February 10 2025
Author : Matthew DeBlock
www.dscript.org

Time To Go

Sample Copy

Available on Kindle
amazon.com/author/dscript

Human Made Content - NO AI

AI is only used as a dictionary, thesaurus, and information search and reference tool.
Absolutely no part of the written story is ever copied into AI for editing, revision, or comments.
Absolutely nothing generated by AI is ever pasted into the story.

Matt has developed a unique style and writing method. Removing all age, gender, ethnicity, physical appearance etc… only leaving words and actions to define a character.

This story, like all of Matt's stories, was written out of home, never at a desk, never stationary.(Matt's original rule was 'only while walking outside' but was revised into 'must be moving through earth based coordinate space' this allows occasional exceptions for trains, buses, etc..). Everything is written with pen and paper, then put into a document with voice-to-text, and finally edited and polished by Matt alone, no other human or AI is involved.

Matt is fascinated and enjoys using AI, but is a firm believer that we should label content.
Human only, AI generated, AI assisted, AI collaboration, etc…

Matt does play with AI in some writing content, like AI assisted poetry (great practice and learning tool to improve writing skills, vocab, cadence, etc..), or AI dialogues as artistic experimentation.
Any works that involve or include AI composition, revisions, or editing are clearly labeled as such.

ISBN: 978-1-998709-07-6

…

Standing here leaning against the weathered railing at this tranquil lookout point, my mind has drifted into the distance, nowhere in particular just floating out there. An old gravel road is the only route here, nothing for miles, there are hardly any faded tracks on the road indicating that only a scarce few others have passed by recently, maybe a handful in the last few days. This place is peace and seclusion manifested as a physical location.

Like I said, my mind has faded off into the distance, but that sensation is popped like a bubble and I am snapped back into immediacy. I feel like I'm returning from an out of body experience, pulled by an elastic band, right back into my eye socket.

“Wow! Hi there! What's your name? What a lovely spot, it's so beautiful isn't it?”

The voice is so energetic and loud, it just doesn't stop, waiver, or fade in intensity, like being woken up not by a slap, but by a continuous air raid siren or blaring alarm clock.

I turn to see who it is, and standing behind me is the most vibrant character I had ever met, bright colorful outfit and beaming smile, that smile… that mouth! It just didn't stop blasting words, friendly engaging words, but loud, so loud, and now right in my face. In this peaceful tranquility I have collided with the exact inverse, here I have met the polar opposite of tranquility embodied in a person, but in a good way, bursting with positivity completely off the charts.

“Hi!” I replied, overwhelmed at first, not knowing what part of the long string of constant questions to reply to. I decided to start from the beginning. “My name is Luda.” The intention to say more was there, but just that tiny moment of quiet hesitation and the opening was immediately filled, before I could even decide what to add next.

“Hi Luda! That's a cool name. I never met anyone named Luda before. My name is Nipi. I'm so happy to bump into you. The view is so lovely but I was starting to get lonely out here.”

It was becoming obvious that with Nipi I would have to seize opportunities to speak. That mouth was like a fire hydrant spraying water, any pause in the stream was extremely short-lived, if I didn't act fast I would never get a word in edgewise.

“Hi Nipi. Yes, I love it here” I replied, then led directly into my own question, knowing that any hesitation will lose me the turn to speak." You surprised me a bit, I never run into anyone out here. Do you come here often?”

“Nope, first time!” Nipi just blurts that short response, straightens posture, stands tall, and smiles ear to ear with squinted eyes. That pose and just smiling, so quiet and uncharacteristic, we'll… It's uncharacteristic based on my first impression so far.

“What brings you out here?” I ask “Do you live nearby? Are you visiting family?”

“Neither! Just aimless exploring. I picked a random out of the way place and then tried to follow the paths least taken, as always.” Nipi proclaims with pride.

“That's very adventurous. This is such a wide empty area, it's quite a coincidence that we crossed paths. ” I comment.

“I don't believe in coincidence, it's Destiny! It always is.” Nipi says.

My interest is sparked, I dawn a quizzical expression and raise my hand with index finger pointed upward, signaling a desire to inquire about that. Nipi of course responds to the body language before any verbal query actually comes out “Destiny is always there, that's why I just travel randomly, I know destiny is the one really at the wheel. Why pretend I am in control?”

“That's… ummm… a very passive attitude.” I follow up quickly “You just give up and don't make decisions? If everything is destiny then why do anything at all? Why not just sit and wait for your destiny to arrive?”

“Oh, don't be silly! That's not how destiny works, it's not some predetermined inevitable result.” Nipi says, then reaches out and shoves my shoulder playfully while giggling “What you are describing would be fate, destiny is very different.”

“How does it work then?” I ask, seriously curious what kind of answer I'm going to get. I'm ready for something ridiculous.

“Destiny is like a coincidence, but a coincidence that wants to happen, it is like a persistent high probability. Something that might seem improbable, unlikely, or even impossible, but it could be destined to happen… You know?” Nipi's head tilts to the side with a grin awaiting my reply.

“Not really. What do you mean? How can something be unlikely but have high probability?” I can't quite understand the meaning.

