

# Night Man

## By Raymond Towers

\* THIS PROJECT IS A WORK IN PROGRESS. \*

**\*\*\* Creative Commons License Attribution - Non-Commercial - No Derivatives (CC BY-NC-ND)** - This PDF story is licensed as 'copy and share.' You may share this story freely as long as you do not change it in any way or use it commercially. \*\*\*

All of the characters in this e-book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, whether living or dead, is purely coincidental.

This e-book contains a HIGH amount of controversial subject matter. Most likely, it will be in the medieval fantasy genre with a lot of horror in it.

Song lyrics: Insane To The Membrane by Cypress Hill

#####

### Introduction

Greetings, readers.

Would you like to follow along as I begin a new writing project? Here are my goals for the moment, but they might change as things roll along. I want to write a new story. I don't know how long this story will be, but I am hoping it will be between novella length up to a full novel. (10,000 to 100,000 words) It might head off in the direction of dark fantasy or dark sci-fi, or both, but it will probably have strong elements of horror built in, so if you're squeamish to such things this might not be something you want to read.

I recently read a book of fiction. This book was advertised as being sci-fi cyberpunk, but in truth most of it is in the medieval fantasy genre. The book is titled *AlterWorld: Play To Live Book 1*, by D. Rus. While reading this book I took inspirational notes, and after I finished it I wrote and posted a book review on Smashwords, where I first acquired the book. You will find the notes at the end of this document. They'll disappear once I've incorporated them into this story, or if I won't be able to use them after all.

### How This Works

(In parenthesis, you will see usually see the current date, a word count and maybe notes or a message to either the reader or to myself for the future. What follows after parenthesis is what I have written on that specific day, and usually I try to be brief about the intro so I can move on to the story. Update: I've been reading a lot of RPG rulebooks recently, and I've also come across a ton of idea generators online. If I happen to use something from these resources, I'll note down what it was and where I found it. I am preparing a full list of these ideas. When it's ready, I'll leave a message so you can download it for yourself in PDF format.)

What follows is the main body of work, that is, the story itself. Since this is an ongoing work in progress, and I am winging it with no clear direction of where this story will lead, you might see some grammatical errors or whatnot that I will, hopefully, correct during the final draft. I should catch most of my errors fairly soon, actually, since I do tend to re-read my material often. Before I begin writing, I always re-read the most recent 2 pages to refresh my mind.

Don't worry when I say 'winging it.' When I first started out as a writer, I would write down character attributes and story outlines. As I've progressed in my skills, I've found I can begin a novel with only a general idea of a character and a few notes. That's what I have here, so I should be good to go.

Barring any unforeseen circumstances, I plan to update this work in progress every few days. You can expect one or two new pages at a time, or perhaps more if my workload lessens and I have more time to write. I have found that some people like to read my updated rough drafts every day, while others can wait a week and read more in one sitting. How often you download an update is up to you. At this writing pace, if this project ends up being a full novel, I should me take about three months to complete it.

**If you see something written in Bold that means it will disappear soon. This will happen mostly in the notes section, where I add things, use them or discard them as I go along. Some initial notes will disappear soon, for example.**

It can be messy if I try to keep a table of contents and page numbers on the bottom of the page, since a lot of stuff may end up being moved around later. The best way to keep track of where you left off is by noting the date.

This project is scheduled to begin on the night of Friday, July 10, 2020. Read along with me as I write it, if you can handle the sort of dark fiction I write. Send your comments and critiques to me, and some encouragement if you like the story, at [raymond towers777@yahoo.com](mailto:raymond towers777@yahoo.com).

Raymond Towers

#####

(July 10, 2020 - I've been working on a bunch of other things and prepared this at the last moment. It's 12 minutes to 11 PM, so I don't have a lot of time to write. I'm at least going to put a few sentences down to get things started.)

Darkness.

I can't remember breathing... or thinking. All I remember was... I don't know, nothing maybe? There was nothing, and then I became aware, aware of how dark everything was around me. I felt... I felt nothing, or maybe it was like being suspended in the air with nothing holding me up. It happened fast. From sensing nothing and being nowhere, I was suddenly aware and everything was so dark that I couldn't see a thing.

*Taste the darkness.*

What? Who said that? Was that me? Was that a thought from my head? I can't tell! I don't know if that was me or someone else... I can't tell if I heard that through my ears or inside my head! What the hell is happening?

I can't breathe. There is something wrong and I can't see anything, and of course I'm going to panic. I don't know if I have arms and legs here, wherever I am, but I'm flailing my limbs to try and get a hold of something, but there is nothing to grab onto...

Liquid. I think I'm in liquid. The second I realize that, some of this nasty shit gets into my mouth and it goes down my throat and now I'm gagging on it and trying to spit, but there's no air and I can't grab onto anything...

You ever seen a fish out of water? Seen it gasping and shaking and it knows it is going to die but there is nothing it can do about it? That's how I feel for... I don't know how long I was struggling in the watery darkness. A minute, maybe?

Things went... How can I even describe it? My awareness went away. I was no longer in the murk that was so repulsive to taste...

*Taste the darkness.*

I don't know who is saying that, but I'm ignoring it.

I think... I think I died, but I can't be sure. I think I suffocated in the water. Was it water? I don't know. I don't know what's happening.

I think I died.

I'm pretty sure I died.

(July 11, 2020 - I'm just getting to this story at 10:20 PM tonight. Yeah, I do this right before going to bed. Ha! That will give me some good nightmares! I do have extra busy days, partly because of the Covid lockdown. If I'm not busy doing something, I'll drive myself crazy over not being able to go out. Maybe I'll jot down what my usual schedule is like in a day or two. Right now I want to get to the story. I'm getting in the 'zone' here. I've already read my previous entry once. I'm going to read it again, take 10 minutes to think it over, and when I come back I'm diving in with the Night Man. Yesterday's word count: 350.)

Oh, shit!

It's happening again!

The awareness, followed by the darkness, and then I'm in liquid that tastes like sewage.

No, no, no!

I'm going to drown again!

Maybe I'm in a sewer, maybe I fell into one...

I can swim! Can I swim? I don't remember! Why can't I remember?

The vile, nasty shit is getting into my nose and mouth. I have no air left!

Wait, wait! There is some air in my lungs, but not much... Maybe if I swim I can find the surface of whatever fucking place I'm in right now!

Don't panic! Move your arms! Kick out your legs! I know how to swim, even if my brain is telling me something else. My brain is my enemy!

*My brain is my enemy!*

There! I've touched bottom! It feels... Ugh! That's the most disgusting thing I think I've ever touched! It feels soft and mushy, like wet flesh. I want to throw up!

Think, God damn it, think!

I've touched the bottom of wherever I am. That means I was swimming the wrong way! My brain automatically assumed this way was up... Go the other way! Hurry up before the air is gone!

*My brain is my enemy!*

I'm not bobbing up in the liquid like I should be. Something is wrong here! It feels like the thicker liquid is at the top. No wonder I was going in the wrong direction. I thought I was getting closer to the surface, but this was a lie!

Damn it, my body is shaking! I need air! I'm dying again!

My face bumps into more wet flesh. I can't see anything! Air, there is air here! Some kind of thin air pocket, only a few inches high. I open my mouth to gulp it in. Stupid! Stupid! Half of what falls into my mouth is this crap that tastes like sewage.

Small breaths... Breathe in a little at a time. The air smells rancid here, like something rotten, like gas coming out of something rotten.

I can breathe. Good. This is good. I can breathe a little at a time.

Relax. Get your shit together. You don't have to panic right now, not unless the air starts to run out, and then you're fucked and it's going to happen all over again.

Whoa, whoa!

This same thing has been happening to me, over and over.

*Eat the darkness.*

What does that mean? That's me, that's my voice in my head telling me this. I've been here before and I must have figured some of this shit out because my brain is giving me clues about it.

What can I remember?

Nothing. I can't remember anything before the first moment of awareness, and then I'm aware and a second later I'm in the sewage and I'm drowning.

Analyze the situation. Figure this out.

I'm in a bag of sewage. That's what it smells like, except it can't be a bag because it feels like wet flesh. How big is this place?

I'm still grabbing onto the fleshy ceiling and kicking my legs around, or else this heavier layer of fluid is going to push me down and then I'm screwed. I can use the flesh as handholds. I wish I could see, but I can't. The ceiling is uneven. I find a spot with a larger bubble of air, and I stop there. It doesn't make sense for me to keep moving in the darkness. This place I'm in, it could be immense, or it could be the size of a small swimming pool, but I'd never know it.

Stay here, breathe this sick air and figure things out.

Maybe a fish swallowed me. Maybe I'm like that Bible story about Jonah getting eaten by a whale or something. I could keep moving around until I find the fish mouth and try to get it to spit me out... But what could be out there? And damn, if this is true that's a big fucking fish!

Start with the basics. I'm in a dark place with a lot of smelly water and soft walls that feel like flesh. I could be inside an animal, some kind of creature I've never heard of before, but it is possible. And this place might be deep, too. My feet aren't touching the bottom.

I have to find out how deep. I take a deep breath and push away from the flesh ceiling. The thick water is actually pushing me away, like it doesn't want me up there where the air is. I float downward, waving my feet around, stretching my toes while trying to touch bottom. I start to get worried, and that worry quickly gives way to panic...

There! I've touched the bottom. Now I'm going to crouch and push my way to the top again. This place I'm in, it could be ten feet, maybe twelve feet deep. Just deep enough to scare the crap out of me when I didn't touch the bottom right away. I can actually feel the liquid growing heavier as I ascend. It feels like a coarse blanket, thick and weighty. You ever hold up a few pairs of jeans, where you can feel how their weight starts pulling down at your arm? That's kind of what it felt like: a ton of jeans or blankets bearing down on my head and shoulders.

I don't find the air pocket right away. It takes me a while, even when I had my sense of direction guiding me. Thank goodness the pocket is still there. Even rancid air like this is better than croaking again.

(July 12, 2020 - From yesterday: New word count: 938. Added with yesterday's word count: 1288. I started up at 10:40 tonight. I want to get straight to the story so here goes.)

I breathe. The air tastes even nastier than before but I keep inhaling. Maybe I'll use it all up but I don't care. If I die, I die.

Analyze shit. Figure it out. What am I doing here? How did I get here?

I realize that I'm not wearing any clothes. Isn't that a kick in the ass? I jumped into a sewer with flesh for walls, and I didn't even have the decency to be wearing any clothes. What the hell is wrong with me? Did I go skinny-dipping or something?

Man, that's not funny.

I'm realizing something else. It makes me shiver just to think about it. I'm starting to panic again! Stop! Stop! Keep it together, man!

Relax. Breathe. Do that meditation thing that... Who taught me? I don't remember who taught me. I don't remember anything.

I don't know who I am. My name is gone, along with everything else about me. I don't remember names or faces, or anything. When is my birthday? I don't know! I have a girl, right? What's my girl's name?

For the next couple of minutes, my brain blanks out. I think I had a girl, but I can't picture what she looks like.

Family. How about family? No, I've got nothing on them either.

My mind is a complete blank. Why is that?

The fog of memory. That's one thing I do remember. When you enter into a new place, the fog of memory might happen and you won't remember the last place you were in. It all starts over in the new place, sometimes but not all the time. I know this because... I can't remember. I learned it, and I know it, but the rest is missing.

Taste the darkness. Eat the darkness. My brain is my enemy. Those are the only things I remember. I feel that I'm supposed to remember them, like I memorized them ahead of time because I knew this was going to happen. This has happened before. I don't know how many times, but it has happened.

I don't know what those things mean, but I'd better reinforce them in my head in case there is a next time.

*Taste the darkness.*

*Eat the darkness.*

*My brain is my enemy.*

Again. Do it again until the air runs out. Keep doing it so I can remember for the next time.

I hear the sound of splashing nearby. It scares me so much I cling to the flesh wall and ceiling, as if I had any hope of climbing out of here. My first thought is that maybe an alligator is coming by, getting ready for a snap at my legs. I've never fought an alligator, so how the hell am I supposed to get rid of it?

The splashing stops.

That makes me wonder if maybe somebody else just became aware, and whoever that person is, they might be sinking to the bottom of the nasty liquid and running out of breath, like I was. Should I chance it and try to save them? What if it is an alligator, or something worse?

If it's a person, I might get answers. If it's something dangerous, it might kill me. Some choice I've got, huh? Does it matter? I mean, if I get killed right now, I'm just going to become aware next time, because I'm in some kind of shit loop that apparently I can't get out of.

Take a chance. Go see if that's a person or not.

All right, I'm going. I suck in gassy, rotting air, as much as I can, and I push off the wall and start my descent into putridity.

(Snap! It's 11:20 already, close to my bedtime. I was just getting on a roll, too. There is good news. I'm finishing up a project, hopefully tomorrow morning. If I can do that, I'll have a little more free time to write this story. I'll have to leave things here for now. Tonight's word count is 614. Added to yesterday's 1288 gives me 1902. I'm yawning now. See you next time.)

(July 13, 2020 - 9:40 PM. Okay, I've got some extra time today! Here is how my schedule goes on most days, thanks to the Lockdown situation. I wake up between 6 and 7 AM. The first thing I do is edit 25 pages of previously released material, or whatever article or short story I'm working on. After I'm done with that, I work on a short story or novel until noon, but sometimes I will get fed up and stop at 11. Basically, on most days I'm putting in at least 4 hours of writing in the morning, and as many as 6, before the middle of the day. My latest re-releases are A Terrible Thing To Waste and Verum Et Inventa magazine no. 4.

During the day, which is noon to 8 PM, I'll work out, clean the yard, and I have up to 4 yards I can clean, and I'll watch TV or do research on something else. I have been doing a lot of research on creating my Role-Playing Game, and thanks to that, I've come across a slew of name and idea generators online, and also a bunch of directions and charts on how to be a Game Master that I can adapt to my RPG. I'm putting together a new article with samples of all the idea generators I can find online, because I got hooked on that and I want to challenge myself to write stories on all the writing prods and results.

For entertainment, I watched Dr. Sleep on HBO a few days ago. That's the sequel to The Shining, and it was good! I'm also binge-watching 60 Days In on the A&E app, which I love, and Miami Vice on the NBC app, which, I have to say, is even better than I remember it from back in the 80s. Oh, I did get someone to drive me out to the Navy Base earlier, so I could see the smoke coming out of the USS Bonhomme Richard. That's only a couple of miles away from my house.

Around 8 PM, I'll settle in and edit another 25 pages of old stuff, and when I get done with that I'll clear my mind by working on something new. I just finished putting together the Verum Et Inventa Archive. I'll give it another look-through in the morning and probably release it right away. So, that's what my days are like, and yeah, it is a lot of work, but if I'm not writing and I end up sitting still, I tend to get ornery. This bit took about 20 minutes to write. I am going to take a ten-minute break and come back at 10:10 to resume the story.)

I hate that I can't see a thing. At least I can feel the turbulence in the water telling me which direction the mystery person is thrashing in.

Something swipes at me. The motion startles me because at first I think I'm being attacked. It's not an attack; it's this person or thing struggling in the water like I had the first time. Another

swipe comes at me. This time I'm fast enough to grab the limb. If it isn't human, I'm getting the heck out of there. It is human! I'm feeling a forearm and wrist.

I've got to play this just right. Since I'm already on the way down, I wait until I reach the bottom, crouch, and kick my body back up, without letting the arm go. The arm keeps trying to jerk out of my grip, and whoever this person is hasn't stopped flailing and kicking around. It's causing us both to drag, and I'm starting to worry that maybe we won't make up to the top.

When I feel the fluid around us getting thick and heavy, I know I'm close to the air pocket. My lungs are about to burst when my shoulder rubs against the fleshy wall. This is good. I kick away from the wall to propel my cargo and myself the rest of the way up.

My head bumps the soft ceiling. Just in time, too, because I'm nearly blacking out. Whoever I just saved comes up next to me. I hope this person is smart enough to figure out there is air up here against the ceiling.

"Hey!" I shout. "Grab onto something! You won't sink if you're grabbing on!"

The person grabs on. I can hear a lot of huffing of air, and spitting, and the sounds of near-retching from breathing in such foul air. It sounds like a person, right?

In such a tight space, I can hear the person drawing in as much air as they can. And then the screaming starts. It's high-pitched and shrilly enough to hurt my ears. The person is probably a woman, or maybe a really loud guy.

"Calm down!" I yell. "You're not drowning anymore! Just grab on and help me figure out what happened to us!"

The screaming continues. It deepens into screeching. It is so bad I nearly want to duck into the rancid water just so I won't hear it. Hoping to stop the racket, I reach out for where I think the person's arms are. I feel the arms jerk away. The water begins swirling around in a hurry. It takes me a second to figure out the person is dragging away from me as fast as they can grab hold of the ceiling.

"You okay?" I try again. "Are you hurt?"

"Send me not your vile curses, demon!" The woman blasts back. "Go back to whatever hell you came from!"

"I'm not a demon, I'm just a fucking guy!"

"Stay your curses! Gods protect me from this demon and its foul retch! Near me not!"

Something about her words let me know she wasn't from the same place I was. Her words sounded archaic, I think. "You're safe here! I'm not a demon!"

"Curse me not, demon-scum! Deliver me to my home! I call upon the gods! See my plight! Take me from this wretched hell!"

I had another thought. "Hey, lady, can you even hear me? Do you understand my words, my language?"

"Gods, see me in this wretched place!" The woman screamed. "There is naught but demon's darkness here!"

"Can you hear my words?" I persisted. "Can you understand me?"

The woman kept ranting, kept moving away, giving me an idea of how distant she was to me. That was weird that I could understand her, but she couldn't do the same for me. No, no, that wasn't completely true. It was normal that I could understand other languages, even ones I'd never heard before. That was because...

Damn! I can't remember.

"Lady, you shouldn't go that far!" I called out. "There might be crocodiles in the water!"

Again, she gave no indication that she could hear anything I said.

She kept going, getting farther and farther away. Wait, that was wrong. She wasn't that far away. She must have run into the wall opposite to where I was. I tried to gauge the distance she'd gone, figuring she was fifteen, twenty feet away. I wondered if we were inside something like a goat bladder. That could explain the stink, right?

Great, I thought. I had a second person in here with me, and she thought I was a demon. Fine, I'll have to do this myself. What were my clues again? Taste the darkness. Eat the darkness. Did that mean what I think it did?

Ugh!

It repulsed me just to think about it. The way the ceiling folded up into soft wrinkles, the way flesh would feel, was about the most disgusting thing I'd ever heard of.

I brought my mouth up against the ceiling, to a spot I was pulling on with my hand. The flesh smelled really bad, but at least I could hold it and make it into a fold I could grab. I bit into it, feeling it rend apart. It tasted even worse than it smelled. I spit the chunk out of my mouth and onto the liquid.

*Eat the darkness.*

I know, I know. I'm biting my way through whatever this ceiling and walls are made of. Bite off a mouthful, spit it out, and bite off another mouthful. I don't know if I could actually eat it, because the chunks were spit out almost as fast as I was biting them off.

(Ended time: 11:15. Tonight's word count: 946. Plus yesterday's: 1902 + 946 = 2848.)

July 14, 2020, 8:40 PM - All right, I cleared some of my workload so I can concentrate on this project between 8 PM and whenever I fall asleep. Now I can get cranking on this story. I'm crossing my fingers that I don't get stuck, because sometimes the start of my novels will lag until I get into the right rhythm.)

After biting into one mouthful, something squirted into my face and disgusted me so much I had to stop. I dry-retched, since I had nothing in my stomach to begin with.

The chick started screaming again. I swear, I felt like swimming over there and dunking her head in the fluid until...

I had to stop myself. Did I really just think that? Did I really want to murder this chick who was probably as terrified as I was?

*My brain is my enemy.*

Yeah, no kidding. Thanks, brain, for putting me into a homicidal mood. Or maybe it was the stink, and my panic to get out of here so much that was driving me insane.

*Insane to the membrane.*

That came from a song, a rap song. Damn! I almost had it in my head too, but it felt like something was driving my memory away, vanquishing it before it became solid. It was more than the usual fog of memory. Maybe someone was using magic to give me amnesia.

I wish I could talk to that woman who kept screaming like a banshee. Maybe she could tell me what this place is we're in.

"Hey, lady, will you shut the hell up for five minutes?" I shouted. "I can barely hear myself think!"

What kind of person captures people and puts them inside of giant goat bladders?

Since I can't see anything, I have to run my hand over the place I've just bitten up.

"Lady, shut up!" I go off again.

The only way I can get away from her is by eating my way out.

Damn.  
I start eating again.

I don't know how long I go at it, but my jaw starts hurting and I stop for a while. I know I've gone through a couple of layers at least. The first one was soft and wet. The second had shit that squirted out and must have been blood. This next layer, it was tougher, like muscle. That stops me for a while too, this idea that I might be eating my way out of a living creature, and possibly a giant human. My brain goes weird places sometimes.

But I keep biting, and the lady that's stuck in here with me keeps screeching at me and calling me a demon. I am so irritated from listening to her that it compels me to bite more meat. I feel like a rat in a butcher shop...

The next bite is rougher, hard to chew and it has stringy shit on it that might be hair. I get excited because I think I got through! I can feel cool air coming in through a pinhole, making my nose cool since my entire fucking face is pressed into this niche I just chomped into existence.

"I got through!" I call out. "I can feel air from the outside!"

I don't hear an answer. I wonder if maybe the **screaming lady** gave up hope and drowned. I hope not! Whatever is outside this bladder, I don't want to face it alone.

"Hey, lady, are you still there?"

"Gods, I beseech of thee!" Her shrill voice explodes in the cramped space. "Deliver me from this foul demon that plagues me!"

"Foul?" I growl. "Hey, you're the one that's foul!"

Two more bites, and I can get my finger through the hole. Sure enough, I can feel cool night air out there. Or maybe that is cave air? Who knows, but then I start to think about who would put a giant goat bladder in a cave, or maybe I got shrunk down to the size of an action figure and the goat bladder is at its regular size.

I'm so tired of biting that I start punching at the tear I've made. I'm throwing a pretty good punch, I think, despite that I don't have any idea of how I know that. Finally, the meat wall starts coming apart. I can shove my arm outside now, but I don't leave it out there for **too** long in case something with teeth is around.

If I only had a knife, that would make things a million times easier.

Maybe there are items down on the bottom of the bladder, I speculate, like my clothes, and any weapons I might have been carrying. No, that can't be right. It sounds too convenient, too contrived for it to be true. I do want to go down there and check, just in case there is a big stopper at the bottom that I could use to get out of here.

I start punching the meat again, but this time with my other hand. I think I'm ambidextrous based on how easy it is to strike with both hands. I punch a hole almost big enough for my head. Then I start pulling and tearing at the edges so my head does fit. I'm not stupid, okay? I'll put my eye close to the hole and see what I can see, but I'm not sticking my head out yet.

The fluid still stinks, but I can splash it around so some of it leaks out through the hole I've made. I can't see anything out there, but I do hear the liquid landing on some kind of ground. It doesn't sound too far below me.

Wherever I am, it is nighttime. Should I keep trying to get out, or should I wait for the sun to come up? Maybe there is no sun. Hmm. I'll keep going.

I punch and tear, wishing the hole was lower so I could use my legs on it. If I can throw a good punch, maybe I can throw a good kick, too. I could go Karate Kid on this bitch, and I'm talking about the OG movie and not the weak-ass re-boot...

Huh? What just happened? I had a thought, and just as I was getting a picture in my head that matched that thought, it all went away. My brain is getting scrubbed while I'm conscious! That makes things even more complicated!

Think, think, think!

This is why you left yourself vague messages. That makes sense, right? If I left complex messages, whatever mechanism is erasing my memories scrubs my mind. That's a neat trick! I mean, it would be a neat **trick** if it weren't happening to me! Since it is happening to me, this really sucks!

I notice how quiet things are. "Hey, lady, are you still there? You didn't disappear, did you? Tell me the truth now!"

"Send me homeward, evil one!"

I was making so much noise I didn't realize this chick was sneaking up on me. When she screeched, she did it close enough to make me jump, and I almost lost my hold on the meat wall and slipped into the water. While she was still screeching, she had to go and lunge at me, and now she's making like a berserker and I'm really losing my grip.

"Get off me, lady!" I rumbled at her, but she's not hearing it.

I lose my grip and we're both in the foul liquid. She slaps and scratches and pulls, and that pisses me off, you know? Normally, I don't fight women, and I wouldn't be fighting this one except she's trying to drown me and she's winning. I punch her in the stomach. She's wide open for it and I know I nailed her good enough to knock her wind out.

We're going down to the bottom, with her sputtering and flailing in panic, and me trying to hold onto her arm so I can help her back up. I crouch and kick, but thanks to Mrs. Wildness I go off at a bad angle and bump into the wall. My arms are so sore it really burns as I try to swim and keep her in tow at the same time.

I make it to the ceiling, grabbing onto it as I lug this chick up. When she realizes she's close to air, she stops trying to get out of my grip and clings to the ceiling. I let her go. It takes me a couple of minutes to get orientated, before I find the hole I made.

"Do not attack me again!" I order the woman. "I'm trying to get us both out of here!"

I really don't trust her. Knowing I have to get away from this woman, I start tearing at the wall again. After a while, I can feel it ripping apart, slowly, but still this is progress. I think of a banana, and how the skin tears away in long strips. I wonder if the goat bladder is made the same way. That would make it *not* a goat bladder, right?

I tire out after about ten minutes. Suddenly I'm anxious because I don't know where the chick is. She could be all the way across the bladder by now, or she could be an arm's length away and trying to sneak up on me again.

"Don't jump on me, lady. If you do, I'm going to punch you. I'm not kidding!"

If I do it just right, I think I can get out now. I shove an arm through, and then my head, and after that I get stuck. This is not a good time for me to be attacked, either on the outside or on the inside. If I got this far...

I grunt and strain to get my other shoulder past the hole. I hear ripping both above and below my body. Whatever I'm in, it is busting at the seams.

Without warning, the wall splits open and I come tumbling out along with a gush of the smelliest sewer water ever. I had half a second to get my arms out before I hit the ground, and I

did that, except my right hand lands wrong and my wrist bends the wrong way and my entire weight comes down on it. I hit my shoulder and upper back, but my wrist... The damned thing is on fire and I'm grunting and rolling around on the ground hoping the pain goes away.

Above me, the rotten fluid is still splashing out. When I have the dread that the chick might fall down on top of me and hurt me even more, I crawl on one arm and one elbow to put some distance between us. My wrist is throbbing something fierce...

Grass. This is some kind of grass I'm crawling on. It's cool, but the breeze is cold and the way it brushes across my wet body makes me shiver. It was warm inside the bladder, but out here it's a lot colder.

I can't see a thing, but I do hear a wet thud on the ground from when the woman falls out. She starts making a weird guttural noise. I know she's hurt, but I can't do anything for her with my wrist jolting me every couple of seconds.

"I'm over here, lady." I call out. "I'll go to you in a second. It's just... I think my wrist is broken. I think it snapped when I fell on it."

The woman groans. I don't know what she fell on, but she doesn't sound so good. I wish I could help her. Maybe I could lie down on my side and roll over to her, as long as I don't bump my wrist on the ground.

I hear something snarl in the darkness. It sniffs really loud like it caught our scents. Just what we need, on top of everything else: some kind of predator that shows up when we're at our worst and can't do anything to stop it.

The woman finds her strength and starts screaming. That only serves to draw the predator towards her. I hear it snorting its way to her. The woman keeps screaming, even after this beast that I can't even see starts eating her.

I wonder what kind of animal it is. I know I shouldn't be thinking this way, but I also hope it fills its belly with her and leaves me alone.

When the woman finally stops screaming, I hear other snorts nearby. It's not the same beast. There are more of them.

Damn.

I don't know how much time I have. I start repeating the clues in my head, for the next time I become aware, if there even is a next time.

*Taste the darkness.*

*Eat the darkness.*

*My brain is my enemy.*

Two of them find me. They smell really bad. One of them bites into my leg and starts dragging me. I admit it, I was screaming my head off because that shit hurt. The other one bites into another part of me and they both start shaking me apart until I tear.

I have one last thought before I lose awareness.

I hate this place.

(Word count: 2159. That's not bad! Adding that to the previous count of 2848 and I get 5007. If I can write an average of 1,000 words per night, that will give me at least 90,000 over the course of three months. That's very close to my completion goal of 100k words, and I can go much faster if I get really zoned in. It is 11 PM now, so I am done for tonight. More to come!)

(July 15, 2020, 8:25 PM - I re-read yesterday's writing and found like 5 errors. I **bolded** them as a way to remind myself not to type so fast. That's how I make simple mistakes!

I've got some more ideas. There is a weather chart in the Cogent Roleplay rulebook that I'm itching to use. The bad thing for me is that it is based on a 100-sided dice, which I don't have at the moment. I want to modify the chart for use with two 6-sided die, except I'll have to find the result percentages first. I forgot to do this today, but I will try to remember tomorrow!

I was watching a wide variety of videos on Youtube today. From the Amazing Places channel, I discovered a video on 1000 Islands in Canada. This is a chain of small islands with a dozen houses or less on them. Some islands only have enough room for one house! That's so cool I have to stick it into this story somewhere!

I also discovered the Coffin Dance meme. That's too funny to pass up. I'm going to try and work that in also. Oh, and I downloaded the lyrics to Insane To The Membrane, because I'm going to need that right now!)

*Oh, makin' my mind slow  
That's why I don't fuck with the big four, oh  
Bro, I got ta' maintain  
'Cause a nigga like me is goin' insane*

You know it had to happen again. You just know it did.

I became aware in the same fucking place, and I had to do the same fucking thing all over again! All over again!

It is a good thing that somebody taught me how to meditate. I understand that whoever I am, I can be a hothead. I'm not always a hothead, because I can think logically and reason things out, but when I'm in situations like the one I'm in right now, something inside of me snaps and I have a burning need to go break something in half.

I do remember a couple of things. I remember hurting my wrist, and I must have hurt it pretty bad because I keep checking it to make sure it is okay. I also remember that crazy woman that kept screeching and screeching at me. Her screeching was so bad it transcended from my past life into this one. Now that I've calmed down, now that I can look back on it objectively, that's pretty funny, huh? Those shrill screams are haunting me in my new life.

And then I remember how wild animals ate us both, and my mood goes sour.

*Insane in the membrane!*

It's funny that I'm remembering that song in particular. It should be insane in the brain, not in the membrane. The membrane part doesn't make sense.

I know what a membrane is, dog. I know I had to chew my way through several layers of membranes to make a hole to the outside again.

*Insane in the membrane!*

That makes me wonder, you know, if I'll be insane once I'm *out* of the membrane. I figured something out, and I think it's important.

This place I'm in, it runs on some kind of Artificial Intelligence. If I think straight-line normal, the AI wipes my entire head. If I think in a roundabout way, like when I think

*Eat the darkness*

The AI can't make sense of what I'm alluding to and my thoughts aren't scrubbed. It makes me wonder if I'm smarter than the AI because I can think in an abstract way.

Oh, I think I'm kind of smart, too. I wasn't always smart, but something happened to me and I got smart. I'm smart and I can throw a good punch. What does that make me?

I'm still a prisoner. This thing I'm captured in, it's a plant. When I became aware this time, I conserved my energy and I methodically bit through the fibrous layers like I did **before**. I took my rest breaks, I sidled all the way around this place, and when I came back I started biting off chunks again. I got through, just like **the last time**. The hole was big enough for me to stick an arm out, but I didn't go any further because it was as dark outside as it was inside.

I was tired, anyway, so I hooked my arm out the hole and hung **it** there, hoping nothing was hungry enough to jump up and chew **it** off. I did not get much sleep, by the way, and my arm is sore as shit, but I did alternate arms and I got through at least a couple of short naps.

At first, I wasn't sure if this place had a sun, but it does. I could feel it warming up the arm I had hanging outside. When I looked out the hole, I saw the rising of dawn. I waited a couple of hours to make sure no predators were around, before I started biting and ripping through the wall until I could get my head out for a good look around.

I'm in a forest. I think some of the trees around me are birch and oak, but there are other kinds I've never seen before. Their leaves are, I don't know, star-shaped? Snowflake shaped? That's when I figured out I was inside a giant plant. It's got a bulb shape to it and outer skin that's green like the inside of an old avocado, with a **spotty** brown tinge to it. This plant has hair on it too, colored brown-orange. All of it tastes like shit, from the softer inner layer to the outer, rougher peel. **It's all nasty.**

Understanding all of this gives me a second wind. Since I can see what I'm doing now, I can bite in a line, straight down or to the sides. That weakens the outer skin when I use my hands to tear the line further apart. I'm extra careful not to burst out like before.

The sewer water starts dripping out at first. The more I keep going, the more it streams then pours, splashing down on loose brown soil this time. That tells me that I'm not in the same plant I was in before, because there is no grass visible **down there**.

Finally, I manage to pull the plant open enough to cause a small flood of rot. The sides **are** slippery, and I almost flop out and fall anyway, but I manage to keep my grip and I hang out a little at a time until my feet reach the wet ground.

That's it. I'm out. I am fucking out!

I walk towards the nearest tree, a birch with part of its trunk peeling. I have to touch it to make sure it's real. When I look around, everything looks and sounds normal, just like a normal forest should sound. I hear birds chirping and I can feel a quiet breeze rustling past the leafy branches. If it wasn't for the ordeal I went through, I would consider this a nice day.

The sunlight never lost its dawn colors, and now I can see why. The sun here is pale orange, not looking anything like the sun I'm used to from back home. Wait, was my sun bright yellow or nuclear white? Why am I remembering two different color suns from back home? I'm stumped. I don't know the reason why.

At least nothing is scrubbing my thoughts anymore. My memories are still mine.

Thinking of my mind being erased provokes me into looking at the plant I just escaped from. Damn, that is one big mother of a plant. It's got to be twenty feet high, with half a dozen bulb-shaped... things hanging from drooping branches. You ever see how the balls hang on an old bull? That's what the things on this ugly plant looked like.

I'm reminded of those pitcher plants from back home, the ones that give off the stench of rotting meat to attract flies or other insects. When the bugs fly in for a better whiff, the plant's sticky little tentacles prevent the suckers from getting out. Little by little, the tentacles move the bug into the rancid fluid at the bottom. These are the plant's digestive juices that are going to absorb the bug into plant food. Yuck!

