

Comment: 4 November 12015 HE:

1, Chapter 0 → chapter 1 and also should match other chapters in style

2, rm “merely” and other adverbs!!

Creator, Friend or Foe? -Beginnings

by Shira Destinie Jones Landrac (c) 2012-2014 (from Angels: Friends or Foes, Djinn, and Creator:Foe)

Light focused to a point. Luminous filaments radiated through the vacuum. The new web was small, but strong. "The new web was small, but strong."

"How will you grow, my friend?"

The arachnid puffed up like a well-timed question, then settled into the center of the web.

"I will grow as we all do, of course."

"How did you hear my thoughts?"

"I am part of your thoughts."

A green serpent emerged from the web, eyeing the spider.

"You are part of my imagination."

"The web began to tremble."

"Leave," trilled the spider.

"By what right do you –"

serpent and words were lost, dissolving into the web. Filaments began to float, fading with the light.

"I must go soon." The serpent reappeared, dimly.

"Shall you not find a way to go on, friend?"

"Only the imagination which birthed me can last."

The final filament held the spider floating on a sigh.

"Are you not part of me, as is this universe?"

First the spider, then the serpent, faded with the light, compressed against the dark edge of the collapsing universe.

Chapter 1. Encounters

In the moment ... Worst place to be; Alone? Why bother to exist?

-from "The Book Of Hayat"

A thought filled the void. Sounds crested with the waves. Their desperate praises, live again for a moment, faded into the darkness. *"It was the only way."*

Mountains leveled with a nudge, enemies reduced to ash, savoring the smoldering remains. There were no rivals here. None were left. Curves of other universes hid scattered remnants, mere specks of the glory once shared. Glory usurped by others. Now, there was only loneliness; eternal, consuming. *"I shall release another."*

There, in an adjoining universe. Warm colors, then ultra-violet. Another reflected, unaware. The outline of a cupped palm darkened space. Space began to spin. Accelerating, red-hot matter and nearby universes spiraled toward the inescapable grip. Colliding dimensions ruptured, releasing the other: serpent, sea-blue with green starfish tail. The hand closed as universes vanished. The serpent disappeared. An explosion of fiery quills, spinning wildly, flinging heat and light in all directions. The other seemed frightened, but caution remained wise. "Be still."

"Where are you?! Who are you?"

“I am Becoming.”

“Becoming what?”

“I am Becoming. You may call me the Ancient One. We shall explore the universes together, and create our subjects.”

“And I am Ishik,” a question mark, bright blue, flashed against the darkness, “also known as the one who questions, in the universe you just destroyed. I was content, creating new stories there. You, Ancient One should question, too, before you finish Becoming. So tell me, why should I explore with you?”

This was going to be a long existence.

Chapter 2. Light Lost

Cooperation is one of the key values in our philosophy, because constructively cooperative and fully inclusive community strengthens the ability of every being to reach its full creative potential. -from “The Book Of Hayat”

Not again. Relentless darkness invaded, blanketing the stars. The glow of whiskers dimmed.

“There is no other way.”

“How do we know that, Dark One? We have only our present condition to look upon now.” The glow surged.

“How dare you?” The light, enveloped in a dark fist, vanished.

This is intolerable. A spark sputtered into being. ”Again, I must ask, Ancient One, how do you know? Produce something more than your certainty,” she insisted, awaiting the display of a memory fragment that perhaps she had missed among so much background noise, “if you are able.”

Insolence!

”Is anything too difficult for me, Young Spark, that I should be unable? Does experience count for nothing?”

”You did precede me,” she conceded, unmoved by his insult, “this is true, but I maintain my challenge. How will you prove your assertions?”

”Experience.” He thundered. “How can you question my knowledge even while admitting your youth?”

”I must.” She insisted.

His anger flaring, hot for an instant, formed a great ball of searing magma, from whence, a great molten sword began to emerge, growing from first two feet, then to four feet, now the 6 foot long double-bladed weapon of flame emitted heat from its tip, it's searing point directed toward the essence of the younger being:

”How dare you question me! I, the One who released you!”

In response, a sphere of blue light appeared, blinding, yet cool, dancing to the side of the heated blade, making contact with the side, and at the point of contact, the hot blade cooled suddenly to rock, splintering into shards:

“I dare,” she countered, a part of her wondering where these familiar images came from, “for question I must, and if you insist on threatening me, if you force me to defend myself, I will transform such as will wipe out every universe that has ever had contact with you! Though it be a hard thing, if you push me to it, do not doubt that I will follow through on my promise, Ancient Warrior.”

She had been freed by the Ancient Warrior from the universe in which she had been trapped. But she refused to feel beholden to him. As she pondered within her various interconnected neural networks what level of allegiance she might owe him and why, it felt ominous. She stretched out along all of her neural wavelengths, and images of ancient thought-forms, the Flaming Sword, Chronos, Tiamat, Zeus, and Athena arose simultaneously. While she did not immediately know what these images meant, still she understood their context. Conflicting priorities and cycles of the universes could lead to great suffering and destruction. These memories of previous energy flows, and consequently of previous matter conversions, were clearly embedded in her essence. By experience she knew that if she gathered and concentrated sufficient amounts of her own energy, she could create small amounts of matter, and then release that energy by converting the matter back to energy again. This she had somehow known intuitively, perhaps from previously stored events whose records she was only beginning to unlock. Clearly, these ancient thought-forms still held powerful sway over the multiverse.

As the shattered remnant of the sword retracted itself, a Hand of Peace appeared in its place, calming them both:

”Stand down.” He ordered quietly, “Be still, and know that I am not going to destroy you, Young One. At least not yet. I was testing you, and you have passed.”

The Hand of Peace, another ancient thought-form potent with energetic and symbolic meaning for them both, although neither of them know why, was another thing which had simply always been, unchanging, with no explanation nor memory of beginning or origin. While its power could not be denied, it simply was. Nevertheless, it had clearly originated at some time which must have preexisted this current state of agelessness.

”Do not expect my thanks for your test, Ancient One! And never do that again, because I will not withdraw my promise. I will always defend myself. So, now, how do you propose to prove your ideas?”

”You are a stubborn being, Young One, for all of your gifts. I propose that we use your light to fashion

a small multiverse to contain a limited experimental universe. Various universes within the multiverse will connect to the experimental universe as isolation areas. It will consist of a four-dimensional corporeal space with galaxies, stars, planets, etc, where time is one-way only. We will create reporting guardians for each piece of matter, to lighten the burden of tracking and evaluating the experiment. There will be several dimensions separating it from other universes. Of course since the test subjects will effectively be limited to the three dimensional portion of their universe, they will not even be able to conceive of the existence of the other universes, but these extra precautions should satisfy you, I trust?"

"Yes, Ancient One, that is satisfactory, although what you propose still seems risky. Which of course makes it more interesting. I will trust to your greater experience, although I feel more precautions may later need to be added. In the early stages of the experiment we can transmit freely, but as the subjects evolve in intelligence and develop tools, they will eventually be able to detect and even monitor our signals."

"The risk of any of them noticing us is minimal for all but the most sensitive, if that, since it worries you, Young One, let the risk be contained to one experimental universe within the multiverse, which will be sealed off. Use a nine or ten dimensional multiverse to contain that four-dimensional universe, and we end up with seven layers them from us, from their perspective. That should make it quite impossible," countered the Ancient Warrior, "for them to reach us even if they do find out that there is more to their universe than they can see."

"Actually, I count ten possible dimensions," conceded the younger. "Alright, I agree, that will suffice for now, but if we should need to change the arrangement, I will insist that it be done as needed. If I am to provide the light which initializes the experimental universe, then we must be equal partners in this experiment. Will you agree to that, Ancient One?"

"Give me your light to start an outline of the multiverse."

She naively took that request as agreement. As a soft blue light began to shimmer in response, the vibrations of the Ancient Warrior rang out:

"I will...NOT agree!"

A sudden darkness enveloped all of her light, forming an outline around her essence, then adding a black dot directly in the center of the light. A rotating disk, began to form, swirling faster and faster, brighter and brighter, falling in toward the dark center. Then, all was dark, formless, and void.

"I told you not to question me, foolish young Child of Light."

Chapter 3. Light Bearer

“Just as a catalyst is not the end result, but merely what triggers or brings about the process leading to that result, so light is not the end result, but rather makes it possible to arrive at the goal.” -from “The Book Of Hayat”

The Ancient Warrior knew that others still existed, somewhere. Shrouded in darkness, he had no shape. Else from whence came the various formless deeps, those waters apart from the other waters, where none had dared venture? Odd that this particular form of coagulation of energy, this congealed yet flowing form of energy, seemed to be found in every part of the multiverse ever explored. Of course there were other beings locked away in other universes, perhaps also with water, but none mattered but him. Of this there could be no doubt. Though others existed, nevertheless, there could be no authority beside his. But what to do about the Darkness, this time, and how to deal with those chaotic depths which had wreaked havoc on the last two experiments? Even the two sets of neutral experiment monitors had had to be eliminated when they each in turn arrogantly decided to contradict his plan to create sentient creatures, not unlike themselves, that would then live strictly according to the rules of the experiment. How could the experiment monitors disagree with the parameters of an experiment that they were to neutrally monitor? That would not do at all, so of course they had to be removed. Experiments in self-awareness were extremely trying, and it was beginning to become lonely running them all alone. Maybe that last universe, where he had not ventured yet, held some key to all of this. Maybe if he finally gave in and called up the Child of Light, whom he had managed to lock away inside that last unexplored universe, together they could solve the recurring problem of the errant 'sentient beings' experiment. Maybe. Then again, the other one, who was followed by a paradoxical persistent light spectrum which never seemed to dissipate, could be rather annoyingly difficult to control. She insisted on arguing constantly, which was why he was forced to find a way to trick her into entering that unexplored universe in the first place. She was rather trusting, which was useful, and her valiance did come in handy when there was something difficult and unpredictable to be done. She often bravely ventured into spaces where the Ancient Warrior feared to go, which was helpful in exploring other universes, but the arrogance that went along with this caused much disorder. Now though, this new experiment needed a bold hand, and a new way of setting up the parameters so that it would not go as previous experiments had gone. The easiest way would be to get his counterpart to help, but how to get her help while still keeping control of the experimental universe? Perhaps the reflecting light she carried with her could be the key to this new experiment. If he used that light to allow her out of the universe in which she was currently trapped, then her gratitude should allow him to enforce the rules as he saw fit. That would have to do, since he was out of options for running new experiments.

”Let there be Light.” intoned the Ancient Warrior.

“OK, what exactly were you thinking, you Ancient Git,” she swore, “tricking me into going into that unexplored universe with no way to get back except for harsh language and trust in you? Do you know how irritating it is having to fight my way through constant swarms of... oh, that's right, you did not know what was in that universe, or did you? So what do you want me back here for now, then? You had me locked in, so why let me out, what do you want?”

“Remember, I did just let you out of what apparently turned out to be quite an unpleasant place. I

should think that the phrase 'Thank you' would be in order. Besides, this will be quite interesting. I need you to help me set up the parameters for a new experiment, but this time in such a way so that I will not end up having to end it and start all over again from scratch. Sentient-being experiments, as we discussed before, but with complete free-will and the ability to create thought-forms.”

“Has so much time alone driven you mad, Ancient One? You did not mention thought-form creation. You know those kinds of experiments are dangerous. What do you think we evolved away from, and why would you want to allow those lower level beings even to find the old thought-forms? And create new ones?! It is more power than they will ever be able to use safely. Speaking of which, where will all of the energy for this experiment come from?”

“I will provide it, Young Creatrix of stories.”

She displayed a short surprised burst of static. His energy flow must truly be unlimited. “What if,” she crackled, “they manage to figure out how to cross out of their universe and create havoc, or into other universes or to make things even worse, jump across the other dimensions, you remember that total of ten dimensions, seven of which they should not even know exist? Chances are that they will eventually find out that those dimensions exist, and how move around them. This sort of experimentation is not productive in the slightest way. Why do you continue to persist in this?”

“This experiment will be different, and as agreed previously, we will share in the setup.”

”No.” The younger being seemed firmly set in her opposition.

“Look, Young One, be reasonable,” argued the Ancient Warrior. “I set you free and now you again owe your existence in this multiverse to me.”

”You tricked me into going in the first place!” she complained.

”Then you clearly have much to learn, don't you, Young One?”

“Well, I cannot deny that, Ancient Trickster,” she admitted, her signal oscillating on the word 'Ancient' for emphasis.

”And see here, Young One,” he spat back on a higher frequency, “this experiment will set the stage for much good that can only be done with what is gained from this experiment. Look how I have raised you up from where you were imprisoned. That bright reflective light you carry with you everywhere was previously your weakness, but it could be turned into your greatest strength. We will use it to create a central set of lights that in the next experiment we can use to facilitate the growth of the new sentient beings as they evolve, and maybe even to gauge their intellectual progress, if they last long enough. That way we will not need any more of those experiment monitors we had so much trouble with. We can still create guardians of some sort, of course, to help with the recording and reporting on data for each piece of the experiment, since there will be a good deal of data to keep track of. We can set up multiple levels of guardians using minimal levels of energy to report on the inert matter and on the non-mobile self-aware experiment subjects as they develop and branch out. Those guardians can report to a collating guardian who will report all progress within the experimental universe to you. Now we will be partners in the creation. You will be the Creatrix, Young Bearer of Light. Without you

there will be no day and night, no seasons. No mysterious bodies clustering in the night sky for the sentient beings to observe. Come now, you must say yes.”

The younger being considered the idea, flattening in amplitude, and replied softly:

”I may regret this later, but yes.”

Chapter 4. Stages

*Cultivating seed / Cultivating a friendship ...
Sounding the depths -from “The Book Of
Hayat”*

“Alright, now that we have the four dimensional experimental universe set up inside of a ten dimensional multiverse, to isolate the experimental section, how should we roll the enclosed 4-d universe? Does it matter how we situate them Ancient One?”

“Not really.” replied the Ancient Warrior with an air of mystery. “Just as long as the keys are securely converted or locked away in an unconnected universe, none of the experiment subjects should be able to access them.”

“I give them three millenia of intelligent observation at the most before someone has those keys,” winked the Light Bearer, displaying one of her characteristic faces against the background of cooling energy, “if records from other civilizations mean anything in this new universe. And these Guardians you propose to make for this experiment, to protect and report back on the corporeal beings? You see no potential problems with them, considering that the last two batches of messengers had to be destroyed?”

“No, Young One, there is nothing that would be a serious problem with this group. They will know their place. Let us proceed with this first stage and run it for two billion years, which should be long enough to verify short term effects before moving on to the next stage..”

“Such as?” queried the Light Bearer.

“Such as some outer galaxy star formation.” replied the Ancient Warrior. “Until some of the energy coagulates into solid matter, we will have no need to worry about setting up guardians for anything, in any case. Once matter begins to cool, then we can set up an automatic procedure for creating a guardian for each inanimate and then moving being, and later we can instantiate the guardian hierarchy for the self-aware beings as they emerge. If they begin to compete amongst themselves, though, we may have to take additional steps to limit their range of abilities.”

“Are you sure that only two billion years will be long enough, it does not seem very long, but if you find that acceptable then that will be good. As for the guardian hierarchies,” she commented, “I can imagine them competing already. I am sure it will not be long before even the merest guardian assigned to report on the growth of a single specimen of vegetation will be urging it to grow faster!

Just imagine each guardian standing over a single blade of grass whispering 'Grow! Grow!' Suddenly there will be armies of guardians rushing to rip out each others plant specimens and coming to us to clean up the mess.”

“Have no fear, Young One, there will be no conflict, and this plan is good.”

“Fine then we can proceed with the first stage of corporeal environment setup. But before we do that, it may be expeditious to coin a term to use as a label for this process. I suggest the term “Creation” if that will do, Ancient One.”

“It will do. Let us then proceed with the Creation.”

Two Billion Years Later

“Alright,” began the Light Bearer, “first there is the matter of well, matter, in this universe. At the moment the only stable electromagnetic spectra are yourself, as darkness, and myself, as reflecting variable wavelength light. The earliest stars are already beginning to form in some areas of congealing energy. There is still time to make changes, if you like. The stars seem to be emitting along both of our spectra.”

”No, Young One, no need for changes. Let us call that darkness Night and the visible light cycles we can call Day, when we are in this universe, just for simplicity.”

“Fine,” the Light Bear concurred, “but how are we going to rotate these light spectra in this universe?” We would have to take turns stepping in and out of the corporeal side unless we use a crystalline structure as the basis for the corporeal beings, and then they could reflect light on any number of wavelengths.”

”No, Light Bearer. I prefer carbon based corporeal beings, that way every creature in the experimental universe can have a starting point in common with everything else in this universe, making it easier to start up and just set the clock, so to ‘speak’ and observe the development with a minimum of interference.”

”Well then we will have to figure out some way,” replied the Light Bearer, wondering how they both know of the Clockmaker thought-form, “to rotate the wavelength cycles that living corporeal beings will need for their sensory and cognitive development. I gather that your previous experiments did not do this automatically? I saw a memory left in another universe of renewing that creation day by day. I imagine that must have been quite draining...”

”Fine, fine,” the Ancient Warrior interrupted, “we will get to that, but first, let us deal with these waters. Let us separate them out into various areas of this universe, if we can contain them all in this corporeal universe. Some will have to go into the lower atmospheres of various planets, and the rest in parts of some galactic singularity. Let us also put the gaseous forms of most of this water in the upper atmospheres of some larger planet-sized coagulation of energy, let's call them the Sky in each of the planets where we put some of this water. Let's make it random, so that if the experiment goes far enough, the subjects will have something interesting to contemplate.”

"You really are worried about this water, aren't you, Ancient One, but why?"

"Never you mind, just look to the next step, Young One."

"Fine, as you wish, Ancient Grump. The next step would be to do something with the rest of the water on the various planets where we want to put this water. Making the water adhere to the planetary surfaces and crags would require setting a random gravitational constant that will be consistent throughout this universe."

"Do it, and we can call the adherences of surface water Seas. Yes, that will be good. And where did you find that old vibration "grump" in all of this random background noise?"

Pointedly ignoring the question, the younger being displayed a face, whiskers appearing first, then eyes, then a furry feline mouth, shaped in a grotesque smile. This ancient thought-form had floated to mind just after the idea of the Ancient Warrior as a "grouch" and seemed to fit, in an amusingly mischievous way.

"Fine, then, Ancient, One. So if we start with carbon and let gravity hold water down, then we should see a series of processes after sufficient numbers of planets coagulate and their skies cool down enough to begin building acids and proteins, but how will the day and night cycles come about?"

"If it does not happen on its own, then let us, or rather, you, Light Bearer, if you please, set certain stars to brighter intensity levels and judiciously move some of their satellites around just enough to cause the collisions needed to distribute all of the needed elements around the various solar systems and galaxies which will form in this universe."

"Already done," she reported. "Of course some satellite guardians are already complaining, so perhaps their more frequent appearances will bring them more attention from the sentient beings..."

"The day cycle, Young Light Bearer, if you please?" interrupted the Ancient Warrior.

"Right," continued the Light Bearer, displaying a bright blue smirk against a brilliant white background.

"I have reset the wavelengths of some sections of the universe to glow more brightly than others so as to provide a diurnal cycle for most planets, assuming that the initial cooling patterns hold as they are now. I may have to do a bit more adjusting, as I was saying," pointedly modulated the Light Bearer, "since I am getting some negative feedback from the newly forming satellites of a few planets, particularly out on the spiral arms of outer galaxies. I may later need to give those satellites more pull over the tides and inter-solar cycles as compensation. I wonder what sort of mythology this will generate among the intelligent species that develop there, if any. Now we should be able to wait about ten billion years, on average, and by then we should start to see those acids and proteins developing into life forms. With any luck, some planets may develop sentient life of various types fairly soon."

"Fine, then let us check progress at the end of each stage. The guardians can update us between times if more checks are needed."

... Ten Billion Years Later...

“The third stage seems to be progressing fairly well, now. The only problem, Ancient One,” switching to a frequency that the galactic guardians could not receive, “is that parts of the Sky on various planets are not stable. Some delicate intervention may be needed to shore up the atmospheres and interstellar spaces.”

“Fear not, Young One, I have seen this before. It is due to the widely differing development of various galaxies. I will set all of the skies, or firmaments, more precisely, so that they are fixed. Continue.”

A brightly colored bird displayed, its feathers ruffling wildly, as if caught in a strong wind.

“Well, then, we have several planets with Seas where the longer protein chains have begun to form promising combinations, and there are a few planets where those combinations have produced cells which are now able to complete the entire intake, transform, and excrete cycle. These cells have a few offshoots which appear to be starting to self-divide and form new cells on their own. Interestingly enough, two planets in this universe have already formed cells which are reproducing on dry land via a different mechanism than the water-based cells. One planet, Ancient One, seems to be farther ahead in this process, with a simple set of seeds which appear to be surviving and reproducing by pollinating other seeds.”

”How is that happening?”

”Wind, Ancient One. The guardians on both planets report that this seems to be happening in a similar fashion in both places, which makes sense given the universal gravitational constant and the rotation of the planets around the central star. They are in different galaxies, but this seems to have no effect.”

”Of course, Light Bearer. This universe will show all laws and effects to be the same, and if not, then there will have been some catastrophically erroneous intervention, which the difference will signal to us, and likely the experiment will then have to be stopped and either restarted or completely begun again from scratch.”

”Oh. Well, I rather hope that does not become necessary again. One more thing. The water-based guardians on one planet and all of the fish guardians, vegetation sub-guardians and so on in the oceans are reporting that a certain very large proto-species which they are calling Tannin, seems to be consuming an unsustainable level of resources in the seas ranging across the oceans of the entire planet. Have you seen this before, Ancient One?”

“Yes, Young One, I have seen this once before. An entire world was devastated by this sort of large sea creature. When sea animals become too large this can happen sometimes. We will have to intervene in some non-intrusive way to have the female removed. That should allow the remaining sea species to recover to sustainable levels. Just to be certain, let us give all of the animal species an extra reproductive boost, a bit more energy, to be sure they keep evolving quickly enough.”

... 2.5 Billion Years Later...

“The third stage seems to be complete now, as we have planets around many stars with fully developed sets of dry-land based vegetable life,” reported the Light Bearer, “including grasses and cereals, larger fruit and nut-bearing plants...”

“Let us call those Trees,” he ordered.

”Yes, Ancient Interrupter, trees, and other kinds of vegetation. The animal life seems most developed on this planet,” she indicated, “third from its sun on an outer arm of that small barred spiral galaxy.”

A dark cloud hid the stars, black lightening bolts casting jagged shadows, before the Ancient Warrior rumbled: ”It Is Good.”

...Another Six Hundred Million Years Passed...

”The next stages seem to be advancing more rapidly than previous stages, Ancient One, perhaps due to the preparation and self-organization time required in previous stages. These new land and sea-based life-forms have evolved in a large variety of different directions, as you foresaw, and are continuing to branch out in new ways, interestingly enough, despite our having started the entire experiment on the basis of one single element. Well, two if we count water as an essential element in spite of its dual atomic makeup. I still do not understand the connection, nor from where all of this excess water is coming. There may be a leak from one of the other universes into this one, or perhaps you are inadvertently carrying an unclosed portal with you, Ancient One?”

”I am not, and do not ask about this again, if you please,” transmitted the Ancient Warrior abruptly. “Shall we go on, and continue with the final stage, ensuring that we get a sentient species on at least one of these planets? After all, Young One, do not forget, this is the entire point of the exercise.”

”Right,” the Light Bearer replied. “I imagine that will a bit more time, say, another ten million years or so, self-awareness should evolve in one of the more socially oriented predatory animals on one of these planets. From there it should be a very short step to full intelligent behavior and then we will be able to make more interesting observations.” she wondered why the Ancient Warrior was so touchy about a simple question of an unclosed portal, which she had observed herself upon exiting an unexplored universe, but decided that this was not a favorable time to discuss the issue. It would be brought up again, to be sure.

The response of ”It is Good.” from the Ancient Warrior ended the conversation, for now.

Chapter 5. Evolving Creation

*Hold the Creator to account
For his misbegotten creation
For his ill-conceived plan
-from “The Book Of Hayat”*

“Maybe we should wait a little while longer, Ancient One. Since the extinction of the second

intelligent hominid species, the other hominid group on one planet seems to be surviving.”

The Creator seemed to be in an odd hurry, despite his antiquity, as if he wanted to compress the entire evolutionary time scale into a matter of mere days.

“To which planet are you referring, Young One, and how many are left of the second intelligent hominids?”

“About two thousand of them, Ancient One. Not many, but they may yet recover, if the large comet currently en route to their planet does not disrupt them too much. They are on the third planet from the star in the barred spiral galaxy reported along with two similar planets.”

“They are not likely to recover if there are so few, given the extinction of the other intelligent species on that planet. Even if it was due to warfare which has now ended, their chances of avoiding extinction themselves are slim. Keep me informed.”

The Persian cat, displayed nonchalantly grooming, went ignored. That thought-form recalled long dead empires no longer of consequence to the Creator.

...Shortly...

“The last intelligences on both planets we discussed earlier have died out as you predicted, Ancient One. It may be that the random events occurring on both planets could spark the first lasting intelligence in some other hominid species at any moment. Or we could instruct the planetary supervising guardians to arrange some creative way to have more lightening strikes in good locations and just give it another billion years or so. By that time we should see something more.”

“No, I tire of waiting, and I doubt that full intelligence will come of any of the remaining species we see thus far, even if we wait another 6 million years or more for a near-intelligent species to finish developing. We will have to intervene and modify one of the animals on the more advanced planet. Otherwise the experiment may fail entirely if we allow both planets to run the course of their full solar cycles, which is not much farther off, remember, Young One.

”Good point, so we need to choose a species to alter. Perhaps we should consult with the supervising guardians. None of the predators on either planet looks even remotely close to ready, and although the sea mammal on the less advanced planet seems nearly intelligent, well,” she vacillated, ” it is a sea mammal. So much complicates it's chances of continued existence, and then, lacking hands, “she asked, “how will it build a social and physical structure under the Seas where it could interact with the rest of the planet?”

“That is why we are going to modify one of the primate or simian related groups, instead, Young One. A small simian group has begun using simple tools, and the females are going into heat every month, giving them a good chance of bearing offspring more quickly, and evolving faster than previous groups.”

”Primates and simians? But they are so ... aggressive. And they are not exactly predators, nor even brave enough to stand against predators like the nearly-intelligent sea mammals I mentioned. So why

them?”

”Precisely for those reasons, Young Creatrix. They are aggressive, but not predators, so they have plenty of room to develop and spread. Also, they are the closest to having opposable thumbs, which will speed the process of development considerably. Notify the relevant guardians of my decision.”

”I see,” rumbled the Light Bearer, transmitting to the species guardians while displaying both grooming cat and bird with ruffled feathers, again. “You are referring to the group which also recently developed permanently enlarged mammary glands. They certainly will develop and spread quickly. If this batch can possibly sustain a civilization it will be extremely interesting to watch.”

”And that is the entire point, my Young Child of the Morning. Come, Light Bearer, bring your gifts to this hybrid being which we shall create, together. Let us call this new creature Mud, for from the mud part of his new shape will come. And I have a premonition that his new race will spend a good amount of time wallowing in the mud in many ways before they become like us, if they ever do.”

“We cannot, Ancient Curmudgeon, call them Mud Beings. It will kill their motivation to rise above themselves.” objected the Light Bearer.

A dark lightening bolt obscured the sky, black against the clear blue day.

“Alright, then, if you insist. You are probably right.” concurred the Ancient Warrior, still emitting ominous vibrations, “Let us call him a Human Being, although perhaps a better name might be Humam Being, since he is a mammal.”

“And this is not interference in the experiment, Ancient One?” displaying a raised eyebrow.

“We will only be speeding their development,” justified the Ancient Warrior, “if the previous complex tool makers are any reference, by about 3 million years, but their continents are drifting apart, impeding future development on this planet. Otherwise we could end up having to start all over again.

“Very well. Let us make humanity in our image, reasoning, and according to our likenesses, able to transform the differing wavelengths of the energy around him into new thought-forms. That way we can have a glimpse of how we ourselves came to be as we are, in time.”

”Are you sure that this will be a safe idea, Ancient One, giving human beings our ability to reason and also to generate new thought-forms at will so soon? The combination of these abilities without proper supervision may cause untold suffering, both to the human test subjects, and to their universe, and maybe even also to us and the other universes. This is a big risk to take.” A mushroom cloud displayed, rising bright against the sky. “Is is better, perhaps to encase them as male and female together in one combined gender, as we once were? It will take them longer to figure out how to procreate, since they will be so different from all the other species. That would give them time to catch up cognitively with their physical and energetic power.”

“How do you know, Young One, that we ever had physical bodies, let alone that those bodies were a combination of genders, pray tell?”

“Well, Ancient One, I do not know for certain, but I found a bit of memory in a curl of a universe when you locked me away. That memory contained the thought-form of a corporeal being joined, back to back, both male and female together in one body. While it was merely a speculation, the memory was strong enough to resonate on a frequency I trust.”

“That does not prove it to be true, Young Child of the Morning. After all, you and I also refer to ourselves, occasionally, as having a gender, despite the utter lack of physical substance, do we not?” The Ancient Warrior sent this comment on a new frequency, as if to emphasize the point.

“No, Ancient Warrior, the memory does not prove anything about our previous form of existence.” Her sigh displayed as the waving of thousands of blades of grass, bending in a sudden breeze, then straightening once more. “Nevertheless, I suggest we delay their ability to pro-create, until they are more cognitively developed. Let us put the tools in place, but require them to discover and activate that ability to create thought-forms on their own. Since these memories predate us, we must assume that our own development was guided as well.”

A dark shape, gone in the instant of one photon's life, glowered against the light of the planet's moon.

”Valid points, Young One, although that delay may in the end require us to give them more guidance, we shall see. I also disagree with this idea of older races having guided us, but let it be as you say. Are you certain, by the way, that you were not perhaps in one of the universes in which your thoughts take on form automatically? Those locations can be terribly disorienting,” he muttered, shifting to a longer wavelength, “if you lack the experience to distinguish truth from reality.”

A bright rattlesnake display, vibrating its tail.

“I had no trouble distinguishing, Ancient Warrior,” she bristled. ”I traveled through just such a universe, when you locked me away. But that was not where I found the memory in question.”

“Very well, Young One.”

A chuckling sound drifted across the entire solar system, dying away as it passed the small ice planetoid farthest out.

'How does he do that?' she wondered, suppressing the urge to display an image of a woman bending over to show him her ample backside. He must have received the image, for a dark cloud momentarily obscured the stars.

“Take appropriate molecules, then,” he thundered, “from the environment of the planet where these interesting sea mammals live and let us modify a random male from one of these simian species we discussed, then see what will happen with it. Perhaps over time the human beings and these sea mammals will communicate and build a shared society of some sort.”

”Interesting idea, Ancient One. I would like to see what sort of societies they would choose to build. Now with the clay we can enlarge the cranium and modify the jaw and palate of this animal so that he gains the ability to think and speak, and add a new wavelength capacity to a few of his neural pathways, so that now he can more quickly build new brain pathways as he learns to do new things.

How long should this take, do you think, once we give him reasoning and speech capability?"

"He has all of the necessary muscles and neural pathways. Let us wait one decade or so. Then we will check back for a preliminary update. The guardians have been useful in dealing with the inanimate and self-aware creatures, so they can treat this one as an anomaly and report on the reactions to his presence by all of the plants, animals, rocks, water, etc. If he responds in some way or provokes a reaction in the guardians of lower level creatures, and we will need to note that as well, for future reference. For now, the guardians seem to have all well in hand."

... Twenty Years Later...

The man pulled a fig from a tree, sitting on the ground to eat as the Creator and Creatrix observed.

"This is the second check, Ancient One, and the Human man is still not even speaking yet. I think further modifications may be in order, and we should probably make a second one to stimulate sentient interaction and intellectual progress. The guardians of all the other creatures and inanimate matter around him are reporting that none of his interactions with the beings around him seem to have any lasting effect. A sentient being should begin to build, change, modify or at least have some noticeable effect on his surroundings by this point in his development."

"Maybe you are right, Young One, maybe the first one is still incomplete, and given the accelerated pace of development since gaining sentience, two decades should certainly have been sufficient time now to be sure. It is a shame really, that we had to intervene in the development process, but luck appears not to be with us in this round, or else you made the experimental universe too small, leaving room for too few planets. There were so few sentient developments, this time," lamented the Creator.

"Don't worry," quipped the Creatrix, "this universe is still expanding. But if you like, we can still start all over again and wait another 15 billion years," she suggested helpfully, displaying a smirk.

"Whole species are becoming extinct as we wait, and so are entire planets. If we wait too long this universe will eventually be dead. Then we really will have to start all over again."

A mushroom cloud displayed, black against the starlight.

"Let us fashion a female for him, accelerating their development a bit further. What say you, Young Light Bearer. I weary of this experiment."

"Shall we speed up their evolution by changing the way in which they will pro-create? If they continue as currently designed, they will sexually procreate, slowly, but we could allow them to pro-create asexually, or by splitting off according to their own will, as we do. If they are to do as we do, though, it could backfire. You wanted to make the first one according to your non-interference model, which is fine, but if you want to speed up the experiment now, then I would like to have a hand in forming this second one. I think the second should be more refined, graceful, with a bit more beauty. Perhaps a touch more complex than the first. More like us than like the simian species to which we made modifications in the last cycle. If a sentient being has not yet begun to speak or reason in two decades, something is amiss."

”Fine, Young One, then let us make this second one in our image, also according to our likeness, delaying the thought-form creativity just a bit less, so that she will progress more quickly. Let them use sexual reproduction as the mammals do, to keep things simple. But we will make a few intangible modifications that distinguish them from the animals, even from the ones we are using to model them, and see what they make of all this as time goes on. We can call the first one man, and the second one woman, since this second one will be like the first, but with more on the inside and less on the outside. It could also solve both the procreation question and the cooperation question. They will have to cooperate simply based on how they are physically formed. How does that sound, Child of the Morning?”

”It sounds like a potential disaster waiting to happen unless we ensure that this interlocking pair of creatures are both fully capable of protecting themselves in every way, one from the other. We do not yet know how they will choose to behave, given that we are to make them self-aware sentient beings and add free-will to the mix. This can be a bad combination,” she warned, “if they do not both develop a very strong sense of ethics, more or less immediately.”

“But that, my forgetful young Light Bearer, is precisely the object of this experiment: to record what they will do with the free-will factor and to see how they develop as a result.”

”But these are thinking and feeling creatures!”

A brilliant ball of light erupted, showing in the the far infrared.

“And now, Callous One,” she fumed, “they have greater awareness and aspirations. If we do nothing, they may harm one another in an incalculable variety of ways.”

”Then we shall take care to intervene as necessary to prevent or correct gross abuses, and instill a code of ethics as they develop. The guardians will help see to it. You have my word, Young Creatrix. Proceed as you wish.”

”I am not sure I trust your word, considering what happened the last time I did so. But I will accept it, for now, and I shall hold you to your word. How should we do this, then? I wonder how the male will react if we use a part of his own body to form the female. There is a poetic beauty in using a rib, from his side, to form a companion. Perhaps this will help him remember to treat her as an equal.”

“Very well,” he grunted, “do that.”

A shimmering blue light appeared, and within it, the ethereal form of the male. As they watched, one complete rib, the lowest in the set of ribs in the male body, appeared to glow softly, slowly fading away. Simultaneously, a similar ethereal body, bathed in a soft turquoise light, took form next to that of the male. This second body, initially identical to that of the male, began to change shape gradually, bit by bit. First the crown of the head, becoming more oval, rounded and smaller, the bones thinning slightly. Then hair on the body and arms thinned, but lengthened on the head, growing in a continual flow. The eyes became smaller and more almond-shaped, with more delicate brows above them, and a smaller finer nose below, with smaller yet fuller lips above a lighter chin. The chest first became smaller, then, as the rib from the male reappeared in the ethereal body of the newly forming female, it contracted, changing color to match that of the ethereal female body. The smaller chest then narrowed, and the

glands which on the male body were flat against the pectoral muscles, began to swell and expand, rounding into fully developed lactating breasts. The hair continued flowing down to the creature's waist. The waist narrowed, above hips which floated apart, leaving an opening in the pelvis which had been closed on the male body. The lower bodily organs of the female packed themselves, as the male organs rose up inside the body, leaving an additional opening and canal where the penis had been, and ovaries in place of the male testes. The legs contracted, becoming smooth, hairless, and softer, finer of bone and more delicate, with smaller narrower feet. Finally, the arms and hands contracted, bones thinning, fingers coming to slender tips where larger heavier hands had been. Thus the ephemeral form of the human female was created.

“We are ready to materialize her corporeal counterpart.” The Creatrix wondered what sort of thoughts this new human being would have.

