Island of Souls
LIGHT WITHIN THE DARK

a novel
From a very young age, I found myself asking some of life’s greatest questions—Who am I? Why am I here? What is my meaningful contribution to this life? It led me down the path to becoming a psychologist, so I could understand humanity, the world, and our existence. But the answers didn’t come quickly, and by no means easily. It was only in my early 30’s that the mist had lifted and things started making sense. As my life path unfolded it became apparent to me that there exists a power far greater than each one of us; that synchronicity is real, and that every experience and encounter we have is just as it was meant to be.

The search for purpose and meaning is a very human journey. We must continuously be looking for ways to expand our knowledge, expand our conscious awareness, contribute in some sort of way, and recognize that our deeper purpose and meaning evolves over time. There may be struggles along the way, and the answers we seek will not always come when we ask for them. But they will show up eventually, and sometimes in ways we least expected, and only when we are ready to embrace their truth and teachings.
Throughout our human experience, we will feel both joy and despair in equal measure. The light exists, and so does the darkness. They each play a pivotal part in their own unique way. There will come a time when we must step into our fears to know our strengths and expand our spiritual awareness and evolution. In doing so, we must never lose sight of the light, even if the flame is small and a soft glow is all we see. When we choose to live from the *heart*, we have chosen to live in the *light*.

The interwoven psychological and spiritual insights in this allegorical tale are some of the guiding principles I have been blessed to receive, and have adopted into my own life journey. Written as a parable with a blend of metaphors, archetypical figures, sacred symbolism, and a twist of historical fiction, I now invite you to join me on a heart-warming adventure to the mysteriously enlightening Island of Souls.

Love, Light, & Blessings

Milan Ljubincic
Spring 2014
Contents

Map of Palmyra Atoll  xiv

1  Sailing to Palmyra Atoll  1
2  The Cave  4
3  Edmund Fanning  15
4  Captain Sawle and the Miracle Tree  27
5  The Hut: A Link to the Past  38
6  The Atoll  46
7  Meeting the Gang  59
8  Klara and the Field of Butterflies  68
9  Camp Stories and Games  81
10 Kaula and the Shaman  87
11 Axè’ki  95
12 Life Refocus  103
13 Back to Betsy  117
14 The Scrolls  129
15 Oneness: A Part of the Whole  147
16 Back to the Cave  157
17 The Big Reveal  164
18 A New Beginning  171

Acknowledgements  181
A Note from the Author  182
We sometimes need the darkness to remind us of the light.
“I think it’s about lunch time, wouldn’t you say, Blue?” Blue is my Australian cattle dog. I take him with me everywhere I go.

Pulling myself up from my seat, I raise my arms and stretch. I head up top to check our coordinates and Blue follows. We have been at sea for almost 28 days, with a couple days rest in Hawaii. The ship is a 38-foot catamaran, affectionately named Betsy. According to the navigation system, Blue and I are only sixty nautical miles from our final destination, a small atoll named Palmyra. The spinnaker has caught the wind, so I drop the main sail.

Autopilot appears to be right on course, so I turn to make my way down to the galley. As I step away from the wheel, a cold chill jogs down my spine, stopping me in my tracks. The breeze is warm and the sun is shining, so the chill catches me off guard. At my feet, a faint whimper from Blue. Something has unnerved the both of us. I scratch him between the ears and scan the sea for a minute or two. Nothing’s amiss. Maybe the solitude is making me jumpy. The constant quiet has put me out of sorts.

Blue and I recover from our sudden anxiety and head for the galley. I look at him and smile as he wags his tail.
As the feeling wears off, I can’t help but notice how tense I’d been. Something really spooked me up there.

In the galley I put Blue’s food bowl down for him and take a deep breath, trying to shake the last, lingering sense of foreboding. I reach to open the pantry, and am again overcome by a flutter of sensation. My stomach flips and tightens and my head feels as though it’s about to float away from my body. If a patient described this to me, I’d say it was a panic attack, but I’ve never had a panic attack in my life. It’s weird, almost as if my body is sending signals my mind can’t understand.

I lean against the kitchen counter to gather my thoughts. I’ve never felt so uneasy. There’s an overwhelming sense of urgency, but I can’t put my finger on the reason for it. Almost as if something demands my immediate attention, but I have no idea what it is. It’s like one of those nightmares where you awake drenched in sweat and panting — and you can’t remember why. The kind that haunts you for a day or two. Learned behavior, I tell myself — a result of the usual nonstop schedule I maintain back home. Maybe I’m still adjusting to life at sea without back-to-back patient appointments and a laundry list of things to do. Maybe I’m just having trouble living without chaos and clutter. I take a few deep breaths and recover, again.

