

God's Diary

Forty-two Days in the Life of the Creator

*A personal view of
Creation Joseph Exodus Christmas Easter*

Edited by Dave Hopwood
Part One - Creation

Day one

Decided to keep a... what shall I call it... A bicycle? A velocer raptor? A library? An aviary? A priory? A friary? A diary... a diary yes that sounds good. Decided to keep a diary. Don't think it's ever been done before. Nice to have a record of things as they stand though. Actually things don't stand at the moment. Nothing stands... or sits... or lies down. Because nothing is. I'm seriously thinking about making a change. Yes. After all I am... Well, hardly needs saying does it?

I know, tomorrow I will make a change, all this blackness must go. Mind you, when does tomorrow come? Perhaps I should make a change now, then there'll actually be a tomorrow. Yes. I like that. I'll be back in a minute.

Marvellous. Done it. Ushered in the light. Switched on the biggest bulb you've ever seen. When I say switch of course I really just mean I told the light to turn up and it did. I mean I haven't invented the switch yet, so it would hardly be worth me trying to flick one. Or press one. Or whatever one does with a switch. Anyway. That's changed things. The light's here. Bit bright though. I'll just switch it off for a while. Till tomorrow.

Day two

I think it's tomorrow now. In fact, I'll call this tomorrow for definite. We had a bit of daylight yesterday and... Oh did I mention, daylight is what I decided to call the light, the light is day the dark is night. Then we can have dark nights and light days, can't really do it the other way round, dark days and light nights. Doesn't sound right. By the way, if you're wondering, yesterday is what I've decided to call the day before tomorrow, which is actually today when you're there, but tomorrow before you get to it and yesterday once you've left it behind. Simple really isn't it? So today, which of course refers to this day now, which is sandwiched neatly between yesterday and tomorrow (oh and don't ask me what a sandwich is at the moment, no time to go into the world of flour and peanut butter and chocolate spread and kippers at this point), now where was I?

Oh yes, today I've decided to make the sky. It's a strip of blue, perhaps grey, or occasionally black, sometimes shot through with a red tinge, and very rarely an orange hue. Anyway, this thing, of variable shades and colours, is going to be called the sky. It seems to fit perfectly just above the ocean, now I know what you're thinking, where did the ocean come from? Well, that came about as I put the sky in place. I gathered all the vapours together, the universe is full of them, then with a somewhat majestic sweep of the hand, (it was most impressive) I cut a line through the vapours, and where they collected underneath the line it formed the ocean and where they gathered above it became the sky. Elementary... sort of. Now I know this doesn't sound like much, one mere sweep of the arm, but I've decided that's enough for today, I'm going to put my feet up and contemplate the deep for a while, and the mysteries of the sea.

Day three

I'm in my stride now. No, really, I am. What a day. I started by scooping the ocean into one place, and lo and behold, dry land appeared. Dry, as opposed to the wet bits. It's solid, it's stuff you can stand on. Well I can stand on the water myself, of course, but you know what I mean. You can scoop this up in handfuls, which, again, I can also do with the water, but there is a difference believe me. Dry land is not blue. It's brown, and red, and black and purple, and sometimes green, but that sort isn't to be touched, or smelt, believe me. So I've called the dry land earth. Which seems to have the right sound about it. I mean earth sounds brown and solid doesn't it? Not like ocean, ocean's a word that moves, it rolls around your mouth, it washes across the tongue. Earth just sits there, it blurts out and stands in a little lump in front of you. So that's what it's to be. Dry land - earth. Then I said, oh by the way, most of the time when I say I did something I often mean I stood in the middle of the gasses and the blues and the greens and shouted, or whispered and then watched the effect. So I said "Let the earth burst forth with grass and herb yielding seed..." Boy! You should have seen it. Vegetation everywhere. Bushes, fruit trees, herbs, vegetables, flowers, shrubs... I had to be double quick in naming them, believe me, it was as if someone had dynamited a paint shop, the colours and the shades crashed out of that brown earth and covered the planet like a flood. What a moment, it was like the earth suddenly disappeared behind a huge multicoloured umbrella. I laughed! All morning and into the afternoon, and the more I laughed the more the planet shuddered and produced that harvest of golden leaves and silver fruit. Oh by the way, dynamite is a kind of explosive, it'll be useful in safe cracking cowboy movies in years to come.

You see this, it's a handful of seed. If I drop these yellow buttons in the dark earth within a week

you'll have a forest. I'm serious, that land is so fertile you could plant an orchard today and be eating apple strudel for Sunday lunch. The seeds are dropping in clouds from the plants and trees and the instant they collide with the ground the place erupts. They only have to get a whiff of soil and bingo! They're sprouting up like fountains of oil in a desert.

So! All in all quite a day, and a poetic one too. Glad I kept the diary, wouldn't want to forget this day in a hurry. Hope tomorrow's not a let down. It's stars and seasons, and I'll tell you about them on day four.

Day four

The dictionary definition of a star is 'a luminous heavenly body', don't ask me how I know so early on in the order of life, I just do. Let me tell you, if you own that dictionary, they're selling you short. I was out there today with the stars, I got up before dawn, while it was still night, well, you'd have to wouldn't you? No good creating stars in the daylight, can't see any of them, you wouldn't be able to tell if you'd lumped them all in one place. And as for losing count... So I was up while it was still dark, and the first thing I did was to call up this massive planet. It's huge, makes the earth look like a deflated football. I took this magnificent specimen, set it in the sky, and put a match to it. Well, if you want to warm your feet, that's the place. The next few stars were a bit of a let down after that, tiny in comparison, but I had fun making shapes out of them. There's one that looks a bit like a... well, I suppose it doesn't look like it at the moment because the comparison doesn't exist. But I'm sure it'll keep folks happy in the future trying to spot the different shapes I put up there. I decided that the big star should be called the sun, and that determines when the daylight should end. Then there's a smaller planet, called the moon. I polished that one with a handful of soft sunlight and it came up beautiful, it shines like a mirror and you can almost see your face in it. At night, when it's dark, it'll reflect the rays of the sun and give a little light to the earth. But not so much that it keeps you awake. Just a silver glimmer in the sky. Dark enough to sleep, light enough to stroll along a shadowed golden beach, which incidentally is where the oceans meet the land.

Oh yes! That reminds me I had a go at surfing the other day. I have a feeling it could catch on. Of course, now that we have the stars and the sun and the moon, we can really go to town on the fourth dimension. I mean, day five is going to happen now whether I decide it or not. The sun's going to sleep and the moon's going to rise and the whole shebang'll be in progress, the stars'll be glinting like diamonds up there and before you know it the alarm'll be going off and day five will be here. Time is with us, it's dawned and the clock is ticking. So suddenly we've got days and weeks and months and seasons, and by next week we'll be counting the days till Summer and the weeks till Christmas. Christmas, hmmm? Sounds a good name for something... Anyway, you get the picture. We're on a roll now, and all those clumps of vegetation will be changing costume faster than Rory Bremner. And don't ask me how I know about him already either.

Day five

Only two days to my day off. That feels good. It's been a busy week. Oh, a week is seven days by the way, I decided to call it that. Six days for getting the universe in order deserves a seventh day off, don't you think? I guess I could call it the weekend. And then I could invent the lie in. But if I do that I must invent it the day before as I'm not going to work on day seven. So I therefore have

to lie in on day six in order to create it for use on day seven. But then I could be late for work on day six. And that's a big day. If only I'd thought of that today before I got up. I could have invented it this morning, not too much to get up for today, apart from the fish and the birds and the reptiles and the dinosaurs and the mammals and the insects and the entire animal kingdom. I know that sounds a lot but really it isn't. I could easily have spent another hour in bed this morning. It would have been nice to have moulded a few goldfish over breakfast in bed. I could have stuck the lizards and the piranhas and the squirrels together while munching on toast. But I digress...

I did get up, and I started with the birds. Specifically, the eagle. You should have seen the boxfuls of talons and beaks, feathers and wings. Made quite a sight when the first one spread its full wingspan and plummeted off that cliff edge. For one moment I wondered if flying really worked, but I needn't have worried. Just before nosediving into the white foam below the bird fluttered its wings and took a U-turn up into the clouds, after that it was like unravelling a mottled blanket. Line after line of the creatures tumbled and swooped off the edge and took to the skies. Suddenly I was not alone, suddenly the place was filled with the sounds of screams and squawks, songs and shrieks, and a million feathered species sat on the horizon like tiny paint spots flecked against the blue canvas sky. And boy, can those creatures talk. They never stop gabbling to each other across the skies. My first creation tomorrow morning has to be the dawn chorus. We've got to get some peace and quiet while it's dark, then I'll let them burst into song with the daylight, at least it'll be ordered that way.

The fish were more manageable. A large hunk of flesh, a smattering of scales, some well placed gills and we were laughing. Then I took a trip out to sea and introduced them to the ocean. There were so many I had to carry them out there in colossal nets, I had a strange feeling about that, as if those nets might end up being put to some other use. Anyway, as soon as they hit the water they swam off happily enough. I built the whales and sharks on the beach and then sent them rolling into the waves, the seals as well. But the penguins were a little more interesting. I set them upright then set them bobbing from left to right, rather like a beach full of black and white pendulums. They seemed to go with that and they waddled away happily. I took a dive after coffee to see how the tropical fish were coming on. What colour! What faces! They were like old men with extended whiskers, scaly sweaters and dayglo waistcoats. There's a long slippery thing down there which gave me a bit of a shock. I've called it an electric eel, and that gave me an idea for something else, a sort of instant power supply. I think I need to ponder on that one. Anyway before I left the sea I reminded them all to get busy and multiply and fill the oceans with plenty more like themselves. They didn't seem to argue, I left them to it. I like those fish, and the birds, they make the planet more vibrant, the place is alive now. Everywhere I turn now I catch sight of a bird swooping low, or a shark fin cutting the surface of the water; and I hear the singing constantly, and the chirping of the dolphins as they leap and dive after one another.

Day six

Morning

I did it. I did invent the lie in this morning - and a superb invention it's turned out to be. The only

major drawback is jammy blobs in the bed and tea spots on the sheets. But I've been brewing up a concoction called Stain Devil which will soon deal with any such problems, not sure if I like the name of the product though... Of course I intend to work late this evening to make up for the lost time spent testing the new lie in. The extra hour in bed meant it was 5.30 am by the time I got up. Only kidding, I stayed in bed till 10.45 really.

And I'm in full swing now. Today it's living creatures, basically, livestock, reptiles and wild beasts. I know I said that I would cover all these yesterday, but I decided to dedicate day five to the birds and the fish, after all, I came up with so many varieties in the end that it took all day to think up appropriate names. And talking of names I've made a list of some of the animals that I will be creating today. Here's just a few:

Bulliphents, datts, coggs, butterfluffs, daftogs, dragonsnuffles, smugs, snagles, ostricles, muckleheads, funsterbuds, crikkles, bedragglefaggles and field mice. Great names, eh? Well, so far I've been at work a couple of hours now (I'm writing this in my coffee break, which would normally be my lunch break, but what with starting so late after the new lie in I'm a couple of hours behind myself, if you see what I mean) and so far I've finished about half of them. Well, when I say finished - none of them are actually living and breathing as of yet, they're all frozen solid and looking like the merchandise which might accompany a future children's movie. I thought I'd give them the breath of life once I've put the finishing touches to the entire animal kingdom. Wouldn't want the muckleheads and funsterbuds going bananas and trampling all over the field mice whilst I'm still sticking their whiskers on. I'm having particular difficulty with the Bulliphents, their joints are so big that their kneecaps keep dropping off before the glue can dry. I've invented something called Blue Tack, to hold the bits in place while I add more glue, don't think it'll ever catch on, but I might reinvent it in the twentieth century.

I've come up with a fantastic idea for a creature: an animal which can jump, punch, make little clicking sounds with its tongue and lean back on nothing but its tail. Can't decide what to call it though. Perhaps a wallabeak, or a kangarob? Or maybe a spacehopper? Can't decide. Some of the dough that I'm using stayed in the mixer too long and it's come out in such huge lumps that the dinosaurs have ended up being ten times the size of any of the other creatures. The Tyrannosaurus looks like a cliff face with teeth, and very large teeth at that. I've decided to give them a short life span in case they go round stepping on anything important, and I may not create any new ones when the first lot have died out. Hope that doesn't cause too much controversy and confusion in the future.

Afternoon

Well, they're alive and kicking, particularly the kangaroobs and wallabeaks. In the end I decided to make some of each. Though I didn't use the name spacehopper, sounds too much like a large orange balloon with handles, which you might sit on. It was an awesome moment, when I started them up I mean. I positioned every living creature, or rather, every soon-to-be living creature in ordered ranks along the valley, then I climbed to the highest peak, cupped my hands to my mouth and began to blow gently over the extraordinary display of creatures below me. For a moment nothing happened and I wondered if I'd forgotten to install the lungs but then a dragonsnuffle coughed, a butterfluff flapped its wings and one of the field mice fell on his face and did three somersaults across the dry ground. Before you knew it the valley was full of the sound of

coughing and wheezing and creaking and crackling, a bit like a geriatric aerobics class, as they all stretched and blew the dust out of their windpipes. And before you could say 'Big bang theory' the cheetahs had sped out of the place faster than a bat out of... ahem... faster than a cherub out of heaven... and the rest of the animals followed behind. There was a bit of trouble with the unicorns, I'd forgotten to Blue Tack the horns securely on their heads and at the first gallop the things flew off. But I think they'll be all right without them and so I've changed their name as well.