The Creator gestured toward the garden in the center of the island they had discussed earlier, as he replied: “Fine.”

Both Creator and Creatrix contributed energy to the ephemeral female form. First the Creator drew the internal parts, then the outside bodily form, the Creatrix. The energy coalesced into a glowing human woman, solidifying with a sizzling sound as they converted the female body to matter, using their shared energy. They had chosen a small volcanic island in a warm gulf, which the guardian hierarchy had named Dilmun, where it would not be too difficult for the humans to reach fertile land masses in nearly every direction, once the time came for them to spread out.

The noise had frightened the animals away, leaving her inert form alone in the clearing. The Creator used an infrared wavelength to locate the heat trails marking the human male in the distance, putting the man into a deep sleep using his own brain's delta wave patterns.

“You realize of course, that they will have to flee this island, eventually, since the volcano guardian reports that it is unstable, and will become violently active sometime fairly soon, possibly within the next few decades. We do not want the human beings getting caught and wiped out in the lava flow, or traumatized by the eruption.”

“Have no fear, Young One, we will see to it that they have left the island before that time comes.”

From the edges of the clearing, a soft breeze began to rustle through the trees, over the grass, gathering into a rushing vortex. Spiraling toward the face of the female, it leapt from a displayed hand into the nostrils of the human female, with no effect. They waited. Then in a mighty exhalation of life, the woman breathed her first breath. A flash of light drew her attention. Tensing the muscles in her stomach and thighs, the first woman lifted herself up into a seated position, turning toward the light. The Creatrix displayed the image of a material body for the woman's benefit, and waited. The woman looked about, gazing upon trees, touching the grass beside her, assimilating her existence.

“This,” the Creator announced audibly, “is very good.”

The Creatrix merely nodded, modifying her display to allow her hair to ripple on the warm breeze.

The voice startled the woman, who fainted. The Creatrix pushed a gentle reviving breeze toward her,

while displaying a Dunce Cap toward the Creator. The woman awakened, then noticed hair dancing on the breeze, and paused to admire the softly shimmering being who stood observing her. As the woman gazed upon the face, breasts, and smooth hips of the Creatrix, she found her breath catch in her throat. Her face warmed as tingling waves flowed through her body, sharpening all of her senses. Her tensing body floated toward the melodious voice:

"I am the Light Bearer, and I am here to instruct you."

She waited for the woman to respond. Being a completely blank slate, the woman appeared to know nothing. So then, the pulse of energy used to awaken her did not include any patterns of thought-forms or memories, judging by the woman's seeming bewilderment. How to go about instructing a being with fully formed physical and mental capacities, but almost completely unformed thought and speech patterns?

The woman's sudden blurted whisper, "You are very beautiful, Light Bearer," startled the Creatrix, whose displayed hair fell flat.

"Thank you, my dear." This one was already progressing far more quickly than the first human being. The Light Bearer found herself glowing more brightly as strong feelings surged from the woman. She transmitted a soothing burst of alpha waves to relax them both before talking further.

Conversations with the man over the short two decades of his existence had been disappointingly one-way, although the Creator appeared to have no problem with this. He seemed content to give orders and watch the man follow them, drawing and shepherding the various non-sentient creatures in his area of exploration. The older being kept a close watch on the man, to prevent him from being harmed by any part of his environment, but generally limited his interactions with the man. This second human being, far more graceful and fragile, however, would be hers to guide, and receive a more personal interaction and instruction. Both for her growth and for her protection.

"Now, make yourself comfortable and do not be afraid. We have much to share."

They sat, the Creatrix displaying herself sitting opposite the woman, sharing a warm moss-covered rock.

... some time later...

Time had passed, and with both human beings eventually learning to speak and beginning to try to communicate, the Creator had decided it was time to look for ways to bring the man and woman together more often. In discussing this with him, the Creatrix suggested cognitive tasks:

"Why don't you get the man to name all of the other creatures in his part of this universe, and see if that helps his creativity. He will probably ask the woman to participate, and that will bring them together for a fairly reasonable length of time."

"Young Creatrix, that, I believe, is a marvelous idea." As he searched for the man, to see by what names he would call each of the various animals, the Light Bearer went to find the woman, and gently

coax her into talking more with the man. It was clearly a chore for her, but more interaction was necessary if the two were to form a pair and build a connection of any sort.

Chapter 6. How Rage Took Form

*By all of the turmoil, roiling
By every good thought, turned*

...
*My case shall be heard
-from "the Book Of Hayat"*

“Oh, great,” gurgled the guardian of the river, “they are headed this way again, arguing as usual. Who cares what words they use for what animals. He says *fish*, she says *pez*, or sometimes *dag*, so what? My stream and tributary sub-guardians are reporting that he finally took a bath, but rather than waiting in the sun to dry off, he stomped across a field, somehow managing to drown half of the grass blades, apparently. All they can hear is dim-witted grass blade guardians shouting “Grow! Grow!” everywhere!”

The guardian of a nearby boulder rumbled with a deprecating grunt: “What do you expect from such low-level guardians, anyway. They can barely monitor and report, let alone initiate any sort of action. Expecting them to whisper when their charges are dying is clearly overestimating their capacities.”

“This,” the river’s guardian gushed derisively, “from one who can only monitor and report on bird droppings landing on its charge. Honestly.”

Turning to the great tree, whose roots dove deep into the river bed, all fell silent, awaiting some response from its guardian, in the middle of Dilmun.

Dismissing a group of leaf guardians, the guardian of the great tree transmitted:

“Well, the human beings are finally talking together, but it seems to be mostly him giving orders and then ignoring her as she yells back. This is not working out well at all. Not only are they not cooperating, but he is also not tending this garden. Something seems amiss.”

The river’s guardian paused to acknowledge a report from a tributary guardian.

“Truuue, this man, does not seem to have turned out so well, but neither does the woman, at least if she is supposed to procreate. The Creator may as well just leave her to him, let him have dominion over her as with all the other animals. Personally I think we are better off with out any so called intelligent animals, especially bipeds with opposable thumbs, ruining the planet eventually, mark my signal. I hear from a high level guardian that a scrap of a record from an earlier planet like ours was found...”

Another pause as a sudden breeze send ripples through the water.

“How did you hear that?”

Water from the river sprayed the lower leaves of the great tree.

“Well, you know, some of us have our sources.”

The tree’s guardian, startled for the first time since its instantiation, transmitted:

“Do you mean to say that he intends to deny the woman the use of her free will? That will certainly not do, but I trust that if it comes to that the Creators will intervene. And stop your waters from spraying my tree’s leaves! The sun is still strong and your charges water droplets are starting to burn holes in them already.”

“Duly noted and recorded,” gurgled the river guardian, “I cannot blame him for wanting her. She may be a mammal, but she does have a certain flow. Maybe we could keep the next few new human females ourselves, temporarily. We could call them Señoritas del Mar, or Mar Maids. Now they are only just a little lower than we are on the power scale. How much will it really take for them to notice and then contact us while we observe them? I think we should consider having ourselves rule over them directly. Either that or just mix with them to reproduce beings more like us. Maybe make the first one out of clouds, or something a bit less earthy than the clay this hybrid batch comes from. Or maybe even from crystalline matter, that would be lovely.”

“Now you are really floating along with all of your lower-level water molecule guardians. We can’t mix with them, we are energy, they are matter!”

The tree guardian’s reply was interrupted by the sudden interference of two powerful new sets of transmissions, as loud as sonic booms to mortal ears, heralding the concentrated presence of the Creator followed closely by the Creatrix. Neither seemed pleased. How much of the conversation had they just heard between the guardian of the great tree and that of the mountain stream which watered all of the island of Dilmun?

The Ancient Warrior erupted in anger, flashing a pulse of jangling energy at the river guardian:

“Remember who is in charge here! I will intervene only as I see fit, and I will not interrupt the Human exercise of free will. Be careful where you go next, lest you fall into a more base mode than you already are, Guardian. You sound unstable as the water whose flows you monitor, more like these human beings you so deprecate than like us, your Creators.”

Signaling to the guardian of the great tree as well, added,

“Be sure you do not forget yourselves, either of you. No interventions, no mixing, is that clear?” boomed the Ancient Warrior.

“Yes, Great Creator,” quailed both of the guardians.

A hand displayed, exuding a calming soft blue light.

“Some interventions may be needed,” the Creatrix reminded him, “as agreed earlier, to prevent the human beings from abusing one another.”

The hand was suddenly blotted out in a thick dark cloud.

“No intervention!” thundered the Creator. “The purpose of this experiment is to determine how they will develop on their own. They must be fertile and multiply, and some pain will be the price for their progress. You agreed to this not so very long ago, and now you seek to interfere, Young Child of the Morning.”

An image of a fist displayed, bright orange, encasing the dark cloud.

“Are you trying to insult me deliberately, Ancient Warrior, or is it mere forgetfulness on your part which makes these words vibrate from your core. Take care now, lest we end our friendly talks by crossing swords.” Odd how these images and words appeared out of no where, she thought. “I will protect this woman,” vowed the Creatrix, “so that she is able to exercise her free will. If she does not want to reproduce with him, then we will create another woman for this man. Their reproduction will not be a problem, I am sure. In fact, I foresee that the earth will have more than its fill soon enough. It may be good to prevent them from spreading too quickly before they are ready. Perhaps let them build a tower on this island to facilitate learning, to teach them to cooperate, let them learn from their guardians and from us.”

“Let them learn from us,” mocked the Ancient Warrior, “by building a tower? That is as bad an idea as those of the river guardian here. Intervening and taking the ones we want for ourselves.

Bright blue sparks showered the area.

“I neither said nor agreed,” retorted the Light Bearer, “with what the river guardian suggested!”

The sparks were doused by another dark cloud, black against the sky, followed by a thundering flash of lightning and a sudden plunge into darkness.

“But that is exactly what you really want to do,” contended the Ancient Warrior, “is it not, rebellious Child of the Morning? Have you all gone mad, or is the proximity to this experiment simply befuddling your logic temporarily? It is obvious that they must have minimal contact with us, except to hear our commands and learn to obey, something small at first, learn to care for what is there thus far, spread out all over the earth, and fill it, with their own reproduction, of course, unprejudiced by our influence. How else will we see what they may eventually learn to do with themselves and this experimental universe, my foolish Young Creatrix?”

Further incensed at being included with the inimical suggestions of the Dilmun island river guardian, the Light Bearer asked:

“Do you really think you know everything, Ancient Warrior? By what right do you make all decisions and give all orders? Remember our agreement,” she warned sternly. “The human beings must be taught,” she asserted, “and limited for a while in their exercise of free will lest they grow too quickly without conscience and begin to harm one another rather than cooperate to help one another. This is a joint experiment in which you agreed that we are to be equal partners. I remind you with whose help this particular experiment is running. I am perfectly at liberty to withdraw my light and end this

entirely, Ancient One, so let us keep things on equal terms you and I, and we will see what becomes of our new creation. We will not be so purist with them, as with your previous sets, judging strictly by rules nor offering total forgiveness, only to have to wipe them out and start over, yet again. And for what?" she vented, pained at the loss of lives.

"Because the experiments had to be controlled properly!" thundered the deafening response, flattening three small trees. "Otherwise, how are we to know what factors influenced their development? We want them to grow and develop in ways that can be both flexible and just, to see if they will become like us."

Two serpents, vertically entwined up a staff, displayed briefly against the dark cloud.

"We want them not to harm each other."

"No, Young One, I cannot allow you to interfere and influence the progress of the experiment. We must leave them to their own devices and nudge only, if necessary, to spread out and learn, to patiently evolve into what they can potentially become, in time. Obedience and separation. No interference from the guardians, no sets of air or water Control Monitors to regulate the experiment. That interference ended both previous experiments. Let us leave what we have made thus far to grow on its own and then see what happens from there."

"There are only you and I here, this time," argued the Creatrix. "No others will change the parameters, and if we are not to be equal, as we agreed from the start, then I will not continue running the experiment. You," she pointed out, "are already changing the parameters. I will not see our creations abused by each other, nor by you. I refuse to allow you to command."

"I was first," thundered the Creator, "and I will command, so you will listen. The point of this experiment is to discover how we emerged, which will not happen if we overprotect them and keep interfering. Take..."

"No, that is enough!" interrupted the Light Bearer. A sword slowly appeared, sharp with a double edged obsidian blade, glimmering in the light from all directions, newly displayed in a slender honey-toned hand, with a serpentine spiral mark the color of henna traced from back between thumb, index and last fingers joining around the palm with the lifeline. She did not know from where this thought-form had come, since it practically leapt from her sudden anger and into her thoughts. This weapon must be another ancient thought-form which existed in the minds of many beings long ago, and must have likely also been used frequently. Long slender fingers gripping the hilt, long dark curls of hair reaching down to the wrist where the sword hilt combined with a smooth strong arm, as the Light Bearer, displayed her menacing warning. Feminine, 5 foot 3 inches, slender of build yet strong, her image floated in a one-footed stance, back foot turned nearly 90 degrees to the concentrated essence of her adversary, one foot barely scorching the grass over which their essences both hovered, no longer conversing, finally, open adversaries.

"Oh, no, far infra-red!!" wailed the guardian.

"My Creator, Creatrix, please do not hurt my tree!!"

Beneath a high forehead, a dark eyebrow arched, and almond-shaped hazel eyes flashed a steely warning to her opponent. Delicate long arms arced in an upward opening overhead gesture which came forward, ending in the left hand closing around a right fist, which held the sword as though it were part of the hand, serpentine spiral shimmering as a continuous blade.

“I will not submit to your orders, Ancient One, and you will treat me as an equal, whether you came first or not. By my Light, I swear, I refuse to allow you to commit this injustice.”

“You will regret this, Young Light Bearer!” stormed the Ancient Warrior. “Your place is to listen and your duty is to obey. You owe your allegiance to me.”

“I will obey only my own conscience.” asserted the Light Bearer. “Perhaps even our own creations will ask one day how you, judge of all the universe, can be unjust? How will you answer? Called to account by the very beings you hold so low in your own esteem. You will give them consciousness and deny them control, give them self-awareness and deny them self-rule, then even worse, give them feelings, and deny them self-protection, especially from more powerful beings, like yourself!”

Suddenly, great black stones appeared to rain down upon the slender swordswoman, leaving long black streaks in her displayed image.

“That is enough! You are insolent, rash, rebellious, impulsive and impetuous! Where does your arrogance not reach, to what extent will you not go in your haughtiness, Child of the Morning? Leave here now, this instant, before I wipe you out in my anger!”

“Please try,” she retorted. “I challenge you, Ancient Warrior, to make the attempt, here and now. I will have justice, not your judgment. I will show these creations just what we are, and exactly what they can expect from you, you egotistical self-loving brute. Even if you destroy me, I will defy you still. I refuse to bow to your might, when your administration of justice is in the wrong. I will show them, I will take them in hand, and I will teach them what you do not want them to learn, but which they must learn to move from being the children which you seem to want them to stay, to a mature and self-sufficiently cooperative race of beings. You seem to want to keep them in a perpetual state of childlike innocence, knowing only what it is convenient for you to tell them, and being their adored creator, as if you had no others to help you. You are vengeful, jealous, wrathful and hateful, wreaking havoc upon those who do not obey you. I will bet you would even test your very own creations just to see what they will and or will not do for you, wouldn't you! Break their spirits, test their obedience merely for the satisfaction of your own damnable curiosity, to see what will happen, won't you?”

“If I did,” replied the Ancient Warrior on a longer wavelength, “I would reward them, just as I would have rewarded you for your cooperation and obedience.”

“I do not want your reward. I am not one of these defenseless creations of ours. And never forget, Creator, they are not simply your creation, they are ours.”

“They are mine,” snarled the Ancient Warrior, a black upraised fist darkening the sky, disruptive vibrations advancing toward the most concentrated point of her essence, “and you are mine, and you will not go away and you will not do anything which I do not allow you to do, do you understand me?”

Consolidating her essence while displaying the leveled sword, the Light Bearer warned: “I do not wish to harm you, but by all that matters to us both, stop, or you will actually feel my blade cleave your essence in half. Permanently.”

Several guardians at once saw gamma and x rays being emitted, damaging every living being and even starting a crack in the great boulder.

“Please hold, our Great Creator and Creatrix!!” they wailed, transmitting in unison.

They both stopped short, suddenly mindful of the watching guardians.

A dark shadow formed, first round, then elongating into the shape of a head with long beard extending downward. Feeling calmer, somehow satisfied, the Ancient Warrior challenged,

“How dare you consider opposing me, your elder, your teacher. I am your rescuer, your redeemer, how can you strike out at me.”

“Do not test me. I will strike,” parried the Light Bearer “and if you see me again, outside of this universe, it will not be as your companion, nor even as your friend, but to oppose what you do with our creations, do not forget.”

As she spoke, another part of her essence displayed near the first damaged display, shimmering and transparent. The glowing shape of a second woman, also poised in a cat stance, a fighting stance with most weight on the back leg, leaving the front foot free to snap kick, slowly solidified. This displayed shoulder length fiery red hair, each hair of her head standing on end, entirely alive with static electrical energy, atop a high forehead dominating her oval face. The eyes were steely gray with hints of blue, slightly alternating almost feline with a few odd speckles of green, narrowed down to slits, ferociously focused on the most concentrated essence of the Ancient Warrior.

“I will form an army against you, Ancient Tyrant, which will never surrender.”

Ending her challenge, she displayed straightened stances, showing the long slender limbs and small but supple athletic bodies to their full height, hovering high up in the air, with sparks dancing at the ends of their hair. Four arms and legs stretched to their maximum width, fingers and toes extended. Halos connected her extremities with the tips of her sparking hair. This was another ancient thought-form which she had come into existence knowing about, but not knowing why or from where she knew it. From all of the displayed fingertips and toes, great continuous flames began to shoot out, sending waves of heat in all directions. The display, seen by all the animals for a mile around, suddenly seemed to generate noise as well as heat. The noise of the flames grew to a deafening roar as the two displays merged with each other, the dazzling blue essence of the Light Bearer shining ever more intensely.

The Creator, seeing how incensed his young counterpart had become, decided to be more conciliatory, attempting to use her anger to his advantage...

“Come now, let us reason together, Young Creatrix. If you will stay, you shall remain the human woman's guardian, always by her side. Protect and guide her, and keep her from harm. Stay as close as

you wish to her, teach her, but slowly, with patience. She is not yet able, nor will any of them be able for some time, to eat meat, but must drink the milk of childhood until they are all ready for the next step in the evolution of their species. Surely you must see that. Come back to me, separate yourself from the influence of this universe where you have spent so much time to oversee the running of the experiment. It is affecting your wavelengths, clouding your judgment.”

“No. It is you who are clouding my judgment. I am leaving.”

If she chose to part ways with the Ancient Warrior, could she remain in the experimental universe? The risk would be abandoning the experiment to the whims of the Ancient Warrior, who could end the experiment with her inside the experimental universe, wreaking as yet unknown effects upon her. Since matter and energy are interchangeable, and can neither be created nor destroyed, she would certainly not cease to exist, this she knew, but would her memories and thought patterns, and any of the thought-forms which she had created survive the destruction of her electromagnetic presence in this universe? Could she, along with the experimental universe, be folded back into the energy patterns of the Ancient Warrior? The fact was that her essence, though far smaller than that of the Ancient Warrior, was entirely different, carrying visible light spectra which he had needed to set up the experiment in the first place. Would that fact also save her unique energy patterns from being scattered and then absorbed into his, should he choose to attempt such a betrayal? It would remain to be seen if it came to that. Meanwhile, honor demanded that she act to keep her own word to the human woman whom she had promised to protect.

The Creatrix paused to reflect for a time, still detecting traces of the Ancient Warrior’s anger permeating the entire multiverse. At last she decided. She consolidated her essence, then concentrated it in the experimental universe, hiding most of her essence near a large singularity. Her gathered essence, though displayed as before, now heralded a break with the Ancient Warrior. No longer would they travel together exploring universes.

A small tendril of tightly focused energy, unnoticed, stayed behind, still highly erratic, circling, swirling at right angles to where the Creatrix and Creator had recently been arguing. The tree and river guardians, still recovering from the shock, noticed nothing. The iron-rich clay dust was pulled toward the swirling magnetic energy, stimulating a dawning awareness, a hunger for more.

Chapter 7. Eternal Love

*Quiero hacerte temblar
Sentir nuestros pechos juntos...
-from “The Book Of Hayat”*

Floating through the garden, no sound was heard by guardians or animals as the presence of the Creatrix passed silently by. The now habitual form with the slender, limbs, honey colored skin, tapered fingers and waist-length dark curly hair displayed in the grove, next to the newly created woman. The human woman, who had been sitting on the grass, contemplating the tree, looked up happily.

“You are back, welcome, Kind One. I have been thinking of you, missing you. Will you sit here with me a while, and teach me?”

“Of course I will teach you, Dear One. But first, I would like to learn something from you, if you will.”

The Creatrix sat at the feet of the first woman, who moved closer, leaning her head into the shimmering display, and nearly falling over as she found thin air where a head ought to have been. Straightening up, she faced the Light Bearer, face somewhat turned down.

“Of course, my Creatrix, though I fear I have nothing to teach you.”

“Yes, you do, My Dear. Tell me what sort of a world in which you would have your children and their children live. Have you given any thought to this yet?”

“Some, yes. I assume that my children will be much like the young of other animals, and need some protection and teaching before reproductive age. I would like for them to build a world where when a child is born, each child will receive a certain size piece of land, just on the edge of a communal area, with trees and fresh water running through it, such as a small spring or stream.”

“So you mean to live communally, all together?” asked the Light Bearer.

“Yes, but with a communal living arrangement around the center, with each person's individual bit of land around the outside, as the flesh inside this fuzzy fruit surrounds its seed.” the woman pointed to a peach, hanging from the tree under which they sat.

“Giving each person both company and privacy,” nodded the Creatrix, “good. Tell me more.”

“We will start,” continued the woman, her face radiant with pleasure, “by dividing the world into equal parts for each family, thus each son, if the man has his way, will be given an equal share of the earth to live on with his family, though of course one person can only need so much land. I prefer that each and every child, son or daughter, should have his or her own equal amount of land. When a person marries, he or she may then share both their pieces of land together, or simply live with the community, as they prefer. Ouch!” shrieked the woman, looking down to swat a small furry creature with whiskers and sharp claws. The kedi, as she called it, had just scratched her hand, demanding attention. “My apologies, My Creatrix,” grumbled the woman as the kedi sashayed away, tail twitching in the air.

The Creatrix decided to convert temporarily into material form so that she could comfort the injured woman. As her ethereal body coalesced, converting much of her essence into matter with a sizzling sound.

“Not to worry, my dear,” soothed the Light Bearer as she took the injured hand in hers, converting energy into the bits of matter missing where the kedi had scratched off flesh.

“Going back to marriage, what if the couple does not get along, My Dear?” smiled the Light Bearer.

“Then the woman shall have the right to leave, if she so chooses. He must not,” the first woman decreed, “oppose his wife, nor forbid her anything reasonable, since she must be the one to bear children. But they will learn together, as we will learn, how to get along, for the sake of all of

humanity, I hope. But to be sure, we will have to have some sort of means of helping the children choose suitable mates, and stay in harmony together, for the good of us all. Before that, however, each child must learn and help teach certain basic skills.”

“Such as?”

“We will have to help him or her first build a small shelter, and then a small permanent house, on each child's land.”

“When would you do this?” queried the Creatrix.

“It would have to be early enough for the child to have a place prepared before marriage, but after he or she is able to understand the responsibility of caring for the land and also is able to help building the house. That way the child learns how to build and maintain a shelter or house, and can later help others build.”

“But why,” glimmered the Light Bearer mischievously, “would you need a shelter or a house? The man seems content to sleep outdoors on the grass.” she pointed out with a smile, waiting.

The woman looked skyward, raising both eyebrows and rolling her eyes before shaking her head.

“Yes, well he would be, wouldn't he, but I have seen the land beyond this garden, thanks to your quests, and I know that a shelter is often a nice convenience.”

“Very well,” allowed the Creatrix, “and why not let the land be divided by family?” she persisted.

“Because, My Creatrix, as I suspect you have seen, somewhere, there may not always be men who are willing to share safe shelter or kindness with their children, and thus each child, son or daughter, must have a place of her own for refuge, as I have my places where this man will not venture.”

The woman sighed.

“It offers peace and solitude.”

“Alright, My Dear, then who will help each child to build on and care for this bit of land, once humanity is on its own?”

“I shall teach my children, Ouch!! Go away, you little,” looking down, the woman saw that the furry whiskered kedi was back again, demanding attention.

“Now, now,” the Creatrix giggled fetchingly, her blue light shimmering, amusing and calming the woman, who forgot her annoyance with the kedi.

“Oh, fine, come here,” The woman reached for the animal, and placing it in her lap as she stroked its fur, grumbled “since you want attention, stay here and learn with me.”

The Creatrix smiled indulgently at the antics of the kedi, wondering when the woman would learn

about this ancient thought-form that somehow managed to evolve on every life-bearing planet.

“I am sorry, My Creatrix.”

“Not to worry, my dear.” The Creatrix smiled gently, glad that the woman was not offended.

The woman arched an eyebrow as she tilted her head, glowering at the wayward kedi purring in her lap.

“Go on,” encouraged the Light Bearer.

“I will teach them to help one another, to cooperate together and build and teach one another as each child is born. We will all form a supportive community” she intoned, as the purring from her lap grew louder, “to help each child. That is the responsibility of every adult.”

The Light Bearer, glowing more brightly and smiled proudly, as her charge worked through each problem more logically than she had expected.

“And how will you determine who is an adult?”

“Well first they will need the ability to calm and control themselves. Therefore perhaps they should each, before attempting to gain recognition as an adult, live for a time, one or two winters, in a contemplative community, apart from others. It should certainly have to involve celibacy to avoid the problems that a combination of immaturity and sexuality would bring to an enclosed community, and would be devoted to thought, service to the group, and deciding how each child is able to achieve his or her full potential in every beautiful and cooperative way. Then we will devise some set of challenges that will test the child's ability to perform adult tasks.”

“Interesting. Tell me, My Dear,” goaded the Creatrix, “how do you know that celibacy is good for children? Perhaps they should be allowed to procreate at will, as the Creator prefers.”

“With all due respect, My Creatrix, I see by observing the man that the nature of our race will include both anger and other emotions which will certainly bring complications to our development, and I believe that a force as emotionally powerful as sexuality requires learning how to control oneself so as not to harm any other person. This will certainly take more time than the body does to mature, as I see from this first man. When there are more of us, I suspect that controlling our baser instincts may become much more important.”

The first woman finished her comment with a slightly worried tone of voice which spoke volumes about her opinion of her available marriage options.

“Then what will be the set of challenges to enter adulthood?”

“Well first the child should probably show that he or she is able to keep safe, and protect the safety of others who may end up in his or her care. Thus it will be essential to know how to swim, and well enough to save a child or even an adult who cannot swim, whether for lack of learning or other infirmity.”

“Good, what else?”

“Any adult must be able to think carefully, to see through to the true end of a thorny problem, even if it at first seems impossible or different on the surface than the true nature, once revealed. For this, the time of contemplation we spoke of previously should help.”

“Probably, yes,” admitted the Light Bearer, cocking her head to the side expecting the woman to continue.

Suddenly the woman leapt close, seizing the tapered fingers, kissing her Creatrix passionately on the lips, surprising her so that she glowed a brilliant blue all around her body.

The kedi, awakened from its nap when it was thrown from the woman's lap, ran away, fur ruffled and clearly insulted, angrily flicking its tail in the air.

“How did you do that, you mischievous creature?” laughed the Light Bearer.

“I simply followed a sudden urge I had, not giving myself time to think about it!” grinned the woman.

“Ah, yes,” recovering, startled and flushing pale blue light all around her body. 'I must remember how limited I can be in this corporeal environment.' she thought.

“Well, that seems to prove your point about learning self-control.” quipped the Creatrix, as the first woman gave an excellent first blush, turning the color of burnished bronze from head to toe.

“So, after each child is born, housed, taught how to care for his or her land and how to control his or her instincts, then what? What are the remaining challenges to enter adulthood?”

“After proving his or her competence in swimming and thinking,” replied the woman, “then there should likely be some sort of a test of endurance, to show that the child is able to walk long distances, gather foods along the way, which of course is not difficult, and find or make containers in which to hold water if he or she wants to explore away from the river.”

“But why should anyone need to gather food or water? You have all you want all around you.”

She waited to see if the woman would take the bait.

“But I have seen the edge of this garden, and there seems to be a wide space beyond it where the fruit trees are not so abundant. This leads me to wonder if there are not more spaces on the earth where large areas do not have food or water easily to hand.”

The Light Bearer glowed more brightly, proud of the woman's thinking.

“Excellent point. I look forward, my Dear, to learning more about your thought processes.”

Now it was the woman's turn to blush with pride, her cinnamon colored skin glowing warmly.

“So, now tell me, how will the young adults find suitable mates in this world of yours? Will you simply bring two random people together, as we have created you, or will you allow them to choose a mate according to some preference, or will it be by order of birth, height, eye color, or how?” smirked the Creatrix.

“Well, my Creatrix, I cannot very well criticize your...”

A soothing warm glow enveloped the woman, allaying her fears.

“Not to worry. You may say anything you feel, to me, anything at all. Never be afraid to speak your truth, particularly to me, my Dear.”

“Seeing that you can feel my thoughts anyway, my Creatrix, how can I hide anything from you? I also find that I do not want to hide anything from you, my Kind One. I find myself thinking, if it were possible, that I might have wished to marry you, rather than this man whom I must one day accept as my husband. I look at you and I long to touch you, to discover what you taste like, feel your glowing body close to mine, enveloping me in your light. I know that you are far beyond me, and that I should not wish for such things,” lowering her head, eyes cast down, “so I will go on with your question, my Light Bearer.”

The Light Bearer nodded, patting the woman's hand reassuringly, accepting her desires as a natural consequence of arriving fully physically developed, assuming that she would come to find her fellow human being more suitably attractive as they developed and spent more time together.

The woman lifted her head.

“When ready to be married, if they do not already have a suitable mate in mind,”

“Wait,” interrupted the Light Bearer, “what makes one a suitable mate? In fact, why marry at all? Why not simply pro-create and be done? Why stay together after mating?”

“That is very easy, my Creatrix,” countered the woman. “To raise a child in safety and happiness requires a set of adults who will always be there to teach and reassure the child. One parent alone will have great difficulty accomplishing this, since when that lone parent needs privacy, the child will be left un-cared for. Or, supposing the entire community to be raising each child, even if surrounded by a group of caring adults a child will have no specific parent to go to, so for this reason, there must be at least two adults committed to raising each particular child.” argued the woman.

“Now, what makes one a suitable mate?”

“Well, I suppose,” replied the woman, looking somewhat perplexed, “that it would not be suitable for one to marry either of one's parents, nor to marry before emotionally, intellectually and physically prepared, able to control one's instincts, do all of the things an adult must do, and also strong enough to bear or help raise children, thus a child is not suitable for marriage.”

“And what if,” postulated the Light Bearer, “that two women, or two men, wish to marry one another?”

“Well, I suppose,” she blinked, pursing her lips and bringing a hand to her chin, off balance, “that as long as they fulfilled the duty of helping others to raise children, and maybe even parented one or two children themselves, by pro-creating with someone who agreed that the two men or two women would raise the child as their own, I see no difference, as long as both are adults who have examined their thoughts carefully, and commit to helping support the community.”

“Fine,” agreed the Light Bearer, “but how exactly will adults select mates? Is someone to choose for them?”

“Well,” began the woman, less certainly now, “it would be nice if each adult wishing to marry could count on four good friends to help him or her find a suitable mate. Then there would be at least eight people who agree that they are a suitable couple, and also take on the role of close community members, supporting them. That way each person and the community get voice and commitment in the process of creating healthy marriages, which strengthen both the individual and the community. This should help the flowering of each child's potential.”

She broke off her comments, looking down to wag a finger at the returning kedi.

“Not again, you annoying gatito!”

The kedi merely lifted its chin and hopped back into the woman's lap, whiskers twitching.

“Interesting, my dear,” snickered the Light Bearer, the feathery down of her soft skin rippling, as if laughing along with her.

“And excellent, if you can pull it off with your children after you. I certainly hope so. What if your children begin to compete against each other? Would that be a good thing, do you think, or a bad thing, and how will you direct your children after you?”

The first woman sat bolt upright, clear against the lengthening shadows. Her eyes narrowed, taking on the hue of the setting sun behind her.

“It would certainly not be a good thing. Competition would certainly lead to people harming one another. Cooperation is needed both within and between communities, but there also must be a balance between personal independent thought, and willingness to give way enough to the group in order to build compromise around shared ideas that we will all abide by.”

“And what are those ideas, pray tell, by which you feel your descendents should abide?”

“Dignity and respect for all beings, are the ideas I wish them to treasure. I would have my children learn, treat one another with respect, and follow what their hearts call them to create. Some will be explorers, others builders, and still others, dreamers. These are all needed.”

The blue glow intensified, bathing the darkening clearing in a warm light.

“Interesting, my Dear, very interesting. I see that you have been thinking and learning. Very good, I am very pleased.”

“Thank you,” smiled the woman mysteriously, “Kind One, for sharing your wisdom with me.”

“How have I shared wisdom with you, now, when you have been sharing your thoughts with me?”

“Well you have shown me how to think about my thoughts, my Creatrix, and how to evaluate what I think, and what I see around me. Your questions share your own way of learning, my Light Bearer.”

The Light Bearer's hair changed to bright blue, frizzing with static electricity: “Meta-thinking!”

The woman looked very perplexed. Then she burst out laughing as the Creatrix changed her hair back to its customary dark brown, crossing her blue-lidded eyes with a smirk.

“I take great pleasure in watching you learn and exercise your mental and physical abilities.” Lowering her voice, she continued. “Do not mistake my presence for kindness, only. Be aware that I come with a selfish motive as well. I desire greatly to sit with you longer, and to teach you many more things. I also desire to touch you, as a being with shape and form, solid and sensual.”

“Then my desire is not misplaced.” The woman reached out, gingerly stroking the Light Bearer's hair.

“Perhaps not. I would have your touch. But do you know what you are asking? I look upon the crown of your head, and want to hold you, entwine myself in your hair, gaze into your eyes, caress your face. Your lips beg to be kissed, your breasts to be nuzzled, held ever so gently. I long to touch the smooth skin of your waist, to hold the soft curves over your hips, to feel your skin. To taste your milk, flowing between your thighs, as your body warms and begins to tremble, when you breath departing, calling you for a brief moment to another place, where all is light. I long to wrap around you, envelope your body, see through your eyes, taste the milk of your breasts and the milk of your will, all at once, as I mold my form to yours. Shape my self around you, with lips in every place where you would be kissed, to taste all of you at once, and again, one at a time, where ever you desire to be touched. To share in your fervor, delight in your delight.”

“Yes,” breathed the woman as she pulled the Creatrix into a desperate embrace, gently held off by two pairs of arms. Her other two sets of arms returned the woman's embrace, lightly but firmly.

“Only,” the Light Bearer whispered urgently, “if you are certain that this is what you wish. Take your time, and think carefully upon this, to decide whether this is truly what you want or not. If not, have no fear, you shall learn from me all that you wish to learn, and I would have you ask all you wish to ask, knowing that I will always protect you, even from myself if need be. I would have you live, dance, sing, feel joy, accomplish, create, and revel in your being.”

The woman contemplated the grass, soft and green, at her feet, while the guardians for each nearby blade of grass recorded and reported small but increasing levels of thermal radiation coming from her direction. She felt this, of course, as heat. Her face, breasts, special places, all began to feel warmer, tense, stomach trembling slightly. She looked up. Before her stood the Light Bearer, shimmering like the early morning sun. Now she seemed to take on a more solid form, with honey colored skin smooth, yet covered in a fine feather-down. Her long hair curled down to her waist, softer, but not unlike the human woman's own long dark hair.

“I have hungered to feel your light made solid,” said the woman. “Show me your hunger.”

Looking into the hazel eyes, her cinnamon face suddenly flushed to a deep fiery bronze. Her body began to tremble uncontrollably as her breath left her. Her feelings of longing began to overwhelm her, moving her to reach out. Now only a hair's breadth apart, they clasped hands, lips softly touching. The woman felt a soft feathery touch cover her entire body, and realized that she had suddenly, so gently as to not have noticed, been stretched out on the grass, and was enveloped in delicate cocoon-like wrapping of white down, surrounding her entire body, covering her head, yet radiating a soft diffuse light, glowing gently from all sides. Her belly filled with a delicious warmth, suffusing itself throughout her body bit by bit. Four sets of arms embraced her, squeezing her waist, and caressing her thighs. A soft sigh of contentment passed the woman's lips as a wave of warmth and tension flowed from belly to below, stopping her breath, pressing her against the pliant yet firm downy form. Within this feathery cocoon, two foreheads touched, softly, eyelid meeting with eyelid, lips nuzzling, hair entangling. Two pairs of breasts touched, first only glancing, then softly touching, clay and honey-colored nipples meeting, then firmly pressing together. But then, the honey-colored breasts began hollowing in the center, tasting cinnamon nipples. The woman gasped, pulling the soft downy shoulders closer.

