

The Temple Of Stupidity

by

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The Temple of Stupidity

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In between The Land Of Imagination and The Valleys Of Enlightenment, there lies the small village of Iqua Quagmaneous. A tribe of farmers, who were originally descended from the very ancient Stupido (pronounced Stupeedo) tribes of long ago, had heard many stories about The Lands Of Enlightenment and how the quality of life there was so very much better than the dangerous, muddy lowlands where they tried to make their homes. And so, wanting to improve their lives, the people went in search of The Lands Of Enlightenment. After a very long and hazardous journey, they eventually came upon the sparsely populated township of Iqua Quagmaneous.

The people were welcomed by the few residents of the village. Finding in the clean air and the high hills a certain something that lifted not just their spirits, but somehow also their minds. That gave to them a sense of appreciation of the beauty and wonder of the land around them that they had never felt in their previous home. The people decided that their journey to better themselves had come to an end, and they settled in the village. They built houses and factories and farms, and found that they could support themselves very well. It was, indeed, a very good place to live. Not only did the village lie on the very borders of The Land Of Imagination, but the whole local area was patrolled by a law man, a very wise and knowledgeable scholar whose name was Common Sense.

Common Sense soon became a regular visitor in the village. He advised the villagers on many matters including how to set up social and industrial laws that would guarantee a fair society. The people of the village had decided that their dark days of unenlightenment were behind them, that they would no longer be the victims of prejudice, that all people would be treated equally and fairly, and that the laws of the village would make sure it was so. The people built temples that would stand for the things they wished to aspire to. There was, therefore, a temple of money, a temple of success, a temple of youth, a temple of power, a temple of business, and many other temples as well. All the people of the village were free to worship at whichever temple they chose.

One particular man built a very strange looking temple on the very edge of the village. He called it The Temple Of Helpfulness. The man invented a long bladed device that, he said, would help people with bad backs to cut their toenails without having to bend down. But when he tried the device out on himself, he sliced off the ends of his feet. Unperturbed, the man then invented another device that, he said, would make a very loud noise, and shower the sky with sparkling light. He claimed this device would be very helpful to people who wanted to annoy someone. But when the man tried the device out on himself, it blew up inside the temple and killed him.

Common Sense came to clear up the mess. He warned all the other people in the village that the ways of the helpful man did not belong in an enlightened society. The villagers had a meeting in the village hall to discuss what had happened. They decided that, although the helpful man must have been an extremely clever man indeed, for surely you have to be clever to build a device

that can blow a person up, yet on the other hand nobody else really wanted to have their feet cut off, or to be blown up. And so, they decided that it was better to listen to Common Sense.

The tragedy that had taken place inside the strange looking temple threw a shadow over the village. It reminded the people of the dark days of their Stupido origins, a time when they had been an ignorant people, an age in their past that the villagers felt they should have left behind them. Therefore the strange temple was renamed The Temple Of Stupidity, and it was left standing on the edge of the village as a constant reminder of the degenerate past that the people had managed to rise above. The bones of the helpful man were buried underneath the temple, and it became a place that was shunned by the village.

A new business firm was created to help enforce the laws that governed the village. The laws would be written down in books and put onto posters so that the people of the village could easily read and understand them. A young man named Roderick wanted a job at the new firm, and he went to see his uncle, who just happened to be in charge of the firm's recruitment.

"I don't see why you can't have a job there Roderick," said his uncle.

"Well," said Roderick. "Aren't there tests you have to pass?"

"Oh indeed, yes," said his uncle. "But a bright chap like

you shouldn't have any problem with those."

Roderick knew he was very intelligent. When he'd been at school, he'd always proved how intelligent he was by always being the first person to shout out the answer to any question that the teacher had asked, even though the other children had often roared with laughter at the answers he gave. In fact, so had the teacher sometimes.

"I'm certainly as intelligent and as educated as everyone else," said Roderick.

"Of course you are," said his uncle.

"It's just that I can't read," said Roderick.

His uncle stared at him. "You can't read?" he finally repeated. "But everybody in the village can read Roderick, and you've been all the way through school, just like everyone else."

"Yes, I know," said Roderick, getting a bit cross. "But reading was just one of those things that I could never do very well. It doesn't mean I'm not bright."

"Roderick," said his uncle. "There's no such thing as not bright. That's been proved."

"Has it?" said Roderick.

"Oh yes," said his uncle. "The old fashioned way of measuring intelligence was completely wrong, far too narrow and limiting. We know now that there are lots of different types of intelligence. There's mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, sporting intelligence, social intelligence, motorcycle intelligence..."

"Motorbike intelligence!" Roderick interrupted. "What's that one?"

"It's intelligence measured in accordance with how good a person is at riding a motorcycle."

Roderick scratched his head. "I'm not really into motorcycle."

"It doesn't matter," said his uncle. "I'm sure we can find a type of intelligence that suits you. We're making up, I mean, we're discovering new ones all the time."

"So what you're saying," said Roderick, slowly. "Is that everyone is really intelligent?"

"Well... yes, that's right," said his uncle.

"So that means that I'm really intelligent."

"Absolutely."