I've had a bit of a wander about this afternoon and they all seem to be settling in all right. The birds and fish got a bit of a fright at first when they saw the entire animal kingdom come tearing across the plains at them but I think they've adjusted well now to their new neighbours. I've only actually made two of each creature - a male and a female, but I've encouraged them to multiply as fast as they can, and I think they'll soon get the hang of it.

Tea time (Usually my evening meal, when I don't have a lie in)

It's really set me back, having that belated start to the morning, looks like I'll be working late into the evening now. You see, although I'm very pleased with the results of the work so far, this next creation is the big one. This is the moment I've been waiting for. Since lunch I've been designing the ultimate in living things. He's a bit like the animals, he has internal organs and limbs and hair and eyes. But he'll be so much more. Admittedly he won't be able to lean back on his tail like the kangaroos, but I doubt if he'll really care about that. After many meticulous hours of thought and construction I've finished the first model. He has four limbs, two legs and two other things... er, we could, say, call them arms. He has a head of course, and a body and little stumpy things at the end of his arms and legs. I thought I'd call them toes and fingers. Toes on the hands and fingers on the feet. The toes will be very useful for him, for tasks such as holding things, drawing, using a telephone, for getting attention in a restaurant, for using cash dispensers, for waving at people, for making silhouetted animal shapes in slide shows and for scratching that irritating itch, wherever it may be. The computer inside his skull is extremely advanced, I've piled all the major intelligence into this one being, my only concern is that he may confuse himself and start thinking he has more ability stored in his skull than he really has. He has a very powerful imagination, which really appeals to me of course, can't wait to see what he does with it. He has sporting skills, numerical skills, language skills, inventive skills, cookery skills and, now that I've perfected the lie in, I've decided to give him sleeping skills too. He's just over here now, under this sheet, and I'm about to breathe life into him. I'll be right back.

He works! He works! He works!

Brilliant!

He was a little wooden at first, and spent longer than I expected merely yawning and stretching, but once he'd got the hang of it he was up and leaping about. He's playing football at the moment with one of the coconuts. I don't exactly know what 'football' is, but that's what he says he's doing. We've had a marvellous chat, he wants to know everything, all about the trees and the plants, and the birds and the fish. I've told him I'll take him for a guided tour tomorrow as it's my day off. I warned him about the lie in though, said I wouldn't be around until ten o'clock. He seemed a little disappointed, I don't think he's ready for sleeping yet, maybe not even for another week. Obviously these humans must have boundless energy when they've just been created. Not

like their poor old creator who's been around for ever.

Oh by the way, that's what I've decided to call them. Humans. I think that he'll be the first of many. You see, I'm going to give him this entire planet, quite a birthday present, eh? I don't mind, I made it for him, I'm going to give it to him after supper tonight, I can't wait to see his face.

After supper

Well! The excitement goes on! When I told him about the planet being his he went bananas. I only just managed to stop him squashing three field mice as he went charging through the undergrowth. Once I'd told him there was no stopping him. Next thing you know he wants to see all the animals and give them names, he can't wait till tomorrow, has to do it today. So he's up there now, standing on the cliff top while all the living creatures parade before him. So far he's caused complete confusion by changing all their names. The only one of mine that he likes is the field mice. Just as well seeing as he nearly turned them into the first helping of raspberry jam earlier on. The bulliphents are now elephants, the datts and coggs he's switched around to catts and doggs, butterfluffs are now butterflies, and dafthogs are hedgehogs. He doesn't like the snuffle bit on the dragonsnuffles so he's dropped that, the smugs and snagles and ostricles are also changed too. Can't think what he's called the muckleheads and funsterbuds, but they'll always be muckleheads and funsterbuds to me. When I introduced him to the bedragglefaggles he just fell about laughing, glad I gave these humans a sense of humour. I don't mind really though, but I am a little worried that he's going to get lonely. And I know what that feels like.

Late night

Done it! In spite of his unlimited energy supply I have succeeded in sending the human to sleep. It was no mean feat, believe me. But it was very necessary. I can't bear the thought of him being alone, so I've come up with the solution. Another model. I've made another human, only this one is different. Same construction for the body and computer for the brain, but I've built in subtle differences. In outlook, in personality, in the sense of humour, table manners, and not least in the outline of the body. That should surprise the man. That's what he is now, by the way, he's a man, and this one is a woman. Hmm. Can't wait to see his face this time.

Day seven

Didn't finish yesterday's entry as I got caught up watching a herd of woolly mammoths racing across the plains in a sort of 10,000 meter sprint. Can't remember who won, there were 500,000 of them competing, but they made a quite majestic sight, and fair took my breath away. Like a million hairy steam rollers thundering in top gear across the land. This morning I went in search of the man and the woman and, strangely, they seemed to be enjoying a lie in after all. Plus they've made another change - they've decided it's got to be fingers on the hands, not toes, they're to be on the feet. They did consider discarding the toes altogether, but thankfully they changed their minds when I demonstrated a few indispensable uses, e.g. for keeping your flip flops on. I've given them a brand new garden to live in. Eden it's called. Of course they'll probably want to shift a few borders and replant half the shrubs, but that's why I gave it to them.

The woman's as curious as the man. They want to know everything about the place. Everything. If this goes on I'll need two days off a week. Thought we'd go for picnic up on the hills this afternoon, they're going to bring some fruit along, and I said I'd bring some recipes to give them some ideas about cooking. I can't tell you what a difference it makes having the planet full of new friends, and particularly Adam and Eve, the two humans. We were up till late last night talking and walking. Eve's created this thing she's called a joke. It usually starts with the words "Knock, knock," and Adam falls about with laughter every time she cracks one. They keep forgetting the names they've given to the animals so I try and drop in one or two of my own here and there, but funnily enough they always remember theirs in the end.

This morning I showed them the largest tree in the garden. Right in the centre it is. They were amazed, we talked about it for hours, I explained to them about its wonderful properties, and they could see how much beauty and colour it brings to their home. The leaves are all colours, bronze, golden, maroon, crimson... and they shine like beacons. Bright as stars. It's the most expensive gift I can give them. As long as that tree is there they will be blissfully happy, and free of all concern and worry. I reassured them of that. They don't need to do anything to it, not tend it, not feed it, not even touch it. It will grow there alongside them, and they can gaze on its splendour. They just need to treasure it and respect its grandeur.

Well, the planet is complete. The job is done. It's a marvellous feeling, the world is seething with adventure and I can sense the creatures and the humans bursting to get a taste of every last drop of its pristine qualities. The work is over. It's finished.

Part Two - Joseph

Day eight - Tuesday

Hello again! Well, it's a while since I wrote in here! Have finally found time to get down to catching up a bit. The world's moved on apace since those early days. And I've been racing around trying to keep things together. Remember Adam and Eve? Well, they've since come and gone. The garden of Eden's overgrown, terribly so. Well, I had to turf Adam and Eve out didn't I? Believe me, I didn't want. I didn't! But I had to, there was no choice. Once they'd helped themselves to the tree... You remember the tree? I've thought it over many times since. Could I have stressed it more? Should I have put up a sign? An electric fence? But of course I couldn't. The whole purpose of the gift was one of trust. And there'd have been no trust if I'd sent in three armed guards and a rottweiler, now would there? They had to have access to the tree in order to be living in the abundance of its shade.

I sensed it the moment it happened. There was a change in the air, a taste of decay in the mouth. I got down there as fast as I could, but of course they were nowhere to be seen. They'd seen things differently, they'd viewed from a different perspective, and I could never shut their eyes again, not so that they could once again be blissfully unaware. The trust was broken, the mystery of the tree had been invaded, so I sent them out, and then I did send in armed guards to stop them coming back in. Well that's all a long time ago now. Their children have come and gone. And now I'm caught up with helping a young lad called Joseph. Now he's a handful! Turn your back for a second and voom! He's off. Of course it all comes back to the tree. But I mustn't go on about it. He's in jail at the moment, Joseph I mean. And it could all end in tears. Perhaps I'd better recap for the record...

Joseph's dad is called Jacob, his mother is Rachel. But that's not the problem. Joseph's got eleven brothers and all but one are older than him, and you know what older siblings can be like. Well, Joseph's got this knack of interpreting dreams, I should know, I gave it to him. And he uses it well, he's always chatting to people about it. Keeping him quiet is actually the dilemma. I gave him a dream about sheaves of corn in a field, it was what you might call prophetic. His brothers' bundles all bowed to down Joseph's bundle, well of course, Joseph had to go and tell them, didn't he? So, needless to say, they weren't too pleased. And then there was the coat. A lot has been made of that coat, someone called it a technicolour dreamcoat. Well, basically it was cooler than his brothers anoraks. You see, Joseph was the popular one with his old man, and Jacob wasn't too tactful about hiding the matter. If there was one fig biscuit left, Joseph got it. If there was only room for one on the back of the camel, Joseph got the lift. Well, you can imagine how much his brothers adored him, he rated about minus ten on their clapometer. That's not strictly true, he has a younger brother - Benjamin, he's called, and they get on famously, rather like a field of corn on fire, but the others, well... Joseph may have had plenty of dreams, but his brother's had had one as well, and theirs was to get rid of Joseph. Forever. So they did. One day when they were all out working in the fields the brothers grabbed Joseph and accidentally threw him into a well, then when a bunch of slave traders went by they pulled him out and sold him for twenty pieces of silver. When they got back they told Jacob that Joseph was dead, and to prove it they

brought in his coat, which was covered in blood. It was actually animal's blood, but Jacob didn't know that.

Young Joseph got dragged off to Egypt and sold to a guy called Potiphar, a member of the personal staff of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. And for a while things were good. You see, Joseph might be impetuous and hot headed and fast with his mouth, but he is also faithful and hard working and basically a good guy. I was able to look after him, and though Potiphar never knew it, I whispered in his ear and gave him a few suggestions of ways to promote Joseph. And it was all going swimmingly until Potiphar's wife made a pass at the young lad. Joseph's very good looking, and she was very bored, and persistent. And she nagged and pleaded with him to sleep with her. Aye, aye, aye. What can you do? I gave Joe as much resilience and stamina as I could, but in the end she pounced, literally, and tore off his jacket. She then tried to blackmail him into bed but he turned and fled - smack into trouble. She told Potiphar a pack of lies and what d'you know? Now Joseph's in prison. I hope I have some better news to report soon.

Day nine - Wednesday

Guess what? The perfect opportunity has presented itself. The two guys who are sharing Joseph's cell have both had bad dreams! Yes! Well, I gave them a little help, I admit... But this is Joseph's chance to really shine. Well actually, it's good news and bad news. Good news for one of the cell mates, the king's wine taster, he dreamt about three branches hanging heavy with ripe grapes. In the dream the wine taster squeezed the grapes, filled a cup and took it to Pharaoh his old boss. Joseph soon cracked that one, good news is on its way. The wine taster is soon going back to his old job, his old boss and his old life. But the other guy in the cell, the chief baker, he dreamt about three baskets loaded with pastries. As he carried them the birds flew down and swallowed the lot. Now this isn't the most encouraging of stories. In a nutshell, the poor chap is history. Like the pastries - he is about to disappear.

It's three days until Pharaoh's birthday, I have a feeling that could be a big day for them all.

Day ten - Thursday (8 days later)

Would you believe it! Having got out of prison on Pharaoh's birthday (as Joseph predicted) the wine taster has completely forgotten about Joseph. He said he'd put in a good word to Pharaoh. A good word? He hasn't even put in a bad word, or a short word, not so much as a cough. He's completely forgotten how Joseph helped him out. I don't know, you could write a musical about this thing, the ups and downs of it all are incredible. The wine taster's as free as a bird and where's Joseph? Still caged up sewing mail bags or curtains for the pyramids or whatever it is they sew in these Egyptian gaols. Oh, I'm afraid the baker didn't make it. He went somewhere else entirely when they dragged him from the cell on Pharaoh's birthday. Still, I've used my influence with the chief jailer, and things are looking up slightly. Joseph's been made prison administrator - in a nutshell that means he's running the place!

Day eleven - Friday (2 years later)

Oh dear. Over two years and not a scribble, not even so much as a comma in that time. Well, I've got some great news today, Pharaoh has had a corker of a dream, and, naturally he and his aids

are in confusion city. At last! At long last! Only a mere two years late, the wine taster has remembered poor Joseph. I couldn't begin to document what the poor lad has been through in that time. I should have picked someone with a better memory. But it looks very much like freedom is on its way at long last, in fact even as I write, the keys are turning in the lock and the bars on the door are swinging wide for Joseph. I'll write more this afternoon.

Well, he met Pharaoh and fortunately remembered to bow in all the right places, so he still has his head. Pharaoh, meanwhile, is losing his over this dream. He's well worried and can't see the sand for the desert as far as his nightmares are concerned. But Joe's on a roll now and I've given him a few pointers regarding the meaning of the dreams. You see, Pharaoh dreamt about these cows, there were fourteen in all. And the river Nile was in the dream too, well, when you're Egyptian how could it not be? It's very prevalent out there. Anyway, in the dream seven fat cows came trundling out of the Nile, and they looked great, the business. No foot and mouth in sight. Don't know what they've been doing in the Nile, snorkelling or something, but that's not the point. The point is, seven more cows came out of the Nile after them and they didn't look so hot. In fact they looked downright mean, lean, and thin as an asp on a crash diet; and without so much as a sand dance they swallowed the seven fat cows whole. They didn't even bother saying grace. Seven fat cows straight down with out touching the sides as they went. Well, you can understand why old Pharaoh's got the jitters. But Joseph put him straight. The seven fat cows represent seven years of plenty - good weather, good crops, good wine, good living and a boom in indigestion tablets. Happy days are here again. But not for long. They will be followed by the seven lean cows, seven lean years of famine, not a crust in sight. Bad weather, bad crops, bad wine, bad living and a slump in the sale of Rennies.

