

A Snake in the Garden of Eden

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Authors Note

Although this is a very short story, it took just shy of four years to finish it. I'm not the speediest of authors as you can image. This story has changed a lot in those years, going through many different revisions and rewrites. Pieces added, large chunks removed, other bits shifted around. Terminology changes and thematic overhauls. Through all that, one thing stayed the same: the core philosophy behind it.

This is a story about ideas, ideals and ideologies. On one hand it's a classic tale of good versus evil, on the other hand it's a philosophical expression of a very radical mindset. Utopia versus Distopia, but one person's Utopia may be another's Distopia, and vice versa.

There are many things in this story that will probably offend a lot of people. If you're one of them, sorry, but that's life. I can't write to please everyone, as the result would most likely not please anyone.

I'd advise reading this story with an open mind. Closed-minded people may want to skip it, as it's almost guaranteed to offend them.

During the writing of this story, I created a whole alternate world with a lot of details that may not have made it into the story, but which have influenced it in other ways. I'll most likely use this world for other stories in the future, as there's plenty of ideas and places left to be explored.

With the warnings issued, and history told, I now leave you with the result. I hope you enjoy.

Early Hours

The cool night air chilled the young girl and she made her way through the alley.

~Maybest ave covered m'self. Meg'n 'll be turned o'r if I don't get back pret soon.

Ma'ia hurried her pace, although the skies were pitch black, the odd lantern hanging from buildings, together with the half-clouded moon, provided enough background light for her to maneuver quickly through the alleyways.

She could tell it had been raining but a short time before, as the streets were still soaked and cold.

The city slept, save for a few night walkers who wandered the streets in search for others who basked in the moonlight. Ma'ia herself would normally be asleep by now, but at the request of Andr she had shared herself with him before heading back to her home.

Still wet from the sex, the sharp breeze cut against her bare flesh. Her long, dirty blond hair swayed in the wind, although it did provide some cover for her back and buttocks.

A lone dog sat drinking from a puddle, but quickly scuttled away as she approached. She opened the door to the old building and stepped inside.

The building was cool, but at least there was no wind inside. Ma'ia made her way through the halls until she arrived at the door to her apartment.

Quietly making her way inside, she laid down on the bundle of blankets on the floor. Meg'n rolled over and looked at her younger sister.

"I did wonder when ya'd get 'ome. Ben o'r with Andr gain I bets."

Ma'ia smiled, "He as in a mood t'night Meg. So we shared for awhile. Am sor if you'd worry."

"Not a prob'm dear, but best'n to get some sleep, fore morn comes."

They both nodded and curled up against one another, the blankets rolled up under and around them. Ma'ia kissed Meg'n and they closed their eyes to sleep.

Sleep however was not to come so quickly for Ma'ia. Her thoughts racing through her mind like horses around a track. Of course, she had never seen a horse, but had heard stories of them from others. Her mother had told her of horses she had seen in a distant village. Ma'ia had never been outside of the city, the stories of wild beasts and even more vicious man-creatures kept her from wanting to explore.

She was cross at herself, as it was hard to remember her mother's face. She had been but six when her mother had passed on, taken while still young by a bitter illness which had nearly killed both sisters as well.

But that was six years ago, wait no, seven years ago now. How time passes, like a leaf being blown in the wind, it goes so far, yet passes so quickly. The flashes of fleeting life, rushing in the winds of time, here but a moment ago, but now faded into distant memory.

Her sister had done amazingly well to raise Ma'ia, being that Meg'n herself had been only ten at the time. Oh lovely Meg'n, her warm skin, her soft hair. Her hot, wet tongue against Ma'ia's as they kissed. What would she do if not for Meg'n.

Meg'n had a very strong will. Stronger than any Ma'ia had ever seen before. Ma'ia had only once heard her sister cry, and that was after their mother had just passed on. Meg'n had not cried when they found mother's body. She had held strong and comforted her child sister. It was only after the older man Stev had taken the girls mother to the place of those-who-have-left that Meg'n had gone into the back room and wept. She didn't know that Ma'ia had heard her. Ma'ia never told her.

Stev and young Andr had comforted the children after their mothers passing. Stev had told them that his own children had died of a similar illness in the city where he had come from. He spoke not much else about his time before, only that he felt more at home in their quiet city than he had ever felt anywhere else. He was a kind older man, and had often shared with their mother before her passing. Meg'n had shared herself with him in those sad days, a subtle yet sublime reflection of his kindness to them in their time of mourning.

Stev still came and visited the girls on occasion, although he'd moved into a different building a few years before, to be closer to his new life-friend, with whom he'd sired a new son.

Few visitors ever came to Utopia. Typically when they did, it was to escape from some awful place. Places where people are shamed and beaten. Places where there is hate and misery, loss and cruelty. For the same reason, very few ever left Utopia.

Andr had left once, a few years ago now, when he'd been sixteen. He had gone out with his good friend Jare to see what other cities had to offer. He had always been an adventurous type. Now at nineteen he still enjoyed exploring, but had no intentions of ever going far from home.

Andr and Jare had been closest of friends, they had shared with each other on a regular basis and had lived in the same complex as Ma'ia and Meg'n. Their many adventures exploring buildings and the surrounding landscape had been fun and happy - but that trip outside had been anything but.

They had seen the horrors in the Others' world. They had witnessed the terrible things they did to one another, and after a brief run-in with some of the monsters, Andr had come running back to Utopia, to the loving arms of Ma'ia, Meg'n and their friends. He did not speak of what had happened to Jare. He just sat in silence and wept.

In Utopia, everyone was friends. Well, almost everyone. There were the few

who kept to themselves, but even they obeyed the single law of the city: 'Do what thou wilt, lest it harm another.' The founders of Utopia had carved the ancient words on a stone plaque attached to the great fountain at the centre of the city. No-one really knew who had said the words, or what their historical significance was, but everyone in the city lived by them.

As a child, Ma'ia's mother had told her a story of a great garden, where the people were free and uninhibited. Much like Utopia, only from long before the known-time. In the story, there was a serpent, an evil creature which corrupted the people of the garden. Once they had been led astray, they had covered themselves and made laws governing everything from eating to sex. Anyone who had broken the laws was punished harshly, often tortured and even killed.

The fallen people spread out, enforcing their ways on all those they found, killing any who would not submit. They showed no mercy, nor flexibility towards anyone who spoke against them, or lived outside their strict rules.

Eventually the fallen people and their descendants grew to cover the world, leaving no place untouched by their corruption.

Then had come the Great Suffering. The world was plunged into darkness and decay. Many cities had been utterly destroyed, others left barren and poisoned. The very winds had carried the lethal illness, killing millions of people with no regard for race, sex, religion or otherwise. Death was indiscriminate. Those who had survived the Suffering, had rebuilt what they could, but much of that which was known had been lost. It was in the days after the Great Suffering that the Founders had come.

They had spoken against the depravity and chaos, and for this, many had been killed. Even so, they had slowly gained support, and sick of the evil in the world, had come to Utopia, where they started anew. A new society, based on that ancient garden. A place where the laws of the fallen people held no meaning, and only the One Law remained. No shame would be allowed in Utopia, nor fear, hatred, oppression or murder.

The people of Utopia cast away their clothes and their superstitions, and built a city of love and peace. They shared with one another, and helped each other in all things.

Ma'ia had never known a world other than this, she had been raised to believe in the One Law and to love and help all those around her.

She had listened to Andr's stories of the world outside, and was glad she lived in a city where she could be free; where she didn't have to worry about fear or hate; where she could share with others in love and unity.

With her thoughts having calmed some, she slept in peace, knowing that she was in a good place.

At Dawn

D'ard was tired. Tired from walking as far as he had been. Tired of having to keep his Archons in line. Tired of everything that seemed to want to drag him down. Tired of life.

However that didn't mean he'd give up. No, D'ard was not a quitter. If only to see one more person bend to his will, he'd keep going. That feeling of power he got when he broke the spirit of another person was unlike anything else he could think of.

However, while not giving up, they would stop and rest shortly, probably within the hour, once they could make out more clearly where they were. For tired men grow restless and restless men grow ugly. While D'ard seemed to enjoy punishing ugly men, he was himself tired, and not at all in the mood for dealing with ugliness.

D'ard was not at all an ugly man, he was moderately tall, being slightly over six foot, well built, and had a face of sharp distinctive angles, like one from a Roman statue. His short black hair was jagged and spiked, although somehow suited him, and did not look at all out of place. His pale grey eyes were so faint, they were hard to see in full daylight, so at the current time all you'd notice would be the reflection of fire from the Lo'dites torches sparkling in dim white eyes.

It was still pretty dark, the light of the sun just starting to appear from beyond the horizon. D'ard and his Archons had been walking for the last two days. Oh, what D'ard would give to have a working soovey. The men of old didn't need to march across the land, they could load their troops in vans, sooveys or even cars. No more though, already before the Great Suffering had there been a fuel shortage. In the stories told by the elder ones, that fuel shortage itself had helped instigate the events leading up to the Great Suffering. But why worry of the past, the present was what mattered now, and for D'ard, that meant marching forward, even if for just a little while longer.