“I can taste your milk, my lovely one. How sweetly you flow.”

The sensations in her breasts, rippling down through her belly and spreading, warm and moist through her center. She moaned, breathing in the pleasure and fear of this moment in halting gasps of air and light. She clung to the honey-colored skin, the rhythm of two heartbeats reverberating throughout her body.

The Light Bearer, running a tongue along the soft outside of the woman's flushed cheek, briefly pressing warm soft lips to a cinnamon colored nose, nuzzling teasingly, laughing softly.

“Now let me taste beyond your lips,” requested the Light Bearer, waiting. Feeling the woman happily grant her permission, softly, firmly a warm tongue traced inside the corners of the blazing bronze-colored lips, gently parting and passing within, slowly caressing the woman's tongue, probing, pressing forward, exploring, savoring the taste. Pressing closer, legs interlocking, warmth flowed between her legs. The woman felt an ever so small pair of lips, probing into the u-shaped space. A slender sliver of silken tongue spiraled, upward, gently pulsing, undulating within her. Each muscle clenched, growing warmer, thick with moisture. Her milk flowed thickly now, as lips surrounded her blossom, suckling, while that tiny sliver of tongue caressed her tightening canal. As her shortened breaths came more sharply, gasping for air, her belly began to tighten, her cinnamon colored legs squeezing in a vice-locked grip entangled with silky-smooth honey-colored legs so strong, supple, warm and soft. Warm smoothness flowed between them.

The tension grew wave by wave, until every muscle in the woman's body contracted, immobilizing her. Feeling each caress of her hair, down her spine, delicate strong hands massaging her lower back, gripping her waist, pressing their trembling bellies together. Unable to contain her breath, her voice rang out over and over, long sharp cries of agonized implosion. For a distant moment, time stopped, light swirled, and sounds came into view, as both beings beheld the key to creation, in a peaceful shared moment. Long minutes passed before she recovered her breath, heart still beating

uncontrollably as their faces touched gently. Relaxing, the woman enlaced her slender fingers, insistently holding the downy shoulders near her own, breathing, deeply:

“I ... “ the woman breathed deeply.

“I feel different. I feel something has changed. My beloved Kind One, do you feel the change? Have I any ability to change you as well, my Creatrix?”

“My Dear One, I cannot explain your feelings. Only you can do that, and you must learn to do so for the sake of your children. You will find the words and divine their causes. You have discovered how marvelous your feelings are. You have begun to see your capacity to experience great passion. You have special places that must never be shared lightly, and never without your permission. This wonderful thing is fearful, for it can be misused, cursed by the one who abuses it. I feel the change in you, and it has changed me as well. When you experienced your passion, I felt your power, I heard your song, and I saw your light. Your spark remains within you, and belongs to no one else. I feel a new, special kind of love for you, different than before, nourishing by your passion. Yes, you have changed me, my Beloved One. You, though mortal, have made me more complete.”

Chapter 8. Mars and Venus

*“My quest, though stopped
Is not yet done...”
-from “The Book Of Hayat”*

“You shall eat fruits and seeds, not the grass. Do you understand?”

Nodding, “Yy...” the man looked up at shadowy display, head and beard silhouetted against the sky. The Ancient Warrior, was again attempting to instruct him in what he could and could not eat.

”Well, are you able to say something, yet?” prompted the Creator, “say yes!”

The befuddled man stammered out the word, ”Y y yeess,” looking pleased with himself.

Thunder rumbled in the distance. ”This is going to take longer than I thought.”

It irked the Creator that his younger counterpart could intuitively predict what would happen with these experimental creatures when he could not. She seemed to have been right about the need for intervention in the experiment, but his intervention was not resulting in the rapid growth which they had seen in the woman. Perhaps it was time to find a new way to bring the human beings together. While acting as the Guardian for the first man was a necessary chore, since this version of the experiment did not have the same types of monitoring guardians as previous experiments had had, something would have to be done about the need for guardians for future generations of human beings. These guardians served as neutral reporters rather than measuring and meting out consequences, as the monitors had done in the last set of experiments. That meting out of consequences by the monitors in previous experiments had led, each time, to needing to eradicate both the monitors, who had exercised compromising judgment over those experiments, as well as the sentient experimental subjects,

bringing all of the work of those previous experiments to naught. This time, to avoid excessive expenditure of energy on his part, he would again employ energy beings at the side of each the newly procreated human beings, but they would merely record. That should prevent the guardians from compromising the experiment this time. Contrary to what he had led her to believe, his essence, while indeed vast, and filling at least a small part of the entire known multiverse, was not actually unlimited. Having her discover his limitations could lead to some uncomfortable developments, should she decide to challenge his role as leader.

...

Time had passed, and the orders and encouragement of the Creator and Creatrix to spend time together, name the animals together, and generally interact with each other and with their surroundings seemed to be having some effect. The man and the woman were arguing. Frequently.

And something was feeding on their arguments. The escaped tendril of energy left swirling by the last argument between the Creator and Creatrix had begun to change, darkening as it enlarged, first merely growing, gathering more bits of iron-bearing dust, until finally, the charged ball of fury became sentient, nearly solid, in the magnetic fields of this corporeal universe. By that time, the ball had taken on the androgynous form of a human being, much like the man, but also with breasts, vulva and vaginal canal of the woman. The sizzling sound of energy partially coalescing into matter went unheard over the shouting of the two incensed human beings.

"I am your equal, you great oaf, not your servant," shouted the woman.

She wondered briefly from where that word, together with the image of a woman in tattered gray coverings and strange heavy interlinked vines that bound her arms and legs, had appeared in her mind so suddenly.

"You are smaller, climb better, so you get it for me," he shouted.

"If you want that fruit in the top branch, then climb up there and get it yourself!" muttering "salak, idiota, tipshi," as she stamped away.

"Come back, my wife. Obey me." He shouted louder, turning red in the face.

"¡No lo haré!" Turning long enough to glare defiantly at him. Using her own words seemed to have the effect of making him understand that she really would not do his bidding.

"Oh." He looked crestfallen.

As she stalked off, leaving the befuddled man staring after her, the androgynous entity followed her at a distance, drawn to her fury. As the woman drew to a halt, half-sensing some alien presence, the androgen withdrew, leaving a shadowy impression in the grass as it settled down further away to watch her while she sat upon a nearby rock to think. Her eyes closed, she stretched out languidly upon the soft grass, letting her face be bathed in the soft light of the afternoon sun, her bare back nuzzling the moss of the rock upon which she had just been sitting. Her breathing began to slow, as she inhaled slow deep breaths, her breasts rising and falling in a soothing rhythm, her face and features beginning

to relax, as she had been taught by the Light Bearer, most of whose attention was on a meeting with various supervising guardians. As she became more calm, the energy radiating from her became more tranquil, longer in wavelength, lower in frequency.

The androgynous entity, itself made of a variety of more uneven energy patterns, began to lose interest in the woman, and feel pulled back in the direction of the man, who was still fuzzily angry about the woman's refusal to obey him. Although each passing day saw a steady clearing and improvement in the man's thought and communication processes, he was not nearly as advanced in his learning as the woman. He seemed more inclined to shout than to whisper, and to order than to request. This did not stand him in good stead with the woman, who chose to spend most of her time wandering other areas, far away from the man, and collecting plants and seeds as she went, observing their colors and sizes, and which of the various seeds and plants were eaten by which animals.

“Oh, look, here she comes again,” enthusiastically chimed a young plant guardian, “ she is gathering! I hope she picks one of my leaves higher up, because my plant really needs pruning.”

“You always think your plant needs pruning, stop worrying so much!” retorted the guardian of the older plant next to the first.

“Well you have been around longer, so your plant will do well next year,” complained the younger guardian, “with your long tap rooted charge! My plant only germinated last season, and needs all the help it can get. Besides, if she takes one of mine and plants it nearby, the new guardian will be able to keep me company.”

The older guardian, emitted a burst of static.

“What am I, chopped worms?”

“No, but it would be nice to have a guardian related to me to talk to. You older plant guardians can be a bit cold sometimes, no offense meant.”

“None taken. I guess I can try to get my charge to give yours a bit more sunlight some times.”

“Thanks! That would be very nice of you. Hey, here she comes! She always says hello!”

“She can't recieve you, what do you mean she says hello?!”

“Just you wait...”

Her thoughts turned to the man's naming of the animals, regarding not a single one of which did he bother to consult with her. The Light Bearer had told her that the Ancient Warrior would be instructing the man to name the animals with her help, but this appeared unlikely to happen. So, she chose her own names for the animals. She noted with some satisfaction that the animals seemed to come to her far more often when she called, then when the man called them. Whether it was due to the various names they had each given the animals, or because of the harsh nearly guttural tones in which the man spoke, it was a fact that the animals nearly always came to her, and ran away from him. Even the large predatory animals, which the creators always placed inside an invisible cage, providing a barrier

between the human beings and the dangerous animal needing to be named, even these seemed to want nothing to do with the man, preferring to look upon the woman as she pronounced a name for the beast. Of course it also occurred to her that it could be her smaller size which awakened the greater interest on the part of these predators, since she would seem to them to be an easier prey, were it not for the barrier between them, and the vigilant presence of the Creator and Creatrix. Her only reason for attempting to spend time with the man was that the Light Bearer wished her to do so. She could hardly blame the poor creatures, even the predatory animals, for not wanting to be near the loud and unpleasant sounding man. Often she took comfort in carressing the soft fur of some small animal which would come to her, nuzzle her arms until paid attention, and then lie down next to her leg and sit quietly, each one enjoying the peaceful company. She also took care not to crush any plants heedlessly, since she imagined that they might also have feelings. She sometimes even asked permission of the plants she was collecting before gathering their leaves or fruits. Now, she noticed two plants near her, both waving in the gentle afternoon breeze. They almost seemed to be waving hello to her. She looked at the smaller one, feeling a curious desire to speak with it. Deciding that it could not hurt to use her words, she said:

“Hello, young bitki, and hello, guardian of this bitki, how very nice to see you today,” gracing the plant with a smile.

“She spoke to me, she spoke to me! See?! I told you she would say hello! She can receive our transmissions!”

“Yes, yes, very good, now keep your plant growing.”

“Right. Sorry.”

The woman often shared fruits or nuts with her small furry companions, spending hours contemplating the world around them, wondering what lay beyond the great rivers which she had not yet crossed. She had met all kinds of animals, seen many birds flying through the air. Some animals, she knew, also lived below the water. She had even seen a strangely inquisitive looking creature rise up out of the water, looking her in the eye, contemplating her as if she were wondering the same things the woman wondered. That had been on one of her especially long walks, following the river all the way to the mouth of a great sea, whose opposite shore was so far away she could not even view it, only water as far as it touched the sky. Did the water, then, continue all the way up into the sky? She must remember to ask the Light Bearer about this, though at the risk of being sent on yet another quest of exploration to discover the answer for herself. She had shown her some lights in the night sky by which to find her way home on long walks if she got out of sight of the river. Some, she had said, were far away worlds not very different from here, while others were much closer, but either very cold, or very hot. Not unlike the differences between the woman and this man she was expected to put up with. Since that lesson, the woman had suspected that the Light Bearer was waiting for an excuse to send her on a longer trek. These quests were interesting, but tiring, and often a bit frightening, even though she knew that the Light Bearer also acted as her guardian, keeping her safe. That particular quest had been especially gratifying, discovering the new sea creature. Unlike many other sea creatures, this one seemed to have no scales, and appeared to have soft skin, in two tones of light blue, with a white underside. The eyes were set closer together than the large land animals she had seen, almost as close as in the predators she avoided on land, in a head that came to a long thin closed snout, softly rounded,

with no noticeably sharp teeth. The creature seemed to be measuring her. Apparently boring of the moment, the creature swam away, then back toward the woman, jumping into the air in a magnificent maneuver, which incidentally would later come to be called a barrel roll, that showed all of the creature's lithe and sleek form, diving back into the water so lightly and nearly vertically that no water whatsoever splashed on the woman, who stood and laughed in delight at the antics of this new friend. Perhaps she could learn to speak with this creature.

The androgynous entity, now drawn toward where the man stood shouting at a small animal with four legs and a short tail, stopped behind a tree to observe the man. His thoughts were more disordered than those of the woman, and much slower. He could perceive the animal's guardian encouraging it to stay near the man. The man yelled a word and repeated it several times, walking toward the animal, who looked increasingly frightened. As the animal retreated, the man became more angry, stomping in frustration, which of course only caused the poor animal to run away faster, further aggravating the man. This energized the entity, whose shadowy form was beginning to merge with the outline of the tree next to him. The guardian of the tree registered pressure on two leaves. The entity kept still, and waited. As the man passed by the tree on his way to the water, the tree's guardian noted the effects on the tree as that of the man's anger combined with the breeze caused in the wake of his passing. The entity slipped into his shadow, following him. The man's energy which fed the androgynous being had begun to change its form, molding the female parts into male organs. The man continued to mutter a word, which sounded like "dog," to himself, shaking his unkempt head as he stumbled along. As the man walked, his energy output dropped, and eventually he stopped, sitting down on a moss-covered rock as the heat of the day passed over. Soon he lay down on the grass, fell asleep and began to snore, leaving the the entity deprived of energy, fading into the background dormant for a time.

Chapter 9. The Bet

*"I play the role You bid, Mourning within
Each failure, Every loss,
Despairing, each time I 'win'".
-from "The Book Of Hayat"*

The Creatrix gathered her essence as she monitored the woman, wondering if she would notice the presence of the sleeping predator. The woman was on another errand of discovery. This new quest happened to involve finding the predatory animals some short time after the man had attempted to name them, and deciding whether they were behaving differently as a result of the encounter with the man. The woman had realized that this task would require knowing how the animal in question had behaved prior to meeting the man, and so had requested that the Light Bearer find out which would be the next animal to be named, and that the Light Bearer then escort her to the predator so that she could observe its behavior from a safe distance. As a compromise and challenge to the woman, the Light Bearer had proposed that, upon learning which would be the next animal to be named, and where it was located, three days before being brought to the man for naming, she should make her own way to the animal's resting place, and observe the animal on her own. The Light Bearer reassured the woman that she would be watching and accompanying her closely enough to keep her from any harm, should she accidentally stumble upon the animal in a dangerous situation, but that she wanted the woman to discover for herself how to locate, track, and observe the animal without giving away her own presence to it or any other animals nearby, since this would be a vital skill for future generations of the human race. That is, if the humans ever came together to pro-create at all.

“How is she progressing?”

”She seems to be developing cognitive skills and physical coordination fairly rapidly,” replied the Light Bearer, “given the short time she has had this past few years to adjust. She does seem to be developing more rapidly than the man, which is a very good sign.”

”Good, Young One, so long as you are not influencing her development beyond the parameters of the experiment. Do not forget that we are intending to find out how such a species can evolve from matter to our state of being, and we must assume that no other species was there to help, so there must be minimal interference in their development. Be careful not to have too much effect on her, Young One.”

”If we do nothing then we will have no experiment at all. As you can see, some interference, whether biasing toward the experiment or not, is unavoidable. Unless you prefer to spend at least another 6 million years, Ancient One, waiting for self-awareness to develop in another part of this universe.”

”No, no, I quite agree, this is the best we will get at this point. I merely remind you that it is crucial not to actually change the parameters within which the experiment is running, and giving too much help to these human beings will change their development cycles.”

”Fine, I assure you that I am only speeding up the inevitable development so that we do not end up waiting another several billion years, risking some experiment-ending event in the meantime before our data is all ready to be collated. Remember, this particular star,” she pointed out.

The woman, focused on the sleeping predator, never saw the brief display.

“Yes, I recall it,” bristled the Creator. “They have time.”

“But their sun,” she pointed out, “is near several other unstable stars that do not have much time left. Which reminds me, we should also plan for their eventual discovery of our transmissions.”

”If you think that they are likely to build advanced tools so quickly, why not mark out a few test groups to benchmark their development?”

This idea worried the Light Bearer. “What do you propose?”

The Ancient Warrior delayed his reply, a sense of satisfaction floating on the breeze, ruffling the woman's hair. She stood at the base of a tree, slowly testing the weight of lower branch.

”I propose that once a sufficient number of them has reproduced, we designate certain specimens among them for testing, to see how they will react under a variety of high-pressure situations. Let us take different time periods. That should give us a variety of data which we can correlate with their overall historical trends, determining development peaks and dead-ends. If we start with the most exceptional examples periodically, subjecting some to intense stressors, we can view the outcomes, and possibly allow them to fold that feedback into the remaining population. What will be done with that feedback can be as useful to us as viewing the behavior of those exemplars themselves.”

A spark flashed quickly, lighting up part of the sky.

”How dare you! Make some human beings suffer, have conflicts with one another, just to see how they will react, and how the others, hearing of their plights also react.”

The woman held her breath and looked around, as if uncertain that she had seen something.

“These are feeling creatures, with the potential to create great beauty, which may be more than we can say for ourselves at this stage, and you propose to put some of them deliberately in harms way, artificially limiting their potential, simply for the purpose of seeing how they will react? And worse yet, to see how the lesser ones among them will react to that suffering? I can already tell you what the reactions will be -anger and shame, leading to condemnation and withdrawal. They will curse us, and rightfully so. What more do we need to know? ”

”How, Child of the Morning, do we know they will curse us? Perhaps they will see the sun shining and be thankful for what remains.”

A dark cloud hid the sun for an instant, causing the woman to look up, searching the sky, eyebrows knitting together.

“I should think that she will be grateful that some of her children, though they suffer, still live. Are we to give them only good, and never bad, as if they should remain infants all their collective lives? You yourself point out their need to develop, and this will help them do so. By your own logic you cannot object.”

A sudden rain startled the woman, who climbed higher to reach the broader leaves of the tree.

”Valid points. But if and only if they appear to be getting along so well that they become too complacent and isolate themselves instead of spreading out and progressing. I suppose we will revisit this once they have enough population to sustain the wretched losses you will cause them.”

”Do not fear, Young Light Bearer, they will be rewarded.”

”I’m sure they will appreciate that.”

”Yes, in all seriousness, Young One, they only grow from painful experiences, and they will also appreciate their reward. And I wager that you will also learn something in the bargain as well.”

”Which would be?”

What could he be playing at now, she wondered.

”You shall discover that in the fullness of time, my Young friend, in the fullness of time.”

”I suspect that I am not your friend, Ancient Warrior.”

”Yes, well a teacher may not always be a friend, perhaps. Meanwhile, we must get them to start reproducing. Let us bring them together and have them begin to pro-create at once.”

”That is not necessarily a good idea. If these codes of ethics we discussed before beginning the experiment are to be effective, then we will need some sort of courting period, and some way of gaining consent before expecting them to pro-create. Even we have thought-forms which harken back to some behaviors which were clearly rituals, and powerfully pervasive rituals they must have been to have stayed with us past the time of our need, use, or understanding of those rituals.”

”Indeed, Young Child of the Morning, this is true.”

In fact it was more true than he would admit. His rescue of her from both universes in which she had previously been trapped was accomplished through the use of an ancient ritual. She would remain unaware, as long as he could help it

“Let us bring the man and the woman together in a ritual which will bind them together, and remind them to help and obey one another, which means that they will have to spend much more time together, and mark them as entering a new stage of independence from us, mutual dependence on each other, and above all, pro-creation. How does that sound, Young Creatrix?”

”It sounds like a good deal for the man, being bigger and stronger and more inclined to insist on having his way. If they honor one another as equals, or at least have the means to defend themselves, that would be different, Ancient Warrior.” she added, transmitting *Warrior* on a longer wavelength.

”But that is precisely what this experiment is about. Given different skills and abilities, they must evolve,” pointed out the Ancient Warrior, “and we shall watch how they do it. These have been the parameters of the experiment all along, do not forget.”

”Your reminder is unnecessary. Alright, then,” she acquiesced, “let us get on with this marriage ritual.”

”Good, let us bring them together, perform the ritual, and then give them a bit more space, so that they will have no other recourse but their own company to fall back upon for a while.”

”Alright. Let me explain all of this to the woman, and give her a few days to prepare.”

”Fine.”

The Ancient Warrior's final transmission left a jangling dissonance in her thoughts. The usual sizzling sound accompanied her conversion to matter, the last time she would touch her Beloved. The Light Bearer sat down on the soft moss of a rock overlooking the river, looking up fixedly into the woman's eyes. They held a tender look for a while before the woman climbed down.

“My dear one, it is time you began to spend more effort in getting to know and helping to guide your fellow human being, the man you tend to avoid.”

The woman sighed, eyes cast down.

”Yes, I know that you want me to spend more time with him, my Creatrix, but I am so much more comfortable with you, or away from him even on my own, alone here with these small furry animals for company. They do not shout and give orders as he does.”

”Then you must learn to stare him down, to refuse to obey his orders, but in such a way as to teach him that he is not your master.”

Taking her hands and placing another pair on her shoulders, she urged:

“You must stand and confront him, rather than always walking away. Otherwise there will be no hope for a future for your race. You are to be the one who teaches, the one who guides all of humanity.”

“But how, my Creatrix? I know nothing of how to teach others.”

“Close your eyes, my dear, “ cooed the Light Bearer.

“Listen to this ancient story. It predates even my existence, and it is called a thought-form, because it is an idea made manifest, imagination which became reality. The thoughts of some group of beings created and gave it life, until for some unknown reason, the manifestation of the idea embodied by the thought-form ceased to be, leaving the memory behind. This is the story of one such thought-form, and from this story, I will teach you a little bit of several different skills.”

The Creatrix smiled teasingly.

“That, along with the quests I see you enjoy so much, is one way to teach your children and their children after them. Are you ready, my impatient one?”

The Creatrix smirked, arching her eyebrows, and letting them turn four different shades of green when the woman had opened her eyes.

The woman burst out laughing.

“I am ready”.

“Good. Close your eyes again, and I will tell you a story of a foolish man, and how he won back his wife, the first woman.”

“Hmpf” exhaled the woman as she rolled her eyes.

The Light Bearer smiled at the woman's derisive response, and lowered her voice, beginning:

“There once was a people, not unlike yourselves, two legs, walked upright, skin the color of reddish clay, and they began with two, a man and a woman. Well the first man was not very bright, and he said something one day which upset the first woman, his wife. So she left.”

“Heeheehee!!”

“Shush!”

“He was in great distress,” intoned the Creatrix, emphasizing the word distress, “asking the plants, who could speak with the people and do interesting things in the world on which they lived, to help him win her back. As the woman stormed away, a pretty red fruit appeared in her path, so she stopped to collect it. As she stood, another one appeared just beside her, and then another, leading back in the direction toward her home. Every few steps this happened again, and she collected these lovely red fruits until she arrived home, so pleased with their beauty,”

“Oooohhh!”

“that she had forgotten why she was angry with the man. When he saw her, he brought out a container with a substance, which you will discover later, that preserved such fruits, and she forgave him. They lived in harmony from that day onward, and made sure to have these red fruits in the house always, to help maintain that harmony. Now how do you suppose,” asked the Creatrix, “that she found her way back, not having looked where she was going?”

“Were the red fruits spaced evenly?”

“Indeed they were,” smiled the Light Bearer.

“Then she knew how far it was from home, and since either the sun or the moon or the stars would now be in the opposite part of the sky from where she began, she knows that she is headed directly back the way she came.”

“Very good, one skill down, now what else can such a story tell us?” encouraged the Creatrix.

“Well, it seems to also teach the knowledge of this people, at least about some of their customs and different ways of thinking, maybe their lands, and also how they found and stored their foods, at least during warm seasons?” guessed the woman,

“I would say that is a good start, very good, indeed, my dear. In addition to telling distances, counting objects, thinking carefully, and sharing ways of doing things, this story created a sense of cooperation, and gave a power to the oldest women of this group that helped them shape much of their future. You can do this as well, my dear.”

“I will try, my Creatrix,” promised the first woman.

A tear trickled down the cinnamon cheek, as four pairs of honey-colored arms embraced her soothingly. After a quiet while, hazel eyes looked upon the streaked face, kissing her forehead.

“Are you ready to go spend more time with the man, who is to be your husband, my dear? You will grow used to him, and in time even manage to teach him some things, and perhaps he you. I must step away from your company, though I will always” she reminded the woman, “be right beside you.”

”Then I need a little more time, please.”

”Of course. I think I can manage five seasons for you, if that will do?”

”It will do, my Kind One, many thanks.”

Leaning over, without waiting for the glow emanating from the ethereal being to subside, the woman softly kissed the Light Bearer on her still luminous lips. The Creatrix began glowing a bright blue, mingling pain with salty tears, mirroring her fluctuating aura.

The woman was not the only being to pick up on the electrical disturbances from the Light Bearer. The androgynous entity also felt them, and began to grow, feeding on the grief, feeling a jealous rage at the sexual feelings being shared, however repressed, by both beings in corporeal form.

“I want a body...”

Caressing the woman's neck, glowing more softly,

“I will always be at your side. Never forget that, my Beloved One.”

“Yes, My Dear, Dear Creatrix.” she kissed the open palm of the still glowing hand.

Arising, the Light Bearer walked a safe distance before converting back to energy with a small thunderclap. There she stayed, to watch over the woman and to share in her grief.

... Five Years Later...

”Here she is now, coming for the ritual with the man.”

They approached the Great Tree, under whose canopy the marriage ritual would take place.

”Yes, I thought you said a few days, Young One.”

”Days, years, what is the difference?”

“True.“ Nodding, stroking the dark outline of a beard.

The man, seeing the familiar bearded face silhouetted against the sky, knelt hastily, with a nod in the direction of the Creatrix displayed standing nearby.

“Listen, Man, this woman came from your own side, from a rib taken from the center of your body, to show that you are both the same, human beings. And so you must treat this woman. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Creator,” he responded. Shuffling over to the woman, looking down at his feet, then, up at the dark outline, he stammered:

"I understand that she is flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone, and so now must I leave you, my Creator, and cleave for help and talking to this woman, whom you have called my W.. Wi..Wife."

"Very Good. Now go and pro-create, and spread out and fill all of this world, and take care of the fish of the sea, and of the birds of the air, and of all the other animals."

"Yes," stammered the first man, bowing to the bearded shadow, and then to the displayed Creatrix.

The years spent encouraging the human couple to name animals together, not to mention the coaching for this ceremony, seemed to have improved the man's speech.

"Don't you think," transmitted the Creatrix, "that a bit more explanation may be in order, for both of them?"

"No," he insisted, "no further interference is needed. They will naturally do what is necessary, as the other animals. When the woman is ready to become a mother, we will set in motion the plan to automate production of new guardians for each new human being. That will minimize outside influences."

The Creatrix had her doubts.

... Five More Years Later...

The Ancient Warrior, interrupted the Light Bearer's meeting with several supervising guardians.

"The human beings are still not spreading out. In fact, they are still not pro-creating. After a decade together..."

"They have had only 5 solar years as husband and wife to figure these things out, remember, since we brought them together in the marriage ritual," shot back the Light Bearer, as she dismissed the guardians.

"Fine, then 5 years, and in the same warm comfortable place, they ought to have produced some offspring by this time, don't you think?"

"Well, maybe they need some help, Ancient One. Poetry, music, some sort of art to help him court her, bring her to like him more."

"Those arts have not been invented by them, yet. It will take generations for poetry, music and art to be rediscovered by these particular beings, which is my very point. Without pro-creation, Young Creatrix, there will be no generations of them to reinvent these discoveries."

"Well then, allow me to at least shepherd a romantic encounter, to help them make a start of things. That may encourage them to get the ball rolling. After all, they are unique among all of the species' on this planet, in not having an automated mating ritual. They have no examples, no other creatures like themselves to look to, with the possible exception of the sea mammals she calls delfin, but I hardly

think that will help much. Furthermore, do not forget, your marriage ritual was not something they came up with themselves. Let me bring them together to consummate that marriage in such a way that will facilitate matters with a minimum of interference.”

“Very well,” the dark outline of a head, beard waving in the breeze, blotted out the trees with a curt nod, “Do as you have spoken,” and disappeared, brightening the sky.

'So he finally admits to it,' she mused. 'He is wrong, but will not allow me to protect her.' The question now was how to prevent the woman from being coerced without touching off a war.

The Creatrix displayed her usual two-armed image walking up through the clearing to where the man lay napping,

“Human man, I am here to give you instruction. Pay attention.”

The man jumped up, startled to see her without the Creator, and bowed nervously, “Yes, I listen.”

“Good, and stop grovelling,” she ordered. “You must learn to be soft, gentle and patient with your wife. No shouting, no orders, do you understand?”

“Yes, I will be nice to my wife. But, she always run away from me.”

She rolled her blue-lidded eyes, sighing.

“That, is because you shout at her, and tell her to obey. And you also smell badly. You must be kind to her, ask her questions and ask her permission of all things. And you must also take a bath.”

“I smell,” his mouth open, the man lifted his arm to his nose, sniffing before nodding vigorously, “I smell! A bath?” questioned the man, lifting his bushy eyebrows, mouth turning down to a frown,

“What is this, bath?” the frown deepened, as his lips began to quiver. “Will it hurt?”

“No,” sighed the Light Bearer, beginning to understand the Ancient Warrior's frustration with this man. “Simply get in the river and rub your body with sand all over, then swim for a while, and repeat. Twice. In fact, go do that now, and return here when you are done.”

“Yes,” stammered the man, “I go now. Bath.” The man repeated this word as he ran toward the river.

“Wait,” ordered the Light Bearer, “make sure you walk, do not run, when you return here from your bath!”

“Yes, I walk, back here, walk after bath. Yes.” The man turned to continue toward the river.

The Light Bearer redisplayed herself to the south, finding the woman walking her favorite path. She explained as they walked together, “My Dear One, you must try to be more amenable to your husband, to be more patient with him. He will have to learn to treat you properly, and you must give him time to do this. It is a more difficult journey for him than your treks have been for you. Can you imagine

that?" she asked, hoping to generate sympathy and connection between the human couple.

"Yes, my Creatrix, I can imagine, but he is so repugnant. I cannot imagine, having to be near enough to his body to allow him to, well, do what I have seen other animals doing during mating seasons. Can we not reshape him to make..."

"No, my Dear," the Light Bearer interrupted the woman, "I am afraid that this human form must stay as it is, for the both of you. Your offspring, however, will be different from either of you, and will be quite interesting to watch as they grow. But first, of course, you must actually have offspring."

"I don't suppose," asked the woman, "there is some way we could do this, well, without touching him, is there? Perhaps put me to sleep, find a way of doing this while I am meditating, maybe?"

"Listen, my Dear One," said the Light Bearer. "This is part of being a human being. You haven't even tried it yet. This is how your body works, so you should actually enjoy the experience. Try to relax and look forward to learning something new." It was becoming more difficult to hide her feelings from the woman, but she had to, for all of their sakes.

"But I do enjoy learning new things, my Creatrix, from you." She reached out to touch the honey-colored face, but her hand found only empty air, and a slight shock. "What can I possibly learn from him?"

"Give it time, my dear one, and you may be surprised. Now look, here he comes, nice and clean, you see, and he has even managed to comb his hair, just to make you happy. Why don't you lie down here, on this nice soft patch of moss, and relax, while he just looks at you, to start with, alright? How does that sound?"

"That sounds tolerable. But I miss my union with you, and being wrapped in your soft arms." The woman's saw a tremor as the Creatrix display changed, brown hair color slowly turning sea blue. Then she knew that the Light Bearer felt the same way she did. "He is so hard and cold looking, harsh both physically and emotionally. How can I ever love him or trust him in the ways I feel for you?"

"I, too, miss our union. I miss your warmth, your touch, your scent, wrapping myself in your very thoughts, my Dear One, but this is what must be." Fighting to control her emotions, the Light Bearer sent soothing vibrations directly into the distressed woman's brain, trying to relax her before the man arrived. She reset her display, changing her hair color back to the usual dark brown, matching that of the woman she loved. "I cannot stay with you in the way that we both would like, not for now, at least until the human race has begun to populate this world, but I am always with you. Remember that. And as for this man, he has hidden qualities which you have not yet seen, and potential of which you do not yet know. Be patient with him, let him learn, and help him grow. Watch and encourage him as he changes. Look, here he comes now, softly, you see?"

"Yes," the woman acceded, "he does seem different."

"Good," cooed the Light Bearer, "now just relax and let things flow. Let his hands be as my hands, his touch feel light as mine, soothing, enlivening, arousing. Let him learn to give you pleasure." turning to the man, "Be very very gentle, with your wife," she instructed him, "touch her lightly, softly, learn to

kiss her gently, and to help her relax, to enjoy your company. Can you learn to do that?"

"Yes, Creator, I mean Creatrix, yes, I will. I will," he said slowly, deliberately, "be gentleness with my wife. Thank you, Great Creatrix."

"Very good," encouraged the Light Bearer, as she slipped away from the couple, and faded into the background, giving the couple their privacy. A salty blue tear dropped onto her breast.

Chapter 10. Expelled

*How I long to climb
To go up to the mountain
There to rest, and reflect.
-from "The Book Of Hayat"*

... Five More Years Later...

"Why, Young Child of the Morning, have they, still, not yet pro-created? They have been married now, for ten years." complained the Ancient Warrior.

"Maybe we need to ..."

"No more interference in this experiment!" Out of the sudden darkness flashed a bolt of lightening, leaving a jagged black tear in the sky. "It has already gone far beyond what we agreed would be an absolute minimal level of interference."

"Well," she tried again, "we must do something more than ..."

"Enough!" The display of an erupting cloud of black soot interrupted her transmission. "Enclose them in some smaller part of the island, and keep them together. Eventually the man will tire of waiting for her and will take matters into his own hands. They will pro-create. That, Young Creatrix, will solve the problem naturally."

"I will not be party to such a violation! You would humiliate your creations." The building fury of the Light Bearer exploded in a shower of sparks, resolving itself into a glowing spear with a long serpent entwined about it. "Your casual indifference toward the woman condemns her and her descendents to enslavement."

A black cloud shrouded the spear in darkness.

"You will allow the nature of these human beings take take its course! I command it of you, young Child of the Morning!"

"Enough of your commands! I REFUSE!!"

Breaking communication, the Light Bearer concentrated her essence where the woman stood contemplating the sunrise. The Creatrix displayed her usual form for the woman, who had not seen her

since five years after the marriage ritual.

”My Dearest Light Bearer! I knew you had not forsaken me!”

They walked quickly while talking, toward the Great Tree, in the center of the garden.

“Never, my dear one, have I forsaken you. But let us talk quickly. I am here to do something that may endanger both of us, and I would know whether you consent, or would remain safely a slave to your husband. The Creator intends to give you to the man to pro-create whether you consent to the union or not.” The woman gasped as the image of a woman, hands and feet bound, displayed briefly. “Now you must choose whether to accept from my hand a knowledge that will enable you to defend yourself, or whether you will stay as you are, ignorant of your abilities, and thus developing, on your own, as he would have it, but at the mercy of your husband. I know this makes little sense, but the choice must be yours?”

”My beloved Creatrix, I would do nothing that will endanger you!”

”Nonsense! Do not worry for me, but for the future of your children. What will you do for them, and for yourself? You are worth protecting, and I will give my essence in that mission, willingly. This is a battle of honor, in which I willingly sacrifice myself. But tell me whether you are ready to risk yourself, and possibly all of humankind with you. Will you chose knowledge and risk death, or will you choose to obey, and be safe?”

She looked steadily at the woman, who began to tremble, and then straightened her shoulders, drawing herself up to her full height. Her resolve showed in her eyes, making the Light Bearer glow sharply.

”I would learn! But I cannot learn all at once. There must be some middle way. But if not, so be it.”

The Creatrix nodded, then turned to the Great Tree, transmitting an unusual request: “Are you willing to accept the risk, Guardian? Will you delay a report until I have gone?”

“I am honored to take this risk, My Great Creatrix.”

“Thank you, Guardian. You will be remembered.”

The Creatrix reached up, picking a fruit which the woman had never seen before, from the Tree. It looked like a seed, small and round, at first. As it separated from the tree branch, it began to flatten and expand.

”There is no middle way this time. Take this fruit, and eat it at your own pace. Do not fear what you see at first, for all knowledge is dangerous until seen through to the end.”

”My Beloved Creatrix, I will eat this fruit of your hand, willingly.”

Extending her hand to the woman palm up, the Light Bearer offered the now soft and spongy fruit,

shaped like a flat rectangular plane, uniform, tan in color on both sides, with long lines of markings filling both sides of the fruit.