"I'm out now!" I yell at the plant. "You want to tell me how I got in there in the first place? Did you put me there or was it someone else? Did I put myself in there?"

I walk all the way around the plant. Besides the avocado-shaped bulge I ruptured through, there are two more that are large enough to fit people. Punching the thick skin on the outside proves useless **because it's so thick**.

It takes me a good fifteen minutes to find a rock with a sharp edge. **I guess this place doesn't have too many rocks**. I smash the rock against the giant bulb until it starts leaking from the bottom, and then I go and do the same to the last bulb. My hand starts bleeding, so I switch the rock over to my other hand and keep going, making both holes wider to allow more rot-juice to pour out.

Eventually, with both my hands scraped bloody, I figure it out. One bulb was empty. The other one had a dead body in it. I suppose I could have kept going until I got the body out, but I was too tired by then. I went over to the birch tree and sat down for a nap.

After my nap, I return to break off more pieces from the plant. I want to get the body out so I can bury it. When the hole is big enough for me to pull out a limb, I cringe because the limb is colored purple-gray. Is that the color I've been turning into when I die inside the plant? I don't know, but the strange limb unnerves me. I stick it back inside and walk away.

I don't want to be around that plant anymore.

I find a stream. By that time, I'm hungry and thirsty, so I take a chance and drink the water. It has a metallic taste to it. Past that, it doesn't taste bad, so I drink about as much as a full glass. People build villages along streams, or so I've been told, so I decided to follow this one.

A couple of hours go by. The day has been warm and my feet hurt from all that walking, not to mention how scraped up my hands are. When I come to a good-size pool of water, I say screw it and step inside. I don't want to stay there long. I **just** want to rinse off and cool down a little.

I can see my reflection in the water. The first thing I think is that this is not my face. It's long and narrow, with close-set eyes and a long ridge of the nose. My lips are thin. My chin juts out and looks ugly. I wonder if I'm human because I've never seen a face like this before.

When the quick rinse is done, I walk over to a patch of short grass that looks like it might be comfortable. Before I sit down, I glance across the pool.

I see two people over there. They are both as naked as I am. Their skin is colored orange and their hair is reddish, but otherwise they look human. One is a man, the other a woman. They are both slender and athletic.

I raise my hand at them. "Hello."

The people bolt off as if I'd pointed a gun at them.

I'd better follow them. They might know where I can find food.

I come to a clearing. Several people are in it, all of them couples, all of them with strangely colored skin. Besides the orange couple, I see a yellow couple and a blue couple. They all look at me as if I'm the weird one.

I hear talking and turn my head to find the speaker. This turns out to be the biggest man I've ever laid eyes on. He's easily twice as tall as I am, a small giant if that's even possible. His skin is colored gold, and he has a dark brown hair and beard. The giant wears a tunic in bright white, held at the waist by a length of rope, and leather thong sandals at his feet.

The giant sees me. He looks puzzled. "Where have you come from?"

"I was stuck inside a plant." I tell him.

"Tell me once more."

"I was stuck inside a plant."

"Tell me once more."

"I don't think you can understand me." I try one last time. "I said I was stuck inside a plant. The plant was holding me inside of it."

"What plant?" The giant asked.

Did I hear that right? Did he actually reply to what I said?

(It is a minute past 11 PM and I am calling it a night. Tonight's word count: 1963. The grand total:  $1963 + 5007 = 6970$ . This means that I am over 6% done with this project, if it gets to novel length at 100k words. Dividing 6970 by the 6 days since I started writing this project gives me an average of 1161 words per day. If I can keep that pace of a 1000 words a day or more, I'll be coasting along at a good pace. As far as page count, about 500 words equal one Word document page for me. The page count is less important because my e-book distributor Smashwords converts my files into several different formats, such as the epub version that has a lot more pages than the PDF version.)

(July 16, 2020, 9:40 PM - I was working on a Weather Chart earlier. You'll find it on the last page of this document. I'll keep it there for a couple of days, before I move it elsewhere. I want to use this chart soon! All right, I've read through yesterday's update, and I've bolded the errors, changes and additions I've made so you can how much I edit stuff like this. Here goes tonight's addition.)

"It was a plant, a pitcher plant." I point away, past the stream and into the forest. "It was that way. That plant captures people."

"So it does." The giant nodded. "Where is your mate?"

The way this giant is looking at me, it's almost as if he's looking at a child. It's kind of weird to see the faces he makes. Maybe he doesn't express himself like I do?

I shrug. "Uh, there was a woman, but she didn't make it."

"She did not make what thing?"

"She died. We broke out of the pitcher plant at night, and these beasts came and ate the both of us. I don't remember all of it. The next time I became aware, I was alone."

"There are no pitcher plants here." The giant said.

"Okay, then what did I come out of, a bell plant?"

"There are no bells here, or bell plants."

I'm getting nowhere. "Is there an easy way to get out of those plants?"

"You must wait until I bring you out." The giant answered.

He was wincing at me. He was wincing and I didn't like it. Like maybe I was asking too many questions or something. First, he said there were no plants like that, and next he's saying I

have to wait inside the plant until he comes and gets me. Which one is it, big guy? **Why aren't you telling me the truth?**

"You are confused, new man." The giant decided. "Do you know my name?"

"No. I've never seen you before."

"But you have. All new men and women have seen me before."

"If I did," I'm relenting here. "I don't remember."

"You must know my name." The giant insisted.

"I'm sorry, but I really don't." He thinks I'm lying to make him look bad. I can see it in his face. He thinks I'm **the one** lying!

The couples are looking at me, even more perplexed than the giant. I guess he has to save face or something, because he repeats to them about how confused I am. When he turns to face me again, he has his arms stretched out and a big smile on his face. If there is one thing I hate, it is fake people.

"I am Demi-Urgos." The giant announced. "I am the god of this realm. I am the one and only god. I am a jealous god. There can be no other gods before me. What is your name, new man?"

"I don't remember."

"Surely, you must know your name."

I shook my head. "I really don't remember."

"Do you see how confused he is?" The giant tells the couples. "It is a wonder he even found us! It is good that he has no name. I will choose one for him. Come with us, new man. We will find your mate. Surely she can be found nearby. Mates always arrive together. Let us go, my children. Let us go."

Demi-Urgos strides away with his huge legs. Obediently, and as if they've been trained to do it, the couples space their selves out by pairs and march along behind the giant.

I take one last look at the pool of water, thinking, that's not me. Since I have nothing better to do, I stroll along behind the short procession of weirdos.

(It's 10:54 PM. I lost my train of thought about 30 minutes ago. I'm in my studio apartment with the neighbors on the other side of the wall making noise, and apparently people making noise outside on the street, and I've also on the lookout for gnats, since I've killed two of them already. I need to get into a certain mood for the part that comes next, and I'm not there yet.

Tonight's word count was 547. My new total word count is 7517.)

(July 16, 2020, 7:35 PM - I'm starting up early, since I can't go anywhere and I don't have any beer in my fridge. I think that probably on the 20th I will remove all the bolded ideas I don't need anymore. That will give new people the chance to see them before they're gone. Okay, let me get started here.)

This god guy lives in a yurt. It looks like a circus tent to me. It's colored in alternating vertical stripes of golden-brown and dirty white. The top is also white, rounded and topped off like the kind of spire you see in ancient Muslim buildings. Around the edges of the top, every five feet or so, are golden-brown puffs of material that look like bunny tails. That's where Demi-Urgos **spends the night**.

As for the couples, they stay with their mates and take seats on the ground. I guess they have to sleep outdoors.

“How come you sleep in a tent and they get nothing?” I ask.

“They are the Created, and I am their Creator.” Demi-Urgos answered. “I will get around to teaching them how to build soon. But first, there are other things I must create.”

“Oh, yeah? Like what?”

“I have not yet decided.”

“Did you create this whole world?”

“Yes, I did.”

“That’s amazing. I meant this is really amazing. How does it all work? Tell me about the plants that have people inside of them. How do they work?”

“I summon new people.” Demi-Urgos detailed. “And I release them.”

I got him to tell me something he didn’t want to tell me earlier, but it didn’t sound right. If he summoned people out of nothing, why did some of them die inside the plants? Wasn’t there an easier way to create people than that?

“You have a strong will.” Demi-Urgos noticed. “You must not influence the others.”

“Sure. Whatever you say. Tell me about the others, so I will know what to watch out for.”

“I will tell you. I have summoned them in pairs so that they might all have a mate. They are sorted by color and they are not able to speak to anyone besides their mate.”

“And you can make them in any color you choose?”

“I can.”

“Can I talk to them?”

“You cannot speak their languages, but it is possible that you might convey to them a message in some other way. That is why I am forbidding you.”

“I understand.” I nodded. “What if I see something dangerous? Is it a good idea to warn them or no?”

“You cannot interfere.” Demi-Urgos replied. “They must learn their lessons on their own. For a new man, you ask many questions.”

“I know. I can’t stop myself from doing it. I just think a question and I want to ask it out loud. Wait, what color am I?”

Demi-Urgos looked at his three sets of people. “The others ask no questions at all. They do what they were created to do, and that is to listen to me.”

“Maybe I came out wrong?”

“I don’t see how.” Demi-Urgos showed a concerned face again. “The rest are in the range they were created in. What is different about you?”

“I don’t know. What color am I?”

“You are pale. That is your color. Pale.”

“That’s good to know, right? I think a wild creature ate my mate. What if a wild creature comes here at night and tries to eat one of us? Is it okay to communicate with the others then?”

“There are no wild creatures here.” Demi-Urgos answered. “I have not created them yet.”

“Are you sure?”

“I am certain of it. That is my quandary of the day. What sort of creatures will I create next? Will they be air creatures, ground creatures or water creatures?”

“I can help you with that. I know a lot about creatures.”

Demi-Urgos winced. “What does a new man know about creatures?”

I tapped my head. “I have a very good imagination.”

“That is unfortunate.”

At once, I thought about the AI and how it could scrub my brain. I wondered if this god guy had anything to do with that.

“You will follow my edicts.” He said. “You are not to stray too far away from where I am, you are not to eat from any trees or bushes without asking me first, and you will cease from giving me so many questions.”

“I’ll do everything you said.” I told him. “But if I can’t ask any questions, how am I supposed to learn new things. You did create us to learn, didn’t you?”

“No, you were created to revere me, and only me.” Demi-Urgos corrected. “The new people you see here; they have learned their duties. If I am pleased, I will give them more freedoms and show them new matters. When they are ready, I will put them to compete against each other. I will give a good reward to the pair who pleases me the most.”

“What if we don’t please you?”

The god grunted. “Too many times the new people have displeased me. I will take them away and summon more. That last few; I told them, do not eat from that bush. That is what they did. They ate from the forbidden bush, and I took them away and created new people. They came to worship the bush because it gave them life. I said no, do not worship the bush. I created the bush. I was the one that gave life. I am a jealous god, and you will worship only me.”

Demi-Urgos stared at me. He looked like he wanted to get rid of me.

“Tell me how to worship you.”

The words put him at ease. “Close your eyes and say in your head. Demi-Urgos is the only god, and he is a jealous god. Let Demi-Urgos grant me strength and obedience so that I will not displease him. Rewards will come to those who please Demi-Urgos most.”

“I’ll make sure to remember that.” I said.

“You ask many questions. Go beyond those trees. You must sleep there. It is better that the others do not see you. You could corrupt them with your imagination.”

I thanked him and I started away. Just my luck, I thought, to get stuck in a place where the only god was a psycho.

If you thought I slept well, you’d be wrong.

I chose a spot that was close enough for me to run back to Demi-Urgos, if some wild animal came by snarling and trying to eat me. At the same time, I was worried the god might try to kill me in my sleep, so he could have his perfect little world he’d made for himself.

At first, I couldn’t sleep because I was so hungry. When I did sleep, I had nightmares. In one of those nightmares, Demi-Urgos walked up to me and stared at me while I slept.

“You are stronger than the others.” He remarked. “You are stronger and you have more imagination. I did not create you like this.”

“There is only one god, and his name is Demi-Urgos.” I replied. “I will try my best to please him.”

My words made him wince, made him deliberate. He turned and stalked away.

He really had come over to kill me, I realized.

In the morning, I thought I should grab some food if I could, and right after that get the hell out of there. Never mind that I had nowhere else to go. I just needed to leave.

As I approached the yurt, I heard Demi-Urgos yelling at his created people. I hid behind a tree to watch what was going in. The god could sense where I was. He looked straight at me for a second, before he started yelling again.

Apparently, Demi-Urgos had got it into his head to make his people walk backwards. The people were trying hard to follow the directions, but I guess they were really simple-minded or really confused. Whenever they tried to walk backwards, they'd take one or two steps, before their brains caused them to half-turn and that screwed up their motion. Some of the people even tripped on their own feet and fell over. Every time one of them fell, Demi-Urgos would pitch a bitch over it.

"New man, come here!" He shouted.

His voice was like a lion's voice, deep, guttural, but also sharp enough to grate my ears. I went because I didn't think I had any choice.

"You have imagination." Demi-Urgos growled. "You can walk backwards when the others cannot. Teach them how."

I didn't understand why he didn't show them himself, unless he thought he was above it. In any case, I did what I was told. I walked backwards, slowly, to give the colored people a good example for them to follow.

"You will do it." Demi-Urgos pointed at the orange couple.

They couldn't do it. They kept looking behind them, as if they expected to bump into something that wasn't there, or they'd stare at their feet and step on their own toes or get their legs caught up and tumble. They sometimes froze in place when their coordination faltered.

Demi-Urgos showed his teeth in anger. His golden face lost part of its luster, darkening into something scary. "Enough! We will return to a previous lesson." He pointed at the orange couple. "Go and stand in your places! New man, you stand there!"

I wasn't scared for myself, but I was scared for all these other people who acted so child-like. I guess the god really had created them, but he hadn't given them much depth.

Demi-Urgos started down the row, pointing at each person. "Woman!"

"Woman!" The yellow man repeated.

"Man!"

"Man!" The yellow woman said.

Everything was backwards today, I observed. Demi-Urgos was calling the men women, and the women men. The blue couple went last, following that same weird precedent, before the god came to me.

"Woman!" He pointed at me.

"I don't know what to say." I admitted. "I don't know this lesson."

"I say you are a woman, and you repeat that you are a woman."

"Even if I'm not a woman?"

"You are a woman because I say you are a woman!" The god rumbled at me.

"Are you going to turn me into a woman?" I asked, and let me tell you, I was not looking forward to that.

"You do not question my edicts!" Demi-Urgos shouted. "You do what I say! You are a woman!"

"Okay, I am a woman!"

The god leaned closer to me. "What color is the sky?"

This time, I was worried for myself. "Uh, blue-orange?"

"Red! The sky is red!"

I had to look up. Maybe we weren't looking at the same sky, because the sky I was looking at was not red.

"What color is the sky?" Demi-Urgos shouted.

“Red!”

I could see the god tensing up. I could almost feel him getting livid, despite that I’d answered him the way he wanted.

In the same moment, Demi-Urgos and I sensed something new around us. We both turned our heads sideways. The blue woman was the person nearest me. She was looking at me, not in fear, but with a sort of want in her simple eyes. Demi-Urgos and I both felt that the woman considered me to be attractive.

The god trudged toward them. In his anger, he grabbed the arms of both the man and the woman. A great chasm appeared right behind the couple, a ravine that hadn’t been there just a second earlier. In a casual manner, Demi-Urgos tossed the blue people into the chasm. They both screamed as they fell to their deaths. The god grabbed the yellow man next, and threw him the same way.

The rest of the people panicked and started running.

This angered Demi-Urgos so much he reached up and grabbed hold of the nearest branch. With a mighty yank, he tore the branch away from the tree and actually bent the tree. Throwing them into a chasm wasn’t enough. Now he was going to bludgeon them to death.

Those people weren’t going to make it, not unless they had more time to run.

“I’m not a woman,” I yelled. “I’m a man!”

Demi-Urgos turned around to face me. The giant swung his big-ass branch and smashed me so hard I went flying and tumbling into the distance. He stomped in my direction, ready to finish the job. I wasn’t in any good shape to do anything about it.

“You are a meddler!” He roared. “I blame you!”

I was hurting something bad, unable to move, but I could still think.

*Taste the darkness.*

*Eat the darkness.*

*My brain is my enemy.*

Demi-Urgos raised the branch and brought it down on me.

It was lights out after that.

(New word count: 2102. Total word count: 9619.)

(July 18, 2020, 10:35 PM - I rolled the dice on my new weather chart, and I got... snow! It’s going to be a cold night for the Night Man!)

It was a bitch and a half to get out of the people plant. That was because Demi-Urgos did something to me. I felt really weak, as if he’d taken my strength away. I bit away at the damned membranes a little at a time, and I punched the wall until my knuckles bled. I tired out quickly and took long rest breaks. Instead of ten hours, it felt like ten days trying to get out of there. Okay, that was an exaggeration, but it did feel like it took ten times longer this time.

From the moment I became aware, I was hungry, as if I hadn’t eaten in weeks. I wondered if it was possible for my stomach to start eating itself, because that’s how starved I felt.

I was tired too. I kept getting sleepy and slipping into the stink-water. I was going to drown unless I got myself out of that place. I had to change my biting pattern, creating a niche where I could hook my arm for a while, just so I could hang there and rest. It was tough on my arm, but at least I lived through it.

A weird dream came to me. In this dream, I was inside a people-plant. I was super hot as if I were covered in fur. It made me sweat all the time, and I groaned and howled at how hot it was. My mouth was bigger, with really sharp teeth, and I had long claws coming out of my fingers. In no time at all, I ripped through the plant and leapt out and landed on my feet.

I didn't feel all the way human, but I know that part of me must have had some kind of human in it because the song lyrics were still stuck in my head. I ignored them, sniffing around instead. When I ran, I did it on four legs. I think I ran halfway across the planet before I caught the scent of one of my kind.

It was a female. Smelling her made me insane with lust. I started after her, but I could not remember what the landscape looked like anymore. It was rocky and windy, I think.

Anyway, I know Demi-Urgos caused me become an animal in this next life. I'd been **too** smart, and so the jealous god decided to make me as un-human as possible.

I found the female. I could scent her sex clearly, understanding she would be compatible with me. On her part, she scented me and could tell right away that I was different than she was. Something was wrong with me, something alien was stuck within this furry body that she should have been familiar with. The female rebuked me.

I leapt on her. We struggled, but I ended up taking her by force. While we copulated, she bit into my neck and I could feel the blood pouring out of me. I was angry that I would die, but I was also elated because I was mating. It would be a good death if I impregnated her. Whatever kind of beast I was, I knew that our females sometimes killed our males during sex.

I told her this. You can kill me, I said, but you can't kill my seed. You will be my baby mama no matter what.

She went berserk when she heard me speak. Either our kind was forbidden to speak, or else we didn't know how as a species, and I was doing it anyway and she understood it, and it drove her crazy. The female flung me aside, easily because I was weak and losing blood. She ran into a wall of rock and bashed her head on it until she was mortally wounded.

We died together.

My last thought as a beast was of me wondering if we'd spawn inside of the same people-plant, when it came time to recycle **into new bodies**.

When I finally escaped the plant, I felt so drained and sick I thought death was probably a blessing compared to this. I was freezing all over as I clung to the edge of the plant and slowly hung down until my feet touched the ground. It wasn't just me that was freezing; there was snow on the ground. That made things even worse. I should have stayed inside the plant and died there. At least I would have been warm.

Oh, and I was blind now. I guess I forgot to mention that because it was always so dark inside the people-plant. I told you how it took forever to bite and tear my way out. When I made the hole big enough to see outside, all I saw was darkness. I assumed it was night. As I kept biting and tearing chunks away, and trying with all my strength to rip the plant apart, I noticed that it never got light. I must have been struggling to get **free** for at least a day and a half, and during the whole time I did not see the sun, not a yellow one, not an orange-red one, nothing.

I walked through a couple of inches of snow, shaking from the chill, hugging my body and with my teeth chattering, until I came to something large, solid and cracked. It felt like I stood in front of a giant tombstone. Fine, I thought, as I sat next to whatever this was and waited for the end to come. I recited the song lyrics, reinforcing my secret code into them, and I also sent curses out to Demi-Urgos for making my new life a living hell.

Somebody showed up. I could not see him, or hear him, or smell him, but I felt someone was there just the same.

“Hello?” I called out. “You wouldn’t happen to have lodge around here, would you? With a nice fireplace and a cup of hot chocolate with tiny marshmallows in it?”

Whoever was out there snorted at me.

Great, I thought, it was another wild beast. “Fine! If you’re going to eat me, just eat me! I’m too sick and tired to defend myself! I hope you choke on my bones!”

“A human.” A gruff voice said.

“What is he doing here?” Another equally harsh voice asked.

“What do we care? Let him die.”

“The humans want him to die. Look, they have left him here with no clothing.”

“We should eat him.”

“Who has left him here? Who?”

I don’t know how many of them were out there, but it was at least three. “God left me here. He wants me to die. Whatever you’re going to do, do it quickly. I hate having to freeze to death out here, and I’m hungry!”

“He talks mostly gibberish.” One of them said. “But I understood one part. He said god has left him here to die.”

“I did not hear that!” Another grunted.

“The snow is cold, my feet are freezing,” I sang out. “In a minute or two, I’ll be coughing and sneezing! Hey, I’ve got another one. Who you trying to get crazy with, ese? Don’t you know I’m loco? Insane in the membrane, insane in the brain! That guy Demi-Urgos, made me a ghost, I ain’t no hoax, got nobody to butter my toast! Insane in the membrane, insane in the brain!”

“What does he say?” One huffed.

“Gibberish.” The other replied. “But he does know the name of the Reckless God.”

“Does he?”

“Let him die, I beseech you!” One of the others nearly pleaded. “Who needs the Reckless God to come here with his misery?”

“The god will not come.” The one guy that understood me answered. “Can you not see? This human was thrown away by the Reckless God, to a place so far the Reckless God will never see him again.”

“What should we do with the human?” One of the rougher voices questioned.

“We will take him to Shika. She will know what to do with him. The only action we should not take is to kill the human.”

“For fear of the Reckless God.”

I wasn’t going to make it. I couldn’t feel my limbs anymore. “Let me die here. I’ll be back tomorrow, after I eat my way out again.”

“Hold **this**.” Someone said.

Somebody shoved something into my hands. Whatever it was, it felt bright and warm. I still felt like shit, and my stomach really was eating itself, but at least I wasn’t shaking anymore.

“Can you stand?” The one that could understand me ask.

“Bro, I can not only stand, but I can also do cartwheels. Just watch me.”

I got up. It was a strain standing upright. The moment I put my full weight on my legs, I buckled and fell down. I dropped the warm thing I’d been holding and started shaking from the cold again.

“The human must be carried.” One of the beings said.

The warm thing was pushed into my hands again. Somebody pulled me up from under the shoulders and shoved me at another guy. This other guy doubled me at the waist and hoisted me over his shoulder.

“Shika will know what to do with him.” The being that could understand me said.

When the guy holding me started walking, he bounced and swayed a lot. It was all I could **do to** keep from dropping the warm thing on the ground.

(Tonight’s word count: 1578. New grand total: 11,197. See the end of this document for the idea generators I’ve used so far.)

(July 19, 2020, 8:10 PM - I added a new dice-roll chart in the Notes section, for defining what a character is most passionate about. That’s about all I’ve got for news, so let’s get on to the writing!)

I was not a happy camper. Bumping along on this guy’s shoulder was pretty bad since I kept dropping that thing that kept me warm. I can’t even describe what it felt like because it was wrapped up in some kind of cloth. In the end, they tied a sash around my waist to keep the warm thing in place. I guess it had to touch my skin or else it wouldn’t work, but what it actually was I do not know. All I can tell you is that I was so tired I fell asleep during the walk to wherever we were going.

You’ve seen those movies right, where the wounded good guy gets found and taken into a house, and people watch over him until he recovers. That shit didn’t happen with me. Nope, if I wasn’t moaning, I was singing, and if I wasn’t singing, I was getting off the little cot I was in and crawling around like an idiot, until someone picked me up and put me back.

Someone growled at me, and I growled back. At least I think that happened.

When they tried to feed me, I grabbed somebody’s arm. The skin felt scaly, like a fish. It was so disconcerting I let go right away. I didn’t even want to eat anymore, so I went back to sleep. I think I slept for days, but what do I know? I couldn’t see anything!

“Can you hear my words?” A woman’s voice pierced through the black veil of my mind. “Answer if you can.”

She didn’t sound like a regular woman, but more like her voice had a slight, watery echo to it. Her voice is hard to describe. It warbled, maybe?”

“Can you hear?” She tried.

“Yes.” I answered. “I was pretending to be asleep.”

“What is that word?”

“Pretending? It means I was faking it. I’ve been listening to you move around for the last five minutes. I didn’t want you to know I was really awake.”

“Was it a deception?” She wondered. “Do you lie?”

“No, I wouldn’t call it a deception. I was just trying to figure out if you were going to hurt me or not.”

“Your healing has come about as the result of my knowledge. Why would I bring you hurt?”

“Some people do that.”

“Some humans, you mean.”

“Are you human?”

“I am not. I am Birayd. We are not like humans.”

“You’re right.” I admitted. “Some humans will take care of other humans, just so they can hurt them later. I don’t know anything about your people. When I arrived here, my memories were wiped out of my head. That’s because Demi-Urgos is an asshole!”

“You speak of the Reckless God. You said he is what?”

“Uh, a really bad person. He killed me because I was too smart for his tastes. I was probably too good looking for him, too.”

“For his tastes?”

“For his... Uh, liking. I was too smart for his liking. He wanted only dumb people around him. You know how that punk-ass buster killed me? He broke a branch off a tree and swatted me with it like I was a big-ass fly!”

“Not possible. The Reckless God only comes to us in our dreams. He will tell us we have displeased him and he will create disasters.”

“That sounds like the guy I met all right. You know what would have been funny? I should have jumped on his back and tried to choke him out. I was a lot stronger then than I am now. He stole my strength. He was big, too. That buster was like twice as tall as I was. He had gold skin. That’s crazy, right? Do other gods have gold skin around here?”

“You describe the Reckless God accurately. Perhaps his appearance was mentioned to you, and in your delirium you imagined having been in his presence.”

“Yeah, I guess.” I said that, and I thought it over as if I was really considering it, but nah, that wasn’t right. I did not imagine Demi-Urgos. Getting beaten to a pulp with a giant branch, yeah, you can’t just sweep it under a rug and call it a dream. That shit hurt! “So, your people are called the bee-raid?”

“Bih-rade.” She corrected.

“The people that found me, they don’t like humans, do they?”

“They do not. Humans chase us away from our hunting lands. They have forced us to come to these mountains. We barely survive here.”

“I’m not like that.” I said. “**I believe in live and let live.** I’ve never been here before. I don’t know where I came from, but it was somewhere very different than this place.”

“If your memories are missing, how can you be certain?”

“I just know. I belong somewhere else. Hey, do you know about the people-plants? The plants that create people inside of them?”

“I have never heard of such a thing.” She replied.

“Oh. Well, I know I didn’t imagine them. I came from somewhere else! I was, like, born or created in one of those plants!”

“You do not look like humans we’ve seen before.”

“I don’t? What do I look like? Can you describe me?”

“You are many years old, and your body shows the weakness of advanced age. Your head has the shape of a stone block. Your hair is white and wispy. Your flesh is... spotty, wrinkled...”

“Please, just stop.” I suspired. “Demi-Urgos did that to me. I was young and strong, and he was so jealous he had to take that away from me! I hate that guy!”

“Be calm.” She said. I could almost sense her cringing away.

“Sorry.” I said. “Your people aren’t as violent as humans, are they? Probably not. Hey, listen. In this world, is it possible for a person to be so hungry their stomach can start eating itself?”

“That is... repulsive.” She answered. “No, that it not possible!”

“That’s good to know.” I blew out a full breath of relief. “I almost thought it was happening to me a couple of lives ago.”

“You say you come from another world?”

I had to stop and think about that. “I don’t know. Every time I think I can remember something about who I am, my mind goes completely blank! Even something I said two seconds ago is gone!”

“More than one layer of magic enshrouds you.” She revealed. “The magic is beyond me. The best I can do is to facilitate your tongue so that I can understand most of your words. My magic is Birayd magic, not human. A human healer could have more success than I.”

“Is there a chance my eyes could get healed? I don’t know if I can handle being blind.”

“A handle of blind?”

“I don’t want to be blind.” I said. “What’s your name? I know, I should have asked you at the start, except I’m not thinking clearly right now.”

“Shika is my name.”

“And you are a healer?”

“I am.”

“Well, thanks for healing me. I don’t know how I’m going to repay you.”

“No payment. You are healed for travel. You must leave soon. The people here believe the Reckless God will come for you. We cannot risk our village becoming destroyed.”

“I get it. As soon as I’m ready to walk, I’ll leave.”

“Not alone. You will go with Nori.”

“Who is that?”

“She is half human, half Birayd. She cannot mate with our kind, and if she cannot mate, she must be cast away. Our survival depends on our fertility.”

“Those are tough rules.”

“Out of necessity, they must be tough. Humans will detest Nori for her impurity. They will not accept her unless you have accepted her first. You must take Nori as your wife.”

“My wife?”

“If she approaches humans with no mate, she will be in danger.”

“Why can’t you keep her here?”

“She is barren. She cannot stay.”

“Great.” I said.

The village only had about half a dozen houses in it, and they weren’t even full houses but short walls of wood erected against the side of a mountain. I guess the walls were supposed to keep the wind and snow out of the caves where the people lived. Less than twenty people total were found there; all adults, no kids since the little ones had all died off after some kind of plague had come through.

The biggest cave also served as their town hall, and as an emergency shelter in case of a crazy event such as a blizzard. I guess everybody met there that night to discuss what they were going to do about me. It didn’t sound good. Half the tribe wanted to leave me out in the cold. The other half wanted to throw me off the mountain.

I figured out what the warm thing was. It was a polished stone that radiated heat. Shika said it was ensorcelled amber that had captured sunlight somehow. The radiation part kind of scared me, because I didn’t know what the stone was giving off. It could have been x-rays for all I

knew. Anyway, the stone could fit in the palm of my hand, so it was pretty small. I was supposed to keep it wrapped up, but I undid the cloth so I could how it was shaped. It didn't burn me or anything, but it was a lot hotter against my skin than in its wrap, so I covered it back up and held it against my chest.

Shika and a few others could understand most of what I said, but they had to clear their minds and **really** focus. When the meeting was going on, so many people were speaking at once that Shika had to quiet them down to talk to me. The nearest human town was three days away, but the good thing was the path was all downhill.

Apparently, Birayd women could get pregnant whenever they wanted to. They were not pregnant at the moment because there wasn't much food around. That was one reason why they wanted to get rid of Nori before the spring thaw. Since she couldn't breed, she was only eating up food that could have gone to someone else.

I could hear their language and speak it. This sounded normal to me, as if I'd gone through that before, but I couldn't remember the reason why. All I knew is that it had to do with magic.

After the tribe made the decision to send me to the human village, they had Nori sit down beside me. Everybody except her was happy she was leaving. They said she'd have an easier time with the humans than with the Birayd.

Nori didn't believe them. She cried until the meeting was over and everyone left. I was the only person who stayed with her.

"Stop crying." I said.

Her speech was off and truncated, but I'll word it out so you'll know what she said.

"All cry." She replied.

"Yes, we all cry sometimes, but you don't have to cry now. If you cry, then I want to cry, and then we'll both be wasting tears."

"Human stupid."

I ignored that part. "What do I look like?"

"Old stupid!"

"What do you look like?"

"Biyard beauty!"

"Do you want to go to where the humans are?"

"Go no! Here stay! Mate no!"

"Tell your people that you want to stay. I'll go by myself if I have to."

"Blind stupid!" Nori said. She started crying again.

"When do they want us to leave?"

"Rise sun! Walk, walk, walk! Humans far! Humans stupid!"

"You are half human." I reminded her.

"Stupid you!"

Since I wasn't getting anywhere with her, I stopped talking. She was young, maybe even a teenager. I didn't press Nori for her age because I didn't know what time was like here. She kept crying, even after her people came by to feed us.

It was porridge, in case you're wondering. Porridge with hare meat, some kind of veggies that tasted funny, and, yummy, tree bark and chopped acorns. Nothing will remind you that you're in a foreign land quite like tree bark does when you shit it out.

It was pretty cold that night. I kept the warm amber stone next to me, but the cold tried to get past that so it could gnaw at my skin. Nori didn't sleep anywhere near me. She slept way across the cave where she probably froze half to death. I hated that she was suffering thanks to

me, but she was stubborn and the villagers had already made up their minds about us. Whether I liked it or not, she was going to be my mate once we left in the morning.

(New word count: 2131. New total: 11,197 + 2131 = 13,328.)

(July 20, 2020, 8:00 PM - In case anyone is interested, I put up another chart at the end of this doc. This time it is aimed at figuring out how much an NPC's passion might wane after a big or traumatic event. I am now going to re-read yesterday's update and go from there. Oh, and I am starting to remove the bolded bits from the Notes section too.)

Once we were on the journey, it wasn't hard to figure out **that** I was an old man. My **ankles** cracked and snapped with every other stride. The bones in my lower back ached. I had a sporadic twitch on my left shoulder. I felt like I was a hundred years old.

At least I had two layers of Birayd clothing on me: an undershirt, a thicker shirt made of animal hide, but don't ask me what animal because I don't know, two pairs of pants, socks that I could walk with **if I had to**, and a thicker layer over those that were like boot-socks, held up by cords of leather. I had a hat too. I was made of fur with a softer lining inside and leather strings that I tied into a knot under my chin. I probably looked funny as hell wearing that hat, but I have to admit that it kept me warm.

Nori did not like being my guide. She complained a lot, but luckily I couldn't understand half of it because she mumbled under her breath. It was all insults about how stupid it was that she had to leave her village with me. She carried our food pouch, too, while I struggled along with a walking stick.

Nori could be a little punk at times. When it was time to feed me, she'd toss the bits of bark bread onto the snow. I had to get down on my knees and search out the food with my hands. I know she stepped on a piece of bread once, deliberately, but I had to eat it anyway because my stomach hadn't stopped growling ever since I'd woken up.