Bad news you might think? Slam Joseph right back inside you might think? But that's not on the cards for young Joseph. Pharaoh recognises talent when he sees it, believe me. I had a word with him while he was taking a siesta this afternoon and I've dropped a few ideas into his regal mind. He's going to offer Joseph a job. And not just any job, a Prime Minister of all Egypt type of job. Pharaoh is about to offer Joseph the power to do whatever he chooses, second only in status to the great man, Pharaoh himself. Not only that, but the job includes governing the entire land of Egypt, and having everyone bow to Joseph whenever his chariot passes by. Now, arranging for young Joe to receive all of this in one afternoon may sound a little impulsive, but remember, poor Joe has been slung into a pit, sold as a slave, wrongfully arrested and locked up in prison for a couple of years on his precarious way to this rather pivotal point in his career, so it's about time he got a break. Plus, he was well ahead of the competition in the 'What's my dream' contest, and he's turned out to be a quite brilliant administrator. Only question now is, will he accept the post, or has he had a better offer?

Day twelve - Saturday (7 years later)

Course he accepted the post! Joseph's maturing by the minute you know. By the way, apologies for the seven year gap, I thought two years was bad enough but I've been rather busy for these past few years. You see, Joseph took the job and immediately implemented a fourteen year plan. He's put his newly found clout to good use and requisitioned a percentage of all the crops grown during these years. Basically he's divided Egypt into five districts and organised officials from each district to gather all the excess crops into the royal storehouses. They've scraped and saved

during these seven years of plenty and as there's been bumper crops everywhere, there's now more spare grain than you can shake a sceptre at, so much so that no one, not even the boy wonder, can keep track of it all. Aside from running the country, wearing the king's best wardrobe and generally wielding authority over everyone, Joseph's also found time to get married and have two sons. He's a busy man now, gone are the days of languishing in a Cairo prison and sewing mail bags and pyramid curtains .

What Joseph doesn't realise is that when the famine hits, round about this time tomorrow, the whole of Egypt and a few of its neighbours are going to form a queue and come knocking on his door. Pharaoh has given Joseph the keys to the larder and it's up to him to dish out the groceries for the next seven years. Not that Joseph will mind that, with his gifts of administration he's well suited, but he may get some surprise visitors...

Day thirteen - Sunday

(The very next day, honest. No twenty year gap or anything)

Meanwhile, back in Canaan, where Jacob and Rachel and the eleven brothers are all still living, bad times are just around the corner... Plenty's been happening to the old family, and I've seen them through thick and thin, but the time is coming when they're going to have to bite the bullet and go looking for food. Just to fill you in, the brothers have all grown older, got married, had children, and really not given Joseph a second thought. Jacob's missed his lost son of course, missed him terribly, but he believed him to be dead and life had to go on. And the brothers have had a blissful few years with no dreams and no interpretations. But, as they say, it ain't over until the fat lady sings, or in their case, the fat Pharaoh.

Well, they've just had a family meeting round the dinner table, Jacob told them all about the impending famine, and strangely enough they all had seconds of pudding. He asked for any suggestions. Well you could have heard a shekel drop. I think they've taken it badly, none of them really needs to go on a diet right now. They've pooled their resources, but let's face it, what use is a full piggy bank when there's nothing on the shelves to buy?

It's now midnight, so technically I should be writing this tomorrow, or rather, I am writing this tomorrow but under today's date. Oh dear I feel another long explanation about today's, tomorrows and yesterdays coming on... Anyway, cutting to the chase, it's now a minute after midnight (so it definitely is tomorrow. Good morning.) and Jacob and his eldest son are chatting in the kitchen. Jacob's just heard that there's food for sale in Egypt, looks like they may all be taking an early holiday. Ten of the brothers are leaving first thing in the morning...

Day fourteen - Monday (8 days later)

What a week! What a week!

It began with the brothers turning up in Egypt. They asked for a few directions to the governor's palace and they went straight there. Well, when I say straight I actually mean they got lost twice on the way, but they did make it eventually, Egyptian street maps aren't the best... Of course, the moment the governor walked in they bowed down, faces to the floor, and they begged relentlessly for some grain to take back to their old man. Well, they hadn't got a clue that the great governor

of all Egypt is really their brother Joseph, but he recognised them instantly. I felt his heart leap the moment he set eyes on them, and you should have seen his face when he left the room for a moment to recover from the shock. As he watched his brothers grovelling to him, you can guess what popped into his mind, a certain dream about bundles of corn bowing down. Now, he's a spontaneously creative sort of guy and I have to tell you at this point that he didn't leap up out of his royal throne and throw his arms around his long lost family, but then neither did he clap them in irons and have them publicly flogged for rejecting him all those years ago. Instead, he tried his hand at a bit of method acting, he pretended he had no idea who they were, and worse than that, he accused them of being spies from the land of Canaan.

Well, of course, they loved that! Just what you need to hear when you're miles from home in a hostile country. Of course it was all part of Joseph's little joke, but they hadn't heard the punch line yet. They pleaded and grovelled again, and it was quite embarrassing actually, and lengthy too as it was all done through an interpreter. Well, it descended into a "Yes you are spies" "No we're not spies" sort of banter, but Joseph was having none of it, not even when the brothers came clean about their family and confessed to killing Joseph all those years ago (a little ironic smile played around the corners of the great governor of all Egypt's mouth at that point). "That proves nothing," Joseph said to them. "I swear you're not leaving Egypt until your youngest brother, Benjamin comes out here for a visit." Jacob had kept young Benjamin back home, in case any harm came to the rest of them.

So, Joseph slammed them all into prison, I guess he wanted them to have a taste of what he'd been through. He locked them up on Tuesday night, but by Friday he was missing them all too much and he had to let them out again. By then, of course, he'd cooked up his little plan. He kept back one of his brothers, Simeon, for a little bit of security, and he sent all the other brothers back home, along with sackfuls of fresh grain for the family. He's threatened to keep Simeon in chains until they prove their story by bringing Benjamin back for a visit. Not only that but before they left he slipped all the money they'd paid for the grain back into the sacks they were taking with them. He's all heart really, believe me, though the brothers don't think so. On their way home they opened one of the sacks and discovered the money, that left them more than a little mystified and really rather worried.

When they got back yesterday, and Jacob saw the sacks of grain, he threw a party, which perhaps wasn't the wisest of moves, as it quickly depleted their new supply, but he was over the moon to see them all arrive back safe and sound. Of course, things soon took a turn for the worse when they opened each sack and found all the money that they'd paid was stuffed in the top. There then followed a rather prolonged session entitled "passing the blame". But what transpired was that in no way was Benjamin going to visit the great governor of all Egypt, in that abominable country, with those atrocious street maps. Which was fine for the brothers who'd gone back to Canaan. Not so fine for Simeon who even now is languishing, like his brother before him, in a Cairo prison.

Oh well, my guess is that when the grain runs out again, which won't be too long now, Jacob will have to concede and send young Benjamin off for a long weekend in the sun. And I can tell you now what Joseph will do. He might be able to pull the wool for a short while, but you can't fool all the people all the time and when he sees his young brother Benjamin, he'll be reaching for the Kleenex, and then it'll all be over bar the shouting... and the crying... and the back slapping...

and the handshaking... and the embracing... and the partying... and the "Well I never" ing... and the "Why did you throw me in that pit and sell me as a slave?" ing...

Day fifteen - Tuesday
(Written with hindsight, some time later)

I was wrong. When Benjamin arrived in Egypt Joseph pulled yet another stunt, he's such a clown, although I didn't see anyone laughing at the time... Anyway, first he threw a banquet for them, though he wouldn't sit with them, because Egyptians don't much like Canaanites. Then he sent them packing, with more sacks full of grain, and a precious cup which he'd secretly stuffed inside. You can work out the next bit, he stopped them, searched them, threw a wobbly, then finally, after scaring them silly, he came clean. Well, the brothers were stunned of course, and it took a good while before the back slapping finally got under way, but in the end it did and Jacob and his whole family moved out to Egypt for good. What a saga. I blame that tree myself, I really do...

Part Three - The Exodus

Day sixteen - Sunday

I still think of them as muckleheads and funsterbuds. I really do. Even after all these years. Moses has one of each. The mucklehead's called Spot and the funsterbud's called Snoopy. Strange names really. And who is Moses? you're probably thinking. And where's Joseph and Jacob and Benjamin? First he kills off Adam and Eve and now he's disposed of the boy wonder. It's not like that, I promise. Time has marched on, trampling the warriors and the dreamers in its wake. There's a host of people I've not yet mentioned at all. Noah, Abraham, Cain, Esau, they've all had their fifteen minutes of fame, and they've all had their moments of loyalty and despair. I've known them all, and I miss them now they're gone. Of course they've not left forever... But I digress. Who is Moses? Well, you remember Jacob? Of course you do, for you it's only a matter of the flick of the page since you left him, in a way it's the same for me too. Those years are only a grain of sand, just a flicker of the eye, but in reality decades have dawned and died again, generations have flourished and faded. Jacob's descendants are still in Egypt, but times are hard now and friends are few, as they say.

Pharaoh's long since passed on his regal way, and his children have not been smiling so kindly on Joseph's clan. In short, the Canaanites are in slavery, doing hard labour. You see there's so many of them that the new king is worried about over-population, and he fears a revolt by these Canaanite strangers. So, he introduced the clamp down, and by the time Moses was born, any new Canaanite infants were under sentence of death.

That's when I intervened. In spite of the hardships, some of Jacob's descendants hadn't forgotten about me, and they were spending a good deal of time petitioning me for a result in their favour. So as soon as Moses was born I scooped him to safety, literally. His mother hid him for a while in their home, then, when she couldn't conceal him any longer she bundled him into a basket and hid him in the river. Now this might have been disastrous of course, but for the fact that she hid him in a part of the river where the king's daughters regularly went bathing. And before too long, bingo! The king's daughter heard the baby crying, found the basket and rescued the child. Next thing you know Moses' sister, who was watching the proceedings, offered to find the princess a mother to look after the baby she'd just rescued. You see, Moses was a beautiful child, an instant star, and the king's daughter fell for him the moment she set eyes on him. So Moses' sister fetched their mother, and of course, the rest is history. She nursed her own baby without danger or fear until he was old enough to live in the king's palace, and for years that's where he stayed; and I'm sorry to say became something of a spoiled brat. Until today, when he began to grow up. Big time.

You see, yesterday he intervened in a fight. Today he's running for his life. Yesterday he watched an Egyptian beat one of the Canaanites. So he came to the rescue, waded in, pushed the guy around a little, then literally took his breath away and buried him six feet under. Today he saw two Canaanites fighting, and when he intervened to try and break it up they said, "What d'you think you're doing? Who put you in charge, big guy? Are you gonna kill us like you did the

Egyptian?" Now that brought Moses up short, I mean he was hoping the whole affair might be quickly forgotten, hushed up, dusted under the Egyptian rug. But it obviously hasn't been, and this afternoon Pharaoh issued a warrant for his arrest and Moses took to his heels and fled into the desert with a price on his head, his royal career lying in shreds.

Day seventeen - A Monday several years later

Of course he didn't bring them with him, the mucklehead and funsterbud, I mean, Spot and Snoopy. He left them back in Egypt. Basically he took the clothes he stood in and whatever happened to be on his mind at the time, that was about it. Then he bumped into some of Jethro's daughters, and in particular Zipporah. They met at a well out in the desert and she and her sisters took pity on his condition, particularly on his good looks and muscular physique, and they introduced him to their father who is a priest. Since then Moses has got married, had a son, called him Gershom and is well settled in as a shepherd. Until this morning that is.

Lately the cries of the Canaanites have grown more and more desperate. The king who put out the warrant on Moses is no more, but the pressure of slavery still bears heavy. I can't stand by and watch this, the time has come to rescue these poor people. The time has come to have a few words with Moses. I have a feeling much will be made of this next encounter. Perhaps it will embed itself in the very vocabulary of every day life, well, one thing's for sure, it'll change the course of events for the Canaanites, and it'll have a devastating effect on the ego of the new king of Egypt. It won't do anything for his reputation, either.

My plan is simple. While Moses is out looking after his father-in-law's sheep I will set fire to a bush, and when Moses takes note I will commission him to lead his fellow Canaanites out of Egyptian slavery and into glorious freedom. As I say - Simple. I'll tell you later how it goes.

Later

Moses' bravado is not what it once was. But that's all for the good. I waited until he was well settled into his morning's work, out in the sticks, then I went for it. Vooooom! The poor chap nearly shot out of his skin. Not that I intended to scare him, he's seen plenty of bushes burning before, out there in the desert, but I guess he knew this one was different when he noticed the leaves on it weren't even getting singed. One minute he was flapping his lips, chewing on a stalk and staring into space, the next he was gaping open mouthed, flat on his face and staring into the dirt. I reminded him he was on holy ground. I reminded him to remove his shoes. I also reminded him that there was a whole nation toiling and sweating in the land he'd left behind.

