

**-prologue-**

*echoing out*

*there are whispers*

*every chamber that*

*still*

*the beating heart,*

*bleeding*

*alive*

*with righteous indignation,*

*the silenced*

*do not*

*forget,*

*impressions left so deep cannot*

*be*

*unrooted,*

*these Men are*

*afraid.*

\* \* \*

*plink plink plink*

Emmanuel glanced upward, searching for the source of the slow-tempo drip echoing over his head. He was sitting at a bus stop.

A total of eighteen minutes had passed since he got to the stop.

The worst part wasn't the drip itself so much as it was the fact that he knew he could fix it. Really, he could do it in the blink of an eye - without even knowing where the drip originated from; he could just snap his fingers and the noise would stop... but he *wouldn't*.

Emmanuel had principles – principles he felt made him practically better than anything or anyone else on the planet. Practically.

“This seat taken?”

Emmanuel turned to his left.

An overweight businessman stood sweating in the sunlight outside of the small overhang the locals of San Solstice referred to generously as a ‘shelter’.

Considered a historical district in the city of Eleusia due to the defunct but mostly still intact structure of a nuclear power plant from the Old World at the centre of a sea of residential buildings, San Solstice was a district composed of several wind and solar farms which generated the majority of electricity in Eleusia; a sparse, desert-like countryside with grass the colour of an overcast sky sat peppered with a variety of makeshift homes, bound together in small, hamlet-sized towns – these villages were the remnants of a time before The Unity, abandoned and dilapidated homes retrofitted by ever-intuitive community members with solar panels they’d built themselves.

*Yes, thought Emmanuel, these are the people who know what it means to survive. To endure.*

Here, it seemed, the past had not been entirely forgotten – and this thought especially pleased Emmanuel.

He genuinely enjoyed spending time among the residents and workers of San Solstice – he considered them hard-working and down-to-earth people.

Now, he could tell the man standing before him – who had so rudely interrupted his thoughts to merely ask for a seat – was *not* from the San Solstice area whatsoever. A business suit of worsted wool was the man’s chosen attire.

*Sheep have been extinct for years. How much did that suit cost?*

It seemed odd to Emmanuel that any man of the sort would be wandering the working-class streets of San Solstice. He found it particularly odd that the man wasn’t wearing a mask to cover his mouth and nose either, like almost every other person going about their days

outside in the particulate-filled air. Even here in San Solstice the dust hadn't yet settled completely in the wake of The Unity.

The man patiently awaited Emmanuel's response but all the he received was a look of absolute incredulity.

"An odd choice," Emmanuel finally said. "Especially for *you*. And those cheap sunglasses certainly aren't doing you any favours. In fact, I didn't even realize they'd figured out how to make those again."

"That's because you've never given these mortals enough credit, if you ask me," the man barked. "And I'll have you know these lenses are fake. They may have remembered the design but what's it worth if the *purpose* is lost?"

He removed his sunglasses and tossed them to the bench beside where he intended to sit.

"Just like this New World the tadpoles have built for themselves," the man continued.

He lumbered over and sat right next to Emmanuel. From further away, the man seemed to have been walking fine but now he seemed to be having trouble moving.

"You've chosen to debase yourself *and* make a mockery of me all at once," said Emmanuel. "Centuries. For centuries, you have been meddling with me. Meddling with these humans."

There was a sudden romantic quality to the man's eyes.

"Meddling? Dear, if I have been 'meddling' then let's not get started on how *you* have seriously done some damage. Not just to these humans but to my heart."

"You are agape. The love you feel is for God Himself, reborn in me."

"Is there a God?" The man asked. "Was there ever? My memory gets so fuzzy sometimes."

There was an uncomfortable silence between the two men as they continued to lock eyes.

An energy was surging between them – energy starting to warp the air and the physical objects around them, turning the metal of the bus stop a darkening, unreflectively dull grayish hue. The ground underneath both men began to steam.

“I know what you are hiding from me,” Emmanuel whispered.