I open the pantry and pull out a loaf of bread, baked fresh the night before. As I turn to the small mini-fridge behind me, I feel the next surge. The fear I’ve been fighting takes me fully in its clutches. There is something more intense going on than vacationer’s guilt. Elusive but severe, the slippery nature of this anxiety is taking its toll. The peace I’ve felt for the entire trip is all but gone, replaced by a sense of being on the brink of catastrophe. But how? Why?

Lunch abandoned, I turn to take a look out the port side window. My eyes scan the horizon — a blue ocean against an even bluer sky. Moments ago, my GPS showed that we were still a ways out from Palmyra, but there’s something tugging at me, insisting that I investigate whatever it is that might be causing this sudden disquiet.

My eyes move restlessly across the surface of the water. Then, I see it. There appears to be a reef, or maybe even land, there in the ocean. I edge closer, my forehead touching the glass, squinting hard in the direction of what seems to be some kind of land mass. I see it clearly now, it’s a coral reef!

“How strange,” I say aloud. “We shouldn’t be anywhere near a reef.”

I run to the wheel, disengage the autopilot, and swing the helm to lee to tack away from the reef. As I turn into the wind to slow down the vessel, I see the wind indicator snap away from the masthead. As I struggle to drop the now entangled spinnaker, the wind softens and Betsy pushes gently forwards across the ocean surface. That was too close! I double-check my GPS; it still shows Palmyra fifty miles away. I’ll have to get this looked at when I return home.
The thought of the missing picture nags at me and keeps me from falling asleep. Trying to turn my mind off now is an exercise in futility. Sitting on the sofa petting Blue, the scrolls in the picture flash in my mind. What in the world is on those scrolls? Something is obviously going on here that the others are hiding from me. I plan to figure out what, and now.

Since sleep is out of the question, I may as well solve this mystery. I’ll go to the shack—Sawle’s shack—while everyone else is asleep at the camp. I’ll find out what everyone else seems to know that I don’t. It’s clear no one plans to tell me. If the others made it across the lagoon safely, I will too. I’ll just take the panther the shaman gave me.

Out on the lagoon it is eerily quiet. The hum of the dinghy’s motor bounces off the water and fills the thick air that hangs in the atmosphere. The metallic whine seems louder than usual against the silence of the night.

On shore I snap a leash on Blue. With the darkness and the spookiness of the island, I’m not taking any chances. I shine my flashlight ahead of us as we walk. Blue is nearly between my legs he’s so close to me. The leash, it seems, is unnecessary.
“There it is,” I whisper to Blue. Something about the whole thing makes me feel I need to be quiet—like I’m a kid sneaking out of the house at night while my parents doze in the next room.

Blue and I move slowly toward the shack. It looks more menacing in the dark of night. The Miracle Tree, the garden, everything that looked so peaceful and quaint now appears ominous in the shadows of nightfall. The harsh beams of the flashlight make everything look almost frightening as they settle on objects in the shack. A rustling of leaves and snapping of branches stops me. Blue growls a deep growl from his belly. My limbs turn to solid cement. My breath catches in my lungs and stays there. I force my hand with the flashlight to move. As the light escapes the door it travels out into a heavy mist that has descended on the island.

“It’s nothing, guy. Only mist—that’s all,” I say to Blue as I scratch one of his ears, but I am really saying it for my own benefit.

I know that the heavy air outside the shack is nothing. As a man of science, I know that there is an explanation for it. It’s just the humidity of the ocean coming to shore. Still, I am second-guessing my decision to go snooping around the atoll by myself in the middle of the night. I would give about anything to be safe on Betsy right now. I am losing my nerve.

Inhale. Big inhale. I take a deep breath, let it out, and wait for the cement to fall from my limbs. The breath caught in my lungs comes out. I continue my search. Beneath a crudely built desk is a scroll. I grab for it, almost reluctantly, and open it.

“This can’t be real,” I murmur, eyes fixed on the words before me. There, on the scroll, are intimate details about someone’s life—my life. Details I have never told anyone on the island. I read things I have never told anyone, period. I read things about myself that not even I have come to terms with fully yet:

He is terrified of real relationships. He ended up being rejected, the one time he truly gave himself fully to someone after his parents abandoned him. His self-worth has been crushed. His failed marriage haunts him. His distant relationship with his sister and friends do too. Because of it, he believes that he is not worthy of love; that he is not worth knowing. He believes once people get to know him, they do not like him anymore—that he is faulty in some way. It is easiest for him to stay emotionally aloof than to step into his pain. Still he finds it isolating and lonely.

He is in love with the one person he has in his life, a woman named Sam. He has never told her though. He believes earnestly Sam will disappear, one way or another, if he is ever honest. That she has never pursued him breaks his heart. He takes it as further proof that he is best to keep his distance.

