**Sample Chapter**

**The Eighth Page – A Christmas Journey**

**Chapter 8**

**A Whisper**

The world is an enormous cache of muted whispers, drifting silently but not sullenly all around us. Sadly, they seem all too absent or we see them as the stuff of vivid imaginations driven by escapist ruminations. The world indeed is thick with the very things that give us life and sustenance in a manner that is always sufficient and ever adequate despite our inadequacy to believe in them.

Hope waits to be discovered, begging it seems that we believe in its existence sufficiently to pursue it in order to find it to be real in the pursuing. However, we don't see it, leaving us to believe in the totality of its absence and therefore living out shrunken lives based on such an errant premise. Yet, whispers not apprehended leave the reality of those whispers entirely unaltered.

It seems that of all places, a forgotten root cellar is entirely absent of any voices at all, much less those spoken in muted whispers. It seemed to be the place of perpetually emptying silence, with any whispers having been spoken long ago and irrevocably concluded the moment that they were uttered. The root cellar seemed to be a place that stored the dead, broken and disjointed shards of yesterday, rendering it a vacant mausoleum permeated by the death of what was and nothing more.

David preferred that it remain just that… a mausoleum. His ascending fear generated by all the many bizarre events of the past several weeks was the fear that what was dead might jump to life if it be engaged yet again. That some muted whisper of something past might actually be heard. Some things are better left stone-cold dead and evermore locked in the dank catacombs of the past rather than retrieved and thrust brazenly alive into the present.

He knew that when Thanksgiving turned and headed toward the Christmas season. His dread was embracing a holiday that appeared to be outwardly bright. Because it was, he feared that he might begin to believe that it might actually be bright, only to find that the brightness was darkness in cruel disguise. Such was the story of ‘his’ life, and therefore it was assumed that such was the story ‘of’ life.

Life had turned for him in manner that suggested that it was all dark all the time. ‘Good,’ as he had defined it, lived it and presumed it to be had shown itself as nothing more than an ideal and anything but a reality. ‘Good’ was nothing more than a wily fictional concept crafted solely by the panicked need to believe that evil was not the single and sole option of our existence. The concept of ‘good’ was certainly admirable and actually rather ingenious. However, naively assuming ‘good’ as a reality that would actually have the breath of life breathed into it if it was acted upon proved to be nothing of the sort. In the end, ‘good’ never took a breath despite David’s efforts to breathe life into it. And if ‘good’ never breathes on its own, hope had to be a concept just as lifeless.

Life, it seemed, was an empty assortment of ideals and hopes that duped people into thinking that it was all worthwhile. Christmas seemed to be one of those things. Sprightly brilliant, it teased the onlooker by feigning of the hope of hope. But David found it to be just that… a tease.

We are fearful people, and fear erects imposing obstacles against opportunity, regardless of how grand the opportunity might be. Rather, we relegate life to the lifeless notions borne of our inherent pessimism and fed fat by fear. David’s pessimism was not borne of anything other than reality. He had deliberately invested in all that was good believing that all that was good would handily offset all that was bad. He had loved another out of the greatest good he could conceive, only to see that ‘good’ was not good enough. Ideals perish in the face of realities. Ethics are wantonly expendable. Values vanish. Selfish agendas implode marriages in plumes of asphyxiating ash and leave families wandering lost among the cinders. David saw hope in just such a way.

All the mementoes of this questionable good and this spurious hope lay in the root cellar, boxed and silent. They were connected to dreams dashed and relationships lost. They screamed that what he thought love could do, in reality it could not do. That what life should have been, wasn't. That in the end, even hope was not enough. Far from it. And so, they all laid buried in this dank mausoleum.

The mementos however were not mementos of his life. They were the various shards and thin slivers of his kin; of ancestors mostly unknown to him. These people now laid in various cemeteries in places where their journeys had pulled in the reins and ended.

One particular cemetery down in Belpre nudged up to a small white church adorned with a pristine steeple and hemmed in by a short diminutive fence. Another over in Elyria had fallen to time and inattention, itself having aged in unison with the headstones that littered its uneven rows. Several others rested in a sweeping cemetery whose manicured vistas rolled off to a forested edge that tip-toed along the border between Michigan and Ohio. Headstones in each were moss-embossed, canted by the press of time, and sporting dates of an era unrecognizable from the vantage point of the 21st century.

