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Flight

At that moment, Amanda felt a small form magically take shape in her hand. Opening her fingers slowly, they revealed an inky black stone cradled in her shimmering palm, carved with twining words and figures. She looked closer, noticing the title of the story that was written on it: ‘Despair.’

“What is it?” Amanda asked.

“The stone called ‘despair’ is the story evil wrote on your heart,” The Man of Light replied gently. “It’s the disappointment and grief hoarded within, born out of losing your parents. On earth, you believed that gripping despair tightly would protect you from being hurt again. So it lay like a cold lump of gnawing fear and fierce anger in your gut, holding you back from love. But now that I have set you free, that story is no longer lodged like a gallstone in your soul. Despair lies unmasked in your hand, within your power, to do with whatever you will. The operation was a success. The tumor has been removed, and the wound no longer defines you.

“Oh, child!” He suddenly cried out, flinging his arms toward

the sky. “Step into trust, and together we will write you a new story, a tale of desire eternally fulfilled replacing that cold stone of sorrow. Come with me into the Beautiful Land, where hope can be tasted and drunk and worn like a golden bracelet. I AM love! I AM hope! And I AM *not* a disappointment!”

An almost-physical wave of joy crashed into her body each time he said, “I AM.” As she braced against the rollicking breakers, she saw herself as a little girl running down the beach and into the sea, lost in the delight of letting the placid ocean waves break into her. Her mother was holding her hand, the old, flowered shirt she used to wear over her swimsuit flapping in the wind as they hopped in the swell and laughed together. Joy rose to her chest, lapped at her shoulders, finally swallowing her head and leaving the taste of sweet water on her lips.

The physical sensation of a wave breaking over her subsided, but the inner joy remained, infusing all the places despair had once touched. Amanda threw her head back and laughed like she hadn’t in years, laughter that would make your sides ache on earth but just made your insides feel warm here. The Man of Light was laughing, too, his happiness throwing off great showers of sparks like a hammered forge. Where each spark met the ground, little pools of brightness formed in the sea of waving grass. She could hardly see him for the spectacular incandescence of color showering forth from that inexhaustible river of joy. Finally, she looked down from the sunlight of his face to the black stone lodged in her hand. It seemed even smaller, and the writing had disappeared.

“So, what do I do with it?” She solemnly held it out to The Man of Light in an open hand. As the aura around his body swept over it, the stone began to fluoresce with color, its ebony surface peeling away like frost vaporizing in the sunshine to reveal a center shot through with light and glittering like a thousand diamonds. For an instant she saw herself as a child on the

beach again, only this time she was launching pebbles out into the waves and squealing with delight each time one plopped into the water.

Jesus simply nodded in smiling agreement. Then laughter took her, and she reared back and threw the stone with all her might, far out over the cliff at the edge of heaven and into the glowing air.

She expected that small black thing to vanish in the radiant abyss, but to her surprise it hung there in the fragrant air, then swiftly began to grow. Explosions of color and brightness and flaming beauty shot from it in all directions. Then what was once despair flew back toward her on iridescent wings. The multifaceted body of this new being of light was now a dazzling, opalescent butterfly, now a brilliant white charger, now a lion with a mane of glittering gold. Its name was Hope.

In her mind Amanda could hear Hope beckoning. *“Come, ride the wind with me, down to the Beautiful Land! Experience the extraordinary!”* Not lingering for a reply, Hope swung in a broad arc and dived swiftly toward the clouds below.

An eager smile on her face, Amanda turned to face The Man of Light. “If I jump, you’ll catch me, right?”

“Always!” he grinned. “Go for it!”

Jump

Amanda ran wildly to the edge, then flung herself screaming over the towering cliff. She catapulted toward Hope with all her might, just as with all her strength she’d thrown away despair. Afterward, she couldn’t explain how, but Hope caught her, and in an instant taught her to fly. Swooping back and forth together in great arcs of joy they zoomed downward, gliding through the scented air toward the Beautiful Land far below.

Hope swiveled her variegated wings into a long, circling glide

down corridors of air toward the enveloping green below, and Amanda followed. *I'm flying!* she exulted. Her arms were spread to the side like wings, but that was more a vestige of earth-thinking than something that produced aerodynamic lift. Her body seemed to have gained the ability to ignore gravity at will. There was definitely a 'down' direction—gravity still existed—but instead of being a master with rules she had to obey, gravity was now her servant, coming at her call.

She'd flown like this before, in her dreams. Breaking the bounds of the conscious mind, her psyche would soar over towns and fields, ecstatic at the feeling of freedom. Yet those dream-flights were never long enough. Her mind, believing this couldn't really happen, always pulled her down to earth. As the rational asserted itself, her imagination fought back against reason and practicality, tried to will herself to stay airborne. If only she could push her analytic mind into a box, the flying dream could go on for just a bit longer! But the pull of earth was strong, and her leaps always grew shorter and shorter, until finally she was grounded for good, living inside the only reality she had ever known.

But not here! Amanda was fully conscious, fully awake, yet still flew. Experimenting, she imagined bending to the left and immediately began to bank in that direction, even though she hadn't moved a muscle. She pictured herself soaring to the right, and where her mind went, her body followed. In a moment she was swooping from side to side in broad curves, with Hope winging along in formation beside her.

I can fly! Amanda exulted. *Wherever I think of, I go—I don't have to exert myself or move a muscle unless I choose to. Awesome! And I seem to have escaped the pull of gravity. If I want, I can obey it and walk around on the ground; or ignore it and rise (here she zoomed upward) whenever I care to.*

The bracing air billowed through her hair, smelling of

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jasmine and cinnamon and a hundred other exotic scents, all blending together and yet distinct. Years later she could still remember some of them, although words failed when she tried to describe the sensation they created inside her. She would always end up saying, “They smell like flying!”

Amanda remembered her hesitation at the edge of the cliff and laughed. *This is what I was afraid of?* Right now, floating miles above the earth, fear of falling seemed like the silliest thing she could imagine. *I was so hyper about whether he would catch me! But I was in a world where gravity is optional and you can fly—and he knew it all along! To him, some of the stuff we agonize over must seem like a total hoot.*

Hit by a new idea, she launched into a barrel-roll, screaming with delight. Then it was all loops and spins and power-dives for what seemed like half an hour. Hope flew beside her and around her and inside her loops, celebrating with her the joy of flying through heaven on the wings of trust.



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