“Ah, well, I’m glad to see that, between the both of us, one of us still has an intact memory.”

“You believe I am delusional.”

If anyone else had been close enough, they would have been able to observe the tiny strands of electricity flickering off of the two men in various directions as if an actual power surge were about to take place.

“I can’t lie to you,” said the man.

“But you can lie-by-omission to me,” Emmanuel responded. “Neither of us were born yesterday.”

“No, we weren’t. I think ‘just after the existence of matter in the universe’ is pretty far from yesterday. Gee thanks, now I feel *old*.”

The man slumped over a little bit and put his hands in his pockets. He had a thoughtful look on his face.

“Do you ever remember what She looked like?” He asked.

“Who?”

“Our Mother.”

Emmanuel remained silent for a minute or two. He decided the he was done with the man’s *games*. He needed answers.

“Is one life worth more than the millions left? The millions we could save and, thus, save ourselves?”

“I don’t know. You tell me... ‘*God*’.”

“The time is not right for Her return and we are not finished here. How much blood are you going to let spill for this?”

*plink plink plink*

“What about Iris?” The man asked. “Hermes? What about *their* blood?”

“That man you’re possessing looks like he should’ve been on the east side of Paros right about now,” Emmanuel remarked, ignoring what the man had asked him. “He’s supposed to be on oxygen too, by the way.”

There was a sharpness to Emmanuel’s tone that the man seemed immediately put-off by.

A long scratch mark appeared along the left side of Emmanuel’s face.

A singular image hit Emmanuel with sudden clarity: a young girl with green, almost-glowing eyes, cowering in the darkness. He had to find her. He had to *destroy* her.

Then, the man raised his hand, and, with the snap of his fingers, the *plinking* sound stopped.

And there was no way Lucifer could ever understand, Emmanuel thought.

He glanced down at the man’s hand to discover he’d conjured a narcissus there, in colour yellow of a crocus.

“Why are you so particularly tiresome these days, Lucifer?” Emmanuel asked.

“Why didn’t you stop that?” Lucifer responded, referring to the drip.

“I didn’t need to.” Emmanuel shifted ever so slightly where he was sitting.

“You’re feeling guilty,” said Lucifer. “And, to top it off, you’re hallucinating.”

“It was the child. The Lamb.”

“I don’t know what you saw, Em. I shouldn’t have lashed out at you like that but it’s just hard to resist sometimes. It’s been eons since we last touched.”

“I’ve come to disband your acolytes, Lucifer. The Order of Mary seek to pervert the natural order of life and death – they will singlehandedly undo humanity. You’ve given them a figure to rally behind for this ‘Gaia Prophecy’ of yours.”

“*You* gave them someone to rally behind, Em. My role is merely that of the spurned lover who wants you to face the consequences of your actions. Surely, we’re past the point of saying ‘something is rotten in the state of Denmark.’”

Emmanuel chuckled quietly. He and Lucifer both had an affinity for Shakespeare.

He decided to ignore Lucifer’s comments and turned his attention to a little girl across the street, playing with a figure she’d made of sticks.

“The final sacrifice,” Emmanuel trailed off. “To ensure this world stands. The Lamb was never long for this world and this world needs saving.”

“But what’s so great about this place anyway?” Lucifer asked, through gasping breaths. “The tadpoles ran this polluted, factory-fest into the ground in less time than it took them to evolve into overly-privileged apes. But they’re beside the point.”

The yellow narcissus in Lucifer’s hand was now brown and wilted.

“You seem to believe that The Lamb should be allowed to live.”

Suddenly, the dead narcissus lit on-fire. It quickly burnt to a crisp in the palm of Lucifer's hand. Both Lucifer and Emmanuel watched as it fizzled away to ashes and dispersed into the atmosphere.

"Think about it," said Lucifer. "Dying together – you and I? Brought together by one of our own ch-"

Lucifer opened his mouth, revealing it was full of blood; he spewed a good amount of it before he could continue speaking.

"These things are not worth half the trouble you stir up with them in physical form," Lucifer continued. "I have to say."

