

*SOMETHING BRAND NEW*  
*An Imitation of Life*

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## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

*At the dawn of time, a hall of souls was created. This realm safely holds the life force of every living thing until the start of the soul's own, unique quest, which, if completed, will result in their birth.*

*This is the story of one of those souls...*

CHAPTER ONE

*Something Brand New*

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“Okay, you’re a human,” stated a voice from the void.

“No, no, no! I want to be either a cat or a bird. I’ve already told you that and I’m afraid I’m putting my foot down about it,” replied a determined but friendly voice.

“You’re a human and that’s final!” The voice sounded cold and unyielding. Surely this wasn’t the way it should happen.

“But I’ve been reading all about cats and birds,” said the friendly voice, beginning to lose its determination. “I don’t know anything about humans,” it added with a distinct hint of disappointment.

“Too late! I’ve marked it down now – you’re a human and that’s all there is to it!” snapped the superior voice. “Right. Male or female?” it continued.

“I want to be a bird!” pointed out the now indignant voice.

“Okay, female it is. Name?” it continued.

“Err... Fred.”

“Fred’s a man’s name.”

“If it’s a man’s name then I suppose I’d better be a man.”

“You’re starting to get on my nerves!”

“You’re the one who started it!”

“Alright, alright; where were we – Human; Male; Fred,” it said with a huff.

“Now what’s next? Oh yes - colour?”

“What do you mean colour?” Asked the indignant voice. He had resigned himself to answering the endless questions, and now sounded more interested than feeling confused.

“Oh that doesn’t apply to you. Humans are all different shades of the same colour anyway.”

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“What do you mean, it doesn’t apply to me?”

“Colour is for things like fish, insects and...”

“Birds... you were going to say birds weren’t you, this just isn’t fair!”

The stern voice muttered under its breath, “there must be an easier way of doing this?” Determined to no longer rise to its difficult subject it continued the questioning, “Age?”

“Age? Aren’t I going to be born?”

“That’s later – goodness me, haven’t you read the handbook?”

“Yeah – it says I can be a cat or a bird if I want to!” The full indignation and determination had returned to the voice. Fred fumbled around in the void, and then promptly pulled out... nothing, holding it with... nothing!

“Here” he said. “Page 27 – *the soul has the right to choose both form and destiny* – look right here!” he gestured towards the nothingness.

Just then another voice came from the void in a deep and exploding manner. “Are you going to take all day? I’ve been waiting over 20 billion years already!”

“We haven’t been going for that long!” answered the first voice.

“I know that, but I want to be a dog. You do know about dog years?” it shouted from somewhere behind Fred.

“I will be with you in a minute. If you’ve waited that long already then I’m sure one more minute won’t hurt, will it?” The answer came in a manner that it hoped would finish the conversation.

“Look Fred, I need to know your age,” it continued.

“Ten!” Fred had already decided on the perfect age to be if he was a cat, and the thoughts regarding what effect the same age would be as a human, had not been a factor in his thinking.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“Isn’t that a bit young?”

“I don’t care anymore...”

“Alright, I know where this is heading – I’ll tell you what, let me finish this off. Why don’t you just start to make your way down the stairs?” it snapped.

“Stairs? Are you sure? Don’t we get sent off in a flash of light?” Fred had no idea what a flash of light would be like, he’d never seen light before, but thought it sounded cool.

“Flash of light? Really!” The first voice sighed. “Here, you’ll be sent to Cornwall, it’s a fairly peaceful place, and there’s not much there. Hopefully you won’t bother anyone!” With this last comment, it pointed with nothing into the void to Fred’s left.

Fred turned and headed off in the direction that had just been pointed out. He felt very hard done by. He had decided ages ago that he was going to be a cat or a bird, and had found out as much as he could about both. He wasn’t sure which would be the best choice, but was all ready to ask for some advice. However, it hadn’t worked out that way. Yet here he was, on his way to some place called Cornwall to be a ten-year old human. It just wasn’t fair.

He had only moved a couple of feet when he suddenly fell down, tripping on the top step. Down he rolled, somersaulting over himself again and again and getting dizzier and dizzier, until he held up a hand and grabbed hold of something. Fred halted for a moment until his mind had stopped spinning, then managed to stand up straight. “Stand up?” he thought. Then, with surprise he realised that he was viewing a hand, which was grasping a highly polished rail. “My hand!” he realised. He looked with uncertainty at his own fingers. The skin was pale and smooth, except around his

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

knuckles where he could see many small folds. He lifted the hand up from the handrail and bent the fingers, one by one.

Fred followed the hand and saw that it was attached to a thin arm and then in turn to a shoulder, very close to where his new eyes were seeing out from. He moved his gaze and startled himself as he saw the body of a young naked boy standing on some steps that were as highly polished as the handrail, going down into what looked like infinity. Turning around, Fred followed the stairs up with his eyes trying to see where he had come from, but all he could see was thousands of steps rising high into what looked like a fluffy object. He then felt for the first time a strange feeling, which brought his attention back to his newly formed body. The feelings were all the more odd because Fred had never felt anything before. He wasn't even sure if he knew what the feeling was, but there was something going on. He looked down and saw something even more bizarre than all the activities that had taken place within the last few minutes.

"Shoes!" he gasped, continuing to stare at his feet, he hadn't expected that. Although he had heard about shoes, cats and birds didn't use them, and it hadn't occurred to him that humans did until he saw them. The shoes appeared as if from nowhere. Something dark rose from the nothingness, up his feet and moulded themselves into what looked like a pair of shiny, black slip-on shoes. Fred looked in amazement and saw laces extend out of holes in the shoes. They weaved themselves in and out of little ringlets that had also just appeared, and then finally tie themselves into neat little bows. Next, two thin rings of black appeared just above each of his shoes and started to grow higher up his leg, filling themselves in, as they appeared to climb higher and higher. Every now and then they seemed to wobble near the top where the pair of trousers, which were growing themselves on him, created ruffles

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

and the odd crease, as they grew higher moulding themselves tighter as they reached his torso.

Fred looked up, not quite knowing what he should do. This confusion, and the sense of anticipation and wonder combined had kept him rooted to the spot, as stiff as a board. Looking back down, Fred noticed that the trousers had finished growing around him. Now he could see the outlines of different items, again they were growing in the same way that the trousers had, appearing from nothing and then developing higher up his body. Fred closed his eyes and concentrated on both the sensations of these clothes being created on his body and the strange new feelings that he couldn't explain. In a short period of time, the sensations stopped. He slowly opened his eyes again and looked down.

“A jacket?” he cried out in surprise and then stopped abruptly. What was he saying? “How did I know that? I didn't even know what a jacket was until I saw it!”

Unlike in the void where nothing was said, nothing had mass and the whole existence there was nothing more than thought, with communication being only the transfer of thought processes between clumps of energy that were not much more than twenty grams of weight each, and without form. Fred explored his new body, patting his torso through the jacket that had formed over him, and then stopping at the zip, which fastened the front of it from top to bottom. Almost immediately, Fred found that he could move the slider of the zipper up and down. As it went up the jacket closed around him, as he moved it down the jacket opened up, revealing a shirt underneath.

He pulled the slider right to the bottom to open the jacket fully, and was surprised to see it fall apart. Tentatively, he slid his new arms out from it and wanting to explore the shirt that was now exposed underneath, dropped the jacket onto the

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

polished step that he was standing on. Within seconds from the jacket leaving his fingers it started to melt into a liquid that appeared to evaporate away, disappearing into a fine mist above where it lay, then vanishing until nothing was left of it. Almost as quickly as the strange phenomena had happened, a thin black ring appeared just below Fred's waist and the jacket started to rebuild itself once again around his body in the same manner as before.

What Fred didn't realise was that the tiniest details of his body and clothing were still being formed, finishing itself with a glow of orange that seemed to grow out all around him. Fred took off the jacket again, marvelling in the way that it had disappeared before and then regrowing around him. But this time when he dropped the jacket to the floor it stayed there. Fred waited a moment, but because his body and its attire had now finished building itself the jacket didn't disappear; instead it just lay still. Confused because he didn't understand, Fred picked up the jacket again and slid it back over his arms and fastened it at the front.

"I don't understand this?" he said out loud, and hearing his own voice gave him another thing to focus on. "Come to think of it, am I sure that I am seeing it? Or that I am thinking? Am I actually saying all this out loud? I think I can feel my lips moving – but what are lips? How do I know how to speak?" he wondered, reaching up and touching his moving mouth as he spoke. "And for that matter, how do I know what I am speaking is real words?" Fred stood there thinking with a frown as he pondered. Then his attention was distracted by the sound of fast tapping feet, fast tapping feet that were growing louder and louder.

"Woof."

Fred had only just started to turn around when there was a whoosh of black as a large, Labrador dog charged its way around him, sprinting down the stairs at full

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

pelt barking on every tenth or so step. Fred stood there watching the dog getting smaller and smaller before disappearing far off into the distance. Realising that he had been just standing, wasting time, Fred had the feeling that he wanted to move himself in the direction that the dog had run. He looked down at his feet, and somehow managed to lift the left one off the ground, move it forward a few inches, and put it down again on the next step. He was a bit wobbly and had held onto the railing beside him, but he had achieved the task without thinking about it, as if it were a natural thing to do.

“Wow,” he said aloud. “How did I do that?” Then he remembered what he had seen the dog doing. “I don’t think I’ll do it quite as he did. This way seems more... comfortable – I think!”

He moved his right foot this time – it seemed to be the most logical of things to do. He was cautious at first, then he began to move his feet faster and faster. He was soon trotting down the stairs at quite a rapid rate. He was glad that this seemed to come to him quite easily. Maybe he thought, he should forget about thinking about things and just concentrate on moving. Fred was so engrossed with his new-found ability to walk, that he didn’t notice his surroundings begin to change until a bright light shone from the steps in front of him.

The light shone right into his eyes, forcing him to raise his arms to cover his face as he came to an abrupt halt. Unsure of what he would see, Fred started to peer around his arms, which were shading him. He felt a gentle breeze and what seemed like heat on his hands that were helping to cover the top of his head. He dropped his arms further down, while his eyes adjusted to this new light, which had formed in front of him.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

It didn't take long for him to realise that the light in front of him was a reflection, bouncing off the steps. He looked up at the object that was causing such a blinding ray of light - It was coming from high above him. He tilted his head upwards and faced straight into the sun before turning his face away, blinking a few times and rubbing his eyes, trying to wipe the round ball that seemed to have stuck itself onto his vision. He soon found that rubbing his eyes was not helping. When he rubbed them too hard, they gave a sharp twinge as if to say that carrying on in this manner and it would make them hurt even more. Fred stopped rubbing but kept his eyes closed, and as he moved his eyes around inside the lids he could still see an image of the blinding sphere, rolling around wherever he looked.

“The sun!” he blurted out. “Of course, it's the sun!”