I told him I'd come to deliver them and to take them from that land of struggle and hardship and bring them to a good land, a spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey. He seemed pleased about that. He even smiled. Then I told him he was going to be the one to tell the new king about it. He didn't seem so pleased about that. And he didn't smile. He began to use phrases like "not the person for this sort of job." So I used phrases like "I'll be with you every step of the way." I even told him that when he'd led the people out of Egypt he would then lead them in worship on the very mountain he was cowering and quivering on. Well, then he rattled off a few excuses about not knowing how to refer to me, so I reminded him in no uncertain terms about

just who I am. Then I told him I'd seen the people's drudgery and humiliation and that he should let them know that and tell them about the milk and honey. So then he says no one will believe him, so I showed him a couple of convincing arguments.

First I turned his staff into a snake, then I gave him instant leprosy. He looked suitably impressed, but was relieved when I reversed the process and took the snake and the leprosy away again. I told him he could keep those up his sleeve for use when he needed to do a little convincing. Then he said he had a speech problem. I didn't even waste my breath on that one. So finally he pulled out the big one. The secret weapon. He suggested I send someone else. He didn't actually want the job. Poor Moses, he couldn't see that was exactly why I was giving it to him, all his arrogance had drained away to nothing in that sheep infested desert. What better ally could I have? As he stood there shaking his head, I got angry. I told him he could drag his brother Aaron along to do the talking if he wanted. So in the end we settled on that. I'll tell Moses, and Moses'll tell Aaron and Aaron'll tell everyone else. It'll be like Chinese whispers. Or Egyptian perhaps.

Day eighteen - A Tuesday, two months later

Well, we're back in Egypt. It took some doing but Moses is back. We had one particularly sticky moment on the journey when I had to wake Moses in the middle of the night and remind him of his commitment to me. It shook him up a little and nearly ended in disaster, but fortunately Zipporah intervened and circumcised their son, just in time. You see, ever since the incident in Eden with the tree things just haven't been the same between me and people. It breaks my heart to even talk about it like this, but I can't walk with them like I used to, it's as if there's a wall between us. The trust that we once knew, Adam and Eve and me, well it's all gone, and now we have to relate as if we're calling through a fog to each other. The planet has lost its pristine qualities, the place is dulled now, it has cracks and tarnish, it doesn't sparkle and glimmer any more. Worst of all my signature is lost, my thumb print has been muddied over, and I have to remind the people about their origins, I have to help them to keep remembering who I am. And that which I first feared has come about, they have started to believe there is more ability stored in that computer lodged in their skull than there really is. They have begun to fool themselves. And they enjoy living with the lie.

So I reminded Moses about a covenant I'd made with Joseph's great-great-grandfather, a guy called Abraham. When I promised Abraham that his descendants would be like the stars in the sky, i.e. rather difficult to count, I sealed that covenant with circumcision. It's an old custom, and painful, and involves, knives and foreskins and blood. There are medical grounds for doing it of course, but this is a unique symbol for these people, it's a reminder, a signpost, a scar that seals their fate, and a mark of the promise that we will always be family, them and me. And Moses had forgotten, or at least, he'd neglected to perform the bloody deed on his new son. Time passes, years may fly by, but that doesn't change my promise, I won't develop amnesia. And that's another promise.

But it's sorted now, Zipporah intervened with a clean knife and we're back on speaking terms again. Not only that, but today Moses and Aaron have confronted Pharaoh, and told him what's what. They took along the elders of the Canaanites, who took some persuading themselves, but

once they saw the tricks with the snake and the leprosy, they knew something was up. And Moses, told Aaron, who told the elders, that I had seen their sorrows, and I was out to rescue them. They cheered up a great deal then, and they remembered to bow to me too.

So they all went to see the new king, also known as Pharaoh, and the conversation went something like this:

Moses: Pharaoh, God says this:

Aaron: Pharaoh, God says this:

Moses: "Let my people go, they must make a pilgrimage into the desert, to hold a religious feast and to worship me."

Aaron: "Let my people go, they must make a pilgrimage into the desert, to hold a religious feast and to worship me."

You can see how much easier it would be if Moses hadn't come up with the one about the speech impediment.

Pharaoh: (In a nutshell) No.

Moses: God has met us.

Aaron: God has met us.

Moses: We must make a three day trip, and hold a sacrifice,

Aaron: We must make a three day trip, and hold a sacrifice,

Moses: Otherwise we face death!

Aaron: Otherwise we... What! You didn't tell me that bit...

Moses: Tell him.

Aaron: What sort of death?

Moses: By plague or sword.

Elders: Is that the time, I think we should be going...

Pharaoh: Who do you think you are? And why aren't you busy making bricks for me and getting whipped? Get back to work. Now!

And I'm sorry to say, Pharaoh proved as stubborn as I expected. No freedom, no trips into the desert, no feasts or sacrifices, and because of Moses, no more vital straw which the people need in order to make the bricks for Pharaoh. So now the Canaanites have to work twice as hard, finding their own raw materials to make building bricks for the Egyptians. It's not the most gratifying of jobs at the best of times. Moral is not at an all time high.

In Pharaoh's own words:

"They obviously don't have enough to do if they have time to listen to Moses all day. And doubly so if they then spend time listening to his brother repeating everything he says."

Round one to Pharaoh. But in the words of a potential song, "We've only just begun..."

Day nineteen - Wednesday

Morning

Moses isn't winning any popularity polls right now. Since their workload doubled yesterday the Canaanites have been holding their own competition - to find the most painful suggestions of where to put Moses and his ideas. And since the Canaanites started this, Moses has been to see me regularly, on the hour every hour. There's nothing like panic for bringing a little focus into

things. His last petition read:

"Why! Why did you send me here! They hate me. They hate me. The Canaanites hate me, Pharaoh hates me, the Egyptians hate me, even Spot and Snoopy ignore me in the street. Ever since I visited Pharaoh things have got worse, and cataclysmically, suicidally, sweat inducingly so! Help! Now! Please!"

I am currently in the process of explaining to him about how to turn a problem into an opportunity. I get the feeling that he doesn't want to see it this way. But I'm confident he'll come round. I've reminded him about my promise to deliver the people from their slavery and make them free. He only nodded when I said that, and merely mumbled something about wanting to go home to a nice cup of cocoa and his pair of furry hedgehog slippers, but I have promised to do this, and I will do it. I persuaded him to tell the Canaanites this, but he will only do it from a distance, and preferably he says, by telegram. I might let him use a megaphone. He says Aaron is under sedation, but I'll soon wake him up. The show must go on!

Afternoon

I've managed to persuade Moses and Aaron to go back to see Pharaoh, believe me it wasn't a bundle of laughs. Moses even brought up his so-called speech impediment again, he really is desperate. But they're back there now. Here's a taste of how it's going:

Moses: Take a look at this Pharaoh.

Aaron: Take a look at this Pharaoh.

Pharaoh: That's nothing, look at this.

Moses: How about this one then?

Aaron: How about this one then?

Pharaoh: So what? Try this for size...

Now I appreciate that this mainly visual encounter requires a little further explanation. Basically Moses and Aaron are doing the "staff into a snake" demonstration for Pharaoh. But, in reply Pharaoh's wheeled in the Egyptian magic circle to do the same thing. However, Moses has had the last laugh because his snake, or rather Aaron's snake, as Aaron was doing all the talking and therefore also all the miracle working, has swallowed all the other snakes. The magicians are not too pleased as some of those snakes were originally made of mahogany and cost a fortune. Pharaoh still hasn't buckled though, so I've arranged to meet Moses down at the river tomorrow morning, we'll give Pharaoh a little surprise when he comes down for a bathe.

Day twenty - Thursday

When Pharaoh appeared earlier, all spruced up in his early morning bathing outfit Moses and Aaron were there waiting. Moses reminded Pharaoh about the plight of the Canaanites and demanded he let them go. True to form Pharaoh yawned and ignored every word. So I told Moses to tell Aaron to point the staff at the river Nile, which he duly did. Just as Pharaoh extended the royal toe and dipped it into the water the whole of the river Nile turned red. And it wasn't food colouring either, the entire river has turned to blood. The fish have died and the water's so foul the Egyptian's can't drink it, even the water stored in jars in their homes has

turned red and smelly. Let Pharaoh yawn and ignore that.

Next week I've arranged for the arrival of two hundred million frogs. They'll be in the toilets, the beds, the cupboards, even the underwear drawers. I've no doubt that Pharaoh will come back with some smart riposte and probably even arrange for his magicians to do the trick themselves, which will be rather juvenile really, as that will bring even more green and hopping creatures into their dressing gowns and duvet covers. Pharaoh may well promise to let everyone go after that, but I have no doubt he will relent when the land is frog-free once again. So then I will implement plan B, or is it plan C now? Aaron will strike the dust with the aforementioned staff and every last speck will turn to lice. The whole nation will be scratching for a month, including the animals, and this time the magicians won't be able to duplicate the trick, though goodness knows why they should want to try. They'll know then that this isn't just magic, this is the finger of God.

Plan D will involve flies. So while the Egyptians are still licking their lice wounds, the place will be buzzing and no amount of fly paper will hold this lot up. I think I'll make a distinction here too. The homes of the Canaanites will remain insect free. There won't be a pair of tiny, transparent wings in sight in their part of town. I think Pharaoh may well offer a compromise then, but it won't be enough, and we'll need to move swiftly on to plan E. This will be a virus, a plague, and none of the Egyptian animals will be safe. When the cattle start dropping I'll send Pharaoh for a stroll in the Canaanite precinct, so he can admire the blossoming health of the Canaanite cows.

To save the laborious details I'll skip lightly over plans F, G, H and I. There'll be boils, (ouch! That'll keep the Egyptian magicians out of the way on sick leave for a while), then locusts, rain and hail, and finally, and most tragically, I will take the life of the first born son of every Egyptian family. Their children will perish, and in his sorrow Pharaoh will let my people go. You could say Pharaoh will have proved incredibly resilient in the face of these disasters, you could also say he has been regrettably stubborn, but then, you could say many things. It will be too late by then.

Day twenty-one - Friday (A year and a day later)

They are free! In the end Pharaoh literally threw the Canaanites out, he couldn't be rid of them quick enough. It took every last one of those disasters to persuade him, and even then, would you believe it, he changed his mind and came charging after them with his entire army in tow. He chased them all the way to the Red Sea, and so brought about a monumental moment in history. The Canaanites thought they were trapped - all they could see was a raging, foaming torrent of water in front of them, and a raging, foaming torrent of Egyptian soldiers behind them. It was not a pretty sight. They turned on Moses and demanded to know why he'd forced them to leave such a wonderfully pleasant homeland, where they had food, homes and marvellous job satisfaction. Moses, thinking well on his feet in spite of everything, encouraged the people not to panic, and told them that they could rely on me to rescue them. "You won't even need to lift a finger," he said, his speech impediment nowhere in sight. "Oh yes you will," I told him, "and both feet as well. Start marching into the sea."

I instructed Moses to hold the now famous staff over the water, and as they waded in, the Red Sea took flight, opening up a path the size of the grand canyon all the way through it. You can guess what happened next, the Canaanites made it to the other side without even getting their feet wet, but when the Egyptians ploughed in after them, Moses waved the staff again and before you could say 'Lifebuoy' the water had claimed them all. The waves closed in on them like the walls of a derelict house, and the entire army was swallowed in the watery rubble. Chariots, soldiers, Pharaoh and all. Gone, but not forgotten.

Part Four - Exodus, phase 2

Day twenty-two - Saturday

(In the desert somewhere, miles of golden sand and sun, sun sun)

You know, I really grew to like Moses. I would say love, but of course, that's different, that's not so much a choice is it? That's a way of life. For me. But liking people, that's another matter, and I really grew to like Moses, we almost got as close as I'd been with Adam and Eve, all those years ago on the other side of the tree. Moses was such a great guy. Oh, I know his beginning wasn't too auspicious, I wouldn't have believed anyone could have found so many different ways of saying no, and he was more than a little reluctant about the precarious course that his life took. But it was all part of this rich earthly pageant, and with the passing of the years and through the eventful, if stormy, journey across the desert, we really became very intimate indeed. The fog was still there of course, but through it we chatted, we struggled, we debated and argued, we laughed and cried, and once we almost met face to face. And then there was the ten things. Ten things which you never knew about me. Ten things which might surprise you. Ten things which can make or break a civilisation. Ten things which are wiser than they seem. Ten things which can enhance the quality of life. Ten reasons. Ten motives. Ten critical decisions. Ten ways to be more human. The top ten most misunderstood and much maligned pieces of advice ever given. The ten commandments.

I took him up a mountain, that's where it began. They'd been in the desert for a while, and they were on their way to a new country. Egypt was fast becoming a distant memory, the wounds of the whips were healing and the burden of brick building was nothing but a shadowy nightmare. So with freedom in mind I wanted to set them up with a new blueprint. A bundle of small print to stabilise the nation. After all, there was well over two million of them, (I kept losing count of the exact figure as the children wouldn't stand still long enough), so you can imagine my desire to pass on a few guidelines for civilisation. So, I fixed to meet Moses up on Sinai, and I gave him a couple of days warning to that the people could get ready.

