

Heart of Lightness

The 757 sliced through February's gray shroud over Cincinnati, lurched fitfully upward, then burst into an infinitude of blue light. Detached from earth and email, I reached for noise canceling headphones looping Nightnoise and Cesária Évora and a paperback of Gabriel García Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, but my brain turned my eyes to the business-class aisle-seat companion on the brief flight to Atlanta. Wearing a starched blue shirt and khakis, the gentleman I judged to be 60 or more held a Lotus Pose, legs splayed, thumbs touching first fingers. Hesitant I might be dragged into conversation, I asked was it comfortable.

"Oh, yes," he said. He introduced himself as Wolram. "Where head you?"

"Colombia - Bogotá, then Santa Marta," I replied, unwilling to risk a plunge into the meaning of life that could have been his query's quest.

"Your purpose," Wolram challenged more than inquired.

I told him how our company SolerCool and our nonprofit OMID USA invented and were installing in Colombia solar-energy drip irrigation and cold storage sheds to empower poor farmers to grow crops in arid areas and get their produce to market at fair prices. "Our goal's to lift a million people out of poverty while helping save the earth," I glowed.

Like a Bodhisattva, Wolram smiled placidly. "I too have come to embrace the light," said he.

"How so?" I was intrigued.

Wolram twisted his upper body to face me. "Do you truly wish to know?"

Hooked, I begged him to proceed. He relaxed the Padmasana posture as the stewardess thanked us for our Medallion status and offered snacks. I chose cashews.

"The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta," he began. "Towering 19,000 feet above the Caribbean coast. Where the Mamas dwell with the Great Mother."

I wondered if magical realism was incarnate next to me. But Wolram added, "I was a lifer for Retcorp & Elbmag," referring to the Cincinnati consumer products empire whose personnel once made things, but now its employees did only marketing and finance, Retcorp having outsourced everything else. My respect for Wolram was immediately secure.

"Marketing was my career," he continued. "The quest for billion-dollar brands. My first Colombia trip was a Retcorp assignment to find and bring back Mr. Ztruk."

I had heard of Ztruk, marketing legend, creator of simple phrases that hypnotized consumers into brand loyalty for ointments and gadgets and plastic filmed diapers and other essentials of premium life. Ztruk, a fabled executive who disappeared in Colombia a year ago, rumored kidnapped by the FARC before the Colombian Civil War ended or ambushed by a drug lord.

"I was Mr. Ztruk's number 2," said Wolram. "He was in search of the ultimate - a \$10 billion brand. He conceived it - a concoction of coca leaf mixed with lime to banish stress. He branded the product - Aahhh. Aahhh - antidote to frenzy, cure for internetitis, iphoneria and caffeine addiction. A massive market! Ztruk set out to learn the secret recipe of the Kogi and

gain endorsement for Aahhh from their Mamas, high priests of the Kogi."

"The Kogi?" I coaxed details.

"The Kogi are the only unconquered ancient tribe of the Andean region. They fled the murderous Carib a thousand years ago and the plundering Spaniards half a millennium later, retreating higher and higher into mountain sanctuaries to escape the unrelenting onslaughts of modernity. They live cut off from tweets, Domino's Pizza and Pampers. They are the calmest people on earth. Ztruk envisioned that if the Mamas endorsed Aahhh, it would sweep the world. Overnight Retcorp would have a \$10 billion, even a \$100 billion brand."

"From coca?" I gasped.

"The coca leaf's not a narcotic banned by the FDA. Extract cocaine from it and it's safer than caffeine. Did you know that until 1929 Coca Cola contained cocaine, and coca remains part of its secret formula? What coca did for that brand - magnificent!" Wolram exulted. "You see, two years ago Ztruk received an unsolicited delivery at headquarters, an invitation in Spanish with a white gold imprint of a two-headed snake encircling an egg. The Kogi asked him to visit – and to become The Messenger.

"You see, Kogi Mamas are males taken at birth to a cave where they dwell in total darkness for nine years, trained to become priests of their people and sentinels of the Great Mother. They learn to read the flow of waters, murmurs of the ground, caresses and slaps of the wind. They come to commune with the Mother. And now they hear her crying out in mortal distress from what Younger Brother is doing."

"Younger Brother?" I asked.