Fred had read about a shiny ball of light, which held itself high in the sky giving off light and heat. “*Cats often sleep under the light of the sun,*” he remembered. He could feel a pleasant feeling of warmth spreading over his body, and he could understand why cats found it so comfortable.

He took a moment to compose himself. He opened his eyes slowly, he wanted them to get used to the bright light before he continued to walk down the steps, comfortable in the warm atmosphere, his eyes regaining control of what he could see with almost every step. He glanced over the handrail, which had stopped him from tumbling earlier. He shrieked at the view. Far below, he could see a large green area surrounded by a glistening dark blue mass that appeared to be rippling in the sunlight. Seeing this view heightened Fred's anticipation, and he discovered that he was now running down the steps two at a time. As Fred ran, he noticed two figures on the stairs a distance in front of him. Not wanting to run into the figures, which were getting closer, he slowed back down to a walking pace.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

As the figures got closer Fred realised that they were bigger than he was and quite different in appearance to him. He had come across an elderly couple walking with care up the steps, only one at a time and with more hesitation than Fred had just managed.

“Hello son,” said the man, looking at Fred with a beaming smile as he approached, arm in arm with a much more cautious looking old lady.

“Hello,” replied Fred aloud in a steady voice, trying not to show any alarm. He felt quite pleased that the strangers had not walked up the stairs while he was naked, but he wasn’t sure why this was a good thing.

“Edie and I are on our way up,” the man continued. “We are going the right way aren’t we?” They did not stop walking as he spoke, but he turned his head to focus his gaze on Fred as they passed.

“Err... yes,” replied Fred with a rather puzzled look on his face. He didn’t know what the man was talking about, but he thought a simple yes seemed the right thing to say.

The couple passed Fred hand in hand. The gentleman had a broad smile, while the lady had a look of anxiety on her face and was very frail in appearance. Fred turned and watched the two people as they slowly made their way up the next few steps. They did not turn back, but continued on their own journey, not speaking, not hesitating, just making slow but steady progress.

Fred looked back down the steps, and wondered whether they just carried on and on, or if they came to an end somewhere down there; the couple who had just passed him must have come from somewhere. “Well, if I carry on walking I’ll find out for myself,” he thought. He chose not to speak out this time – he knew now that other people could hear him if he used his voice, and he wanted to keep his thoughts

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

to himself for a while. The old man had seemed to know what he was doing, and Fred didn't want to let on that he felt somewhat lost and confused. He carried on down the steps. Then he glanced back to see how far back the elderly couple was, when...

Swoooooosh.

Thump.

Fred had landed with a massive thump onto something hard and very uncomfortable. He contorted his face with the shock of the fall and indeed the landing, and it was after a moment or two he realised that this was the second fall he had experienced in a short period of time, although without a doubt the worst of them.

"If this is what it's like in the living world then I'm not impressed," he thought. His bottom hurt and there were numerous stabbing pains all the way up his legs. He lay for a while where he had just landed, focusing on the uncomfortable sensations he was experiencing and wondering what he should do. When he had come to terms with the aching and bruising feelings, which were subsiding, his attention was turned to some pricklier pains in the backs of his legs, his head and neck. These sensations were very different from the general bruising he felt all over. It seemed as though he should be able to do something about them. Carefully he rose and noticed that he was lying in a gorse bush. Picking himself up he felt the prickling pains ease so he walked a couple of feet away from the bush to a patch of grass that looked a lot more comfortable. Sitting down on the grass, Fred started to rub the back of his neck and the backs of his legs, which had felt the hundreds of sharp objects sticking out of the bush. As he gave himself a jolly good rubbing, the pains changed to itchiness and

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

then dissipated all together. He was surprised that he seemed to know what to do in order to make himself feel better.

The immediate problems now dealt with, Fred took a long look all around him. All he could see so far were high stone walls in the distance on all four sides that seemed to enclose him. Within these walls were numerous gorse bushes and grassy areas. A large rock stood in the middle about ten feet away from where he sat.

“Strange place to plant a rock,” he thought, feeling quite grateful that he hadn’t landed on it. His first painful experiences had furthered his education, and he was learning how to realise when he was better off.

Whilst rubbing himself down, Fred felt a strange, hard object in his jacket. He looked down to where he had felt it, but all he saw was the fabric, which appeared to be hiding something inside it. He tapped on the hard item bulging from his side and then in bemusement he thumped it harder. Nothing happened, although he did feel the object being banged against his side. Fumbling around, looking inside his jacket, which he discovered was lined with a thick woollen material that felt as though it was it’s own little woollen jumper. He was convinced that it was the jacket that was hiding this object he could feel and searched harder for a way into it, maybe through the lining. Soon Fred found a pocket and with no effort at all, pulled out the thing he had been looking for, which he held in his left hand.

“It’s a book,” he thought to himself. He remembered the books back at the Hall of Souls, which were made of energy; that he had found so helpful before he had been assigned, wrongly! The deep red, hard-backed leather cover showed the inscription ‘A Soul’s Guide to the Universe’, embossed in gold lettering. Fred opened the book and looked at the first page. He read the introduction, which explained the existence of souls and the process involved in which, when it’s their time in the queue

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

of life, they are transposed into the form of their choice. This process is to enable entities from the Hall of Souls, which was commonly known as the Guf, to walk the surface of the Earth - each in their own specific domain, and set out on their own personal quest to find suitable living partners of their species as their would-be parents. It all began to make sense the more he read, and Fred couldn't help but wonder why he had never seen the book before.

He soon became engrossed within the pages and the more he read the more he learnt, and the more he wanted to continue. Chapter two explained the various different life forms that could be chosen and the advantages and disadvantages of choosing each one. For example, being transposed into the form of an ant would give the soul the ability of finding their parents quickly, but this would be somewhat hindered if their domain were in the middle of the sea. Fish, however, can live in the sea and find many compatible would-be parents, unless their domain were in a fish tank, or even worse a discarded teapot. When the Guf was to assign a soul the form of its choice, they were trained to advise of such wrong decisions.

Humans were classified as one of the hardest species to adapt, because they tend to be so choosy about things, and sometimes rather reckless in their tasks. Because of this, finding your potential parents could sometimes take a lot longer than in the world of animals, insects and birds. Fred sighed and continued. The book gave an example and explained about a soul called Tabitha whose domain was on the stairs of a small castle in the south of England. Fred realised the difficulty in trying to find your designated parents in such a confined domain, and could not help but begin to wonder how difficult his own search was going to prove. He read on to learn that Tabitha has been walking these stairs now for over five hundred years, up and down, not being able to exit the confines of her domain. Tabitha managed to learn how to

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

appear as an apparition over two hundred years ago and now walks up and down showing herself as a semitransparent form. This, she hoped, would lead other humans to her in an attempt to find out what she was. If her plan worked, she believed that the more people whom came to visit her, the more chance she would have to find her parents. Unfortunately, everyone who saw her called her a ghost (“I wonder what that is,” thought Fred) and they all ran away from her. Now the castle is abandoned and left to fall into ruin, and, to make matters worse, has been engulfed by a lake, which was created over the years due to the landform in the area. Tabitha now walks up and down the underwater wreck of the castle in the cold and wet - miserable, and without much chance of ever achieving her goal.

Fred felt very sorry for Tabitha and thought her story was sad. He peeled his eyes away from the book and looked up.

“Is this Cornwall?” he asked himself aloud in thought. “What if Cornwall is only the distance between these stone walls on each side of me?” If that is the case, then he was going to have a hard time achieving his goal, as he could already see that there were no people who looked suitable to be his parents, in fact, there wasn’t any other *people*, in Cornwall. Fred heaved an immense sigh. He remembered the voice in the void saying that he would send him somewhere where he wouldn’t bother anyone, but Fred didn’t expect not to find anyone at all. He thought that this was not going to be an easy or short task. He put the book back into his pocket, thinking he had read enough and would return to it later. As for now, he needed to explore. He stood up, feeling rather stiff. It appeared that he had been sitting down reading the book for some time. The sun, which earlier had been high above him in the sky, was now hovering above one of the walls – either it moved fast across the sky, or he had spent a lot longer reading than he had first thought.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

Then he heard something. A distant screeching sound coming from above. Looking up into the sky, Fred could see two large birds circling high up, each one giving out a high pitched screech every now and then. He watched as the birds seemed to circle right above him with their wings spread open, soaring round and round. It looked as though it was a terrific place to be. The birds must be able to have an immense view from up there.

“I knew I should have been a bird,” he thought with a smile.

As the light started to dim all around him, Fred began to explore his domain. “Cornwall,” what a funny name he thought. Maybe this field used to be full of corn, and it was held in the field by the walls. He was not sure what to think, but thinking was, at this point, his hope of making sense of anything. He could, of course, learn more from his handbook, but the story about Tabitha has filled him with a feeling of sadness, and this was a feeling he didn’t want to feel too often, so he decided not to read any more at this stage.

Reaching the stone wall with the sun hanging just over it, he paused before stretching out his right arm to see what would happen if he crossed his domain. He stretched further and further until his fingers were right above the middle of the wall, then suddenly a large animal jumped out near to where his hand had been hovering. Startled, Fred withdrew as the reddish brown coloured animal jumped right over him, off the wall and ran away to his left. When the animal reached the standing stone in the middle of the field it stopped, looked back to where Fred was standing, twitched its ears and then turned back again running off to the other side of the domain, jumped over the furthest wall and disappeared from sight.

“A fox! That was a fox!” Fred said to himself as the animal ran away. “Wow!” he added, wondering what it would be like to run around as fast as that, and to exit the

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

confines of Cornwall, as he believed it. He decided after that it would be a nifty idea if he circled his domain to see if there were any more animals hiding - maybe he might even see a human if he looked hard enough. He started to walk around looking all about him at every step in case he missed something. About half way round he stopped, and examined an object that was separating two pieces of the wall. Fred was standing beside a broken gate, which had been taken off its hinges and was leaning at an angle, propped up at either end and held with pieces of string. There was a gap at one side of the gate, which he thought he might be able to squeeze through, but a large shadow was now being cast over his domain. The sky was turning from a light blue to a subtle shade of red, especially where it was close to the sun, which was now just above some trees.

“I think I’ll continue exploring this later,” he thought, yawning. Fred had never yawned before. “What was the purpose of that?” This was another question he had no hope of answering, but he still felt the need to ask to the air around him, just in case it answered back. But silence confirmed that he was not in the Guf any more. He turned towards the stone in the middle of the field and strode towards it with yet another yawn and all of a sudden feeling tired. His legs were getting heavier, as was for some reason the rest of his body. When he reached the rock, Fred sat down on a piece of grass that appeared to look quite comfortable. He looked around once again, but his eyelids were starting to get heavy also, so he closed them.

“What a funny time I’ve had so far,” he thought. “I’ll sit here for a while before carrying on my exploration!” Fred rested his head against the rock with his feet stretched out in front of him in the long grass.

