

Theory

by

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Note written by a Gypsy fortune teller at an outdoor café as she went person by person around the table, laying hands on them and playing her gambit upon the patrons for a few coins.

In the heights of the himalaya the modern life with renewable energie sources has come. progress and technology. an ingenieer travels there to help the people with the new energy source and the installation and ends up in a complete new life.

Peter kept this note tucked away in his wallet. It was his ‘talisman’, of sorts, which he would occasionally read and then smile. Yes, he was an engineer, and that the old woman seemed to know this was passed off as good powers of observation or a wild lucky guess. The other part was sheer nonsense. He hardly knew where the Himalayas were let alone who lived there. In this he did not see himself ever leaving the borders of Germany. As to the idea of a completely new life... that could qualify as anything, and so it was also debunked as simply standard Gypsy tripe.

The engineer was now holding the note in his left hand as he gazed out of the window of a very crowded train car. His eyes were pulled to the mountains that rose all around him in a seemingly unending display of ice and snow sitting atop jagged peaks like glaze on a donut. Normally he would have asked if his prospective employer was out of his mind when the interview turned to where he was to go for a period of five years; but the money was staggeringly good. There was also a 30K Euro sign on bonus to be deposited in his account upon arrival at his destination, and a further 30K bonus at the end of the five years.

“What about Yeti insurance,” he’d asked with a smile.

“That’s included, of course,” his interviewer told him without cracking a smile.

“You’re serious?”

“Absolutely,” he replied, “You will also be given a local guide, and a team of five Sherpas to carry your gear. We have a team working the project already, but the need for an engineer of your caliber is imperative.”

“Why?”

“The area is, shall we say, geologically challenging. The name of the range derives from the Sanskrit *Himā-laya* (हिमालय, meaning “Abode of Snow” for good reason. For that reason, and because you are being brought into the project rather late in the game, we will supply all of your needs in dealing with what you might encounter.”

“I see. What happened to the engineer before me?”

“What makes you think there was one?”

“You said I was being brought into this late. I am assuming...”

“There was an avalanche.”

“I see,” Peter replied softly, “My condolences. Is there anything I might do to prepare myself mentally?”

The fellow, who was older and possessing a solid gray of hair above each ear smiled a strange smile. “None what so ever. When you arrive in India, you will be met and directed as required. When you arrive at your destination, you will be given a week to acclimate yourself to the altitude. During that time you will also be given what research notes you will need to bring yourself up to speed. The project manager will deliver them to you, and then you will be on your own.”

“This is a lot to think about,” Peter replied.

“Don’t think,” the man on the other side of the desk told him. “We are aware of your reputation and past job performance, as well as your ability towards discretion. We specifically want you and no one else. I am therefore authorized to offer a further bonus of twenty thousand Euros to be deposited in the bank of your choice today; if you sign on before leaving this office. I can also suggest a particular bank for the deposit this bonus, where it will triple in the five years you will be gone.”

The paperwork was produced, inclusive of a non-disclosure agreement, signed, and hands were shaken. Now, as Peter looked to the mountains, he wondered if he’d made the right decision.

“This life is temporary,” said a voice next to him. It had a British accent and was tenor in tone. “It is best if you do not dwell upon the things required to advance yourself in this life. Only be concerned for that which you need to exist.”

Turning to the voice, he found a very bald Buddhist monk clad in the orange robes of his calling. “And you are?”

“My name is Ben... but you may call me Ben,” replied the monk with a smile. “I am relieved your English is good because my German is very rusty. A sizable donation was made to the Temple where you are headed, and my person was then given a new direction. I am to stay with you for your entire time with us and answer any questions you might have.”

“Right now,” the engineer said softly while looking down at the scrap of paper in his hand, “I have nothing but questions.”

“Questions are the root of wisdom,” the fellow intoned.

Peter sighed, tucked the paper back into his wallet and then looked back out the window.

“Did I offend you?” the monk asked.

“No... it just sounded a little too much like that old television show ‘Kung-fu’.”

“They had that in Germany?”

“The voices were dubbed, but yes. It was hugely popular. Now tell me about the place we are going to.”

The temple was called ‘Leopard’s Refuge’ and took three days traveling by train and an additional five days hiking and climbing on foot to reach. Peter was amazed at the amount of weight a Sherpa could carry. Ben was the guide allotted him by the ‘company’ and a very worthy guide he showed himself to be. He’d been homeless in England and one day, had an epiphany when a Buddhist monk offered him a sandwich. It had been the monk’s own lunch, but he gave it

up for someone he saw as more 'deserving'. It took a total of five more years before he'd ended his travels at the temple, and became a monk. Five years more and he was handed the task of taking care of a German Engineer coming to help. Yes, he was happy with his existence.