“Persistent high probability… persistent.” Nipi explains. “Like… rolling a six-sided dice has a low probability to roll a six, but rolling it persistently, like a hundred times, has a high probability to roll a six. If you keep rolling the dice until it comes up six, then you will usually get a six at some point.”

“I don't get it, are you saying destiny is just a large sample size?” I asked, rather confused at this logic.

Nipi laughs out loud “No no no silly, destiny is when the universe keeps saying you can roll again because you didn't roll six. It's like it wanted a six so it gave you lots of rerolls, and when

you rolled six then it says ‘okay you rolled a six let's count that result’. Sometimes destiny wants a six, sometimes destiny wants Luda and Nipi to meet hehe”

“So destiny decides the outcome” I summarize “It's some specific guaranteed result, the length of the path is undetermined but the destination is fixed?”

“Haha, you really like simple answers.” Nipi jests “Destiny doesn't get to reroll infinitely, it gets worn out, time runs out, destiny might prefer an outcome but even destiny doesn't always get what it wants, haha! When something is fixed and guaranteed, when the universe is already decided, then fate is the word to use. When it has a preference it's called destiny… and when it doesn't care, doesn't know, or is curious then we call it random… or maybe random is just misunderstanding the preferences haha!”

I was surprised, that was actually a rather coherent and well thought out interpretation “You know, I do kinda get what you mean.” I say “three are times it feels as if something is very likely to happen, every step that doesn't lead there, every moment that doesn't cause it, they only trim the chances of it happening, and once it happens… that's it! It has happened, it is set!”

“Exactly!” Nipi exclaims gleefully “... So you see, destiny brought us together.”

“How do you know it was destiny? Maybe it was just random.” I say playfully, but beneath the whimsical mask I am sincerely wondering what answer I'll get.

“I just know! I could feel it!” Nipi proclaims happily “When I got here I spent so much time exploring, seeking destiny as I wandered. Every place I saw, every step taken, every corner turned, they just felt unfinished. Like when drawing or writing, sometimes you get it on the page, then step back to look at it and... it just feels like it's still missing something. When I saw you standing here it was like ‘Ah, there it is!’ I just knew meeting you was the six. ”

Such a friendly face, just staring at me. Those words proclaiming that meeting me was destiny. That day, that moment, was filled with a unique warmth, it made me feel so special and wanted. Stunned in that sensation I just enjoyed it, even when the silence began to feel awkward, even when it started to feel like Nipi was holding that Grin a bit too long, still I just stood frozen in that moment.

We talked a while, then wandered back from the lookout chatting and had dinner, our conversation flowed naturally. Afterward we went our separate ways, never meeting again, but that chance encounter permanently altered my life. I went back to my usual life and routines, but that day set me up to embrace an oncoming destiny.

…

Plopping down in my window seat on the plane I do the natural thing, I look out the window. Airport ground crew bustle around the terminal tarmac. Turning on my music and zoning out, the memory of my encounter with Nipi pops into my head for some reason.

This trip was planned at the last minute on an impulse. It's not a holiday and the destination is picked randomly. Only now, after settling down, do I remember that day and how Nipi described traveling at random to follow and find destiny. I swim in that nostalgic memory for a while. Before I know it my window is filled with clouds and macroscopic geography.

I was content in that state, like a daydream seeded by a real memory. Oblivious to the plane full of people, that window view enveloped my perception, just soaring through the sky. Even the awareness of the plane itself vanished, the noise and vibrations had just faded away completely.

That blissful oblivion of memory and illusion was punctured by a tap on my shoulder. I was suddenly aware of my surroundings again. I turned to see my neighbor who was poking me gently, and then those memories of that long past encounter charged my mind with an expectation… it might be Nipi! Of course it wasn't, it was just some stranger. A stranger with a warm inviting smile, but not that old acquaintance who had turned into a friend for a single day.

I pull out my earbuds and attempt to grin back pleasantly. I'm in no rush to speak or initiate the interaction, so the ask comes first. “Excuse me. I know this is a faux pas, but I failed to select the seats I wanted, and I was just hoping you might consider switching with me. I know mine is a middle seat, so I totally understand if you don't want to.” A little chuckle follows, it has that tone of false awkwardness, you know the kind, the type made by someone who is profoundly confident but emulating discomfort, a feigned awkward tone.

I pause and make eye contact trying to gauge this request. Those eyes scream sincerity and hopeful anticipation, how can I refuse? After all, I don't really mind that much, and it's not a very long flight. “Sure.” I concede, while shrugging my shoulders. That forced awkward tone of the request was highly effective, because I feel a strong sense of moral pride as I grant the request, like I'm helping someone in need. We shuffle and I take the middle seat.

I get gratitude and a smile in return “Thank you so much!” Then, poking forward and turning to get in the face of the person on the other side of me, in the aisle seat, the stranger says “See Anul! I told you it would work out.” and turning back to speak to me again “Oh, I'm Elec, and this is my twin Anul”

I look at Anul who gives me a grin that feels both warm and chilling. Then looking back at Elec on my other side, I ask quizzically “Don't you two want to sit together?”

