

“Morning, Mose,” the postmaster said as he came to the counter. “What can I do you for today?”

“I have some packages to pick up.” Mose Hooley took his time answering because he was annoyed at the *English* couple fussing over his quaintness behind him as they stood in the post office in Hartley, Delaware, U.S.A. English is the term used by the plain-folk, or Amish, to describe anyone not a member of their own sect. Standing only a few feet from Mose, they talked about him as if he were not there. And Mose did stand out from the other customers with his long beard sans moustache, straw hat, black homespun trousers and suspenders.

“Look Brittany, it’s one of them Amish men,” a tourist from New Jersey said loudly to his wife. “They don’t drive cars and their houses aren’t hooked up for electric or phones.”

“He must be married ’cause they keep shaved while they’re single,” Brittany replied.

“They still dress the way they did a hundred years ago. In fact they still live the way people did before they got civilized.”

“I heard tell that they only bathe once a week,” the couple talked back and forth. Sightseers are usually charmed by the sect’s doctrine of adherence to nineteenth century technology, typified by their refusal to connect their homes to the electrical and telephone grids. Perhaps the most noticeable example of this is the horses, buggies, and wagons they use to transport themselves and their goods about. Though a traffic hazard, the sight of a buggy makes even hardened urbanites wax nostalgic for the mythical good old days.

But there was danger in such two radically different means of transport coexisting on the same road. Mose understood this bitter fact better than most, for his wife, Rebecca, and young son, little Mose, had been killed when a reckless driver had crashed his motor vehicle into the buggy that Rebecca had been driving.

Mose disliked being made an impromptu tourist attraction. He’d secluded himself since the loss of his family to avoid such encounters and had only come to town because of the necessity of buying supplies for spring planting and to pick up the last order his wife, Rebecca, had made for the little store they’d operated on their farm.

Rebecca had begun selling notions in the little building that Mose had built for her onto the barn. Here they sold their produce directly to the public for cash along with items ordered through mail order supply houses such as boxes of kitchen matches, needles, thread, scissors, and other quilting supplies that their Amish neighbors would buy.

Though Mose loathed the idea of interacting with the English, keeping the store going and restocking the shelves with goods Rebecca had ordered kept something of her alive in his life, and outsiders looking for an opportunity to see Amish up close kept the store busy. Otherwise, he would have abandoned the shop and concentrated exclusively on farming to occupy himself. His wife and son had been dead a mere six months, and though his soul felt hollow, he knew he must go forward and at least go through the motions of operating a farm.

Mrs. New Jersey thought it so odd that one of Mose’s kind would utilize a post office, that she addressed Mose directly, “I thought you people didn’t like modern things like...mail? What the hell you gonna do with all that stuff anyway?”

Mose ignored her, for he could never abide anyone swearing at him, and was grateful to finally pay the postmaster and carry the boxes out to his wagon. Behind him he could hear the couple protesting his rudeness at stalking out without replying.

He set the boxes on his wagon between the new water pump and the rest of the supplies for spring planting that he had bought earlier that morning at the coop. It had been overcast all day, so Mose covered the bed of the buckboard with a tarpaulin that he carefully fastened down so his goods were protected. The water pump was a replacement for the old one on his wind mill, and though compact in size, the iron casting was weighty, so he had brought the big buck board wagon, pulled by four large horses. He climbed up on the seat, grabbed the reins and giving them a shake set the rig rolling, before leaning back and reminiscing as the music of the horses hooves lulled him into a reverie.

Preparation for spring planting is one of the most exciting, eagerly anticipated times of the year on an Amish farm, with the whole family pulling together to assure prosperity through the coming year. The fact Mose was going it alone rekindled his grief for his lost family, and even though he knew it wasn't healthy, he could not help dwelling on their final minutes together.

Rebecca had asked Mose to go to town and get medicine for their son who had a high fever. But Mose was worried that the impending rain would ruin some hay he'd cut if he didn't get it into the barn, so he told his wife to take the buggy to the pharmacy. As she drove in the rain, an automobile that had been traveling too fast smashed into the rear of the buggy. Even the horse had been killed, and Mose had saddled himself with a heavy burden of guilt for not being the one who went to town that evening.

The almost ritual preparation and chores that attended to the turning of seasons and the fulfillment of domestic needs did not hold the joy and significance that they had when he'd had someone to share them with. Rebecca had been his only true love, even though he had at first been courting her sister, Rachel. Mose had courted Rebecca's younger sister for nearly a year but wound up marrying Rebecca instead.

He had still been a beardless youth then, though two years older than Rachel, and would arrive in his family's buggy to escort her to approved community functions after church on Sunday. It was like a parade in Hartley on the Sabbath afternoon, for all the courting couples would drive through town to see and be seen by the other Amish teenagers. Rachel Lapp was the prettiest girl in the community, and Mose attended every social gathering, every Sunday at church, and every Sunday evening hymn sing to be in her presence.