During the time they traveled, he answered any question Peter could think of except why the project required an engineer. In that instance, he didn't know. It was true an electrical grid was being erected for the small village attached to the temple, but for the most part this was a simple mechanical exercise. Power was to be locally derived through a specially designed snow and ice shedding windmill. The system was actually set up on a twelve volt system so a buffer could be obtained through the use of storage batteries flown in as close as possible and then lifted during what good weather might come their way by helicopter. Solar panels were also being installed, as well as a good sized industrial generator. The initial fuel for this was brought up by the same helicopters and then later would be replenished by hand as it could. Since the generator was held as 'emergency reserve only', the amount of fuel used on a regular basis should be close to nil.

"What I don't understand," Peter said to the project manager, is 'why'."

"Why what?" asked the burley fellow. His name was Frank and he was from the mid-west United States. Peter swore he could see his chest hairs even through the thick clothing he wore. It wasn't exactly the cold season yet, but the altitude certainly didn't contribute to warmth.

"Why the company is going to such great lengths to bring electrical power to 'Leopard's Refuge'. I mean, look around the place and tell me if there's going to be any sort of monetary return in all of this."

"Karma," the man responded.

"I expected something a bit better than that."

"All right then," he replied, "Dāna, which is charitable giving to monks, is a virtue in Buddhism. It leads to merit accumulation and better rebirths."

Peter looked at him for a moment, stunned. "I think you've been up here a little too long, Chief. So you're telling me all of this is because the owner is Buddhist and is simply looking for his next life to be a better one?"

"That's what I was told," he growled, holding out a thick envelope. "I was also told to hand you this when you got settled in."

"What is it?"

"I don't know, and I don't want to know."

Peter raised an eyebrow as he took the package.

“One of the pre-requisites of the job was ‘Don’t ask questions’. The money is good, and I want to live long enough to enjoy it.”

“Really? You really think that would happen?”

The manager shrugged. “Why take chances? Now; unless you have any questions about the power grid, I’ve got work to do.”

As he left, Ben came in, his orange robes flowing behind him from the draft caused by the open door. “Did I catch you at a bad time?”

Peter threw the package on the table and looked out the open window, trying to organize his thoughts. “No... my mind is simply numb at this point. My grandfather always told me to be sure what exactly you’re agreeing to before taking an offer because not doing that was how our country ended up with the Nazi’s.”

“Ouch.”

“Yes... ouch.”

“Do you have time?” the monk asked, “I’d like to show you one of the reasons I stay here.”

The engineer turned back to him and squinted his eyes suspiciously. “Is this going to be another ‘ouch’?”

Ben just smiled.

It took an hour for them to arrive at the blind, which Ben whispered to him was his own safe place to go when he needed solitude. He’d been going there for some time before he actually spotted her; and immediately understood she’d been watching him all along. He named the snow leopard Marcy after a school teacher he’d had a crush on as a lad. ‘She was always kind to me’, he explained. Human and animal both had their quiet place it would seem, and neither apparently minded sharing. Peter suspected, however, the cat might be looking at the monk as that emergency candy bar you keep stashed away ‘just in case’.

After they were settled in for thirty minutes or so, the snow cat gracefully made her appearance and Peter was immediately smitten. She was no more than thirty feet from them and absolutely beautiful. Occasionally she would look over at them and sample the air. He was sure she knew there were two of them. Eventually the large feline rose and walked back into the tree line, disappearing into the background that perfectly matched her coloring. It was as if she’d given just a teaser of a look just to satisfy their needs.

Shortly after, Ben and Peter, staying as quiet as possible, departed as well. On their walk back to the temple the monk was the one to finally break their silence by asking the first question.

“Do you believe it is possible, Peter, that people could change into animals?”

“No. I don’t believe that. I’m an engineer. You give me something concrete like a bridge you need built or an electrical grid giving you problems, and that’s something I can grasp with my mind. Changing into an animal is something best left to the movies.” He paused for a moment, listening to their footsteps crunching in the snow, and then asked, “Do you think it’s possible?”

Ben didn’t jump on the question as he didn’t wish to appear preaching, but finally admitted that he did believe it. “A legend of our religion holds that a former wife of an emperor, known as Yeshe Tsogyal, willingly became a disciple of Guru Rinpoche in Tibet. She transformed herself into a tigress and carried the Guru on her back from Tibet to the present location of the Taktsang Temple in Bhutan. In one of the caves there, the Guru then performed meditation and emerged in eight incarnated forms (manifestations) and the place became holy.” He looked to the German, “If I was to hope for one thing through my life as a monk, it would be that I could transform myself into one of the many animals that live up here.”

