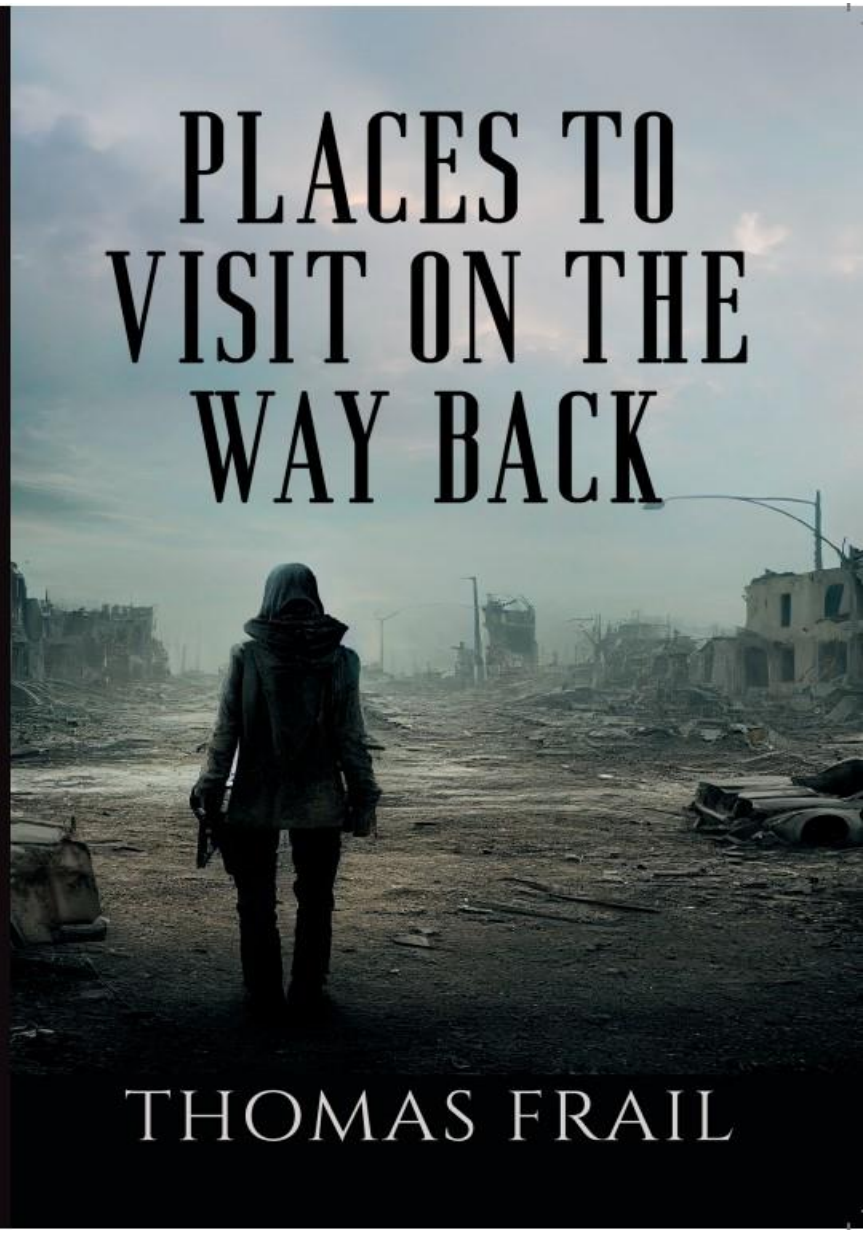
HAS LIFE DRAGGED YOU FROM THE SAFE, THE FAMILIAR? ARE YOU ADRIFT AND LOST IN CIRCUMSTANCES THAT ARE ALIEN, FRIGHTENING, UNNERVING? ARE YOU FEARING THE NEXT STEP?

YES?

THEN MAY I OFFER YOU MY HAND AND I WILL LEAD YOU TO SAFETY, TO THE FAMILIAR, THE COMFORTABLE, THE REASSURING; BUT I MUST WARN YOU WE WILL BE STOPPING NOW AND AGAIN AT PLACES TO VISIT ON THE WAY BACK.

PLACES TO VISIT ON THE WAY BACK

THOMAS FRAIL



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Places To Visit On The Way Back

by

Thomas Frail

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This is a work of fiction. Names and characters are the product of the author's imagination and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Book Dedication

Mam and Dad; miss you every day.
Joan; words are too small to express what you mean to me.

Acknowledgements:

All the authors of the books I have read whose words first captured me then led me to the path of writing my own.

Ed, my little, ‘Big’, brother.

Mr McKeague, my English teacher, who taught me imagination is just as important as using the right punctuation; if not more so.

And to the few of you who took a chance on my first book and have chosen to give this second one a chance also; thanks.

And one more thing, for those of you who are on your own journey may God grant you the serenity to accept what you cannot change, courage to change what you can and the wisdom to know the difference. One day and one step at a time.

