

A Brilliant Mess

(An excerpt from Seandon's upcoming Novel "Brilliance")

We had successfully chased the sun around the entire world for the last twenty four hours - stopping in each time zone for one hour before ending our journey back on the east coast of the USA at exactly noon the following day. It had been noon for us for the last twenty four hours. It was quite an interesting adventure. Exhilarated by my travels and my time with B, I was far from tired even after a solid day with no sleep. We had seen so many places and so many cultures that my mind was reeling. In one day I saw more of the world than most people could see in a lifetime. We hit Tokyo, Singapore, Sydney, Tibet, Moscow, Istanbul, Rome, Paris, Dublin, Iceland, Brazil and Mexico City just to name a few. I was so enthralled from the adventure that I didn't want it to end. The only remote reason I looked forward to the end of the day was the fact that B told me that he saved the best stop for last. You can imagine my surprise when we transposed onto the top of a mountain of trash in a landfill.

I stood in amazement as I surveyed the scene from high atop the mountain of putrid trash. As far as my eyes could see in either direction we were surrounded by mountains of trash in what appeared to be thousands of acres of landfill. Seagulls, vultures and birds of all sorts flew overhead diving occasionally down to pluck an edible item from the refuse. It was an unbelievable sight and even more unbelievable was the smell. I could hardly breathe as the stench of trash emanated from all around us. This experience was quite contrary to everything I had seen in the last day. In fact, this was my first visit to a landfill ever.

"Why are we here B?"

"Well, you have seen the beauty in the world and now I wanted to show you the not-so-good side of the world."

"You certainly have done that. Where are we?"

"We are in a landfill in Eastern Pennsylvania. It is one of the largest landfills on the East Coast of the US."

"Ok, so why are we here and how long do we have to stay? I am beginning to feel nauseas and would hate to throw up the awesome lunch we had earlier."

"Yeah, it's a pretty sickening sight isn't it?"

"It sure is. So why do we have to see it?"

"Well, this is the price the planet is paying for all of the "beauty" of the modern world that we just experienced. Remember the café in New York where we ate?"

“Sure, how could I forget the amazing food, the view and your company?”

“Well, the trash generated from that café as well as almost every other restaurant, hotel, household and person in New York and surrounding areas ends up getting shipped here - to this very dump. This is New York’s trash pile. Lovely isn’t it?”

“Not exactly my choice of descript. B, really couldn’t we just look at a picture of this place instead. I am really not feeling very well and don’t wish to stay here any longer than we have to.”

“V, I don’t feel well either knowing that this mess is here. I feel even worse knowing that we have contributed to it - even if only a sandwich wrapper or a straw. This place is a disgrace to the planet and mankind’s treatment of her. You want to see a picture? I’ll do better - I’ll show you the history of this land - it certainly wasn’t always this way.”

“Ok, I’m all eyes.”

“Good, then close your eyes and listen. Feel what I am telling you. Connect with my words - and the land.”

I stood there motionless, eyes closed and stomach churning. I tried to control my breathing, but forced myself to take short calculated breaths as if to stave off the stench from my nostrils. My footing was uneasy on the rubbish underneath them. The sounds of seagulls and bird cries shrieked out from above. I tried to tune it all out and focus on B as he took my hands into his. The moment he touched me, the filth of my surroundings seemed to vanish. A cleansing feeling coursed through my mind and body and even the smell seemed to dissipate. I no longer heard the birds either - only B’s voice.

“For thousands of years man coexisted on this land in harmony with nature. The Native Americans lived on this very land. They farmed the land, drank from creeks and streams that once flowed through it and they raised their families here for generations. They respected the land and respected nature. There was no pollution, no trash, and no waste. Everything was natural and returned to nature in the cycle of life and natural decomposition. It was a beautiful place full of tall, healthy trees - some bearing fruits and others bearing leaves. Some trees were deciduous and painted the landscape with a spectrum of beautiful colors from their foliage as it died and fell every autumn in accordance with the season and cycle of life. Other trees remained evergreen and kept their greenery to beautify the scenery during the winter season. Snow fell occasionally and turned the landscape into a winter wonderland. Days got short and shadows were long as the sun hung low in the southern sky. Man learned to conserve and stockpile for the winter. Man adapted to hunt and kill wildlife for survival during times when plants went dormant - not for sport. Other animals hibernated and conserved through the winter months. In reward for their patience and coexistence with nature, mother earth returned the favor by bringing the return of spring and more favorable living conditions. Trees