The damp ground beneath their feet seemed to move itself, as if alive, as they strove onwards.

~What of t' ground? Do ground feel pain? Do ground give up. Ne'r! Ground is al'ys there, al'ys hard, ne'r relenting. E'rth is made of ground, but man can move it, can mold it, can ma'e it into mud, c'ment, or whate'r man needs. Fore man, beasts were slaves to E'rth. Now E'rth is slave to man. So man is greater th'n E'rth, and only Lo'd is greater than man.

It didn't help D'ard's tiredness that he'd had to push onto Garik. Garik had tried to abandon them, had tried to return to the city from which they came. D'ard could not have any of the Lo'dites, Archons especially, show any form of independence, anything but complete submission to his will was unacceptable. So he pushed onto Garik. Forcing him down onto the ground, the other men standing back, knowing if they spoke out, they'd be next, D'ard had enjoyed the feeling. Ramming himself up inside Garik, while the others gawked and cowered. Releasing his seed into the beaten man, before kicking him and telling him to get back in the line.

No-one else had attempted to leave. They feared D'ard, and that was just as D'ard wanted it. That was also why he hadn't let them stop there and rest. No, they must march forward, no matter how tired they were, no matter how tired he was, he couldn't let them see any signs of weakness. He was above that.

Any man who dared speak or act against him, would be broken. Breaking men was like breaking ground. Cold, hard and unrelenting. His methods were exact and just, for that is how Lo'd wanted it. For while E'rth was slave to man, man was slave to Lo'd.

Though Lo'd did not sanction pushing onto of men by men, it was not as though he was just a man, he was Master. The Archons themselves were free and clear to push whomever broke the laws, for that was their job. What is law without those to enforce it? If the people had to be punished, the Archons would punish them. If the Archons needed to be punished, that was the job of the Abrax. D'ard was the Abrax.

He remembered when he had been broken, when the previous Abrax had pushed onto him. He had been shoved into the ground, the dirt grinding into his face, while his Master ground into him. The others had sneered and joked. He remembered the kicking, the beating, the pain of his Master's throbbing manhood being forced into his tight, virgin shit-hole. He remembered everything.

Of course, he was Master now. He'd made sure that once he'd killed the old man who'd Mastered him, that he punished all those he remembered mocking him. Each one he beat and kicked. Oh and punishment for Pet'r had been even greater. He had shoved Pet'r down, making the battered man lick the filthy ground. Then he had pissed on Pet'r, forcing the begging man to drink his hot spray. Torture and brutality, those were the tools which enforced obedience.

Pet'r had been his rival, and the one among the Lo'dites that D'ard felt deserved greater punishment. So after the initial torture, he'd tied him up, and pushed down Pet'r's wife, making sure the nearly-broken man saw every detail, every moment of her suffering. Then without an ounce of mercy, he sliced her throat and let her bleed out while still fucking her.

Her blood soaked the E'rth beneath them, and Pet'r's screams had echoed throughout the entire city.

It had taken several more months of breaking, but eventually Pet'r had become the right hand of D'ard. Of course, that didn't mean that D'ard ever let his guard down around him, or any of the Lo'dites for that matter. He knew that any one of them would kill him at any time if they only had the chance.

D'ard himself had sixteen wives, as well as countless mistresses. His role allowed him the privilege of such extravagance, for if any other man slept with anyone other than their wives, he'd be punished by the Archons, for that was the law of Lo'd. Most men had but one wife, for only the Archons were sanctioned by the law to marry more than once. D'ard himself made it a priority to fuck all the wives of the Archons every few months, to ensure they knew he was in charge of them, as they were of their wives.

For just as woman must submit to her man, so must the Archons submit to D'ard. Just so as the people must submit to the Archons.

He'd been the Abrax for three years now. Three long years in which he'd ensured that the people of the five cities feared and obeyed him. The people were sheep, and the Archons the shepherds. D'ard himself was the right hand of Lo'd, the one who ensured the Will of Lo'd was always upheld.

For Lo'd had many laws, all of which had to be upheld. Most of the laws applied to the common people, but some applied to the Order of Lo'dites as well, and a Lo'dite who broke the law was one who did not live to speak about it. It mattered not your rank in the Order, from Initiate to Archon, the law was to be obeyed. Only D'ard was above the law, for he was the law. He interpreted the Great Books, using the feelings he knew came from Lo'd as inspiration as to their meaning.

For no-one but Teacher were able to read much more than simple wall blog. When D'ard had been a child, Teacher had instructed him on how to read, but many of the lessons had been lost over time, and so it required guidance from Lo'd to fully understand the nature of the Great Books.

Teacher had left what at that time had been the two cities, shortly after the Lo'dites rose up against the Benefaction. D'ard had been sixteen at the time. It was the next year that the Abrax had recruited him. He had waited four years before becoming the Master himself. He wondered how long it would be before one of his Archons decided to challenge him.

How many challenges had there been in the past? He did not know. Although before his ascension, the Lo'dites had not known as many of the laws of Lo'd as they did now. None of them even knew how long the Lo'dites had been around. Why then had it taken them so many years to rise up against the Benefaction to defeat those heathen blasphemers who had ruled the two cities as well as several other locations in Merca? The Benefaction had denied the laws of Lo'd, had declared themselves above Lo'd, saying that Lo'd did not exist, and only they should be trusted to guide the people of Merca.

When the Lo'dites had defeated them, most of the Benefaction had been killed, publicly executed, their bodies left for others to see as a warning against blasphemy and heresy. Those who did survive fled the north-western territories of Merca, venturing either into the frozen east or into the poisoned south. Proof again that Lo'd had reserved the healthy and warm parts of Merca specifically for the faithful. Which is why the Lo'dites had spread out, expanded the two cities into five cities, and would continue to expand until everyone in the chosen land was safe and pure, under the laws of Lo'd.

He realized that he had let his thoughts distract him. Never a good thing

when surrounded by jealous Archons. Not that it mattered, he could see the destination now. The morning light hinting of the coming sunrise revealed a sight he had been longing to see for some time. Up ahead, just visible was the city he longed for. The legendary place only whispered of in secret, for it's name alone was blasphemy in and of itself.

It was safe now to rest for a while. Rest in comfort knowing their target was in sight. D'ard did not sleep of course, without the safety of his locked room, he dared not sleep near any of the Archons, for they would surely kill him in his sleep. The Archons themselves slept. They knew he would not kill them in their sleep. He needed them, for now. For in a couple hours they would resume their march, and head to that place about where he'd heard many tales.

Tales of such grand scale that they seemed mostly unbelievable. Tales of such wickedness that only Sod'm and G'mor could compare, and even then may still be found less perverse. Stories of perverted sex acts between all sorts, with no regards for gender, age or relation. Stories of people who were not shamed by their nakedness and flaunted it to all others. He had heard so much of the sick corruption of this place, and wished only to save them from their wicked ways.

Soon he'd find out how many of those stories were true.

Shortly before adding a sixth city to his empire.

So Comes the Sunrise

The man sat slumped against the bleak, cracked wall. Dew drops glistened in the early morning light, barely able to be seen against the wet cement. The sound of water splashing down onto the pavement below, flowing from the eavestroughs which had captured the rain from the night prior.

Splashing down, falling down. Down into the drains below where the water was taken beneath the street, washing the stains of time along with it.

~Why can't I just wash away with the rain?

He stared out at the old air conditioning unit he'd been trying to fix the day before. How many years had it been since that ancient machine was built? A hundred? More. It didn't matter really, for while he'd managed to salvage some solar panels and build a make shift generator, it wasn't enough yet to power the unit.

Also the fact that the sun was just nicely starting to show at the peak of the mountain, made solar power slightly less than efficient. However alternative energy would have to suffice, as the massive generators of power used by those before the Great Suffering had other issues which he did not want to deal with.

The ones which burned fossil fuels, of which the planet was mostly drained, caused pollution and smog and death. Not something he really wanted to bring back to the people of Utopia.

Then there was the cleaner power of fission, but look where that had gotten the planet. A great discovery which could power the world, used to destroy it instead. After the Great Suffering there had been nothing but chaos, the few who tried to rebuild had been killed by extremists. How long ago was that? Nobody knew. By Ka'l's guess at least a hundred years had passed since the Great Suffering, but it may have been longer. In the time of chaos nobody kept records. They just pillaged and killed and brought suffering and oppression to their fellow man.

In the south it was said the water from the ground was undrinkable, between the fossil fuels, and the nuclear fallout, much of the land was as well. It was no wonder so many had migrated to the northwest. No need to poison this land by repeating the mistakes of the old ones.

The texts of the old ones brought some sense of the society they had built to those who were still able to read the ancient tongues. While it mostly was written in a language similar to Glish, the words were not always the same, and the usage of some had changed over time.

There had always been a few who kept the knowledge of reading alive, but not many were to be found anymore. Ka'l had known a few in many cities, but most kept their skills secret for fear of what others may do to them. At least in Utopia, Ka'l didn't have to worry about that problem.