There is a snicker from Anul so I turn to catch a response “I think we get along better with some people between us hahaha. Besides, that obsession with window seats would leave me boxed in if we sat next to each other.”

From the other side an echoing chuckle “Always dragging everyone into the role of arbiter hehe. Anul is always trying to imagine we have some irreconcilable differences, we don't.“ Elec leans forward and smirks past me at Anul then says “We are just different faces of the same thing. You know you love me.”

Anul blurts back “You know that I find that condescending! You're always insinuating that I'm primitive and unenlightened.” Then with a dismissive wave snorts at Elec “Just stare out your window and search for a glimpse of your singular god, always searching but never finding.”

This back and forth banter, side to side, makes me feel like I'm standing in between warring nations. “If I'm going to be caught in the crossfire then I might as well know what the conflict is, hahaha” I jest “what exactly is the argument? What's this talk of god, is this a religious debate?”

They stare at each other for a moment, then Elec’s hand extends, palm up, and swipes forward, the same gesture used to tell someone to go ahead first when merging at an entrance, so Anul speaks first “The oversimplified version is that I'm a polytheist and my twin is a monotheist.”

“Really, which religion? I ask.

“Oh, not like that.” Responds Elec “Neither of us would fall neatly into any category that you may be familiar with. We do agree on some things, like the understanding that life's complexity and meaning is definitely not simple enough to write out in text.”

From the other side comes a continuation “There are patterns everywhere in life, elegant, more than just structural and mechanical. If you observe carefully you can feel the intentions and directions. There are forces on higher levels trying to sculpt and mold.”

Elec cuts in “...and we both agree on this, but I acknowledge the obvious unity. I hear conducted harmony, whereas my twin hears noise and discord.”

“Condescending as always!” Erupts Anul “You always frame it that way, you are order and I am chaos. But right there! You believe in order and chaos, discord and harmony, all sorts of polarities, dualities, and even trinities. You believe in fundamental, conceptual, and ideological polarities all over. If anything you are the embodiment of internal dissonance, plurality masquerading as singularity.”

“And there You go again with that false dichotomy. I'm allowed to believe in complex forces, agents, and pluralities while still believing in an overarching force of guidance.” Elect retorts “We both agree that there are intentions shining through from behind the veil of reality. Why do you deny that there is a coordination to their actions?”

“I don't deny it! But you are adding an extra layer of confusion to something that is already a struggle to interpret.” Anul says with frustration “Just perceiving and understanding the forces of intention is like trying to see an artists true intended meaning behind an abstract art piece. Most

of the time our own perceptions pollute the interpretation, or completely substitute the artist's original meaning. It's hard enough already, if you further add another layer, an intention that manipulates the first layer of intentions, then it gets ridiculously convoluted! It's like you are trying to deduce the intended meanings of an author by studying abstract paintings inspired by their story."

Elec jumps at the challenge "So what do you suggest? Just ignore an obvious truth because it's hard to uncover?"

"Again! You so love your dichotomies, If it's not A then it must be B. I can sense the connections and perhaps even coordination, but I can't say for sure what it is. Maybe there is a conductor as you say, but how do they conduct? Does the conductor even see us? Or are they too high above the ones above us? Is this conductor part of our universe or outside it? Maybe the conductor is just an Illusion or an emergent high-level phenomena…" Anul clearly had more to say but just ran out of steam, a bit frustrated and a bit fatigued, pausing, then summarizing a point to drive it home "We always come back to the same thing. It's hard enough to identify and comprehend individual forces and actors, we can barely make out the shadowy outlines of these characters. Sure we both feel and sense all kinds of things, some real and some artifacts of our own perception. If we are barely grasping the ones acting in our immediate vicinity and scale, then we should just stick with that. Besides, it's hard enough to talk about the first layer of plural forces, most people have difficulty understanding and accepting that alone, adding another layer just makes us look crazy."

"I disagree!" Elec snaps back without hesitation "The idea of an overarching conductor resonates with people. I think most individuals are more open-minded to the idea of a singular conductor than anything else."

"Pandering to the masses and worried about conversion rates? hahaha." Anul replies mockingly "Why don't we ask for an opinion from the poor sap currently stuck between us?"

They both look at me, I'm suddenly the arbiter of this dispute, my only instinct is to feign ignorance but thoughts just start flowing and I let them out filterless. "I honestly haven't given it much thought… but I suppose I've recently begun to feel inclined towards the concept of destiny." I pause and look to each side, they both seem to be interested so I continue rambling "... I feel like the concept of destiny could be like either of those. Sometimes destiny could feel like a singular force, other times it might seem like multiple forces converging on a common preference."

"Haha, well done!" Chuckles Anul "Pure neutrality!"

"So you believe in destiny?" asks Elec "I suppose we both seem a bit crazy to you then hehe. We see intentions where you see pre-determined inevitability."