"The rest of us. Mamas believe that unless humans reverse our profanation of creation, life itself will soon be extinguished - the horror will be ourselves, and the Mother will finish us off. And so the Mamas turned to Retcorp's high priest, Mr. Ztruk, trusting he would understand and return as The Messenger to Younger Brother that we are at the precipice of life's destruction, hoping that he would market the Mother's plea to save her creation."

I took tonic water, Wolram tomato juice, both no ice.

Wolram continued, "Ztruk and I plunged into Kogi research. We studied the poporo, the object every Kogi male receives when becoming a man. Shaped like a gourd, the poporo becomes his constant companion, symbol of the source of life. It holds lime from burned crushed seashells, and the male caresses and penetrates it constantly with a stick in and out that mixes with coca leaf. Men chew it all day to harmonize with the Great Mother and with the ancestors. Ztruk toyed for a time with marketing poporos, swiffers for the mind, but we settled on Aahhh as a potion packaged in poporo shaped containers with a thin straw. Ztruk set out for secrets of the Kogi recipe and the Mamas' endorsement. He would become The Messenger, all right, for a \$10 billion brand."

I was speechless. Wolram sipped his juice. "The last we heard from Ztruk, he'd left Santa Marta on the coast with interpreter and mules, layers of clothing to adjust for the ascent's declining temperatures, and saddlebags of whitening strips, offerings for the Kogi. You see, they wear all-white clothing, white for the purity of nature, but their teeth are stained green by the coca/lime mix they chew all day. Ztruk's last text came as he passed into Kogi land. It read,

'Entering heart of lightness.'

"Retcorp sent me on my quest. My interpreter Mateo, mule master Filipe and I departed from Santa Marta when a message came to Mateo's iPhone miraculously without a sender's ID. It read "pasos en la bifurcación" - steps at the fork. The mule master scowled. At the start we sweltered in a 40-degree steam bath, waving away mosquitoes and flies."

"95 Fahrenheit," I mumbled to myself.

"104," corrected Wolram. "Within hours we were stroked by outstretched fingers of a thickening lowlands jungle. Alone on an ancient trail, but not, as we were being watched, inspected. We spotted white eyes glaring at us from forest camouflage, not knowing if they belonged to the progeny of Pablo Escobar or Che Guevara. Cloud forest canopy shaded us at 3,000 feet. We camped for the night just off the path. As I was relieving myself aside a massive fern, an albescent fungus protruding from a towering, decaying evergreen beckoned me to taste, but Mateo shouted "No," explaining later its toxin would rip apart the insides and kill within a day if ingested and if touched would spread a disabling, excruciating rash. I got little sleep, the screech of anonymous creatures in foreboding syncopation warning it was night to be survived but day to be feared.

"Day two we entered la tierra templada, the temperate midlands. Discarded Coca Cola cans, plastic caps and littered wrappers of Nestle, Hershey and other empires graced the path's edges. An obese squatting woman sat with mangoes spreading from her skirt that doubled as her stand, begging "tres por mil". A grizzled man in white panama hat and ragged jeans hunched like a troll against an enormous palm tree hawking suspiciously bottled water and

begging "dollar," but we marched on as he spat and hurled what Mateo said was a curse.

"At noon, the sun exactly overhead as it was every day at this equatorial latitude, a choice abruptly arose - continue along the gradual upward path around the edge of a cliff face or ascend abruptly upward on a narrow stone staircase with no handrails to an unseen point above. The path was obvious, but mule master Filipe commanded "los pasos." I shuddered without revealing my dread of heights and ledges. As the mules and we were fifty steps upward and I envisioned myself exercising on a Stairmaster to suppress my acrophobia, a crashing rumble to our right halted us in terror. An enormous slide of chalky limestone sheared away, as though the mountain were shedding skin like a pearly reptile, erasing the path we had just left for the steps. Mateo crossed himself twice, and the mule master looked up to the heavens. My heart pounding faster than I thought it capable without bursting, we rushed upward into a blinding sunlight that pulled us like a magnet until we reached a plateau reconnecting with the now dissected path. We did not speak of how death had grabbed for us and we were saved by a warning from an anonymous sender.