But she was a frivolous, lazy girl and he had begun to have doubts about her ability to keep up a hardworking farm household. Then he began to notice how Rachel's older sister Rebecca was always busy about the farm, lending a hand wherever needed and not afraid of hard work. Rebecca helped organize the meals at the Stoltzfus's barn-raising, and rallied the community to help Elder Beiler thresh his wheat when the old man fell ill.

She was enterprising too, making simple flower arrangements that she sold at the side of the road. So Mose broke it off with Rachel, after going to their father, Amos Lapp, and asking his permission to seek Rebecca's hand. Mose had been worried the older man would be angry, but Amos had laughed and told him that it proved he was a sensible boy. The old man had said, "Rebecca will be a far better wife to a farmer, besides it's a good thing to marry off the older daughter first. If'n the younger one gets hitched first, folks will start calling the older sister an old maid. I'll have no trouble finding a husband for Rachel, it's always easier to sell a young heifer than an old cow."

His courtship of Rebecca had lasted only a month before they married, and Mose counted himself lucky everyday of their life together.

One of the horses breaking wind brought Mose back to the present just in time to steer the team through a turn he needed to make in order to take care of the final item on his agenda for this trip. He was stopping by the abandoned Poole farm to scrounge for antique hardware that he could either use or sell to tourists in his shop. Derelict farms from that era often yielded many items hand forged by blacksmiths, and the rustic iron hinges, latches, door knobs, and shackles, were usually still functional and brought a good price.

The old Poole place had been empty for thirty years after having been a working farm for over a century. Besides the hardware, Mose had seen several nice mantles over the cold fireplaces, and they would bring a nice sum on Tuesday at the Carroll's Corner sale.

As he turned onto the dirt lane to the farm, a soaking rain began to fall. Pulling up his collar, Mose drove with his head down to keep the rain from blinding him. When he pulled into the Poole place, he put his wagon into the dilapidated barn to stay dry while he salvaged hardware.

After several hours stripping the place of most of its useful items, Mose decided to forego attacking any of the fancy millwork. *Enough for one day, Mose thought, I'm running out of room on the wagon.*

Mounting the seat of the buckboard, Mose seized the reins with the intent of driving the horses forward, but with a sound like a clap of thunder, the floor gave way and he and his rig fell into the cellar of the barn. To his astonishment, the landing was not only soft, but he was suddenly in a sunny, dry, and hot climate.

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Though still morning, it was a hot sunny day in Babylon, the city on the Euphrates. King Nebuchadnezzar II and all his family were on the temple plaza for the Ritual of the King's Atonement – the day when the king humbled himself to Marduk before sacrificing a bull to him. Soliciting the gods with his atonement, the most powerful man in Mesopotamia prayed for good crops, health, and procreation.

Thousands of his loyal subjects were in attendance in the world's mightiest city. They flocked to the shrine at the foot of the ziggurat of Marduk which was the center of the ceremony. Gathering in the courtyard before the shrine, the multitude jostled for position on the brick paving of the square to watch the proceedings. The fine robes of the many priests and priestesses overseeing the ceremony were a marked contrast to the rough clothes of the farmers and artisans gathered in the shadow of the *Tower of Babel*.

Each level of the soaring monument to Marduk was painted a different color, first black, then white, yellow, blue, scarlet, silver, and gold, in honor of the stellar gods: Adar, Ishtar, Merodach, Nebo, Nergal, Sin, and Shamash. From the top of the ziggurat, one could see that Babylon was two cities, one on either side of the Euphrates. The western half of the city appeared golden as it reflected the morning sun, and the light dancing off of the wide expanse of the river transformed the waterway into a ribbon of silver.

Being the fifth day of the festival of the new year, the traditional heavy drinking and debauchery were beginning to take a toll on the endurance of the worshippers, but few stayed home to nurse their hangovers, for today was the highpoint of the festival, when the gods would receive the sacrifice of the finest bull in the realm in hopes of a successful harvest in the coming year.

Fastened securely with ropes to metal rings in the floor, the bull that the high priest had selected snorted as the priest offered prayers of appeasement to Marduk as he raised his arms to the heavens and declared, "The white star which brings omens to the world is my lord, my lord be at peace..."

Farmers brought forward hundreds of baskets of barley as offerings to Marduk while the priest continued with incantations until the temple was purified. Other priests then led the king into the chapel of Nabu, son of Marduk, to an offering table with a golden canopy where he was positioned before a statue of the god. The high priest took the king's scepter, ring, sword, and crown then laid them before their supreme god before turning to the ruler who was now deprived of the symbols of royalty. Symbolically striking the king's face by brushing it with a bull rush tassel, the high priest made him kneel down and pronounce a declaration of innocence.

The priest continued, "The star Gud which causes rain is my lord. My lord be at peace! The star Gena, star of law and order, is my lord. My lord be at peace!"

Nebuchadnezzar responded, "I have not sinned, O Lord of the Lands, I have not been negligent regarding thy divinity, I have not destroyed Babylon."

The High Priest replied in Marduk's name, "Do not fear. Marduk will hear thy prayer. He will increase thy dominion and heighten thy royalty."

After the prayer, the priest struck the king's face once more. This time the holy man used his open hand, in the hope of drawing tears, for these would be counted a favorable omen and proof of the god's will. Then taking up the insignias of royalty, the High Priest gave them back to the king.