“Oh, not at all!” I say then correct Elec’s misinterpretation. “First of all you are confusing destiny with fate. Fate is predetermined, destiny is softer and more subtle, instead of guaranteed outcomes it's more like the universe is imbued with preference.” I scan their faces, they are hanging on my every word “Secondly, I suppose believing in destiny might just be a hesitation to definitively conclude there are intentions within the forces of life. What you have been debating, both sides, resonate with me. I can't say for sure if either of you are more reasonable than the other, but I will say that listening to the two of you has instilled a strong feeling, you've given me a sense that there is probably intention behind or within what I have been calling destiny.”

They both seemed pleased. I think I had acknowledged that they had imparted me with an attention to sculpting forces and an awareness of intentions beneath the surface of reality, and this acknowledgement from me gave them a sense of satisfaction.

The rest of the flight they both dropped the topic and we chatted about travel, people, places, and experiences. I engaged fully in the conversation but deep down inside there was a constant rumble. Perceptions of past events, interpretations of memories, they were all being reshaped by this new layer of perspective.

That rumbling continued long afterwards, like a building settling because the earth had shifted beneath it. Even weeks later, creaking in the still of the night, as its foundation readjusted.

…

As I approach the wall of glass at the top of this ridiculously tall building, first there is the distant horizon of fuzzy detail, those blurry miniature objects are actually entire buildings reduced to barely significant features in a thin horizontal band. Getting closer to the windowed skin of the skyscraper, now the buildings below that band on the horizon start coming into view. As structures are gradually revealed by the receding hard cut line, the line which traces the edge between the floor and glass, the nearest visible structures become larger and larger, but the vantage point is also shifting into a bird's eye view. It is as if from up here the city resists familiarity, it's either a scale too small or it's a foreign viewing angle from above.

Now, right up at the glass, looking down, I can see all the traffic and people flowing through the streets below. I slip into a daze then began to notice one tiny person at a time.

One person walks along, another runs past and my eyes now stick to them, until they stop at a corner and my gaze locks on to a new target. As my attention jumps from one to the next I start to wonder where they are going, what they are doing… Are they aware how small they look from up here? If they could see from this view would they change their priorities and behavior? Maybe forces are guiding them, are they all being guided by the intentions that Anul and Elec talked about? Are their actions free will or determined?

“From up here they look like swarming insects, don't they?” a slick voice whispers into my ear from right behind me. I snap in shock, a stream of shivers slides down my neck and into my

shoulders. Startled and creeped out, twirling around, I'm face to face with a stranger's unflinching gaze and grin. Staring back in shock I flash a disapproving glare but get a wink in return. The moment lingers, then from the side comes a voice “Oh Stim, don't pester strangers. Please, can't we have one day where you aren't provoking people?”

“Twar, my dear, I'm just asking a question.” Stim turns to meet the scorn from this new interjecting character. I examine the background and there are two people standing behind Stim, this new one and another, they are clearly a group of three friends.

Arms now crossed and squinting, Twar says “You just can't resist infecting people with your soured view, can you?”

“Yes, an infection, that's precisely how to describe us. Just look down at those squirming bacteria or parasites, that's exactly what we all are.” Stim quips.

“Ha, exactly like I just said, you can't stop spinning it into a putrid interpretation.” Twar pounces as if prey has fallen into a well laid trap. “Bacteria and microbes are not evil, we need them to live, they aren't inherently the agents of rancid corruption you describe.”

“You both argue a lot for a pair of people who fundamentally agree with each other.” the third member of the trio now chimes in.

“Oh Sume, you are right here with us.” Twar responds, grinning “Don't pretend you are the outsider, you are just another face of our trinity.”

“You both see people as swarms of foreign agents and describe them as bacteria” Sume rebukes “I see all of us as part of a cooperative whole, like cells of a body.”

“Hahaha! Sume, you think Twar and I are the same, but it's actually you two who are slightly different versions of each other.” A deep belly laugh leading this verbal poke from Stim “The pair of you think everyone has harmonious common goals and interests. Cells and symbiosis, Ha!”

Standing here feels similar to when I was stuck between a Nula and Elec, except this time I am watching from outside as they take turns redrawing lines. Myself still unsure who is in the middle or what the contrast is “You three are clearly good friends, I'm probably being too familiar, but it seems to me all three of you have a lot in common. The nuanced differences seem a bit trivial don't they? You all use an analogy of microscopic life for the macroscopic world.” I say.

All three heads look towards me, then Twar answers and the others turn that way to listen intently, as if supervising the response, ready to interject if they disagree “Well the analogy of microscopic life is actually new. We normally use different language to discuss these things.” Pausing a moment as if to give the others a chance to object “... But it is feeling like a very productive lens for our debate. These two both think there is a universal body and that people are either cells of it or bacterial infections. Whereas I think we are all part of a diverse and

complex symbiotic community. They want simple answers, like saying that we are the truest unit cells of life, or believing we are a parasitic corruption that is consuming the pure life force of the universe."

"Ha!" scoffs Stim "There you are claiming middle ground, and then proclaiming it the high ground!"

They appear to be enjoying this, perhaps too much, seemingly primed for several rounds of cyclically exploring this analogy. As interesting as this is, it just seems tiring, yet I am also truly enchanted by their dynamic. The solution pops into my head, a way to divert into something new, so I speak up "What about intention?" The fluid succession of banter is severed, all three stop and chew on my words silently "You all speak like there is a purpose or meaning to life, people are good or bad for it, part of the whole, members of a community, or foreign entities… but this higher level, is their intention?" Doubling down my proposed reframing, laying my words on the table confidently.