Actually I gave him a lot more than ten commandments, but the main ten are what people remember. Or think they remember, and often misquote. For the record here's the top ten :

1. *Worship.*
2. *Idolatry.*
3. *Reverence.*
4. *Rest.*
5. *Respect.*

6. *Murder.*
7. *Adultery.*
8. *Robbery.*
9. *Truth.*
10. *Envy.*

Now, I know that the above inventory is not exactly a comprehensive thesis on the subject. It's rather like summing up the entire works of Shakespeare on the back of a postage stamp. And it's not at all clear from that shopping list what my viewpoint is on each category. To sum it up in a nutshell, I'm in favour of five and opposed to five. For further details you need to check out the small print. But the point is, those are the issues which really matter. Those are the elements of life which require careful attention and consideration if society is to function healthily. You could sum them up another way, love God and love each other. Hmm, must remember that definition. I think it may be useful.

Of course, ever since the tree incident I know that it's impossible for anyone to observe that list correctly. But one of the reasons I wrote it down for Moses and his rather extended family was so that they would know what I was like, so they would know what matters to me. What my principles and priorities are. Of course it didn't take long before they'd broken every one of them, in fact the second commandment was being shattered even as I was etching the letters in stone. Poor old Moses came down the mountain, weighed down with two brand new legal tablets, all ready with the words "Thou shalt" poised on his lips... and what does he find? Enthusiastic idolatry smattered across the horizon as far as the eye could see. The Canaanites had built a golden calf out of ear rings, eagerly confused it with me, and were now celebrating this event with a wild party. Worst of all, brother Aaron had overseen the proceedings, and when confronted with his crime he came up with a wonderfully creative excuse, claiming that - "I just threw the ear rings into the fire and - hey ho! - a golden calf came out!" Moses was so incensed he took the stone tablets and smashed them into gravel. Well, who could blame him for turning the slabs into jigsaw pieces? That's what the people had done to the law, and without even taking the time to read it. Of course I was all for wiping the rebels out right there and then. I took Moses to one side and told him we could start again, obliterate the nation and preserve just him and his next of kin. And I would have done it too. But for Moses' pleading. Faithful old Moses. He even suggested I should wipe him out instead of all the others. I couldn't do that to my best man, be like shooting myself in the foot. There've been many times when I have felt like trading the entire lot of them for a handful of his calibre.

After that occasion I kept my distance, I had to. I had previously travelled close to them, concealed in a mantle of fire and smoke as they made their epic journey through the wilderness to their promised land, flowing with milk and honey. But now I have to draw back, restrain myself, if I came too close I couldn't say what I would do to them. Oh I still care for them, as I said before, that's not a choice for me. That's not an issue. But sometimes love consumes, and I feared I might swallow these people alive. Moses still comes to visit me though, and lately, as we've neared the new country, our friendship has deepened. Deepened indeed.

Day twenty-three - Sunday (A month later)

By the way, I am aware that Shakespeare hasn't yet written his complete works, but at some point in the future I'm sure he will do. And it won't do them justice to compile them on the back of a postage stamp, believe me. Oh, and a postage stamp is a stamp you use for postage. Or will do, in years to come. Now that we've cleared that one up...

Today we sent the spies out. Moses stands on the verge of a new dawn. He is an old man now, but his faith is young and his strength hasn't ebbed away yet. It's well over a year since they bustled out of Egypt. I met Moses before dawn this morning and briefed him on the strategy. He has picked twelve men, one from each of the twelve tribes of the nation and this morning they slithered in true snake-like fashion into the land of Canaan. Amazing to think this is the land that Jacob left all those years ago, when his family were starving and he sought food in Egypt. Now his descendants are back, and this time they must take the land by force if it is to be theirs again. I've had a sneak preview myself, and I don't think they'll be disappointed. The place drips with fruit and wine, grain and cattle. There are grapes the size of juggling balls, and figs which look more like baseball gloves. They were nervous going in of course, but it isn't exactly exactly Mission Impossible. Perhaps it would be truer to say Mission Improbable. After all, no one round these parts expects Moses' travelling circus to pose any kind of threat to their stability. This Canaanite army has been on the march for a year, and it's brought its women and children along for the ride. However, when the spies get back and report the abundance and fecundity of the land, there'll be no stopping them, and my people will at last have a place to call their own.

Day twenty-four - A Friday (Forty days later)

I don't believe it. I don't believe it. I bring these people across an ocean of sand and starvation; I deliver them from innumerable natural disasters; I rescue them from a million plagues, everything from athlete's foot to hiccups. And then to top it all I provide a place of paradise for them and their children's children. And how do they respond? They don't quite fancy the look of it, thanks.

Would you credit it? The spies got back this morning, every one of them, I hasten to add, looking healthier, rosier and fatter than when they went in, and all they can talk about it is the occasional problem they encountered as they battled their way through succulent vineyards and ripe fields of golden corn. Admittedly they brought back sacks full of proof of the land's fertility, but I guess that's just leftovers from their breakfast on the return journey. All they can talk about is the people who already live there. Well of course people already inhabit the place, it's a very desirable residency. That's why I picked it. Of course, the spies are worried about the military presence of some of the tribes. They're even bandying about such words as "giants" and "heavily fortified". For goodness sake, it can't be that difficult to live there, it took the spies forty days to decide to come back. In a nutshell, the land is good, the soil is rich, the place is fertile and the crops are abundant. That's my summation. Their report reads like this. The people are taller than us, there's rather a lot of them, some of them are ugly and they seem to be staying around for longer than a Summer holiday. Needless to say this has not encouraged the rest of the people, and they are not in a mood of jubilant rejoicing right now. I hasten to add, ten of the spies took this approach, the two others, Joshua and Caleb, gave a brief and succinct reply: "It's a great place, let's emigrate tomorrow."

While this warms my heart, I don't need to point out that two against ten does not give them a

majority vote. And knowing what these people are like, any mention of trouble and they'll be fantasising about the benefits of Egyptian hard labour. The unthinkable has happened. They have glimpsed paradise and they don't like the view. Well, there isn't another one next door. Only the desert beckons now. And knowing them they'll probably think it's wonderful.

Day twenty-five - Tuesday

I don't believe it. They haven't actually begun to fantasise about Egypt, they're too busy constructing nightmares about Canaan. The latest report goes like this... If only we'd died crossing this glorious desert, now we're in big trouble, we'll all be killed when we go into this terrible place of freedom and abundance... They're mad. Mad! At the moment they're talking about electing a new leader who can bravely guide them back to Egypt. I suppose when they get there they'll want me to resurrect Pharaoh and his men all over again so that they can suffer the pleasures of his brutal tyranny once more. Moses and Aaron can't believe it either. They're face down in the dust at the moment while Joshua and Caleb plead with that nation of nutters down there. Joshua's speech is worth recording, it's the one fragment of sanity that prevails at the moment.

"It's a wonderful country, and God loves us. Don't worry about the people who live there, God will take us safely into the land he's prepared for us. It's rich, it's a place of bounty and promise."

And you know what the response was to this reasoned, impassioned plea? "Shall we throw stones at them now or do it later?"

Honestly, you could write a book about this, and people wouldn't believe you. There's only one thing for it. I'm going in.

Well, it was messy. Very messy. This time I really was intent on incinerating the lot of them and airlifting Moses and his family to safety. I came within a shadow of infecting the whole crowd of them with something akin to bubonic plague. But I backed off. And why? Well you can guess, Moses again. This time he waded in with a line about other nations waiting for the opportunity to cast aspersions on my conduct. He said the Egyptians would spread the word that I couldn't look after my own people. Of course, he had a point. And he topped it off with a plea for forgiveness, a cry for more mercy, a petition for a display of undeserved, unconditional love. It's a good job he's a fast talker when he wants to be. If there'd been any sign of a speech problem today I'd have contaminated the entire nation while he was still fumbling for the right words. He has saved his people again. And though I despair of saying it, my people as well.

In the end I issued a decree, instead of a fatal disease. None of this generation will ever enter Canaan again. Only Caleb and Joshua. They will get a second look, when they lead the new blood into the land once promised to their parents. For the rest of them, it's a life in the desert, and a long wait while their children grow up to inherit the promised land. What a mess. What a waste. What a shame.

Day twenty-six - A Wednesday (Forty years later)

Well, I've been their tailor, footwear supplier, caterer and tent maker. Which is the major reason for my not being a diligent diarist. They've been slow, stubborn, picky, forgetful, restless, bored, meandering, sweaty and unbearable. And that's on a good day. But not anymore. The desert has

honed them, pummelled them, wearied them and to be perfectly frank, killed them. Now a new generation stands before me. Young men and women strong of limb and fleet of foot. A new vision in their eyes, and no memory of Egypt in their hearts. A people who will take one look at the new country and grasp it with eager, strong hands. A few of the old generation remain, Caleb is here, and the new leader, Joshua. Both recall a day a generation ago when they braced themselves for this very journey. It's been an interminably long time to wait for the return visit, but it's here at last. Sadly, Moses is not. He died a short while ago. I cannot find words to sum up the depth of feeling I have for that man, we have seen many weary wilderness days and many long, lonely nights, and I will miss his company dearly. There will never be another man like him. At a time when he was terrified he walked before the might of Egypt with no defence but his trust in me. When I longed to destroy his rebellious nation, he threw himself in the way, with no thought for his own life, and deflected my anger. We have shared many adventures and we have shared many hours of conversation. I have lost a dear friend and there will be no replacement. He was 120 when he died, yet his foot was firm, his strength sustained and his gaze as clear as that of a young man. We will all miss him dearly.

Now it is the turn of Joshua. And the hour has come for a new journey, a new generation and a new land. This evening we arrived at the River Jordan, and in two days time we will cross it. Joshua sent two spies in, that was a stressful time for me I must confess, waiting for them to return. I had visions of them coming back with all kinds of new excuses for putting off the excursion for another forty years. The sand isn't golden enough, or the clouds are the wrong shape, maybe the sky is a bit too blue, or the grapes too ripe, the weather a bit too breezy or the air just a bit too pollution free. Thankfully they returned only with a story about a prostitute, which at first sounds more than a little disconcerting but you'll soon discover that all she displayed was a barrelful of compassion and courage. The good news is that when they arrived at her house she hid them from the local police who had discovered that there were spies around, (I must encourage Joshua to refurbish and improve their collection of false beards and clown costumes). The police searched the place but found no one, well, apart from three men hiding in the wardrobe, but they were there for another reason altogether. Before she let the spies slip out to safety she had a little chat with them. She told them she knew that they were going to inherit the land and she begged for clemency when they returned with the rest of the people. Ahh, if only she had met the other twelve spies on their mission forty years ago... Anyway, the spies promised to remember her and they returned encouraged and utterly convinced of victory. That's my girl!

Day twenty-seven - Thursday (Eight days later)

They're in! They crossed the Jordan last Saturday. It took me back to the Red Sea, I can tell you. I'd fixed it so that the Jordan opened up for them, and the river swung back like two blue, rippling curtains to allow them to pass through. They all made it safely and this time there were no Egyptians to drown on the way over. As soon as the last of them stepped onto dry land, well it had all been dry land that morning of course, but the dry land that was usually dry, if you know what I mean... Anyway as soon as they were over the blue rippling curtains swung to behind them and the water connected again and flowed on. But before they all left the river bed, Joshua got a few of them to grab a pile of rocks from the bottom of the Jordan, and when I say rocks, I don't mean the odd pebble here and there, or a few bits of gravel, they brought stones the size of cows out of there. You can imagine how pleased they were with Joshua for suggesting that one.

It took them an extra half hour to roll the massive things out, and all the time the Jordan was lapping at their heels and straining at the leash to give them a good drenching. Anyway, now, whenever the kids ask them in the future about these monolithic monuments, they'll all be reminded of the day the river dried up and the nation crossed over into the promised land.

That's it really, just a few million locals to deal with now, and the odd city to level to the ground of course. Jericho's the first one. I've room in my diary to make the odd note about it.

Day twenty-eight - Friday (Two weeks and one day later)

Remember the old custom with the knife and the blood and the foreskins? Well, the whole of the male population went under the blade the other week. You see, in the wilderness they hadn't maintained the rite, so I had to remind them again. It may seem barbaric, but like I said before, it's a reminder and a signpost, and it was important for them to seal their covenant with me at the start of these new days in this virgin country of theirs. So, the storming of Jericho was postponed for a few days, after all, they'd have been rather ineffective limping up to that huge fortress of a town with their wounds still heavily bandaged. Once the scars healed, bingo! we were up and running, literally.

Now my plan for Jericho was an unorthodox one, and in order to convince Joshua of its credibility I sent an angel down to have a few words with him.

The gates of Jericho were always kept locked shut, and they were heavily guarded, preventing anyone going in or out. So I told Joshua to march around the outside of the walls once a day for six days. Not only him, but his entire fighting force was to go too. Then, on the seventh day they were to march around the city seven times, and each time the priests were to go with them and blow their trumpets. So, once a day for six days, then seven times, on the seventh day. Sounds like a prescription doesn't it? Well it worked. It cured the problem. The walls came tumbling down and the place was left naked and defenceless. Joshua's men were suitably impressed, I might add, and were quite captivated by the spectacle, so much so that Joshua had to remind them to run like blazes, to avoid the flying debris as the battlements came tumbling down in their general direction.

They kept their promise to the prostitute, I'm very glad to say. They'd warned her to tie a red rag to her window so that she'd be escorted to safety when the attack began. Joshua ordered them to rescue her and her family, and it transpired that she had her mother and father with her, along with her brothers, children, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, cousins, and pets, so it took a little while. But they're all out now and have been given alternative accommodation.