Some time later, although it hadn’t seemed like more than a minute, Fred opened his eyes again and assumed a rather exaggerated squint. He instinctively

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

stretched out his arms as wide as they would go, and did the same with his mouth, his whole body felt very stiff, and even more so where he had fallen into Cornwall. He was beginning to understand more about how his body worked, but these odd movements to loosen up his limbs were, as yet, beyond his understanding. The sun was shining on the right side of his face, brighter in light than just before, but not quite as glary as when he was on the shiny steps. He looked around, trying to remember where he was and all the things that had happened to him. They seemed to have happened up to an instant before, and yet everything in his domain now seemed much brighter than a minute ago when the sun went down past the other wall.

He decided not to waste any more time wondering what was going on, he knew he wasn't feeling any pain, just more confusion, and that he could deal with. So with a heave he got to his feet and had another long stretch. He walked towards the gate that he had started to explore the day before.

"I wonder what's on the other side?" he thought. He decided to crouch down and look through a gap at the side of the gate. Then he heard something, a distant rumble. He searched around to try and locate the source of the noise, which was definitely getting louder. He picked himself back up until he was standing straight again. Over the wall in front of him and to his right he spotted where the rumbling noise was coming from. A large white thing, which seemed to be moving and swaying, was rumbling towards him. Leaning on the gate to get a better look, Fred saw the large, white object, loud as ever, rattle passed him. He noticed a human was driving the object, he gasped, this was the first of his species in the living world that he had seen. The white thing was moving on wheels that seemed to be spinning very fast. As it was being driven away, Fred read some words on the side of it in large black lettering: Kernow Removals.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

As his eyes followed the strange object as it rolled off into the distance. On the back was a copy of the words he had read as it passed, and a lot of numbers that were also painted but this time in red. Fred leant further forward in amazement trying to gain a clear image in his mind of the strange object so that he could try and look up what it was later. Stepping further forward Fred moved as the rolling object rolled out of view. He took another step just to see if he could observe anything else that would help his identification, but it had gone. He could still hear the rumbling, but it was fading away.

All of a sudden, he looked down to find another step a feeling of pure dread spread over his body, starting with his legs and moving further up his torso and finishing with his face, which seemed to start pounding as his legs started to wobble. While trying to improve his view of the strange object, he had accidentally squeezed right through the gap between the gate and the wall, and realised that he was now outside of his domain!

Frozen to the spot, Fred wondered what would happen. “Would he be sent back to the void?” For over ten minutes Fred just stood still, not daring to move, thinking about the consequences and whether there was a punishment for strolling out of bounds. But the longer he stood there, the more he realised that he might have been wrong. Perhaps it was possible that Cornwall was bigger than the territory he had believed he was confined to? It looked as though it was a long, narrow road, with lots of separate areas; similar to the one Fred had thought was Cornwall, each of which surrounded with its own set of stone walls.

“A Road. Of course!” He blurted aloud as he remembered from his previous studies that it was recommended that cats should stay well clear of busy roads. Although Fred was not quite sure what busy meant he did understand why the road

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

could be dangerous for cats, with those large white monsters hurtling along it. He relaxed, and within no time at all he had decided that this was worth investigation and started to stride down the dark grey, hard road. He had been walking down the road for a while and had been examining everything along the way, and although it had been a fascinating journey he decided to stop and maybe look up some of the things that he had seen in his book. The sun was getting brighter as the dawn turned into morning, and the heat from it was starting to feel like it had the day before when he'd felt it on his face. He looked up and saw that fluffy white blobs were floating up in the sky. These blobs were changing shape and Fred started to play a game with himself. Looking skyward, he tried to imagine that the blobs were different objects that he had seen so far in this strange land. One of the blobs looked similar to the fox he saw earlier as it was jumping over the wall, and another looked like the rock in the middle of the area he thought was Cornwall.

He walked along and down a hill with large trees either side of the road that rose up and intertwined their branches together in the middle. It looked as though he was about to walk into this tunnel of trees when he found a large tree stump at the side of the road. Feeling a bit weary, Fred decided that this would be the perfect spot to stop and read his book some more, so sitting himself on the stump he got the book out of his pocket, more easily this time because he knew how pockets worked. He found the chapter, which explained how souls travel back to the realm at the end of their quest.

*Life's Ladder is a set of steps, like stairs, which reach right up to the realm of the Hall of Souls. These steps are used when a living being dies,*

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

*at which time a member of their closest family that has already passed will greet them.*

Fred paused after reading these words. He had never heard of the word dies, but liked the idea that the closest member of their family would greet them. Then he thought back to the old couple who he had passed on the steps before he landed. The old man looked calm and happy, but the old frail woman was not looking quite as relaxed. Could it be that the old man had come down to greet the passing of the woman and was escorting her up to the realm? He thought that this sounded quite plausible.

“But I wonder why he asked if it was the right way. Surely he must have known where he was going?” Fred pondered before he read on:

*Life’s Ladder can also be used by souls to enter back into the Hall of Souls, although teleportation through portal is another acceptable means of travel.*

*If you do try to enter the domains of Earth by using the steps then remember that the ladders do not reach all the way down, but stop thirty feet above the ground to avoid collisions by larger souls hitting their heads.*

“That explains a lot,” Fred thought aloud before continuing to read.

The next few pages explained that the Realm, the Hall of Souls, the Void and the Guf are all words for the same place. “Why?” thought Fred, “this is a lot to try and

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

take in!” Reading further, Fred found an explanation of the ladder in which it stated the fact that no matter which way you are going on the steps to the Realm, you feel as though you are always walking down. It was designed this way in order to help the elderly and animals such as fish and snakes that can’t climb stairs. The book continued to explain with diagrams how the steps were made this way, but Fred didn’t understand them so he skipped hastily through that section.

The next chapter explained that there are many hidden access points called ‘Portals’ to Life’s Ladder and that these are scattered around the Earth, the reason for this is to help returning souls to gain quick access to them. There are thousands of these portals from the living world to just the one ladder. If you fall, you can only fall down, even if down is going up, and you cannot go upstairs once you have entered the ladder.

“Interesting,” muttered Fred, rubbing his chin.

“Confusing,” he thought.

CHAPTER TWO

*Mustard*

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

Fred's nose was lost within the pages when he heard a noise in the distance, and he popped his head up out from the book to see what it was. It sounded just like the rumbling he had heard earlier when the white thing had passed, but this time it was coming from down the hill; the direction in which the original wheeling object had disappeared. Within seconds, the same entity that he had seen earlier came hurtling up the hill, through the tunnel of trees and rolling on its four wheels as before. Fred gave a short gasp as the object whooshed past him without slowing, and as it was passing he realised that it was two humans in the front, sitting behind a clear shield. He thought that this might be some form of transportation device that humans would use. Maybe what was referred to in his book as teleportation? Or perhaps the large white thing had somehow consumed the two humans. He was not quite sure which was the real situation, but found them both engrossing and wanted to discover more about these beings that moved around on Earth.

As the object rolled out of view again, Fred placed his book back into his pocket, got up off the tree stump and continued to walk down the hill, where the entity had come from, for some more exploring. As he walked, looking around he noticed two birds, Magpies who were sitting high in a tree. He knew which species they were because he recognised the white markings on their wings. They were the same variety that he had decided he wanted to be if he were to become a bird. The information he had read in his handbook back in the Guf was limited, but it gave him enough background knowledge to recognise some common birds and know their names. He watched the Magpies for a while as they hopped around in the tree, jumping to a branch close to each other and then moving apart again. They seemed to be playing a game together, and Fred thought it looked like fun.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

The road sloped downhill under the cover of trees for quite some time, but Fred was in no particular hurry. He knew that he had lots to learn and was keen to extend his adventures as far as possible. He also had lots to think about already and the walking gave him plenty of time to think as well as look around at the wonder of everything new around him.

“How many different living things were there on Earth? What was the difference between living and soul beings? Do all beings move around in big white things? Do the humans know about the Magpies and, if so, do they join in their games?” As Fred asked himself those questions, he felt quite excited about finding the answers. He now believed that his time on Earth was going to be better than he had first thought, even though he wasn't a Cat or a Bird. He continued along, before stopping outside some double gates. These gates were different from the ones he had seen before, and they were wide open. Beyond them, Fred saw a large garden with freshly cut grass leading up to a large stone building. The ground looked different to the field he had landed in. Someone or something had been looking after this land.

“Human dwellings,” he muttered. “Houses, I think they're called?”

Fred felt excited and walked up a driveway at the side of the lawn. The neatly kept plot of land was bordered on four sides by large hedges, filled with foliage and a couple of large trees. To his left he noticed another large rock, not as big as the one in the field he had landed in, which had been placed in the middle of an area of grass. This time however, the short grass had been cut right up to the base of the rock in a very neat manner. Fred stopped to admire the ordered garden but was startled when a man appeared from behind the rock, and Fred's excitement grew at seeing the man; another human being. The man was bending down to the grass and pulling up little plants out with his hands, then standing upright, looking around at the lawn, and then

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

bending back down to pull up some more little plants that were scattered around the grassy area. Every time he captured a plant he placed it into a bag, which was tied around his waist.

“This is funny behaviour,” thought Fred, who watched intently.

The man looked almost as old as the one he had seen walking up (or down) Life’s Ladder, but there seemed to be something different about his head. After a few seconds, he realised that the man’s head wasn’t covered in hair like the first he’d seen. Instead, this man’s head was the same as the rest of his skin. Fred raised his hand to his own head and felt a mass of hair. “It must have been caused by some kind of accident,” Fred thought. The man was wearing blue trousers and a heavy sweater, which seemed a lot thicker than Fred’s jacket, and reached higher up the man’s neck.

“George... your tea’s ready!” said a voice from the house.

“Coming Alice.” replied the old man. He had a warm tone in his voice, and Fred felt strangely drawn to him.

“I’ll just shut the gate.”

Fred started to walk towards the house; he wanted to take a closer look at the other human, which appeared to be called Alice. As he reached the doorway where the voice had come from, he stopped. He felt somewhat apprehensive about allowing himself to get too close to these people without knowing too much about them, but he also knew that he would be able to learn a tremendous amount from them – so what was the harm?

Behind him, Fred heard the footsteps of George as he walked across the front of the house and to the gates that separated it from the road. Turning and watching the man and how he moved the gates into position, Fred wondered if he should try and introduce himself, but just as this thought was swilling around his head, Alice walked

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

right through him with a bag in her hand, appearing out of the front of Fred, who suddenly felt a wettened feeling all through his body. Alice stopped and gave a shudder, almost dropping the bag in her hand. Fred understood how she felt and returned the gesture involuntarily. Feeling spooked by what had just happened he ran past Alice. He wanted to get away from her, so that it didn't happen again. Once out of range he glanced back to see Alice placing the bag into a cylindrical black object with a lid on it. Alice and George then went inside the house, shutting the door behind them.

“I really didn't like that!” said Fred to himself under his breath. He had discovered yet another new experience, which he did not like. Somehow, he felt cold and drained of energy. He turned on his heels and walked further into the garden where he wandered around the stone in the centre for a while as he caught back his breath, which seemed to have been taken away when Alice walked through him.