She threw a pine comb at me, hitting me on my arm so hard it was twitching even worse afterward. I would slip on rock covered over with ice, I'd walk into cold puddles or mud because Nori refused to warn me, and I would crash into low-hanging tree limbs or walk right into snow-covered bushes when I hadn't used the walking stick properly. Let me tell you, I learned how to navigate with that thing pretty quick after a couple of hours of mishaps.

"Mate no!" Nori screamed at me, when I guess she'd had enough of leading me around.

She wanted me dead, and there wasn't anything I could really do to prevent that. All Nori had to do was smash my head with a rock the next time I slept, or simply walk away from me since I was utterly lost without her. I wasn't scared, but I was wary of her. Even if she did kill me, I figured as long as she did it quick I wouldn't care. I did not like this old man's body **I** was in so much, I felt like taunting her until she did kill me.

That first night, we slept under a Christmas tree. Okay, it wasn't a real Christmas tree, but it had pine needles and it smelled nice. It was... Damn! I had just pictured something from my past, something associated with the pine tree... But then whatever magic is controlling my thoughts was activated and it swept all the clues away! Damn it! All I had left was the word Christmas. I don't even know what it means anymore. All I know is that this is some kind of holiday that is associated with snow. People sing at Christmas time, right?

*Insane in the membrane!*

So let me tell you how fucked up Nori was that night. She could have slept close to me, where we would have added our body warmth together to stave off the cold. Instead, Nori waited until I was sitting down before she snatched **the** warmth stone out of my grip. She kept the stone and she went to sleep somewhere else.

It was so cold my breath came out in icicles. I thought I was going to die, but apparently the old man's body I was in was too stubborn to go out that way. I was hungry, and I was tired, and I felt sick either because of the magic I was under, or maybe I had a fever coming. My old body shivered and shook, and I had a lot of anger in me thanks to Nori. Maybe it was the anger that kept me from passing on. I did not want to give this little girl the satisfaction of knowing she had beaten me, even if I was old and withered.

Besides, my next life might be even worse than this one.

In the morning, Nori was still at it. She took a shit on my acorn bread and left it on the floor for me to find. I found it all right, and I had to wipe my hand on the snow to get the smear off. If my sense of smell was working, maybe I could have smelled what she'd done, but by that time my nose was red and runny, and just breathing made me shiver.

Call me paranoid, but I was wiping my hand every hour or so. I continued to smell her shit on my fingers long after the actual smear was gone. She probably thought it was funny.

If I didn't have to depend on her so much, if my eyes were still working, I probably would have thwacked her on the head with my stick. She really pissed me off with that last stunt, not only because she was humiliating me, but also because I still felt like I was starving.

At least I could tell where the sun was. I could feel it warming up one side of my face as we traveled. When it was directly overhead, I figured it was noon.

"Can't you just tell me which way this village is?" I asked her. "I'll find my way there by myself. Then you can go wherever you want."

"Mountain slope now." She answered. "Tomorrow, we find little streams. Many little streams together run to large stream. Large stream to village."

Nori didn't sleep too far from me that night. The reason was because we kept hearing strange howls echoing down the mountain, as if some large beast was out there stalking prey. I almost thought I recognized the howl from somewhere, but like with everything else, I couldn't remember any details.

At least she shared the amber stone with me. She would hold it for a while, before she passed it over to me for a few minutes, then she'd take it away. That was better than nothing. Curiously, I felt better inside while having the stone in my grasp. Maybe it had healing powers as well as warmth?

We found the stream on the morning of the third day. The water was freezing cold, too cold to drink or even touch with my hands. Nori had control of our single water pouch; a treated goat bladder of course. She filled the pouch up and kept it next to the warmth stone and the sun, and it made the water tepid after about ten minutes. I drank over half of it I was so thirsty. Naturally, Nori got mad and took the pouch away.

We reached a waterfall. It was so loud I could hear it from a good distance away. When we came in close, everything around the waterfall was slippery as if it sprayed all over the place. I kept trying to figure out where Nori was. She was sneaking around, maybe trying to find a good spot where she could push me into the water so I could drown.

“Is this where the stream is?” I asked out loud. “I can follow it from here to reach the village? I can go on by myself now.”

I had to be really careful here, because if I was dumb enough to slip into the water, it might be too cold for me to get back out. I found the bank and poked around the shallow edge with my stick, before I decided to walk south, where I assumed the stream was heading. I expected Nori to leave, but a short while later I heard her mumbling a behind me.

“Are you going to the village?” I asked.

“Human men handsome. Mate me. Village go.”

Strange girl, that one. It didn't sound as if she wanted to get pregnant, only laid.

I walked until my legs started aching. After searching a good spot to sit on, I slowly, very slowly set my butt on the ground. Nori said we only had a few more hours and we would reach our destination.

I started wondering why I did not recognize my face the last time I saw it. You would think that if it were my face, I would know what it looked like, right? Maybe the body I was in was not mine, but belonged to someone from that world, or maybe **from** that region. Maybe I somehow possessed the body and it would return to its original owner once I was exorcised out. **That was a pretty scary idea, the more I thought about it.**

That didn't explain my awareness, though. I was nowhere, and then I was somewhere, and in the somewhere I gained a body and fell into the rancid juices of a people-plant. Where was my awareness located when it was not in a body? Did my awareness choose my next body, or did the magic fling me into it? There I was, turning into a philosophy major like Plato.

Nori's scream alerted me. She was shouting and fighting with someone. I tried to localize exactly where she was, but I couldn't. I grabbed my stick from the ground and started to stand, only to feel a hard hand shove me back down.

“Stay, old man.” A heavy voice said.

“What is happening to the girl?” I asked.

“That mongrel? We are ridding this world of that abomination. Who are you?”

“I don't know.”

The man grunted, not believing me.

“It's true. Someone used magic to wipe my memories and send me to the top of the mountain. You can't hurt the girl. She was told to take me to a village near here. Someone who knows magic there might be able to help me.”

“The village is near enough.” The man replied. “You can find it without the girl. Don't stand or we'll kill you.”

The man walked off in the direction of Nori's screams. The men were taking turns raping her. I felt like helping the girl, and I would have if I were in my original body. I think I used to be strong enough to take on however many men were out there. In this body, as old and blind as it was, and even with the stick as a weapon, I knew I didn't have a chance.

I refused to sit there and listen to Nori being tormented like that. I crawled for a few yards, getting close to the stream, before I stood and used the walking stick to lead me away. Another day, another time, and things would have gone very differently.

Two men caught up to me. I thought it was two men, anyway. There could have been more but the sound of rushing water from the stream masked their noise. That's how that first man had snuck up on me so easily.

“Where are you going?” He asked.

“To the village.” I answered. “What happened to the girl?”

“The same thing that happens to any abomination we come to. People are told as children that humans and Biyard don’t mix. If they refuse to listen, there are consequences.”

“I don’t know anything about these lands.” I admitted. “That is the truth. Are you a sheriff or a constable?”

“I don’t know those words.” He replied.

“Are you following the law?”

“Law? There is no law here. If you want law, you take yourself into the cities where they have rules for everything. The only rule here is you have to work if you want to eat. If you don’t work, you can starve for all we care.”

“I could work, if I had my sight back.” I said.

“Work at what, counting sheep in the field?” The man laughed. “Good fortune doing that with no eyes! Here, give me your clothing. You won’t need it in the village. They can give you new clothing there. Take off the hat. Take off the coat.”

“The boots.” Another man said. “You take those off too.”

The men took my entire outer layer of clothes. They took my walking stick too, and the amber stone, and the food Nori had carried. The only thing they left me with was the goat bladder with water in it.

“Go with the stream.” The man said. “You’ll find the village after dark. They will tend to you there, and fix you up if they can.”

Nori was probably dead now, I figured. She’d been a pain in the ass, but she did not deserve to die like that. Then again, maybe that’s how things went in this world. From what I’d seen of it so far, it was a pretty harsh place to live in.

“Follow the stream!” One of the men pushed me.

I stumbled to the ground, landing hard on one knee and wincing from the pain as I got back up. Before some other jerk took a swipe at me, I started walking away, but I was moving very carefully and very slowly. I kept my hands out in front of me.

“Give him the stick!” A man said.

The walking stick was thrown over, cracking against the ground and bouncing into the backs of my legs. I kneeled and groped around until I found it. It’s funny. I was blind already, but without the stick I felt twice as blind. I started tapping the ground ahead of me, rounding a muddy patch, keeping the sound of the stream close.

The men did not follow.

I did not find the village like I expected to. I don’t know where I ended up, other than the stream was still flowing pretty strong a few yards away.

I was so tired I could barely walk, and the cold was doing its best to halt me. I tapped out with the stick and found a big tree. This was as good a place as any to freeze to death, so I sat down next to the trunk and waited for destiny to come and get me.

I dozed off for a while. When I woke up, it was freezing so much my entire body trembled. A noise caused me to turn toward my right side. I peered around the tree, wondering what could be out there, hoping it wasn’t one of those howling beasts. The animal sounded pretty big as it lumbered closer, slowly as if it were stalking me. It kept coming, breathing at me with moist exhalations.

“If you’re going to eat me, just eat me fast!” I called out. My grip tightened around the walking stick. I could probably give the beast one good whack before it finished me. “You hear me? Eat me fast!”

I could feel the creature’s head looming closer and closer.

(Tonight’s word count: 2546, plus yesterday’s 13,328 gives me a total of 15,874.)

(July 21, 2020, 8:15 PM - I just re-read last night’s entry. I will take a 10 minute break and get to work when I get back.)

It was a big head, and it smelled like old, sour vegetables. The head sniffed at me, grunted a little. I’m not too much of a man to admit that I was scared shitless of whatever it was.

The creature backed off by a few feet. I could still hear it sniffing around. Apparently, it found something it wanted to eat, besides me, and it started munching down.

It began to dawn on me that not everything in this world was out to get me. I reached out with my walking stick and ever so gently tapped the creature’s leg. The creature grunted once, lightly as if it understood that I had touched it, but not perturbed or ticked off. I wondered if it might be a horse, but even if it were, I had no idea if I could ride one. Regardless, I huffed and puffed myself onto my feet in that freezing night and went to pat the animal.

Its haunch... Is that what you call it? Well, the big, bony bump over its front legs, where the neck starts, had all sorts of fur on it. I walked my way toward the creature’s back legs, finding the same fur all over. It had a big belly. I started wondering if it might have udders, but I was afraid of checking, and possibly offending the creature into giving me a mule-kick that would probably kill me. Instead, I worked my way back up toward the head.

“Hey, buddy. What are you doing out here this late? Don’t you have a barn or something to go to at night? Did you get loose? Is that what happened, buddy? You got loose and now you’re here and your people are probably wondering where you went?”

I was talking extra nice as I felt the back of the neck and head. The creature huffed once when I touched its horns. They weren’t sharp. I guess someone had filed the ends into rounded nubs to keep it from hurting anyone. That meant the animal was domesticated, because it couldn’t fight in the wild if it had dull horns.

“Are you like a yak or something?” I asked, still in my friendliest voice. “Are you a bull? You’re too nice to be a bull. Where I come from, bulls are really mean and they chase people all over the place. But you’re not like that. You’re a stray, probably from that village I’m headed to. Is that right?”

I started patting the animal’s head and rubbing its back.

“Yeah, you’re nice and friendly. You know what would be really cool? It would be really cool if you could walk me back to your village. I’m sure you have a lot of hay and water waiting there for you. And a place to keep warm, too. You want to go home, right? Let’s go home, buddy. You can introduce me to all your people. Let’s tell them what a cool adventure you had out here in the wild.”

The animal huffed and sniffed around, not really caring about what I’d said. Would it get mad if I pushed it? Probably, so I left it alone.

“Don’t you want to go home?” I tried again. I think that where I came from, people had to be assertive with their livestock. “Go home, buddy. Go home!”

The creature snorted. It left whatever it was chewing on alone and turned itself around.

“Go home slowly.” I told it. “I can only walk so fast. I hope you don’t mind, but I’m going to stay real close to you. You’re fifty times warmer than I am, okay?”

I don’t know how I did it, but I got my stiff legs moving. The creature was one of those habitual sniffers that had to stop every ten feet to investigate whatever new smell it found. That was okay with me. I tagged along just fine.

It is hard to say how far we walked. It could have been across one large field, or we could have been winding around in circles half the night, but I had no way of knowing. I can tell you that the ground was cold and hard because I could feel it through my sock-shoes.

At one point I was poking around with my stick and discovered something like a barrel sitting out in the middle of nowhere. Whatever was inside of that thing smelled really bad, so I kept my distance from it after I felt its shape for a few seconds.

My hopes went up when I discovered a rock wall. It was only about three feet high and was made simply by stacking rocks on top of each other. The wall was probably built to keep animals like Buddy in, but he’d gotten out anyway. I guess he had enough of my company by then. He started shaking his back until I let go. I figured it was okay because I was sure I’d found the village by then.

I tapped the stick against the wall as I walked on without Buddy. I was looking for a gate or some kind of opening, but after about thirty, forty feet, I started feeling the cold biting through my clothing. All I can say is that it felt like an ice cube bath.

Shivering, with my breaths raspy and my knees knocking, I crouched down against the ground and curled against the wall. I was at the village boundary now. That’s as far as I could get unless someone came around and saw me. There could be worst places to die, I figured, as I felt my body taken over by fatigue. Sleep came slowly, but when it arrived, it was comforting and **close to** warm and that’s all that really mattered.

I expected to wake up inside of the next people-plant, but no, I was still sitting against the rock wall in the morning. It actually felt colder than it had at night. Trembling, I got to my feet and start tapping out my bearings. I heard a soft snort nearby.

“Buddy, is that you? I’m still freezing, so I’m going over there.”

The big creature was munching on something that stank. I wondered if that was the same smell from the barrel I’d come across the night before. Did the villagers feed their animals rotten vegetables or what?

“Go home, Buddy.” I rubbed and patted the animal’s side. “Show me where all the people are. I want to meet the village ladies!”

Buddy kept close to the wall as if he knew where he was going. I got careless in that I relied on him and stopped using my stick. When I came to some kind of rut I fell over and twisted my ankle. I don’t know if Buddy abandoned me deliberately or not, but he kept walking while I cussed up a storm.

“Who is there?” A man’s gruff voice called out.

“Who is there?” I repeated.

“What is your name?”

“I don’t know. I’m an old man whose memories were robbed by magic. I’m lost!”

“How long have you been out there?”

“All night.”

“Impossible! The cold would have killed any man!”

“Hey, I almost died! Whatever magic is on me, it left me blind. I don’t know where I am and I have nowhere else to go!”

“You bring your curse here to us?”

“If I knew where I was, I would have taken my curse somewhere else!”

The gruff voice was silent.

“Listen to me!” I pleaded. “My memories are fading away right now! I have to say this before I forget. The people on the mountain, they said I should come here. They said I could find a... I don’t know what, a healer or a mystic or something. This healer can help me take the curse away. I don’t even have to enter your village. Can you send me the healer out here?”

“What do you have to trade?” The voice asked.

“Not much. Maybe the clothes I have on, if you want them. I... Shit! I had more clothes, but I don’t know what happened to them. Oh, man, my goat bladder is gone! Maybe I dropped it by the wall last night. The only thing I still have is my walking stick. How much healing can I trade for a stick?”

“We have enough sticks!”

“Oh.” I was starting to hate my life all over again. “I’ll just hang out here then.”

“Come to my voice.”

“Why? You come out to me. I already told you how blind I am.”

“You must come to me.”

“Are you blind?”

“Yes.” The man replied. “I am blind if I step out of the village proper.”

“But if you stay in the village you can see?”

“Yes. I can see clearly when in the village.”

“Do you think that will work for me? Okay, I’m heading your way. I am not a threat and I am not armed, unless you count this stick as a weapon. If that’s the case, then I am armed. I’m just letting you know so there won’t be any doubt that I’m telling the...”

Abruptly, without warning, several strong and heavy hands grabbed me and yanked me off my feet.

(New word count: 1548. New total word count: 17,422.)

(July 22, 2020, 8:10 PM - I’m feeling a little tired tonight, so I might stop early. Also, during the day I was stuck on how I wanted to introduce the townsfolk. I have a vague idea that I’m going to flesh out as I go along. That’s the way I have to do it sometimes. I just start writing and let the details work themselves out.)

I remembered Christmas. I remembered carrying a small pine tree into the house, or building one of the plastic models, and decorating it with tinsel and bells and little ornaments. I got to put the shiny star on top, and my family, they put the presents under the tree. I still can’t remember what my parents look like, or if I had any siblings, but I felt this was a start to me getting my memories back.

Oh, and I slept a lot, too. I think I’ve been asleep almost since those people grabbed me, but don’t ask me what they looked like because I couldn’t see them. They grabbed me and they carried me to their headman or their chief, and that guy told them to take me to some chick and I was dropped off on a cot and that was it.

“What is your name?” A woman’s voice asked.

“What’s your name?” I returned, because yeah, I could still be a smartass even in my golden years. Actually, they weren’t really that golden.

“What is your name?” The woman tried again, this time with more authority.

“I don’t remember.”

The woman seemed to be addressing someone else. “He still doesn’t remember. I tell you, I’ve tried everything I can and there are still no good results! This is frustrating!”

“Try once more.” A gruff voice grumbled at her.

Was that the same gruff voice I’d heard before? Was that the headman talking?

“What do you want me to try?” The woman scoffed. “I’ve gone through half of my medicines already! Maybe you should try **yourself** if you **are so sure** it can be done!”

“Go through the other half of your medicines.” The man replied. He sounded like a tough guy, my kind of guy. “We must find out what he knows. Call me when you have news.”

“Wait.” I called out. “I do remember one thing.”

I told them about Christmas.

The man grumbled because my information was meaningless. I could visualize him standing there with his arms crossed **and grimacing**.

The more I talked, the more I kept remembering other stuff.

“Demi-Urgos.” I said. “I remember Demi-Urgos.”

“Tell us.” The man said, sounding much closer and attentive. “What of him?”

“He killed me with a big fucking branch!” I answered. Glimpses flashed through my head, of the way the god mistreated the people he created, and how he made them do everything in reverse. My story didn’t make sense, **even to me**, but whatever popped into my head came out of my mouth.

“He is lying.” Another person, another man spoke up. “No one can set eyes on the Reckless God and live.”

“Uh, excuse me, but I didn’t live!” I emphasized. “He took me out!”

“Out of where?” The second man asked.

“He... He killed me. He destroyed me. I hate that guy!”

“It was the Reckless God that set the Black Affliction upon our lands.” Mr. Gruff said.

“He could not have seen the god.” The second man insisted.

“It could be a vision.” The woman cut in. “This man could have dreamed **of the Reckless God**. We all know that dreams and visions have a certain degree of truth in them.”

“Use your magic.” Mr. Gruff said. “Use it until he remembers all!”

I heard several feet shuffling around, growing more distant.

Trying to move didn’t help. I thought I had a heavy blanket on top of me, or a heavy quilt, and maybe I did have **one**, but I also had some kind of restraints over that. They prevented me from even sitting up.

“Uh, a little help here.” I asked out loud. “Can you untie me?”

“For what reason?” The woman asked.

“I want to stand up and touch things, because I can’t see them. **Can I touch our face?**”

“No. Stay where you are.”

“Somebody said that to me recently.” I recalled. “**Stay where you are**. But I can’t remember who. Why are you not letting me stand?”

“Your body could be possessed by a demon.” She admitted.

“Does that kind of stuff happen around here?”

“Yes. It happens often.”

“Oh.” I sighed. “In that case leave me how I am. I’ve been wondering myself if I might be possessed. I’ll let you know when I need to tinkle.”

“What is that word?”

“Uh, to relieve myself. No? Uh, to let go of the yellow water.”

“You mean waste water? From the body?”

“Yes, that’s what I mean.”

“I don’t know if I can trust you.” She said.

“Lady, I don’t know if I can trust me either.”

“I am no lady.” She huffed.

I guess ladies were considered bad around here? “Okay, what can I call you?”

“I am the healer here. I am Methild.”

“Okay, Methild. I don’t know what is going on... I mean, I don’t know what is happening to me. Maybe you can help me figure it out. What do you know about me so far?”

“I know nothing of you.”

“You’ve been doing stuff to me, right? Have you learned anything yet? Can you tell me why I’m old and blind? Can you tell me why my entire body hurts so much?”

“You are old.” Methild replied. “It is common for ailments to increase with age.”

“I wasn’t old before. I was young and strong. Demi-Urgos did something to me and made me this way! Oh! I remember something else now. I remember the people-plants.”

I told her about those. She didn’t believe me. I gave up. “Okay, so I must have dreamed that up too. I’m going to ask you one more time. What have you learned about me so far?”

Methild refused to answer.

“Okay, if you don’t want to talk, I will. I’m going to start singing my favorite song!”

“No!” She cried out. “You sang when you were delirious! It was a song about insanity! I cannot bear to listen to that again! It is an evil song you sing!”

“Evil?” I asked. “Evil? It’s a song, lady... I mean, Methild. Where I come from, or where I assume I come from, a lot of people sing that song.”

“And surely they are all as insane as you are.”

“Are you going to tell me or not?” I shouted. “Insane to the membrane! Crazy insane, got no brain! Insane to the...”

“No more! No more!” She cried out loud than **my singing**. “I will tell you, and if truly you do not know this, you will surely faint again.”

“When did I faint? You’re kidding, right? Did I really faint?”

“You lost consciousness when I applied a medicine to your soup.”

“That’s not really fainting. That’s more like passing out. What did you give me, anyway?”

“Witch’s Oastrunt.” Methild answered.

“Whoa! And you’re calling my song evil? What the hell?”

“It is a healing plant.” Methild explained. “It cures many stubborn ills, but in most people. In you, there are too many ills to be cured. I am beginning to doubt that you’re even alive.”

“Say again?”

“Your skin has an unusual pallor. There is hardly any blood near its surface, giving it a deathly pallor. Your breathing, your heart, they slow down so much it is a miracle you when you wake up again...”

“Hold on, lady. About that; it’s called meditation. I think I had a girlfriend, a lady friend, who showed me how to do that.”

“I don’t know that word.” Methild replied. “Are you saying you can manage your breaths and your heart? Are you causing your skin to be so pale also?”

“I don’t know about the pale skin part, but the rest of it...” I tried to think, I really did. “Don’t you have bears on these mountains? Do the bears sleep during the cold months, like in a death sleep where they won’t wake up for a long time? That’s what meditation is like.” It was just starting to dawn on me what this woman was getting at. “Hold on... The pale skin, the slow breaths and heartbeat... Do you think I’m a zombie? Are you serious?”

I started laughing. This terrified the woman. I could sense it.

“Why do you laugh?” She asked. “What is that word? Zom... Zom...?”

“Uh, it means the undead. You know, dead people that come back to life. Or actually, not really life but dead people walking around and tearing shit up.”

“Why do you laugh at that?”

“Where I come from...” I grinned. “We have these things called scary movies. You know what? Forget I said zombies. Let’s get one thing straight. I am alive. There is something wrong with me, but I don’t know what. Can you help me with that?”

“You have a demon inside of you.” She said. “**I believe.**”

I took a deep breath. “Explain to me how you know that.”

“When we feed you, very little food goes into your body. The demon is inside your stomach. It is eating almost everything you swallow.”

“That kind of makes sense.” I reasoned. “Can this demon make me feel like my stomach is eating itself?”

“The demon could be eating your insides.” She confirmed.

“We need to get rid of it. How do we get rid of it?”

“Avea Leaf. I can make a medicine if I had any.”

“But you don’t have any?”

“No. Ever since the Black Affliction came a few months ago, the people here stay as close to the village as possible. We cannot see anything past the village. Creatures come from Hell to catch any of us who stray too far.”

“And Demi-Urgos did that? Do you know why?”

“He came into the dreams of the children who lived here. The children said the Reckless God was angry with us for not sacrificing to him. After five days, the same children who had those terrible dreams left the village on the same night, when their parents were sleeping. The Black Affliction appeared the next morning. The children never returned.”

“That sounds like something that jerk would do.” I nodded. “He must have given me the demon... No, wait. I think I had the demon inside of me before I met Demi-Urgos. My stomach has been messed up for a while now. This demon could be making me forget who I am.”

“It is possible.” She said. “There are many layers of dark magic surrounding you. Some of them are easy to see, but not easy to dissolve. Some of the layers are very deep. They intertwine with one another the way roots from two plants might intertwine. If I try to remove one layer, it could damage another layer, and that could in turn damage you.”

“This leaf we have to find, is it far from here?”

“It grows in the mountains, near the damp and dark crevices.”

“We should go out there.” I decided.

“No one will leave the village. We are too afraid.”

“Then I’ll have to go by myself.” I said it, but I knew it was impossible. “Damn it! How far can I get while being old and blind? How am I supposed to do anything? You know, I should have jumped on Demi-Urgos when I had the chance!”

“Do not curse the Reckless God.” Methild warned. “He will hear you, and he will destroy the entire village.”

“I’m not afraid of him. Take me out of the village. Take me to that little wall.”

“For what reason?”

“I’m going to yell out every curse I know at Demi-Urgos. I’m going to dare him to show his ugly face to me!”

I yelled for hours. There was no point to it. The god never showed up.

The guy with the gruff voice, he was the chief of the village. His name was Wirenth. When my voice started growing hoarse, he came and got me.

He took me back to where the healer was. Methild tried to feed me, but in a rare moment I wasn’t that hungry. I did go to sleep on that same rough cot.

She tried to feed me again when I woke up. “Drink this mixture. It should counteract a layer of magic from around your head.”

“How many layers are around my head?”

“Many. As many as six or seven.”

“Damn. I must be a popular guy with the demons, if I have that much attention.”

“You should not speak that way.”

Methild left as soon as I drank the mixture. I think she was scared of me, or scared of all the demons or dark magic I had on me.

I wasn’t scared. Why should I be? It would only make things worse, right, if I were scared of this shit someone had smeared on me?

I wasn’t scared; I was pissed.

I tossed and turned all night. I felt feverish, not over my entire body, but only around my head. It felt as if the dark magic was fighting the potion I’d taken. I remember people around me, wiping me down with damp towels. I could smell their fear.

I also remember singing. I sang out loud and clear, all night long, until my voice cracked and then I hummed when the words ran out.

*Do my shit undercover now it's time for the blubba  
Blabber, to watch that belly get fatter  
Fat boy on a diet, don't try it  
I'll jack yo' ass like a looter in a riot*

Insane to the membrane!

(Stopping at 10:48 PM. New word count: 2226. Total word count: 19,648. That’s after 13 days, with an average word count of 1500 per night, or about 3 pages’ worth. This is a good pace for me. I have a ton of random idea generators now. I will probably prepare a list of them and post a PDF on my website. I’ll make an announcement soon about that.)

(July 23, 2020, 8:00 PM.)

When I woke up, I had an attack of vertigo so bad I almost fell off the cot. I would have fallen if no one had tied the restraints on me.

Methild came over to correct me, except I was wedged tight on the edge of the cot. She actually made things worse. By trying to move me while I was tied down, she ended up tipping the cot on its side and twisting me up even worse.

“I must find two men to help me.” She said.

“Yeah, you go find them.” I growled because I was in a bad mood. Three seconds later, another bout of vertigo sent my head into a tailspin. That’s funny, huh, sending your head into a tailspin?

The men walked in. They scrutinized my plight and decided the best solution was to remove the restraints, put the bed right, put me on the bed correctly, and tie me down again. When I felt my limbs go free, I made a fast crawl in the direction I expected the door to be. As it turns out, I ran headfirst into a fairly solid table leg. Crap that was sitting on top of that table got shook, and some of it toppled over and landed on my back. Yeah, after that disaster, that was the last time I tried to crawl my way to freedom.

Whatever Methild had done to try and fix my eyes; it didn’t work. I was as blind as a bat in a spotlight.

“I’m still blind.” I told the men as they moved me back onto the cot. “I don’t want to lie here all day. Can someone take me out to the wall again?”

Men from the village took turns watching me. They talked among themselves, mostly speculation about who I was and where I came from, but nobody talked to me.

That changed when Wirenth showed up.

“Are you certain you don’t remember your name?” He asked.

Sometimes, I stood next to the short wall and felt a slow breeze waft by. Other times, I sat down and leaned against the wall, or if I got tired or lazy, I lay down and took a nap. A couple of times, some bug I couldn’t see took a stab at me, and I scooted away hoping it wouldn’t follow.

“Your name?” Wirenth pressed.

“I’m certain I do not remember it.”

“Tell me your story once again. Perhaps you will remember more if you do.”

See, that’s why Mr. Gruff was the chief. He was smarter than the average bear. I know the reason he wanted me to tell my tale was because he was trying to catch me in a lie. I went ahead and told it anyway. I don’t think I remembered anything new.

“Hold on.” I started. “The people that live on the mountain, what are they called?”

“The people? There are several sorts up there.”

“What about the people that have scaly skin?”

“The Birayd. You know of them?”

“I think... I think one of them guided me down the mountain. Is there like a hatred between those people and humans?”

“There is bad blood against them.”

“Why?”

“We were here first. The Birayd arrived from somewhere else and they thought to take our lands away from us. We fought them for it, and they lost.”

“Where did they come from?”

“Nobody knows the answer to that question. They were not here one week, and the next week they were, hunting in our spots. We had to chase them away.”

“Is there any way that humans and Birayd could co-exist together?”

“No. Those people are nothing like us. They are a filthy race.”

“What if a human got a Birayd pregnant? What would happen to the baby?”

“No man would ever fill one of those female creatures with his seed.”

“But what if it did happen? What if a man impregnated a Birayd woman, and a baby was born? What would happen to the baby?”

“The Birayd would eat it, surely. If that baby were ever to be seen by humans, it would fall upon us to kill it. Such abominations must not be allowed to exist.”

“Of course.” I said. “You said there are other people living on the mountain?”

“Some, but not many. The Scoffers are out there.”

“Who are they?”

“The ones that scoff at our customs. The ones who refuse to put their shoulders to a man’s work. They hunt when they can, and they steal when they can’t hunt. The Scoffers will not come to us, not until the Affliction is removed. They know evil curses this place. **They know well enough to stay away.**”

“The people of the village are enemies of the Scoffers?”

“Often-time, yes. If we have a surplus of grown food, or if they have a surplus of hunted food, the Scoffers might send one of their women here to make a trade with us. That is the only time they descend from the mountain.”

“I think I met the Birayd near the top of the mountain, and a band of Scoffers near the base.” I related. “I don’t remember any of the details, except maybe a Birayd had to bring me here. I don’t know what happened to her.”

“The Birayd would not send a woman.” Wirenth said.

“Oh. I guess I’m wrong then.”

My head started throbbing when the sun went down. I mean for a good forty-five minutes it felt like my brain was trying to crack my skull open. Usually, I’m a pretty quiet guy, or at least I think I am, but the headache was bad enough to make me groan and roll around on the grass.

It subsided by itself, thankfully. I sat there, wondering if the pain would come back. That’s when I noticed that the world wasn’t pitch black like it was before. I saw patches of dark gray now, like a smear of paint on a black palette. I couldn’t tell what the patches were, so I got up and started walking over.

Some guy grabbed me by the arm. “Where are you going?”

I pointed. “That way. I can see something gray there. Dark gray.”

“What is it?” The man asked.

“I don’t know. That’s why I’m walking there.”

“I must watch over you.”

“You can keep watching me.” I said. “Help me walk over there.”

He did. “There is nothing gray.”

“Are you sure?” I pointed again. “I see it right there. It’s a lot closer now.”

“You said gray?”

“That’s what I see.”

“You are pointing at a torch.”

“A torch? What color is it?”

“Of course it is of yellow and orange flame.”

That sounded unusual, but I was intrigued. Whatever the healer had done to me, it had lightened up my eyesight by about a tenth of a percent. I stared at the gray blob that I’d been told was really a flaming torch. It was a smudge, but **better** than nothing at all. It didn’t move, didn’t flicker, didn’t waver; it only stayed in place like a permanent stain in my eyes.

“Take me to Methild.” I told my watcher.

She gave me more of that Witch’s Grunt, or whatever it was called. Nothing happened right away, as far as I could tell.

“I can see the magic binds around you.” She said. “One bind, one of the closest to your mouth, is of a different color than the rest.”

“What color is it?” I asked.

“Blue. Since it is a small bind, I think I can remove it next.”

“Okay.” I nodded. “Wait! Wait! No, you have to leave that one alone! I know why it’s there!”

“Do tell.” Methild said.

“You said it’s only around my mouth? That’s a translation spell. That’s how I’m able to hear and speak your language. If you take that away, I won’t be able to talk anymore.”

“Where did you get that magic?”

I had to pause to have a good think over it. “I don’t know. I think I’ve had that spell on me for a while. Is there a spell around my eyes?”

“Yes. It is very thick and colored an ugly yellow-brown. This is better than before, when it was dark brown with no yellow in it.”

“Then your healing magic is working?”

“It appears so.”

“But I’m probably going to have more headaches?”

“You will.”

“Shit.”

Every three or four hours, my head would feel like it was splitting open. The pain lasted anywhere from half an hour up to a little over a full hour. When the headache went away, I would drink more of Methild’s potion, until it **finally** ran out.

She’d left a candle for me. I stared at that thing for half the night, watching it go from a tiny gray blob to a silvery flicker. I could actually see the shape of the flame, roughly anyway, but not the constant waver from a clearer image.

Because of the pain, and the excitement, and the fear, I didn’t sleep much. In the morning, I went outside to greet the dawn. Strangely enough, I could see the sun’s gray glow before it crested the horizon. Once the sun was visible, when it should have been visible to me, the entire landscape of my mind returned to pitch black.

I was so disappointed I had someone lead me back into Methild’s... What was it, like her doctor’s office? I know she didn’t live there, but she did go in to perform her healing services. Whatever it was called, I went inside and I was tied down to the cot, and I slept all day.

That night, I was feverish again, but Methild said this was normal after I’d consumed so much Witch’s O-strunt, or whatever it was called. I was exhausted, but I was also fed up with lying on the cot so long, so I asked the guy watching me to remove my binds.

“I can see your silhouette.” I noticed. “I can see the flame, too. It’s colored white and gray, but I can see its shape, and its flicker. Take me outside. Take me to the wall.”

It felt strange walking out there. The sky was black, but not totally black. It was more like midnight blue mixed with black. I couldn’t make out a thing in the village if there was no lit torch nearby to illuminate it. When there was a torch, I could see dark gray or medium gray people and objects. The short wall, for example, was blue-black, except for a few spots where torches were mounted on short posts, where the wall looked dark gray to me.