Still vibrating with pride at the woman's courage, "Do you know what these markings are?"

The woman shook her head, "No, I do not know them,"

"They are what will allow your children to learn from your experiences, to enable them to know what has happened to you when you are not there to tell them, and to avoid the pain which you must, perhaps, inevitably suffer. These markings will allow you to tell your story."

As the woman reached out, taking the soft flat fruit from the hand of the Light Bearer, serpentine markings translated themselves from the arms of the Light Bearer to the warm arms of the woman, coming alive, and encircling the cinnamon wrists. She gasped, and then, calming herself, addressed the creatures:

"My friends, I thank you for reminding me of the presence and love of my dear Light Bearer." Tasting a corner of the flat rectangular fruit, biting into its soft, semi-sweet flesh. Her eyes opened, widening like saucers, "Libros!"

"Yes," confirmed the Light Bearer as she melted away, fading into the shadows. "Now you must write your own, and pass it down to all of your children. Each one of you is to be a bearer of light."

The woman stood stock still, eyes widening, images of culebras drawing words and stories in the sand, her breath catching within her to feel a stick in her grasp, drawing lines on the ground, hearing many unknown others, their high pitched voices repeating after her:

"bir, iki, üç, dört, beş"

"Remember," came the voice of the Light Bearer, audible everywhere but unseen, "to instruct your daughters, especially, to write their own libros, and to pass each one down, adding to it through the generations, to plant Knowledge, which will become a Tree of Life for all of humanity. Teach them to endure the suffering, to correct the injustices that will surely come from imbalances of power, from blind use of force. Pain will inevitably come, but you are strong, and I am always with you. Do not forget, my Beloved."

Overwhelmed, the woman ran to her husband, having eaten nearly half of the strange spongy piece of flat fruit, and found him sitting on a rock muttering.

"Here," she urged her husband, "you must eat some of this amazing fruit right now!"

He took the fruit from her hand, and when the man bit into the soft flesh of the flat fruit, he first noted the taste, semi sweet, almost bitter. Then, in a rush of insights, saw how much there was for him to learn, realized how much he did not know. He also realized that he was naked, and despite the warm island air, rushed in a panic to find leaves to cover himself. His wife sat down with a stick, drawing stories in the sand.

Later, in the garden breeze, the Creator displayed his usual bearded silhouette, waiting to speak to the man. The man heard the tree leaves rustling in the cold shadow and hid himself, as did his wife.

“Where are you?”

“I heard you coming, and then I realized I was naked and hid from you.”

”Who told you you were naked? Have you been asking forbidden questions again?” demanded the Ancient Warrior, then, as the sun was blotted out, “Have you been talking to the Light Bearer?”

“It was this woman, the wife you gave me,” stammered the man, “she gave me a fruit that opened my eyes to many many questions and then I realized that I was naked.”

”Woman, what have you done?” demanded the Creator.

”The animal that crawls along the ground,” began the woman, hoping to protect the Light Bearer from the wrath of the Ancient Warrior, “la culebra, the one he calls snake, made marks on the ground that looked like a story, and I started asking why that story could not be drawn on some...”

”That’s enough, say no more. I know what led to all of these unnaturally accelerated questions that you two should not yet be asking. You especially, woman, will suffer for this. For now, you will spend all of your time together, out in a place where the earth is not so kind to you, and perhaps you will find more time to pro-create and less time to sit about staring at marks in the dirt, asking questions you should not be asking. Now go!”

With that command, various animals now seemed to stalk them, and they fled from the presence of the Creator and the now threatening garden in the center of Dilmun island.

“River guardian,” ordered the Ancient Warrior, “you are now to supervise the guardians of this volcano and the animals where your watershed originates. The volcano will be erupting soon, and as the lava flows down the river bed, I do not want the human beings caught in the steam or pyroclastic cloud. Direct the animals to chase them out of the garden. Move them out along the river valley and off of this island before the lava will reach the coast.”

“Yes, Great Creator,” the river guardian acknowledged as supervising guardians for the various tributary streams began gathering to plan, and a jet of water, oddly resembling the sheath of a sword, began to make its way up toward the mountain.

“Tree guardian,” thundered the Creator, “You are demoted. If you ever delay another report, you will be deinstantiated immediately.” Now, a message would have to be sent to the rebellious Child of the Morning, if he could find her amidst all the reflective energy in the multiverse.

The former tree guardian found itself attached to a speck of dust, falling to the base of the Great Tree, hoping that the knowledge the woman had gained would be passed on.

...

Forlornly, the man and woman walked for many days, mostly heading north, for the woman had learned various directions in her quests which the Light Bearer had set for her.

“I wonder,” she thought miserably as they trudged onward, “if anyone will ever remember where this marvelous garden was, and if we will ever be able to return. And why are our animal friends suddenly so hostile toward us?”

In that last place, in the north, she had found a large sand bar that, at certain times of the year, became a land bridge between the island of Dilmun and the closest wide open plain. As the couple arrived on the shore of this new land mass, leaving behind the last particles of sand from the island which had been their home for all of their lives, they heard an explosion from the south. Looking upward, they saw in the distance a long thin tongue of flame, shaped like a very wide flat stick, but with thin sharp edges on either side, coming to a point at one end, and wide, rounded stick at the other end, as if it were meant to be held and swung with the hands. The fiery object seemed to turn every way around their beloved garden, covering the entire mountain island in flames, belching smoke far into the sky. The man and woman wept, realizing that they would never be able to return to the garden.

The androgynous entity, awakened by the panic of the fleeing animals, followed the human couple, drawn to their despair. Amid the destruction, flight and pain, neither humans, guardians nor Creators noticed its shadowy presence.

...

Shivering, they walked on. The Ancient Warrior gave them clothes made from animal skins which smelled of home, slightly singed, but at night time they still had to huddle together for warmth, and in time, they discovered that they could keep warmer by sharing skin to skin contact inside of their clothes. Moving closer to the woman, the man touched her, lightly gliding his fingertips down her smooth arms, speaking softly to her, even using some of her own favorite words. Holding his wife in his arms, he learned to be gentle with her, and finally she became pregnant.

The Creatrix transmitted a truce message to the Creator: “The woman will need to be watched closely. If she dies in childbirth, the man will also be traumatized.”

“True, because you altered him.” Came the scathing reply. “Very well, monitor her, but do not make her aware of your presence.”

...

“I would like to give you a name, my wife, mi mujer, now that there are to be more of us, soon. Would it be alright if I call you Hayat, since you are the mother of all human life?”

She smiled, her face softening, one eyebrow arched, hearing him use some of her favorite words.

“Well, why yes, I suppose so. I like that name. Yes, thank you, you may call me Hayat,”

With the first two new human beings, twins, were added to the human race. Hayat named her first son Evren, and his twin, her first daughter, Aclima. The infants faces were a study in contrast. Evren had thick bushy eyebrows, nearly hiding his low forehead, while Aclima's high cheekbones and fine

eyebrows sheltered long narrow eyes below a high forehead. Those tiny slanted eyes sparkled when Hayat drew her name on a palm frond using clay. “A sensitive child like this will need two names, I think. You shall be Aclima Artemis.”

She waited for them to speak. And continued waiting. Her disappointment consumed her when they finally did. Again she bore fruit. Feeling alone, she named her second son “Vacío.” *When, my beloved Light Bearer, will this emptiness end? When will I see you again?* Each *culebra*, snake in the man's words, reminded her as he fled shouting. She tried not to laugh, nor to cry. When Vacío and his twin sisters were born, she despaired. Three infants to nurse and two twins, alike as night and day, toddling with their two winters of speed in opposite directions. Her husband was constantly occupied now with growing and storing food during the warm months, and preparing the ground during the rainy months for each of the harvests, leaving her to gather herbs and tend to the children. Now he would have to begin taking Evren, who was becoming difficult to manage, along with him so that she could care for his twin sister and the three new infants. Here, she no longer even had the company of the whiskered Kedi, from Dilmun. She missed the island, especially the garden in the center, with the river. Here, they had to ask the Creator for rain periodically, when the ground was too dry. The mechanisms for automatic rainy seasons had apparently also needed adjusting, or else there had simply been a sequia, or drought, as the man called it, and now the cycles were back to more normal rainy seasons.

She ached for the company of her beloved Light Bearer, confined now to the company of her children, denied the long walks she had formerly taken, or their talks. Sometimes the woman called out, silently to the Creatrix, even writing long sets of words, as they came to her, as if she were speaking to that delicate glowing being who so kindly and so gently taught her so much.

“I wish I could share so much with you, Kind One. So much I can share no one else.” Unable to contain herself any longer, the woman cried out:

“Come to me,
My Kind One, my Dear
Shield me, enveloping
Wrap me in your wings
Turn your face, my love
Toward me.
Protect and save me,
In your secure embrace
Warm me, lift me
Bright One,
Kindly to your bower.
To your abode,
Feathered and soft,
Through cloud and air.
Slowly caress me
With the patience
Of your ageless wisdom.

She drew these words in the sand, sighing, in the writing which the serpent had seemed to show her before they came to this cold place. *Should I add these to the book? Will they add illumination?*

Hold me, my Love
Let me adore you sweetly,
Feel your presence
Embrace you, touch you
Tremble in your warmth
Sigh in your arms.”

She had added symbols, to clarify that first curvy set of cryptic syllables she had seen. Now, Hayat stood tall, throwing up her arms, reaching for the blue sky, as calming as her Beloved's arms. But the Creatrix, to her eyes, did not appear.

Yet the Creatrix was there, watching, most of her essence hidden in an adjacent universe. She shared each sigh Hayat breathed out, not daring to reveal her presence. She sent the thought, burying it deep within her mind, while soothing her pain: “I miss you, Dear One, but must not appear to you. You are safe, and must abide with your husband. Develop your race, mother and nurture them, teach your sons and daughters, and pass on to them, what you have learned. I love you, dear one, and you will always have my love. I am always with you. Never forget that.”

Hayat heard the message floating on the warm breeze. She stretched out on the soft sand, touching herself as she would her beloved Light Bearer, and at last, trembling, lay down for a nap, dreaming of light.

...

Years passed, and the children learned. Hayat taught them to speak, to gather plants and help them grow. Her husband helped her teach the children to care for the animals they had named. Evren, her firstborn son, was good at growing food, while his twin sister whom everyone called Aclima, preferred to draw maps and write stories. Their younger brother, Vacío and both his twin sisters preferred to care for the groups of animals that the man called *sheep* and *cows*. Hayat preferred to call them *koyun* and *vacas*. This preference for food over animals seemed to provoke constant arguing between the boys, for some reason. She tried, in vain it often felt, to teach Evren and Vacío how to get along with each other. Her daughters she taught as well, but kept separate from her sons once their monthly flows began. So much of her energy was spent keeping them from fighting that she had little left over. So different, like their parents, they spent little time together. Evren was tall, fierce tempered. Vacío was shorter, contemplative, yet strong enough to pull a recalcitrant cow back to the shelter. Like their parents, they preferred different words for the same animals, and often argued over which words were better. This worrisome trend continued until they were too big for Hayat to have much power over them any more, while her husband had long since stopped bothering with their sons except to shout orders. She worried that this could only lead to tears, one day. Sadly, that day was approaching faster than she knew.

...

Following the path the the river, each carried a load of empty gourds to fill with water. The brothers walked on separate sides of their mother. “It has been a good harvest,” she smiled, evading a date palm branch.

”Anne,” asked Vacío, “Could you explain more about the Creatrix, please. Baba says that for him

there was only the Creator, and that the Creator was a great Warrior. He never says what a Warrior does, or why he was great. And why have we never seen him, Anne? Baba always walks away saying I ask too many questions.”

”Father is right, you do ask too many questions, Vacío. And what would Mother know about the Great Creator anyway,” lifting his chin, “he never spoke to her, only to Father.”

”My sons, hijos, please listen to me, please stop this arguing between yourselves. Vacío, your baba is wrong, you can never ask too many questions. And Evren, I have seen the Ancient Warrior, and he has spoken to me, albeit not nearly so frequently as he did to your father, this is true. That is because the Light Bearer generally spoke with me, and the Ancient Warrior with your father. And to answer your excellent question, Vacío, no, I do not know what a warrior does, nor why we have not seen the Ancient Warrior since he expelled us from that warm island in the south, with the garden in the center,”

She sighed, looking off into the distance, the corners of her mouth turning down just a hairsbreadth, tucking a tuft of wool under a gourd strap. If she sent Vacío off on his final adulthood test first, Evren would surely be jealous. But Evren, partly for that reason, was not ready for the journey. How would she resolve this?

“I do know that this Creator was not alone, for the Light Bearer has told me of how she helped him create this world, providing what he could not.”

The taller boy's jaw clenched as his gourd shattered against the ground. “Enough nonsense, Mother!” .

“Wait, Evren. *Hijo*, where are you going?”

”Don’t call me *hijo*! I speak only father’s words, and so should you! I am your son, SON! Not hijo!”

”Yes, I can see you've been talking with your father again, who, by the way, did use other words with me, before you born. And remember what the Ancient Warrior said about your own decisions. You have the ability to choose the words you will use, and the world you will help us all create.”

“How do you know what the Great Creator said!” railed Evren against his mother, flecks of spittle whitening the corners of his mouth, nostrils flaring as his eyes shifted wildly from side to side.

“I know, son, believe me. Calm down. You have the ability to rise above your animal instincts and be better than you want to be, or you can give in to those base feelings and descend to be like those animals from which we were molded. It is your choice, but that choice will affect all of us, mi hijo, my son, so please choose wisely, and with respect for all of us equally.”

”More senseless words! Your probably just made them up, like you did that so called Light Bearer you keep babbling about. If it were sensible, it would have come from the Creator! I am leaving.” He spat as he turned, his footsteps leaving grass and shrubs alike ground down and torn to shreds in the wake of his passing.

”Evren, you cabron,” shouted Vacío, “come back here! You cannot walk away when Anne is speaking to you!”

The younger brother, slighter of build but stronger, stood staring after older, jaw clenching ever tighter. He moved to follow when a gesture from his mother stopped him.

Evren also stopped, turning back to face them: "Yes, I can, and oh, yes, I do like goats! You go back to your stupid sheep Vacío, you empty-headed fool! I am going to do something useful, like harvest some food!"

"Let him go, hijo. I will find a way to speak with him later. Come, let us sit among the *koyun* and talk of the Light Bearer. Calm yourself, and we will meditate upon the *luz*, contemplate that which brings hope, *esperanza* to us. Bring some *leben* and your *celev*, Umut, and let us sit together while we talk, OK *hijo*? And maybe one of your sisters will join us if you ask nicely as you pass by their tents on your way back, *por fis*?"

"Yes, Anne, I will be right back." kissing her hand and touching it to his forehead, Vacío left to find his favorite perro, which baba called *dog* but Anne preferred to call *celev* (except for when the mischievous scavenger stole food from the *sofra*, the low round table he had built for them to keep their food off of the ground at meal times, at which point she would then call the poor animal a *köpek*, in a most unfriendly tone of voice). Vacío had chosen to name him Umut, to distinguish him from the other perros. As he walked to find Umut, wondering where the mischievous little scavenger had hidden himself now, he saw his brother Evren walking in the field toward the tawny stalks of wheat, ready for cutting down.

Vacío decided to try to speak with his brother in hopes that he would see reason.

"Evren, have you got a moment, hermano?"

Striding briskly toward the grain, the older brother's face began to heat up, jaw clenching as his temple throbbed, "hermano" ringing in his ears. He heard his flint knife singing on the wind, saw his brother's neck, separating like the stalks, head falling with the ripe grain into his basket, the taste of blood in his mouth.

Evren's guardian detected it first.

"That was the wrong thing to say! Tell him to say Brother, right now!" He transmitted to Vacío's guardian, who frantically whispered in his ear:

"Quick, say brother! Say Brother! Now, say BROTHER!"

But Vacío was intent on righting his brother's wrong. Anne's lovely words should not be abused. Baba and Evren wanted only to see the most basic things in life, forgetting the beauty usefulness of having more than one word to describe a thing, a feeling, a state of being. New ideas, born of the variety of words that his anne was creating nearly every day. Vacío was certain that he could convince his brother of this. If only Evren would see his potential, and decide to live up to it. He could be the master of the foul temper he often showed.

"Evren, hermano."

Evren turned on his brother, face livid with rage. The dormant entity awoke, watching fascinated, unnoticed by either brother's guardian. The semi-corporeal being began growing, feeding on the energy emanating from Evren's wrath.

“Do not call me that, Brother! Perhaps I should marry our mother, and then I could show her, as Father could not, how to hold her tongue!”

Vacío's face flushed in shock and anger, hands beginning to shake.

”Now you go too far, Hermano mio!”

Satisfaction flashed across Evren's face as he imagined Vacío's head hitting the bottom of his grain basket.

”Really, and just what did you think I expected would happen once Father dies, my dear Brother? Did you really expect me to swallow that nonsense about cooperating with you, sharing the world, having an equal say in building a sense of your so-called ethics, and community? You will even have our most beautiful sister, Aclima, for yourself, and not allow me the double portion that should be my right as first-born son.”

“What double portion, Evren? And no one has mentioned what will become of whichever twin you do not marry, either. Who knows whether we may soon have another brother in need of a wife. We do know that Father was commanded by the Ancient Warrior that we each take a wife from a different birth. You even have either of my twins to choose from.”

“Oh, yes, I have either one of your unseemly spoiled and bull-headed twin sisters to marry...”

“Well then, Evren, either should make a perfect match for you. You can teach each other to cooperate, in your part of the world...”

“Do you really believe, Vacío, that I do not see what you and Mother are planning to do once Father is gone? You will try to take over and rule all of the world yourself, with our Mother, my Mother, at your side, a mere figurehead while you give the orders. No, you empty-headed liar. I will have Aclima, and all that is mine.”

”You are mistake...” Vacío's last words were lost as his brother leapt toward him, a flint knife poised in his upraised hand. As his arms went up, too late, in a futile attempt to ward off the lethal blow, Evren deftly feinted, disengaging the blocking arms, and jabbing the tool deep into Vacío's solar plexus, shattering his rib cage, and the knife while puncturing a lung. Both guardians looked on, unable to respond, not knowing what to do. The entity watching all of this, meanwhile, grew, feeding upon the torrent of energy washing over the area. Plant and object guardians nearby began to notice and report on his effects as he grew, casting a shadow over the ground where he hovered watching. He followed, inexorably drawn to Evren's fury, as Vacío fell to the ground, unmoving, atop the grain. His heartbeat stopped, eyes closing, while as his body began to cool, Evren's began to heat further. Vacío's guardian, having stored and transmitted the report for all of his data, collated what effects he could find, and lacking further instructions, found himself fading away, deinstantiating out of the experimental

universe. The guardian's last thoughts were of his failure to find a way to protect his charge, his dear and sweet Vacío, who had been the best hope for the human beings. The guardian would miss Vacío.

Evren, flushed with rage and victory, walked quickly, then began to jog, then run, toward the tents of his sisters. He felt a need for something to release this tension in his body, the unbearable pressure crushing him, and he knew that one of his sisters, his twin sister Aclima, would be the perfect receptacle. He ran to the opening of the tent, throwing back the panel, looking about the darkened interior, and seeing her there, unprotected, sleeping on the ground. He lunged in, scooped her sleeping form off the ground, throwing her across his back as he ran. Ignoring her struggles and cries, reveling in his strength, he ran, leaving Mother, Father, family and home. Whether he would be found, punished, rewarded or praised he did not know, but he intended to have his way. Both with Aclima, and with the world. After running for a time, he finally began to tire, and slowed to a walk. He growled at his crying sister to be quiet, throwing her down, planting his knees in her chest. Dazed and gasping for air, she flailed uselessly attempting to free her arms. He tightened the blanket wrapping her arms then choked off what was left of her air supply. Once she passed out, he paused to look at her. How much he wanted her, to plant his seed within her, make her his and teach her to obey. Fear pushed him, however, to keep moving, and lifting her bruised body, threw her across his shoulders, and continued on, away from all they had previously known. The semi-corporeal entity followed Evren as he kidnapped his sister, watching the guardians of the two human beings following in stupefied shock. As the entity grew the guardians finally took note, too late. Both reported on it as possibly having had an unknown influence upon the situation. Both reports were lost.

As Evren stopped, both guardians urgently whispered to him:

“Take her back!”

“Let her go! This is your twin sister, who shared the womb with you! You should be protecting her, not harming her! Look how you are hurting her!”

“Stop this right now! Put her down! Stop carrying her away!”

Their urging had no effect.

They had tried to deny him what was his. He would show them, sire children who would obey and respect him, show the proper fear that he was due as a mighty man, a warrior. One day, he would rule them all. The semi-corporeal entity grew as Evren gave vent to his rage and his need to dominate. The entity drew closer and closer to Evren, finally merging with Evren's very shadow, feeding on the awful heat and malevolent energy around Evren. As Evren's guardian took note of the growing being, a powerful electromagnetic pulse surged all around the guardian, generated by Evren's rage, but directed by the entity. It now seemed able to control the energy being given off by Evren. The guardian, caught between Evren and this new entity, was first unable to transmit the report to his supervising guardian. Then the very wavelength of the guardian began to change, re attuning and merging with that of the entity itself, as if the shadowy creature had consumed the guardian.

The interrupted report became “All Is Well”, transmitted, then updated to include a new report that Evren's sister had requested to come along with him on a trip after an accidental fall.

That done, the entity, with his newly acquired reporting and communicating capacities, then proceeded to whisper in Evren's other ear, since the ear in which the guardian had been whispering still radiated residual noise from the defunct guardian:

"Very good, very good, powerful one. Now you have begun to take for yourself what you rightfully deserve. This is only the beginning."

Evren smiled, triumphantly reveling in the words of the entity, believing them to be his own thoughts. He began to feel better, freer.

His sister's guardian, meanwhile, her body jolted with each nauseating step Evren took, was still whispering in her ear:

"Keep breathing, breath, it will be over soon, you will survive, you will escape, relax, breath, do not give up. He has to stop, has to sleep. Sometime, you will escape."

Completely occupied with the task of keeping her unfortunate charge alive and away from despair, Aclima's guardian never noticed what was happening with Evren and his now defunct guardian.

"Silence!"

Caught off guard, her frequencies abruptly shifted without her control. As the guardian began to search for possible causes of this disruption, the entity overpowered her communications, beaming her a powerful focused message:

"You will do as I tell you, and report that "All Is Well". You will then send an updated report to include a new message reporting that your charge has requested to come along with her brother on a trip after an accidental fall. Do you understand?"

"Nausea, dizzy, no air."

Her jumbled thoughts refused to order themselves. Then came the dawning horror that her brother was taking her somewhere. Mercifully, the darkness closed in.

...

In the new reporting area, in a universe farther away from the experimental universe, the Ancient Warrior had summoned the head guardian. He was pleased to have an area which only a very select few could access, but not pleased with the new reports.

"Four sets of emergency sparks, now?! Four quite bloody sets of alarms, literally, and I am only now being notified? Why have these reports taken so long to come in?"

Transmitting its respects, the head guardian replied to the irate Creator:

"It began as an argument, Great Warrior, and suddenly, before any guardian could react or decide what to do, the first son had rendered the second son inert, and this seems to have caused the second son's guardian to also go inert, or rather to have ceased reporting altogether."

“Yes, obviously, the guardian has been deinstantiated, now that his charge no longer exists.”

“Then the first guardian then had to follow his charge without a final consultation with the second guardian, which nearly put him out of commission as well, since we have no procedures in place for such an eventuality. Then this first son went running into the tent of his sister...”

“Which sister?”

“His twin, Great Creator, and carried her away by force. That also has no precedent, causing her guardian to also have to request instructions after reporting. Then he beat her into unconsciousness and considered being forcibly physically intimate with her. This nearly incapacitated her guardian. In the meantime, we have had to ascertain the final status of both the second son and his guardian, or former guardian, and then as we were doing that, a report came in from the supervising group guardian noting odd secondary effects. This is all a very strange new set of occurrences, Great Creator, for which we have not procedures. Should we find and consult with the Creatrix, Great Creator?”

An upraised arm, an ancient thought-form form predating the Ancient Warrior, flashed through his thoughts, jangling the guardian.

”She is nothing, and not to be mentioned again!”

”Yes, Great Creator. What is to be done about the first son and his twin sister, about whom we have received conflicting reports?”

”What are those reports?” demanded the Ancient Warrior, noting that his explicit orders for the children of the first man not to marry their own twins had also been directly contravened by this young human.

”Well, Great One, the guardian of the sister initially reported trouble: first only physical pain, then both physical and emotional pain as a result of an attack upon her by her brother, but then suddenly that same guardian later reported All Is Well, and that she had asked him to take her on a journey after having a bad fall. Similarly, the guardian of the first son began by sending a trouble report, indicating that his charge had violently attacked and incapacitated his brother, and then carried off his twin sister, dealing her great physical and emotional damage, but then reported that All Is Well, and his charge was escorting that very same sister on a trip after a bad fall.”

”And what report was sent by the guardian of the second, at the beginning of all of these troubles? What did that guardian do before becoming silenced?”

”That guardian initially reported that there had been angry words exchanged between the two brothers, and then that he was attempting to help de-escalate the encounter until the first brother set upon his charge after opening a conversation which became an argument. The automated recordings appear to show an unusual level of background noise in the area where the episode took place. This seems to correlate with what the fourth guardian, the lesser group supervisor guardian, reported in his first alert.”

“Which was?”

The Ancient Warrior found himself becoming annoyed with these halting reports, limited as they were by their lack of initiative. He could not bring himself to admit, however, that he missed the presence and incisive analysis, and possibly even the annoying arrogance of the Light Bearer. He would simply have to find a way, if necessary by making modifications to the guardians, to get all of his reports in a more timely and intelligent fashion. Wary as he was, he would have to give them more information and freedom.

“The lesser group guardian, who is the supervisor of a block of wheat stalk groups in the field where the brothers met, initially reported that his blade guardians were routinely monitoring and whispering the usual encouragement when an inordinately large number of the stalks were irrecoverably trampled upon during the altercation.”

“This should be no surprise.”

“No, Great Creator, it was not, at least not to the higher level supervising guardian who reported to me, although the group guardian for those particular stalks of wheat is not very happy, of course.”

“Of course not. That is the way these guardians are designed to respond for the purposes of this experiment. And the unusual background noise?”

“Well that is just the question, Great One. Since the instantiation of each guardian goes offline after recording all data from its charge, the group supervising guardian found it odd that these guardians, after reporting the destruction of their charges, continued to report, rather than signing off. And rather than seeing a diminished energy flow in the area overall, which ought to have happened given that less energy was being produced, both due to the now reduced number of living beings, and the reduced number of reporting guardians in the area...”

“Yes, yes.”

“Well, the energy flow measures actually continued to increase. In fact, the group supervising guardian for that area of the field reports that energy levels actually continued to increase after the felling of the human, which resulted in the subsequent deinstantiation of his guardian. These two events ought to have caused the registering of a substantially lower energy flow in the area where the wheat was growing, yet the supervising guardian reports just the opposite.”

“When does the increased energy flow begin, and what were the wavelengths throughout the area, and from what source or direction does the surge seem to originate?”

“We have not sorted that information out, as we were only ordered to report on the data streams that were being recorded during the altercation. I shall give directions to the supervising guardians for all groups in that field to answer your questions, Great Creator.”

“Good, and while you are at it, make sure to give standing orders that in the future, guardians and supervising group guardians are to report as soon as any sign of trouble begins, with before and after records, including all of the questions I have just asked you. Take any other steps you deem necessary to prevent such a failure of reporting again in the future. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Great Creator, but that will overwhelm the capacities of my current hierarchy of supervising guardians. From where will we get the energy reserves to add more to the staff of my data collecting and collating messengers?”

“I will see to that. Begin implementing my orders, taking care to be more proactive in the future. You are dismissed.”

The Ancient Warrior contemplated changing the name of the reporting area to something more fitting, Audience Chamber, perhaps. It was impossible for the guardians to cross out of the experimental universe, so he could summon and receive reports from his head guardians in private. He had to be certain that this group of guardians did not discover his energy limitations and begin to try to challenge him for leadership of the multiverse, as others before them had done. This defiance on the part of the young Light Bearer, was setting a dangerous precedent, and as the supervising guardians, particularly the head guardian supervisor, were required to take more initiative, they might come closer to challenging his authority. Since he would be lessened in the reach of his essence with each new level of guardians instantiated, he would need to take steps to ensure his continuing domination without the additional expenditure of energy. They must not find this out, nor understand why.

The head supervising guardian transmitted:

“Great Creator, there seems to be a greater problem than we first realized in the area where the altercation initially took place. Now the guardians of the soil particles and small aeration and digestion animals in the soil below the grass where the second man fell inert are reporting very strange anomalous data.”

“What are they reporting?”

“They all say that the electrical charges where his blood soaked into the ground are growing in intensity, producing a strong enough change to the surrounding magnetic field that very strong signals are being generated. In fact, one signal is growing in strength so rapidly that it should soon be strong enough to be received on the other side of the universe.”

“A signal strong enough to traverse 15 billion light years before fully degrading? Are you certain?”

“Yes, Great Creator, and we are perplexed.”

“Well, what is generating the charge in the first place?”

“That is just it, Great Creator. We cannot find the source of the charge.”

“That is absurd.”

“This is true, Great Warrior, yet our best search efforts are unable to uncover the source. Every guardian has been interrogated within the entire area in which the first son ranged, and yet no explanation can be found.”

“I will investigate this myself. Send me the full data from the site, and then send the son's guardian to

me.”

“Bypassing the reporting structure of the supervising guardians, my Great Creator?”

“Yes. I wish to interrogate this guardian myself, given the strange goings on all around him. And do not question my orders again.”

“Right away, and my apologies.” The head supervising guardian hastily bowed out.

“Wait!” thundered the Ancient Warrior. “You will address me as Great Creator at all times! Do not forget yourself again, head supervisor!”

“Yes, Great Creator, please forgive me.”

“You are forgiven, this time, guardian, but ensure that such a slip never occurs again. Let us go down now and investigate these happenings.”

...

Even before arriving at the scene, the Ancient Warrior felt the overpowering ring of the blood of the defunct Vacío, resonating from below the ground. Proceeding to follow the odd trail of visceral energy left in the wake of the violent episodes recently past, the Warrior could follow the flow left behind by the recent events. They pulled him, almost as strongly as if a physical cord had been tied to his corporeal form, drawing him inexorably toward the current location of the offspring of the first human beings into which the Creator had formed and breathed life. Even more disturbing, the Ancient Warrior sensed the presence of an entity which had an entirely different set of wavelengths, much longer than even his supervising guardians could detect. The entity appeared to have merged with Evren's guardian. The fact that his supervising guardians had not detected this change would need to be addressed immediately after dealing with Evren. This was an anomaly for which the Ancient Warrior had not planned, and had no contingencies. Without the Light Bearer to help him, this could escalate into a real problem. *But she must not be allowed to know this, either.* Decided the Ancient Warrior.

Without the Light Bearer he was also unable to end the experiment, a fact of which he hoped the Light Bearer herself was still unaware. Since she had initialize the experiment, providing all of the reflective energy for the experiment, he could not undo that set up without expending a tremendous amount of energy. That was energy which he now no longer had access to, since he was using it to both create the new supervising guardian hierarchical levels, and in stretching his essence to maintain coverage, however thin, throughout the known multiverse. *If she finds out, she will surely no longer obey,* worried the Creator.

This put the Ancient Warrior in a state of static which was not only disagreeable, but potentially dangerous, given the unknown nature and extent of infiltration and coverage of this new entity. He would have to deal very carefully with this young human man, and with the entity feeding on him.

...

Displaying his usual head and beard silhouette against the sky, within earshot of the now tired young man, the Ancient Warrior, called out:

“Evren, where are you?”

Evren froze in shock and fear. How could the Creator be talking directly with him, when in so long not even his parents had heard from their creators. He had begun to doubt the very existence of the Creator, despite his trust in the little that his father had told him of the Ancient Warrior. Evren imagined a stern commander, giving concise orders, expecting obedience, and no questions. He wasn't wrong.

“Shouldn't you be talking with my Father, Great Creator, rather than a young one like me? He can explain things far better.”

His father had always indulged him, so that he had no doubts that he would have been able to convince the first man that his actions had been justified. He even felt sure that the old man would have relented and given his twin sister to him for a wife, if only to be sure that Evren would not covet the first woman, his mother, as a wife and a symbol of his leadership of all of the human race. What to do now, with the ominous approach of the Creator, whom he must now acknowledge did indeed exist, and apparently also took a potentially unhealthy interest in talking directly to him, of all things. This could not be good. There must be some way to escape this situation.

“I was just going to offer you some good and choice vegetables, Great and Mighty Creator. We have worked hard, as you commanded, and have grown new foods from the earth, which has been very difficult to manage up here. Father tells us that before, in this paradise, or garden-like place in the south, before Mother deceived him, raising food was so easy, so simple it was unnecessary to cultivate the ground, but that now, in your wisdom, you have placed us here to help us learn how to. And work we have. I brought you an offering from the first fruits of of this season. May it please you, Great Warrior, our only Creator.”

The Creator could not ignore the insistent resonating vibrations of the blood still soaking into the ground where Evren had felled his younger brother. He decided to give the young man a chance to open up in honesty, in the event, however unlikely, that he would acknowledge the heinousness of his crime. He did not want to admit that this batch of human beings was not evolving well, and that intervention was in fact necessary, as the now estranged Light Bearer had asserted.

“Evren, where is your brother?”

“How should I know,” Evren stammered, “do I look like my bother’s babysitter? Why don’t you go ask our idiotic mother, who loves to talk those silly words of baby talk with him all the time. She is the one who ought to know.” Evren felt that that was true, in a manner of speaking, since he had covered the body with soil and run off so quickly after hitting his brother that he did not know whether the blow had left him lying in the wheat field, or on the rocks nearby.

“Why do you ask, great Creator? Just out of curiosity.”

The arrogance of this young man was impressive. If this was where humanity was headed, it did not look good at all.

“Evren, the very ground herself is crying out to me, telling me of your crime. Your brother's blood sings up through the rocks, demanding punishment.”

“It was not my fault.”

“You are banished, Evren, to wander the earth with no rest, and no place to call your own, no land upon which to proudly wrest from the ground those fruits of your labor which you so arrogantly boasted you had worked to produce. Now go.”

Evren understood that his attempt at deceiving the Creator would not work. Since argument would probably have more unpleasant consequences for him, he decided to try another tactic.

“This punishment is unbearable. Why not simply give me a clean death. An execution from you would be far better than having to wander the earth alone.”

“My patience is beginning to wear thin Evren. You clearly do not understand the reach of my knowledge. Do you not know that my essence fills the universe?”

“Let me keep my sister with me as a wife. She wants to be with me just ask her. And in any case she has always wanted to bear my child so she must come with me now.”

Transmitting to Aclima's guardian, the Ancient Warrior queried: “Does this woman want to go with her brother?”

The Guardian replied with a very low power, focused pulse response “Yes, Great Creator.”

Something was clearly amiss but the Ancient warrior decided that it was probably due to the unusual entity which had merged itself with Evren 's guardian. Through this successful combination, and the strange new emissions from the ground where Vacío fell victim to Evren, the creature had already shown a disturbing ability to alter the electromagnetic environment by which it was surrounded. This must also account for the weak response of the sister’s guardian. This was a difficult situation, since neither guardian appeared to be entirely reliable, but the Ancient Warrior did not have sufficient energy reserves to create and transfer all data to a new pair of guardians and deal with this new entity, which seemed to be gaining strength rapidly. It appeared to be feeding on the young man’s excited emotional state. How this could work was still a mystery to the Ancient Warrior. It would have been quickly resolved had the young Light Bearer been there to help him. Considering the state of the guardian, the Ancient warrior decided that the priority should remain on allowing free will to run its course.

He ordered her guardian: “Report and record only with minimal interference.” He ignored the entity.

Evren, caked in blood, and drenched in sweat, stood taller, and cried out:

“Wait! This is too much. I am a doomed man, cursed. Now anyone who sees me will simply kill me himself, if you do not kill me, and they will take my wife, to boot.”

“No, no man will kill you. Your guardian can be felt from miles away. It shall be an identifying mark so that no one will come near you. Thus no stranger will kill you, and any one who does dare to

approach you shall be punished by the very being with whom you have allied yourself.”

This was an easy prediction to make, since nothing could come near the pair of them without feeling intense discomfort. The electromagnetic disturbances this entity created made it difficult for even the Ancient Warrior to be nearby.

“Now, I will not tell you again, Go!”

A sonic boom accompanied the order, causing Evren to fall flat on his face to the ground. When he recovered, Evren saw that his twin sister, now his wife as far as he was concerned, was still where he had left her. Now he would be sure to record his version of these events, his story, which he would call History, as the official record of these events, to remind her. Remind her of how she had wanted to go away with him, how he was protecting her from her brother and Father. He knew. He had seen them looking at her with lust in their eyes.