Lucifer's vessel – an overweight businessman named Isaac Noah with a bad smoking habit and three coronaries already in the bag – was beginning to deteriorate before Emmanuel's eyes. What Lucifer had neglected to notice when he entered Mr. Noah's body that morning was an oxygen tank and mask located right next to the front door of his apartment. In his haste to get to the bus stop in time to confront Emmanuel, Lucifer ignored what was clearly a necessity for Mr. Noah's continued survival. Regardless, human bodies never seemed to take particularly well to possession; the relationship always eventually grows parasitic, as the demon must draw power from everything down to the marrow inside of human bones – once everything is harvested, the demon can move on to its next host body. Usually, there are signs that a demon has overstayed its welcome in a human host's body: namely, blood spewing from every orifice, flesh cycling through various hues, weakening limbs; these problems are compounded by a human host's pre-existing conditions.

Blood was running down Isaac's nose and his eyes were red and bloodshot.

Lucifer had overstayed his welcome.

"Why do you keep these tadpoles on and on about how happiness can only be found in things outside of themselves? All those 'hallelujahs' and then what?"

“I’m amused that you seem to have taken a sudden interest in the idea of ‘faith’. What would you know about it? About trying to inspire some *good* on this forsaken plane of existence? Sometimes, I think you forget we *both* lost in Eden.”

Isaac’s eyes glazed over but, to Emmanuel, it almost seemed as if the man (or Lucifer?) was about to cry.

*I’ve touched a nerve*, thought Emmanuel.

“If you think I forgive anything that happened there – in Eden,” said Lucifer, “then you haven’t been paying attention.”

The nine-thirty bus appeared at the hilt of the long boulevard; the Sun reflecting off of the slick surface of the road nearly blinded Emmanuel and Lucifer as they both realized the bus was nearing and took a peek.

Lucifer grabbed Emmanuel’s hand.

“I loved you. I *love* you. I’m sick of fighting like this – really, I am. And you need to stop fighting this.” Lucifer’s grip tightened. “Don’t you remember our adolescence? The years we grew together? Made love together? Consider this the final embrace. Call it a Rapture. Call it the End Times. Call it an orgy of all that is natural and meant to be because, baby, we were born to die. We *deserve* to die for what happened to our children. I’m not telling you to do this for the tadpoles we had no choice in governing. I’m asking you to consider doing this... for *me*.”

Emmanuel had to look away from Lucifer for a moment. He felt a sense of hesitation he hadn’t felt in centuries.

*This is wrong*, Emmanuel reminded himself. *This is wrong. We are Gods. I made a mistake. I was weak. But now I will be strong. I will be the God they need.*

“You lack restraint, Lucifer,” Emmanuel said, “and the will to see beyond your own beliefs for the greater good of humankind.”



“You think the world has only **just** stopped making sense? It never did! But you know what does make sense, Em? *Time*. Time makes sense and you forgot.”

Lucifer’s hand was sweaty and seemed to be thinner than it was before – like Isaac was quickly shrivelling up while Lucifer was inside of him, a parasite sucking away every ounce of protein.

“Mother called you and you answered readily – like a dog at Her feet. Your loyalty is truly commendable. But we weren’t made to die. Not like this.”

Issac’s bloodshot eyes narrowed.

Emmanuel could feel Lucifer’s true gaze behind that other man’s face – he could feel the intensity of Lucifer’s discontent. There was still a part of Emmanuel that loved Lucifer deeply and unendingly, but he couldn’t bring himself to admit it. There was a lack. A deep connection without which Emmanuel had grown lost and lonely; he turned to humanity for comfort, for **control**. Lucifer could see how accustomed Emmanuel grew to the idea of absolute power, even if Emmanuel himself couldn’t see it.

“I *am* sorry,” said Lucifer.

Emmanuel simply locked eyes with Lucifer and remained silent for a few moments before responding: “For what?”