"The word intention feels like a change in context, away from the microscopic analogy." says Twar with a somewhat quizzical look.

"Not at all!" Argues Sume "Together we form a collective whole, like cells of a body, and intention is there for sure, but an emergent intention. It's hard to imagine a cell as having an intention, but together cells can form a living being capable of higher level emergent behaviors, like intention."

"So any significant meaning and intention to life is all about us silly little people?... and even larger scale values are just derivatives of our petty lives and trivial pursuits?" Mocks Stim "If anything we are deviations away from greater intentions. The larger world, the universe, the medium in which we live does have tendencies, or intentions if you want to call them that, but we are surely a net impediment. Look at us! How can you possibly think the average trends we cause are aligned with the greater good of a higher level?" Stim snorts.

"I know you both expect me to position myself in the middle ground, so before I say my part let's get something straight…" Twar stops, index finger wags once, then holding it fixed pointing forward continues "Let's be honest, we all do it. Whoever talks third always seems to be standing between the other two." Staring at them, back and forth, until getting at least one tiny nod of acknowledgment from each. "I think there is intention on a scale above us, we do form a collective that has emergent intentions. But there are also other groups that form such collectives, subgroups of not just people but also composed of other living things, at larger scales and smaller scales. So I do agree with Sume, we form a collective intention, but I also agree with Stim, there is a larger scale intention. I think it's a fractal tapestry of the universe. There are sometimes ways in which we deviate from and impede the broader whole. We are part of life, we play a role in greater intentions, but we play it imperfectly."

“You are making a lot of sense.” Words trickle from my lips but my attention is elsewhere, I'm almost unaware that I'm speaking, instead nearly all of my focus is being siphoned away, far away, into reevaluating my worldview. I'm barely here with them in this moment, just present enough to externalize an acknowledgement, an appreciation of the effects their insights are having on me. “Intentions are emergent.. Fractal grouping of collectives..” I turn to the window again muttering little things like that, simplified titles of epic novels written about a character profoundly reshaping their worldview with new layers of nuance.

I remember hearing them talk amongst themselves behind me, only a few tidbits stuck with me.

“Did you see that look”

“Yep. Staring down the bottomless rabbit hole for the first time.”

“That's going to take a long time to process and I'm hungry…”

When I turned around they were gone. I felt like it was only a few moments, then I noticed that the sun was now on the other side of the sky. I wandered off in a daze, those ideas still stuck resonating in my head, like a ball bouncing around a room filled with carefully piled bricks, knocking out pieces and collapsing structures with each ricochet. It took days before that feeling started fading and for my perspective on life to settle into a new island of stability.

…

Is there anything more mesmerizing than glistening sparkles of sunlight on turbulent wavy water? Here in the middle of this bridge, my attention is shifting and my focus is scaling. Shimmering flashes of light, then the waves these flickers live on top of, then the directional motion of the waves flowing downstream. My mental observation mode is like fidgeting with the focus on a microscope.

All the noises of traffic and people around me are completely drowned in this visual serenity, alone in my personal sea of passive contemplation. Then, while watching a twinkle of sunlight dance, it suddenly flashes in unison with a loud “Hey!” And the hypnotic daze is abruptly shattered, that fluid holistic tapestry of waves and light is torn into shreds and I'm just here, standing on a bridge.

Unwillingly and resentfully aware of my surroundings, next comes a booming response from the other side.

"Niar! Tulf!” I look to my left and right to see two couples closing in, one couple from each side. They are smiling and waving at each other, the pace of their steps begins to pick up. One pair passes me, their steps now slowing as they meet the other two, they all group together just arms length off to the side of me.

The two pairs meet and start chatting. I become aware that I'm staring at them so I turn back to look at the water. I start trying to get back into that mesmerized state, but they deny me that opportunity when one of them taps me on the shoulder and requests “Could you take our picture please?”

I politely comply, they shuffle together and then I take several pictures. “Okay, I think I got a few good shots.” I tell them, lowering the camera. They all begin to thank me pleasantly then they split down the middle into two new pairs, each new pair is a mix of one member from each original couple. Now chatting in their new pairings I stand awkwardly, still holding the camera, they seem to have forgotten about me.

I step forward and hold the camera up towards the leftmost person while letting out a subtle humming ‘ah’ sound. That gets me a response “Oh, hahaha, oops!” A response, it works, I break their conversation and one of them engages me “Thank you so much! It seems I found an honest stranger, you probably could have wandered off with it and I wouldn't have noticed haha” Taking the camera with a laugh and a smile “I'm Elpa” Then reaching out to shake my hand “... and this is Niar” Elpa lets go and points, we shake hands as well and everyone exchanges a few pleasantries.

“See even the strangers you collide with are just like you, honest and trustworthy” Niar says, playfully poking Elpa’s shoulder “Like I always say, the universe is a mirror.”