As he recovered, he noticed small, dark pit marks in the grass made by George when he had captured the plants that he'd then collected. Following them with his feet he soon found that he was wandering around the edge of the lawn, where the foliage met the grass. When he was aligned with the side of the house, Fred paused when he thought he heard something. He turned and gazed towards the direction where he thought he heard the sound. He stood very still and stared at the base of a tree where it seemed the noise was coming from, straining his ears and trying to hear what the sound was. However, the strange noise had stopped as abruptly as it had started and now all he could hear was the odd bird or rustling in the foliage when the breeze caught the branches. He stepped over the neat border where the grass changed with the line of trees and walked towards the one with light green leaves that reached down to the ground on long, thin branches. He was admiring the gentle droop of the slender

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

boughts when he heard the sound again. It seemed like a very soft voice, a whimper, maybe.

Fred crept under the leaves and branches in towards the centre of the tree, and there, propped up against the trunk, was a small baby. It was clothed in an all-in-one but rather tatty greeny-coloured suit, half-asleep but whimpering. He stepped closer to get a better view, wondering to himself why someone would leave such a small baby here all alone. As he approached to within a couple of feet, the baby startled itself awake and stared right into Fred's eyes.

"So, you can see me then," whispered Fred to the small person. He noticed that there was a faint orange glow emanating from all round the young child. The faint light shone even through its clothing, as if it were reflecting the sun from the inside.

"What is your name?" Fred asked.

"Dadda," replied the baby. "Dadda!"

"Alright Dadda. What are you doing here?" Fred asked in a soft and gentle voice, holding out his hand towards the child as if he were greeting it.

"Dadda," the baby spoke again, reaching out its own hand and grabbing hold of Fred's littlest finger. Startled by the baby's touch, Fred pulled his hand back, snatching it away from the little fingers before they could get a proper grip. He was unsure what to make of this thing, and the hand glowed eerily.

Fred sat back on the grass, a short distance from the child, and looked at it, "how can you see and touch me and yet that other person couldn't?" he asked himself.

The baby squirmed around on its bottom and tried to pull itself up using the trunk of the tree to keep its balance. It wriggled and stretched until it was standing upright, leaning against the bark. Then it reached out towards Fred and took a step forwards, letting go of the trunk. The baby wobbled, then regained its balance before

wobbling again and falling on its back, just avoiding hitting its head on the main part of the tree.

While the baby continued to wriggle on the ground, trying to sit itself back up, Fred noticed that the fabric of the baby's garment was worn through in places, and the soles of its feet were showing through. Fred could see something on the sole of the baby's left foot. Reaching forward and deciding that he could touch this small human, Fred grabbed the baby's ankle and held it still so that he could have a closer look.

"Type: Human. Gender: Male. Name: Mustard. Age: 1. Domain: Gunwalloe."

Fred read aloud.

"You're a soul like me, aren't you?" he called out.

"Dadda," was the response.

"Can't you say anything else?" Fred requested, knowing for some reason it would be futile.

"Dadda."

Fred propped the baby back up against the tree trunk and placed himself back down next to the child. His face had contorted itself into what could be described as a frown.

"If you've got your details written on the sole of your foot, then I wonder if..."

Fred said, thinking aloud. He untied the lace of his left shoe, which pulled apart when he tugged at one end; he slipped the shoe off, placing it on the ground next to where he sat. He then pulled off the sock, which until now he didn't know he was wearing, and lifted his foot up, resting it on his right leg to have a look.

"Type: Human. Gender: Male. Name: Fred. Age: 10. Domain: Cornwall."

The words were written clearly in black writing on the sole of his foot, with a straight black line underneath. Fred tried to rub the writing off but even with a bit of

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

spit and some hard rubbing using his sock he didn't manage to make any difference. He frowned while deep in thought, taking his sock again and sliding it back over his bare foot, then the shoe, which he slid into. He stopped for a moment and looked at the laces.

“This could be a problem,” he thought. He had never tied a knot before, but now was not the best time to start learning so he just tucked the loose ends back into the sides of the shoe. “What should I do now?” he thought. “And why do I need to have all my details written on the sole of my foot? And who put them there, anyway?”

“Well, at least I know your name,” Fred said turning again to face the young child.

“Dadda,” Mustard replied.

Fred sat there thinking for a couple of minutes before deciding to resort to his handbook. It didn't take long for him to find the passage that dealt with the ‘Soul Markings’. He started to read the passage aloud.

*The Soul Markings are permanent inscriptions written by the keeper of souls, and are placed on the sole of the soul when it is sent to Earth. These markings are made for creation and tracking purposes and cannot be removed under any circumstances.*

*All markings are written with a permanent pencil, which can be used to add extra descriptive information. The soul will take on the form of whatever is written on the sole of their left foot.*

Fred continued to read on, but soon realised that he already had all the relevant information. He now knew why the markings were there, and that he could not do

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

anything about rubbing them out. He looked at a series of diagrams, which showed how the pencil could be used to add further details to the soul markings, but these were no use without a pencil. Having checked all his pockets, Fred knew that he did not have one of those.

“Well, what shall we do now?” he muttered as he continued to flick through the book for something that would help him answer his question, but he also knew deep down that the solution was not going to be found that easily. He felt as though he had already done so much and discovered so many new things for himself. He also felt that he still did not have a clue where he was going or what he was doing. Now he seemed to have a small baby to deal with. He couldn’t leave Mustard where he was, although he did look as though he had been there for some time already. Fred’s mind was overloaded with questions and problems, and his trusty handbook had been his only source of real information so far; he wished there was a chapter on troubleshooting!

Then Fred accidentally turned to a page marked: *How to conjure up material objects from the Guf Stores.*

“What are the Guf Stores?” he asked himself aloud; then read on.

*If you need an object from the Guf Stores to aid in your quest then use the following procedure:*

- 1.) *Close your eyes.*
- 2.) *Think about the item you require.*
- 3.) *Look in your clothes for the desired item.*

*The item will only appear in your possession if it is available and the soul has the required credits.*

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

*Warning: Do not ask for objects if you are not wearing any clothes, because the item can materialise inside the body.*

Fred stopped reading and slammed the book closed. He didn't know what credits were, but he didn't think too hard on that bit.

“Wow! This could be good!” said Fred with excitement. His mind now began to fill with items he had heard of and would love to learn more about. “I could get myself a cat!” he exclaimed. “They didn't say I couldn't *own* one – only that I couldn't *be* one!” He would have liked to have thought about things that he would find useful or entertaining, but he stopped there, his mind had to try and work out what he could do under the current situation. He wasn't sure if Mustard wanted to be a baby. It seemed pretty unlikely but then he was asked in the Guf what age he wanted to be, so why would he have chosen one? Having said that Fred himself didn't even want to be a human, and yet he was in a human body, even after complaining, so it was plausible that Mustard didn't want to be in that form. He pondered for a bit before making up his mind that something had to be done.

“Okay... First things first,” he looked at Mustard, who by this time was starting to doze off, using Fred's upper leg as a pillow. “Some new clothes for you at least!” What had seemed like such a good idea put Fred onto another train of thought. Of course, he could get Mustard some new clothes, but the problem still remained – he had a baby to care for and he had no idea how to do this. Mustard fell fast asleep and dribbled onto Fred's leg. Fred sat quite still so as not to wake the baby (although he wasn't at all sure he liked the idea of being dribbled on) and thought hard about his situation over and over again, trying to find a solution.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“The soul markings can be added to!” he exclaimed loudly and quite abruptly, waking Mustard up instantly. “If I can conjure up a permanent pencil, then I can add some more details to your foot!” he added in the same excited tone. Mustard, rolled off his leg in the outburst, lay down on his back and looked up at Fred’s face. It was as if he knew that something important had been realised and would really like to have said “Good idea!” Fred rose to his feet and composed himself for a second.

Closing his eyes, He muttered “Permanent Pencil, Permanent Pencil,” as the diagram of the pencil from the book flashed past his eyes. Then, with no sound, he felt a plopping feeling, as something seemed to drop into the pocket in his jacket where he had kept his book. With great caution, Fred reached a hand into his pocket.

“Yes!” Fred yelled with delight, pulling out a pencil from his pocket, “Yes!” Fred dropped to his knees in front of Mustard’s feet, lifted up his foot by the ankle and using the pencil added a ‘1’ after the age statement so that it read: *Age: 11*.

Neither of them had to wait for something to happen. As Fred watched Mustard with analytical eyes, he noticed a red spot appear on the top of the child’s head. The redness grew larger with every second. Then, as Fred stood back and watched in amazement he saw the red patch sweep its way down from the top of Mustard’s head. As the redness travelled right down his body, his body seemed to vanish behind it as if he were being gradually devoured. Mustard didn’t seem to realise that anything was happening at first, and after Mustard’s head had disappeared it was impossible to see if anything had started to register in the infant’s mind.

Mustard’s body had disappeared as if finely sliced and removed; Fred began to wonder if he had made a terrible mistake. Fred had seen every part of the human child’s body from the inside as the redness, which was the only way he would have described it, ate away the young soul body. Just a thin slice was now left on the

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

ground as the soles of the child's feet remained on the grass, still emanating a light orange glow. Then, the right sole disappeared too, leaving just the thin shape of what had been Mustard's left foot. The sole, which once helped to support a whole body, started to shudder and jolt backwards and forwards as Fred noticed that it was beginning to grow larger.

Growing again, as if from nothing the sole of Mustard's left foot enlarged. Once the sole had reached about the size of Fred's own foot, it stopped shuddering and shaking. It stayed still for a couple of seconds, and then, as Fred had half expected at this point, a new larger body started to grow, starting as the other had finished. Firstly the sole of a right foot materialised and then followed by feet, ankles and legs growing up Mustard's new body. He was now a lot larger than before, in fact, larger than Fred. In the same amount of time that it had taken to vanish, Mustard's body was complete, although like Fred was at first, naked.

"Wow!" cried Fred.

"Good, isn't it?" Replied Mustard in a casual voice. He was beaming all over his face. Mustard's clothes had already started to grow around him. Both boys looked on with anticipation to see what attire he would end up with. Fred remembered the feelings of his own clothes as they grew on his body. He remembered that he hadn't been able to choose his clothes the way that he should have made the other choices that began his existence on Earth, but the clothes had somehow seemed right. Maybe he had seen them in a picture during his reading, or maybe there was just a natural awareness of what he should wear.

Mustard had this awareness too; white training shoes were the first items, with what looked like dark grey socks hiding inside. Long black trousers then ran

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

themselves up Mustard's legs, and finally a maroon and black striped Rugby shirt. He picked himself up and stood next to Fred, facing him.

"Cheers mate," said Mustard, a large grin filling his face. "Flippin' brilliant!" he added, admiring himself.

"How long had you been a baby?" Fred asked.

"Nearly a hundred Earth years now," replied Mustard looking up and connecting eyes with Fred.

"What's an Earth year?"