and beautiful flowers bloomed. The sun shone high in the sky and brought its warmth back to the land. Birds returned from their southerly migration to eat the bounty of food that came to the land every spring - not to plunder through trash piles for semi-edible rotting refuse of man. Before man, prehistoric creatures such as dinosaurs roamed this land for millions of years - also living in harmony with the land and nature. Not since a series of meteors hit the earth 65 million years ago and sent the planet into a massive climate change that led to world-wide extinction of dinosaurs has there been an impact on this planet as destructive as what man has done in the last 100 years. The meteors were an extra-terrestrial influence new to the earth that changed the world dramatically. But never before has anything or anyone on the very planet that we live on made such a negative impact. It all started in the early 1900's with the discovery of coal deposits on this land. Massive excavation and mining took place and changed the millions of years of natural beauty with a few short years of blasting and digging. The man-made damage would take millions of years of weathering and natural processes to reverse, if at all. The long time life-rich natural landscape became a barren, rocky mine-filled and coal dust polluted wasteland. The mines were eventually tapped out and abandoned. Some mines naturally filled with water, others were blasted for safety reasons and collapsed into craters that scarred the landscape. The surrounding towns which had thrived and profited during the coal mining boom shut down and their residents relocated. This land was forgotten - until 1978 when, in partnership with New York, the State of Pennsylvania signed the Refuse Removal and Relocation Act. This act essentially converted the forgotten mine fields and cratered land into New York City's trash can. The creeks and streams that ran through the deserted mine fields were dammed up and flooded the surrounding areas turning them into swamp land or "wetlands" as the government calls them. For the next forty years, barges, trains and trucks hauled in load after load of waste - a lot of which will never naturally decompose. It's quite a man-made mess isn't it?"

"Yes, it is a very sad story. It makes me embarrassed and ashamed to be human and have contributed to it." I kept my eyes closed as intertwined images of trash trucks dumping their loads and coal miners blasting and digging and hauling away their dusty loads flashed through my mind. I tried to quiet my mind and return to the peaceful images of the land before man's impact. I pictured deer drinking from streams. I imagined fields of wildflowers in pastures on the gentle rolling landscape. I vividly pictured a fall landscape with autumn leaves of red, orange and yellow. I could see Native American Indians roaming the land to hunt and gather naturally and then returning to their village to feed their families. Their village was made of huts and tents and natural items from the land - not buildings made of metal, glass and other manmade materials. I tried to imagine what the land would have looked like when the dinosaurs were here 65 million years ago. Whatever it looked like then, I knew for certain there was no dump full of man-made trash - textiles, plastics and other un-natural things.

"Keep your eyes closed V. I want to sing you a song. My friend and reggae artist Michael Franti describes my feelings about the land and the impact man has made on the planet pretty well in his song "Hey World. I know the lyrics by heart. It is one of my favorite songs."

“Ok.” I replied as I stood in silence and let my mind wander. B squeezed my hands a little tighter and pulled himself a little closer as he began to sing. His voice was amazing and I could feel the emotion in him. Although I was unfamiliar with the song, I could hear the harmony and even imagine the music and chorus with the absence of any sound. His singing captivated me and animated my thoughts more vividly. My thoughts and the images in my mind turned into reality as he started to sing.

“Tell me why the grass was greener - Years ago I swear it used to grow here, but no more here. Tell me why on this hill - All the birds they used to come to fly here, come to die here. And tell me why I need to know - Sometimes I wish I didn’t have to know all you’ve shown me...”

B’s words rang in my ears. I felt the energy from his voice and the lyrics resonated in my ears and radiated through my body. I felt as though I had been transposed into the reality of the land before man. The smell of the dump was totally gone and replaced by the freshness of nature. I felt as if I were standing on grass instead of trash. I could even hear the sound of water flowing from a nearby stream. I saw a deer come to the edge of the stream to drink. Trees cast shadows from the sun around us. My eyes remained closed, but my soul opened up. My body may have still been at the dump, but my mind and spirit were in a different place.