"As the sun was about to set, we neared a chasm where four logs from ancient fallen trees stretched toward a tall gate crossed by bamboo sticks and locked with thick vines. Mateo was explaining this was the barrier to the Kogi sanctuary, where they lived apart, barring outsiders from entry, when he enunciated very firmly, "Do not move." I froze. At the lower periphery of my right eye I beheld a glistening white snake, it seemed eight feet long, encircling my feet. It licked my right hiking boot with its forked tongue, lifted its arrow-shaped head inspecting me as though the pearly viper were a hostile immigration officer. It swayed

backward, coiling, daring me to action, but I was pale and comatose with fear, and so deceiving it into inaction, the snake relaxed its cocked posture and slithered into the brush. 'We were invited,' Mateo exhaled, explaining that had it chosen to strike, I would already be dead.

"My heart raced but was in practice by now. White, what it expressed – the snake, funeral lilies, Mexican Day of the Dead masks, ghost sheets, the third eye of an Indian widow, the full moon of Halloween, the shade of a page of writer's block, the hue of vampires in search of a feeding, avalanche, the great white shark, Titanic's iceberg, the whiteness of Ahab's whale. All white, white - the pallor of death. I had escaped its grasp twice in one afternoon.

"We and the mules teetered in the dusk across logs bridging a thousand-foot drop. At the gate two men in white smocks and baggy pants and hats shaped like Hershey's kisses unleashed the vines and admitted us without smile or frown. Our greeters held poporos, which they ceaselessly plunged in and out with a stick. A side pouch held coca leaves they offered as we entered. They ushered Mateo and me silently to a cylindrical temple they called a nuhue in the center of a circular village of about fifty primitive stone and mud huts crowned with palm leaves, as Filipe and the mules were led by women dressed in identical fashionless white gowns to a watering pond. Men, women and children drifted aimlessly about, in slow motion, zombie-like, a monotony of routine, no smartphones, frozen in abject boredom, and yet moving to a gentle pulse that seemed to beat from the body of the earth. No billboards, no litter, no hate. Was there love? There were children. Three leather-skinned men in white robes emerged from the nuhue. "Mamas," whispered Mateo.

"They handed us cups of steaming coca tea. 'For the altitude' I assumed, feeling light-

headed but not faint, as we'd reached 8,000 feet.

"No shoes. Mateo explained Kogi bare feet held constant connection to the Mother, never separating her from their soles, ever receiving signals from the ground of nature's wisdom and alarm. And I beheld green Kogi teeth, enameled a dull unpolished emerald, all else the color of white. Said Mateo translating a Mama, 'White spreads the light, it does, reflects the source of wisdom to us all in community with the Great Mother, it does.'

"'You must The Messenger be,' the Mama said rather than asked, his linguistic and facial expression flat, unchanging. 'We tomorrow talk,' he said. 'Night - rest.' He snuffed his candle, and all went black inside the sanctuary, where Mateo, the Mamas and I slept on goat skin.

"Coca cast its spell. For in my dreams I traveled to magnificent realms. The Great Mother appeared in shifting faces of every woman who ever was, who cried out to me, at me, weeping for her human children who were destroying her creation and themselves. She lifted me into the skies to witness Younger Brother's work. Glaciers blanketed her peaks no more, robbing the great rivers of their source, stranding fish to rot along their lifeless banks. Toucans, macaws and condors fell from the skies. Frogs and toads chorused one final time and fell silent. Barren brown fields were afflicted with a spreading leprosy inflicting open sores and great scabs across the face of the land. Drought and unrelenting heat withered earth's flora. The Great Mother pointed below to the great strip-mined coal beltways we had crossed from Santa Marta, enormous pathways where half-naked men stripped away the green of abundance and left the land tattooed with unending dark strips of coal-dust and despair, gouging the earth with giant mechanized daggers that ripped the mineral blanket just below the soil for export as

burnt offerings to the electric energy gods, converting rivers to poison-filled veins and clogging the deltas of life that once spread their tendrils to greet the seas but now were amputated and replaced by sprawling oil rig platforms and steel and iron ports and vessels that claimed dominion over nature and dared unsuccessfully to hold back rising tides that flooded coastal borderlands. And then I saw the great black coal strips rise as a gigantic ravenous two-headed boa constrictor swallowing every living creature that challenged it or dared to enter its newly conquered kingdom, encircling the entire Sierra Nevada and squeezing, ever tighter, strangling life forms, devouring fruits, ripping out trees as toothpicks for its fangs, poisoning the fish of the evaporating and poisoned rivers of Guajira and so robbing the oceans of the snow waters of on high that had fed the lands and seas since the birth of life. Death stalking, ever closer to its victory.