Joshua's proving to be a good leader, his fame is already spreading far and wide. He has many miles ahead of him, and the battles will not always be this easy. But the promised land of Canaan rises before him and his people, the land is still fertile, and the promise still belongs to them. The promise I made years back to Joseph's great grandfather. This nation will become like the stars in the sky, and the sand on the shore, and they will inherit this land, a good land, a spacious land of milk and honey, wealth and bounty. And though many may try, because of envy, suspicion, jealousy or hatred, to wipe them out, these people will live, and more, they will prosper and they will thrive.

By the way, Joshua has recently acquired a couple of muckleheads and at least two funsterbuds, he's decided to call them John, Paul, George and Ringo. Not sure about that myself, the names would seem more appropriate for a group of shiny black insects, like the bedragglefaggles. But there you go. That's freedom of choice for you. Think I'll put my feet up for a while, it's my day off tomorrow and far too long since I experienced that famous lie in. Must try it out again and ensure it's still working properly. I do miss Moses, Joshua's down there now debriefing his men and drawing up strategic charts for subduing the land. If Moses were still there we'd be having a chinwag about now, unwinding the spiral of the day and swapping a few stories. Ah well, time waits for no one, as they say, and when you're outside of time all you can do is watch others chase it and hope they stop for a tea break soon. I'll write more tomorrow.

No I won't.

It's my day off.

Part Five - Christmas

Day twenty-nine - Tuesday

I am not turning out to be the meticulous diarist I hoped I would be. One thousand years may only be a drop in the ocean when compared with eternity, but as far as my diary is concerned it's a ridiculously long period of time in which I have made no entries whatsoever. I can't even pretend to have been on holiday. A millennium! And not so much as a weather report. Where on earth should I begin? Well, there's been a palace load of kings, Jeroboam, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Ahaz, Jotham, Uzziah, Hezekiah, Manasseh... Oh and plenty more. A templeful of prophets, including the greats - Isaiah, Ezekiel the first mime artist, Jeremiah, and Daniel, and in their shadow, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Habakkuk, a few others and of course, the reluctantly nautical Jonah. All of whom turned out to be great friends of mine, some of them more quirky than others, and all of them dripping with courage and oozing tenacity. They gave a few people a headache, and one or two others a pat on the back. The last of these, Malachi, left a rather stirring message in his wake, his last words if you like, on the answerphone of life... "the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings." I rather like that. And it brings me neatly to the reason I've finally taken up my pen again and am ready to write.

I have a plan - in fact, I've had it since the tree incident in the garden all those centuries ago. You see, I've not mentioned it before, but I have a son. He's been around since the beginning. He was there in the dawning days of the new planet, when the dry land was born, and the light broke through the curtain of darkness. In fact, the funsterbuds and the muckleheads were partly his idea, and he invented the bedragglefaggles whilst I was taking a nap. Well, he's going to visit the earth himself, a sort of working holiday. He's going there in disguise, as a human being, and he'll be just like old Adam, as perfect as the first human. He's going there to clear away the fog, to take down that wall that's come between me and everyone else, so we can talk freely again. There are a few risks involved of course, he'll arrive as a new baby, and the mortality rate at that age is excruciatingly high. But it'll be worth it because when people meet him, it'll be like meeting me, and the other way round. So all those who've forgotten what I'm like because of the tree incident... well they'll get a surprise, won't they? Of course, for some of them it'll be a nice surprise, but for others it'll be every bit as charming as a bucket of ice water on a cold and frosty morning, as pleasantly surprising as a vampire bat in the pyjamas. Hmmm... Hope he behaves himself. Of course he will, but then good behaviour is open to interpretation, and I guess there'll be a few raised eyebrows... and voices... and fists. Oh dear. I can think of one or two colourful characters who'll be offended that I've even considered the idea of getting dressed up in flesh. The earth is a little messy these days, goodness knows what'll he get stuck on his shoes, and hands. But on the other hand that's not a bad idea, perhaps I should send him down there with a bin bag from the Jurassic period, and a velcro suit that deliberately attracts all the planetary litter and garbage.

I had word with Gabriel this morning. He's one of my servants. I've given him the job of breaking the news down there. He's in for a busy time. First there's Mary. I have a feeling this incident may well really put her on the map. Gabriel's visiting her even now as I write this, I thought I'd

get the facts down early so that I can record the whole event in here. I recall writing that the tree was the most expensive present I could give to the people down there, but I think I was wrong. I think this will be the most expensive.

Mary lives in Nazareth, which is a village in Galilee. Oh I know what you're thinking, why not Rome, or Paris or Milan. Well, all I can say is, she's the one for the job, and she lives in Galilee. Plus the fact that one or two of the prophets I mentioned earlier predicted that my boy would be born in that neck of the woods. And I wouldn't want to go stirring up trouble with some of them, that Jeremiah in particular can be quite a handful, and Jonah's still recovering from his trip in the fish. His clothes have never been quite the same since their brush with the stomach acid. So that's that. I had wondered about a glorious, snow clad mountain scene. Perhaps in the Alps. A sort of bleak midwinter birth, surrounded by a host of snowmen perched on earth standing hard as iron, with the sound of frosty wind moaning... But it hasn't snowed in Nazareth in a good long while. So it's most unlikely. I'll write more this afternoon.

Afternoon

Gabriel's back! He's quite a mover, you know. Doesn't hang about. Mary took the news well, it seems. She was a little perturbed on first catching sight of Gabriel but then he is seven foot three with huge wings on his back and he glows in the dark. He told her she's a highly favoured lady and that won her over a little. Mind you, the moment he said, "Don't be afraid!" she began to worry. He told her about my son, which was fine, then he told her he was going to be born as a baby, and that was fine too. Then he told her she was going to have the baby. Now that wasn't so fine. How shall I say it, she was... a little taken aback. Aghast. Knocked sideways. You see, she's only young, and she's not married. And most significant of all, she's a virgin. So attending ante natal classes for her would seem a little premature. Anyway, Gabriel explained that the baby she will have is going to be mine. And at that point she had to lie down. But she also readily agreed, and promised to obey. Then Gabriel left, and Mary stared into space for two and a half hours.

Day thirty - Wednesday

A bit of a snag has arisen. Mary has told Joseph. Which is fine apart from the fact that he instantly grabbed the wrong end of the stick with perfect precision and now refuses to let go. You see they're engaged, or perhaps I should say, were engaged. For some reason, when Mary told him she was pregnant Joseph assumed that if he wasn't the father someone else must be. Which you could say is true of course. You could say Joseph immediately put two and two together and made four. But in reality the answer is five. Oh dear, humanity can't half complicate things at times. Just because I have set them certain patterns it doesn't mean I can't muddle them up every so often. For some reason Joseph wants to do the decent thing. The decent thing apparently being to run a mile. Actually, that's not fair, he is a decent chap, and he's not so much running away as tip toeing off at high speed. It's against his religious principles to marry Mary now that she's pregnant. What he doesn't realise is that she's pregnant because of religious principles. Good job Gabriel's got a gap in his diary tomorrow morning at 5 am. I have a feeling he's going to be doing some tip toeing of his own across that terrestrial ball again and in through Joseph's bedroom window. If we don't intervene fast, Joseph may well have moved to a time-share in Spain.

Day thirty-one - Thursday

Phase two of the plan. Joseph hasn't emigrated, though I did notice there was a rather full saddle-bag snuggled beneath his bed last night. Gabriel visited Joseph in the early hours this morning, he's a reliable angel and made the trip without getting caught in too much traffic. Joseph's a bit of a light sleeper and when Gabriel slipped into the room and knocked over two chairs, a bowl of figs, a coat stand and a vase full of water Joseph stirred, fell out of bed and woke up right on cue. However, this wasn't part of the plan as Gabriel had intended to speak to him in a dream, so, thinking quickly, Gabe had to grab the upturned coat stand and encourage Joseph back to sleep with a glancing blow across the back of the head. It's okay though, angelic assaults don't cause concussion or leave bruises and we often have to encourage people to doze off in this manner, particularly those insomniacs who insist on keeping the rest of us awake by audibly counting sheep all night. Anyway, Gabriel explained about the baby. Joseph explained that he already knew. Gabriel explained that we knew he already knew but that he didn't really know. Joseph said what didn't he really know, and Gabriel told him. I think that won him over. Of course now Joseph has the task of proposing to Mary for a second time, once is terrifying enough.

Day thirty-two - A Friday (Nine months later)

Morning

They're on their way to Bethlehem. Now this may come as a surprise, particularly with the timing and all that, but if you look carefully in the small print you will see that some of the prophets from way back actually spotted that this would happen. There's still no chance of it being a white Christmas of course, and the odds on them having turkey and pudding are very low indeed. But there's a strong possibility of presents, and there'll certainly be a few visitors, though it's a bit far for the uncles and aunts to come. You can blame the Romans for the inconvenience of the journey. They've suddenly decided to take a census throughout the empire. They're in power now you see. They've marched across the world and now own half of it. Why they should want to make a list of the contents I can't imagine, but basically everyone has to register, and as Joseph is a descendent of King David's then he and Mary have to go to Bethlehem, David's birthplace. Fun, fun, fun... I don't think, when you're nine months pregnant with your first child. It's seventy miles from Nazareth and I doubt if there'll be anywhere for them to stay when they finally arrive tonight. The place is already bustling with temporary refugees in search of a bed and a bowl of food.

Lunch time

Fifteen miles to go. It's now two days since they left home and I can hardly bare to watch. I wince at every jolt, every stumble of the donkey carrying Mary, heavily bloated as she is. This is not the best ante natal preparation for anyone, let alone the mother of my son.

Late afternoon

Seven miles to go. Seven tedious, parched miles. They should make it before nightfall, and by the looks of Mary, it'll be none too soon. I have a feeling the boy is already on his way, and he'll have no snug place to lay his fragile body.

Evening

A mile outside of the town. The throngs of people can be heard now, along with the cries of the last lost travellers searching for that elusive accommodation. I think that every shuddering step must now be felt by the little life Mary carries inside her. She has survived the journey with incredible stamina but the barrel is running dry, she needs to be a mother now, she needs to nurse her baby and give both of them some rest.

Late evening

They say the last mile is the longest. They're inside the town now, and though the streets are late and dark, they are not the only travellers still seeking for a bed. The inn is full, already over subscribed and nearby homes too. But there is an outhouse and Joseph looks set on securing this for the night. He has just brought Mary into it and she in turn looks about to bring her son into it.

Midnight

He's here! He's here! He's here!

He's arrived. He's safe and whole. Ten fingers and toes, a good pair of lungs, and limbs that are writhing and twisting in the straw even now as I write this. Mary is collapsed, just a heap on her makeshift bed. There's an ocean of relief and happiness behind her eyelids, though you wouldn't know it at present. Joseph is craning over the child right now. There is plenty of wonder and pride in that battered face. There's plenty of wonder and pride up here too. A son, born to the world, in the humblest of beginnings, dressed only in straw and torn blankets. A son! My son! I've got to tell someone! I've got to tell someone! Where's Gabriel gone?

Day thirty-three - Saturday

Early morning - still dark

In my excitement I'd forgotten the next part of the plan. Gabriel's not here of course. He's off with the news. As soon as the sound of crying reached heaven's gates he'd assembled the choir and they were off. Voom. Straight down to a hillside just outside the town. There's some shepherds there, looking after some of their sheep. The plan is to break the news to them and get them right in on the scene while it's all still happening. Gabriel's just popped up from nowhere and the shepherds are doing a rather good goldfish impression at present. He's just told them not to be afraid and true to form they're now very worried indeed. The whole field is lit up like a Christmas tree at present so I guess they have good cause to be overwhelmed. Gabe's just letting them know about the baby now. They seem excited about the news although it's hard to tell with their mouths still hanging open like a line of empty caves. Now comes the good bit, the way they'll know when they find the right baby. He'll be in an outhouse, wrapped in bits of blanket

and lying in an animal trough. What now? Wow! Now that was impressive.

The rest of Gabriel's mates have just turned up, and it's as if someone had set fire to the sky. It looks like a million white stars out there. The shepherds still haven't moved, and their mouths are bigger than ever. It's all very well Gabriel and the angels putting on a technicolour widescreen surround-sound extravaganza but I want those farmers down in the town. Oh hang on, the light show's fading, they're looking at one another, I think they're discussing the baby. They're up, no, they've sat down again. I think they're still seeing stars after the shimmering white of the angels. They're up again and this time... Oh, they've sat down again. They're up again and... Oh dear, if this goes on much longer I'll have to drag them down there myself. One of them's muttering about the sheep. The others are up now and yes, this time they're running off down the hill. No! You're going the wrong way. Not that... Oh! Didn't anyone listen to those angels? They're taking the scenic route. It'll take hours. Oh, wait, they've stopped. One of them's hungry now. No, they're off again, still in the wrong direction but at least they're moving. Oh great! One of them's slipped on some sheep dung, he's fallen headlong and the others have tripped over him. They're rolling all over the place now, but at least two of them are actually bouncing in the right direction. Now if only the others will follow. They're up and on their feet again. They're all covered in green and brown skid marks, probably just as well they're only visiting a cow shed. Ah! One of them's disappeared completely I can only assume he's still spinning down the hill in the direction of Jerusalem, but the others are on the right track now, they're limping down towards the town of Bethlehem. Back in a second.