“If I drink the potion one or two more days,” I calculated out loud. “I might be able to see again. Tell Methild that I need more potion.”

It took four days. Close to the end, I was ready to quit taking the potion because the headaches had grown so bad, maybe three to five times worse than the initial ones. If I had quit, I would have been left seeing a blurry world half-drained of colors. Because I toughed it out, I got my vision back, but there was one big restriction.

I could only see at night.

Don’t ask me how it happened, because I don’t know. Methild said she was dissolving one layer of magic from around my head. By tampering with it, she caused another layer to react. It was the second layer that tightened up during the day, as if it could sense daylight. The layer loosened up after dark and I could see. I think this was some kind of cruel joke Demi-Urgos had played on me for not listening to him.

These people in the village, I’m sorry, but I thought they were really ugly now that I could tell what they looked like. They had long heads with long noses and close-set eyes. Many of them had extra long chins or large ears. As a whole, they weren’t very tall, with the average man a couple of inches shorter than me. Their hair was blonde or red, or some combination of the two. No wonder they were afraid of me, with my dark hair and my old, square face.

Seeing at night was better than nothing. I had to start sleeping during the day, just so I could see stuff at night. Chief Wirenth kept me confined to about a quarter of the village, so he could always have me in sight or close enough to know where I always was, but also so he could keep me away from the rest of the village. Now that I could see in the dark, to a point, and with so many of my watchers sleeping, I was able to get a better look at the entire village.

The Affliction, as they called it, was encroaching on the village from all sides. Apparently, at first the village had been twice as large, and it had a lot more people in it, but the darkness had move in a little at a time, and the people had either left before it got really bad, or they’d gone out to farm or hunt, and they never came back. About sixty people lived in the village now, most in houses made of stacked stones with wooden roofs. The rest lived in lean-tos and open frame dwellings. Of the near sixty people, I think I’d only been around five or six of them total.

The Affliction was a dark and scary thing, like a fog so thick you couldn’t see through it. Even if you only walked three or four feet in, and you turned around to face the village, you would not be able to see it. You could walk through the fog and everything, but it felt as if the air were heavier, a lot denser, almost like walking over sand or through water but lighter.

Since I had nothing else to do all night, I started walking around the entire village. I took my walking stick and stayed close to the wall, just in case anyone tried to nab me. Wirenth didn’t like this at first, but I was stubborn about getting my exercise and I kept doing it. In the end, he relented and simply said that if some creature attacked me, he could not send people to defend me. If I died out there, he said, that’s how it would be.

(Stopped at 11 PM. New word count: 2426. Total word count: 22,074.)

(July 24, 2020, 8:10 PM.)

The more I walked, the more I thought things over. Not about the people-plants and being up on the mountain, because a lot of that I still couldn't remember. I'm talking about things that were happening in the village.

I didn't like how Wirenth was always on my ass. If he wasn't watching me, Methild was, and if she wasn't, the other men were. They never let me out of their sight unless I was chilling out past the short wall. At first, I thought they were watching me because I might be a threat to them, especially if I was really possessed as Methild suspected. When they didn't follow me out of the village, it made sense because nobody wanted to risk their lives for me.

At the same time, those few people kept me confined to one section of the village, and despite that I did see other folk walking around and doing stuff, I wasn't allowed to talk to any of them. It made me wonder if maybe Wirenth was keeping me away from the rest of the villagers because he was trying to keep a secret hidden from me.

I walked around the stone wall, to the rundown part of the village. Normally, I would keep on walking without paying attention **out** here, because there weren't that many torches and most of the residents were already sleeping. This time, I decided to stop and peer over the wall for a closer look.

The first thing that caught my attention was the smell. It was sweet and acrid, a full smell that impregnated the air with its weight. At one time, I was a big weed smoker, and while this didn't smell like **the weed I was used to**, it sure reminded me...

Damn! Just when I was giving birth to a recollection, and this crap-ass Fog Of Memory shuts my mind down! I was close to a revelation; I know it! Or not. Maybe it was just a hint of a memory that didn't mean much... But my mind got shut down anyway.

I had my walking stick with me, because Withern relented and let me have it while I went out **on** my dangerous walks. For a couple of minutes, I tapped on the wall **with it**, hoping to get the attention of whoever was over there smoking out, but nobody came.

Let me tell you, getting old is a bitch and a half. I had to grab onto the ledge, lift a feeble leg over, scoot on my belly, lift my other old leg, and flail until I belly-rolled and landed on my arm and knee. I was that weak! For the next five minutes, I leaned against the wall and huffed as my bruised knee screamed at me for being to careless. On top of that, **I** scraped one of my palms and it was stinging like crazy.

Suck it up, I thought. Suck it up and do what I came here **for**.

I ambled past meager buildings made of rough wood, seeing their edges clearly against the dark blue of the sky. At one point I stepped into something soft and squishy, something that stunk and clung to my sock-shoe, and I had to rub my foot on the grass like fifty times to get the stuff off. Once I'd reasonably cleaned my **shoe** off, I headed for the nearest lighted torch to see what I could see.

Three guys were sitting close together: two on a stiff wooden bench, the third on the ground. The guy on the ground was passed out with his head tilted back and his mouth open and leaking saliva. The seated two were passing back and forth a skinny pipe with a fat bowl on the end. The acrid smell was coming from the bowl.

These men had a markedly different appearance than Withern's people. They were shorter, with round heads and big cheeks, and dark hair. All three wore ragged clothing. The two on the bench eyed me as I approached them.

"Who are you?" One demanded. His voice was raspy and sharp.

"I don't know." I answered. "I appeared on the mountain with no memory, and somehow I made it here trying to find someone to help me."

"You did not climb down the mountain by yourself." One of the men said.

"I think I had a guide."

"Do you have any coin on you?" The other inquired. "Let us see it."

"I have no coin."

"Do you carry anything valuable?"

They were scoundrels, I decided. No big threat to the young and powerful man I once was, but lethal to a feeble old fart like me. "I did. I had valuables, but they were taken from me."

Both men started paying more attention to me.

"What sort of valuables?" One asked.

"I had a second set of clothing, warmer than what I'm wearing now. And sock-boots, I had those two. I had a goat bladder and a stone that captured sunlight and kept me warm at night. All of that was taken from me by a band of thieves I ran into."

"Thieves? What did they look like?"

"I don't know." I admitted. "I was blind up until I arrived here. Methild has been giving me medicine ever since then. My sight has been restored, but only at night. I don't understand why I am unable to see during the day. But you wanted to know about the thieves, and not me. They spoke like men, and they were big and rough and shoved me to the ground. Do you see this walking stick? They took it from me, and then they threw it at me. That's the only thing they didn't steal: my stick and these clothes I have on."

"Those are Birayd clothes." The first man decided.

"And the thieves, they were likely Scoffers." The second man added. "They scoff at anything they don't like. They will scoff at their own mothers!"

"When did you arrive?" The first asked.

"Six, seven days ago." I guessed.

"You must be the traveler we've heard about. That is the rumor, that a traveler came along the road and stumbled into this shit-pit of a village. But you say you came from the mountain?"

"I did." I nodded. "That is the truth. Why would Withern lie and say I came from some other place that isn't the mountain?"

"People that come from the mountain come full of demons. Withern ends up killing them when they lose their sanity."

"They lose their sanity? Why?"

"Because the demons boil up inside of them, eat them from the inside out. The demons make the people say vile things, and do vile things, and the only way to stop them is to kill them. You're not the only one, you know."

"There are others who say they came from the mountain." The second man confirmed.

"Two more is their number. Withern doesn't know they came from the mountain because they made up a lie to fool him. They said the Scoffers stole them away from their camp, and they escaped the Scoffers and found this wretched place."

“It isn’t the truth.” The first man confided. “At least, that’s what the two have told us. They have bound us to secrecy about it. We can’t tell anyone, but we are telling you because you say you’ve come from the same place.”

“We can test this one.” The second man said. “We can ask him a question to prove whether he came from the mountain or not.”

“Yes, let us ask him.” The first started at me, his eyes becoming rounded and gaping. “You can’t lie to us, because your lie will smell like shit. Tell us the clean truth when you answer. If truly you did come from the mountain, tell us how you came to arrive on it.”

“I don’t remember all of it.” I started. “Do you know about the people-plants?”

The two men looked to one another, before they stared at me again.

“We have never seen a plant that can birth people.” The second man said. “But **hear** this. The two who came from the mountain said the same as you.”

“We didn’t believe them.” The first added. “No one believes them, but you are a third that says the same. That is no luck-filled guess!”

“We will ask him another question.” The second man decided. “Have you seen the Reckless God? What does he look like?”

“Golden skin, dark beard...” I tried to focus further, but the image was hazy in my head. “I think he had a tunic on?”

“No.”

“Sandals?”

“No!”

“What color were his eyes?” The first man pressed.

“I don’t remember his eyes. They were normal, weren’t they?”

“No!”

The two men conferred with one another in whispers. They doubted my honesty.

“How many people did the Reckless God torment?” The second man asked.

“Two, four, six, I think. They were man and woman, three pairs.”

“Were they colored?”

“Yes. I think they were.”

“What colors?”

“Oh, boy.” I said.

“What say?” The first man asked.

“Boy. I don’t remember where I had time to think about this, but I did have a lot of time to try to make myself remember that. I chose the word Boy. Each letter stands for one of the colors of the people I saw. They were Blue, Orange and Yellow.”

“He speaks nonsense.” The second man told the first.

“I think so also.” The first man agreed. “But he said the colors.”

“The colors are wrong!”

“They are, but who would know the people were in pairs and in colors?”

“The colors were red and green!” The other insisted. “His answer was not the truth!”

“When the Reckless God creates people, can he only make them in red and green?” The first man reasoned. “What if the Reckless God creates a man with a blue head, an orange body, a yellow arse and limbs that are red and green in circle twists?”

“That would be a strange man!” The second laughed.

“I need to talk to those people.” I determined. “Maybe they can help me remember more.”

“Give us coin or food, and we will let you speak with them.” The first man replied. “Bring us anything, even food.”

“I don’t have anything to trade.” I shrugged. “All I have is this stick.”

“Bah!” One of the men balked. “Who needs a stick? All a stick is good for is to break it on a man’s head. Find us something valuable, and we will talk to the two.”

“Something valuable.” The other grinned. “Very valuable!”

“When you have it, come back here at night. Do not come during the day when Withern is about. That Withern is a cock, I tell you! A smelly, hairy cock!”

“Withern is a cock!” The second man laughed. “Withern is a cock!”

“And Methild is a cunt!” The first man giggled. “A cock and cunt! A cock and a cunt!”

They both started chortling out loud.

I figured it was high time I left. “I’ll try.”

“What is your name?” The second man wondered.

“I don’t remember it. I don’t remember anything about who I used to be.”

“The man who comes at night.” The first man said. “That is his name and he will come at night!”

“What are your names?” I asked.

“Opul and Lupo.” The second man answered.

“We are Mirror Twins.” The first man said.

“What does that mean?”

“It means that once we were only one man.” The first explained. “But that wasn’t enough. There was a need to have two men instead of one, and a warlock was hired to split the one of us into the two of us.”

“We are mirrors of each other.” The second said. “Even we cannot remember which of us is the true man!”

That was one of the weirdest things I’d ever heard. Even with my forced amnesia, I didn’t think I’d heard anything that crazy before. “What about that third man sleeping on the ground? Is he a Mirror Twin too?”

The first man huffed. “That is an idiot thrice! He is a bump on a log!”

“Or a flea on a dog!” The second rhymed.

“Or a fly in a frog!”

“Or a snake in the bog!”

The two weirdos started laughing again. That’s when I walked away.

“Where have you been?” The watchman asked, when I neared the entrance to the village.

“I went all the way around.” I answered. “I took a nap, too.”

“I thought a beast had eaten you.”

“Does that happen often? Do beasts come in this close?”

“They do. By certain they do.”

“I will be more careful next time.” I decided.

I sat down on the ground and put my back against the cool stones. Now that I had time to think calmly, I understood that I’d remembered a lot about Demi-Urgos and the people he kept pushing around. Why did I remember all that? Was I more relaxed than before, or did those Mirror jerks have some kind of magic that neutralized my Fog Of Memory. I started yawning.

The watchman was just on the other side of the wall, listening to me. “What, will you sleep again after you just woke up?”

“I’m an old man. That’s the way it is for me. Wait until you get old, buddy.”

“I won’t get old.” The watchman replied. “Something will kill me, for certain, before I ever get to that old age.”

(Stopped at 10:30 tonight. New word count: 2259 + 22074 = 24,333.)

(July 25, 2020, 8:00 PM.)

Being restrained was not a piece of cake. Methild had me bound up all morning, and she would have kept me bound even longer except she didn’t have any more medicine to pour down my throat. She was deliberating whether or not I should be allowed to go for a walk when one of the other men who watched me entered the doctor’s office-slash-shack.

“You are needed outside.” The man told her. “Wirenth tells me to stay in your place.”

Methild left without answering. I thought she was ugly when I first saw what she looked like, but she was starting to grow on me. Now I found her passably cute.

“What is happening that she has to leave so fast?” I wondered.

“Visitors have come.” The man answered. “It is none of your concern.”

“How did visitors get through the Affliction?”

“Two are magic adepts.”

“What do they want?”

“You have no need to know such matters.”

“You’re right.” I relented. “Hey, can you undo my restraints and walk me to the wall? Methild was about to do that before you came in.”

“She was not.” The man refused to believe me.

“Buddy, you should really untie me.”

“Say why.”

“Because I’m about to let out some horse droppings. If you don’t take me outside, I’ll poop on myself and stink up the cot. Then you’ll have to clean me, and clean the cot, and you’re going to hate every moment of that.”

I wasn’t lying. It had happened twice already.

I was untied and led out to the wall. When I... Let’s just call it defecated. When I did that, the guard, or guards, would tie a rope around my waist and let me walk into the dark nothingness that encompassed the entire village. I thought about sneaking around to see the magic adepts for myself, but I don’t think I would have accomplished anything even if I’d succeeded. I walked straight out with my stick in front of me, until I was far enough that I felt I had some privacy.

I squatted, did my business, wiped with my left, **cleaned** off on the grass, and started back. I’d only gone about twenty, thirty feet away. When I figured I was halfway back to the wall, I decided to stop and take things in. I still couldn’t see anything, and the dark air was so thick it didn’t allow sounds or smells to waft in either.

When I returned to the gate, the guard removed the rope I had on and returned my walking stick. I didn’t get it. I was free to walk the perimeter all night long, when I could see, but I was not free to take a dump while I was blind. It was a conundrum. At least I had something to think about and speculate for what would undoubtedly be a very boring day.

I sat down against the wall and contemplated a good many things, before I went to sleep out there. It wasn't a comfortable sleep, but I could turn over when I felt like it, as opposed to the cot where the restraints could start choking me if I shifted the wrong way.

When I woke up, I heard the voice of one of the other guards talking. This was Ruehnar, who I got along with more than the others.

"Hey, Ruehnar." I called out. "Who are you talking to?"

"Not to any person." The man answered. "I pretended to speak to... a certain woman I've grown fond of."

"Oh, yeah? What are you going to ask her?"

"The Time of New **B**eginnings approaches." Ruehnar explained. "This is when the sun hurries across the sky in the short days, before the shortest day is reached and the days begin to grow longer once more."

"What does that have to do with a woman?"

"The sun will die on its shortest day, and become reborn on the day following. This is the Time of New Beginnings. Old habits and grudges are told to leave, and new hope will arrive with the advent of the new sun. This woman I know, she lost her husband some time ago. I will ask her to set aside her past and see to her future, a future where I can become a new husband for her. I believe she has a liking for me, but I am not certain. I do not know if she will decide for me or against me."

"She was married before? Were you?"

"I was."

"What happened to your wife?"

"She was in the forest searching for edibles, along with my two young children and several other wives." Ruehnar revealed. "They were all taken by the Affliction. It took place over one turn of the sun ago."

"I'm sorry to hear that, man. I had a girlfriend once. I can't even remember what she looks like anymore. I think... I think I really loved her. I can't figure out why we split up."

"You split up?"

"We separated, we weren't lovers anymore. Hey, bud, can I ask you something? Are you going to tell me about those magic guys that came into town?"

"Withern can tell you."

I huffed on hearing that. "No he won't! Withern doesn't tell me anything!"

"Why would you know about the visitors?"

"Because I'm bored and I want to find out what's going on, just like everybody else."

"I suppose **you are in the right**. Very well. They were envoys from a large city to the south of us. They have come to find out how many of us still live out here on the edge of wilderness. We were told that our village was not the only one that has suffered through the Black Affliction. There are two others with similar blights."

"Three villages?"

"At least three. Perhaps more if **the envoys** continue around the base of the mountain. There could be a dozen halved settlements to be found, unless they have been wiped away entirely."

"I don't remember people talking about the Affliction while I was on the mountain." I recalled. "It might only be around the villages."

"The envoys said the same." Ruehnar confirmed. "If the magicians cannot **sort** it out, what chance do the rest of us have?"

"Why doesn't Withern trust me?"

“Why should he? You are a stranger. You are old and blind, at least during the day now, and there is no lucky chance for you to have survived a descent from the mountain. You say you’ve seen Birayd and Scoffers, but anyone can say this and we would not know if this is truth or lie. You say you’ve seen the Reckless God, but no one has ever seen him unless it was in a vision. Mostly likely, you are demon-possessed, and if you are, the symptoms will manifest and it will fall upon us to be rid of your abomination.”

“What if Withern is wrong? What if I’m not possessed?”

“That is why we are waiting so many days. Withern will not kill an innocent victim, but he will kill a demon-possessed man. If a demon truly does hide in your belly, it will tire of sitting in that place and provoke you into some sort of violence. That is when we will know who you truly are.”

“I hope I don’t show any symptoms. I told Methild already. I don’t know if I am possessed or not. I could be! Okay, so why doesn’t Withern let me talk to more people? Can I pass a demon over to someone else?”

“That is possible.” Ruehnar answered. “A demon knows many deceptions. If a demon were cunning enough, it could fall asleep inside of a man, a man who could very well be found in this village right now. Another demon could come by days, or even weeks later, to wake the sleeping demon up, and then we would have two of them to worry about. This is another reason why you are kept apart from the others. You are old and frail, yes, but if our backs were turned, who can say that your demon will not emerge and kill us with its greater strength?”

“I don’t want to have a demon inside of me.” I admitted. “I need to find that plant that Methild said would cure me.”

Withern didn’t make a big deal out of it, when I asked him if I could stay outside. I slept off and on during the day, because I wasn’t used to it, and I started feeling more active when the sun began hiding its face.

I had a lot to think about. Maybe a demon was responsible for the way I kept forgetting my past. Maybe it caused me to black out while it took over my body and did bad things to people. I started feeling afraid of asking people what the symptoms of possession were, in case I really had a demon in my belly.

I had a thought. What if I didn’t have a demon inside of me, but a parasite? That could explain a lot of what I was going through. A parasite in my stomach could be eating up all the nutrients out of food that was meant for me. That’s why I was so hungry all the time, and why my skin looked so pale. Could a parasite make me forget my memories? If I did have a parasite, I know where I’d picked it up. It was inside the foul-smelling people plants. All kinds of bacteria and germs could have been swimming around in the plant’s digestive juices, and I’d probably swallowed half a gallon of that sludge every time I’d been there.

I was walking along, turning that idea over in my head, while absently tapping the ground once, and the wall once to keep my bearings. Over and over, I tapped one and then the other.

“Night man.” A woman’s thick voice called out.

“Who said that? Is someone out there, or was that my imagination? Hello?”

“I must speak with you.”

“Who are you?”

“Yma.”

“Where are you?”

“Only a few strides ahead. I heard you tapping the stick against the wall.”

“Oh.” I said. “For a second I thought I was hearing a ghost. Why don’t you have a lantern? I can’t see you.”

“And neither can the monsters.”

“You have a point. I’m coming to you.”

I could see normally inside the village, when a torch was on or when I could catch the edge of something against the night sky. Out here past the wall, a time or two I’d caught a glimpse of the stars up high. Anything about ten feet high and lower was pitch black.

I took a few steps forward. “Say something so I can find you.”

“I am Yma. I am here.”

The veil was black and impenetrable, up until I was within a stride of this woman. I did not see her clearly in the darkness, but I did see her silhouette. She was about as tall as I was. Her silhouette showed strong **shoulders** and thick arms.

“You called me the night man?” I asked.

“Yes. You are the man who comes at night.”

“Oh. That makes sense. Can I touch your face?”

“Why would you want that?”

“I can’t see you. How do I know if you’re not a monster?”

“If I was a monster, I would attack you.”

“No, because I’m holding my stick. You could use a woman’s voice until I drop my guard, and then you could snatch the stick out of my grip so I would be defenseless.”

Apparently, she could see me better than I could see her. Yma reached out and yanked the stick out of my grasp.

“Now you are defenseless.”

“Great.” I mumbled. “If you’re going to finish me off, just do it.”

The hard end of the stick poked into my chest. “I am not going to kill you. Have you truly seen the Reckless God? Tell me about him. Tell me everything you remember.”

Like I said, I recalled a good amount of detail about that jerk god. Since I felt this was one of the people the Mirror Men had spoken of, the people who had come down the mountain like I had, I went ahead and gave Yma all of the information.

“Okay, that’s my story.” I said. “What’s your story?”

“How is it that you can understand my words? **My tongue is distinct from the tongue of the villagers.**”

“Magic, but I don’t remember who gave this ability to me, or how they did it.

“I believe your story.” Yma decided. “My friend and I went through something similar. Demi-Urgos is a fool, an imbecile of the worst sort. He believes he created the world and all that is in it. I know of the people-plants, but I did not arrive through them... That is enough talk for now. I must speak to my friend before I tell you more.”

“How much do you remember?”

“Everything after Demi-Urgos, but nothing from before that.”

Since I was in full-disclosure mode anyway, I told her that my stomach might be inhabited by either a demon or a parasite. I finished that off with, “Methild told me that I have several layers of magic around me.”

“That cannot be caused by the Reckless God.” She said.

“Why not?”

“The Reckless God does things quickly and decisively. He would not take the time to create a multi-layered magic binding on anyone, not when he can easily kill or change his target into

anything he wishes. The Reckless God enjoys boasting to his enemies of what he has done. It is not in his nature to remove memories, not when those memories could humiliate a person.”

“So you know a lot about him?” I asked.

“I know enough. He does what he pleases and he knows no one will halt him. My friend and I were arranged into couples with several others. I was red, my friend green. The Reckless God played his games with us, his cruel and twisted games. When he tired of us, he killed some and he threw the rest into the chasm. Only my friend and I survived the fall. The rest **perished** when they crashed into the large trees they fell on. My friend’s legs were hurt, but we did manage to find the stream, and then the Scoffers, who sent us toward the village. We will speak more of this next time. I must tell my friend of your experiences.”

“I want to meet him.”

“You cannot. His legs were removed after he developed an infection in them.”

“Oh.”

“Methild cut them away.” Yma said. “When Opul and Lupo were told, they went into Methild’s healing hut at night and they stole the severed legs. Those miscreants ate them.”

“They ate them?” I asked.

“That is enough for tonight. We will talk more next time.”

(Tonight’s word count: 2493 + yesterday’s 24,333 = 26,826.)

(July 26, 2020, 8:00 PM.)

I think I was getting shafted when it was time to eat. I sat down on the cot, not seeing anything because it was daytime, when Methild told me to hold my hands out. She gave me a bowl that smelled like ass.

“Can I ask you something?” I said. I had to clear my throat first because I hadn’t spoken a word for like the past hour, because... meditation.

“What question?”

“Uh, a question about food.”

“You may ask.”

Weird, huh, having to ask permission to ask a question. These villagers had funky customs. “Why does my food always smell so bad? I know for a fact that what you eat does not smell as bad as what I eat, and I want to know why that is.”

“We eat the same, you and I. The entire village eats the same as you.”

“That’s not true.” I pressured her. “Where I come from, people that tell lies are bad people.”

“Never say that!” Methild cried out. “Never say it!”

I guess I offended her, because she stalked out in a hurry. I think that was the first time I’d ever been left alone while I was in the village. I wasn’t alone for long, because guess what? That hooker went and ratted me out to the big honcho and that’s who trudged in less than five minutes later.

“What is this commotion?” Withern demanded. “Why have you upset Methild?”

“Come and smell my broth.” I held my bowl out. “It smells like dirty feet.”

Withern was an okay guy most of the time, but he could be really gullible sometimes. When he leaned over to sniff my bowl, I had this streak of mischief come over me, to where I almost threw the broth in his face just to get a reaction out of him. I was difficult to keep myself from doing it.

“I smell nothing odd about your food.” He said.

Those two Mirror Twin weirdos, they’d said they could tell a lie from the truth because a lie smelled like shit. What Withern just told me, that was a big stinker.

“If there is nothing wrong with my food,” I said. “Why don’t you taste it?”

“I have no hunger in me...”

He started, but he didn’t finish. That’s because my temper finally got away from me. You see, Withern could have stopped lying right then and told me the truth, but no, he doubled-down on his fucking lie and my days of being the old, humble blind guy were over. I splashed the broth in his face, but don’t worry because it wasn’t that hot to begin with. As he gasped and probably made a big shock face, I turned the bowl upside-down and felt around for his head. I put the bowl on his head so he could wear it like a hat.

Maybe Withern was a good fighter, and maybe he wasn’t. I imagine he turned red as he realized that this crotchety old man had just disrespected him. Withern was the type of guy that growled when he was about to throw a punch, and I was the type who listened well. I heard that telegraphed growl and instinctively reacted to it. I leaned my upper body sideways to avoid the punch. Alas, my belly muscles were ancient and my reflexes slow as molasses. The punch did not land squarely on my chest, where it was aimed, but it did smash into my shoulder and put a hurt on me like you wouldn’t believe.

I was not done reacting, however. Whatever combat training I’d had in some other life was, I’m guessing, quite extensive. My weary shoulder was going to start throbbing soon, very soon, but I managed to curb the pain aside because I still had a threat in front of me. Picture this, if you can. I have to picture it because I was blind at that moment, so let me paint it out for you.

Withern was turned sideways with his right hand stretched past my right shoulder. I hooked my right arm under his armpit, controlling his arm. I hooked my left arm around his neck, a move designed to choke him out. Withern was in motion and off-balance. I nudged him past the point of equilibrium. Withern hopped on one foot for half a second, before he went down like a frozen turkey and landed on his face and chest. Since I was hooked up with him, I landed on his back to further stun and wind him, and this despite that my old bones did not weigh much.

Withern’s idea to get out of my wrestling hold was to try to buck me off. When he could not do that, he made the fatal mistake of rolling over on his side, and I rolled onto my back with him on top of me. My training kicked in further. I squeezed my legs around his stomach and hooked my ankles together. Withern panicked and tried to pull my legs part. I countered by releasing his arm and putting both of my arms around his head, and I got him into a better chokehold.

I’m an old man, right, so I expected that Withern would be strong enough to get out of my grip. Surprise, surprise, because he flailed uselessly on my arms and my legs and was unable to pry either set of limbs away. My blood choke was going knock him out in around thirteen seconds, and there was really nothing he could do to get out of it.

Enter two other guys that had come into Methild’s doctor’s office. They started battering at my arms trying to pull us apart. They did it, but not right away, as if all three of them put together weren’t as **mighty** as this ‘defenseless’ old fart.

“Ruehnar!” I called out. “Are you there?”

“I am! Let Withern go instantly!”

“Okay, but take me out to the wall. I don’t want to be in here anymore!”

As we walked side by side, Ruehnar’s hand gripped my arm, but I could sense that he was afraid of me. “What was that about?”

“Methild tried feeding me shit and I didn’t like it.”

“She did not!”

I kept forgetting how these people took everything literally. “Methild tried to feed me broth that smelled horrible. She put something strange in it, and I’m not going to eat it.”

“It is for the demon. It is meant to kill the demon.”

“And what if it kills me too?”

“Then the demon will flee your body and the village will be safe.”

“That doesn’t work out well for me, does it?” I grumbled. “You know, I’m ready to go out there and look for this stupid plant by myself. Just tell me what it looks like and where it is!”

“You will die out there, blind man.”

“It’s the same as dying in here. The only difference is that out there, a predator will come to eat me. In here, people I thought I could trust are going to kill me.”

“Are you awake?” Ruehnar asked, maybe an hour and a half later.

I was just outside the short wall, sitting on the grass and meditating. “I am awake. Is it time to eat already?”

“You will not be fed. Methild refuses to prepare food for you.”

“Great. What am I supposed to do, starve? Get me something to eat, man. I’ve always been cool with you.”

“I can bring you bread.”

“I’ll take anything I can get. My stomach is growing teeth!”

“That is... That is horrible to envision. I will bring bread.”

“And water! Please bring water!”

Ruehnar was only gone for a couple of minutes. Maybe he had a loaf stashed behind one of the shacks or something.

The first thing I noticed was that the bread was soft. It had such an unusual texture to it that I thought it wasn’t even bread at first. Then I tasted it.

“Ruehnar.” I said.

“I am here, friend.”

“This bread tastes good. What kind is it?”

“Rye.”

“Rye bread? People have rye bread in this village?”

“They do.”

“And they’ve had rye bread all this time?”

“They have.”

I could imagine Ruehnar nodding his head. He was another gullible type, like Withern. “Explain to me please, why ever since I got here, I’ve been getting bark bread and acorn bread, and bean bread that makes me fart all night. Could you do that for me?”

“You are given coarser food with a purpose. The demon will not like coarse food, and so it will abandon your body and go elsewhere.”

“So far, whatever is in my stomach is eating better than I am. Is this something that Methild cannot figure out?”

“Fig-oor?”

“Understand, something that Methild cannot understand.”

“Methild is not a sorceress. She is a herbalist and cook. She knows nothing of demons or how to rid a man of them.”

“What about the magic adepts that came by?” I wondered.

“We cannot tell them that it is possible demons are within the village. If we did, the village would be declared cursed and none of us would be allowed to leave. Withern has asked that we be given a new place to live, a place far from this Black Affliction that torments us.”

I was mad at Withern and Methild, but after hearing that, I couldn't stay mad at them **anymore**. They were just humble villagers who got caught up in something that terrified them, something they didn't know how to deal with.

“I hope to ask you a question.” Ruehnar said.

“Yeah, sure. What's on your mind?”

“On my mind?”

“What is your question, bud?”

“I saw you turn into a snake when you attacked Withern. I saw it with my eyes!”

“Huh?”

“Yes, your limbs became snakes that crawled across his body!”

“See, this is how people start mixing up real events with mythology. You don't know what mythology means, do you? Okay, you have real events that happen, but people haven't seen them before and they assume it was magic, or god, or demons. I did something real with my arms and legs. I did not turn into a snake.”

“I tell you that I saw it!”

“Fine. I turned into a snake. My arms and legs turned into snakes. My head turned into a nest of snakes. Tell everyone you know, and tell them to tell everyone they know. We'll see in about a week what the story has changed into. People will probably say I have scales by then.”

“Do you have scales?”

“Yeah, on my butt, but I'm not going to show them to you.”

“You are a strange man.”

“Do me a favor, buddy. Go and ask Methild what the Witch's Turnout looks like. I think I'm going out there tonight to look for it.”

“Will you stay here, or will you walk around the village?”

“I'll stay here. I'll wait for you to come back.”

By the time Ruehnar returned, I felt like taking a walk.

“Come with me.” I told the guard. “I need a favor from you.”

Ruehnar left again, but for a shorter time. He walked back with the walking stick for me, and a short sword and wooden buckler for him. **I touched both of them.** The **sword's shape** felt familiar. I don't mean exactly that sword, but more that I once had a weapon like that. If only I could remember.

Ruehnar could see in the village because it was daylight, while I could not. When we left the short wall, both of us were covered up by the blight. We could only see about an arm's length before and aft most of the time, and about five or six feet away if we were lucky. I gauged when we'd gone about a third of the way around the village.

“Okay, we can stop here.” I spoke up. “We should be close to the part of the village where all the outsiders live. I want you to jump the wall and go find a woman named Yma. I need to talk to her.”

“Withern prohibited you from interacting these people.” Ruehnar said.

“No, he never said that. He prohibited you from letting me interact with them.”

“And Methild?”

“Methild did not prohibit me either. Just go, bud. I would do it for you if you asked me to.”

“Wait here for me.” Ruehnar said.

I heard him grunt and scuff his sock-boots on the wall, but only for a second. He hauled his body over the wall and landed on the other side. It made me jealous because if I tried that same move in my withered body, I had a fifty-fifty chance of maiming myself.

“You young whippersnapper, you!” I muttered after him.

Ruehnar was back in a handful of minutes. I could hear him scraping around to get back over the wall.

“Did you find her?” I asked.

“I am here, Night Man.” Yma said. “This **guard** said you have need of me.”

“Yes. I wanted to tell you that I’m not going to walk around tonight. I’m heading up the mountain. I have to find the Witch’s Turnip up there.”

“Avea Leaf.” Ruehnar corrected. “You continue to confuse this plant with Witch’s Oastrunt. What you are looking for is Avea Leaf.”

“Yeah, that.” I said.

“What does it look like?” Yma asked.

Ruehnar answered her. “The plant grows low to the ground. Its leaves are rounded and pointed at the ends. They are the length of the palm of your hand. Its catkins are bright and yellow. The plant will be found near moist and dark areas, such as crevices near a stream, or caves with water running through.”

“I know the plant.” Yma said. “Night Man, do you still have blindness during the day?”

“Yes, I do.”

“I can help you find the plant. I will go with you.”

“You don’t have to.” I said.

“You forget so much. What if you forget the plant’s description halfway up the mountain? I am coming. Wait here. I will gather a few supplies and we will walk together.”

Yma didn’t wait for a reply. She just turned and walked off.

“Ruehnar.” I whispered. “Should I let her come along? Is she pretty?”

“She is not pretty.” The guard replied. “Her head has a block shape to it. Her shoulders are broad, more manly than womanly.”

“It’s a good thing I can’t see her face?”

“I would say so.”

“Well, if she can remember what the Witch’s Trout looks like...”

“Avea Leaf, **man!** Avea Leaf!”

“Yeah, that. If she can remember that, I guess she should come along, right?”