"So I should be able to pass the tests really easily then?"

"Well." His uncle picked up the tests and threw them in the trash bin. "I'm very well connected with the people who run the firm, so I'll just tell them to give you the job."

So Roderick started working at the law firm. He made friends with everyone around him, and became very popular. His worries about the job soon faded away as it turned out that he and his work colleagues were not really expected to do very much work anyway. Roderick was part of a team of people who were supposed to read the finished books and posters and check them for mistakes. And if there were just a few disgruntled, silly,

petty minded people who pointed out that the fact that Roderick couldn't actually read pretty much prevented him from being able to do his job at all, well, Roderick just ignored those people.

Now that he had a proper job, Roderick's mother and father told him that he should decide which temple he wanted to worship at so that he could begin worshipping every day like all the other adults in the village. Roderick went on a tour of all the different temples and eventually found himself at a very big, grand looking place right on the edge of the village. Roderick walked around the building finding himself strangely drawn to it. It was clearly a temple, and yet no one appeared to be worshipping at it. What a wonderful old place, Roderick thought to himself. Maybe other people don't know it's here. There was a large sign in front of the building, covered in black letters. Because Roderick couldn't read, he had no idea what the sign said, and therefore he decided that it couldn't possibly say anything important. Roderick knelt down and began to worship.

Roderick liked the feeling that worshipping gave him. He began going to the temple every day, worshipping at it for hours on end. One day, when he was having dinner, he realised that his mother and father were looking at him in a very strange way. His father finally put down his fork.

"Roderick?" he asked. "Why are you worshipping at The Temple Of Stupidity?"

Roderick looked at his father as if he'd gone insane. "The Temple Of Stupidity?" he said. "I'm not."

"Yes you are son," said his mother. "You go out there every day, and you worship."

Roderick stared at his parents in absolute bewilderment. "Why would someone worship at The Temple Of Stupidity?" he asked, shaking his head with utter confusion. "That doesn't make any sense."

"Son, everybody sees you sitting there, worshiping at the place," said his mother. "Oh Roderick, don't you understand? You've started worshiping there by mistake, and you just haven't realised..."

Roderick leapt to his feet, his fists clenched, his face very red. "I am not!" he screamed at the top of his voice. "I am not! I am not! I am not! I AM NOT!"

Roderick turned and ran out of the house. He didn't care if every other person in the whole world believed that he was worshiping at The Temple Of Stupidity, he knew that he wasn't and that was the end of it. He ran into the local pub and went straight to a group of his friends.

"Will you tell my mother and father that I am not worshiping at The Temple Of Stupidity?"

The people in the pub all looked at each other.

"Roderick," said one of Roderick's best friends. "Come with me for a moment."

Roderick followed his friend outside. "Where are we going?"

"Just over there," his friend replied. "Into The Land Of

Imagination."

Roderick had often heard people talking about The Land Of Imagination that supposedly surrounded their village. But he was confused because, as far as he could see, there was no such land. He had long ago come to the conclusion that The Land Of Imagination didn't actually exist and that people talked about it all the time because... well... just because they did.

"Where are we going?" Roderick asked again.

His friend pointed ahead of them. When Roderick followed the direction of his friend's finger he finally saw something very hazy at the side of the road. He tried to focus, and the hazy image solidified into an entrance to a vast forest. Roderick was highly confused. He had never noticed this gigantic forest land before. Feeling somewhat disturbed, Roderick followed his friend inside the forest. Once they were inside the line of trees, something very strange happened to Roderick. He saw images inside his head, pictures that somehow formed strange connections in his brain, connections that suddenly made him aware of things in a way he never had been before. Roderick didn't like it all. He turned and ran out of the forest as fast as he could. "Roderick!" His friend ran after him. "Are you alright?"

Roderick crouched on the ground, clutching his head in his hands. Something had happened to him in there. Suddenly he seemed to understand how he could actually have made a mistake, how it was possible that he had gone to The Temple Of Stupidity, and because he couldn't read the sign that warned people what the building was, that he had knelt down and started worshiping there by mistake. That for the past few weeks

he'd been worshipping at The Temple Of Stupidity every single day. That everybody had seen him... everybody in the whole village had been watching him sitting there, worshipping at that place!

"Why did you do that to me?" Roderick spat the words at his friend in absolute fury.

His friend backed away, as if he thought Roderick might actually hit him. "Roderick, you've been worshipping at that place every day."

"I know!" Roderick cried. "Do you think I don't realise where I'm worshipping? I know that I worship there."

"But you mustn't..." said his friend.

"I worship there because I want to!" Roderick screamed. "I worship there deliberately! Okay?" And with that Roderick ran straight to The Temple Of Stupidity, threw himself on the ground and started worshipping.

And so it went on. Every day after work, Roderick would go straight to The Temple Of Stupidity and throw himself into fierce worship. He never missed a night. He was as dedicated as any worshiper in the village. In fact, it was probably true to say that no other person took their worship more seriously. He did it for many reasons, one of which was his friend telling him that he mustn't worship at the place. That, more than anything else, had made Roderick utterly determined to worship there, no matter what. And furthermore, if he stopped worshipping there now, he would look like a total and utter fool to the entire village, and Roderick could not allow that to

happen.

