

# LIGHT FOR THE SEEKERS

## Sojourner Howfree on the Inquisitive Mind

The searching inquisitive mind is a compulsion, driven by a need for truth. The dove of peace at times appears elusive because it is selective about where it will settle. Only gently descending on the heart that is home to truth. Our God is not a God of disorder, but of peace. Those who seek to emulate him, also yearn for peace. We ache to solve the mystery, to allay the confusion, though it is at times beyond our reach. Yet we still must aspire to it, or else give way to nihilism. To keep one's mind stayed on him, the place of peace can be a challenge at times. Although he is no author of confusion, we live in this present chapter of darkness and complication. When there is blood spilt, even in fictitious worlds, the cry of our ancient ancestor Abel still resonates today. When Abel's blood cries out to God from the earth, all who ever walked its face hear his agonising cry rising from the dust, the substance of all human beings.

Oh, the life that could have been. A patriarch who was pleasing to God, who fathered none. It was not just the loss of Abel, but all the generations hence from him, gone. The great loss of potential; what could have been, and yet was not. Abel's death was the first recorded human death, and his destruction was from the betrayal of his own brother!

Fiction stories are the rehearsal spaces for our true stories. It is a correct posture to respond to them with righteous anger in the face of bloodshed, and with a drive

to restore order from chaos when these crimes are committed.

God's question to every Cain demands a response from every person. Should Cain insist on his right to remain silent? We must not, else we are complicit. God's question, "What have you done?" must be answered. His words shall not return to him void. Somewhere within the connectivity of humanity there is compassion (how devoid of love and purpose we are without it). True compassion is imbued with a yearning for atonement and justice and a return to order. True compassion is love in action, with subsequent unrelenting efforts, with whatever endeavours necessary, to find truth — no matter how elusive she might be: first in the fiction to prepare the acuity of the mind, then in the true narratives of real life.

In the words of the late Alden Wilson Tozer: "Truth engages the citadel of the human heart and is not satisfied until it has conquered everything there. The will must come forth and surrender its sword. It must stand at attention to receive orders, and those orders it must joyfully obey."<sup>1</sup>

In my own little citadel was a stone. Beryl.

Beryl is a precious stone; the book of Ezekiel details that it was found in the garden of Eden. Some cultures from antiquity claimed it had some facility to connect people with their God.

Beryl is also the name of my grandmother. To me, she was always 'Nan.'

Nan and I never really had a great deal in common. Beryl is a very practical, industrious, servant hearted and

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<sup>1</sup> A.W. Tozer, *Of God and Men* (Chicago: Moody, 2015), chap. 7.

capable woman, while I am none of these things, although there is aspiration.

She lived with my family of origin for a long season during my formative years, and I love her. Despite our differences we shared a passion for reading, although tremendously different genres appealed to each of us — except mystery and detective texts.

I remember as a little girl waiting for the hour that *Perry Mason* in black and white would appear on our turn-dial television set, and together, we would watch the mystery unravel, and thanks to Mr. Mason's very sharp mind, and a fortuitous clue or an overheard conversation, an innocent person was always set free. The true culprit was revealed. Such a satisfaction: in just thirty minutes, the catastrophic circumstance was reversed and the potential for a perversion of justice was overturned. That easy solution as a child was wonderful to me — a clear-cut solution, all was well with the world and my soul. The narrative never deeply considered the nature of the crime or the bloodshed, just the unravelling of a plot that had the capacity to circumvent justice. Order reigned in the end.

Later in the week I would climb into Nan's perfectly made bed in the downstairs room and together, we would plot out the course correction in much the same vein. This time with Jessica Fletcher as our guide in TV episodes of *Murder, She Wrote*. At about 10 years old however, I learned the formula: the murderer was always the most unlikely character, whose back story would only be revealed once she had been exposed by Miss Fletcher. Upon discovering the formula, it was no longer a mystery, and viewing became quite a banal encounter for me. The dénouement of these texts was still satisfying

in that the truth had been made known and the wickedness of spilt blood was atoned for. I found that I preferred to return outside to the swing set to wait for the afternoon boobook owl to swoop onto the cold metal frame and seek out the twilight snakes for her supper, whilst I waited for Nan to make mine.