"You haven't been reading your book have you?" Mustard asked, but without waiting for an answer he continued. "An Earth day is the time it takes for the sun to circle around the world. A year is three hundred and sixty something days!"

"Blimey," said Fred, not understanding what was being said, but he did think it sounded like a long time. He had seen the sun, and knew a bit about Earth, but the idea of one moving around the other was difficult to comprehend. First impressions led Fred to believe that Mustard was very clever indeed.

"If you look through this tree, you can see the sun, which looks about three quarters round the sky," Mustard continued to explain. "When it sets we all fall asleep through the night and we wake up again when the sun gets back up there again."

"Night?" interrupted Fred.

"Night time is when the sun has disappeared around the other side of the Earth, and everything becomes dark," Mustard explained. "When we are sleeping, the glow you see around us fades, so that the living people can't see it, because they can when it's dark you know... only time they can see us."

"Right, I understand. But my glow isn't as bright as yours?" Said Fred with a slight bemusement and even disappointment in his voice. Mustard sounded very wise,

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

and he was certainly very talkative. Fred hadn't spoken half as much since landing on Earth but was enjoying someone being there talking to him, and was in awe of this person Mustard, whom he thought he could learn a lot of new things from. As long as Mustard explained things so they made sense.

"It is, you can't see your own glow as well as you can see everyone else's," answered Mustard. "Unless, of course, you find your future parents and stand next to them, then you glow red all over and you get sent away so that you can be born," he continued with a glint in his eye. Everything all seemed so matter of fact to Mustard. He must have done loads of reading before he came down to Earth, Fred thought just standing rooted to the spot with his mouth hanging wide open. He, on the other hand, had obviously not been researching enough.

"Funny times are when there's an eclipse of the sun," Mustard carried on rambling. "You know - when the moon moves in front of the sun during the daytime," he explained, noticing Fred's bemused expression. "All the living humans see an orange glow all over the land and think it's the effect of the sun being blocked by the moon," he carried on. "Actually it's the light of all us souls, glowing. Living people can only see our glow when something obstructs the natural light of the sun, and they come up with their own reasons for the strange light. They don't know it's really us. Anyway what's your domain?"

"Cornwall," Fred replied, glad to be able to speak in the pause again.

"Blimey, someone's on your side! How in Guf did you wangle that one?" asked Mustard.

"What do you mean?" asked Fred.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“Cornwall’s huge – you’ve got loads of scope! I only got Gunwalloe. I thought it was all a joke when they asked me all those silly questions,” Mustard stated with an amused tone.

“How big is Gunwalloe, then?” Fred asked.

“Put it this way, you can probably fit a thousand Gunwalloe’s into Cornwall, and still have room for the beaches!” Mustard replied in a knowing voice.

“Beaches?” said Fred, bemused again. He still had so much to learn.

“You haven’t been there yet?” asked Mustard getting to his feet. “Right then - last one there’s a Muppet!”

Fred had no clue what on earth Mustard was talking about. He had felt ignorant enough before, when he had been exploring on his own. Now he had met Mustard, he realised just how much information he didn’t know in comparison to him. At the same time he didn’t want to look as though he didn’t know what was happening, so he followed him across the grass and right through the closed gates as if they weren’t even there, which was a strange sensation in itself. Fred could see that Mustard knew what he was doing because he didn’t pause, and after looking back at the gates that he’d just passed through, he ran after the new eleven year old, catching up with him walking along the road.

“What did you mean back there when you said that you thought it was a joke?” Fred asked.

“Something started to ask me questions when I was busy doing nothing. It asked me what I wanted to be... So I said Human,” Mustard replied, “I know quite a lot about them.”

“I wasn’t asked, I was told,” muttered Fred under his breath.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“Well, the voice then asked me for a name. Without thinking, I said, Mustard. Don’t ask me why, probably because I had been researching different foods that the livings eat, and my first thought was of beef sandwiches,” Mustard continued.

“Next they asked me for my age. Well, thinking I’d already fluffed whatever test they were giving me, so I said one!” Mustard was starting to frown as he kept telling Fred the story. “Next I was asked what my location was, well I tried to make up a name. I thought that if I messed it up completely then they might give me another go from the beginning. So I said Gunwalloe. I mean, what’s the chance of there actually being a place called Gunwalloe?” Mustard continued.

“And since then I’ve been living as a baby – till you came along,” Mustard stopped walking and turned his face to Fred. “Thank you! I probably would have stayed there like that forever! I could never move further than a few feet, and even that would tire me out so much that I would have to sleep for the rest of the day. I really owe you one, you know.”

“Can I ask you something?” Fred was so intent on finding out more from Mustard that the gratitude didn’t sink in. “Why was the fabric worn so badly on the soles of your clothing when I found you?”

“I get itchy feet, so I kept rubbing them on the trunk of the tree, every time I tried to scratch them with my fingers, I kept fumbling and ended up scratching almost every other part of my body,” Mustard replied. “Ooh! It’s so nice being able to walk and move the way I want to go – you have no idea how frustrating it is to be a baby!”

It seemed like ages walking along the road, up and down hills until they finally reached the top of the cliffs. All the time Mustard was coming out with facts about what they were seeing, naming plants and trees or birds that were flying in the distance while Fred just listened and learnt, trying to take it all in. All of a sudden, the

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

land seemed to disappear and was replaced by the most beautiful, vibrant blue mass, which was rippling towards them.

“The sea,” said Mustard stretching out his arms to articulate the size.

“Cor! What is it?” Fred asked in amazement.

“That my friend is the ocean, a mass of salty water filled with fish, crabs and wrecks from the livings,” Mustard replied.

Fred looked out over the deep blue sea with awe. He could see the shadows of the fluffy white blobs, which hung in the sky casting shadows on the rippling mass in front of him. He turned his head around to survey the rest of the landscape. To his left, he could see the tall, jagged cliffs stretching for what looked like miles, breaking the land with the sea and receding every now and then to show large areas of yellow mixed in with gray masses of rocks and stones. Behind him, there were similar areas to the one he had originally landed in, with walls of different colours, sizes and shapes. The area of land that Fred had first dropped into was square, but most of the areas he saw were irregular shapes. Some of them were rectangles, some triangular and some were shapes Fred could not identify at all.

“Those are fields,” said Mustard, pointing in the direction Fred had been looking. “They’re used by living people, to grow things and to keep their animals in!”

“I landed in one of those,” Fred replied. “I thought the distance between the four walls around mine was Cornwall. I couldn’t believe it when I walked out of what I thought was my domain. I believed I’d something had gone wrong and would be sent back again.”

“Cornwall is all this,” explained Mustard.

“Wow! You were right – there’s tons more to my domain than I thought I had!”

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“There’s a lot more to it actually, ten times what you see,” Mustard continued, “but unlike you, I can’t explore much of it,” he added.

Fred could see buildings were scattered here and there among the areas of land, and just like the land that they were built on all these buildings seemed to be different sizes and shapes. Some of the areas of land had just one building, and other areas were packed tightly with what looked like hundreds of houses. He noticed in the distance, a few large dish shaped structures. He wondered if living humans used them to serve the large amounts of food he heard they ate. Especially in if they lived so close together. However, as soon as he’d thought more about it, he decided that they must be for some other purpose, which he’d have to explore one day.

Food was one thing that Fred believed he knew everything about. He had been researching the different types of foods that were eaten by the living, especially the types of food that cats and birds enjoy. It seemed as though Mustard had also been reading the same material back in the Guf because of what he had admitted earlier about the origins of his name.

“What are you doing?” asked Fred when he turned his head back to gaze over the other shoulder. Mustard was fumbling about inside his trouser pockets.

“I’m conjuring up a new book. I lost my last one years ago when I was crawling around in the garden. It was a bit difficult as a baby to read anyway!” Mustard found the new book and was pulling it out from under his Rugby shirt.

Fred wondered what Mustard would need a book for, considering he already seemed to know everything there was. Fred watched his new companion flicked through the pages until the right one was found. Mustard bent the spine of the book back, about half way through so that it could be read.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“Hmmm. Oh! Here it is,” muttered Mustard, turning the page. “A watch – that’s what I need!” he continued, closing the book with a thump, and then shutting his eyes so that he could imagine what he desired. He had a very serious look on his face, and Fred thought that he must have been conjuring up the thing he had called a watch, whatever that was. Mustard opened his eyes, and started to search his clothes for his newest possession.

“Here it is,” he said, pulling an item out from down his black trousers. Mustard examined the object. He had that serious look on his face again, and this time Fred thought he must have been trying to work out what the watch was for, but he knew what it was for, and how to use it, and after examining it to make sure it was the one he wanted, he passed it to Fred to have a look.

“6:30p.m.” Mustard said. “That means we’ve not got long!”

“Not long for what?” Fred asked.

“Till Spiritime of course,” Mustard replied.

Fred took the watch from Mustard and looked down to examine it. It was a round object with straps coming out of it on each side. The face of the round object had numbers from one to twenty four printed in black, set in an off-white background with a shaded area between the nine and nineteen. A small arrow, which was pivoted in the middle, was pointing between eighteen and nineteen. He tried not to look at it for too long, because Mustard hadn’t needed to.

“We’ll be awake during the shaded areas,” Mustard continued the explained. It didn’t seem to bother him that Fred knew nothing. But it did bother Fred. He was amazed at how much Mustard knew, and couldn’t help being full of admiration and jealousy at the same time.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

Fred passed the watch back to Mustard, who placed it on his wrist and fastened it with the straps so that it wouldn't fall off. Fred thought this was a good idea. If the books had straps on them, then they could be tied in the same manner so that they wouldn't be lost. Thinking about the watch, Fred decided that it was a useful object and that he should also have one. So he closed his eyes and pictured the watch that he'd just been looking at, in his mind. Plop! Fred felt a scratching of his skin around the bottom of his right leg. He pulled up his trouser leg and saw that the watch has somehow fallen into his sock. Fred took out the watch, which looked the same as Mustard's, and affixed it to his left wrist the same way that he had seen Mustard doing.

"Can you conjure up anything you want?" asked Fred, tightening the strap to a comfortable amount, where the watch wouldn't fall off, but also wasn't too tight.

"Only if you can fit it into your clothes, and only if it's believed it will help you with your quest to find your parents," answered Mustard. "However, they're pretty lax up there, they don't tend to refuse many requests, unless you are on their radar for some reason!"

Mustard walked again along the road, proudly swinging his arms at his side making sure his new watch was in view, even though there was no-one else around, other than Fred who could notice it. Fred copied the actions as he strutted along just behind his new friend.

"Look, there's a patch of grass over there, beside the wall. Why don't we relax and explore the beach tomorrow? I don't know about you, but I'm exhausted! Changing form can really take it out of you," Mustard gestured toward the grassy area at the opposite side of the road.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

Fred remembered back to when he was formed into a human, it wasn't long after that he fell to Cornwall, and recalled that he suddenly felt very tired too, resting against the large stone in the middle of the field. Both he and Mustard walked over to the grassy patch and sat down leaning their backs against the wall, both pulled out their books and started to read without saying another word to each other. Fred wasn't sure where to begin reading, but when he opened the book it fell onto a page entitled *Day and Night* and Fred thought this was a good place to start.