(11:00 PM. New word count: 2456 + yesterday’s 26826 = 29,282. This is an excellent word count after 17 days. I projected a conservative pace of 29k words in just under 30 days. At this point I am 12 days ahead of schedule.)

(July 27, 2020, 8:00 PM.)

I kind of remembered a holiday where I would dress up like a skeleton, and I think I walked all over the neighborhood asking people for... something. I don't know what that something was, but I think I was happy when I got it. And there was another year, when I dressed up like a one-eyed scurvy pirate. Yarrgh! Walk the deck, matey! You'll be feeding the fishes tonight!

"Yarrgh!" I said out loud.

Yma gasped. "Have you gone insane?"

"No, I haven't gone insane." I replied. "Hey, you want to hear my insanity song?"

"We are in the wild now. It would not be good for our voices to carry through the trees and give us away. Stay quiet!"

It was nighttime now, but the moon was up. I have to tell you that the moon looked bizarre to me, but I can't remember what my old moon used to look like for comparison. The moon on this world, it was more like a lady's blush case. You know those round blush cases that open up so the chick can dab her brush or whatever to get the blush? Imagine pulling the top of the case off slowly. It slides away from the case evenly because both the top and base are round. Maybe I want to say cylindrical instead of round. You see the outer edge of the base exposed as the top slides away. That's what this moon looked like. The face of the moon was yellowish-white, but the edge, like a thick arc, was super-bright yellow. It looked like a flashlight with a cover on it.

The moonlight was bright enough that Yma and I could see where we were going. We followed the stream up the base of the mountain, hoping to find a smaller stream that would take us to the moist cave or crevice we were looking for.

Anyway, the reason I mentioned costumes was because Yma and I were wearing them. She called it a winter-suit. Basically it was a one-piece garment with soft lining on the inside and plush fur on the outside. It opened up from the crotch to the neck to allow a person to put it on. Looped cords attached to small buttons to secure the garment's front. The suit even came with an attached headpiece that had little fox ears on it. It was plenty warm enough to walk in, but if we did end up getting cold, we had another layer of clothes wrapped up into bundles that we carried along under our arms. I thought the suit was ridiculous until I put it on and felt how comfortable and warm it was.

Yma led the way. She knew enough to use hand signals when she wanted me to stop or to crouch down behind cover.

"Yma." I quietly called out. "Do I have a square head?"

"Of course you do."

"Do you have a square head?"

"What do you want from me?"

"Do we both have dark hair?"

"Yes, we both have dark hair."

"That can't be a coincidence." I deduced.

"Everyone in my pairings, everyone Demi-Urgos created, had square heads. It was the same with you, wasn't it?"

"I can't remember the shape of our heads. That might be right. Does that mean that any people we run into, if they have square heads, might have come from Demi-Urgos?"

"I can't be sure. It is possible. I am worried about my friend. I do not trust the Mirror Twins around him."

"The man with no legs? Is he your lover?"

“No, not my lover. He is simple of mind, the way the other people Demi-Urgos created are simple. I worry about him because of his naivety. You and I, Night Man, we are different. I know for certain we have come from elsewhere.”

“I get that same feeling.” I said. “Did that Reckless fucker make you old, too?”

“Not as old as you, but yes, I am many years older than should be. Night Man, perhaps you and I come from the same world.”

“I don’t know if I want you to call me Night Man. Call me by some other name, will you?”

“No, I can’t. If I begin to call you by another name, and your memories return and you recall your true name, I will feel betrayed, as if you had lied to me from the start.”

“But I’m not lying when I say I don’t remember my true name, or when I say I don’t like being called Night Man.”

“When I am from, a name stands for honor and strength. A false name is a sign of deception and corruption.”

“Yeah, I don’t think we come from the same place. I think I would feel if names were that important where I come from.”

“Night Man, I have decided that you may touch my face.” She stopped and **looked at** me, waiting for me to approach.

“But I can see you now.” I replied.

Yma stood there waiting. I didn’t want to be a punk and refuse, so I stepped up and set my hand on her cheek. I couldn’t see her clearly, but enough to make **out** her shadowy features. Yma did have even-set eyes and a square jaw, making her look more handsome than pretty. She was as tall as I, with enough on her chest that I could see **her** winter-suit slightly bulging. I hadn’t decided yet if she was pretty or not, delegating that observation for a time when I could see her face with more light around.

She could move fast when she wanted to. Her hands were down around her middle, when she stuck her right into her winter-suit. Yma brought something sharp out. I knew it was sharp because she poked me under the chin with it.

“I could kill you in a moment.” She said. “What do you say to that?”

“Go ahead. I don’t care. I’ll end up in one of those stupid people-plants and have to bite my way out again. That’s not going to be easy with these old teeth of mine. You know what you could do? You could kill me, and then kill yourself, so we can both incarnate in the same people-plant. That way, you can help me get out because it took me about half a week last time.”

“You don’t fear death, Night Man?”

“Why should I?” I shrugged. “This might be the worst world I’ve ever been on. I’d rather be with you in a people-plant than alone.”

Yma’s grip loosened on her sharp weapon. “You want to be with me in a people-plant?”

“Sure.”

She put her weapon away and started walking again. I could see her furry silhouette clearly in the moonlight. Her head was down as if she were thinking this over. I followed quietly, giving her as long as she needed to think.

Yma spoke again about ten minutes later. “Demi-Urgos forced us to do unnatural things to one another.”

“You mean scary things or... sexual things?”

“I am not ready to talk about them yet. The night will get much colder than this. We have to find a place of shelter quickly.”

“I thought you said Demi-Urgos created you? And now you’re saying you’ve been in a people-plant? Which one is the truth?”

“I don’t remember anymore.” She admitted. “I have been in the people-plants. I don’t believe I’ve ever been more terrified than when I was inside them. I am not... a person who is easily terrified.”

“Me either. Let me see your knife.”

“Why?”

“I just want to hold it to see what it looks like. Here, I’ll trade you my walking stick for it. You can beat me on the head if I come at you.”

“No.”

“I’m kidding. I’m not going to come at you! I just want to see it.”

Yma relented. When she took my stick, she retreated by a good ten feet, just in case.

“This isn’t even a knife.” I noticed. “It’s a piece of wood with a sharp end.”

“The Mirror Twins lent it to me.” She revealed. “They lent me these winter-suits, the second set of clothing, the food and water we carry, everything. I told them we would bring back something valuable as payment.”

“Do you have something valuable we can give them?”

“No, I don’t. Perhaps we can find something.”

“I don’t like those guys.” I said.

“I feel the same.”

The night did get colder. When the water from the stream started giving off an icy aura, we moved away from it and into the forest. After scouting about for five minutes, we found a small **cluster** of shrubbery we could hide in. We had to break off a few low branches to give us enough space to sit with our backs to the shrubs. That way, we could keep an eye out if anybody tried to sneak up on us.

“No fire?” I asked.

“I am able to make one, but not here.” Yma answered. “If I did, its glow would attract the sort of creature we do not want. It will be bad enough to deal with any predators that can smell our scent from afar.”

“Like the beast men?”

“Yes. You know about the beast men?”

I had to really dig into my head to find them. “I think I was one of them.” I told Yma about being a beast man, ripping out of the people-plant, and chasing down a female of my kind. “Do you believe me?”

“It sounds incredible, but I believe your story. I have Snock Root. If we smoke it, its smell will repel any predators, but it might attract any Scoffers.”

“What’s worse?”

“The predators. Will you smoke with me?”

“No thanks.”

Yma unrolled her bundle of extra clothes. In its middle, she’d stored her food and water, and also a pouch with a few items in it. One of the items was a plant bulb about the size of my thumb. Yma stuck the bulb into a small pipe, and lit the pipe by sprinkling some kind of dust into the bowl. As she began smoking, the smell ebbed past me. It was the same substance the Mirror Twins had been smoking in the village.

“What does that do?” I asked. “What are its effects?”

“You will feel relaxed and happy, and your hunger will go away for a time. Everyone in our end of the village smoked Snock Root.”

“I’ll give it a try next time.” I decided.

“Tomorrow. We can try it together tomorrow.”

Yma started yawning once she’d smoked her bulb.

I told her to go to sleep while I took first watch. She could take over when I got tired.

(10:25 PM. I got tired early tonight, so I will stop here. New word count: 1800 + 29282 = 31082. That puts me over 30% done.)

(July 28, 2020, 8:30 PM.)

Dawn was so cold we ended up huddled together to sleep.

At noon, the air finally started warming up. I couldn’t see anything anymore now that the sun was **in the sky**.

We were still exhausted but unable to rest. We figured we could travel for a few hours and settle down for a good nap in the afternoon, and resume our journey at nightfall.

Yma was impatient. She walked me to the stream by tugging me along at the wrist. “We will bathe quickly.”

“Do we have to?” I asked. “The water is probably freezing right now.”

“It is cold but not freezing. We must bathe here. At higher elevations, the water will be ten times colder. We will not be able to bathe and... We would smell untowardly.”

I get it, I get it. Yma was a chick and she didn’t want to smell bad.

“Undress.” She told me. “I have a cloth to wash you with.”

“Okay.”

I was an idiot, okay. I managed to get the winter-suit halfway off with no problem. When I tried to get my legs out, I must have assumed I was a young man that could balance on one foot. Since I was old, and my body had to remind me of just how old I was, I slipped on the **wet bank** and landed on my ass **like a newbie on a skating rink**.

Yma pulled me up to my feet. She held my arm while I finished taking the suit off, and lastly the waist wrap that served me as underwear.

“That was my fault.” I said, feeling sheepish. “I should have sat down first.”

“Stand here. When I finish I will wash you.”

I did just that. I heard birds chirping but the sky felt cool. “It is overcast?”

“Over cast?”

“Cloudy. Is it cloudy?”

“Yes. It could mean rain for tonight. We need better shelter than a shrub or else we risk becoming ill.”

I thought she was done talking, but I guess she was thinking.

“Night Man?”

“Yes?”

“Do you have a desire to see me without clothes?”

I didn’t know how to answer that. I felt that she wanted me to say Yes, but I didn’t want to sound like a horn-dog. Her eyes seemed to be penetrating into me. I felt I had to say something.

“I don’t know.” I answered.

“How can you not know? I am a woman and you are a man. What more is there to know?”

“What if we don’t come from the same world?” I asked. “What if **your** customs are different than mine? What if my answer offends you and you leave me stranded out here?”

“Well...” She started. “I understand your worry. In your custom, how does a man tell a woman that he finds her attractive?”

“In my world, a man can be attracted to a thousand women.”

“Is it true?”

“Yes. Some men have the idea that they have to bed with as many women as possible. The more partners a man has, the more he is sexually superior to other men.”

“I know that idea. Were you sexually superior to others?”

“Uh...” I tried to think back. “I really can’t remember. I don’t think I was. I think I am the kind of guy that only likes one woman at a time. The last girlfriend I had, the last mate, I think I was with her for a long time.”

“Could she be dead now?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know what happened to her, or to me. I don’t know how I ended up on this **crazy** world.”

“But you are certain you have come from another world?”

“Yes. Definitely yes. And you?”

“I don’t know either. In the customs of my people, an interested man will tell a woman that he would like to be with her.”

The first thing I thought of was when I mentioned that I wouldn’t mind having Yma in the same people-plant I ended up in, but that was totally out of context.

“Are you glad I am here?” She asked.

“Yes, I am. I’m glad you decided to come with me, and about how you’re helping me with this quest, and how you’ve been taking care of me.”

That was a nice thing to say, right? Maybe in her custom, I was making a marriage proposal but I was telling her the truth.

“I am almost done washing.” She said. “I am washing my breasts now.”

I was a blind man, and I was being baited.

“I am washing my legs now, Night Man.”

If I had a collar on, I would have started tugging at it to let the steam out. As it was, I could feel my face getting red.

“Now I am washing between my legs.”

Oh, oh! I had to turn sideways because my, um, temperature started rising.

“Night Man.” Yma said, right before she put that freezing rag on my back.

I jumped at how cold it was. I shivered so much that all thoughts of anything else went dormant. “Cold! Fucking cold!”

“What is that word?”

“It means very cold, super cold!”

“Soup-er. What is soup-er?”

“They’re just words from where I come from.”

I shivered again when she washed my arms and legs. She did everything: my armpits, my stomach, my butt and... You know where. My nuts!

A couple of hours later, we started tracking a smaller stream in another direction. The smell of fresh pine was fragrant and sharp. I don’t say ‘wonderful’ very often, but the forest really did smell wonderful.

“Stand here.” Yma said.

“Did you find something?”

“There is a stone rise before us, with many large rocks strewn about. They are all dripping wet from the recent snow. The water collects into a channel and becomes a stream. I do not see any crevices or darkness. This may be a false end. Give me a short time to look closer.”

Since I didn't have anything else to do, I sat down on the cool ground and waited.

A few minutes later, Yma returned. “I found nothing. We must move on.”

Where does a stream start? Did you ever wonder that? I mean, how does it happen? Do a million drops of water from all over drip and leak and roll over into a depression, and when so many of them get together **do** they start running along in a posse full of determination? It just boggled my mind how that would work. Wherever I came from, I was city guy. I didn't know a whole lot about nature.

“You are quiet, Night Man.” Yma said.

“I'm just thinking about water.”

“Are you thirsty?”

“No, not that way. I'm thinking about water and crevices and plants that decide they can get rid of demons that move into people's stomachs.”

“You think too much.”

“I really do. How much farther do you think we have to go?”

“I am not certain. I should have asked the guard what elevation is best for finding the plant. It can't be at the top of the mountain because nothing grows there. Since we are having no good luck at the bottom, perhaps the plant will be found at the middle elevations.”

“How long will it take to get up there?”

“Three days, four days. You were there before, were you not? When you first incarnated?”

“Yes, I was there. I did not think I was going back so soon, but here I am doing it.”

“It is growing late. We must leave the stream and find a place to rest.”

Yma said she found a cave. I'd been waiting next to an extra large pine for about fifteen minutes before she came back to tell me. She took me by the arm and walked me over.

“It's starting to drizzle.” I noticed.

“It is best not to walk in the rain. We should stay together until it passes.”

“Sure. We'll stay together.”

Yma crowded in on me. I didn't understand what she was up to until I felt her lips on my cheek. She gave me a quick kiss and withdrew right away. Her hand tightened on my arm as if she tensed up from nervousness.

“I felt a really big raindrop on my face right now.” I said.

She started laughing. It was a big, rough laugh, but it fit with her character.

I got tucked into a cave and left behind. The rain was light but loud as it struck nearby trees, making for a pleasant atmosphere. What I did not like was that the ground was soft and almost muddy. It would stain my winter-suit if it got any wetter.

This time, Yma took a good half hour before she came back. The cave wasn't that big. She entered in a crouch and made a lot of noise as she sat down next to me. The noise, I understood a moment later, was from an armful of tinder she'd collected.

“Did you find anything?” I asked her.

“I did. I found what I was looking for. Do you know, this cave is the perfect place for us to find that leaf we came here for, but it isn’t here. Let me start up a fire now and I will prepare a medicine for you.”

“A medicine?”

“Yes, but not from the Avea Leaf. This is another medicine that could be just as good for your malady.” I could hear her moving the tinder around. “The Mirror Twins taught me a trick. They gave me an oil to rub on the sticks of wood. The oil will give off extra warmth and give the fire a long duration. The **small** load of firewood should last us all night.”

“Yeah, I think it’s going to be a cold one.”

“It is. Let us move further into the cave, in case the wind picks up.”

I hated that I couldn’t do anything to help, at least not until the sun went down. I listened to Yma moving around. Right away I could feel the warmth of the fire.

“You are hungry, aren’t you? We won’t eat yet, not until you **have** this medicine. It will only take me a short while to prepare it. Here, I will give you a taste of it.” Yma took my hand and put a leaf on it. “This is Winter-Cress. It has a pungent taste. It will burn your tongue if you leave it in your mouth too long, so swallow it as soon as you can.”

“This will burn my tongue, and you want me to put this in my stomach? That’s funny.”

“It could cure you.”

“All right, fine. I’ll do it. What kind of medicine is it?”

“I don’t know.”

“What do you mean you don’t know?”

“The Mirror Twins recommended it to me. They said it would work.”

“Do you trust those guys?”

“Guise?”

“Those men, do you trust those men?”

“I only trust you and my legless friend. I don’t trust Lupo and Opul, but I think it is in their self-interest that they told me the truth. How can we give them something valuable if we don’t return to the village? Take this leaf and swallow it.”

I stuck it in my mouth. I should have left it alone, but I was part sadist. I bit into the leaf, and let me tell you, its taste was hot and sharp like pepper. “Shit, that burns!”

“You bit into you it? Are you a fool?”

“Yes!”

“After I told you not to? Go on and suffer then, or swallow it and let its taste burn all the way down your stomach. Here are two more leaves. I hope your lesson is learned and you don’t make the same mistake again. Hurry, swallow them. I have more to give to you.”

The first leaf went down like a red hot chili. The other two didn’t alleviate the taste of their angry compatriot, but they did go down a lot smoother.

“Give it a moment.” Yma said. “Let them reach your belly.”

A couple of minutes later, she put a small bulb in my hand.

“The Snock Root. Bite this one right away. Bite it in half so the juices will start coming out of it.”

“How does it taste?”

“Sour, but also chewy. It does not have a bad taste.”

“I guess not, if people smoke it and get addicted to it.”

“If Snock Root is smoked, it will give a feeling of euphoria and calmness.”

“Then why can’t I smoke it?” I asked.

“You must consume the bulb to reap the medicinal benefits. Don’t wait. Bite it and swallow it down. The Root has to mingle with the Winter-Cress.”

“Easy for you to say.” I mumbled. I bit, and I frowned. The Root tasted like a combination of sweaty vegetables and sour piss. The second it hit my stomach it reacted with the Winter-Cress. I felt like throwing up. “This stuff is nasty! Nasty!”

(Stopped at 11 PM. New word count: 2166 + 31082 = 33,248.)

(July 29, 2020, 8:05 PM.)

“Be strong, Night Man. The fever will pass.”

I was sweating all over despite the cold that ebbed into the cave. Even my hair was sweating, causing rivulets to run down the sides of my face, tickling my ears as they went by. Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever sweated from your frigging hair?

I remembered sleeping on a hot summer night, in that other life I kept getting glimpses of. The fan was busted, so I had no choice but to lie there and soak my pillow with the sweat coming off my head. I only had a single window in my room, and it was wide open that night, but there was no breeze, no breeze at all...

I clutched at my stomach and moaned, feeling it quiver to let me know a cramp was coming. Sure enough, three **seconds** later I felt a raw jolt of pain. I growled through gritted teeth and rolled over on my side. “Shit, Yma! How can I make this stop?”

“You cannot, not yet.”

I stretched out on my back, hoping that by lying straight the cramp would subside. My breaths tumbled out of me full of hot worry. Another cramp hit. “Uuurrrrgh!”

Yma’s hands were on my leg, and then my side as she moved up next to me. She was doing her best to take care of me, and she should be since it was her medicine that got me this way.

“It will pass.” She repeated.

I was angry with her for doing this to me, because I’d been feeling okay before and now I felt like I was dying. I panted and braced myself as another quiver went through my belly.

“Aaaaagh!”

Yma’s arm caressed mine. Twice, she touched my face, feeling the clammy heat. She slid away for a few moments. When she returned, she held a small rag that’s she’d wet with the rain. She dabbed the rag all over my head.

My stomach felt like it just did a back flip.

“I think... I think I liked Methild’s sour soups better!”

“You can jest at a time like this?” Yma sounded amused.

The fire was only a couple of feet away. I could feel its heat adding to the volcano brewing inside of me. I started retching, spitting out thick glops of phlegm. If I had anything in my belly it would have come out about an hour ago.

“Night Man, when you spit, cast it into the fire. Do you hear me?”

“Gaaaagh! Ulp! Ulp!”

Yma had strong hands. She leaned me toward the fire, not letting me get too close. “Into the fire, I said!”

I began trembling. My entire stomach revolted at how long Yma’s medicine had been in it. Suddenly, my stomach began lurching, moving, climbing up into my throat as if it wanted out. My insides were getting wrenched apart.

“Breathe, Night Man!” Yma shouted. “Fill your lungs with air!”

I tried. I sucked in as much as I could before the lump in my neck burst against my tonsils. I retched again, unable to move air in or out, feeling something bubble onto the roof of my mouth, onto my tongue. Whatever the hell it was, it was thick and slimy, and it moved!

The thing slapped against the insides of my mouth, feeling foreign and ugly. Yma’s fingers went in there. I could feel her fingers against my teeth, trying to catch this thing. She managed to snag it, giving it a yank. It felt like a piece of rope was coming out of my throat.

It was nighttime now. I could see, but I wish I’d closed my eyes when I saw what Yma pulled out of me. It was about a foot long, as thick as two of my fingers, black and wet like an eel. Yma threw it into the fire, where it twisted and turned as the flames tore into it.

I gagged for a second, before I realized I could breathe. I’d barely started an irregular **breathing** rhythm when the next eel fought its way out of me.

“My fingers, Night Man!” Yma shouted.

I’d bitten her by accident, thinking she was this disgusting creature that didn’t belong in me. Trying to help her, I opened my mouth wide and felt her hand digging into it, grabbing at this unholy thing that did not want to be grabbed. She got the second one out.

I collapsed onto my back, struggling to get air into my lungs. When I had enough to form words, I cried out, “What the fuck are those things?”

“We must get your clothing off.” Yma answered.

“Okay, but why?”

“Now that they are coming out, they will come out of every opening they can find.”

I couldn’t face her after it was over. I sat there with my knees up and my face hidden. I don’t think I’d been that embarrassed in a long time. “How many?”

“Eight.”

Yma was being respectful. She kept her distance and she didn’t fawn over me. I was glad she was giving me my space. “You never told me what they are.”

“Parasites, just as you thought.”

They had come out of my mouth, and they had come out of my butt. A couple came out of both places at the same time. Yma chased one down and threw it in the fire. The second one tried to crawl out of the cave. It had gotten all of ten feet before it died of cold. Yma left it out there to tend to me, but after my stomach stopped cramping, she went and got it so she could show it to me. It was nearby but I didn’t have the courage to look at it yet.

“I don’t know what they are.” Yma tested my mood.

“Tell me what you **do** know.”

“My friend complained about his stomach often, when we first arrived at the village. I told him to be quiet about it because the villagers all feared we might be demons. When we met the Mirror Twins, I asked them. They said what you already know. They are parasites that get into a host and attached themselves with tiny claws. You said you felt as if your stomach had teeth.”

“I don’t remember telling you that. When did it happen?”

“During one of your walks around the village. You passed by singing your insanity song, and I heard you and we spoke. You were very tired and you sat down to sleep. I watched over you until you woke. You seemed to have forgotten I was there because you found your walking stick and you began tapping along the wall, without addressing me even once. I thought you were angry with me and so I did not call out.”

“I swear I do not remember **any of** that.”

“We talked twice.” Yma sighed. “This was before you climbed the wall and spoke with the Twins. I was saying; my friend complained about his stomach. I asked the Twins about it and they told me of the Avea Leaf that could rid a person of demons. They described the plant and told me to climb the mountain to find it. I did not want to leave my friend behind, but I did find out all I could about the leaf. The leaf is an irritant. It forces a parasite to tense up, to become rigid. The parasite can avoid the irritant by falling into deep sleep. I thought that if the Avea Leaf is needed only as an irritant, perhaps I can substitute the Winter-Cress that has the same properties, but I did not tell this to the Twins. Winter-Cress is more bountiful.”

“Okay.” I nodded. “What about the Knock Knock Root?”

“How can you joke when this just happened?”

“Bad habit, I guess.”

“The Snock Root causes relaxation and sleep. If the parasites are already sleeping and avoiding the hotness of the Winter-Cress, I wondered if the Snock Root would relax them. Do you see? The creatures become tight and rigid. By causing them to be relaxed and loose, they absorb more of the irritant. When they cannot hide from the Winter-Cress, they naturally seek to find the nearest escape route.”

“You gave it your friend the Winter-Cress?”

“Yes. I did this in privacy, away from the Twins.”

“And what happened to his stomach?”

“He vomited several parasites. They were much smaller than yours, and they were all dead. I don’t know why yours were so much larger and still alive.”

“Probably because I drank a lot of sewer water from the people-plants.” Not a second later, my stomach churned. “I, uh, I have to go outside again.”

I had diarrhea, okay. I’d gone out like ten times already and not looked down at the parasite that had come out of my ass. This time, I didn’t turn away. **It was black.** It didn’t have any eyes or mouth, but it did have four rows of tiny, curved claws that had once pierced the lining of my stomach.

It was freezing outside the cave. I had my second set of clothes on because it was too much hassle to keep taking the winter-suit off. As a result, I was shivering by the time I found the tree I’d been squirting on. I pulled my trousers down and squatted. You probably don’t want to know this, but something was coming out and got stuck. I had to... I had to reach back there and grab the parasite to pull it away. It was dead, thankfully. I wiped my butt with cold pine needles and my hand with fresh snow, before I returned to the cave.

If you guessed that I wouldn’t be much for conversation that night, you wouldn’t be wrong.

We made zero progress that night, obviously.

In the morning, Yma and I were so exhausted we collapsed against each other and stayed that way until past noon. I still had a minor fever going, but it was nothing compared to what I’d gone through the previous night.

My stomach growled. “Yma, I’m hungry.”

She was sitting close to the cave entrance, getting a little sun since the sky was clear. “We will eat shortly.”

“But I want to eat now!” I whined. “If I knew where you put the food, I’d get it myself!”

“Hold your carriage, Night Man.” She said.

“But Yma, I’m hungry! Ymaaaa!”

As blind as I was, I could still feel her staring at me.

“What?” I asked.

“You’re teasing me, aren’t you? Are you playing with me?”

“Don’t they joke around where you come from?”

“No. The men are very serious. They don’t joke at all.”

I heard her rustle a little, as she stood up and stepped over to sit next to me.

“Night Man, since the parasites have all left your body...”

“I think there is still one left.”

She laughed. “Can you feel it in your bottom?”

“Don’t mention that, ever.”

“I was saying...” She started, reaching out to turn my face.

I felt her lips come close. This time, I was ready for them.

We slept off and on until dusk, when I started regaining my sight. By that time, my stomach was growling, not from parasites but from lack of food.

“Your stomach is likely raw from where the parasites damaged it.” Yma theorized. “The food might be too coarse for it.”

“Does that mean I can’t eat? I’m really starving right now!”

“I could chew it for you, if you’d like?”

“Go ahead. I need to eat something.”

I could only handle about half a cup of mushy berries and nuts before the acid in my stomach started irritating my raw spots.

We set off when the cloak of night fell, when my sight had returned completely. It had only snowed for a short time the previous night, but its chill still hung in the air and prompted us to wear our extra clothes under our winter-suits.

I should mention that I could see Yma’s face clearly now. I’d seen it when I was struggling with the medicine, but I was a little distracted to really contemplate on its finer points. Yma had a square head with manly, hard features. She looked rugged, with a small blob of a nose and thin, pursed lips. When she smiled, which happened infrequently, she opened her mouth only slightly, as if afraid to reveal her full mirth. I would call her handsome. Her dark hair went down to her shoulder blades, and her arms were thick and strong, making her formidable for her size.

“You are looking at me again.” She mentioned, when she halted over an outcrop of rock, in full glow of the strange, glowing arc of the moon.

“I’m not sure how to ask this.” I started. “Relative to your people, are you pretty?”

“Relative of my people?”

“I mean, do your people consider you pretty?”

“I believe so. I was fair when compared to the other women the Reckless God created.”

“That’s what I’m getting at.” I tried to explain it better. “This isn’t my true face, or my true body. I’m in a body that isn’t mine. This body is something Dem-Urgos made. What if we were in our true bodies, and we looked completely different than we do now?”

“We can do nothing to change our bodies, so why waste time thinking about that?”

“Am I handsome?”

“Yes.” She admitted. “Am I pretty?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you remember what you looked like before?”

“No.”

“Do you remember the face of your lover?”

“No.”

“Then you cannot compare my face to anything else. You know the people in the village looked nothing like us. The only people like us were in the domain of the Reckless God, and they are not here. They are all probably dead now. Do you think I’m attractive?”

“Yes.” I confirmed. “I think you’re attractive.”

“You must, if you kiss me, and you sleep next to me, and you allowed me to bathe you.” She reasoned, before she scanned the area around them. “We should talk about this at a later time. Do you see the moon? It is bright enough to show us trees and large rocks that block our path, but it can’t show us the darker corners where the Avea Leaf could be found.”

“And we still need to find it because it is valuable.”

“I don’t trust the Mirror Twins.” Yma admitted. “I want to have something in my hands when I see them next. We won’t find the leaf this way, by searching for it at night. We must find the Scoffers. They must know the hidden places where the leaf grows.”

“How do we find them?”

“We will climb higher on the mountain. We’ll find a good high spot to look down. With good fortune, we will spot their encampment **from** afar.”

“I hope they’re friendly. The last time I dealt with those people, they nearly took everything I had.”

“They will trade with us. I have Snock Root. That is something they want.”

“All right. So which way do we go?”

“Up. We will go up the mountain.”

(Stopped at 10:55 PM. New word count: 2542 + 33248 = 35,790.)

(July 30, 2020, 8:10 PM.)

By the third night, we reached the middle elevation of the mountain. We were lucky that it **wasn’t** raining or snowing, because the trees were spread out and there was nowhere for us to find shelter, not unless we dug ourselves into the hard ground like gophers. Lighting was even better **than before** because a full third of the moon was shining like a spotlight.

“Do you remember what the moon looked like on your world?” I asked Yma.

“I can’t be sure, but it looked like the moon here, did it not?”

“No. I remember a pale white moon with a lot of scarring on it. People said it looked like a man. They called it the man on the moon. Other people thought it looked like a rabbit.”

“Your world must be full of fantasy.” She replied. “All I see is a plain circle with a bright, glowing edge.”

“Actually, not that many people on my world used their imagination. They were all practical sorts. There was no magic on my world.”

“Magic? What do you consider magic?”

“Magic is the ability to create something tangible with your mind. I’ve seen... Damn! I just had it in my head and it went away! I don’t know what I was about to say now!”

For the next five minutes, we walked on in silence as I tried to get my train of thought back. It totally missed the station, but in its absence came suspicion. “Yma, how do I know if you’re telling me the truth about everything? You and I talked before, and I don’t remember any of it. What if I told you something that could make me remember who I am, but you’re keeping it a

secret from me now that you don't remember? What if half the things you tell me aren't even true?"

My head started hurting. I felt so woozy I had to lean on the nearest tree. A wave of nausea swept through me, turning into vertigo that was so bad I ended up toppling over. Yma stepped over to help me up.

"Don't touch me!" I snapped at her. "You could be my enemy and I wouldn't even know!"

I drew my knees up to my chest and hid my head, and I started crying.

"Night Man," Yma started. "I don't recall much from my world, but I do remember this. My people are not liars. If our honesty is questioned, we will fight."

"I'm sorry! I don't know what to believe any more!"

"It is the medicine and the fever that came with it. They are causing your emotions to waver. Be strong. If you cannot, I will be strong for you. Stand up and I will support you."

"If you touch me, I'm going to smack you with my stick." I growled.

She did it anyway. She pulled me to my feet and we started walking again. I didn't want to hit her, didn't want to anger her, because she was the only friend I had.

We heard howling in the distance. One of those beasts was out there loping around, looking for something to eat.

"That creature will be too powerful for us." Yma worried.

"We can take it. I've got my walking stick and you've got your sharpened twig."

She tried to hold in her laughter, but it tumbled out of her anyway. "It isn't a twig, it is a wooden spike! I have a good idea. Let's walk away from the howling, yes?"

"See, you can make jokes, too."

"I cannot believe I am thinking of humor at a time like this. Walk briskly."

Briskly? I don't think I'd ever heard that word before. Yma wanted to set off at a fast pace, but my old legs were weary after so much hiking. She was so impatient that I thought she was going to toss me on her back. When Yma moved toward me, I stuck my arm out to stop her, because no way was I going to let anyone carry me around like a sack of potatoes!

"Night Man!"

My hand bumped into her chest, into her tit. I withdrew my arm right away. "Oops!"

"What is that word?" She started laughing again. "What is oops?"

"It means I didn't mean what I just did."

"You did mean it!" She took hold of my arm started pulling me along like a child. "You only refuse to admit it!"

We hadn't gone very far when we felt an uneasy silence around us. I noticed it and so did Yma. I stood there on a narrow trail between the trees, with the hairs on the back of my neck standing up as if a magnet was pulling on them.

"Someone is watching us." Yma said.

"I don't think it's the howling creature. I think it's something else."

"We are wearing our winter-suits." Yma realized. "From afar, we could be mistaken for howling creatures."

"What should we do?"

"We should call out. If humans are watching us, we should let them know we are also human like them. Is that a good idea?"

"I guess."

Yma shouted out ahead of us. Her voice was loud enough to cause me to nearly jump out of my clothes.

“Hear me! We are human! We’ve come to trade with the Scoffers!”

“What do you bring to trade?” A rough voice returned, sounding so close it could have been only a couple of trees over.

“Snock Root. I have five bulbs of it here.”

“And what do you want in exchange for them?”

“Avea Leaf, if you have any. If not, will you show us where it is found?”

“We can take the Snock, if we wanted to.”

“Here, take it. We are no fighters. We are an old woman and an old man. We have both encountered Scoffers before; you might remember us. Take the Snock then, but if you don’t trade fairly, I won’t return with more Snock, and I know where to get a pouch full of it. Do you want to trade or no?”

“Have you weapons?”

“A walking stick and a wooden spike.”

“Walk ahead by twenty paces. We will meet you there.”

Two groups of men appeared from either side of the path. I couldn’t see their features, but their heads were long, similar to the people we’d left behind in the village.

“I also have fire oil and small portions of meat.” Yma said. “Take me to your tradesman.”

“The tradesman is asleep until morning.” The Scoffer said. “Don’t you hear that howling out there?”

“We hear it.” Yma acknowledged.

“And you still come skulking about at night?”

“Do you see my husband here?” Yma motioned toward me. “The Reckless God has played a cruel joke on him. My husband can only see at night. He is blind during the day. We have no choice but to come at this time.”

“I remember you.” One of the other men stepped forward. “You were here before, with a man that had injured legs. You said that was your husband.”