Nebuchadnezzar claimed descent from Nabu, and by purifying himself of the taint of past sins through penance and confession, he had thus cleansed the community as well. Handing his scepter to his page, the king unsheathed his sword.

Silent, the crowd watched intently as the robust young king deliberately approached the great beast with the blade raised above his head. He meant to cleave the bull's skull, as he had done in previous years, and with his warrior's build and muscular arms he was more than capable. But when he was within a yard of the bull and beginning to bring down the sword in a lethal arc, the clamor of frightened horses was heard within the chapel of Nabu, causing the bull to jerk violently to one side, so that the sword of Nebuchadnezzar only grazed the animal's jowl as it cut one of the restraining ropes.

Its anger roused by the wound, the bull lunged breaking the remaining ropes. Knocking the king to one side, the beast charged across the stage towards the king's family.

The ivory colored drapes covering the doorway into the chapel of Nabu were torn down as four enormous horses emerged from within pulling a strange looking four wheeled chariot with a man at the reigns. The man leaped from seat of the vehicle bearing a rod. He was a giant of a man, over four cubits tall. Adorned in otherworldly garb the stranger lifted the rod with both hands to summon a thunderbolt that immediately dispatched the raging bull to the other world as it slid to a stop at the feet of the king's son.

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When Mose had stopped falling after plunging through the floor in the Poole barn, he was sitting in the settling dust and was amazed to find that not only were he and his horses uninjured, but his rig was intact. Mose had experienced the sensation of falling, but not the impact.

His confusion was compounded by the fact that he had apparently changed locations and instead of sitting in the musty, dark cellar of the barn, he had come to rest in a huge, well lit, airy room. Clay oil lamps illuminated a large statue that was lavishly painted and burnished in gold. The walls were covered by a sky blue stone except for the procession of immense bas relief figures that were as brightly painted and gilded as the statue. There was an colossal arched doorway that was hung with ivory colored drapes. Though disoriented, Mose was determined to figure out his dilemma, so he snapped the reigns and drove the rig through the cloth to find himself in open sided building that was situated within a public square of generous proportions at the foot of a soaring tower.

While he was still trying to puzzle out where he might be, Mose saw a swarthy man with a black beard and moustache wearing a fancy skirt swing a sword at a bull. If the man was trying to kill the bull, he'd made a bad job of it, for the blow had missed and now the bull was loose upon the plaza angrily wreaking violence upon the people who ran in confused disarray.

Knocking the swordsman aside, the bull set upon three men clad in shimmering robes, tossing one of them up into the air and goring another.

Looking at the scene, Mose muttered to himself, "No good ever comes of leaving horns on a bull." Though he knew that fanciers of Ayreshire and a few other breeds of cattle liked to leave the horns on both bulls and cows, it seemed a foolish practice to Mose, and here was proof. But even though these folks had been imprudent not to poll their livestock and that his situation was totally incongruous, he had to help for panic ruled on the platform and the screams of the thousands of spectators was deafening.

Calmly reaching beneath the buckboard's seat, he retrieved the double barrel twelve gauge Steven's shotgun he kept there in case he ran across a poachable deer and snapped in a pair of high brass shells loaded with rifled slugs. Jumping off of the wagon, he saw the bull leave the man he'd gored in a bloody heap of rags to charge a young boy perhaps eight years of age – about the same age as little Mose had been.

Not thinking of the danger, he placed himself in the path of the bull. Facing the on-rushing beast, in one swift, smooth motion, he brought the stock of the gun to his shoulder and fired with the rampaging animal only a few yards away. Shot between the eyes, the bull fell to its knees, then belly as it slid to stop lifeless at Mose's feet. When he decided that he didn't need his second shot, Mose lowered the shotgun and looked around.

The plaza fell under an awed silence for a heart beat, then erupted into tumultuous cheering. Mose turned to check on the boy and was gratified to see him unharmed. The slight lad leaped into his savior's arms and embraced him about the neck. Laying the shotgun down, Mose instinctively wrapped his own arms about the frightened youth.

The surviving priest inched closer to the bull, amazed to find it dead and its lifeblood pooling around its head. Reaching a conclusion about what had happened, he signaled the crowd to silence then declared, "This messenger of the god Marduk was sent to save the prince's life by striking the mighty bull dead with a clap of thunder. You see the son of Nebuchadnezzar is thus blessed by being embraced by this divine being. This is surely a sign of the prince's right to succeed his father."

Astonished, Nebuchadnezzar called to his son, so Mose loosened his embrace and let the boy run to the man. Walking to where the pair stood the Amishman said, "You must be his father."

The king looked towards his priest and asked, "What is he saying? I do not understand his words."

The priest looked all-knowing and answered, “He speaks the language of the gods, of our long ago ancestors.”

Mose retrieved his shotgun, and looked about him at the strange people. He had reacted instinctively to save the small boy’s life like any decent Christian would. As he turned to the crowd gathered in the plaza, they fell to their knees.

