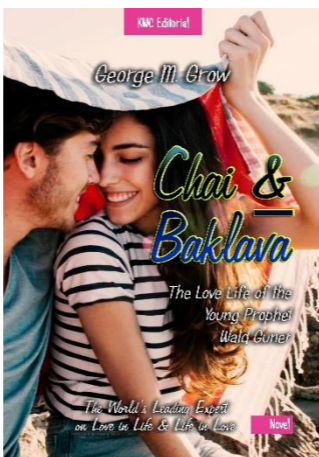
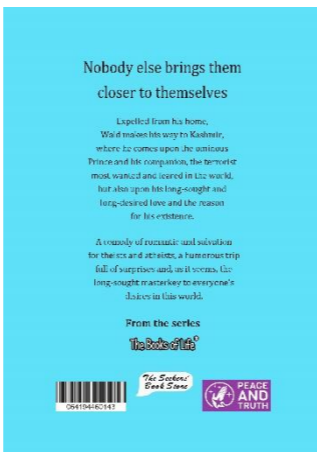


George M. Grow  
Chai & Baklava  
Romance

"Nobody else brings them  
closer to themselves"



From the series  
The Books of Life®



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## The Island

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Wald enjoys strolling through the highly bygone scenery coated with historical patina, inhaling the strange smells of the stands and roasting pans and encountering friendly, attentive people. The connoisseur is like a vessel open to all sides, he tells me. The attentive interest he contains within himself on good days like that day is received by the senses unquestioningly, does not interpret the sensory data and does not fragment them into objects as Craig did with his camera. And so he dreams with his eyes wide open until they turn southbound into a lane where the paving ends and a musty smell spreads in their noses. Great puddles coerce them to jump from one more-or-less dry place to the other and to pinch to their noses (each in his own way) to avoid taking in the stench; and when he wonders why they take one way and not another, they reach a cobbled square at the lakeside looking out at a wooden footbridge leading over lake Dal to a little island with settlement. Wald turns slowly around on his axis and looks upon mainly uninhabited, partly derelict houses, upon a small, colorful store and his operator of whom only the bobble cap and the waving hand are visible behind the stacked goods, and reports that the square is the starting point for quite a number of waterways. In all directions he can see how the Kashmiris pole their little wooden boats along the old houses, how they exchange goods from boat to boat and

how they head out to a wedding. Craig throws his flower chain to the bride, and Hari asks them to go on. And so they follow him along several paces onto the footbridge.

The little, green island in front of their eyes, following the thousand-foot-long wooden bridge across the lake is a memorable thrill to Craig and Wald. Accompanied by the titillating danger which bodes but, despite Craig's warning, does not materialize in the creaking and shaking under their steps in a highly ready camera in Craig's hands, he is, however, glad to reach the island's shore without getting his feet wet, where the first thing to catch Wald's eye is the cooperation between men and animal. Here and there are young and old people in front and inside their houses, and a great many of these people are waving to them. Two sheepdogs run up to them, ducks are chattering, and even the washing hung out in the breeze is waving hello. Then they meet a shepherd boy with his flock. Two young rams butt heads, and the winner gets his choice of the ewes. But not only the land-based animals have chosen this island for their home, even a flock of birds has settled here: Swallows are wafting through the air slightly warmed by the sun, cormorants with eyes like sparkling emeralds are beating their wings to cool their feathers down and, overhead, there is a sedge of cranes whose call rings out for a long time. The water is as abundant as the land: A boy lets the visitors see his ciscos and sea basses, and even scale carp are available on the menu. Then, just a stone's throw away from the bridge, Wald

discovers a half-sunken skiff that is home to mosses and mussels, and finally he comes upon a cow standing up to its knees in the icy water of the lake. "The most beautiful joy cannot do without tears," he sings to himself, and, indeed, Wald who has plenty of songs on his mind all throughout this afternoon, is about to shed a tear. At the end of a little path where a rock overhangs the smooth lake, he is greeted by a single blue poppy holding its head out to spring; he has found his blue flower, the fulfillment of a youthful romantic dream. Even as a school-boy, one flower was of special importance for him, the blue flower which flourishes secretly beyond the mountains. To this day, he knows every line of this old song, which is not his but an expression of his youthful longing and not his but a remembrance of grandfather Mohammed:

*We want to go for a ride through  
the country mute  
Over the open fields up to the  
clear peaks of solitude.  
Want to eavesdrop from  
where the storm wind roars,  
Want to look what behind  
the mountains floors,  
And how the world so far, and  
how the world so far.*

*The blue flower blooms fine  
deeply in the woods,  
To win the flower we move into  
the woods.  
The trees roar, the river mumbles  
and never crust,  
And who wants to find the blue  
flower must*

*Be a bird of passage, be a bird of passage.*

Again and again, this song has accompanied him on his journeys, and he always secretly hoped to come across the blue flower at some point. In this sense, he is like the poet Ibrahim Al-Wahlab who incessantly had his protagonist Ali long for the blue flower of Romanticism. The blue flower stands for longing and love and for the metaphysical striving for the secret which dwells within the world. It was what everybody is seeking without knowing whether one calls it God, eternity or love. The crack which splits the world by technology and the principles of liberalism and materialism into the world of rationality, numbers and figures and into the world of feelings and wonder shall become whole again. The driving force of the romantic person therefore is the longing for the world's healing and becoming one, for synthesizing the contradictions to a harmonious ensemble, which is why the romantic person travels a lot and while looking consciously around, he does not set the bar for what is beautiful or strange or worthy or valuable ever higher, but rather continually lowers it. Whether this is his religion, I ask between two slurps of coffee, whereupon he tells me that you can have more than one religion at once, you can comply with any number of ideas, concepts, eras, feelings, experiences and references for coming to grips with the fullness of life even better, which reminds me of the architect of the organic style of building and deconstructionism that he mentioned. The loving, attentive,

tender element of romantic philosophy, he adds, as it was manifested in Buddha under the Botree or in Jesus and Mohammed when they were in the desert, or in himself when he was at his uncle's estate and on the island in lake Dal when encountering the blue flower, was a religion much nicer, more reliable, more universal and more useful than liberalism, socialism, humanism or conservatism since its totem is not only economics, the working world, mankind or tradition, not the system of trade, the system of society, the system of nature or the system of myrmecology but all these systems combined into a world system.

Furthermore, I put on record that religion is the discipline of inwardness. The romantic was a man of inwardness, the yogi was a man of inwardness, the mystic was a man of inwardness but also the engineer, the scientist and the researcher. And since I fully understand, I ask what the discipline of inwardness was not for the working, the stock broker or the politician, but for the man of the world, whether he means meditation, and hear that man, if he experiences and understands what the world is about, if he approached it with love, in devotion, respect and attention, that objective interest wasn't sufficient to evoke sympathy for it, to experience and understand it, indeed, that you had to be as it is, no, he corrects himself, you had to be the world itself, which sounds strange to my ears. He entices me with a crime thriller he had been stringing along from India to this place and I get served a flower story. I must admit though that he never disappointed or hung me out to dry.

Of course, he might have spared his campaign with his “Shame Mobile”. A passel of managers in designer suits, it appeared, had committed to let them hitch to his convertible in which the “people” were celebrating life. And so the team pulled the “Shame Mobile” around the Ring Road up to the stock exchange where starry-eyed do-gooders caused the police to disband it.