“Hey world, what you say - Should I stick around for another day or two? Don’t give up on me, I won’t give up on you. Just believe in me like I believe in you...”

I felt the strongest bond with the earth and nature that I had ever felt. I also felt totally connected with B. I hung on his every word as he continued to sing.

“Tell me why on the corner - All the kids that used to come to run here, load their guns here. And tell me why it’s okay - to kill in the name of the Gods we pray. Tell me who said it’s okay - to die in the name of the lies we say. Tell me why there’s child soldiers - tell me why we closed the borders. Tell me how to fight disease - and tell me now, won’t you please. The only thing I want to do is to be in the arms of someone who believes in me - like I believe in you...”

His words rang true - there was no one I believed in more than B and there was no one who I wanted to be with more than him - no matter where we were. My mind left the quiet serenity of the natural beauty of the land and was transposed through images of the state of the world today. I vividly saw gang violence, pollution from factories billowing into the air, bombs exploding in war, trash blowing through city streets and landing at my feet. The images then retreated back to nature as his lyrics continued.

“Hey world what you say - Should I stick around for another day? Hey world what you say - should I stick around for another day or two? Don’t give up on me and I won’t give up on you - and I try, I try, I try, I try, I try, I try, I try, I try for you. Don’t give up on me - and I cry, I cry, I cry, I cry, I cry, I cry, I cry for you. Just believe in me... Hey world, what you say - Should I stick around for another day? Don’t give up on me, I won’t give up on you. Just believe in me, like I believe in you. Don’t give up on me... Hey world, what you say?”

His singing stopped with the question to the world. My mind snapped back into reality and my nostrils once again filled with the putrid smell of the dump. I opened my eyes and looked into B's eyes as he stood in front of me. His eyes were glassy and a tear formed in his right eye and rolled down his cheek. I followed the tear as it dropped from his jaw and landed on the rubbish at his feet. I appreciated the sincerity and gravity of his emotion, but didn't know what to do about it. I wanted to dry his eyes, but tears began to form in my eyes as well. Just as I was about to release my hand from his to wipe his eyes, he blinked and his eyes seemed to return to normal. I wanted to say something, but he beat me to the punch.

"Michael Franti said it pretty well in his song, didn't he? Maybe he wrote the lyrics while standing at the dump."

"Yeah, it was a pretty deep and moving song. I fully understand what he is saying. I hope the world doesn't give up on us. I hope mother earth allows us to stick around for another day or two."

"Yeah, but I think you have it backwards, V. I want to show the earth that some of us still care. I don't want to give up on her. I want to show her appreciation and I want to show man that there is a better way to treat her."

"So what are you going to do B?"

"Well, I don't want to just stand here and cry. I haven't cried in years. But maybe crying for the earth will help in this case."

"B, it's okay to show your emotion and cry sometimes." I thought my comment would console him. I wanted to pull close to embrace him, but he hung his head and kept his arms firm instead of pulling me close. I stood there not knowing what was next for a minute. For a moment I sensed he was ashamed that he had cried in front of me. But then I realized he was no longer crying, but he was staring at the trash below his feet. I cut my eyes down to the spot he was staring at. In disbelief, I noticed that a pool of water had formed on top of the trash in the exact spot where his tear drop had landed. I fixated on the pool of water which was rapidly growing larger by the second. The pool of water seemed to be upwelling from the trash heap. I began to notice that the trash under our feet was turning into water as well and forming smaller pools around us. The pools began to form small rivulets and flowed in all directions through the trash as the water coursed its way down the mountain of rubbish. My feet began to get wet and I felt my weight slightly sink. I turned my gaze back up to B. He was grinning, not crying, but he was still looking down at his feet which were ankle deep in water now. He cut his eyes up to me and said "Sometimes crying does help. Would you like to go for a swim?"

I didn't know what to say. The small rivulets of water had turned into steady streams that were flowing rapidly from all directions around us. As the water coursed its way down the trash, it seemed to turn all of the trash it touched into water as well. I looked out in the distance across

the hundreds of acres of trash and noticed that the other mountains of rubbish had water flowing from them as well. The mountains of trash seemed to be sinking in relation to the horizon. The sound of flowing water filled the air. The smell rotten garbage was replaced by the smell of water as if a refreshing spring rain shower had just passed through the sky. I realized that I was now up to my knees in water. I looked back to B as he his grin had turned into a full-blown ear-to-ear smile. "What the heck - I'll go for a swim with you B."