Roderick was a gregarious man and usually preferred to be in the company of other people. But no one else ever wanted to worship at The Temple Of Stupidity, and so Roderick's worshipping hours were very lonely ones. But one day, while he was on his way to the temple, Roderick bumped into a girl that he'd known at school.

"Hello, Roderick," said the girl. "Where are you going?"

"Hello, Shirley," said Roderick. "I'm off to worship, at the temple over there."

"Can I go with you?" said Shirley.

"Of course you can." Roderick was a little bit nervous as they walked past the sign in front of the temple.

"The Temple Of Stupidity," Shirley read out. "What does that mean?"

"Er... nothing... really," said Roderick.

"Oh," said Shirley. "So where do you work then?"

"I've got a job at the law firm," said Roderick.

"I wanted to work there," said Shirley. "But I failed the tests."

"Oh yes," said Roderick. "Well, they are quite hard."

"So what do you do there?" Shirley asked him.

"I... well... I don't actually do anything," Roderick answered, quite truthfully.

"Oh." Shirley frowned. "What does the law firm actually do?"

Now, in truth, Roderick didn't really understand what the firm did either, so he just told Shirley something that didn't really make sense.

"Oh," said Shirley. "I hate cruelty to animals."

"So do I," said Roderick. "I think animals are more important than people. I've got a pet cat. He's called William."

"Cats are lovely," said Shirley.

"Yes," said Roderick. "But I kept forgetting to feed him and he got malnutrition, and then I forget to let him in one night and when I found him in the morning he was nearly frozen solid, and his tail snapped off, and we took him to the vets and the vet said he had to be put down."

"Oh," said Shirley.

Roderick decided it would be better to lie about what had happened to William from now on.

Shirley started coming to the temple every day to worship, and so Roderick was no longer lonely. But more than this, he saw it as a victory over the rest of the village, because he'd finally managed to get somebody else to worship at the temple.

Roderick knew that he was every bit as good as all the other people in the village. He knew that his family were descended from different stock than the rest of the villagers, but if anything that made him better than everyone else. His family line were descended directly from an ancient tribe, who, centuries ago, had occupied the lowlands far to the south by the Miss-The-Point river. The Miss-The-Point tribe had been a glorious people, who had finally been wiped out in a terrible war. The tribe had been led by a certain King Roland, who had found his people at war with two rival tribes, one of whom were marching towards them from the north, the other coming at them from the south. Seeing the hopelessness of the situation, King Roland had turned to his best war strategists, who had come up with an ingenious plan. They would split their army in two, and take one half into the hills so that they could ride around the back of the invading army from the north. They would then be able to take that army by surprise, attack them from both sides, and defeat them. Then, when the invading army from the south arrived they would see the battlefield littered with the bodies of the decimated north army, and their courage would be taken from them, making them easy pickings for King Roland's army.

According to legend, King Roland himself had insisted on riding at the head of the troops, that were supposed to ride around the back of the invading north army. He'd studied the strategist's plan in depth, then finally looked up and uttered the immortal words, "I understand that perfectly." He'd then sat at the head of the army, led them in the wrong direction, ridden straight into the invading south army, and been completely massacred. The few survivors of the Miss-The-Point tribe had then escaped across the lowlands until they'd been taken in

by the Stupido people. Roderick was extremely proud of his heritage.

One evening, Shirley told Roderick that she was going away.

"Mrs. West wants me to go on a trip," she said.

Mrs. West was a shopkeeper in the village, who was also Shirley's aunt and guardian. Roderick found most people in the village to be very polite, but Mrs. West was well known for speaking her mind about things. She had once said something about Roderick that he hadn't quite understood, but it had something to do with Roderick's brain and the stuff that came out of people's backsides. Roderick was on good terms with most people in the village, but he did not like Mrs. West.

"It's just for a little while," Shirley told him. "She thinks it will expand my mind a bit."

"Does your mind need expanding?" said Roderick.

"Well," said Shirley. "Sometimes I think it does."

So Shirley went away, and Roderick worshiped alone again. But one day, as he arrived at the temple, he was amazed to see another man sitting on the ground and worshipping. He was further amazed to see that it was a man called Owen, who was one of the people who ran the law firm where Roderick worked.

"I haven't seen you here before," said Roderick.

Owen sighed. "Well, I normally worship at The Temple Of Money, but I've had an argument with my wife, and I

just wanted to get away from it all." And Owen started to tell Roderick about his problems. In truth, Roderick only half understood what Owen was saying, but he did what he always did in such situations and pretended that he understood. Owen sat for more than an hour talking to Roderick, and Roderick, who was still a bit lonely without Shirley, was quite happy to sit and talk back. When Owen finally rose and stretched his legs, he caught sight of the sign in front of the temple.

"Oh my god," he said. "Roderick, look where we are." He slapped his head. "We've been worshipping at The Temple Of Stupidity. Oh my god, what a mistake to make. I didn't realise where we were." Owen suddenly began to laugh. He laughed and laughed until he nearly fell over.