Ka'l was a patient man, he'd been wandering through the cities of Merca for several years, trying to put the pieces back together. He was one of the few who still ventured outside of Utopia, apparently unafraid of the horrors of the others.

He stood at around five foot nine inch, and his shoulder length walnut hair seemed disheveled and wild. One look into his emerald green eyes and you could tell he'd been around. His eyes spoke of age far beyond his appearance which would put him in his early 30s. No, looking into those eyes, you'd almost think he'd have been twice that age. Or more.

Ka'l noticed the naked body of Ma'ia approaching from the roof door, her bare feet making tiny splashes on the wet roof.

"G'morn Ka'l, I see yo's up 'ere gain. Why yo's spend s'much time up 'ere?"

Ka'l looked over, "Because it's peaceful. And I'm still trying to fix the cool-maker."

"I love yo's speak-way, it's so dif'n't to mostus. Yo's gonna learn me to read paper-blog so I can say like you?"

"Maybe. The first lesson is, they are called books in the old tongue, not paper-blog. Wasn't Teacher instructing you in the old tongue before he passed-beyond?"

"Yesir, b' I don member nuf to read it, tho I do 'stand yo's speak."

Ka'l smiled and turned back to look at the air conditioning unit. Ma'ia sat down next to him, and wrapped her arms around his back.

"Tell a story o the oldons Ka'l. I al'ays like t'ear bout the time fore."

Ka'l turned towards her and nodded.

"Well, as you know, before the Great Suffering, Merca was made up of three countries. The countries of Merca believed in freedom, maybe not quite as much as we do here in Utopia, but moreso than many others.

"However things began to change in the countries, they started to retract their freedoms, creating more laws to enslave the people. While all of them partook in this gradual downfall, the worst was the one in the middle. They made laws with which they could imprison anyone for no reason other than they suspected they may be a criminal. Almost everything had laws based on age attached to it, arbitrary numbers that decided whether you had the rights of others. Very similar to how earlier in their history they had restricted rights based on the colour of your skin. They also had all sorts of laws in regards to sharing, for instance they did not allow those of the same gender who shared with one another to recognize their relationships. In fact many of those who did share with others of their own gender were persecuted for doing so, treated like sub-human by those who did not agree with their friendship and love. Nudity was totally taboo, even showing a nipple in public could cause an outrage which would threaten to bring society to its knees."

Ma'ia looked shocked, "That soun's 'or'ble, why'd the people stay?"

“Well, they couldn’t leave. In those days if you were a citizen of one country, it was much harder to go to another. But it wouldn’t have made much difference, as all countries believed in most of the same laws and rules. It was the legacy of the fallen ones, who had preached against true freedom.

“The utter blasphemy was that they did it all in the name of freedom. They claimed that their enslaving laws and blatant disregard for human life was their way of protecting freedom! They killed infants in the womb, murdered murderers, jailed those who used mind altering substances and deemed any depictions of sharing to be obscene.

“They went to war with other countries by making up stories about them, lying to their own people to get support to do it. They killed civilians, tortured prisoners, murdered opponents, and generally spread terror across the E’rth. Once again ironically in the name of fighting against terror.

“Everything they spoke against, they were themselves, and everything they claimed they believed in, they undermined. Now let me be clear, it wasn’t just the people of the middle country, nor even just Merca itself. Most countries on E’rth did similar things, and were all to blame for the coming of the Great Suffering. It’s only that the middle country was the most powerful, they held the weapons with which much of E’rth was devastated with. That is why much of the land to the South is poisoned and impure. The few that live there, mutated and insane.

“We must remember these stories, and you must tell them to the children when you are older, make sure nobody forgets what our ancestors did in the past, so we do not repeat the same mistakes again in the future.”

“I’ll not forget Ka’l. It soun’s awful. I’m glad we don’t live like they did.”

“That may be true for Utopia Ma’ia, but never forget that most cities are not like us. Most are even worse than what the old ones lived through. It’s up to us to keep Utopia alive and hope that others eventually join us in friendship rather than follow the ways of the fallen ones.”

“I ’ope so, I really do.”

Ma’ia embraced Ka’l in a hug, holding him tightly. Ka’l turned away and looked out over the rooftops again, making Ma’ia look up at him with questioning eyes.

“Why won yo’s share with me Ka’l?” She asked.

Ka’l just sat silently.

“Cumon, I know yo’s shared with Meg’n fore. She’s told me. So why’n’t with me?”

Ka’l looked down at her. He did find her attractive, highly so. Her golden skin, fair hair, light blue eyes that sparkled in the early sunlight. She was definitely not repulsive, what with her small budding breasts, and that soft patch of fine blond hair starting to show between her legs.

It wasn’t her personality either, for she was so bright and joyous, so free and pure. Innocence was still within her, she had never experienced the horrors of the fallen ones, never committed an act of selfishness or cruelty. She was warm and kind, and definitely someone who Ka’l would easily love.

And that—love—was the problem. Memories, memories of a time long past, of an ever-repeating pattern. Not just a pattern, but the Pattern. He had known love. More than once before. He remembered those feelings. He remembered those lovers. They'd had the same qualities that he now saw in Ma'ia. Gentle voices of kindness and inner-wisdom. Beauty beyond that of the skin. These were memories of the past. Memories he didn't really want to remember, and yet could never forget.

Sharing between friends was one thing, but Ka'l knew from every moment Ma'ia spent near him, he felt more than friendship. If he could squelch those feelings, hold back the pain of the past, he would gladly take her, right there and then. But the memories remained, and the remembrance of loss kept him from wanting to get any closer than he already was.

"I'm sorry Ma'ia, please believe me, it's not you- it's me."

"I dona 'stand yo's s'mtime Ka'l. Yo's ben here on'n'off for a num'r years now, yet yo's still a mys'ry to allus. I wanna share m'self with yo's. I've wan'to since I saw yo's first came 'ere. I knows yo's shared with other friends, whaso diff bout me?"

"I said, it's not your fault, you're very beautiful and highly attractive, it's just..."

Ma'ia had silenced his words by placing her lips against his. Slipping her hot tongue into his mouth, she tasted his confusion and felt his fear shudder through his body as she explored his wet mouth. She pulled closer, wrapping her arms even more tightly around him, holding him close against her flesh.

Ka'l's mind was a rush of scattered thoughts, bright flashing explosions of conflict, sensual overload. He wanted to pull back, to break the kiss, to walk away. The memories were fresh and ripe, but somehow the feelings overwhelmed his senses and drowned out the pain of the past.

He threw his own arms around her, and joined the kiss in an active roll. Their tongues entwined and writhing like snakes wrapping around each other.

Her taste, her breath, her hot sweat mingling with his, he pulled her closer, and before he had a chance to change his mind, he was inside her. Two bodies becoming one with the sun rising quietly behind them.

The gasps, the quivers, the moans, the electricity in the air. Every muscle, tendon and organ of their bodies exploding with pleasure. Their sweat pouring together against their hot wet bodies, streaming off and splashing onto the wet roof, then down, down, through the gutters with the rain, into the street below. Their bodies seemed to dissolve into one another as their souls washed away into ecstasy.

Release, oh sweet release, they both came together, their moans and cries echoing out into the morning sky. A lone cat perched on the wall of the roof glanced over and seemed to smile. Then they lay there, holding each other, letting everything else melt into the sunlight, and splash down upon the waking E'rth.

Morning Breaks

The sun was rising in the sky, daylight now illuminating the land and its people. A fire was burning in the commons pit, where the lady Dalia was roasting some various nuts and seeds.

The flames licked up towards the sky, like a tongue lapping at an unseen candy. The crackling of wood, the bright embers hissing. Warmth, made moreso by the shining spring sun, itself a glowing inferno—filled with the same destructive power which had ravaged the E'rth, yet bringing life to all who lives on the small blue planet.

Ma'ia was helping Lil, a kindly and wise woman of nearly thirty years. Lil was quiet and sweet, her shiny red hair sparkling in the morning light. As life-friend of Councilor J'son, and a direct descendant of the Founder Justice, she worked hard to ensure the vision and truth of the Founders was kept alive in Utopia.

For Justice had laid down the One Law when he, his life-friend Mercy and his brother Shalom had arrived in the city. The three Founders had guided the people of peace, and together they had turned a nearly abandoned city into Utopia.

Since their childhood, Lil and J'son had believed in their ancestors vision, had shared in the hope for the future of mankind. They had at sixteen declared themselves life-friends, and had never stopped working to keep Utopia as a place of harmony and love.

J'son had been elected to the Council nearly ten years prior to this day. An honor bestowed upon him not because he was descended from a Founder, but because of his never ceasing belief in the truth of the One Law.

Lil had turned down an offer to be granted Council, saying that the position was better held by new blood, not a life-friend of an existing Councilor. She truly believed in justice and reason, and knew that her brother-come-lover would represent their shared ideals in the Council.

At the moment, Ma'ia was preparing the tables in the courtyard, setting them for the multitudes of people who would join the festivities that afternoon. Lil was busy bringing food and wine from the storage rooms out to the small building by the courtyard, were it could be kept cool until the festivities began.

Dalia let Meg'n take over the roasting, and went up to see Lil.