The remnants of these kin long past sat collected in a damp root cellar. Each artifact had been present at some living event now long past. They had beautifully and rather marvelously attached that time and those events to themselves, carrying something of that time and those events undiminished across time. They lay packed in the present full of something of the past. The old root cellar was a storehouse, which is quite the opposite of a cemetery.

As a storehouse, it tenderly held the mementos of someone else, someplace else. Yet, sometimes things that are not ours are in reality a part of us as much as anything might be. Nothing in the root cellar was of David, yet it was everything of David.

He wished not to stir any of the boxes or their contents any more, particularly the old chest or its contents. The outcome of doing that before was anything but good. The exact fear of such an action was entirely unidentifiable to him other than the fear was embarrassingly real. David was not typically a fearful man, yet for all his efforts to do so, fear of this place was a fear he could not calm. And when we cannot calm fear despite the heroics of mind and heart to do so, we will press through despite the fear, or we will flee from it. David was caught in a colossal pull between the two. Calls like the one from aunt Mabel stirred those fears even more, sometimes raising them to a frenzy and rubbing him up against the edge of panic itself.

Yet something whispered to him out of that place of dead and decaying memories. Something that held out something more than black memories smeared in the cold pain of loss. Something said that there was something more. David had stood facing the boxes and heard a voice of sorts, the kind of voice that’s completely undefinable, yet entirely familiar. A voice that we doubt with the fullest of our fears, but yet believe with the fullest of our hopes. In such a terse conundrum, we are tantalized by the very hope that we doubt. And our lives turn on the choices we make at just such moments.

Indeed, once upon a time David had been a dreamer; a vitally expansive and explosive dreamer filled with robust ideas and a hope that seemed at times irreverent in the way that they challenged life. The whispers reminded him of that because at one time, in a place now far away he had responded to them without question, thought or fear. Those earliest hash marks scrawled on the old river-rock fence just across the road were marks of a hardy journey infused with ravenous hope. He had been bursting with hope in those early days to the point that he was gladly swept up and swept away in it. But no more. That part of him had died in the flames of a divorce and a family fallen into cinders and ash.

Pondering this inner prompting, he recalled a gentler time when such voices would have seized his imagination and sent him on a journey seeking out the voices. Without question, he would have set off running after them in wild pursuit of whatever crumpled boxes they might have been hidden in. As the memories burst open from some hidden spring within him and filled the expanse of his entire being he found himself passionately longing for what he used to be. What he thought he was. What he wanted to be again. The longing itself reached a manic-like intensity that, for the first time since his wife walked away with distraught children in tow, he found himself willing to once again risk that life might be good.

For the first time there was in it all a violent grieving that ignited a fiery desire to return to the something and someone of hope, adventure and challenge. His soul had gone gray. His heart had become listless. He had devolved into a netherworld where all was black and deathly still, causing him to become the same. He stood realizing that his heart had altogether stopped beating a decade ago, and his lungs were filled with the stale air of a breath not taken in ten long years.

Over the years, the root cellar seemed to develop a voice of its own. There had always been something. It had called him over and over, or so it seemed as he now pondered it all. Up until this point, such musing had been written off to imagination or the manifestation of grief. Only now however had he heard something of its voice, a tattered phrase, a fragmented sentence. And laced in it all he heard something of his own voice from long ago mixed in the calling.

The root cellar had been the one place that he was desperate to avoid, yet it became the one place that began to become irresistible. He was nothing of a weak man, yet he was caught in the bottomless chasm between the man he once was, and the man he had become. Each of those two people responded entirely differently to the voices emanating from the root cellar. One part of him found himself desperately desperate to believe that something more existed to which the voices spoke. The other part of him mercilessly chided himself for believing in such nonsense and setting himself up to be disappointed in hope and fooled by love.