“Always with the mirror, are you ever going to let go of that?” Elpa jests “The universe doesn't just become what you want, only hard work can sculpt it, you gotta make it into the world you want.”

“I never said it just becomes what you want. It reflects who you are. For you, your honesty and trustworthiness are reflected in your world, including this stranger.” Niar argues playfully, then hesitates and looks at me with a mildly embarrassed expression.

Elpa butts in “I'm so sorry, what's your name? We shouldn't keep calling you a stranger, it's so impolite. We're probably making you feel uncomfortable and awkward.”

“Oh my, don't worry, not uncomfortable at all. I'm made of stronger stuff than that.” I stand tall and announce confidently “My name is Luda. If anything I love being a fly on the wall for your conversation, please don't stop on my account, I want to hear more.”

“There you go, a reflection of your honesty and straightforwardness, plus a mirror image of my confidence and awesomeness.” Niar proclaims “Elpa here thinks everything has to be a battle of force. So headstrong and blinded to the obvious symmetry and projection of life, haha.”

“I do not think everything is a battle!” Elpa rejects that statement adamantly “... But you gotta try, nothing comes from nothing.”

I can see Niar is ready to snap back, they are still using friendly tones but there is an argumentative and almost competitive spark. Something inside me surges up with preventative purpose, I speak before even knowing what words will come next “Seems to me you both agree.” They turn to me, I realize I have taken a position without thinking it through. Time to think on my feet, without hesitation I take the first idea that wells up and let it flow freely from my lips “You both think you are the architect of your own reality. Elpa by doing, Niar by being. Elpa, your doing is also a mirror, a universe that mirrors your effort. Niar, your reflection is also work, an external world forged by sculpting your internal self, your world becomes a reflection of internal work.”

A brief silence hangs then they start laughing. Elpa slaps my shoulder approvingly, Niar then calls out to the other two members of their group “Tulf! Irar! Come meet Luda, the great arbiter… the arbiter in the middle of the bridge, hahaha!”
The pair now laughing even harder as their partners come over and join us.

As they close in Elpa introduces me. “This here is Luda.” The two that are joining us partner up next to their original companions. One snuggles up hip-to-hip with Niar and waves, introducing “I'm Tulf”. The other saunters in, places a hand on Elpa’s shoulder, then makes a swooping elegant hand motion inwards towards self and proclaims “And I'm Irar! A pleasure, I'm sure.”

“Luda here thinks Elpa and I are fundamentally the same character.” Niar explains, then reaches around to grab and pull Tulf in tight by the waist.

Both Tulf and Irar burst out laughing, they look at each other and snippets like “So true!” and “They are!” or “Even strangers see it!” are exchanged amidst their continuous laughter.

Irar looks over at Elpa, still laughing, and says “You two never believe us, always denying it, declaring that you are actually opposites, hahaha.”

“Yeah, but you see Luda here did what neither of you ever could.” Elpa smirks back at Irar, holding ground patiently as that statement takes root. The laughter subsides, replaced with quizzically silent stares. Anticipation fills the air, and just as it starts to feel like someone might need to ask for an explanation, with perfect timing, Elpa elaborates “It was so simple, so elegant, right there, clarity in so few words. Niar is being, and I am doing.”

Elpa looks at me and nods approvingly, as that succinct description is processed by Tulf and Irar. They are both taken off guard and stuck in thought. A moment passes then Irar steps out of reflection first and verbally applauds “Insightful, profound, worthy of praise, and infinitely more so for also being clear and concise. Such qualities are beautiful individually but all of them at once is a rare treasure.” The praise impacts hard, throwing me off balance, my confident stance crumbles. I find myself staring at my toes feeling like a blushing child who has been lavished with too much praise, left unsure how to respond. Then more is added “A sage of life and living by any count.” This strikes a completely different nerve.

I am no sage or guru. I have no idea what the meaning of life is, I'm barely scraping together enough pieces of the puzzle to keep moving, one step at a time, one day at a time. Everyone else seems to be sure they know, or at least they believe they know, but me? I feel like a leaf in the wind. “It's okay. Don't worry. Irar is generous with words, don't let them turn into pressure.” Tulf’s gently spoken advice dissolves the crystallizing thoughts. “Whatever pool of heavy self-doubt you were sinking in just now, it's unjustified. Praise should raise you up, just don't let it push you off a cliff.”

Those two left me emotionally dizzy, or better to describe it as a roller coaster. “Wow! Your partners may be the same, but you two are polar opposites.” Just as I finish speaking I start to worry that those words might be taken the wrong way. “I mean a polarity without any good, bad, or judgemental qualities. I think you both radiate positive and supportive energy.”

“Thank you dear! It's so nice to be acknowledged like that.” Irar thanks me “... but I must disagree, Tulf and I are not opposites, we have far more in common than anyone else we know.”

I'm a bit thrown off and start twisting my frame of mind, trying to see how they are the same. “It's true, we almost always agree.” Tulf chimes in “No matter where we go or who we meet, we may not notice the same details, but we can always agree that everything we notice is just different elements of the same thing.”