"Thankbe dear'st Lil for all ya 'elp t'day. I've seen-to pr'par' th' pool for us-all. Ka'l's takin' care o'that now. He say'd he w'ain't able to get the big

cool-mak'r to work, 't we's 'ave the small'r one pow'd by the sun 'ook'd up 'ready."

"Yes'm I'd noticed it Dal', thanks-be to Ka'l for help'n out. He may be a quiet one, but he sure can fix the 'chines. I'm so glad we have you 'round to org'nize the most 'portant day o'the year."

Dalia smiled, "I'd-n't want 'be an'where else dear'st. You'n y'ur bro'er saved ma-life 'n show'd me a bet'r way of livin'. I'd like'n but to do what'r I-can to help y'all make 'topia the bes' place on E'rth."

Lil kissed Dalia, then resumed her tasks, for while morning was still at its peak, there was much to be done before the festival.

Dalia was slightly older than Lil, in her mid fourties. Nearly twenty years younger than her life-friend Stev. She'd given birth to her second child (the first with Stev) four years ago. Today the Watchers were looking after her children as she organized the great event.

Her age had not diminished her looks, her light brown skin, dark wavy hair, bright silver eyes which seemed to have an inner fire shining from within. Her large shapely breasts and slightly stiffened nipples showing no signs of tan-lines, for like the others, clothes were kept for winter or cold days—and this was spring, and warm.

Andr had stopped to gaze at her strong yet well shaped legs, and that patch of curly black hair between them. She was so lovely and had such tenderness in her, yet an inner strength that well matched her physical condition. He longed to share with her—it had been nearly a month—but knew it could wait until the festivities. Besides, this early in the morning she'd probably be wanting to prepare for later. Plus he wasn't really in need of the physical act, for he'd shared with Ma'ia only but last night. But what is time? Oh, time! Preparation, celebration—time was being wasted, he should be getting a move on! He resumed his walk over to Lil.

"Aye Lil, Ka'l says t' pool be ready. 'e send me o'er to 'elp out 'ere."

"Greaten, go-see Dalia, she-be org'nizing festiv'ties this y'ar. I'm-a sure she-do 'preciate some 'elp."

Andr loved Lil's accent. Her words seemed so alive. There weren't many people in Utopia who spoke the same, as they'd either come from other cities, or their ancestors had. Each bringing their own method of speech and version of Glish with them. Of course Ka'l seemed to be the most different of them all, but since Ka'l kept his life outside of Utopia to himself, nobody questioned him to where he learned to speak as he did. It didn't much matter anyway, as long as the people were speaking Glish, most others could understand them. There were of course those who spoke other languages, passed down from their ancestors, but most in Merca at least knew Glish.

Dalia got Andr to help Ma'ia get the tables set, after which they were to prepare the Place of Friends, which was just outside the library. Teacher had once used the library as a place of learning for any who wished to come and learn. Many people missed Teacher, for he had been wise and understanding. Very few still knew the words written on the books inside the library, although most knew the very basics. Enough to write simple wall-blog anyway. The

creative type. Blended with pictures and colours, symbols and metaphors. A library full of books, in a world that had forgotten how to read.

Inside the library sat Ka'l. Sitting in quiet contemplation.

~Why? Why did I do it. Why did I let her do it? I can't let this happen again. I can't do this again. No love. I have to keep my mind clear. No love. I don't want to hurt her. No love. I don't want to get hurt. No love. I don't want to lose her. No love. Dammit, I can't do this. No. Please no. I have to stay focused. No. I'll tell her later. I should tell her now. Later. Why is this happening now? I can't handle this. Stay focused! What'll I do at the celebration? No love. Keep it strictly between friends. No love. I can't do this. Why are these thoughts still here. I need to keep my balance. Focus. Stay clear. I don't know if I can do it. No love.

He stood up and began to pace across the room. He walked to the door and looked outside. The bright morning sun, the blazing fire across the courtyard, Ma'ia and Andr heading straight towards him.

"G'morn' 'gain Ka'l." She said, as she reached up and kissed him.

Ka'l stepped back trying not to fall. Ma'ia gave him an odd glance. Andr looked momentarily perplexed then smiled widely, with a slight laugh.

"Oiy, so! Ya fin'ly got Ka'l to share wit'ya ay? Mayb's be me as lucky t'is aft'noon, w'at say-ya Ka'l?"

Ka'l tried to calm himself as much as possible, even attempting to smile for the two, "Maybe my young sir, maybe."

Andr winked at Ka'l, and Ma'ia just gazed oddly before the two youngsters both resumed setting up the Place of Friends.

Ka'l stood in the door watching them, the morning sun getting higher in the sky. The flames from the pit fire flickered in a gentle breeze, small pieces of ash floating up from the pit, slowly hovering until then touched ground, melting into the cracked concrete. Ka'l watched the sparks, followed the ashes, looked out past the Andr and Ma'ia, fast at work in the upper courtyard. The Place of Friends would be so lovely this year, a place everyone would come and enjoy, but the look in Ka'l's eyes seemed to say that he was elsewhere at the moment.

~Why now? I just can't let this happen. No love. No love. No love. Why do I have these feelings? I can't stop it. I must stop it. I should tell her now. Dammit, why won't I just do it. Never again. No loss, no tears, no pain. Never again. No love.

Elevenes

D'ard contemplated. They were within a couple hours of the city now, and what to do next was the question on D'ard's mind.

The ground was cracked and drying, very little of the dampness remaining from the night. A lone grasshopper sat on a leaf of clover, partially covered from the sun by a patch of dandelions which hovered above the clover like massive trees over a small clearing in the woods.

D'ard sat on a rock, staring at the grasshopper. He saw every movement it made, every movement of the grass and plants as a gentle breeze passed by.

~T' loc'sts know no sin. Th're but cr'tures o' Lo'd. Th'y commit no blas'my 'gainst Him. Oh Lo'd, I ask for guid'ce - what must I do? I know't t' people are sinful Lo'd. I know th'y need your guid'ce, your justice. Al'ys th'y turn-way from you, since time 'gan. Why Lo'd? Plants no turn-way. Animals no turn-way. No-ven loc'sts turn-way. Ne'r do nothin' but man turn-way from you.

~Am gon' need you more'n us'ul Lo'd, for I go to place of great sin and blas'my. Off' me guid'ce in th's time of testin' Lo'd. I know I'ma gon' need it.

The Lo'dite Archons paced back and forth grumbling, watching D'ard as he sat praying. Pet'r stood by the edge, holding a whip, and armed with a long blade, in a sheath by his side. He knew no-one would try to run anyway, they'd seen what D'ard was capable of. Also, D'ard was the only one allowed to carry a death-maker.

Lo'd had forbidden all to even possess a death-maker, let alone carry one. Only the Abrax was permitted. It was said in the time before the suffering many people had possessed death-makers. That they used them against one another on a daily basis.

D'ard had warned them that in other places outside the five cities, some still carried death-makers. Lo'd knows, the Benefaction did. Of course, Lo'd had made an exception against the baring of death-makers during the Holy Purge. If the Benefaction had them, the Lo'dites would have been wiped out without any. The previous Abrax, Master Saul had given the Lo'dites all death-makers, for they had a common enemy to defeat, the heathen swine who ruled the cities without mercy and denied the authority of Lo'd.

Master Saul should have done better accounting on his part, should have ensured that none of the Lo'dites had kept their death-makers after the Holy Purge. For it was said that D'ard fired a death-bolt straight into the back of Saul, piecing his heart, and killing him instantly.

Pet'r had far preferred Saul to D'ard.

Among the Lo'dites, other than D'ard and Pet'r, the only other not pacing around with anticipation was Garik. He just sat, hunched over with his hands against his chin, staring at the ground.

Another Archon came shuffling past, and Garik looked up, saw who it was and scowled, before returning his gaze to the ground.

~Beast. I can't believe he'd b'tray his own. Filthy Lo'dite.

Garik had always respected the Lo'dites, until he'd been recruited. He'd always followed the ways of Lo'd, and yet when he saw how the supposed Holy Archons acted, he couldn't bare to put his faith in them. They claimed they were doing the will of Lo'd, but in upholding His laws, they were breaking every one of them. How was that Holy?

Disenchanted by what he saw around him, he only wanted to be free. Free from all this suffering, all these lies. Free from the brutal warlords who were no better than the Benefaction, only in Garik's mind, worse, because unlike the Benefaction, the Lo'dites committed their crimes in the name of Lo'd.

He could only hope that some day Lo'd would pay them back for their so-called "righteous acts".

Under the Benefaction the people had been oppressed, allowed to have no possessions, forced to work for the city in jobs to which they were assigned and punished for expressing any religious beliefs publicly. Now you could own property, choose your job, and express your faith—but only if it was the True faith. Believers in other religions were heretics, the punishment for which was death. Was that in Lo'd's Word? Not that Garik had been able to tell.

Unlike most of the others, Garik knew how to read. He'd been raised by a man who had taught him how to read and write. How to speak. When he'd turned 12, the city he had lived in, had been taken by the Benefaction, who had some kind of grudge against his adoptive father. His father had put him into the trust of another man, called Teacher, who continued his education up until the coming of the Lo'dites when Teacher had fled the city.