One of the reasons he had never moved into the old farmhouse was the root cellar, as immature as he thought that sounded. Instead, he had opted for a comfortable home in a tidy neighborhood on the outskirts of the city. If he were to be vulnerably honest with himself, David would have confessed that the root cellar was the single reason he had made that choice. Sure, living in the old farmhouse would have represented a rather long commute, but that excuse was always insufficient. The house itself was largely empty; having a few sordid remnants of discarded furniture and wall decor hanging canted and dusty. Bits of wallpaper hung faded, peeling and curled at various edges. It always seemed a place entirely abandoned, but entirely alive in some way that defied logic or explanation. With some tender loving care, it could have been a marvelous home and David knew it. But to know something and to be assaulted by fear in the knowing leaves ‘doing’ abandoned.

The root cellar was the single room, something like a sacred catacomb that had remained intact and untouched over the sprawling decades. Most everything else had at some point been moved out or sold or rearranged. Yet the root cellar went oddly unnoticed and unaltered. If we leave something alone it is either out of a deep reverence or paralyzing fear. There are things that adamantly refuse to touch our lives without transforming us in the touching. David knew that the root cellar was full of just such things. And so, he avoided it out of the ever-accelerating fear that passion might someday rise sufficiently to offset fear. And with fear abated, he knew that he could no longer avoid touching and being touched in the touching. And that day was coalescing at that very moment.

Aside from the deep dust of inattention, it was exactly as it had been at the very moment his grandfather had been moved from the farmhouse to the nursing home on that December morning in 1957. What David was to learn was that sometimes in life things fall into a shrouded state of inattention so that their treasures might be held in the fullest state of preservation for another time.

Suddenly David’s cell phone angrily vibrated yet again, demanding his immediate attention. Yanking it out of his pocket he read the caller ID.

“Aunt Mabel again,” he muttered.

The date read December 11th.

“That’s going to voicemail,” he said with a voice laced tight with irritation. “I’m not in the mood for another ‘pages’ conversation, whatever that is. Why don’t they medicate her for that?” As soon as the thought passed through his head he felt a tug of regret that was instantly followed by a swell of regret. *Ugh,* he thought. *I’ll call her back in a minute.*

David found himself increasingly conflicted, ever angrier, and yet ever more curious at the same time, all of which was projected onto aunt Mabel and her call. For it was not the call of aunt Mabel. It was, in fact, the call of life. The ascending anxiety within him was accelerated by the guilt of hurting her as she had no part in the feelings that churned within him. Suddenly, pain rendered him soft instead of casting him hard.

As with so many moments that thrust us out of the smallest of ourselves into the greatness of great things, he found himself driven to a restored softness that tenderized him sufficiently around the edges. Yet, such tenderness stood against the whole of his will. David battled with himself for the entire hour it took to drive back to the old farm. He found himself engaged in a draining seesaw battle of being grounded by all things practical but being unable to shun the voice of something greater that invited him to places that the practical would never dare to tread or think to exist. And so, he once again returned to the farm of fence, field and forest, driving the road of Indians, horse and heavy wagon after a long day at work.

Entering the engulfing vacancy of the farmhouse, he reflexively stopped, turned and walked back out onto the yawning front porch. Standing on its vast expanse, he scanned the rolling vista of slumbering fields and quietly napping forest as darkness began pulling a veil over the day. Piecemeal flocks of birds rose and dropped into the field’s growth of winter stubble. The shrill call of mischievous blue-jays rolled out from dense stands of maple and ash. Far down the field a handful of deer skirted wood’s edge, feeding on a bounty of acorns dropped from the muscular oaks that flanked the woods. Sporadically the deer anxiously scanned the open fields, fearing to wander too far from the safety of the wood’s primitive tangle. A lone hawk circled high on generous updrafts, soon joined by a second as both danced on the wings of the wind.

Sighing, David took a step to the railing, put his hands on its wooden surface, leaned forward and drew in a breath of sweet country air. And suddenly, this battle began to lift. Everything began to orient itself alive with color, wildly fragrant scents and the soothing sound of a world at peace with itself. Nature sets things right when the nature of our minds throws them into disarray.

