

Chapter 21

Road to Bethany

(Extracts from Doctor John Kirkham's casebook)

April 1

The most extraordinary event in my 35 years experience of hypnotism occurred today – perhaps 'shocking' would not be too strong a word to use. What might be described as an 'involuntary regression' is unheard of; at least to my knowledge, it is unknown. Or was unknown until earlier today when, without preparation of any kind Joe Richardson passed almost instantaneously into what later became apparent was a deep regression.

In my years as a hypnotist I have never had dealings with anyone able to enter into a deep hypnotic state as easily and quickly as Joe. His regression sessions are unique, in my experience; the depth he reaches takes him far beyond the ordinary questions and answers relationship between client and hypnotist his recall is brilliant. It is total. It may have something to do with his training as a journalist although I am not sure how it can. It is a special gift, this ability of Joe's, to make the barriers of time and space almost immediately transparent. It certainly is not one that I have. I'm not certain now I would want to have it.

But all these developments were acceptable, pleasing. I felt the indescribable joy a master must experience when he has discovered by chance a pupil who is a prodigy and will, with little tuition, surpass the master and in time himself carry forward the knowledge and experience that has been inherited by savants down through the ages.

Today it was different, frightening. A quantum leap in the field of hypnotism has occurred and we are in an unknown world.

It began simply enough. Joe and I had been drinking coffee and discussing the article he'd written based upon his last regression, his 13th century experience in Assisi. He was on the couch, but the headrest was almost fully vertical. I sat in my usual chair, facing him. I was about to discuss the possibility of a new regression session when his eyes became unfocussed, his face very pale. 'I

can hear Him,' he murmured.

'Hear who?' I asked.

But all he said was: 'He is calling me – shouting.'

Then his eyes closed, as though clamped shut to keep out any light. They reminded me of the mummified shriveled eyelids of a corpse taken from a peat bog. His arms and legs seemed to grow rigid as he lay in the half upright position.

I shouted: 'Joe! Can you hear me?' But there was no response.

I shook him gently; there was no sound or movement. For a moment I had the feeling that I was handling a ventriloquist's dummy.

I thought for a time that he was in a catatonic state. But as I left his side to get my stethoscope from my desk drawer he called out: 'Help me!' When I turned I saw his eyes were still tightly closed and he was not looking towards me. The cry for help wasn't directed at me. Then as I turned away from him again he murmured: 'Mary, Martha. Lord!'

I could feel no pulse and for a time I heard with the stethoscope no heartbeat but finally it came as though I'd summoned it from a far, far distant place the steady flub, dub sound, at first weak, then stronger, the echo of life.

I rubbed his wrists, then gently slapped his face. As I did so I kept calling, over and over again: 'Joe, snap out of it! Wake up!'

Finally he gave a deep, long, sigh, opened his eyes, stared at me as if wondering who I was, then wailed like a newborn infant: 'Help me!' I put my arms around him and he clung to me as he wept and wept. When the storm was past, I took him home.

It seemed to me, while it was going on, that the episode lasted for hours. But I'd just checked the time moments before it started, and a glance at the clinic clock as I comforted Joe showed the hours were in fact no more than seven minutes. In that time, as I discovered later, Joe had experienced death, resurrection and a meeting with Christ!

Richardson in Regression: Lazarus

'Lazarus! Lazarus!' The voice low, but compelling. Commanding. The voice of authority. Slowly I rise out of a stygian blackness, surfacing from unknown depths. I have no memory. Who am I? Where have I been? Where am I?

I feel that I recognize the voice, that voice that has summoned me from where to where, I am uncertain. All I do know is that NOW I AM and the voice has summoned me from a place where I WAS NOT I. A place I cannot remember for although I strive to do so I can recollect only far off shadows even more insubstantial than a wakeful man's long faded dreams.

The silence within and about me is as an enormous, pressuring weight.

The silence is again broken: 'Lazarus!' Silence. Then Boom, Boom, Boom. The sound of a giant's footsteps stalking down a stone lined tunnel bounded by echoes. Awareness is growing as the I that is ME breaks through layer after layer of sticky, clammy webs that enfold and enshroud my mind as thickly as a midnight moorland mist. Boom! The sound is a heartbeat. MINE.

CLICK, CLICK. More sounds from quick movements of what? They are what? They are yes! Canopies, curtains, cleaners – drapes for eyes. Eyelids. Eyelashes. Flick, click; flick, click. They make tiny, rustling sounds in this enfolding darkness. Eyes are for seeing a new awareness! I have eyes! They are for seeing but not here, not now.

But behind the curtains there is a kind of seeing – pictures are emerging out of the dark.

Memories, faint as a whisper, are returning: pictures, voices.