Since then, Garik had read all of the Holy Books. He knew that most of the stuff D'ard and former Masters had claimed to be the Word of Lo'd was not in those books. So where was it from then?

Only Lo'd knew. And maybe those who were "hearing his voice".

The Archon who had walked passed Garik was still pacing back and forth with the others. Unlike the others however, his thoughts were of a different nature.

~Can I go t'rough wit' t'is? Do I 'ave t'e right? W'at will t'ey t'ink o'me? W'at am I doing?

His thoughts were muddled, his emotions confused. He wished he didn't have to be there, he wished he'd been left back at the capital city. More than anything, he wished he'd never gotten involved with the Lo'dites.

It'd seemed so much more exciting back then. Joining a group of powerful men who ruled over several cities, who had all they could want – except freedom. Only within a month of joining the group, it's leader had been killed, a new one rising to the top, a new one who was even madder than the first.

D'ard was a psychopath, an anti-social, anti-human, anti-life megalomaniac. Only once you're a Lo'dite, there's no escape. The only way out is death.

Even when D'ard had taken over, things were still exciting, it had seemed like he was finally having the ultimate adventure. Within the three years he'd been there, they'd managed to capture another city, the largest of them yet. Bringing their count up to five. The new city had been led by a splinter group from the Benefaction. They had called themselves the Socialateral. Unlike the Benefaction, they'd not banned religion. In fact, they encouraged religious expression, and most of them were believers in Lo'd.

It hadn't mattered to D'ard. They'd been deemed heathens, and wiped out. Once again, the Lo'dites had lifted the ban on death-makers, after their first attack against the Socialateral had resulted in the death of nearly a dozen Lo'dites.

It was so convenient how Lo'd Laws were flexible depending on the situation. Once the city had been conquered, the people's weapons seized, and the last of the Socialateral dead at D'ard's feet, the Abrax had once again declared death-makers illegal and taken them from all the Lo'dites.

If you have no advantage over your Master, you cannot think to disobey his orders, let alone defeat him.

D'ard himself had known this all along. The bitterness that filled all of his men, he knew it as well. Bitter hearts, bitter minds, bitter souls. They were bitter because they did now know how blessed they were. In that, the ways of Lo'd were often bitter to those who did not know, to those that did—bitter-sweet.

There he still sat, contemplating the word of Lo'd, knowing what he must do next. It was time for action, time to start the process that would end in him ruling Utopia. Ah, yes, that long forbidden name would soon be not blasphemy, but a joyous word once again praising Him.

He stood, told the Archons it was time to march on, and stepped forward, crushing the grasshopper.

High Noon

Dalia seemed pleased. Preparations for the afternoon celebrations looked nearly complete. Already people had started to gather in the courtyard, talking and laughing, generally enjoying the warm spring sun.

Andr, Meg'n and Ma'ia were among those laughing with a group of their friends. They joked of times long past and events yet to come. It was a joyful day, for today marked the yearly anniversary of the founding of Utopia. It was a day of friendship and peace.

Birds flew round in the trees, while cats sat watching them in anticipation. Friendly dogs followed their human companions, lapping at their legs, tails a-wagging.

Nothing it seemed could break the spell over Utopia, it was a higher magick, a form of enchantment forgotten by the fallen ones, but reclaimed by those who came to live in harmony. No fighting, nor abuse, nor aimless arguments—only warm and happy people who truly felt like a part of something greater.

There was no sour grapes in Utopia. Nothing of a sour nature to get their spirits down, or cause them to lose hope.

D'ard on the other hand was sour. Utter sourness just oozed from his soul. Standing outside, hearing the laughter and the joyous sounds, made him angry, and jealous.

“Garik, Pet'r an' you three, yo'l com'th me. Rest ya, wait 'ere 'til one-us comes f'r ya.”

The six Lo'dites began their venture into the city centre, looking entirely out of place in their uniforms. They passed many citizens of Utopia, who gazed at the clothed men with odd curiosity. The Lo'dites gazed back, shocked by the wanton display of naked bodies. Women, children, men, the old, the young, the strong, the feeble—they all were naked to the world and treated each other the same. These people did not keep their children locked up in their schools, the men did not seem to be keeping their wives in submission. There was definitely something wrong with these people.

~Not'n I-see make sen'e Lo'd, th'y don' look like th'y 'ave no shame. Th'y don' app'r to ev'n know th'y be sinners. 'ow c'n th'y be happy Lo'd? Th'y should-no b'able to stan' t' 'viction. I may-need time to o'serve 'em fore I know 'ow best to deal.

D'ard and the five Archons had reached the courtyard where the group of people was beginning to grow larger. As they stood, gazing in shock and wonder

at all the joyful, naked people, a man approached them.

“G’day friends. You mus’be from afar, I’m assuming from your mann’r o’ dress.” The man offered his hand.

D’ard looked perplexed, then slowly raised his own hand and shook with the stranger.

“W’be vis’t’ers from t’ five cities, we seek’t for lost souls in t’ cities of Merca, try’n to ’elp all we can. We brin’ wit’us t’ Wo’d o’ Lo’d.”

“Welcome, welcome, we offer you sact’ary here in Utopia. I am J’son, I stand for the princ’pals o’ the Founders. Feel free to stay long’s you’d like. Coverin’ is option’l as you may-guessed. The only law in our city is that o’ the Founders: Do what thou whilst, lest it harm ’nother.

“You bring mention o’ Lo’d, I think you’ll find many here b’lieve in Lo’d. As twas m’own ancestor, Founder Justice, who taught the teaches of Uniterra – ’spect all b’liefs, seek the truth for yourse’f, be kind, share love.”

D’ard contemplated this strange concept of religious freedom, then answered quitely, “Thank you-sir, we wish o’ly to see wh’t’s ’is place be ’bout, and’t share our ways w’th ’oe’er wants learn.”

“Well my friend, you have ’rrived on the right day then. In but an hour’so begins our Cel’bration of Life. You are welcome to share with us as much as you’d like, and enjoy the great feast a’well.”

D’ard thanked him, and turned to Pet’r who he whispered to. The six men wandered over to one of the tables and sat, watching the crowd gather. This was going to be an interesting day.

Afternoon Tea Time

The air was thick with hot sweet sweat. Bodies against bodies, a mass of living flesh intertwined in ecstatic glory.

The pungent stink of sex mingling with the sweet aroma of burning incense, adding the finishing touches to an atmosphere of excitement and pleasure.

Some sat off on the side, taking breaks from the festivities, watching the ever changing groups of people as they left all inhibitions behind and became as one. A giant living organism, moving and evolving faster than one could keep up.

Fantasies blurred with reality as all desires were fulfilled and no-one was left in longing.

Andr had been sitting out, already having shared with Dalia, who now was with Stev, Lil and J'son. The four of them wrapped round each other in sybiotic eroticism. Andr glanced over at the group of four. Such love they shared. He knew they were planning on binding together as four-way life friends at the end of the celebration. In that he was perhaps just a bit jealous.

Andr then looked over at Ma'ia, who sat across the courtyard. She appeared to be looking over at Ka'l, who was sitting a few rows down from Andr. Andr wondered if he didn't catch Ka'l trying to avoid her glances at him.

As he sat, wondering if he should go over and seek an audience with Ma'ia, he noticed one of the strangers approaching her. It was the man who seemed to be the leader of the strange people from the five cities. Andr had been there once, back before it had been five. He had no intentions of returning, and did not trust the travellers from there.

D'ard smiled at Ma'ia, "B'en seen you while no', and thin' you's pret' sweet."

"You'n wanna share wit' me?" She smiled as she replied.

"B'en thin'so."

Ma'ia smiled even more, and took D'ard by the hand, and guided him to a non-occupied spot on the ground.

Andr glared.

~Damn'n girl, she'sa too tru'w'rthy wit' dem strang'rs.

Shaking his head in disapproval, Andr got up and headed over to where Ka'l was sitting.

"So y'r feelin' li'e 'avin' some time 'ith me?" Andr asked.

Ka'l, who had been gazing at the ground, looked up, "Yes, I think that would be nice. Giving or Receiving today?"

Andr smiled, but rather than answering with words, just grabbed Ka'l from his seat and pulled him forward, locking the older man's lips against his own. They remained in an embrace, locked in a kiss that drowned out any thoughts Ka'l might have had.

Finally releasing him from the kiss, the younger man pulled Ka'l down onto the ground, turned him around, and promptly was inside. Waves of pleasure echoed from their moaning.

Ma'ia in the meantime had helped D'ard out of his uniform. "Have you not shared yet th's af'noon?" She asked.

"Sor' but menots use't th' customs 'ere. Yoube th' firs' li'l thin' I be'n re'd' to 'ave."

"'ave?" Ma'ia pondered.

D'ard did not answer, but instead grabbed Ma'ia and shoved his tongue into her mouth.

The young girl was like a forbidden fruit, a long desired candy now melting in his mouth. He began to taste her body, sucking on her neck, then working down to her small breasts, which he licked with much enthusiasm. His tongue wrapped around her small perky nipples, and he continued down, licking her chest and abdomen, before reaching that place he'd longed to have since first laying eyes on her.