The priest moved to Mose’s side and spoke in a tongue unknown to the Amishman. The robe worn by the holy man was woven through with golden and silver threads that glimmered in the sunlight as the man dropped to his knees before Mose. Reaching down, Mose took the priest by the arm and lifted him back to his feet.

As he looked into the priest’s face, Mose thought he saw fear and awe. Letting go of his arm, Mose took his hand and shook it in greeting and said, “I am Mose Hooley.”

“Mozhooli?” the priest responded.

The king interrupted and asked, “What does he say?”

“We are too ignorant to converse directly with a god.”

“What good is a priest who cannot understand his gods?” the king asked.

“We understand them through signs. For instance, the arrival of the messenger of Marduk portends well and tells us our greatest god looks favorably on your atonement. Our crops will be especially prosperous this year,” the priest answered adroitly.

Nebuchadnezzar nodded, having bought into the priests explanation, and asked, “All well and good, but I still think it would be a good idea to learn how to talk to him.”

His son, Amel, spoke, “I will learn the language of Mzhooli.” Then moving to Mose’s side, Amel took his hand and said, “From now on, I will be an acolyte to this holy one and learn all he has to teach me.”

The priest raised his arms and pronounced, “It is fitting for the heir to be an acolyte to a divine being, and in light of the favor shown by the god to our prince he will henceforth be known as Amel-Marduk.”

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Half a year after the Amishman arrived in Babylon he was living as one of the royal family, and despite Mose’s best efforts to discourage them, the Babylons revered him as a messenger of the gods. The Amishman’s arrival had exerted quite an impact on Babylonian society in his brief time there, revolutionizing technology and agriculture. People were emulating his dress and even his facial hair. Straw hats were the rage and beards without moustaches were becoming the norm, and many of the plants he’d brought with him were being cultivated throughout the land.

Nebuchadnezzar was so pleased at the prosperity brought by this divine visitor, that he had a statue built to honor him for being the catalyst of profound technological progress in the kingdom. He gave Mose a wing of the palace, which the Amishman occupied with Amel, and where tonight he was hosting an elaborate banquet for his adopted family.

As Mose began the meal by saying grace, Amel explained to all that Mose was talking to heaven. Always at hand to translate for Mose, the prince was now fluent in the German dialect spoken by the Amish. He adored Mose Hooley and was ever at the side of his hero.

The entire royal family was in attendance for this special occasion as well as the High Priest of Baal. All were in awe of the rare and exotic foods that Mose was serving. There was a heaping plate of scrapple, the manufacture of which is an Amish art, and hominy along with many new and strange vegetables.

Mose had grown the lima beans, squash, potatoes, yams, sweet corn, pumpkins, and tomatoes from the seeds that had been in his wagon when he arrived. The Amish detest idle hands and waste, so shortly after taking up residence in the palace, Mose had asked for a fertile plot of ground to cultivate in order to keep busy with honest labor and prevent the perishable seeds he brought with him from going to waste.

As wondrous as the advancements wrought by Mose were, the method employed to irrigate his field was considered the most marvelous. Mose had commissioned the royal masons to build a brick tower some fifty feet in height, upon which he mounted his wind driven water pump. Crowds gathered and watched enthralled for hours while the water flowed from the end of the lead pipe irrigating the field. It seemed miraculous that without buckets or pots, water was being moved from one place to another without regards to gravity. No one had ever seen water flow uphill before, which is how the Babylonians thought of the pumping of water.

As they finished eating dinner the king thanked Mose for his help with redesigning his war chariots to make them more effective.

Mose modestly brushed aside all compliments, "You all just copied my wagon...I didn't invent that stuff." The tack and harnesses of the king's chariots had been redesigned in imitation of Mose's rig and spring mounted axles had been utilized to smooth out the ride and increase the accuracy of the archers fighting from the vehicles.

The king added, "And thank you for this sumptuous feast."

"Shucks, as far as the meal goes, there's nothing special here, just good home cooking," Mose replied then winked at Amel who excitedly announced, "Mozhooli wishes for us to engage in an after dinner ritual from his homeland in which holy objects made from the most wonderful of his plants are consumed." Clapping his hands to call his servant, he smiled in anticipation when the small highly polished wooden chest was brought forth and set before Mose. Mose opened it up and passed out the brown cylindrical objects he and Amel had made from the dried leaves of one of his crops.

When he saw that some of the guests were about to eat the cigars, Amel hurriedly explained that these objects were not for eating. "Watch and learn," he said. Then Amel deliberately pulled out one of the kitchen matches that Mose often passed out as goodwill gestures, and struck it on the sole of his sandal with a flourish, then holding the flame an inch or so from the end of the cigar, he slowly puffed to draw the fire into the end of the stogie.

Mose passed out matches to all at the table, then lit his own cigar. Following their host's example, all the guests, even the women, enjoyed the world's first after dinner cigar. As the room became wreathed in fragrant ribbons of smoke, Nebuchadnezzar leaned towards Mose and said, "Let us go to your balcony and enjoy the view of the city as the sun sets."