The engineer smiled at his guide. “Especially the Snow Leopard?”

The monk smiled back. “Especially the Snow Leopard.”

Peter did not read the dossier given to him by the Project Manager until he’d crawled into bed that night. What he read, and then re-read several times kept him up the entire night. He looked at the figures produced by the engineers studying the phenomenon before him and compared them against each other and all seemed to back up what the one before them discovered. There were ten engineers in total and each told a slightly different story of what they’d seen, including one who was missing a finger from a childhood accident; and it grew back. Another, sick with cancer, made the trip just to study the phenomenon before he might die. When he returned home he was found to have no cancer at all. Three of the reports were suspiciously incomplete and contained mention of a strange illness.

Somewhere, located within the Leopard Refuge Temple, there was a room with a center section surrounded by a small stone barrier that issued a six foot column of blue light. This column, though it appeared solid, was translucent. It made no noise. It did not move. It did not flicker. It was simply there.

If one were to hold an incandescent light bulb out towards this light, the bulb would illuminate. When doing this, if a meter were placed upon the two polar ends of the bulb, a current was produced. The closer you moved towards the light; the stronger the current.

No heat or radiation of any sort was detected by any of the five.

Now he understood the requirement of an electrical grid. If they could harness this and supply electricity for the temple and surrounding village, it would be the perfect experiment and perhaps advance a theory on what exactly the blue light was.

Within the envelope was also a letter addressed to him. It had apparently been sent ahead and placed within the packet by the courier. Oddly, it was hand written in old school long hand. By the delicate lines and small flourishes, Peter guessed that the writer was female and very old.

My Dear Peter,

By now I am guessing you have settled in and have gone over the previous five reports. If you have not done this, then go to them now and read this last. If you have read the reports I am sure you will have many questions with which I cannot help. All research moves us forward just a little bit. I am hoping you will be able to add to this accumulation of truths.

You may also have guessed that what you are there to study is the most closely guarded secret in the world. I would ask that you help us keep it that way. We have fought hard, over the years, to protect what you are about to study. Thousands have died doing so.

I anxiously await your findings.

X

That day, Guru Nyima personally came and escorted Peter to the caves where entrance was forbidden even to the Guru. Here the holy man tied a long rope around the engineer's middle and indicated he would pay out the line as the engineer walked forward. When Peter asked him about this, he replied simply, "When your time is done, I will pull on the rope. If you do not respond, I will drag you out and see to your funeral."

"What will I find inside?"

The wizened old religious leader smiled a strange smile. "Your salvation."

The engineer was surprised by this, and then even more surprised when he was instructed to remove his clothing. If what he was about to see was central to the temple's religious beliefs, why was the Guru not to accompany him? This, along with the known of two healed and three missing engineers, made him nervous to the point of refusing to enter; but then a sense of peace flowed over him and he felt everything would be fine. Entering the cave, he walked no more than twenty feet and found what he'd read about in the reports. Sitting outside the perimeter wall, he stared at the blue column of light emanating from the floor of the cave, trying to understand what it was he was seeing. No more than a moment passed and the rope attached to his body tugged

urgently upon his mid-section. Angry at being disturbed just as his observations were begun, he went back out to the Guru and was informed his time with the light had lasted a full eight hours.

The Guru then untied the rope, and Ben was there to take him by the hand in order to lead him back to his quarters. “Did you know,” the monk said as they walked, “That the air temperature of the village never goes below fifty degrees Fahrenheit?”

“Even during the cold of winter?” Peter asked. He felt punch drunk and knew his eyes were blinking a lot.

“Even then.”

He would again be allowed entrance to the cave for three days. In the interim, Ben began teaching him about meditation, using their observation blind for solitude. This schedule went on for six months with every third day Peter observing and performing his experiments with the blue column. One time he cut his hand straight down the palm just before entering. Dripping blood as he walked, he sat, as before, and held the injury towards the light. The dripping blood stopped and when he pulled his hand back there was no evidence the cut had ever existed. He also had a distinct impression of disapproval. Another time he took an incandescent light bulb in with him and as soon as he entered the holy place, it began to glow. Inching closer to the light, he released his grip on the bulb and it floated in midair.

“Do you have any idea what it is you’re dealing with?” Ben whispered to him during one of their conversational moments in the blind.

Peter had his eyes on Marcy. Her eyes were perfectly matched to his as he whispered back, “I have a theory.”

“Which is?”

“Only a theory without a way to prove it as a law. I suspect the phenomenon could be studied for years without any definitive outcome.” Nodding to the cat he asked, “Do you see she is listening to us?”

“I have known she was listening for a long time.”

“Then why are we whispering?”