Her magic mound, her pleasure pit, her place of splendor. He lapped at the juices already moistening the small slit, quite enjoying the feel of the fine soft hair which had just begun to cover the outer skin. Diving deep inside with his rabid tongue, he savoured her inner flavour, shuddering like as in an ecstatic trance.

Ma'ia moaned and grabbed D'ard's hair, running her fingers through it and grasping him as though she might fall through the ground. D'ard, now overwhelmed in an ecstatic fury, rose up like a demonic phoenix, and gazed down upon the young girl. Then without a further thought, grabbed her by the shoulders and plunged himself into her.

The ancient cracked pavement itself seemed to have a heartbeat. The pulse of the city—beating in rhythm with those upon it.

Ka'l moaned. Ma'ia cried out. Andr panted. D'ard grunted.

Everyone was lost in a mesmerizing daze of ecstasy, a collective consciousness, where all souls became as one, along with their bodies, which were joined in sacred ritual.

D'ard shuddered as he thrust himself one final time, deep into Ma'ia, gripping tightly on her shoulders, his fingers digging into her skin, as his seed was released. After spasming a few times, he collapsed onto the ground, panting with his eyes closed. Ma'ia rolled over, cringing slightly, and lay there for a while to recover from his rough treatment.

Across the courtyard, Andr had also reached climax, and was now assisting Ka'l in doing the same.

A while later, as the second hour drew to a close, many had already sat out, content to watch those with greater stamina continue their sessions. As it was yet early in the spring, the days had not yet grown long, and while the warm

sun was still fairly high, it would be only a few hours before it would start to head downwards.

Dalia had already started preparing for the feast, as it was to start in mid-afternoon and continue long into the evening. For this was the most important celebration in Utopia's culture, and nothing could disrupt the elevated spirits of all those participating.

Even so, looking up at the sky, Ka'l felt a shiver of anticipation go up his spine. While he could not place it, could not quite describe the feeling he was having, one thing was certain: something was not right.

Evening Falls

The people of Utopia along with their guests had assembled at the outdoor tables, preparing to begin the Feast of Life.

Before the feast commenced, was to be the annual speech, this year to be delivered by J'son, with a closing statement offered by his life-friend and sister Lil.

"Dear friends, t'day do mark the 'ginning of the new-year. A year in-which we shall all like t'wards love and understandin' with one-nother. A year in-which we shall come gether closer, and welcome in any who wish to join us in our going-on path of understandin' and free'om to all kind.

"Tis my great honor to open the Feast of Life this year, and to 'ave helped o'ersee the Cel'bration as-ell. We'd all like-a thank Dalia for 'er work in org'nizing this year's Cel'bration, and for all you who helped her make this poss'ble.

"For t'day is more than just a day to enjoy life, it-a day to 'flect on the past, and look-head t'ward the future."

J'son sat, and Lil concluded, "As we com' gether now, let 'member the sac'fices that wir fore-us made to make-be Utopia, an' nev'r forget the Gr'at Suff'rin' that came-be fro' the old ways. Wir come far, an' mus'n' ev'r 'llow wir-all t' fall back in-a the traps o-the fall'n. Be lov'rs t'-the 'orld, an-a the 'orld will love yis back. Wit' that'n mind, let wir now eats, an' gives thanks t'-the 'orld which gives-back us such riches."

D'ard ate with a passion rarely witnessed. Devouring the food as though it might vanish any moment. Many of the Archons ate quickly as well, perhaps not with the same enthusiasm as D'ard however. Most of the rest of the Lo'dite party had been invited in for the feast after the ceremony had ended. D'ard had specifically chosen that a group of about ten remain on patrol outside, undetected by those in the city. He was not yet sure of what to think about this unusual place. Caution must be maintained.

Ma'ia and Meg'n sat at one of the tables together, and Stev sat across from them. Ma'ia wondered when Ka'l would return. He had been sitting with them for the meal, when she had asked him if he would join with her in the Ritual of Life, to become life-friends. The question had seemingly caught Ka'l off guard, and he had gone for a walk to contemplate it.

Ma'ia had been quite clear, she was ready to make the commitment to become a life-friend, to partake in the Ritual which was in Utopia, the greatest oath to another one could make.

Ma'ia was scared that Ka'l would reject her, that he would not want to make such a strong commitment. In all the time she had known him, he always avoided anything that even smelt of attachment.

She sat and ate her food, but it seemed too salty. Maybe it was just the salty sweat still beading on her body from the Celebration, but whatever it was, it only added to her uneasiness.

As for Ka'l, he wandered through the empty alleys on the outskirts of the town.

~I can't do this. Yes, I can. Why should I keep punishing myself for the past? Don't repeat the past. There's no way I can go through that again. But what if it's different this time? J'su!

To escape the Pattern. That's what Ka'l wanted. To escape from the never-ending, always-repeating Pattern. Somehow, the fabric of reality had a vendetta against him. It didn't seem to matter how many places he went, the Pattern followed. How could he possibly allow himself to love, after all that had happened?

He had come here to hide from the past. Come to try to start a new life. This was not the first time though. Far from it. That as well, was a part of the Pattern. Start anew, Suffer again.

~It doesn't have to be that way. I can be prepared. I can prevent the past from becoming the future.

Even though he whispered the words to himself, something still bothered him. Something was not right. With an uneasy feeling in his guts, he headed back toward the circle. ~Whatever will be, will be.

A small group of Lo'dites were gathered around a table. Garik was talking to them in a low voice.

"I don't know about yous-all, but I like this place, and am tired of D'ard and his corrupting of the Truth. He not speak for Lo'd, he speak only for his-self. I want-be worship Lo'd, but in my own way, with not D'ard's hypoc'sy."

Many of the Lo'dites around the table nodded and mumbled quiet agreements. Nobody spoke too loud, as D'ard himself was standing with some of his more loyal followers on the other side of the circle.

Garik continued, "I think here would be a good place to live. We's-all could be free to find ours own paths, and worship Lo'd as we-all want for ours-self. I'm not sure how we's-all going to deal with D'ard yet, but I'm not going back with him."

Andr was wandering through the tables at the feast, celebrating with the others. As he came up to the table where the small group of Lo'dites were, he stopped dead. He could not move, could not speak.

It was Jare who spoke first.

"ello Andr." was all he could say.

One of the other Lo'dites looked up, "An 'oo is this then Jare?"

Andr answered for him, "An old frien'."

Jare stood up. He looked as though he didn't know what to do at first, then, the feeling that he had finally made it home overwhelmed him. He embraced Andr.

“It ’as be’n too long mines friend. I am-as sorry. Oh I am-as so, so sorry.”

Neither of them noticed, but D’ard had turned toward the small group, and was standing there, watching, but not making any moves or comments.

Andr looked into Jare’s eyes, “It real’ ’as be’n too long, ’asn’t it?”

Jare nodded, and the two moved away from the rest of the Lo’dites to speak alone.

“What ’as be’n happ’n’n since-be I lef’?” asked Andr.

Jare looked towards the ground as he answered, “It-be bad Andr. Real bad. D’ard dead-made Saul short’ af’er you-as gone. I don’ wan’ be too loud ’bout it, but D’ard is craze-mad. ’e true ’as ’come a mons’er. ’e not-be human. I prom’ce-make I no’-did know what-was we-as gettin’ into, I true-be didn’t.”

“I knows. I not-do blame you, I only ’ope you-as can f’give me fo’ leavin’.”

“I-as only wish I-did leave too. Now I may ’ave a chance. Garik is-be plan’n a ’bellion o-sorts. ’e believes it-be time tha’ those o-wir are sick of D’ard and ’is evil path, should be free.”

The two sat in silence for a few minutes, before one of the Lo’dites came up to them. “Jare, you shoul’ come, D’ard wanna speak at you.”

At Dusk

There was an electricity in the air. Everyone seemed to be on edge, although nothing had happened yet. It was like a silent voice was screaming inside the minds of all present. A warning. An opportunity. Change was coming. But would it be for the better?

Ka'l had arrived back at the circle a few minutes before D'ard had called on Jare. He had found Ma'ia sitting with Meg'n, and sat next to her.

"I will."

Two simple words, but it was all that Ma'ia had needed to hear. She had thrown her arms around Ka'l, and wrapped her lips around his.

Ka'l had let himself get lost in the embrace. Soaking in all of Ma'ia.

For what seemed like an eternity, Ka'l had only known loss, pain, confusion, doubt. Now it was time for love, time for happiness, time for pleasure. The past be damned, the present was hopeful.

While Ma'ia and Ka'l remained lost in each other's presence, tension was building but a few metres away.

"An' ya did no thin' of tell'n us of your friend?" D'ard was scowling at Jare.

"Why would I? It no-does 'fect wir mission, do-it?"

D'ard struck Jare, knocking him to the ground, "Do not say-back t' me!" He was now yelling, attracting the attention of those around the Lo'dite group.

Jare looked up from where he lay on the ground, "I not-mean..."