Right. That should help, I've turned up the brightness control on the star that I placed over the outhouse. That should make things a bit more obvious for the shepherds. They've made it to the town but so far they've only located two goats and the innkeeper's mother-in-law. I wonder if I should send in Gabriel and his mates to give them a shove in the right direction? Oh great, they've gone inside the inn now, I hope they don't stop for a drink or we'll be here for another hour. Hello, they're back. The innkeeper's pointing up the road. Yes, one of them has caught a glimpse of the star over the outhouse, this is looking good, this is starting to look very good indeed... No it's not. Oh no. They've got stage fright. One of them mentioned the word birthday and suddenly they're all worried that they haven't bought a present. It doesn't matter! It doesn't matter! I just want you to go and see him. Now! Please! Oh I don't believe it. They're turning round. Within six feet of the greatest baby on earth and they're going home. Wait. One of them's heard the crying, Joseph's appeared in the doorway of the outhouse. Good man! He's waving to them. They've turned. They've waved back. They're moving. They've stopped. They've started again. No. Yes. No. Yes. No. Oh I can't stand this, I think I'll just go down there and carry them there myself. Yes! They're in! They're inside the building. Mary's asleep, they're looking at the baby. That's my baby! My baby! Isn't he brilliant? They're passing him round. careful he's aslee... Oh. he's awake. He's seen them. Ah. Ouch! He has got a good pair of lungs. Now Mary's awake. They're patting her on the back. She looks as if she really needed all these visitors. That's my baby! My baby! Oh hang on, what's that noise? Oh the angels have just arrived back here.

Gabriel! Gabriel! Look at this, look at this, the shepherds have found the baby. What d'you mean, took them long enough? They... they came the scenic route. They came very respectfully, thoughtfully and prayerfully. Anyway, they might have made it there quicker if you guys had given them a lift. But what's it matter? They've found him, that's what counts. A few wrong turns, the odd tumble in sheep droppings, a little trepidation along the way, but they made it. And here

they are passing round my son, this miniature child cradled in their soiled, swollen, sweaty fingers. Perfect innocence oblivious and asleep in the sheep stained arms of a bunch of swaggering shepherds. Now that's my boy.

Day thirty-four - Sunday (A few weeks later)

No excuse for the delay in keeping up my diary I'm afraid. I haven't been busy. I haven't been away. I have merely been distracted. I have not been able to drag my eyes away from gazing on my son. So I have unashamedly neglected my duties as a diarist. I just want to watch him, to see him grow up, to be there with his first faltering steps, his first faltering words, his first faltering years. He will only be this young once, and I don't want to miss it. My choice of parents was, even if I say so myself, perfect. Mary and Joseph are caring, disciplined, faithful people, he's in good hands. I must confess that there have been moments, in the still starlit nights, as his earthly parents have slept, when I have reached down from heaven, and with the faintest of caresses have run my finger gently across the perfect skin of his face. There have been moments when his eyes have flickered and I have imagined that his gaze has met my own as his clear blue eyes have searched the sparkling night sky. He is truly a child of wonder, and I trust he will bring his simple, uncomplicated light to those who like me have dared to reach out in the night and touch him.

And people have come to do just that. Only this morning visitors from the East burst in upon the quiet house where Mary and Joseph have made their home. They have travelled for a prolonged period, facing adventure and danger, and all the while following a star which heralded my son's birth. They found Mary and Joseph after dropping in on Herod, who is the ruler in these parts (just a puppet really, stuck in position with a Roman hand at his back). The Jewish leaders informed them that Bethlehem was the place to be, so they came straight on down. And what a scene! Not merely the wide eyed wonder of the shepherds, but complete adulation and awesome respect. These guys know how to treat a king. They fell on bended knee in front of the child and his parents. And there's more! Presents. They brought presents. Now I know that I wrote earlier that I didn't want any but it's still great to get some. And they'd really splashed out. Gold, perfume, spices. And then they were gone. Astonishing really. After such journeying, such an arduous quest, they said few words, and expected nothing in return. They just upped and left. There is an interesting post script though.

Having witnessed their encounter with Herod, I had to send Gabriel on another globe trotting expedition. While the visitors were resting prior to their return he dropped in on them and gave them directions for a detour on their way home. I didn't want them dropping in on Herod again and giving him any map references for the whereabouts of Mary and Joseph, I've seen his heart of late and it's heavy with insecurity and greed. These men had come to give my son worship, but I fear that Herod would come to take his life.

Day thirty-five - Monday (8 days later)

I was right. The news is grave, very grave. Mary and Joseph have fled to Egypt. They had little choice, Herod has proved to be worse than I feared. Having discovered that the visitors have shunned his hospitality and denied him access to the new child, this tyrant has now sent

whip-handed soldiers to Bethlehem to arrest and slaughter all the male children under two years of age. The scene is red with infant blood, the streets are ringing with the brokenhearted sobbing of new mothers. I can only recall the ancient words as they were written down for such a time as this: "the sound of bitter weeping is heard in the region of Ramah; Rachel is weeping, weeping for her children. And there is no comfort".

Like Jacob and Joseph before them, Mary and Joseph have found a safe haven in the deserts of Egypt, they crept out under the cover of night before the terrible annihilation began. I don't wish to end this section on a dark note, so I'll add that as soon as this tyrant has breathed his last I will let them know and arrange for a safe passage back to the land of Israel. But for now they're in exile, a place of waiting, a place of home where there is no permanency, a place of peace where there is no rest, a place of hope while the future waits to be realised. And what a future that promises to be.

Part Six - Easter

Day thirty-six - Monday

I couldn't begin to describe what's been happening these past thirty- three years. I look back on the previous entry and all I can say is, that was a gross understatement. The past has delivered extravagantly more than the future ever promised it would do. If you can follow that. My son has grown up so quickly, you turn your back for a moment to check on the activities of other nations and snap! He's a young man. Trained as a carpenter, skilled and confident. Since his father died he's been running the family business himself. Joseph passed away a few years ago, and he now lives with his mother and brothers, diligently labouring and developing the business his father left him.

At least, that used to be the case, until three years ago. Then I tapped him on the shoulder and we went for a walk together. I took him out into the wilderness for a while, and we had a long talk. I reminded him about Moses, and the years of slavery in Egypt, about Adam and Eve and the tree incident, and about the world we fashioned together. He remembered. The images came racing back to his mind like a crowd of excited school children running for the playground, images of history and destiny thronging around the doors of his memory. And when he returned from those days in the desert he knew he'd retired from carpentry forever. And he was about to embrace a major career move.

Since then he's travelled the country, telling stories and cracking jokes, enacting parables and healing cripples. My old friend Moses astonished the people with a handful of miracles and wonders, but they were dusty shadows in comparison with the divine mystery that my son has brought to the land. Mystery that affects the heart and the mind, the soul and the spirit. Mystery that proclaims a new dawn. Not a new country this time, but a new continent, with fresh air and no fog to blur the communication.

Of course, he's had his critics. And at times it's been difficult to spot his friends from his enemies. They've all had plenty to say about his motives and miracles.

Take this morning for example. They all arrived in Bethany at the house of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Now Lazarus is a walking controversy himself of course. He was fatally ill recently, and lost his fight against a killer disease. By rights he should be six foot under now and disturbing nothing but the daisies. In reality he only has to walk out of the door in the morning and a lot of people get very upset indeed. You see there's a lot of theories around today about life, and the reason for being part of it. And while Lazarus insists on moving and breathing he's a living example that my son is no ordinary man, that his words are worth weighing up. And that his actions can literally bring people to life. (And also, poetically, life to people.)

Well, they were all there this morning, and Martha served up a delicious, mouth-watering feast. Then, while they were talking, Mary took a jar of costly perfume, broke it open and poured the exotic oil over my son's feet. Then, when she had anointed him in this fashion she dried his feet with her hair. Well, once she'd left the room panic broke out. You'd have thought someone had

pressed the fire alarm. His friends were up, pacing the room, expounding theories. Judas, that's one of his friends, was up in arms. Why waste expensive perfume like that? They could have sold it, and of course, given it to the poor. Knowing Judas though, I find myself wondering what rate of interest he might have charged. And these are just his friends! His enemies come up with other wonderful suggestions such as stone him, and excommunicate him.

Day thirty-seven - Tuesday

Nothing of much interest to report today. Oh, apart from twenty thousand people turning out to welcome my son and his friends when they arrived at the city of Jerusalem. Basically they had a street party. It was fantastic. Singing, shouting, dancing, and they all threw their coats down like a red carpet for him, or perhaps I should say a red, white, yellow, blue and puce carpet. Mind you by the time everyone had trampled over it, it was all of uniform colour.

Day thirty-eight - Wednesday

People are coming from all over the place to see him and hear him speak. Of course they come for other reasons too. He recently fed twenty thousand people with one small basket of food so a lot of people turn up just for the catering. And then there's a very faithful group from Cana, they've turned up regularly ever since he turned a hundred and eighty gallons of water into wine at a wedding of a friend of theirs. And there's always the sick and the injured folks, and the more people he cures, the more word travels, so often he has to slip off quietly with me and we go and talk out in the desert. It's amazing how few people follow him when he goes into a dangerous wilderness full of snakes and wild animals. Very useful for getting away from it all.

Anyway, today's audience included a group of Greeks, who were in town for the Passover. They came and sought out Philip, one of my boy's friends. Philip then teamed up with Andrew another friend and they brought over the message. I don't know why but they often seem to come in twos when they have a proposition or a request, I'm not sure what they think my son might do to them if they went to see him alone. Apart from Peter of course, a big, blustering question mark of a man. Full of fire and contradictions. I love him. Now he's not afraid of putting his foot in it, just as well really, because he does it all the time. I think he's got a degree in it or something. Anyway, back to the chase... after the Greeks put in an appearance, the clouds began to gather. My son began to sense the storms that are looming now on the horizon. His face filled with questions and he cried out to me about glory and honour. This caused complete confusion and mayhem amongst his friends as usual. But I couldn't hold back at that point, I couldn't sit quietly at the windows of heaven, watching his turmoil. So I called back, I've not done it often, but I did then, to reassure him. You should have seen their faces. There were more explanations and theories bandied about that night than you could cook up about the shooting of an American president. But it was my voice, and he heard me, and it gave him strength for another day.

Day thirty-nine - Thursday

Morning

And here it is. A day I have been more than a little reluctant to set in motion. A day when

humanity may well reveal its darker side, when the course of human nature looks set to travel into deepest night with no thought of returning. If I could have stopped the clocks for this one, I would have. Tonight is the Passover feast, and there will be a meal of lamb and unleavened bread. This custom dates back to the days of Moses and Pharaoh, and the final twist of Pharaoh's arm to persuade him to let the Canaanites go. When the angel of death visited every home to collect the life of each first born son, Moses' people were commanded to slaughter a lamb for each home and then to splatter their door posts with the blood of the lamb. This would be a protective sign, proclaiming no entry for the angel of death as he walked the streets of that country claiming his harvest on that terrible night. So, the people remember that occasion now with a feast of lamb and unleavened bread. And as they recall that night of sacrifice so it will herald a new era, a night when death will claim a different prize. And another first born son will die.

Evening

Peter and John went ahead to find a place for the meal. They asked where to look, so my son told them to look for a man carrying a pitcher of water, and when they found him to follow him into the house. Well, you can imagine Peter's enthusiastic scepticism here, he was none too keen about tailing a stranger, following him home, then accosting him on the stairs. I think the phrase breaking and entering came to his mind. But as raggedly impetuous as ever, once he'd blustered about the idea for ten minutes he went skulking off with John to do the job. Well, in his enthusiasm he followed three people into their homes before he found the right one. The first two were tough old spinsters who were none too feeble with a handbag so he picked up a few bruises when he attempted to muscle his way into their hallways. The third one was a Roman tax collector with a bad case of B.O. so Peter took one step up the garden path, caught the sweet aroma in the wind and hastily beat a retreat. If he'd only used his common sense and taken a look at the house beforehand he'd have realised there wasn't room inside to hold a telephone conversation never mind a party for thirteen.

As I say, they got it right in the end and the meal went well, though during the course of the evening Peter managed to put his foot in his mouth more often than the food. He was particularly put out when the subject of feet actually arose in the same sentence as a towel and a bowl of water. Now some might have thought he was ticklish, or shy about his feet, or worried that the water might be cold. But he wasn't. He was just trying to get it right again, and trying so hard that he fell over himself in the process. But once he'd landed on his face he was in a good position to have his feet washed. And to wash other people's feet. You see, that was the point, it wasn't really about cleanliness so much as godliness. That's what it was really about.

Late evening

If I stumble over the next few lines, forgive me. The following pages may not be the most coherent in this diary, and they will not be the easiest for me to record, they may well fall from my pen in cluttered, awkward phrases, and much of it may not even make it onto the paper.

My son led them from that house and out to a garden, a place called Gethsemane. And there he went off alone to pray, while his friends stayed together to sleep. He prayed until his heart would

burst, and for a time he must have felt as if his words were falling on deaf ears. But I heard every plea, every pause, every breath, and when he was ready I sent Gabriel down to stand close by and comfort him. I can hear voices approaching now, through the darkness and I'd better lay my pen to one side. His friends are waking, his enemies are come to arrest him and soon the night will really be upon us.

Day forty - Friday

Early morning

I can barely bring my pen to record the events unfolding before my ancient, weary eyes. The maker of the world stands before the world he made, and receives only contempt and despite in his finest, loneliest hour. I can only stand to chronicle these events by making reference to my beloved son as if he were some other man. Some other human being. Some other prisoner. So here goes. I begin.