"Oh my lord," he said, when he could speak again. "Good grief, it's a good job nobody saw us. Come on Roderick, let's get away from here quickly."

"I'm staying here," said Roderick angrily.

"But Roderick, it's The Temple Of Stupidity."

"No it isn't," said Roderick.

Owen gave Roderick a very confused look. He finally shook his head, then turned and ran off as fast as he could. Roderick turned back to the temple, and threw himself into a fever of worship. Over the next few weeks Roderick spent longer and longer at the temple, even going there at lunch times, and in the evenings staying there for many hours after it became dark. One day, just as he'd begun to worship, he turned and saw Shirley standing a little way from the temple.

"I didn't know you were back," he said.

"I've been back for a week," said Shirley. "I've been trying to talk to you, but you're always here."

"How was your trip?" said Roderick.

"It was good," said Shirley.

"Have you come to worship?"

Shirley looked a little uncomfortable. "I've been worshipping at The Temple Of Youth," she said. "There are some really nice people there. There's this nice boy, he took me into The Land Of Imagination. I really liked it."

Roderick felt his insides go cold. "You liked it in there?"

"Yes," said Shirley. "It was fun." Shirley looked around at the darkening night. "Roderick, why don't you start worshipping there as well?"

"No!" said Roderick fiercely. "I worship here. You worship here. You always liked worshipping here!"

"Well, I did sort of," said Shirley. "But I didn't quite understand..."

"Understand what?"

Shirley looked around her again. "Roderick, I've got lots of new friends now, and I just don't like people thinking that I want to hang around here."

"Neither do I!" Roderick screamed at her. "I hate it!"

Shirley frowned. "Well, why do you come here all the time then?"

Roderick turned and stalked away from Shirley. His fists were clenched, his teeth were bared, he was shaking with anger, absolutely enraged that he'd fallen into the intellectual trap that Shirley had set for him.

"Roderick," Shirley called after him. "I've realised that are other places to worship, that's all." But Roderick didn't want to speak to her anymore.

Roderick knew there were other places to worship. It was just that he had to worship at The Temple Of Stupidity, no matter how unhappy it made him. When, one evening, he confided this to his mother, she suggested that he should go and see a man who lived in the village, a man who was called a psychiatrist.

The psychiatrist was very easy to talk to. Even Roderick, who was good at talking to people anyway, found himself opening up to the man in a way that he couldn't with most others.

"The thing that bothers me the most," Roderick told him. "Is when people talk about The Land Of Imagination."

"And what bothers you about it?" said the psychiatrist.

"I don't understand what they're talking about."

The psychiatrist pursed his lips thoughtfully. "The Land Of Imagination is all around us Roderick."

"Where?" said Roderick.

"Well, there are entrances to it everywhere." The psychiatrist looked out of the window. "There's one just out there. Look. The opening into that great big forest. D' you see it?"

"No," said Roderick.

The psychiatrist pointed. Roderick tried several times to follow the exact direction of his finger, and finally he did see something very hazy outside the window. He was confused, because it hadn't been there just a second ago. Looking at it gave Roderick a headache.

"The forest has strange properties," the psychiatrist told him. "Every person seems to see it slightly differently."

"I don't understand," said Roderick.

The psychiatrist gave him a long look. "Roderick," he said. "I'm going to ask you a direct question. Why do you worship at The Temple Of Stupidity?"

"Don't you understand why?" said Roderick.

"I'm asking you to explain," said the psychiatrist.

Roderick clenched his fists. "When everybody in the village sees me worshiping there, it forces them all to stop and think. They think about what I'm doing, and they understand it, but they turn away because they can't handle the truth that I'm showing them. But I won't let them turn away. I'm going to worship there night and day, until they can no longer deny what I'm saying to them."

"Roderick," said the psychiatrist. "You seem to be suffering what we psychiatrists call 'Seeing Everything The Wrong Way Round Syndrome'. You see, in reality, you're probably the one person in this whole village that nobody really pays any attention to at all. And it's because you worship at The Temple Of Stupidity, that nobody pays any attention to you."

It was very hard for Roderick to accept what the psychiatrist was saying, but in the end the man's words did begin to get through to him. When he finally left the psychiatrist's office, he went into the village pub and sat drinking on his own, which was unusual for Roderick, until he saw someone that he knew from work, a boy who had the reputation of being very bright indeed.

"Have you met my girlfriend?" said the very bright boy.

When the girl turned around, Roderick saw that it was Shirley.

"This is marvelous," said Shirley. "Next time we go into The Land Of Imagination, you can come with us Roderick. Can't he?"

"Of course he can," said the very bright boy.

Roderick almost choked on his pint. He was never ever going into that horrible place again.

Roderick lay awake that night, wondering if people really would notice him more if he stopped worshiping at The Temple Of Stupidity. If he worshiped somewhere else maybe he would meet a girl, and then he'd be looked up to, like the very bright boy was. He drifted off to sleep, remembering the psychiatrist's words. Let go of it

Roderick. Stop making yourself so unhappy. Whatever's made you like this, just let it go. Let it go...