Also by the same Author: (Available via Amazon)

Even Broken Biscuits Find a Mouth - (Poetry Collection)
eBook format

Places to Visit on The Way There – 25 Short Stories
eBook & paperback format

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Introduction

Ok, let's get something absolutely clear right from the get go.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, locales, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination, (in this case me), or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental. (If you, 'think', something is familiar to you then that is by happenstance and your interpretation).

I know what you are thinking, "why is he stating the bleeding obvious, and then doing it again?", well the answer is simple, it isn't, 'bleeding obvious' to some. So now that's out of the way let's begin.

This tome is my second foray into the world of literary fiction and book publishing and after the first one was completed I was told by all and sundry that the second one would be much easier; what a load of codswallop that homily ended up being. The second book, the one you now hold either as a paperback or on your electro gizmo, was bloody hard work!

If you say third times the charm, I'll scream.

Don't misunderstand, I love words and love writing but the stories that came to me in the first book were nearly all natural births, so to speak, most of the ones in this one was either breach or caesarean. (Please don't think I am trying to belittle those ladies who experience this in the real world, all mams are brilliant!).

I have included with this book feedback I received for my first book, not for the sake of self-aggrandisement, but to show that non biased opinions, although not very many, were on the whole fairly positive, and can be corroborated with a few keystrokes.

While I had indicated at the end of the first book that some characters would return in the new book I did so without any real idea as to who this would be or how I would do it. Looking back, I wish I had erased the lines, you see when I sat down to begin this new one I was immediately hamstrung by the spectre of these characters. Nearly all of them, at one point or another, vied for my attention and storylines and plots blossomed and then died, stopping me from moving to pastures new. In the end I put down my pen, stopped thinking about the characters I had already written about and let a month go by during which I only made notes about stories and characters that did not appear in the first book.

So, after that first month I was able to crack on and got a couple of stories, well first drafts, on the board in less than a month. I was then incommoded for almost three months by circumstances that, in the end, amounted to nothing, but like the wind which you cannot see a lot of damage was done in the wake of this matter. Anyway, once I had made my way safely out the, 'minefield', I cracked on again, or at least wanted to, but my mind, which had been through the wringer, just didn't have it in it. Prodding and poking it made no odds and so I had to just ride out the storm a little while longer, hence this book appearing later, much later, than I had anticipated.

Well that's enough of the sackcloth and ashes you've selected this book to be entertained not to listen to a middle-aged old fart whinge. So, what can you expect? To be entertained, for that is all I wish from my endeavours, even if only one or two of these tales do so then I shall be a happy man and if you should feel inclined to pop some thoughts of your experience on Amazon then my happiness will know no bounds. (Wow, do I sound like a Prat or what?)

Enjoy.

Reviews of 'Places to Visit on the way There'

The author is already working on 'Places to Visit on the Way Back', which will see the reappearance of some of the characters from this book. I know which ones I should like to meet again but, whichever ones they are, I very much look forward to reading their new stories.

Drena Irish, A Love Reading Ambassador

This is a very eclectic mix of short stories, a good variety of tales, from ghost stories to science fiction, from the mundane to the ridiculous. Sometimes the ending takes the reader quite by surprise. This is a selection of well-crafted tales lasting from 5 to 25 minutes, perfect for dipping into.

Chris Woolfenden, A Love Reading Ambassador

Amazon:

Elbow 5 - 5 Stars

Compelling read from start to finish

EW - 4 stars

He gives words to your everyday nightmares

reader of GREAT fiction - 5 stars

perfect for those dark and stormy nights

Amazon Customer - 4 stars

Not for the staunchly religious. Overall, I enjoyed it.

m r Sugden - 5 stars

Entertaining. Brilliant read. Dark and entertaining

David W - 5 stars

Excellent read, a real page turner. Looking forward to the next book

Rgp - 5 stars

Excellent book I couldn't put it down once I started reading. I would highly recommend it.

Amazon Customer - 4 stars

Very thought provoking shocks and poignancy all wrapped up in one book

Prologue – Devotion

If you have persevered so far in the reading of this book, (God I hope so, this is only the first story!!!), or have read this book's predecessor, you will realise that I give each of my stories a prologue within which I try to outline the origins of the story that subsequently follows. I also add into these prologues any other bits and pieces that I think contribute or could possibly enhance the reader's, (i.e., you), enjoyment. If you are one of the few owners of a copy of this book's predecessor, "Places to visit on the way there", (and you are rarer than hens' teeth), or even if not, you will, I hope, feel that my inclusion of these prologues is worthwhile and do not detract from your amusement. That being said I must now advise you that the following story is not going to be preceded by a prologue in the same vein as the others. I will not be outlining the source, inspiration or happenstance of the origin of the story; instead, I am going to ask for your indulgence and request that you read the following story without any preamble. I have added a postscript which I hope will clear things up.