“He was.” Yma confirmed. “By the time we reached the village at the base of the mountain, that man’s legs were infected. His legs were cut off. I had to leave that man behind and find a new husband for myself. **I cannot bear to be without a husband.**”

“And you chose this old feeble one?”

“There are very few of my kind for me to marry. This one may be old, but at least he still has his legs.”

They scrutinized me for a second, before one of them gestured for us to walk ahead. For a second I thought they might try to jump us, but they simply spread out, two men ahead and **the rest** behind, to escort us along.

We reached the mouth of a cave. Just inside were two other men who were sitting on the ground and chatting. Hearing our approach, they jumped to their feet and came out to see who had shown up.

“It’s only you.” One of the guards said. “For a moment I thought it was the Howler.”

“That beast could be close.” One of the men who accompanied us replied. “It was coming this way, probably scenting these two.”

“A woman?” The guard said. “**Coming here at night?**”

“Yes, a woman. She’s been here once already. She’s brought items to trade. Will you walk these two into a nook, man? The sooner you get your arse back, the sooner we can resume our watch.”

“I’ll take them.” The second guard volunteered. “This way.”

“They will treat us as guests because we are traders.” Yma told me.

I was still worried that this whole thing might be a set-up, but now that we were old news, nobody was really paying attention to us. The guard leading us wasn’t particularly concerned either, as he shuffled along in the cave that was just wide enough to allow us through without scraping our arms.

“Here.” The guard halted. “You can sleep here. We will have the trader come by when she’s woken up.”

I could see outside the cave, but not in here because my night vision just wasn’t that good. Yma took hold of my arm and led me inside.

“I have fire oil.” She told the guard. “I can light a fire here?”

“Light your fire, only don’t make noise or you’ll wake the rest.”

The guard walked away.

“Do you hear that?” Yma asked, sounding as if she was teasing. “We can’t make noise or we’ll wake up the rest.”

This nook wasn’t much bigger than a typical bathroom, I felt, as I set my hand against its cool, craggy wall. I heard Yma rustling about with her gear.

“Stand where you are, Night Man.” She said. “I’ll have the fire going in the crack of a twig.”

I have no idea how she got the stick **of wood** to light up, but she did. I guess she covered the entire length because **it** lit up in a bright orange-yellow glow. In its light, I saw the way the walls inclined inward the higher they went, creating a sort of cone-shaped room. On the ground, I observed a furry roll.

“What is that?” I pointed.

“A bed roll.” Yma answered. “We can spread it out and sleep on it. It is narrow, so we will have to sleep very close together.”

The tone in her voice kept changing, as if she were flirting with me but didn’t really know how. She was an amateur at trying to seduce me, but I got the hint.

“It will be warm, I think, if we’re lying close together.” She continued. “Warm enough that we won’t need so many clothes. Do you agree?”

Yma had desperation in her voice that she kept trying to hide. It was important that we consummate things this way, but I couldn’t figure out why. Maybe if we slept together, in her custom we would then really become husband and wife.

She undressed before me. When she saw that I hadn’t moved yet, because I was so full of uncertainty, she lowered her head and went to prepare the roll.

Was I ready to be married, if that’s what this was about? I don’t know, but seeing Yma naked, seeing her bare back and backside as she spread the roll out, it gave me stirrings for her. She wanted me, that was crystal clear, but she also wanted me to return that want to her. When the roll was ready, she sat on it and waited for me with expectant eyes.

“This is what we look like.” She said. “You are not in your world and I am not in mine. You and I, we are in different bodies than what we’re accustomed to, but it makes no difference. I... I am attracted to you. I want to sleep with you.”

“If we do this together, does that mean we will be married?” I questioned.

“If you want that.” She replied. “We can do this only for frolic.”

I could see her square jaw, and her sturdy shoulders. Her arms weren't intentionally covering her chest, but she sat in such a way that I couldn't see it. She noticed this and stretched her arms out to her sides, jutting her chest out and trying to keep from grinning.

“You're teasing me.” I said. “And it's working. Listen, I want to be clear about this. I am attracted to you. I just... I hate that I can't remember my past. Maybe I'm already married. Maybe I have a wife and children wherever I came from.”

“That is somewhere else, but not here.”

I took my clothes off and went to lie down. Yma didn't move until I was stretched out. When she did, she lay on top of me.

“I thought about doing this with my friend.” She admitted. “But he is so simple-minded I feel I would be taking advantage of him. You, Night Man, you are intelligent like I am. Nothing is simple about you. You are the sort of man I want to frolic with.”

She instigated **our** kisses, but I really was ready to mess around with her. I rubbed her back as she smothered her body against mine. Yma panted hard into my face, when my hands found her backside and her thighs.

“You care for me.” She said. “I know you do. I care for you the same way.”

We touched and rubbed on each other, getting ourselves into a sensual frenzy. Yma broke away, sitting on my thighs and reaching for my manhood. She held it in her grasp, fondling it, playing with it.

“Night man.” She said.

“What is it?”

“Ask me no questions, but I have never done this before. I'm not afraid, but I am... What is a good word to describe it? Ready, yet not ready? Anxious? Willing with hesitation?”

She raised herself on her knees and scooted over my waist. Again she held me, keeping me steady as she descended onto me, as her body took me in. Yma gasped at my entry, clutching at my forearms as she slid further down, taking me in entirely.

She sat on me, moaning softly, keeping her voice down so it wouldn't carry out of our little niche. It seemed she really didn't know what to do next. I pulled her close enough to kiss her. She accepted my attention, kissing back with passionate will, while our bodies remained in union. When Yma sat up again, she moaned at the pressures that our contact created.

“Wiggle.” I told her. “Bounce, but not too hard or you'll break me.”

She laughed, but she listened. Yma's body bounced softly against mine, and whatever worries I had in my head vanished like my missing memories.

(Stopped at 11 PM. New word count: 2473 + 35,790 = 38,263.)

(July 31, 2020, 8:10 PM - I've been at it for 40 minutes now, moving things around and checking my notes for relevance. I have posted my Short List Of Story Nudgers on my author's website. I'm not sure if I will included new tables here first or stick them straight into that doc. Also, I have bolded out some of my book review notes. Those parts will work their way into this story sooner or later. I already have an idea for another story I can use the leftovers in, but first I have to finish this one! I am taking 10 minutes to clear my mind, and coming back at 9 to get to writing.)

“Wake up, Night Man.”

I grunted for Yma to leave me alone, but I could feel her face hovering close to mine.  
“What do you want?”

“You must eat. The medicine woman has made an herbal soup. It won’t be as hard as the nuts we’ve been eating.”

“I just know it is going to taste nasty.”

“No.” Yma replied. “It has a dab of honey and a bit of Snock. It’s sweet.”

“Sweet soup? I don’t think I’ve ever had sweet soup before.” I sat up. The moment I was upright, my stomach started growling. Also, it was competing with my legs for being the sorest part of my body.

“Hold your hands out for the bowl. It is a small bowl because the people here only have enough for small portions.”

I held the bowl. It was made out of what felt like rock. I wished I could see what was in this so-called soup I was about to ingest. I took a whiff. “It smells like mint.”

“That is Ground Ivy. It has a slight scent of mint.”

I took a sip, finding the soup warm.

“The ivy leaves are bitter, but they have good flavor to them.”

People on other worlds didn’t have sugar, I recalled, and they did not have candy. I stopped my brain before it could try to remember anything past that, or else I’d risk losing even that little thought. “It’s not bad.”

“Bad?”

“It’s good.”

“If something is not good it has to be bad? And if it isn’t bad it has to be good? How can something go from one extreme to the other in a blink?”

“It’s the way I talk.” I tried to explain. “This is how people talk where I come from.”

“Something can be good, or it can be much better or less good, but it certainly will not become bad **right away**. There are levels to goodness where I am from. Bad things are called bad things because they are truly things to be abhorred and avoided...”

“Okay, I get it now. Did you do any trading yet?”

Yma stopped talking. Maybe she was thinking about yanking my hair.

“I have to say something.” I spoke up right away. “I did not sleep well, my stomach feels raw and my feet have blisters. Because I am in such bad shape, I mean, my shape is not that good right now, but because of that I feel irritable and I might snap at you.”

“I can snap back.” Yma replied. “Eat your soup!”

I had another sip, and then I remembered when I tossed the bowl of broth into Withern’s face. This made me chuckle. I didn’t want Yma to think I was laughing at her, so I told her about it and she started laughing.

“Withern is a very rigid man.” She said. “If he cannot understand something, he will try to lock it up in a cage and pretend it no longer exists. He is a hair-wart of a man.”

“I thought so too, at first. After a while, I kind of figured out that all Withern is, all the people of the village really are, are poor farmers and woodsmen. They’ve never had to deal with Black Afflictions and other crazy stuff the way we have. Have you **ever** seen stuff like that?”

“I don’t know. I am not surprised by it, I don’t fear it, so I believe I have. That soup was made to be heavy in your stomach. It will put you to sleep until tonight.”

“That’s good. I think I need a lot of sleep. What are you going to do?”

“The tradeswoman will take me out to where the Avea grows. Apparently, it is abundant in certain places. I have a surprise for you.”

“What’s that?”

“An amber warming stone.” Yma revealed. “The men said they took it from you. It has run out of warmth and no one here knows how to refill it. They have given it to me as part of our trade. I wonder if the Twins will think it valuable. I will put it on your lap, Night Man.”

“Are you leaving now?”

“I am. The medicine woman believes a hard snow is coming tonight.”

“Tonight? I was hoping to get started down the mountain right away.”

“For what reason? We are safer here than down there.”

It took me a few minutes to figure out that she was right. Yma had already gone by then.

I slurped down my soup, finishing quickly because it was mostly all liquid, and I set the bowl to one side. After this, I held the warming stone, wondering if it was replenished by some kind of magic. Too bad I didn’t know any.

It was nighttime when I finally woke up. I didn’t feel great, but I did feel a little better than I had that morning. Instead of hurting, my stomach felt sour now. My legs and blistered feet were the same.

I could see the little nook I was in because Yma **must have come back and left** a small heap of burning twigs on the ground. They didn’t burn right; the way I was used to fire behaving. Instead of flames, the twigs ebbed a warm, bright glow. I needed to find out exactly what that fire oil was.

I could hear the wind howling through the tunnel outside. Every so often, a gust of icy wind burst into the nook, making me shiver. I had on my second set of clothing, spotting my winter-suit against the wall, and next to that, another small pile of clothes. I assumed these belonged to Yma, but when I went to pick them up, I discovered they were the thicker clothes the Birayd people had given me, the clothes the Scoffers had kept for themselves. The clothes were clean and dry. I wondered if I could wear the sock-boots inside or outside the winter-suit.

I heard several men laughing. These were the guards and night watchers who usually spent the night outside the cave. One voice was louder than the rest. I recognized it as belonging to the man who’d kept all my stuff. Since Yma was nowhere to be seen, I poked my head out of the nook and into the narrow corridor just past it. The tunnel was full of sitting men.

“There he is, the ancient one himself.” Mr. Loudmouth said. Wait, I think I’d called him Mr. Gruff before. “Is it true what the woman says? You can see now, but only at night?”

“I can see you.” I told him.

The gruff man leaned to either side, as if trying to peer past me and into the nook. “You haven’t brought any Birayd girls for us this time, have you?”

Right when he said that, I remembered the scaly people from higher up on the mountain. I remembered that stupid hybrid girl that had been picking on me as we descended, and what had happened to her at the hands of these men. Her name was Nori, and I was not going to forget it.

“Looking at you, I wish I was still blind.” I told Mr. Gruff. “You’re about the ugliest and mangiest looking dog I’ve ever seen.”

The rest of the Scoffer men laughed. Mr. Gruff looked around, knowing he’d just been insulted but unsure of what he should do about it. If someone had reacted angrily, Mr. Gruff would have probably gotten up to kill me. As it was, they were all laughing, and soon enough he was shaking his head and laughing too.

“The moment this blizzard is over.” One of the men said, more to me since the others already knew it. “We are going to hike up there and kill off the entire lot of Birayd. That will be the last of them creeping onto our hunting grounds.”

It was so easy for these men to talk about killing. I felt anger at how they talked, but I also knew I had to distance myself from my reaction. This was not my world. I wasn't allowed to have a say in how it ran. All I could really do is watch people doing what they normally did. If there was a fight to the death between the two tribes, I didn't know who I hoped would win.

“Your turn.” I told Mr. Gruff. “I made a joke about you, and now you have to make one about me.”

Mr. Gruff showed crooked teeth as the men around him waited for his response. He had all the attention on him, and that gave him power. “You say I'm ugly, Night Man, but I've seen a goat's arse that was better looking than you are!” He started laughing uproariously. “And the bollocks... The bollocks looked like your nose!”

It was good that they were having a good row at my expense. Hopefully, I wouldn't have to worry about them attacking me later. They were all so crowded into the tunnel that **when Yma showed up, she** had to walk over and through them to get into the nook. I followed her inside.

“You are making new friends.” She said.

“No, I'm just trying to keep them off my back. Where were you?”

“Were you worried about me?”

“Kind of. Those men did something evil to a Birayd girl the last time I was around them. I just remembered that. I hoped they hadn't done anything evil to you.”

“They won't.” Yma said, **sounding** entirely certain of it. “If they did, they would lose a trading partner, and that is one thing they cannot afford to lose.”

(11:00 PM - New word count: 1607 + 39,870. This was good. At the beginning I didn't think I could make the minimum 1,000 words because I started so late.)

(August 1, 2020, 8:30 PM. Any new charts and tables I create are going straight into the Story Nudgers document. You'll find it on the E-Zines / Articles page of my website at Raymond Towers Dot Com.)

By keeping each other company, we managed to stay awake the entire night. Unfortunately, in the morning the blizzard conditions **still** hadn't let up. The wind still gusted into the tunnel, and the cold was so fierce we wore our two sets of clothes and had to hold onto one another for warmth.

“I can't sleep with such howling.” Yma sighed.

“Can't we go deeper into the cave, where the Scoffers live?”

“No, we are not allowed, not unless one of them accompanies us. I suppose the good thing is that those rascals left earlier, during a lull in the storm they thought would **last longer than it actually did.**”

“I hope they don't find the Birayd people.” I said. “I really don't want to listen to them bragging about a massacre when they come back.”

“You don't understand this world, Night Man. Here, bad things happen **often.**”

“I guess. Hey, I know you said this place was safe and all **that**, but I don't want to be here anymore. I don't want to be cooped here for the entire day.”

“You want to leave now? **With conditions the way they are?**”

“I’m too tired to **just get up and start walking**. What time do you think it is right now?”

“It is still early in the morning.”

“We should sleep for a few hours, and if the storm calms down a little by the time we wake up, we should get going.”

“You’re not fully healed yet.”

“I can heal somewhere else. Did you get that leaf you were looking for?”

“I have plenty of it.” She motioned at a pouch given to her by the Scoffers.

“I just want to go. I have to get out of here.”

“We will go then. You are my husband now and I will always stay close to you.”

“Am I really your husband? Don’t we have to be in a ceremony or a ritual or something?”

“For what reason? If you agree and I agree, that is all we need. I only want to know if you agree or not.”

“Of course I agree. I just want you to know that I tend to fart a lot when I sleep.”

“What word is that?”

Don’t judge, okay? I leaned to the side and let one rip. It was loud and long and smelled like mint. I had to do it because I’d been holding it in for like five minutes already.

Yma ran out of the nook laughing.

It was past noon when we woke up.

Yma was able to get a couple of bowls of fresh leaf soup to warm our bellies, but let me tell you, that didn’t last long. As we worked our way down the mountain, we had a hard time finding the stream, because it was frozen and covered over by a couple of inches of snow. When we did find it, it was only because we both slipped and tumbled our way to new bruises.

The wind slapped snow into our faces, forcing Yma to pull me behind thick trees or big rocks until it slacked off, and then we started moving again.

Some hours later, I heard what were probably the loudest, scariest thunderclaps I’d ever heard. They sounded as if the thunder was trying to collapse the entire mountain into fragments.

“Why is this storm so loud?” I asked through the stiff wind.

“The Reckless God is angry.” Yma tugged me along. “I thought we would make good progress because we are no longer seeking out the Avea Leaf. This storm is hindering us greatly. We will have to find a place of shelter soon, before we are blown off the entire mountain.”

Minutes later, I fell badly, sprawling on my walking stick. The stupid stick ended up jabbing me in the stomach. I groaned as Yma got me to my feet.

We had just started moving when more thunder ripped through the sky. Yma grabbed me and shoved me into a tree trunk.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Lightning is coming down in bunches! At the top of the mountain! It is the Reckless God, Night Man. He must be striking at either the Birayd or the Scoffer men, but I don’t know which.”

“Do you think he’s really doing that? Can’t it just be the storm doing it naturally?”

“If you had your sight, you would not doubt it. There are other mountains. Why is only this one being struck?”

The wind would pick up for twenty, thirty minutes, and then **died** down for five to ten. During the lapses, Yma led me further down the slope. We were both falling a lot, partly because it was icy and partly thanks to the panic overtaking us.

“This was a bad idea, wasn’t it?” I questioned. “We should have stayed in the cave!”

“We don’t know who the Reckless God **is** angry with.” Yma replied. “If he **has** decided he no longer wishes for the Scoffers to live, he could have found that cave and destroyed everyone in it, including ourselves.”

“The Reckless God is that vengeful?”

“Don’t you remember what he did to the colorful people?”

“No, not anymore.”

“He killed them, all of them. It was only by my good luck that my friend and I survived. It was only by your good luck that he sent you into a people-plant to begin again.”

We found an outcrop of **cold** rock that sheltered us from three sides, and that’s where we stayed for the night.

It took us nearly as long to scale the mountain as it had taken us to climb it. Nearly three days passed before we reached the base. The rain had returned, soaking us to the bone as we **finally** found level ground and followed the stream toward the village.

The moon was starting to wane, but it was still bright enough to illuminate the outlines of trees and shrubbery. We walked past it, onto a withered grass field. I saw a fat, reddish creature out grazing what little it could find.

“Hey, buddy,” I called out. “Is that you? What are you doing out here? Did you climb your way out again?”

The hairy yak-looking thing kept munching, but it did swing its big head over to give me a look. It huffed once before it went back to scavenging. I wondered if that was Buddy’s way of greeting me.

“That cow is blessed.” Yma said. “If it wasn’t, a predator would have eaten it by now.”

“Do you mean lucky or really blessed?”

“Demi-Urgos must care for it. I wonder what a cow must do for it to find favor in the eyes of a god.”

“We should ask it.” I went over and started rubbing the beast’s shaggy back. “Buddy, how come nobody wants to eat you? Did you win at cards against that crummy Demi-Urgos guy?”

“You could consider another reason.” Yma said. “It is possible that Demi-Urgos has incarnated inside that cow.”

“For what, to find out what dead grass tastes like?” I asked, only half-kidding. Knowing this could be the Reckless God made me back up quickly. “Does Demi-Urgos really incarnate that way?”

“That is one of the many tales the villagers speak of. Demi-Urgos can choose to become anything he wants. One of his favorite incarnations was when he caused himself to be born as a mountain, but I have no idea how the villagers know that.”

“Let’s just keep going to the village.” I said.

I did not like when I looked over my shoulder, seeing that Buddy was right behind us and approaching steadily. I liked what lay ahead of us even less. While I could see a general view of what was around, I observed a dark veil surrounding the village. It was the Black Affliction, and for the first time I was **really** seeing it.

(10:00 PM. I’m stopping early tonight because I want to put a little time into the Nudgers article, and also because I need to think over where my characters are going to go next. Tonight’s word count is  $1303 + 39870 = 41,173$ .)

(August 3, 2020, 8:10 PM. I am heading into the Notes section to clear out some clutter first of all... Okay, that didn't take too long. I have a plan for all those notes based on RPG games. I will put that into motion as soon as get Night Man settled in. All right, I am heading into the last day's entry to refresh my brain and I will get to writing tonight's content when I'm done.)

"Use your stick." Yma said.

I poked around ahead of me, entering that black veil and feeling right away how it wasn't as cold as the frozen grass field we'd just left. "Where are you?"

"Here, Night Man. I am at your side."

"Grab onto my shirt or something. I don't want us to drift apart."

Only when I felt her hand on my garment did I start forward again. I only took a couple of steps when I shivered from something that was not the cold. Call me super paranoid, but I began doubting that Yma was near me at all, suspecting that instead some demon had latched onto me.

"Yma?" I asked.

"I am here. Something is bad here, very bad. Can you feel it?"

"I don't know what it is, but I feel something."

"The Black Affliction has intensified. It has grown more powerful. We must get through this wall of evil as quickly as we can."

I'm not stupid, okay? I'm really not, but on occasion, I can do stupid things. What happened was that Yma got me anxious, and I started moving forward too fast. I held the walking stick out, the front end bumped into the wall, and the back end...

"Oof!" I cried out, nearly doubling over as the stick shoved into belly.

"What is it?" Yma grabbed at my back.

"I found the village wall. Give me a second."

"How?"

"How what?"

"How do I give you a second?"

"Wait." I grumbled. "Just wait for a fucking moment because I jabbed myself with the stick. Wait a few seconds."

"What is that word you say sometimes?"

One of these days, I was going to tell Yma what 'fucking' meant, or not. Maybe it would be too hard since some words could have multiple meanings and tones. I started tapping out, finding the top of the wall to make sure it was the wall I was used to. After that, I took Yma by the hand **and began tapping along** the wall looking for the entrance into the village.

I found it after about five minutes.

The second we left the Affliction, we walked into a dark, desolate village.

"Where are the guards?" I asked. "They should be here by now. There should be torches lit right here by the gate, and over there by those houses."

"This entire side of the village looks abandoned." Yma said.

"Yeah, and look up at the sky." I noticed. "I used to be able to see the moon and stars up there on most nights. This Black Affliction has covered up the village like a dome. **I'm surprised we can see anything at all.**"

Yma tugged on wrist. "Walk with me to the rundown section. We must find out what has happened here."

The houses were set up haphazardly, with a cluster of three or four to one side, two houses sitting along across **the way**, and further down, some other combination. I wondered if maybe the first builders in that village had placed their families close together for protection. Everyone that came after simply chose a spot and started building. These were areas of the village I had not seen before. Many of them had small gardens surrounded by stretches of stone.

Yma stopped me when she saw two men digging into one of the gardens with a simple hoe. “You two, what are you doing here in the side prohibited to us? Where are all the villagers?”

“They’ve gone.” One of the men answered. “Two days ago, they packed their valuables and left. All of them at once, without saying a thing about where they were going to next.”

“Do you remember the magic adepts?” The second man asked. “They must have told the villagers something when they were here. I’m sure they did that! What other reason could the people have for leaving so sudden-like? I’ll wager they packed inside their homes. When they were ready, they walked out that front gate so they didn’t have to walk by the lot of us.”

“It took us half a day to see no one was left but us.” The first man added.

“This one is Agut.” Yma pointed. “The other is Krozor. They are kinfolk to the Mirror Twins. Tell me, how many are left? Who has taken charge of the village?”

“The Twins are in charge now.” Agut said. “There are only nine of us now, mostly men but a couple of women. The women,” He grinned with teeth stained yellow-brown. “They become agreeable to us once we give them the Root.”

I could see the resemblance between these two and the Twins. They had the same round heads and ruddy skin. The villagers, they’d looked... I don’t know how accurate this is, but to me they looked honorable. These two looked like thugs, or criminals.

“What of my legless friend?” Yma asked. “How is he faring?”

The men looked at one another. Their eyes said nothing good.

“You need to ask the Twins about him.” Agut said.

Yma’s face showed tension, but also resignation, as if she already suspected whatever the men were hinting at. “What are you doing now? Is this something you are doing for the Twins?”

“We are.” Krozor, the one holding the hoe, answered first. “We’ll be leaving this place just as soon as we finish digging out these edibles.”

“We are filling up an entire handcart with food.” Agut said.

“For the Twins?” Yma asked.

“You’re right.” Agut confirmed. “The Twins put us to it.”

“Come with me, Night Man.” Yma started off.

My legs were weary, but I’d caught a second wind now that we were in supposedly safe confines. I kept up.

“They ate him.” Yma whispered. “The Twins ate my friend because he had no legs and could not fight back against them. He didn’t even have a name, Night Man, because he refused to take one. He said the Reckless God had created him, and only the Reckless God could name him. He was a simple man, but a good man. What sort of world is this where the crippled are eaten by the healthy? Can you answer me, Night Man?”

I said the only thing I could think of. “I’m sorry about your friend.”

We found the Twins standing with another man, with over a dozen pieces of wooden furniture set before them. Mostly, the collection consisted of plain tables and chairs, but there were other strange-looking pieces as well. One piece was shaped like a small, narrow table, with a large hole in the center as if it once held a basin or pot. Another piece looked like an A-frame

with several thin boards running across. I found out later that the table with the hole was supposed to have a stone bowl on it, for washing one's face and hair in the morning. The A-frame was used to cure meat into jerky.

"Do you have valuables for us?" Opol asked, the moment he spotted Yma.

"First, tell me what happened to my friend." She insisted.

"He was in the way." Opol said. "He is no longer in the way."

"Did you... Did you eat him?"

"It was good meat." Lupo sounded as if he were taunting Yma. "Nothing is wasted here! You can have some if you'd like. It hasn't spoiled yet!"

"I will not eat another person." Yma said. "My culture is different than yours."

"Your culture is full of pock!" Opol huffed. "The valuables, do you have them or not?"

She held out her pouch. "This is full of Avea Leaf. I have some Burdock and Winter-Cress also in a smaller pouch. I only have a little Wolf Mushroom."

"Wolf Mushroom?" Lupo licked his lips. "Tasty! I will add a good flavor to our meat!"

"Please do not speak of my friend that way." Yma said, stepping toward the Twins. They regarded her suspiciously, as if she might try to harm them. "Have no fear of me. The Scoffers kept my fire oil, edibles and Snock Root, but they have give me a few things in return."

"What things?" Opol asked.

"First, here is the wooden spike you lent me to protect myself with."

"What else?" The Twin snatched the item out of her hand.

"Night Man was given the set of clothes the Scoffers took from him. They are Birayd made clothes, much better for surviving the cold than what these villagers **wear**. He is wearing them now under the winter-suit. I also have this."

She held out the amber warmth stone.

"A yellow rock?" Lupo balked. "What good is that?"

"The spike has more value than that!" Opol seconded.

"This is a magic stone."

"Magic?" Lupo asked. Along with his Twin, he peered closer at the stone. "What does it do?"

"It uses magic to hold sunlight, to keep a person warm at night. The Birayd gave this stone to Night Man for his journey down the mountain. It was working then, and it also worked when the Scoffers took it away. Since that time, the warmth has gone out of it. The Scoffers do not know what magic is used to refill the stone."

"But the Birayd know?" Opol wondered. "It works on Birayd magic?"

"I cannot say." Yma admitted.

I felt I had to say something. "I did not see the Birayd fill the stone. I don't know how they did it, but I do know it worked best when I held it against my skin."

"Should we touch it?" Lupo asked his Twin.

"No!" Opol refused. "Who know what residual energies rest in it? We could be damaged!"

"Keep it for us." Lupo told Yma. "When we need it, we will ask for it."

"The Avea Leaf is valuable." Opol calculated. "And so is the Wolf Mushroom, and so are the Birayd clothes that are made to endure the coldest parts of the mountain."

"What of the stone?" Lupo inquired. "How valuable is it?"

"As it is, it has no value." Opol decided. "If we see it give off warmth, it will have value. The question becomes where do we find a mage that can cause it to work?"

"Good question." Lupo agreed.

“I have information.” Yma said.

“Tell us.” Opol perked up again.

“A blizzard occurred a few days ago. The band of Scoffers we were staying with had the idea to travel further up the mountain. Their plan was to attack the Birayd and kill their entire tribe. They hoped for a massacre. As Night Man and I descended the mountain, we looked up to the top. A great storm fell upon that area where the Scoffers were going to kill the Birayd. With my eyes, I saw great streaks of lightning fall upon that spot, and on no other mountain.”

“A rarity?” Opol asked. “Or an omen?”

“The Reckless God has chosen a side.” Lupo conjectured.

“We do not know which side.” Yma quickly said. “We were too far from the mountaintop to see which side was favored.”

“It is enough to know that there was favor.” Lupo replied. “This may be a time of favoring. The time of neutrality could be finished.”

“I have a last bit of news.” Yma said.

“Tell, tell!” Lupo squealed. “This lightning storm portends favor, favor we might cultivate for ourselves! What other news do you have for us?”

“Just outside the village wall is a blessed cow.” She told them.

“Blessed?” Opol looked shocked. “How do you know it is blessed?”

“Night Man has seen it more than once.” Yma explained. “No animal has attacked it. The cow was in the forest edge when we first encountered it. It followed us into the Affliction with no fear, and you must know how tainted the Affliction has gotten recently.”

“Yes, we know!” Opol said. “Demons swirl within the blackness now! Angry demons!”

I remembered sensing something evil when Yma and I were moving through the Affliction. She’d mentioned the same thing.

“Do you see?” Yma asked. “The cow can walk back and forth with no danger. No hunting animal has killed it, and no demon from the black has driven it insane.”

“We must catch that cow!” Opol decided. “We must catch it and take it with us! It will keep an aura of good fortune around us!”

“We will need it when we travel.” Lupo agreed.

“Travel?” Yma asked. “Where are you traveling to? It is your turn to give news. What has happened to the villagers? Why did they leave here?”

(Stopped at 10:50 PM. New word count: 2090 + 41174 = 43,262.)

(August 4, 2020, 8:15 PM.)

“The villagers are deceivers!” Opol growled. “The adepts came here, and they spoke with the villagers, and they said nothing to us! Oh, but did they gather their belongings? Did they carry in their arms all that they could carry? Did they put their children and their chickens into their wagons and their extra clothing and tools on their back, and did they...”

“What did they deceive us about?” Yma cut him off.

“What do you think they deceived us about?” Lupo huffed. “The adepts knew the Affliction would become worse. For what other reason would they have come out there to this isolated, small and insignificant place? I tell you, the adepts gave the villagers their warning. The Affliction will worsen, they said. It will teem with demons **shortly!**”

“Pack up your shit!” Opol took up the rant. “Go to another village!”

“Why would they leave the foreigners behind?” I wondered.

“They don’t want us!” Lupo grumbled. “They’ve never wanted us! They don’t want us around their women, or their children! Oh, they want our labor. They want us to build their walls of stone and their houses of wood, and they’ll feed us their scraps only because there are too many scraps and too few dogs!”

The Twins kept up their rant, but I droned them out. What they were saying didn’t jive with what I knew about the villagers. If they left without telling the foreigners, they must have had a good reason for doing so. It was a shifty balance, though. The villagers had been feeding me some nasty gruel, which they said was so the demons could exit my body faster. At the same time, I was not about to put my trust in the Twins, not after they ate the poor legless guy.

“Enough with the tirades!” Yma shut the Twins up, thankfully. “I held up my end as best I could. I brought you things of value, and now they are yours because you are the best managers of items left here. You must have a plan on what we should all do next!”

“We have plans.” Opul said. “We have many plans.”

“But why should we tell you about them?” Lupo pointed at her.

“Because I am working with you, not against you. If I know your plans, don’t you think that I would work more in accordance with whatever you are up to?”

Opul turned to his Mirror. “Should we tell her?”

The other Twin gesticulated and shrugged his shoulders oddly. “She did bring us valuables. Perhaps not as much as we’d hoped for, but she did not fail us.”

“No, she did not fail us.” Opul agreed, before facing us again. “We want to leave this village, but we are uncertain of which way to go. You don’t know this region, Yma, and neither does Night Man. If we follow the road to the south, we will end up wherever the villagers have gone off to. If we take another direction, where there is no road, we do not know where we will end up.”

“What about your kinfolk?” Yma asked. “Do they know anything about these lands?”

“Nothing.” Opul said.

“We may be destination-less, but listen to the remainder of our plan.” Lupo spoke up. The third man who’d been around had since stepped away, but the Twin looked around regardless for any eavesdroppers. “Not a word of this to anyone. Do you hear my mouth, Yma?”

“I hear your mouth.”

“The men that are left, they are all oafs. They do nothing but fuck the women and smoke the Root. That is all they do! We will simply take them along, and if we become tight on food, we will take one into the trees and club him on the head! We will eat them, one by one!”

Both Twins started snickering.

“They are your kinfolk.” Yma reminded them.

“Kinfolk smin-folk!” Lupo grunted in between chuckles. “They are as stupid as birds that go through a trap-hole **in a cage** and cannot find their way back out!”

“We will make a lie to confuse them.” Opul resolved. “We will say the killed one was too sick to carry on. We will say he fell and killed himself! The others will believe whatever we tell them to!”

Yma looked as shocked as I felt.

“But don’t worry.” Lupo told us. “We won’t damage either of you. You are smart! We need people that are smart to be with us! **We need allies!**”

“You don’t have to eat man-flesh if you don’t want to.” Opul resumed talking. “We are digging up whatever edibles the villagers left for us in their gardens. We are taking enough soil

for the food to grow, and we needn't worry too much about water with all this rain and snow we've been getting. We will keep the meat for us and you can have the rest!"

"I must speak with Night Man now." Yma said. "We will search through the village homes. Perhaps they have forgotten a map."

"What good is a map?" Lupo wondered. "Can you read it?"

"I can't." Yma admitted. "Perhaps we can study a map for landmarks we've seen, to know where we are. All the same, I should take Night Man with me before morning comes and he will be left blind again."

"Use fire oil." Opul suggested.

"I don't understand why we can see at present." Yma replied. "It is so dark and no torches are lit. We should all be seeing only darkness now."

"Blame the demons swirling through the Black Affliction for that." Lupo said. "They have their darkness, and they won't have any other darkness to rival it. Don't ask me how they are doing this because I don't know the reason. What I can say is that ever since the Affliction has intensified with demons, we have been able to see throughout the night."

"The insides of the houses will still be plenty dark." Opul added. "That is why you should use the fire oil."

"I will." Yma decided. "I will only take a small portion."

She'd been fiddling with the amber stone all this time, I noticed. When she handed it to me, she took my wrist and led me away.