After work the next day, Roderick went for a very long walk. He weighed up all the reasons for not giving up, against all the reasons for doing so, and found it hard to escape the conclusion that life would be better for him if he did find somewhere else to worship. He was almost crying as he made the decision, but he finally decided that he would try worshipping somewhere else. On his walk he was passing various other temples, and when he saw one that especially appealed to him he walked up to it and began to worship. It only dawned on Roderick after quite a while, for it sometimes took quite a while for things to dawn on Roderick, that there was no one else worshipping at the temple. He stood up and ran around the building several times, panic clutching his heart as he realised that for the past hour he'd been worshipping at The Temple Of Stupidity.

"No!" he cried out in horror. "I... I went somewhere else!"

But he hadn't. He'd tried to go as far away from The Temple Of Stupidity as possible, yet somehow, impossibly, he'd ended up back here and started worshipping again without meaning to!

Roderick denied it. He knew this wasn't the way it was. He went to the temple deliberately. It was not where he ended up without meaning to!

"It is not!" he yelled at the temple.

He turned and saw two people walking along the road.

"There he is again," one of them said. "Look he's talking

to it now."

"Oh just leave him alone," the other one replied. "He's quite harmless."

Roderick became totally enraged. How dare you look down on me! He wanted to yell at the two people. HOW! DARE! YOU!

Feeling as if he was about to blow apart with rage, Roderick ran back to the temple and began to worship harder than he'd ever worshiped before.

Roderick's worship became the whole point of his life. Every day, immediately after work, he would go straight to the temple. Roderick spent most of the time he was at work, well, actually all of the time he was at work, idly chatting with his friends. Ever since he'd made friends with Owen, on that occasion when Roderick had found him mistakenly worshipping at The Temple Of Stupidity, he'd found that he didn't even have to pretend to do any work. Owen was the director of the law firm, and what he said went. Roderick often found himself invited into Owen's office on some pretext, when all Owen really wanted to do was chat with Roderick about his problems. Roderick, you see, was always happy to talk to people. Even if he didn't really understand, or frankly even care about what they were saying to him, it was better than working.

One night Owen and his business partner Brian, were both confiding in Roderick about the pressures of running the law firm. Roderick had already spent ten minutes pretending to understand what they were

saying, and he was now becoming a bit impatient.

"I'm really really sorry," he apologised. "But every night after work, I have to go and worship at my temple. It's very important to me."

"Good grief," said Owen. "You don't mean to say you're still worshipping up at that place?" He and Brian exchanged a look. "Oh well, Brian, we're keeping the young man." Owen looked at his watch, then gave a great big sigh. "Well, I'm just going to go home and argue with my wife. You don't fancy a pint do you Brian?"

"I wish I could," said Brian. "But I should really stay here and wrestle with the company accounts."

"You could both come with me to my temple," said Roderick hopefully. "It's fun out there."

"Fun?" said Brian. "I don't think I remember what fun is anymore."

"Hang it all," said Owen. "Let's blasted well go with Roderick out to his temple. Stuff what everyone says."

"Stuff them," Brian agreed.

Roderick was very grateful to have company for once. When he started worshipping in earnest, Owen and Brian stood and watched him.

"It's so peaceful out here," said Owen. "I thought that before, when I worshiped here by mistake. Nobody bothers you, no one pays any attention to you. It's like being free from all the pressures of life. Do you know Brian, I can

almost understand why Roderick likes coming here so much."

"I know what you mean," said Brian.

The two men sat down next to the temple, in no hurry at all to go back home.

"Roderick's such a nice young man," said Owen.

"Yes, he is," Brian agreed.

"I really don't know what I'd do without him," said Owen.

"He's such a nice, friendly, helpful young man," said Brian.

"You know what Brian? I'd like to make Roderick vice president of the company."

Brian gave Owen a slightly doubtful look. "But he worships at The Temple Of Stupidity."

Owen sighed. "Oh yes I know Brian, I know, but it's just... I like him so much Brian."

The following evening Owen called Roderick into his office. Owen wanted to talk to him about how well he was doing with the company, and Owen seemed to think that Roderick was doing very well indeed. They went onto chatting about this and that, until Roderick began looking at his watch. Owen phoned his wife to tell her he was going to be late, then walked with Roderick to the temple. He sat, listening to the peaceful night, as Roderick performed his worshipping tasks, then the two of

them leaned against the temple wall talking. Owen found himself telling Roderick his innermost secrets. Eventually Brian came walking up the path.

"I thought I might find you two here," he said.

"Brian-ee," Owen cheered. "What are you doing here man?"

"I got fed up with working late," said Brian. "There's more to life than balancing the accounts."

Brian had brought some cans of lager with him. The three of them became heavily drunk, and then Owen and Brian knelt down in front of the temple in imitation of Roderick's worshiping technique. When some midnight walkers on the road stopped and stared at them, Owen and Brian began swearing and throwing empty cans of lager at the people until they ran off.

"I haven't enjoyed myself so much for ages," Owen said to Roderick the next day. "We'll have to do it again mate."

It wasn't long before some of the villagers started complaining.