Devotion

The pain was now the greatest part of his waking hours. It was a constant companion that no matter how hard he tried it would not be outrun or shaken off. It had started off as a nuisance more than anything, a few twinges, a sudden stab of pain that went away as quickly as it came, a little breathlessness, nothing of any significance. Then as the days and weeks had passed it had slowly taken over and had now settled deep, deep; and seemed to have taken up residence in every bone, muscle and sinew, he even felt as if it circulated with his blood so as to ensure no part of him was pain free. The only relief he got was when they came to administer an injection, in the morning and in the later part of the day. He wished they came more often than they did but he supposed they were doing what they thought was best for him and he cherished them for their compassion and love, which he tried to return as best he could. They would sit by him as the contents of the injection worked its magic and the pain slowly ebbed away until it became a distant echo, and, under their concerned and benevolent eyes, he would be able to sleep for a little while.

Bringing him some small relief; and to them also he imagined.

His dreams were always the same. They took him back in time to when he was young and vibrant, filled with a healthy exuberance that never seemed to diminish, as if he held a reserve of life within him that was limitless. The days had seemed to last forever and he had been surrounded by love and had reciprocated that love, and now, as his days neared their end, that love, undimmed by the years, was his greatest comfort.

Sleep, and the wonderful dreams that came with it, never lasted as long as he would have wished and consciousness would eventually return. He would fight it a little, try to keep the comfort of sleep a little longer, to stay in his dreams, but the imperative to wake, goaded by the ever-present pain, would always win out and he would open his eyes to take in the same

unchanging view. If he were lucky the effects of the injection would still be working and he would try to take a little fluid or food. He did not feel very thirsty or very hungry anymore, and hadn't for many days, but it always pleased them when he made the effort and so he did his best for them.

He would then settle back and wait for the pain to return; the inevitable pain.

But this day as he returned to consciousness, regretfully leaving the marvellous dreams behind, the pain seemed to be in abeyance for a little while longer than normal and, rousing himself, and it taking more effort that he thought should be needed, he was able to rise from his bed and totter a few steps to the French windows that looked out on the back garden. He spent a few minutes just staring out upon a world he knew he would not be part of for much longer and as he looked out through the glass the sun shone from a cloudless blue sky, or at least he thought so; his vision was a bit dodgy these days and anything further away than a few feet was a blur, but he chose to believe that the sun was bright and warm and the sky free from any cloud.

A few errant leaves fluttered by the door within his view then as quickly slipped away on the breeze, he wondered idly where they would end up. He would have sat there forever staring myopically out at the world now beyond his reach but they came and returned him to his bed. They did it tenderly and gently with compassion and care not realising he had been content where he was but he raised no objection; how could he when their every thought was for his welfare and comfort.

He settled back into his bed and accepted their kind words of reassurance then, surprising himself, he fell asleep again, his meagre reserves of energy taxed by his small foray.

This time his dreaming seemed like a continuation of his waking time insofar as he was once more staring out on the world through the glass, but this time his vision was perfect, as it had been in his younger days, and he could see that he had been right.

The sun was at its zenith and shone from a flawless blue sky, small birds fluttered in and out of the trees looking to capture small insects and he could feel the radiated warmth of the unfettered sun in every fibre of his body. It seemed to fill him up with a sense of wellbeing and health, the pain and discomfort forgotten; he felt all the vigour of his long-ago youth.

Regrettably reality would not be put off and his sleep, and temporary respite, was once more interrupted by a wakefulness he both welcomed and hated in equal measure. The pain had returned, not at its eventual and inevitable high level but sufficient to cause him discomfiture and for him to try and adjust his position in the bed. They saw his attempt to move and hands were suddenly there aiding him to move.

So it had come to this, unable to even move himself in his own bed without assistance. He felt old.

As he settled back down, with their faces near to him showing concern, he noticed that they looked sad, sadder than usual, and the children, who, he realised were no longer children but young adults, had left the room, gently guided out by their mother. He wondered why.

Then the door opened again and another person came into the room. This newcomer was just a fuzzy outline but even the vagueness seemed familiar and when the new person spoke in quiet tones, he recognised who it was by the inflection in the voice of the man. The other man came closer to him, close enough so that his poor eyes could see clearly; he had been correct. He listened as a brief conversation took place, picking out only the odd word or two; his hearing was also a bit dodgy these days.

He felt a hand caress his brow and he turned towards it, and then he felt the familiar tiny prick of the needle. He thought it was too soon for his injection, the sun was still high in the sky and his injections were normally in the morning and then again in the evening, at just about sundown.

Never mind; they knew best.

The hand felt good on his brow and he found his breath was coming a little easier and the pain, which had just begun to return, began to slip away again until it became no more than a whisper. His body began to feel light, as if the diminishing pain had been a weight that the injection was somehow lifting from him. He felt good, something he hadn't felt for weeks, but he also felt tired and the hand on his brow now seemed somehow distant, he could still feel it but it was more like a memory, a pleasant memory.

He looked up trying to show his contentment, his happiness, his gratitude, then he felt his eyelids become heavy and he slipped quietly to sleep. He dreamed of summer days that never ended, of arms that never tired of throwing him a tennis ball to fetch, of little arms that entwined his neck, kissed his face and fed him treats and, most importantly, of love and devotion.