



*We must never cease from explorations,
and at the end of all our explorings,
Will be to arrive where we began
And to know the place for the first time.*

— T. S. ELIOT

Calling It a Day



The walk back to the car was timeless. If asked, Larry wouldn't have been able to remember a single thing except that he somehow ended up next to his SUV with his dog standing by his side, tail wagging.

"Howya doin', pardner?" Zeus asked, looking up at his master, giving it his best John Wayne drawl.

"Is that really you?"

"This is truly a Kodak moment lost. Your very first sentence and no camera! What's a poor dog to do?"

"My God, this is nuts. I'm going bonkers!" Larry said to no one in particular.

Zeus gave no reply and simply jumped into the car the instant Larry opened the door. He promptly scampered into the back and curled into his blankie, just the way he always did. Larry slid into the front seat and stared. "So help me, I'm going crazy!"

After a few minutes, regaining a semblance of composure, he turned to the back of the car. "Okay, let's say this is really happening. What's with the cowboy twang?"

"It makes me feel a part of history. Both this place's and mine. You noticed how easy it was to disappear from sight among all the rock outcroppings? I know you did because I caught some of your thoughts about it as we were walking. The place where we were is called Hidden Valley because it can't

easily be seen from anywhere. That's why cattle rustlers used it back in the 1880s. Since I was orphaned myself, and I am a dog, I adopted the song 'Get Along Little Dogies' as my personal theme." Zeus began to sing the cowboy ditty, amused at the thought of being a doggie-dogie.

"You can read my thoughts?" Larry blurted.

"Of course I can read your thoughts. I told you that earlier. You don't have to shout at me. I can hear your mind just fine. In fact, I can generally make out what you are thinking even before you know it yourself. When you hear me talking, you're doing the same thing. The only difference is I project to you. You couldn't handle free access to my mind. My sense of smell alone would put you out for a week!"

"You mean you know everything I've been thinking?"

"Yep. Everything from the time you sent the first e-mail to Lucy. She read me your reply, I tuned in and telepathically let her know you were the one. She's a very gifted intuitive, so I didn't have to use words. In her mind, she just knew."

"Everything?"

"Oh, give it a rest, already. Start the car. We both need a break," said Zeus.

"Where's the park map? I need to find a campsite before it gets any darker."

"Forget the camping business. You're as much a boy scout as I am about to win Westminster Best of Show, if you care to remember the immortal words of Dr. Do-little when you got me my shots. What you need is a hot bath, a soft bed, and dropping off the planet for a while into the Bermuda Triangle. This world has just gotten much too complicated for you to handle without a good rest. Backtrack on the same road you entered and make a left turn onto 62 toward Yucca Valley."

"You've got to be kidding. Where are we going to find a

place to stay at this hour? Especially one that will take a wise-cracking dog!”

“I’ll take that as a compliment, thank you. As to the rest, have no fear. It will be as it will be.”

They drove in silence, Larry’s mind capable of only disjointed fragments and Zeus apparently sound asleep in the back of the car, dreaming doggie dreams. “Slow down. It’s coming up on the left.”

“What’s coming up on the left?” Larry asked.

“You’ll see. Turn here.”

Larry maneuvered the car into the steep driveway of the Oasis of Eden Inn and Suites. The sign clearly said NO VACANCY. Larry, at Zeus’s insistence, opened the car door, got out, and approached the office. Maybe someone could offer a suggestion.

The office was empty, and the phone began ringing just as Larry walked in. A rather attractive woman entered the reception area and picked up the receiver, simultaneously smiling and nodding at Larry, indicating she’d be with him in a minute.

“Good evening. Oasis of Eden. May I help you? . . . Oh, yes, Mr. Halverson. . . . Okay, Michael, I do understand. I’m so sorry to hear about the break-in. . . . Of course I understand. However, our cancellation policy requires forty-eight-hour notice. You know we’re booked out weeks in advance for all our theme rooms, especially over the weekends. . . . Okay, I’ll hold.” She turned to Larry, cupping the receiver.

“Can I help you?”

“I’m looking for a room. Your sign said you’re full. Could you suggest any place we could go?”

“Don’t move,” the lady said. “You may be the luckiest man in Yucca Valley.” She returned to the phone while Larry marveled at the photos lining the reception area walls. Each was of a different room, decorated as if on a movie set. The brochure on the desk described the fourteen “Theme Rooms with In-Room

Spas” available—an à la carte menu of tempting fantasies: the Jungle Room; the Cave, complete with stalactites, designed by a Hollywood prop man; the Art-Deco Suite; the Esther Williams Suite; the New York, New York Suite; plus Persian, Oriental, Grecian, Roman, plantation, safari, Tahitian, desert oasis, and . . . the Bermuda Triangle Room!

“Okay, hold a sec,” the lady said, once more cupping the phone and speaking to Larry. “You won’t believe this, I have just had a most unlikely cancellation. . . .”

“Let me guess,” Larry said. “The Bermuda Triangle.”

“Why, yes. How could you have possibly known that?”

“Please, don’t ask. I’m dreaming. You’re part of my dream. The script is playing itself out, and I’m hitting all my marks and saying all my lines on cue. I’ll take the room so I can sleep and wake up to find myself in a new dream.”

The lady gave Larry a very strange look.

“Only kidding. This has been a weird day and I’ve been walking around Joshua Tree. A bit too much sun, maybe. Just tired me out. Where do you suggest I go for a quick bite to eat?”

Larry went through the check-in formalities, got the key to room 209, and found a parking place at the rear of the motel. When he opened the door, he all but burst out laughing. He felt like he was in the twilight zone, stepping from the high-desert evening into a lush tropical paradise. It was absolutely surreal, a perfect ending to the events of the day. Billows of white clouds covered the ceiling, palm trees and waves covered the walls, instantly transporting Larry into a fantasy heaven, without the sand flies. In the corner of the room, off to the side of the king-sized bed, was the largest indoor hot tub he had ever seen. It was at least six feet across and more than four feet deep. And he was sharing this dream place with . . . a dog?

“Don’t even think of it,” Zeus said.