"It's unseemly," one of Owen's colleagues said to him. "You and Brian acting like drunk morons night after night. What are you thinking? And out at The Temple Of Stupidity of all places."

"Stop being such a prude!" Owen replied, shocking his colleague. "What people say about that place is all rubbish! Roderick worships there every night."

"Yes, but Roderick is a little..."

"Don't you dare say anything about Roderick!" Owen shouted. "Damn it! People can worship wherever they like. I worship out there!"

"You've actually been worshiping...?"

"Yes we have, and why shouldn't we? All these years I've been worshiping at The Temple Of Money, and has it made me happy? I'm telling you, worshiping out there with Roderick is a lot more fun."

"But Owen, you're an important man in this town."

"Yes I am aren't I?" said Owen. "And that means I can do whatever the hell I like."

The next week Owen made Roderick vice president of the firm. Roderick was given his own office, and was told he could turn up to work at whatever time he liked, or not at all if he felt like it. Roderick was flabbergasted. He was especially pleased about the fact that he was now senior to everyone else, including the very bright boy. It finally proved that he was better and cleverer than everyone else, just like he'd always known he was. He was sure now that Shirley would go out with him. But when he asked her, she told him that she was in love with the very bright boy, and would never leave him. Roderick went to Owen and told him that the very bright boy had been saying malicious things about him and Brian. This was a lie, but one that landed the very bright boy in a very serious amount of trouble. Roderick suspected the very bright boy's days at the law firm were numbered.

But for Owen this was the final straw. At the next monthly village meeting, Owen stood up and angrily told everyone that the village's attitude towards

stupidity had to change. The old stories about The Temple Of Stupidity were ridiculous old wives tales. These were supposed to be enlightened times! Surely they didn't believe in witchcraft anymore. What they were dealing with here was nothing more than sheer prejudice, and prejudice was not supposed to exist in their village!

Owen and Brian were powerful people, and an awful lot of the villagers were afraid to go against them. So when they held an 'open evening' at The Temple Of Stupidity, a group of the villagers turned up and actually found that they enjoyed the riotous, drunken worshipping. Word was passed around, and the next night even more people turned up at the temple. Roderick, Owen and Brian suddenly found themselves the leaders of a congregation. It was a unanimous decision that Roderick should be made the High Priest of Stupidity.

"Roderick?" Owen said to him one night. "You're the leader of the most popular congregation in town. You're the vice president of the most powerful company in town. But my friend, it's as if you're still not happy. What's wrong?"

"It's The Land Of Imagination," Roderick told him.

"What about it?"

"Everyone can go there, except me," said Roderick. "It's not fair. If I can't go there, no one else should be allowed to either. If things were truly fair and equal in this village, The Land Of Imagination wouldn't exist for anyone."

Owen, Roderick and Brian went to the next village meeting to argue their case.

"The only fair course of action is to ban The Land Of Imagination," Owen told the village. "It should be a crime for anyone in the village to be able to go somewhere that Roderick can't. Does the village agree?"

In truth, more than half of the village were already swilling beer, and were frankly just impatient to get to The Temple Of Stupidity and start the orgy of depraved worshipping.

"Nobody cares about the tossing Land Of Imagination!" somebody yelled.

"So it's agreed then," said Owen.

"No!" someone objected from the front row. It was old Mrs. West, Shirley's aunt. "This madness has gone too far," she said. "You can't ban The Land Of Imagination, it would take so much away from us!" She turned to the rest of the village. "Surely you don't all agree with this."

The only reply from the impatient villagers was several loud burps.

"Brian," said Mrs. West. "You have some influence. Surely you don't think this is right."

"I think whatever Owen and Roderick think," said Brian as he took a swig of beer.

Mrs. West turned her sharp, steely gaze onto Owen and Roderick. "You two," she pointed at each of them. "Are destroying this village."

"Nobody cares what you think Mrs. West," Roderick said gleefully, overjoyed that he was finally getting his own

back on the old bat. "Not anymore."

"Is the motion passed?" Owen asked the village.

The village voted in favour, then immediately deserted the village hall, intent on getting to The Temple Of Stupidity, with perhaps a stop at the village pub on the way. Mrs. West crossed herself, muttering beneath her breath as she watched everyone leaving.

Over the next week, all the entrances to The Land Of Imagination were boarded up, fenced off, made out of bounds, or covered in barbed wire. Winter took hold of the village, and the days became long and dark. Attendance at The Temple Of Stupidity had been steadily rising, and during the following month it soared until almost every person in the entire village was worshiping there. Roderick's power over the village was almost complete. They were all living life the way that he, as their preacher, told them they should. They were pretending to work rather than actually doing so, they weren't reading books any more, they were just making up lies instead of telling the truth, and none of them took responsibility seriously. Night after night Roderick and his two assistant priests, Owen and Brian, would sit on the roof of the temple and preach down to the worshiping village.

For the first time in his life Roderick felt truly secure. He would run across the roof of the temple and jump for joy, unafraid that he would fall, feeling that even if he did the rest of the village would catch him. Then one night, as the congregation was just beginning to arrive, Roderick looked down from the roof and was startled to see Mrs. West standing below him.