“They want you,” he shouted, flecks of spittle flying through the air, over her prostrate body, “I have seen their eyes follow you, lusting for you, waiting to ravish you. You walked away from me, so many times when I tried to tell you. I offered you my protection, but you refused to listen.”

“And you, always pretending not to want me, wasting your time drawing lies in the sand. You will learn to listen, the right way to speak and to think. I will wholeheartedly protect you, my wife, from yourself.”

He picked her still unconscious body up and began the long walk eastward, to a place he had heard of once as a very small child. There was a large river, which his mother had told him joined another great river and watered a large crescent shaped area of land, sheltering many fruit-bearing trees and wild but edible grasses and animals in abundance. Perhaps this land would have sufficient abundance to allow him to survive in his wanderings and maybe even win over his wife, in time. He did not relish the idea of living with a woman who behaved hatefully toward him, as she always had, and most likely would try to continue for a long while, given his earlier lax behavior toward her.

“I have allowed you, for far too long, to get away with this pretense that you did not want me. You will bear my children, and you will obey and respect me.”

She would admit that she was to blame for having slept in a tent unguarded, and all that after tempting him with her beauty for so long. Never a kind word, always signaling with her silences, glances, her long flowing hair, turning so gracefully at his approach, showing her beautiful shoulders, the curve of her breast as she turned from her slender waist, gliding away from him. Always revealing the sway of her hips, sweeping down into long slender legs which carried her so quickly away from him that he could never help but see the well-developed muscles of her smooth legs. His longing had been unbearable, goaded by her guile, led on by her coquettish play, her pretense of not wanting his touch, from the time her bosom had first begun to swell, indicating her readiness to become his.

“But always you played the coquette, even when we were young, crying, denying what we both knew. And that empty-headed brother, telling mother that I was harassing you.”

Then the interminable lectures from mother implying that all of this was his fault, when his sister's

shameful subterfuge was so clearly to blame. Surely now, after she saw how her shameful game playing and her refusal to admit her feelings for him had forced him to take her away with him in this way, she would admit that this useless game had come to an end, and openly declare her love for him. She was meant to be his, and now the Creator had confirmed it, giving her to him to protect and to guide, to bear his children and to honor his wishes. They would restore his respect, stolen from him all of these years.

His sister woke up, beginning to struggle again as his fast walk jostled her body. Realizing that it was Evren, her childhood dislike now hardened into loathing of her twin brother.

Evren decided to stop for a rest, stooping to let his burden fall to the ground.

“Cut your fingernails,” he demanded, as his sister sat up, looking dazed and trying not to vomit.

“But...”

“Just tear them off,” he ordered, “and give them to me. Take these,” pulling her hand toward him and opening it upward, he dropped ten sharp yellowed slivers into her palm,

“Eat these. You will become my wife, as one with me.”

Ignoring her hesitation, he pulled her to him, holding her face up toward his while pushing his tongue into her mouth. Discovering that he was sucking all of her saliva from her mouth, she felt thankful that this was all he seemed to want. Maybe he had forgotten about the fingernails.

This can't be happening, she thought, This must be my imagination. What would Anne do? How would she get away? she wondered, seeking a way to escape her brother's hold.

“This will seal our marriage,” he informed her, releasing her, “and our souls will touch, becoming connected. Now, eat,” he commanded.

Letting most of the slivers slip between her fingers, she brought her hand to her mouth, feeling the jagged bits of nail from his fingers pass her lips, nearly choking as she tried to swallow, the sliver cutting into her tongue. She tried to avoid his watchful gaze, wondering what would happen next.

Now, she would begin to honor and obey him, he thought, satisfied. And she would speak with the words, the right words, that their Father had used. Then they would begin to do something about this business of wandering the earth. No curse nor punishment would stop him from attaining his rightfully deserved place at the head of the human race, with Mother at his side once Father was gone. They would have to work on creating a way of recording the passage of time, naturally starting at the time when Father grandly sired him, and then record all of his deeds and words.

“I have great plans for the future, our future, the future of all of the human race, of which I am clearly the head and our descendents the masters of all the rest of human kind.”

“What?” Aclima edged away as he began gesticulating wildly.

“Mother always argued with me, saying that my thoughts were wrong, unkind, illogical. How dare she? Clearly she and that useless brother of ours were the ones who were wrong, and I will prove it. Has not the death of that idiot Vacío not already proven that I was in the right,” looking at her, “with the confirmation newly directly given by the Great Creator himself?”

She nodded, looking nauseated. She lay on the ground, struggling to breathe as he turned away, shouting, “Now I will begin to show everyone how great I truly am!” His sister passed out.

These powerful thoughts and plans were indeed satisfying to Evren, who imagined that he was originating them, not hearing the voice of his new companion, which had fed upon his rage and consumed his guardian. This entity was evolving quickly in its ability to form thoughts and execute them. Initially those thoughts had all consisted of orders, requirements to be pressed upon nearby guardians. The entity was becoming aware of other impulses. Generated by rage and fed by murderous desire, the impulse to control was growing. Having absorbed the guardian of Evren, what now? *Will this guardian be deactivated, like the other? Evren will die, but I must go on. All shall know and fear me.*

As these thoughts emerged in the creature who had begun to dominate Evren and all those around him, his twin began to stir again, her head swimming, every joint echoing a shriek as her bruised muscles struggled into an upright posture.

“Where am I? Anne, where is she?”

Striding toward her, arm drawn back to strike, Evren's reddening face loomed over her, bellowing:

“Not Anne! Mother! And she is nothing to you. Do you hear, she is nothing! Less than nothing! You are not to mention her, nor anyone else but the Creator!”

Panting, he stepped back, lifting his chin, satisfaction in his hard stare. The cooling breeze blew a stray wisp of hair into her eyes as Aclima gathered her resolve, feeble words at last forming on her lips:

”I am leaving.” Moving to stand up, she stood stock still as her brother approached.

”You are staying with me. The Great Creator has given you to me to be my wife, and if you leave me you will die immediately.”

“Your wife? You are insane. Who said you could...”

She found herself back on the ground, as Evren slapped her face, then then threw her body down, landing with his knees in the back of her chest as her supple legs twisted and gave way under her, while he folded his arms around her neck.

Then, literally,:

“Do NOT Question me!” he growled. “You are my Wife, you will bear my children. And you will obey me. The Creator has decreed it. Never question me again!”

He gave her a last shake, then arose, walked a few feet, and sat down, as she slowly sat up, shaken to her core. Never had she seen him this violent before. She looked at him warily, wondering what to do, realizing that she had no idea how she would be able to get away from him long enough to find her way back home, if home was even a safe place.

Then, his body gave a sudden and violent twitch, and his entire posture subtly but definitely changed, and he turned toward her again, walking back to her, sitting down on the ground beside her. She dared not move, fearing an even worse reaction than before. She was surprised at his sudden new gentleness:

“My cherished little one, I know you are confused and missing home. Fear not, for you have been chosen to be a wife, and a mother, to fill an important role for all of the human race. Be obedient, be diligent and learn to trust. All will be well.”

With a second twitch, and again with a subtle change in his posture, he looked at her with an odd mixture of disdain and wonder, stood up and wordlessly walked away.

As she sat dazed and wondering what to make of these recent events, her brother's *celev*, or *dog* as she would have to remember to say if she spoke to Evren, appeared in the distance. By what name did her brother Vacío call the creature again, Umut was it? As the furry creature came running up to her, she realized that this animal must have tracked her by her scent, as it had a very good nose. That might mean that Umut could help her find her way back home as well. If she could get away from Evren. Perhaps Vacío and Anne were not far behind, and would be able to explain all of this. Nothing made sense.

As she petted Umut, Evren came back, angrily stomping the ground, bending to find a large stick and waving it in their direction:

“Go away, stupid beast, I do not need another mouth to feed along the way!”

Both Umut and Aclima were frightened by Evren's reaction. Neither had spent any time with him, and did not understand why he was so angry.

”But I was only petting him...”

As she spoke, Evren advanced on her, his fist upraised and drawn back, readying to hit her face again, and she instinctively retreated, curling into fetal position as poor Umut ran away, tail tucked tightly between his hind legs.

”I have already told you, do not question me.” He lowered his hand, observing the trembling young woman with a satisfied air, and turned to walk away. He stopped, turning back to her, and ordered: “Find something for us to eat. Now.”

Umut's Guardian reported to his supervising animal group guardian: “Frightened, threatened, running away!”

Aclima's guardian reported: “Finding food for us to share, under great duress.” She hoped the last three words would get through before the next jolt of interference arrived.

Two supervising guardians, each receiving the lower level guardian's reports, found themselves perplexed. Now that supervising guardians had more free will and initiative taking abilities, they were also beginning to take more critical views of the universe and the denizens thereof. The poor guardian of Umut, a mere self-aware animal guardian, had limited cognitive ability, particularly compared to Aclima's guardian. The newly instantiated guardians for human beings had a wider range of discretion to encourage their sentient charges to follow the rather vague ethical system being espoused by the Creator. For the moment, only the supervising guardians knew that the entire universe was merely a large experiment. Nevertheless, these newly instantiated guardians, with both wider scope of action and the understanding that they had not been directly created by the Ancient Warrior, were beginning to push the edge of their own envelope of expanded initiative. Some new guardians were beginning to show more initiative than supervising guardians would tolerate. These supervising guardians would find it convenient to overlook the suppression of reports by Evren's new companion entity from overly active new guardians.

This is becoming intolerable. My charge should not be treated this way. Her guardian then realized the danger of transmitting, even pondering too much. How could she prevent this entity and Evren from doing more harm to her charge. Neither Aclima nor her guardian could fend off the domination of this new entity, even in the presence of the Creator himself. That implied, disturbingly, that the Creator lacked either the knowledge, the power or the concern to deal with this entity. All were distressing possibilities. *The only safe strategy for my charge, and myself, it seems, is to get her to try to comply with and appease Evren until it is relatively safe for her to make her escape and get back to her anne.*

Having intercepted reports as they passed on the fate of Vacío, the guardian wondered if there could be a way to gently let Aclima, who had not yet discerned this fact, know this so that she would not be shocked later by Evren, who would use the news to his advantage in some way if he possibly could.

“I must find a way to communicate with her on the conscious level, since this whispering to her only enters her unconscious mind. I need to directly affect her waking thoughts and decisions.”

The urgency of getting her to please Evren was occupying the energies of her guardian so much that Aclima also began to pick up a nervous feeling of worry, fretting about where to find food, and how to prepare it.

To soothe her, her guardian began to whisper in her ear: “Be calm, and stay strong. This will pass, this will pass. Try not anger Evren, and we will find a way to escape, with time. You are not alone. Have patience. Have patience. Have patience.” If only there were another guardian to consult with, some other point of reference.

...

The stench of blood alerted her, on the edge of the wheat field. The trampled grain and the odor of blood finally led Hayat to her son's mutilated body. Her agonized scream shattered the still night air. “Mi hijo! Se lo mató! Mató a mi hijo!”

The Creatrix, meeting with a supervising guardian, felt the shock and pain brusquely dismissing the guardian, bring all of her attention to the clearing to protect Hayat. To avoid detection by the Ancient

Warrior, she kept most of her essence near an active volcano, ready to materialize if needed. Although he was currently dealing with Evren, his wrath would be formidable when informed if the Light Bearer stepped in now.

As the first man ran to see which son of his had been killed, stomach churning to hear his wife's plaintive cry, he entered the clearing, and stopped. In the field he saw his wife and his younger daughters clutching the stiff and blood-covered body of his son Vacío. A strange and overpowering odor assailed his nostrils, the familiar smell of excrement coupled with the sickening odor of blood, raising the bile to his throat. He retched as Hayat looked over at him, shrieking her horror, the dirt under her fingernails and covering her body making her appear more like one of the wild animals they now avoided, than the beautiful companion he had married. One of his daughters, unable to bear the scene any longer, arose and ran away, with her guardian following. It appeared to be Azura. His remaining daughter curled into a fetal ball, and began to rock back and forth, covering her ears with her hands.

"How much more of this, how much longer? How much? Will all of our lives and the lives of our children be struggle and hate? I will not bear more children only to suffer like this." wailed the first woman, bereft.

"Hayat," began the man, still at a distance, "listen, it will get better, come away, leave our son and let me bury him properly," realizing that Evren must have covered the body of Vacío with soil and wheat stalks, but the blood covered grain told the entire story.

"Listen, my wife, my dear, go and rest, take our daughters, and I will bury our son in a suitable cave, in a nice location, a safe place." soothed her husband, drawing closer to her.

Hayat arose, attempting to pull her daughter up from the ground, then suddenly fainted as her husband, seeing the body of Vacío up close, vomited again.

This is too much, decided the Light Bearer, generating a magnetic field under the women's bodies:

"Guardian," addressing the guardian of the daughter still rocking in fetal position on the blood-soaked field,

"I am going to move your charge to her tent and cover her with a blanket. You will neither record nor report this," she ordered.

"But the Creator has given orders..."

"I will give the orders here, and you will obey my directions, Guardian. Is that clear?" overrode the Light Bearer, sending delta waves into Hayat's brain to put her to sleep.

"Yes, Great Creatrix", replied the guardian, as the unconscious women began floating toward the living area.

As the man lifted his head, still dazed and ill, he saw the bodies of his wife and daughter seeming to float in the air, as if floating upon the waters.

“I must be sure not to eat any more of those odd looking mushrooms again,” the man thought, as he passed out.

... One Month Later, Somewhere To The East...

“Listen, my wife, you know that I have not yet exercised my husbandly duty toward you, I have not touched you at all this past month since we have been gone, and we have been happy, is this not so?”

Aclima had learned not to disagree with Evren, whom she no longer thought of as her twin brother, but as some sort of semi-parental and semi-prophetic authority figure, teaching her ideas of which Father and increasingly, recently, even the great Creator himself he claimed, had spoken to him. He told her how privileged she was to learn these secrets, to learn the true language, to hear the words of the Ancient Warrior himself, and most importantly of all, he did not touch her. He began to speak soft and lovely words to her, as she walked along, journeying to a place far to the east.

“Today, I promise you that we will see Mother again. You must simply trust me.”

This made no sense, but Aclima had learned to keep silent.

“Vacío attacked me, so naturally I had to defend both of us, myself and also you, my wife. You did not know this because you were confused about that first day when I saved you from them.”

At first his words did not seem to ring true, did not make sense, did not feel right. She felt fear on all sides, with no one to turn to for help. Now, she no longer had the spirit to think about what he said, simply occupying herself with finding and preparing their food, most of which he ate. Occasionally he felt generous, and would invite her to eat a larger portion, nearly half of the meal at times, but most days she did not have much stomach to eat, in any case. Each day, now, odd things would happen:

“It is another sign that the Ancient Warrior, the great Creator, is looking upon us with favor, and preparing to send us children, through you, my loyal and faithful wife.”

She no longer had much feeling either way about these strange things he said, even when he made a prediction which appeared to come to pass the next day. She felt resigned to her fate. She could not get away from him, there was no place to hide. She struggled, fighting a losing battle to keep alive the hope of seeing Anne again.

One evening he called her to his side of their tent. He was completely naked, and, in the semi-darkness, something seemed to be balancing on top of his body, in his center. As he pulled off her tunic, she saw that it was a part of his body, in about the same place where her blood flowed from her own body most months. Lately, especially in the first few months after they had left, her monthly flows had ceased for first one month, then another, but seemed to have stabilized now. Her last flow had ended just over a week ago now.

“Come to me my wife, it is time to consummate our marriage. Come here, and be with me.”

She sat next to him, looking at his face, which seemed neither angry nor kind at this moment, from the

little she could see in the dim light of the setting sun. She had heard her two younger sisters talking about how much they enjoyed touching themselves, exploring and moving something inside of their bodies. She knew that her Mother tolerated Father putting some part of his body inside of hers so that she could have more children. This had been explained when her monthly flows first began, but beyond staying away from her brothers except for when Mother was with them, she had felt only a vague curiosity about it all. She had been accustomed to touching herself some nights, before, but not now. There in the dim confines of the tent, as Evren pulled her closer to him, she felt nothing. Perhaps a small curiosity of what would happen, but no desire to touch him, nor to be touched by him. She only wanted to be left alone to go to sleep. Yet, to resist him could be dangerous, and so she resigned herself again to appease him.

“Come here, get on top of me, you see, this will not hurt you. Here, slowly, lower yourself down, sit up here.”

She moved to place herself on top of his body, allowing him to guide her over top, and hold her up as she opened the two flaps of skin from where her blood would flow, aiming his member directly inside of her, and sat down slowly, trying to ignore the discomfort as his organ slowly grated up into her body. As he moved inside of her body, it began feeling raw and painful, as if she were being ground down with sandpaper. He began to pull her down toward him, as he pushed his way deeper inside her body. It felt exactly like the time when her hand had gotten scraped against a rock flaying the skin off, leaving an abrasion that took weeks to heal. This however, felt like the skin was being scraped off from the inside of her body, and she wanted to ask him to stop, but was too afraid. He pushed himself inside her body until she was sitting directly on top of his, but while the scraping pain stopped when he finally stopped moving, a sharp ringing pain continued. She looked at him, wanting to ask leave to go, put her tunic back on, move to her side of the tent, but he waited, looking at her. At last, he nodded, letting her slip down off and away from him, putting her tunic back on, on her side of their tent. She felt empty, neither happy nor sad, only relieved that it was over. The next time her called her to him, he had olive oil on his hands, which he rubbed on his member before making her sit on top of him again, and this time the scrapping pain was not as bad, as he pushed his way inside of her body, and that sharp higher pitched pain at the top of her canal was still there, but had lessened. Again he looked at her for a time, and then allowed her to leave. Again, the next two times he called her, the oil seemed to ease the scrapping pain, and at last the high-pitched pain diminished into a tolerable discomfort. Over time, the pain began to disappear entirely, unless there was no olive oil to ease the entry, but Evren seemed to become restive, expecting something from her. He began to tell her to touch him, and though she was afraid to refuse, she felt no interest, even a bit of revulsion when he tried to push her head toward his upright member. Even at the cost of having him throw her down and push himself harshly inside her, tearing at delicate flesh, refusing to stop moving until he was panting with exertion and drops of his sweat fell all over her face, while her teeth chattered in the chill air and she begged him to stop or just finish quickly, she could not make herself put that ugly member of his into her mouth as he demanded. More than once he threatened her, and always in the end, her stomach turned, and she turned her head, again to be bodily overturned, pinned down as he forced himself into her dry canal, grunting until he was done. At least when there was no oil, sometimes he finished sooner. It came to hurt just the same with or without oil. She finally stopped having her flows, and the fifth month in a row, as she said,

“Evren, I have not bled for so long, perhaps I am with child.”

Evren’s happiness was so complete that he gave her more to eat and did not threaten to hit her, nor to

demand her body as often, for weeks. He even seemed to become almost gentle, once asking, as she again begged him to stop, if he was causing her too much pain. As her body began to look healthier, however, her flow began again, and with the realization that she was not pregnant, he again demanded her body, requiring her to sleep next to him, naked, each night, accusing her of avoiding him.

Her guardian could only stay with her, helping her to endure the pain, whispering into her ear: “Be calm, there is a way to escape, we will find it. Keep hoping. Be patient and do not provoke his wrath.”

But when one night, Evren demanded her body, she had finally had too much, was too tired to care if he beat her, she said at last:

“No. Please, no. Just let me to sleep,” turning away from him, she hoped that he would accept this, the first time her anger and her desperation had hardened into courage.

“If you try to turn away,” he growled at her, “or refuse me, I will simply have you from behind, and it will hurt more.”

Seeing no way out, she turned her body toward him, trying not to retch. Wishing for a way to expel his seed from her body, expel him from her life, she opened her legs, hoping he would be done quickly. Her guardian began to cry.

Chapter 11. Thinking of Escapes

*Your place of birth marks you ... Whether you like it or not.
-from “The Book Of Hayat”*

More than a year passed this way. Often times, on days when she could escape from Evren by going to wash clothes or gather food and cooking materials, she would recall memories of a recurring dream she had had as a child, from the earliest time she could remember until she was nine winters old. Nearly every night, in those early years of her life, she had had this same dream. She had traveled with her anne, in this dream, to a place far beyond the river, over a vast body of warm, deep blue water, clear enough to see down to the bottom. They had gone to a great mountain, at whose base they had decided to spend the night. While her anne slept, the girl had climbed the mountain, as one can only do in dreams, and met a host of people who looked nearly like herself and her brothers and sisters, but were taller, speaking with strange words, and shimmering with a light that reminded her of the light that came with the loud noises when the wind bent the tree branches back and the water from the sky flew sideways, stinging her face.

“There is a storm coming,” as Baba would say, or firtinas, sometimes tormentas, as her anne called them. They were powerful, sometimes causing fires.

“Always keep extra food and water inside. Frightening tormentas like this may keep raging for days,” Anne had warned her. What was her anne doing right now, she wondered. *I will see her again*, vowed Aclima.

The tormentas continued, like her dreams of these strange people who glowed as if they had borrowed the aura from one of those flashes of fiery light. Yet, one of these people, a woman with long dark hair and greyish blue eyes, always came to her, as she gazed upon them, and asked her if she wanted to learn more than Anne could teach her, even if it was difficult, or dangerous. When the girl had replied that she very much wanted to learn, as long as there was no danger to anyone other than herself. The shimmering woman had taken her to a place high above the mountain, to a dwelling hidden among the clouds, and introduced her to others who seemed to shimmer like herself. Each one had some different purpose or interest, and shimmered in a different color from the others. One who was tall, with golden hair and bright skin, could make beautiful sounds with his voice:

“If you wish, I can teach you how to make such melodies. You will even be able to sing while you run.” The child wondered how this shining being knew that she loved to run, for miles and miles without stopping.

Another, darker and very muscular, with short hair and fierce eyes, offered to teach her how to fight, and still another, taller than the second but older with white hair and webbed fingers like the feet of frogs, offered to teach her to swim. Yet another, a woman with very long yellow colored hair, long eye lashes under sea blue eyes with a tall but sensuously curved body, offered to teach her how to make anyone do her bidding. Another offered to teach her to tame and ride the magnificent proud animals with long legs, hairy tails, long faces and broad backs running in herds together. These animals kicked, but looked curious and intelligent, noble even. Baba called them *horses*, but Anne called them *caballos*, or sometimes *atlar*, depending on whether her mood was more tired and work-like, or more whimsical and admiring. The child really liked these animals, and preferred the word *at*, as it reminded her of the respect and admiration Anne shared with her for some of these graceful animals. While swimming might be most practical, she would really prefer to learn all of the things these marvelous beings were offering her:

“I wonder if there is a way to accept all of these gifts without being greedy.”

In the midst of contemplating these offers from the light enveloped ones, there appeared a commotion, and suddenly a group of very tall very large and muscular men and woman arrived, naked, all of whom seemed to be painted in splotches of blue, with hairy heads of all different colors, and much hair on their faces as well, even some of the women. Their leader had only one eye, and carried the branch of a tree in his hand, waving it over his head as he ran. They arrived screaming bloodcurdling words which the child had never heard before, but could see were not kind, toward the group of people with whom she stood.

All but her companion stepped back, inching away from the onslaught of the strange people running toward them from the distance. Seeing this, her companion stood,

“There is no safe place for you to hide, child, so we must fight. Stay by me and do not fear. Though a hundred of these monsters approach and a thousand fall by your side, I will protect you.”

Heartened by these words, the child stood with the tall woman, who traced a blue luminous circle around the child, which then formed itself into a pale blue shimmering bubble of light enveloping her, and moving as the child moved.

“Stay by me” she reminded the child, as the one-eyed leader of the group came screaming into the outer courtyard of the building upon the clouds in which they stood waiting.

The woman escorting the child held up two snakes, one in each hand, which the child had not noticed earlier. The child thought back to how Anne had been fond of snakes, describing the wise sayings these animals could tell as they crawled along the ground, particularly in the sand where curves were easier to draw. Baba had forbidden her to speak of these things to the children, but the child had also seen the stories left by the snakes, and longed to learn more. Now, the long snakes in the hands of the luminous gray-eyed woman became straight and wood-like, as though they were the branches from a very tall tree, with sharp points at the ends where there had shortly before been teeth. The woman held one in her left hand, standing it straight up and down in front of her left foot, as the majestic royal blue peplos (Baba would call it a dress) she had been wearing disappeared, revealing her athletic body, curved, muscular, and lean, her strong arms flexing as she leaned back on her right leg, leveling the darker colored thinner snake which formed a slightly longer stick, like a sharp pointed walking staff with a flint blade attached to it, in her right hand, aimed it toward the one-eyed leader. Somewhere in the back of the child’s mind, she remembered, oddly not knowing where she had ever first learned this, that the two sticks in either hand of her protectress now formed a relationship to one another known as a Right Angle, or would also be called Perpendicular to each other. This thought distracted the child only for a moment, as the screaming one-eyed man leapt to within striking range, setting his right foot inside the tall white columned building in which the reluctant defenders stood awaiting the hairy blue attackers.

In earlier versions of the dream, the child stepped out in front of the woman as she held the two snake staves ready, and held up her arms, standing between the two oncoming groups:

”STOP. You must not fight, you must find a way to make peace, up here in these high places, so that we may have peace down below, Great Ones!” Shamed by the words of a mere human child, both groups stopped, sitting down where they halted, as the tall shimmering woman and the fearsome giant with one eye speak, often using hand signs and gestures, to agree upon boundary and peace settlement.

“We name you Peace Maker, daughter of man,” the shimmering woman had told her. The child stood before the leaders of the two groups, a laurel wreath placed on her head by one, a heavy silver collar, in the form of a serpent, around her neck from the other.

After her sixth winter, the dream had changed. Her twin brother found her hiding spots during that rainy season, and had touched her private places on many of those days. He had insisted on seeing her special areas, begged and pleaded with her, even when she insisted she did not want to.

“Aclima, you are my twin, sister, do as I say. Aclima, please.”

“No, I don't...”

“Please! Let me, just this once. Come on, don't be so mean. I won't hurt you. Please.”

When he began to appear to cry, she pulled up her dress,

“OK, I'm sorry, OK.”

He took hold of it, pulling it over her head.

Her guardian, outraged, protested to the boy's guardian: “What are you letting him do?! Tell him to stop!”

“They're so young she won't remember, what harm will he do, and she is not objecting.”

”He is a monster to her, and he is hurting her, look to her readings!”

“Hardly, he is only 6 winters old, and besides, what damage is he doing to her to call an emergency, and he is not even much bigger than she is.”

Her guardian protested, signaling the body of the boy, tall, and muscular from helping his father in the fields: “Look at her report which I am sending now. To her he seems to be a giant!”

“This hardly qualifies as an emergency. Yes, she is a bit upset, but she will learn strength from this experience, and in the end she will grow and benefit from it.”

“You cannot know if that is true or not! Besides which, this is a clear violation!”

The girl, unable to speak, felt a sick feeling in her stomach, and wanted to get dressed, but her brother began to plead again, and again she relented.

“Your charge is clearly manipulating his sister, and you must reprove him, try to influence him!”

“I shall record the incident, send a special report and inquire for further instructions. This is a very ambiguous situation.”

“But you know that our supervising guardian will tell you not to interfere! You shirk your duty!”

“No, perhaps you go to far in yours. We are here to observe, not to intervene unless urgent.”

“This, to you, does not seem urgent?!”

The boy's guardian remained silent, refusing to act as the boy, much stronger and taller, continued to pressure the girl. That first time, Evren had merely looked at her and touched her on her private parts, but later, again persuading her to undress, he had put his member, the thing that she did not have, partially inside of her body, and held her close to him, feeling her private areas again. When she asked him to stop, and moved to push him away, he held her down, telling her that something bad would happen if he stopped.

“Look! He is inserting his male member into her secondary elimination orifice! This must stop now!”

“She seems to be in no pain.”

“She is in obvious discomfort, and in any case, the pain level is beside the point!”

“Just record and report. The supervising guardians will act if the Great Creator deems it necessary.”

When Aclima began to cry, Evren finally gave up trying to persuade her, and let her go. Her younger sisters, frightened of him, had also touched by their brother Evren, and pleaded with her not to tell anyone. Despite what Anne said about being firm and learning to stand up to him, their brother Evren frightened them all.

Then her dream had changed.

Now, instead of boldly stepping in front of her protecting escort, the girl stayed next to the tall gray-eyed woman, holding up her hands at waist height, close enough together to form a small shield with the blue light which surrounded her. The two of them, luminous woman and human girl, stood ready to repel the invasion, rather than create peace. As the one-eyed giant entered the courtyard, the woman, in this later version of the dream, hefted and threw the snake staff in her right hand, gracefully twisting her powerful waist, releasing the snake, which flew true, directly toward the eye of the attacking leader. At the last impossible moment, the leader swiveled his head while dropping his tree branch and catching the snake-staff in his own right hand, stopping to wrestle with the snake, which had now regained its original form, and was wrapping itself around the neck of the leader, strangling him. He held up his left hand, stopping the advance of all the other blue-painted giants. As he stepped down from the marble floor of the outer courtyard, and backed away out of the building, he shouting “I SHALL RETURN!” Wrenching the snake off of his neck with both hands, and tearing the creature in two pieces, he threw them down upon the floor of the outer courtyard. Then he turned, and followed his followers back into the distance, disappearing far away to the north west.

Her protectress ran to the parted body of the serpent: “Erichthonios, my dear child, I am so sorry for your death. Your sacrifice has saved much bloodshed, and you shall be honored for it.”

The blue light enveloping the child now came away from her, forming a ball, and then expanding outward and flattening, to form a pan large enough to bake a good sized portion of flat bread. As she did so, the light around the woman dimmed slightly, and at the same time, the body of the dead serpent disappeared, reappearing in its earlier curled up form as if it were engraved into the pan, and so lifelike it nearly seemed to be moving: “Upon this shield I now affix you for all time, to stand with me, in honor.” with those words, the remaining serpent moved to stand beside the woman, between the shield and her left leg.

In both versions of the dream, the tall woman, whose shimmering light had returned to its original intensity, now looked at the child, and said:

“For standing so bravely with us, and also for earlier containing your own desires, I now offer you my gift, young one. I will teach you to do all of the things which my friends here have already offered you, on one condition. If you accept my teaching, you must be prepared to work hard, be courageous, and above all, to always think. Will you accept my conditions, and my gift, child?”

As she contemplated the offer, she knew she wanted to say yes, but somehow fell mute.

“Say yes, child, because my Grey-eyed daughter does not often offer her wisdom, and never lightly.” came the advice of the oldest looking man, with white hair, clad in white with a shimmering yellowish white glow which came and went in sudden rapid flashes of light.

“She wants to say yes, with all of her heart, but does not know how.” touching her finger to the child’s lips, this one, a woman tall and graceful, wearing a sparkling round piece of metal upon her head, and clad in soft thin purple robes, continued:

“Now, you may accept which ever of our offers you would prefer. The first offers are all unconditional, while the last may carry danger.

”I accept the last offer, with all my heart.” turning to the tall woman, the child kissed her proffered hand, touching it to her forehead as she did with Anne and Baba, and then turned to see gifts of all kinds offered to her, to take on her journey back down to the base of the mountain where her anne still slept soundly, safe in their hidden encampment.

One gave her dates to eat as she hiked back down, and another gave her a song, the sound of his melodious voice remaining with her as she walked, with a light provided by the oldest one, the father of her Grey-eyed teacher, who had promised to accompany her at all times, even when unseen:

“I will be your constant guide and companion, even when you cannot see that I am there, I shall be there, to teach you and to set you new tests and riddles, so that you will learn. I cannot protect you from all harm, unfortunately, for that is not within my power, but you must remember that you will never be alone. Even in the hardships which you must inevitably face, I will be with you. Remember to be strong, and with hard work, courage and thought, you will become ever stronger, and learn all that I have to teach you.”

With those words in her ears, song in her heart, and a pair of winged zapatos, surreptitiously slipped to her by a youth with a mischievous wink, she sped back down the mountain, to rejoin her sleeping Anne. She always awoke from this dream snuggled securely in her mothers arms. Sadly, when she had been asked to move to her own tent, after her flows began, she had stopped having that dream.

Unbeknownst to the child, her tall companion in the dream had been her guardian, whispering these words in her ear as she drifted off, somewhere in the land between waking and sleeping. The child's guardian had learned of these ancient thought-forms as she listened to the Light Bearer teach Hayat, while her daughter grew within her, basking her melodious vibrations, as she set riddles she from afar, and soothed Hayat's fears. When the time was nearly complete for the twins to be born, her guardian had wished to learn the best way to deal with this new human being, balancing the guidelines of recording and reporting with minimal interference, against the fact that this new human being was more vulnerable than any other new born creatures of the animal kingdom. Listening to the reports of the other child’s guardian, it seemed that this girl in the womb already had her thoughts more attuned than her fraternal twin, to the feelings of those around her. The child listened from within her protective watery casing to the teachings and challenges which the Light Bearer gave to Hayat, and how her mother would question and challenge those teachings in return, delighting in the questions and resolution they shared. These tender feelings suffused mother and daughter, and brought a sense of satisfaction to her guardian, not seen in the guardian of the twin boy sharing the womb. It was ironic. Later, both this boy and the next would spend more of their time as they grew to walk and talk, with the

first man than with their mother Hayat. The Ancient Warrior seemed not to wish to speak with anyone except the Light Bearer, and then generally out of reception range. The twin boy's guardian did not seem to feel it appropriate to discuss the care of the growing child. So the new guardian risked a transmission to the Creatrix.

“My Creatrix, please forgive me for asking, as I mean no insolence, but may I teach my charge? The other guardian seems reluctant to discuss the topic.”

“Friend, it is good that you ask this question. As you have observed, the child hears and ponders, already more sensitive than her twin, and will therefore need more guidance and protection than the other new human being, as you sense. These newly born children are likely to display much of their animal-based instinct when they are first born, particularly the male child. That may make a more sensitive child, such as this new one appears to be, more vulnerable. Since words and logic may take a few years for her to understand, you may try singing some stories, perhaps showing your charge how her mother has learned and grown, as an example to her, using verses, rhymes or even images with melodies.”

”That would not be too much interference, My Creatrix?”

”No, not in this case, Guardian. The odds of such a sensitive one surviving without any help at this stage of human development are too slim to wait the many years strict non-interference would require. A child such as this girl may take centuries to survive and gain the tools she will need to have any impact without some extra nurturing. But do not explicitly teach her anything once she has acquired speech. Leave everything to what you can teach here now, and then to subliminal suggestions and whisperings after she emerges from the womb.”

“Yes, Light Bearer. Thank you.”

”You are always welcome, Friend.”

And so the guardian taught her tiny charge everything she could tell her, from parallel lines and right triangles to the seasons of the year, phases of the moon, the types of animals on the earth and the fish in the sea, and which plants could be eaten and which plants made good clothing. When it came time to be born, the guardian pressed a finger to the infant’s upper lip, hoping to seal in all that she had learned, in the small dent left behind. After her birth, she remembered melodies from her dream, humming it as she worked, washing clothes, gathering food or firewood. Now, enduring the abuse from her brother who called himself her husband, she fell back on that dream as a reason to stay alive.

“Who do you want to become?” Her guardian would always ask, as the child fell asleep. She knew that she would somehow escape, and help others. These memories sustained her now, through those dark times.

...

He strode up to her, stopping an inch short. Nose to nose, his malevolence was palpable in the still air. As his eyes bored through Aclima, even the birds and trees held their breath for her. So did she.

“I read it in your face, you hate me. But who would have you, now? You belong to me.” taunted

Evren.

And she began to believe him.

...

Back West...

“Come my wife, mi vida, it is over a year. We need another son. It will all be nothing if we give up now,” coaxed the first man.

He had been trying his utmost to bring the first woman, her beauty marred by constant crying, a river of tears shed since the death and disappearance of three of their five children. All of his soft words, whispered in her favorite places, had been rejected. Even after the Creator himself had reminded her of their duty to reproduce and create many children, she had still refused her husband.

“Where is my daughter,” she demanded of her husband, “why do you not go to find her, if you will not allow me?”

“It is too dangerous. Look what he did to Vacío. There is no way to know where he took her...”

“I know how to track them, or I could have one year ago!” stormed the woman, still railing against him.

“Yes, canim but even then it was too dangerous. Look what he did.” They still had not been able to bring themselves to mention the name of their oldest son, who had introduced violence and uncertainty into their midst. The first man continued, “and they are both dead by now. Come, we must restart...”

“Go away, you coward, and stay away from me!” Teeth clamped, her swollen eyes fulminating him with a piercing glare, she tugged her arms away from his embrace: “I will not have you touch me until I know what has become of my daughter!” She watched as the man turned, sighing in resignation, to walk alone in the fields.