At some point every person who has ever lived has a moment when everything that they are suddenly comes face to face with everything that they should be. Every person has a seminal moment when this gentle collision leaves them aghast with who they’ve been, fearful of how much they’ve missed, and cautiously electrified with what they could be. Decisions made at these moments will soundly dictate every other moment that will transpire for every moment of life that one has yet to live.

It suddenly dawned on David that he had relegated the farm to a lifeless piece of stale real estate, and he therefore had inhumanly compartmentalized it as a sterilized commodity. He had thoughtlessly ripped the beating heart of history out of it, except for a few piecemeal stories whose origins and authenticity he had seen as fictionalized to the point that fact was entirely indiscernible. All of that was about to change.

Again, standing on the very precipice of transformation, he froze as he realized that he had done the same to himself. And it was here that the change that had begun in the old root cellar began to crystalize. Tentatively, but surely. David was far too hurt and interminably too wounded to be transformed in this single moment, or any single moment. Yet, drawing in the quiet glory of field and forest it began in a manner sufficiently strong that it would not be stopped. He drew another breath, and in the breath realized that something was changing and that he need not yet understand the change for it do to its work. He then turned and stepped into the farmhouse.

Closing and thoughtfully latching the door behind him, he walked across the kitchen and descended the rough-hewn oak stairs to the basement. Apparently, the root cellar light had been left on again, extending an invitation to a moment beyond the moment. Turning, he walked up to the old chest and stood in front of it. This was for him the ridiculousness of it all. It was a chest. Just a chest. An inanimate object. The logical side of himself that he had so meticulously constructed after the divorce had kept him emotionally safe and sufficiently distant from every calamity and injustice that had been perpetrated on him since. It had even shielded him from the barbs and attacks that populated the divorce.

But here, in front of an antique chest, everything logical within him went completely limp. The change that had been put into gentle forward momentum in the root cellar and was roused on the front porch finally, and quite mercifully, gave all of this a meaning that logic could not and need not make reasonable. He had faced far more than this on roads both personal and professional, but here he stood trembling and afraid in front of a chest full of relics.

We certainly feel some element of fear when life attacks us. But real fear is felt when life calls us out beyond our safe confines and points us to great things that don’t feel all that safe. That’s when we feel real fear. So, with real fear pounding at his chest, David reached into the old chest and prayed.

Nothing occurred this time, as was the same each time he had engaged things a second time. He pulled back a bit and tentatively reached in again. Nothing happened. Nothing at all. No passing out. No blurring. Nothing. With the logical side of himself being gradually reassured that this was simply a mismatched collection of relics and nothing more, he reached into the chest.

As he did, he was drawn to the old family Bible. It had a coal black leather cover that was cracked along its curling edges. The words “Holy Bible” were imprinted in a simple flowing script across the upper third of the front cover. It was a bit stiff all about. Its binding appeared stiff as well, with its pages having been embossed by a gold trim that was slightly faded at points and places. It was thick and robust, much like the message inside. Someone had applied a touch of glue on the binding at the top of the book and had run a slight bead down a fraying edge. Pulling it out, he turned it back and forth as if determining how he was going to engage it or how it might engage him.

As he did, he found six crisp, new pages that had obviously been tucked in its pages at some point in history.

“Pages,” David blurted. “What?” He counted them. Six. “Oh my… are these…? Are these?” David’s mind spun. *Are you kidding*, he thought. *This can’t be… can it?* Holding the Bible at arm’s length and canting his head as if in some sort of catatonic disbelief, he said, “There are pages. There actually are pages. They’re for real. Really real.”

He drew the Bible to himself, took out the pages and counted them again. Six. Recalling, he remembered that aunt Mabel had said seven. She was adamant about that number for some reason. Very adamant. But, dementia does strange things. It messes with minds and it screws up numbers. So, it didn’t much matter… until it would. But for now, there were pages. Six of them.

With curiosity consuming him, he pulled out the first page. Squinting, he walked under one of the bare bulbs just outside the root cellar. It appeared that the writing had been done in pencil and was somewhat crude. Yet, it seemed entirely fresh, as if it had only been written but a moment ago. Its message was short, something more like the meandering of someone who was waxing a bit philosophical or trying to figure oneself out in the writing. Taking it and holding it under the light, it read:

“The fire burnt down the farmhouse ten years ago today. Seems that it was only yesterday, but time does that to you. It always amazed me that it takes a man so long to face his fires, much less believe that he can rebuild something out of them. I went back to the farm today. I’ve driven by it here and there over the past ten years out a kind of itching curiosity, but I never drove up the driveway.”