"What do you want?" he said.

Mrs. West glared up at him. "You may think you've won Roderick," she said. "But there's something you've forgotten. Common Sense will come back here eventually. And everyone listens to Common Sense in the end. Everyone, except you, of course."

That night Roderick couldn't keep his mind on the service. While the joyous, drunken worshiping went on below him, Roderick sat shivering by himself in a corner of the roof.

"Roderick, what's the matter?" said Owen.

"I'm afraid of what will happen when Common Sense comes back," said Roderick. "What if he tells the villagers to stop their new ways?"

"Well, what if he does?" said Owen. "It's our village, not his. He's no right to tell us what to do."

"I know," said Roderick. "But people always listen to him. I'm frightened Owen, I'm really really frightened." He clutched Owen's arm. "Don't let him in. Owen please, don't let him in."

And so fences and walls were built around the village, and armed guards roamed inside the barriers. The village became impenetrable, completely cut off from the outside world, and no one was able to pass in or out. But Roderick still became almost ill with worry, knowing that the day that Common Sense came back was drawing ever nearer.

When the day finally arrived, an armed guard pointed

his weapon over his barrier.

"I'm sorry Common Sense," he said. "You're not allowed in."

"But what's this all about?" said Common Sense.

"I'm not supposed to let you in," said the guard.

But then Common Sense spoke to him, and the guard finally pulled back the barrier and let the law man inside. When he saw the state the village was in, Common Sense was horrified. People were lying drunk in the streets, while all the business buildings stood virtually deserted. Industry had all but ceased. The few shops that were open were selling food that hadn't been made properly, people were suffering from food poisoning. The clothes that were being sold were badly made, and people were wearing them without complaining, as if even fashion sense had regressed along with everything else in the town. The people that spoke to Common Sense were rude and impolite, and yet clearly thought they were possessed of high manners. On the farms the animals had been given the wrong kind of feed and were suffering and dying. Packs of animals had been left for months on end inside small pens, and they were all lying in their own feces and were eating each other to stay alive, and cows and pigs and sheep had mated with their own siblings and produced deformed offspring that had six eyes, and twelve legs, and eighteen mouths, and heads that came out of their stomachs, and stomachs that came out of their heads, and teeth that came out of their legs, and tails that came out of their noses, and one creature that was just a body with ears all over it, and an utterly obscene thing that was just an enormous bottom with a tongue.

Then Common Sense saw the massive crowd gathered up on the hill where The Temple Of Stupidity was and began to suspect what had happened. As he approached the temple he was accosted by a group of worshipers led by Owen.

"You're not welcome in this town," said Owen. "I'm going to have to ask you to leave."

"Owen," said Common Sense. "The village has fallen into ruin."

"No it hasn't," said Owen. "We're fine."

"Owen all your businesses have crumbled, your farms are dysfunctional, half your livestock is dead, you're massively in debt, your people are virtually starving, and in a short time when your supply of beer runs out, everyone is going to turn on each other and the entire village is going to self destruct."

"I meant, apart from that we're fine," said Owen.

"Owen, that doesn't make sense."

Owen looked down at the ground.

"How can you let the village's prosperity decay like this?"

"Well," said Owen. "You see, it's just, we, what happened was... well..."

"Even letting it affect your own children Owen?"

Owen fell to his knees and buried his face in his hands.

"Oh, Common Sense, you're right. What have we been doing?" He looked up at the group of worshipers that surrounded them. "Common Sense is right, we have to stop all this. We're destroying the town."

Common Sense followed the worshipers to the congregation at the temple, and he spoke to them all. One by one each one of them saw sense, and finally went off feeling very ashamed of themselves. All except Roderick that is, who lay on the temple roof curled in a ball, his tear filled eyes full of black hate.

Common Sense stayed in the village, until the people had made a start on repairing the damage. The businesses started up again, the farms were cleansed and replaced with new stock. But although the villagers had largely seen the error of their ways, they now regarded it more important than ever that the laws of the village be upheld, and they decided that in the name of absolute fairness and equality, The Land Of Imagination should remain banned. Common Sense had a lot of influence with the villagers, but he could not overturn their laws. But more than this, he understood that once a place had been twisted in the way that the village had, it would never ever become totally untwisted. And so, shaking his head at the barriers that hid every entrance to the great shining forest, the wonderful place that would now forever be beyond the villager's boundaries, Common Sense finally moved on to the neighboring village.

And while the village was trying to repair itself, Roderick went on worshiping alone at The Temple Of Stupidity.

One night a great meeting was held in the village hall. Every single person in the village attended the meeting, for there was to be a very important discussion about all

that had happened over the past months. At six o'clock sharp Roderick arose from his worshiping at The Temple Of Stupidity and walked down to the village hall.

"We must decide where the village goes from here," said Brian, who was chairing the meeting. "We will hear all sides of the argument and all points of view in our usual fair and democratic way. Who wishes to present their point of view first?"

Roderick stood up. "I do!" he said.

"The chair recognises Roderick," said Brian.

"Wait," Mrs. West objected from the audience. "He shouldn't be allowed to speak, after what he's done."