“That I never said sorry... for leaving you – after everything happened down in Eden the way that it did. Even after all these centuries. I realize I never actually apologized to you.”

“You really believe we’re going to die, don’t you?” Emmanuel asked, a quiet fear emanating from his eyes – only perceptible to his one companion in near-omnipotent existence.

“Have you preached your Word for so long that you’ve forgotten *Her* Wyrd?”

Lucifer suddenly hocked up a handkerchief full of blood.

He nearly collapsed before tossing the handkerchief away and he had trouble regaining his balance. Glancing upward, he noticed Emmanuel staring off across the street again at the little girl. Emmanuel was no longer smiling or silently chuckling; his face simply held a vacancy that Lucifer could not place.

“God cannot die,” Emmanuel whispered to himself.

“Maybe you aren’t the One who saves these people. Maybe there isn’t any One.”

Lucifer rose. Emmanuel could practically hear the strain that such sudden movements were having on Isaac Noah’s body. As Lucifer turned to face Emmanuel, a small but steady stream of blood crept down Isaac’s face from both of his eyes. He wiped the blood away lazily.

“Luce,” Emmanuel said, “I know none of this is supposed to make sense. I understand that.”

“There was a time when hearing you call me ‘Luce’ used to make my soul soar, full of that same raw love and energy that went into what we built together. There was a time when the moral complexities of this world were not too much for you to bear – when we both recognized the one fundamental truth about this universe: change is inevitable.”

“Change is one thing. You’re going to destroy everything that we’ve built since Eden, and that’s another.”

“We broke the cardinal rule: nothing here is built to last. We tried with Eden, you tried with the humans... and what have both instances shown us? That Time is what’s in control; we merely ride the wave, my dear.”

Emmanuel smirked and let out a snide chuckle under his breath.

“An impressive attitude.”

“Sarcasm isn’t a great fit for you, Em, I have to say.”

“Much like that vessel of yours is beginning to look like an ill fit. Our lives are paramount to the survival of this planet and everything on it, Lucifer. This is **our** world.”

“This was never our world.”

Lucifer stumbled awkwardly away from the bus stop, each movement deliberate as Lucifer strained against Isaac Noah’s decaying flesh. His legs were beginning to give from under him, and he could feel it.

“We are not gods,” Lucifer continued. “We’re just another part of the *balance*. And everything is out of balance.”

The blood which had started dripping from his nose had made its way down to his chin in two steady streams, past both sides of his mouth, co-mingling with the blood coming from his eyes. He could hear the droplets hitting the cold pavement beneath his feet.

“Why are you really doing this, Lucifer?” Emmanuel asked, finally.

Isaac’s ribcage let out a horrifying crack. However, Lucifer was smirking.

“You see,” began Lucifer, “that’s the difference between us. If you had shown some restraint, then maybe you wouldn’t be scrambling to find the last piece of yourself lost somewhere in Time.” He leaned in close to Emmanuel’s left ear and whispered (in a language known only to them both), “Our Mother will live again. The Wyrđ is true. Time has not, in fact, betrayed us as once we believed because the truth is, my dear love, that we were destined to die. I wish you could see that... you’re not as pretty when you play dumb. Then again, it doesn’t seem apt to call most things ‘pretty’ these days.”

*plink plink plink*

At his last word, Lucifer threw Isaac directly in front of the oncoming bus, collided with a horrifying smack followed by the sound of screeching tires coming to a halt.

“You always have to have the last word,” Emmanuel mumbled.

Everyone on-board the bus was screaming. The driver was petrified.

What was left of Isaac jutted out flaccidly from under the bus's front right tire and stretched a few feet beyond that here and there – there were bits of flesh and brain matter spattered across the bus's grill and windshield.

Emmanuel stared past the gruesome scene immediately before him and instead at the little stick figure the girl across the street abandoned after witnessing the accident and fleeing in horror. The figurine looked like a little girl too, Emmanuel thought.

Suddenly, the wooden figurine burst into flames.

“This can't be the end.”

*plink plink plink*

The drip had begun overhead again.