Religion, romanticism, mysticism, inwardness, discipline. What is different now as if he said, “The little island in lake Dal is a beautiful, enchanting corner of the earth,” I ask myself without pondering an answer and comply with his story, which has shown no signs of terrorism up to now, inasmuch as I ask him about the ominous discipline he displayed being on the island in lake Dal, take my pen in hand and note that he has not practiced the discipline of inwardness below the Bo tree, not in the desert or at any other special place but everywhere, therefore, wherever he is just now on days like this one. Literally,

“If you wake up at five o'clock in the morning and you tell yourself, I'll do it (religion), if you are busy and you tell yourself, I'll do it, if you are distracted by other things and you tell yourself, I'll do it, not later, not sometime but now, if you shift down a gear from morning to night so that your attention, your feelings and your nerves are not disturbed by anything, not by movement, hasty glances, brooding or doubting, if you take less than eighty steps per minute, if you regain your attention to the things that matter, if you respect nothing as much an individual, separated object by taking, for instance,

the street with its people, shops, buildings, vehicles, lights and everything else not as parts of the street but as the street and the world itself, if you look around without seeing any objects, without emphasizing anything, without preferring anything too much and you know that life is expansion, love is expansion and he who loves, lives, you will probably be well enlightened and accompanied wherever you go.”

And really, as a matter of fact, so many years later, he has found it, the blue poppy, gentle as the bearing he just spoke about, named after his discoverer “*Meconopsis baileyi*” and admired by many as the queen of flowers. This encounter imparts a brief epiphany unto him: You can lend good fortune a hand, and if it comes true, you haven’t pursued it, you have let it happen. This is supposed to mean: If you release fortune from desire, from your goals, from numbers and figures and if you are of an attitude that allows good fortune as something happening that appears when the objective universe and your subjective self become one sense of sight, touch, hearing, tasting, smelling – the Mystery of the world will be revealed to you, or as Spinoza said, “*Omnis determinatio est negatio.*” Every determination, every objective recognition, every statement is a denial of reality. Every determination is a demarcation which displaces the fortune-bringing Mystery, the world itself, and shoves fortune as crucial experience, as inspiration, signpost, counselor and edification into the background. Wald:

“Then I don’t care about admired but to become an admirer.”



The motto of this would-be religion is: "Realize what the greatness of nature and the great secrets are, and do not concern yourself with what you should believe in."

"Shall I pick it?" he asks himself with eyes full of love. No. He knows that he never would do this to his flower, and instead of separating it from its lifeblood, he lets a tear fall on it which slowly flows over the stem down to the roots. Then, while he feels it as a stroke of luck that the sun is still sending its rays down on this soft body and bathing it in glittering light, a shrill noise awakens him. He quickly immortalizes his find through the lens of his camera and follows in the direction the noise is coming from, trudges over soft, wet grass around a barn and encounters a swarm of children who are romping and prancing around Craig and comes straight to the point.

"How old are you?" a little girl wearing a wreath of white flowers in her hair wants to know.

"Fifty-nine," Craig answers, beguiled by the little creature.

"No problem," the girl says in clumsy English. "My granddad is sixty and he is also light on his feet."

When Wald looks into Craig's glowing face, he is seized by the idea the American is secretly calling for King Herod, more resoundingly, as it seems to him, when the children of the village, safe in the knowledge that Craig, even if he tried to, would be too slow to catch them, are dancing around him and pulling at his jacket. And even due to the fact that Craig partly imploringly, partly scolding is hardly proving himself to be a good sport now, in Wald's eyes

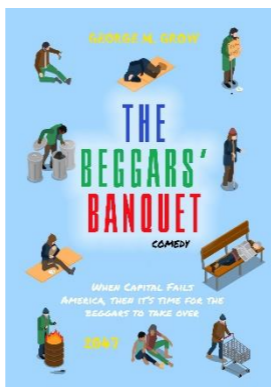
everything here is unrestrainedly beautiful. He does not find it beautiful in or of itself but in its most familiar nature. "Beauty is not only skin deep, beauty goes even deeper," he says to himself; and so, he doesn't find the modest houses, the aged barns, the dirt tracks or the grass between the houses beautiful, not the uniform clothing Hari and all of the children wear or what he can see through open doors and windows, no, for him, all of this taken as a whole is bewitchingly beautiful.

End of the reading

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