It had never really hit me over how deplorable the conditions were in the poor side of the village. I hadn't paid much attention at the time because I always slept in the house that Methild used as a doctor's office. Now that I could go back and forth between both sides freely, I saw a definite distinction between those who had good houses and those who didn't. Maybe there was a good reason for why that was, but I couldn't figure it out. I had other questions, though. "The Twins and all their kinfolk, where did they come from? Their skin is **too** dark for them to have lived all their lives in such a dank place."

"When you say dank, do you mean wet and snowy?"

"Yeah, and cold."

We stepped into a lean-to that was made with dirty, patched up sheets of some really rough material. Yma scanned over nearly a dozen jars and pots that had matching covers on them, all of them sitting on a rudimentary bench made of a short plank and thick **stone** blocks for legs. She set her pouches down on an empty spot, before she retrieved one specific pot.

"I need a good stick." Yma told me. "Get one for me from the pile over there."

They were only a few feet away.

"The Twins and their kind were here before I arrived." Yma said. "I don't know if they've told me a true story or no. What they have said is that they all came together from the middle of the mountain, the same way we first arrived. They never mentioned a thing about the people-plants, not until you spoke about it. I think the kinfolk really are simple-heads, but the Twins probably know a lot more than they're telling."

"I think they might be demons." I replied. "I just don't like the way they can talk so casually about eating their own kind, or any other kind of human. The villagers aren't like that."

"They do have twisted thoughts." Yma agreed. "They convinced two of the local girls to smoke the Root with them. Now that the girls are stuck on it, the kinfolk will bed with them every chance they get. This angered the villagers, but there was nothing that could be done to

remedy the situation. Even if the girls were dragged off to their side of the village, they would always sneak back here.”

I gave her the stick.

“You asked about the fire oil, but I don’t know the ins and outs of how it is created.” She said. “I know it is not expensive and not cheap, but somewhere in the middle. The villagers **had** barrels of it that they’ve acquired from elsewhere. They give our end of the village small buckets of it. It is simple to use. Come closer and I will show you.”

Yma set about half the length of the stick inside the jar. When she pulled it out, she let the thick oil scurry off the end. Next, she handed the stick to me.

“You’ve seen the fire burn.” She said. “It isn’t hot, and it takes a long time for the wood to burn. To light it, all you have to do is think the fire into being.”

“I think it?”

“Yes, that is how the oil starts. If you want to light it with a flourish, simply wave your arm around while you think. The oil will not fly off and splash anything. Will you try it?”

“I guess.”

I tried to think in my head, fire, start burning, but nothing happened. I imagined flipping a light switch, but that didn’t work either. Finally, I began waving the doused stick around and with a little more impatience I thought, burn, you shit!

The stick caught. It surprised me enough that I dropped it on the bench. I didn’t know if the fire would smolder the bench, so I snatched the stick up right away. It was on, glowing like a glow-stick the kids used when... Ugh! It happened again! I had a memory surface, and I didn’t think fast enough to make it a secondary thought. When the memory focused clearly in my head, whatever mechanism erased my past did just that!

“You’ve learned how to light the fire oil.” Yma said.

“Yeah. I don’t know how I did it, but I did it.”

“With practice comes ease. The Twins want to leave this place, but I imagine they will have to spend an entire day digging out their hidden stashes of Snock Root. They are all over.”

I looked around. “Where?”

“Behind the houses, hidden in the gardens, in places that haven’t been disturbed for some time. Withern would complain if he walked over and saw a large patch of Root growing, so the Twins changed their tactics. Instead of one large patch, they have a dozen smaller patches hidden away where people like Withern are least likely to find them. When it is time to smoke, that’s when the Twins always show with the bulbs in hand and the pipe already lighted.”

(I cut things off at 10:30 PM, because... tired. New word count: 1898 + 43262 = 45160.)

(August 5, 2020, 8:00 PM - I just reread yesterday’s writing. I’m taking a ten minute break and will be starting tonight’s entry as soon as I come back.)

Yma’s scream woke me up in the morning.

We’d found a house that still had a cot in it, and despite that it was really uncomfortable with its lumpy sack of old straw, not to mention how small it was, the two of us still managed to squeeze ourselves on it because... We were on top of each other, okay? It was the third time I had sex with Yma. The other two times were when we were in the Scoffer camp, and when we were descending the mountain and got freaky during a heavy rain...

“Why are you doing that?” Yma demanded.

I was back to being sightless, just so you know. “What’s happening?”

“One of the Twins is here!” She answered. “I don’t know which one it is! He is eating what is left of a human arm!”

“More like gnawing at it.” The Twin said. “All the good meat is gone already.”

I don’t think I’d slept more than a couple of hours, and my eyelids were heavy enough that if I closed them, I’d probably doze off again. “Lupo?”

“Opul, you cretin.”

“Excuse me, but I’m blind here. I can’t exactly tell you apart by looking!”

“Come and smell my arse then.” Opul chuckled. “My arse smells ten times better than my Twin’s!”

“How do you know that? Have you smelled your brother’s arse to compare it to yours?”

“I haven’t done that!” Opul snapped.

“Then how do you know?”

The Twin stayed quiet for a time, as if trying to formulate an answer. “I take more baths than Lupo, that’s why!”

I started getting up, only to feel Yma’s hands holding me back.

“Where are you going?” She asked.

“I have to go outside to drop the yellow water. Which **way** is the door?”

“It is here, by where I’m sitting.” Opul replied.

Reluctantly, Yma let me go. I felt along my feet, where I remembered I’d left my walking stick. My hand scraped against uneven floorboards.

“You are close to it.” Opul said. “By your left leg.”

I shifted that way.

“Your right leg.” Yma said.

“Which is it?” I asked, grouchy because I was still tired. “Left or right?”

“Left.” The Twin answered.

“Right.” Yma said right after.

I figured it out because I can figure shit like that out. Opul was in front of me, while Yma was behind me. They were both right, in a manner of speaking. In any case, I soon had the stick in hand and stood up. I tapped it along the ground slowly, making sure the Twin wouldn’t try something underhanded with me like trying to trip me down. In few seconds, the stick gave a soft pat close to the floor on my left side.

“My leg.” Opul said.

I could hear him chewing. Before he could react, I swung the stick out, and brought it down on what I assumed to be Opul’s thigh. The Twin shouted in pain. My mostly forgotten training began to kick in. I grabbed the walking stick at two places, ready to use it like a really dull spear and poke out at the man on the floor.

I struck nothing. Opul was much faster than I’d expected him to be. He rolled away from my weak weapon, jumped to his feet and bowled me over. I didn’t have time to counter him like I had when I fought Withern. I fell and smashed onto my back and I grunted because it hurt, and suddenly Opul was all over me and keeping me down with his weight.

You ever eat something meaty and a piece of it gets stuck in your teeth? And that bit stays in there for a while, and then you use your tongue or your finger to jostle it loose and you taste it and it tastes really nasty? That’s what Opul’s entire mouth smelled like.

“Why did you smite me?” The Twin breathed his foul breath on me.

“You know Yma doesn’t like how you eat humans!” I shouted back. “You came in here anyway to taunt her! She’s my wife now! I have to stand up for her!”

“I could eat your face right now!” Opul barked **at me**.

“Go ahead! Kill me and I’ll be re-born in another people-plant and I get to start this great life all over again!”

“Your Twin wants us alive!” Yma shouted. “He will be angry if you kill Night Man!”

“I make the decisions, not Lupo!” The Mirror snapped at her.

“You said so yourself, we’re smarter than most!” Yma reminded him. “We are worth more to you alive than dead!”

Opul’s face came close to mine. He cracked his teeth together loud enough that it unnerved me into thinking he really might take my nose off. They way he’d pinned me; there was no way that I could maneuver myself into a better position.

Thankfully, the Twin relented and pushed his body off mine. “You are smart, and I am sure we will need you in our travels.” He grabbed my arm and started pulling me off the floor. “Do not smite me again, or I will chew one of your fingers off! What’s this? Have you pissed yourself, Night Man?”

“I did.” I admitted. “You fell on me too hard. I’m an old man!”

“You’ve wet my leg!”

Without warning, a harsh slap landed on my face. I staggered back, about to fall out the door because I went too far, but Opul grabbed my arm and held me upright. “Never smite me again! You won’t need to piss because you’ve pissed all over the floor! You’ve even pissed on the arm I was eating! **I’ve lost my appetite many thanks to you!**”

“I don’t have to piss, but I do have to shit!” I growled back. “Let me tell you something! I was blind when I started down the mountain. The Birayd told a girl named... Nori, that was her name. She was a Birayd girl and she was told to bring me down the mountain. She hated me so much that one time, one time she shit on a piece of bread and she tried to get me to eat it!”

“She shit on your bread?” Opul asked.

“Because I can’t see! She gave me the piece of bread and I couldn’t see that it had shit on it! I almost tasted it!”

The Twin started laughing, and that’s what I’d been after all along. “You came here with no Birayd girl. What happened to her?”

“The Scoffers took her. They raped her and then they killed her.”

Opul laughed even more this time. “Ah, I’ve always wondered what their kind tastes like. I forgive you, Night Man. I will walk you out to where you can have your shit.”

“Take the arm.” Yma said. “I don’t want to see it!”

Opul let me go long enough to retrieve the arm, before he pulled me out of the small house. He was courteous enough to give me the walking stick as well. “We have a husband and a wife. That is good, I think. Neither of you will think to run away from us unless you do it together, and you will be easier to find if you are together.”

“You think we’ll run away?” I asked. “I don’t know anything about this world! Where the hell am I going to go?”

I slept for the entire day, but not in that same house because I was too embarrassed after my earlier mishap. The Twins told two of their kinsmen to carry the rickety cot outside, and since it wasn’t raining that day, all I needed was a coarse blanket and I was good. They found a second cot for Yma. She snored, and I probably did too, but hearing her nearby was comforting.

When we woke up, Krozor brought us a bowl of soup and told us to share it. The soup did not have people meat in it. It had carrots, onions and potatoes, plus chopped nuts and a strong flavoring of herbs. I'd never eaten nuts in soup before, but it tasted pretty good.

The Twins needed someone to talk to, someone on their mental level, so they were eager to fill us in on what they'd done during the day. They brought chairs over and sat next to us while we finished our food.

"The villagers left behind two of three parts of their belongings." Opul revealed. "We have been sorting through the best of it for what we will be taking with us."

"No weapons." Lupo added. "The best we have for weapons is a few farming tools, but we can break a couple of chairs apart and use their legs as clubs. Not good clubs, but better than only smiting with our fists."

"We found no maps." Opul grunted.

"No good luck with maps." Lupo said. "But we did walk into the Afflicted portion of the village. We found a small wagon with a loose wheel that has been sitting there for a good time. We pulled it here and mended the wheel."

"With the cow." Opul interjected. "The cow can pull the wagon. We have the cow tied to a building to keep it from wandering off again. You are right, Yma. I do think the cow is blessed."

I did not like that Buddy was a girl cow, by the way. **I assumed it was an old bull like me.**

"The wagon will be filled with the best items." Lupo said. "House wares, trinkets and clothes. No furniture. The cart has been packed with soil and living plants, mostly Snock Root. It will be heavy enough that two men will have to push it along."

"It sounds like you've got everything planned out." I said.

"All except a destination." Opul frowned. "Our best idea is to follow the road to the south, toward the next village over."

"So we're not going toward any other villages around the mountain?" I wondered.

"Too dangerous." Lupo answered.

"We will be moving too slow with the cart and wagon." Opul explained. "We have no good fighters among us, but I gather we will give a better combat than the villagers would!"

"The villagers had no fighters." Lupo agreed. "All dull-witted farmers, as dull-witted as our kinfolk."

"We think we know why the villagers left us so abruptly." Opul nodded.

"Why?" Yma asked. "Does it have to do with the increase in demons?"

"You are right!" Opul pointed at her. "You see, if everyone left at once, the demons would sense only an empty village. They would follow the road until they discovered the villagers, and they would stick to them like shit on a shoe."

"By leaving us, the villagers sacrificed us to the demons." Lupo added.

"Sacrificed?" I asked. "But the demons haven't attacked us yet?"

"Why haven't they?" Lupo asked.

"I don't know."

"I understand." Yma said. "The Black Affliction has struck areas of population. It surrounds places where people live. The envoys that arrived, the adepts that came with them, they must have told the villagers the Affliction would soon worsen. The villagers knew that if everyone left the village, the demons in the Affliction will follow."

"The foreigners were left behind as bait?" I asked.

"It seems so." Yma agreed. "That means that if we leave, the demons will know the village is empty, and they are likely to follow us."

“But not the villagers because they are already gone.” Lupo finished off. “The villagers were smart to leave us behind.”

“And there lies the answer to our problem.” Opul said. “We must leave a kinfolk or two here, to give the impression that some of us remain. I wonder if one man will be enough, as we will need the strength of every one of us to push the stupid cart about.”

“That person could die,” Yma worried. “Probably will die.”

“A necessary sacrifice.” Opul decided. “Either that or the demons will follow us like a curse. They are being held back now, controlled in some way, but when their fury is unleashed they will surely kill anyone in their path.”

“Shouldn’t we try to save everyone?” I asked.

“We sacrifice the one or the two for the sake of the rest.” Opul told me. “Have you a better idea to present?”

“No.”

“What is our next question?” Lupo said. “Our next question is when should we leave? When are the demons at their least powerful? In the morning or at night?”

“We are watching them.” Opul answered. “We are seeing when their intensity wanes, and when it waxes.”

“In the morning.” Yma said. “When the sun begins to warm the land, that is when I believe the demons will be at their weakest.”

“The demons will seek to hide their faces from the sun?” Opul questioned.

“I think so.” Yma replied. “I’m not completely sure, but I think so.”

Yma and I were getting used to staying up all night. We volunteered for night watch while everyone else slept. When we got bored, we found a place where we could mess around.

After that, we walked over to the edge of the Affliction. It had cut into the village by about a fifth more than before we’d gone up the mountain. At first, I had the idea to have a walk around the village like I used to, but standing too close to the Affliction unnerved the both of us. We felt as if something within that darkness was watching us, even hungering for us.

We set off in the morning, when it really did feel as if the demons had less power, or less intensity to them. The Twins had chosen one man to stay behind, but even that simpleton figured out he was being used as bait. Twice, the man tried to follow us out the gate. The third time this happened, the Twins beat the man unconscious and tied him to a chair. When the man woke up, he started screaming for us not to leave him behind.

I’m not a cold person by nature, and I hated hearing the guy’s shouting, but I didn’t see what I could do to make things better for the little caravan we’d put together. Seeing the man tied up like that did give me an idea.

We spent about half an hour taking old clothes the Twins had deemed valueless and stuffing them with other old clothing. We set the bulky shirts and pants on chairs so that from a distance it might look as if people were sitting there. We did the same thing to the remaining cots. The demons could be fooled by the ruse, or maybe not.

At any rate, we started off: Yma and I, six round-heads including the twins, two long-headed **female** Root addicts, one crappy wagon, one crappy cart, and in the lead one shaggy red cow that I swore looked more like a bull.

Behind us, we heard the bound man screaming until we stepped into the Affliction and his straining voice was drowned out.

(Stopped at 10:50 PM. New word count: 2516 + 45160 = 47,676. After 27 days, my daily average Word Count is 1765. I'm getting close to being halfway done!)

(August 6, 2020, 8:10 PM.)

You can guess who got to ride on the wagon's bench seat. Hint: it wasn't me. The Mirror Twins took the spots because they claimed they were the smartest people in the group. That meant the rest of us had to foot it. The round-heads were complaining the most because they had the chore of pushing the cart, and let me tell you, that thing was heavy. I tried it a couple of times and both times my forearms were throbbing afterwards. The two long-head women complained because **they were lazy and** they weren't accustomed to walking. I complained because my legs were creaky and old, plus my feet enjoyed getting blisters. Yma put us all to shame. She marched on like a proud soldier, with her head held high and her strides steady. That's when it was night and I could see her. The rest of the time I walked like a blind man, because I really was a blind man, and I kept stumbling into ruts and dips because I wasn't **yet** proficient in using a fucking walking stick.

As a sort of compromise, we walked for half the day and half the night. During the day, the Twins were in charge. At night, Yma and I kind of fell into the leadership positions, where we assigned patrols and kept watch and let the others sleep. We could hear howling up in the hills we traveled past, during the darkest parts of the night.

"That creature will come for us." Yma worried. "I know it will."

"It might." I replied.

"Why are you not afraid of it?"

"Look, if it shows up, we'll try to chase it away, because I don't think we can kill it. If it kills us, how are we going to stop it?"

"The others will sure flee from it. I don't know if the Twins will attempt to fight it or not. That means that most likely it will fall **upon** your shoulders and mine."

"In that case, hope it doesn't attack during the day."

"Stop joking! This is a serious matter!"

"Look, babe." I reasoned. "If the creature attacks us, it either wants to eat one of us, it wants something from the food cart, or maybe it wants to eat Buddy. You and I, we can move away from the others and stand our ground. If the others run, and you were a hungry creature that can howl across mountains, would rather eat the people running away, or the people holding sticks and ready to fight? Of course, if the creature is really evil, it might kill all of us anyway."

"I can never understand you!" Yma stormed off.

She did that sometimes. I said something that made perfect sense to me, but it would twist her brain up in a knot and end up frustrating her. Yma would stay away from me for, usually, about half an hour to an hour. She'd always come back, though, because every time she got close to the round-heads all they talked about was having sex with her.

Oh. Let me tell you about the round-heads. They loved smoking that fucking Root, and they loved fucking each other. That's right, you heard me. The six round-heads, including the Twins, would go at it with the girls from the village. If the girls were busy with other round-heads, the leftover round-heads would tap each other. They had their little orgies in meadows, on the banks of streams, on upwards slopes and downwards slopes. About the only place they didn't, uh,

congregate was up in the trees, but that was only because the trees had thin trunks and few if any branches that could hold their weight. Otherwise, every night was make like a rabbit night.

The Twins were **pretty** pissed off on the dawn of the third day.

“The villagers said that the next village was only a stone’s throw from the village we left!” Lupo growled. “We have been walking for three days already!”

Yma was one of the few who spoke to the Twins when they were angry. “We have not been walking for three days. This is the morning of the third day. We have been walking for just over two days by my count. Besides that, we are moving very slow because of the heavy cart. Other travelers most likely travel from early in the morning until the sun falls. They travel a greater distance than we do.”

“How much longer then?”

“If we are lucky, we will reach the next village perhaps by noon of tomorrow, or perhaps at night.”

“No, no!” Lupo balked. “That means we travel four days! We are supposed to only travel three, three, three! Make it three days!”

“I don’t...” Yma started, but she cut herself off. “All right. Tomorrow at noon it will be three days of travel. Tomorrow night at the latest, we should arrive.”

“Good.” Lupo said. “Three days, that is the distance we were told.”

“You are an imbecile!” Opul scolded his Twin. “Four days is not three days! Three days is three days! Four days is four days!”

That set Lupo off and they both went on a tirade. As for me, I was blind as a bat and just sat there listening to the entire episode. It was pretty funny, actually.

By the evening of the third day, most everyone in the troop was getting sick. There was something to be said for sleeping indoors at the village, except for the poorer folk that had to endure the lean-tos. I guess I was luckier than most, since I had the doctor’s office all to myself most days, even if I was tied down to a cot **back then**.

During our three day journey, we had a good amount of sun for about half a day. The rest of the time, the skies were overcast or drizzly. The light rain of the day before was the kind that left a person soaked to the bone after about fifteen minutes, and we were out there the entire day and night getting doused. We didn’t even have dry clothes to change into because the extra clothing on the cart was also wet, and some dumb ass had left the top of the fire oil bucket open and that got rained on too, so we couldn’t even start a fire.

The moon was waning, with its strange glowing arc on the opposite side now. It glowed just enough so we could see each other’s silhouettes, but nothing into the woods on either side of us.

Yma was leaning against the wagon, her arms crossed and her head in deep thought. I figured she needed some space, so I went over to rub Buddy’s back for a while.

“Hey, Buddy.” I said. “How are you doing, huh? We’ve been walking for a good long while now, haven’t we? Are your legs tired, because mine are ready to fall off.”

The cow huffed, but it wasn’t an angry huff. It sounded like an answer in cow language.

“You like bulls?” I kept messing with it. “When we get to the next village, maybe we can find you a bull to hang out with. Would you like that? When is the last time you had a boyfriend, huh? Is that why you always jumped the wall and went out into the forest? Were you out there looking for a boyfriend?”

“You say the strangest things.” Yma said. She’d crept up behind me when I wasn’t looking. “Why do you talk to an animal as if it can listen?”

“How do you know it can’t? Where I come from, people talk to their cars... I mean, their carriages, their pets, their plants. People really talk to things when they get angry. Let’s say I was working with a hammer. If I hit my hand with that hammer, you can be sure I will have a lot of **colorful** things to say to it.”

Yma laughed.

I reached out and pulled her to me. “You’ve been quiet for the last couple of hours. Is everything okay with you?”

“Things are not well with me. I must tell you something.”

“Go ahead. I’m all ears.”

“What do you mean you are all ears?” She laughed again.

“That means I am listening to you.”

“I want to tell you, but not here.” She looked into the distance. “We must walk away, into the forest. It is a secret.”

“Okay. Let me tell Agut that we’re heading out. I’ll tell him we’re going to frolic.”

I counted strides as we walked. Based on a stride of about three feet, we were a good fifty feet away from the others when Yma stopped. It was very dark there, with the trees casting a malevolent gaze at us. I made to hug Yma but she stopped me and pulled away.

“What’s going on with you?” I asked.

“You must not be angry with me.”

“I won’t. I promise I won’t be.”

I could hear her sighing. “I am not a woman.”

“Now you’re confusing me.” I joked. “The last time we were together, I mean in bed, there was no doubt in my mind that you were a woman. Did something change over the last couple of days? Are you growing a mustache now?”

“Night Man, you have a jest for everything. I am telling you the truth. I have a woman’s body now, but I was a man before. Does this anger you?”

“Not yet.”

“But it will? Will you become angry if I continue?”

“No, it won’t anger me. Go on. Tell me more about your man-self.”

“I don’t remember what I looked like originally. I came from another plane, the same as you. I arrived in the presence of Demi-Urgos. He thought to place me with his simple people, assuming I was one of them. He assumed he had created me, but his awareness is so narrow. He could not grasp that I arrived to his plane in a way that had nothing to do with his creation.”

“Okay.” I said.

“I was a man. I still am a man, inside of my body. Do you remember when Demi-Urgos demanded that you see things backwards? He did the same to us. He said, you, Yma, you are now a woman. The others accepted their fate because they are simple. I was foolish enough to argue with him. He slapped me hard enough that I fell to the ground and lost consciousness. When I awoke, I was in this body. I was a woman, a man stuck inside a woman’s body. I was... I was angry and afraid and confused. The others, the simple people, they were only confused, but they could not accept their unwanted change either. They could no longer listen and function as before. It angered Demi-Urgos so much that his conversion had failed, that he began to stomp on the simple people to kill them. I ran with two of them, wanting to hide them in the woods. The Reckless God snatched one up and bashed him against a tree. I ran with my other friend, too far for the god to catch us. That is when he opened up a ravine in front of us and we fell.”

“And you woke up in a people-plant?”

“Yes, but listen to my mouth. I have come to a conclusion. The Reckless God creates his people as he wishes, in his plane that is apart from this world we are in. If his creations displease him, he will kill his people or cast them away, and they fall here. Do you understand?”

“Yeah. Uh, kind of. What are you getting at?”

“The people you see here, they are the discarded ones. I don’t know how long Demi-Urgos has been creating people, but it has to be several generations by now. They have been here so long they do not remember where they first came from, or perhaps the god has taken their memories the way he has done to us.”

“We’re trash? I remember something from my world. God created people, and people disobeyed god, and god threw the people out of his garden.”

“That cannot be from your world. That is what happened to us.”

“You’re right.” I decided. “Okay, so Demi-Urgos keeps making people and they never come out perfect and he tosses them away and starts over. Can we use that to our advantage?”

“I believe so, but you will have to trust me.”

“I’ve always **trusted** you.”

“You have, but you did not know I was a man until now.”

“I still trust you, especially when you’re naked.”

“Stop with the joking!” Yma laughed. “If you trust me, you must agree to do this with me. We must pray to the Reckless God and tell him he was right.”

I had to take a deep breath. “I don’t know if I can do that. I hate that guy!”

“He is the god of this world. As far as I know, he is the only god of this world. You heard the Twins speaking of how the Reckless God could be finding favor with certain people, including your cow. What if we pray to the god and ask him to have favor with us?”

I had to really think about that.

“Let me pray for the two of us.” Yma resolved. “All you need do is stay at my side, and agree with me. This could really help us, Night Man. The Reckless God might return our memories to us.”

I didn’t have much hope left in me, but what Yma said made sense. If I could figure out who I was, there was a possibility that I could figure out how to get out of this shit world. “Okay, you do your thing and I’ll back you up. I mean I will stand with you.”

Yma made her prayer. It wasn’t short, and I don’t remember all of it, but here is part of what I do remember.

“Demi-Urgos, will you hear my plea? You are the creator god here, and there is no other god but you. We have found disfavor in your eyes, but see us now. You have made me a woman, and I did not accept it before. But look upon me, and see how I have found a husband to be my mate. You have made Night Man into an old man, yet he claims he was young and strong. Look upon him as well. Look how well we have adapted. Find favor with us and give us your blessing, that we might tell others of the wonders you have shown us.”

You know I had to throw my two cents in, right? “Demi-Urgos, I am old and withered like a prune turning into a raisin. My years are few, but think about returning Yma and I to our youth. Think how we grateful we would be if had many years in front of us. That’s all I want to say. Oh, one more thing. I think you should invent pizza... Oh, man! I just forgot what pizza was! Damn! I hate when that happens!”

Yma tried to hold her laughter in, but she couldn’t.

“Demi-Urgos,” I concluded. “I just want to say that I’m here and I’m ready to leave my mark on this world. Why don’t you... Why don’t you put me in your most troublesome place and let me fight my way out of it. I can’t do that as an old man. You know what I’m saying. I am the Night Man, and I am out.”

(August 7, 2020, 8:25 PM - I must have been so tired last night that I forgot to add up the new Word Count. I’ll do that now before I reread last night’s material.  $2615 + 47676 = 50,292$ . Sweet! I’m over the 50% mark! Okay, I am re-reading the last entry, then taking 10 minutes to clear my head, and when I return I’ll get to writing!)

It was foggy the next morning, almost as bad as when it drizzled, because we were still getting wet just by walking down the road. Everybody was coughing, even Buddy, but I couldn’t tell you if cows get sick like humans do.

I was so glad when we stopped walking. Thanks to my blisters, I’d already been limping along, but for the last couple of hours I was humbled into hopping with my stick. I don’t know if the Twins would have let me ride on the wagon; hell, I would have sat on their laps if they asked me to, but I was too proud to whine about it and they were too selfish to care.

“We will stop to sleep.” Opul announced.

It was probably around noon by then. The Twins were sniping at each other, ready to argue and maybe even fight. Half the troop went on watch or into the trees to relieve themselves. Yma, myself, two round-head dudes and one long-head chick were all getting ready to sleep. The best spot was under the wagon, so at least we wouldn’t get rained on if a storm started. I did not trust the round-heads, though, because I’d seen them sleeping and then one would roll on top of another and then the humping shenanigans would start up.

Yma and I went to sleep under the handcart. It covered most of us, except our legs were sticking out and it would have been pretty bad if the cart got loose and it wheeled over us. For that reason, we made sure we wedged a couple of good-size rocks under the wheels.

Yma threw up before she crawled under the wagon with me. She smelled something fierce but I felt for her and I let her nuzzle up next to me. I guess I probably stank pretty bad myself by then. This whole thing about Yma being a man still hadn’t really sunk into my head. I was just trying to figure out how to survive when it seemed so much **was** stacked against us.

And then, I started dreaming...

I was standing in a nice, pleasant meadow full of high and vibrant spring grass, and holding a brown pizza box with no logo on it. Man, the pizza box was warm underneath, telling me the pie hidden inside was still hot. I couldn’t wait to sink my teeth into the first slice, but I didn’t want to do it out in the open. I was looking around a lot, as if somebody was going to sneak up on me and steal it out of my hands.

I scanned past a meadow, spotting a grouping of medium-sized trees with fall colors on their leaves. They looked really beautiful, actually, with their oranges, reds and yellows. A ton of brown and orange leaves were lying on the ground, as if the trees had just shed their summer coats. That looked like a good, safe place to eat a pizza, so I walked over and took a seat with my back against a thick gray truck with a lot of knots on it.

I looked to the left, I looked to the right, and only then was I comfortable enough to open the box. For the next few moments, I breathed in the aroma of freshly baked pizza. My mouth watered as I pulled the first slice out, watching the melted cheese string away from the rest of the

pie. It was heaven, I'm not kidding, when I bit into **it**, tasting that slightly oily slice of pepperoni, and the cheese, and the soft, golden-brown crust. Sometimes I don't eat the crusts, but since I hadn't had a pizza in so long, this time **the crusts were** definitely not going to waste.

Somebody was watching me. I looked to one side and saw nothing. When I looked to my left and up, I saw Demi-Urgos peering around the trunk I was leaning against.

"What have you there?" The Reckless God stepped out from behind the tree.

"Nothing." I said. "I swear it's nothing!"

He'd changed his look. I remember him being golden and bearded, wearing kind of like a Roman toga. He still had the golden skin, but he was clean-shaven now, and he wore loose shorts that went down to the knee, leaving him bare above the waist.

"Give it to me." He demanded.

"No! Get your own!"

"Give it to me!"

"This is my pizza!" I held the box away from him because he was already reaching for it.

Let me tell you why I hate deities that have extraordinary powers. Demi-Urgos vanished from my left side, and he reappeared on my right side, where I had the pizza box hanging out in the air. Because he was such a jerk, and because I was looking the other way, he snatched the box out of my hands.

"Hey, don't be a dick!" I got up, and I was ready to rock and roll with him.

So what does the Reckless God do, but he vanishes again and the next time I see him he's halfway across the meadow. How much do you want to make a bet that I was pissed off? From where I stood, I watched Demi-Urgos open up my pizza box, *my pizza box*, and he started sniffing at it and staring at my pizza! When he pulled a slice out and bit into it, that's when I lost my cool. I started running at him, already planning on getting the god into a chokehold until he returned to me what was rightfully mine.

The Reckless God just stood there, munching down on my pizza and watching me run at him. That made me doubly mad. Before I choked him out, I was going to make a running jump and drop-kick him in the chest. I was fuming. I was livid. I was Level 9000 enraged, man!

So what do you think Demi-Urgos does? He opens up a giant chasm between me and him, and I'm focused on him so I don't even see it, and then I'm flying through the air until I **lose** my velocity. I start falling into the black void, too angry to scream, thinking of goddamned people-plants and having to chew my way out of another one...

I probably died in that last dream. The next thing I remember is another dream, but I'm not in this one. I'm like floating in the air, like a drone-copter-thing would, staring down at this little village in the woods. Yma was floating nearby, looking like a ghost, probably the way I looked in her eyes.

"Yma?" I called out, but she didn't hear me. She was too focused on the village, not paying attention. I tried again. "Yma!"

This time, she did turn. "Night Man! Where are we?"

"I don't know. We're just floating here. Are you okay?"

"I am sorry. I am sorry that I hid my secret and I coerced you into believing I was always a woman. I should have told you the truth from the beginning."

"I don't care about that." I said. "Can you reach out for me? I don't want to float away from you if the wind starts blowing."

"What if the Reckless God changes me back into a man? **What will we do then?**"

“We’ll probably have to stop humping each other.”

She started laughing as if that was the funniest thing she’d ever heard. I was so used to Yma as a woman that I couldn’t really imagine her as anything else. She did reach out her arm. We floated toward each other as if we were magnetized, until I had her and put my arms around her.

I looked down at the village, taking in its strangeness for the first time. I saw half a dozen huts clustered together, but there were other dwellings nearby: in the roots of the giant trees and up in the biggest branches. “Where do you think we are?”

“The place looks familiar.”

As we watched, people began to appear out of nowhere. They were little men and women, their skin a sunburned red color. The people had large heads, thick bodies and short limbs. They were topless with only thin strands of leather and patches of cloth covering their genitals, but not their butt-cracks.

Like the ghost of Christmas Past, we were drawn closer to the ground, where we saw the people close-up. They were pygmies, mean-looking with angry, beady black eyes, scruffy dark hair, pudgy noses and sharp teeth. They were always fighting. The men would chase each other with sticks and beat themselves bloody. The women pulled hair and bit each other. Even the young ones were fighting all the time, as soon as they learned how to slap or kick they were doing it. Things got really bad sometimes, when half the tribe turned against one sorry individual and stoned that person to death.

“Rough crowd.” I said. “Does this still look familiar?”

“Yes.” Yma replied.

One of the girls appeared over and over at different stages in her life. Neither Yma or I could understand their language, but the girl’s name was said often enough that we recognized it after a while. Her name was Rotva.

“Night Man.” Yma said. “I know I said I was a man before, but in some other lifetime that I can barely remember now, I was that girl. I was Rotva.”

As time moved forward, Rotva grew from a child to a young woman. The pygmy men were after her, trying to bed with her, but she was adamant that she would not be taken. Rotva carried a pointed rock to beat them with. In one fight, she broke a man’s eye socket and burst his eye. In another, she bit part of a man’s cheek off. I couldn’t believe Yma said she was once Rotva; that girl was one of the most violent of the entire bunch.

Some kind of uproar started up a short while later. The pygmies were running around agitated, when taller men, black men wearing red wraps **around their waist**, walked into their village. The men had curved knives and used them against the wild pygmies. The pygmies fought back with stones and clubs, but for every black raider they killed, the raiders would kill three or four of them.

Rotva was caught in a thrown net. A muscular black man beat her until she stopped fighting back. Along with a few others, she was carried along by an arm and leg and thrown into a cage with iron spikes on the inside. The pygmies didn’t understand at first that the spikes would hurt them, since they’d never seen cages before. In their frantic desperation to get out, they ended up wounding themselves, including Rotva. She bled from the hands and feet where she’d struck or kicked at the spikes. Over a dozen little people were thrown into the cage, too many for its size, resulting in more of them getting injured.

For several days, they weren’t fed as a wagon took the cage into a larger village full of blacks. A merchant came to look at the catch, holding his nose as he caught a whiff of their stench. Regardless, he paid for the lot and the cage went from one wagon to another. Black men,

slaves of the merchant, took the famished, exhausted pygmies out and washed them, putting strange clothes on them to make them look ridiculous.