Me: I am Lazarus. I am he who is called. Women's voices, angered, soothing, the Faces smiling. Faces, voices, bitter, weeping. I know them – my sisters, Mary and Martha.

How long have I been here a day, a month, a year? I now know of time, even if only a half-remembered concept.

(Now I hear a new voice from somewhere within me, but a voice sounding immeasurably distant: 'Joe! Joe! Joe, snap out of it!' I do not understand it's meaning. What is 'Joe?' I feel it is something

I should know. The voice vanishes abruptly into the void from whence it came).

New awareness: I see; I hear; I breathe. But sound came first. I heard His voice before sight or breath came to me. I am Lazarus but I cannot see; I cannot move; my limbs, body and face feel as tightly cocooned as a spider's paralyzed prey. A new emotion, fear, begins and as I begin to struggle to free myself, reaching like a drowning sailor trapped in weeds stretches his hands high for the light, I am aware of another sense smell. The sickening putrescence that summons the jackal and the vulture fills my nostrils and mouth. I begin to scream silently and as I do so the silence and terror is momentarily displaced by the rumbling, scraping of a large rock moving and there is a faint light that tells me my eyes and face are covered with what feels like thin linen.

Before the panic can return the stench of corrupting, liquescent flesh vanishes, replaced by the gentle, fragrant odours of unknown herbs and blossoms, and I hear His voice shout: 'Lazarus, come forth.'

Hands are holding me, lifting me. I blink and blink as the linen napkin is lifted from my face and light from the outside world shines through a cloud of dust. I feel the linen wrappings around my body being loosened and unwound. Mary and Martha, one on each side, grasp my freed arms and help me up and guide my stumbling feet towards the light, framed like a glimpse of heaven by the mouth of my tomb to begin life anew and to meet Him who has raised me.

As we shuffle towards the tomb's mouth a large brown moth flies from the grave linen wrappings laying on the sand covered floor and soars out and into the light ahead of me, a tiny messenger from the kingdom of night heralding my approach.

I can feel the convulsions from Mary and Martha as they stand close to support me; my arms are around their shoulders, rising and falling rhythmically with the sobs that wrack their bodies. There is shouting, crying, weeping and a deluge of sound arises from the crowd, our neighbours and friends from Bethany, who stand behind Him, Jesus, the man, our friend

I stand, still bewildered, gazing into familiar eyes so rare in their colour eyes of vivid blue; often soft as a quiet early morning spring sky when, as now, they are filled with understanding and

love but in anger the blue splintered with tiny diamond sparks as cold as ice.

As I stare into his eyes I have a strange sensation that something of me is in those eyes. That part of me is within Him. And something more. I sense not only that He is part of me but some other being is part of me and I am linked in some way to that being.

The sounds of praying, weeping, shouts of joy vanish as a cone of silence envelops me and Him. He smiles, and though His lips do not move I hear Him speak clearly as though he has read my thoughts. 'Be not afraid,' he says. 'We are all one.'

He reaches out and strokes my cheek. 'I have done this thing out of love for you and Mary and Martha and as a sign.' 'A sign of what?' I ask. 'Of who I am, why I am. We are part of each other's destiny and because through me you have been given new life many will cry out for blood.'

The cone of silence is broken. A voice cries: 'Let us return to Bethany!' The wondering people move away chanting 'Hosanna'. Jesus beckons to me, turns and follows the chanting crowd. Someone puts a dish of water to my mouth. It is crystal cool and sweet and flows into my dust parched throat like a river of life, down through my gullet and into the cavity of my stomach.

Out of love I am walking this road back to Bethany. I share the joy of my sisters and neighbours in my return, and I rejoice in the gentle sun bringing new warmth to my body, the sound of birds signaling the advent of new spring life, the scent of promised abundance in the fields.

But although the shadow of death has been lifted from me I see it hovering like a dark cloud over Him who walks in front of me, for I know that Bethany is only a temporary halt for Him who must shortly make a much longer journey.

And as I pause to look back to the now distant black mouth of the cave that was my tomb, set like a rotted tooth at the bottom of a hill, I know that wherever I go, whatever I do, I will have to pay a price for my sisters' happiness, and for being a witness for Him. It will be a high price for always, like black mildew secretly leaching out the life, scents and colours of a rose, the memory of my awakening in the tomb will etch a patina of corruption on my soul and with it will be the knowledge that one day I must return to that black hole. For Death cannot be permanently cheated,

at least not by ordinary men such as me.

But am I an ordinary man now? I feel a cold chill seize my body and dissipate the warmth of the sun when I turn and shuffle towards Bethany, and fleetingly I wonder if I may have to pay an even higher price. For what if the black hole is permanently barred to me – and Death forever refuses me entrance?