“Right... I'll start with this bit, and then I'll see if I can find out something about beaches,” said Fred aloud.

CHAPTER THREE

*The Beastion*

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

Fred and Mustard woke up at the same time with their books still in their hands as when the time came, they instantly fell asleep and woke up the next morning without even a blink from either of them. Fred's book was open at a page about sea creatures, which he had been browsing through, and Mustard's was on a page entitled: Hobbies and Pastimes of the Livings.

"Do you want to go down to the beach, then?" Asked Fred, while he was stretching out his arms and giving a long yawn; knowing that it was another day by the sudden change in the direction of the sun in the sky.

"Yeah, alright!" replied Mustard, who was starting to stand up already. He looked at his watch before putting his handbook into his pocket. "You know, after a while you'll realise that you don't need to yawn," he said matter-of-factly.

"What do you mean?" asked Fred.

"We only do things like yawning because the livings do," Mustard explained, "after a while, you can train yourself not to imitate all the little things."

"Right," said Fred - puzzled, as he got up off the ground, putting his book into his jacket pocket and brushing himself down with his hands. Once he had smoothed out his trousers he started to follow Mustard, who was already walking quite briskly down the road. Fred remembered his own watch, so lifting up the sleeve of his jacket he peered at it. The pivoted pointer was aiming at the small figure nine.

"Nine. Good it works," he muttered to himself. Fred and Mustard turned left into a small track and continued down the hill. At the beginning of this track was a wall with a sign attached, which read: Dollar Cove - No Diving.

"So tell me Mustard, how is it that you know so much?" Asked Fred as he strode past the sign without really noticing it. "I mean; it was only a few hours ago that you were nothing more than a small baby!"

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“I read a lot,” replied Mustard.

“How? Babies can’t read, can they?”

“What did you do in the Realm?” Mustard asked.

“The Realm?”

“Yes, the Realm you were in before you arrived here of course!”

“I didn’t do anything,” replied Fred, feeling as though he was once again giving the wrong answer.

“Nothing? You mean for all those millennia you did NOTHING?” Mustard halted and stepped back in surprise.

“I’ve read a little,” Fred responded, “I just didn’t have much time between resting,” he added, trying desperately to justify himself.

Mustard raised his eyebrows and hands simultaneously, let out a deep breath, then, accepting the answer in a given-up fashion he lowered his hands back down. “He was resting – for millions of years, he was resting” he uttered to himself, half under his breath as he turned and carried on walking down the steep path to the beach.

Fred stood on the spot for a moment longer. He had obviously given the wrong answer and wasn’t pleased about it. He was determined to make Mustard think he was clever too, and was fed up with feeling ignorant.

“Wait!” called Fred. “What should I have been doing? What were you doing before you came here?” He ran to catch up with his new friend, and tried to adjust the look on his face to one of indifference. He didn’t realise that he’d given himself a rather large frown. As it was, Mustard was so consumed with singing his own praises that he didn’t notice.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“Like I said, I read a lot,” Mustard replied. “There were loads of interesting things to read, and I get bored, so I decided to learn as much as I could. Did you honestly do nothing?”

“Well, not nothing exactly... Like I said, I read a few things too. I found out about cats and birds – that’s what I really wanted to be, you know,” Fred hoped that Mustard didn’t think he was completely stupid and lazy. One or the other he could cope with, but not both! “There were so many chapters to choose from, I didn’t know where to start. How did you know what to read?”

“I didn’t really. I suppose I was just lucky. I found a section called ‘The Meaning of Life, The Universe and Everything.’ The information seemed quite good so far; don’t you think? Mind you, I don’t know anything about cats and birds!”

Fred was not sure whether Mustard had just said that to cheer him up or because it was true. Either way though, he did feel a lot happier, and began to contemplate imparting all of his own information about his two favourite species. By the time that they had reached the beach, the two boys had quite a spring in their step.

“The sand is lovely!” Mustard remarked as he strode towards the water.

Fred, who was walking a few feet behind, mainly to check that everything was safe in this strange, new place, was starting to feel a chill. He assumed that the sand was the grainy material they were walking on, but was very aware of something else new and all his attention was taken up. “This wind’s going right through me!” he shivered.

“A bit like everything else,” Mustard replied, as a wave rushed up the shore and a swarm of bubbles passed through as well as surrounding the two youngsters’ feet.

“Blimey, it’s cold!” Fred shrieked.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“Everything that passes through us is cold. Well at first, but I’ve read you get used to it!” Mustard replied.

The water was moving up and down the shoreline with majestic waves as the two boys gritted their teeth and walked into it, rising higher and higher around their legs as they moved deeper. The liquid passed through their bodies, and the slow motion of the waves rocked them as the chill quite literally went right through them.

“Let’s have a look at the wreck,” said Mustard who was waist deep, pointing out past the rocks, which spread themselves out to sea from the cliffs on their left side.

“Wreck?”

“Yes, there’s supposed to be the wreck of a ship over there somewhere, it crashed against the rocks in a storm and sunk some hundred or so years ago,” said Mustard.

“How do you even know that?” Asked Fred, who was dumbfounded at the knowledge this young lad had.

“Read it of course,” replied Mustard.

“You first,” Fred responded, just getting used to the cold chill he felt every time he touched something (including sea water) in this weird world of the living.

Mustard led the way deeper into the sea, which was by now just over his waist. Then, without warning, he disappeared under the water, without leaving even a ripple in the place where he had stood. Fred, who was now feeling rather excited, followed until the waves were also reaching his waist. Then, before going forward to the spot where Mustard had disappeared under the water, Fred took a quick glance behind him to reassure himself that his new friend wasn’t playing a trick. But looking back, he saw something on the beach, about thirty feet from where they had entered the water. Fred blinked and strained his eyes in an attempt to get a better look.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

The object that was moving up the beach towards him was large and appeared to be very hairy and, above all it had a distinct hazy orange glow. Fred moved position so that he could face the beach but stumbled and disappeared under the water, falling backwards down a shelf of sand that had built up along the full length of the beach. Now underwater he got back up to his feet. Further out to sea he could just make out the shadow of his friend ahead, walking further out into the ocean.

Quickening his pace, it didn't take long for Fred to catch up with Mustard, especially when he had stopped still; scratching his head and looking a little lost.

"I'm sure it's over there somewhere," said Mustard frowning and pointing.

"Mustard," Fred puffed. Being out of breath under the water was another intriguing feeling: "I saw something on the beach?"

"Yeah, cliffs," Mustard replied, trying to search around on the seabed, hoping he would find a clue to the wreck's whereabouts. Before Fred could explain what he saw, a shoal of little fish appeared from beside him and swam between the two boys.

"Cor!" said Mustard.

Fascinated, the two boys watched as the shoal of what looked like more than a hundred fish, swam back and forth, changing directions together every couple of seconds. A few of the fish made contact with Fred, passing right through him as though he wasn't there, and giving Fred an even colder shiver as they swam through him.

"There's a soul!" said Mustard pointing towards the back of the shoal, as all the fish again changed direction. He had spotted one fish trying to swim up to the front of the large group. The fish was glowing orange.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“How long do you think it’ll be until...” Fred began, but before he could finish, the glowing fish stopped swimming and its orangey glow appeared a lighter red, getting much brighter, as two fish closest to him appeared to quiver.

“He’s found them!” Mustard interrupted.

The red looking fish changed direction and pointed up towards the surface, just as a swirl of light started to revolve around it. The light grew brighter and brighter until the fish could not be seen anymore, then the light exploded through the water and the little soul fish disappeared.

“There you go,” said Mustard looking back at Fred. “That’s what happens when you find them!”

“What happens after that?” Fred asked.

“Your soul will be added to the foetus in your new mothers womb, and then you will be born, without any knowledge of the quest you have just completed,” Mustard answered. “Well, of course he’s a fish, so he’ll be in an egg with hundreds of others... But it’s really the same kind of process!”

“I can’t wait!” said Fred. “It sounds brilliant! It’s a shame you don’t remember anything from your soul life though. All this learning for nothing?”

“Not for nothing, really. It all helps you find out whom you’re meant to be with. If we’ve got to be here anyway, it may as well be interesting, don’t you reckon?”

As the shoal of fish swam off into the distance and out of sight, Mustard started back on his search for the wreck. Fred thought that the underwater world was very different from the surface in lots of ways. The most obvious difference was the visibility. Underwater, he could only see as far as a few feet in any direction, and it was also much colder here with the water passing through his body. He was glad he

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

had been able to see one of the creatures he had read about find its parents, though, and he felt reassured about his own quest.

“There it is!” yelled Mustard after wandering around in the water for a while, pointing with his finger towards a dark outline ahead of him.

As the two boys walked towards the object, Fred could start to see what all the excitement was about. The shipwreck was about fifty feet long and was hardly recognisable as a once floating object. Most of the wood that had made up the hull had rotted and broken up, leaving a destroyed shell with rusty metal portholes. At the rear of the boat were large broken windows, laced in ornate metal designs that had buckled over the years. The ship had sunk, burying itself into the sand, surrounded by large rocks, some of which had been the cause of its demise.

“Come on, lets go inside!” said Mustard starting to climb onto the wreckage.

“Why don’t you walk right through it?” Asked Fred, watching his friend using a broken window as a foot ledge.

“Haven’t you ever wondered why you don’t fall through the Earth? Or how you can lean up against a tree without falling through it?” Mustard asked, now sitting on the deck above the ornate window frames.

“No, not really,” Fred answered, but when he thought about it, it did seem strange. He remembered back to when he had walked through the gates, which separated the garden that he’d found Mustard, and the road.

“In the Realm, they have mapped out every static object.” Mustard started to explain, “Well... Not every object because they can’t keep up with all the new buildings and things that humans continue to produce, but mostly they try and keep up to date. Everything on the map is given a mass for us souls so we can interact with our

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

environment,” he continued. “They don’t map things like tea cups or tables, but they do map objects that don’t move too much.”

“I see,” nodded Fred at these new revelations, and this time he felt that he did understand, “So... can you get a copy of the mapped items, so you know what you can interact with?”

“If you want a copy, just conjure it up. But be careful - the map is the same size as the Earth, so you’ll need a big pair of pants!” Mustard sniggered.

“I’ll give you big pants!” said Fred, who was now following his mentor by climbing up the window frames towards the deck.

By the time Fred had reached the top, his friend had disappeared into the bowels of the wreck down a set of iron stairs, which had rusted but were still in perfect form. Fred looked down towards the front of the boat. The deck had taken quite a beating over time, and most of it was covered in sand and seaweed, which was disturbed by about twenty crabs scurrying around looking for food.

“How long has this wreck been here?” Fred asked as he walked down the steps, catching up with Mustard.

“Over one hundred years,” replied a deep-throaty voice from below, “Hello, Laddie!”