“Hmm. Sounds like me,” David mused. “Just like me.”

He continued:

“Never walked through what was left of the farmhouse. Couldn’t bring myself to do that. I couldn’t because all I saw was destruction and ash and cinders and such. Couldn’t see nothing good rising out of any of it. Just thought that when something is destroyed, it’s destroyed for good. Move on is what I thought. So, after ten years I came back and spent most of the day today just walking around it. Looking at it and thinking about it and praying some. Remembering that day for the first time in a long time. Thinking about Nellie and frozen pumps and all.”

*This must be my grandfather*, David thought, finding himself irresistibly drawn into the emotions of an event long past and a man long dead. “This is him!” David blurted out loud. Immediately, he started reading again. However, the writing was slightly different, as if his grandfather had paused or written the last part of the letter after some subtle shift in thought, much like David’s shift. It read:

“But something’s come over me, telling me that it’s not over, only if I want it to be. It’s burnt down, but it isn’t done. Something says I need to rebuild it. Raise it back up. Make it kind of a symbol that genuine hope will withstand any fire, and in the middle of the cinders and ashes hope always has the power to make all things new. Hope says things aren’t done. What got burnt up don’t need to be lost, even though we think it’s gone. It don’t need to be gone. Fires don’t kill hope. Hope’s fireproof. I’m not sure why, but I believe that hope can redeem anything, so I’m gonna start right here with this house.

David Morris

December 12, 1938”

“This was after the fire,” David mumbled. “Ten years after. This is when he decided to come back here and rebuild it,” he muttered looking up at the flooring overhead and scanning the basement. *This is what made him do all of this,* he thought. David was completely unfamiliar with the kind of hope that would allow a single man to take on such a daunting task. *Wouldn’t it just be easier to walk away,* he thought to himself.

David’s mind suddenly stepped outside itself into a space entirely unknown. His mind began to fashion the emerging reality that false hope, regardless of how craftily it might be constructed, could not have the power or force to compel a man to give himself over to his ashes in order to rise above those ashes. So, this must be…

His cell phone suddenly buzzed. As he reflexively reached it for, the page slipped out of the Bible and fell toward the floor. David turned and quickly reached for it, grabbing it in its spiraled descent. As he did, he fell to the floor… again.

Suddenly David came to, finding himself sitting on the basement floor in front of the old chest with page in hand.

“Again?” he said. “Again?” he said a second time, chiding himself a bit while rubbing his forehead.

Drawing himself up from the root cellar floor and summarily collecting himself, he turned to see a young man standing in the doorway of the old root cellar.

“Howdy,” the man said staring directly at him with a clear softness and a hint of tease.

Squinting, David sharply said, “Who or what are you? And what are you doing in my house?” Looking beyond the young man, sunshine poured into the basement windows, pulling his attention away from the young man to embrace night having instantly turned to day. *Wasn’t it night,* he thought to himself.

In the pause of the conversation he thought he heard the soft neighing of horses off in the distance, and the more pronounced sound of chickens that seemed somewhat closer although they were a bit off as well. The sounds completely disoriented him as they were never part of the farm as he had known it. Clearly, the presence of the young man became secondary to all the misplaced things that David was hearing and seeing and even smelling.

Suddenly, upstairs he could hear the soft sound of someone walking.

“Who you takin’ to?” came a voice from upstairs.

“Just talking to myself Nel,” the young man shouted at the basement ceiling, “You know full well that I do that quite a bit.”

“Well, pumps froze again,” came a delicate but strong female voice. “Can’t do supper without water,” she continued.

“Things do tend to get froze in December, don’t they?” the young man replied, casting a winking eye toward David. “Be right up,” he said, projecting his voice toward the stairway. With that, the footsteps walked away from the door.