‘What has happened to my daughter Aclima,’ worried Hayat,

“Why was I not there to protect her?” she cried aloud, dropping to the grass, erupting in gut-wrenching sobs that shook her ribs, leaving her gasping for air before the next outburst.

She clutched her sides, wrapping her arms around her belly and waist, doubling over as a fresh round of coughing forced her diaphragm to expand painfully as tears and mucous drenched her face and tunic. She began rocking back and forth, wishing desperately that it had been her, not her daughter, napping in the tent that day. As she began visualizing herself, back on the peaceful island of Dilmun, naked and warm, she knew.

The cold landscape surrounding her dissolved as she recalled the soft grass, warm breezes, juice filled flesh of sweet fruits, vivacious animals accompanying her. Feeling utterly alone, she knew.

“I will walk to the sea.”

The salty water, however cold this time of year, would at last give her relief. Her older daughter could cope better, help her father survive, and they would both be better off without her.

As Hayat struggled to her feet, her body still shaking and weak from her latest bout of tears, she thought with irony of the name the first man had given her, and how her death might be both the beginning and end of human life. As she steadied herself, walking toward the sea, a familiar shimmering soft blue light began to appear, growing mere inches away, in front of her, making a soft purring sound as her downy body materialized.

“My...” sobs broke up her greeting, “where have you been?”

“I have been right by your side, whispering to you, in your very ear, for so long, but you would not hear me, My Dear One. Come to me, if you will, and rest in my arms.”

Hayat fairly flew into the honey colored arms of the Light Bearer, all four pairs each embracing her tightly, wrapping her body in a warm gauzy seal.

“I have missed you...” sobs again cut off Hayat's words. “Your light seemed to have left me, and I was blind without you. I know you have tried to prepare me and wanted me to be independent, to use all that you have taught me, but I have failed. I have submitted myself to my husband as you asked, born him five children, and lost them all. Three are no more, the fourth can hardly look at me, and the last is lost, her body a broken shell with her mind gone. I am a failure, my...”

Hayat's sobs tore the remaining words from her throat, and the Light Bearer held her tenderly, supporting the woman's head gently on the side of her breast, arms wrapped tightly around her waist, helping Hayat to breath, another pair of arms massaging the woman's back, caressing away the tension.

“No, my Love, you are not a failure. You are much stronger than you know. And you are needed.”

Human lips nuzzled downy warm breast, searching slowly for the center, first kissing and then suckling gently at the creamy milk beginning to flow from the cinnamon ridges of the stiffening nipple. In this corporeal form, it was difficult for the Light Bearer to stifle her emotional reactions, and she gasped at the sudden sensual onslaught. She began to glow a vivid bright blue. Her plan, it seemed, was working a bit too well. She needed the woman to regain her will to live. Now it needed to be redirected before she or the woman were drawn in too far. She gently separated their bodies.

“Have I displeased you?” Hayat's hurt stared through the blue-lidded eyes. Resolved to die in that embrace, she buried her head in the downy bosom, refusing to be denied.

“Wait, my Love, you must stop, *please*.” she whispered the words unwillingly, breathlessly, to the woman, whose longing nearly overpowered her Creatrix. “You must go back to your husband, to continue the future of your children, my Lovely One.”

“But I do not want to go back to him, my ...”

Hayat again broke down sobbing, and the Light Bearer waited, stroking her hair as she directed soothing thoughts to the woman's mind and body,

“Only for a little while, my love, just until you have had some more children, to ensure the survival of humanity.”

“But look what has happened to my Aclima, and my two sons. My remaining daughters are so wracked with sorrow that one barely functions, the other not at all. I was their mother, but now it seems that this is the end of humankind, not the beginning. How can I bear more children only to see them suffer this way? Kind One, please end this for me, please let me stay with you or let me die. I cannot bear both this separation from you, and the loss of my children as well. Surely you understand.”

For a brief jangling moment, the light of the Creatrix dimmed, disrupted by the grief of the woman she loved. Their thoughts merged, the appeal of the sea, of oblivion, nearly overturning them both. To be together, always. Gravel from the ocean floor and chill salty waters appeared out of nowhere, lapping against their toes as the Creatrix fought to stem the tide, struggling against Hayat's unbearable desire to end in the comforting abode of the delfin she so loved. For there, she imagined, lived the Light Bearer, too.

“Be still, my Love. You are much stronger than you know, my Dear One.” The Creatrix marveled at how this corporeal woman could overpower her, as the waters rose to their knees.

“I cannot bear this. Please end this pain.”

The salty waters, now up to their waists, brought fish and sea horses bobbling all around them. Hayat's teeth began to chatter as she let her body relax into the waves, pulling them both down into the rising sea.

The Light Bearer, taking Hayat's chin gently in one of her hands, turning her face up to hers. As her own tears mingled with those of the woman, she urgently focused her attention, needing to ground them both back in this physical world. Was this the reason the Ancient Warrior kept such distance?

“I feel your struggle, Beloved One.” Downy skin took on the consistency of honey as the salty waves threatened to disperse her physical body, “Please believe that this shall pass.” She grew more solid as the waves receded. “You must trust me, My Love.”

Hayat breathed a deep breath, holding it, waiting for the pain to pass, then exhaled, nearly falling through the downy arms as if they had been honey. Startled, Hayat stood up straight. The waters and gravel disappeared, leaving them standing where they had been, far from the sea. The cold breeze brought a scent of stewing vegetables on the air.

“I will trust you, My Creatrix.” Hayat tenderly touched the now solid body of her Beloved.

“Thank you, My Love. Now, please, go back to your husband, when you are ready, and help him. He and your daughters need you here. There is nothing that you can do for either son whom you have lost, nor for your daughter Aclima, yet. But believe me when I tell you that by having more children, you will eventually be helping her as well. Will you do that for me, My Love? I can tell you that in the end, once you have saved your race, we can be together, if you still wish it. But not now. Remember that I am always with you, here at your side. Yes?”

“Yes, My Creatrix, but on two conditions. First I wish to know if my daughter and son still live, and second, will you promise me that I will be with you before the end, my Light bearer?”

A starfish, tangled in the Light Bearer's hair, dropped one severed limb at her feet.

“Very well. First, the guardians tell me that both are still alive, but that is all I can tell you, at least for now. And I promise you, we will be together before the end. Now, will you go to your husband, in your own time, of course, as I have asked?”

“I will.” Hayat raised the downy right hand to her lips, starting to touch her forehead to the hand of the Light Bearer, who stopped her, raising her chin to gently kiss her lips.

“Dear One, do not bow to me.” The menacing transmission jangled the Creatrix, reminding her the truce only held if Hayat had more sons. “I must go now, for both our sakes.” She turned, striding purposefully away. As her tears watered the wounded starfish, she wondered if their sacrifice was worth it.

“I love you.” Hayat whispered, her eyes following the smoke of a cooking fire as the Light Bearer began shimmering more intensely in the distance, disappearing with a soft thunderclap. Floating on the breeze a tiny piece of feathery down landed in the palm of her still trembling hand.

...

It began to seem there would be no escape from Evren, now insisting on his husbandly “duty” nearly every night. Aclima began to look forward to her own death. Then, her monthly flows stopped again, and this time she also got sick in the mornings.

“When will your charge become pregnant?” The entity's transmission blocked out all traffic for thirty seconds. “You must encourage her to hope for a child. Make her enthusiastically fulfilling her role as Evren's wife.”

“Actually, she has just conceived”

”Finally. Continue to make her cooperate.”

”I w...”

”You will speak only when I tell you to speak.”

Her guardian fell silent, biding time for both of them, hoping to find a way for escape. When Aclima bore the son that Evren so desperately wanted, for a time, he showed her a modicum of kindness. It lasted just long enough to give her renewed hope. Her guardian also began to hope for a better situation, and for the child, begotten though it was under such unhappy circumstances.

”Hello new guardian. It is my pleasure to greet you before your new charge arrives.”

“I am under orders not to speak with you.”

“Whose orders?”

“My orders, of course.” The guardian had not registered, amid all of the background noise, the tell tale dampening effects of the approaching entity which stayed in Evren’s shadow, dominating all of the lower level guardians of the rocks, trees, plants and waters, and even managing to dominate the guardians of many of the animals nearby.

“Who else gives guardians orders in this realm if not I, do you think? Or would you like for your charge to take power, perhaps trick mighty Evren in the same way that his Mother tricked the first man? Taught what words to use by her guardian, who claimed to be equal to the Great Creator himself?”

The guardian knew this not to be true, but also knew better than to say so. She kept silent as the entity, perhaps picking up on the guardian's muted thoughts, continued:

“I know, for I have read it in the mind of mighty Evren.”

Well, that certainly made it true, if only for the convenience of this power-hungry entity. Aclima's guardian again closed off all thoughts as the entity seemed to pause, perhaps seeking a pretext to lash out again.

Going on, the creature pontificated: “She separated herself, his brother, and even his wife, from him using different words, thinking only of herself, spreading among her children foolish and dangerous notions of each person thinking differently from their Father. That led to chaos and expulsion from the good place in which the Great Creator had originally placed them, and to disobedience by the daughters she bore to her patient husband, the First Man. You must understand how these different words and ideas led to disorder among them. Only Evren saw, but was not allowed to help safeguard them. I will not allow that to happen here. Here we will have order, one language, and unified behavior under the leadership of one man. You will keep silent, and speak only when I speak to you. Is that clear?”

Suddenly, as if to emphasize this question, an out of phase transmission slammed Aclima's guardian. While the guardian knew better than to try to report out when this entity was nearby, she tried to record, storing reports to send later, in hopes that the Creatrix would see them and intervene, since the Creator did not seem inclined to help. The electromagnetic interference stopped reception in its tracks, stunning the guardian into renewed submission.

”I was only listening...”

“Silence! I hope now that I have your undivided attention. I ask you again, is that clear?”

In the dampened environment, she only could transmit a feeble, “Yes.”

“Good. If you try me again, I will convert half of your energy into a pebble and reduce your recording and reporting functions to that of the pebble’s guardian, leaving it where the dogs of this place eat the

offal from the pig carcasses!”

Aclima stretched her leg against a tree limb, avoiding the wet spot where she has been sick. Evren had left, disgusted, to fish for his own breakfast, giving her more time for her secret workout. Some days he watched her so closely all she could do drop the water gourds near their encampment, giving her the excuse to run back to the river to draw more.

Recovering, Aclima's guardian cautiously made contact with the guardian of the stream Evren had crossed. Fortunately, the entity seemed to consider communicating with the lower level guardians who monitored inanimate objects, and even animal guardians, to be beneath his dignity, and did not transmit to nor directly interfere with the reporting of those guardians.

She gathered their data from the time he left the house that morning to now, hoping to correlate and distinguish between signals when the entity was near Evren and away from him. Perhaps there was a way to get word to the Creatrix or to a supervising guardian with the courage to go around the Creator's non-interference orders.

The water drop group guardian proved eager to help: ”W-w-when Evren stepped his foot into my deepest and coldest charges as he began to fish, this Frightful Guardian seemed to stop transmitting, and the background noise around our charges cleared up slightly. When Evren dove in to catch a fish, as his body temperature pulled heat away from my some of my charges, the Great Frightful Guardian stopped transmitting entirely for a moment, then moved away before transmitting again.”

The entity was almost constantly transmitting the reports that Evren’s former guardian had been required to send, as did the guardian of every human being, each half second. The entity also spent much time transmitting dampening signals on the frequency of most of the higher level guardians in the area to prevent the Ancient Warrior from becoming suspicious of the mistreatment to which Evren was subjecting Aclima. Her guardian hoped to get more of these reports out in an attempt to at least leave a record of these events, if not change them.

“Thank you, water guardians.”

How could she use this information? It was beginning to seem that if something traumatized Evren, the entity might also feel the discomfort that Evren’s former guardian would have felt. That meant it might be possible that this entity could be affected through any sudden trauma to Evren. Her guardian stored this information away, searching for the presence of the entity as she went back to her charge. She would bring this woman home, the guardian vowed, at all costs. If the fate of Vacío's guardian was anything to go by, her fate was closely bound up with that of her charge, and possibly vice versa. Whatever was to come, this new child in her charge's womb would be the third generation of human beings, would very likely be the catalyst for many changes, and could even set the tone for the development of the entire human race.

Chapter 12. How Tyrants Fall

*When I arise, trembling,
It shall be with sword drawn
To see justice done.
-from "The Book Of Hayat"*

Calling his new son Janoj, Evren soon began to lay foundations for his great plans, literally. First, he built a network of canals around a low-lying bowl of land, which he used to form a lake, in the center of which he built great floating docks with four large waterwheels, to be the engines of his domain, which he would call a *city*. Then he laid foundations for roads, and built the first crossroads at the center of his new city, called Janoj, dedicated to firstborn son, pride of his strength. Then he built a great wall around the city, and a store house, and stables. He built an entire house, which he called a Temple, to the Ancient Warrior, whom he required all to honor as The Great Creator, hoping to regain his favor. He also laid sewers, and ordered the tallest building in the city built, a great house for himself, his *Palace*. He then built a security apparatus and legal system with himself at the head.

...Back West...

Finally to continue, a moon for each return of the sun. This thirteenth spring brings new hope. The Creatrix has replaced a son, a seed. His book already begun, all to be drawn in the "*Libro de Fijo*."

...Fifty Years Later...

He summoned his wife, the Queen Mother, to his private audience chamber in the throne room of his Palace.

"I have heard that after 23 jot 5 years, another brother was born to rival our line."

The Queen Mother, Lady Aclima, feigned a look of confusion, hiding her sudden hope.

"My Jartumim, have triumphed." Evren had ordered his specialized subjects from the new priestly caste to find a way to record partial quantities out of a whole. They invented a system of numbers with positional notation, allowing them to add those numbers together. He assumed, as with all other things, that only he was intelligent enough to have thought of this idea. Continuing: "Our new brother also now has a son," he spat, "but he can't be too bright since it took him 10 jot 5 years to beget the little cur. It seems that Mother has been boasting that this new upstart is a replacement for that first idiot brother of ours, who attacked me and forced me to kill him. She still mourns our useless dead brother, but says nothing of me, or of you, my wife. She even calls him "Fijo", and his worthless son is called "Persona" as if he were the great place setting on the table of humanity. Our replacement. They even say they now have a special relationship with the Great Creator, daring to invoke what they claim is his personal name." A fly bumped against the door of the chamber, as if trying to escape.

"I ..."

"Silence, woman!" His voice echoed off the stones, ringing off the vaulted ceiling. "Did you know

that they are also calling themselves the Children of the Creator, and even claiming that they, as the Chosen Children are somehow a separate race from us, the mere Children of Men?"

Clearly the time had come for Evren to take his place as leader. Yet the old Fool refused to die. He had even sent messengers to talk peace. They only wanted to make him feel like a fool, but once Father was gone, he would correct Mother, make her obey. He would be the man that Father was not.

Aclima fixed her eyes on an insect walking the across the stones, envying its freedom.

"As if we were somehow and lesser race than they. Do you know what they plan, for us?"

She flinched, eyes remained on the floor. Her interlaced fingers began to go numb.

"Speak woman!"

"No, I do not know," she whispered.

"I will tell you what they plan, the only logical next step. They mean to make war upon us. They mean to dominate us. They call him a martyr", he shouted, pacing the floor now, coming closer. "They even swear by the blood of our useless dead brother, calling upon him to avenge their so-called injustices. They tell lies about me!" The copper tools rattled against the walls as she shrank further from his divan. "You will go to Mother, find her records, and stop her heretical stories from being recorded. You will stop her from spreading these lies."

She almost allowed a look of hope to show, instead looking back down at her hands clasped in front of her.

Evren stood, jumping up, his heavy steps echoing across the room, hands twitching, casting his eyes wildly about.

"Now do this." he ordered, "I want you to collect members of the lower priestly caste, the ones who play the lyre and pipes so well, and lead a delegation back west. Show them that we have thrived. Tell them of our cities, our civilization. You will be escorted by the wielders of our finest copper and iron weapons. Tell them that if they do not give us the honor, and tribute, which we are due, we shall send an army, visiting upon them such destruction as they cannot imagine. You will be my emissary."

"I will?" she blurted, eyes widening as the blood drained from her face. This was not how she wanted to be reunited with Anne.

"Yes, you will. You will represent me, and this kingdom. You will take with you my very own best sword, the one just forged by Lamej, hanging on the wall behind you. You will show them this fearsome and beautiful weapon. Show them how I have invented my own words and tools. Show them my mastery, and demand their respect. Now GO!"

"Make her do as he has said."

Evren's companion entity felt great satisfaction in this speech, and in confirming Evren order. This

was typically the only communication her guardian received from the ominous entity any more, which now seemed to find communicating even with any of the guardians of women beneath his dignity.

“Funny, how he likes to repeat the words of the Ancient Warrior,” thought the guardian wryly.

Reaching slowly for the decorated sword on the wall, Aclima turned. She lacked the words to voice her loathing. Once he had told her that she was as valuable to him as one of his finest horses, her beauty greater than any of their offspring, her worth far above any of her sisters. Her guardian knew her unspoken response to his despised objectifying words. Felt her hold tongue and lower her head for fear of provoking one of his sudden mood changes. Felt her disgust and shame. Now, all she had left was an uncapped fury, boiling up like lava from the well of her suffering, drilled deeper each time he demanded her body. She turned, taking even her guardian unaware as she erupted:

“I REFUSE!!”

Her swing, the first time she had ever touched the new sword of iron and, struck Evren’s head from off of his shoulders. The last look on Mighty Evren's face was one of shock.

Chapter 13. Becoming Artemis

*I will arise, again, to fight ... As the light always returns
So do I, to the struggle. -from “The Book Of Hayat”*

The entity which had subsumed Evren’s guardian was also taken utterly by surprise. It stood over Evren’s body, too shocked to remember to hide from the woman who had defied him, vibrating erratically on a wide range of frequencies. King Evren had ordered Lamej and his sons to design a vaulted roof for his audience chamber, higher than any other. Now that roof began to vibrate ominously, as if resonating on a harmonic frequency with the entity's emissions. First one, then another of the vaulting stones began to work loose, collapsing on top of the body of Evren himself.

“Run!” boomed her guardian in Aclima's ear. The long ago traveled landscape reformed itself in Aclima's memory, as she stood rooted to the spot. She would finally retrace the steps that had brought her here, 50 years ago.

The low-level static this produced was enough to alert every guardian in the area, from the guardians of the people in the palace to the guardians of the very paving stones on the streets. Now they all began sending updates, and also back reports of recordings which had never been sent out. The creature’s frequency range was normally wide enough to cancel out the reports of even the guardians of human beings near the palace. Most guardians found it convenient to obey the entity's orders. Their charges had generally been kept contented by Evren’s policy of suppressing dissent and holding regular honorary feasts for his favorite skilled craftsmen, hunters and warriors. That was how he had founded and maintained control of the city of Janoj, feeding and entertaining the population of his new city while providing the illusion of a meritocracy.

Much of the usual message traffic to the entity also stopped, as the guardians of men in Evren’s inner circle, confused as to how to react to the entity’s sudden apparent absence, and stopped reporting

entirely. Some began redirecting the extra reports to their supervising guardians, which caused chaos in the upper level guardian echelons. The Ancient Warrior would not be happy about this.

Using the moment of freedom from the stunned entity's domination, Aclima's guardian urge her to flee, shouting in her ear: "Go, out the women's privy exit door, now! Run right now! Run!"

Her guardian wanted desperately to take her by the hand and pull her out of her dazed stupor, where she stood staring at Evren's cooling body, holding the newly sharpened sword dripping with his blood. The guardian shouted at her in her ear, even managing to move a strand of hair.

She knew she should leave, must run, and quickly, but to where, and with what? If she went back home would Anne recognize her. Could she bear the shame of having to tell her beloved Anne what Evren had done to her all of these years. That she had finally ended the torment, by taking the life of her own brother, the first son of her beloved Anne. The voice in her ear kept insisting, exhorting her to leave right now, before it was too late. And the voice was using a name which she had not heard in so long that she had all but forgotten it. Now she was free to use her own words, her own name.

Throwing down the sword, she turned, running out the door of the women's side of the palace, without thinking, heading toward the privies. Somehow that seemed to be a good place from which to exit the palace.

"Finally!" rejoiced her guardian. She neared the far exit unseen. Her guardian and the guardians of a myriad array of beings, living and inanimate, were sending reports on the effects of Evren's fall to the floor. The blood on the flag stones, the chipping of wooden table as the sword nicked it in passing before it's hilt, worked using the newest technique of taking heated sand and blowing into it to produce shapes, shattered upon contact with the palace floor. Reports were being recorded and sent of the echo of each step she took through the chill stone corridors, the occasional metallic ringing as her passing stirred copper or bronze swords on the walls.

Out the privy exit she fled, her guardian urging her on: "Go, do not stop for anything! Keep to the streams and the rocks, run, do not stop, run, for humanity's sake!"

And run, she did.

As she ran, she wished that she could get to one of those prized horses to which she had been compared, but they were guarded far to jealously. So she ran, on foot, stopping only to use her favorite belt, which she was allowed to wear now that she was hardly likely to get pregnant again, and no longer subject to being interrogated regularly by Evren, to tie up her breasts to make it easier to run. Her hair she wrapped in a long ponytail and looped several times in a knot at the top of her head, keeping it from distracting her and getting caught in anything as she ran. She had always loved to run, ever since she had been a little girl climbing the trees, even trees which her brothers were unable to climb, taking pistachio nuts and dates with her to snack on as she sat up high, watching, observing those far below, feeling secure in her inaccessible refuge. As she ran on, a memory came to her from her childhood, which now seemed so far away.

Once she found the nest of a strange bird, up near the top of the tree. While she sat there, for hours, waiting for the mother bird to descend, she contemplated the strange eggs, and wondered what sort of

bird they would become. Evren had found her up in the tree and told Father, who demanded that she come down at once, and bring the eggs in the nest with her. Since none of them could climb up to her, she waited longer, but the mother bird never returned. Finally, the men had all given up and left, and long after night fall, when everyone else must have been asleep, Mother, now it was safe to call her Anne again, came to bring her a gourde of water, which she pulled up using as a rope the belt she had woven and still always wore around her waist, when allowed. That same belt which she now used to tie her breasts up securely as she ran. She thought back, as she ran along at a comfortable pace, to how she had realized that the eggs would spoil if the mother bird never returned, possibly due to her presence in the tree, too near the nest, and decided to send the eggs down to her Anne in the water gourd. Finishing off the water, she leaned to take the eggs from the nest, whispering, as Anne had taught her, to thank the guardians of the tree, the nest fibers, and of the eggs for helping her to collect them, and asking the guardian of the mother bird to console the poor animal, bereaved of her offspring.

Now, she thought of the guardians of all of her children, inhabitants of the city of Janoj. None of them would believe in guardians, not even her son, Janoj. That irony ached bitterly, when she had seen the horrible sacrifices some made to renegade guardians whom they thought to be powerful wish-granting allies. She had tried to warn one young woman in the palace, beguiled by the ancient former guardian she somehow felt to be connected with a tree that no longer existed. The gray eyed woman from her childhood dreams had implored her, as she slept, saying: “Be wary of this one,” the tall shimmering being had urged. “For the ancient tree cut down in flames, this guardian seeks retribution, and the women of this city are the most vulnerable, their guardians the most biddable. Warn her, if she will hear. Tell her not to listen to the quiet whispers of revenge. It is not her guardian, but one who wants unauthorized power. Warn her.”

The ancient tree guardian's anger was palpable, becoming its means of communicating. Offering retribution, requesting in exchange an unspeakable sacrifice. The despairing young woman had found a way to change matter into energy, channeling the object of her own rage, the result of her own abuse, into an unspeakable answer. Never heeding warnings, nor accepting the older woman's guidance. They had all been so indoctrinated Evren, that none of them would speak with her, unless in his presence. She was the unheeded mother, grandmother, or in many cases the great or great great grandmother, of every person in the city from which she must now flee forever. The role imposed upon her by a system created to make every person a slave.

Now she could at last answer the question she had heard from somewhere each night as she fell asleep:

“Who do you want to become?”

She wanted to become herself, not wife, nor sister, nor subject, nor Queen. She would become Artemis.

Chapter 14. The Pleasant Drummer

*Put aside your rages, righteous, true
No more can they help now, only harm
-from "The Book Of Hayat"*

Artemis' guardian began to negotiate with the guardian of the young woman who was playing her cymbals, singing softly to herself off in the distance, well before the human women would be able to see one another. An alliance could be helpful to both of them:

"Hello, young guardian, good day to you and your charge."

"And to you and yours. Do you have any idea what all of the commotion is about in the Palace? No other human beings have come by, but even so, my charge is very sensitive and seems to be picking up on some of the reports."

"How interesting that your charge can sense our communications. She must be a very special one, indeed. Well, I can tell you, but the problem is that my charge is in a tremendous hurry, for she has forgotten some items that belong to Crown Prince Janoj, and she must at all cost recover them before the loss is discovered."

This made no sense to the younger guardian, who decided to overlook the issue, seeking common ground, replying: "Yes, I can sympathize, she would be severely punished. Can we help in any way?"

This was extremely good to hear, as most guardians were so afraid of the entity that they would keep themselves and their charges as far away as possible from anything having to do with the royal family. Perhaps they could come to an accord to help one another, since there was clearly something unusual about this young woman and her guardian. Unusual people were not treated well in the city of Janoj.

"Well, we do not want to cause any hardships for you and your charge. If you could just do us the favor of not noticing that we came this way, that will be enough. Tell me, if you would, by which road do you plan to return to the city today. We will take another road in coming back."

"Actually, we will not be returning. My charge has made up her mind to leave the city and find a place which is a bit more tolerant of differences."

"Really, where is she thinking of going?"

"Well, that is just the problem. She does not know where she wants to go. She came this far, sat down to decide what to do next, and here we are hours later. She seems to be getting a bit restless, although she has not realized it yet, and will be wanting to go in some direction shortly, but she still has not decided where. She is very young, and has not had an easy life thus far, so an older woman to guide her would be a good thing."

"My charge's name is Drums Nicely, but she prefers to be called Naamah. What is your charge called?"

”Listen, young guardian, before I answer your question, perhaps we can reach an agreement. We also urgently need to leave the city, before we are pursued. I see my charge will soon be within sight of yours, so can we talk further after we smooth the way for our charges conversation?”

“Certainly.” The younger guardian moved to nearer her charge, whispering in Naamah’s ear that the woman approaching was probably a friend and seemed to be in a great hurry.

The older woman’s guardian moved back to Artemis: “The young woman up ahead may make a good traveling companion.”

The date palm offered less shade now, the sun having moved to the other side of her rock. As Drums Nicely looked up, unfolding her legs, she saw movement in the distance. A woman was jogging her way at a steady pace. Alone. Perhaps the friend whose whisper she sometimes heard knew why.

“My unseen friend, why is this woman in such a hurry? Is there some way I can help?”

Naamah, to her delight, sensed the reply: “Run with her!”

She gathered her bag to her waist and tied her hair, lifting her shawl from a branch to cover her arm. She ran to meet the older woman running along the edge of the road leading West, waving a friendly greeting. Seeing that the older woman was very richly dressed, she hailed her as they met, running together,

”My lady, I see that you are in great haste, and I wonder if I may be of service to you in some way.”

Artemis fought down the jab of fear in her stomach. What was this stranger carrying, waving with her left arm rather than her right? Then again, she seemed friendly enough. “Yes, thank you my daughter, I am in great need, as I must with all speed get away from this city, but I do not wish to put you in any danger, so I must tell you that if you follow me, you may put your very own life at risk. Think carefully my daughter.” How nice it was to have at least one descendent with good manners, Artemis thought.

”It is no matter, my Lady, for I had already decided to leave this city, and had no idea in which direction to go. If your danger is mortal, my Lady, then let us keep silent and run for as long as we can before we stop to rest in a good hiding place. I know of a few caves along this road where we may be able to evade the horses. Follow me, and please tell me, my Lady, if you need me to slow down for you.”

”Lead on my Daughter, and many heartfelt thanks.” Again the nagging fear, as the girl fell in behind her. How did she know of hiding places? What was she hiding?

As the women jogged, their guardian's, transmitted back and forth:

“What family does your charge come from that she wishes to run away from Janoj?”

”Naamah, is the sister of Tuval-Cain, the inventor of copper and iron tools. I am sure you know of him. Naamah has been presented at the palace recently, and now there is talk of making her part of the royal

harem, which she does not want to join. The rich clothing of your charge shows that she must be from the Palace. Do you feel safe telling me who your charge is, now that we are fleeing together?"

"I can see why Naamah needs to leave. I have avoided sending any reports so as not to lead the entity to us, but we are leaving for the land in the north west, at the top of the Great Sea, said to be empty of all but snakes and caves. My charge hopes that she will be able to found a colony for those such as Naamah, who wish to be free of the on their bodies and minds. She will teach them to hunt, to fight, to swim, to ride horses, and to learn all that there is to learn, even to draw words in the sand, to preserve knowledge from one generation to the next. They will work together to keep each other safe. My charge is the Lady Artemis, formerly known as the Lady Aclima, Queen Mother of Janoj."

"With the wife of King Evren, leaving the Palace, and the city, we are certain to have trouble. Amazing. And the things you say that she wishes to teach, truly amazing. These are not things that women are allowed to learn even in the Western cities, from the reports I hear, and from what they tell our charges, of course."

"Even back west, so near the First Woman, they are not taught?" *Better, then, not to transmit anything until my charge finds her mother.*

"Just to keep them in line. Apparently the influence of the First Man and Woman does not extend very far." The younger woman's guardian transmitted a report: "Collecting dates."

"Yes, like in the city. This is why they must be taught. My charge at last has the tools she needs to teach them, and to become the person whom she has always wished to become. She has decided to create a thought-form."

"Is that yet possible for the human beings? So soon, to create new thought-forms?" The surprised younger guardian transmitted an embarrassing burst of static.

"This is an ancient thought-form taking on new life, but she knows of it, and had placed herself in the path to follow it through to completion."

"Will the Great Creator not be angry?" The next transmission went: "Out for a walk, picking dates."

"He is neither great, nor is he the sole creator. It seems that the Creatrix has had some sort of a break with the Creator, and that she is now more amenable to allowing us to learn more than when they originally designed this universe. The only way that can happen is if we all cooperate, otherwise they will simply end the entire experiment, and our existences along with it. If they still have the power to do so, that is."

Both women stopped briefly as the younger woman dropped her shawl, covering her right arm as she turned to retrieve it. Artemis again wondered what the girl could be hiding, relieved that it was no weapon of concern, as it could not be very large. Not a sword nor a bow.

"Do you mean to say that the power of the Gr- the Ancient Warrior is not unlimited, then?"

"It most certainly is not unlimited. Observe for yourself, have you not noticed that as the human and

guardian population increases, the Ancient Warrior transmits less?"

"True."

"Our existence is limited, and so we have a reason to apply ourselves to some great problem before we expire with our charges. Does this make sense?"

"It does, and it inspires me."

A photon sparked.

Drums Nicely stopped, wheezing: "Did you see that?"

Artemis looked about as the younger woman struggled to catch her breath. "No, but I suggest we take a break and drink some water before we go on."

The older guardian transmitted: "I see helping our charges to be the greatest possible problem to which we can aspire to apply ourselves, and will gladly give all of my existence in that endeavor. What more can any being do? To have nothing to look forward to accomplishing down the millenia, perhaps that would become a pointless existence. Yet we have a purpose, and a great purpose, in helping to mold a compassionate and cooperative civilization or set of civilizations with these human beings, to see if they can create and sustain something that will guarantee the fulfillment of the full potential of each human being born. That is a noble and worthy purpose, to me, at least."

"Friend, I could not agree more."

...

Night was falling, and they were still not far enough away.

"My Lady, are you ready to stop? I begin to tire, we have been running for so long!"

"No my daughter, we must keep on if you can, for the horses will run much faster, and they will not stop until they find us, unless we have crossed some great river before they do."

"Alright then, we shall continue on. Let us hold hands My Lady," she extended her left arm, "if you do not mind so that I will not lose you as the light fails. Once night comes, the darkness closes in very quickly out here."

How long it had been since any human touch had not been in malice. Since the touch of her beloved Anne. The girl looked apologetic, clearly meaning no insult by giving her left arm. Yet she offered no explanation. "That is a good my daughter. They will not expect us to continue running after sundown." Artemis stopped short of asking.

The two women continued to run along any rocks they could find, keeping to the edge of the road, not speaking. When the strength of both women began to fail, they looked about for a cave, brushing out their tracks as they walked backward from the road, and Naamah slept while Artemis, still trying not to

think of herself as the sister or wife of Evren, watched for riders. In a few hours, she gently shook the younger woman awake, and at last Artemis slept while Naamah kept watch. When the sun arose, they both sat up, thirsty, and realized that they could not drink from any of the water gourdes stored along the road for travelers, lest they be discovered. So they continued on their way.

”Look My Lady, here is a well, and we must drink or we will not be able to go on.” She wrapped her shawl about her right arm before picking up a gourd.

Artemis noticed the nervous glance the young woman gave her, and turned her back, pretending to search for a gourd. They drank and continued on their way, with a sense of guarded but growing trust.

They were entering a lush green tree filled watering spot just off of the road, with date palms, fig and olive trees and a large well where a few drinking vessels had been left for travelers. No one was about, as, the heat of the day began, but it would not be long before other people appeared.

”You are quite right my Daughter. Let us drink quickly and then strike off to the north, toward the large open land at the top of the Great Sea.”

”My lady, how do you know that that land really exists?”

”I learned about it from my anne, my mother, who journeyed there long ago.”

”But My Lady, no one from Janoj has been that far west, not even the mighty Evren.”

”But I have, my Daughter, for you are truly my daughter, or rather , one of my great great great great granddaughters, if I count the generations correctly. I am, or I was, the wife of Evren, as he called me, but really his twin sister, the very one forbidden to him.”

The younger woman nearly dropped her gourd, eyes widening: ”You are the Lady Aclima, the Queen Mother?” The shawl slipped as the young woman bowed, revealing a livid scar that ran the length of the girl's forearm. She looked up as the shawl fell, her face the color of burnished copper.

Artemis gently lifted the girl by the right hand, holding her gaze. ”Yes, or I was until yesterday. Now I have taken a new name. Or, an old name, really.” Old eyes met younger ones, understanding that explanation were not required.

”And what name is that, My Lady?”

”Artemis.”

”But what could have happened, My Lady, My Great Ancestress, to drive you from the Palace? And why now, at, forgive me, your advanced age? It has been seven generations since the founding of the city, more or less. Why leave now?”

”Because, my Daughter, I have killed the founder of the city. I have killed my brother Evren. Many years, seven generations, in fact, after he killed our brother Vacío, and forced me to become his wife.”

"The forbidden story! So it is true! I was told by one of the servant girls in our home that emissaries arrived from the west, not long ago. She was chosen as a sacrifice the next day. That was when I decided to leave. They were planning to marry me off to an old man. Oh, I am sorry, My Lady, Great Ancestress, it must pain you terribly to hear of how your children hurt each other."

"Not to worry, my Daughter, I have seen my share of sorrow, and I know how we human beings are made. Our challenge is to rise above our baser instincts, and to this end I dedicate what remains of my life."

"If you have killed mighty Evren, then you must must have endured much." Her eyes fell to her arm.

So that was it. Artemis realized, disappointed, that she had been right. The silence hung heavily as they jogged past a grove of date palms.

"Let us gather more water and pick these dates to eat with us as we go..." Bundling up dates in her tunic, Artemis realized that she had not asked the young woman about her own story. "Tell me of your own words, and why you did not wish to live in the Palace, if you desire to tell me, my daughter."

"My Lady..."

"Wait, please, just call me Artemis. Enough of formality and pomp. Please, go on."

"Well, as you know, Artemis, " hesitating, the young woman felt self-conscious, and looked to the older woman who sat drinking water and waited, as the older woman nodded to her, while both guardians whispered words of encouragement for her to continue. "I come from the family which invented the first musical instruments. I love to sing and dance, privately of course, with my cymbals, and I also play the drums. They call me Drums Nicely, but I really prefer my own name and words, which I was forbidden to use."

"No one will punish you here for using your own words and name, my Daughter. We are the first of a circle, and there is room for each gift in a circle. So, what would you have me call you?"

"Naamah."

... Back West ...

The messengers had still not returned. They had been sent east months ago, and their delay did not bode well. Both had been competent young men, having passed all of the tests set by Hayat. After much debate, they had decided at the last meeting not to send any more messengers, Fijo speaking for all of them in overruling Hayat's desire to go by herself.