They walked through the arched doorway onto the veranda. From this vantage of several stories height, the two men looked out as the slanting rays of the setting sun washed over the city. Mose was always taken aback by the splendor of this tranquil view. The colors reflecting off the majestic Euphrates River, as the sun set over the western half of Babylon, reminded him of the ethereal Maxfield Parrish paintings he had seen in magazines.

Nebuchadnezzar looked out proudly onto the glorious city he had built. Sweeping his extended arm as if to present the expanse of his domain to Mose, he asked, "Is this not the most glorious city one could ever see?"

Mose thought about Dover, Delaware, the only other city he had ever seen. Back in his own time, Dover was a town of about thirty thousand clustered about a swampy river and giant air base. Delaware's capital had grown up around the original colonial town to become a chaotic

blend of strip malls, fast food joints, and massage parlors where large crass signs compete garishly for the attention of passing motorists. It was a place where Mose had always dreaded to go.

The only thing the two cities held in common were that they were divided – Dover by a noisy highway and the shimmering jewel Babylon by its languid river. Nebuchadnezzar’s capital was surrounded by magnificent tiled walls that contained a hundred gates with brass doors, statues of solid gold, and buildings painted in lavishly brilliant colors. The planned streets were laid out at right angles and incorporated a number of open squares before holy or royal buildings.

Mose heard the sounds of birds, flowing water, and exotic music carried on the refreshingly cool evening air, and compared it to Dover with its annoying mechanical sounds of cars, trucks, and airplanes, and the irritating noise bellowing from the boisterous boom boxes the young English listened to in public places as they loitered. “Yes, this is without a doubt the most glorious city I have yet to behold on this earth.”

Taking pride in the compliment, Nebuchadnezzar counted how fortunate he was to have such a being as Mose to advise him. So the king resolved to ask for help with his most thorny and difficult problem – worse even than war with Egypt, or bringing the Hebrews to heel. “My friend, I have come to depend on your wise counsel and now I seek your insight into a personal, family problem of mine.”

“I’m not usually one for giving out advice, for these sort of problems are usually referred to the Elders. But since there aren’t any Elders here, I reckon the Christian thing is to give what help I can to you,” Mose replied.

“My wife, Amyitis, has grown homesick for the land of her father. There in the Kingdom of Medes, the land is green and mountainous, full of trees and lush growth, so different than this flat arid land. I am at my wit’s end, for she spends everyday sulking and every night crying, and I want nothing more than to see her content. Besides, with the household disrupted by her despair, I can find no peace. I worry that I will become too troubled to think clearly when I make decisions regarding my rule.”

Despite the language barrier, Nebuchadnezzar and Mose had begun to form a friendship; so Mose took his friend’s plea quite seriously. They stood there in silence gazing at the sun sinking past the horizon, and Mose thought about the National Geographic he had read while sitting in the dentist’s waiting room and the artist’s concepts that illustrated the article on the ancient wonders of the world. He smiled and said to his friend the king, “I think I may have a solution for you.”

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Delighted at Mozhooli’s solution, the king had put all the enormous resources of his kingdom into bringing it into life. Now many months later, as the priests were beginning the preparations for that year’s Atonement Ritual, the king and the messenger of Marduk stood taking in the splendor of the finished project which was indeed a wonder. From their vantage point on the roof of the palace, they could behold most of the cascading vegetation that descended from the heights of the palace to the bricks of the street to give the impression, from a distance, of a lush, forested mountain. This marvel had become known to the world as the Hanging Gardens, but they were more of an overhanging garden built on pedestals and vaulted terraces supported by brick arches and piled with soil interspersed with special earth filled columns in which were planted large trees.

Nebuchadnezzar was as entranced as anyone at what Mose had accomplished and asked, “I thank you for the wondrous plants you brought.” There was vegetation from every corner of the king’s world, but there was also many plants that grew from the seeds and bulbs Mose had brought with him and these were of special interest to the king. Many of the same crops Mose had been cultivating in his field now festooned parts of the gardens along with the petunias, zinnias, and marigolds from some Burpee seed packets.

“So you brought these plants with you from the heavens?” the king asked.

“Nope. I brought them from Delaware.” Mose rose and gestured for Nebuchadnezzar and Amel to follow him. Leading them off the roof of the palace, they went to a map of the world painted on the wall from the Babylon perspective. It depicted a circular world, surrounded by water, with Babylon at its center. Estimating the right distance from Delaware to Babylon, Mose pointed to a place several feet off the edge of the map and said, “These plants come from a land way over here, not shown on the map, where they are as common as barley is here.”

When Mose let it be known that the map was incomplete, the king became irritated at the wise men who had created the deficient depiction of the known world and declared, “I will have these cartographers thrown into the fiery furnace and turn their homes into dunghills.”

Mose was horrified and replied, “Please spare them... although their map is not complete, the people who live outside the circle do not know that you exist either.”

“And you live in this other world?”

“You betcha.”

“And you grow all these plants there?”

“That’s right. I’m a farmer and Delaware is pretty fair farming country.”