*Nel?* David thought, *Who’s Nel? There’s two of them in my house!*

The young man’s attention turned back to David, scanning him up and down rather quizzically. “I always wondered how this moment would go,” he said with an air of curiosity mingled with an electric tingle of excitement. “Always wondered, but wondering’s over ‘cause, well here we are. Here you are! Come on over here,” the young man motioned vigorously as David stood to confused feet and weak knees.

He could not have been much more than thirty, maybe thirty-five if that. His features were sharply chiseled with his skin seasoned deep and rubbed golden by the Mid-Western sun. His clothes were simple, earthy and not pretentious in any way. He sported a worn pair of hardworking overalls and a stained t-shirt that bespoke the labor and life of simple farm-folk. Leather work boots caked with dried mud and framed with meaty soles peered out from under turned up denim cuffs that themselves sported threadbare holes in variant places. His clothing had been worn thin by the kind of full-bodied labor that grants a man a stalwart sense of purpose, while filling him with the unalterable peace that the day was well lived instead of wholly squandered.

Light blue eyes were set as deep pools against his richly tanned skin. Locks of tussled brown hair fell in short, uncombed clusters across the breadth of his forehead. His hands were broad and sturdy. Thick callouses lent a sense of adversity overcome by leaning into the hardships of life and bending them backwards against themselves.

He had a slow, drawl-like mannerism about him that outwardly seemed a lot like stupidity and slog of mental slowness. Yet the more David watched him the more it seemed that the slowness was about a fallowed maturity and a seasoned wisdom that allowed this young man to simply be comfortable just being. It was something that had eluded David all of his life, yet this simple person has grasped it in a way most masterful.

Collecting himself as much as he could, David said, “What are you doing in my house?” He found himself caught between looking around the basement in order to orient himself to something that was not quite his basement, while confronting what he thought be an intruder.

“Funny thing ‘bout that,” the young man replied, “Life sometimes doesn’t go like we think it should or like it’s always gone before. Seems to me that sometimes life kinda interrupts and, well, we don’t know what to do with the interruption ‘cause we didn’t plan for it. But I’ll tell ya what, I’ve learned that if life interrupts us, it’s ‘cause it’s got somethin’ good and right to say to us.”

“What? What does that mean?” David responded critically, not really knowing what to say, but having to say something. Still looking around he said, “Look, I don’t need a lesson in philosophy or pop-psychology. Who are you and what are you doing in my house?” David again asserted. “Are you one of the neighbors, or some sort of homeless person… or who are you?” he said. With a pause that was the continuation of David’s attempt collect himself, he then said, “And who’s that upstairs?” pointing upward.

The young man’s calm comfort and molasses ease was uncanny, as if he were home and David was not.

“Well, which one of those questions to you want me to answer first?” the young man replied. “That a passel of ‘em fer sure. But, they make sense… given where ya’ve come from.”

Pulling a rag out of his back pocket and contemplatively wiping something off his hands, he held up the rag as if to lend weight to his words and said, “Well, here, let me answer ‘em in the best order. Sometimes you youngsters don’t really understand the order of things,” he said while tucking the rag back into his back pocket. “I suppose you couldn’t in this situation anyway. Most folks couldn’t.” Shaking his head, with a bit of a drawl and looking back up at David he said, “I reckon I couldn’t if I was in yer shoes either.”

*Youngster?* David thought, *I’ve got this guy by at least twenty years, at least! Probably more.* “What did you mean by that?” David shot back in a mix of anger and confusion. “Are you one of those mental patients or something?” he said stammering and now evermore lost.

“Let me see… let’s start with what am I doin’ in your house and see where we go from there,” the young man replied stepping back, leaning against the basement wall and completely ignoring David’s last comment.

Looking at the man, David’s attention was suddenly drawn away from the young man as he realized that there was supposed to be a utility sink on the wall to the young man’s right, with an old, black sump pump to his left. Neither was there. Turning to his left, he saw that the steps were there in the right place, and the windows were where they were supposed to be. But the washer and dryer were gone, as was the large gray fuse box that was supposed to be above the dryer. Spinning around, the furnace was likewise gone with something that looked cast iron coal burner of some sort sitting in its place. For some illogical reason that David couldn’t understand things weren’t in their right place, or they weren’t there at all. It all just wasn’t…

The young man silently watched David’s confusion mount, doing so with an entirely assured calm that gave rise to the notion that somehow, the events were entirely known to him. Sometimes we anticipate something for so long that when it actually happens it’s strikingly different than we could have ever imagined it to be. At other times, particularly when life is afoot, it’s everything that we thought and more. Such was the young man’s experience.