He struggles with some patients because they are brave enough to talk about the battles he fights himself. He envies their ability to cry over that which haunts them. He is conflicted—he wants to bury and expose his vulnerability simultaneously; and he is trying to do just that.

“Who wrote this?” I say aloud. “Who wrote this about me? What is happening to me?”

ZZZZZ.
“You aren’t,” he insists. “I am an adult, Edmund. I know what I am ready for. I want you to answer me right now.”

“I’m sorry, Lucas. I just cannot do that. You just need to trust me.”

“Right,” I say, and take off for my boat.

“You aren’t ready to leave yet,” Edmund calls after me. I don’t look back. Sam was right. Something is terribly wrong with this island. Something isn’t right and I need to leave it as soon as I can.

Without knowing why, I stop. I take a breath and turn to ask, “Why did you take the photo?”

“The photo wasn’t yours to take” he answers. “Who are you? Who are all of you?”

“We’re your friends, Lucas. I am telling you. This will make sense later.”

“I want it to make sense right now.”

“That is your problem, Lucas. You think that everything should make sense in life, but sometimes it just doesn’t.”

“You are hiding something from me and I want to know what,” I bark.

“It is not the right time, Lucas.”

“Who wrote it?” I demand. “Sawle did.”

“Why? What are you people? What are you going to do to me?”

“Nothing bad. You’ve my word.” “Your word? I don’t know what that’s even worth.”

“A lot, I think.” “Why is he writing about me?” “You’ll find out when you are ready.” “I’m ready now.”

“The sunrise is beautiful. Even with so much going through my head, the pink-orange blaze lifting from the ocean calms me. The sound of footsteps behind me ruins the calm. It’s Edmund.

“I need to talk to you,” I say, brushing the sand from my backside as I get up. My clothes are damp. I don’t care about that though.

“You’re here early,” he chirps merrily. “I was here all night.” The smile fades from Edmund’s face. “Is that right?”

“It is. And I found a scroll in the shack that…” “You shouldn’t have gone there. You weren’t meant to see that yet,” he interrupts. “I apologize that you did. It isn’t the right time, Lucas.”

“Who wrote it?”

“Listen, Lucas. I know this must be a bit strange.” “A bit strange?” “Okay, yes… you’re right. It’s more than that. Just trust me. It will make sense when the time comes.”

“Who wrote it?”


“Nothing bad. You’ve my word.” “Your word? I don’t know what that’s even worth.” “A lot, I think.” “Why is he writing about me?” “You’ll find out when you are ready.” “I’m ready now.”

“You aren’t,” he insists. “I am an adult, Edmund. I know what I am ready for. I want you to answer me right now.”

“I’m sorry, Lucas. I just cannot do that. You just need to trust me.”

“Right,” I say, and take off for my boat.

“You aren’t ready to leave yet,” Edmund calls after me. I don’t look back. Sam was right. Something is terribly wrong with this island. Something isn’t right and I need to leave it as soon as I can.

Without knowing why, I stop. I take a breath and turn to ask, “Why did you take the photo?”

“The photo wasn’t yours to take” he answers. “Who are you? Who are all of you?”

“We’re your friends, Lucas. I am telling you. This will make sense later.”

“I want it to make sense right now.”

“That is your problem, Lucas. You think that everything should make sense in life, but sometimes it just doesn’t.”

“You are hiding something from me and I want to know what,” I bark. “It is not the right time Lucas.”

“Something isn’t right and I’m supposed to let it be? That’s bullshit. This is all bullshit: the weird nights here, the stuff laying around, the scrolls with stuff about me, the photos that make no sense. This entire island is bullshit!”

“Please, listen to me, Lucas…”

“I’m trying to! But you won’t tell me anything!”

“I will tell you this Lucas. Not everything in life is perfect. Not everything in life makes sense. But realize
Behind every great book is an incredible team — working their magic behind the scenes. This book could not have been written without their guidance, support and encouragement. First and foremost I must thank our Creator — for everything; my Soul family all over the world — this is for you! Much love, light, and gratitude for all your love and support; my family for their loving guidance and for always being there for me; and a massive thank you to my friend, editor, and literary maven, Cassandra W. Powers — you are truly amazing; and Teresa Kennedy and Danielle Forrest for their words of literary wisdom. And for anyone I may have missed... you know who you are... Thank You!!!
A Note from the Author

To hear about my latest books, sign up for my exclusive New Release Mailing List and be the first to know:
www.Ljubincic.com/updates

I would love to know what you thought of my novel! If you’ve enjoyed this book, would you consider reviewing it on www.Amazon.com and www.Goodreads.com?