“And the both of them are great at knowing just the right thing to say and do.” Elpa chimes in “Over the years I have learned to trust Irar to help guide me. A hammer is useless if you can't find the nail.”

“Exactly, same here!” adds Niar “Tulf is my own personal weather reporter, helping me moderate my behavior to fit the situation or environment.”

“Ah!” I gasp as everything seems to make sense. The puzzle pieces now feel like they will fit, I haven't put them together yet, but they feel like they are part of one picture, ready to snap together easily. “Let me ask you, Tulf and Irar, what do you think defines reality? What is the key to life? How do you interact with the universe?” I ask, seeking their versions of how they perceive reality, just like Niar and Elpa had given me earlier.

“The universe is everything at once, it's up to you. What your reality is depends on you.” Irar states confidently “There is beauty and wonder everywhere if you know how to find it, there is also ugliness and disturbing sides to life as well. You choose what you want, you can focus on and recognize the glorious splendor in every moment, or you can choose to obsess and ruminate on the vile and putrid.” Irar looks to Tulf as if to encouragingly hand over the chance to speak.

“I don't disagree with Rari, but I fit more into the camp of people who believe in karma.” Tulf starts off speaking in a somewhat meek tone, but there is a visible spark of passion emphasizing the word karma, that spark clearly ignites a flood of passion and expression. “The

universe is like a living thing, we are all part of a self-balancing interconnected ecosystem. Most people think karma is simply about getting what you give, but there is an art to the giving part. Your sense of what you should do is like a radio, you need to tune into the right frequencies so you can hear the right stations. Your reality will be determined by which stations you listen to and how well you follow along with the music they play."

"Now I get it!" I announce, filled with the satisfaction of a student solving a challenging problem "You are both perception, like senses." They look at each other, Irar confirms the appraisal with a nod, Tulf smiles back. I continue elaborating with the pride of a kid doing show and tell. "See and feel. Irar you focus on and choose to see the world you want to live in, and Tulf you tune in and feel the universe that you choose to vibe with."

"Another home run, two for two. Ha!" Niar jumps in, then looking at Elpa jests "We are even attracted to the same type of complementary partner hehe."

All four of them start chatting and laughing playfully. Watching them interact for a while I noticed something more "See-Do and Feel-Be." I blurt out, they fall silent and give me their full attention. "Each pair of you forms an action sense couple, and at a higher level there is more. Irar and Elpa, See-Do, you are more proactive, more action based, while Tulf and Niar, Feel-Be, you are more reactive, more sense-based. I think the four of you get along so well because there is a symmetry, your relationship as a pair of couples is a macro version of your individual relationships with your partners."

That statement goes over exceedingly well, they all express approval and discuss how much they love my observation. I just kind of zone out, revisiting the insight and longing to know myself how they feel. They look so content and happy, they have a sense of identity and embrace it, havung a stranger notice their characters and relationships seems to give them so much satisfaction. Even before I said anything they obviously must have known all of this, at least on some level. I only gave it some fun linguistic framing.

"We are going to eat. You wanna join us? We'd love it if you did." Elpas invitation crashes through my pensive fog.

I look at the group as they all invite me with welcoming smiles and gestures, the warmth they radiate is strong but there is a freezing heat sink within me, I can only describe it as jealousy. I want what they have, even just a sliver of that identity, purpose, character… some, or even just any of those. I need to process these jealous feelings, if I go with them I'm just a third wheel, worse actually, a fifth wheel.

"Another time, but today I'll have to pass." I politely refuse. We all bid farewell and promise to catch up soon. They head off yammering gleefully, I lean against the railing to look back at the river.

No matter how hard I try my mind won't slip back into that mesmerized mode. The sparkles, waves, and current can't charm away this sense of longing.

I look up and inspect the bridge, then the city on each side. The roar of traffic on the bridge seems to drag my attention in both directions. I have to go in one direction.

WHICH way should I go?

The traffic on the side closest to me is dominant, it drags my attention stronger. My gaze constantly lured along with that louder flowing noise.

Looking to that side I can see the buildings and paths that create the structured city, with all those traffic lights, crosswalks, intersections, and one-way streets. Even if I just walk randomly the infrastructure and traffic systems will encourage routes and locations. Rivers of directed flow and designed currents.

Which WAY should I go?

The streets are bustling with traffic, commuters and explorers. The buildings are filled with people working and consuming. Will I end up interrupting someone else's flow? Will I land at a restaurant and eat a meal? Do I go shopping for groceries, or perhaps clothes? Maybe it's best to seek out people and make friends, or seek a networking opportunity to expand my professional circle.

Which way SHOULD I go?

Those four new friends, I want to be like them. They knew who they were, they act and sense. To be like them I should read my reality and learn to act accordingly.

The buzz of the city blurs out and I can hear voices of friends, old and new.

Destiny chooses the game
Intentions will push and pull
Life gives it meaning
You are your choices

Which way should …I… go?

<<<>>>

A prof stands in front of a screen displaying a complex pixelated 3D shape.

“... and that's the result from a single execution of our example quantum algorithm. A single execution is called a shot, and a single shot only tells one story, one possible outcome. So we

run many shots and collect the distribution of the results, this distribution gives us a window into the quantum realm."