“Well,” said the young man, interrupting David’s accelerating thoughts, “Some things are darn right easy to explain and fer a farmer like me, some things ain’t quite as easy… kind of like plowing a field straight. Sometimes you get the furrow a little crooked, you know. Kinda depends on you and kinda depends on the horses… its working as a team.” Pausing and casting a rather longing glance out of the basement window next to David, he said, “Seems to me that great things in life happen ‘cause there’s a team that’s working together and sacrificin’ together. Ya know, cuttin’ the furrows together. Makes great things happen, ya know. Like plowin’ a field or plowin’ a future.” He looked down and wiped his hands on the rag once again.

“Okay,” David said now trying to be calm, “I have no interest in mind games or philosophical mush or home-spun farm stories.” With his voice developing a bit of an edge, he said, “What are you doing in my house,” half asking the question and half looking around trying to make sense of things missing and things out of place and things different.

“David,” the young man said with a striking softness and a tenderness, something like a gentle father, “This ain’t your house… not yet, but in half a century or there bout’s it’ll be yours; not this house exactly, but one a whole lot like it.” Waving his arm across the basement while scanning it, he said “This here is about a day away from burnin’ down. All of this right here, where you and I are standin’. And it’s about another ten years from being rebuilt… a long ten years. Mighty long.” Pausing, the young continued, “That there’s the fact of the matter.”

“What?” David bumbled.

The young man replied, “Let me answer the second question,” he said as he pushed himself off the wall and stepped toward David. The young man stared at the floor as if formulating something unthinkably profound. He then shifted his gazed directly into David’s eyes. Drawing in a deep breath he said, “David… David, what day is it… today, what day is this?”

“It’s Tuesday” David snapped.

“Let me rephrase that,” the young man said. “What’s the date?”

“December 11th,” David replied.

“Yup” said the young man, pausing as if something life-altering was about to happen. “Yup, yer got that right. But here’s the next question that’s worth some ponderin’. What year is this?” the young man asked, “what year son?”

With anger and confusion building simultaneously within him, David said, “I’m calling the sheriff!” With that he thrust his hand into his pocket to retrieve his cell phone. He found his pocket empty of everything but a bit of fluffy lint. Rummaging through his pocket, he frantically began going through all of his other pockets. “I don’t have my phone,” he said out loud. “My wallet, that’s gone too!” he said with a mixture of confusion and anger. “What’s this about?” he said looking at the young man and left going back to rummage through his pockets. “You’ve stolen my wallet and phone!”

The young man said, “Well David, ya don’t have any such contraption ‘cause, well, how do I say this right… ya don’t exist yet. Neither does the stuff that yer scratching ‘round in yer pockets for. It’ll be invented, created and all, but not fer a while.”

“Of course I exist,” David retorted while continuing to rummage through his pockets with a mounting anxiety and somewhat comical confusion.

Snapping out of some sort of fog, David became erect and said, “Wait. How did you know my name? How did you know that? Did you get that from my wallet?” Continuing to frantically look around to see if he might have dropped his wallet, he then blurted out, “Did you go through my phone?”

Pausing, the young man repeated, “What year is it?”

“I don’t know! What year is it? You tell me” David said out of escalating anger and a developing sarcasm while continuing to rummage through his pockets and repeatedly checking the ground around him.

At times we’re faced with realities that are genuine realities but are realities that far too great for us to embrace. We would be wise to live life cognizant of life’s realities, but we’d be even wiser to be equally cognizant that sometimes greater realities exist that shun our logic and circumvent the best of our mind. Such openness gives life ample space to work out wondrous things. Such openness creates room for hope.

Staring David in the eyes, the young man said, “David, its 1928. December 11th, 1928.”