When I reached the teen years, that love of mystery and a passion for justice followed me. At that time, I discovered a film, a true murder mystery, that moved me profoundly: *In the Name of the Father*. This was a biographical drama based on the true encounter of the ‘Guildford Four’: youths who were wrongly convicted for bombing a tavern in England that killed four British soldiers and a citizen. The dreadful sequence of events that detailed tremendous government and systemic corruption stunned me as a young teen. One significant mystery for me was trying to understand the motivation for this corruption. The reality is that it is still an unknown decades later, with documents still withheld from the public despite a multitude of freedom-of-information applications to access these key documents. One can only speculate why this might be.<sup>2</sup>

This awe at flagrant ill intentions was only trumped by the lead character’s father and his deep expression of love for his son. He came to England to support his prodigal, only to be framed and embroiled in the saga, and then also cast off into a dark, despairing, desolate prison cell that ultimately became his tomb. As the title alludes, there is a remarkable resonance in this film,

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<sup>2</sup> Alastair Logan, “Guildford Four: how the innocent were framed and the truth buried,” *The Justice Gap*, March 6, 2020, accessed 15 September 2022, <https://www.thejusticegap.com/guildford-four-how-the-innocent-were-framed-and-the-truth-buried/>.

found in the power of a father who will make unfathomable sacrifices for a foolish prodigal, whose very freedom is demanded by a merciless angry enemy with a hatred steeped in ancient history. The very same enemy that murdered Abel. The story has deep connections to the appeal of the sacred tenets of the Christian narrative. A fallen, foolish son, who rushes into the hand of the enemy, and a precious father who chases after us, follows us into the prison cell, and lays down his very life in that darkness, in the hope that we might see the light one day. After 15 years, the Guildford Four were exonerated. Eventually, after significant personal challenges, Gerry Conlon, was the prodigal no more. Upon his release his life was marked by his service to others and he became a campaigner against miscarriages of justice.

A handful of years later, I moved beyond the lounge room with Nan. Out from the foothills of Australia's Blue Mountains, and all the drama and beauty of those sandstone outcrops, jutting proudly through the waterfalls and caves and the resplendent crackling hot bushland — to the city. Driven there by an endless thirst to understand the great mysteries and find the jewels of knowledge.

Longing for something more than Miss Fletcher and Mr. Mason, even more than the true biopic of Conlon I wanted my own narrative. The 'Western Sydney rattler' would take me there, off to Sydney University. It was a ride of one hour and twenty minutes on the brown rust coloured train with fixed windows that would offer only a crack of fresh air to circulate into the innards of the tin traveller.

That city that held the universe, or so I thought, and was finally within my reach. They would show me where to go, what to read, where I would unravel the great mysteries, what it meant to live, to mean something, where to find my Maker.

Le Carre, *The Spy who Came in from the Cold*. That was one of the first novels that the English Literature Professor directed me to. The complex plot of spies with double agency during the Cold War, was so distant from Mr. Mason and Miss Fletcher. It was difficult to understand how callous hearts could be, that people would be so duplicitous to betray one another in deliberate and calculated ways, hiding behind thin facades of 'it's my job,' or 'I'm doing this for my country and the greater good' — and although it was fiction, our Professor explained these events were likely steeped in significant truths of history. Stories have such a facility to give us aspects of truth. The longing for justice and a yearning to understand the mysteries, distinguishes us from the rest of creation.

At the close of the narrative, the lead character, Leamus, 'comes in from the cold.' This is a euphemism for the end of an espionage career. Yet the double entendre that Le Carre employs with the title and the narrative thread is important. Leamus discovers that his own humanity has been cold and that the life of deception has cost him dearly. Love, relationships, and his own integrity; this is the substance of true humanity. These profound jewels of the human encounter are the costly exchange rate of deception. Leamus discovers this too late in his lifetime, and then, it is done. There is a desperation, a nihilism, a despair here, that Mr. Mason and Miss Fletcher had never shown me, and perhaps I

was not ready to discover it back then. Yet that is the truth, that is what this petty detective has discovered after 43 years on the earth. Without truth, without justice, the villainous foe of our soul is victorious. We lose the jewel of our own humanity, our very soul.

I have seen in my own little microcosm, the Goliath of the state deceive, so many cogs in the wheels hiding behind 'I'm just doing my job.' I did not need my detective skills to understand the deceptions, they have been clumsy and overt.<sup>3</sup>

In any case, I remember dear Beryl, when I was so small that my fingers did not have the dexterity to shift the dial to Mr. Mason. I remember your song, as you lulled me off to sweet dreams: "Jesus died for all the children, all the children of the world . . ." Thank you for strengthening my connection to my God; I would not be alive without it.

The searching inquisitive mind is a compulsion, driven by a need for truth. There can be no peace without truth. There is something ethereal, otherworldly, that connects us to that ancient helix strand. Abel's blood cried out to God. That cry is within each of us too. It will not be silent. In anguished desperation, beating relentless at such a deafening decibel, in our own hearts. Our veins. Beat, beat, beat our own blood cries out: "Answer these questions, unravel injustices, seek the master of the soul."

If we refuse the call, remain silent, sit and not seek, we are destined to be like Le Carre's Leamus. The prudent

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<sup>3</sup> Soujourna Howfree, "Joy — Brief," *An Unexpected Journal* 5, no. 3 (Fall 2022): 59-69.

would instead hearken to ancient, wise Solomon of Ecclesiastes:

“Remember Him before the silver cord is snapped and the golden bowl is crushed, before the pitcher is shattered at the spring and the wheel is broken at the well.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Eccles. 12:6-7 (NIV).

# Bibliography

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