A student raises their hand and waits patiently, the prof notices and says "I told you at the beginning of class, don't raise your hands just speak up. I'll stop you if you cross the line, tell you to wait if you are ahead of the program, and if you become a distraction I'll let you know. I'm not going to let you feel ignored then blame me. instead it's your own fault if you annoy everyone else haha."

"I understand the operating mechanics of this quantum circuit, and the results, so I see how it works and what it does, and even its application. It's very useful, but how was it designed? Like…If I want to solve a problem, how do I design a quantum circuit to do it?" asks the student.

"Ha, wonderful!" The proof is delighted at that question "Well, even in classical computing that can be difficult. Sometimes you might say it's more art than science, the inspiration for a new formula or algorithm can come from unlikely insights or abstract ideas. Quantum Computing probably more so than classical." Continuing the answer, the prof goes on "This one here was chosen because it is a great example of a fundamental archetype. Think back to the way I explained it. How would you segment the presentation if you were asked to break it into sections?"

The student thinks for a while then speaks up "First you initialized the circuit and primed the initial states, then the activations were set off, next pure propagation through the circuit, and finally collapse and measurement."

"Well said. There are so many permutations and ways to construct a circuit, it helps to start with something simple like this. A staged approach can help, or at least provide a starting point. Initialize the state and set the board, manipulation and interference, evolution within a circuit, then collapse and measure the result." Pausing to let students digest. "You can have more stages or less. Some prefer to take a more holistic approach, I personally think this is a good place to start when designing a quantum circuit. It's not the answer, just a place to start experimenting while you develop your own style." Another break to let that sink in. "Investigating the space of possible circuits, applications, and structures is like exploring the ocean, and this class only teaches you how to build a simple raft. Haha."

A new voice chimes in "If the result or answer we want is a waveform, then why don't we measure the waveform itself? Why do we aggregate a pile of individual results like this? It only creates an imperfect approximation."

The prof looks a bit annoyed, forces a smile, and says "There are a bunch of prerequisite quantum mechanics courses for this class, but somehow we always have these kinds of questions…. It's okay though, it's good you asked, there are probably lots of other students who need this review as well." A small snicker, perhaps a bit derisive, then the explanation begins. "We can't measure a waveform without collapsing it. It is possible to measure only some

portions, elements, or properties by only collapsing it partially. But no matter what you do, you always collapse it into a single result, or subset of the original probabilities. The only way to view a waveform is to average a collection of results."

The student looks puzzled. "But unitarity says information is never destroyed, the missing parts of the waveform must go somewhere. So when we collapse it there must be some way to capture an impression of the rest of it too, shouldn't there?"

"Same old hang up, time symmetry, hahaha." The prof laughs. Quite a few students furrow their brows. The prof then continues. "This is a computing class, not philosophy. So let me be clear… Leave your interpretations at the door! If you are so desperate to believe in time symmetry, determinism, or information preservation that you need to also believe in many worlds, pilot waves, or whatever else, that's fine! But leave it outside of my classroom!" A pause to let that sink in, looking around the room the prof senses a need to drive the message home harder. "The maths and models describing wave function evolution have unitarity, but collapse appears to violate unitarity, and there's absolutely no evidence to suggest otherwise. Many people just want so badly to believe that unitarity is a fundamental law of everything that they think is easier to believe in many worlds. They prefer to twist everything around interpretations rather than just accept that the empirical evidence and models imply that collapse destroys information."

The room is silent then a timid voice asks "So you don't have a preferred interpretation?"

"That's not a topic we deal with here." The prof looks around, smiles widely and points to the screen. "For the purposes of this class… the quantum world is made of tiny civilizations of elves, the elves live lifetimes within wave function evolutions. The result we measure is just the meta information about one elf's life in the city of our circuit. Anyone who wants to talk about interpretations in my class is required to frame their questions using this context and terminology of elves."

The class starts laughing.

The prof then asks, while holding back a chuckle. "So… Does anyone want to discuss how we should ask elves about their emotions and feelings? Or why do elves do elvish things?" Pausing to let the students' laughter spread around the room. "... Or can we go back to discussing quantum computing?"

>>> meanwhile, across campus

A different prof is giving a lecture.

"... So this school of developmental education focuses on four sequential stages

First is tautological. Things are the way they are because they are that way

Next comes authoritarian. Things are the way they are as dictated by the power of authority figures.

Then the complexity of community roles is introduced. This reveals that all of us, even the authority figures, are players in a larger society.

Finally, agency is promoted. Identity through choice is encouraged.

The ability to employ this model is affected by…”

Two figures stand near the door in the back of the room.

One leans in and whispers “It's the same as it was in our first year. Why are we here?”

The other responds “This is one of my favorites. It inspired my choice to specialize in early development.”

The second character grants a few more moments and waits, then loses patience and says “Come on, we're all packed up, we've got places to go and people to see. Don't spend your life reviewing lessons you've already learned.”

The first remains silent, focused intently on the lecture.

The second grabs the first by the shirt and pulls…

“Come on… it's time to GO!”