To the king, this seemed appropriate for the messenger of Marduk, the god of the harvest. After all, Mozhooli had turned the palace into a Garden of Eden. The plants thrived in this arid climate because they were irrigated with water pumped to the highest point of the gardens where it bubbled up like springs and flowed down the artificial mountain slopes. How this impossible feat was accomplished became a mystery of the ages.

But it was simply the power of the desert wind that elevated the river water to the pinnacle of Nebuchadnezzar’s palatial garden. The pump on Mose’s windmill had capacity to spare beyond what was needed for his fields, so the king’s smithies had been directed to fabricate pipe from lead sheeting and route it from the windmill to the highest point of the hanging gardens. It was nothing less than a miracle of advanced technology to the Babylonians.

Queen Amyitis had been delighted by the humid and colorful enclaves that were created within the garden reminding her of home and curing her of her melancholy. Joyous at the change in his consort’s outlook, Nebuchadnezzar had dropped to his knees to pay homage to Mose as a supplicant before a god. This had alarmed Mose, who felt it would be a grievous sin to accept this sort of adulation, so he had said, “Nay, get off your knees. Do not bow down and worship me like some golden calf, you are no different than I am.”

The king had not taken the speech to mean that Mose, like him, was a man, but that the king, like Mozhooli, was divine. Delighted, Nebuchadnezzar had leaped to his feet and embraced Mose calling him, “My brother through eternity.”

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True to his word, the king treated Mose as a brother and spent an hour or two every day visiting with the Amishman in his apartments. Nebuchadnezzar found this time away from the

bustle of his court very calming, and this evening, like most, found the king and Mose sitting quietly together. It was the comfortable silence of contemplation that friends sometimes share rather than filling every minute with chatter. Mose was experiencing something of an identity crisis as he thought about the man he was, how being in Babylon affected him and his faith. His savior, Jesus, would not be born for half a millennium, but God had to be eternal, and Mose wondered if he had been living up to his faith.

It was easy for Mose to ponder so deeply in the company of his friend. Sitting on the balcony and watching the sunset, while puffing slowly on cigars and sipping wine, had become a ritual for the two men. Nebuchadnezzar, too, prized his time with Mose, for he was the only person the king could talk to without having to assert a kingly air.

Today Mose was unusually pensive, and if anyone had forced him to describe his condition he would have said he was homesick. He wondered why God had sent him back to befriend this pagan king. Though confident there was a reason, he was doubtful of ever understanding it – though his sojourn had gone a long way towards taking his mind off his grief at the loss of his family. But now he wondered, *If I could go back... would I?*

He missed the fellowship of other Amish and he had not lain with a woman since his wife had died almost two years before. If he'd been back in Delaware he'd probably have taken a new spouse by now, maybe even married his dead wife's sister, as many men did. He had considered taking a Babylonian wife, but these people were not Christian and he could not take a pagan wife. Now that he had considered the possibility of returning, he had absolutely no idea how to do so, but he was positive now that he wanted to.

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The messenger of the god Marduk was the recipient of numerous offerings from subjects both mighty and humble and had begun to accumulate a horde of gold, silver, grain, and precious stones. When the royal granary designated for his use had become full, Mose had ordered it opened to feed the poor.

He was planning to do the same with his hoard of gold and silver, for what use did one of the plain folk have for such? But he had no such plans for the gems. The smooth beauty of the precious jewels had a special fascination for him, so he held onto them. To Mose, they were like condensed droplets of creation – so full of color and fire.

He enjoyed holding up the larger stones to watch the sunlight blaze through a flickering palette of brilliant hues. Rubies, sapphires, and emeralds were his favorites, but he also had diamonds, lapis lazuli, aqua marines, and carnelians. He carried a few in the pockets of his trousers because it calmed him to reach into a pocket and jostle the stones in his hand. The immense wealth these items possessed meant little to him – it was the beauty of the gems that beguiled him.

Mose was working a pair of rubies the size of pigeon eggs in the palm of his right hand, like Captain Queeg on the stand, as he stood in the holy of holies in the temple of Marduk looking at the walls of brick and trying to discern how he originally came to this room directly from the Poole barn. Having come to this place scores of times since deciding he wanted to return, Mose was still without a clue on how to go back to his own time and was beginning to despair that he would ever succeed in doing so.

Mose turned at the sound of a leather sole on the brick pavement behind him. Expecting to see Amel or one of the priests, he found himself face to face with a stranger – a young man that was obviously not a Babylonian. He was tall with neatly cropped red hair and beard, dressed in upscale outdoor sporting clothes, the sort found in twenty-first century L.L. Bean or Eddie Bauer catalogues. When the stranger donned his baseball cap it displayed the swoop logo of a popular brand of athletic shoe.

“Guten Morgen,” the man said. Mose was astounded to be addressed in the same language spoken by the Amish among themselves, though the man’s European accent sounded strange to Mose’s ears, but incredibly, he could understand the man.

Curious about this person who also appeared to be from another time and place, Mose was eager for the opportunity to converse with someone without having to use an interpreter. Mose replied in German, “Good morning to you as well.”

“I didn’t know anyone else had figured this route out before,” the stranger said.

“Figure what out?”