Fred stopped abruptly on the bottom step. In front of him was a broken table, which somehow was still on all four legs, with five tattered chairs surrounding it. In one of the chairs to his left was Mustard with a large grin pointing right up towards him. To Mustard’s left there was a large scruffy soul man holding up his hand toward Fred.

“Come on, Laddie! Sit down,” the man continued with a smile, gesturing towards the empty seat on Mustard’s other side.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“I’m Donald,” said the large, depth-throated man who had answered Fred.

“I’m Antonio,” stated a thin-faced man to his right. Antonio had long, dark hair that flowed down his back and held in place by a red and yellow patterned bandanna.

“And this is Rico, the ship’s mate,” said Donald, as he wrapped his muscular arm around the shoulder of the third new face. Rico was a smaller man with short, spiky blond hair and a dark five o’clock shadow. His clothing was shabby, with a light cream shirt hanging half out of his baggy, brightly coloured trousers – quite the opposite of Donald, who was very stocky, well built man with a bald head and a big bushy black beard, which almost reached down from his chin to the table.

“Hi” greeted Fred and Mustard together.

“We’re Spanish sailors,” said Antonio proudly, before taking a half-full tankard off the table and drinking the brown liquid down in one large gulp.

“We had plans of being rich and living on a luxury boat during our soul lives,” Donald added, “little did we know it was about to sink!” he continued with a snigger.

“Yeah, very funny!” said Antonio, rubbing his mouth with his forearm before placing his now empty tankard under his shirt. Seconds later he pulled it back out full to the brim with the frothy brown substance with a cream coloured fluffy head on top, which started to dissipate in the surrounding water as soon as it had been conjured.

“We’re sea faring folk, damned to live in this ship!” said Rico, lifting his head and speaking with some drama.

“Don’t listen to him. He’s unhappy about spending all his days with us jolly folk!” said Donald, patting Rico on the shoulder.

“Going to join us in a beer?” Asked Antonio, gesturing his drink towards the new arrivals.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“Not at the moment thanks,” replied Mustard.

“I’m fine,” said Fred with a smile

“Why do you call yourselves Spanish sailors if you’re stuck down here in Cornwall?” asked Mustard to none of the three sailors in particular.

Fred had never heard of a place called Spanish before and wondered if it was as big as Cornwall.

“Cos we’re supposed to be in a port in Spain not here, living the good life and partying with the rich and famous,” replied Rico.

“That’s where we were off too, you sees, before we hit the rocks,” added Donald.

“Right, I understand!” said Mustard, lowering his head and wishing he hadn’t asked.

“Don’t mind my friend, he’s always asking questions!” said Fred with his tongue in his cheek. “Haven’t you tried changing your soul markings?” he added when he saw the look that Mustard had glanced towards him.

“I’ve just had mine redone, and I feel much better!” interrupted Mustard, smiling to show he could take a joke.

“Pencils don’t work underwater, do they?” uttered Rico in an annoyed voice, perturbed by the youngster’s assumption that they hadn’t tried such an obvious method of escape from this underwater prison, “anyway, what would we write if we could?”

“Spanish sailors on a ship that doesn’t sink” laughed Donald.

Fred looked around the room as everyone followed suit and started laughing. He saw the water filled lanterns hanging from large wooden beams crossing the length of the ceiling. The walls were all wooden with holes of various sizes and

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

shapes, which had been punched out from the impact on the rocks, and years of deterioration. Through these holes, little fish kept appearing, swimming around inside the room for a while before finding another hole or broken window and promptly disappearing through it. The windows were decorated with metalwork, with distorted areas of lead still holding the odd piece of glass together.

“You should be careful with modifying your soul markings,” warned Donald quite seriously through the laughter as it subsided. “There’s a human soul who walks these very beaches who modified his markings to see what would happen. He ended up as a large hairy monster that eats other souls!”

“That must have been the thing I saw before I fell into the water?” Cried Fred, looking straight at Mustard, “I tried to tell you before we saw the fish, then I forgot all about it after that!”

“Short attention span ah,” muttered Antonio.

“Seriously... you need to be careful,” Donald continued, “many of our soul visitors have been eaten by the Beastion; he doesn’t take any prisoners!”

“Beastion?” Mustard queried.

“That’s what it’s called,” Antonio answered, “If he catches you, you’re a goner!”

“Why would someone change their soul markings to be a monster?” Asked Fred.

“Why would anyone change their soul marking?” Asked Rico.

“I did,” replied Mustard, “I was stuck as a baby, at least now I can walk about.”

“Ah yes, but there are some who like to mess about, and it’s never a good thing to mess,” said Donald.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“So what happens if a soul dies?” Fred asked, looking back at Mustard, whom he was sure would know the answer.

“Don’t look at me!” said Mustard, “I don’t know!”

“You’re gone!” interrupted Donald. “Not dead, that’s the way the living end up back in the Guf – Oh No... It’s a release thing, you have to be released to go back - if one of us dies then that’s it!”

This unsettling news took both Fred and Mustard by surprise. If Fred had seen the Beasion on the beach then it could be there when they went back to the shore. Even if they did get past the soul-eating animal, then it would stop them from ever going to the beach again. Who would take the risk of getting eaten, just for some time on the beach?

“Don’t worry. You’re young, and I’m sure he won’t be able to catch you,” said Donald, breaking the awkward silence that filled the room. “He’s fast, but you can outrun him. He’s also not very bright. You two could outsmart him easily.”

“And it’s only doing what its now programmed to do, it’s his new instinct,” said Antonio, trying to end the conversation with a justification.

“Yeah, there’s worse than him, the Outsiders for instance.” Rico piped up.

“The Outsiders?” asked Mustard and Fred in unison.

Antonio gave Rico a look of disappointment, they didn’t want to scare the young lads, but now it seemed as though the damage had been done.

“The Outsiders are a massive army of Mongols from a far away land.” Donald started.

“Thousands of them ride across Europe finding souls that they kill with lightning strikes,” interrupted Rico, who didn’t take any notice of Antonio’s glare towards him.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“Don’t worry,” said Donald, “they live far away and hardly ever come over here.”

“How far, as far as the edge of Cornwall?” Asked Fred, the concern showing on his face.

“Oh way farther, a hundred Cornwalls,” said Antonio.

“I don’t understand why they would be like that?” said Mustard.

“If they eliminate all the other souls, then they have more chance of finding parents just for themselves,” said Donald. “but because they are too busy clearing the land, they miss their own quests... sometimes great gaps happen in the births of the livings, solely because of the Outsiders.”

“It seems stupid to me,” said Fred.

“It is, but that’s what they’re like.”

“You can tell them its stupid if you ever run into them Fred,” said Antonio with a grin.

“Err, no thank you.” Smiled Fred.

From that point on, Fred and Mustard aimed to forget about the Beastion and indeed the Outsiders by trying to talk to the crew about everything and anything, except their possible fate when they went back on land. They had felt happy and positive earlier, and although were reluctant to let anything break their mood, something as daunting as the thought of meeting the Beastion on the beach was somewhat disturbing.

During a conversation, a large Conger eel entered the room, swam around for a bit before swimming into the bottom of Antonio’s tankard as he was drinking from it. It then swam through his mouth and out through the back of his head. Antonio

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

slammed down his pint onto the table giving out an enormous shiver. Everyone around the table, including Rico burst into laughter as Antonio swore and spluttered.

“Why does that always happen to me!” He gulped and shivered again.

Many hours passed, and the light in the room was starting to dim when Mustard decided that they should leave the sailors and head back to land. The two boys were not used to being in the water and were starting to shiver.

“Argh! After a hundred years you get used to it!” Donald announced while putting his hand on Mustard’s shoulder as a means of reassurance.

“You will visit us again won’t you?” asked Rico with anticipation.

“If we can get past the monster on the beach then you bet we’ll be back!” Fred replied as they walked up the rickety stairs to the deck of the ship. “This ship is amazing, I want to come back and explore the rest of it, if you don’t mind?”

“Sure. We don’t mind at all – it’s always great to have visitors. But believe me, the ship ain’t so great when you’ve nowhere else to go!” said Antonio, with an expression similar to that of a father giving advice to his son. “Now boys, take care on your way across the beach.”

“Last one down’s a wally!” Mustard shouted as he jumped off the ship and glided down to a patch of sand below. Fred followed, with some determination to beat his friend to the seabed, but in his haste, he forgot to aim his descent. He landed right on Mustard’s head, knocking him straight down and headfirst into the sand.

“Cheers mate!” Mustard said in a cheerful manner as he picked himself up from a crumpled heap on the floor.

“Any time!” Fred replied as he too picked himself up poking his head right into a small shoal of fish, which had just swum out of a broken window in the wreck.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

The two boys started to giggle when Fred shivered violently on making contact with the fish. It was bad enough shivering in the water, let alone when he made contact with the living, to make it worse.

The young soul lads walked across the seabed towards the beach. They didn't say anything; both had the realisation that the beast on the beach could be waiting for them when they returned. Fred was the first to pop his head out of the water after he had climbed up the large sand shelf that was shaped from the underwater currents. The sun had started to lower itself far out over the sea, casting shadows along the cliff's edge where rocks jutted out. Mustard emerged from the sea behind him and joined Fred who was scouring the length of the beach for any sign of the Beastion. There were dark areas along the length of the cliff from the casted darkness, and the boys found it difficult to see if there was anything between all the rocks. Both knew that they would have to make a move sometime, but they wanted to be as sure as possible that it was safe. The sailors had made it very clear how dangerous the Beastion was, and they didn't feel that they needed to find out for themselves.

"It looks clear," said Mustard, placing a reassuring hand on Fred's shoulder before walking forward towards the beach.

Fred felt cold and for the first time quite fearful. He could feel his stomach churning, which was a strange sensation that he had never experienced before, but knew it was because of the fear he felt towards the monster he hoped he wouldn't bump into. At a slow pace, the boys left the water and made their way up the beach towards the path that led to the road at the top of the hill in front of them.

"Can you see him?" Mustard whispered close to Fred's ear.

"No!" replied Fred, while starting to quicken his pace over the stony edge where the sand met the larger rocks and seaweed that had been washed up to the

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

waterline they were crossing. Then Fred, who was leading, stepped onto what seemed like a soft stone which gave way under his foot as if it were a sponge. Fred took a step back, bumping into Mustard. It wasn't something he had felt before underfoot; everything that was mapped for them was harder and more unyielding.

"What is it?" said Mustard, searching around, looking to see why he'd stopped so abruptly, hoping that it wasn't what they had been worried about.

In front of the boys, what looked like a large area of dark stones and seaweed seemed to disappear and change shape as an enormous animal lifted itself out of its hiding place, which was a natural dip in the ground. Raising itself onto its hind legs as it stood up, and matching the colour reflected on the ground of the setting sun behind them, it reached high in the air, and the boys could see for the first time the enormity of the beast in front of them. Once the Beastion was standing upright, it turned around towards the two trembling little figures that had just stepped on it and roared at them, blowing their hair back with the force of its breath, which smelt of something old and rotten.