"I jolted awake, vowing too much coca was indeed too much, to find staring at me an elderly Mama, placid, without smile or frown, as though walking dead, serene, calm, one with nature, sure of his role in eternity, not needing laughter or dismay to express that life is exactly what it is each moment without change, beyond frenzy for no frenzy there is in the realm of the Kogi.

"The Mama took my hand and led me to the village edge, where a sheer cliff opened a vista to the lands far below. He swept his right hand across the distant city sprawl and the great black coal strip at sea level, now not a dream but a revelation. 'To Messenger go we,' he said.

"Ztruk,' I ventured.

"With Grand Mama,' said the Mama. And with that Filipe appeared with a single mule.

Anticipating my concern that Mateo would not accompany us, the Mama said, 'You alone and I.'

"We walked into light that intensified with each step, to a treeless region, a sprawl of dust and bush desiccated, brittle, and by sundown to a broad plateau of parched brown where not a flower appeared, with the peak of a great mountain looming above, dotted in snowy patches. 'Pico Cristóbal Colón,' I pointed. The Mama corrected, 'Gonawindua,' Kogi language for the fifth most prominent peak in the world. 'Heart of World,' he proclaimed.

"The Mama veered from the upward path and picked his way through impenetrable thorny scrub, as though it had been planted to hide El Dorado. We came to a clearing that revealed an abrupt towering face of sheer granite, a skyscraper sculpted by nature with a serpentine semi-circle of cairns marking the boundary of a sacred place. At the peak's base was an egg-shaped entry to a cave carved into the rock. We entered the cairn-ringed enclosure. I was struck by ten-foot-high serpent statues flicking their forked tongues from guardian posts at the rock face. Was this the entrance to the underworld?

"From within slowly emerged an ancient figure in a white robe, attendants trailing in Kogi costume. Across the wizard's aged chest glinted a breastplate of pre-Colombian design and his head supported a radiant tiara with elaborate primitive images, his withered biceps clasped by white gold. 'Grand Mama,' my Mama guide whispered as he bowed deeply in reverence. My upper body did the same without instruction from my brain, as I was transported to an age when authority had force without question, demand or fear.

"Lacking Grand Mama protocol, for no guidebook or written history had ever mentioned a Kogi Grand Mama, I extended my right hand and stupidly said 'Mucho Gusto,' immediately

regretting this might have been the initial greeting of conquistadors 500 years earlier before they began the slaughter of the indigenous people, feeding Kogi infants to their dogs and ripping gold and emeralds from their land, enslaving cultures that stretched from beyond the fog of history and forcing conversion to the God of Rome on pain of torture and death. The Grand Mama had pearls for eyes, thoroughly milky white. Blind, or so I thought.

"Greet you, we do,' the Grand Mama said in English, with an indecipherable accent. An aide offered cups of steaming tea. At the altitude of 12,000 feet with the temperature about 8 degrees centigrade, I was grateful for it. 'Snakes, wondered you,' said the Grand Mama, reading my mind. 'The Earth bore they, the great egg of life their offering. In come," as he turned to the cave. I followed, feeling I was entering a den of hypnosis.

"He led me deep within a cavern, walls etched in ancient petroglyphs, markings I learned later to be priceless previously undiscovered testaments of the Tairona culture of which the Kogi are the sole pure remnant. The Grand Mama sat on an alpaca rug in a Buddha-like pose and gently waved a hand for me to sit on a log before him.

"Aahhh,' he said, nodding. 'Endorsement your desire.'

"Using my MBA training and years of Retcorp discipline, I tried not simply to open my mouth in dumb disbelief but said, 'I come to find my friend, Mr. Ztruk.'

"Ztruk meet you will,' he said. 'But to me tell, where head you?'

The same question Wolram had asked me.

Wolram continued, "I took his point. I responded, 'I seek Ztruk and to know what keeps

him here.'

"Near the passage is he,' said the Grand Mama. 'Younger Brother, open are you?'

"Yes,' I replied, not sure what else to say. The Grand Mama arose and grasped my head in his hands. He placed his forehead against mine, while flashes of Star Trek mind meld floated through my brain. And when he released his gentle grip, I was anew, my soul thrust into the Garden of Eden, in communion with all creation.

"Come,' said the Grand Mama. He led me to a side passage, where lying on a raised platform covered with white blankets crossed with red stripes was Mr. Ztruk, or what was left of him, bearded, pale, a diminutive of the master of marketing that once graced the cover of Business Week. 'Silent he went,' said the Grand Mama, 'after our conversation.'

