. Had Eris sent him upon a fool's errand into the nature of human existence?

As he began to descend into despair, he noticed a man sitting in the shade of a nearby tree. The man stared idly, tapping his foot. Johnnyson hesitantly approached him.

“Are you the lost man?” asked Johnnyson.

“I am lost by name but I am not lost,” the man replied. “In fact I know not only where I have been and where I am in this moment, I know precisely where *we* will go in the future. I also know that you carry a small pouch given to you by my mother, intended for me. Let me introduce myself. I am Perdu, the pharmacist. I’ve been waiting for you Johnnyson Poppypeed.”