D'ard kicked him in the face, knocking him backwards, and causing blood to gush from his nose and mouth.

Andr ran forward screaming, "What'r you doing? Leave 'im lone!"

D'ard turned and laughed at the figure of Andr, rushing toward him. Without another word, he slid forward, bent at the knee, and caught Andr in the stomach with his fist. Andr went down.

"You weak-men, none-you can stop me. I am t' Word of Lo'd on E'rth, an' I am 'ere t' claim this city for Him!"

Dalia stood up from her bench, "Now pl'ase, if we-all co'd just calm-on down, I'm-n sure we-all can work this out peacef'ly."

D'ard looked over at her, and spat, "Shut up whore. You'n t' rest of t' woman whores in this den of deprav'ty will soon-be learn'un why-as Lo'd say-as th't men be the masters. Get'n back t' t' be'room t' service o-wir needs, that-be all you's good for."

Stev stood up next to D'ard, shaking in anger. "That-be no way to talk to her, you pig. I suggest you..." But he had no chance to finish.

D'ard had pulled out the death-maker, and fired it straight into Stev's face, blasting a large hole into his head. Stev fell to the ground, blood splattering over the ground, dead. Dead.

Meg'n screamed and rushed D'ard, catching him off guard. She gouged at his eyes with her fingers, and D'ard howled in agony as she tore one of them from its socket, before turning the death-maker toward his attacker and firing.

Over and over and over, until no bullets remained. Meg'n's body had already fallen, another man had been hit in the side, but was still alive, writhing on the ground. Meg'n was not so lucky. Her chest was filled with holes, blood soaking the ground under her body. Her eyes were still open wide, glazing over as she stared blankly into the sky, her heart beating no longer.

Ka'l had to hold Ma'ia back. One arm he kept wrapped around her, as she struggled to run at D'ard. She was yelling, cursing, crying. D'ard turned and with his one remaining eye stared at her. "Bitch, shut up."

She screamed out obscenities, and D'ard started walking toward them. Ka'l put his other hand over Ma'ia's mouth, to quiet her. She bit him.

Shocked, Ka'l lost his grip on Ma'ia, who rushed forward and started pounding against D'ard. Punching him in the chest, over and over. D'ard, a sick smile drawn across his face, stood there – silent at first, but then he started to laugh.

"Y-all are lost a'ready. I don-ave t' conquer you, I 'ave a'ready won."

With those words, he grabbed onto Ma'ia, the smile vanishing from his face immediately. He turned her round to face the rest of the Utopians. He dragged her up onto one of the tables, staring out at those gathered round. Five Lo'dites had restrained Ka'l, who could do nothing but watch in horror as the events were unfolding around him.

"On thi' day, I-as declare Utopia t'-be t' prop'ty of t' Lo'd. T' emp're of t' Five Cities will-be hence'ort' call'd t' Six Cities. Do not'n 'tempt t' fight back. Do not'n ques'ion my 'thority. Take th's as a warnin' t' y-all, of 'ow I deal wit' th'se who say-back t' me."

And with that, he snapped her neck.

After the Sunset

It had been just over an hour since Ma'ia's lifeless body had fallen to the ground. Ka'l sat in the make-shift prison cell, head cast toward the floor, eyes closed.

In his mind, he saw her. Her long hair blowing in the wind, her soft blue eyes sparkling in the sun, her smile. Oh her smile. It could melt the heart of a stone warrior.

Why? Why did he have to feel this again? Why hadn't he just said 'No'? Why was the Pattern repeating again?

The Pattern. It had been his curse for so long, he no longer knew when it had started. Wait, no, maybe it had been there even longer than that. His parents. He hadn't recognized it at the time, but he had loved his parents, and they were taken away from him, in a cruel and horrific manner. In the eternity since then, every person he'd ever loved, had been taken in an equally brutal fashion.

This time he had thought he could stop it. Thought he could control it. Then, without warning, it had caught up to him again. It always did. There was no escape from it. The Pattern was his eternal curse.

Maybe it was time to end it. What would it take? He'd pondered the question before. Maybe today he'd find out the answer.

In the next cell however, the winds of change were already starting to blow.

"Do you re'ly b'lieve in w'at D'ard be teachin'?" Jare asked the guard.

"It'n not my place to ques'ion the Master. Yas shouldn' either."

"Maybe it-be time to. T'ere-be o-wir who-be plannin' to leave, an' start a new group, free from D'ard and 'is 'ruption of Lo'd's word."

The guard looked surprised, "What are-n ya talking a-bout? No-one be stupid 'nough to move 'gainst D'ard."

Jare smiled, "Ah, so you can say 'is name. An' yes, t'ere is some'n strong-willed 'nough to do it, but we can' do it 'lone. If you 'elp us, you co'd be free too."

"Or I could be dead. If ya want a r'volution, yas can do it ya-self. I'll help bury yas bodies."

Jare just shook his head and sat back down on the stool.

A knock at the door made him look up. The guard opened the door. It was another guard.

"T's been sent t' fill in, you's t' report t' D'ard 'mediately." The new guard spoke.

The first nodded, and headed out of the cell. The new guard waited for a minute, then turned to Jare. "You okay?"

Jare nodded, "Ya, t'at las' guy just didn' wan' to listen, but 'e wasn't 'busive."

"That's good. I'm 'fraid th' guy who was guarding you's frien' Andr wasn' quite as kind. You's friend is goin-be a while to heal, an' won' be able t' help us much with a broke leg."

Jare shuddered. While his own face was bruised, and he was missing two of his front teeth, he still had the use of his arms and legs. The thought of Andr being crippled by some sadistic guard made Jare grind the teeth he had left.

"ow's it look for wir side?" Jare asked the guard.

"Bett'r than I'd thought. Garik has lot-a influence, an' even more charisma. He's been able t' convince 'bout half of D'ard's men t' join us in th' quest for freedom."

"T'at's great Rax. Wit' t'e 'elp of t'e 'topians, wir-be able to drive out D'ard. Maybe one day wir-be able to free t'e res' of t'e Five Cities. 'ave we man'ged to get Pet'r?"

Rax shook his head, "No. He refuses t' b'tray D'ard. Aft' ev'thing that D'ard's done t' him, and he won't turn 'gainst him. If Pet'r did tell D'ard 'bout our plans, D'ard hasn' acted on it yet. I don' know what's going on there, but we-be nearly ready. Th' 'topian's will help us, but will not kill. Hopefully that will be 'nough.

"Howe'er it goes, if we's goin' t' be free, it's time t' act."

Jare nodded, and stood up. The two men departed the cell.

Ka'l was still in the same position when the door to his cell opened. A few words were exchanged between Rax and the guard in Ka'l's cell, then the guard promptly left the cell.

"You's free t' go." Rax told Ka'l.

Ka'l sat up and opened his eyes. "And do what? He killed her. Your soulless leader killed her, and you say that I'm free?"

Rax was now the one to drop his head to the floor, "I-be sorry. Those o' us who want out do not condone th' actions of D'ard."

Ka'l looked up, "Then you should never have supported him in the first place."

With that, Ka'l stood up, and walked out of the cell.

The bitter breeze had the fleeting last edges of winter hiding within it. Ka'l shivered. Then he noticed he was being watched. It was Garik.

"It's you." Garik said bluntly.

Ka'l nodded. "It's been a few years, I see you've grown up well."

Garik looked towards the ground before replying, "I am sorry. I've b'n a fool, I know't. You taught me to live f'r freedom, and inst'd I've worked for the slave-masters." He looked up at Ka'l, "but no more! No lon'r will I stand by and watch the Word of Lo'd be corrupted so. No lon'r will I 'low these crimes to continue. I am gatherin' many to stand 'gainst D'ard, together we will be free!"

Ka'l was now the one to look down, "I am glad for you. I hope you find the freedom you seek, for I can never be free."

Garik gazed at Ka'l, then said, "I truly am sorry, I hope on'day you will find happiness. I should get back, the people need me."

Ka'l nodded, and watched Garik head out into the city. Ka'l turned and headed the other direction.

A short time later, Rax re-joined Jare, in a small court-yard where Garik had gathered his supporters together. Garik's meeting with Ka'l had re-energized him. He looked out at the group of men. These were good people, who had been corrupted and enslaved by an evil tyrant. It was time to change all that. Time for something new.

"My fellow Lo'dites. We-all have been led astray. Evil men like D'ard, who claim-be to speak the Word of Lo'd, are in fact the enemies of Truth. Lo'd bestowed upon all-us, the basic precept of right and wrong. Do you-all really believe that the things we-all have done under D'ard's leadership have been right?"

The murmurs in the audience seemed to agree that most everyone there did not think they'd been acting in a 'right' manner.

Garik continued, "Many of us-all became Lo'dites, because we-all believed in Lo'd. Others joined for the excitement. However, some joined for the Power. There may be a few of you-all in this group right now that fit into that latter category, but I can guarantee, most of those-all have stayed behind D'ard. Not because they believe in him, but because they wish to replace him."

Again, a consensus.