“The route through the nexus to here...ancient Babylon...during the fifth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.” After stating the fact, he extended his hand saying, “Hans Mueller. Graduate student and research assistant in cosmology at University of Heidelberg School for Particle Physics, Astro Physics, and Cosmology.”

“Mose Hooley,” the Amishman slipped his rubies back into his pocket then took Hans’ hand. “I’m a deacon of the Ebenezer Creek Congregation.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Hans said then asked, “Where are you from?”

“Hartley, Delaware.”

“United States?”

“U.S.A.,” Mose replied

“And when?”

“When?”

“After winding up here, I’d think you could see the relevance of that question.”

“I didn’t intend to come here...I was in an accident and just suddenly found myself here without any idea how it happened.”

Hans looked thoughtful for a moment then said, “So you have no idea about navigating the interdimensional nexus?”

“Navigate it? I never even heard of it.”

“When are you from?”

“It was a few years ago when I came here.”

“But a few years ago when you were back in Hartley, what year was it?”

“Two thousand and five.”

“Ahhh...then we are from different times.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Just as you traveled to a world where it is 600 BC in Babylon, I would have to navigate backwards in time, though not very far, to visit your world. I was born in the year 2018 and earned my bachelor’s degree in 2035. In fact, the reason I am here is that I’m doing research for my doctoral thesis.”

Though only a graduate of the eighth grade, Mose was familiar with the process of earning postgraduate degrees, so he politely asked, “You’re writing your thesis on Babylon?”

“No,” Hans replied. “My thesis is on temporal manifold theory, and I am here as part of my research.”

“I’m a little familiar with manifolds, I have a friend that repairs small engines,” Mose said.

Hans laughed, “We’re not talking mechanical manifolds, but the concept is similar...my thesis is on an abstract mathematical space called a manifold. One can travel in a manifold from one point to another more or less instantaneously, for each point resembles the next but they are not necessarily identical...” The look of absolute mystification that was stamped on Mose Hooley’s face caused the physics student to stop and ask, “This doesn’t make much sense to you, does it?”

“Not in the least,” Mose replied.

“Well, let me try and explain it in simpler terms.” Hans stood rubbing his chin for a moment then continued, “It’s like being able to walk out of your kitchen, but instead of entering your own living room, stepping into the living room of a different house miles away.”

“How can that happen?”

“It may be that all living rooms are connected and that any random cosmic perturbation may take you into someone else’s living room instead of your own. The reason you do not commonly experience this is the lack of the proper perturbation. What I have discovered is that there are certain places on earth where these disturbances seem to exist...why they are there and what they are, I do not yet fully understand. In other words, there are interdimensional interfaces, and if one knows where they are, one can pass through them like stepping from one room to another. Clearer?”

“Not in the least,” Mose said. “But I don’t really need to understand it, do I? I believe it, for I have experienced it. Now all I really need to know is where one of these here, what did you call them....interfaces...occur.”

“You were standing very near it when I walked up behind you.”

“That figures. This is where I first came to be in this place.”

“Likewise for me. Tell me what you remember of the experience.”

“I fell through the floor of a barn and when the dust settled I was here. I never saw anything during my actual arrival,” Mose said. “If I was near it a minute ago, why couldn’t I see it?”

“You were under it. The portal here is a few meters above where you are standing, but there really is nothing to see, it is like an invisible trap door and you’re standing below it.”

“So I actually fell into this world?”

“That’s a fact, though not all of these *portals* are the same. You might have to crawl through some of them, and others you’d use like a door. These phenomena occur in many places throughout the universe and often many scores or hundreds of them intersect at the same place. I took note of the spot when I dropped in, but if I’d lost track or wanted to find another, I would just use this.” Hans held up a small device about the size of a deck of cards. It had a meter, a few blinking lights, and a miniature keypad. “It detects the presence of interdimensional disruptions.”

“I’ll take your word for that. But if you know where the hole is, why do you need that thingamajig?”

“That’s how I found this portal in the first place. Landmarks come and go, this site is a rubble heap in the twenty-first century, but the trap door you fell through is still in the same location back in our worlds. It’s my compass as I navigate this nexus of discontinuities in the fabric of space and time, allowing me to analyze a portal before I pass through to see what kind of temporal shift I’d be making. You see, when you step through the portal you can usually go in many directions – each of these takes you to a different time and place. For instance, when you fell through the barn floor, you didn’t have an opportunity to choose your path. During your

fall you could have gone to any number of different places if only you knew how...a few centimeters to the left or right, or facing a different direction, could have radically changed your destination.”

“This makes my head hurt,” Mose said. “Is this part of God’s mysterious plan? Or a work of the devil? It would be impossible to accept, except that I have been through it.”

“Well, Mose, I am not a religious man, so I cannot answer that question...I can’t explain it in any philosophical way. It just is. Like the sun appears to rise and set, though we know that that is an illusion. But for whatever reasons, in the end one can move from one place and time to another.”

Mose asked, “Then I can go back to Hartly?”

“Yes, you can.”

“If I went back would anything be different?”