He clutched my hands and pulled me close to his body. In an instant, the entire mountain of trash below us gave way and turned into a giant waterfall. We rode the wall of water down and plummeted into a crystal clear lake below. B held me tight as we submerged. We quickly reemerged to the surface in time to see the rest of the mountains of trash rain down in the same fashion around us. Each mountain of trash turned into a huge waterfall that rushed into the lake and rose the water level around and under us. In a matter of minutes the entire landscape changed into a scenic lake surrounded by rolling hills as far as the eye could see. I couldn't believe my eyes. Was this real? Had I not been swimming fully clothed and actually soaking wet, the dream would have been less of a reality. How was it possible that thousands of acres of trash had just dissolved into a lake of pure, clean water? The water was so crystal clear that I could see past our feet into the depths of the lake. B filled his mouth with water, gargled it and then shot some between his teeth into the air like a fountain.

"Thirsty?" He asked me as he winked at me. I was, but was still reluctant to drink what I knew to be trash only moments ago. Even the seagulls had scattered in amazement of what had transpired. Several brave ones had landed on the water around us and were bathing themselves and drinking the water. "It's safe to drink - I promise. Safer than the recycled toilet water that cities call tap water! Let's call this water we are swimming in - Brilliant water!"

"Sounds brilliant to me, B. But how did you..." He didn't let me finish my sentence before he splashed me and then did a porpoise dive into the water head first. He disappeared for a moment and then broke the surface and began swimming around me in circles like a kid at the pool on the first day of summer. B continued his swimming and frolicking around me for a while. He rolled onto his back and began backstroking. He started singing again - this time adlibbing the lyrics a little. "Hey world, what you say... Hey world what you say about this? Hey world what you say... Have a drink of some Brilliance today!" He then let out a loud shout "Whoooo-hoooo!" before rolling over and diving under the water again. This time he went under me and grabbed me by the feet and pulled me below the surface. After my momentary dunking, we rose to the surface and came face to face. He had a look of joy on his face which translated me into a carefree schoolgirl.

"It feels good doing good - doesn't it?"

"Yes, absolutely - but how did you..." He cut me off again before I could inquire about the logistics of his amazing magic act.

“So, have you had enough swimming yet? I feel inspired to do something else brilliant. Are you ready to dry off and change scenery?”

Before I could answer him, I found myself standing on a dock in a port overlooking a river. My hair and clothes were bone dry - and so were his. I spun around and quickly realized where we were. The first thing I saw was the Statue of Liberty - then the familiar skyline of Manhattan behind us. I was home. I guessed this was the final destination in our around the world trip. I hoped that B was not going to say goodbye and leave me here. I had no desire to be in the city right now. The “Big Apple” had been home to me for most of my life and I loved it, but my opinion and vision of the city had changed dramatically in the last hour when I truly realized the impact that modern, urban life was having on the surrounding areas and the rest of the earth and nature. I turned to ask B why we were back in New York, but I discovered that he had ducked under the railing and was climbing down the side of the dock to a lower level by the bank of the Hudson. “Stay right there for a minute” he commanded to me. That was an easy request to adhere to as I had no desire to climb down the filthy, barnacle encrusted dock pilings. I watched him for a moment as he disappeared under the dock and then I turned my attention to the busy river before me. Several large cargo ships were in transit on the river. A couple of ferries were passing to the south. An airplane flew overhead on its departure from LaGuardia. The air was thick and humid and heavily polluted.

“Ok, V - come on down here.”

Before I could object to his request, he transposed me under the dock and into the muddy, messy bank of the river that he had discovered below. I was up to my knees in crud and not happy about it at all. I dismissed the thought and excused the mess I was in. I remembered standing on a trash heap and then bathing fully clothed in a crystal clear lake only to be instantly dried just moments ago. I knew that if B had anything to do with it, this mess would only be temporary.

He reached down and grabbed a handful of muddy muck and held it up for me to see. “How much shit is in my hand right now, V?”

“How am I supposed to know?”