"It looked like a stroke to me, or had he tested Aahhh recipes once too often? The shrunken body turned to its side, and Ztruk whispered, 'Wolram, how kind of you to visit.'

"At Retcorp he'd never accused me of being kind. I sensed the end was near. I would be gentle. 'Mr. Ztruk, I've come to escort you home.'

"Too late,' he waved weakly. 'You must become The Messenger,' he uttered softly and relapsed into unconsciousness.

"The Grand Mama and I ambled to an alcove with a simple table and two latticed chairs. Attendants brought golden berries and flat unleavened bread and coca tea. The Grand Mama said, 'The Messenger to be was he, but near his passage is. The one will be you?'

"I came for Mr. Ztruk and for your blessing,' I said, not knowing how to address this Cacique, this priest of a forgotten age.

"Blessed are you. But not for Aahhh. For redemption, for redemption. To market, yes to market, the message to banish blindness.'

"Blindness of what?' I asked, more abruptly than intended.

"The Grand Mama said, 'Of the Mother's lament and of her plea, blindness of the great extinction Younger Brother causes - yes, Younger Brother causes, to creation, to us all. The Messenger you must be, I see.'

"You see?'

"Why no pupil, no iris have I you wonder,' he said. 'At birth taken was I to the Mamas' cave for nine years and nine more. In darkness all day slept we, and each night outside studied we, earth to read, bubbles to discern from waters, plunders of the world to observe, rapes and beatings of the Mother, melt of the poles, floods, heating of earth and ocean, angry weather...."

"I sensed an opening to interrupt without rudeness, 'How could you know these things from here, and without sight?'

"Sight? Sight the Great Mother gives us, if we listen and feel and touch and know with our heart.'

"But how would you know of Antarctica, for example,' I lightly challenged.

"What think you we do all day in a cave? Internet we have, sun powered is it, access to

every written word we enjoy. Gnosis from depth of mind and heart arises. And so we know mind and heart agree, they do. Clear is their concord - near destruction Mother's creation is, savaged by Younger Brother. Younger Brother, who drove our people to recesses beyond capture, who massacred our ancestors, who spews carbon into heaven, who gouges land to grow bank accounts, who is blind to Younger Brother's collective suicide and murder of life.'

"I did not interrupt. 'Ztruk we asked. Our invitation yes, to Retcorp's high priest of marketing. Why he? Retcorp, yes, he marketing's cacique, but also because he and you dwell, you do, in city where Martha died a century ago, last winged messenger, passenger pigeon was she, that Younger Brother destroyed, and her sacrificial cry Younger Brother heeded not. And since, disappear daily animals, plants, trees, snowbanks melt to nothing. Gonawindua once womb of 36 rivers, and now ... trickles. Dying are we. Sad Younger Brother will be - when Mother releases her molten heart. Sad will be Younger Brother at the End. Time there is, but little, until message will be but wind of memory with no ears to hear, no eyes to see, no hearts to know. The Messenger you must be."

"I said, 'Our scientists and governments are working on it, but business and the economy....'

"Again he read my mind.

"'Intrigued were we by a story in July's Paleogeography - that the End-Permian mass extinction that almost destroyed the Mother's creation 252 million years ago was largely due to carbon dioxide emissions unleashed by Siberian volcanoes, it reported. Yet, Younger Brother remembers not, does not know what he does by spewing CO2 into skies. Younger Brother

worships his god GDP."

"GDP? I don't worship"

"To money your lives you devote, its acquisition, accumulation, control. Above all else is money to Younger Brother. Cost/benefit studies your EPA does. Cost is first, as though money measures benefit, as though nature may be destroyed if money that will save. Money is offering to your great god GDP."

"But," I countered, "Money buys the tools of happiness, of health. And we lift people from poverty by raising their income."

"Income – measure of money it is. No need of income have we," said the Grand Mama. Fixing his milky eyes on mine, he asked, "Poverty. What is poverty?"

"I felt like Jesus before Pilate, or was I Pilate before Jesus? I had no facile answer, as I assumed he'd not read Samuelson or the Wall Street Journal."

"Yes, to the Journal we subscribe, though it's not the same since ownership changed," he shocked me. "No poverty of body or spirit have we. All that is needed we have, all sharing, all protecting, all with Mother." He bowed his head, "Now Mother wounded she is. To you the message is given - for Younger Brother to see and before great extinction to act."