"Everyone is allowed to speak," said Brian. "Everyone's point of view is equally valid."

The village murmured agreement.

Roderick stood on the podium, in front of the whole village. "This is my point of view," he said. "I think it's wrong that Common Sense tells us what to do."

The village muttered.

"But he's so wise, and knowledgeable," someone called out.

"And he can see things so clearly," another person said. "And he cares about us."

"So what?" said Roderick. "Being wise doesn't mean that he knows better than us, and being knowledgeable just

means that he knows things, and seeing clearly just means that he can... er... see."

Roderick paused, to let his words sink in. "Why does it matter that the village is no longer so prosperous? Why does it matter that other villages don't want to buy from our farms anymore, and we're being shunned by the local community? So what? Why does it matter if we aren't very good? Why do we have to be?" Roderick ran his gaze over the rows of villagers. "Why do we think that life was better in the days when we were rich and healthy and it was safe to walk in the streets? Why? Because Common Sense tells us so, that's why. The whole lot of you just agree with whatever he says to you, and I tell you that man's power is unnatural! It is wrong! It is against everything that is normal and right! It is evil!" Roderick hit the podium. "I think he should be killed."

There was a gasp from the audience, and then some angry shouts. Roderick sensed that he'd gone a bit too far.

"Okay, no," he said. "I didn't really mean that last bit. But listen. We live in a village where everyone's point of view is equally valid. Is that not true?"

"Yes," the village agreed unanimously.

"Well in that case," said Roderick. "Common Sense's point of view is no more valid than anyone else's, including mine. And therefore you should listen to me as much as you listen to him."

"Agreed," said Brian. "That does makes sense."

"No it doesn't," shouted Mrs. West.

"It does according to our laws," said Brian. "We have to obey the laws of the village."

"Roderick does have a point," someone shouted, and several other people called out in agreement.

"If we really have an equal society," said Roderick. "I should be considered just as important as Common Sense. And in order to prove that, you should elect me to the village council."

The village hall echoed with murmuring.

"Um..." Brian looked slightly doubtful. "Well... I suppose, that does... make sense... sort of. Does anybody disagree?"

Some people put their hands up, but actually not as many as Roderick had expected. "This will prove that nobody feels prejudice," he said, remembering the word Owen had used before. He wasn't entirely sure what it meant, but it seemed to have quite a powerful effect. "Prejudice is... er... an evil... thing."

When he said that, everyone who had raised their hands put them down again, with the exception of just three people. The three lone protestors were Mrs. West, the psychiatrist and the very bright boy.

"It seems to be almost unanimous," said Brian.

"You can't do this," said Mrs. West. "He nearly destroyed our village."

"You can't blame Roderick," said Brian. "It's not fair to blame anyone, whether it's their fault or not."

"This is utterly wrong!" said Mrs. West. "Common Sense tells us not to listen to those who worship at The Temple Of Stupidity."

"But we don't have to listen to Common Sense," said Brian. "In fact, in the interests of fairness, we shouldn't do. It's decided, we will elect Roderick to the village council."

And so, even though Mrs West and the psychiatrist and the very bright boy all objected furiously, Roderick was elected a member of the village council.

And Roderick laughed with joy, a dark and furious elation surging inside him. He had won! HE HAD WON!

And then something began to happen. The lights inside the village hall suddenly burned low, and it became more and more difficult to see. A gigantic shadow arose from the back of the hall and moved along the walls and the ceiling, darkening the the building even further.

"Roderick!" something spoke in a hissing, sibilant whisper that somehow echoed throughout the entire building. "Roderick!"

Roderick cowered on the floor in terror. "Who are you?" he whimpered.

"I am the Lord Of Dimness," said the hissing voice. "Your ceaseless worshiping at The Temple Of Stupidity has awoken me from my eternal sleep. Go and worship at the temple one more time Roderick, and speak my name, then I shall rise up and cover this land with a terrible

darkness that will last a thousand years."

The village hall erupted into screams of terror. Roderick watched, horrified and ashamed, as panic and fear gripped the villagers. People stampeded for the door, some of them fainting, some of them begging for forgiveness. A huge crowd of people surrounded Mrs. West, begging her to tell the village what to do. How do we save ourselves? How do we protect the village from this terrible, inhuman threat?

And even as Roderick lay shivering on the floor, his sense of supreme self importance over came even his terrible fear. He knew that it should be him they were all crowding around. He was a member of village council. He was the most important. He should know what to do.

And then he realised that he did know what to do.

He actually knew what to do!

"Wait!" Roderick sprang up, just as Mrs. West was starting to speak. "Everyone! Don't listen to her, listen to me! I know the answer! I know how to save the village!"

Roderick fought his way through the crowd and sprinted out of the building, panting and gasping as he charged up the hill, filled with fear and elation at the sheer brilliance of his idea, knowing that just for once in his entire life he really had thought of the right thing to do. He was going to save the village. He was going to go straight to The Temple Of Stupidity, worship and worship until he finally called up this Lord Of Dimness bloke, whoever he was, and then together the two of them could protect the village against this hideous threat that everybody kept talking about.