“Well, you live here - I figured you could tell me.” He cracked a smile and winked at me to show me his jest. He then took the handful of crud and threw it on the bulkhead behind the bank. It splattered and slid down the wall leaving a disgusting trail of filthy residue behind. He then reached back down into the mud and pulled out a broken bottle and tossed it into the bulkhead - smashing it into pieces. He dug deeper in the mud and this time pulled up a large piece of something indiscernible. He tossed that to the bulkhead also, but it was too large to stick and too hard to break. I was somewhat amused by his antics. I realized that in all of my years of living in New York I had never actually paid much attention to the river. I had certainly never seen it from this vantage point under the dock. I had also never really thought about how much

crap was in the water. I just knew it wasn't a place to swim - I just never thought about how it got that way.

B continued digging through the muddy bank and tossing trash toward the bulkhead.

"I will spare you the history of the Hudson and how it once was a beautiful estuary teeming with life and nature - and how 200 years ago you could see to the bottom of this murky mess - and how you could once drink from these waters upstream before the tidal brackish water line. The beautiful city that you call home has all but destroyed this waterway and made it almost completely uninhabitable by wildlife. A couple hundred years of wastewater runoff, sewage, trash, fuel spills, toxic dumping and industrial pollution has done irreversible damage to such a beautiful natural habitat. The residents of New York City should be drinking and swimming in this river, but instead they pollute it and bitch about crossing it as they sit in bottle-neck traffic on the many bridges that cross it."

I nodded in agreement as I knew I was guilty of doing just that.

"V, I'm gonna need a hand here. It's gonna take forever to clean up the river in this fashion at the rate I'm going."

B extended his filthy hand to me and coaxed me to come closer to him. I stood in reluctance as I stared at the disgusting mess on his hand, arm, shirt and even up to his knees. I then realized that I had sunk almost knee-deep in the same muddy filth. I hesitated, but grabbed his hand and he pulled me free from the quicksand-like trap my feet were suctioned in. I stepped deliberately and carefully and joined him on the semi-firm area of the bank where he stood. He released my hand and I held it out away from my body in disgust. He chuckled as he noticed my anguish over my dirty hand.

"No problem, V. Let's just wash our hands in the river. The filthy water should wash the filthy mud off right?"

I sensed the sarcasm in his comment. "No way! Why don't you just transpose us out of here and clean us up at the same time?"

"That would be too easy, V. You mean to tell me that you are scared to momentarily dip your hand into the water that thousands of fish and other critters are forced to live in with no choice or ability to escape?"

"Yeah. I'm not crazy about the notion."

"Would you rather keep that grime on your hand than to wash it off in the river?"

I looked at my filthy hand and then at the filthy water. Then I looked at B who was standing ankle deep in muck waiting for my response.

“Look, trust me for a minute V. I promise it will only take a moment. It will be very cleansing and worthwhile.”

How could I not trust him after all I had witnessed just in the last twenty four hours alone? I guess my hesitation was not a matter of trust in B, but rather a lifelong subconscious fear of the river. Everyone knew it was not a place to swim and I had never been this close to it. I put my fear aside and grabbed B’s hand as I stepped toward him. He clutched my hand and we bent down toward the water. He kept a firm grasp on my hand as we both submerged them into the edge of the river. The instant my fingers touched the water I felt an electricity pass through my body. The feeling originated in my hand and traveled up my arm and sent chills up my spine and a shockwave through my body. I recoiled back, but B held me tight and kept my hand in the water for a second longer before releasing it. I stood upright and he stayed crouched over the water.

“What the hell was that B?”

“Look, your hand is clean now. I told you it would be cleansing.”

I looked at him and smiled. For some strange reason I was proud of the fact that I had mustered up the courage to put my hand in the water. It was indeed clean now, but my shoes, feet and legs were a different story. As I looked down at my feet, I noticed something strange floating in the water. In the exact spot where we had touched the river there appeared to be a clear spot in the water as if someone had submerged a glass of clean water in the river right to its brim. I bent down again to get a closer look. My eyes weren’t playing tricks on me - there was a spot of crystal clear blue water about the size of our hands. While I looked at the spot closer, B put his hand in the water again in a different spot and when he pulled it out there was another spot of clarity. I stared in disbelief as the two spots grew larger and radiated out concentrically until they joined to form one larger single spot. I could see clear to the bottom of the shallow water as if I was looking through a tube. Within a few seconds, the clarity had spread and was larger than a basketball. I looked up at B who had the same grin on his face as when the waterworks started at the dump.