Fred and Mustard stood, glued to the spot and trembling with fear as they looked up at the face of the monster. The Beastion was covered in thick, coarse hair over its entire body including its long, thin tail, which was black and covered with matted locks. There were small patches of bald bony lumps that went down its spine, and its head was large with what looked like a triple beak moulded together with short yellow stained teeth running up and down the line of the mouth. It had enormous red eyes, with slits like that of a cat, which bulged from its head and stared at each of them in turn. Its small, pointed ears, which poked out from each side of its head, seemed out of proportion to the rest of it. However, that was not what they were

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

focusing on. Large hooked claws protruded from its four powerful legs, two of which were outstretched towards the two boys.

“Mooove!” cried Mustard, and with a sudden rush of desperation, he leapt to the left of the beast, trying to run around it in the direction of the path ahead.

“I’m coming!” Fred shouted while running around the other side of the beast, whom looked over his shoulder at the fleeing Mustard. When Fred started to follow his friend’s sprint, the creature quickly turned his head around. Fred was flaying his arms to try and gain more speed as he followed his friend. The beast turned its body around, whipping its tail high in the air and then crashing it down on the stony ground as it swung to face the boys. Then letting out a roar that echoed around the cliffs it started to run towards the fleeing two on all four of its powerful legs, bounding up and closing in, its claws stretched out and beak open. It snapped its beak shut just behind Fred’s head with a sharp snapping sound followed by a scraping of the teeth as they locked themselves together. Fred yelped and tried to push his body harder to gain more speed, but the chasing animal was getting even closer.

“It’s going to get me!” Fred screamed in terror as he jumped onto a rock, which allowed him to propel himself onto the path, just as the Beastion reached out with its claw towards Fred’s leg and in a sweeping motion sunk the talons down into Fred’s calf, pulling the soul skin apart and gashing at the muscle underneath.

“Help! It’s got me!” Fred yelled, stumbling but just managing to keep on his feet.

“Keep running!” Mustard shouted back, taking a quick glance over his shoulder to see his companion still running up the path towards him. Mustard couldn’t see, but Fred had orange liquid spurting out of his leg. What Mustard could see though was the look on Fred’s face, which showed absolute terror combined with near

unbearable pain. Mustard hoped Fred could keep going; if he stopped now, he knew what would happen.

Fred did somehow keep running up the path while the monster snapped its beak right behind his head and slashing his claws around, determined to reach its target, which managed to stay ahead because every slash of the claws slowed the creature down. The boys kept running up the path and by the time Fred was approaching the top of the path his pursuer was starting to flag. As he ran towards the road ahead, he looked back to see the Beastion still chasing, but it had dropped to almost ten feet behind him. Then, while looking behind him, Fred tripped on the uneven ground and fell, skidding along the path and onto the road in a crumpled heap.

Fred turned over and found himself dangerously close to the monster that was still chasing up the path, now with an added sense of determination having seen Fred's fall. The petrified boy could feel his heart beating hard in his chest, and his skin all over his body felt cold and tingly. If he weren't so sure of his imminent death, he would have stopped to concentrate on these new sensations, but he had no time to do anything except watch in horror, as the beast seemed to smile while it prepared itself for a final attack.

The creature lowered its racing stance with its claws extended and opened its beak wider than ever. It leaped high into the air to pounce on its prey, which was now lying exposed, bleeding and sprawled out on the road. Fred shut his eyes tight, turning his head away from the flying beast and waited for the teeth and claws to dig themselves into his body. Any moment now he would hear the sound of ripping flesh and crunching of soul bones. Instead, all he heard was a loud thump.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“He’s reached the edge of his domain!” he heard Mustard shout in a pant from behind him. Fred opened his eyes and then turned his head to see what had happened, unsure as to what he’d heard or what it meant.

Lying on the floor beside Fred’s feet, knocked out from the impact against the limits of its domain was the Beastion. Orange blood was dripping from the corner of its beak where it met its hairy facial skin. Fred got to his feet, wincing at the pain from his leg and puffing hard from the run. Blood was dripping down his leg quite profusely onto the ground. Glancing down the path, he could see untidy drips of blood. They showed the trail he had run whilst trying to avoid being mauled to death by the creature, which was now lying motionless except for its chest moving up and down in a rapid motion.

“You’re hurt bad!” said Mustard looking at Fred’s leg and pulling his hand out of his pocket, “Here... use this to slow the bleeding down.” He passed Fred a bandage that he had just conjured up. Fred wrapped the bandage around his leg tightly over his trousers, which were stained and gaping open where they had been slashed.

“Thanks,” said Fred through panted breath. He wrapped the dressing again and again around his leg. He had shut off the wound before he finished off with a knot to prevent it from coming undone. Instinctively he had made a knot similar to the one on his shoes that he didn’t know how to tie, but in this situation, he hadn’t thought so much as acted, and it had worked out.

As soon as he was all bandaged up he arose and took a few steps to make sure the dressing held without falling off, which it didn’t. “That’s better, thanks,” he said feeling more comfortable, especially now that he was out of range from the soul-eating creature lying on its back a few feet away, still unconscious.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“Oi, Fred!” Mustard shouted, kneeling down at the left back foot of the Beastion. “Look at this?”

Fred limped back into the Beastion’s domain and over to Mustard so that he could see what had been found. “Something on the soul markings,” he thought. He got down on his good knee, wincing as he did, to look at what his friend had seen.

“It’s his soul markings,” Mustard explained. “It says that his name is Tim and that he’s a human that looks like an unimaginable beast that eats souls!”

“It’s not unimaginable?” said Fred in surprise, “Heck I have no problems imagining that coming after me again.”

“It was unimaginable when it was changed, of course after that it’s impossible,” explained Mustard.

“Its domain is the beaches of Gunwalloe,” said Fred looking over his friend’s shoulder.

“Look, the writing’s different where he changed his details!” Mustard continued, pointing at the different handwriting.

“Oh yeah!” said Fred examining what was written on the monster’s sole. “I wonder why he wanted to change his markings?” He continued. “Do you think he’s pleased with his new self?”

“Dunno,” replied Mustard. “But in a funny way I feel quite sorry for him,” he added.

Mustard wandered back up out of the Beastion’s domain to where Fred had been when the creature had pounced. He tried to imagine what Fred had seen and felt when laying on the ground helplessly.

Fred got up from his knees and walked around the creature so he could take another look at its head, now that it was not trying to eat them. “Look, a tooth!” He

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

had glanced down at the ground and found one of the Beastion's teeth on the gravel of the path. He reached down and picked up the jagged weapon, which was about an inch long, had a faint orange glow but was yellow in colour and slimy. Looking at the beast, he could see the bloody gap in the creature's open mouth where it used to be.

It appeared that the tooth had been knocked out from the creature's mouth when it had hit its domain barrier, and the impact had caused the bleeding at the corner of its beak, dripping from its mouth and leaving a small puddle of orange blood on the ground by its head. Fred tried to show Mustard his new find, but the tooth appeared to make contact with an invisible wall and flew out of Fred's finger and thumb, which had been holding the object.

"You can't take it out of its domain," said Mustard.

"But now it's not attached surely it can't be constrained to the Beastion's domain – can it?" Fred asked.

"Reckon so," Mustard replied in a puzzled voice. "Hey look, I think it's losing its glow," he added looking down at the tooth back on the ground.

The boys looked down in amazement as the tooth began to lose its orange glow, which grew dimmer and dimmer until the aura had gone. Straight away, the tooth seemed to dissolve into the ground as if someone had poured some kind of acid over it. Within a minute, the tooth had disappeared without any evidence that it was ever there.

"Well there you go, just in case there was any question?" Mustard had learned something new himself, but wasn't going to show it.

Fred stood up and scratched his head, not quite knowing what to say or do.

"Do you think we should leave before it wakes up?" Fred finally spoke.

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“Good idea. I don’t fancy making that thing madder than he already is with us,” said Mustard in reply. “Come on - let’s get out of here!”

Together they walked along the road back towards the garden that Mustard had been staying in for all those years. Fred was limping, and Mustard walked at a slower pace so that they could keep together. The pain from the back of the leg was bothering Fred more than he made out. He felt tired. He didn’t know if it was because he was injured or because it was getting close to Spiritime. The sky was starting to darken as the sun made its way over the water and was starting to set over the cliffs to the west. Fred lifted up his sleeve and glanced at his watch. “Five-thirty,” he thought. “Only another hour to go!”

“Is it hurting really bad?” asked Mustard with concern as he gestured towards Fred’s leg. He had never felt an injury like that himself before and didn’t know how painful it would be, but if looks were anything to go by then it would be a lot.

“Not too bad, but it’s feeling very weak and I’m starting to feel very tired,” Fred replied. Then looking down he pulled a face when he saw how much orange blood had seeped through his trousers as well as the bandage.

Mustard placed his arm around Fred’s waist to help support him as they walked. The bloodstains on Fred’s leg had started to dry, and at least he wasn’t leaking any more.

“There’s a shelter just up the road, I saw it when we passed it earlier. We’ll rest in there until morning. Then I think you should go back to the Realm. They’ll be able to help you there,” Mustard explained. “I’ve been trying to think of how I can help, but aside from conjuring up a new leg I’m not sure I can do anything. I don’t think they allow me to do that anyway?”

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

Fred gave a forced smile. He knew that something had to be done and going back to the Guf would be the best option, but would much rather have a new leg conjured. It didn't take long for the two boys to reach the green, painted shelter. As they walked through the open doorway, they were relieved to discover that it was equipped with a wooden bench. Mustard helped his friend get as comfortable as he could on the wood slats and then lay down on the concrete floor beside him.

Fred thought for a while about the day's events, and shuddered as he had in the water when he remembered back to the sight of the Beastion, when it was just about to pounce on him. He couldn't believe his luck that the creature had reached the edge of its domain right at that point, but he wasn't going to complain about avoiding disaster by such a measurement. In the short time that he had been here, he had experienced so many different things, and feelings, and some of them hadn't been very pleasant at all. The worst feeling so far had to be the throbbing pain coming from his leg right now. It hurt when he moved, and it hurt when he kept it still. It also gave him a chill to think what could have happened if the Beastion had been just a bit faster. He wondered if anyone else had survived a Beastion attack, and thought that the sailors would be pretty impressed to hear that they had escaped it – just!

He wrapped his arms around his body, and tried to think of some of the good things he had discovered in the last two days.

“Is there anything I can get you?” Mustard asked, noticing how uncomfortable his friend seemed. He wanted to help, and conjured up a blanket to warm Fred up, but didn't know what else he could do.

“No, I'm fine, thanks,” Fred answered. He paused. “How do I get back into the Realm?”

## SOMETHING BRAND NEW - AN IMITATION OF LIFE

“I’ve no idea, but I’ll have a read and find out – you go to sleep, I think you need it!” Mustard replied, seeing Fred’s orange glow dimming.