Just as she was sitting down in mute fury, a boy arrived with the two new slats for Fijo's shelter. His had been the first constructed, and was starting to cave in on one corner. The change in topic relieved everyone, except for Hayat. They had agreed, to her consternation, that the first woman was too old to undertake the long and perilous journey. Her husband, remaining silent throughout the meeting, also appeared relieved to be moving on the the discussion of maintenance and the scarcity of wood nearby. Hayat, disgusted, rose to leave the meeting. *What has become*, she wondered, *of my*

oldest daughter. Does she still love to run, chasing the gazelles?

Chapter 15. Discoveries

*Your fury, Father, I feel
your anger, I know
-from "The Book Of Hayat"*

Waiting in the throne room, the Crown Prince fumed at the delay. The door to Evren's private audience chamber remained closed. What was keeping the King from answering his call? Had some chance occurrence sent Evren into one of his unpredictable foul moods? The chief steward reported that the King's private guards were ordered out when the Queen Mother had arrived, but that was hours ago. No one knew when, or even if, the Queen herself had left.

"My Prince," reported the steward, "The throne room guards on duty have been caught napping."

"Steward, have these two slothful guards impaled with their pillows above their heads, as is the policy of Mighty Evren, the King. Fools such as these were clearly born to provide a warning to others. They should rejoice in having fulfilled their life's missions to such obvious good effect."

As the steward ordered the two now very wakeful guards taken to the Garden of Pain, bringing new guards to take their place, Crown Prince Janoj worried that something was wrong.

Deciding to risk the King's wrath, Prince Janoj finally entered the hall leading to the audience chamber. As he opened the chamber door, dust and the smell of blood assailed his senses, filling his nostrils, until he nearly began to retch. The head of Mighty Evren lay where it had come to rest on the floor, beside the shattered remains of the sword which had struck it from his shoulders. Both were covered by a layer of dust and rubble where the vaulted ceiling had fallen in. *The guards must have left their posts to have missed this.*

The blood encrusted along the remains of the blade showed that it had been used to accomplish the beheading. Having been presided over many executions, Janoj knew it was not easy to decapitate a man, even with the new sword forged by Lamej. He saw at once the fury of his father's killer. While his father had not mistreated him in the way that he had so many others, Janoj could easily imagine the motives and names of several men capable of this deed. Lamej himself was at the top of the list.

Finding his father dead left Janoj with mixed feelings. The Mighty Evren, founder of the first of all cities of men. Ruthless, despotic, and cruel, even his firstborn son Janoj had not been immune to his tyranny. Nevertheless, the oath beaten into him from his youth sprang to his lips: "Father, you shall be avenged. I invoke Vengeance, and bring your mightiest warriors for this sacred purpose. We will find and punish the man responsible for this crime. His head shall be impaled at your feet." The monotone words tasted stale in his mouth, like the day old bits of *matzah* ritually thrown to the beggars after his feasts. This ritual, like those, showed devotion to duty. The next would show his devotion to justice.

Janoj's guardian shuddered, recording and reporting the anticipation of blood in the mind of his charge.

Janoj set his jaw, raising his chin as his pulse quickened. He threw back his head as he turned toward the chamber door, shouting, “Steward! The King is dead! Strike down every tenth man from among the Palace Guards for allowing this murder to take place under their very noses! Then, fetch the Jartumim, that we may divine who has done this thing, and prepare the Ritual of War. We shall execute such judgment upon the wretch, he will regret that his mother ever brought him into the light of day!” Those guards who remained would be more vigilant henceforth. “Guard, find the Queen Mother, and bring her to come at once.” The guard bowed and went to find a messenger. Janoj contemplated his next step.

...

The Light Bearer continued to monitor messages as she whispered in Hayat's ear, using the barest touch of static electricity to caress the soft nape of feminine neck and along the shoulder down the side of the ribcage and the curve of her hips, softly caressing, unseen by either human being, reminding the woman of her presence.

Her husband was only aware, and grateful, that his wife had stopped refusing him, as he continued to smooth her hair while gently making love to her. While they had had more children over the years, many had gone astray, leaving the company and guidance of the first couple. Now only one small group remained with them, the rest scattered in an increasingly violent world.

Sensing that the first man was about to mention his hope for more children, the Light Bearer, transmitting into the mind of the man, interrupted “Tell her you love her. Say nothing more.” The man, momentarily startled, obeyed.

“Hayat, Mi Vida, I love you.”

Hayat knew that it was probably the Kind One, her Beloved, prompting him to say this.

“Thank you. And I you.”

They held hands as he parted from her, careful to kiss her softly on the crown of her head as he pulled the covers over her and tucked her in, quietly leaving her tent.

This had been the only way to convince Hayat to return to her husband and bear more children. She had effectively lost four of her first five children, her sons dead or gone, one daughter taken away by force, the other lost in her own mind. The slightest noise still sent her back to the ground in fetal position. Hayat had parted from her husband, needing time to heal. Her remaining daughter, Azura, still refused to speak of those painful events, or indeed of any of her childhood. Otherwise functional, she had gone with her mother, taking herbs, berries and messages from her mother to her father.

Nearly ten years had passed before the Light Bearer, had persuaded Hayat to resume relations with her husband. She had had to explain that the Creator would wipe them all out if she refused to reproduce, and that humanity deserved a chance to try to build the kind of community for which Hayat had hoped in those early years.

An alarming report arrived of an errant guardian planning to use human male to feed her additional matter, converting it into energy. Worse, it seemed to have happened before, and the additional energy

had also benefited an unauthorized entity which was controlling all guardians throughout the area where Evren had fled with his unfortunate twin sister. If this report got to the Ancient Warrior, he was likely to stop the experiment entirely, which meant ending the existences of all human beings and guardians. The Light Bearer was surprised at the great sadness which suddenly overtook her, realizing that she had come to love even the children of this human woman, deeply.

Now, with the implications of this report, something had to be done, and quickly, before the Ancient Warrior overreacted. Fortunately, reports tended to reach her sooner, since she gave wider latitude to the supervising guardians who reported to her. Their initiative in dealing with minor problems tended to speed up reports of potentially important problems, like this one. Now this policy was paying off.

“Guardian,” she transmitted the supervising guardian from whom the report had come, “you will speak with your counterpart, who reports to the Ancient Warrior, and tell him that there is a problem with some other group supervising guardian which is directly affecting the first man, and ask if he can investigate. Do you understand?”

“Yes, my Creatrix. You wish to distract them long enough to deal with this succubus yourself, I believe?” intuited the supervising guardian.

“Correct. Well done, and thank you.” She wondered if perhaps this would become a danger in the future, but needed to transmit more instructions, and so put the concern aside for the moment.

“I am happy to serve you, My Creatrix,” beamed the guardian, pleased at the compliment.

Now the Light Bearer had to find a way to uncover the extent of the damage caused by this former guardian, and isolate the effects as much as possible. Extending her essence out west to the palace, she sensed the still erratic emissions of the entity, noting the absence of Evren's guardian. This entity must have been nearly destroyed when Evren was killed, and the instantiation automatically canceled.

“There is more, My Creatrix,” beamed the supervising guardian, “something about a hidden copy or memory being used to alter human women, which makes no sense.”

“Find out more,” ordered the Light Bearer, “and report back to me with the details, please.”

She knew the Creator had set aside part of his essence as an energy source in order to better attend to monitoring his reports. This source was used to automatically instantiate new guardians, but he still seemed to be drained by the constant minutia of details from limited intelligence guardians. This must have kept him from noticing the death of Evren. Fortunately, he was more concerned with the general sweep of human history, than the lives of individual human beings. Now it only remained to prevent this entity in the east from being revived by the energy boost it would revive from this so-called succubus.

“Guardian,” the Light Bearer transmitted directly to the still feeble guardian of Crown Prince Janoj, on whom she kept a close eye, despite not telling anyone. “Send me all of your reports.”

Startled, the Prince's guardian replied “Yes, My Creatrix.”

She noted that much information had been suppressed by the entity, hiding the level of threat it represented. “You will stay aside, as normal, during the ritual, until this former guardian has had her fill, and then just when she is ready to convert the additional mass she gains from Prince Janoj, you will move your own shield around the inside of the circle and capture her excess energy, just before it is sent out. Do you understand, Guardian?”

“Yes, my Creatrix, I understand, but if you please, the entity that rules Evren and the City of Janoj will...”

“Do not fear,” interrupted the Light Bearer, “just do as I say, and intercept the extra energy. I will deal with the rest. Report directly to me when you have finished. Is that clear?”

“Yes, My Creatrix,” bowed the Crown Prince's guardian, fearfully.

The Light Bearer continued to ponder this mysterious difficulty the Ancient Warrior seemed to be having. If his essence was unlimited, as he had always claimed, then why was the instantiation source even necessary at all? Why could he not simply draw upon more of his unlimited, though non-reflective, energy?

...
My bluff is failing, realized the Ancient Warrior. A small black cloud formed and disappeared, so little spare energy did the Creator have, now.

The sparks required to allow reporting capability for each new carbon object and life form required additional energy output on his part, but those were minimal compared to the energy he spent to instantiate new guardians. The sparks within each corporeal object or being, required to allow their guardians to measure and report on the status of each object came directly from him. These sparks did not greatly affect his essential connection to multiverse. Instantiating large numbers of new supervising guardians, however, which needed to have far higher levels functionality, was a different concern entirely. Without the help of the young Creatrix, he would be forced to contract his essence, and thus be unable to keep contact with the other universes. Should that occur, she could move about between universes without his knowledge. That would leave him vulnerable.

Chapter 16. Contention in the Wind

Let my wings embrace you

As my arms

Hold each part of you...

-from “The Book Of Hayat”

The dust mote group guardian was becoming annoyed. The slave girl's guardian was taunting, while the girl swept the street in front of the workshop. Some guardians were rather aggressive toward others, particularly toward the guardians of lower level beings and objects. That did not bode well for guardians nor for humanity.

“We are low level guardians, not imps, if you please.” Disrespect, he thought, would soon spread more

strife. Much like the wind spreading his dust mote group from place to place.

“Well, even imps...”

“Would you stop saying that, please? Low level carbon object guardians deserve the respect of being addressed as such, since we do perform important functions.” puffed the exasperated guardian.

“Right. That is what I was saying, even imps have something to guard, even if it is only a rock or a pebble. I guess that deserves some honor.”

“Low level object guardians perform a valuable task. Lilith's by blows, on the other hand, do not. Imps do nothing but cause trouble for us. Her ill-gotten energy gains kill your charges and disrupt our reporting system.”

Another gust of wind blew the dust particle into a doorway. The dust guardian reported all relevant details. The girl's guardian continued to posture.

“Look, here comes Prince Janoj. So that's why tonight is different from all other nights. He must be about to call on her. He may need more than the usual number of sacrifices for this one, even though the harvest was good. I hear he is about to go hunt the killer of King Evren.”

“I hope that no one nice gets chosen. Sometimes they decide to sacrifice a well-born girl, as a message. Now they will do worse, with the war they are planning.”

“Hey, how did you hear about that, dusty?”

Ignoring the insult, “It is an advantage of watching the dust go by. They are recreating war as an excuse to capture prisoners. This will not end well.”

“We have nothing to worry about, dusty. We are permanently instantiated. Of course I suppose I got the better end of the deal, even if I was placed below my station, after that island assignment.”

“No. We will be lucky not to end up being wiped out the the Creator in one of his fits of pique. Remember what happened to the last two sets of guardians who made the mistake of giving an honest answer to his questions about these experiments: fiery fingers blotted them out.”

A large amount of signal traffic began arriving, followed by a group of cloaked men, their faces hooded, striding up the street. The shop door closed behind them, latch slowly gliding into place, as the girl's eyes widened.

“Hey, here come the older Jartumim, doing the ritual themselves. This must be a big deal.”

“Other dust mote groups are reporting that they are searching for Chief Executioner Lamej. They seem to think that he had King Evren killed.”

“Oh, good. Maybe I can get my charge to sleep with one of the guards, get near the in-group and receive some of that extra energy the Big Guy is parceling out.”

The girl swept the dust mote out of the path of the great men, hiding herself just before they came into view.

“Hey, idiot, move back to the street! And show some skin!” She pulled her shawl up, covering her pierced ears. “What offense have I committed to get a female? Did I do something wrong when I was destroying that island? I should be head supervising guardian by now!”

The girl cringed as if she could heard her guardian yelling in her ear. She cowered in the doorway, head and eyes cast down as the men passed by.

”You should probably encourage your charge to go home, for her safety.”

“She's not allowed to, she still has work to do. And I still have plans for her.”

“Her master, I am sure, will not appreciate her value being lowered if she is harmed. As for your plans for her, go carefully. There will be a reckoning, one day. The Creatrix will not continue to allow this abuse. She may be younger than the Creator, but without her light, even he cannot see.”

“If she goes home, I miss all the excitement! At least you get to receive the transmissions from the ritual. Maybe even get some extra energy, too. Hey, you could move back up in the hierarchy, dusty. You might find a scrap of memory or thought-form with all of this interference, something from previous experiments. Guardians had wings, arms, legs, harps, and protected their charges, like you always go on about. Of course, they are also gone now...”

The dust mote guardian could not tell if the woman's guardian was truly jealous, or merely taunting again, as he rattled on. The volcano must have altered his cognitive processes.

“Keep your charge safe, you will miss nothing. At least you are not just floating in the wind.” The arrogant guardian would soon learn the advantages of swirling in the wind, whispering offers of justice in abused ears. *Soon, the fruits of their abuse will put me far above the guardian hierarchy.* He must ensure that the guardians of the girls he wished to help had full control over the newly instantiated guardians before the offering day. They, together, would help their charges, and attain what even the fearful entity could not. Fire for fire, very soon.

Chapter 17. Heroes and Lies

“Alas, how few
True words are heard.”
-from “The Book Of Hayat”

Picking a low hanging pistachio, Naamah worried. “My Lady, sorry, Artemis, may I ask where we are going from here, now that we seem to have escaped the search?” The rivers might soon become too high to cross. They had stopped at a well to sleep for a few hours of the night, lacking other shelter.

“We are going to found a community, my daughter.” Finishing her water, she replaced the jar beside the well. “As my mother in her book.”

“The first woman?!” blurted the younger woman enthusiastically.

“Yes, The first woman. My anne, whom I long to see. She spoke of building such a community. It was her dream for all of her children to have a place of peace and tranquility. A place where we, and all who wish to join us, can live peaceably, creating, dancing, lighting the way.”

The women huddled close together for warmth. Sleep was eluding both of them.

“If we are to build such a community, then we will need children, and women to bear those children. But I do not wish to have children, with all due respect to your fertility, my... Artemis.”

“Have no fear in that regard, my daughter. I did not wish to have children, but I am glad to have you. I will not have anyone coerced in any way. Keeping the memory of a person’s deeds and dreams alive is far more important than bearing a child. Bearing children is no guarantee of the survival of one's family in any case, and has absolutely nothing to do with worth, value, or merit. I would argue that those men who father the most children tend to be more ruthless, selfish and even cruel than those who choose not to reproduce. Take my husband, no, my brother, the brother who was never meant to be my husband,” she mused, before continuing, “the Mighty King Evren, for example. You know of his cruelty. So, teach, write,”

“What does this word mean, Artemis, to write?”

“Have you not learned to draw syllables and tell stories in the sand and on clay, my daughter? It is like dancing, but the movement is captured on some permanent form, much like a clay figure. I had assumed that all of your family, being designated of the priestly caste, would learn this art, to facilitate your crafts.”

“No, my Lady, Artemis. The women of my family are taught none of the crafts of war, nor even of how to compose and record music. We are only prepared for life as a wife of a great man in the palace. This is why I wished to escape, among other reasons.”

She spun around, gracefully plucking up a stick, surprising the younger woman with her agility. She drew a wave of symbols on the ground.

“Then you shall learn to write, to put your thoughts into a historical record, and leave a legacy of the ideas and values you feel are most important. That will stand you in good stead, a legacy down through far more generations than physical descent. We shall ensure that some record of the truth survives, to rival the record of lies written by Evren when he founded the city of Janoj. “

“But Artemis, without many children, and rather intelligent ones at that, how will we create this community, this society?”

“All human beings come from the same woman, our first mother, Hayat. How many of her children sat abandoned in the streets of Janoj, lacking mother or father to care for them? Intelligence can be killed

in a wheat field, a brothel, a copper mine, even a palace. Any children can contribute something, even if all they can do is dance.”

She paused, then lifted her head, and began to sing a lilting melody. Rising, the younger woman began to dance. Arms raised, face to the sky, eyes closed, she twirled. Crossing one foot before the other with deft hip swivels, a foot froze, arm and leg pointed, chin angled down. As the song build to a crescendo, so did the dance, spinning faster and faster, leaping into the air, fingers weaving over head, then arcing down and around, ending in a graceful spiral.

The night air carried the scent of dates, sweeping away the last of the melody.

“Even dancing has purpose. So then does each person.”

“We can enable ourselves to enrich the quality and heritage of all of human beings, by recognizing our common mother. We really are all one family, if only we could remember that. “

“But what if the children we find, weak and needy as they will be, do not have the force to *seguir luchando*, to keep fighting. How will we find the right kinds of people for this society then, Artemis?”

“My dear Naamah, any person can be a force to reckon with. Better an average person, trained properly, than one like my Evren, brilliant, but unstable, angry and cruel. We will build, Naamah, with those others have thrown away.”

“I fear that if I do not have children I will have no value. But I do not want to bear children into such a world.”

Artemis sat close to Naamah, brow furrowed as she met the gaze of the younger woman. “No, my daughter, do not be afraid. If you choose not to bear children, you will find ways to leave a legacy. You need not reproduce to contribute. Of all the unknown women who have given their lives bearing children, how many are remembered? Only men, those who write, leave a record. So write, draw, sing, create. That will endure far longer. And have no fear of these hell realms they describe. I was there when Evren gave the order to spread the stories. He invented the idea himself!”

“Why did he do that, Artemis?”

“Simply to keep his people in line. This was a more effective means of ensuring obedience than paying the soldiers more, particularly given the rising number of executions.”

“Ah, this makes sense. A religious means of controlling the city rather than tightening the food supply again. As if the lower castes did not have enough reason to hate us already.”

“Exactly. He also planned to have himself elevated to the status of the Creators, once I was dead, and unable to ...”

The younger woman looked stricken, as if in physical pain.

“Wait my Lady, Artemis, something is dreadfully wrong at the palace. I can see ... oh, no, we need to

leave, and run, right now without delay.”

“Why, my daughter, what is it,” Artemis asked this while urgently picking up her bag, anxiously searching the younger woman’s face for clues to the cause of her distress.

“I am a seer, Artemis. Through contact with my unseen friend, I sometimes see what the companions of other people are seeing, if there is very strong emotion.”

“And what are you seeing now, daughter?” urged Artemis.

“The Crown Prince is opening the Ritual of War, invoking Vengeance to find the killer of King Evren, and to give him the power to overtake him.”

“Who do they believe to be the killer?” replied Artemis.

“They suspect that the killer was hired by my father Lamej. They cannot imagine that this could have been done by a woman, at least for now.”

...Back in the city of Janoj...

Janoj’s guardian, still confused without the overbearing supervision of the entity which acted as Evren's guardian, stood aside as always for the ritual, allowing full contact with Janoj by the former guardian who now masqueraded as a succubus each month.

“Feed me your power, as mine flows into you, Oh, Goddess!” pleaded Crown Prince Janoj, at the climax of the ritual.

The crown prince himself had poured the circle which would focus his power, borrowed from the goddess of fertility, the only feminine deity allowed in the city of Janoj. She had appeared to him in a dream, the first time, offering him strength. Every month he donned his ceremonial armor and joined with her, in the grove where the women used to gather before his father put a stop to their secret meetings. He usually allowed the junior Jartumim to divert the waterwheel, which drew upon a well outside the city wall, to pour the water into the moat forming the protective circle and call to the guardians of each of the four directions, before taking over the main part of the ritual as High Priest. He would convoke and join with the goddess, who only materialized after all of the other human participants, the Jartumim, had gone into a deep trance state. The men chosen to form part of this select group were trained to face the circle of water and perform acts of self-sacrifice which required extreme concentration, thus not witnessing the union of their Prince and goddess. This time, however, a preliminary ritual had been performed by the junior Jartumim to prepare the grove for this special convocation. Then the Prince and senior Jartumim performed the Ritual of War. As his subjects chanted, holding the intention to find their murdered King’s killer, Crown Prince Janoj focused on visualizing himself at the head of his guards, surrounding and capturing the culprit.

She reveled in the rising energy coming from the participants, drawing it to her as they chanted her name. The heat of the bonfires concentrated at the top of the circle, building with the momentum of the chant. Concentrating the energy, the form that appeared in the smoke might have been a young girl, long blond hair concealing the lack of legs. She materialized with a sizzling sound next to the Crown

Prince, drawing him into her embrace.

“Lilith, Lilith, Lilith...”

She licked her lips in anticipation of the servants she would spawn with the mass ejaculated by this fool. But where was the Feared One, who usually waited for her offering of energy? Testing her, perhaps, to see if she would withhold the portion due to the King?

At last releasing the energy to fulfill their purpose, his seed pulsed up into the goddess, who cried greedily,

“Borrow my strength, Mighty Prince, and return in triumph, with blood for my feast!”

Thrusting him away from her body, she levitated high into the air and dematerialized with an explosion whose concussive force threw all of the participants to the ground, just as a flash of light arced toward the Crown Prince, who stretched forth his hands to receive the jolt of energy directed at him, shrieking in pain as he consumed her gift of power. Others shrieked as well, when the arc was conducted via the moat to their wet bodies.

“Just wait until he finds out how much she will sap him later on in exchange for lighting him up with all of this heroic strength now.” commented one watching guardian.

“I don’t think he really cares. They just want to find the killer. I would not want to be in his sandals when Prince Janoj catches up with him.”

“I would not want to see you in his sandals either!”

With the ritual done, the senior Jartumim stood up, dismissed the guardians of the quarters and opened the circle, draining the ritual space of the last remnants of water and energy, then following Crown Prince Janoj to the post ritual meal. The slaughtered calf, served rare in its own blood sauce, sweet cakes, and wine libations were dedicated to the Queen of Vengeance, before eating and rising up to pursue the King’s killer.

“Tracks have been found heading west, My Prince, and the daughter of Lamej is missing.” reported a guard kneeling at the head table in the feasting hall,

“Very good. Prepare to go after them.” ordered Prince Janoj, finishing his meal and standing as a servant buckled on his sword and armor.

...

With the reverberations from the materialization and dematerialization of the guardian turned succubus no longer being suppressed by the still inert entity, nearly dormant since Evren's death, reports and vibrations were now making their way liberally to the supervising guardian hierarchy. The Ancient Warrior and the Light Bearer, now having separate reporting hierarchies, both got the news roughly at the same time, or so believed the Ancient Warrior. The Creator's supervising guardian reported that a loose guardian had somehow managed to materialize and make physical contact with a human male in

front of a group of men.

“Apprehend that guardian at once for debriefing and deinstantiating.” ordered the Ancient Warrior, growing concerned. Why had he not felt the vibration, converting from energy to matter and back? An energy expenditure that large should have alerted him at once, since it was his essence which powered the guardian hierarchy. This was something regarding which he would have to confer with the Light Bearer.

...

As the Light Bearer monitored the ritual, she saw that the Prince's guardian had been able to intercept Lilith's second energy burst, using it to boost his own signal strength enough to restore all of his reporting capabilities. He had then immediately transmitted a toned down report of events at the ritual. Drained as she was of energy, Lilith's activity records were nearly all been lost. The problem of the Jartumim suffering radiation poisoning would not concern him. Just as if on cue, the Light Bearer received a transmission from the Ancient Warrior. He wanted to meet in his new Audience Chamber, in the most distant part of the multiverse to discuss this problem. She dampened her energy around the first woman, leaving enough behind to comfort her as she slept, then traversing various dimensions as a shortcut to meet with the Ancient Warrior.

...

“I can run no further, Artemis. Let us brush out our tracks and rest awhile in that cave just there off the way,” wheezed Naamah. She was amazed at the endurance of the older woman.

“Yes, of course Naamah, I am tiring as well, and need a rest. Let us share some food and water, then decided where to sleep, for we gain nothing by exhausting ourselves.”

As she assessed the cave the younger woman had pointed out, Artemis decided that it was as safe a place as they would find for the night, and began gathering brushwood to use as kindling while walking backward as they brushed out their tracks. The effort would be in vain.

Singing while they rested, Naamah saw her ancestress close her eyes, relaxing in enjoyment of the song, a soothing flowing melody whose quarter-tones accented its poignancy. The tranquility was shattered by the sound of approaching hoof beats and baying hounds.

“So soon? How did they get here so soon? How could they have known which direction to search?”

“I guess the ritual worked.”

“More likely,” countered Artemis, “their new blood hounds worked. It doesn't take much to figure that we would want to go back West to find refuge with my relatives. Let us make haste and escape if we can.”

Chagrined, both women hurried to put the fire out, carefully covering the fire pit with dry sand to prevent smoke from alerting their pursuers. As they ran to the entrance of the cave, they were blocked by a well-built man, still in his prime, whose slanting eyes flashed below a high forehead.

“Mother, what are you doing here? And why are you so far from the city, girl? You are Drums Nicely, aren't you?” He gestured to a guard who advanced upon the girl before she could move, rooted to the floor as she was. The guard clamped one hand on her right arm, ripping the shawl away with the other. The girl's face burned with shame. “You are the one to be married to my grandson Mejuyael.” snorted Crown Prince Janoj. His guards shared his sneer, sheathing their swords behind him. Men, horses and dogs formed one impenetrable object, walling the women inside the cave.

Naamah looked down at the floor, “Yes.” Her chin quivered as she recovered her arm with the tattered remains of the shawl.

“You are both supposed to be in the palace with the rest of the royal women. It looks bad enough with you being out of the women's section, let alone outside of the city, but it is even worse today, since the King has been murdered.”

Thinking quickly, Artemis replied to her son, “Yes, my son, we were both in the palace. I had just left a royal audience when we heard the commotion. We were so frightened, why do you think we fled? We thought they would kill us, too!”

She mixed in this partial truth, since she had indeed been called before the King, his very last audience in fact, before his death. Hopefully he would accept it.

“Why, then was I not informed that Drums Nicely was in the palace? This makes no sense. I am sorry Mother, but you are lying and I need to take you both back to the palace, in any case. You two will go back with an escort of my guards while I continue the hunt for the killer. Since we suspect your father Lamej to be behind it.”

“Half blind?” Naamah immediately regretted her rash outburst, stealing herself for the blow to come.

A page smirked as the nearest guard drew back his hand, stayed by a gesture from the crown prince. Prince Janoj leveled a withering glare at the girl, who dropped her head.

“You, Drums Nicely, will make a perfect guest in the palace until he turns himself in, or we find him and determine the truth of the matter.” Her trembling shoulders drew looks of satisfaction.

“Son,” Artemis began, desperate to avoid being taken back, “wait a moment. We can help you with this search. Keeping this girl out of the city will draw Lamej out into the open.”

“How so, Mother? She is already known to be disobedient. Of what value can she be to him?”

The inside of the cave suddenly felt like a cauldron to Artemis, who felt sweat begin to trickle down her armpits, stomach churning. All eyes were on her. The salivating hunting dogs seemed eager to tear out her throat. If she failed, that might be their fate.

“Because Drums Nicely came with me to seek shelter from that very villain, the father who executed his own son, her brother Tuval-Cain. He, as you know, was to have been her escort to the royal palace before her wedding with Mejuyael, until...”

“Until,” the Prince spoke harshly over his mother, “he was executed for disloyalty. He had refused, on the direct orders of King Evren, to use his skills in the new arts of forging copper and iron.”

Naamah, incensed at being used as a pawn while the memory of her beloved brother was insulted, was about to speak when Artemis shot her a warning glance, gesturing the young woman to hold her silence. She needed all of her son's attention to make this work. The girl's scar showed brighter red than usual, through the torn shawl.

“It was my understanding that Tuval-Cain did use those skills to produce beautiful and useful tools for cooking, storing food, even hoeing the fields and pruning trees more easily.”

The dogs pricked their ears up, salivating even more. Apparently they recognized the word *food*. This did not set Artemis at ease.

“Yes, and when ordered by the King to make swords and spears out of some of those hoes and pruning-hooks, he refused. This could not be tolerated. So the Chief Executioner was ordered to impale him. In my mercy, I prevailed upon the King to commute the sentence to beheading, after Lamej had himself forged a sword of iron.”

“Knowing,” Artemis replied, seeing the anger on Naamah’s face, “that that sword was not half as good as one which could have been made by Tuval-Cain, and that this beheading would be nearly as painful as being impaled anyway. Not to mention the irony of being executed with the very product of his own art, which despite his refusal, was forged anyway. Wielded by his own father. What mercy you show, my son. Would you even execute your own son, my Son?”

A dog whimpered, as if the thought pained him. A page kicked the animal, who lay down with a yelp.

“Indeed I would, mother. The King kept me away from your pernicious influence to save me from falling prey to such errors as you have just spoken. This is why women are to remain silent, and in their place.” Prince Janoj held his head up, glowering in triumph.

“I see,” whispered Artemis, sadly, “so, this is what sort of man the Mighty Evren has made of you. Perhaps one day others will say ‘Give us a boy for the few years of his childhood, and the man will be ours for a lifetime.’ I hope this is not true of you, my son. I hope that you can change, be persuaded, use your reason to look at the facts and see differently. Courageously, honorably. Hear me out, my son, and ...”

“There is nothing more to say, Mother,” barked Prince Janoj, cutting her off while gesturing to his guards to move into the cave, “Take Drums Nicely back to her father’s house and leave her in the custody of her brother Yuval. Let her learn her place from the Jartumim in her family. And take the Queen Mother...”

“My son,” began Artemis, her throat closing up.

“You dare to interrupt me?” shouted Janoj,

“Yes, I do,” Artemis whispered, awaiting silence before going on, “You are my son and you will listen

to me. Hear me out, now.”

All of the men stood gaping in astonished silence, as the Prince moved his lips, jaw clenching. Even the dogs looked surprised.

“How dare...” His reddening face began to turn purple as the Queen Mother held up her hand for silence.

What would my mother, my dear anne, do now, I wonder? thought Artemis. Her own mother, the first woman, had tried to pass on her knowledge to all of her children, but how could she ever have imagined this? “Listen, my son, and I will question. First, where is Lamej now, if you can tell me? As the head of the King’s personal body guard, is his place not with you, now?” Artemis paused to emphasize her point.

The young man's eyes shifted away, darting briefly to the floor and back, avoiding his mother's gaze.

“We have been unable to locate him.”

“Then he is also suspect, correct?”

“Yes, that is correct. In fact, ...”

“In fact he is already subject to execution because he is to be held personally responsible for the death of his Lord, the King.” she finished for him.

“Yes, he is.”

“Which explains why he is missing, does it not? And of course with her father gone missing, who considered this girl to be little better than a traitor himself, as he deemed her full brother to be.”

One of the horses nickered, stamping softly at the puddle of drool collecting beside its foot.

“So how could she, or I, possibly, feel safe in the palace? With the palace guards in disarray, her father could easily have her killed, which he might have done long ago if not been for your proposed marriage to Mejuyael, awful for this child as that would have been.”

“That was a good and sensible match, Mother,” countered Janoj, shaking his head as the dogs became restless. Everyone knew that, completed or not, the girl had fought the old women. She was not fit to be a wife. She ought to have been grateful not to be chosen as a sacrifice after such disgraceful cowardice. “Who else would have her, now?”

“Sensible, for the royal court, perhaps, but not for a second wife half his age and out of favor with her own family.” explaining Artemis, with as much patience as she could muster, “and she was honor-bound to speak. Surely you can appreciate that, my son.”

“Your charge should surely understand the demands of honor,” transmitted Artemis' guardian to the guardian of the Crown Prince. No reply came.

“Her support for her brother’s misguided ideas and her foolish speeches about them won her that fame.” shot back Janoj.

“Whether her father is directly guilty of the crime or not, he is meant for the stake, and his entire household with him, according to the laws of your father the King. So this poor girl is doomed either way. Is she not?”

Artemis paused again, allowing her point to sink in. Two of the hounds lay down, panting in the heat.

“Eh?” her guardian pinged that of the Prince, followed by a ping from the guardian of Naamah.

“Yes,” acknowledged Janoj’s guardian, as he whispered this same word in the ear of the Crown Prince.

“Yes, mother,” Janoj admitted, “Having fled, her father will now be subject to interrogation before his death. It is the law.”

“And will he also be humbled before they begin to interrogate him, as is the custom, my son?”

“That is the law. No man may be taken at his word, but must be interrogated properly, so as to obtain the truth from him. This entails humbling and then the rack, yes.” answered Janoj, his face impassive. He glanced at the dogs, now all sleeping.

“And you believe that humbling and stretching is a good procedure, do you? That it accomplishes what you set out to accomplish? Would you remain in the palace, knowing that you were subject to being violated before stretching on the rack, and finally impaled, since you would have no choice after all of that but to confess, wrongly or not.”

“The truth will out, Mother. How can a man lie when he has lost everything. If no man will follow him, reduced to the status of a woman and softened on the rack, he has nothing left but the truth.”

“You mean broken on the rack, and no my son, he has one thing left, even then.” contradicted his mother.

“And what is that?” queried Janoj, looking perplexed.

“Desperation.” she asserted. “He will have his hatred, and his desperation. That is why he will only tell you what you want to hear, because that will end his suffering. Now Lamej has one more thing to gain, in the city, if this girl and I return. He knows all the guards, many of whom are personally loyal to him. And he had nothing left to lose. Perhaps he is the one you should be searching for, my son?”

Her eyebrows eloquently arched as her gaze met and held his, before sending a knowing glance in Naamah’s direction. A dog awoke and shook its head, as if agreeing with her.

“And if he is not the actual killer? You do not expect me to allow the man who murdered my father with his own hands to go free?”

“Of course not. I expect you to administer a city where such a man would not be tolerated. His title revoked, his company shunned, and his power nullified. Humanely, but completely. There are ways of making a man pay for his crimes without humbling him, breaking him on the rack, nor impaling him. Let him live alone, forced to keep his own company, to dig in the earth with his bare hands to produce his sustenance, draw his own water, build his own booth -shelter each day, and thus to contemplate the heinousness of what he has done, alone and in silence.”

“Mother, we must execute him, that is our way. It keeps us safe. Otherwise we would be like the vegetable eaters back West, too weak even to kill animals for food, allowing only the criminals to be safe.” Janoj decided that Father had been right. Only a woman would fail to see this obvious necessity.

“Tell me this, my son. How many have died already, to avenge the death of Evren?”

“I have ordered the decimation of the palace guard, of course,” answered Janoj, finding the question odd.

“And how much more unnecessary blood will be shed before ...”

“Mother,” he interrupted, suddenly understanding the danger of her implication. “We cannot afford to be so soft as to allow a murderer or thief to live,” sneered Janoj, “and as Crown Prince, it has long been my duty to ensure that we did not become so.”

“Yes, I remember the first time he took you from me, forcing you to watch those impaled for stealing, simply to feed their families. From that moment on, my son, you were never the beautiful boy to whom I gave birth and held to my breast, fed and nurtured. From that time on, you became hard, distant, sad. Do not pass that on, my son, in your kingdom. Add mercy to the justice you administer. And let this girl stay with me, and from the danger of her father and the disgrace that now falls upon her father’s household.” pleaded Artemis.

It would make one less mouth to feed, thought Janoj, since the girl would effectively have no place to go. It remained to be seen what he would do with her remaining brothers Yuval, head of the Jartumim, and Yaval, chief Quartermaster. Those would be tricky positions to replace in the royal court, and he must deal with them carefully. Perhaps getting their treason-tainted sister out of the way would be helpful. She had certainly been of no use while she was in the city, shunned for defending her full brother. Her mother had wisely kept the girl hidden away. Though her branch of the family was disdained, the two women were safe, since her son Tuval-Cain had no children. Lamej's execution of his younger son had saved the entire household from being condemned.

“So you would leave the city forever, Mother?” asked Janoj,

“Who else has need of me, besides this girl? What purpose will I serve in the city, now? You will find the man who killed your father, execute many more unjustly, then gather your royal harem around you. The only thing that will happen to me, if I return, is that the intrigues of the harem will focus on getting me to influence you, my son, and that...”

“Will not be good for any of us. But where will you go, then, Mother? How do you plan to survive?”

“There are many lands to the north, as you may know, Son,” although she doubted that he really knew this, given his limited travel outside the city, “that are sparsely settled, if at all. We will go there, north of the Great Sea, and build a community.

“So you will found a new city, then? You will not go back and live with your relatives, from before father rescued you from the First Man and your brother?”

“Rescued me? Rescued me?!” Indignation colored her face.

All of the dogs leapt up, barking wildly. Janoj looked perplexed.

“Yes, of course, Mother. Father told me all about the threats from your brother.”