“Are you impressed yet?” He asked through his grin.

“I was impressed the moment I first met you.”

I took his hand in mine and stood on the bank of the river and watched our clear spot spread more rapidly. Ripples formed around the perimeter of the circle as it reached the bank in front of us and then spread outward concentrically. Its pace grew more rapid and the ripple effect turned into more of a small wave. In a matter of a minute or so, it had reached the end of the dock and was spreading out into the open bay. The wave of clarity revealed the bottom of the river which was littered with years and years of debris. There were tires, bottles, scrap metal

and everything else you could imagine - all completely visible to the naked eye through the clean, clear water.

“Looking better now?” He asked.

“Yeah, except for all of the junk on the bottom. What can you do about that?”

“Well, let me see - I think I have an idea. I’m not going to cry about it this time, but...” he left my side and walked through the mud over to the bulkhead. He returned carrying the piece of debris he had tossed at the bulkhead earlier. “Let’s put this trash back in its place with the rest of its friends.” He hurled the flat piece of trash into the water like a Frisbee. When it hit the water it skipped across the surface once like a rock and then made a splash much larger in proportion than an object of that size and weight should have made. Then it disappeared under the surface. When I looked back down into the water in front of me, there was no longer an old sunken tire on the bottom of the river - nor was there any other trash or debris. Instead, I saw several fish swim by and saw some sort of crab burrowing into the now clean soil under the water. I looked down at my feet and discovered that my shoes and legs were clean. My feet were no longer buried in muck - the ground on the bank had become firm and looked more like regular dirt rather than the disgusting mess we were previously standing in. I looked up at B with a big smile on my face this time.

“What do you say we get a look at this from a better vantage point?” He asked as he extended his arm to grasp my hand.

I agreed - and in an instant we were standing at the base of the Statue of Liberty on Ellis Island. The water surrounding the island was still murky brown, but I looked back toward the dock on the other side of the river where we had been and saw the wave heading toward us. The wave wasn’t huge by any means, but slightly larger than the wake of a passing cargo ship. In fact, the wave could have easily gone unnoticed except for the fact that it was followed by crystal clear blue water. It looked as if someone had released a dam somewhere and flooded the Hudson with water straight from the Caribbean. I looked around and saw that other people had begun to notice the change and the wave that was headed for us. A sailboat was passing close by and tacked in our direction to avoid the wave. A ferry loaded with tourists was coming toward the island in the same direction the wave was heading. People on the ferry were pointing and hanging over the railing as they observed the water changing right before their eyes. Within minutes, the word had spread and people had made their way down from the statue to the dock to see the spectacle. People were taking pictures and video of the spectacle. Crowds had begun to gather on the banks, docks and streets to witness the transformation. We blended right in with the onlookers and, although I knew the secret, I was as equally amazed. My hand had a part in the cleansing of the water. It was a surreal feeling. B grabbed my hand and said “Have you had enough excitement for today?”

“Yes, I certainly have. It’s been the longest, most interesting day of my life. I can’t wait to see what you have in store for us tomorrow.”

“Sleep, V - and lots of rest and relaxation. It took God 6 days to create this world, but it’s going to take us a lot longer than that to clean it up.”

Hand in hand we turned our back on the river and walked toward the Statue of Liberty. Everyone was focused on the river, but when we were out of sight we transposed out of there. I was pleased to discover that we were finally on board The Brilliance again. I had missed her for the last twenty four hours and was happy once again to be at sea. The sun was setting on the horizon - wherever we were now. It had been a very long day and I was happy to know that nightfall was finally upon us. I hugged B and we both retired to our staterooms.

The next morning I awoke and wondered if the events of the previous day had been an amazing dream - or reality. The reality hit me as I logged onto my computer and saw the headlines on the internet. “Who cleaned up the Hudson?” and “Who dumped the dump?”

People from all around the world traveled to NY and Pennsylvania to witness the spectacular miracles. It was the talk of the world and every media publication too. We kept it a secret between the two of us for now. I couldn’t help but wonder how long it would take the city to undo what we had done. One tear and one touch had turned two cesspools into Brilliant natural beauty again.