The prisoner is hauled before the makeshift court, blood seeps from the open wounds in his face. His back is a bloody tapestry of whip lashes, bruises and torn flesh. He has been awake and tormented all night. Taunted by packs of howling soldiers; slapped and slashed by a brooding mob of frightened men.

Unsure of the crime, they accuse him of conflicting conspiracies - nothing makes much sense but no one cares. They do not want him acquitted they only want him suffering. They do not want his freedom they only want his blood. They do not require a free pardon, they only want him dead. It has been a long night.

The accusers stand seething and spitting on the sidelines, the judge wipes his weary face and hopes to come out of this night with an adequate cover over his cowardly actions.

He circles the prisoner and surveys the damage. Not a word is spoken.

The judge bends close until he can almost taste the freshly spilt blood.

The smell of sweat plays around his gums as he speaks in quiet breaths.

"Who are you?" he says.

The question slices through the tortured atmosphere with the whisper of a razor.

The prisoner lifts his head and turns to face his accuser.

"Who is it that wants to know?" he asks.

And the words slip softly through his swollen lips, and somewhere behind the clouds of bruises the prisoner's eyes betray only sincerity.

The judge pulls back. The reply will ring in his head long after the verdict is delivered.

He turns to the simmering batch of people, waiting like throbbing dough to rise up and spew out their anger upon this uncompromising man.

He has pleaded with crowds before, it will not be the first time the judge has argued for clemency. But this time he will fail.

He will fail and be left only with a bowl and a towel, and years ahead of him to contemplate the stain on his fingers.

*The soldiers move on to the games. As the blindfold heralds the prisoner's next moments, they begin their sport, slapping and fisting their prey until their own faces are flecked with the red spray, and their uniforms are coated with the dark stains of another man's life. Wise cracking and arrogant they play out their cruel contest until their rival can no longer stand and the event is therefore deemed finished. No winners, only losers.
Soon the long walk will begin.*

Carted, shoved, lashed and dragged, the prisoner staggers blearily through the last mile of his life, the hill awaits and the hammer is ready.

The soldiers are accustomed to the final struggle of a criminal's existence. Sudden strength seems to overtake a man when he is pressed onto a cross and the nails begin to bite. But this prisoner appears to have no argument.

Perhaps the whipping stole his spirit, perhaps the torture took his fight. Either way he lowers himself silently onto the wood and allows the naked white of his wrist to gape open and receive the callous metal spike.

After the first few blows the nail is always more difficult to hit, many times the hammer careers off the head crashing against bone and flesh, and with the eventual completion of one arm, there is only the agony of a second one to follow.

Then onto the feet.

Wave after wave of shock assault the mind as each collision with the hammer drags the nail further through the living tissue.

It may take hours, days for a man to die once suspended on a cross, hour after hour of hauling the body back up for each extra inch of breath, each last precious moment of torment, before the shoulders finally collapse and crunch the final gasps from the wrecked body.

He summoned up the strength to speak several times before the end.

He called out to a fellow sufferer, he refused the comfort and escape of drugs, he offered hope to his family, and he released a desperate cry to his God. Then, rather than battle for every last minute of that bitter end, in his own short time he allowed his spirit to slip away to a different freedom.

The people were horrified and amazed at his dying.

The judge expressed surprise at the abruptness of it all.

One man who witnessed it will never be the same again.

And I know the world will never forget.

But what of me?

What can I write?

I have tried to prepare myself for this...

What can I say? Only that I have never felt so alone, so...

I wish I could do something, I wish I could die myself in his place. And yet even as I say that I feel I am dying. As he dies, as his life drains away, seeping into the cracks of the abyss, I feel as if my own were melting with his. His light is fading, his love is spent, his days are gone...

Gone

Gone

Empty

I feel so alone

I can hardly lift this pen to write

Weakness floods my being, as if I were drowning in a room full of it

Dullness is all I can see approaching

The dark cloak of everlasting night is brought for me to wear. It envelopes me, and in its folds I find despair, and disease, and death.

Death

Death

No more the distant enemy. Now embraced in combat, and wrapped around this immortal soul, this beautiful child whose tears I wiped away in his childhood nights when Mary and Joseph slept, whose fingers I caressed with my own, while his parents were busy labouring, whose frail body I cradled in my arms while they were chasing earthly endeavours. Now I must cradle this frail body again, and I cannot stand to do it. I cannot bear to hold these lifeless limbs, these broken bones, once so vibrant, so full of passion. Now only bloodied and tortured and torn apart. His gentle, perfect head, ragged and ugly after being lashed by their lead and their leather and their language of brutal fools. I have lost a son today. And I am alone.

Alone

Alone

Alo

Perhaps

If only I

No

I am alone, and I cannot, will not turn to face the faintest fragment of hope, for I will not leave him behind. If death and decay are his home now, then I will bear him while he lives there. I will bear him, though I could not face him while he was on his journey into that God forsaken land.

Day forty-one - Saturday

All is quiet now. In a silent state of equilibrium, the world and I wait. We watch and wait outside a silent tomb. We gaze upon its rocky door and wonder. Earlier I took a walk down in the garden where the tomb lies. Goodness knows what I would have said if someone had spotted me. I only walked, and remembered another garden, another place where this morbid adventure began. I rested beneath a tree and listened to the sound of nearby insects. And in my mind's eye I saw again another tree. That work of pure beauty, that great gift to Adam and Eve, that piece of life which sought only to bestow upon them health and happiness, bearing with it the key to their downfall and destruction. I saw again those fingers, reaching, reaching, flexing and stretching to take hold of that shining fruit, tearing it from the wood of the tree, so that a single drop of juice slipped from the velvet skin and fell upon the spotless earth. And with that very drop, mankind fell too. Humanity fell and the crash was so loud that it brought all else with it, the creatures, the planets, the systems, the day and the night. All else fell in that moment of disobedience, when Eve and her husband invaded and raped the tree of all knowledge. And in my mind's eye I saw the faces of the years, the friends and their enemies, the kings and their subjects. The women and their men. I saw them all, and like the single drop of juice, one tear slipped down my face and splashed upon the weary earth, and the noise of that fall shook the garden to its core, and I had to get out of there very quickly indeed.

Afternoon

Now it's later, and I feel more able to collect my thoughts. They took him down from the cross after only six hours, sometimes it can take a man days to die. But not him, he gave up his spirit at the third hour of the afternoon, and when they came to finish him off in time for the Sabbath they found him already gone. Already in that other land. They took him down and two of the religious leaders petitioned for his body, and that's how he came to lie in the tomb in that sweet garden with the birds singing above him as if his life had not been taken, as if the world were still a place of light and song.

Day forty-two - Sunday

I record the events of this morning as I watch them unfold, I don't believe there is a better way to do this, and I don't believe there will ever be a better day...

The time is early morning, so early it is not yet light. As I write this a dark figure can be seen snaking through the blackness towards the garden, towards my son. She carries something. She is entering the garden, it lies as still as the tomb it holds. Nothing stirs, there is only the stilted shadows waiting to smother any visitors as they negotiate the path that unravels its way to the tomb. I can see her clearly now, it's Mary, not his mother, but an old friend, a prostitute he rescued from spiritual decay. She has brought spices and a longing to dress his tarnished body.

As you stand at the penultimate bend you get your first glimpse of the tomb, it is carved into the side of a rock. Of course she knows that, and she knows also that the tomb is sealed by a massive rock, but she must make every attempt to care for her dead friend. Shadowy fingers glide across her face as she passes the ghostly scenery, but she is not afraid, only depressed and incredibly tired. She is faltering.

She has stopped. Something's wrong, through the moonlight she can see the tomb, I can see it as clearly as she, the mouth of the cave gapes at her, yawning expectantly. There is no stone covering. No sealed rock protecting the enclosed corpse. In fact there is no sign at all of the allegedly impregnable door, the tomb is open and the body is gone.

The jar she is carrying has fluttered through her fingers and it splinters against the path. The leaves scatter to make way for the debris, and her foot kicks against the jagged pieces sending sparks of brittle clay into the undergrowth as she turns and panics her way back to the home of nearby friends. I watch her as she runs, breathless now, and I can see her battering on the door of the house as it crouches silently against the night sky. Two windows open, two men who were not asleep, reproach her for waking them. They sullenly agree to return with her, but as they enter the garden annoyance melts into anticipation and one of the men overtakes the other, nudging him into the undergrowth as he forces his way past and on to the waiting tomb. There he hesitates, drawing back for a moment, whilst the other man careers on into the cave and sprawls in the dust beside the empty robe that now lies splashed across the lifeless floor. They both recognise the clothes, but I think only one recognises the signs. In a daze they leave the woman in the garden and return home.

Once again Mary stands alone, she reels slightly, and feeling suddenly drunk from the rush of events she has to sit down. As she drops to her knees I can see the tears as they slip from her eyes and her pent up anger and grief at last emerges. She watches a tear crash onto her forearm, and then catches sight of something else. There is a light in the cave, she had not noticed it before. Cautiously her eyes follow the glimmer to the back of the tomb. Two faces smile back at her, one of them speaks, asks her why she is upset. I recognise these faces, these are friends of mine.

Mary blurts out her emotional response, she just wants the body back. Behind her there is another footfall, she looks around. Suddenly the garden is alive with activity. For some strange reason the gardener has appeared at this early hour. Mary hardly bothers to look at him but only bleats out her desperate plea.

One word. Her name, that is all he needs to say and instantly she knows the truth. Worlds collide in her mind, her face explodes into laughter, the tears begin to stream across her cheeks, her head spins and all she wants to do is hold him forever. I know how she feels.

It is now half an hour later and Mary stands again at the gate to the garden, this time she has not come alone. She has torn her closest friend ungraciously from sleep, and the two of them now chatter excitedly as they slip into the darkness. In the short time it has taken to weave their way back Mary has spilled out the details of her recent discovery, now she can hardly wait to prove her point. Inside the garden the two women are halted in their tracks, the sound of broken pottery crunching beneath their sandals. They both stare, Mary speaks but no sound comes out. The rock is back, safely sealed, the tomb is locked. The two women can do nothing but stand,

there is no miracle and no tearful reunion. The friend turns to go. Mary protests, she argues, she reasons, she knows... the broken jar, the splinters clinging to their shoes. There must be an explanation.

But there is none and the excitement of the morning ebbs away and a dreary weariness washes over everything again. As they turn and take one last look the sun begins to appear and for a second the earth seems to tremble. That is the moment of the earthquake - it strikes just as the sunrise upsets the night. The women tumble like matchsticks and when they find their feet again the seal of the tomb is crumbling like cheap plaster and an unseen force rolls away the stone like a huge marble from the opening. As they stare in horror a figure in white steps up to them, he speaks, explains the miracle, he seems relaxed about it all, tells them to spread the news. They don't need further encouragement but turn and flee from the scene almost colliding with another man coming down the path.

It is him again, just as she had met him before, it was no dream - it's true. There is no tarnished corpse, there is only life.

At precisely the same time as this extraordinary meeting I can see another group of women have arrived in the garden. They are also friends of the dead man and have come to anoint the body. But they can only stare in horror as they crowd on the brink of the cave muttering and stammering about rocks and earthquakes. Finally they dare to venture inside and now they come face to face with the two figures reclining against the back wall. I think they also face a dilemma. Should they accuse these intruders of theft or beg for their assistance? There is a pause. An awkward silence... Then, suddenly, it's all okay, the men have broken the silence, thus solving the problem, the women only need listen, then run like the wind, faltering only as they stumble across Mary and her friend. I watch them now as they burst out of the garden, like water from a dam, and flood back to their homes to pour out the jumbled catalogue of events.

He's alive. Alive. I can't shout it when I write it, so I won't even endeavour to do so. Instead I will put down my pen, retire to a lonely cliff top and shout it to the galaxies and the solar systems, my son is alive, he's no longer twisted, crushed and discarded, he breathes, he moves, he leaps, he laughs and he dances. He's back. And the only thing to lie dying this morning is death itself. Now my son lives, the days of death are numbered, and the tree incident can at last be reversed and laid to rest.

Evening

Again Mary found herself battering on the door of that house, she went back there a second time this morning. By then the two men had been joined by others, all sleepless, all listening but not listening as they nodded and unanimously dismissed her story. Well, that's not entirely true, one of them already believed, though he may not have vocalised it, while another one went running for a second time to the tomb. He peered inside yet again, scratched his head aghast at the blatant emptiness, then stumbled outside into the day and returned still bleary eyed and confused about the meaning of it all.

When I began this diary, standing in darkness, and dreaming of a world of light, I intended to write a very different story. A trip to paradise, a journey through heaven and the places beyond.

Well, I need not tell you dear reader what a different story it's been. But I'll continue to write it, and now that my son has been born, and walked the earth, and begun to clear away the fog and to take down the wall, a different record must begin, and I have an inkling that my words will no longer be recorded only on paper like this, but on the hearts of human beings, and in the souls of people who will dare to lift their eyes a little and grasp hold of the one who has slipped into death so that he could remove its fatal poison.

I still think of them as muckleheads and funsterbuds, and bedragglefaggles and kangaroos and wallabeaks. And I still long for that mysterious morning, when the darkness gave way to light and the earth appeared over the horizon, full of promise and potential. And I think that one day it will be again, perhaps not on this planet, but on a different earth, and in a city where the light will never grow dim, and sadness and mourning and guilt and regret will be confined to a place a million miles from the nearest human.

Thank you for reading.

To be, as they say, continued...