"The next day I returned to Ztruk, who was still, and I thought of exiting his chamber, but he turned his head and rasped, "Wolram, how kind of you to visit."

"I asked if I could summon drink or food. He signaled no with a slight horizontal head

movement. 'You must be the one,' he said, barely able to pronounce the words.

"I leaned close to him, sensing what I'd learned as a teenage hospice volunteer. 'My passage is here,' he smiled.

"Ready to return with me?' I grinned, hoping to spur a brief rally.

"He scowled. In a delirious spurt he gasped, 'No endorsement! Report my failure. Then tell them to understand,' he gurgled.

"Tell them what?" I asked softly.

"He raised his head – 'Turn away.'

"Turn away from what?' I asked softly, drawing even closer to him.

"I saw what chaplains and physicians and family members witness when a life is at its last, a mix of regret and love and resignation and release, of the parting. With a final burst of reserved energy Ztruk strained forward, reaching out as though to the ages - 'The money, the money,' he rattled, and his eyes turned upward in their sockets and he expired. Perhaps it was my coca tea, but I swear I saw a final exhalation pass from his lips. I followed it out of the cave and watched breathlessly myself as an aura of light floated upward toward the very top of Gonawindua.

"The Grand Mama was at my arm to rescue me from catatonic astonishment.

'Understood, he did.' And I knew then the great chasm between the ancients and the moderns. I understood the onslaught of civilization, of the business world, the great game of commerce

and accounting that replaced a time when no such matters mattered, when our ancestors dwelled with the earth and because of its blessings and only in communion were there goodness and harmony, a time when the Great Mother cradled her creation and it did not turn on her to destroy itself and all life, a time preserved here, in Aluna. I heard the Mother's cry. It pierced my heart.'

"I trekked down the mountain the next day, meeting Filipe and Mateo at the Kogi village. As we approached the cliff staircase, I thought my acrophobia would strike fatally this time - it's much worse coming down than going up - but the mule murmured that the Mother was with us and for the first time in my life I had no fear. I took to headquarters the message that Ztruk suffered a stroke atop a mountain while making the ultimate sacrifice for Retcorp & Elbmag. I certified his death so his widow would receive the insurance and the stock. I confirmed he was a company hero to the end.

"Ztruk, yes, he taught me all that was important, made me the man I am today."

"'How so?' I asked, having not opened my salted cashews, entranced by the great story I had been rewarded by suppressing my instinct for flight solitude.

"You see, I learned that death is best when you finally find yourself, as had Mr. Ztruk. If you can do that earlier, life, what we have of it in this incarnation, is richer than all the money in the world. For death is not a hero's moment. It can be a torch passed, though sadly for many it is a failure of the light. For some, for Mr. Ztruk, it is light itself."

Fearing Wolram might lapse into theological discourse, I changed the subject to what he

was doing now.

"Oh, I retired early. I head now to Bogotá for the Earth Summit. Screw our politicians. The mission's for us to do ourselves. I head marketing now for Guardians of the Earth."

I knew the organization. It transcends politics, surmounts the titans of carbon by uniting each of us to act now – alone and together - restore the earth, reconnect one by one with the Great Mother, Embrace the Light its mantra.

"One question," I begged. "The Grand Mama must have been angry - for what happened to his people, for what Younger Brother has done to the Great Mother. What were his final words to you?"

Wolram turned to me with the kindest smile I've ever received from a man. "Nodding gently, the Grand Mama stretched out his arms and a dazzling white macaw alighted on his right forearm. 'Last of her kind,' he said. 'Like your Martha. Her habitat and kin destroyed, she graces us in her final days, the sole remaining widow of the race of the great ivory macaw.' He said no more.

"The macaw stared at me with black saucer eyes. The argent bird whose ancestors graced forests before humans existed bobbed her neck up and down as do parrots. 'Younger Brother, I love you,' she said."

Wolram resumed a silent Lotus pose, thumbs arcing to first fingers.

I gazed out the aircraft window at ripples of green below, the undulating foothills of northern Georgia, at red-roofed farmhouses and brown barns, at rivulets of blue, capillaries of

the earth. Distant cumulus formations signaled there would be rain, but not this day, as we glided onward, gently onward, towards a landing, yes, for me headed for the heart of lightness.

Joseph J Dehner, For The Literary Club, September 18, 2017