"Well, now is time to take back the teachings of Lo'd. Not to replace D'ard as Master, but to replace the idea of Masters altogether. We-all will go out now, and face the enemy of the Truth, and when we-all have driven D'ard and his remaining loyalists out, we-all shall be Free! We-all are not turning our back on Lo'd, we-all are turning our back on oppression and the corruption of the Word of Lo'd. We-all will be the Free Men of Lo'd, bringing His teaching back to the people, without the tyranny and hypocrisy of the current Lo'dite regime. Let us-all go out now, and gain our freedom!"

With that the battle cries began, and the small army of Lo'dites began to march toward the circle where D'ard's camp was. Win or lose, they would be free from D'ard. One way, or the other.

Cold is the Night

Ka'l threw up.

Kneeling on the ground, he could not bear to look up again. His heart was pounding, his head was swirling, nausea was overwhelming him. He puked again, nearly dry bile being all that came up.

In front of where he was kneeling on the ground was the sight which had put him in this condition. There they stood, the three tall statues of the Founders. Carved from hardwood, they had stood in this place for three quarters of a century. They had been the ever-watching guardians of Utopia. Each of them standing over the city, with one arm stretched out toward the darkened sky.

At this time of night, it would normally be difficult to make out the scene, but tonight the statues were illuminated by the light of a fire, burning fiercely in a barrel below them.

On each of those arms, was now impaled, a body.

The older man Stev had been castrated, and impaled through the hole where his manhood once lay. The end of the Founder's hand stuck out through his neck.

The two sisters were in similar grotesque poses. On display, as a warning. A warning to those who would think for themselves. A warning to those who believed in the very Founders who were now a part of this vicious desecration of human life.

Blood had oozed down the arms, covering the Founders with a crimson stain.

The blood of the innocent, spilt.

Ka'l was shuddering, his whole body was convulsing. His wails of agony, disgust, horror and fury were heard across the city.

In the city centre stood D'ard. His supporters were standing behind him, cursing and spitting at the rebels who were facing them. Pet'r stood at the right-hand side of D'ard, silent, and empty. A blank face on a broken man.

Fire barrels sat near the edges of the circle, casting eerie shadows against the two opposing groups.

"So, ya wor'less heat'ens th'nk th't ya'll knows t' Will of Lo'd bet'r th'n I?" D'ard spat at the rebels, his bloody, empty eye socket staring out unblinking.

Garik stepped forward, "Indeed D'ard. You have been corrupting the Truth of Lo'd for so long, I think you've swallowed your own lies."

"Impudent swine!" Screamed D'ard.

“Call us what you will, but you are the liar and the spreader of blasphemy. Yours is not the Word of Lo’d, but the words of a depraved lunatic.”

At that, D’ard screamed out to his followers, and the fight began. Fists and feet, sticks and stones. The two factions of Lo’dites fought one another with a religious fervor.

The rebels were helped by a large number of Utopians, for while the Founders were against offensive aggression, they did believe in defending liberty, so long as you did not become your enemy in your fight against them.

D’ard and Pet’r stood back and watched the battle, but neither of them joined in the fray. This was contrasted by Garik, Jare and Rax who all were in the front-lines, taking and delivering blows.

The fight was brutal, the tearing of flesh, the cracking of bones, the splashing of blood. Some poor Lo’dite; whose side he was on, unknown, was thrown into one of the fire barrels. The barrel fell over, and the man screamed in agony as his clothing and hair caught fire.

So caught up in the fight, it seemed nobody, including D’ard, noticed the dark figure approaching from behind.

Pet’r did. He said nothing.

Ka’l grabbed the unsuspecting D’ard by the throat, and lifted him clear off the ground.

D’ard was choking and sputtering, trying to say something, but Ka’l clenched tighter and tighter around his throat. A few of the fighting Lo’dites on D’ard’s side had noticed the altercation, but whether it was loathing of D’ard or fear of Ka’l, none approached to stop it.

D’ard took one of his hands away from his neck, lowered it to his side, and grabbed a knife out of his belt. In one quick motion, he plunged it into Ka’l’s lower chest.

Ka’l didn’t even blink. He tightened down on D’ard’s throat, and pulled out the knife with his free arm, tossing it to the ground. D’ard was still trying to pry Ka’l’s hand from around his neck. It was a futile effort. D’ard, who was quickly turning purple, began to sound like he was crying. “Pphllsshh, Ayhll...”

Ka’l glared directly into D’ard’s remaining eye, which had begun to bulge from its socket. “No.”

And with that one word, Ka’l tore D’ard’s throat from his neck and tossed both it and the dying man to the ground.

D’ard made a gurgling sound, and blood gushed from the gaping whole where once his throat had been, with a few convulsions the gurgling noise stopped. His body slumped down and stopped moving. He was dead.

Ka’l stood there, above the body, his hand and arm covered in blood, still sticking out, like he was pointing at the crowd. He looked like an incarnation of one of the Founders, and like the statues, he had become stained – A warning.

The fighting had mostly stopped. The followers of D’ard had noticed their leader was dead. Ka’l said nothing.

Pet’r stepped forward, and addressed the crowd, “This ends now. I be Master now. Those loyal to the Lo’dites will ret’rn wit’ me to the Five Cities. Those who want t’eir freedom, can take it now. We’ll not stop you, we’re done here.”

Pet'r looked at Ka'l, "I amn't a good man, but ye are. Don'a let t' darkness consume ye. Don'a become like us."

Pet'r turned and started walking out of the city. Most of the contingent which had been loyal to D'ard followed him, but not all. Some stayed behind, joining Garik's group.

Garek himself went over to where Ka'l still stood, he looked up at the blood-soaked icon, "I am so sorry. You raised me well, taught me right from wrong. Ne'er forget what side o' that battle you belong on."

Ka'l remained silent, but nodded at Garek, who turned and went to tend to the wounded.

Tomorrow would begin the cleaning up of the city, and the start of a new life for them. Theirs was not just a conflict of ideologies, it was a fight for freedom. It was over.

The Coming of Midnight

The moonlight shone against the water in the cement pond. J'son and Lil stood at it, looking at the man who seemed to be lost in thought while gazing at his own reflection.

"You don' have to leave Ka'l. The Founders believed in fightin' for freedom and self-d'fence." J'son said, softly.

Ka'l looked up and replied, "I'm sorry J'son, but what I did was not self-defense, it was pure, unadulterated vengeance. I killed him. Cold-blooded, and brutal. In doing so, I became like him."

Lil looked down toward the ground before speaking, "Is that why ye left b'fore?"

J'son looked over at her, a puzzled look on his face, but before he could inquire, Ka'l answered.

"Yes. In those days, things were even more chaotic than now. Stability was needed, and I was standing in the way. It's funny, as your great-grandfather, Justice, told me the same thing that J'son did just now. I gave him the same answer, and left."

J'son looked shocked. "So, t'is true. You-be the nameless fourth Founder."

Ka'l nodded.

Lil continued, "I'd guessed it a long time-go. Yer manner o' speech, yer b'liefs, yer knowledge of the ou'side world, and what it be like 'fore the Great Suffering. Teacher 'ad 'scribed the Founders many times, an' of'en spoke o' the nameless Fourth."

Ka'l lowered his head, "That time it was revenge as well. Founding a new society is always a dangerous occupation, I should not have been surprised when Shalom was assassinated, but the killer did it in plain sight, and gloated over it. My friend was dead, and he was laughing. I killed him. Just as I did tonight.

"I thought that I had waited long enough to clean the slate. That after so many years, I would have changed. I was wrong. I helped found this city, and I will not be the one to bring it down by betraying the principles it was founded upon.

"I've eaten the forbidden fruit, and now I must leave the garden."

J'son embraced Ka'l, then said, "If that-be your choice, I will 'spect it. I do wish you good luck on your path ahead. Do you think you'll ever return?"

Ka'l seemed to ponder the question, then answered quietly, "One day. Maybe in fifty years. Maybe in a hundred. I don't know. I hope that when I do, Utopia

is still the city of peace. Never give up on the principles of your ancestors. Ensure that at least one pure place still exists for the people of E'rth."

J'son nodded, and Lil kissed Ka'l, a passionate kiss, one of final goodbyes.

As J'son and Lil watched from the pond, Ka'l turned and walked out into the darkness.

He didn't know where he would go. Across the seas once more perhaps. An eternity he'd travelled from place to place. Different worlds, different times. Now he found himself stuck on this one. No magical doors would open up to take him away to somewhere new.

He wondered if he would ever break free from the Pattern. He wondered what he'd done to be cursed with it in the first place. Whatever the cause, he was determined that wherever he went, to avoid love at all costs.

~Never again.

He didn't know if he could do it, but he would certainly try.

~What good is immortality, if you're alone, forever?

He had no good answers to the question. Maybe he'd find them in the next place he settled down. Maybe he wouldn't.

Whatever the future held, he'd not give up hope. He almost had back in Utopia. He'd almost tried to seek an end to it. He didn't even know if he could end it. No matter now, for he was determined to go on. He had to go on. There were still questions left unanswered, and if it took a thousand years, he'd find the answers.

He walked off into the night, destination: unknown.

As he faded from view of the great city, a new day began.