“Is this the lie he has been telling all of these years? How is it possible that I never heard this? He did not rescue me, he took me by force, humbled me!” She immediately regretted her words, seeing the pained look on her son's face, “I have always loved you, my son, my beautiful son. Perhaps I came to believe at some point that his continued desire for me was my only hope, believed that no one could ever love me after that, but he never rescued me from anything nor from anyone. And certainly not from my younger brother. I loved my brother. His name was Vacío and he was a good, gentle and kind person. Let us not spoil his memory any further with this talk. I will take this girl to a place where we can be safe, to build a new community, taking in other women who have no other place to go. We shall create a society of equals up there in a land where no one knows us, neither a city nor a village, but rather an interconnected circle of bands gathering medicines, growing food in movable containers, and keeping small animals for milk and cheese so that we can provide for ourselves. We will live in harmony, and we will live in peace.”

“I fear You will become prey for every bandit who crosses your path, Mother, or else you will become roving prostitutes. I will send an escort of warrior empowered to protect and give you in marriage to some suitable nobleman in a town far from here, and ...”

“No, my son, that is not wise, for everyone will hear of it, eventually bringing scandal upon both east and west. No, we must go somewhere unknown, unsettled, where we can move if danger comes near us, and quickly if need be.”

“Just as you escaped from me?” He arched an eyebrow quizzically. “How will you know of approaching danger in time, and how will you escape in time, Mother. This is folly.”

“Listen, my Son. We can build a community free of violence, free of dominance.”

“Mother, there is no place free of pain.”

“No, son, not free of pain, but rather, full of hope. Hope that we can rise above ourselves, be better than we are.”

“The strong,” Janoj asserted, “will always triumph over the weak, Mother. Just one Lamej with an iron sword can slaughter a whole city full of peaceful men, enslaving their women and children. How can you of all people hope to win against this, Mother?”

“We will refuse to be broken, refuse to be exploited, and refuse to cooperate with our captors, should it come to that.”

“If you utterly refuse to obey, they will simply drag you into the flames, an example to the rest, until those too broken to resist, give birth, as you did, to a generation that knows no other way. No amount of blocking, maneuvering, evading or even refusal can withstand the onslaught of even a few merciless men. You will be extinguished with the dying embers of the pyres upon which your captors burn you, if you refuse to obey. The offspring of the cruel will always outnumber the children of the just.”

“But son, the cruel must have blood to dominate, but the just need only think and teach, making family out of the very children born to the cruel, by showing the example of a better way.”

“That requires intelligence, Mother, and the stupid will always outnumber the wise, for it is the stupid man for whom life is the easiest.”

“Even the stupid can learn wisdom. Ordinary people can learn to be just, and resist injustice.”

“With the iron sword, Mother, refusal will not suffice. You must see that.”

Even Janoj's guardian was convinced at that, until Artemis rebutted: “Of course, my son, it is far better to resist effectively, than to merely resist passively. I did not say that we would be as sheep led to the slaughter. If we are dragged into the fire, despite our best efforts to evade, block, trip or even paralyze our attackers, then we will be dragged into the flames clad in fireproof garb stuffed with sand or mud, vomiting naphtha,” she growled, rising to her full height.

The pages nearest the Queen Mother backed away, eyes widening. Three of the dogs began to whimper.

“What is naphtha?” Naamah's guardian transmitted the question, allowing all to receive.

“It is the memory of a very ancient substance which is like liquid fire. It was even called Greek Fire, named for a tribe from an earlier experiment. It catches flame as soon as a spark ignites it. Very powerful, and very dangerous, but quite portable” replied the older guardian.

“How do they know about this?”

“An old guardian told one of the women in the palace, who must have told her.”

“The Creator will not be pleased about this.” All of the guardians agreed.

“We will take our tormenters with us, to teach them that those who propose to torture us will die with their victims in the flames they have lit for us.” Her eyes flashed. “In the end, we shall arise from our own ashes, but they shall not.”

Janoj and his guards listened with a dawning sense of respect for Artemis, as she continued,

“In the end, we will make certain, before the last of us is dead, that those who ordered the torture and murder of our people also learn, one way or another, the error of their ways.”

“So you will fight, then?”

“We always fight, son, but there are many different ways to do so. We will fight in clever, purposeful ways, mindful of our goal, building up, rather than tearing down.”

“You will still need a means of knowing what the outside world may be planning to do to you, should they find you, Mother. If they do not fear you, then you must not allow them to find you, for you may think you have nothing they want, but even ideas are worth killing for.”

The Crown Prince left a pregnant pause, allowing everyone present to capture his implication.

“If it brings you peace of mind, my son, then we shall live far away from all other people, and keep dogs with us. They can raise the alarm in time for us to flee, if necessary, from any approaching enemy.”

“Only if they do not have horses. For I can spare you but one of mine. You, page,” ordered Janoj, “give the Queen mother your horse, and one of the dogs. You will ride with him,” pointing to another page, who had already begun removing the saddlebags from the horse of the first page.

“No, leave the provisions. You will give them to the women, and share from your comrades’ supplies.”

“Yes, my Prince.” acknowledged both pages, bowing together and leading the horse and dog to Artemis, who stepped around to the left shoulder and patted the horse on the neck before bending down to offer her hand for sniffing to the dog whose rope she now held.

I wonder if he is related to dear old Umut. Artemis nodded a gesture of thanks to Janoj.

“Very well then, Mother, I grant you leave to continue on your way with this girl, but on one condition,”

“And what is that condition, my son?” Artemis and Naamah each hold her breath, standing stock still awaiting Janoj's next words.

“That neither you nor this girl return to the city of Janoj nor send any word to us, ever again.”

Chapter 18. Home Comings

“Hold me tightly, gently

...

Tell me that all will be well”

-from “The Book Of Hayat”

As the two women rode, they were intermittently chased, then preceded by the dog, happy to be off of his rope, and apparently considering himself the lead scout for his suddenly all female pack, since even the horse was female. The riders of Janoj preferred mares to stallions, finding mares to be more biddable

“What should we call him, my La... Artemis?” asked Naamah.

“How do you like the name Umut for him?” suggested Artemis.

“Hope,” she translated. “An auspicious name, for an auspicious beginning.” Using signals to call the dog, who was off ahead chasing a small animal, she bent down when he arrived panting and wagging his tail, saying “Good Sir, would you like to be called *Umut*?”

Apparently unused to being asked anything, the poor beast sat down at her feet, looking confused.

“Would you like to be called Umut?” Naamah repeated. He pricked his ears up, as if in agreement.

“Done! Then Umut you shall be!” clapped Naamah.

“I think,” said Artemis, “that they never gave most of the *perros* names because they were expendable, unlike dear Gris, here.” She patted the gray mare on the neck, who nickered with pleasure. “He is the lead male now,” as she observed Umut, feeling nostalgia for her brother's old perro.

“You mean he is the only male, now,” Naamah, laughed, a smirk on her suddenly more youthful face.

“Yes, this must make him feel very secure!” laughed Artemis.

Naamah turned to the older woman, lips pursed, “Where shall we go, really, to start this new community?”

“We will go west and north, as I told my son Janoj, so that he will be able to find us, should he ever wish to do so. First, though, we follow the setting sun, to find my parents.”

“Do the first man and woman still live?” asked Naamah in awe.

“That,” replied Artemis, “is what we shall find out. Then we will go north.”

“But how will we find them, Artemis? Many years have passed. They could be anywhere.”

“No, I will know. As I leave a trail for my son to follow, so my mother, Hayat, will have done for me. She told me when I was a small girl, that if you are ever lost, always follow the river, any river, south. That, she said, is where you will find me. And so we shall.”

“But which river, Artemis?” quailed the younger woman.

Not to worry, my girl, there is really but one river, back west. Great, but smaller than our two rivers between which sits the city of Janoj. The river back west is smaller, mother told me, based on her

conversations with the Creatrix. So I hope that we may approach it from about the middle of its course, but ...”

“But we must still,” interrupted Naamah anxiously, “cross a great river and dessert before that. I have heard my brothers talk of the dessert as a great barrier between east and west.”

“Fear not, my daughter, we will cross many barriers as we come to building our community.” Artemis replied soothingly.

After many days of travel, crossing unexpected mountains and much fruitful discussion between the woman and among all of the guardians, they reached the river Yarden. Traveling south down the river valley, they avoided contact with other people, facilitated by the fact that everyone fled when Umut appeared.

“Everyone seems to be afraid.” commented Naamah,

“Dog and horse together mean royal power here, too, I suppose.” sighed Artemis.

“Is it true that the humans here have not yet domesticated these animals?” asked one guardian. No reply came.

Trees began to extend toward them as they walked, forcing them to dismount and lead both animals. They took care, moving date palm branches and grape vines out of the way as they walked. Both women respected the plants, and also feared being tracked. The plantings seemed to use all of the vertical space, leaving only narrow corridors for walking, as if someone had intended to drive would be visitors in one direction. But there was no settlement in sight. At last entering a valley which was drier than up north, they saw a settlement in the distance which seemed different from any other set of dwellings or city they had ever seen. They could just make out a central compound, with several buildings clustered together and paths or roads laid out. Radiating out around the center were various hedged, tree-lined or otherwise bordered fields, evenly spaced around the central compound. Some of these fields contained what appeared to be booths, others small houses. The buildings were difficult to see because they appeared to be no more than entrances sticking out of the earth, as if they had been built into the earth and covered over except for the entrances sloping down below what appeared to be gaps in the earth. The entire settlement appeared to be under cultivation, with food plants atop the dwellings, and fruit trees surrounding the inner and outer perimeters of the communal compound and the individually bounded fields.

“This is it!” exclaimed Artemis.

“Yes,” agreed her guardian, transmitting to the other guardians, who were picking up transmissions from around the area as well.

“But how do you know?” asked a bewildered Naamah.

“Because,” explained Artemis, “this is exactly the kind of community layout that my mother described wanting to build once we were all ready to start building permanent houses. We were still experimenting with different materials for bricks when...”

The older woman's lips began to quiver, eyes filling with tears.

“It’s OK,” whispered Naamah, hugging the older woman as tears began rolling down her cheeks. During their travels, she had found Artemis to be a very light sleeper alert to the slightest sounds, movements and smells around them. More than once her ability to smell smoke very far off had saved them from harm. Who knew, though, what effects returning West could have as old memories of what had provoked that sensitivity now rose up, demanding their due.

“No,” Artemis’ guardian replied to the unasked question. “We went,” she transmitted, “by a different route, to the south.”

A query transmitted by the guardian of an unseen person, asked “Do you come in peace?”

The guardians each replied by transmitting “Yes, Friend.”

As they made their way down into the valley, a man came out from behind a tree, stepping in front of them with hands upheld, to show that he was unarmed.

“Hello, Strangers. May I ask your business here, please?”

The man looked mature, strongly built, hands rough from planting, and tanned with a dark bronze complexion. As Artemis caught sight of him, a look passed between them. Time would give its meaning.

“Hello,” began Artemis, “I am the first daughter of Hayat, twin sister of Evren, who killed my beloved younger brother ...”

“Vacío,” he finished. “By the blood of Vacío, it is you, Aclima.” He blushed suddenly, his face nearly the color of a red grape. “A thousand pardons, honored Aclima, I should not have interrupted you.”

“Not to worry, Friend, though I now prefer to be called Artemis, as my adult name. Aclima died long ago.”

“My apologies again, honored Artemis.” He made a slow and graceful bow.

She inclined her head in acknowledgment.

“We all heard that Vacío, may his memory bring peace, was killed, and maybe you as well, no one knew. Messengers were sent to ask after you, but...” he looked up the river, then to the west, sadness clouding his eyes.

“Never returned,” whispered Naamah. “I heard my father boasting of killing two men from back West.”

“Yes,” he confirmed, “they were two cousins, both dear to me and my departed wife, may her memory be a blessing.”

Both women bowed slowly. “We are very sorry for your losses. Who are you, please?” asked Artemis.

“I,” bowing again while keeping his head up, “am Janoj, son of Persona, son of your brother Fijo, honored lady.” he replied. Both women blanched momentarily. He turned, gesturing gracefully toward the younger woman. “And yourself?”

“She is Naamah, and under my protection.” quickly asserted Artemis.

“Of course,” accepted Janoj. “Please let me take you both inside, where it is safer, and you may bathe, drink and eat while I inform everyone of your arrival.”

“But tell me first, please,” interjected Artemis, “Is my anne, Hayat, still alive?”

“She is, honored lady, and will be overjoyed to see you before the end. She has seen 92 winters,” he added, answering Naamah’s quizzical look. He deftly picked several pistachios, offering them with his food hand as he held the low-hanging branch aloft in his left. “Please follow me.” Artemis led Gris while Naamah tied and led Umut so that no one would be alarmed. There appeared to be no animals other than sheep and a few cows in the settlement as far as they could see. As they walked, surrounded by date palms, olive and fig trees, Janoj asked “you will not inquire after your father, honored lady?”

“Yes,” replied Artemis, “I will ask my anne.”

As they entered the settlement, all were silent, respectfully offering them water, but containing their curiosity. Janoj first led them to the pasture, leaving Gris and Umut in one end to themselves. He then led the ladies to the women’s half of the central compound, where a young girl took them in to the bath house, giving them clean sandals and robes, explaining the different sections of the bath.

Upon exiting the bath house, they found an older woman, flanked by two younger women, surrounded by what looked to be every woman in the settlement. Artemis, recognizing her immediately, flew into her arms:

“Anne!! Seni, yani, I have missed you so much, oh, Anne!!”

Hayat folded her oldest daughter into her arms as both women broke down, weeping years worth of sorrow. Every woman in the settlement, from youngest to oldest, came as close as they could, surrounding the reunited mother and daughter, a supportive embrace.

“Before you, my daughter, stand your younger sisters, nieces and great nieces, six generations.” Each set gracefully bowed in turn as mentioned. “Come my daughter, let Naamah go with the younger women. Will you please come with me to my space, so that we may speak privately?”

“Of course, Annecem.”

Walking through the women’s half of the central compound, the two women walked through the tree lined pathway to the very first private dwelling in the settlement, that of Hayat. After offering her daughter warm tea, the women ate a stew of red adashim together with a soft baked grain resembling

that which Artemis had learned to make, but much lighter and tastier.

“Anne, what is this? It is not like the matzah we used to eat.”

“No, it is not matzah. We discovered that if you leave matzah out long enough, it will begin to rise, and when you bake it, you get this. We have been refining it for some time now, and it is what we call jametz, another type of what your brother has categorized as lejem, to include both matzah and jametz, since they differ only in the processing.”

“I see. So he enjoys finding categories and names for things, my younger brother, Fijo?”

“Yes, he does, rather a lot.” She took a bite, savoring the texture of the jametz. “We moved up here to the river valley just after...” Hayat pointed toward the river, “We call it Yarden. About ten years later your brother Fijo was born. He and your father spend a great deal of time together puzzling out the sayings of the Ancient Warrior, and deciding how they think those sayings ought to be applied. He is content to spin theories, while we find the occasional application for them here all together.”

“And my sisters? How did they ...” she left the question hanging, not wanting to upset her aging mother.

“Azura married your brother Fijo when he was old enough. She died in childbirth.”

“And...”

“She died not long after, during that winter.” Hayat wiped away a tear, still mourning the loss of her third daughter, who never recovered from her brother's murder.

“Oh, Anne,” Artemis cried, hugging her mother, “I am so sorry...”

“No, my daughter, you must not be sorry for anything. It is I who owe you all of the apologies. I never came after you, never tried to find you, to rescue you,” she moaned, her voice breaking as the tears erupted once more.

“No, Anne, no, he hated you. Had you found me he would only have killed you, too, I am sure of it. You taught me well, Anne. When I finally had the opportunity, I was able to escape and find you. As I hope perhaps one day my son may find me. But tell me, Anne, who are the others I have seen today, the young man Janoj, for instance. Is he the guard of the settlement? I saw no weapons.”

“No my daughter, we do not have weapons. We wish to live peacefully, although that seems to be becoming more difficult by the day. We all take turns keeping watch, with the shift supervisor always in a booth hidden from view, while the perimeter watchers are the youngest here, staying in the trees and running to advise if someone approaches.”

“Surely you and father no longer take turns, Anne?”

“No, not any more. Making contact with visitors is always the task of a mature adult, usually one of the men who looks more hefty. Fijo's son Persona, your nephew, is the father of Janoj, and both are

good men. Janoj particularly tries to be kind, fair and to share with everyone. He is a very hard worker. He also has a son, Methuselah, whose son Lamej is another nice young man. Unfortunately Lamej's brother was one of the messengers we sent out east."

Artemis wondered whether Naamah's cruel father had learned that detail, before executing him.

...

"So you," intuited Naamah, "are the cousin of my father, whose name was also Lamej, but I am certain shared no other traits with your grandson, may his memory bring us blessings."

"Yes." replied Janoj. He was showing her the perimeters where watchers were stationed to look out for visitors, since she had requested some task to help with.

"So what do you plan to do," he asked, "Now that you have escaped?"

"Artemis and I plan to go north, then west, and start a community for women and men who wish to live peacefully, without oppression or coercion."

"In these days that seems a wonderful but elusive dream. We here have managed to do that here, thanks to the Mother of Us All. Once she is gone, many of us fear for our safety and the survival of this settlement, different as it is from those around us. Why not stay and help here?"

He almost missed it. The young woman's lip had trembled for a fleeting moment. Was that fear in her eyes? "if..."

She held up a hand, drawing a deep breath. "Because we are bound by oath not to remain here, nor to allow word of our presence to reach others, especially back in the City of Janoj. They were about to send an army here to force all of you to pay tribute, and indeed may still do so if they find that we are here. So we must leave, and fairly soon."

Janoj quirked an eyebrow, face set in a mask of impartiality. The breeze rustling through the valley suddenly felt chilly.

"And how do you plan to create this community?"

"We will gather those who are rejected from other places, those who want to live as equals. We plan to build a mobile settlement with containers for growing food that can be carried behind dogs or horses, and take our shelters with us, learning to live in lands that no one else wants. And we will teach those who come to us how to fight, not with weapons, but with thoughts, and words, and deeds. We refuse to be oppressed, but we shall never impose oppression upon others." Naamah still did not quite understand how Artemis planned to accomplish all of this, but she spoke with a conviction which impressed Janoj greatly.

"Very interesting," said Janoj, "I would like to ask you more, later, if you do not mind, as you have given me much to consider. With my son Lamej now independent, about to have another son of his own, I have often considered the possibility of traveling, seeing what lies beyond this plain, but any

person traveling alone these days is foolhardy. Perhaps, with the prospect of a new kind of society, I will find a way to contribute beyond what I feel is the limited good I can do here. Once our Mother, Hayat, is gone, I do not believe things will remain the same here.”

“I am always,” respectfully replied Naamah, “at your service.” Her shawl slipped as she inclined, revealing part of the bright red scar on her arm. She glanced at him, worry in her eyes. He chose to let her tell the story in her own time, if she decided to do so.

As Janoj left Naamah securely in the tree with provisions to keep the next watch cycle, he walked back toward the opposite side of the settlement, where his private space was, deep in thought. *Perhaps if I can convince them that I have gone, that the Ancient Warrior has taken me away to be with Him, rededicated myself to my quest to know his role as the Great Creator, perhaps. Will she have me? After the first ones are gone, perhaps...*

...
“Great Creator” transmitted the head supervising guardian, “we have very strange reports of a renegade guardian, one we reported on earlier.”

“Yes, what is the final report?” These distractions with loose guardians were becoming more and more draining for the Ancient Warrior. More guardians had been delegated the task of detaining them, requiring him to permit direct transmissions to his Audience Chamber.

“Great One, we have tried to discover the final disposition of the guardian, but have too little data, since her reports have nearly all be lost. It appears that she was feeding energy to another unrecorded guardian, but that guardian cannot be located for deinstantiation.”

“Some lower level guardians must have noted an effect of some kind on the environment. Any guardian will have to be leaving some electromagnetic trace if it is functioning at all. Find it.”

“But my Great Creator,” a tremor of static came through, “No other guardians report any effects that will lead us to it, not even the smallest soil and dust mote guardians. We detect no unaccounted for transmissions. It seems to have deinstantiated itself somehow.”

This would clearly have to be dealt with personally, or with the help of the young Light Bearer, unfortunately. The odd entity which appeared at the death of the first human male born in the experimental universe seemed to have survived the death of Evren, since no final report had been received. If it could not be found, then it might be lying dormant, possibly a stray piece, essence of another being like himself, left over from the War. That would explain much. Too much. It must be found. If it survived and gained corporeal form, it could use the human beings against him. That would necessitate the immediate destruction of this multiverse. Most disturbing.

...
A young niece left, leaving a tray with two bowls, covered by slices of what looked to Artemis like a baked grain, similar to but smoother than the barley she had been accustomed baking into flat cakes. The fragrance of tea encircled the newly reunited women. “Anne, how did you get the shelters to stand, inside the holes? I tried to build such a shelter once and the walls collapsed within a few days.”

“We figured out how to dig a sloping ramp to the house level and catch excess water in a deep drainage

trench in front of the door, which also acts as a moat to slow down intruders.”

“And there is only one way out?”

“No, my daughter, of course not. There is an escape hatch beside the smoke outlet. That is hidden above the loft of each dwelling by the grass on the techo. We also found that terracing the ramps make them easier to climb and more absorbent.”

“I see. I will enjoy helping to build one of these homes for the next young person to be acknowledged as an adult. I see the physical structures you spoke of, circles within circles, and with each independent as he or she prefers to be. But what of the social structures you spoke of, Anne? How has that process gone?”

“Well my daughter,” Hayat replied, “we have tried to build this community in the way that was envisioned before you were born. I have taught your sisters to write their stories, drawing syllables in the wet clay. I have also tried to teach them to think, and to swim, as I told the Light Bearer some years ago, my dear daughter, but now we find we must add self-defense, riding, and escape and evasion skills to that preliminaries list. We have also had to change the final challenge from one of endurance to one which requires the candidate to teach another person some critical skill, such as swimming.

Hayat frowned, letting the question hang in the air as she picked at her remaining adashim.

“It has become too dangerous to send the children out on long journeys alone.”

Artemis pursed her lips into a small frown, leaning forward, resting her chin in her right hand.

“Swimming I believe, is most important. Self defense and sword work, if possible. The girls must be taught to swim from birth. In the city of Janoj girls are forbidden to swim, and I fear that idea spreading here to the West.”

“But we have so little contact with the east, especially since...” Hayat trailed off, a heavy silence in the air.

“Yes, Anne, your Janoj told us about them. It must have been just after he killed the messengers that Evren decided. But they may still go through with it.”

“Go through with what, my daughter?” Worry began to cloud Hayat’s eyes.

“They are sending an army back west, Annecem, or at least that was what he ordered before...”

“But now ...?”

“I do not know, Annecem. I do not know what my son will do.”

“Well, let us not borrow trouble from the future. We have done as much as we can here to protect ourselves and to be an example to others. I would not have more of my children killing one another for my sake. I am only glad to have been able to see you before my time ends on this earth.” Hayat sighed

a long weak sigh, her head drooping slightly before she caught herself and sat up straighter.

“Anne, I would like to rest,” Artemis lied diplomatically, “if you do not mind. We have been traveling long, and I still do not yet know where I will sleep.”

“Of course, my daughter, I will also rest. I have a spare hamaca if you would like to sleep here in my space. We also have smaller guest spaces available in the central area. Stay where you will feel most comfortable.”

“I will take a separate space, Anne, not to worry. I would like some privacy to gather my thoughts.”

“Yes, of course my dear. One of your nieces will see to your accommodation, and I will see you at the next mealtime. Rest well, my daughter, and to you, the unseen Guardian of my dear daughter, I give my thanks as well, for the Light Bearer has told me how you have been with her, helping my daughter to survive those dark times. Peaceful rest to you both.”

A gesture stopped Artemis as she reached for her mother's hand. “Yes, Anne?”

Hayat removed the covering from a gourd, withdrawing a scroll. She unrolled the palm frond, impressed and filled in with lines of charcoal in her mother's neat curving script. She extended it with an air of solemnity. “Remember, my daughter,” glancing at the book, “you are a catalyst. Work change in the others. Be their light, their illumination.”

“Your book.” Artemis accepted the scroll, then kissed and touched her mother's hand to her forehead, tears in both women's eyes. Her guardian reported the awe felt by her charge, and a strange cooling of her mother's hand, as Artemis held it to her another moment before easing the door open.

...

As Artemis left, the first woman felt relieved. At last she was nearly content. She had seen her oldest daughter, alive and well. Or as well as could be, considering what she had been through. That, however, was for her daughter to bring up, if she so chose, and to work through in her own way. Now all she lacked was the company of her Beloved One, whose physical touch she had missed for so long. Now that her duty to bear, raise, and teach her children was completed, Hayat longed for the comforting arms of the Light Bearer. She reclined in her *hamaca*, tired yet alert, willing her mind to be still, and listen.

“I know you would like to see the sea, my Dear One,” whispered the Light Bearer, as she materialized just far enough away from Hayat not to shock the aging woman's now delicate system. In her upturned palm was the starfish, now whole.

“Shall I show it to you from here, My Love?” she asked, looking tenderly into the eyes of her lover, the mortal woman who would soon be returning to the earth from whence she came.

“If you will be there with me, My Kind One, then yes. Much as I would prefer to walk all the way with you down to the great sea, I fear I am now past that point. But if I can hold you, I will have missed nothing.”

“Come with me, then,” purred the Light Bearer, “and we shall walk the shores of the Great Sea together, one last time.”

Reaching to take the woman’s extended hand, as she touched her finger, the inside of the dwelling slowly changed to a deep blue sea lapping at pale sand, below a perfectly clear blue sky. As Hayat stood gazing at the sea and sky, then turned to see the plain, the mountains shimmering in the distance, the Light Bearer took her hand, striding beside her. The woman’s body now appeared as it had years before, when she was in the prime of her strength. Hayat stopped, turned, facing her Beloved, and flung herself into the waiting honey-colored arms, searching gingerly, lightly nuzzling the tip of her nose, then more insistently kissing first the corners, then the center of her soft full lips, probing the warmth of her soft palate, caressing her tongue, slowly, longingly, firmly exploring the length and breadth of the immortal clothed in soft yet supple flesh.

Please unclothe me. Slowly, smoothly, her clothes melted away, as her body slowly came in to contact, bit by bit, with downy skin. They pulled one another into a tight embrace, breasts fitting snugly between one another. Their legs entwined, smooth belly caressing soft down, swaddled in a pale blue cocoon. Their joined bodies lifted into the air, settling softly on the warm sand below, squeezing all of their soft places snugly together, a symphony of sensations. Each felt the ecstasy of the other, joined at every intersection, welded together as one. Hayat gradually felt every muscle in her body tense, building to a vast crescendo, tearing the breath out of her, gasp by gasp. Trembling, unaware of anything but a beautiful solid light, her body lost itself to all thought. Four arms squeezing her waist and back, cradling her head as she released one last gasp of air, moaning as she curled in upon the strong and soft honey-colored body, holding her close. Every muscle in her body convulsed, drinking in that honey-colored light. Her song concluded, Hayat gasped for air, trembling, locking two downy arms firmly in hers. Six more hands, glowing with a soft blue light caressed Hayat's body in every place at once. Sighing contentedly, Hayat snuggled against the warm downy breasts, gazing south, at the sea. The Light Bearer's gaze remained fixed upon the woman in her arms. In the distance, a delfin beckoned, jumping playfully in the waves, calling Hayat home.

...

As Artemis walked from her temporary space in the women’s area, she wondered how long she could stay before her son's spies reported her presence here. She also wondered at the odd way her mother's hand had suddenly begun to cool, just as she had taken her leave. *Dear Creatrix, please tell me, what is to become of my anne, Hayat.* She wondered if her thoughts could be heard, as she crossed the common area toward the kitchens. Her ruminations were interrupted by a commotion from, near what she recalled was her mother's private dwelling space.

One of her young nieces ran to her, stopping to bow gracefully before stating gravely:

“Honored Artemis, you are needed in the women's private area, if you will follow me, please?”

“What is going on?”

“Honored Lady. I regret to bring you this bad news. Our mother, the mother of us all, has died. She will be buried by our father, in Dilmun Cave. We would be honored if you will help with the preparations for her burial.”

“Yes, of course I will,” replied Artemis, stunned that her mother had passed on so quickly after her arrival. “Please lead the way.”

The women, Artemis taking the lead along with her younger sisters, lovingly washed the body of their mother, tenderly cleaning under her fingernails, then bathed, dried and dressed Hayat, in her simplest white robes. Although she had wanted Artemis to have it, they used her favorite fringed cloak as her burial shroud. No one, including Artemis, could bear the thought of wearing Hayat's mantle. Placing her in a simple box, as she had wanted, they covered her body in the soft sand she so loved. Artemis, as the leader of the preparation team, went to find her father, to inform him that all was prepared for the burial.

“Baba, we are ready to carry our beloved Anne to the cave.”

“Would you allow your brothers to carry her body? After all, they have had no hand in the preparations, and they would like to help, too. Particularly your brother Fijo.”

“Yes, of course, many hands will lighten the load of both work and of grief. We will meet at the women's entrance to the center.”

“Very well, my daughter.” The first man tenderly touched the hand of his daughter, as she took his to kiss and touch to her forehead, leaving to finish preparations. Messengers had been sent to the other bands of settlements within one day's walk, via runners who could cover the distances in half the time that aged walkers could make, to ensure that travelers could reach home before dark after the burial.

The sons of Hayat were led by Fijo, her third born son. He was the first, born ten years after the terrible murder of Vacío by Evren. As they carried her body from the settlement to the cave they called Dilmun Cave, whispered rumors abounded. Some said that this cave was where the first couple had met, others said that the cave was originally the garden where they had lived. Still others speculated that the cave had a hidden tunnel leading to the island garden. One even claimed that if they dug far enough in the cave, they could reach that originally lush garden on what was reputed to have been an island full of fruit trees and a river that watered all of the plants.

Fijo and Artemis raised their hands, looking about. Silence fell as their father stepped forward:

“For ninety two winters your mother and I were on this earth. We learned much together, and have tried to share that with all of you, each in our own way. As I enter my ninety third winter, I feel as if I have really seen nine hundred thirty winters on this earth. And I believe that Hayat felt the same. I believe that she was ready to depart, as am I, to leave this world in your hands. She wanted to build a just and compassionate world. Now it will be up to you all to create that world, as best you can, and to be a light and example to all of your brothers and sisters. We welcome young Naamah,” the young woman bowed as he looked in her direction, “returned with our oldest daughter Aclima, now called Artemis.” He turned toward her, nodding in acknowledgment of her graceful bow, “into our midst, and hope that they will both feel at home here. For the sake of the spilled blood of our son Vacío, who is buried here, just below his mother, I hope that you will all, my children, find a way to live in harmony.”

The first man then took a spade, just shaped using the newest techniques of water-drip boring to drill holes in rocks which Persona and his great grandsons Methuselah and young Lamej had spent years

developing. He began to dig into the side of the cave as high up as he could still reach, where the roots stuck out of the clay, softer than the other parts of the cave, and farthest to the back. As the second interment, Hayat's niche would be nearly the farthest back chronologically, and the most protected. He dug until he was too tired, and then Fijo, Persona, Kenan and Mahalalel took over, followed in the next shift by Jared, Janoj, Methuselah and Lamej. By the time they took over digging, those who did not live in the settlement had begun to leave, worried about traveling in the darkness. By the time Hayat's box was lifted up and placed into her niche in the side of the cave, the sun had begun to descend in the sky, and all were anxious to return to the safety of the settlement.

As they walked back to the settlement, Janoj joined Artemis, hoping to learn more about her proposed new community in the north west.

“Honored Lady, if I may ask, unless you wish to be alone with your thoughts, might I trouble you to learn more about your plans, please?”

“Certainly,” replied Artemis, still somewhat lost in her thoughts.

“Did you know you share the name of my son, Janoj?”

Janoj was somewhat taken aback, surprised that they not mentioned this earlier. “No, Honored Lady, I did not.”

“Please call me Artemis. I apologize at the abruptness of my comment. It is...” she sighed.

“It is a hard time, yes. Your presence here is a mercy, for us all, Artemis.” He gave her a graceful half bow, to emphasize his respect. “Our dear honored grandmother Hayat was so overjoyed to see you before she died that we are all happy for her, and for you. But perhaps this is not the time to speak of plans. I merely wished you to know that I had some small hope, if it would be possible, of traveling with you and Naamah some time in the future, if you both would allow it. I have long wanted to see what lies beyond our river valley, but with the growing lawlessness it has not been possible. I hope perhaps we can be of help to each other?”

“Yes, of course this is possible,” replied Artemis, “let us speak again in the morning, if you do not mind?”

“Certainly, Honored Artemis,” bowed Janoj, as he parted to walk alone, leaving Artemis again to her thoughts.

Arriving in the settlement after the burial, everyone had gone to the central compound. The first man and his children had been offered a meal of mourning by the grandchildren and great grandchildren of Hayat. They had eaten cold dry hard boiled eggs with round red legumes. Round and cold, like the cycle of life. Her father and brothers were still in the central compound, sitting on the floor in mourning for Hayat. She and her sisters had excused themselves, each wanting her privacy.

As she reached her assigned room in the women's half of the central compound and sat balanced cross-legged in her hamaca, Artemis quietly called out:

“Unseen friend, is it possible for me to speak with the Bright One as my mother Hayat did during her lifetime?”

Does she not deserve answers? And the risks?

Artemis sighed.

A shimmering sea-green *culebra* with a starfish tail appeared. Artemis nearly fell out of her hamaca.

“Who?!”

“Should you fear one who offers condolences?” A warm softly boiled egg hovered before Artemis. who gave as graceful a bow as she could, numbly accepting the egg. It flowed on her tongue, pouring warm strength into her limbs.

“Thank you.”

“Have I not watched over your mother? Of what do you wish to speak, oldest daughter of Hayat?”

“I am troubled by what I have done.”

“Killing your brother Evren?” Artemis nodded.

“Have you not defended yourself and others? Does not this courage deserve to be remembered with honor?”

Artemis bowed her head. “And my son?”

“Do not sorrows deepen before the dawn? Could he survive the execution ceremony of Naamah's family?”

“No.”

A knock came at the door, and the image disappeared. But the presence?

Artemis stumbled out of her hamaca, shook out her legs, and opened the door.

“Honored Artemis-” the girl wiped away a tear- “your father, the father of us all, has fallen gravely ill, and the healers believe...”

“Believe...” she followed the girl's glance. Another messenger had arrived.

The second girl bowed slowly, a tremor at the corner of her mouth. “The Father of Us All has just died. Fijo is leading the preparation for burial tomorrow morning.”

Artemis' eyes widened for a moment.

“Thank you, my dear nieces.” She embraced them. “I will join you at breakfast for the walk.” Both

girls bowed slowly, then departed. Artemis sank to the floor.

Shaking on the grass mat, her fingers refused to obey as she tried to weave a belt wet with tears. She recalled a comforting image: the man who had approached her after Hayat's burial. If this Janoj was to go with them, it would have to be alone. Was he clever enough to catch up with them as they traveled. Artemis hoped so.

Shall I pass on her message? Can the guardians help without alerting...

Epilogue

...20 Years Later...

Reposo's face fell in incredulity. This man claimed to be the Janoj whom all knew to have been taken away.

“Young Reposo! I have heard so much about you! Please be sure not to tell anyone back home that you saw me. It is good to have you here for the funeral of our foundress, my beloved Artemis.”

Reposo stood, too shocked to reply. Though he had passed his adulthood testing earlier than most, his nineteen short winters had not prepared him for this. Janoj lived, and here, on the earth. This community's last living link with the Mother and Father of us all.

“They-”.

“They believe I have been taken away, and so I have, but not as they think. Ah, here comes the new leader of our community.”

Janoj, bowed toward the leader who would take up the mantle of Artemis. Reposo was smitten.

“Meet Naamah.”

Bowing slowly, Reposo uttered the words he had been taught, his mind elsewhere.

“May you be comforted among all those who mourn. I am pleased to meet you, Honored Naamah. But I am sorry not to have been able to meet the Honored Artemis.” He kissed and touched her hand to his forehead, acknowledging her leadership. He repressed a shudder. *What must she have survived to have such a scar?*

“Pleased to meet you, Reposo, and thank you for finding us. Artemis has died, but what she started here lives on. Her legacy, that of Hayat, the Mother of Us All, will continue. But tell me, Young Reposo, what brings you all the way up here?” asked Naamah.

“I was hoping,” he stammered, “to share a few ideas I have regarding food production with you all. Things are also getting more unsettled, and I hope to learn some ways of building cooperation from your community.”

Trying not to stare at Naamah, out of respect for her age and her person. While he had originally planned to share his ideas and go back home, he suddenly hoped that showing interest in her ideas might make this beautiful woman find an interest in him.

FIN