“It depends. If you take the same path back that you took coming here, you would simply arrive when you left”

“You mean I could arrive at the same place but at a different time?”

“That is correct. By taking a different path back you could arrive either at a time in your future or in your past.”

A chill ran down Mose’s spine as he grasped the meaning of what Hans was saying. He asked, “Could you teach me how to do that? Do I need that little light gizmo you have?”

“I don’t know how much good it would do you, since, as I understand it, your people don’t have much to do with electricity or electronics.”

Mose nodded his head in agreement, “So how do I get back?”

“Just as both you and I have discovered the existence of this nexus, so have a number of others, and many of them have made commercial enterprises out of their knowledge by setting up way-stations at locations where a number of desirable destinations intersect, or hiring themselves out as guides to clients seeking particular worlds. They can take you where you want to go.”

Though Hans went on, Mose was not paying attention, but contemplating the possibility of returning home to a time before Rebecca and little Mose were killed...imagining once more sitting at the dining room table with his son at his side while his wife was preparing their dinner in the kitchen. That was what Mose wanted more than riches or adventure.

His attention returned to Hans who was saying, “...but it costs a fortune if you utilize the services of guides or the proprietors of the way-stations. Everyone involved takes a completely mercenary approach to passage through the nexus and they all want their pound of flesh. So be prepared to pay.”

In response, Mose put his hand in his pocket, grabbed a fistful of what was within, then opened his palm before Hans. The German’s breath was taken away by the sight of the multi-colored gem stones held by the Amishman, “Do you suppose I could pay my way with these?”

“I dare say that should get you home. Do you always carry such a fortune on your person?”

“The king has been very kind to me in his rewards for the little bit of help I’ve been to him,” Mose said as he poured the gems he held into Hans’ hand before continuing, “I am a simple man, with simple desires. That which I do desire, I wish to achieve in the most direct way possible. If you would but show me the way to return home about a year before I left, when my wife and son were still alive, I would be forever in your debt.”

Hans was silent for a moment then said, “It would be a pleasure to do you this favor. Keep your gemstones my friend, they will serve you better on your trip back home.”

The German tried to give them back to Mose, but the Amishman refused by pulling an even larger handful from his other pocket and showing them to Hans. “I have a vase full of them at my apartment in the palace, so please consider those a retainer.” Mose said a silent prayer thanking God for sending him this emissary. He knew that there was probably some lesson in this, but at the moment he didn’t understand it.

He was simply grateful beyond measure that he could go home to those he loved most.

\* \* \* \*

Mose hesitated outside the front entrance to his home. It had taken him and Hans many months to trace a passage through the nexus that brought him back to Hartley on a date previous to Rebecca’s and little Mose’s deaths. Hans had told him that one could never be sure that there weren’t some minor variations with any particular dimension in relation to his original one, but as far as the German could tell, they should probably be negligible.

Standing on his own front steps, he rolled several of his remaining gems in his fingers and looked about his homestead after an absence of almost four years. Despite Hans’s theories, Mose could not be at peace until he visually confirmed the fact that he had come back at the right time. All appeared as it should, his fields were golden with grain, his truck patch bountiful with vegetables, and his orchards heavy with ripening fruit. Then he beheld a sight that almost made him weep, the carriage in which Rebecca and little Mose had met their tragic end stood intact by the barn. He had arrived before their deaths.

Though it was nearly harvest time, it was still fairly humid – a pleasant contrast to the atmosphere of Babylon. Mose took a deep breath of the moist air, opened the door, and stepped back into his life.

The wonderful aroma of dinner cooking brought a flood of memories back to him. He could hear his wife in the kitchen, singing softly to herself as she prepared the meal. Stepping into the dining room, Mose saw his son hard at work on a drawing of a cow, though the boy was being forgetful of his manners by wearing his ragged straw hat at the table. But before chastising the boy, Mose came up behind him and hugged the lad.

“Hello, Poppa. Mother said not to tell you what she’s making.”

“Whatever it is, it smells good,” Mose said. As he removed his son’s hat he was taken aback to see straw colored hair instead of the dark brown he remembered. *The boy’s been out in the sun without his hat and bleached his hair*, Mose thought. And as the older man watched his son draw he thought that though the boy looked pretty much as he remembered, there might be something just a slightly bit different about his features. *It’s a long time I’ve been away...or is it one of them there perturbations Hans spoke of?*

His wife called from the kitchen, “Sit down, dear. Since today is our tenth anniversary, I’ve made your favorite meal. I’ll be in with it in just a little bit.”

So Mose sat in his place at the end of the table and thought about what he’d been through since falling through the floor of the Poole’s barn. He began to say a prayer of thanks for his deliverance.

“Starting grace early?” his wife said as she carried a tureen into the dining room. “At least let me get dinner on the table my darling husband. I’ve made your favorite beef stew with okra and fluffy dumplings.”

Opening his eyes and lifting his head from his prayer, Mose turned to gratefully take in his first glimpse of his wife as she set the stew on the table, but as he looked, he beheld not Rebecca, but her sister Rachel.

“Close your mouth dear,” she said, “the flies will get in it.”