Ben did not answer and they continued on in silence for the rest of their time that afternoon. The next time Peter was allowed into the cave, he caught fleeting sights of faces within the light. Some were ape like and he suspected looked much as the Yeti might. Others were Bear in appearance as well as Mountain Goats. One was also a snow leopard and its face lingered as if studying his own. It was as if those who were on the other side of the blue had finally realized his presence and had come to look.

The following day, the German began drawing plans for an electrical bridge he would place near the phenomenon. The wires would be stretched out and should the correct voltage be found, fed into the temple's electrical grid. He had mixed feelings about his device and deep within his unconscious a small voice asked if those within the light would approve; but he pressed on.

The following day he and Ben made their way to the blind where he was determined to meditate upon the issue. This meditation was interrupted by the report of a rifle and Peter opened his eyes to find Marcy lying in the snow bleeding. Her lips were pulled back in a snarl and her tongue lolled out from between bared teeth.

“NOOOOOOoooooooo!” he yelled, and was up faster than he could ever have imagined himself moving. Running to her he did not even pause to examine how bad things were. Picking her up in his arms, he turned and began running back down the hillside with Ben now hard on his heels.

“Peter, Peter,” the monk called after him, “What's amiss? What's wrong?”

“Marcy's been shot!” he yelled back without turning. “I have to get her to the cave! They will make it right! They can do that.”

Though Peter appeared to be carrying something in his arms, the monk saw nothing. “Who will make it right?” he shouted, already beginning to fall behind.

When the engineer did not respond, the monk tried one last time to reason with the running man before him. “You cannot go into the cave yet Peter! It has not been three days!”

When the engineer arrived at the village, it's occupants were all standing along the road leading towards the temple. As he passed, each in turn bowed low in respect. The engineer saw none of this, not even the Guru who was the last to bow as he passed the entrance to the cave.

There was no rope this time. Peter, very aware of the Snow Leopard's dead weight in his arms, paused only to lay her on the floor in order to strip off his clothing. Picking her back up he walked directly in to where the blue column emanated from its position of permanence. Walking forward, he stepped over the perimeter wall and approached the light.

“Please fix her,” he said, and the face of a Snow Leopard appeared within the translucence. The eyes of this face blinked.

“You would give yourself for this ‘animal’?” asked a feminine voice which emanated in the middle of his head.

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“I don't know.”

“You have connected with her.” It was a statement, not a question.

“Yes.”

The cat’s face nodded. “Step into the light then,” it told him, “And accept what will be.”

As this took place, Ben finally caught up and entered the holy place as he was not supposed to do. A moment later he prostrated himself and slowly inched backwards from what he had seen.

A very old woman sat in her sun room in Germany reading a letter removed from an envelope presented to her by a servant. A tea setting sat on the table next to her that was a very exquisite bone china. The tea it contained was called Snow Leopard and came from a small village located deep within the Himalayas.

Report by Project Manager Frank Grundy

Subject: Disappearance of Engineer Peter Faust

Having concluded the search for our lost engineer, I would like to assure the company that I have done as much as humanly possible to locate the missing man. With regards to the search party, I pulled in the entire maintenance crew and paired them with the villagers of Temple Leopard’s Refuge to form search parties which we kept active for two weeks.

Though no signs of the missing man were found, they did report an increased amount of Yeti tracks and oddly, mixed with these tracks were a different type more resembling a Snow Leopard’s though they were much larger.

I have included with this report all of the research notes compiled by Mr. Faust which were compiled up to a few days before his disappearance.

I have since released my crew from searching, and our work has once again commenced.

Please send my condolences to his family if he had one.

Regards,

*Frank Grundy
Project Manager*

Accompanying the report was a smaller letter written on very fragile paper using a brush and ink stone. Though it too was in English, the words flowed in a very pleasing manner and spoke to her of enlightenment.

*I bore witness to the transformation
Of a body and soul
This was met by
Diverse others
Gone before
Yet still alive:
Living with the mountains
Nirwana found.*

The old woman dropped her hands into her lap and looked out the windows overlooking her garden amidst the snows of winter. She knew the poem was from a young Englishman she supported in his life as a monk.

“If only I’d had your faith Peter,” she muttered to no one.

On the morrow she would instruct her solicitor to once again review resumes and perhaps this time look for a female engineer with whom she might meet face to face. This way, perhaps, she could better impart her own experience which might carry more weight than a simple letter.

Looking deeper into the envelope, she saw a small scrap of paper at the bottom and alternately blew and bumped it until the small piece fell out into her hand. Squinting to see better, she unfolded it and recognized her hand writing immediately.

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Her message as a gypsy fortune teller was thus returned. She understood the meaning of this and was happy for it.