One man thought to rape a pygmy woman, but she was much too small for him and she suffered grievous wounds. She died later that same night. When the merchant discovered the dead pygmy, he had her taken out of the cage, and the slave thrown into it. With an enemy in their midst, the pygmies came to life and bit the black man to pieces. The other slaves were terrified as they watched the pygmies eat their fellow, but not the merchant. His greedy eyes lit up and he spoke to the others with great excitement.

Rotva was sold to a young black man, a nobleman of some sort, judging from his regal purple robe with gold edging. The man waved his arms to give orders, saying nothing as if words were not to be wasted on slaves. The workers carried a smaller cage with Rotva in it to the nobleman's household, a whitewashed building with a narrow front but a wide length. The nobleman clapped his hands to signal **for** his workers to carry the cage inside. Many people from the wealthy family came to witness the oddity of little Rotva.

Her cage wasn't secured properly one night, and with her teeth, Rotva bit through the remaining binds. The next day, the nobleman's father entered the room where the pygmy was kept, arriving with two other men. The men ogled Rotva, who sat there in calculating silence. When the father leaned too close to the cage door, the wild pygmy kicked it open and leapt at him. She managed to sink her claws into the man's robe, and her teeth into his neck. Rotva ripped the man's throat open. Nothing could be done to save him.

For her grisly act of violence, Rotva was boiled alive in a large jar of oil.

It was a very long dream. When I woke up, it was nighttime and the Twins were calling for us to get ready to move on. Yma lay next to me, awake but not speaking at first.

"I was Rotva." She said, once **we** started crawling out from under the cart. "When I was in the pygmy village, I would always tell the men that I was a man like there were. Even then, I knew the truth. I knew they would kill me if I attacked the rich man. That's why I did it. I killed him and they killed me, and that's what I wanted."

I helped Yma get to her feet. She cried as we started walking, but the rain began coming down hard enough that **after a couple of minutes** I couldn't see her tears anymore.

(Stopped at 11:05 PM. Tonight's Word Count: 2362 + 50292 = 52,654.)

(August 8, 2020, 9:10 PM. I had a new race of people I thought up yesterday, but I also wanted to see the races the online generators could create. I did not like the generator results, and so the tree-people I'm about to introduce came about entirely from my twisted head.)

Very early the next morning, my feet made sure the journey didn't get any easier. I had to lean to one side so I could walk on the edge of my foot that was in the worst shape, and then the walking stick dug into my armpit so much it left a bruise. Yma had it worse, I think, because she was throwing up every couple of hours, even if she had nothing in her stomach and was only retching up air and spit. Everybody in our bunch was sick, actually, except for the Twins and Buddy. I don't know if it was something in the air or what, but we were looking like a pretty sorry marching column.

You would think that when we spotted the village, our spirits would have lifted and things would have gotten better, but nope, not on this world. This world should have had the motto of

‘wherever you just left is better than where you’re at.’ We were on a hillside slope a couple of hundred feet higher than the forested valley we were coming into. From that angle, saw the tall mountains on either side, the great, proud conifers and the wide, steady river culminating from over a dozen smaller streams. What we could not see was the village, because the Black Affliction was coursing around it like a slow tornado. We all knew what that meant. A siege of demons was plaguing that place.

Opul and Lupo stared at the malevolence, hating it because they’d been putting so much hope into becoming successful traders. Sucks for them.

As for me, what can I say? Shit happens, right? Shit just happens to occur with tenfold ferocity on whatever world this was. Once you see the pattern, the terror loses some of its zing, you know? “I say it’s time for a rest break. Anybody got playing pebbles?”

I know, playing pebbles is a crappy game. Basically, you toss the pebbles on the ground, and whoever gets more marked sides than unmarked sides wins. The problem is that we didn’t have anything to bet with so the outcome was largely pointless.

“This village is in worse Affliction than the last.” Opul grumbled.

“Here’s an idea.” I piped up, because I had to rub it in. “Let’s not go there!”

Opul looked at me as if I was going to be his lunch.

One of the girls screamed and suddenly everybody was running around to one side of the wagon. Some of the round-heads were crowding behind the two women, while others were ready to bolt and leave our entire caravan behind. Not a single person thought to grab a weapon except for me, but that’s only because I was already using my walking stick.

From where the Twins and I stood, we could not see what put a scare into the crowd, so we moved around Buddy and the wagon for a better look. Yma was there, watching the trees.

I didn’t see them at first, because they blended in so well **and dawn was fast approaching**. They were a new kind of people I hadn’t seen before, tall enough that the tops of our heads reached only to their shoulders. Their flesh was gray-brown, the color of the tree trunks, and their limbs were straight and thin as if their joints were smaller or less flexible than humans. Whoever these people were, they had leafy hair, with real leaves on it, and dark-colored eyes. Their mouths were small lines etched onto their faces as an afterthought, allowing for little in the way of expression.

I counted a few hiding among the trees. Two of them stepped forward. One stopped, while the second kept coming, standing at a halfway point between the trees and the road we were on, about forty feet away.

“You can decipher languages, Night Man.” Opul decided. “Go talk to them. See what they want.”

I did not know the Birayd spoke in a different language that nobody could understand, and that the Twins and Yma had trouble speaking with the long-head villagers sometimes. Lucky me and my magic-enhanced polyglot skills. You didn’t think I knew what a polyglot was, did you?

“Are you afraid?” Yma asked.

“No.” I shrugged. “I’ll go talk to them. I just didn’t want to walk on my bad feet for a while. I’m sure the Twins will come along in case we start talking about valuables.”

Opul and Lupo glanced at each other. Through some unknown means, they came to a mutual decision and went into the wagon to grab a couple of clubs that were once chair legs.

“We will stand two strides at your back.” Opul said, and that was good enough for me.

That didn’t work out so well. My sight had been getting progressively worse the closer it got to **sunrise**. **The sun’s arrival** was only minutes away and things were already getting blurry.

I told the Twins because they were so self-centered they had to be reminded of my blindness. Lupo was selected to hold my arm as I went to introduce myself. I sure hoped that whoever these tree-people were, they were nice to blind men.

“Close enough.” Lupo hissed at me. “They are two lengths from us now.”

Don’t ask me how long a length was, because I’d asked three round-heads so far and I always got a different answer. I raised my hand and said, “I come in peace.”

The voice that replied was thick and rough. “You are a new people.”

“Yes.” I replied. “We have square-heads and round-heads and long-heads. About the only thing we don’t have is triangle-heads.”

“We know the fair skins, but we don’t know your kind.”

“We were created by the Reckless God and then cast out when we angered him.”

“We hear your mouth. It is the same with us. We are Yemini.”

I heard pride in the man’s voice. I hoped they weren’t too proud in case I made a mistake, so I decided to cut down on my humor. “They call me Night Man. My partners here are Mirror Twins Opul and Lupo, and my wife there is Yma.”

“We have no separate names. We are simply Yemini as one. We have also suffered at the whims of the Reckless God.”

I translated to the Twins.

“Haven’t we all?” Opul joked. “Night Man, ask him about the village.”

I was curious about that myself.

“The Affliction has devastated the folk of the village.” The Yemini answered. “The dark ones swirl to frighten. When they cause terror, they enter the terrorized and cause them to inflict harm upon others. We came to trade, but what we saw was butchery and slaughter. The fair-skins kill each other for no reason. When they saw the Yemini approach, they sent their blame to us for their children that have gone missing. They have chased us away from the village edge. We must wait for sanity to return to the villagers. We are in dire need of food.”

Once I related the words, Opul said, “Ask them what they eat.”

(Stopped at 11 PM. I almost screwed up and had Night Man seeing during the day, so I went back and made a couple of adjustments to keep him in character. Tonight was a little tougher because of the transition I’m trying to make, but hopefully I can smooth that out by the next time. Tonight’s Word Count: 1183 + 52654 = 53,837.)

(August 9, 2020, 8:00 PM - Check the notes section for future plot advancements. I’ll read yesterday’s update, take a ten, come back and start writing.)

If I could have named this world, I would have called it Hard Luck. The Yemini had only arrived recently, not even two full months ago. They were vegetarians and fish eaters, used to temperate climates and struggling greatly to feed themselves in this harsher environment.

“Have you food for trade?” The tree-man pleaded with us.

We did, of course. We had a third of the wagon hard-packed with hardy veggies and the tough soil they grew. If I was in charge, I would have given the Yemini half our load, but I guess that’s why guys like me don’t ever amass a whole lot of wealth. Know what I mean?

“Ask what they bring to trade.” Opul urged.

“Precious stones.” The Yemini said. “We only have a few.”

The Twins started getting excited. I could see it in their faces.

“Show us!” Opul said. “Tell them to show us!”

The Twins were pretty suck-ass when it came to describing what was happening around me. It fell on Yma to come closer and give me the rundown.

“The first Yemini is motioning for the second who stayed further back. These people walk very slowly. It will take the second a fifty-count to reach us.”

Eventually, this second Yemini loomed over me, but I had no idea how close because I couldn't see him, or her. Who knows what sex they were?

“Yes, yes!” Opul was heard ejaculating. “We will trade! Tell them we will trade!”

“Yma,” I asked. “What are they showing us?”

“Small wafers. Some have the glint of gold, others silver. A few have a rainbow glimmer when tilted into the sunlight.”

That sounded pretty strange to me. “Where do you get these things?”

“In the hills there is a place long abandoned by men. There are broken traces of their former habitats. The wafers are found in random places, among other fragments. It is a dangerous place for my people. We have lost many while attempting to claim the wafers.”

“What kind of danger?”

“Manifold.”

“Uh, manifold? That means a lot, right? Or are we talking about hot rods and intakes? Wait, forget about that last part. You guys might not get my special brand of humor, because my wife sure doesn't. Can you be more specific about what kind of dangers?”

“The buzzing flurries, the stinging bats, the forgetfulness demon...”

“You're right.” I nodded. “They are manifold. Let's set that aside for now. I want to make sure I have this straight. Your people go out to these ruins. There are many dangers there, but you go there anyway because you need something with trade value.”

“You speak with veracity.”

“Yeah, okay. Your people find these valuable items, these wafers. You bring the wafers here to the village, and you trade for what, food?”

“Vegetables, smoked fish, at times oil for our flesh. The conditions here dry us out very quickly. The villagers give us only meager portions, not enough for us to survive. For this reason, we must return to the abandoned places often. Many of us have died.”

I could take this Yemini at his, or her, word, or I could assume I was being lied to. I didn't know enough about them to judge whether they were honest or not. I knew what the Twins would say if I asked. “We might be able to trade with you. Let me talk to my partners for a couple of minutes.”

Yma took me by the arm and led me away. The Twins followed closely, eager to hear my translation and opinion. Once they had that, I said, “How should we deal with the Yemini?”

“If the villagers bilked them, we should bilk them as well.” Lupo decided.

Bilk; there was another word I don't think I'd heard before.

“The wafers are very valuable.” Opul added. “How much in gold do you suppose the villagers had before they left us? How much in silver?”

“I don't think they had any.” Yma answered.

“I hear your mouth.” Opul agreed with her. “My brother and I kept our ears perked for any mention of valuables, but no mention ever came to us.”

I don't think I'd ever met anyone as greedy as the Mirror Twins. “All right, say you trade food for their... I think those wafers are coins. You make the trade, and you have money. What are you going to do with that money?”

“Buy meat, unless you would give up a limb to us.”

I know I can be a smartass, but sometimes I just don't have anything to say, so I change the subject and talk about something else. “And where do you plan on buying this meat?”

“You are an imbecile, Night Man. The village is only down the hill.”

“You mean the village that has a demon tornado around it? The one where all the people are killing each other right now?”

I could imagine Opul scratching his head, because as smart as he liked to think he was, he didn't plan that far ahead.

“I must speak with my brother.” The Twin decided. “Lupo, come and talk.”

After a couple of minutes, Yma said, “They have gone ten strides from us.”

“Good.” I replied. “How are you doing, Yma? You haven't been too talkative recently.”

“Remembering Rotva has brought up old pain I would do better without. I wonder why the Reckless God showed that lifetime to me. I am sure I have lived other lives on this world, but I have no idea how many. Have I been circulating here for hundreds of years or longer?”

That same question might have applied to me. After the handful of incarnations I'd already gone through in the people-plants, it was entirely possible that I had lived previous lives but could no longer remember them. “Do you believe the Yemini?”

“No, not completely. Perhaps they are suffering for food, but they are traders. There could be a large pile of precious wafers in the hills, or coin as you call them, but we would never know it because we have only their word as proof.”

“That's right.” I realized. “Do me a favor and call the Twins back. I have an idea.”

The Twins were eager to hear me out.

“What if we go into the hills and see the ruins for ourselves?” I suggested. “We'll collect any valuables we find, and then we'll come back here with a lot more stuff to trade. If the village still has the Affliction around it, and I don't really want to walk on my bruised feet, but maybe we can find out where the next village is and go there.”

“What if the Affliction vanishes in one hour, or one day?” Opul asked.

“We can leave someone behind to watch the village. They can stay here, up the hill where it's safe. The rest of us can travel into the hills on foot, because I don't think we want to push that heavy ass cart up there.”

The Twins talked it over with each other first, before they started up a second conversation with Yma and I. When I approached the Yemini about it, they said they had no problem taking us up there, reminding me of the danger several times.

The Twins did a couple of things that were out of character. They filled up a basket with potatoes and onions, still in the growing stages and packed with soil, so the Yemini would be able to grow at least a couple of veggies on their own. They traded the basket for the wafer coins and promised more food if additional valuables were found.

The next thing the Twins did was go into the piles of clothing they'd collected in the wagon. From that, they gave me a couple of garments to replace whatever I had worn out the most, like the wrap I wore around my waist. I also got a new pair of sock shoes, but I kept my winter-suit because that was the warmest thing I had.

We spent about an hour moving the wagon and cart closer to the river, and then a new issue started up. The Twins could not decide who was the most useless: their four round-head kin or the two long-headed women. In the end, they left five people with the wagons, including Yma who was in charge. The Twins, two of their kin and myself were going treasure hunting.

You might be asking yourself why I had the idea to take the Twins into the hills, and put the bunch of us in danger. The reason was, and don't tell them I said this, but I didn't like them very much. If the Yemini were losing kinsmen left and right at those scary ruins, it sounded like a good place to get rid of the Twins. Maybe I could be like the Reckless God and push them into a chasm. The Twins didn't suspect a thing. They were already musing over what kinds of treasure we were going to find.

With enough supplies to last us about two days, we started up the hill, following the Yemini at first, but outdistancing those slowpokes soon after they told us which way to go.

(Stopped at 11 PM. I don't think I mentioned this before. The idea for Night Man being blind came from the trilogy of novels I'm reading, titled *The Chronicles Of Thomas Covenant*, written by Stephen Donaldson. In the second book, the author introduces us to Warmark Troy, a man from our modern Earth who ends up in this fantasy realm, alongside Thomas Covenant who is a leper. The author thought to give Troy a major handicap as well. He can see during the day, and he goes blind during the night. Donaldson went as far as giving both Earthmen major roles in commanding armies and countering the forces of evil, which I still find unrealistic, but the story does have its merits regardless.

This idea of partial blindness intrigued me. While I do give my characters minor faults at times, I've never given them such major disadvantages. Night Man actually has multiple issues holding him back: he's blind during the day, he's a younger man in an old, frail body, and he constantly suffers from the Fog Of Memory. At this point in the story, I am thinking of keeping him blind at least through the end of this book, with him regaining his sight in a sequel.

Tonight's Word Count is  $1548 + 53837 = 55,385$ .)

Opul, Lupo, Agut, Krozor

#####

Notes:

Dehmi-Urgos, description: *He's easily twice as tall as I am, a small giant if that's even possible. His skin is colored gold, and he has a dark brown hair and beard. The giant wears a tunic in bright white, held at the waist by a length of rope, and leather thong sandals at his feet.*

People are colored BOY: Blue, Orange, Yellow

The Parthenon.

The following are story suggestions from *20 Encounters In The Ruins Of The Elder Beings*, prepared by Gregorious 21778. You can acquire this PDF article free from Drive Thru RPG.

04# *The Buzzing of Insects* - *As strange as it seems, the characters begin to hear the faint buzz of an insect in flight. Soon thereafter they will notice tiny, pale moth-like creatures that dance around them, seemingly attracted by their light source. After about a turn, a small cloud of those will have gathered and follow them where-ever they go. The next encounter is going to be 06# Albino Cave Bats.*

*06# Albino Cave Bats - 1d3 Albino Cave Bats have been attracted by the light source of the characters and the noise they make. They will flutter around them and get pretty close, but unless the characters strike at them they will not attack but fly away after a while.*

*02# A Moaning Breeze - A gust of air moves through the subterranean place and blows into the faces of the PC. It is accompanied by a low, moaning noise. After about a minute the phenomena repeats itself, just like the slow breath of a chthonian titan. In truth, it is just a subterranean air movement, but the very next turn there is 1 out of 6 chance that a torch a character wears is blown out (4 out of 6 in case of a candle, a lantern is not effected). The phenomena is just that: a natural (but perhaps scary) underground air current.*

The following detail is from 20 Further Details For Random Monster Encounters In The Wilderness by Gregorius 21779. You can acquire this PDF article free from Drive Thru RPG.

*The encountered monster... (d20): 16# ...is very, very hungry: treat a Friendly reaction as Indifferent, all others as Hostile and increase its Morale by 1.*

A general spirit type, from the article 20 Bookplate Spirits from Gregorius 21778. You can acquire this PDF article free from Drive Thru RPG.

*03# Ward of the Fleeting Memory [Level 3] - The book is guarded by a spirit that clouds the minds of those that try to read it. A character that tries to must pass a Saving Throw vs. Spells or will forget what just has been read in mere moments.*

And once the monster is defeated, our heroes should be able to acquire some treasure. Here are three suggestions from the article Treasure Table D100. No author name is listed, but I will try to look it up tomorrow. You can acquire this PDF article free from Drive Thru RPG.

- 14. Sapphire (5 gp)*
- 28. Ancient tea pot, china (1 sp - 2 gp)*
- 62. Book genealogy of a great family (10 gp)*

Independent thought.

“You have a pretty mouth for a man.”

Coffin Dance meme

1000 Islands, Canada

Evil twin brother.

Deity as pet.

Demon apocalypse / people hiding underground - (came from an RPG video I watched, will add source later!) image of fort or castle surrounded by demons, Black Affliction present, demons target settlements based on potency of Affliction

Only begotten son.

#####

Idea Generators Used So Far:

Biraid (adjusted to Birayd) - the name of the mountain tribe that finds the Night Man in the snow, from Alien Species Names by Fantasy Name Generators

Yemin (adjusted to Yemini) - name of the tree-people near the village, from Alien Species Names by Fantasy Name Generators

The average member of this race has a delicate build and is quite short. They have skin covered in radiating yellow-to-green scales. They have cat-like ears and small, gold eyes. They wear highly technological suits and a lot of jewelry. They are well-adapted to an aquatic environment. They tend to be intellectual and many of them have expressed interest in learning about other peoples' cuisine. - a loose description of the Birayd, from the Fantasy & Sci-Fi Race Generator from Springhole Character Generators

Shika (healer or shaman) and Norio (changed to Nori) - members of the Birayd tribe, from Cat People / Nekojin Names by Fantasy Name Generators

Methild (human healer), Wirenth (chief), Ruehnar (guard) - Random Name Generator: Elf Names by Fantasy Name Generators

Yma - Greek Names by Seventh Sanctum

Opul and Lupo (Mirror Twins) - Mirrored Twin Names by Fantasy Name Generator

Agut, Krodozor - young men, Mirror Twin kinfolk

Ogre Names by Fantasy Name Generators (to be used as kinfolk to the Mirror Twins, if they're crossed out, they've been used)

~~Agut~~ Bokog Ogork Zeruk Zag Emezrog ~~Krodozor~~ Zierek Muworuk Zizegark

Rotva (pygmy girl) - this name came from Seventh Sanctum's Dark Elf Names Generator

Witch's Oastrunt - This sprawling plant has tiny star-shaped leaves. It reproduces via a cluster of crimson four-petaled flowers. (This is used to help Night Man's magical maladies) - 2 different generators, Plant, Herb And Flower Name Generator and Random Plant Generator, both from Springhole Role-Playing Randomators

Avea Leaf - This low-growing plant has moderate-sized pointed round leaves. It reproduces via numerous huge bright yellow catkins. (This will be used to help with Night Man's belly demon) - same as Witch's Oastrunt

Snock Root - This bush has large leaves shaped like spearheads. It reproduces via numerous tiny dark orange catkins. (This is what the village addicts smoke in their pipe.) - same as Witch's Oastrunt

#####

August 9, 2020 - Step 1: Okay, it's 4 PM and I have some extra time available. I am going to sort the following story ideas into short sentences, number them and put them into a list.

This is a story concept by Geek Gamers, from a Lovecraftian-style adventure she put together. You can find my review of her video *Solo Lovecraftian RPGing* on my Chaos Rift RPG Creation Log. I might use this story idea to inspire the Night Man!

*We have a socialite trying to convince a university scholar to investigate some strange things that are going on. This might lead them to discover underground passages at the university. They are going to fight skeletons down there. Also, in a second act, the two head to the docks where they meet a tough guy who may lead them to an even more powerful skeleton.*

Another story concept by Geek Gamers, from her video Ironsworn Gameplay:

*A white knight searches for his father, meeting up with a pilgrim during his quest. Together, they learn about a ranger girl not that far away who might help them, but first, she must be saved from an unknown danger.*

Story concept by Solo RPG Guy:

*The village name is Atherton. It was built during a Blood Mist event 150 years ago. A confused sorcerer rules it. The village has a problem with bandits. Cattle wander aimlessly. It is known for its wonderful breads and pastries. Notable items in the village include a windmill, an inn (The Grumpy Wild Boar), a trading post (in the center of town), a temple to the Raven God and a forester. The village features three prominent families and a smith. A nearby mine produces silver. The bandits are after both cattle and silver. Sub-plots include a scared king who commits suicide, an ancient artifact and a death knight. The party of adventures gets together to battle the bandits first, with several story arcs available after that.*

From the Fudge Rulebook:

*a low Telepathy Power lets you send your thoughts to another, for example, but greater Power lets you read minds, send painful waves of energy, sense emotions, and possibly even control others*

From a video by Artichoke Dip:

*The dwarf king's grandson has gone missing in a far off land. To find him, the king enlists three of his best dwarves. They travel to a town and enter an inn. The locals aren't tolerant of them. The tender tell them he has important info he can give them later. The dwarves visit shop and head off to find a shrine. When they arrive, they explore ruins and an ancient battlefield.*

*Upon returning to the inn, the tender tells them about orcs coming down from the mountains to raid the village and slaughter the townsfolk. The dwarves question whether or not they should help, angering the keep. In the end, the dwarves refuse and continue on their way. The dwarves then return to the shop, where the clerk sends them off toward another ruined town, this time after a battle with barbarians. The folk melted their gold down and molded it into a giant bell, which they painted over to disguise. The clerk claims the bell is still there, but guarded by powerful enemies. For the last forty-five minutes of the game, the dwarves attempt to breach a fort full of orcs, and they suffer greatly because of it.*

From another video by Geek Games:

*We start with an inter-dimensional portal hidden inside a dungeon. Her heroes will be fleeing from a tyrant's city that features coliseums, circuses and servant quarters. An arrival point for the heroes will be called the Hall Of Tapestries. The hall includes a silver throne dedicated to a friendly air elemental. From these ideas, GG goes on to construct a background story for her game.*

*GG's party includes an elf thief, a dwarf priest with eight spells, a human wizard, a human scholar with a cat familiar and a human fighter. The heroes pay a visit to the air elemental, who sends them into a dungeon with narrow corridors. The objective is to battle bad guys and find an artifact. After three rounds of combat, the heroes discover a spinning wheel that can turn straw into gold.*

Step 2: Condensing the ideas into usable plot devices.

*We have a socialite trying to convince a university scholar to investigate some strange things that are going on. This might lead them to discover underground passages at the university. They are going to fight skeletons down there. Also, in a second act, the two head to the docks where they meet a tough guy who may lead them to an even more powerful skeleton.*

1. The party acquires a new member.
2. The party investigates underground passages at a place of learning.
3. The party encounters opposition.
4. The party visits the docks, where an NPC leads them to a more powerful enemy.

*A white knight searches for his father, meeting up with a pilgrim during his quest. Together, they learn about a ranger girl not that far away who might help them, but first, she must be saved from an unknown danger.*

5. A PC searches for a loved one, meeting a new character.
6. The party seeks out a new member, but first must save him / her.

*The village name is Atherton. It was built during a Blood Mist event 150 years ago. A confused sorcerer rules it. The village has a problem with bandits. Cattle wander aimlessly. It is known for its wonderful breads and pastries. Notable items in the village include a windmill, an inn (The Grumpy Wild Boar), a trading post (in the center of town), a temple to the Raven God and a forester. The village features three prominent families and a smith. A nearby mine produces silver. The bandits are after both cattle and silver. Sub-plots include a scared king who commits suicide, an ancient artifact and a death knight. The party of adventures gets together to battle the bandits first, with several story arcs available after that.*

7. A problematic mage rules a village.
8. Bandits become a problem.
9. Livestock are bountiful.
10. The local bread and pastries are delicious.
11. The windmill is a local landmark.
12. The inn is a local landmark.
13. The trading post is a local landmark.
14. The temple is a local landmark.
15. A forester has knowledge of the forest and takes care of trees.
16. Three prominent families manage the local village.
17. A smith is a prominent villager.
18. A mine produced precious metals, possibly silver.
19. Bandits raid this place frequently.
20. A scared ruler commits suicide.
21. An ancient artifact is hidden away.
22. A Death Knight protects something.

*a low Telepathy Power lets you send your thoughts to another, for example, but greater Power lets you read minds, send painful waves of energy, sense emotions, and possibly even control others*

23. A mentalist or sorcerer has strong psychic powers over others.

*The dwarf king's grandson has gone missing in a far off land. To find him, the king enlists three of his best dwarves. They travel to a town and enter an inn. The locals aren't tolerant of them. The tender tell them he has important info he can give them later. The dwarves visit shop and head off to find a shrine. When they arrive, they explore ruins and an ancient battlefield.*

*Upon returning to the inn, the tender tells them about orcs coming down from the mountains to raid the village and slaughter the townsfolk. The dwarves question whether or not they should help, angering the keep. In the end, the dwarves refuse and continue on their way. The dwarves then return to the shop, where the clerk sends them off toward another ruined town, this time after a battle with barbarians. The folk melted their gold down and molded it into a giant bell, which they painted over to disguise. The clerk claims the bell is still there, but guarded by powerful enemies. For the last forty-five minutes of the game, the dwarves attempt to breach a fort full of orcs, and they suffer greatly because of it.*

24. An important person goes missing.
25. The party is hired for a quest.
26. The local inn has suspicious patrons.
27. The party is not given important information right away.
28. The shop is a local landmark.
29. The party explores a shrine or temple.
30. The party discovers an ancient battle field.
31. Raiders from the mountains frequently attack the village.
32. The party refuses a task.
33. An NPC sends the party to a ruined village.
34. A large artifact could be very valuable.
35. Powerful forces guard an artifact.
36. The party attempts an ill-fated attack on a fort.

*We start with an inter-dimensional portal hidden inside a dungeon. Her heroes will be fleeing from a tyrant's city that features coliseums, circuses and servant quarters. An arrival point for the heroes will be called the Hall Of Tapestries. The hall includes a silver throne dedicated to a friendly air elemental. From these ideas, GG goes on to construct a background story for her game.*

*GG's party includes an elf thief, a dwarf priest with eight spells, a human wizard, a human scholar with a cat familiar and a human fighter. The heroes pay a visit to the air elemental, who sends them into a dungeon with narrow corridors. The objective is to battle bad guys and find an artifact. After three rounds of combat, the heroes discover a spinning wheel that can turn straw into gold.*

37. A portal is hidden inside a dungeon.
38. The party flees from an important city.
39. The party arrives at a great hall.
40. A throne is occupied by an elemental being.
41. An elemental being sends the party into a dungeon.
42. The party must fight enemies while exploring for an artifact.
43. A valuable artifact is discovered.

Step 3: I'm putting the plot devices in numerical order here.

1. The party acquires a new member.
2. The party investigates underground passages at a place of learning.
3. The party encounters opposition.
4. The party visits the docks, where an NPC leads them to a more powerful enemy.
5. A PC searches for a loved one, meeting a new character.
6. The party seeks out a new member, but first must save him / her.
7. A problematic mage rules a village.
8. Bandits become a problem.
9. Livestock are bountiful.
10. The local bread and pastries are delicious.
11. The windmill is a local landmark.

12. The inn is a local landmark.
13. The trading post is a local landmark.
14. The temple is a local landmark.
15. A forester has knowledge of the forest and takes care of trees.
16. Three prominent families manage the local village.
17. A smith is a prominent villager.
18. A mine produced precious metals, possibly silver.
19. Bandits raid this place frequently.
20. A scared ruler commits suicide.
21. An ancient artifact is hidden away.
22. A Death Knight protects something.
23. A mentalist or sorcerer has strong psychic powers over others.
24. An important person goes missing.
25. The party is hired for a quest.
26. The local inn has suspicious patrons.
27. The party is not given important information right away.
28. The shop is a local landmark.
29. The party explores a shrine or temple.
30. The party discovers an ancient battle field.
31. Raiders from the mountains frequently attack the village.
32. The party refuses a task.
33. An NPC sends the party to a ruined village.
34. A large artifact could be very valuable.
35. Powerful forces guard an artifact.
36. The party attempts an ill-fated attack on a fort.
37. A portal is hidden inside a dungeon.
38. The party flees from an important city.
39. The party arrives at a great hall.
40. A throne is occupied by an elemental being.
41. An elemental being sends the party into a dungeon.
42. The party must fight enemies while exploring for an artifact.
43. A valuable artifact is discovered.

Step 4: I will reorganize the plot devices using a D20, in a day or two. Let's see, today is the 9th. I think I'll leave the story notes and Steps 1 through 3 up for the next seven days, in the case anyone would like to copy them and adapt them to a story the way I am. After that, I will discard them and leave the plot devices as the basis for the next events in the second half of this book.

#####

The following are my notes from the reading of *AlterWorld: Play To Live Book 1*. This is one of my primary inspirations for this e-book.

*Notes from reading Alterworld Play To Live 1:*

*spiral game concept: when enough barrier is cleared, they reveal a dungeon (or similar*

enclosed space) where they are immediately besieged by monsters, it will be a huge chore to defeat the creatures for these new players

dying old people, handicapped and other short term types upload their consciousness into a virtual reality game with the idea of living forever

**video game initiation where main has to kill an innocent in order to prove his allegiance to evil**

short termers in a perma-game could be called Lifers Squad or equivalent

video game animosity between a clan of actual military vets and a clan of ex-policemen

rival gamers start a world war in the VR environment, based on continents and language

**idea that new players in a VR game will look grotesque, obese, whatever, they can only improve their looks by leveling up, could this game have morals built in, so that a player leaves the game a better person than when entering it?**

concept of online community of dead people interacting with living peeps on the outside, to maintain graves, take care of loved ones, et.

necro deliberately leaves summoned zombie creature behind, it becomes aggro when unsupervised and will remain a threat until someone with a higher level kills it

a digital serial killer lures perma souls into a confined environment and kills them

prisoners are digitized to solve violence problems and alleviate crowded prisons

main char is told the dark guild is gone, could advance this so that main has to rebuild it, instead of dark ones, the guild could consist of truthers

as part of creating a guild, main has to destroy temples, this could be a way to reestablish spiritual order on ley lines

shell sings and eats fruit?

**VR chars can age, gain or lose weight, based on their expectations**

recipes can be patented and hacked?

VR furniture maker?

idea that permanent VR characters can plot to kill a real person

old players can rejuvenate, how does this correlate with the idea of designing a new char

*before entering the game?*

***to escape a dungeon, main is the only player to figure out he can kill another prisoner, causing that prisoner to respawn outside the dungeon***

#####

(official teaser for website)

### Can You Find The Night Man?

I've started writing a new story. This story takes place in the Chaos Rift Universe. It will have strong medieval fantasy elements and a lot of horror in it, enough to rate it at the HIGH controversy level. This will not be for the faint of heart, I assure you! I really do!

I'm hoping this story will be at least novella length (10,000 words) or a complete novel (100,000). I have some starter ideas I jotted down from a book I read recently. Also, while I've been researching how to create my new Role-Playing Game, I've come across a massive amount of idea generators online, and a lot of creator charts and idea lists in the RPG rulebooks I've been studying. I'm going to be using many these resources for my story as a writing exercise for myself, and also to show emerging dark fantasy writers how it can be done. The name of this story is Night Man.

Would you like to read along as I put this story together? There is a twist. The Night Man doesn't stay still for long. He tends to move around a lot, making him difficult to find. To read this story as it progresses, you'll have to go looking for the Night Man. He roams around from page to page on this website, never staying in one place for long. About the only place he won't go is in the Blog Section, because he's not into the political stuff like I am. If you see the Night Man's image, click on it for a PDF direct download. If you see the Night Man's image in the same place two days in a row, he's probably resting and hasn't been updated yet.

This story will be updated frequently, perhaps as often as every other day. It all depends on how much time I have every evening to prod Night Man along, not to mention adapting the results of generators and charts into the story. It is possible that NPCs from the story might be found on this site. Be careful of their counsel. They might be lead you to where you can find the Night Man, or they might be jealous of his good looks and send you in the wrong direction.

The hunt for the Night Man is about to begin. The Night Man has just arrived, so he is still woozy and disconcerted, and not sure at all about where he is. Click on him to get the first part of the story, before he gets away, because he isn't staying here for long!

#####

Project started on July 10, 2020.

Credits

Articles:

Videos:

At the same time I wrote this novel, I watched a good number of Youtube videos while preparing my article Chaos Rift Role-Playing Game Creation Log. If a video presented an RPG game with a story, I wrote the details in the article, before copy and pasting the details here and adapting and working them into this story. Once incorporated, I discarded the notes from here to remove some of the clutter. For a full list of the videos watched, you can request my article from the E-Zines / Articles page of my website at Raymond Towers Dot Com.

Websites: