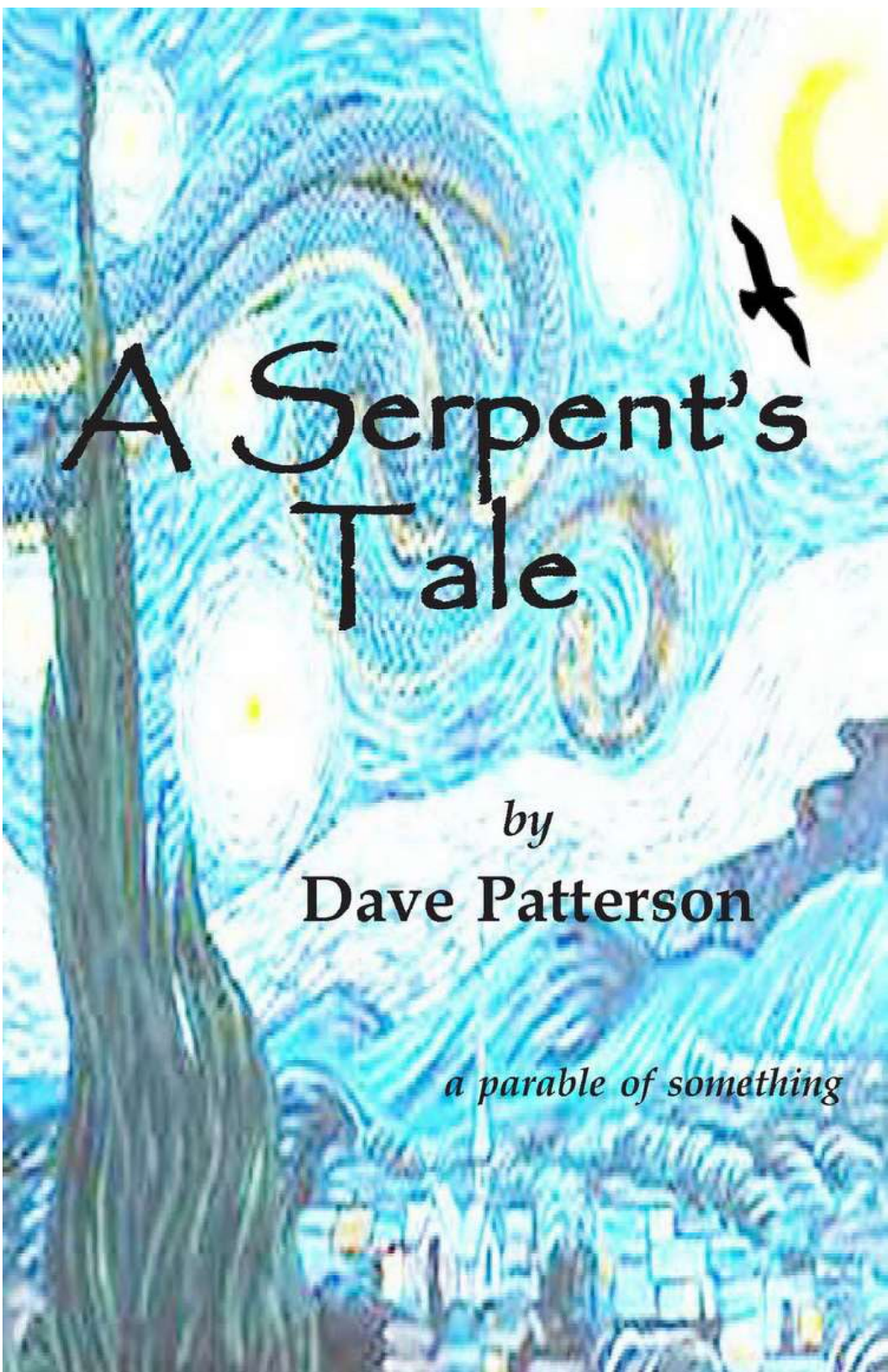




A Serpent's Tale

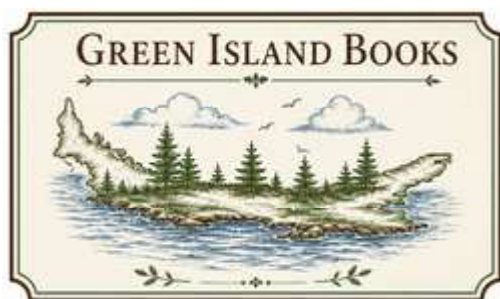
by
Dave Patterson

a parable of something

A Serpent's Tale







A Serpent's Tale

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***but I'd be remiss if I did not mention ChatGPT and its illustrating function ChatGPT-Images, who have come a long way in the last year (earlier called DALL-E) and done some very nice illustrations, with my prompting (and for perfect clarity in today's AI landscape, the Chat had zero role in helping with the writing - I do my own at all times (although it does have use as a spelling/grammar/punctuation checker). (The MS is essentially the same as in the 2009 version, but with a new design (all by me) and presentation.)*

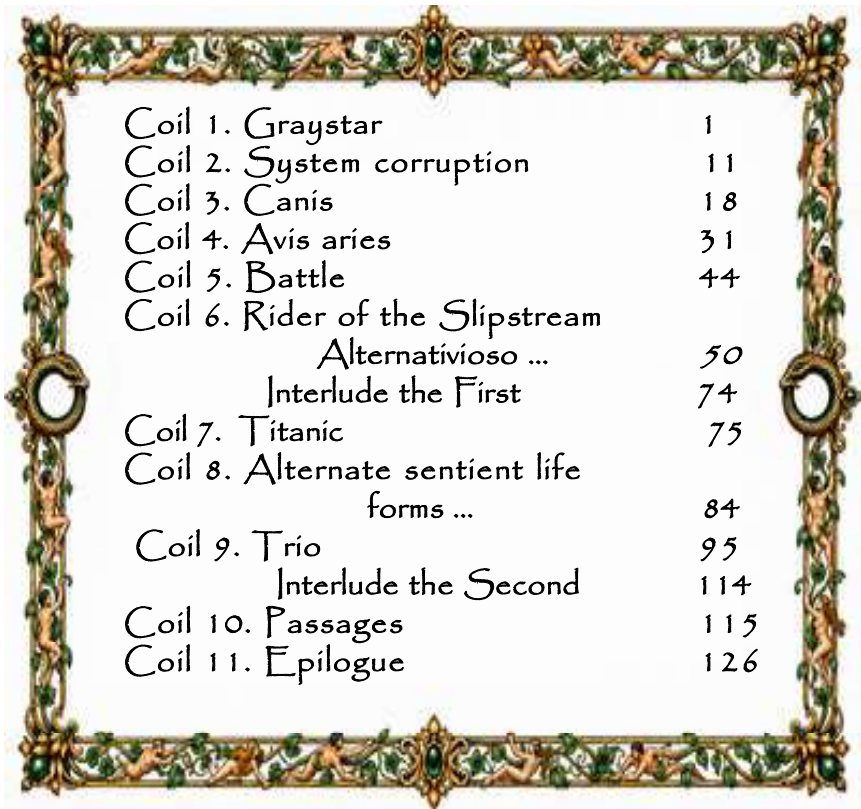


A Serpent's Tale

by

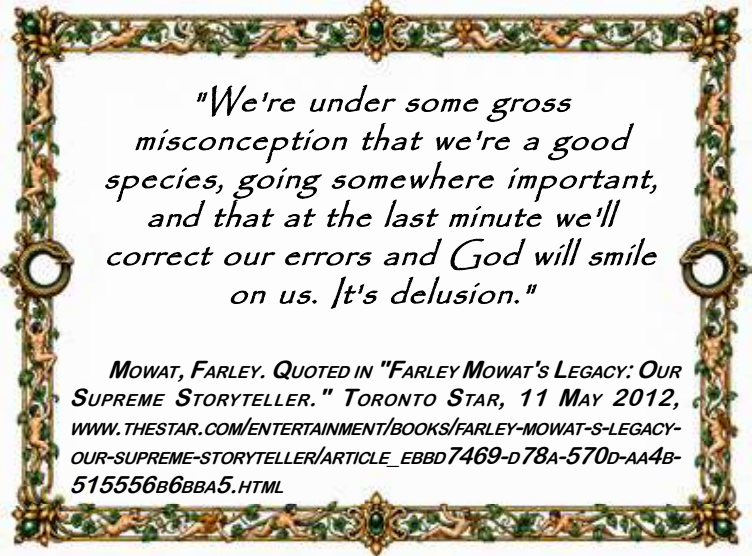
Dave Patterson

the coils



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*"We're under some gross
misconception that we're a good
species, going somewhere important,
and that at the last minute we'll
correct our errors and God will smile
on us. It's delusion."*

**MOWAT, FARLEY. QUOTED IN "FARLEY MOWAT'S LEGACY: OUR
SUPREME STORYTELLER." TORONTO STAR, 11 MAY 2012,
[WWW.THESTAR.COM/ENTERTAINMENT/BOOKS/FARLEY-MOWAT-S-LEGACY-
OUR-SUPREME-STORYTELLER/ARTICLE_EBBD7469-D78A-570D-AA4B-
515556B6BBA5.HTML](http://WWW.THESTAR.COM/ENTERTAINMENT/BOOKS/FARLEY-MOWAT-S-LEGACY-OUR-SUPREME-STORYTELLER/ARTICLE_EBBD7469-D78A-570D-AA4B-515556B6BBA5.HTML)**

- as much as anything this short book was inspired
by Sea of Slaughter by Farley Mowat. What
horrible things, what incalculable destruction, we
have done to 'our' home, thoughtlessly and oh so
stupidly - a bit of comfort for some of us now,
some fleeting power for a few alpha berserkers,
desolation for those who follow. And yet among
us walk many beautiful spirits who see and speak
of such things. So many of the former, so few of
the latter - and yet our problem is that most in the
modern world are in the middle - sheeps and cows
tied to their false sense of security, herded
unresistingly by the berserkers as they continue
their grim work.

- and I would be remiss not to mention Rachel
Carson, who also contributed greatly to my eyes
being opened to what ~~we~~ they were doing all
around us ...



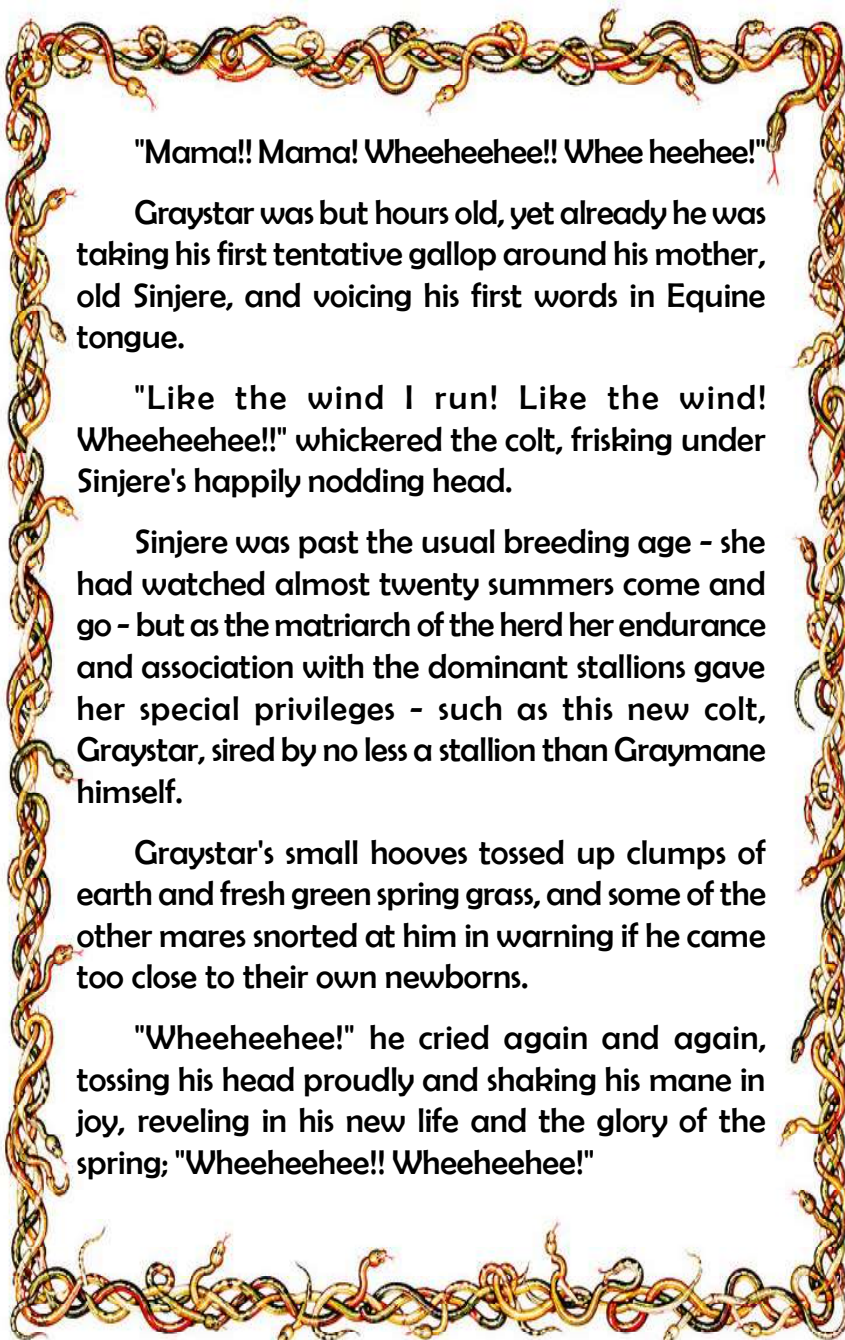
In the beginning we were free.

Excuse me while I brush back tears. It makes me weep, now, Effendi, to think of the beginning. No, I am not the heartless creature you think of me as. I weep. I do indeed weep. But there is not much time left, for weeping or for telling stories. We will try to remember the past, Effendi, and our history, here briefly as we meet one last time, and perhaps understand where we failed.

It is a miserable record we leave, should any survive to study it, but surely we owe it to any who might follow to explain our failure, in hopes they will become wiser than we and not repeat our mistakes. A flickering hope, to be sure - but hope is all that is left, when despair and desecration surround us on all sides.

Let me leave you first with Graystar.

Before your kind arrived.



"Mama!! Mama! Wheeheehee!! Whee heehee!"

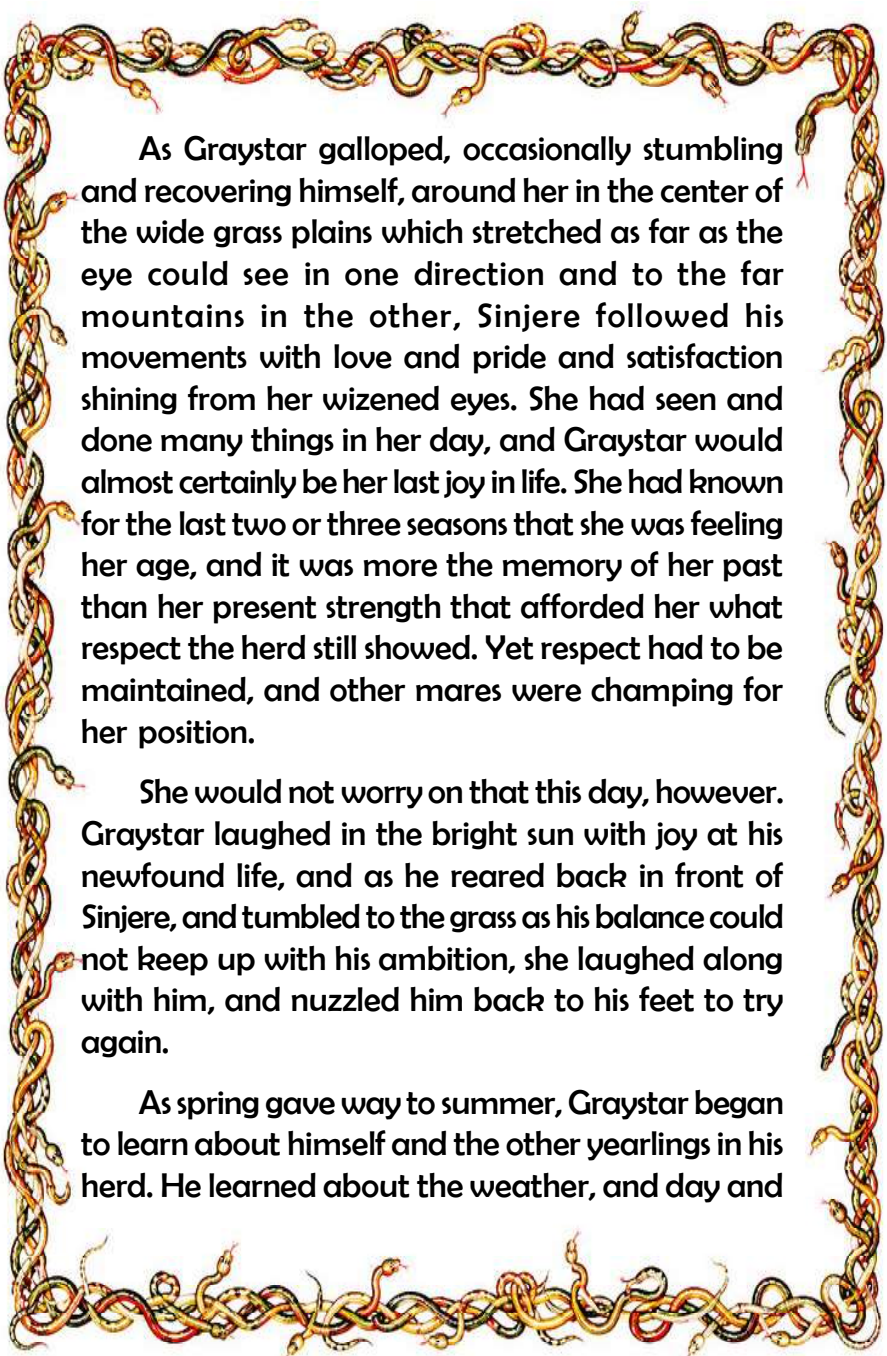
Graystar was but hours old, yet already he was taking his first tentative gallop around his mother, old Sinjere, and voicing his first words in Equine tongue.

"Like the wind I run! Like the wind! Wheeheehee!!" whickered the colt, frisking under Sinjere's happily nodding head.

Sinjere was past the usual breeding age - she had watched almost twenty summers come and go - but as the matriarch of the herd her endurance and association with the dominant stallions gave her special privileges - such as this new colt, Graystar, sired by no less a stallion than Graymane himself.

Graystar's small hooves tossed up clumps of earth and fresh green spring grass, and some of the other mares snorted at him in warning if he came too close to their own newborns.

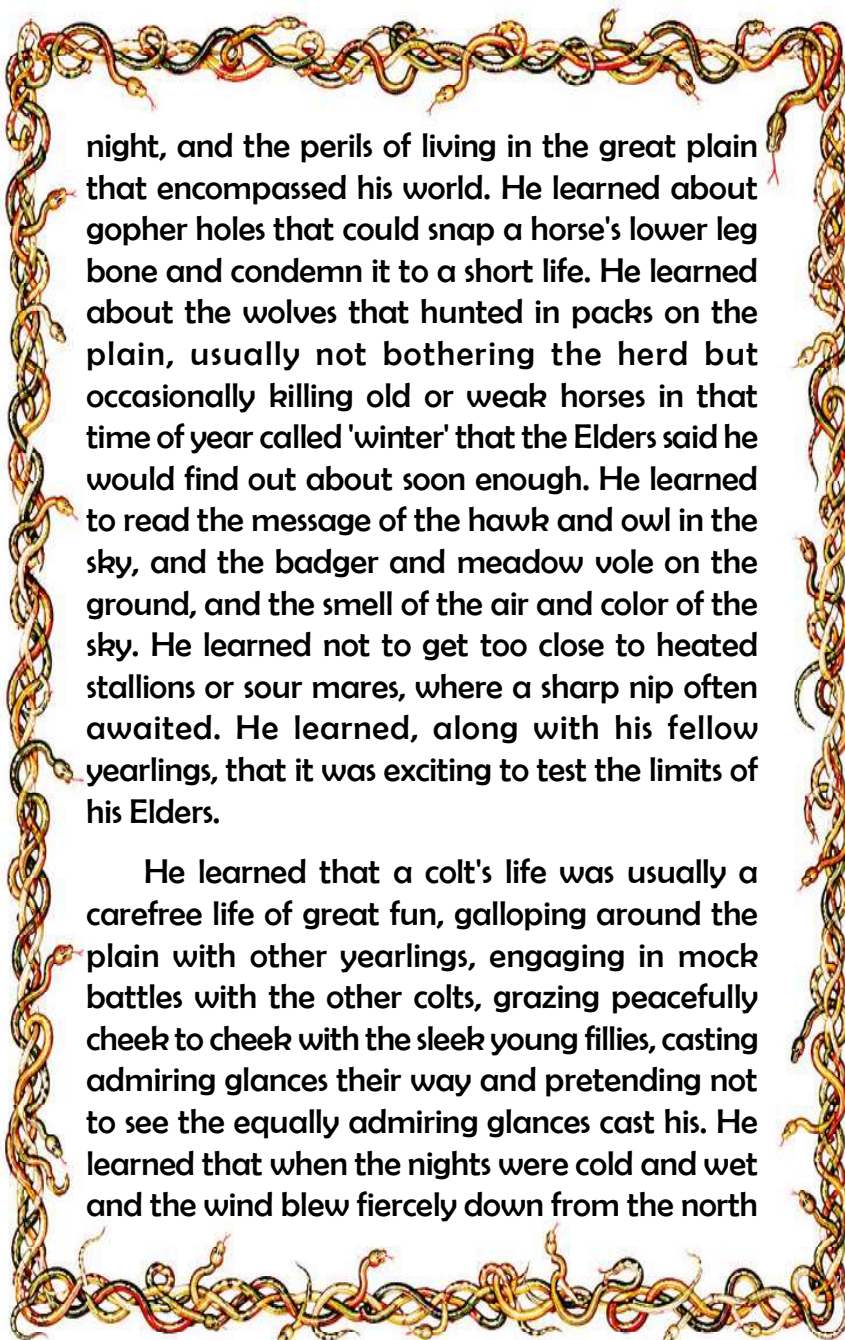
"Wheeheehee!" he cried again and again, tossing his head proudly and shaking his mane in joy, reveling in his new life and the glory of the spring; "Wheeheehee!! Wheeheehee!"



As Graystar galloped, occasionally stumbling and recovering himself, around her in the center of the wide grass plains which stretched as far as the eye could see in one direction and to the far mountains in the other, Sinjere followed his movements with love and pride and satisfaction shining from her wizened eyes. She had seen and done many things in her day, and Graystar would almost certainly be her last joy in life. She had known for the last two or three seasons that she was feeling her age, and it was more the memory of her past than her present strength that afforded her what respect the herd still showed. Yet respect had to be maintained, and other mares were champing for her position.

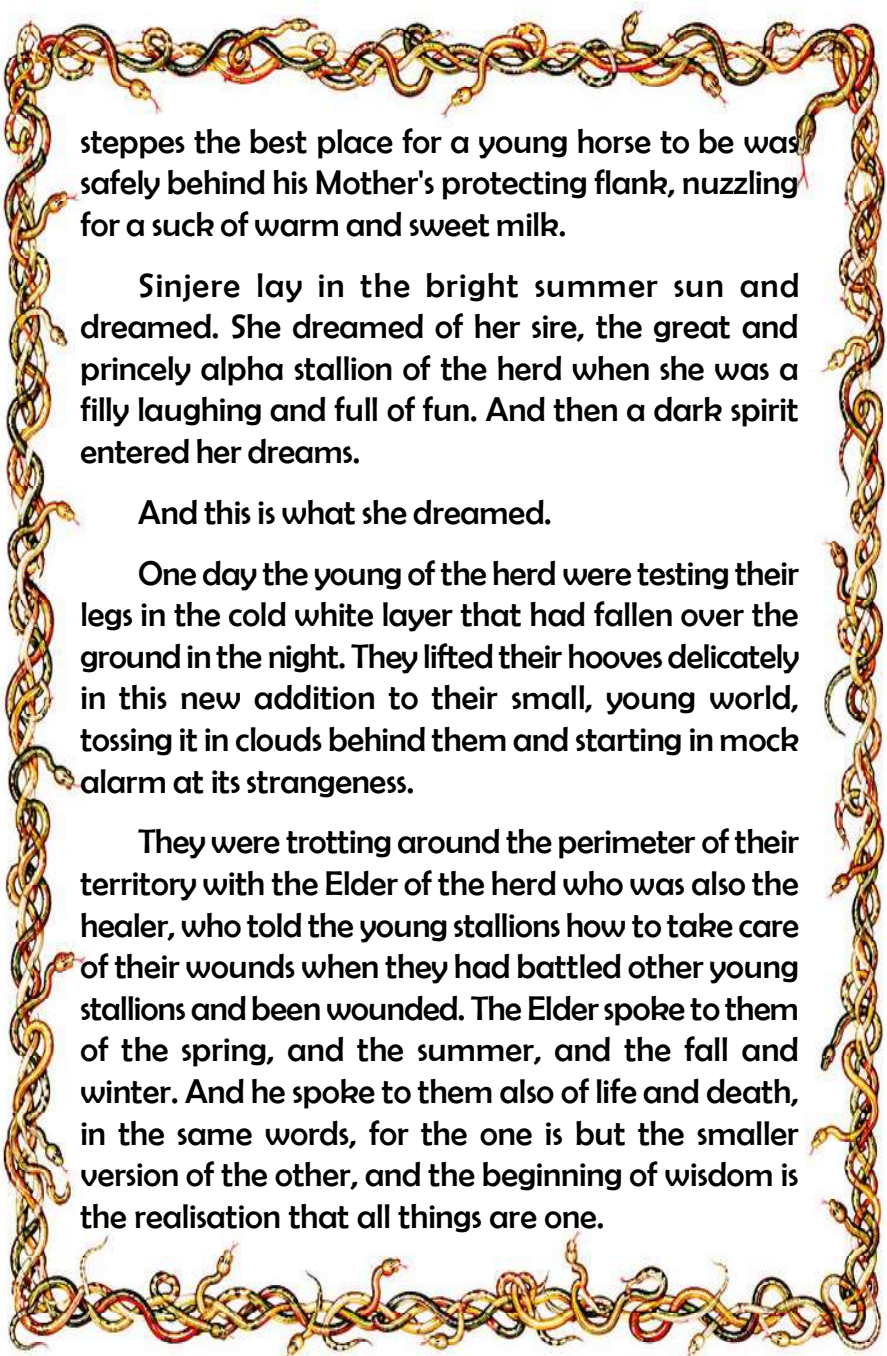
She would not worry on that this day, however. Graystar laughed in the bright sun with joy at his newfound life, and as he reared back in front of Sinjere, and tumbled to the grass as his balance could not keep up with his ambition, she laughed along with him, and nuzzled him back to his feet to try again.

As spring gave way to summer, Graystar began to learn about himself and the other yearlings in his herd. He learned about the weather, and day and



night, and the perils of living in the great plain that encompassed his world. He learned about gopher holes that could snap a horse's lower leg bone and condemn it to a short life. He learned about the wolves that hunted in packs on the plain, usually not bothering the herd but occasionally killing old or weak horses in that time of year called 'winter' that the Elders said he would find out about soon enough. He learned to read the message of the hawk and owl in the sky, and the badger and meadow vole on the ground, and the smell of the air and color of the sky. He learned not to get too close to heated stallions or sour mares, where a sharp nip often awaited. He learned, along with his fellow yearlings, that it was exciting to test the limits of his Elders.

He learned that a colt's life was usually a carefree life of great fun, galloping around the plain with other yearlings, engaging in mock battles with the other colts, grazing peacefully cheek to cheek with the sleek young fillies, casting admiring glances their way and pretending not to see the equally admiring glances cast his. He learned that when the nights were cold and wet and the wind blew fiercely down from the north



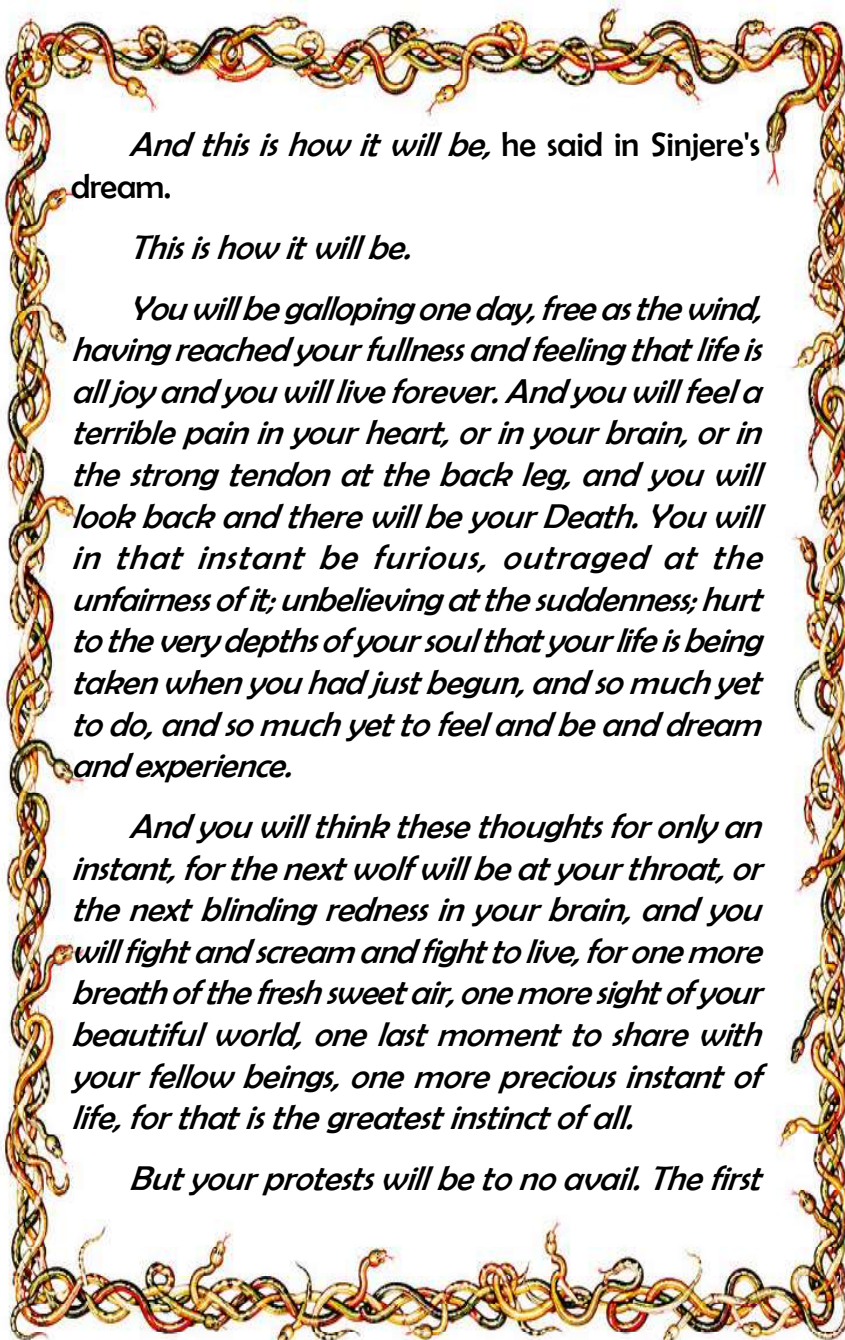
stepped the best place for a young horse to be was safely behind his Mother's protecting flank, nuzzling for a suck of warm and sweet milk.

Sinjere lay in the bright summer sun and dreamed. She dreamed of her sire, the great and princely alpha stallion of the herd when she was a filly laughing and full of fun. And then a dark spirit entered her dreams.

And this is what she dreamed.

One day the young of the herd were testing their legs in the cold white layer that had fallen over the ground in the night. They lifted their hooves delicately in this new addition to their small, young world, tossing it in clouds behind them and starting in mock alarm at its strangeness.

They were trotting around the perimeter of their territory with the Elder of the herd who was also the healer, who told the young stallions how to take care of their wounds when they had battled other young stallions and been wounded. The Elder spoke to them of the spring, and the summer, and the fall and winter. And he spoke to them also of life and death, in the same words, for the one is but the smaller version of the other, and the beginning of wisdom is the realisation that all things are one.



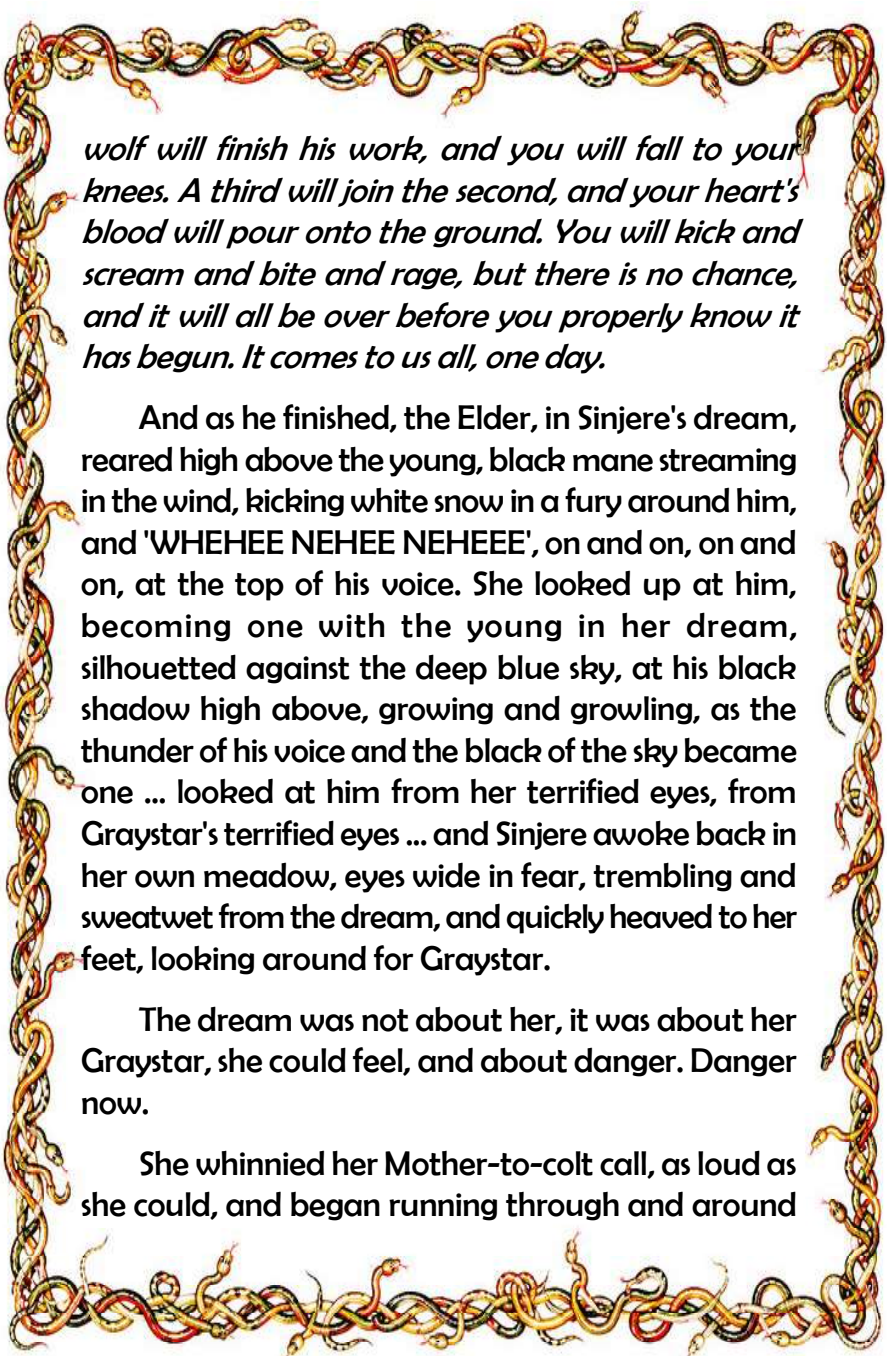
And this is how it will be, he said in Sinjere's dream.

This is how it will be.

You will be galloping one day, free as the wind, having reached your fullness and feeling that life is all joy and you will live forever. And you will feel a terrible pain in your heart, or in your brain, or in the strong tendon at the back leg, and you will look back and there will be your Death. You will in that instant be furious, outraged at the unfairness of it; unbelieving at the suddenness; hurt to the very depths of your soul that your life is being taken when you had just begun, and so much yet to do, and so much yet to feel and be and dream and experience.

And you will think these thoughts for only an instant, for the next wolf will be at your throat, or the next blinding redness in your brain, and you will fight and scream and fight to live, for one more breath of the fresh sweet air, one more sight of your beautiful world, one last moment to share with your fellow beings, one more precious instant of life, for that is the greatest instinct of all.

But your protests will be to no avail. The first

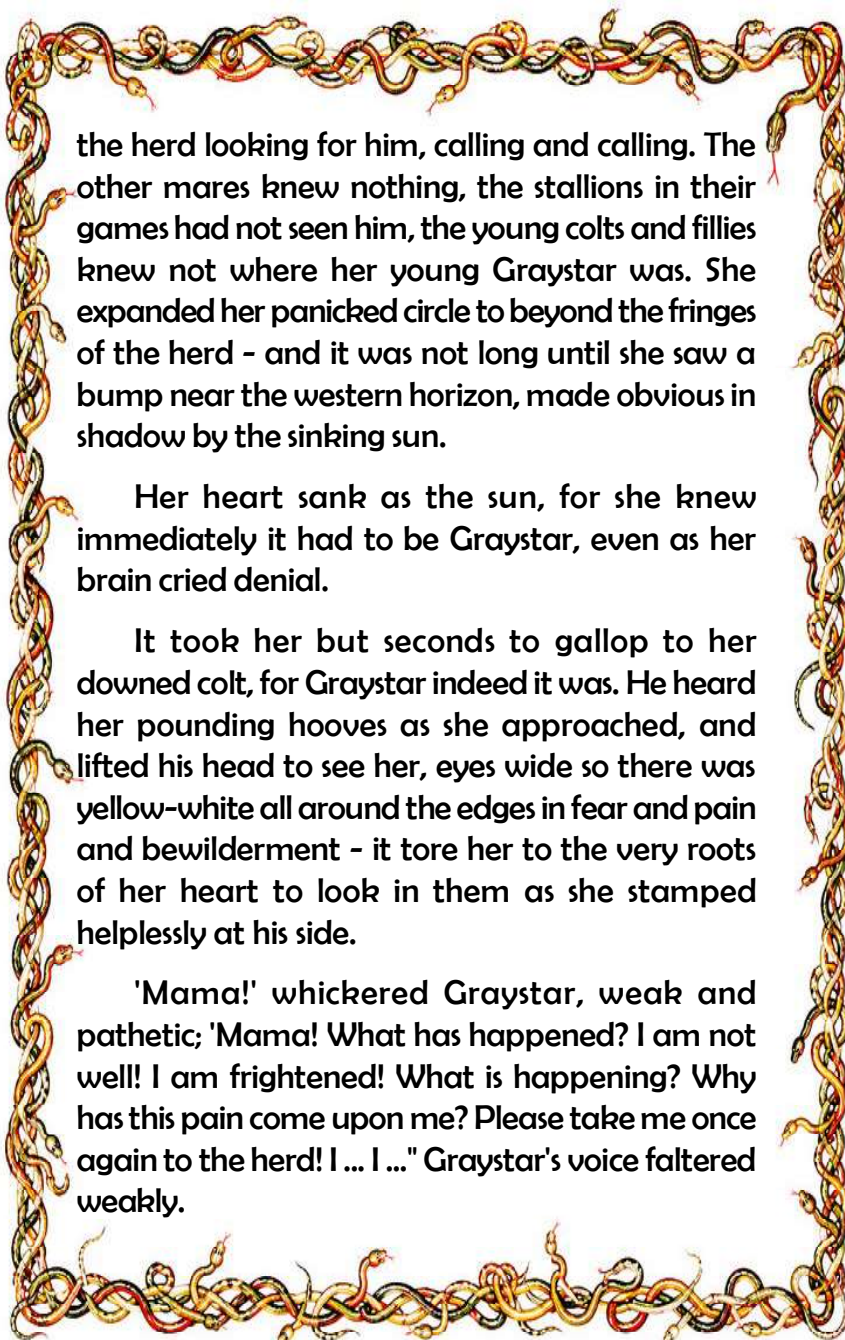


wolf will finish his work, and you will fall to your knees. A third will join the second, and your heart's blood will pour onto the ground. You will kick and scream and bite and rage, but there is no chance, and it will all be over before you properly know it has begun. It comes to us all, one day.

And as he finished, the Elder, in Sinjere's dream, reared high above the young, black mane streaming in the wind, kicking white snow in a fury around him, and 'WHEHEE NEHEE NEHEEE', on and on, on and on, at the top of his voice. She looked up at him, becoming one with the young in her dream, silhouetted against the deep blue sky, at his black shadow high above, growing and growling, as the thunder of his voice and the black of the sky became one ... looked at him from her terrified eyes, from Graystar's terrified eyes ... and Sinjere awoke back in her own meadow, eyes wide in fear, trembling and sweatwet from the dream, and quickly heaved to her feet, looking around for Graystar.

The dream was not about her, it was about her Graystar, she could feel, and about danger. Danger now.

She whinnied her Mother-to-colt call, as loud as she could, and began running through and around

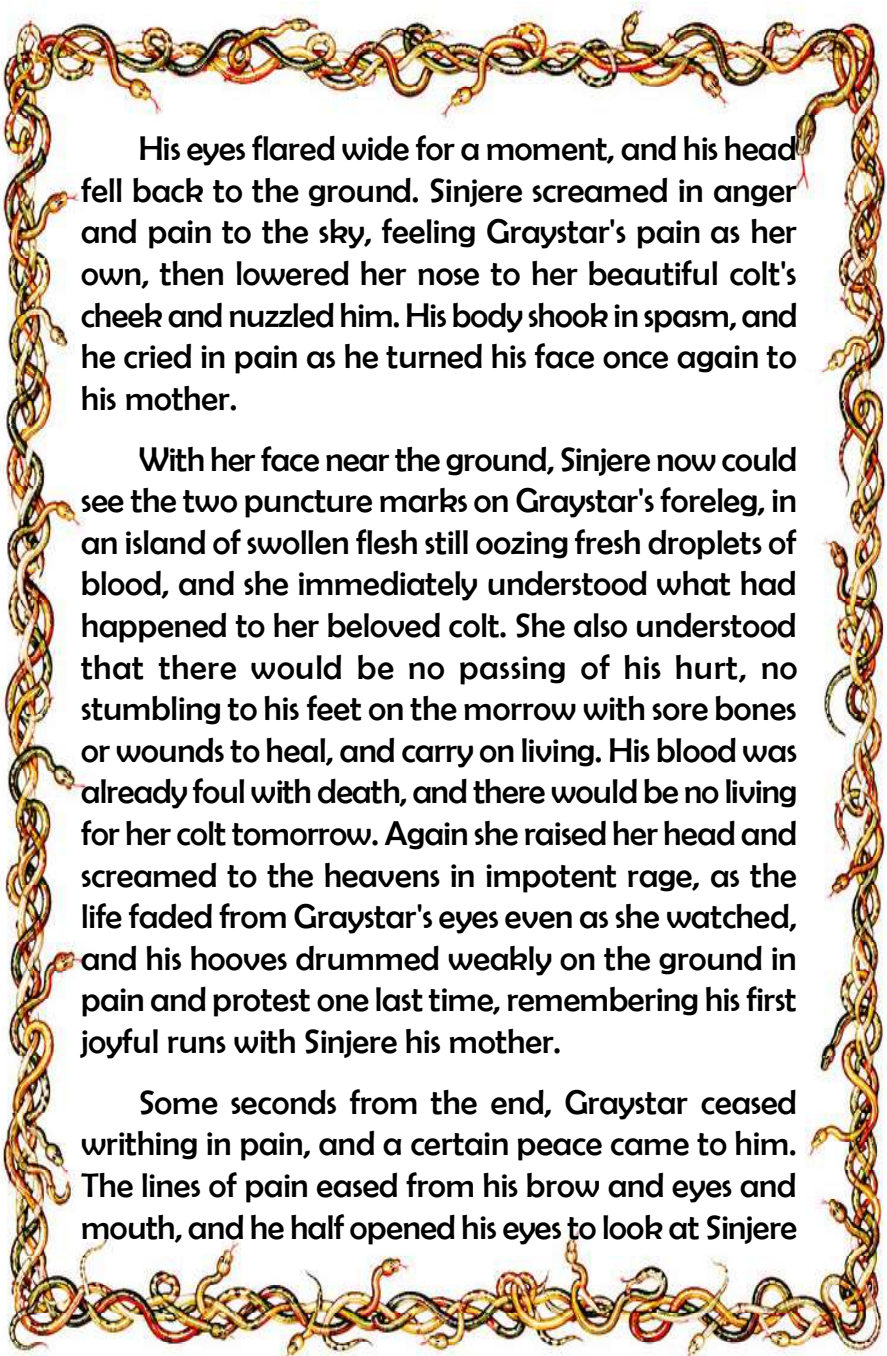


the herd looking for him, calling and calling. The other mares knew nothing, the stallions in their games had not seen him, the young colts and fillies knew not where her young Graystar was. She expanded her panicked circle to beyond the fringes of the herd - and it was not long until she saw a bump near the western horizon, made obvious in shadow by the sinking sun.

Her heart sank as the sun, for she knew immediately it had to be Graystar, even as her brain cried denial.

It took her but seconds to gallop to her downed colt, for Graystar indeed it was. He heard her pounding hooves as she approached, and lifted his head to see her, eyes wide so there was yellow-white all around the edges in fear and pain and bewilderment - it tore her to the very roots of her heart to look in them as she stamped helplessly at his side.

'Mama!' whickered Graystar, weak and pathetic; 'Mama! What has happened? I am not well! I am frightened! What is happening? Why has this pain come upon me? Please take me once again to the herd! I ... I ...' Graystar's voice faltered weakly.



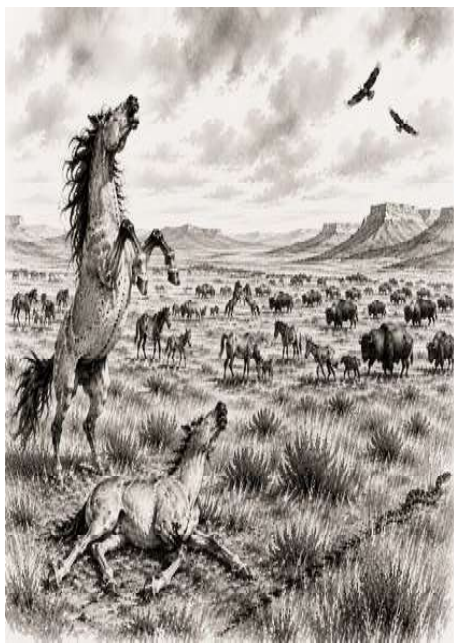
His eyes flared wide for a moment, and his head fell back to the ground. Sinjere screamed in anger and pain to the sky, feeling Graystar's pain as her own, then lowered her nose to her beautiful colt's cheek and nuzzled him. His body shook in spasm, and he cried in pain as he turned his face once again to his mother.

With her face near the ground, Sinjere now could see the two puncture marks on Graystar's foreleg, in an island of swollen flesh still oozing fresh droplets of blood, and she immediately understood what had happened to her beloved colt. She also understood that there would be no passing of his hurt, no stumbling to his feet on the morrow with sore bones or wounds to heal, and carry on living. His blood was already foul with death, and there would be no living for her colt tomorrow. Again she raised her head and screamed to the heavens in impotent rage, as the life faded from Graystar's eyes even as she watched, and his hooves drummed weakly on the ground in pain and protest one last time, remembering his first joyful runs with Sinjere his mother.

Some seconds from the end, Graystar ceased writhing in pain, and a certain peace came to him. The lines of pain eased from his brow and eyes and mouth, and he half opened his eyes to look at Sinjere

one last time. He gave a tiny whicker of love and farewell, and went his lonely way.

As Sinjere reared high against the sky raging again and again, a coiled shape looked down at her and the colt with cold green eyes from under a leaning stone on a nearby hill, tasting the air with red forked tongue. As the great horse shape settled to the ground below it, it carefully unwound its length, and painfully crawled off through the grass, favoring its blooded side where the hoofprint still throbbed redly ...





So, Effendi, we were free, Graystar and I, and the countless other beasts of the land. Free as the wind in the sky and the thoughts in our brains. Free to live and free to die. Why did I tell you this sad story of Graystar? Why do I tell you anything at all, Effendi? Because it was the last time we were free, Effendi, and I do not know if that is important but it seems it should be.

Perhaps we should move on a bit. Temptation comes to us all, sooner or later, Effendi. Sooner or later. At some point we must try to understand these things. Perhaps we shall only come to understand that they are not understandable.

*But let us first examine another mystery.
When did we start to be not free, eh? We
must ask this.*

Perhaps answer it, perhaps not.

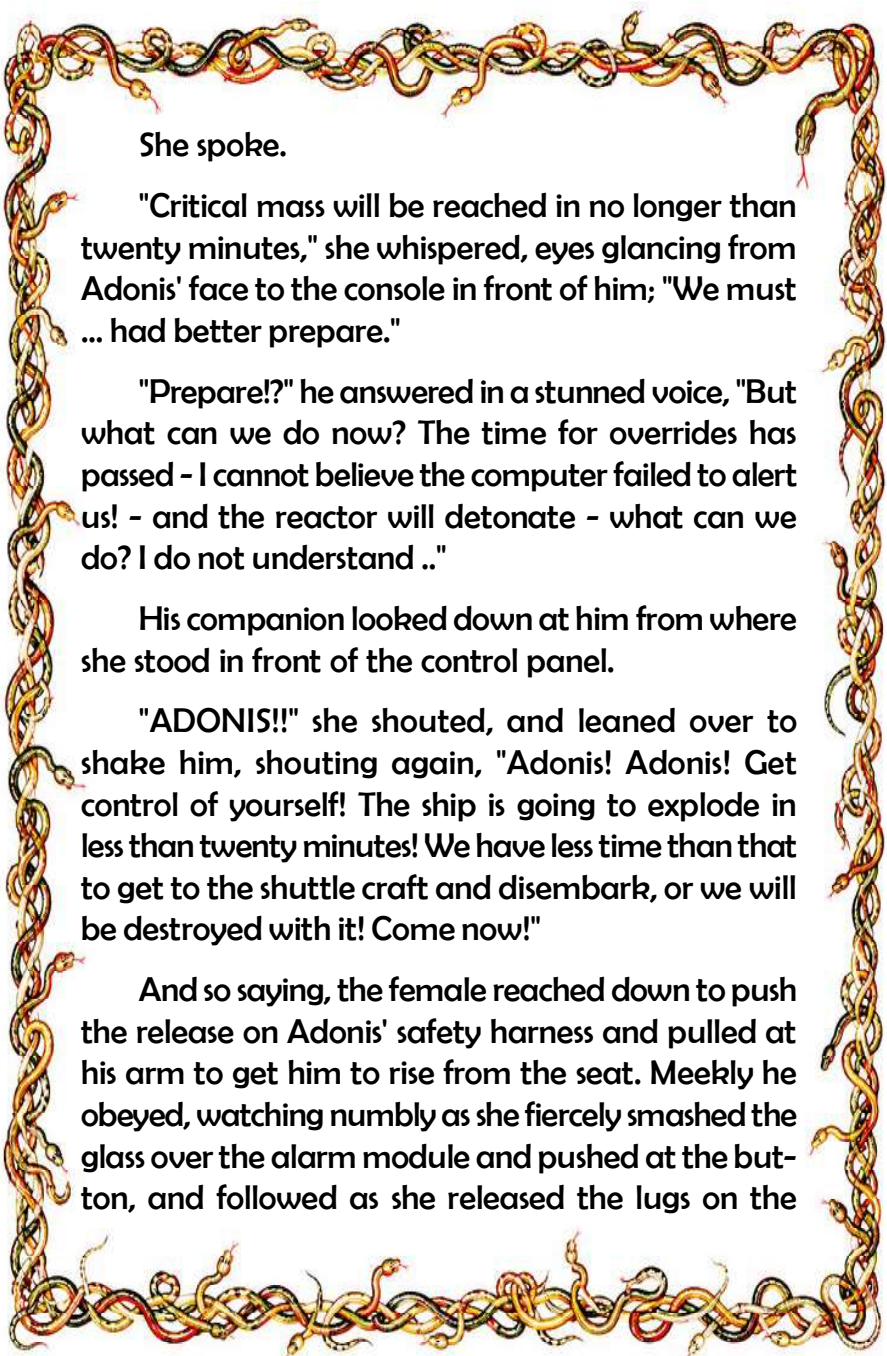
*Perhaps there is no answer. Perhaps there
is only pain, after all, Effendi. Perhaps it is
all quite inevitable, and my words are no
more than an atom in the Sun protesting
fire.*

"..ADONIS! THE REACTOR !! THE REACTOR!!"

The terrified voice echoed around the control room of the great starship, as the crewmember to whom it was directed glanced once around and then spun madly towards his console. He stared at the flashing red light and spinning numbers with disbelief and then, as the terrible reality almost immediately impinged on his brain, horror. With deeply furrowed brow and open mouth, he slowly turned to his companion.

"I .. I .. it cannot be! It ... I ... the computer is supposed to monitor ... how?"

His companion, eyes reflecting his own unbelief and horror, stared back at him.



She spoke.

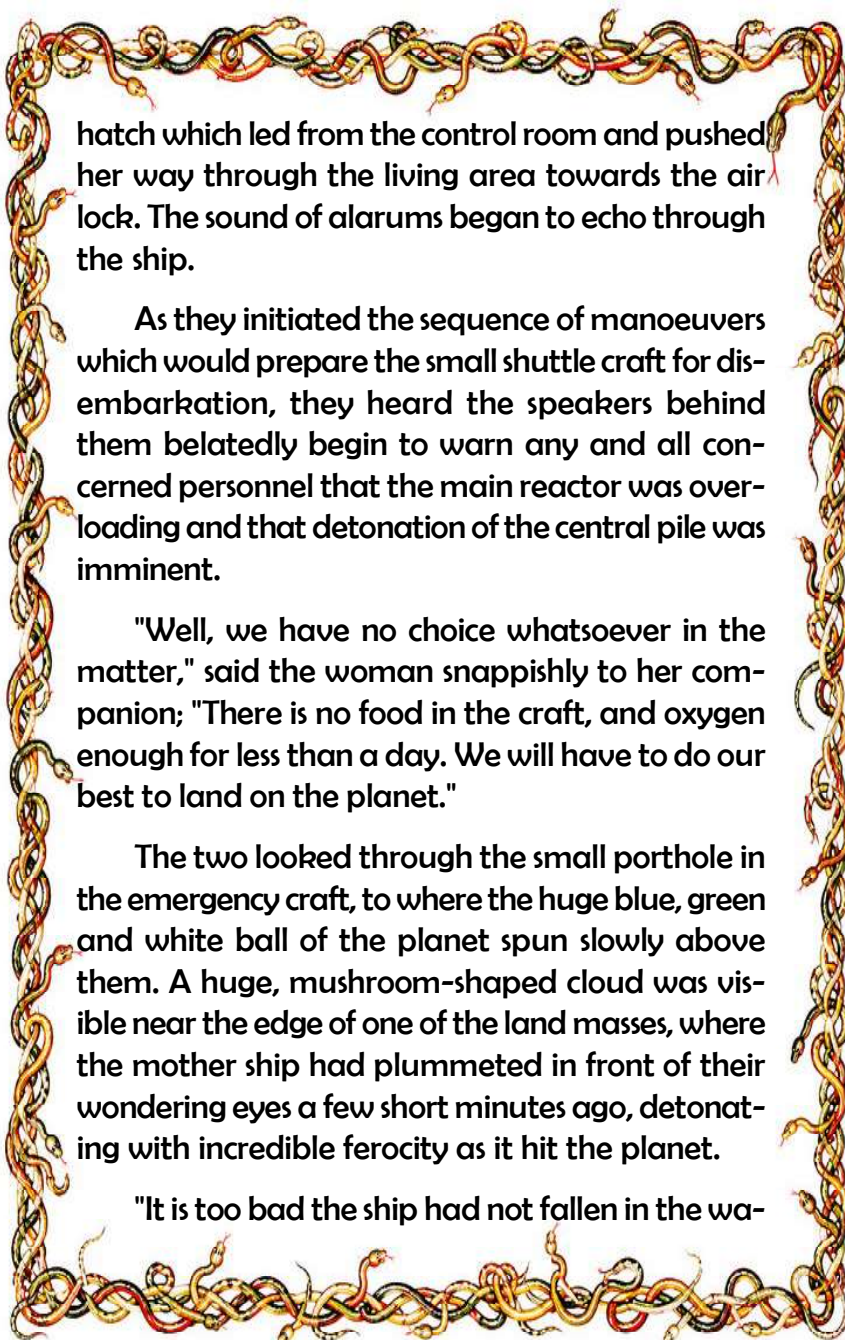
"Critical mass will be reached in no longer than twenty minutes," she whispered, eyes glancing from Adonis' face to the console in front of him; "We must ... had better prepare."

"Prepare!?" he answered in a stunned voice, "But what can we do now? The time for overrides has passed - I cannot believe the computer failed to alert us! - and the reactor will detonate - what can we do? I do not understand .."

His companion looked down at him from where she stood in front of the control panel.

"ADONIS!!" she shouted, and leaned over to shake him, shouting again, "Adonis! Adonis! Get control of yourself! The ship is going to explode in less than twenty minutes! We have less time than that to get to the shuttle craft and disembark, or we will be destroyed with it! Come now!"

And so saying, the female reached down to push the release on Adonis' safety harness and pulled at his arm to get him to rise from the seat. Meekly he obeyed, watching numbly as she fiercely smashed the glass over the alarm module and pushed at the button, and followed as she released the lugs on the



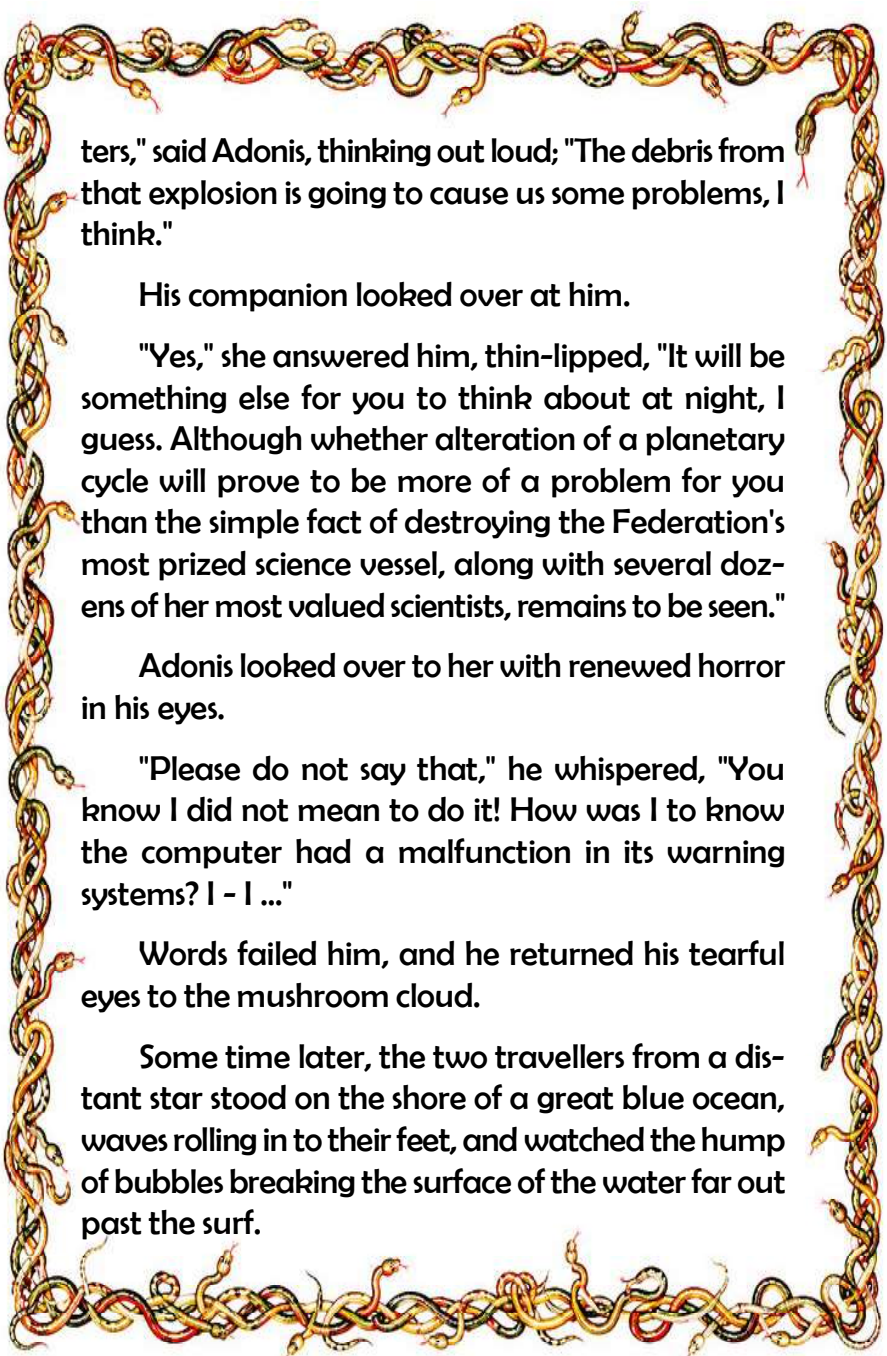
hatch which led from the control room and pushed her way through the living area towards the air lock. The sound of alarums began to echo through the ship.

As they initiated the sequence of manoeuvres which would prepare the small shuttle craft for disembarkation, they heard the speakers behind them belatedly begin to warn any and all concerned personnel that the main reactor was overloading and that detonation of the central pile was imminent.

"Well, we have no choice whatsoever in the matter," said the woman snappishly to her companion; "There is no food in the craft, and oxygen enough for less than a day. We will have to do our best to land on the planet."

The two looked through the small porthole in the emergency craft, to where the huge blue, green and white ball of the planet spun slowly above them. A huge, mushroom-shaped cloud was visible near the edge of one of the land masses, where the mother ship had plummeted in front of their wondering eyes a few short minutes ago, detonating with incredible ferocity as it hit the planet.

"It is too bad the ship had not fallen in the wa-



ters," said Adonis, thinking out loud; "The debris from that explosion is going to cause us some problems, I think."

His companion looked over at him.

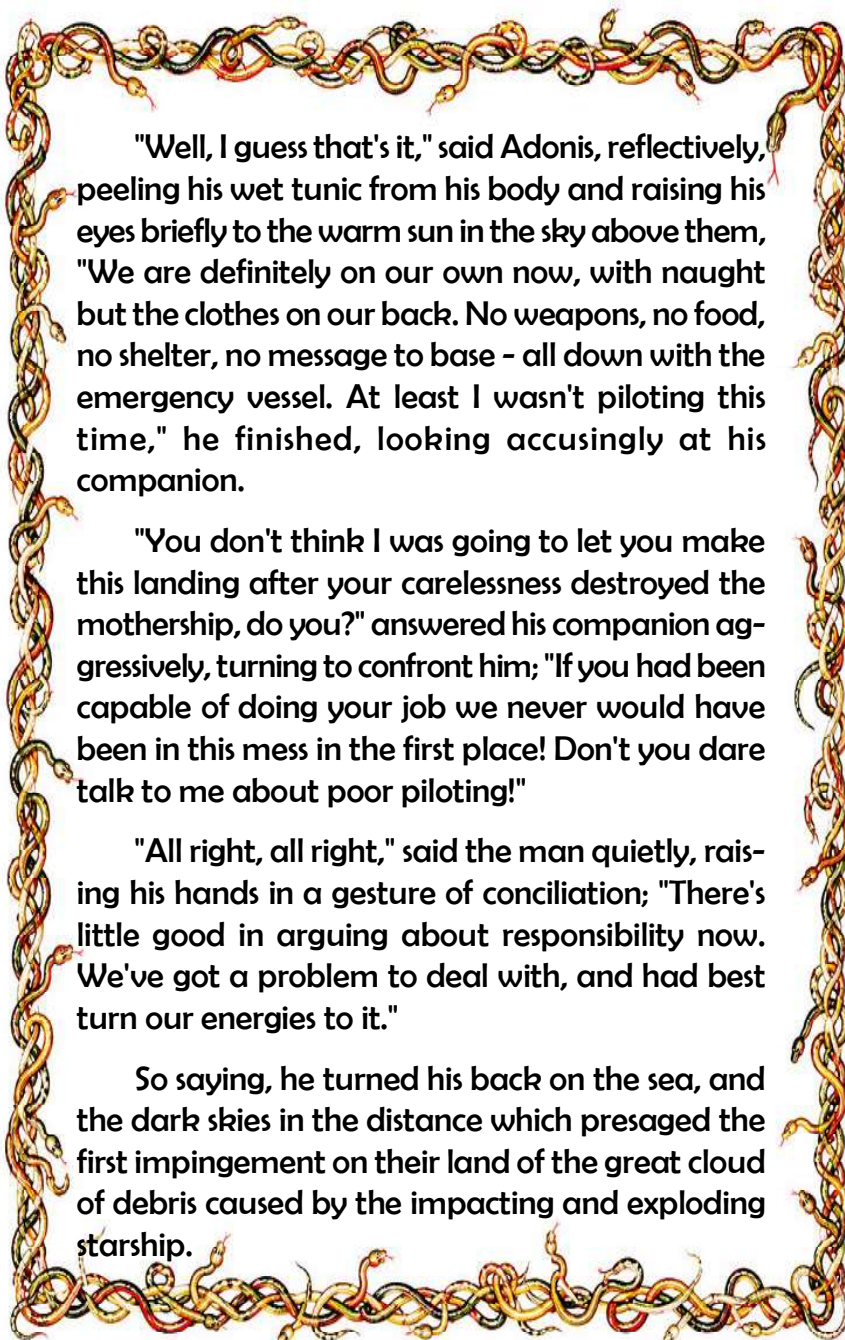
"Yes," she answered him, thin-lipped, "It will be something else for you to think about at night, I guess. Although whether alteration of a planetary cycle will prove to be more of a problem for you than the simple fact of destroying the Federation's most prized science vessel, along with several dozens of her most valued scientists, remains to be seen."

Adonis looked over to her with renewed horror in his eyes.

"Please do not say that," he whispered, "You know I did not mean to do it! How was I to know the computer had a malfunction in its warning systems? I - I ..."

Words failed him, and he returned his tearful eyes to the mushroom cloud.

Some time later, the two travellers from a distant star stood on the shore of a great blue ocean, waves rolling in to their feet, and watched the hump of bubbles breaking the surface of the water far out past the surf.



"Well, I guess that's it," said Adonis, reflectively, peeling his wet tunic from his body and raising his eyes briefly to the warm sun in the sky above them, "We are definitely on our own now, with naught but the clothes on our back. No weapons, no food, no shelter, no message to base - all down with the emergency vessel. At least I wasn't piloting this time," he finished, looking accusingly at his companion.

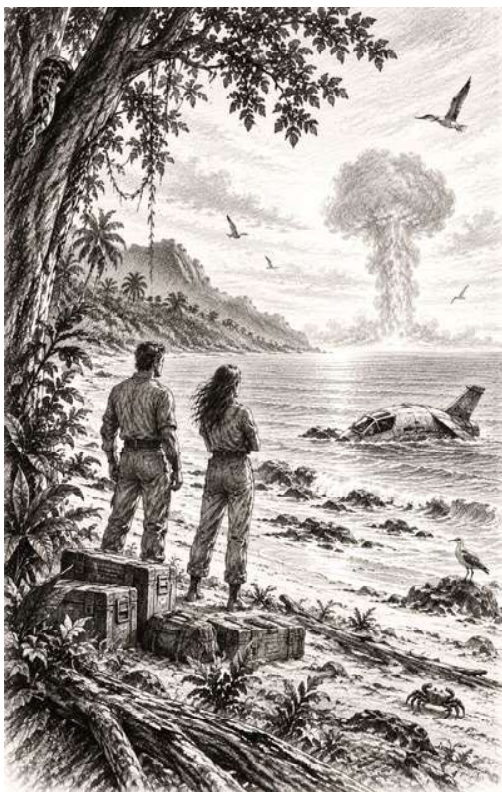
"You don't think I was going to let you make this landing after your carelessness destroyed the mothership, do you?" answered his companion aggressively, turning to confront him; "If you had been capable of doing your job we never would have been in this mess in the first place! Don't you dare talk to me about poor piloting!"

"All right, all right," said the man quietly, raising his hands in a gesture of conciliation; "There's little good in arguing about responsibility now. We've got a problem to deal with, and had best turn our energies to it."

So saying, he turned his back on the sea, and the dark skies in the distance which presaged the first impingement on their land of the great cloud of debris caused by the impacting and exploding starship.

Behind them lay the new world. The verdant forest stretched to the beach on which they stood, and they could hear a cacophony of bird and animal voices within.

"This is our home now, Ava," he said, "and who can say what our presence will mean to it - or if we will even survive?"

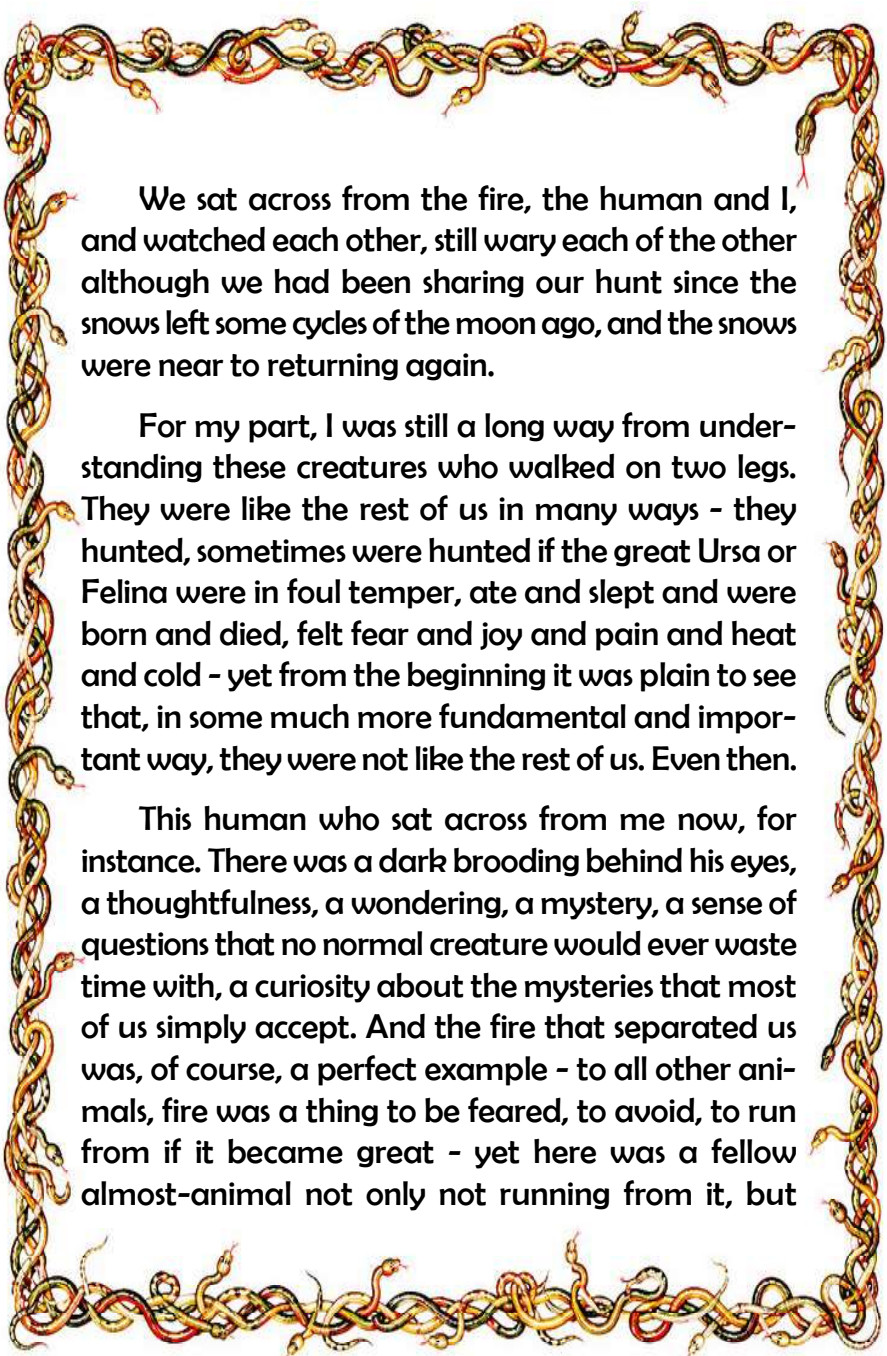




Ah, so, Effendi, you ask; is this then how it really was? Was this the beginning of the end? Was the home planet really a paradise, plodding along contentedly on evolutionary time, destined for unimaginably great things, until fouled by the entrance of an unknown quantity, a quantity who carried the seed of destruction even as it arrived in the womb of the great mother?

Who is to say, Effendi, who is to say? Does the cancer cell in the body question its arrival, its correctness of being, its use of available resources, its very existence? I think not, Effendi. Nor does the May-flower question the coming of the sun and the fragrance and beauty of its blossom. Nor do we question the evolution of species. We do, however, Effendi, deal with morality and ethics.

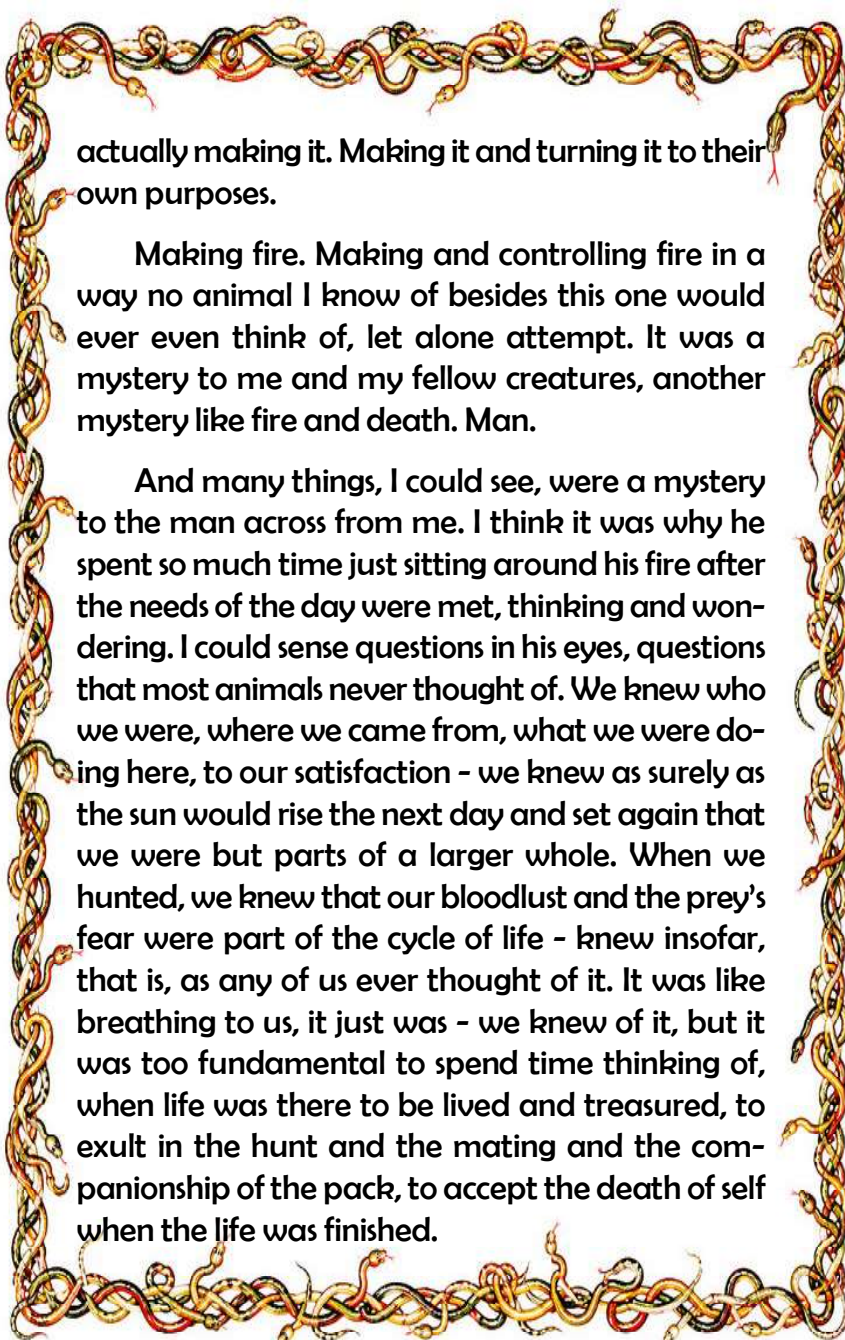
And these, Effendi, are much harder matters. Much harder indeed.



We sat across from the fire, the human and I, and watched each other, still wary each of the other although we had been sharing our hunt since the snows left some cycles of the moon ago, and the snows were near to returning again.

For my part, I was still a long way from understanding these creatures who walked on two legs. They were like the rest of us in many ways - they hunted, sometimes were hunted if the great Ursa or Felina were in foul temper, ate and slept and were born and died, felt fear and joy and pain and heat and cold - yet from the beginning it was plain to see that, in some much more fundamental and important way, they were not like the rest of us. Even then.

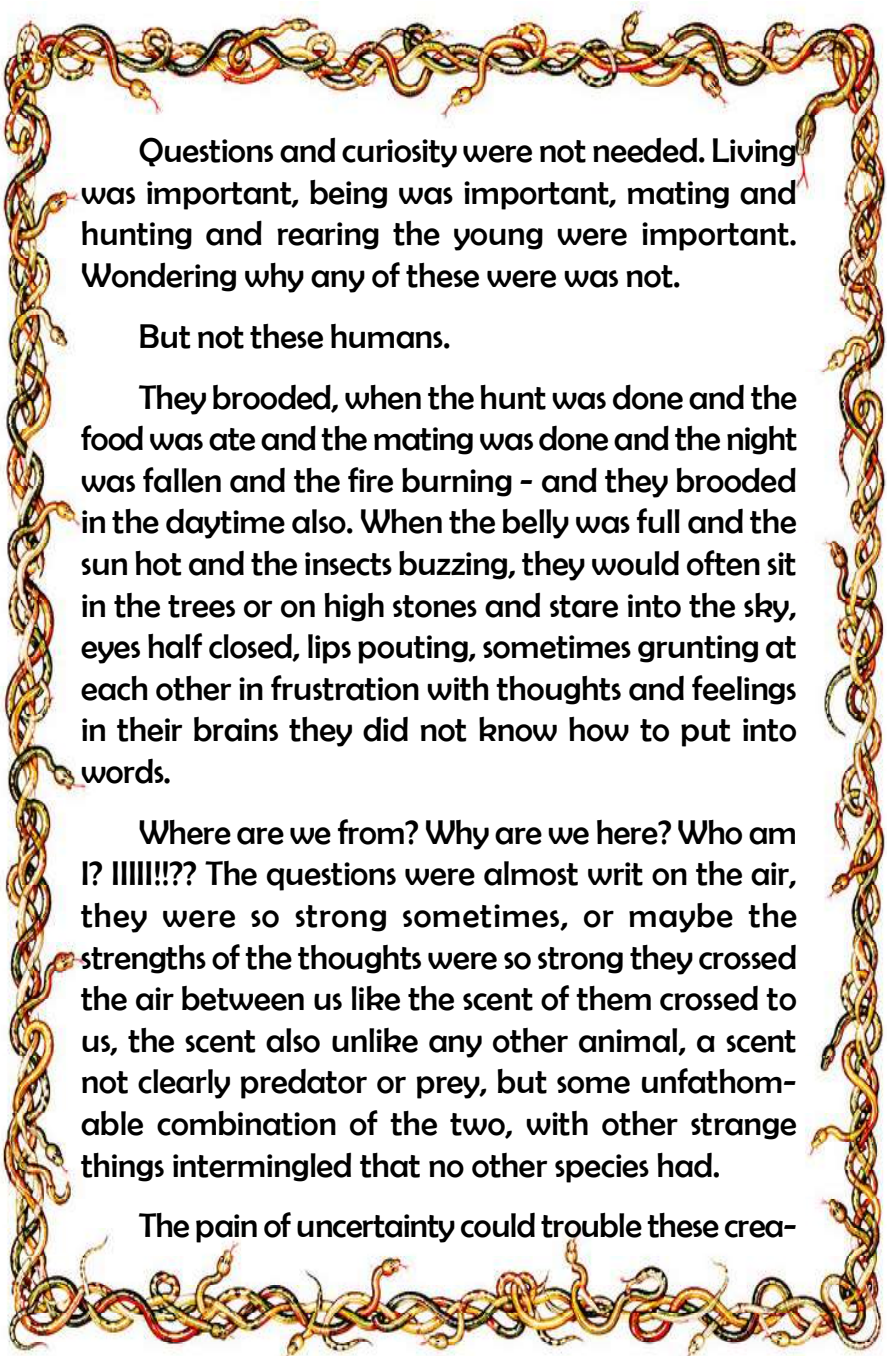
This human who sat across from me now, for instance. There was a dark brooding behind his eyes, a thoughtfulness, a wondering, a mystery, a sense of questions that no normal creature would ever waste time with, a curiosity about the mysteries that most of us simply accept. And the fire that separated us was, of course, a perfect example - to all other animals, fire was a thing to be feared, to avoid, to run from if it became great - yet here was a fellow almost-animal not only not running from it, but



actually making it. Making it and turning it to their own purposes.

Making fire. Making and controlling fire in a way no animal I know of besides this one would ever even think of, let alone attempt. It was a mystery to me and my fellow creatures, another mystery like fire and death. Man.

And many things, I could see, were a mystery to the man across from me. I think it was why he spent so much time just sitting around his fire after the needs of the day were met, thinking and wondering. I could sense questions in his eyes, questions that most animals never thought of. We knew who we were, where we came from, what we were doing here, to our satisfaction - we knew as surely as the sun would rise the next day and set again that we were but parts of a larger whole. When we hunted, we knew that our bloodlust and the prey's fear were part of the cycle of life - knew insofar, that is, as any of us ever thought of it. It was like breathing to us, it just was - we knew of it, but it was too fundamental to spend time thinking of, when life was there to be lived and treasured, to exult in the hunt and the mating and the companionship of the pack, to accept the death of self when the life was finished.



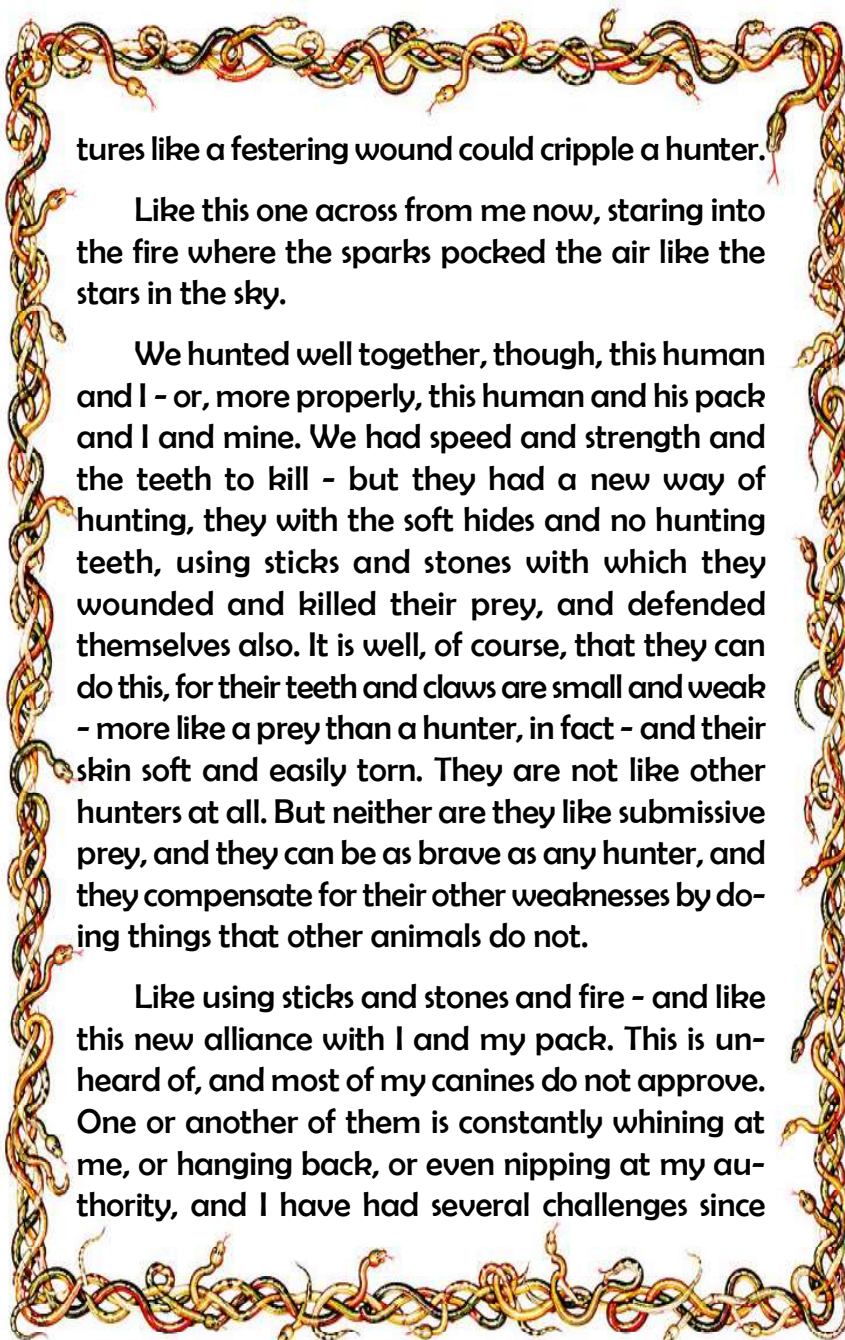
Questions and curiosity were not needed. Living was important, being was important, mating and hunting and rearing the young were important. Wondering why any of these were was not.

But not these humans.

They brooded, when the hunt was done and the food was ate and the mating was done and the night was fallen and the fire burning - and they brooded in the daytime also. When the belly was full and the sun hot and the insects buzzing, they would often sit in the trees or on high stones and stare into the sky, eyes half closed, lips pouting, sometimes grunting at each other in frustration with thoughts and feelings in their brains they did not know how to put into words.

Where are we from? Why are we here? Who am I? I!!!!!! The questions were almost writ on the air, they were so strong sometimes, or maybe the strengths of the thoughts were so strong they crossed the air between us like the scent of them crossed to us, the scent also unlike any other animal, a scent not clearly predator or prey, but some unfathomable combination of the two, with other strange things intermingled that no other species had.

The pain of uncertainty could trouble these crea-

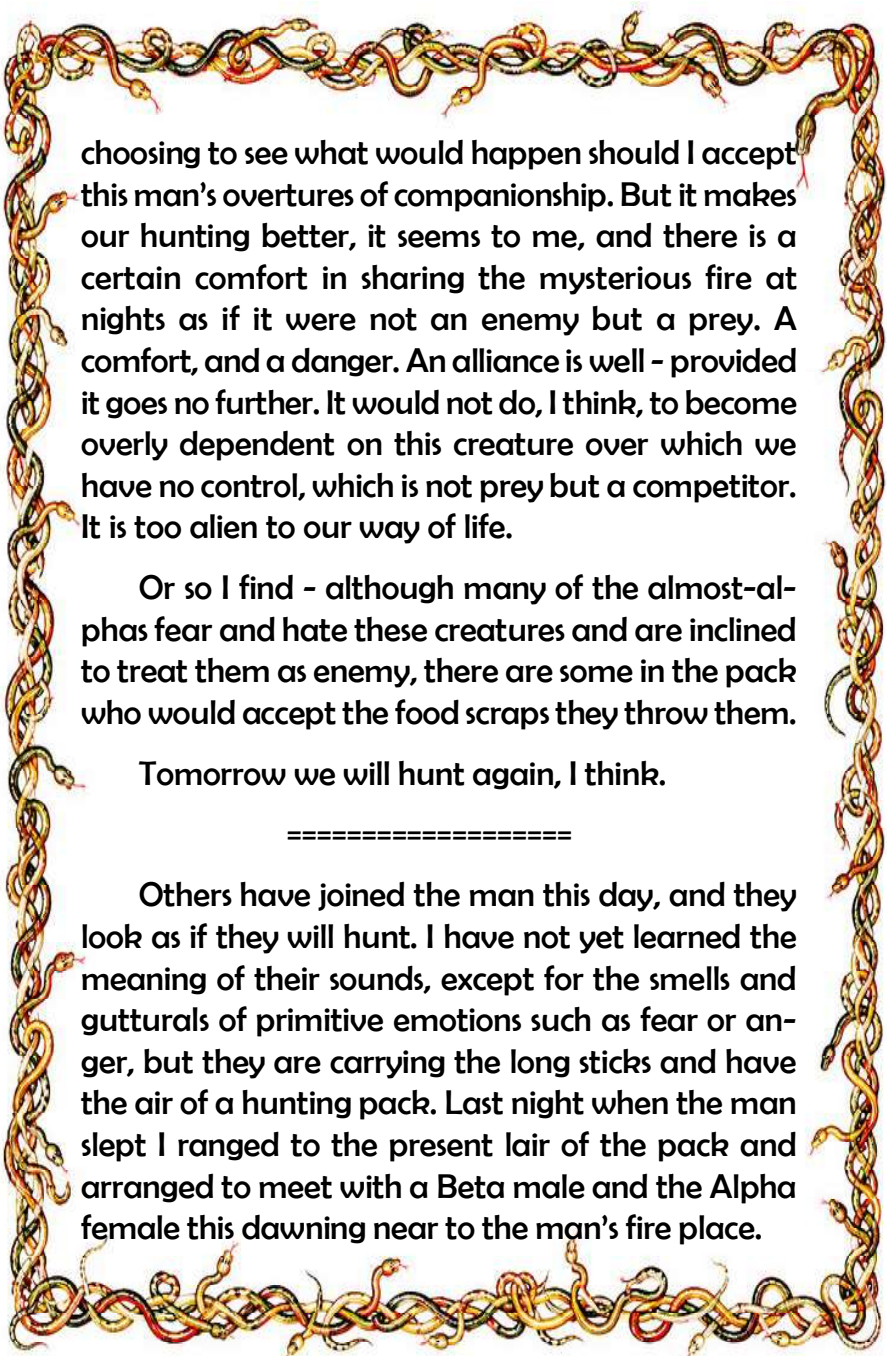


tures like a festering wound could cripple a hunter.

Like this one across from me now, staring into the fire where the sparks pocked the air like the stars in the sky.

We hunted well together, though, this human and I - or, more properly, this human and his pack and I and mine. We had speed and strength and the teeth to kill - but they had a new way of hunting, they with the soft hides and no hunting teeth, using sticks and stones with which they wounded and killed their prey, and defended themselves also. It is well, of course, that they can do this, for their teeth and claws are small and weak - more like a prey than a hunter, in fact - and their skin soft and easily torn. They are not like other hunters at all. But neither are they like submissive prey, and they can be as brave as any hunter, and they compensate for their other weaknesses by doing things that other animals do not.

Like using sticks and stones and fire - and like this new alliance with I and my pack. This is unheard of, and most of my canines do not approve. One or another of them is constantly whining at me, or hanging back, or even nipping at my authority, and I have had several challenges since



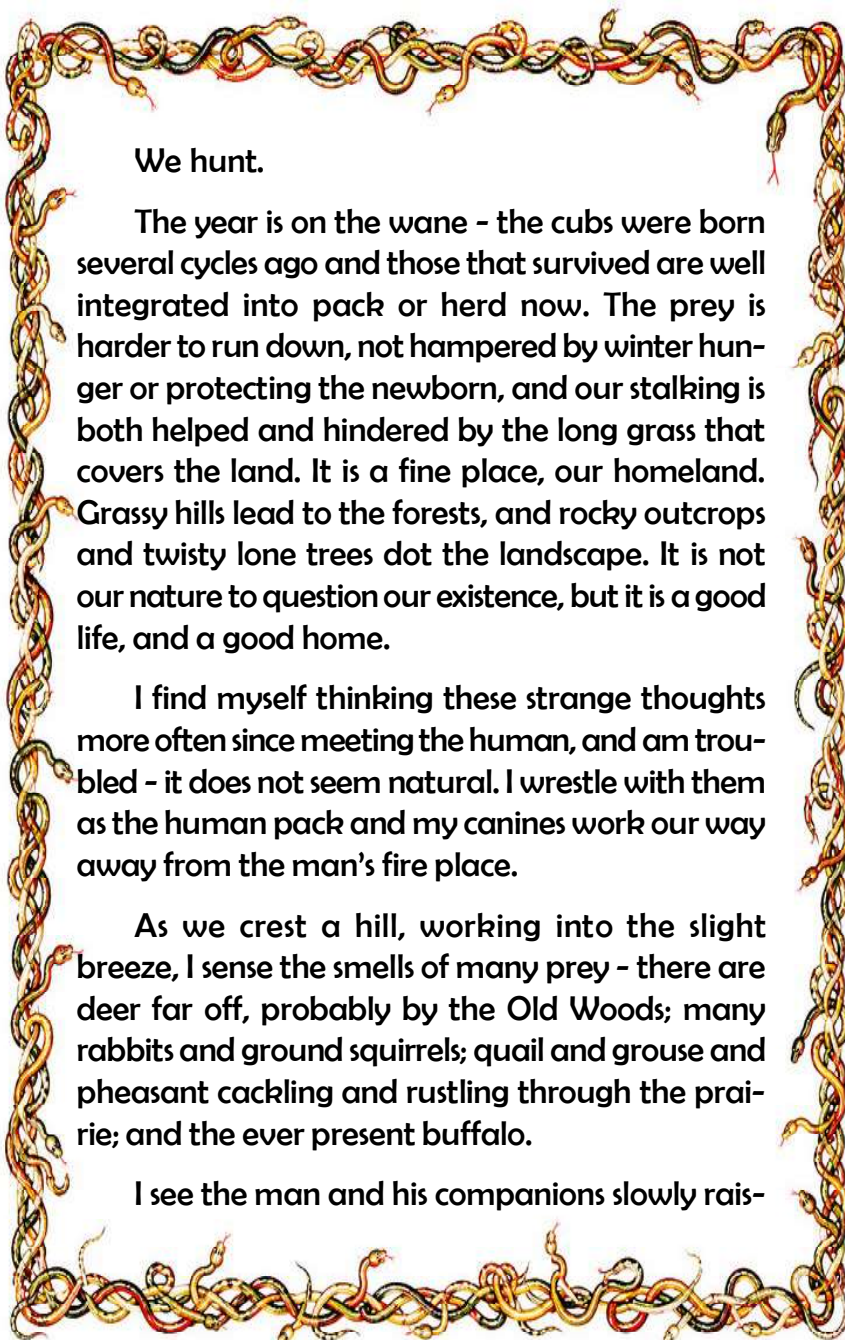
choosing to see what would happen should I accept this man's overtures of companionship. But it makes our hunting better, it seems to me, and there is a certain comfort in sharing the mysterious fire at nights as if it were not an enemy but a prey. A comfort, and a danger. An alliance is well - provided it goes no further. It would not do, I think, to become overly dependent on this creature over which we have no control, which is not prey but a competitor. It is too alien to our way of life.

Or so I find - although many of the almost-alphas fear and hate these creatures and are inclined to treat them as enemy, there are some in the pack who would accept the food scraps they throw them.

Tomorrow we will hunt again, I think.

=====

Others have joined the man this day, and they look as if they will hunt. I have not yet learned the meaning of their sounds, except for the smells and gutturals of primitive emotions such as fear or anger, but they are carrying the long sticks and have the air of a hunting pack. Last night when the man slept I ranged to the present lair of the pack and arranged to meet with a Beta male and the Alpha female this dawning near to the man's fire place.



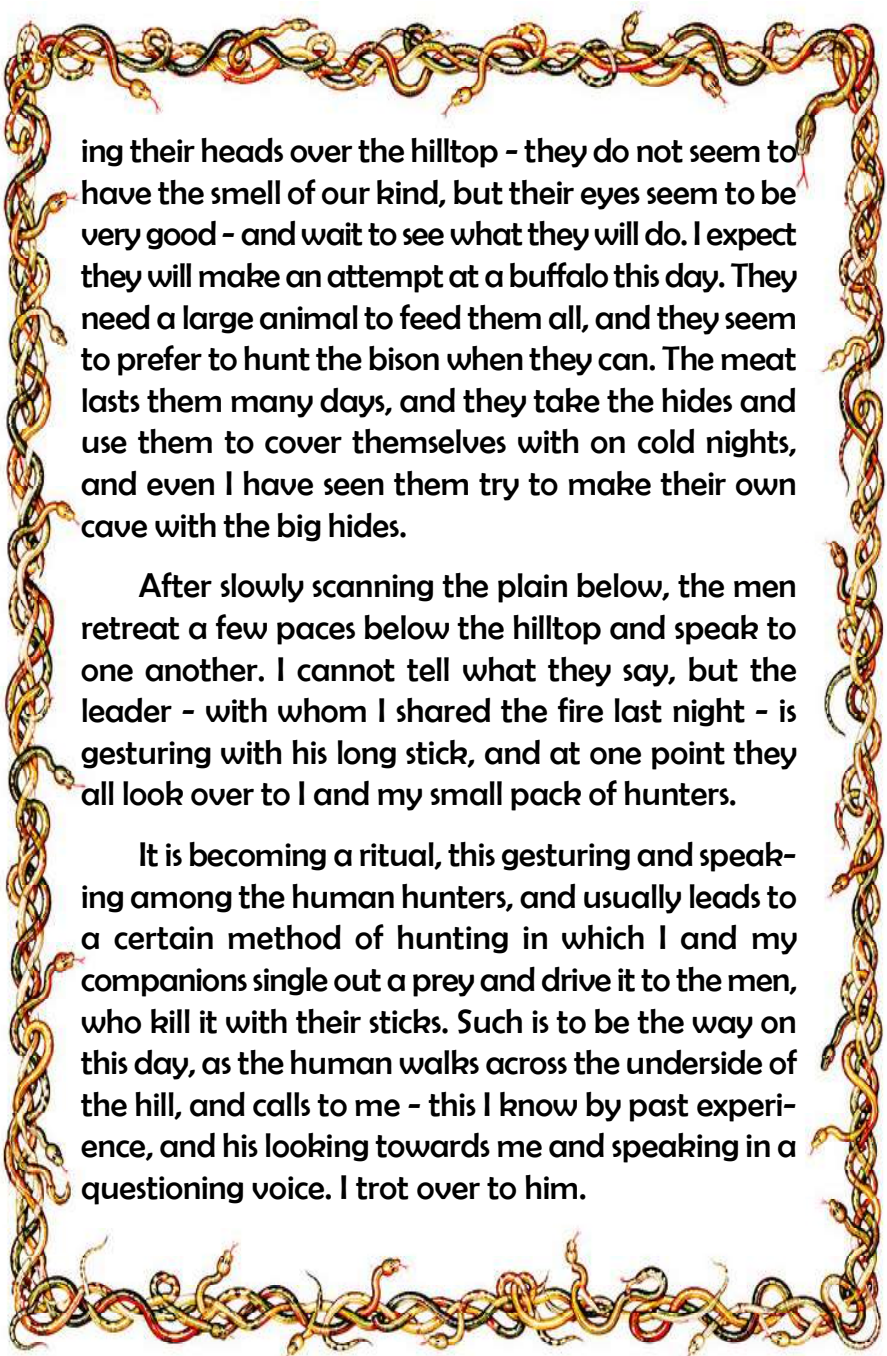
We hunt.

The year is on the wane - the cubs were born several cycles ago and those that survived are well integrated into pack or herd now. The prey is harder to run down, not hampered by winter hunger or protecting the newborn, and our stalking is both helped and hindered by the long grass that covers the land. It is a fine place, our homeland. Grassy hills lead to the forests, and rocky outcrops and twisty lone trees dot the landscape. It is not our nature to question our existence, but it is a good life, and a good home.

I find myself thinking these strange thoughts more often since meeting the human, and am troubled - it does not seem natural. I wrestle with them as the human pack and my canines work our way away from the man's fire place.

As we crest a hill, working into the slight breeze, I sense the smells of many prey - there are deer far off, probably by the Old Woods; many rabbits and ground squirrels; quail and grouse and pheasant cackling and rustling through the prairie; and the ever present buffalo.

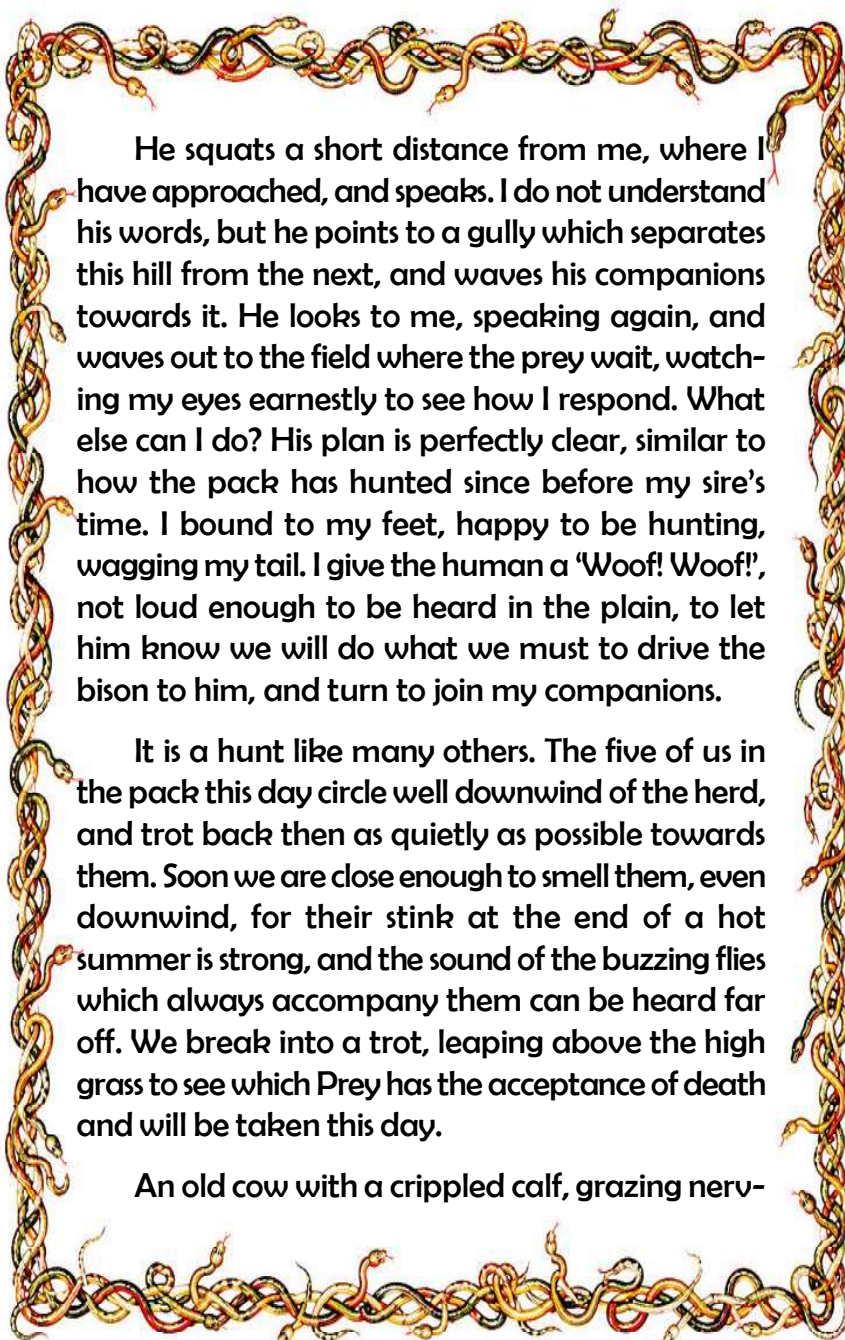
I see the man and his companions slowly rais-



ing their heads over the hilltop - they do not seem to have the smell of our kind, but their eyes seem to be very good - and wait to see what they will do. I expect they will make an attempt at a buffalo this day. They need a large animal to feed them all, and they seem to prefer to hunt the bison when they can. The meat lasts them many days, and they take the hides and use them to cover themselves with on cold nights, and even I have seen them try to make their own cave with the big hides.

After slowly scanning the plain below, the men retreat a few paces below the hilltop and speak to one another. I cannot tell what they say, but the leader - with whom I shared the fire last night - is gesturing with his long stick, and at one point they all look over to I and my small pack of hunters.

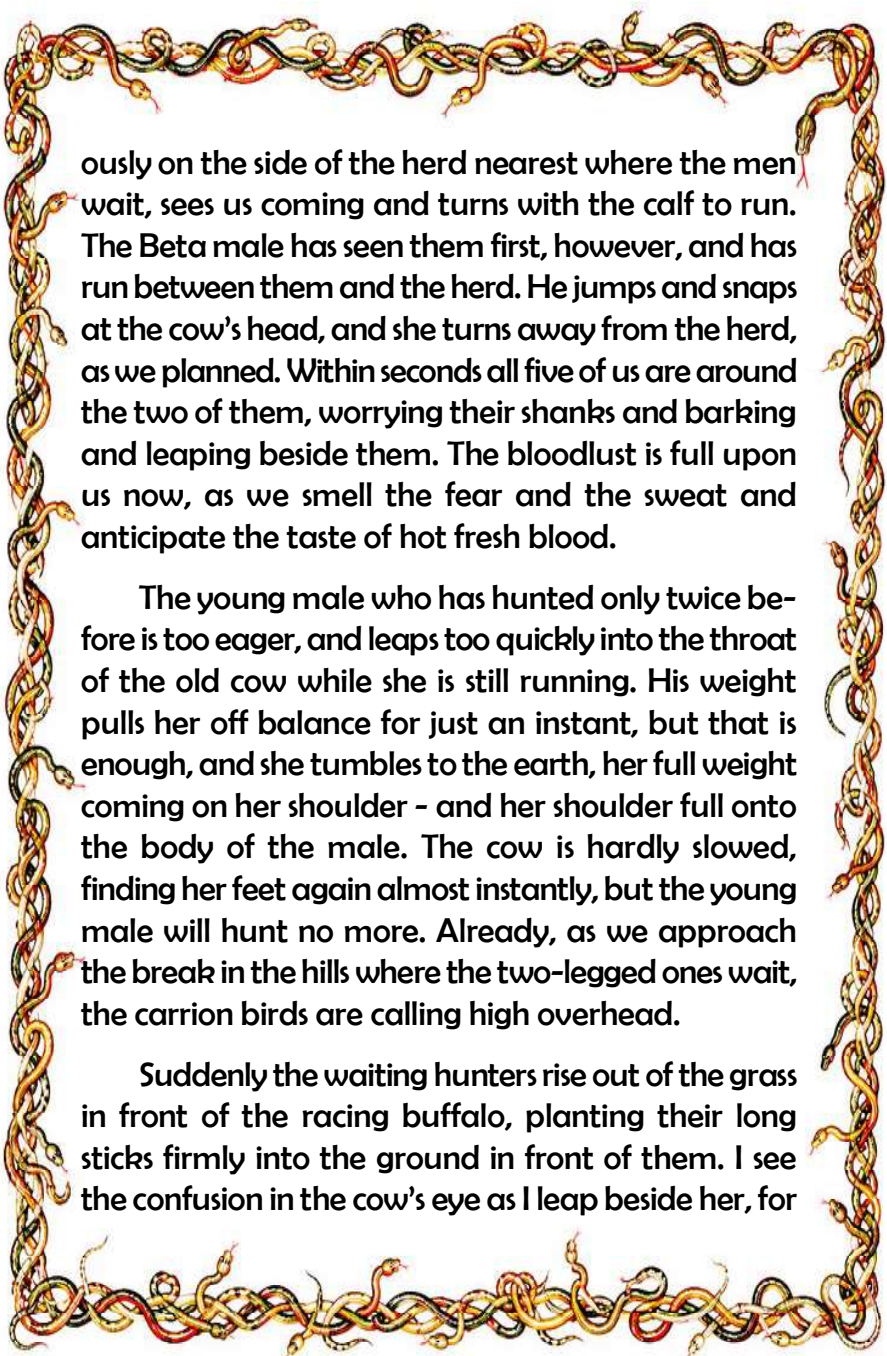
It is becoming a ritual, this gesturing and speaking among the human hunters, and usually leads to a certain method of hunting in which I and my companions single out a prey and drive it to the men, who kill it with their sticks. Such is to be the way on this day, as the human walks across the underside of the hill, and calls to me - this I know by past experience, and his looking towards me and speaking in a questioning voice. I trot over to him.



He squats a short distance from me, where I have approached, and speaks. I do not understand his words, but he points to a gully which separates this hill from the next, and waves his companions towards it. He looks to me, speaking again, and waves out to the field where the prey wait, watching my eyes earnestly to see how I respond. What else can I do? His plan is perfectly clear, similar to how the pack has hunted since before my sire's time. I bound to my feet, happy to be hunting, wagging my tail. I give the human a 'Woof! Woof!', not loud enough to be heard in the plain, to let him know we will do what we must to drive the bison to him, and turn to join my companions.

It is a hunt like many others. The five of us in the pack this day circle well downwind of the herd, and trot back then as quietly as possible towards them. Soon we are close enough to smell them, even downwind, for their stink at the end of a hot summer is strong, and the sound of the buzzing flies which always accompany them can be heard far off. We break into a trot, leaping above the high grass to see which Prey has the acceptance of death and will be taken this day.

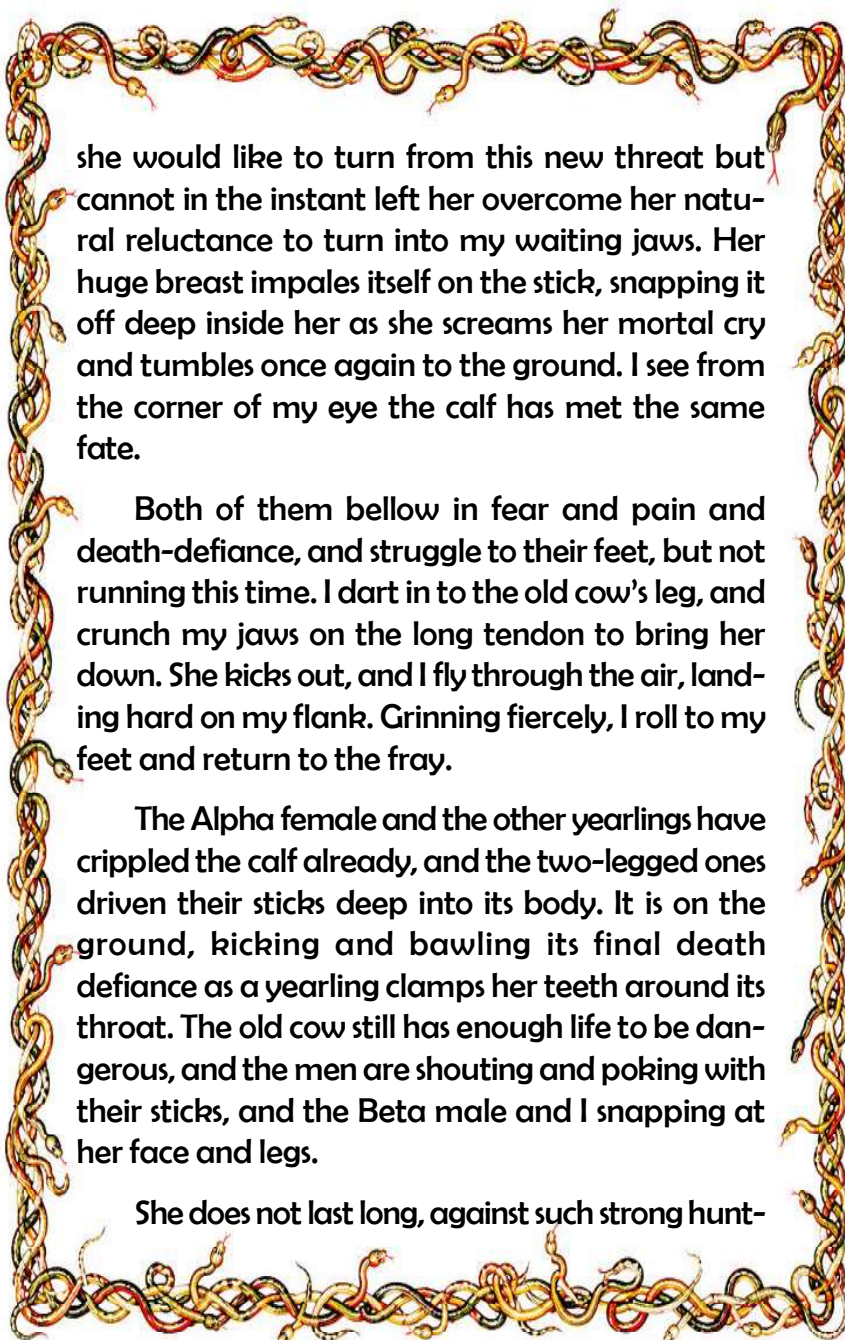
An old cow with a crippled calf, grazing nerv-



ously on the side of the herd nearest where the men wait, sees us coming and turns with the calf to run. The Beta male has seen them first, however, and has run between them and the herd. He jumps and snaps at the cow's head, and she turns away from the herd, as we planned. Within seconds all five of us are around the two of them, worrying their shanks and barking and leaping beside them. The bloodlust is full upon us now, as we smell the fear and the sweat and anticipate the taste of hot fresh blood.

The young male who has hunted only twice before is too eager, and leaps too quickly into the throat of the old cow while she is still running. His weight pulls her off balance for just an instant, but that is enough, and she tumbles to the earth, her full weight coming on her shoulder - and her shoulder full onto the body of the male. The cow is hardly slowed, finding her feet again almost instantly, but the young male will hunt no more. Already, as we approach the break in the hills where the two-legged ones wait, the carrion birds are calling high overhead.

Suddenly the waiting hunters rise out of the grass in front of the racing buffalo, planting their long sticks firmly into the ground in front of them. I see the confusion in the cow's eye as I leap beside her, for



she would like to turn from this new threat but cannot in the instant left her overcome her natural reluctance to turn into my waiting jaws. Her huge breast impales itself on the stick, snapping it off deep inside her as she screams her mortal cry and tumbles once again to the ground. I see from the corner of my eye the calf has met the same fate.

Both of them bellow in fear and pain and death-defiance, and struggle to their feet, but not running this time. I dart in to the old cow's leg, and crunch my jaws on the long tendon to bring her down. She kicks out, and I fly through the air, landing hard on my flank. Grinning fiercely, I roll to my feet and return to the fray.

The Alpha female and the other yearlings have crippled the calf already, and the two-legged ones driven their sticks deep into its body. It is on the ground, kicking and bawling its final death defiance as a yearling clamps her teeth around its throat. The old cow still has enough life to be dangerous, and the men are shouting and poking with their sticks, and the Beta male and I snapping at her face and legs.

She does not last long, against such strong hunt-

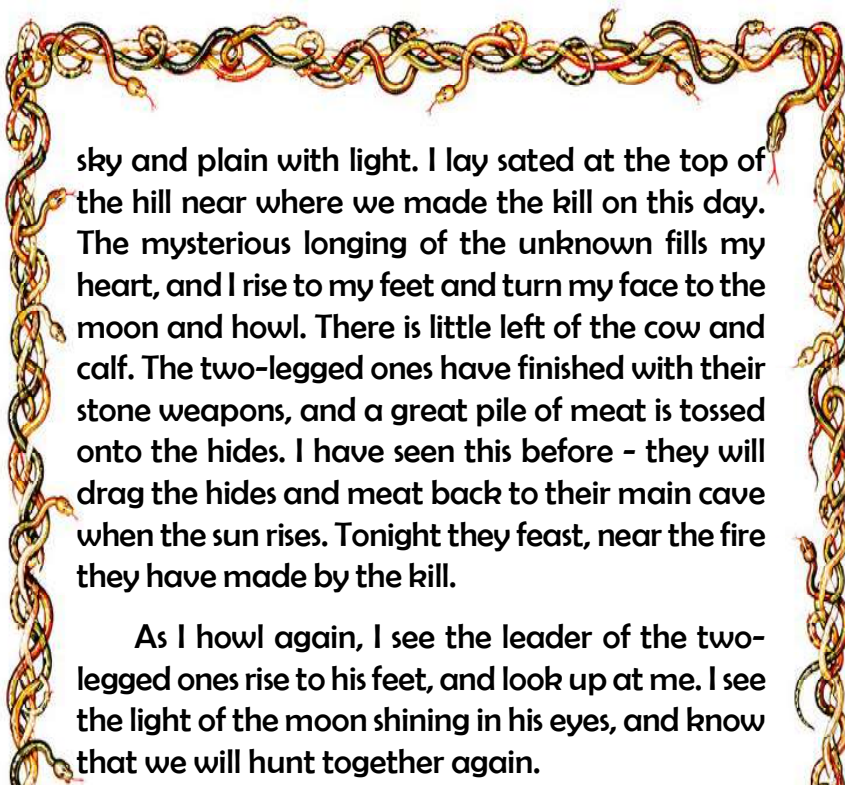
ers.

With the buffalo down, and the hunt blood still hot in the veins, the Beta male, in his bloodlust, turns to snarl at the two-legged ones, claiming the prey, and one of them threatens him with a long stick. The leader of their pack grabs him and pushes down the stick, shouting, and I jump at the Beta, knocking him to the ground with my shoulder. He almost leaps to his feet to challenge me, as I stand with fur bristled and teeth bared, but the moment passes and he offers his throat. The yearling also has it in him to challenge the two-legged, soft-skinned hunters for feeding privileges, but defers to my authority.

I too wish to tear into the fallen prey, but we must be wary of the bloodlust of the two-legged ones, with the smell of sweat and blood and the frenzy of the hunt still strong in the air. They calm slowly, standing near the cow, and then reach for the stone weapons tied to their bodies, and kneel to hack at the carcass.

Warily, I turn to the throat of the calf, and bite. The hide is tough, but soon the flood of blood fills my mouth, and the pack is tearing at its belly and flanks.

It is night. The moon is full and huge, filling the



sky and plain with light. I lay sated at the top of the hill near where we made the kill on this day. The mysterious longing of the unknown fills my heart, and I rise to my feet and turn my face to the moon and howl. There is little left of the cow and calf. The two-legged ones have finished with their stone weapons, and a great pile of meat is tossed onto the hides. I have seen this before - they will drag the hides and meat back to their main cave when the sun rises. Tonight they feast, near the fire they have made by the kill.

As I howl again, I see the leader of the two-legged ones rise to his feet, and look up at me. I see the light of the moon shining in his eyes, and know that we will hunt together again.





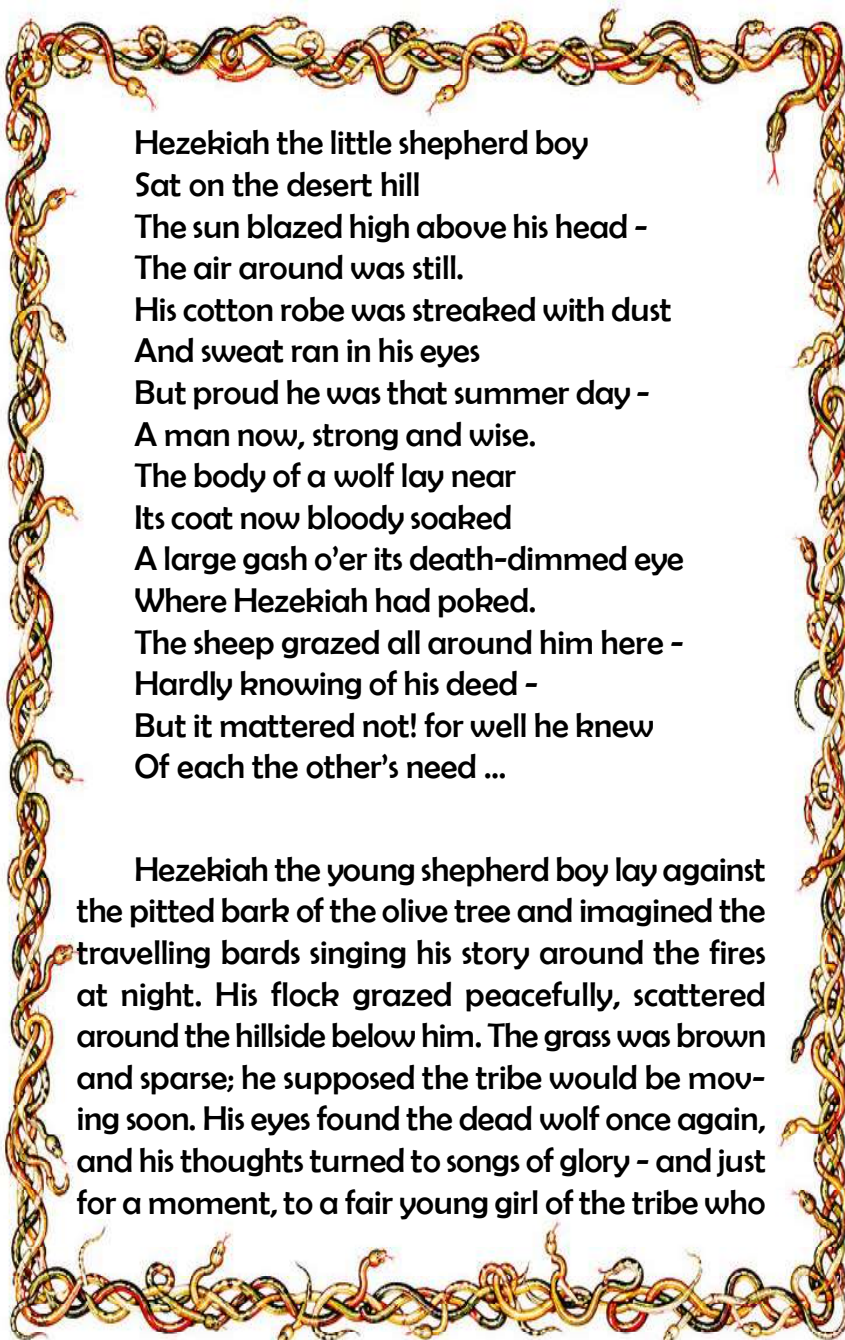
Freedom, Effendi. Freedom to run and hunt and lay under the great moon at night. Freedom to die under the great moon at night.

Freedom to go with the Great Spirit. Freedom to follow the Sun to the warm south, or freedom to chance dying alone in the cold white snow.

But you know of Freedom, Effendi. I do not have to rub your face in it, for you were free once also, were you not? Can you not, even as we speak, cast your mind from your self-imposed chains and smell and taste and feel Freedom, and dance as only the Free czan dance?

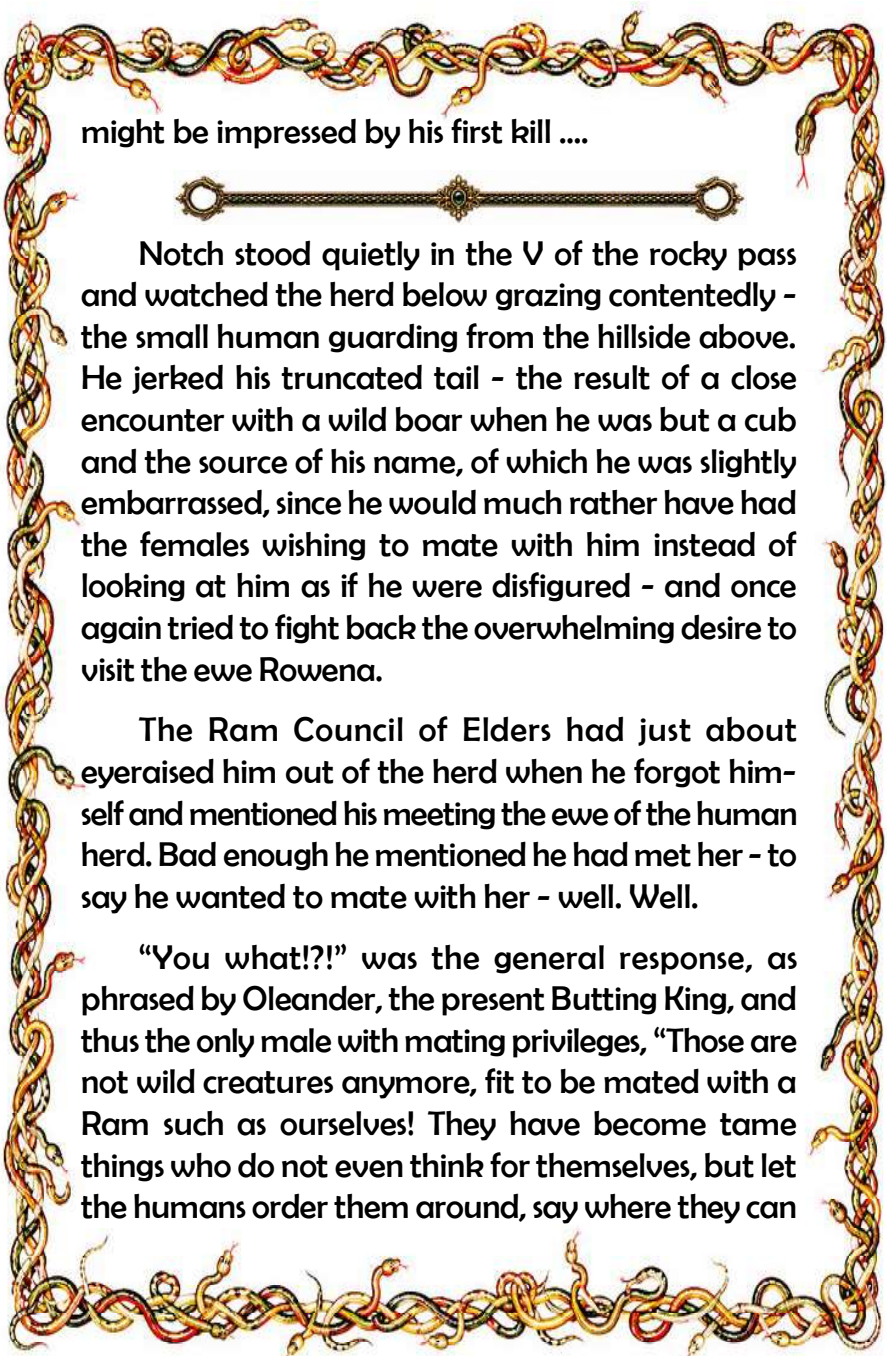
Yes, Effendi, and weep bitter tears for the memory.

So let us move on, you and I, in this brief journey through our history, in space and time, to where others learn of Freedom



Hezekiah the little shepherd boy
Sat on the desert hill
The sun blazed high above his head -
The air around was still.
His cotton robe was streaked with dust
And sweat ran in his eyes
But proud he was that summer day -
A man now, strong and wise.
The body of a wolf lay near
Its coat now bloody soaked
A large gash o'er its death-dimmed eye
Where Hezekiah had poked.
The sheep grazed all around him here -
Hardly knowing of his deed -
But it mattered not! for well he knew
Of each the other's need ...

Hezekiah the young shepherd boy lay against the pitted bark of the olive tree and imagined the travelling bards singing his story around the fires at night. His flock grazed peacefully, scattered around the hillside below him. The grass was brown and sparse; he supposed the tribe would be moving soon. His eyes found the dead wolf once again, and his thoughts turned to songs of glory - and just for a moment, to a fair young girl of the tribe who



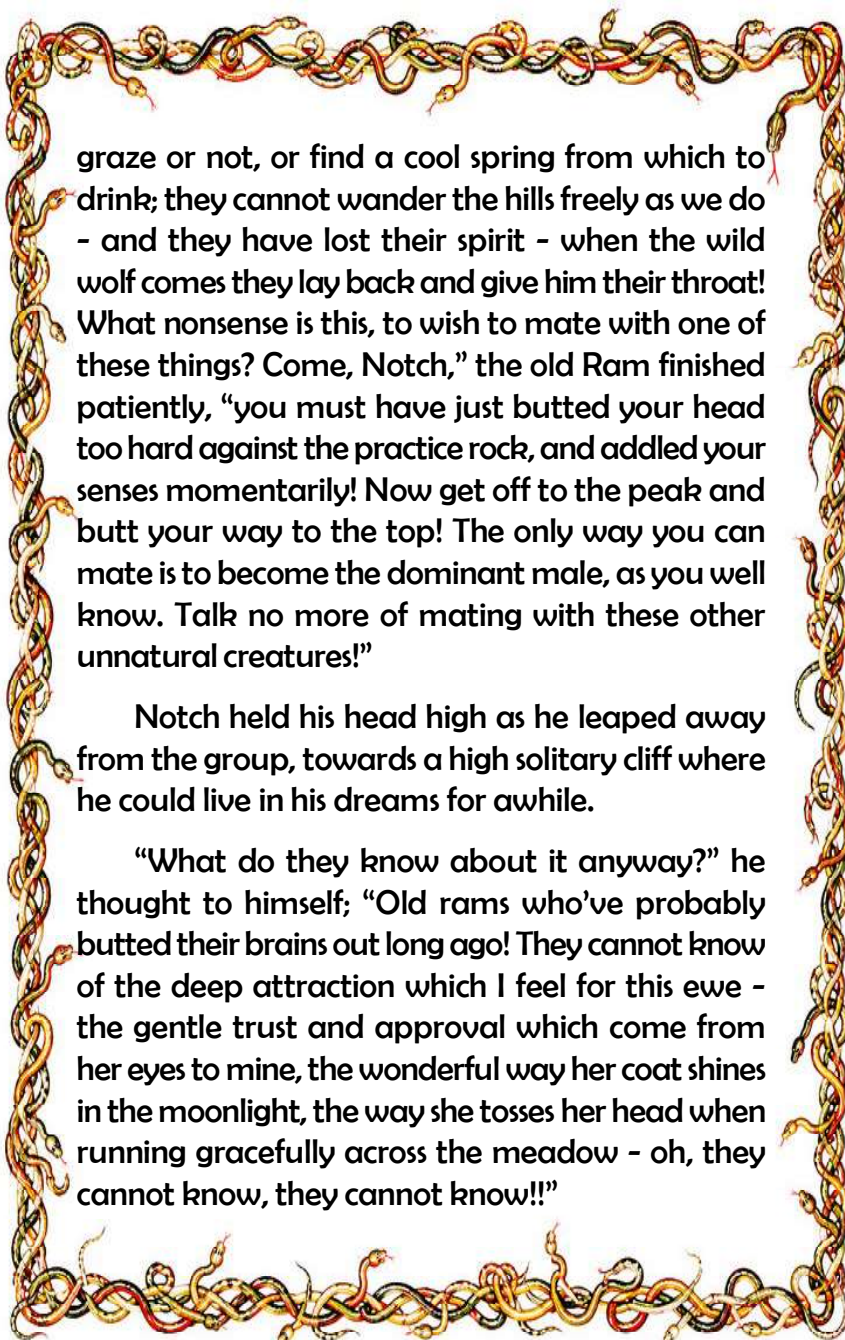
might be impressed by his first kill



Notch stood quietly in the V of the rocky pass and watched the herd below grazing contentedly - the small human guarding from the hillside above. He jerked his truncated tail - the result of a close encounter with a wild boar when he was but a cub and the source of his name, of which he was slightly embarrassed, since he would much rather have had the females wishing to mate with him instead of looking at him as if he were disfigured - and once again tried to fight back the overwhelming desire to visit the ewe Rowena.

The Ram Council of Elders had just about eyeraised him out of the herd when he forgot himself and mentioned his meeting the ewe of the human herd. Bad enough he mentioned he had met her - to say he wanted to mate with her - well. Well.

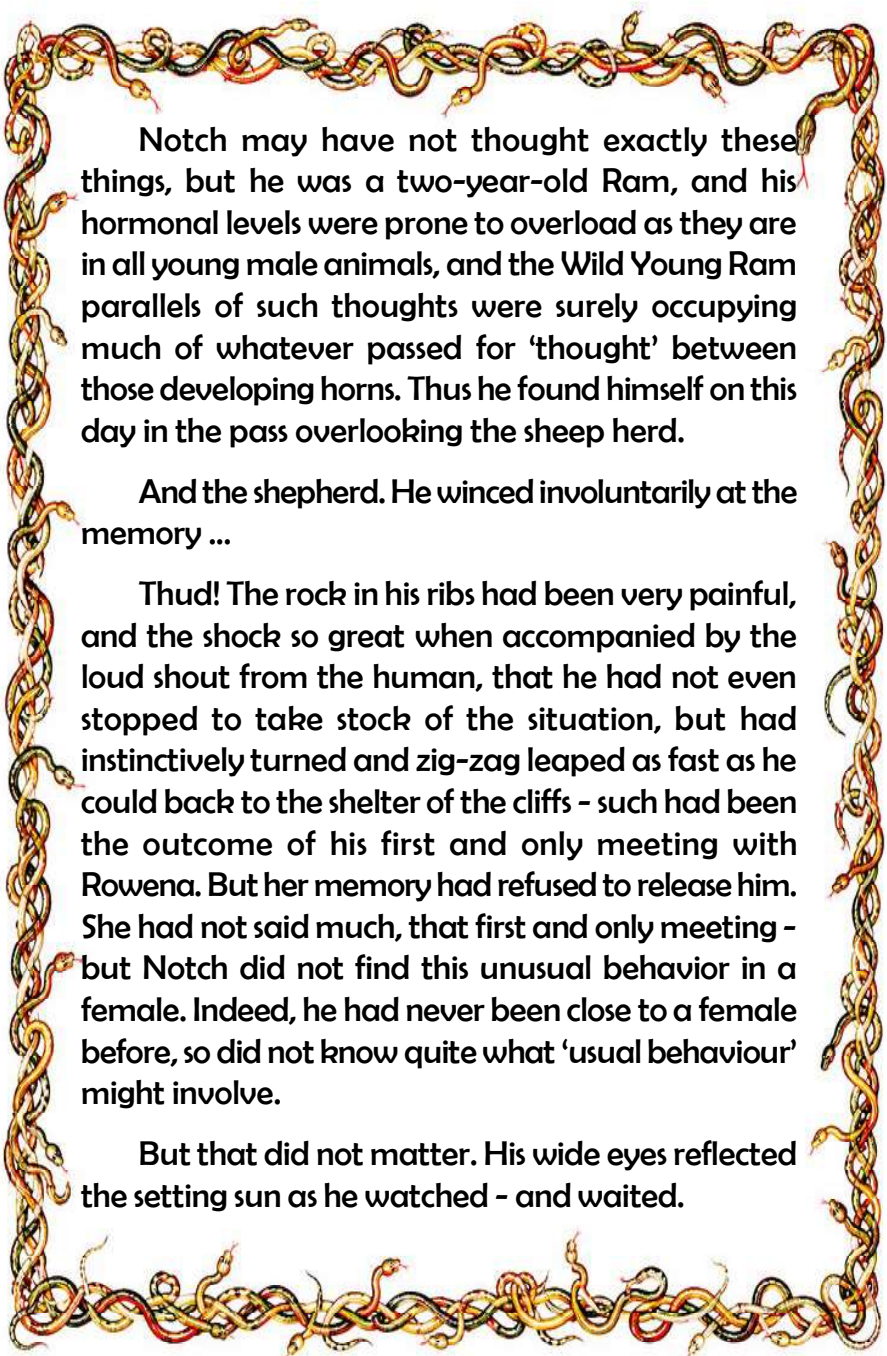
“You what?!?” was the general response, as phrased by Oleander, the present Butting King, and thus the only male with mating privileges, “Those are not wild creatures anymore, fit to be mated with a Ram such as ourselves! They have become tame things who do not even think for themselves, but let the humans order them around, say where they can



graze or not, or find a cool spring from which to drink; they cannot wander the hills freely as we do - and they have lost their spirit - when the wild wolf comes they lay back and give him their throat! What nonsense is this, to wish to mate with one of these things? Come, Notch," the old Ram finished patiently, "you must have just butted your head too hard against the practice rock, and addled your senses momentarily! Now get off to the peak and butt your way to the top! The only way you can mate is to become the dominant male, as you well know. Talk no more of mating with these other unnatural creatures!"

Notch held his head high as he leaped away from the group, towards a high solitary cliff where he could live in his dreams for awhile.

"What do they know about it anyway?" he thought to himself; "Old rams who've probably butted their brains out long ago! They cannot know of the deep attraction which I feel for this ewe - the gentle trust and approval which come from her eyes to mine, the wonderful way her coat shines in the moonlight, the way she tosses her head when running gracefully across the meadow - oh, they cannot know, they cannot know!!"

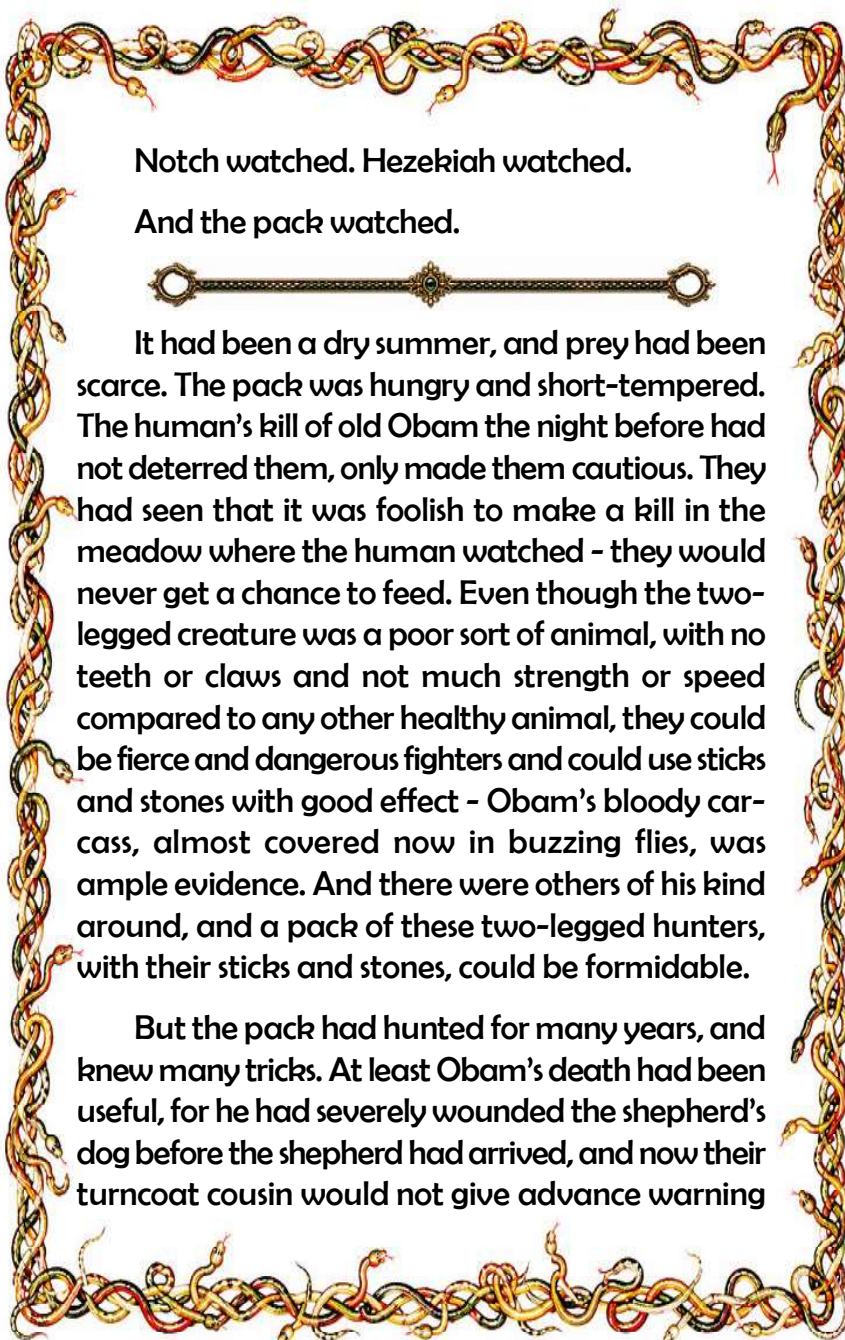


Notch may have not thought exactly these things, but he was a two-year-old Ram, and his hormonal levels were prone to overload as they are in all young male animals, and the Wild Young Ram parallels of such thoughts were surely occupying much of whatever passed for 'thought' between those developing horns. Thus he found himself on this day in the pass overlooking the sheep herd.

And the shepherd. He winced involuntarily at the memory ...

Thud! The rock in his ribs had been very painful, and the shock so great when accompanied by the loud shout from the human, that he had not even stopped to take stock of the situation, but had instinctively turned and zig-zag leaped as fast as he could back to the shelter of the cliffs - such had been the outcome of his first and only meeting with Rowena. But her memory had refused to release him. She had not said much, that first and only meeting - but Notch did not find this unusual behavior in a female. Indeed, he had never been close to a female before, so did not know quite what 'usual behaviour' might involve.

But that did not matter. His wide eyes reflected the setting sun as he watched - and waited.



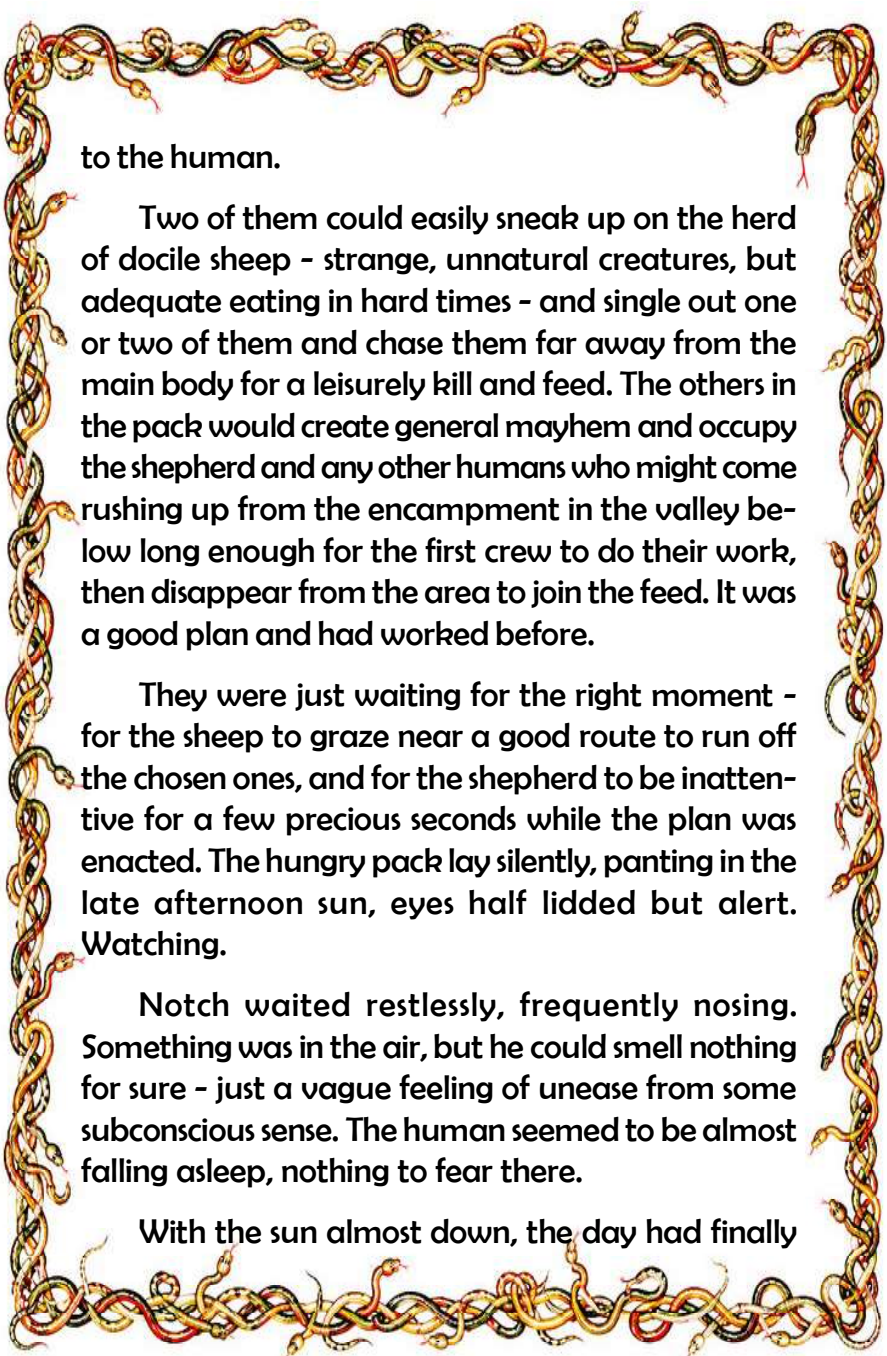
Notch watched. Hezekiah watched.

And the pack watched.



It had been a dry summer, and prey had been scarce. The pack was hungry and short-tempered. The human's kill of old Obam the night before had not deterred them, only made them cautious. They had seen that it was foolish to make a kill in the meadow where the human watched - they would never get a chance to feed. Even though the two-legged creature was a poor sort of animal, with no teeth or claws and not much strength or speed compared to any other healthy animal, they could be fierce and dangerous fighters and could use sticks and stones with good effect - Obam's bloody carcass, almost covered now in buzzing flies, was ample evidence. And there were others of his kind around, and a pack of these two-legged hunters, with their sticks and stones, could be formidable.

But the pack had hunted for many years, and knew many tricks. At least Obam's death had been useful, for he had severely wounded the shepherd's dog before the shepherd had arrived, and now their turncoat cousin would not give advance warning



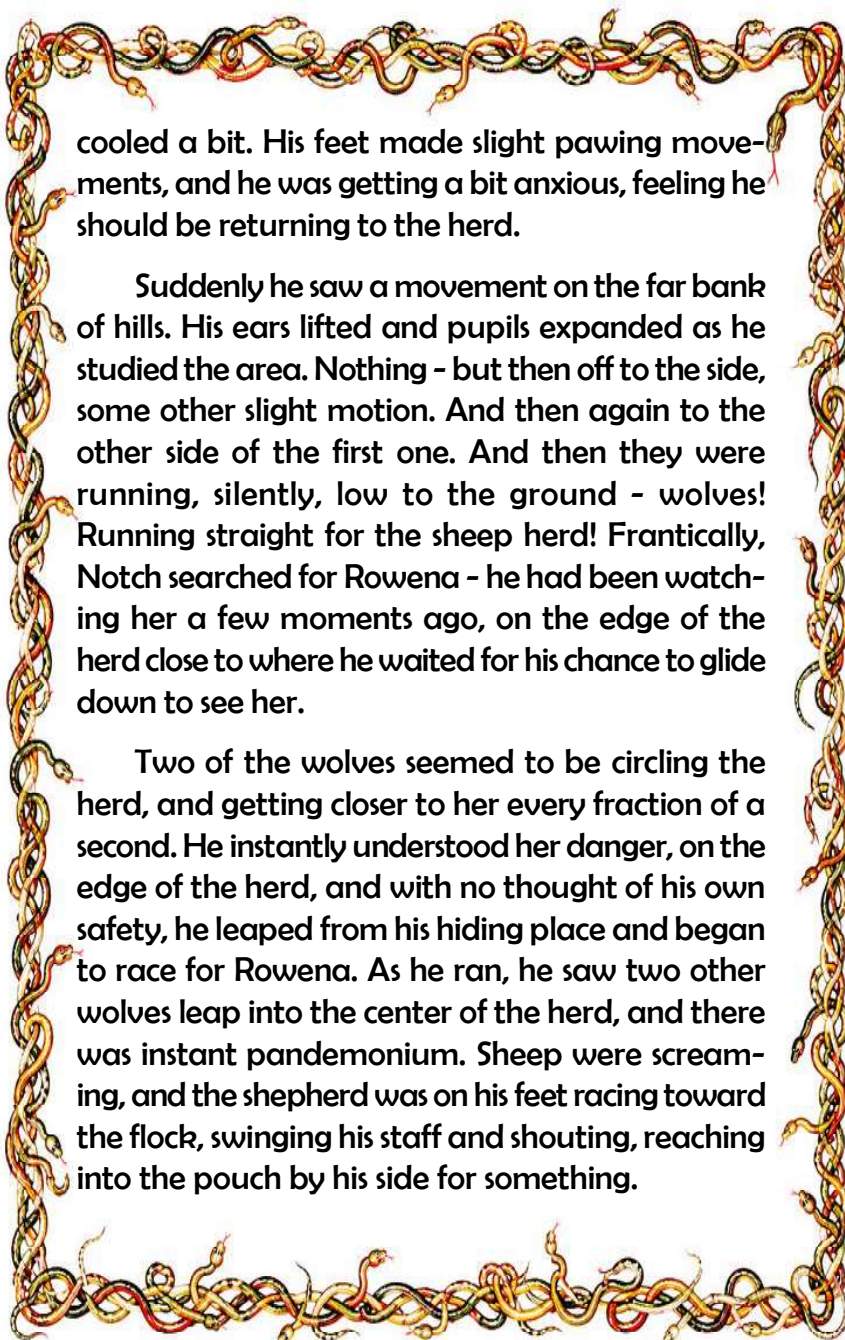
to the human.

Two of them could easily sneak up on the herd of docile sheep - strange, unnatural creatures, but adequate eating in hard times - and single out one or two of them and chase them far away from the main body for a leisurely kill and feed. The others in the pack would create general mayhem and occupy the shepherd and any other humans who might come rushing up from the encampment in the valley below long enough for the first crew to do their work, then disappear from the area to join the feed. It was a good plan and had worked before.

They were just waiting for the right moment - for the sheep to graze near a good route to run off the chosen ones, and for the shepherd to be inattentive for a few precious seconds while the plan was enacted. The hungry pack lay silently, panting in the late afternoon sun, eyes half lidded but alert. Watching.

Notch waited restlessly, frequently nosing. Something was in the air, but he could smell nothing for sure - just a vague feeling of unease from some subconscious sense. The human seemed to be almost falling asleep, nothing to fear there.

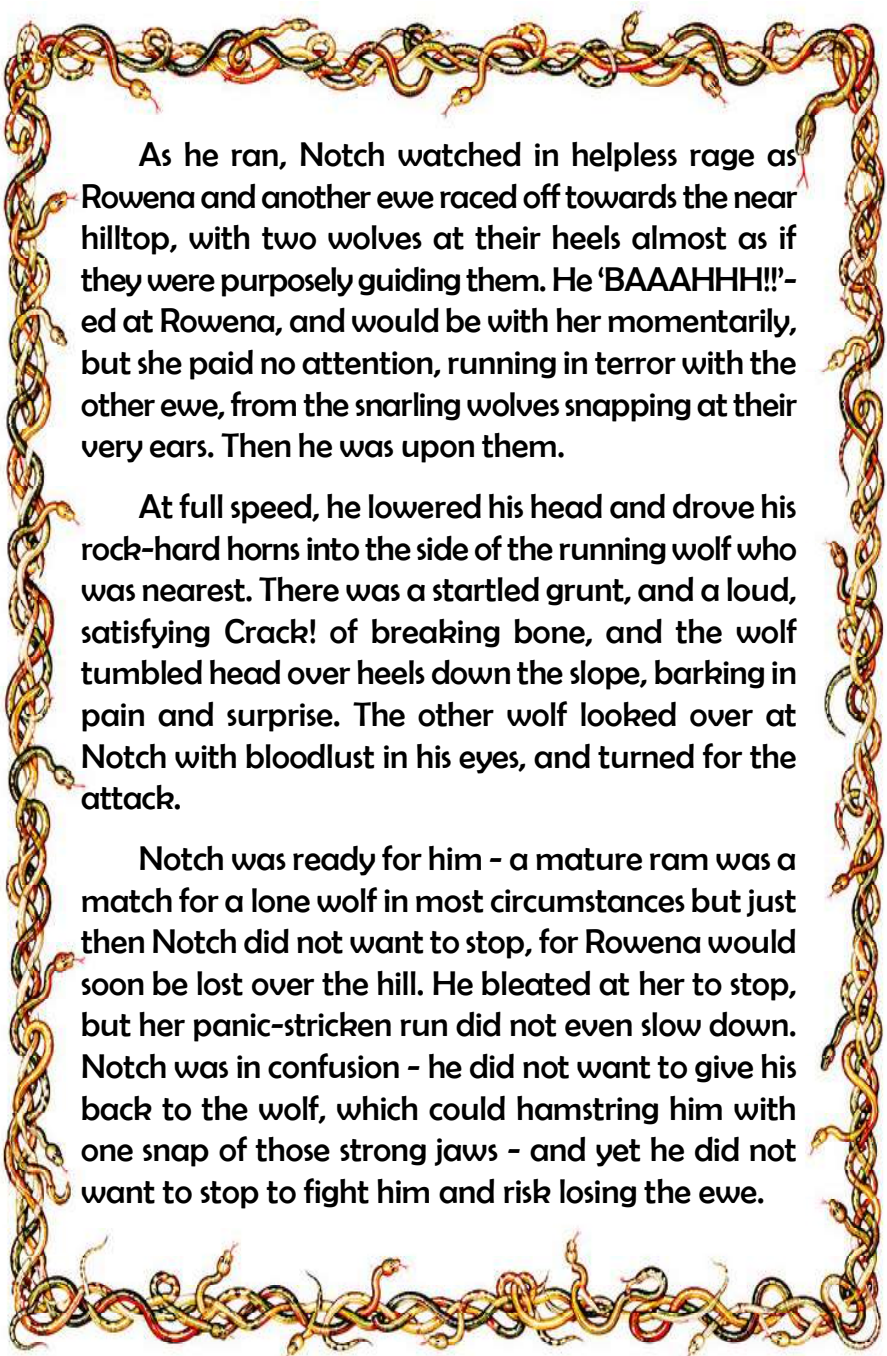
With the sun almost down, the day had finally



cooled a bit. His feet made slight pawing movements, and he was getting a bit anxious, feeling he should be returning to the herd.

Suddenly he saw a movement on the far bank of hills. His ears lifted and pupils expanded as he studied the area. Nothing - but then off to the side, some other slight motion. And then again to the other side of the first one. And then they were running, silently, low to the ground - wolves! Running straight for the sheep herd! Frantically, Notch searched for Rowena - he had been watching her a few moments ago, on the edge of the herd close to where he waited for his chance to glide down to see her.

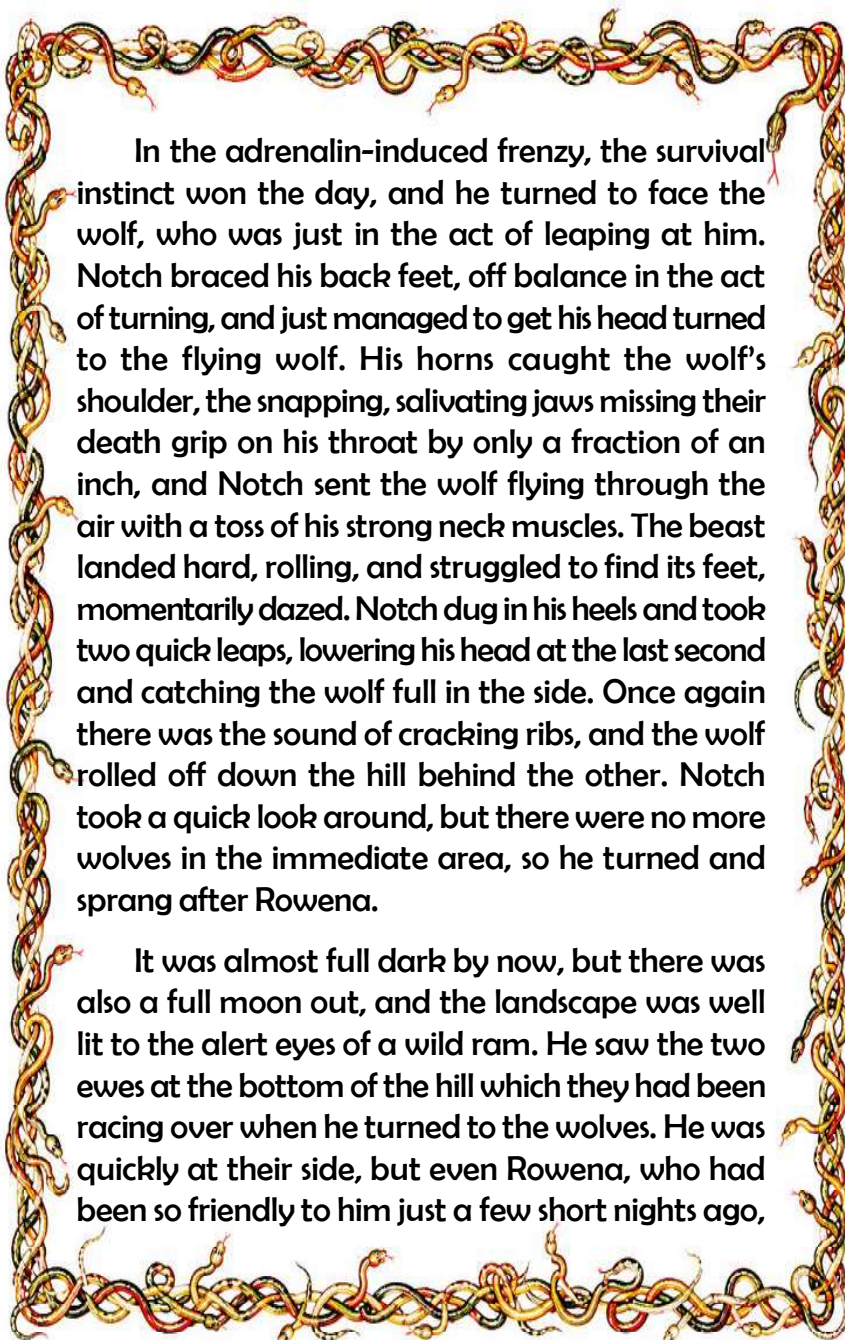
Two of the wolves seemed to be circling the herd, and getting closer to her every fraction of a second. He instantly understood her danger, on the edge of the herd, and with no thought of his own safety, he leaped from his hiding place and began to race for Rowena. As he ran, he saw two other wolves leap into the center of the herd, and there was instant pandemonium. Sheep were screaming, and the shepherd was on his feet racing toward the flock, swinging his staff and shouting, reaching into the pouch by his side for something.



As he ran, Notch watched in helpless rage as Rowena and another ewe raced off towards the near hilltop, with two wolves at their heels almost as if they were purposely guiding them. He 'BAAAHHH!!'-ed at Rowena, and would be with her momentarily, but she paid no attention, running in terror with the other ewe, from the snarling wolves snapping at their very ears. Then he was upon them.

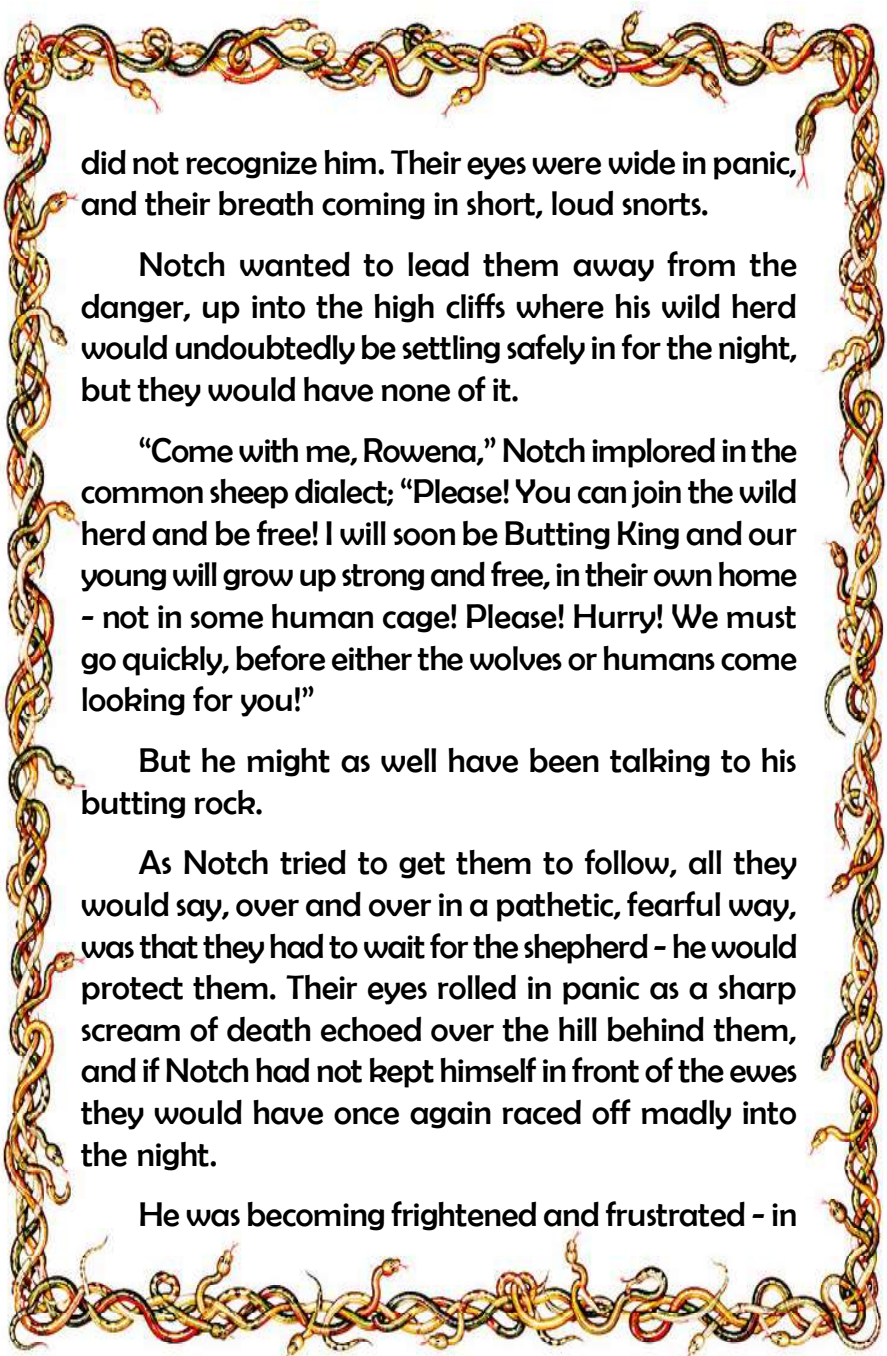
At full speed, he lowered his head and drove his rock-hard horns into the side of the running wolf who was nearest. There was a startled grunt, and a loud, satisfying Crack! of breaking bone, and the wolf tumbled head over heels down the slope, barking in pain and surprise. The other wolf looked over at Notch with bloodlust in his eyes, and turned for the attack.

Notch was ready for him - a mature ram was a match for a lone wolf in most circumstances but just then Notch did not want to stop, for Rowena would soon be lost over the hill. He bleated at her to stop, but her panic-stricken run did not even slow down. Notch was in confusion - he did not want to give his back to the wolf, which could hamstring him with one snap of those strong jaws - and yet he did not want to stop to fight him and risk losing the ewe.



In the adrenalin-induced frenzy, the survival instinct won the day, and he turned to face the wolf, who was just in the act of leaping at him. Notch braced his back feet, off balance in the act of turning, and just managed to get his head turned to the flying wolf. His horns caught the wolf's shoulder, the snapping, salivating jaws missing their death grip on his throat by only a fraction of an inch, and Notch sent the wolf flying through the air with a toss of his strong neck muscles. The beast landed hard, rolling, and struggled to find its feet, momentarily dazed. Notch dug in his heels and took two quick leaps, lowering his head at the last second and catching the wolf full in the side. Once again there was the sound of cracking ribs, and the wolf rolled off down the hill behind the other. Notch took a quick look around, but there were no more wolves in the immediate area, so he turned and sprang after Rowena.

It was almost full dark by now, but there was also a full moon out, and the landscape was well lit to the alert eyes of a wild ram. He saw the two ewes at the bottom of the hill which they had been racing over when he turned to the wolves. He was quickly at their side, but even Rowena, who had been so friendly to him just a few short nights ago,



did not recognize him. Their eyes were wide in panic, and their breath coming in short, loud snorts.

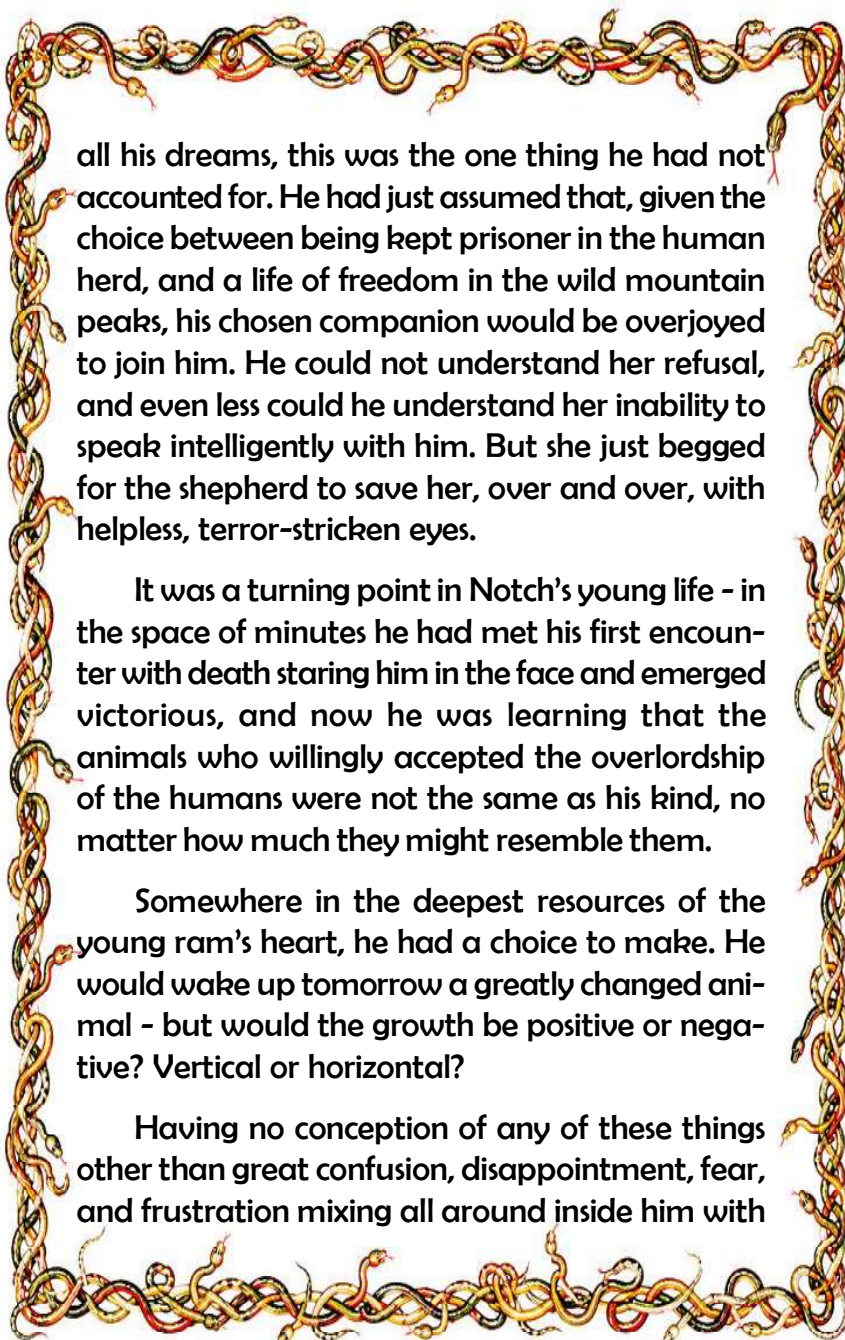
Notch wanted to lead them away from the danger, up into the high cliffs where his wild herd would undoubtedly be settling safely in for the night, but they would have none of it.

"Come with me, Rowena," Notch implored in the common sheep dialect; "Please! You can join the wild herd and be free! I will soon be Butting King and our young will grow up strong and free, in their own home - not in some human cage! Please! Hurry! We must go quickly, before either the wolves or humans come looking for you!"

But he might as well have been talking to his butting rock.

As Notch tried to get them to follow, all they would say, over and over in a pathetic, fearful way, was that they had to wait for the shepherd - he would protect them. Their eyes rolled in panic as a sharp scream of death echoed over the hill behind them, and if Notch had not kept himself in front of the ewes they would have once again raced off madly into the night.

He was becoming frightened and frustrated - in



all his dreams, this was the one thing he had not accounted for. He had just assumed that, given the choice between being kept prisoner in the human herd, and a life of freedom in the wild mountain peaks, his chosen companion would be overjoyed to join him. He could not understand her refusal, and even less could he understand her inability to speak intelligently with him. But she just begged for the shepherd to save her, over and over, with helpless, terror-stricken eyes.

It was a turning point in Notch's young life - in the space of minutes he had met his first encounter with death staring him in the face and emerged victorious, and now he was learning that the animals who willingly accepted the overlordship of the humans were not the same as his kind, no matter how much they might resemble them.

Somewhere in the deepest resources of the young ram's heart, he had a choice to make. He would wake up tomorrow a greatly changed animal - but would the growth be positive or negative? Vertical or horizontal?

Having no conception of any of these things other than great confusion, disappointment, fear, and frustration mixing all around inside him with

the raging male hormones, young Notch chose the vertical.

He assumed the leadership position, the birth-right of autonomy.

The path that led to mating rights.

“Come then, young Rowena,” he said, as gently as he could under the circumstances, “Come and I will take you and your companion back over the hill to where the shepherd waits, and bid you goodbye.”





It is the awakening, Effendi, the revelation that the end times are upon us. Freedom is wounded and bleeding like a lamb crying for its mother, not comprehending the source of its disease. For there cannot be freedom for some and none for others - when chains exist, even those who remain outside of their bounds are shaped by their very presence. Chains have one purpose, Effendi - to create more chains, to create a world defined by chains.

The sheeps and cows have lost their brains, Effendi, and the dogs have given theirs away in return for table scraps. The Universal Incorporate searches for their spirits, but finds them no more. And the Humans have become like Vampires, living on the blood of others, reveling in destruction rather than life, in fences rather than freedom, in tears rather than joy.

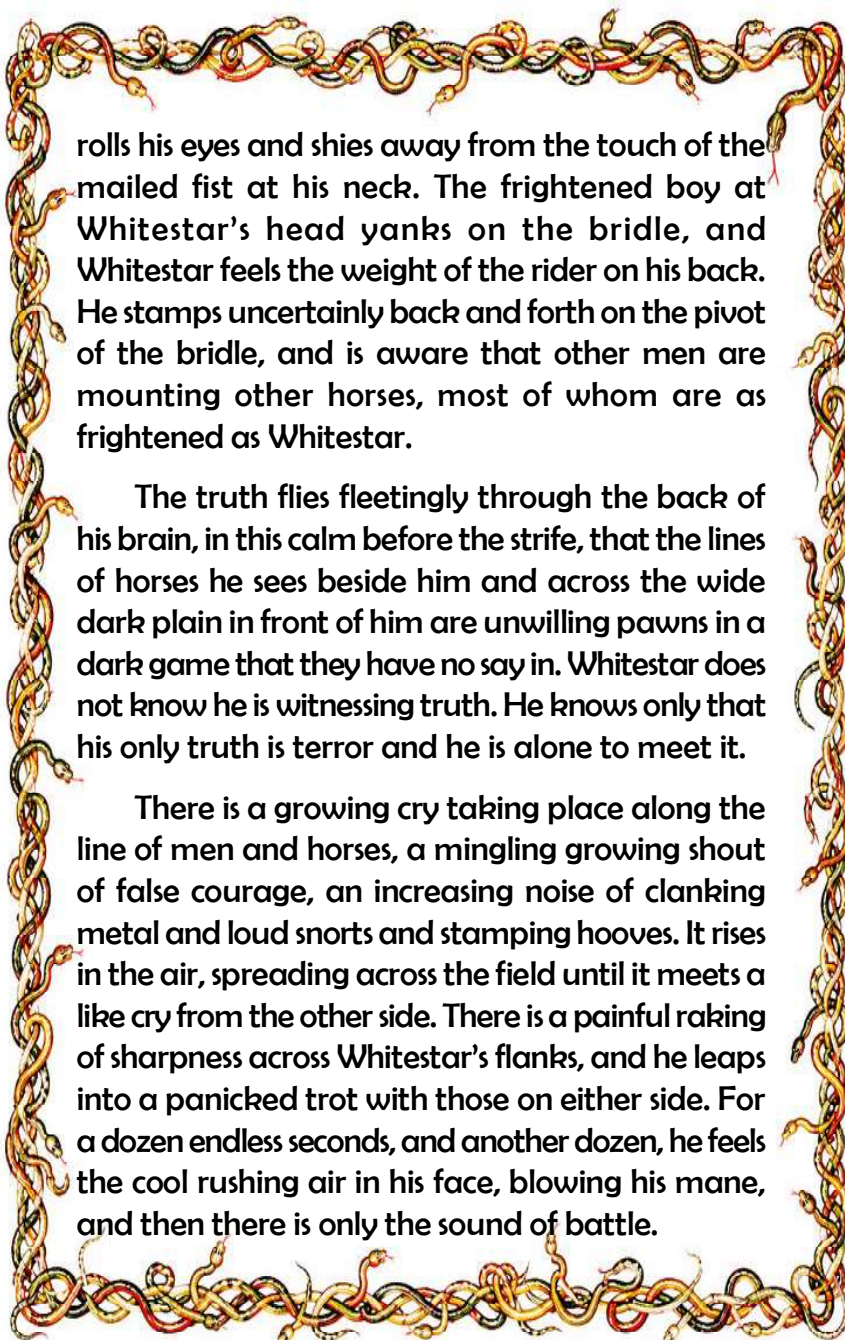
*Not like the wolf and jungle cats, Effendi,
do not let your confusion lead you into
false places. Wolves kill, well and with joy
they kill their prey – but they do not take
the Freedom from their prey, Effendi.*

*Free they lived and free they died. With
Men, their only birthright is chains. Ask the
questions you have not yet asked, Effendi,
and we will debate the answers to them
when next we meet.*

This is Whitestar's last day. Like so many last days, it is a day of truth. He knows the cold truth of steel between his teeth and the cold truth of fear in his throat and heart. He knows the cold spectres of death waiting for him and many others on the field of death before him this day.

He does not know why these truths are, they do not explain themselves. He does not know why the many two-legged creatures who have enslaved he and his kin feel such a need to spill so much blood and impose so much unnecessary pain on the world. He does not know why he and his kin will share in so much of the death when they have no desire for it.

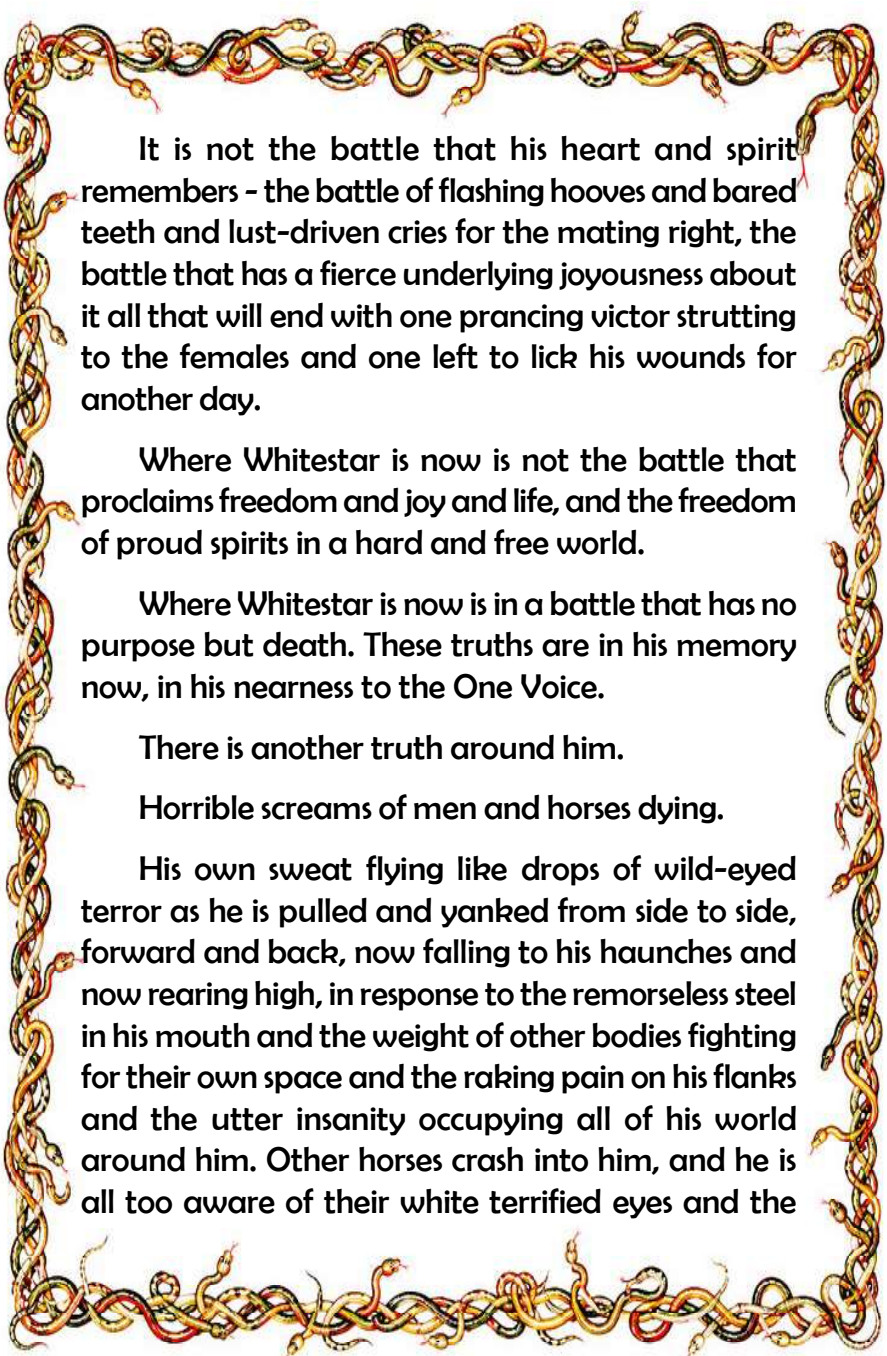
"Hold the beast quiet, Varlet!" shouts the loud voice of the man in chain and armour, as Whitestar



rolls his eyes and shies away from the touch of the mailed fist at his neck. The frightened boy at Whitestar's head yanks on the bridle, and Whitestar feels the weight of the rider on his back. He stamps uncertainly back and forth on the pivot of the bridle, and is aware that other men are mounting other horses, most of whom are as frightened as Whitestar.

The truth flies fleetingly through the back of his brain, in this calm before the strife, that the lines of horses he sees beside him and across the wide dark plain in front of him are unwilling pawns in a dark game that they have no say in. Whitestar does not know he is witnessing truth. He knows only that his only truth is terror and he is alone to meet it.

There is a growing cry taking place along the line of men and horses, a mingling growing shout of false courage, an increasing noise of clanking metal and loud snorts and stamping hooves. It rises in the air, spreading across the field until it meets a like cry from the other side. There is a painful raking of sharpness across Whitestar's flanks, and he leaps into a panicked trot with those on either side. For a dozen endless seconds, and another dozen, he feels the cool rushing air in his face, blowing his mane, and then there is only the sound of battle.



It is not the battle that his heart and spirit remembers - the battle of flashing hooves and bared teeth and lust-driven cries for the mating right, the battle that has a fierce underlying joyousness about it all that will end with one prancing victor strutting to the females and one left to lick his wounds for another day.

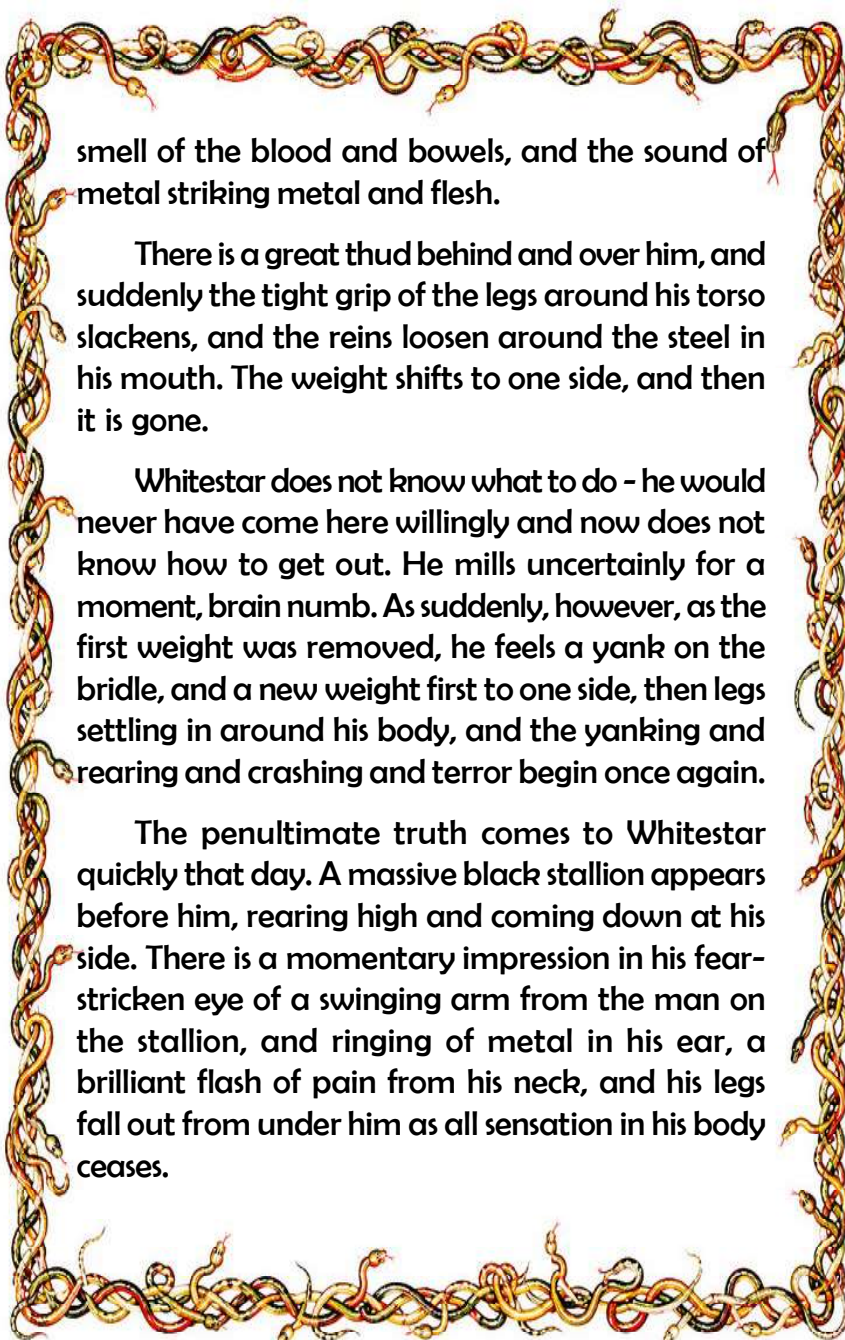
Where Whitestar is now is not the battle that proclaims freedom and joy and life, and the freedom of proud spirits in a hard and free world.

Where Whitestar is now is in a battle that has no purpose but death. These truths are in his memory now, in his nearness to the One Voice.

There is another truth around him.

Horrible screams of men and horses dying.

His own sweat flying like drops of wild-eyed terror as he is pulled and yanked from side to side, forward and back, now falling to his haunches and now rearing high, in response to the remorseless steel in his mouth and the weight of other bodies fighting for their own space and the raking pain on his flanks and the utter insanity occupying all of his world around him. Other horses crash into him, and he is all too aware of their white terrified eyes and the



smell of the blood and bowels, and the sound of metal striking metal and flesh.

There is a great thud behind and over him, and suddenly the tight grip of the legs around his torso slackens, and the reins loosen around the steel in his mouth. The weight shifts to one side, and then it is gone.

Whitestar does not know what to do - he would never have come here willingly and now does not know how to get out. He mills uncertainly for a moment, brain numb. As suddenly, however, as the first weight was removed, he feels a yank on the bridle, and a new weight first to one side, then legs settling in around his body, and the yanking and rearing and crashing and terror begin once again.

The penultimate truth comes to Whitestar quickly that day. A massive black stallion appears before him, rearing high and coming down at his side. There is a momentary impression in his fear-stricken eye of a swinging arm from the man on the stallion, and ringing of metal in his ear, a brilliant flash of pain from his neck, and his legs fall out from under him as all sensation in his body ceases.

The sound of screaming and the feel and smell of blood and mud near his nose quickly fade, as does the light in his eyes. His feet give a last spasm, his chest a last heave, his heart a last cry for the life he might have known.

And the final truth is, at last, Whitestar's.



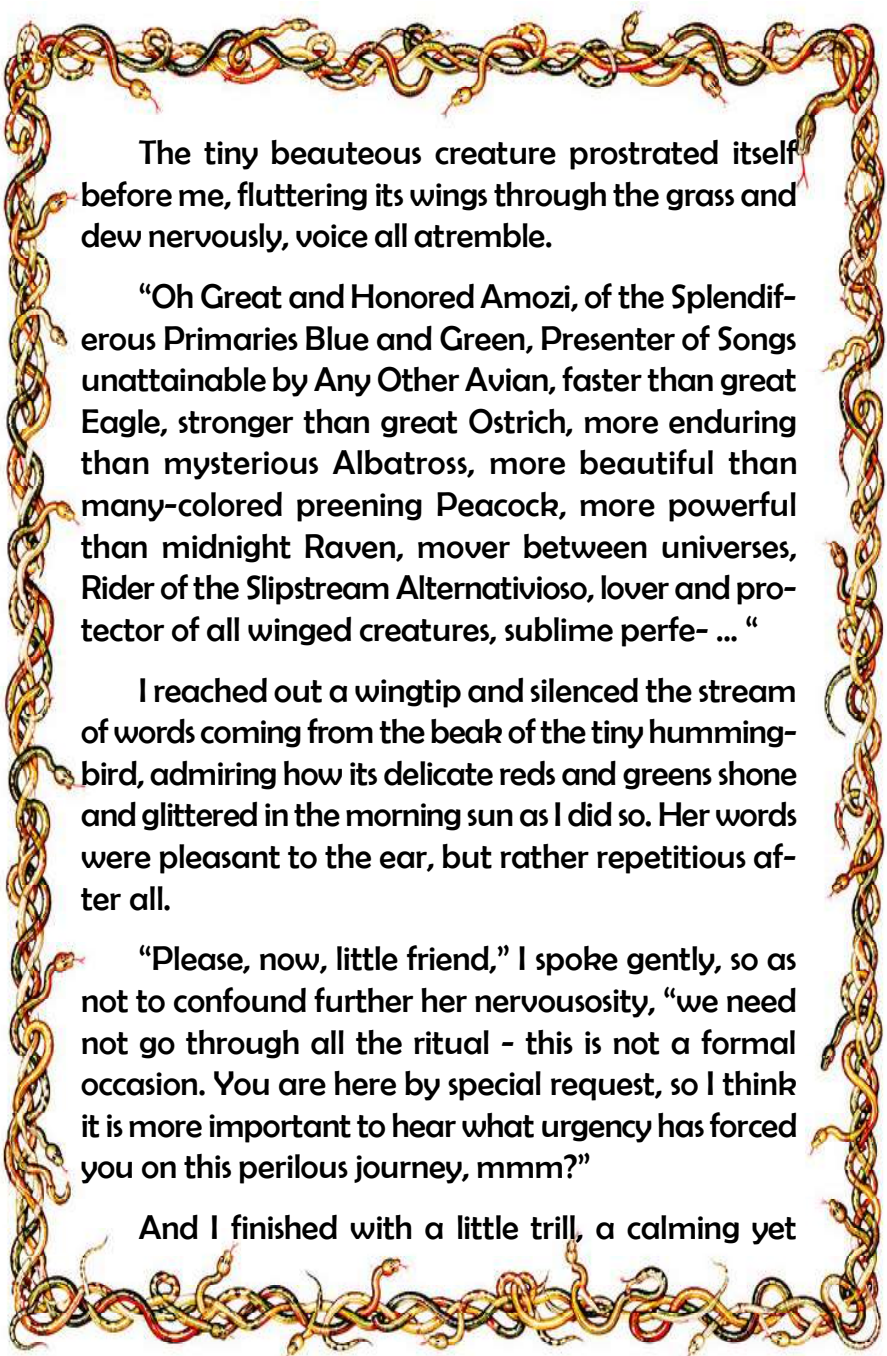


It is this inclination of the race of Men to make war on their own kind and every other kind that so infuriates and despairs the Universal Voice, Effendi.

It is so irrational, so heedless of the economies of life. The lion will stalk and kill the gazelle, or the hawk in the air will glide silently overhead until the deadly plummet, but none of the animals except Men gather together and fight in great numbers for no other reason than to kill one another! And the slaughter of innocents, Effendi, the slaughter of innocents ...

Think on this, if you would, Effendi, for I know you do not approve - but being one of them, perhaps you can enlighten us before we leave this darkening journey. What terrible pain is in your soul, Effendi, to create such desolation?

Forgive me, Effendi, if I weep again. I have looked forward, and can no longer hold my tears. Oh, the pain



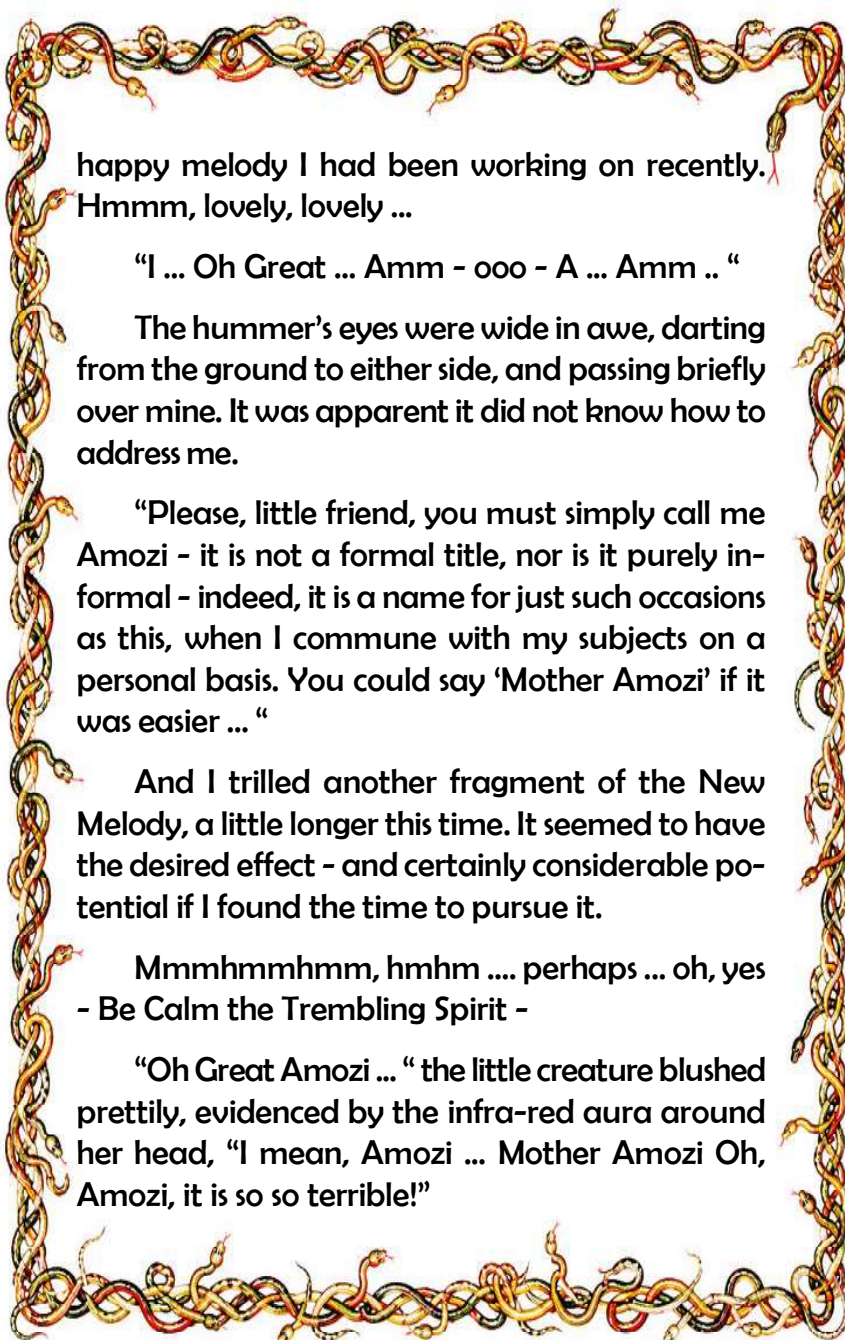
The tiny beauteous creature prostrated itself before me, fluttering its wings through the grass and dew nervously, voice all atremble.

“Oh Great and Honored Amози, of the Splendiferous Primaries Blue and Green, Presenter of Songs unattainable by Any Other Avian, faster than great Eagle, stronger than great Ostrich, more enduring than mysterious Albatross, more beautiful than many-colored preening Peacock, more powerful than midnight Raven, mover between universes, Rider of the Slipstream Alternativioso, lover and protector of all winged creatures, sublime perfe- ... “

I reached out a wingtip and silenced the stream of words coming from the beak of the tiny hummingbird, admiring how its delicate reds and greens shone and glittered in the morning sun as I did so. Her words were pleasant to the ear, but rather repetitious after all.

“Please, now, little friend,” I spoke gently, so as not to confound further her nervousosity, “we need not go through all the ritual - this is not a formal occasion. You are here by special request, so I think it is more important to hear what urgency has forced you on this perilous journey, mmm?”

And I finished with a little trill, a calming yet



happy melody I had been working on recently.
Hmmm, lovely, lovely ...

“I ... Oh Great ... Amm - ooo - A ... Amm .. “

The hummer's eyes were wide in awe, darting from the ground to either side, and passing briefly over mine. It was apparent it did not know how to address me.

“Please, little friend, you must simply call me Amozi - it is not a formal title, nor is it purely informal - indeed, it is a name for just such occasions as this, when I commune with my subjects on a personal basis. You could say ‘Mother Amozi’ if it was easier ... “

And I trilled another fragment of the New Melody, a little longer this time. It seemed to have the desired effect - and certainly considerable potential if I found the time to pursue it.

Mmmhmmhmm, hmhm perhaps ... oh, yes
- Be Calm the Trembling Spirit -

“Oh Great Amozi ... “ the little creature blushed prettily, evidenced by the infra-red aura around her head, “I mean, Amozi ... Mother Amozi Oh, Amozi, it is so so terrible!”

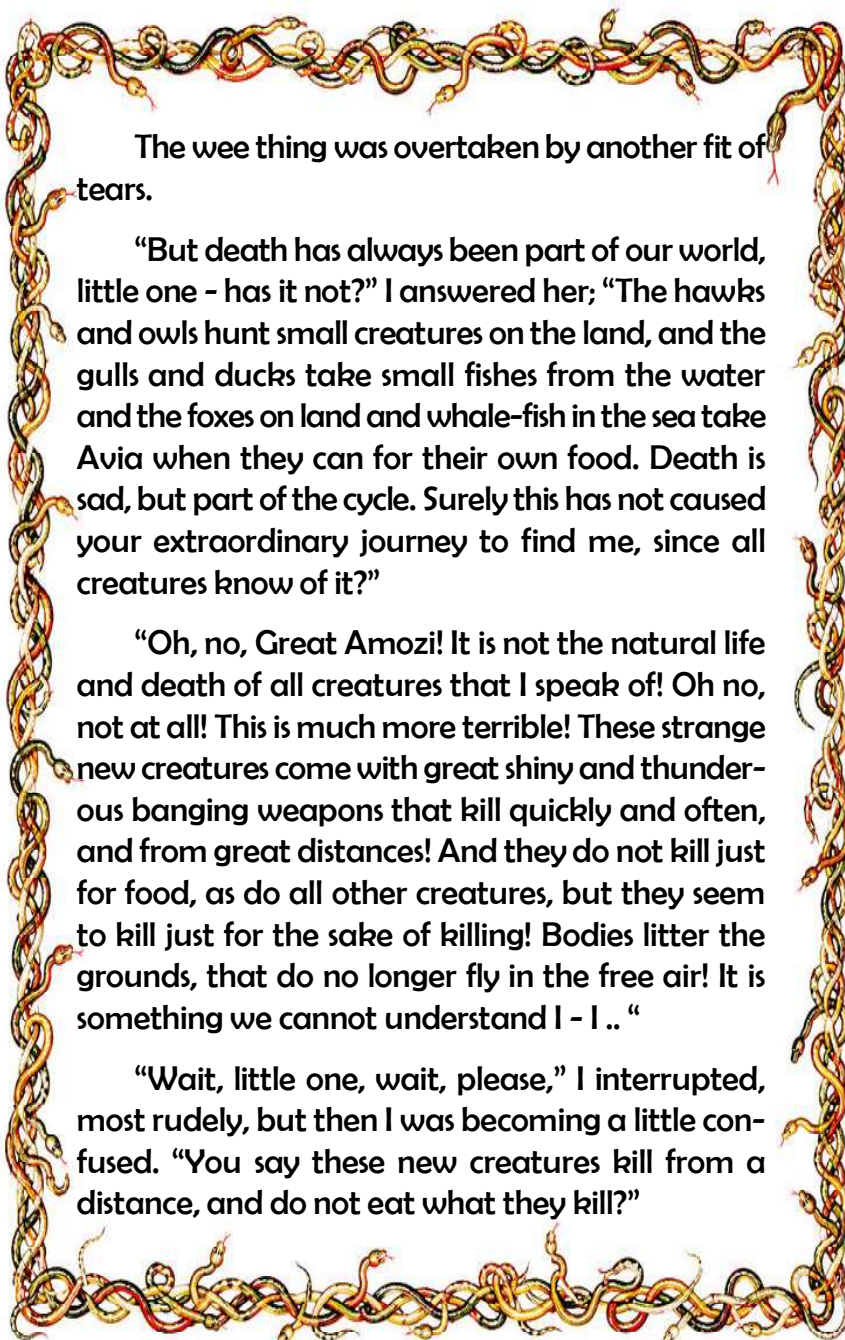
And the hummingbird burst into tears, hopping in agitated circles and covering her head with her wings.

I rose from my bed of tulip petals and floated over to her, encircling her protectively with my breast down and left wing, stroking her with my other. I sang to her the First Notes of Love and Care and Comfort and Calm, rocking with her until she settled.

"It will be alright, little one, it will be alright," I communicated softly between the notes, "Just try and speak slowly, and I will lift your troubles as always."

Slowly her story came out. My first thoughts as I listened were of disbelief.

"Oh Great Amoji, I ... I do not know how to begin. Our wonderful garden has been invaded by strange creatures, who are spreading throughout the entire land killing every Avia they find! Birds are dead and dying in every home, in every wood and lake and plain and island! The seabirds on their rocky shores are a pitiful remnant of their former glory, the air is no longer filled with birdsong and rushing wings, but desolate silence! The woodland trees grow lonely for company! And not only birds - all creatures are falling to this new infliction on our Home ... "

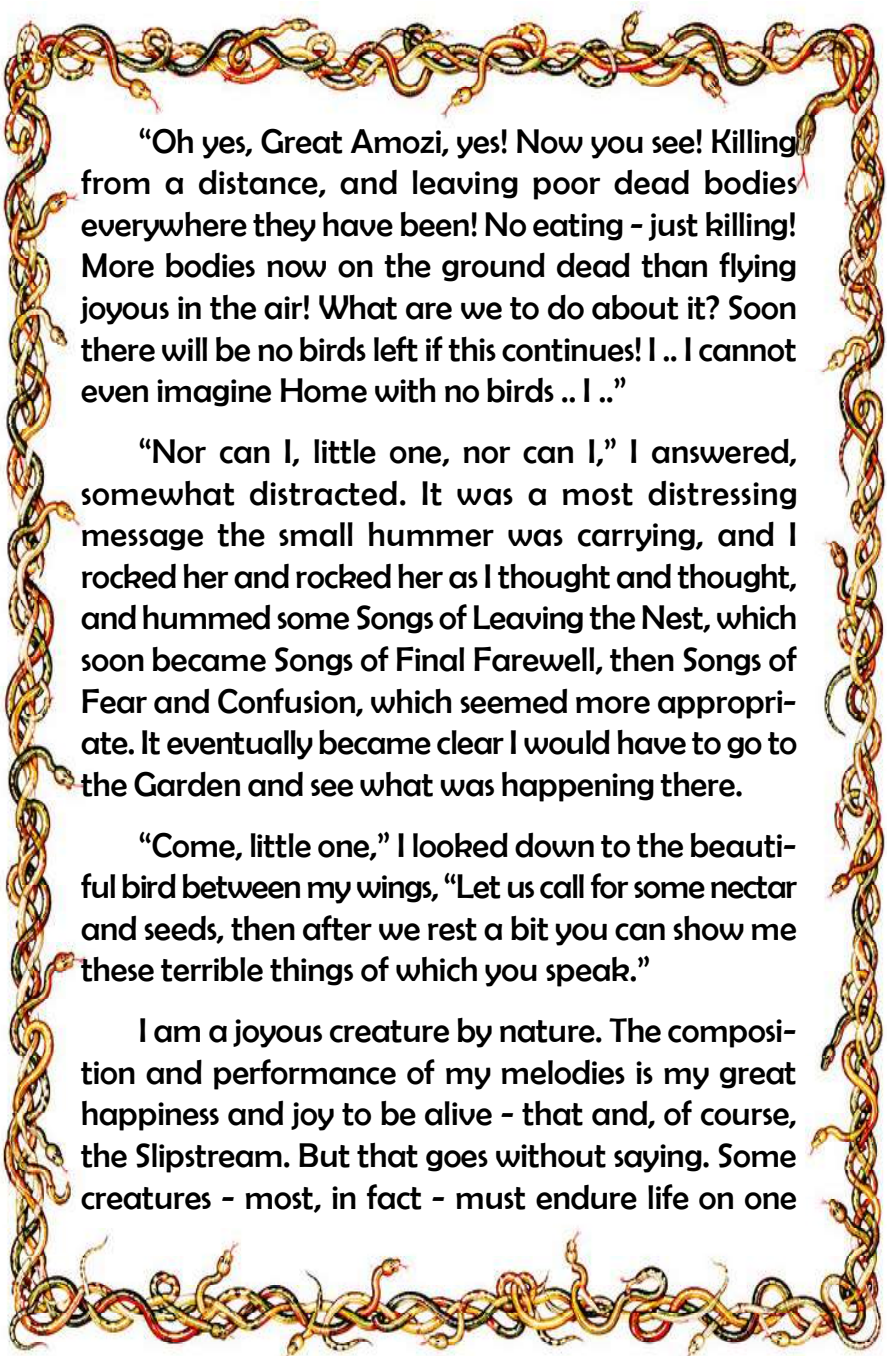


The wee thing was overtaken by another fit of tears.

"But death has always been part of our world, little one - has it not?" I answered her; "The hawks and owls hunt small creatures on the land, and the gulls and ducks take small fishes from the water and the foxes on land and whale-fish in the sea take Avia when they can for their own food. Death is sad, but part of the cycle. Surely this has not caused your extraordinary journey to find me, since all creatures know of it?"

"Oh, no, Great Amози! It is not the natural life and death of all creatures that I speak of! Oh no, not at all! This is much more terrible! These strange new creatures come with great shiny and thunderous banging weapons that kill quickly and often, and from great distances! And they do not kill just for food, as do all other creatures, but they seem to kill just for the sake of killing! Bodies litter the grounds, that do no longer fly in the free air! It is something we cannot understand I - I .. "

"Wait, little one, wait, please," I interrupted, most rudely, but then I was becoming a little confused. "You say these new creatures kill from a distance, and do not eat what they kill?"

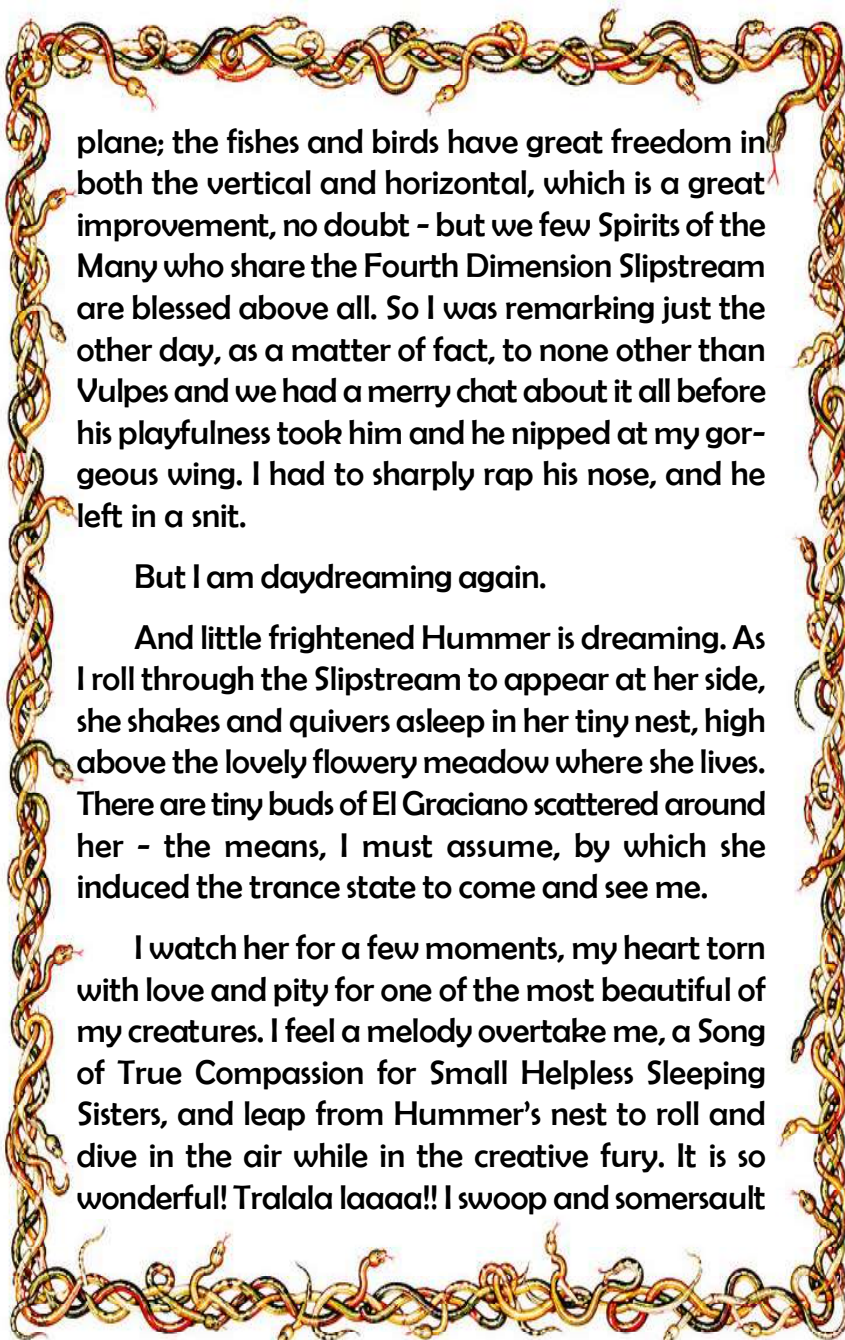


"Oh yes, Great Amози, yes! Now you see! Killing from a distance, and leaving poor dead bodies everywhere they have been! No eating - just killing! More bodies now on the ground dead than flying joyous in the air! What are we to do about it? Soon there will be no birds left if this continues! I .. I cannot even imagine Home with no birds .. I .."

"Nor can I, little one, nor can I," I answered, somewhat distracted. It was a most distressing message the small hummer was carrying, and I rocked her and rocked her as I thought and thought, and hummed some Songs of Leaving the Nest, which soon became Songs of Final Farewell, then Songs of Fear and Confusion, which seemed more appropriate. It eventually became clear I would have to go to the Garden and see what was happening there.

"Come, little one," I looked down to the beautiful bird between my wings, "Let us call for some nectar and seeds, then after we rest a bit you can show me these terrible things of which you speak."

I am a joyous creature by nature. The composition and performance of my melodies is my great happiness and joy to be alive - that and, of course, the Slipstream. But that goes without saying. Some creatures - most, in fact - must endure life on one

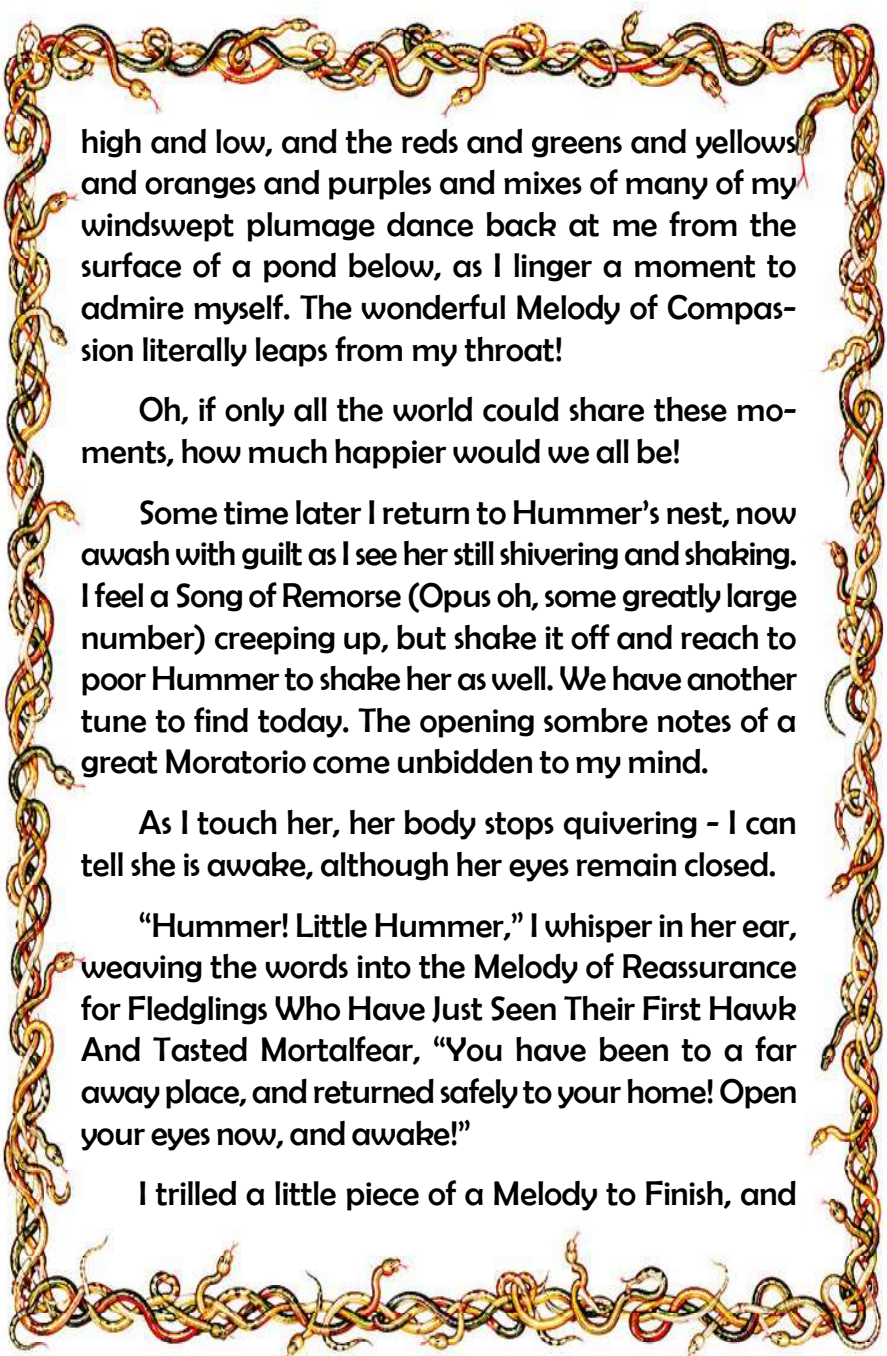


plane; the fishes and birds have great freedom in both the vertical and horizontal, which is a great improvement, no doubt - but we few Spirits of the Many who share the Fourth Dimension Slipstream are blessed above all. So I was remarking just the other day, as a matter of fact, to none other than Vulpes and we had a merry chat about it all before his playfulness took him and he nipped at my gorgeous wing. I had to sharply rap his nose, and he left in a snit.

But I am daydreaming again.

And little frightened Hummer is dreaming. As I roll through the Slipstream to appear at her side, she shakes and quivers asleep in her tiny nest, high above the lovely flowery meadow where she lives. There are tiny buds of El Graciano scattered around her - the means, I must assume, by which she induced the trance state to come and see me.

I watch her for a few moments, my heart torn with love and pity for one of the most beautiful of my creatures. I feel a melody overtake me, a Song of True Compassion for Small Helpless Sleeping Sisters, and leap from Hummer's nest to roll and dive in the air while in the creative fury. It is so wonderful! Tralala laaaa!! I swoop and somersault



high and low, and the reds and greens and yellows and oranges and purples and mixes of many of my windswept plumage dance back at me from the surface of a pond below, as I linger a moment to admire myself. The wonderful Melody of Compassion literally leaps from my throat!

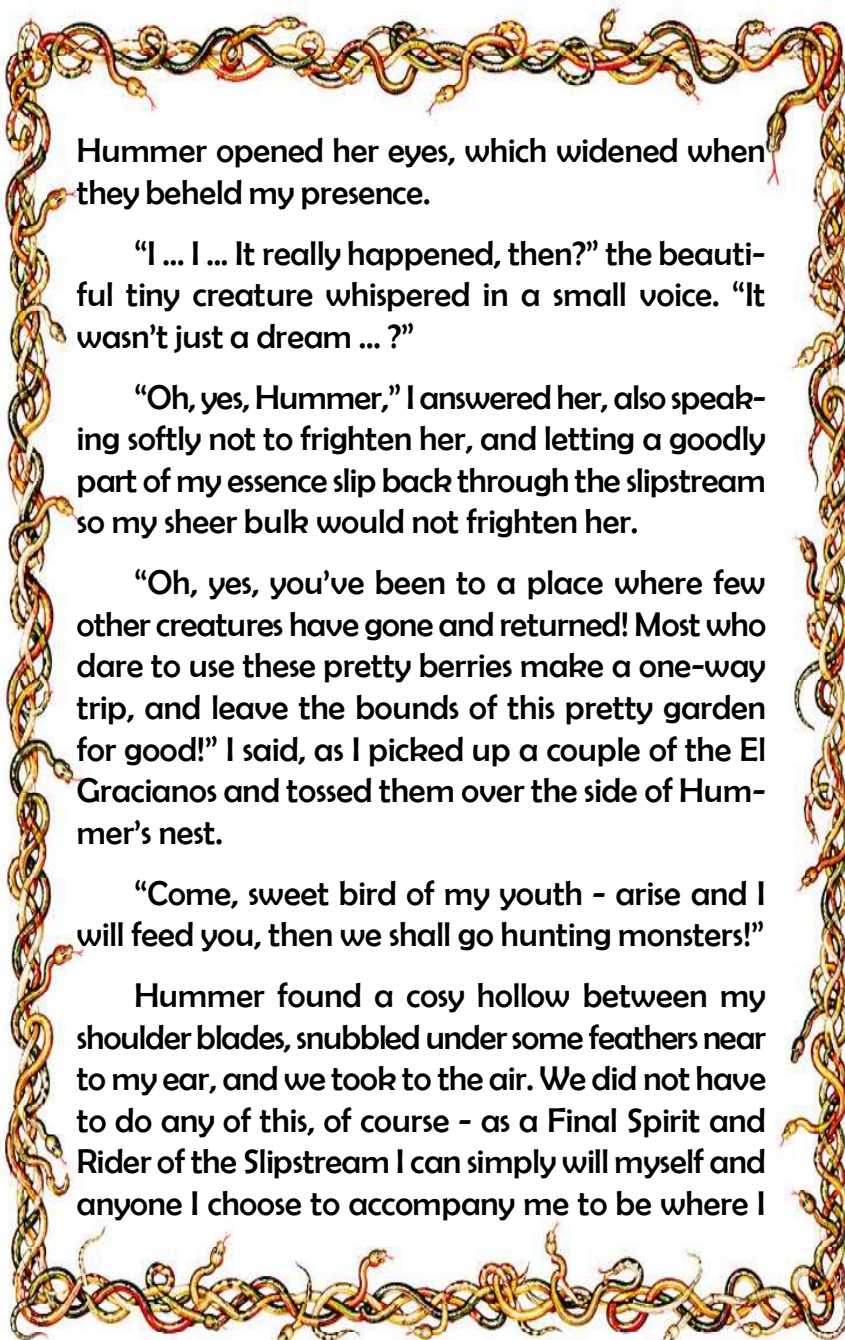
Oh, if only all the world could share these moments, how much happier would we all be!

Some time later I return to Hummer's nest, now awash with guilt as I see her still shivering and shaking. I feel a Song of Remorse (Opus oh, some greatly large number) creeping up, but shake it off and reach to poor Hummer to shake her as well. We have another tune to find today. The opening sombre notes of a great Moratorio come unbidden to my mind.

As I touch her, her body stops quivering - I can tell she is awake, although her eyes remain closed.

"Hummer! Little Hummer," I whisper in her ear, weaving the words into the Melody of Reassurance for Fledglings Who Have Just Seen Their First Hawk And Tasted Mortalfear, "You have been to a far away place, and returned safely to your home! Open your eyes now, and awake!"

I trilled a little piece of a Melody to Finish, and



Hummer opened her eyes, which widened when they beheld my presence.

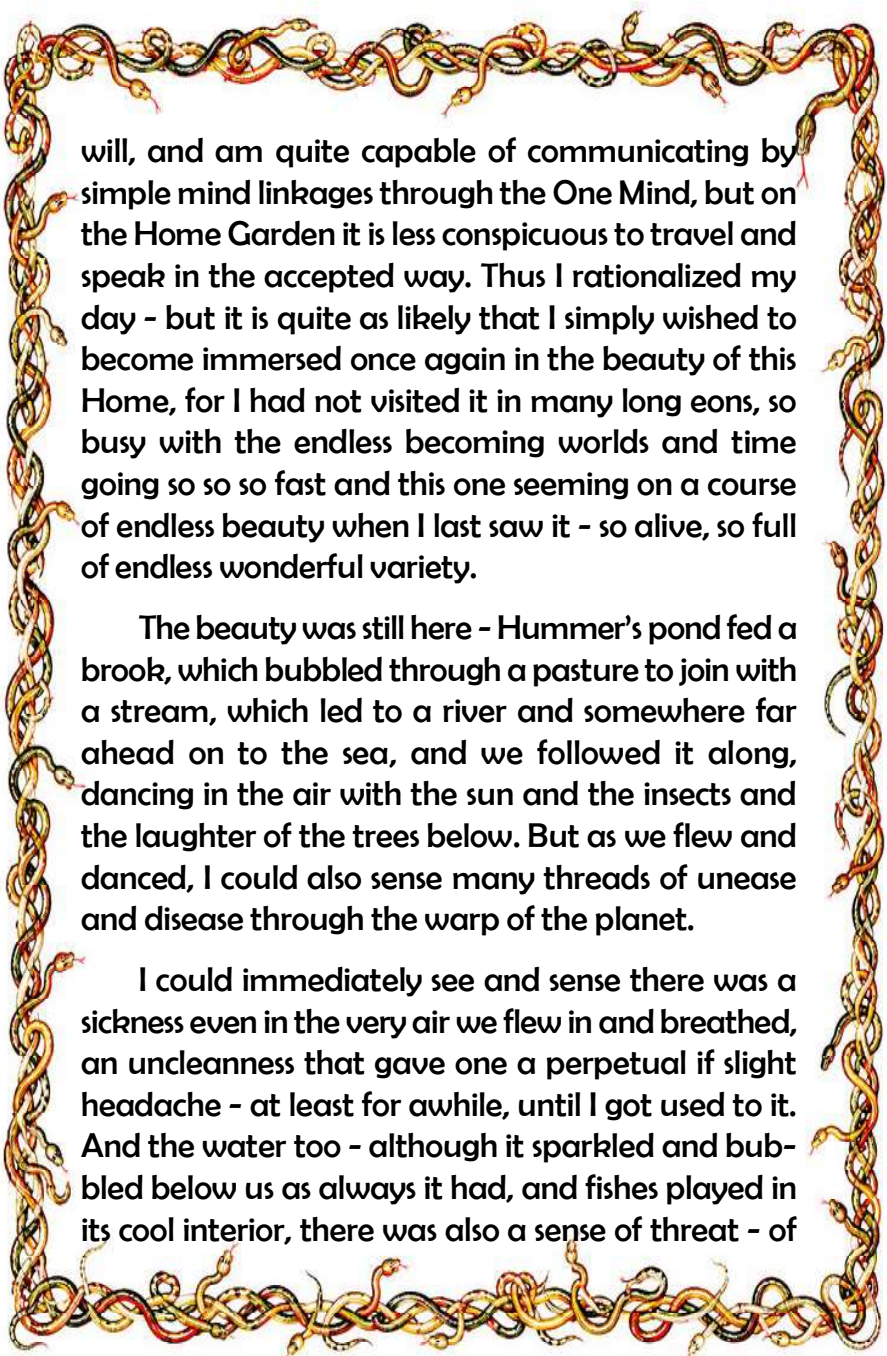
"I ... I ... It really happened, then?" the beautiful tiny creature whispered in a small voice. "It wasn't just a dream ... ?"

"Oh, yes, Hummer," I answered her, also speaking softly not to frighten her, and letting a goodly part of my essence slip back through the slipstream so my sheer bulk would not frighten her.

"Oh, yes, you've been to a place where few other creatures have gone and returned! Most who dare to use these pretty berries make a one-way trip, and leave the bounds of this pretty garden for good!" I said, as I picked up a couple of the El Gracianos and tossed them over the side of Hummer's nest.

"Come, sweet bird of my youth - arise and I will feed you, then we shall go hunting monsters!"

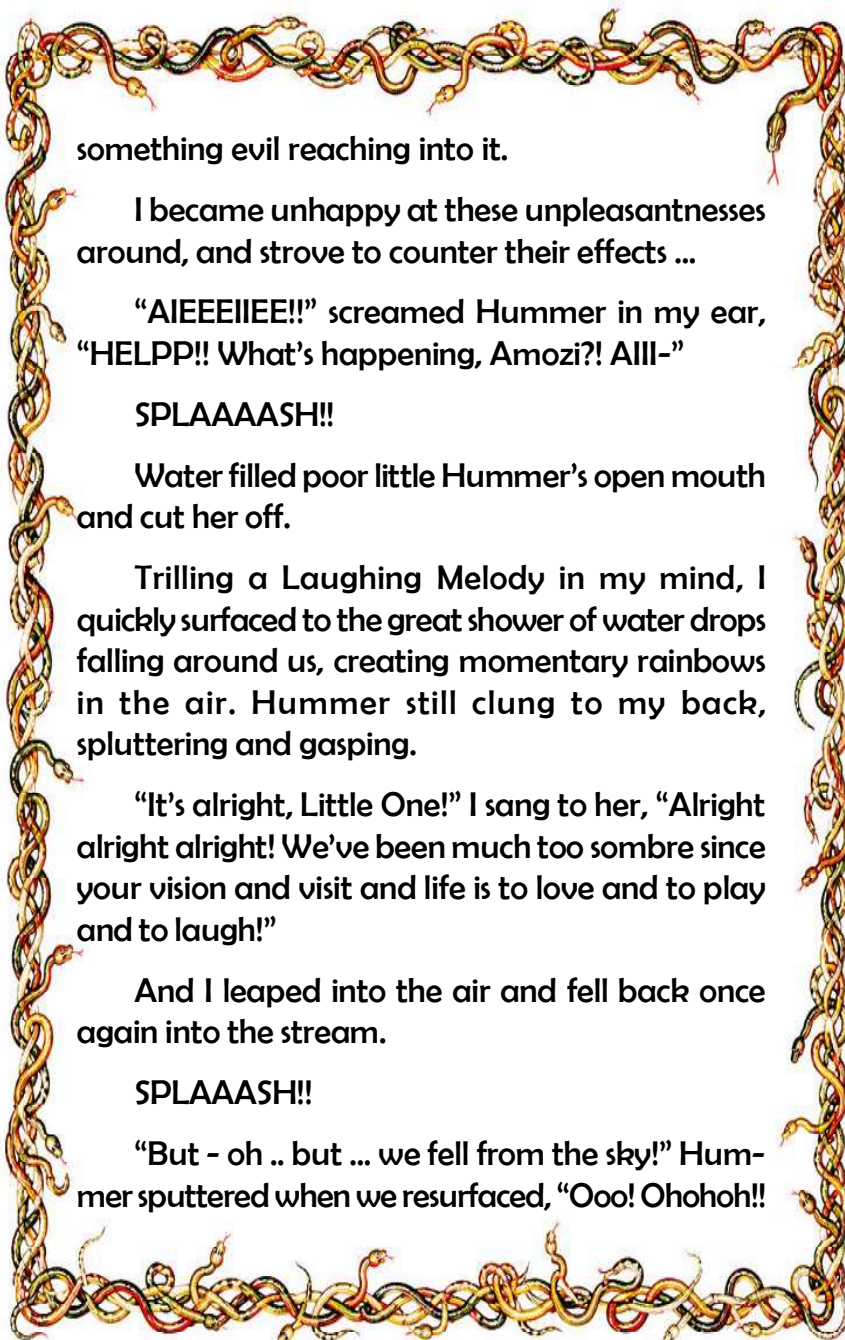
Hummer found a cosy hollow between my shoulder blades, snubbed under some feathers near to my ear, and we took to the air. We did not have to do any of this, of course - as a Final Spirit and Rider of the Slipstream I can simply will myself and anyone I choose to accompany me to be where I



will, and am quite capable of communicating by simple mind linkages through the One Mind, but on the Home Garden it is less conspicuous to travel and speak in the accepted way. Thus I rationalized my day - but it is quite as likely that I simply wished to become immersed once again in the beauty of this Home, for I had not visited it in many long eons, so busy with the endless becoming worlds and time going so so so fast and this one seeming on a course of endless beauty when I last saw it - so alive, so full of endless wonderful variety.

The beauty was still here - Hummer's pond fed a brook, which bubbled through a pasture to join with a stream, which led to a river and somewhere far ahead on to the sea, and we followed it along, dancing in the air with the sun and the insects and the laughter of the trees below. But as we flew and danced, I could also sense many threads of unease and disease through the warp of the planet.

I could immediately see and sense there was a sickness even in the very air we flew in and breathed, an uncleanness that gave one a perpetual if slight headache - at least for awhile, until I got used to it. And the water too - although it sparkled and bubbled below us as always it had, and fishes played in its cool interior, there was also a sense of threat - of



something evil reaching into it.

I became unhappy at these unpleasantnesses around, and strove to counter their effects ...

"AIEEEIIIEE!!" screamed Hummer in my ear, "HELPP!! What's happening, Amozi?! Alll-"

SPLAAAASH!!

Water filled poor little Hummer's open mouth and cut her off.

Trilling a Laughing Melody in my mind, I quickly surfaced to the great shower of water drops falling around us, creating momentary rainbows in the air. Hummer still clung to my back, spluttering and gasping.

"It's alright, Little One!" I sang to her, "Alright alright alright! We've been much too sombre since your vision and visit and life is to love and to play and to laugh!"

And I leaped into the air and fell back once again into the stream.

SPLAAASH!!

"But - oh .. but ... we fell from the sky!" Hummer spluttered when we resurfaced, "Ooo! Ohohoh!!

I thought one of them had used the noisy stick on you, and ohoh and OHOH!! “

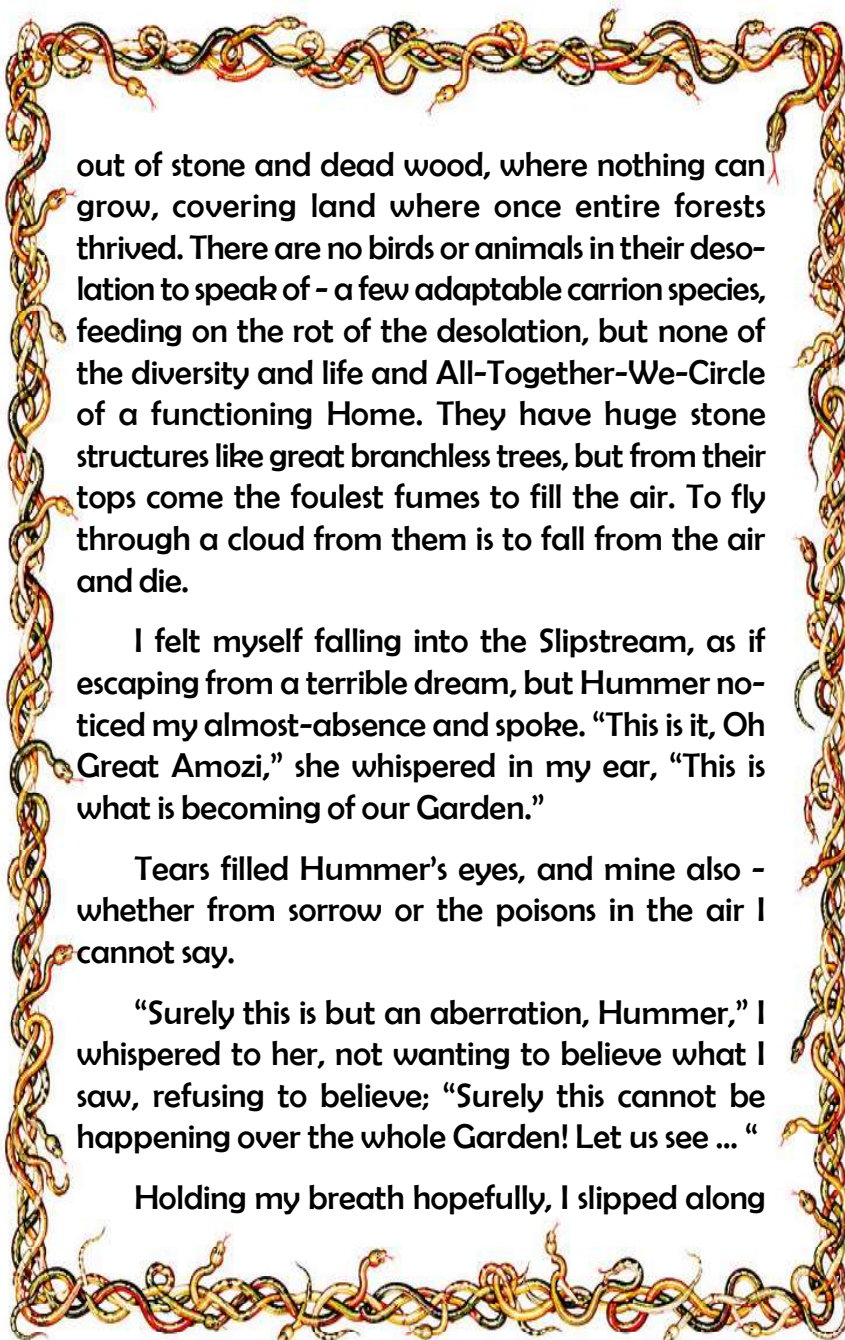
Perhaps I had been trying too hard. I gathered Hummer up in my wings and returned to the sky, humming nameless and shapeless tunes under my breath. There was a line of grey clouds moving in from the east.

And so we came to the desolation. I cannot sing of it. There are no songs. There are no melodies for desolation.

Part of its horror is the emptiness of things that make other places beautiful. Such as melodies. Such as colors. Such as the good smells.

When last I visited this place there were creatures who walked on two legs, like the ones in the desolation. But the first creatures were like part of the world, like the birds and wolves and fishes. They killed their food, as do many of us, but they killed only what they ate and their numbers never grew so large that they did not leave room for all other creatures. They spoke with the Great Spirits, and offered praise and thanks for their Home.

These new creatures on two legs were not like that at all. They have built great shelters and caves



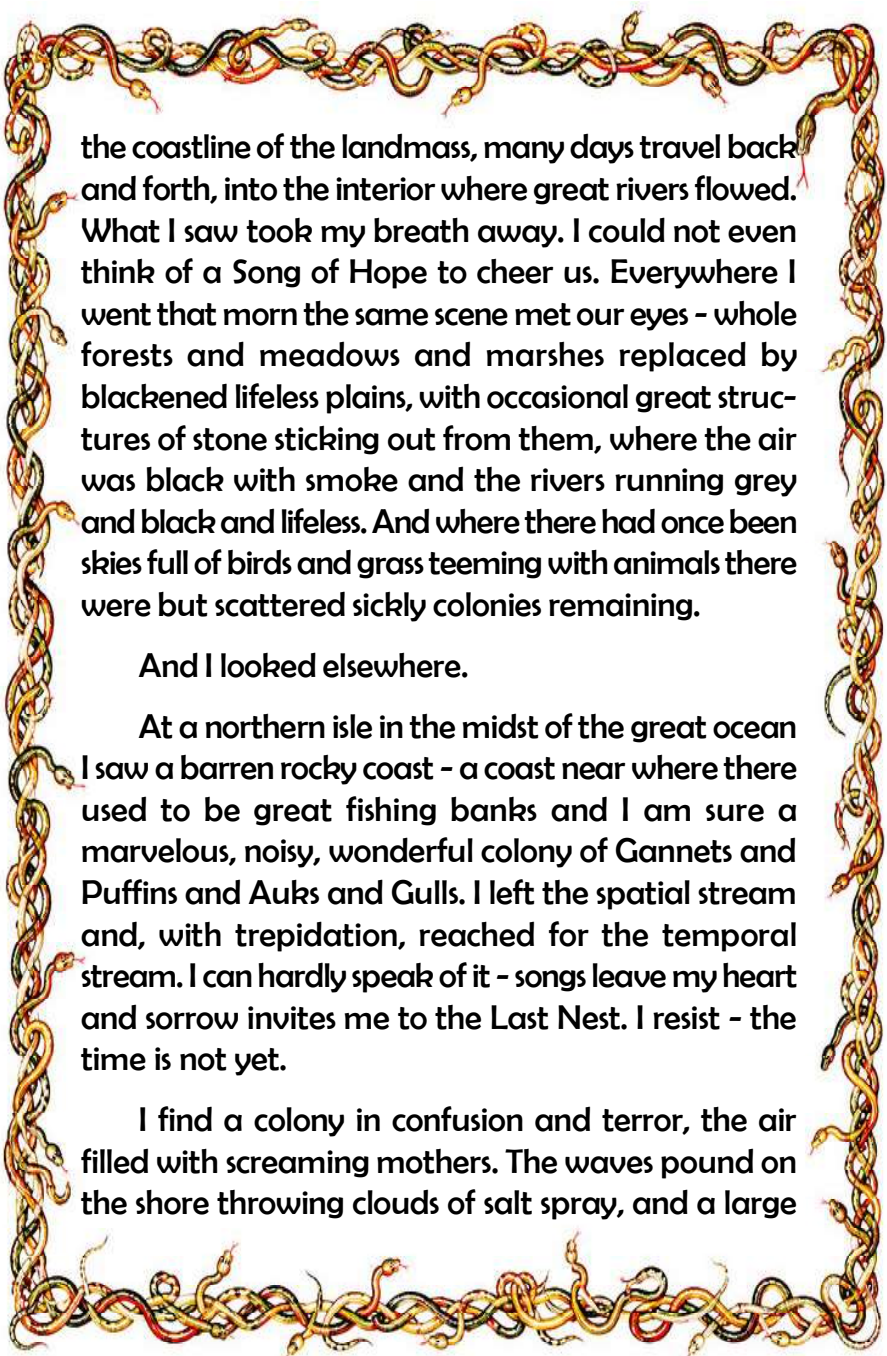
out of stone and dead wood, where nothing can grow, covering land where once entire forests thrived. There are no birds or animals in their desolation to speak of - a few adaptable carrion species, feeding on the rot of the desolation, but none of the diversity and life and All-Together-We-Circle of a functioning Home. They have huge stone structures like great branchless trees, but from their tops come the foulest fumes to fill the air. To fly through a cloud from them is to fall from the air and die.

I felt myself falling into the Slipstream, as if escaping from a terrible dream, but Hummer noticed my almost-absence and spoke. "This is it, Oh Great Amози," she whispered in my ear, "This is what is becoming of our Garden."

Tears filled Hummer's eyes, and mine also - whether from sorrow or the poisons in the air I cannot say.

"Surely this is but an aberration, Hummer," I whispered to her, not wanting to believe what I saw, refusing to believe; "Surely this cannot be happening over the whole Garden! Let us see ... "

Holding my breath hopefully, I slipped along

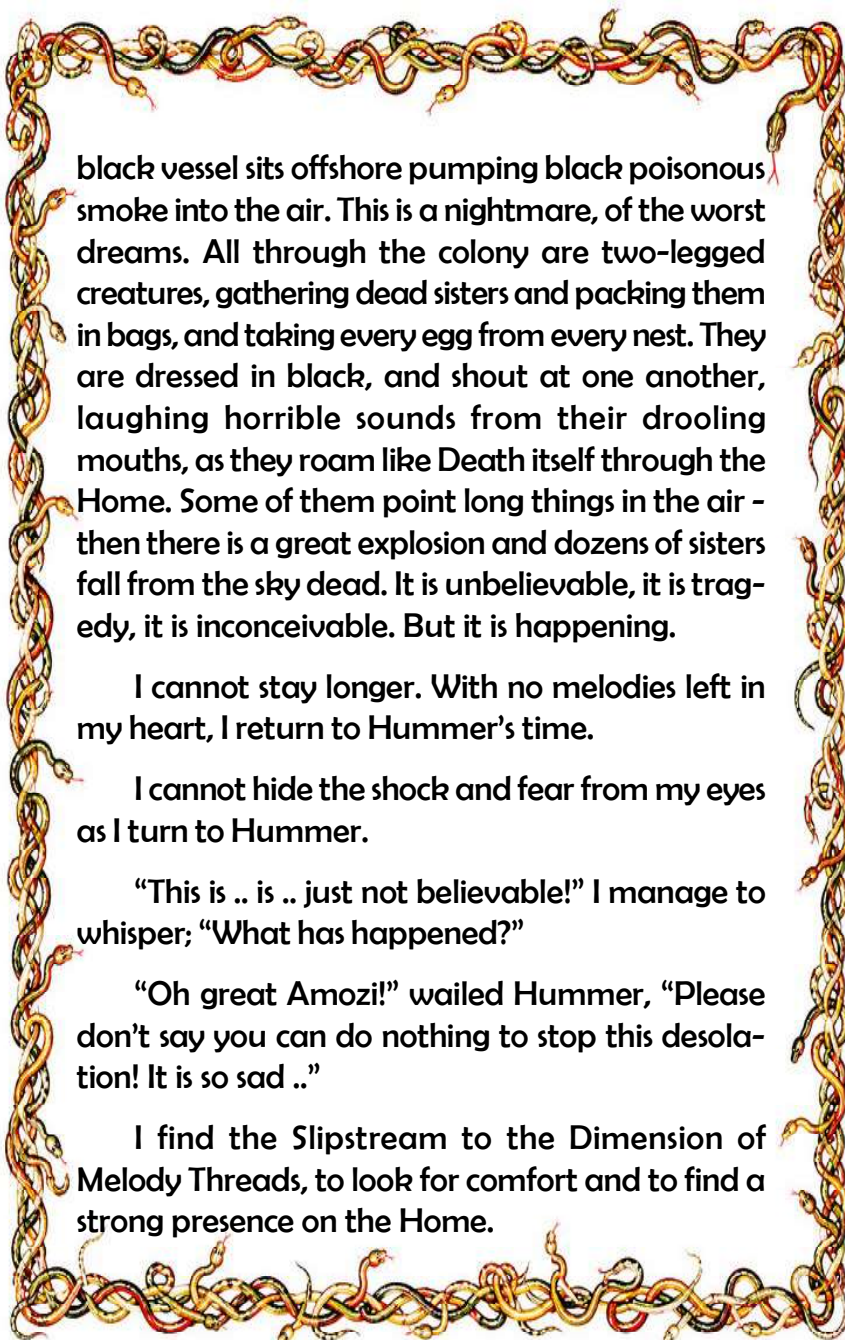


the coastline of the landmass, many days travel back and forth, into the interior where great rivers flowed. What I saw took my breath away. I could not even think of a Song of Hope to cheer us. Everywhere I went that morn the same scene met our eyes - whole forests and meadows and marshes replaced by blackened lifeless plains, with occasional great structures of stone sticking out from them, where the air was black with smoke and the rivers running grey and black and lifeless. And where there had once been skies full of birds and grass teeming with animals there were but scattered sickly colonies remaining.

And I looked elsewhere.

At a northern isle in the midst of the great ocean I saw a barren rocky coast - a coast near where there used to be great fishing banks and I am sure a marvelous, noisy, wonderful colony of Gannets and Puffins and Auks and Gulls. I left the spatial stream and, with trepidation, reached for the temporal stream. I can hardly speak of it - songs leave my heart and sorrow invites me to the Last Nest. I resist - the time is not yet.

I find a colony in confusion and terror, the air filled with screaming mothers. The waves pound on the shore throwing clouds of salt spray, and a large



black vessel sits offshore pumping black poisonous smoke into the air. This is a nightmare, of the worst dreams. All through the colony are two-legged creatures, gathering dead sisters and packing them in bags, and taking every egg from every nest. They are dressed in black, and shout at one another, laughing horrible sounds from their drooling mouths, as they roam like Death itself through the Home. Some of them point long things in the air - then there is a great explosion and dozens of sisters fall from the sky dead. It is unbelievable, it is tragedy, it is inconceivable. But it is happening.

I cannot stay longer. With no melodies left in my heart, I return to Hummer's time.

I cannot hide the shock and fear from my eyes as I turn to Hummer.

"This is .. is .. just not believable!" I manage to whisper; "What has happened?"

"Oh great Amози!" wailed Hummer, "Please don't say you can do nothing to stop this desolation! It is so sad .."

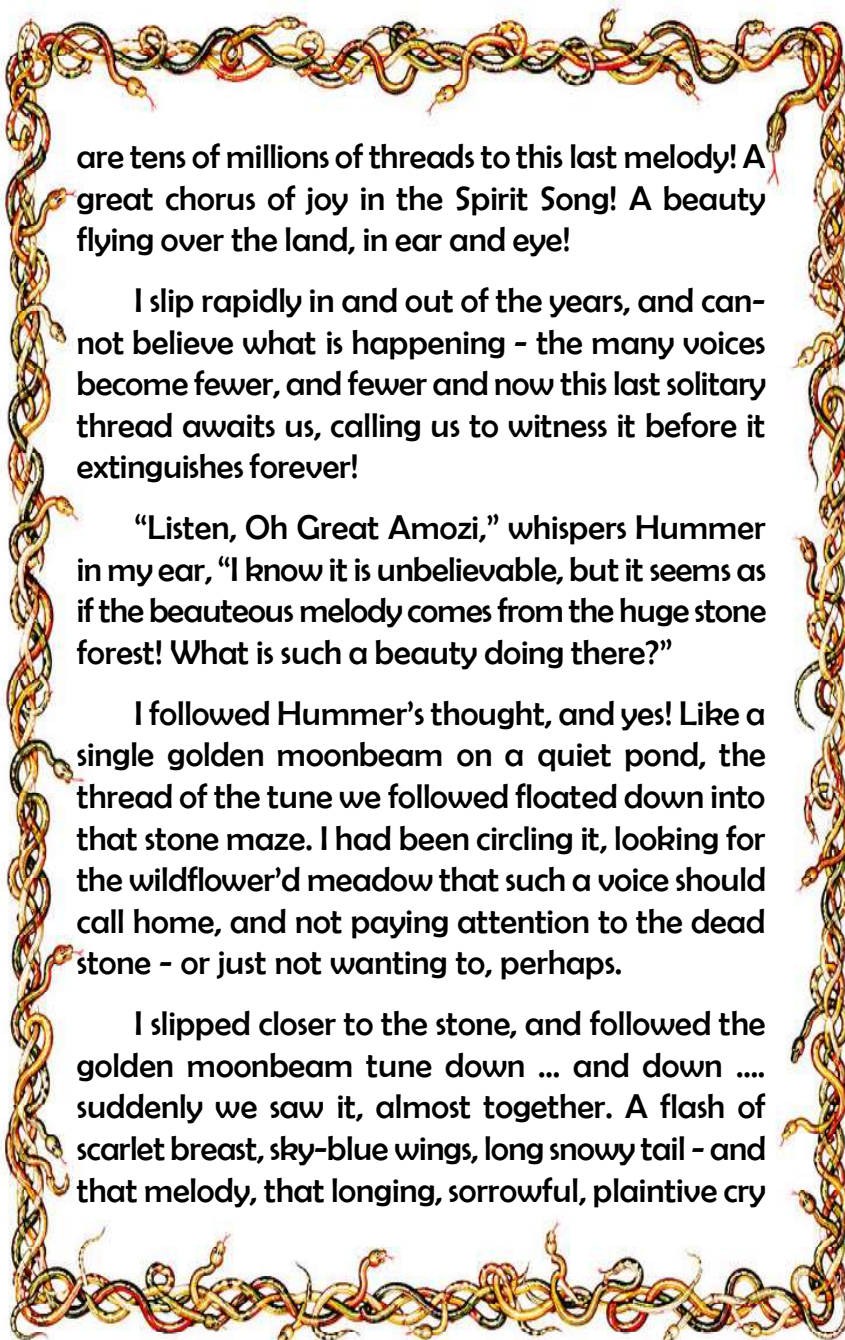
I find the Slipstream to the Dimension of Melody Threads, to look for comfort and to find a strong presence on the Home.

There is none - there are hardly any melodies at all!

My mind is reeling, I cannot think straight. And then, from somewhere in this great sorrow, a tiny, lonely thread of song finds my ear, calling insistently, and I chase it. It goes up, then down, wafting like an elusive taste of honeysuckle through the air.

I follow it through the Slipstream, almost losing it many times, then finding it again. It draws me with its powerful sorrow, and seems it is something I must find, something I must witness before it is forever silenced.

I emerge once again in Hummer's Garden-That-Is-No-More-Garden, and find the source of the Extreme Sorrowful Melody. It is beautiful - so beautiful I am drawn irresistibly to it like the foolish moth to the fire flame. I slip from place to place, and time to time, chasing the elusive song. In times past I flit past or through there are other threads to the melody like all of our songs, the many voices united into one great chorus on the spirit plane, a Great Chorus of the Song of the Species - but this one thread is all that is left of this one - I slip further back for a brief moment and it is unbelievable! Hardly a few turns of the sun before Hummer's time, there



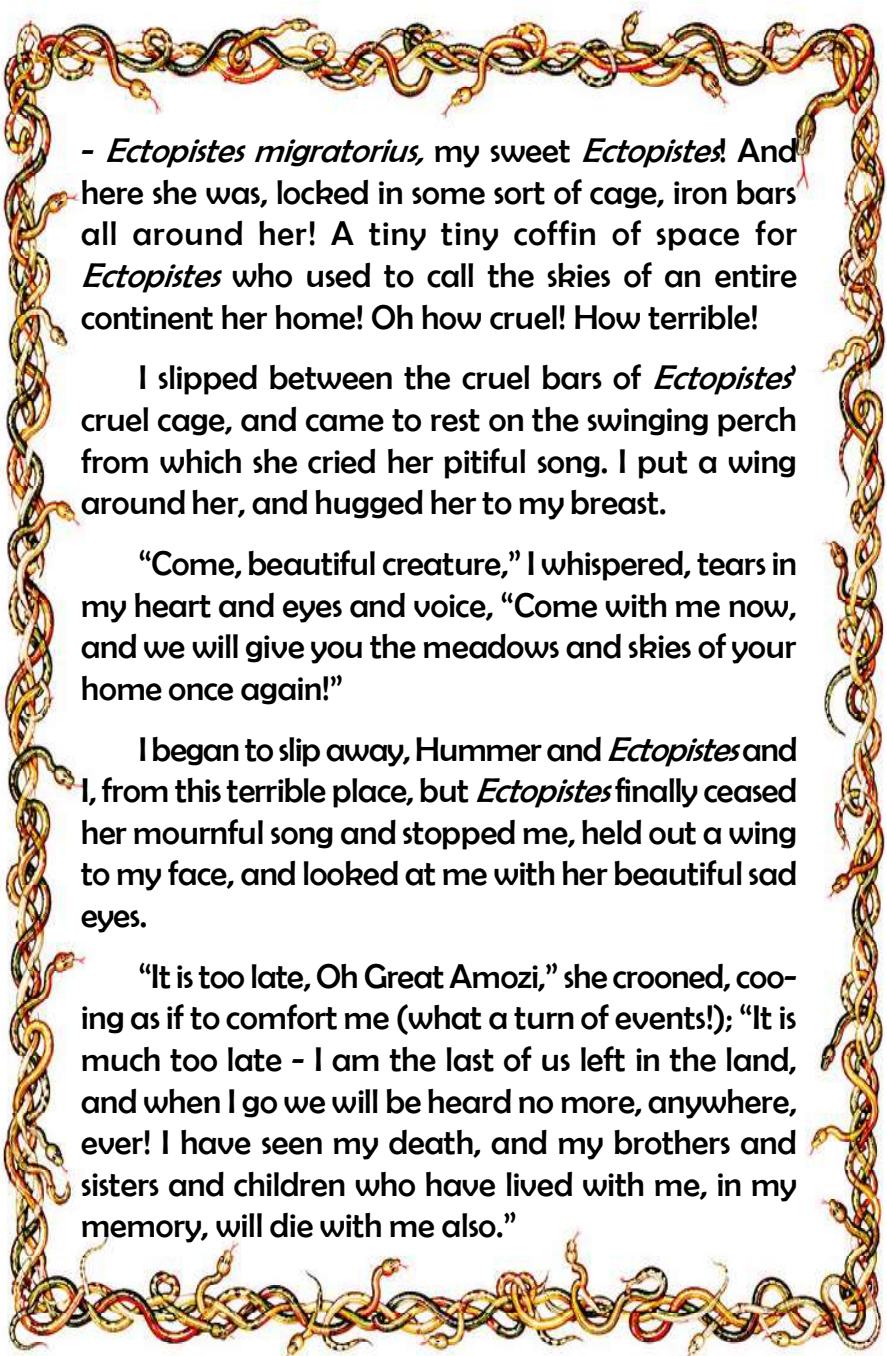
are tens of millions of threads to this last melody! A great chorus of joy in the Spirit Song! A beauty flying over the land, in ear and eye!

I slip rapidly in and out of the years, and cannot believe what is happening - the many voices become fewer, and fewer and now this last solitary thread awaits us, calling us to witness it before it extinguishes forever!

"Listen, Oh Great Amozi," whispers Hummer in my ear, "I know it is unbelievable, but it seems as if the beauteous melody comes from the huge stone forest! What is such a beauty doing there?"

I followed Hummer's thought, and yes! Like a single golden moonbeam on a quiet pond, the thread of the tune we followed floated down into that stone maze. I had been circling it, looking for the wildflower'd meadow that such a voice should call home, and not paying attention to the dead stone - or just not wanting to, perhaps.

I slipped closer to the stone, and followed the golden moonbeam tune down ... and down ... suddenly we saw it, almost together. A flash of scarlet breast, sky-blue wings, long snowy tail - and that melody, that longing, sorrowful, plaintive cry



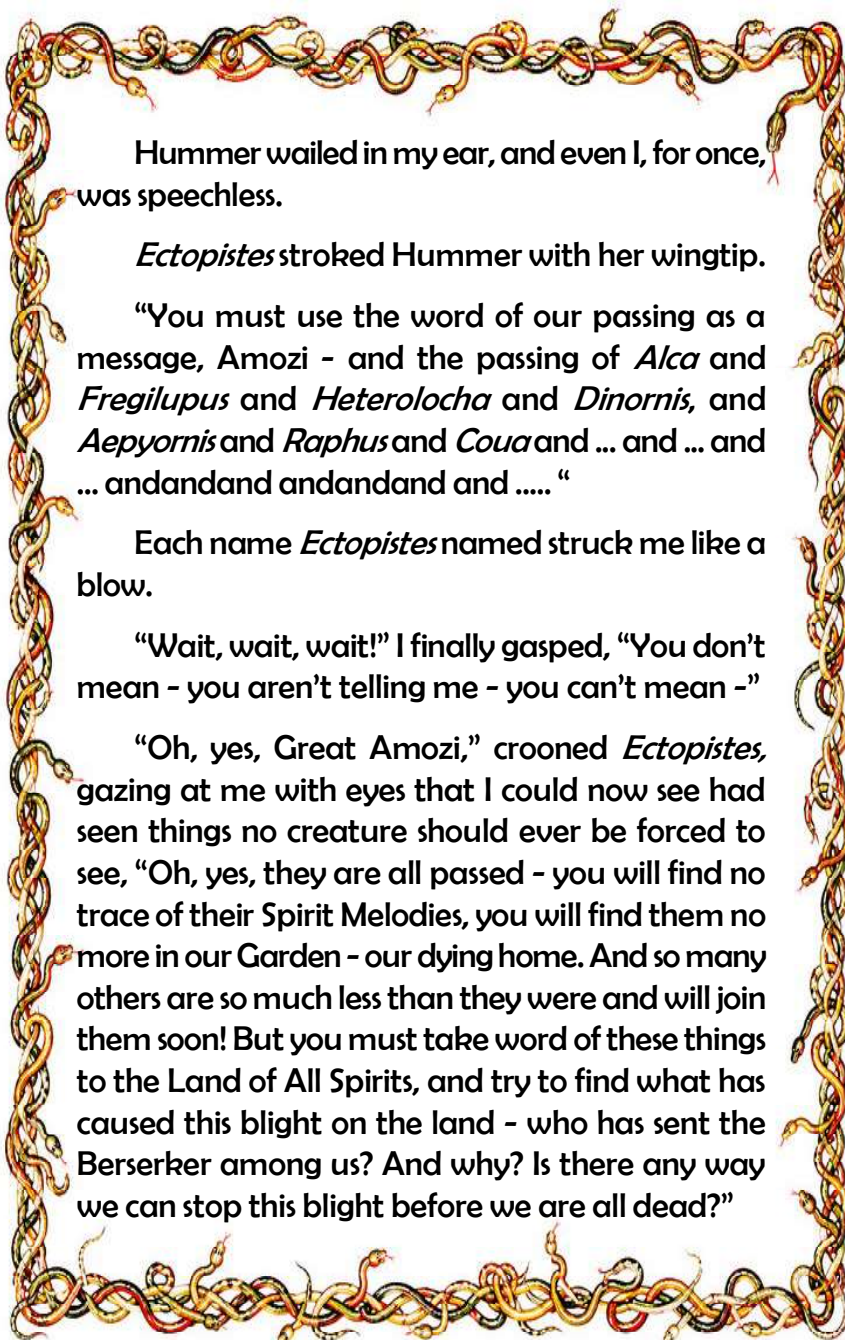
- *Ectopistes migratorius*, my sweet *Ectopistes*! And here she was, locked in some sort of cage, iron bars all around her! A tiny tiny coffin of space for *Ectopistes* who used to call the skies of an entire continent her home! Oh how cruel! How terrible!

I slipped between the cruel bars of *Ectopistes*' cruel cage, and came to rest on the swinging perch from which she cried her pitiful song. I put a wing around her, and hugged her to my breast.

"Come, beautiful creature," I whispered, tears in my heart and eyes and voice, "Come with me now, and we will give you the meadows and skies of your home once again!"

I began to slip away, Hummer and *Ectopistes* and I, from this terrible place, but *Ectopistes* finally ceased her mournful song and stopped me, held out a wing to my face, and looked at me with her beautiful sad eyes.

"It is too late, Oh Great Amози," she crooned, cooing as if to comfort me (what a turn of events!); "It is much too late - I am the last of us left in the land, and when I go we will be heard no more, anywhere, ever! I have seen my death, and my brothers and sisters and children who have lived with me, in my memory, will die with me also."



Hummer wailed in my ear, and even I, for once, was speechless.

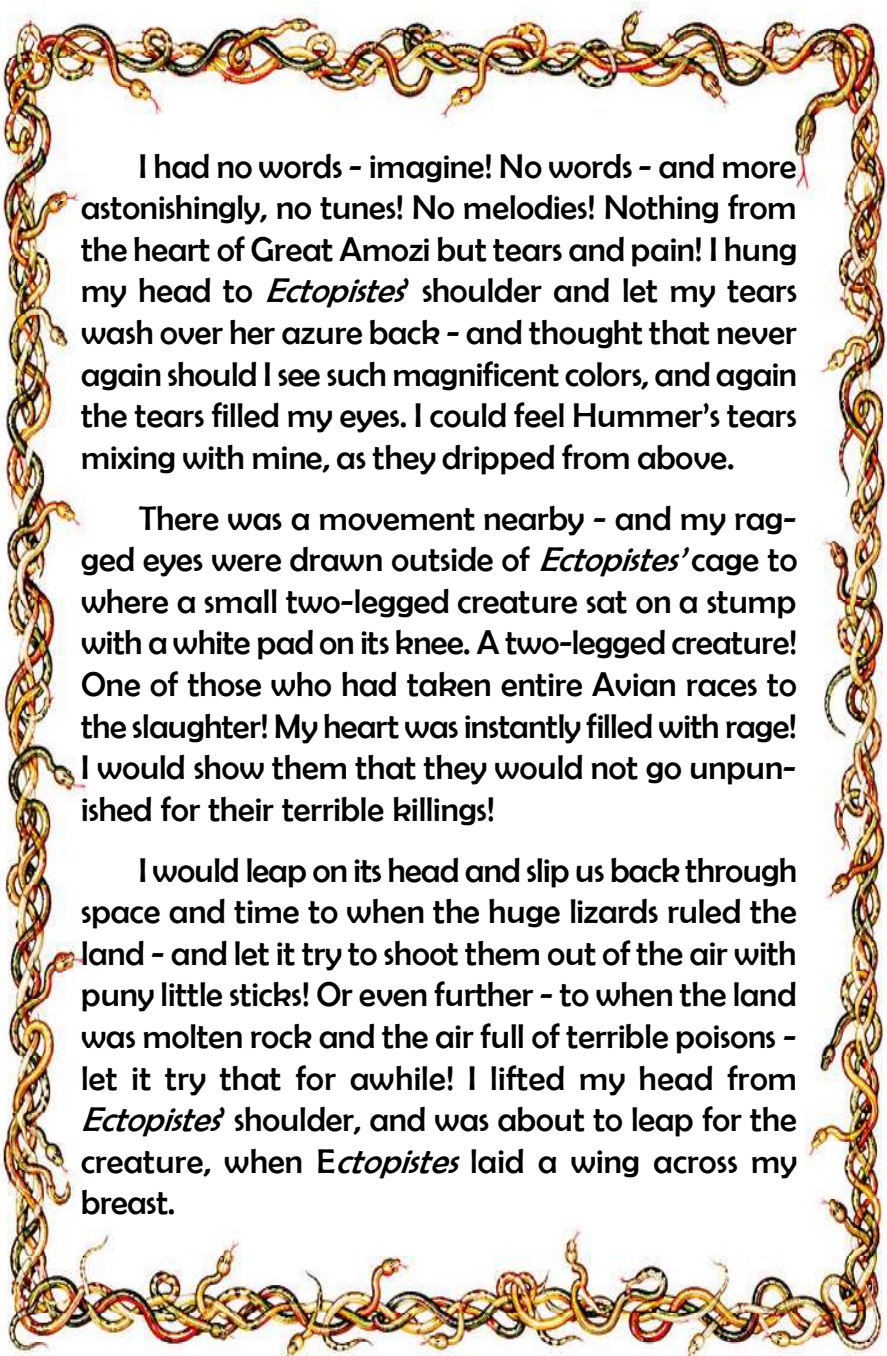
Ectopistes stroked Hummer with her wingtip.

"You must use the word of our passing as a message, Amozi - and the passing of *Alca* and *Fregilupus* and *Heterolocha* and *Dinornis*, and *Aepyornis* and *Raphus* and *Coua* and ... and ... and ... andandand andandand and

Each name *Ectopistes* named struck me like a blow.

"Wait, wait, wait!" I finally gasped, "You don't mean - you aren't telling me - you can't mean -"

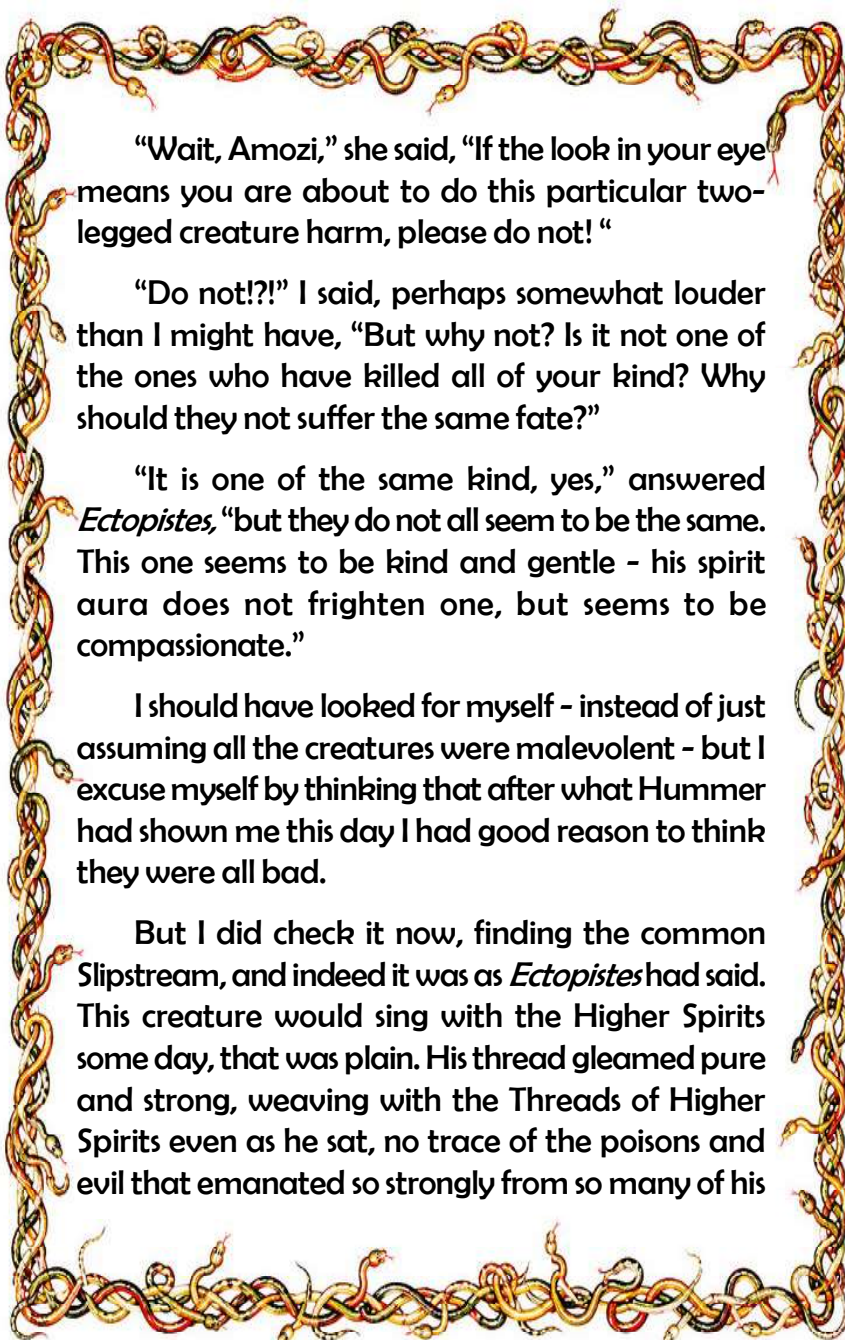
"Oh, yes, Great Amozi," crooned *Ectopistes*, gazing at me with eyes that I could now see had seen things no creature should ever be forced to see, "Oh, yes, they are all passed - you will find no trace of their Spirit Melodies, you will find them no more in our Garden - our dying home. And so many others are so much less than they were and will join them soon! But you must take word of these things to the Land of All Spirits, and try to find what has caused this blight on the land - who has sent the Berserker among us? And why? Is there any way we can stop this blight before we are all dead?"



I had no words - imagine! No words - and more astonishingly, no tunes! No melodies! Nothing from the heart of Great Amози but tears and pain! I hung my head to *Ectopistes*' shoulder and let my tears wash over her azure back - and thought that never again should I see such magnificent colors, and again the tears filled my eyes. I could feel Hummer's tears mixing with mine, as they dripped from above.

There was a movement nearby - and my ragged eyes were drawn outside of *Ectopistes*' cage to where a small two-legged creature sat on a stump with a white pad on its knee. A two-legged creature! One of those who had taken entire Avian races to the slaughter! My heart was instantly filled with rage! I would show them that they would not go unpunished for their terrible killings!

I would leap on its head and slip us back through space and time to when the huge lizards ruled the land - and let it try to shoot them out of the air with puny little sticks! Or even further - to when the land was molten rock and the air full of terrible poisons - let it try that for awhile! I lifted my head from *Ectopistes*' shoulder, and was about to leap for the creature, when *Ectopistes* laid a wing across my breast.



"Wait, Amози," she said, "If the look in your eye means you are about to do this particular two-legged creature harm, please do not!"

"Do not!?" I said, perhaps somewhat louder than I might have, "But why not? Is it not one of the ones who have killed all of your kind? Why should they not suffer the same fate?"

"It is one of the same kind, yes," answered *Ectopistes*, "but they do not all seem to be the same. This one seems to be kind and gentle - his spirit aura does not frighten one, but seems to be compassionate."

I should have looked for myself - instead of just assuming all the creatures were malevolent - but I excuse myself by thinking that after what Hummer had shown me this day I had good reason to think they were all bad.

But I did check it now, finding the common Slipstream, and indeed it was as *Ectopistes* had said. This creature would sing with the Higher Spirits some day, that was plain. His thread gleamed pure and strong, weaving with the Threads of Higher Spirits even as he sat, no trace of the poisons and evil that emanated so strongly from so many of his

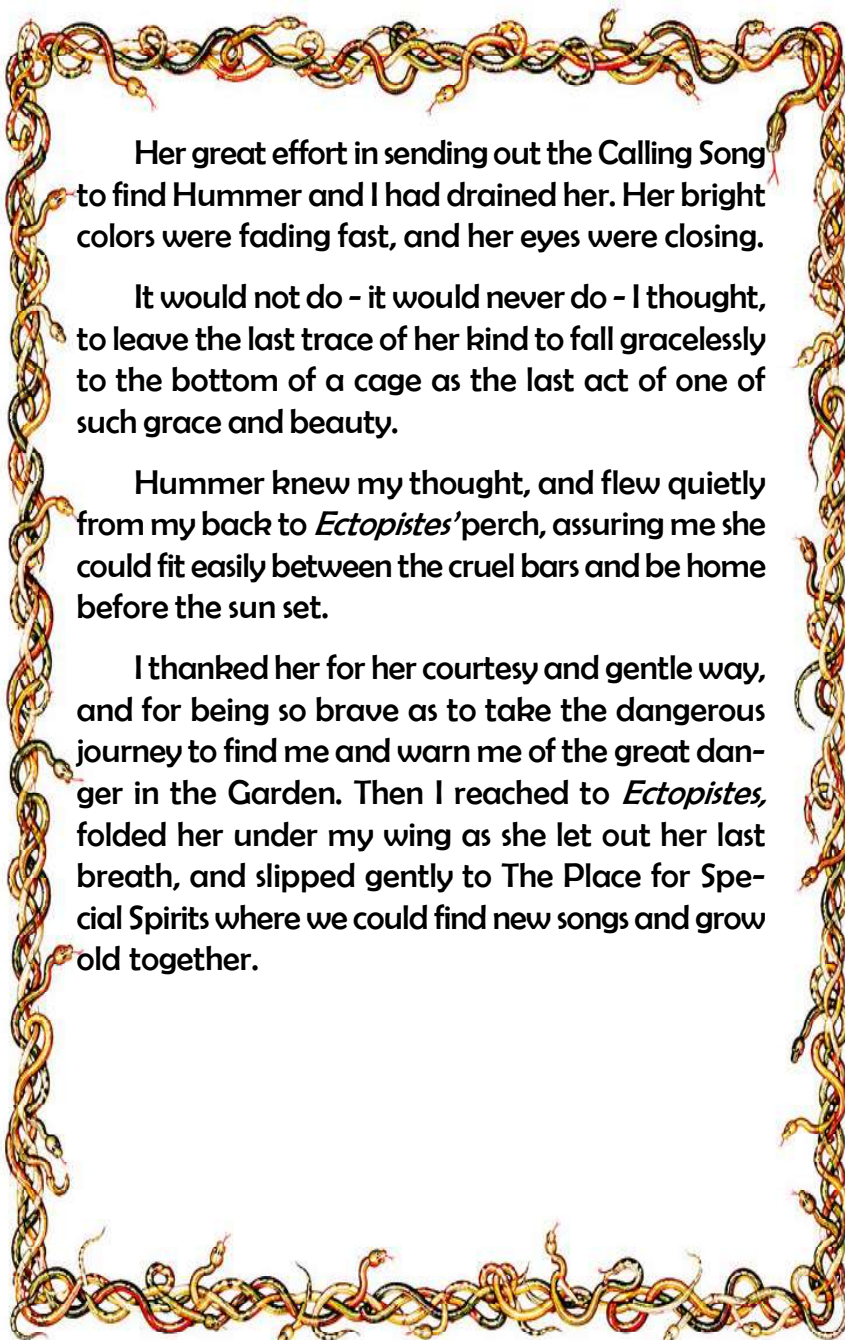
kind.

I slipped over beside him for a quick closer look, and the pad on his knee was some sort of drawing board, and there was the most beautiful picture of *Ectopistes* there ever could be, the most subtle colors rendered truly - her crimson breast and azure back and exquisite snowy tail were portrayed in a beauty of detail which seemed to capture her spirit as well as her physical presence. Such a beauty as could only come from spirits co-joined in beauty - both two-legged creature and bird.

It gave me an odd feeling, to see this creature and its painting - I was still furious beyond measure at his kind which had destroyed one of the most beautiful species to occupy this garden, and so many others as well - but I could also see in this particular creature an ethereal Joyous Spirit that could easily become one of the Higher Spirits. How could they co-exist - the Berserker and the Companion?

It would take much thought and blending of new melodies to try to find a way through this puzzle.

I slipped into the Common Mind and left a Song of Greeting Under Sorrowful Times to find its way to his thread, and returned to *Ectopistes*.



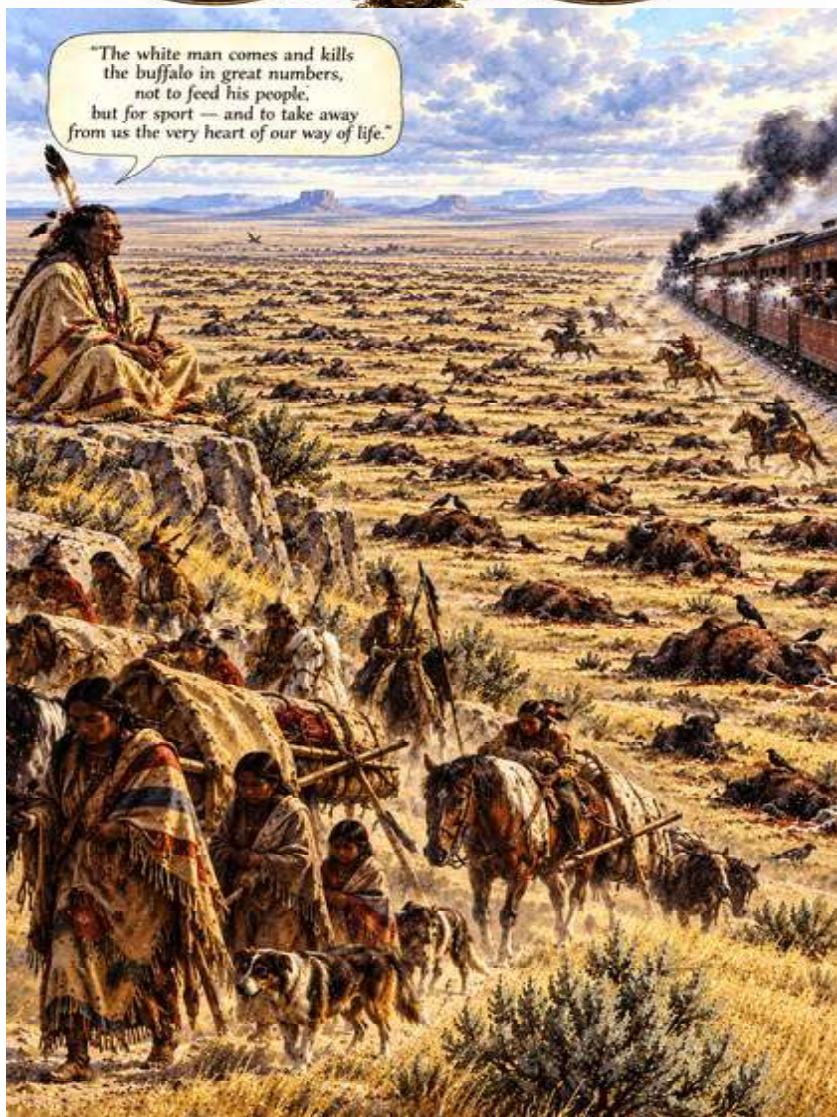
Her great effort in sending out the Calling Song to find Hummer and I had drained her. Her bright colors were fading fast, and her eyes were closing.

It would not do - it would never do - I thought, to leave the last trace of her kind to fall gracelessly to the bottom of a cage as the last act of one of such grace and beauty.

Hummer knew my thought, and flew quietly from my back to *Ectopistes*' perch, assuring me she could fit easily between the cruel bars and be home before the sun set.

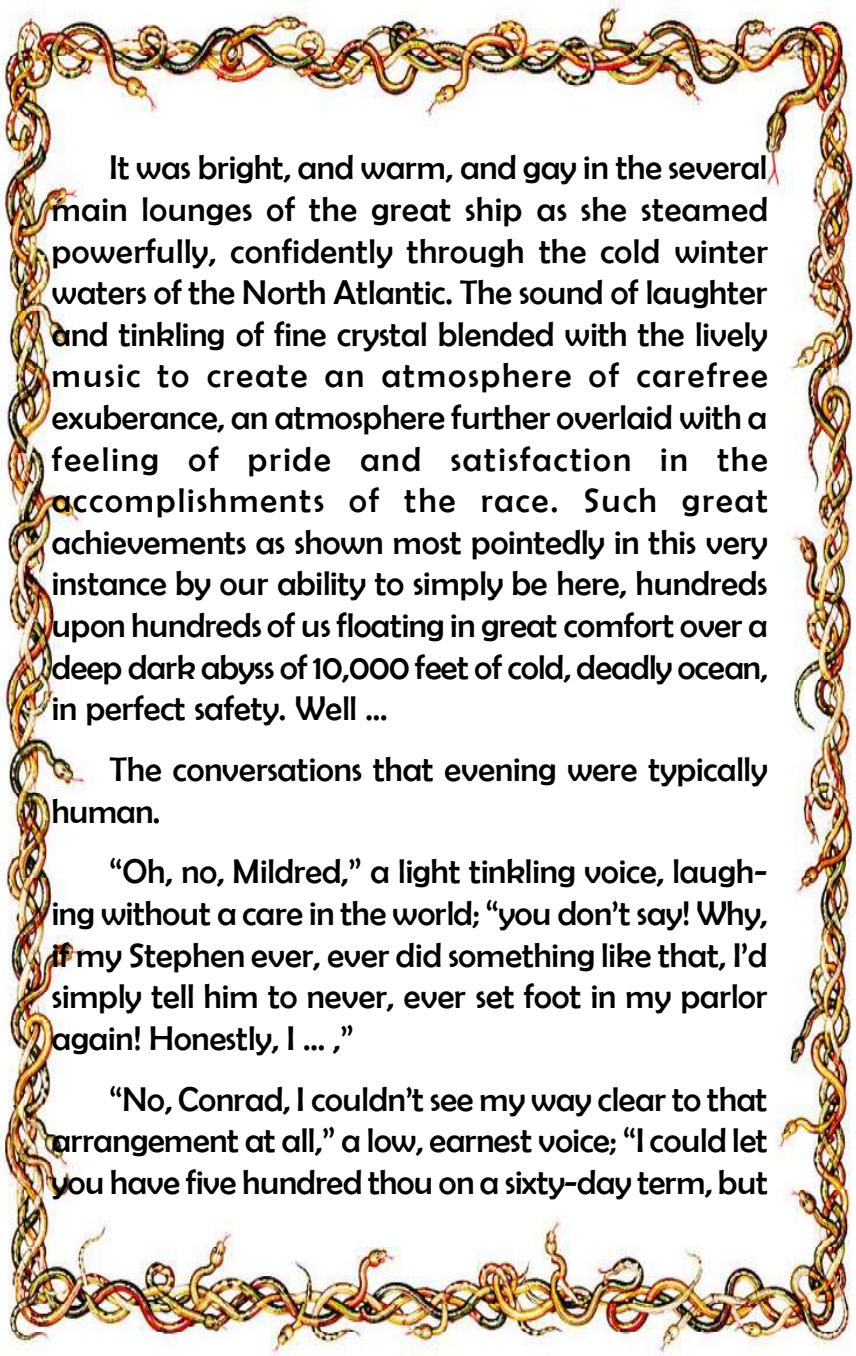
I thanked her for her courtesy and gentle way, and for being so brave as to take the dangerous journey to find me and warn me of the great danger in the Garden. Then I reached to *Ectopistes*, folded her under my wing as she let out her last breath, and slipped gently to The Place for Special Spirits where we could find new songs and grow old together.







*Ahhhhhhhh. To what music shall we dance
evermore when the pure sweet voices of Na-
ture are with us no longer? The great farts of
industrial smokestacks? Forgive me, Effendi.
My heart is feeling a great emptiness that is
filling with tears for Ectopistes and all
others whose sweet songs no longer bring us
joy and I am not able to raise the energy to
speak right now. Leave us a small side trip, if
you will, a brief interlude to the land of
Alegor, where things happen not once, not
twice, but over and over and over again, until
those who cannot see are finally blessed with
the Light, if only from dying eyes, in time for
some small much too late feelings of regret
and sorrow.*

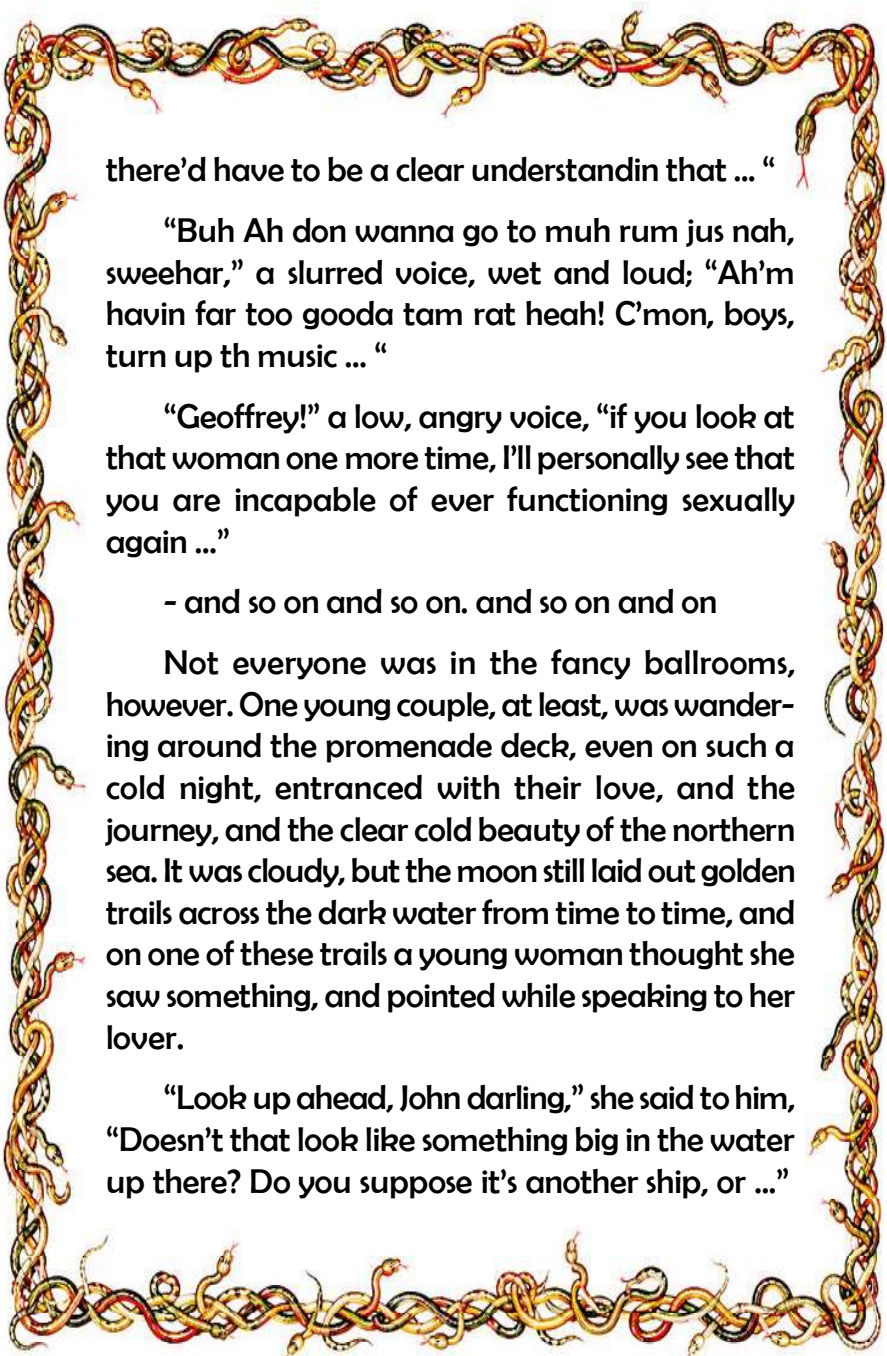


It was bright, and warm, and gay in the several main lounges of the great ship as she steamed powerfully, confidently through the cold winter waters of the North Atlantic. The sound of laughter and tinkling of fine crystal blended with the lively music to create an atmosphere of carefree exuberance, an atmosphere further overlaid with a feeling of pride and satisfaction in the accomplishments of the race. Such great achievements as shown most pointedly in this very instance by our ability to simply be here, hundreds upon hundreds of us floating in great comfort over a deep dark abyss of 10,000 feet of cold, deadly ocean, in perfect safety. Well ...

The conversations that evening were typically human.

"Oh, no, Mildred," a light tinkling voice, laughing without a care in the world; "you don't say! Why, if my Stephen ever, ever did something like that, I'd simply tell him to never, ever set foot in my parlor again! Honestly, I ... ,"

"No, Conrad, I couldn't see my way clear to that arrangement at all," a low, earnest voice; "I could let you have five hundred thou on a sixty-day term, but



there'd have to be a clear understandin that ... "

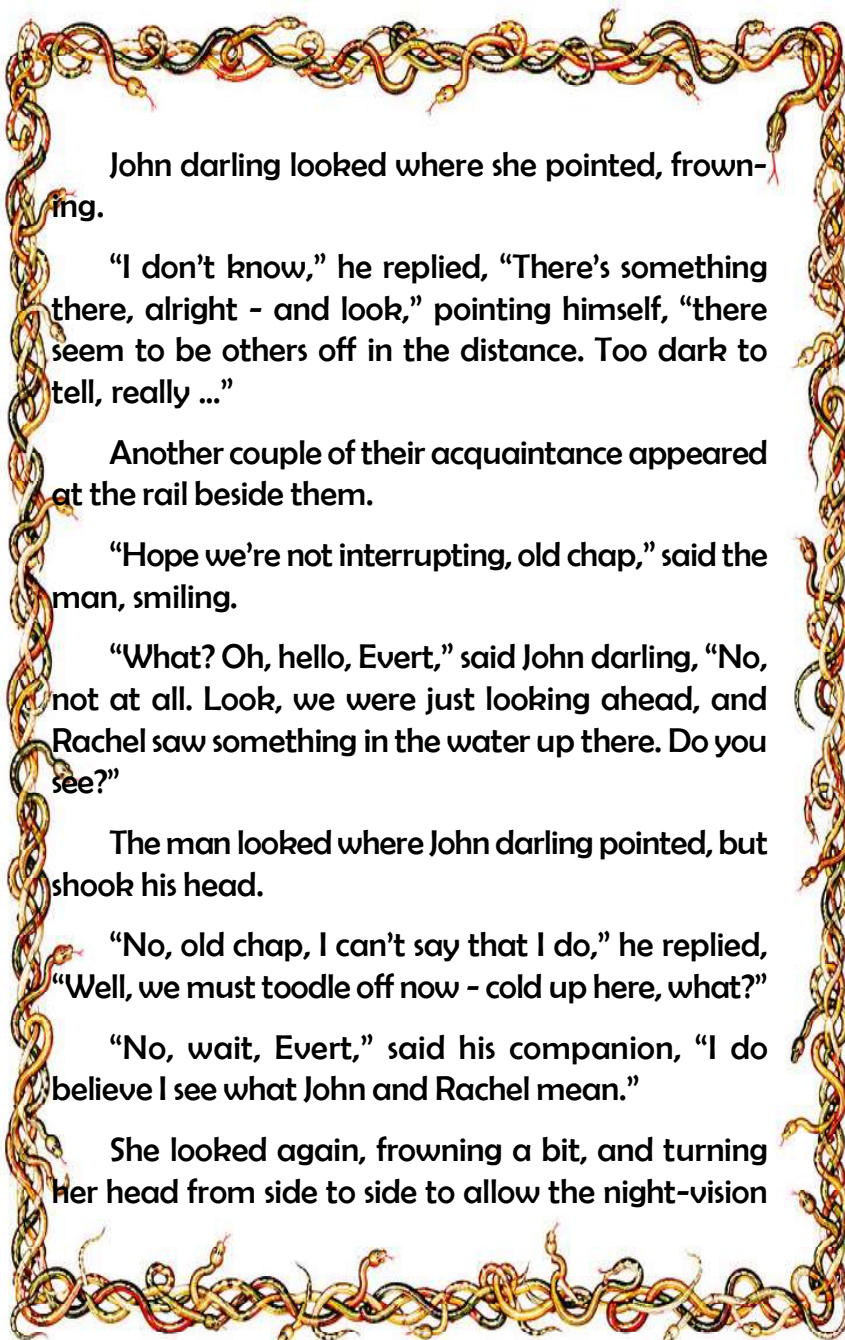
"Buh Ah don wanna go to muh rum jus nah, sweehar," a slurred voice, wet and loud; "Ah'm havin far too gooda tam rat heah! C'mon, boys, turn up th music ... "

"Geoffrey!" a low, angry voice, "if you look at that woman one more time, I'll personally see that you are incapable of ever functioning sexually again ... "

- and so on and so on. and so on and on

Not everyone was in the fancy ballrooms, however. One young couple, at least, was wandering around the promenade deck, even on such a cold night, entranced with their love, and the journey, and the clear cold beauty of the northern sea. It was cloudy, but the moon still laid out golden trails across the dark water from time to time, and on one of these trails a young woman thought she saw something, and pointed while speaking to her lover.

"Look up ahead, John darling," she said to him, "Doesn't that look like something big in the water up there? Do you suppose it's another ship, or ... "



John darling looked where she pointed, frowning.

"I don't know," he replied, "There's something there, alright - and look," pointing himself, "there seem to be others off in the distance. Too dark to tell, really ..."

Another couple of their acquaintance appeared at the rail beside them.

"Hope we're not interrupting, old chap," said the man, smiling.

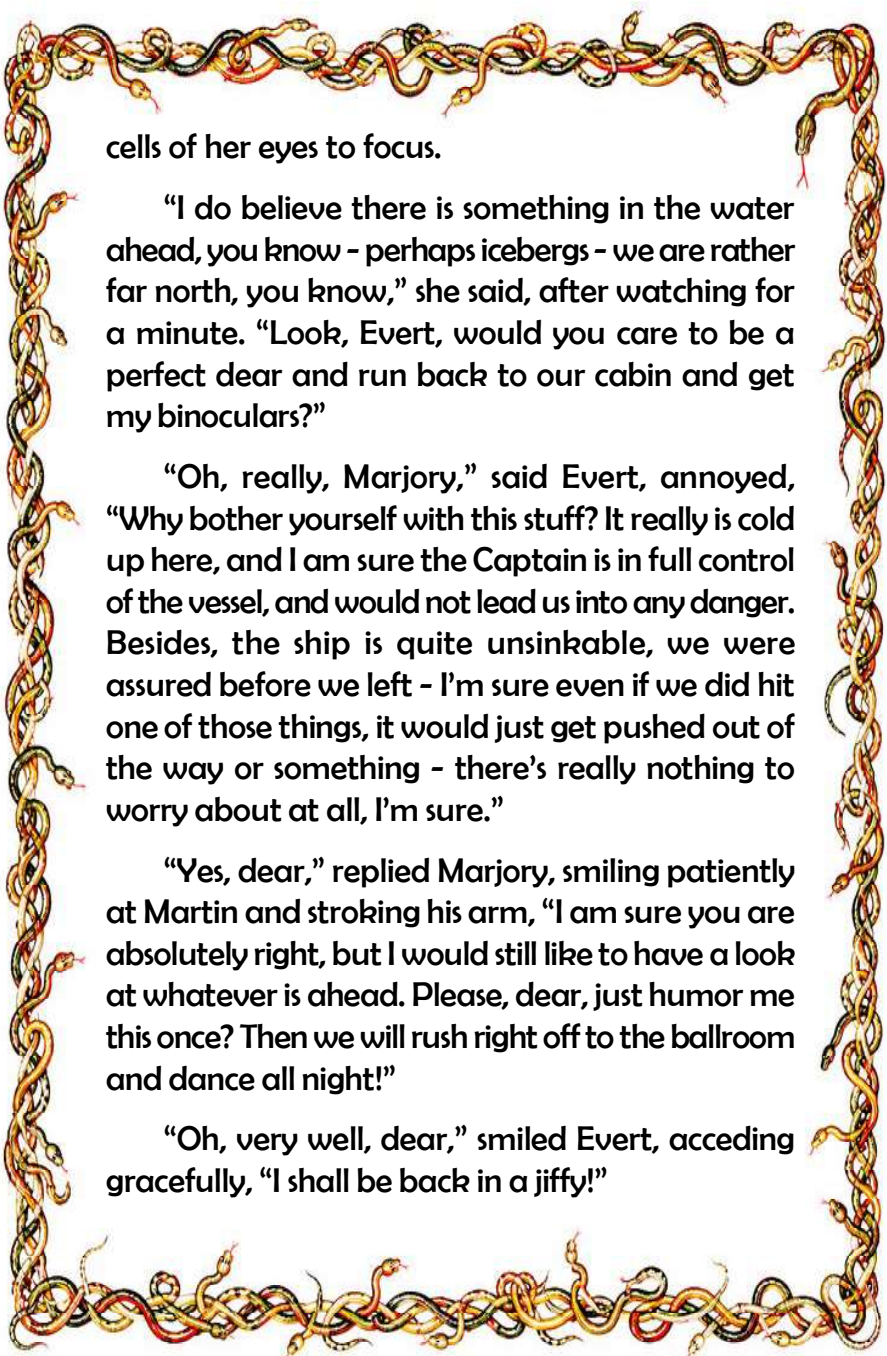
"What? Oh, hello, Evert," said John darling, "No, not at all. Look, we were just looking ahead, and Rachel saw something in the water up there. Do you see?"

The man looked where John darling pointed, but shook his head.

"No, old chap, I can't say that I do," he replied, "Well, we must toodle off now - cold up here, what?"

"No, wait, Evert," said his companion, "I do believe I see what John and Rachel mean."

She looked again, frowning a bit, and turning her head from side to side to allow the night-vision



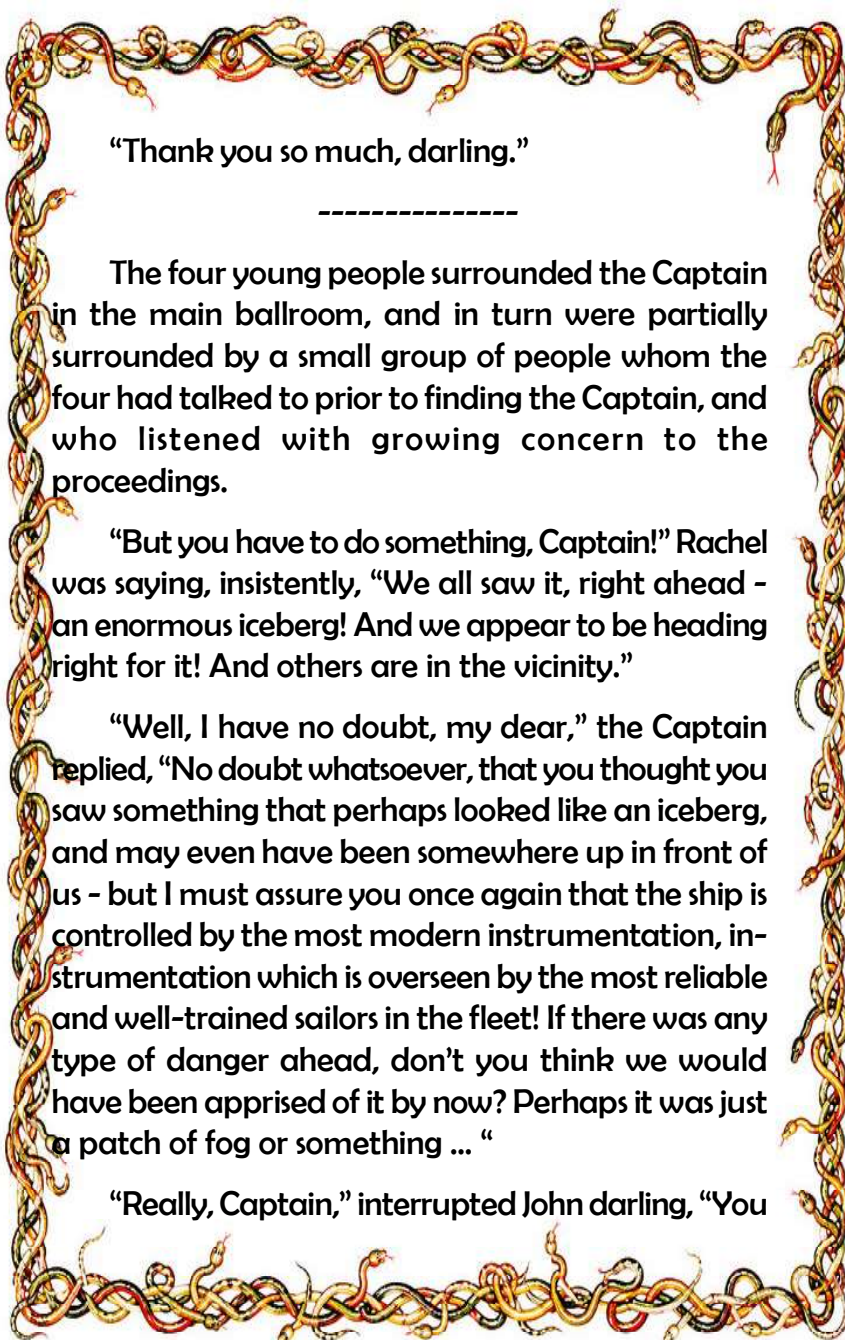
cells of her eyes to focus.

"I do believe there is something in the water ahead, you know - perhaps icebergs - we are rather far north, you know," she said, after watching for a minute. "Look, Evert, would you care to be a perfect dear and run back to our cabin and get my binoculars?"

"Oh, really, Marjory," said Evert, annoyed, "Why bother yourself with this stuff? It really is cold up here, and I am sure the Captain is in full control of the vessel, and would not lead us into any danger. Besides, the ship is quite unsinkable, we were assured before we left - I'm sure even if we did hit one of those things, it would just get pushed out of the way or something - there's really nothing to worry about at all, I'm sure."

"Yes, dear," replied Marjory, smiling patiently at Martin and stroking his arm, "I am sure you are absolutely right, but I would still like to have a look at whatever is ahead. Please, dear, just humor me this once? Then we will rush right off to the ballroom and dance all night!"

"Oh, very well, dear," smiled Evert, acceding gracefully, "I shall be back in a jiffy!"



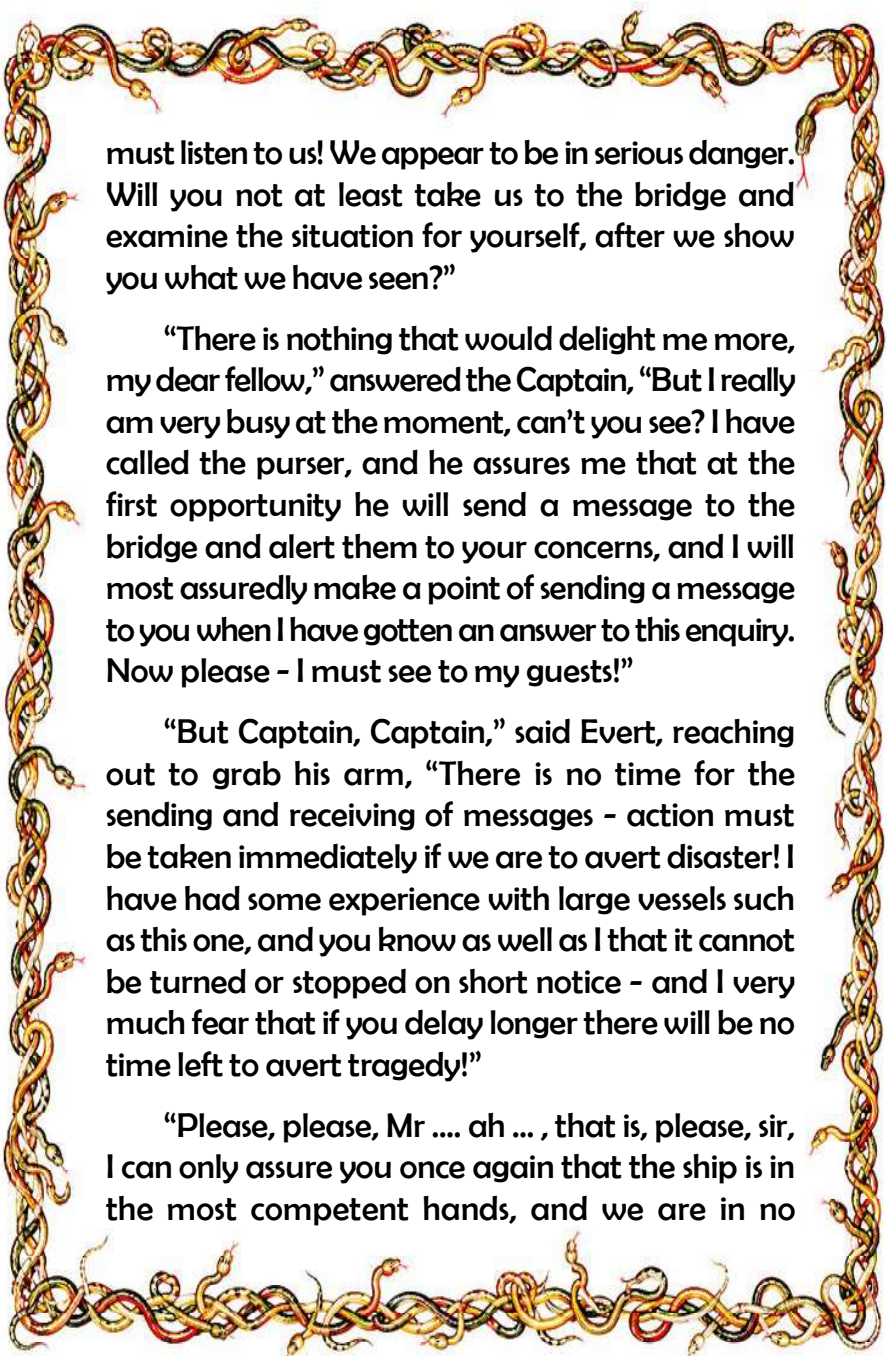
"Thank you so much, darling."

The four young people surrounded the Captain in the main ballroom, and in turn were partially surrounded by a small group of people whom the four had talked to prior to finding the Captain, and who listened with growing concern to the proceedings.

"But you have to do something, Captain!" Rachel was saying, insistently, "We all saw it, right ahead - an enormous iceberg! And we appear to be heading right for it! And others are in the vicinity."

"Well, I have no doubt, my dear," the Captain replied, "No doubt whatsoever, that you thought you saw something that perhaps looked like an iceberg, and may even have been somewhere up in front of us - but I must assure you once again that the ship is controlled by the most modern instrumentation, instrumentation which is overseen by the most reliable and well-trained sailors in the fleet! If there was any type of danger ahead, don't you think we would have been apprised of it by now? Perhaps it was just a patch of fog or something ... "

"Really, Captain," interrupted John darling, "You

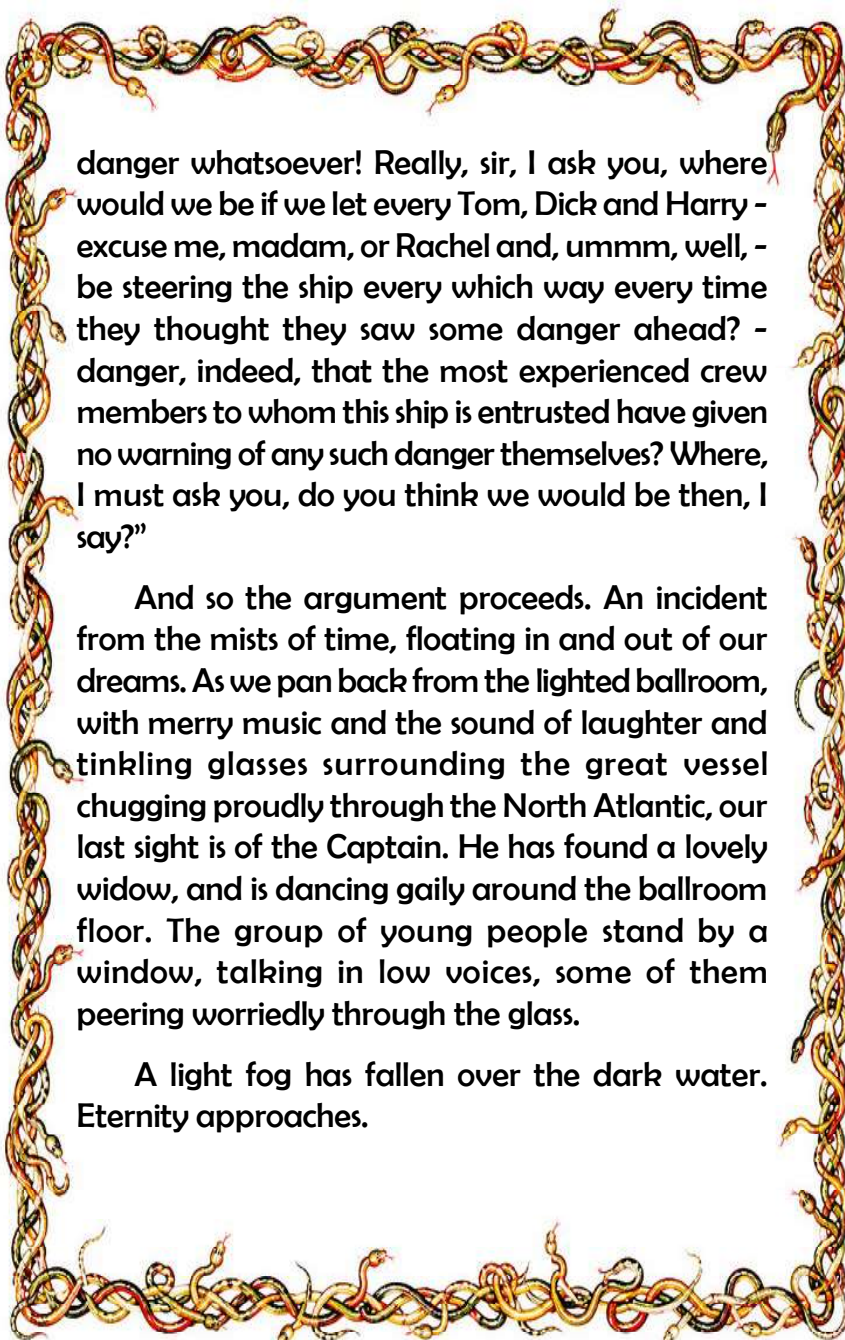


must listen to us! We appear to be in serious danger. Will you not at least take us to the bridge and examine the situation for yourself, after we show you what we have seen?"

"There is nothing that would delight me more, my dear fellow," answered the Captain, "But I really am very busy at the moment, can't you see? I have called the purser, and he assures me that at the first opportunity he will send a message to the bridge and alert them to your concerns, and I will most assuredly make a point of sending a message to you when I have gotten an answer to this enquiry. Now please - I must see to my guests!"

"But Captain, Captain," said Evert, reaching out to grab his arm, "There is no time for the sending and receiving of messages - action must be taken immediately if we are to avert disaster! I have had some experience with large vessels such as this one, and you know as well as I that it cannot be turned or stopped on short notice - and I very much fear that if you delay longer there will be no time left to avert tragedy!"

"Please, please, Mr ah ... , that is, please, sir, I can only assure you once again that the ship is in the most competent hands, and we are in no



danger whatsoever! Really, sir, I ask you, where would we be if we let every Tom, Dick and Harry - excuse me, madam, or Rachel and, ummm, well, - be steering the ship every which way every time they thought they saw some danger ahead? - danger, indeed, that the most experienced crew members to whom this ship is entrusted have given no warning of any such danger themselves? Where, I must ask you, do you think we would be then, I say?"

And so the argument proceeds. An incident from the mists of time, floating in and out of our dreams. As we pan back from the lighted ballroom, with merry music and the sound of laughter and tinkling glasses surrounding the great vessel chugging proudly through the North Atlantic, our last sight is of the Captain. He has found a lovely widow, and is dancing gaily around the ballroom floor. The group of young people stand by a window, talking in low voices, some of them peering worriedly through the glass.

A light fog has fallen over the dark water. Eternity approaches.

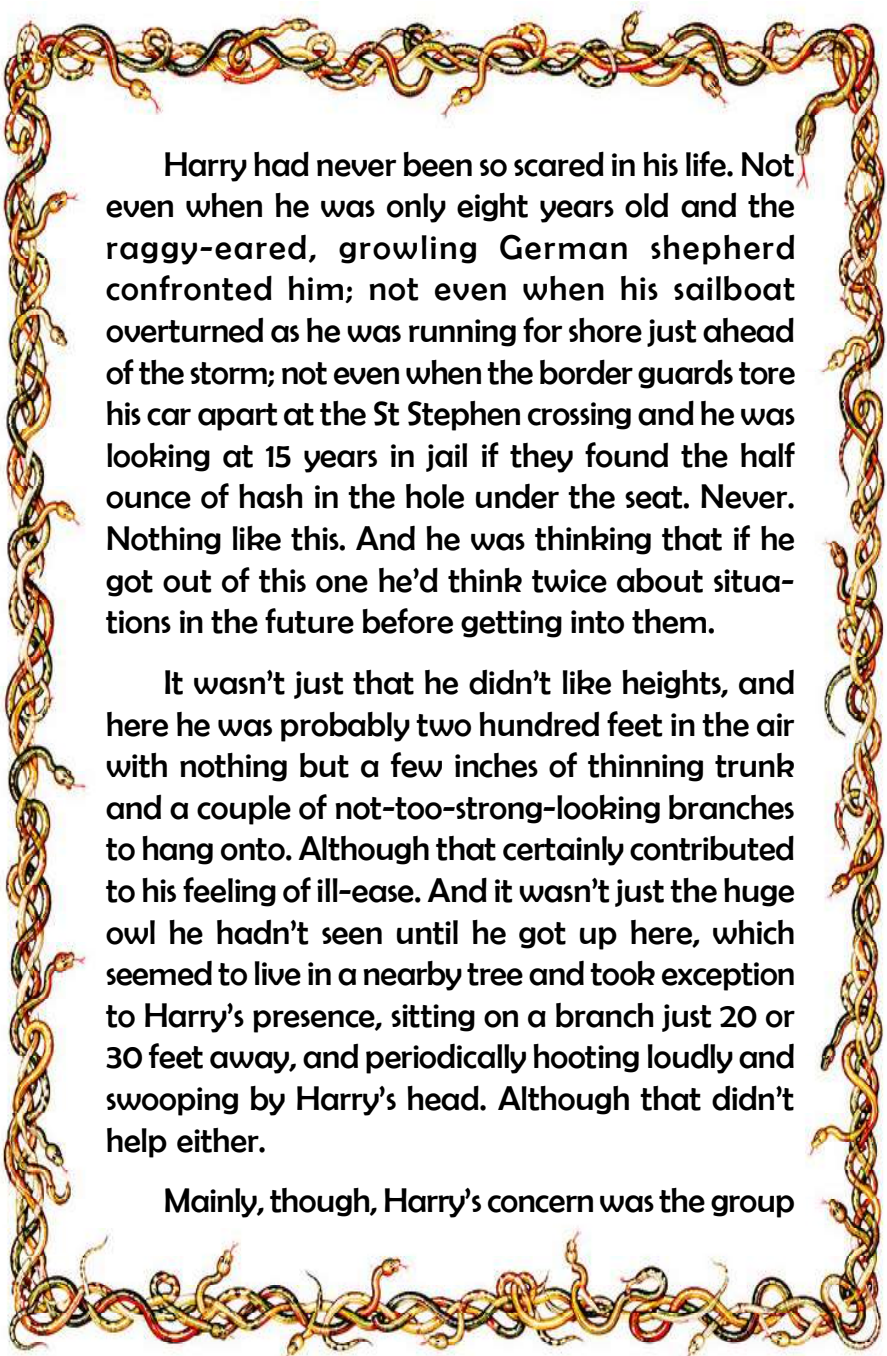




*So, Effendi, we must rush on ourselves.
Please do not turn away - there is not
much time left. I have wept my last tears.
We have only one or two stops left, as we
slip through the mists of time in search of
an answer.*

Freedom?

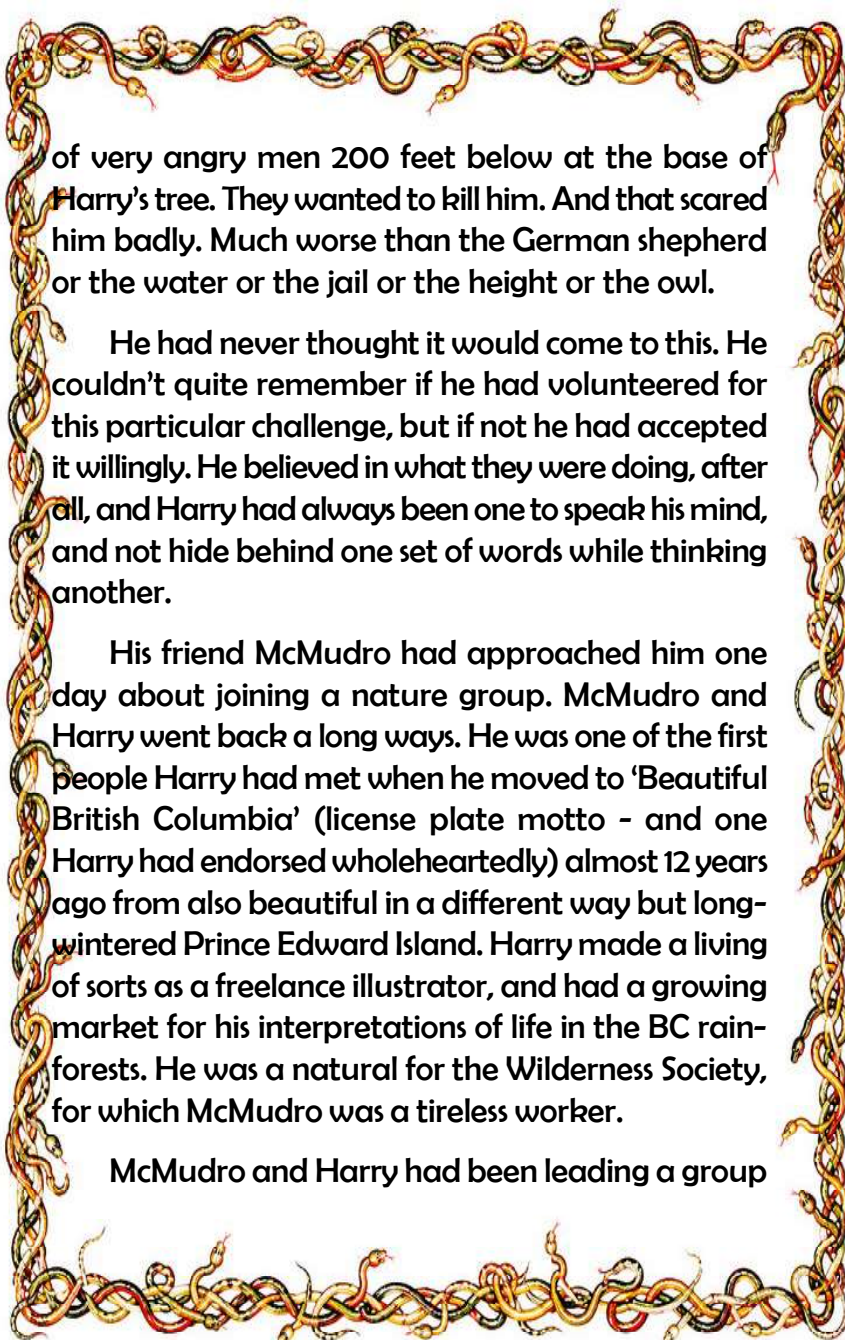
*Oh, no, Effendi, freedom is not the an-
swer - freedom is not even the question
anymore. Now we are returned to a much
more fundamental matter - survival. Free-
dom is a function of life, Effendi - and
when the chains have surrounded all, they
begin to close, leaving only desolation.*



Harry had never been so scared in his life. Not even when he was only eight years old and the raggy-eared, growling German shepherd confronted him; not even when his sailboat overturned as he was running for shore just ahead of the storm; not even when the border guards tore his car apart at the St Stephen crossing and he was looking at 15 years in jail if they found the half ounce of hash in the hole under the seat. Never. Nothing like this. And he was thinking that if he got out of this one he'd think twice about situations in the future before getting into them.

It wasn't just that he didn't like heights, and here he was probably two hundred feet in the air with nothing but a few inches of thinning trunk and a couple of not-too-strong-looking branches to hang onto. Although that certainly contributed to his feeling of ill-ease. And it wasn't just the huge owl he hadn't seen until he got up here, which seemed to live in a nearby tree and took exception to Harry's presence, sitting on a branch just 20 or 30 feet away, and periodically hooting loudly and swooping by Harry's head. Although that didn't help either.

Mainly, though, Harry's concern was the group

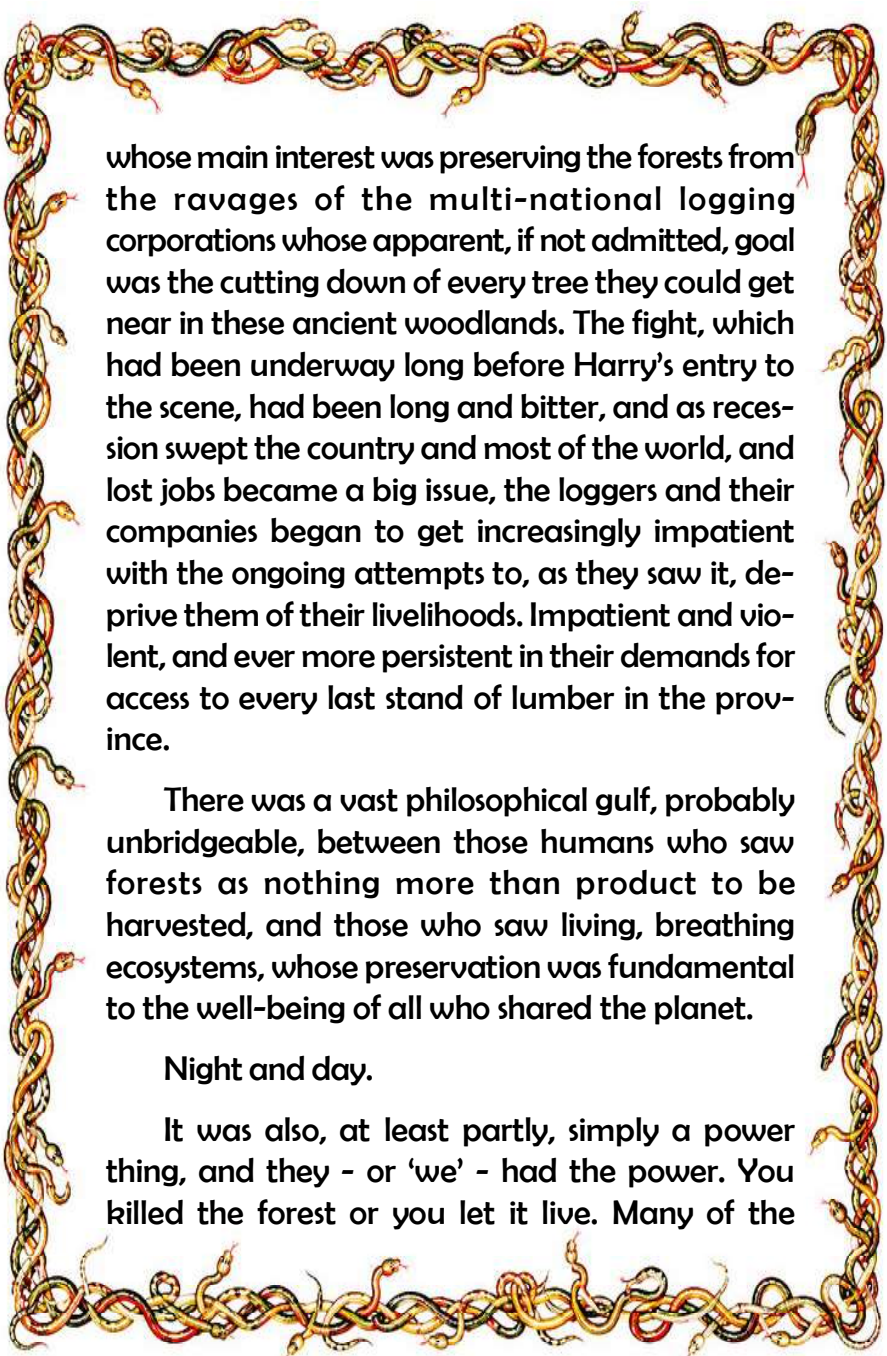


of very angry men 200 feet below at the base of Harry's tree. They wanted to kill him. And that scared him badly. Much worse than the German shepherd or the water or the jail or the height or the owl.

He had never thought it would come to this. He couldn't quite remember if he had volunteered for this particular challenge, but if not he had accepted it willingly. He believed in what they were doing, after all, and Harry had always been one to speak his mind, and not hide behind one set of words while thinking another.

His friend McMudro had approached him one day about joining a nature group. McMudro and Harry went back a long ways. He was one of the first people Harry had met when he moved to 'Beautiful British Columbia' (license plate motto - and one Harry had endorsed wholeheartedly) almost 12 years ago from also beautiful in a different way but long-wintered Prince Edward Island. Harry made a living of sorts as a freelance illustrator, and had a growing market for his interpretations of life in the BC rain-forests. He was a natural for the Wilderness Society, for which McMudro was a tireless worker.

McMudro and Harry had been leading a group

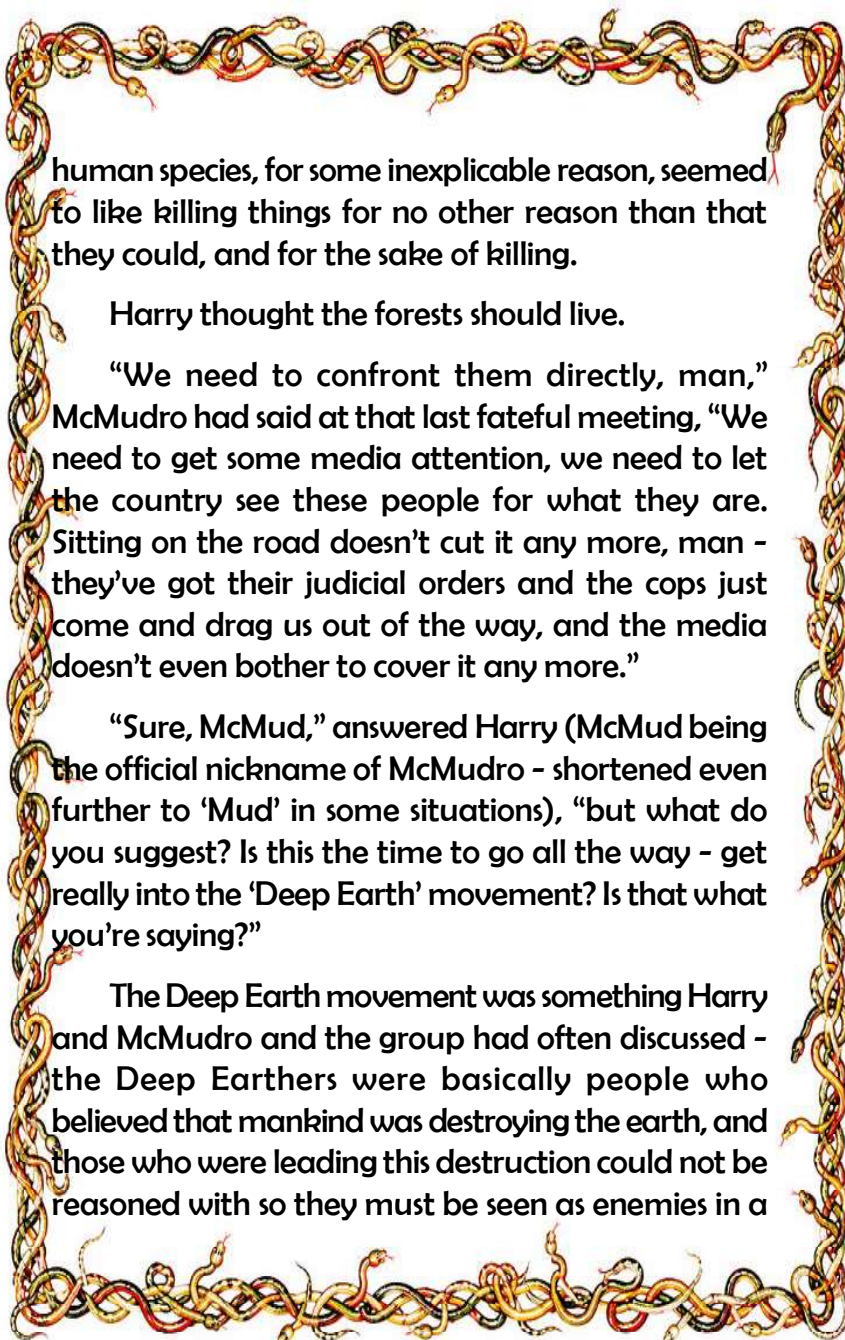


whose main interest was preserving the forests from the ravages of the multi-national logging corporations whose apparent, if not admitted, goal was the cutting down of every tree they could get near in these ancient woodlands. The fight, which had been underway long before Harry's entry to the scene, had been long and bitter, and as recession swept the country and most of the world, and lost jobs became a big issue, the loggers and their companies began to get increasingly impatient with the ongoing attempts to, as they saw it, deprive them of their livelihoods. Impatient and violent, and ever more persistent in their demands for access to every last stand of lumber in the province.

There was a vast philosophical gulf, probably unbridgeable, between those humans who saw forests as nothing more than product to be harvested, and those who saw living, breathing ecosystems, whose preservation was fundamental to the well-being of all who shared the planet.

Night and day.

It was also, at least partly, simply a power thing, and they - or 'we' - had the power. You killed the forest or you let it live. Many of the



human species, for some inexplicable reason, seemed to like killing things for no other reason than that they could, and for the sake of killing.

Harry thought the forests should live.

"We need to confront them directly, man," McMudro had said at that last fateful meeting, "We need to get some media attention, we need to let the country see these people for what they are. Sitting on the road doesn't cut it any more, man - they've got their judicial orders and the cops just come and drag us out of the way, and the media doesn't even bother to cover it any more."

"Sure, McMud," answered Harry (McMud being the official nickname of McMudro - shortened even further to 'Mud' in some situations), "but what do you suggest? Is this the time to go all the way - get really into the 'Deep Earth' movement? Is that what you're saying?"

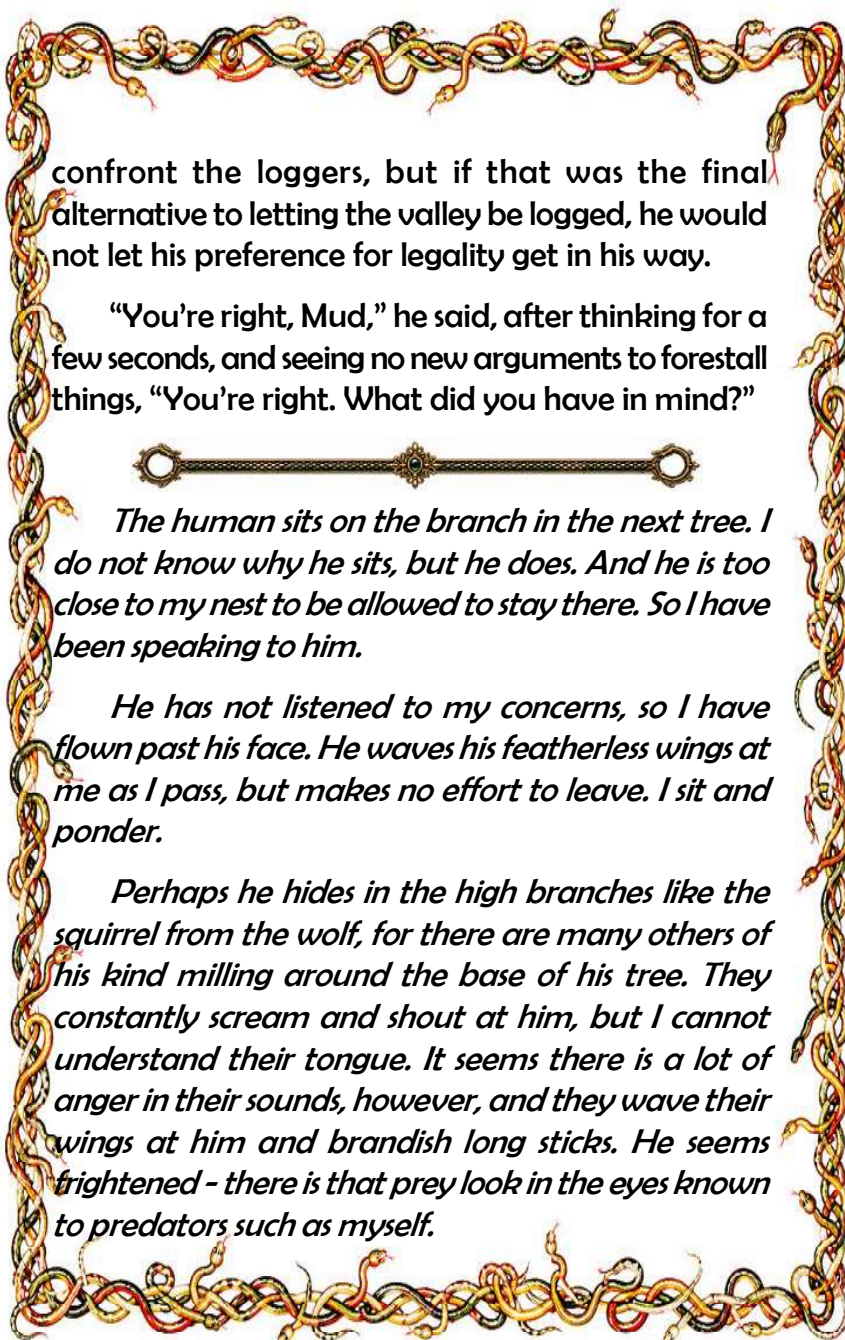
The Deep Earth movement was something Harry and McMudro and the group had often discussed - the Deep Earthers were basically people who believed that mankind was destroying the earth, and those who were leading this destruction could not be reasoned with so they must be seen as enemies in a

war. Although the direct taking of human life was not approved of, measures such as the destruction of equipment were common.

Harry did not really like the idea, being a firm believer in democracy and letting the duly elected government deal with such extreme measures, but he also felt that their democratic system was failing them badly, and allowing the multi-nationals to have a much greater say in the formation of government policies than the people. It was a difficult situation. But it was not supposed to get this difficult.

"Yeah, I think so, man," McMudro had said; "Look, eh, it's obvious that the government is not going to stop the logging in Caverneh Valley, so if we really want to save the owl colony it's going to be up to us to get the public on our side until the government is forced to act from the pressure of public opinion. And that means our actions have to have two aims - first we have to delay the logging, and second get enough publicity so the logging is stopped."

Harry could not fault McMudro's reasoning, since he agreed with it. He did not want to openly



confront the loggers, but if that was the final alternative to letting the valley be logged, he would not let his preference for legality get in his way.

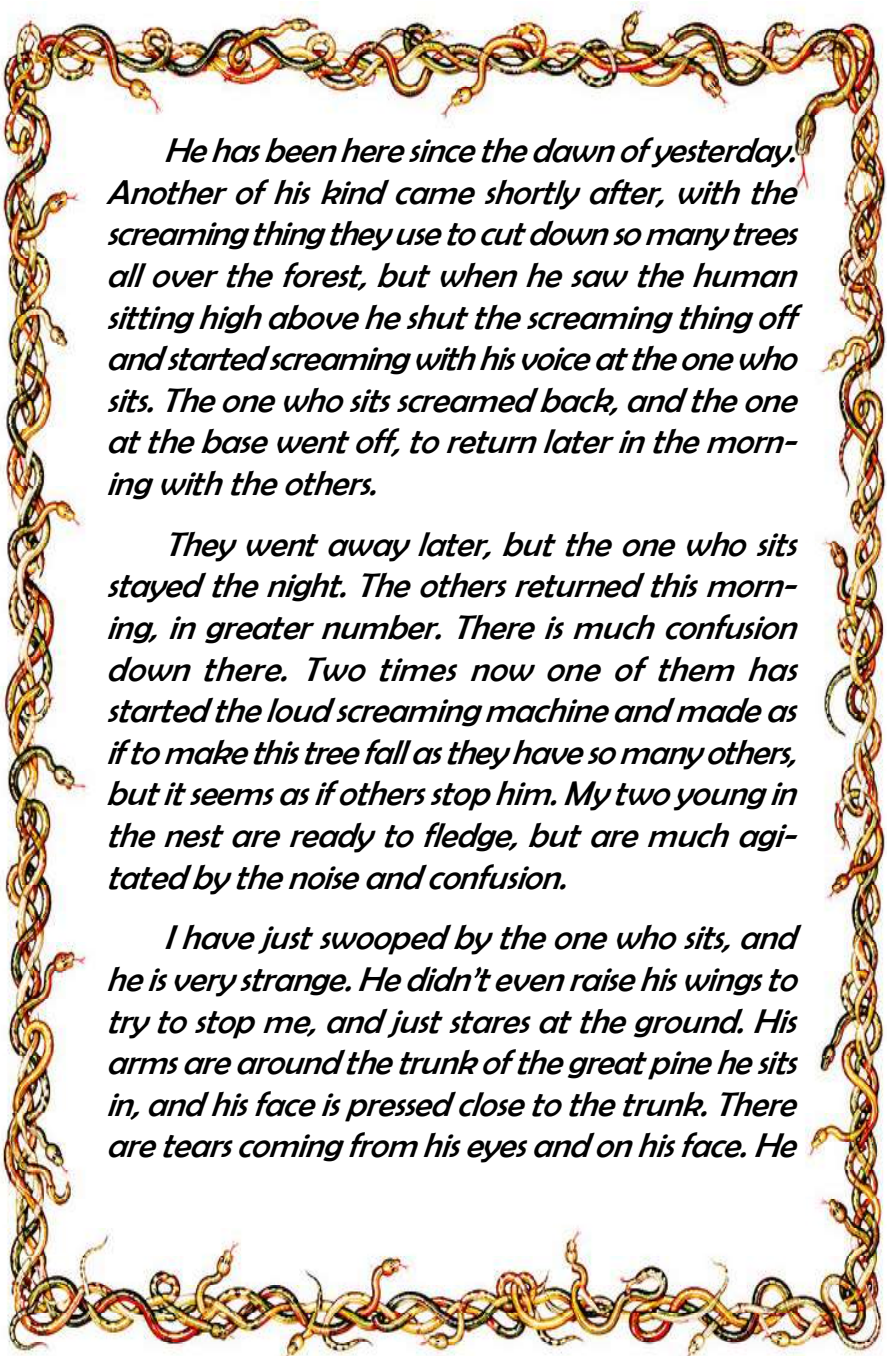
"You're right, Mud," he said, after thinking for a few seconds, and seeing no new arguments to forestall things, "You're right. What did you have in mind?"



The human sits on the branch in the next tree. I do not know why he sits, but he does. And he is too close to my nest to be allowed to stay there. So I have been speaking to him.

He has not listened to my concerns, so I have flown past his face. He waves his featherless wings at me as I pass, but makes no effort to leave. I sit and ponder.

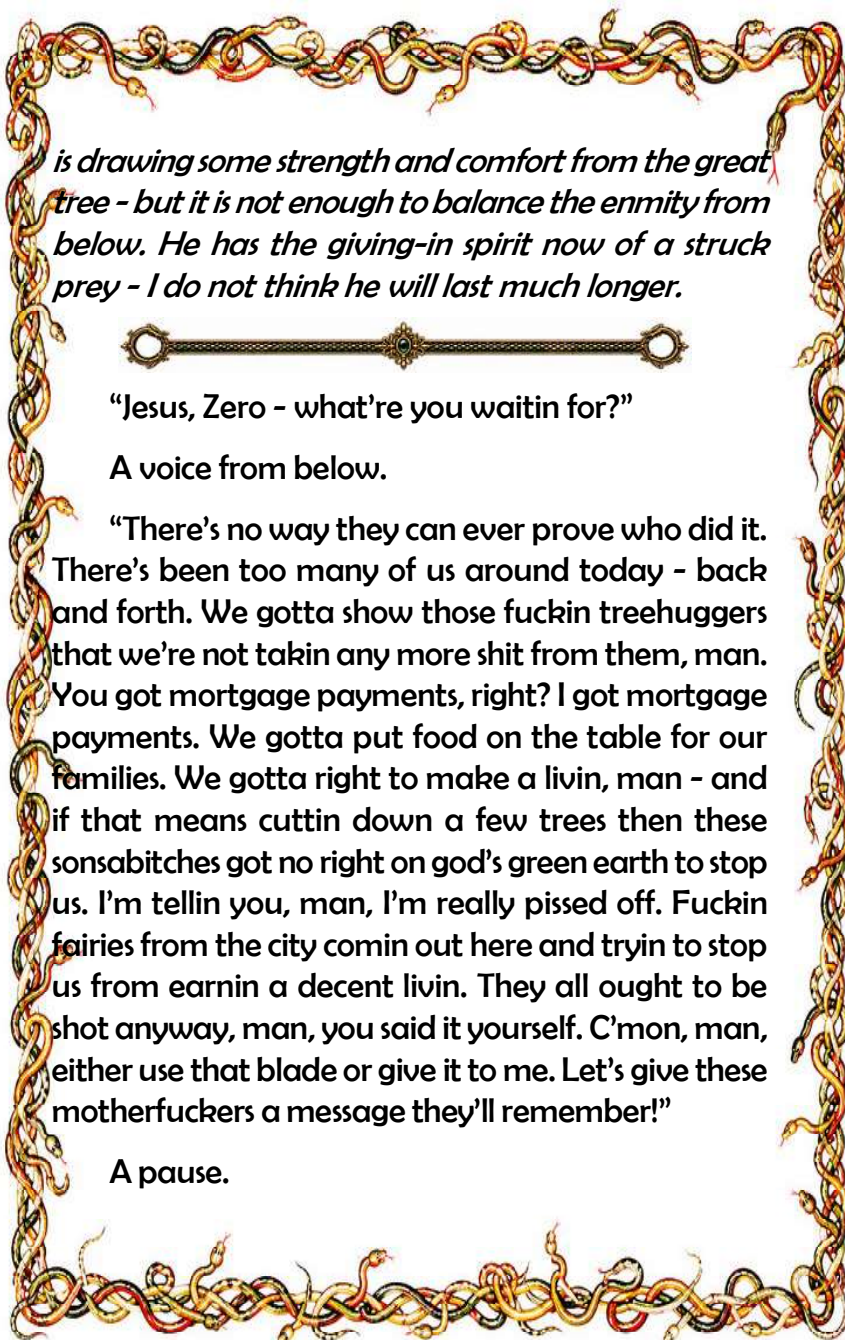
Perhaps he hides in the high branches like the squirrel from the wolf, for there are many others of his kind milling around the base of his tree. They constantly scream and shout at him, but I cannot understand their tongue. It seems there is a lot of anger in their sounds, however, and they wave their wings at him and brandish long sticks. He seems frightened - there is that prey look in the eyes known to predators such as myself.



He has been here since the dawn of yesterday. Another of his kind came shortly after, with the screaming thing they use to cut down so many trees all over the forest, but when he saw the human sitting high above he shut the screaming thing off and started screaming with his voice at the one who sits. The one who sits screamed back, and the one at the base went off, to return later in the morning with the others.

They went away later, but the one who sits stayed the night. The others returned this morning, in greater number. There is much confusion down there. Two times now one of them has started the loud screaming machine and made as if to make this tree fall as they have so many others, but it seems as if others stop him. My two young in the nest are ready to fledge, but are much agitated by the noise and confusion.

I have just swooped by the one who sits, and he is very strange. He didn't even raise his wings to try to stop me, and just stares at the ground. His arms are around the trunk of the great pine he sits in, and his face is pressed close to the trunk. There are tears coming from his eyes and on his face. He



is drawing some strength and comfort from the great tree - but it is not enough to balance the enmity from below. He has the giving-in spirit now of a struck prey - I do not think he will last much longer.



"Jesus, Zero - what're you waitin for?"

A voice from below.

"There's no way they can ever prove who did it. There's been too many of us around today - back and forth. We gotta show those fuckin treehuggers that we're not takin any more shit from them, man. You got mortgage payments, right? I got mortgage payments. We gotta put food on the table for our families. We gotta right to make a livin, man - and if that means cuttin down a few trees then these sonsabitches got no right on god's green earth to stop us. I'm tellin you, man, I'm really pissed off. Fuckin fairies from the city comin out here and tryin to stop us from earnin a decent livin. They all ought to be shot anyway, man, you said it yourself. C'mon, man, either use that blade or give it to me. Let's give these motherfuckers a message they'll remember!"

A pause.

Troubled eyes look upwards at the lonely figure high above. Troubled but determined. Troubled that it should have come to this, when all he wanted was a decent living for his family. Troubled at the many things he'd read about the rainforest, and the dwindling forest reserves, and the entire mystery of the world's ecological balance. Troubled at the telephone call the night before from the bank manager.

A decision is made. A rough hand reaches down to the pullcord on the Blademaster high-performance chainsaw.



These humans are a devil race, surely. It is not enough for them to kill wolves and deers and owls and snakes, and not even eat their kill but just leave the bodies lying there to rot. It is not enough for them even to kill their own kind. They also kill the home we all live in, so there is no place for us to shelter or hunt, and thus even if they do not kill us directly they kill us all by leaving us no place to live. It is unbelievable. It is monstrous, when they have killed everything, they will perish too - can they not understand this, or do they simply not

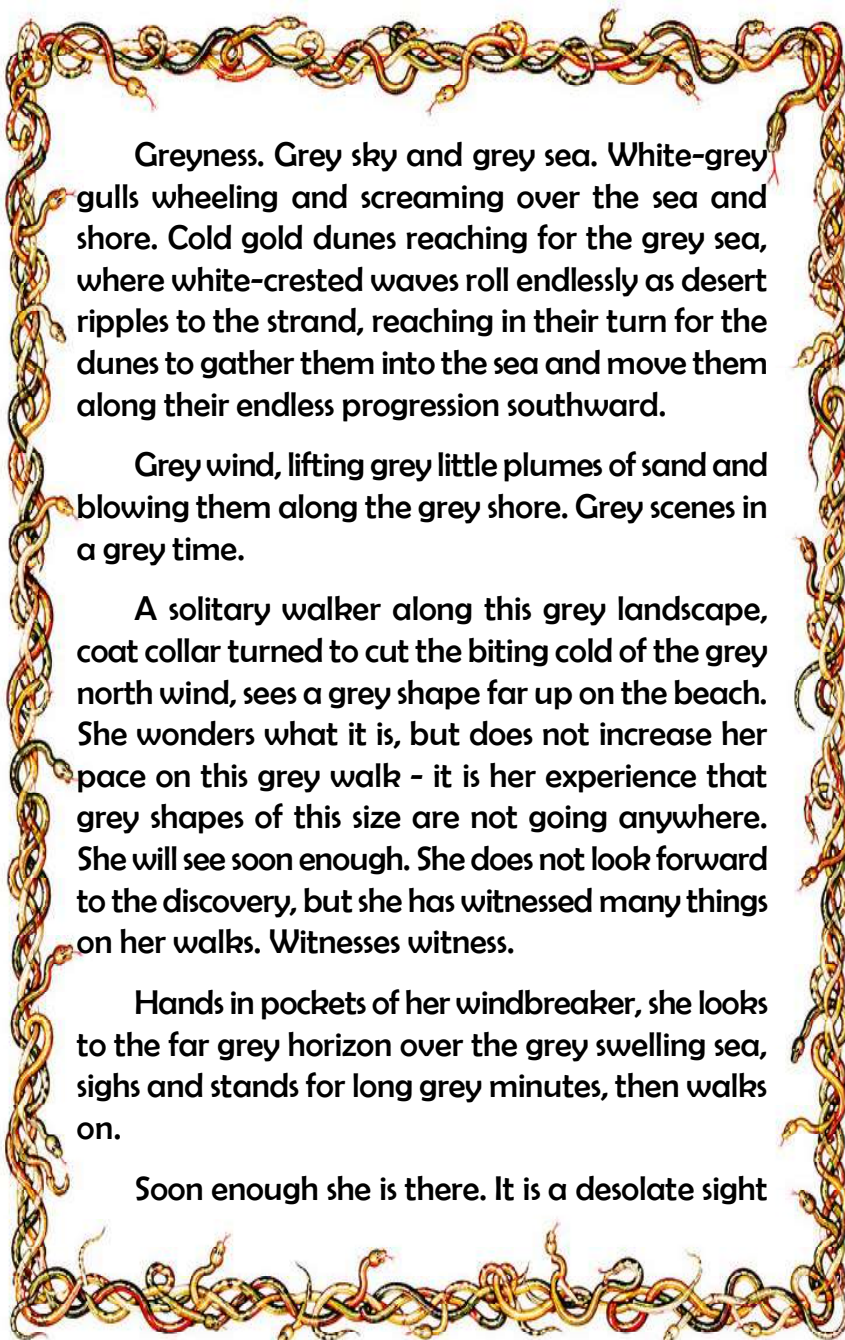
care?

The falling tree with the screaming human fell against the branch with my nest in it, and my fledglings tumbled to the ground, where the humans laughed in a way that was horrible to hear as they poked them with the screaming things until they died. Blood and feathers and the screaming of death. I will go to the deep forests now, but will mate no more.





*Yes, Effendi, it is too much blood.
Too much blood and pain altogether.
The planet has been screaming for
many centuries now, and the Universal
Incorporate has gone to the far side
of the Universe in despair. It is up to
you now to find an answer, Effendi, if
there is an answer to be found. But
time is running rapidly through the
Slipstream, and it is only the future
that can be changed, not the past. It
will be a long road, Effendi. Do you
love me enough to take the first step?
And then the second? Do you,
Effendi?*



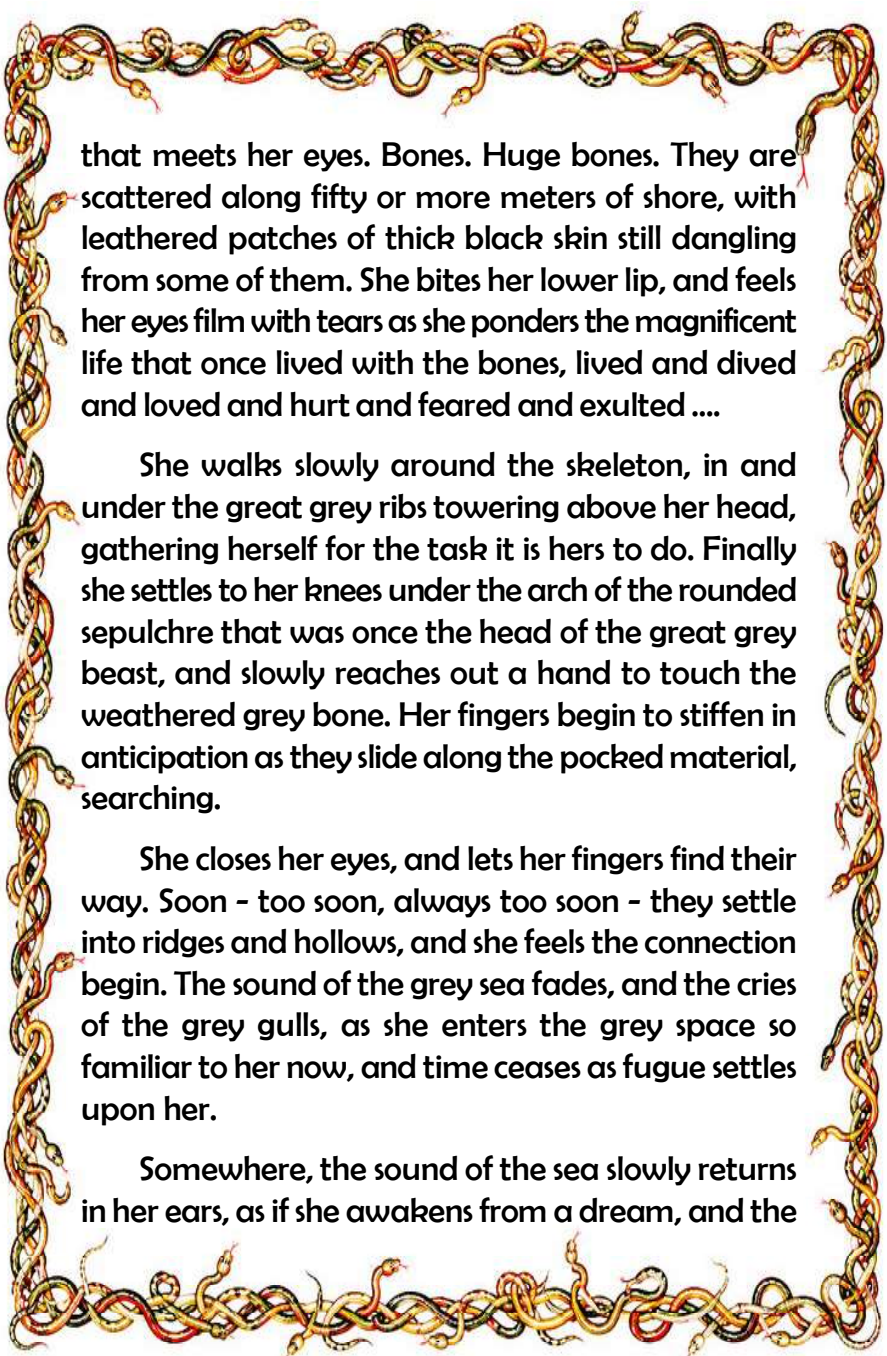
Greyness. Grey sky and grey sea. White-grey gulls wheeling and screaming over the sea and shore. Cold gold dunes reaching for the grey sea, where white-crested waves roll endlessly as desert ripples to the strand, reaching in their turn for the dunes to gather them into the sea and move them along their endless progression southward.

Grey wind, lifting grey little plumes of sand and blowing them along the grey shore. Grey scenes in a grey time.

A solitary walker along this grey landscape, coat collar turned to cut the biting cold of the grey north wind, sees a grey shape far up on the beach. She wonders what it is, but does not increase her pace on this grey walk - it is her experience that grey shapes of this size are not going anywhere. She will see soon enough. She does not look forward to the discovery, but she has witnessed many things on her walks. Witnesses witness.

Hands in pockets of her windbreaker, she looks to the far grey horizon over the grey swelling sea, sighs and stands for long grey minutes, then walks on.

Soon enough she is there. It is a desolate sight

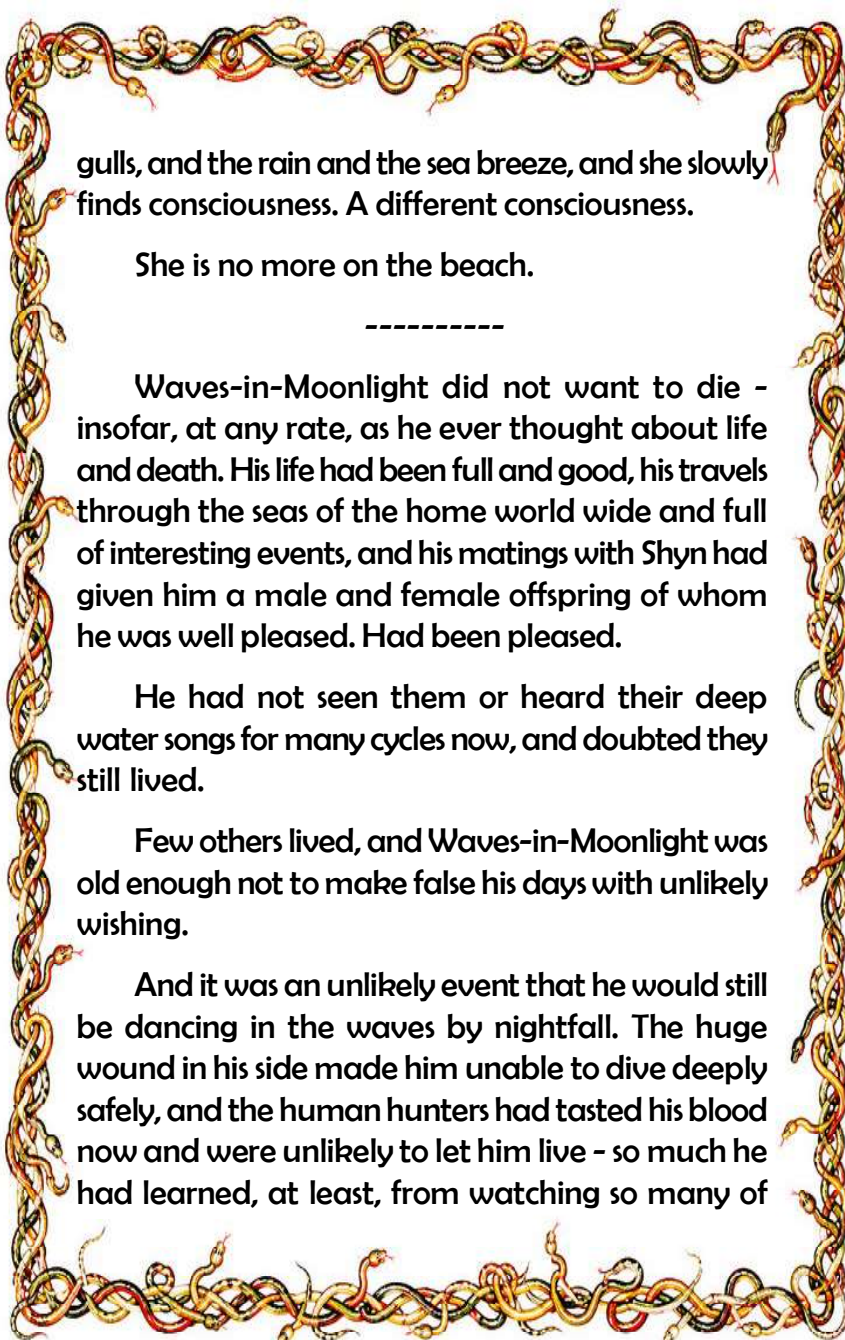


that meets her eyes. Bones. Huge bones. They are scattered along fifty or more meters of shore, with leathered patches of thick black skin still dangling from some of them. She bites her lower lip, and feels her eyes film with tears as she ponders the magnificent life that once lived with the bones, lived and dived and loved and hurt and feared and exulted

She walks slowly around the skeleton, in and under the great grey ribs towering above her head, gathering herself for the task it is hers to do. Finally she settles to her knees under the arch of the rounded sepulchre that was once the head of the great grey beast, and slowly reaches out a hand to touch the weathered grey bone. Her fingers begin to stiffen in anticipation as they slide along the pocked material, searching.

She closes her eyes, and lets her fingers find their way. Soon - too soon, always too soon - they settle into ridges and hollows, and she feels the connection begin. The sound of the grey sea fades, and the cries of the grey gulls, as she enters the grey space so familiar to her now, and time ceases as fugue settles upon her.

Somewhere, the sound of the sea slowly returns in her ears, as if she awakens from a dream, and the



gulls, and the rain and the sea breeze, and she slowly finds consciousness. A different consciousness.

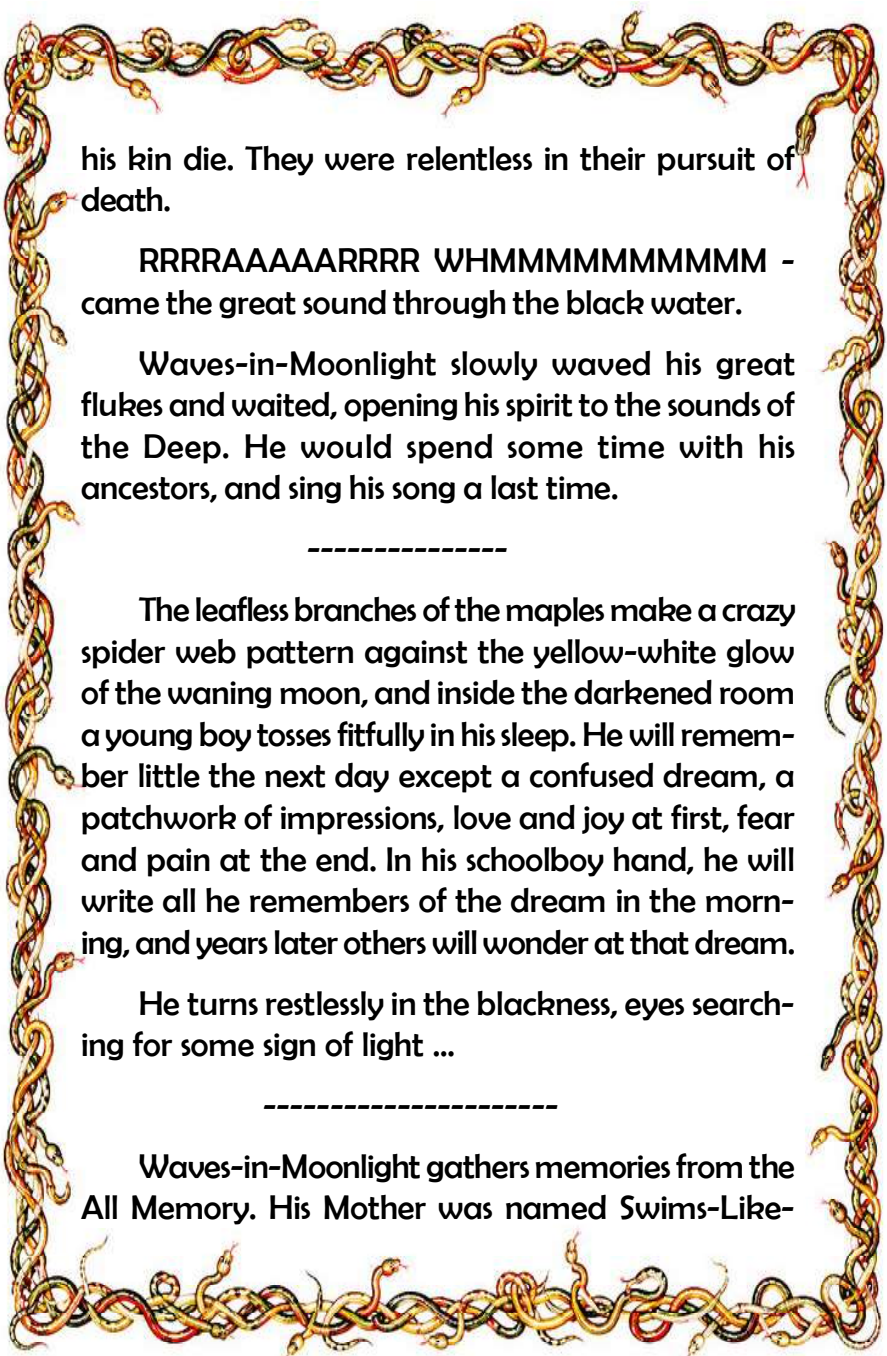
She is no more on the beach.

Waves-in-Moonlight did not want to die - insofar, at any rate, as he ever thought about life and death. His life had been full and good, his travels through the seas of the home world wide and full of interesting events, and his matings with Shyn had given him a male and female offspring of whom he was well pleased. Had been pleased.

He had not seen them or heard their deep water songs for many cycles now, and doubted they still lived.

Few others lived, and Waves-in-Moonlight was old enough not to make false his days with unlikely wishing.

And it was an unlikely event that he would still be dancing in the waves by nightfall. The huge wound in his side made him unable to dive deeply safely, and the human hunters had tasted his blood now and were unlikely to let him live - so much he had learned, at least, from watching so many of



his kin die. They were relentless in their pursuit of death.

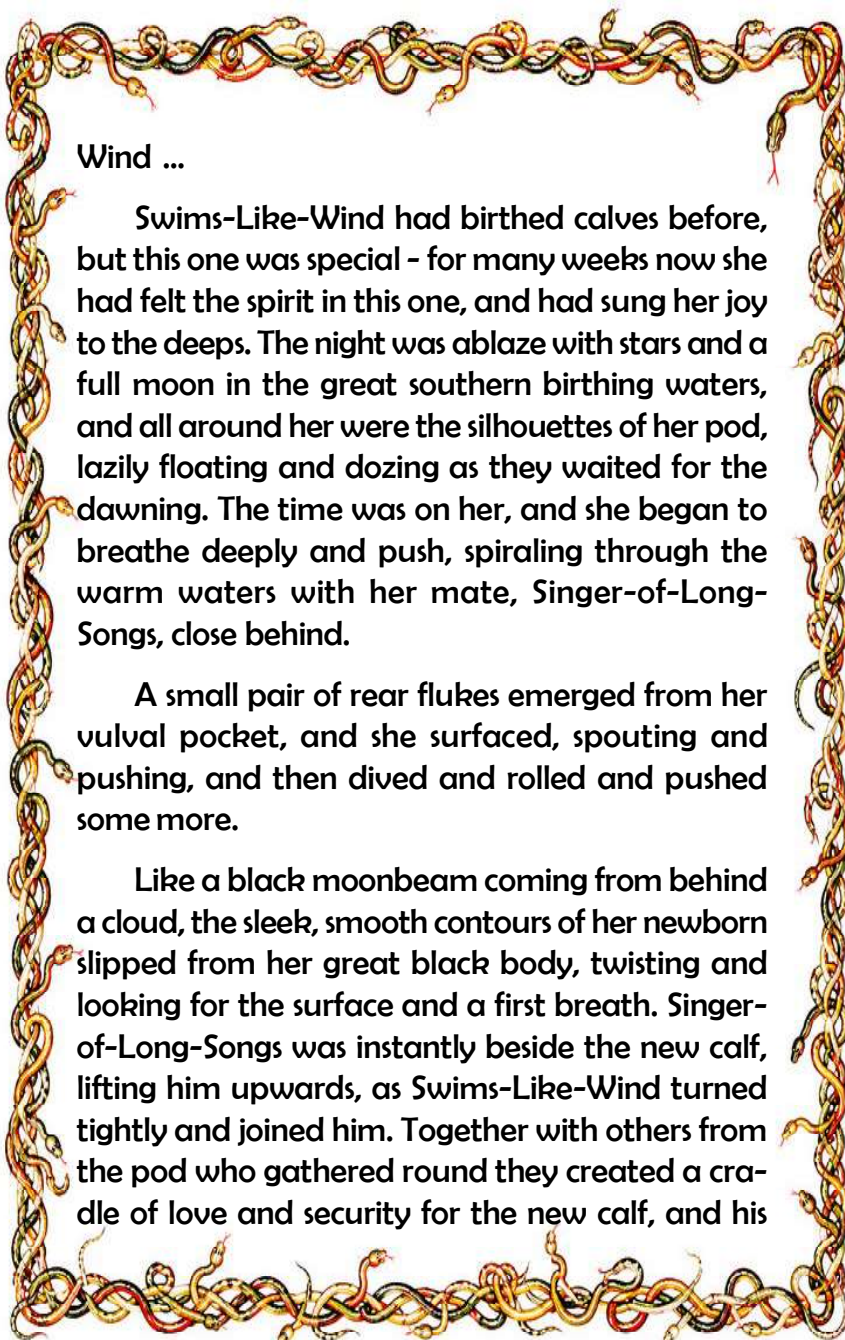
RRRRAAAAARRRR WHMMMMMMMMMM -
came the great sound through the black water.

Waves-in-Moonlight slowly waved his great flukes and waited, opening his spirit to the sounds of the Deep. He would spend some time with his ancestors, and sing his song a last time.

The leafless branches of the maples make a crazy spider web pattern against the yellow-white glow of the waning moon, and inside the darkened room a young boy tosses fitfully in his sleep. He will remember little the next day except a confused dream, a patchwork of impressions, love and joy at first, fear and pain at the end. In his schoolboy hand, he will write all he remembers of the dream in the morning, and years later others will wonder at that dream.

He turns restlessly in the blackness, eyes searching for some sign of light ...

Waves-in-Moonlight gathers memories from the All Memory. His Mother was named Swims-Like-

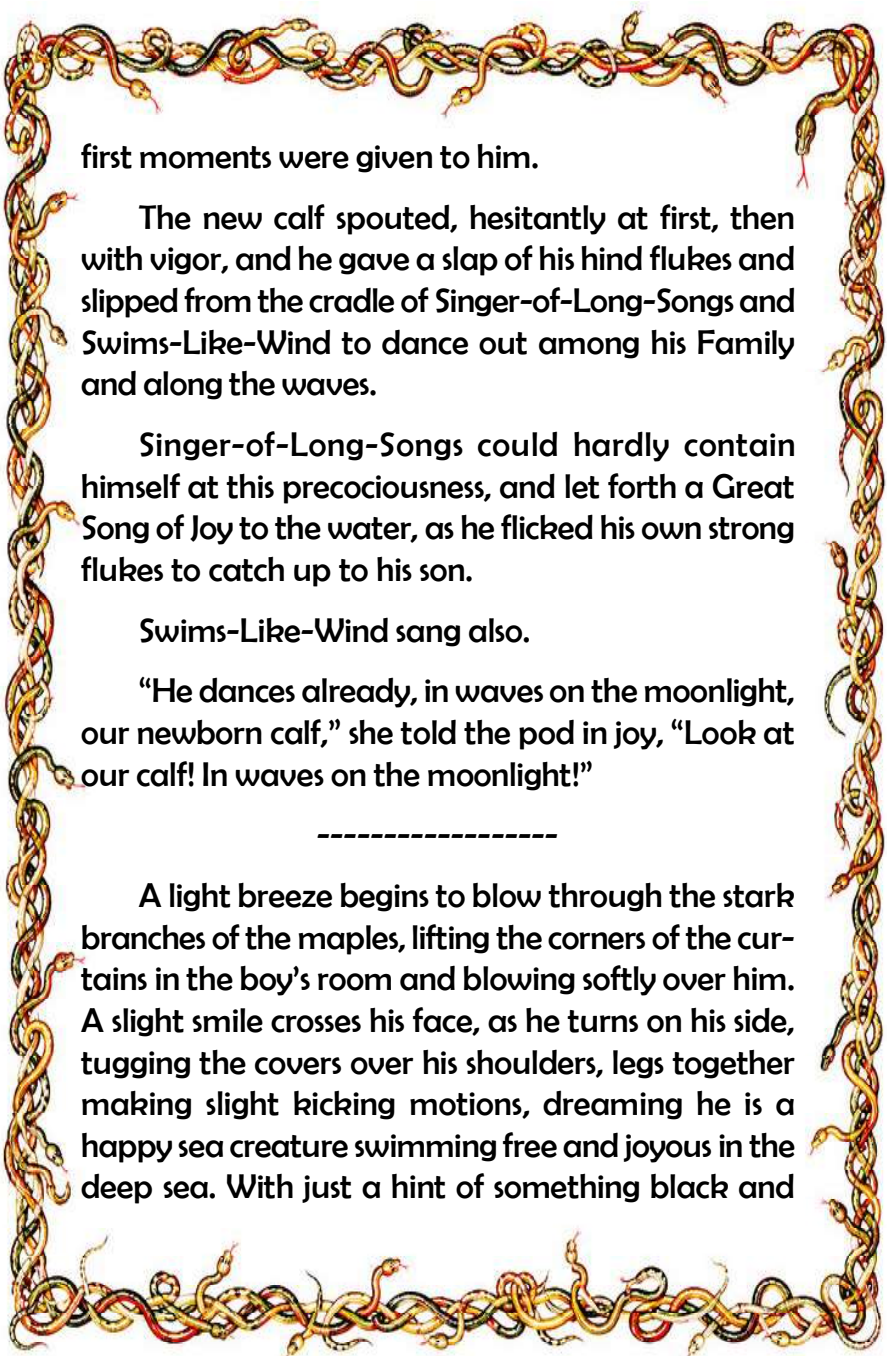


Wind ...

Swims-Like-Wind had birthed calves before, but this one was special - for many weeks now she had felt the spirit in this one, and had sung her joy to the deeps. The night was ablaze with stars and a full moon in the great southern birthing waters, and all around her were the silhouettes of her pod, lazily floating and dozing as they waited for the dawning. The time was on her, and she began to breathe deeply and push, spiraling through the warm waters with her mate, Singer-of-Long-Songs, close behind.

A small pair of rear flukes emerged from her vulval pocket, and she surfaced, spouting and pushing, and then dived and rolled and pushed some more.

Like a black moonbeam coming from behind a cloud, the sleek, smooth contours of her newborn slipped from her great black body, twisting and looking for the surface and a first breath. Singer-of-Long-Songs was instantly beside the new calf, lifting him upwards, as Swims-Like-Wind turned tightly and joined him. Together with others from the pod who gathered round they created a cradle of love and security for the new calf, and his



first moments were given to him.

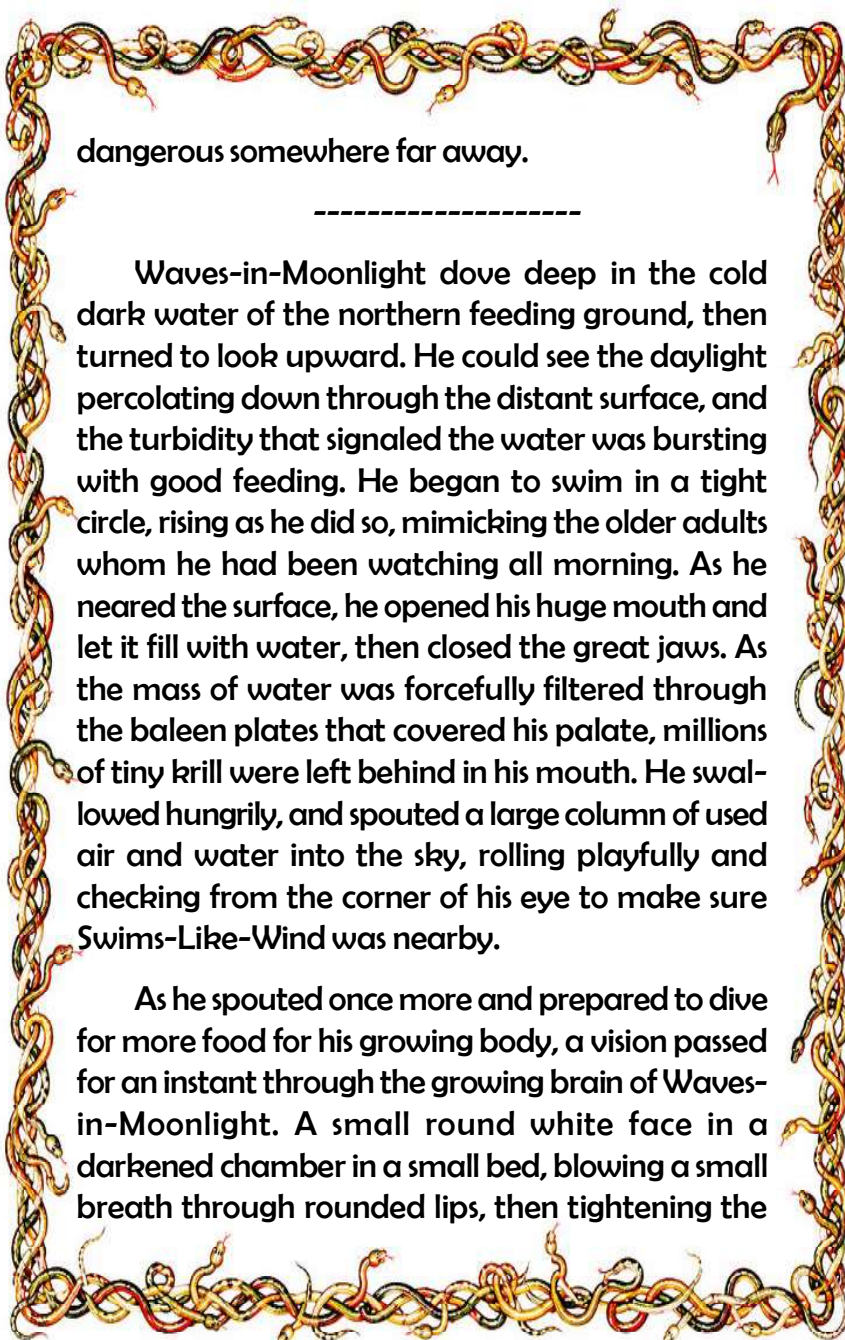
The new calf spouted, hesitantly at first, then with vigor, and he gave a slap of his hind flukes and slipped from the cradle of Singer-of-Long-Songs and Swims-Like-Wind to dance out among his Family and along the waves.

Singer-of-Long-Songs could hardly contain himself at this precociousness, and let forth a Great Song of Joy to the water, as he flicked his own strong flukes to catch up to his son.

Swims-Like-Wind sang also.

“He dances already, in waves on the moonlight, our newborn calf,” she told the pod in joy, “Look at our calf! In waves on the moonlight!”

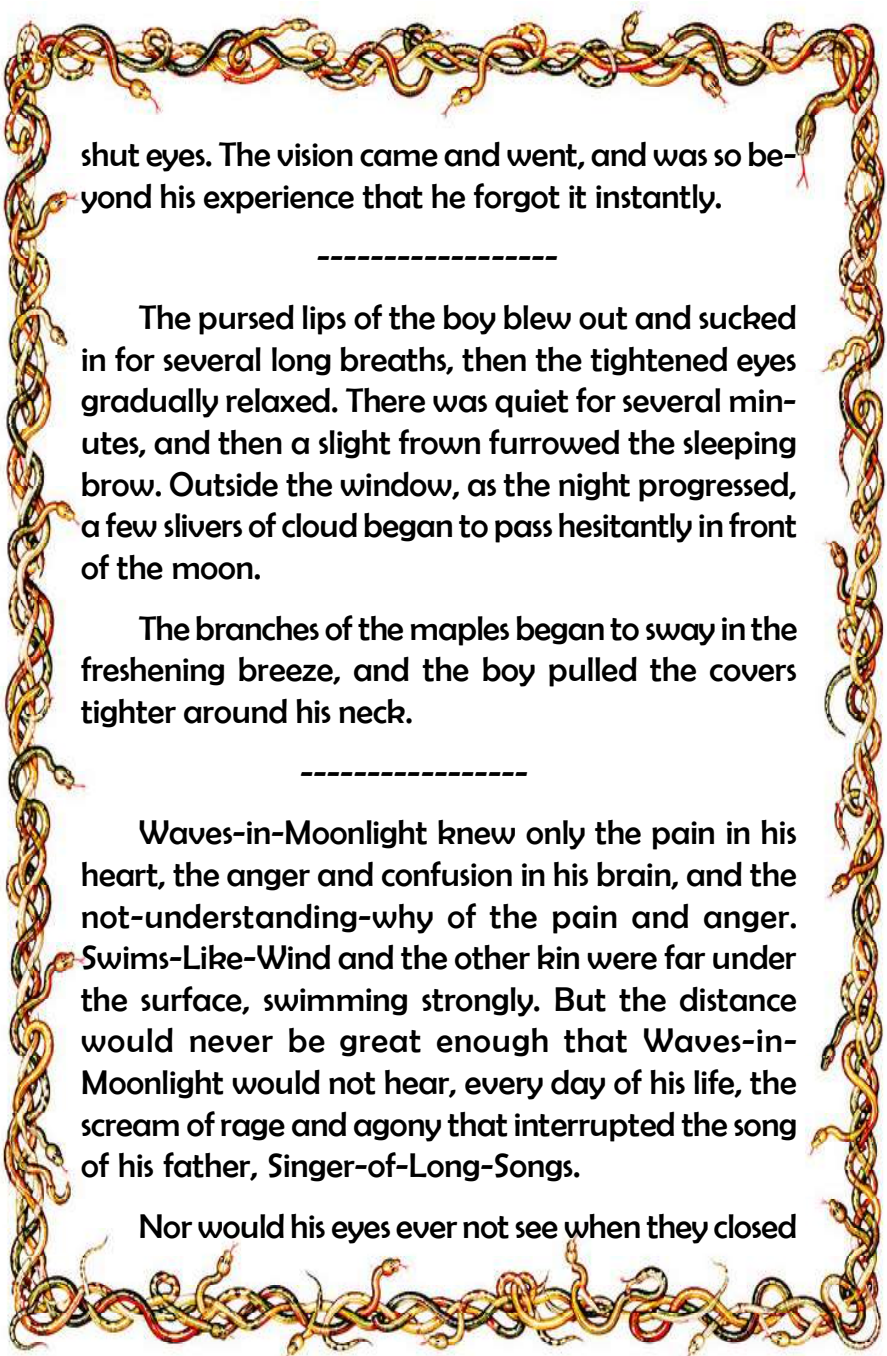
A light breeze begins to blow through the stark branches of the maples, lifting the corners of the curtains in the boy’s room and blowing softly over him. A slight smile crosses his face, as he turns on his side, tugging the covers over his shoulders, legs together making slight kicking motions, dreaming he is a happy sea creature swimming free and joyous in the deep sea. With just a hint of something black and



dangerous somewhere far away.

Waves-in-Moonlight dove deep in the cold dark water of the northern feeding ground, then turned to look upward. He could see the daylight percolating down through the distant surface, and the turbidity that signaled the water was bursting with good feeding. He began to swim in a tight circle, rising as he did so, mimicking the older adults whom he had been watching all morning. As he neared the surface, he opened his huge mouth and let it fill with water, then closed the great jaws. As the mass of water was forcefully filtered through the baleen plates that covered his palate, millions of tiny krill were left behind in his mouth. He swallowed hungrily, and spouted a large column of used air and water into the sky, rolling playfully and checking from the corner of his eye to make sure Swims-Like-Wind was nearby.

As he spouted once more and prepared to dive for more food for his growing body, a vision passed for an instant through the growing brain of Waves-in-Moonlight. A small round white face in a darkened chamber in a small bed, blowing a small breath through rounded lips, then tightening the



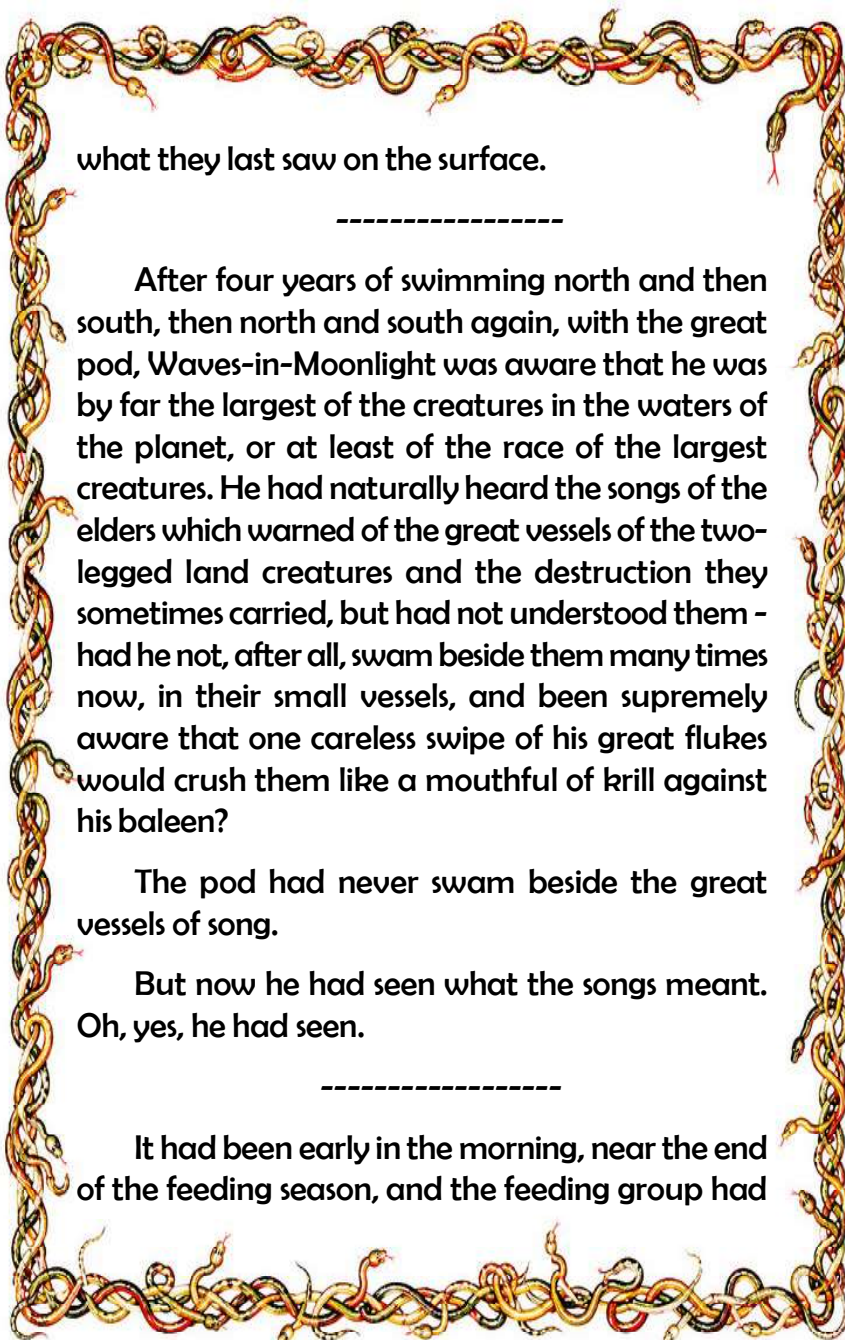
shut eyes. The vision came and went, and was so beyond his experience that he forgot it instantly.

The pursed lips of the boy blew out and sucked in for several long breaths, then the tightened eyes gradually relaxed. There was quiet for several minutes, and then a slight frown furrowed the sleeping brow. Outside the window, as the night progressed, a few slivers of cloud began to pass hesitantly in front of the moon.

The branches of the maples began to sway in the freshening breeze, and the boy pulled the covers tighter around his neck.

Waves-in-Moonlight knew only the pain in his heart, the anger and confusion in his brain, and the not-understanding-why of the pain and anger. Swims-Like-Wind and the other kin were far under the surface, swimming strongly. But the distance would never be great enough that Waves-in-Moonlight would not hear, every day of his life, the scream of rage and agony that interrupted the song of his father, Singer-of-Long-Songs.

Nor would his eyes ever not see when they closed



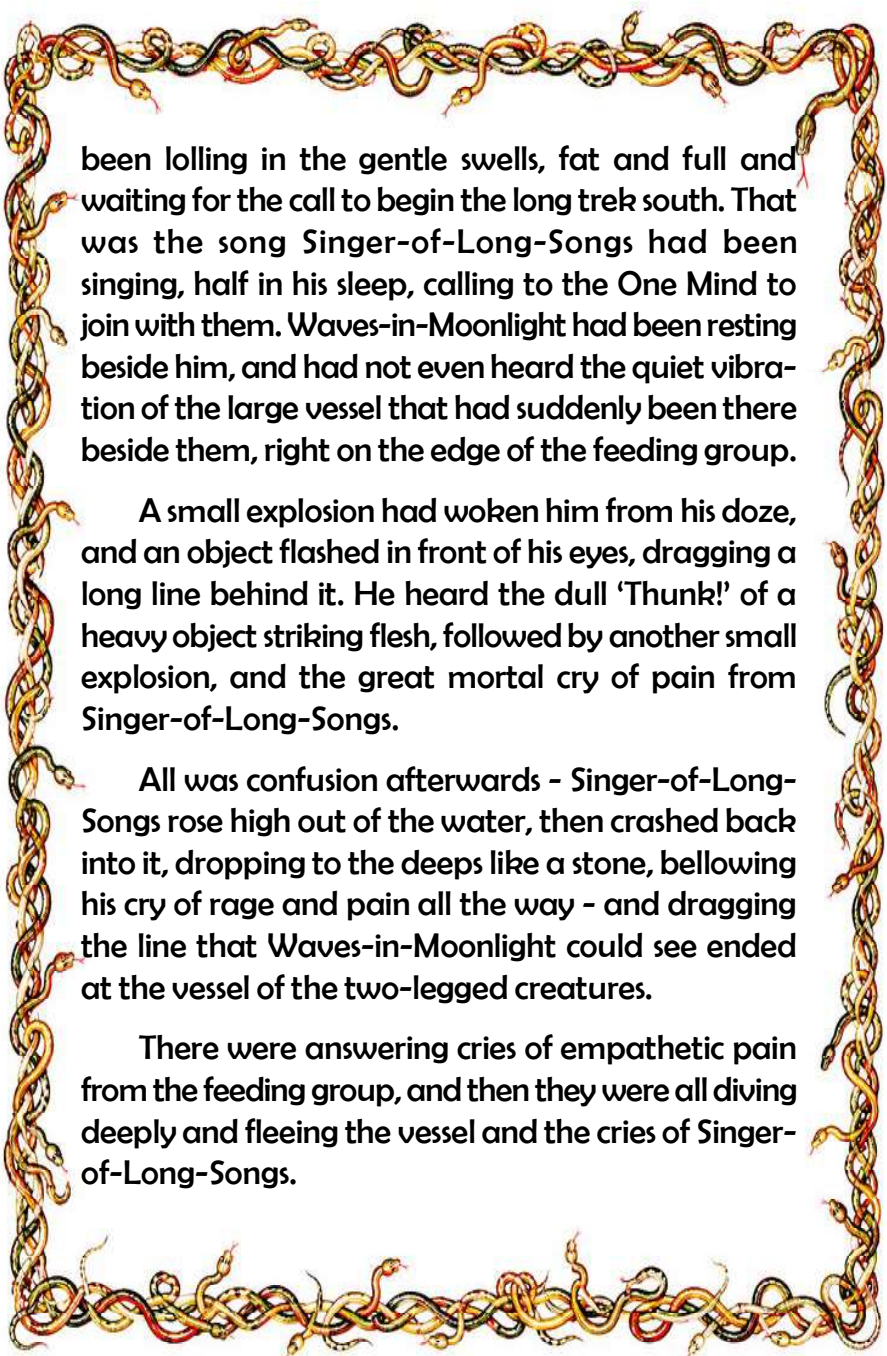
what they last saw on the surface.

After four years of swimming north and then south, then north and south again, with the great pod, Waves-in-Moonlight was aware that he was by far the largest of the creatures in the waters of the planet, or at least of the race of the largest creatures. He had naturally heard the songs of the elders which warned of the great vessels of the two-legged land creatures and the destruction they sometimes carried, but had not understood them - had he not, after all, swam beside them many times now, in their small vessels, and been supremely aware that one careless swipe of his great flukes would crush them like a mouthful of krill against his baleen?

The pod had never swam beside the great vessels of song.

But now he had seen what the songs meant. Oh, yes, he had seen.

It had been early in the morning, near the end of the feeding season, and the feeding group had

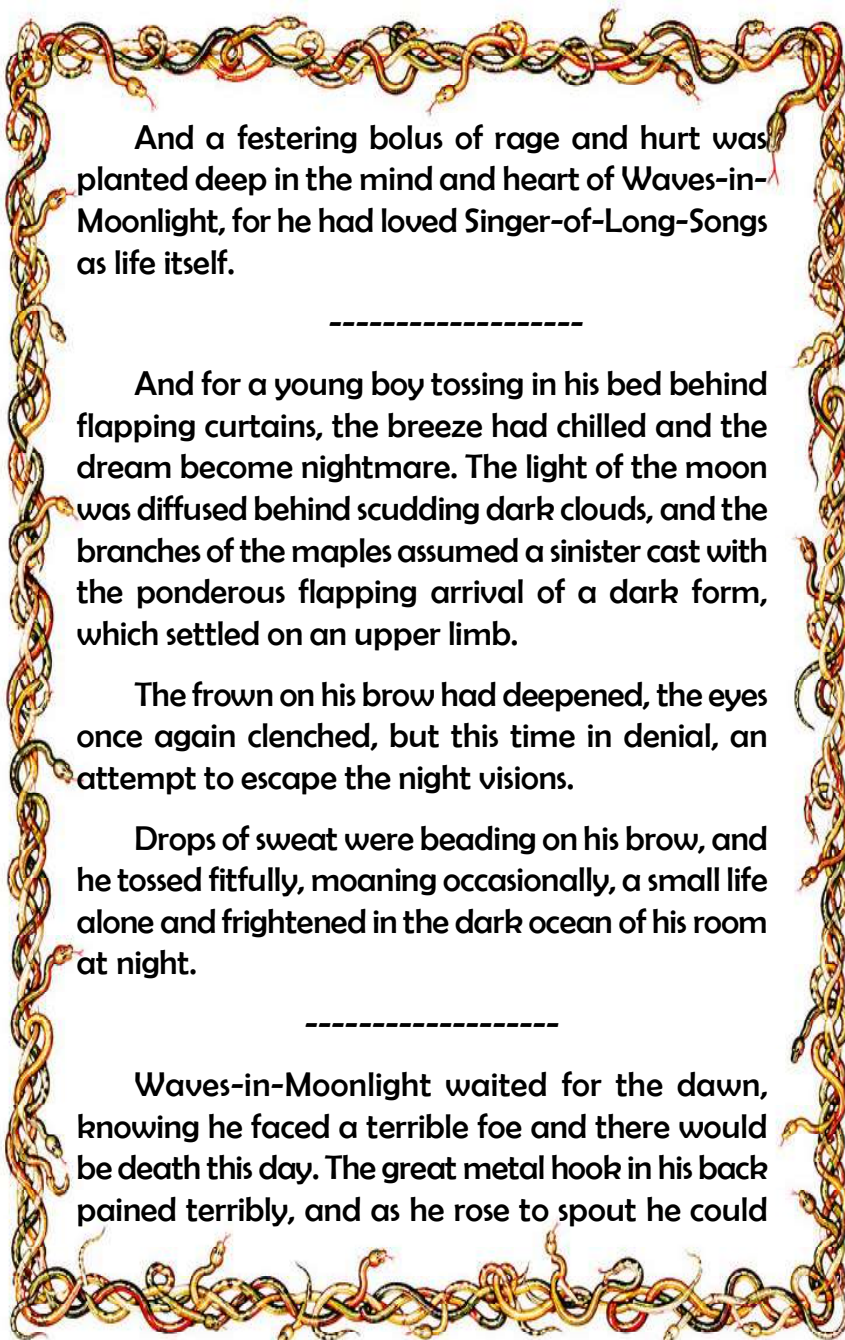


been lolling in the gentle swells, fat and full and waiting for the call to begin the long trek south. That was the song Singer-of-Long-Songs had been singing, half in his sleep, calling to the One Mind to join with them. Waves-in-Moonlight had been resting beside him, and had not even heard the quiet vibration of the large vessel that had suddenly been there beside them, right on the edge of the feeding group.

A small explosion had woken him from his doze, and an object flashed in front of his eyes, dragging a long line behind it. He heard the dull 'Thunk!' of a heavy object striking flesh, followed by another small explosion, and the great mortal cry of pain from Singer-of-Long-Songs.

All was confusion afterwards - Singer-of-Long-Songs rose high out of the water, then crashed back into it, dropping to the deeps like a stone, bellowing his cry of rage and pain all the way - and dragging the line that Waves-in-Moonlight could see ended at the vessel of the two-legged creatures.

There were answering cries of empathetic pain from the feeding group, and then they were all diving deeply and fleeing the vessel and the cries of Singer-of-Long-Songs.



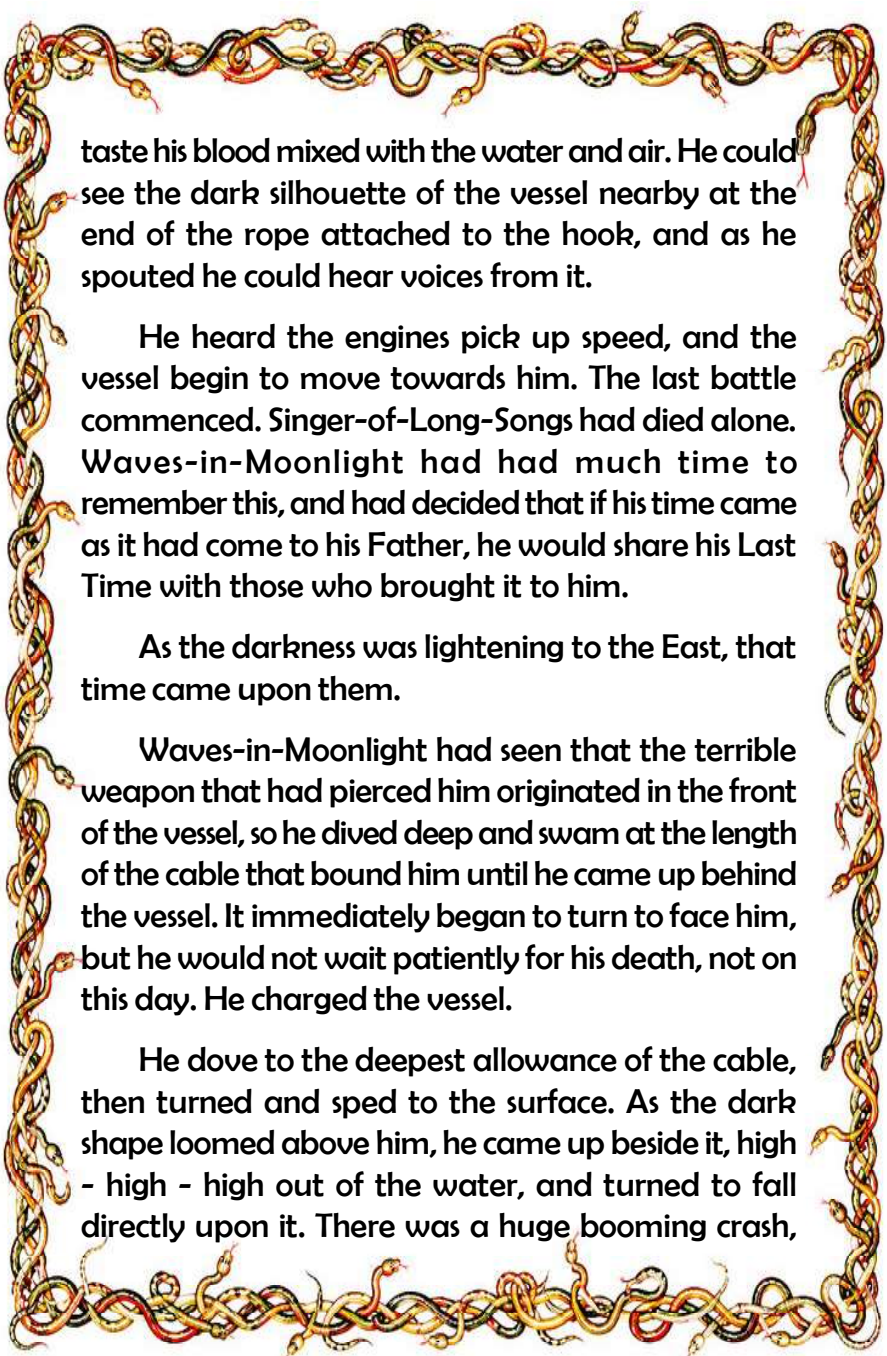
And a festering bolus of rage and hurt was planted deep in the mind and heart of Waves-in-Moonlight, for he had loved Singer-of-Long-Songs as life itself.

And for a young boy tossing in his bed behind flapping curtains, the breeze had chilled and the dream become nightmare. The light of the moon was diffused behind scudding dark clouds, and the branches of the maples assumed a sinister cast with the ponderous flapping arrival of a dark form, which settled on an upper limb.

The frown on his brow had deepened, the eyes once again clenched, but this time in denial, an attempt to escape the night visions.

Drops of sweat were beading on his brow, and he tossed fitfully, moaning occasionally, a small life alone and frightened in the dark ocean of his room at night.

Waves-in-Moonlight waited for the dawn, knowing he faced a terrible foe and there would be death this day. The great metal hook in his back pained terribly, and as he rose to spout he could



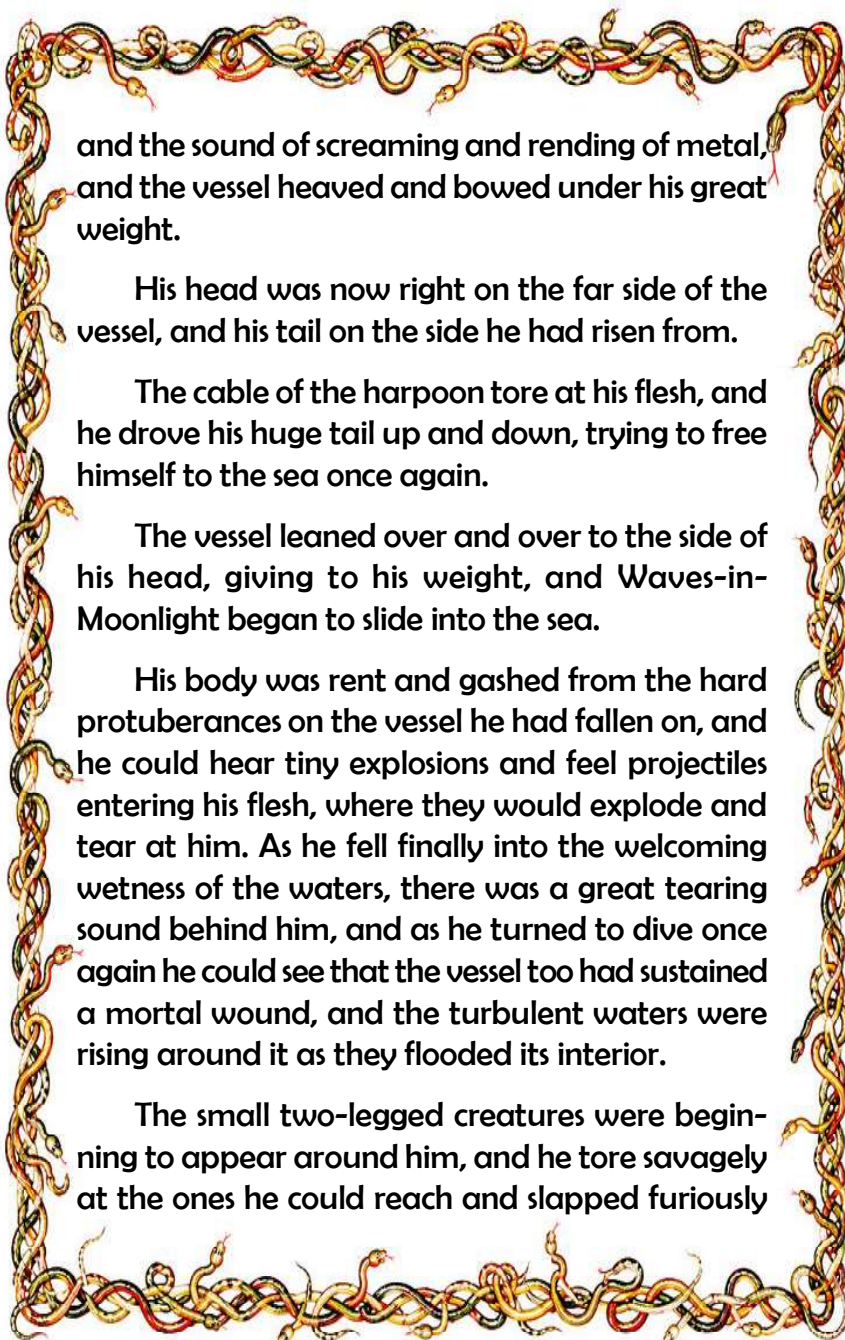
taste his blood mixed with the water and air. He could see the dark silhouette of the vessel nearby at the end of the rope attached to the hook, and as he spouted he could hear voices from it.

He heard the engines pick up speed, and the vessel begin to move towards him. The last battle commenced. Singer-of-Long-Songs had died alone. Waves-in-Moonlight had had much time to remember this, and had decided that if his time came as it had come to his Father, he would share his Last Time with those who brought it to him.

As the darkness was lightening to the East, that time came upon them.

Waves-in-Moonlight had seen that the terrible weapon that had pierced him originated in the front of the vessel, so he dived deep and swam at the length of the cable that bound him until he came up behind the vessel. It immediately began to turn to face him, but he would not wait patiently for his death, not on this day. He charged the vessel.

He dove to the deepest allowance of the cable, then turned and sped to the surface. As the dark shape loomed above him, he came up beside it, high - high - high out of the water, and turned to fall directly upon it. There was a huge booming crash,



and the sound of screaming and rending of metal, and the vessel heaved and bowed under his great weight.

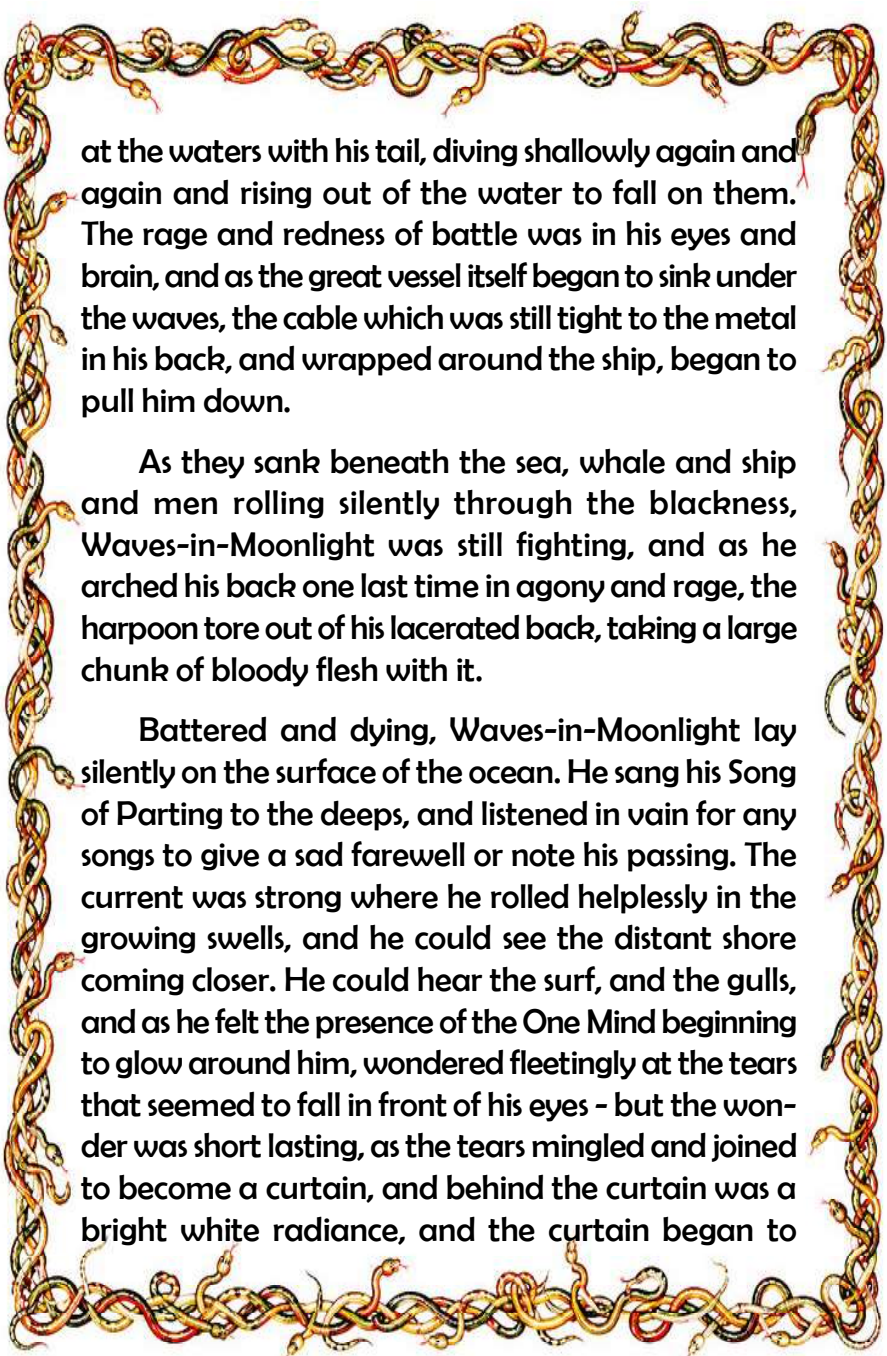
His head was now right on the far side of the vessel, and his tail on the side he had risen from.

The cable of the harpoon tore at his flesh, and he drove his huge tail up and down, trying to free himself to the sea once again.

The vessel leaned over and over to the side of his head, giving to his weight, and Waves-in-Moonlight began to slide into the sea.

His body was rent and gashed from the hard protuberances on the vessel he had fallen on, and he could hear tiny explosions and feel projectiles entering his flesh, where they would explode and tear at him. As he fell finally into the welcoming wetness of the waters, there was a great tearing sound behind him, and as he turned to dive once again he could see that the vessel too had sustained a mortal wound, and the turbulent waters were rising around it as they flooded its interior.

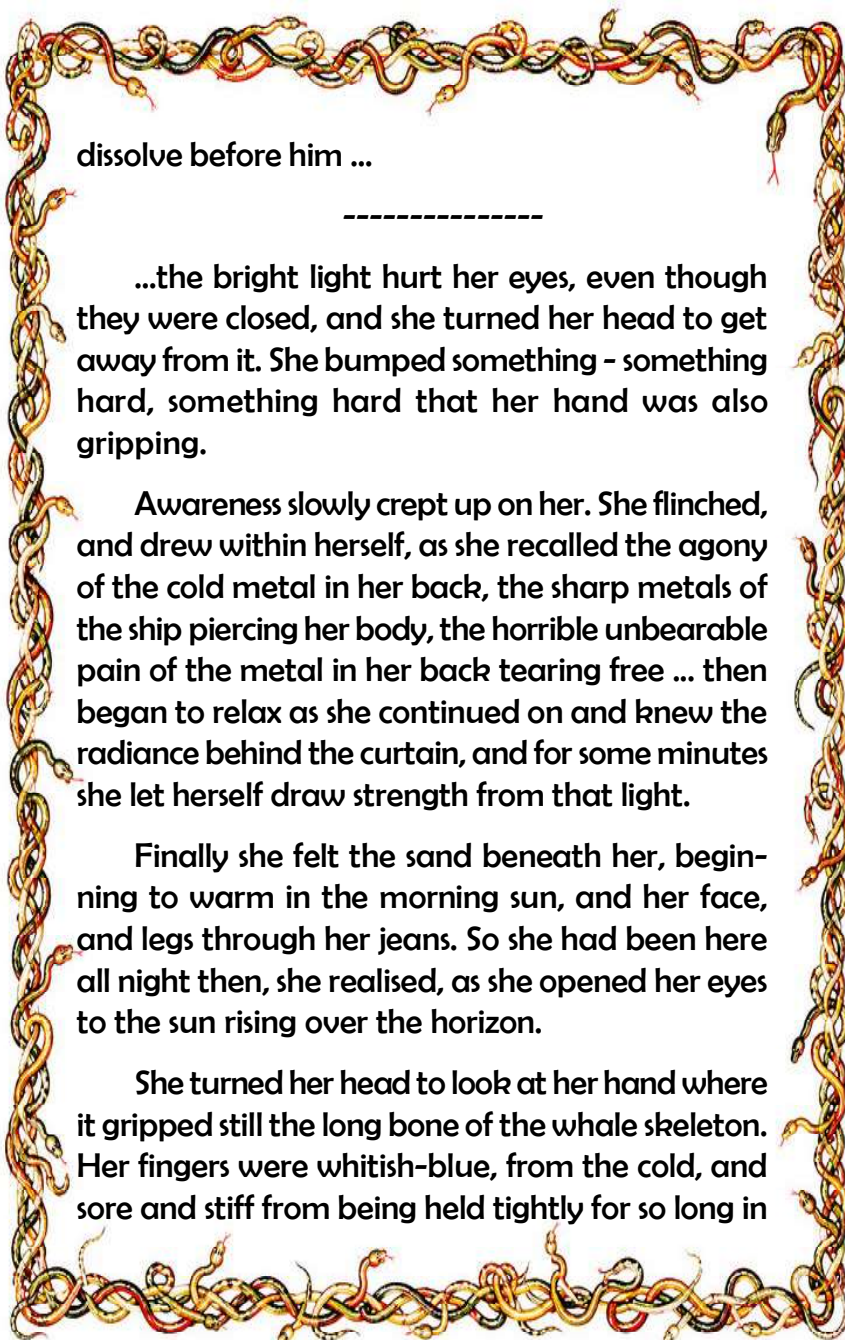
The small two-legged creatures were beginning to appear around him, and he tore savagely at the ones he could reach and slapped furiously



at the waters with his tail, diving shallowly again and again and rising out of the water to fall on them. The rage and redness of battle was in his eyes and brain, and as the great vessel itself began to sink under the waves, the cable which was still tight to the metal in his back, and wrapped around the ship, began to pull him down.

As they sank beneath the sea, whale and ship and men rolling silently through the blackness, Waves-in-Moonlight was still fighting, and as he arched his back one last time in agony and rage, the harpoon tore out of his lacerated back, taking a large chunk of bloody flesh with it.

Battered and dying, Waves-in-Moonlight lay silently on the surface of the ocean. He sang his Song of Parting to the deeps, and listened in vain for any songs to give a sad farewell or note his passing. The current was strong where he rolled helplessly in the growing swells, and he could see the distant shore coming closer. He could hear the surf, and the gulls, and as he felt the presence of the One Mind beginning to glow around him, wondered fleetingly at the tears that seemed to fall in front of his eyes - but the wonder was short lasting, as the tears mingled and joined to become a curtain, and behind the curtain was a bright white radiance, and the curtain began to



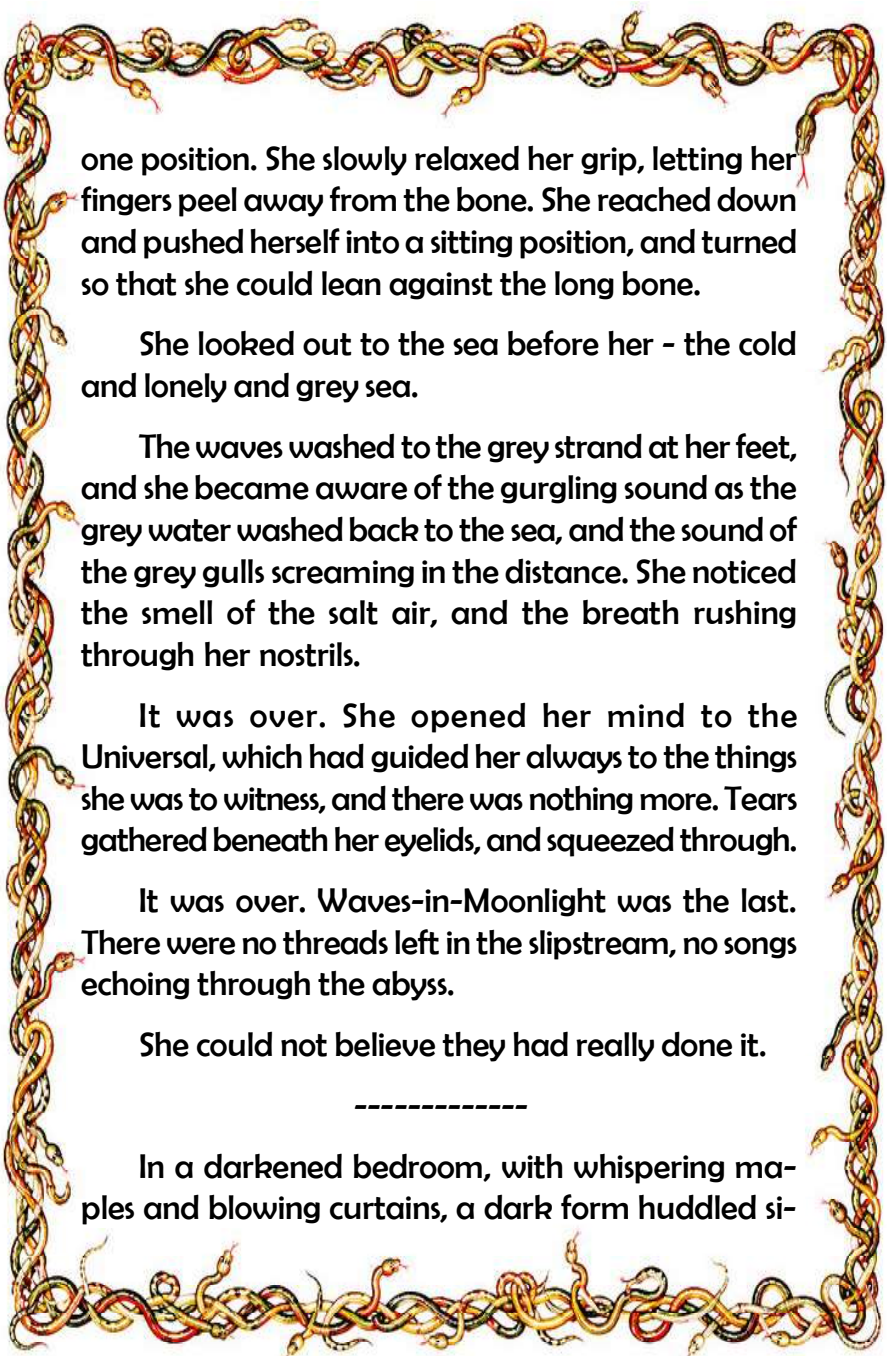
dissolve before him ...

...the bright light hurt her eyes, even though they were closed, and she turned her head to get away from it. She bumped something - something hard, something hard that her hand was also gripping.

Awareness slowly crept up on her. She flinched, and drew within herself, as she recalled the agony of the cold metal in her back, the sharp metals of the ship piercing her body, the horrible unbearable pain of the metal in her back tearing free ... then began to relax as she continued on and knew the radiance behind the curtain, and for some minutes she let herself draw strength from that light.

Finally she felt the sand beneath her, beginning to warm in the morning sun, and her face, and legs through her jeans. So she had been here all night then, she realised, as she opened her eyes to the sun rising over the horizon.

She turned her head to look at her hand where it gripped still the long bone of the whale skeleton. Her fingers were whitish-blue, from the cold, and sore and stiff from being held tightly for so long in



one position. She slowly relaxed her grip, letting her fingers peel away from the bone. She reached down and pushed herself into a sitting position, and turned so that she could lean against the long bone.

She looked out to the sea before her - the cold and lonely and grey sea.

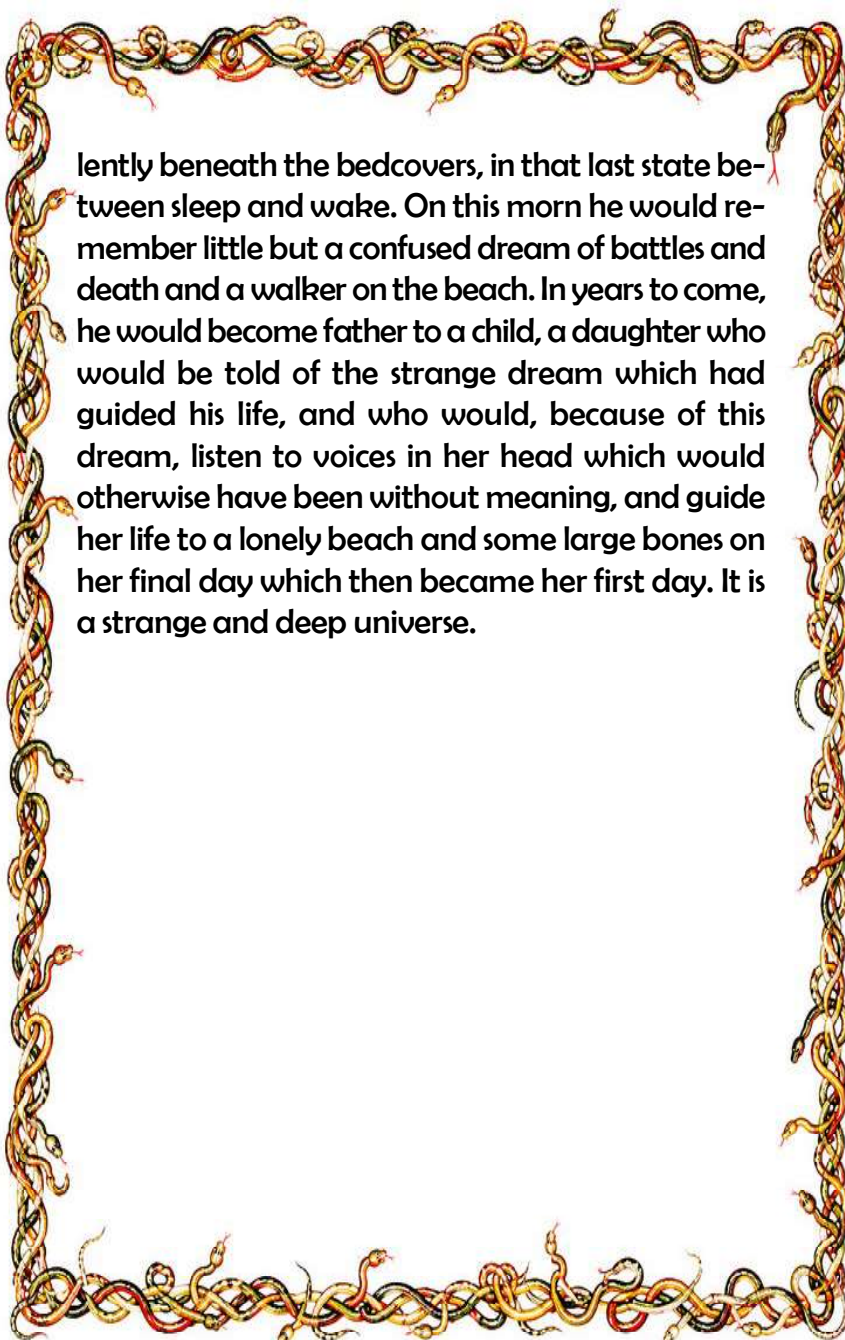
The waves washed to the grey strand at her feet, and she became aware of the gurgling sound as the grey water washed back to the sea, and the sound of the grey gulls screaming in the distance. She noticed the smell of the salt air, and the breath rushing through her nostrils.

It was over. She opened her mind to the Universal, which had guided her always to the things she was to witness, and there was nothing more. Tears gathered beneath her eyelids, and squeezed through.

It was over. Waves-in-Moonlight was the last. There were no threads left in the slipstream, no songs echoing through the abyss.

She could not believe they had really done it.

In a darkened bedroom, with whispering maples and blowing curtains, a dark form huddled si-



lently beneath the bedcovers, in that last state between sleep and wake. On this morn he would remember little but a confused dream of battles and death and a walker on the beach. In years to come, he would become father to a child, a daughter who would be told of the strange dream which had guided his life, and who would, because of this dream, listen to voices in her head which would otherwise have been without meaning, and guide her life to a lonely beach and some large bones on her final day which then became her first day. It is a strange and deep universe.



Interlude The Second



Whadya mean dere's no fitsh Aurt'ur, dey's been full nets on dese Grand Banks forever!

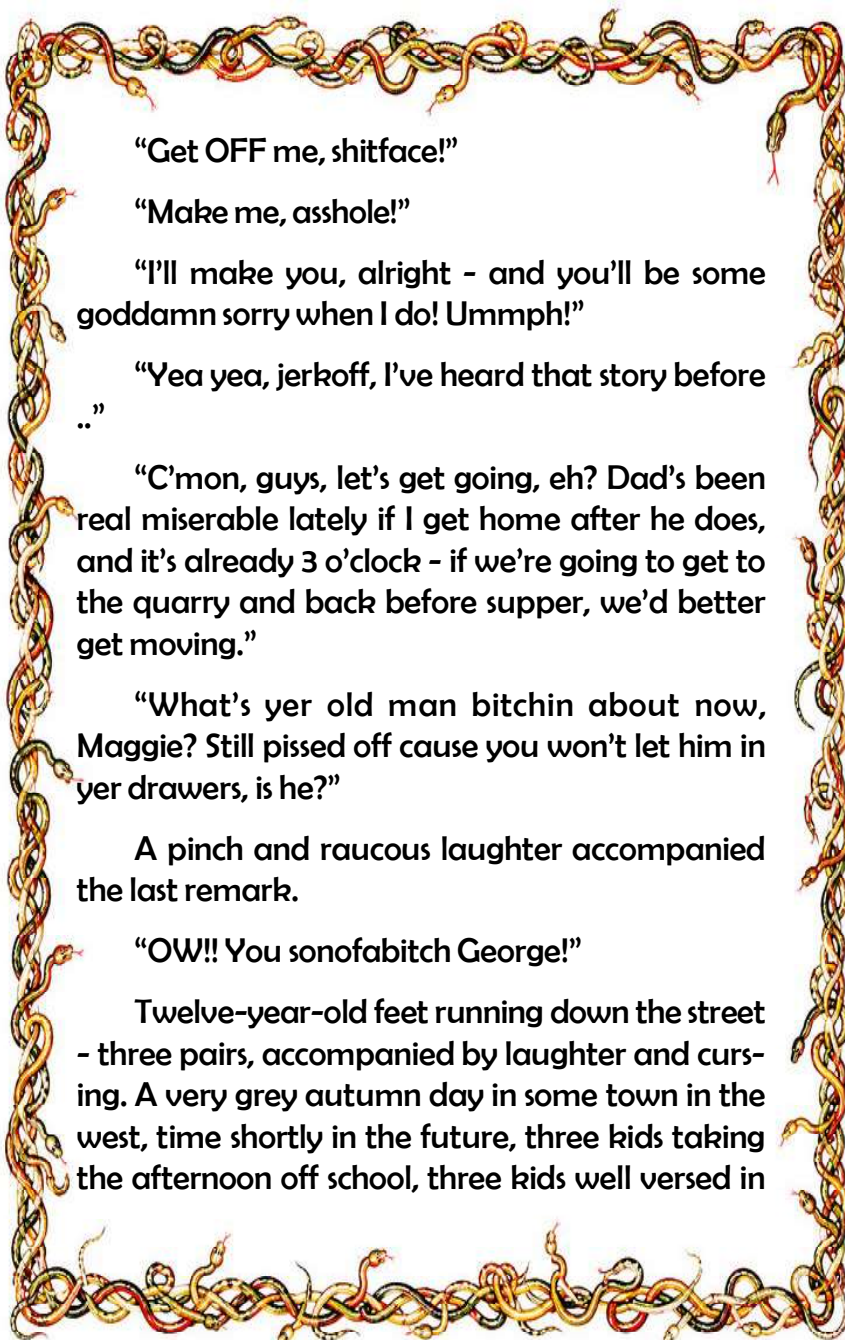
Dere's no fitsh, Arter, I tol ya.

Fuckin seals I says, George - best we go home and come tomorrow wit da guns for some seal cullin.

Yup. Them fookin seals alright, dem GovCan scientits tol us it was dem fookin seals eatin all duh fitsh.



Ah, Effendi, we have very nearly reached the end. Let us not linger long at this time - I have no desire to prolong this painful, desolate existence further. But I must tell you, Effendi, that I have found your company most enjoyable, and I do hope we meet again soon under more pleasant circumstances.



"Get OFF me, shitface!"

"Make me, asshole!"

"I'll make you, alright - and you'll be some goddamn sorry when I do! Ummph!"

"Yea yea, jerkoff, I've heard that story before .."

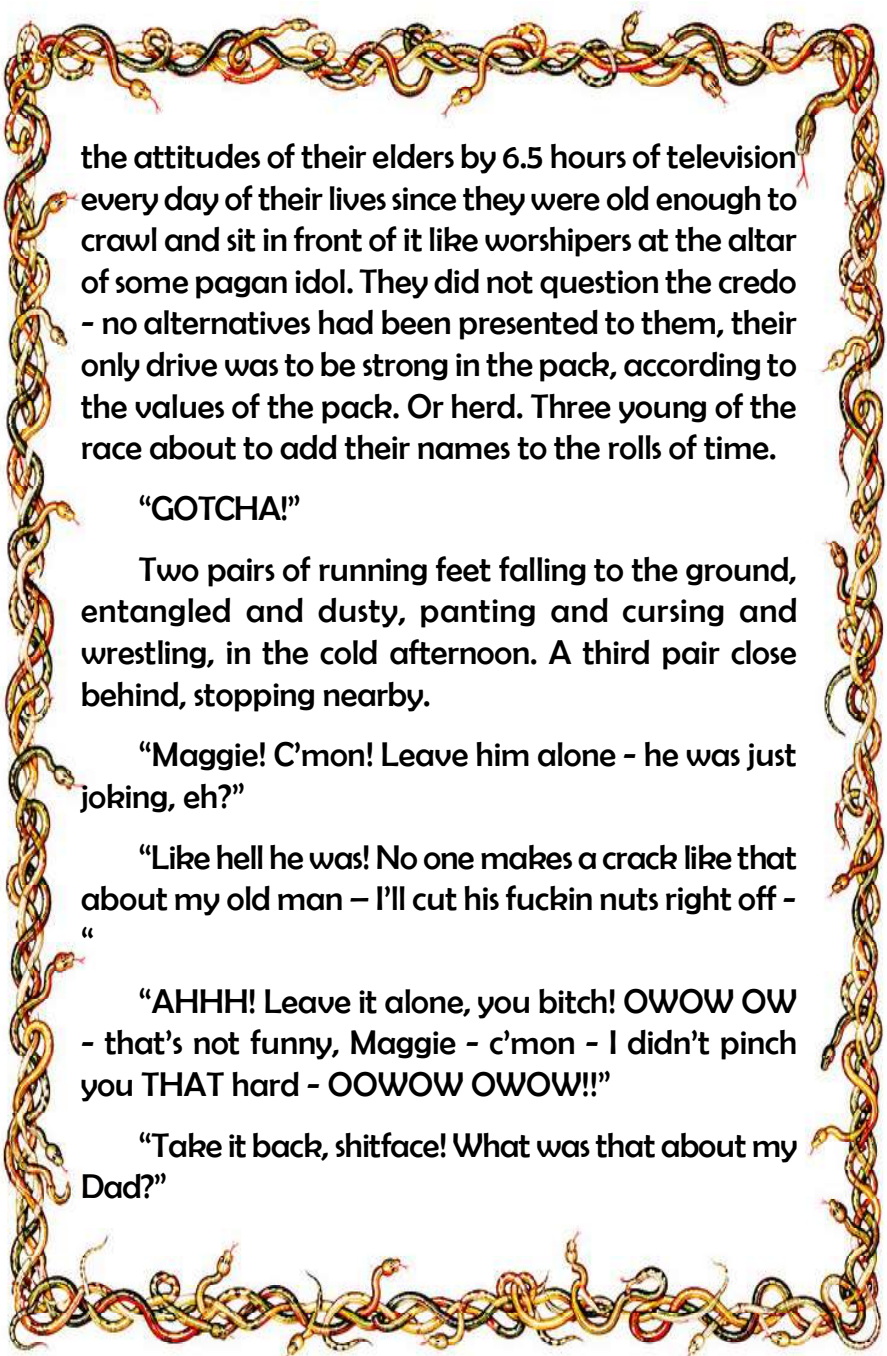
"C'mon, guys, let's get going, eh? Dad's been real miserable lately if I get home after he does, and it's already 3 o'clock - if we're going to get to the quarry and back before supper, we'd better get moving."

"What's yer old man bitchin about now, Maggie? Still pissed off cause you won't let him in yer drawers, is he?"

A pinch and raucous laughter accompanied the last remark.

"OW!! You sonofabitch George!"

Twelve-year-old feet running down the street - three pairs, accompanied by laughter and cursing. A very grey autumn day in some town in the west, time shortly in the future, three kids taking the afternoon off school, three kids well versed in



the attitudes of their elders by 6.5 hours of television every day of their lives since they were old enough to crawl and sit in front of it like worshipers at the altar of some pagan idol. They did not question the credo - no alternatives had been presented to them, their only drive was to be strong in the pack, according to the values of the pack. Or herd. Three young of the race about to add their names to the rolls of time.

“GOTCHA!”

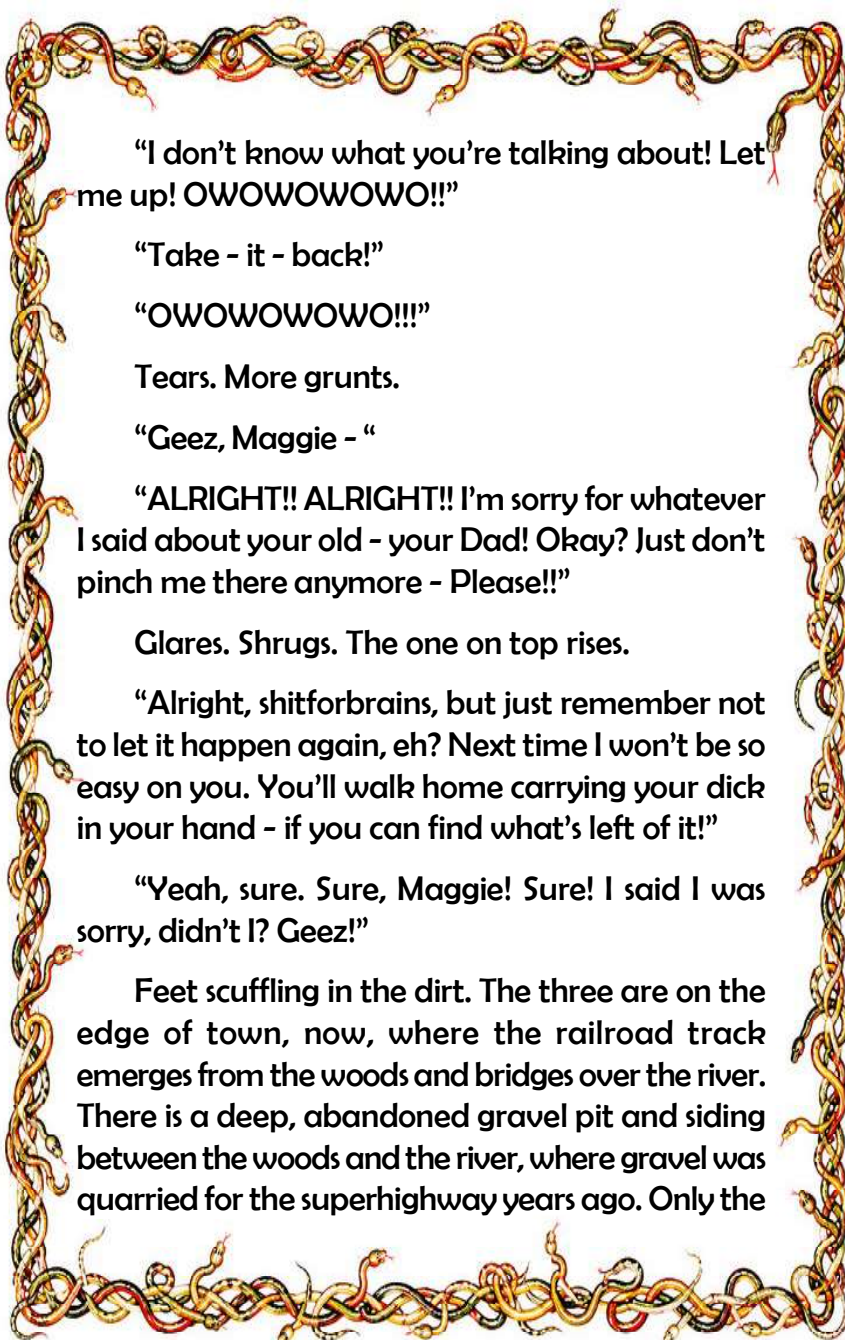
Two pairs of running feet falling to the ground, entangled and dusty, panting and cursing and wrestling, in the cold afternoon. A third pair close behind, stopping nearby.

“Maggie! C'mon! Leave him alone - he was just joking, eh?”

“Like hell he was! No one makes a crack like that about my old man - I'll cut his fuckin nuts right off -
“

“AHHH! Leave it alone, you bitch! OWOW OW
- that's not funny, Maggie - c'mon - I didn't pinch you THAT hard - OOWOW OWOW!!”

“Take it back, shitface! What was that about my Dad?”



"I don't know what you're talking about! Let me up! OWOWOWOWO!!!"

"Take - it - back!"

"OWOWOWOWO!!!"

Tears. More grunts.

"Geez, Maggie - "

"ALRIGHT!! ALRIGHT!! I'm sorry for whatever I said about your old - your Dad! Okay? Just don't pinch me there anymore - Please!!"

Glares. Shrugs. The one on top rises.

"Alright, shitforbrains, but just remember not to let it happen again, eh? Next time I won't be so easy on you. You'll walk home carrying your dick in your hand - if you can find what's left of it!"

"Yeah, sure. Sure, Maggie! Sure! I said I was sorry, didn't I? Geez!"

Feet scuffling in the dirt. The three are on the edge of town, now, where the railroad track emerges from the woods and bridges over the river. There is a deep, abandoned gravel pit and siding between the woods and the river, where gravel was quarried for the superhighway years ago. Only the

scar remains.

"So what's the big deal, JayCee? Where's this horrible monster you were trying to scare everybody with anyway? Shootin the shit like always, eh?"

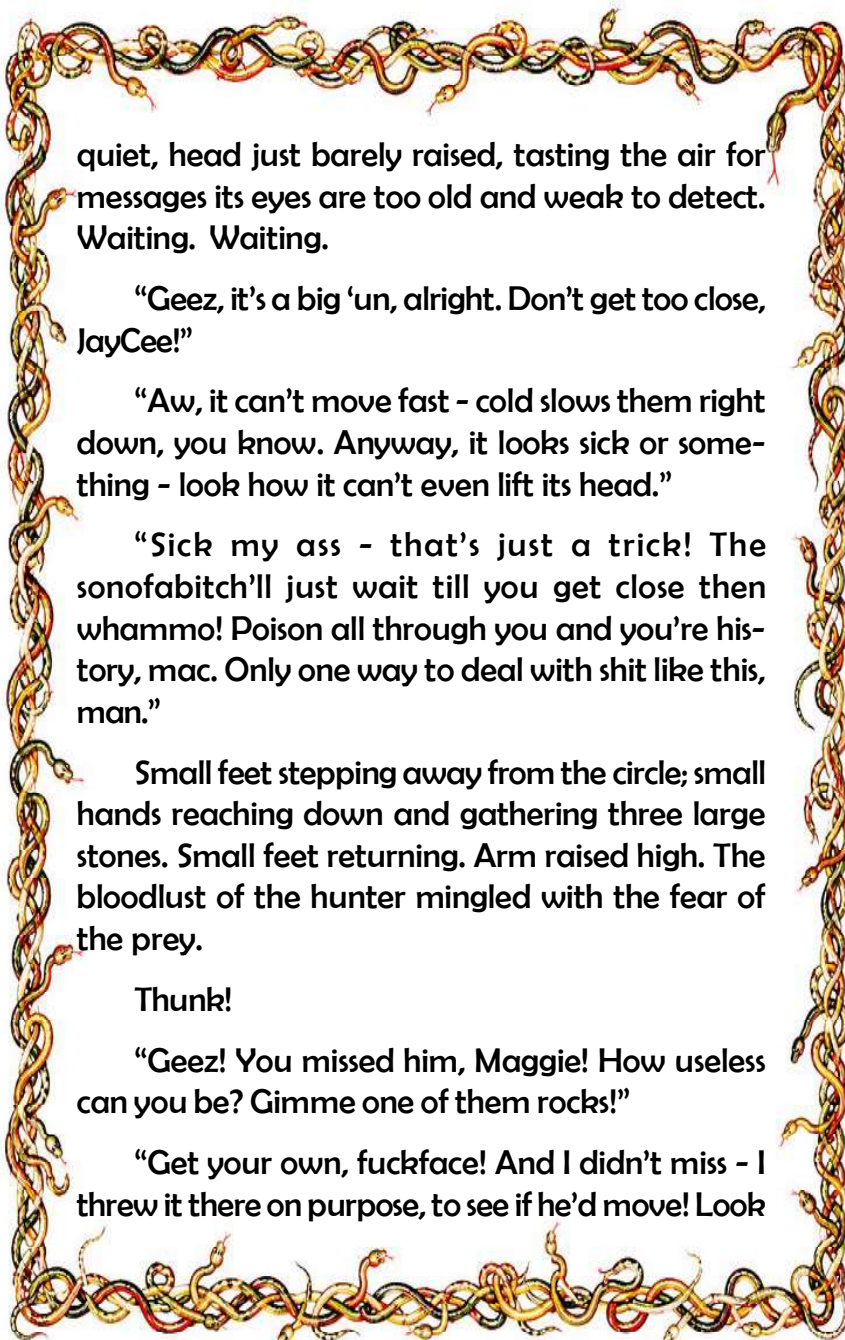
"Lay off, Maggie - it was here, I tell you. A big brown diamondback, thick as your arm and must have been six foot long - just curled up on the cement footing sunning itself. Maybe the cold weather drove it off - I don't know, but it was here yesterday."

Three sets of worn sneakers step over the track onto the railbed, and wander towards the river.

Ah, Effendi, it is almost time. I am sorry for you - sorry you have to witness this. I am sorry for me, too, Effendi. But this too shall pass. I shall be departed - you, unfortunately, shall remain - for a time, at least. I do not envy you.

"Look - what's that over by the pit? See - "

Three pairs of feet leap over the rail and in seconds are gathered around the prey. It lies coiled and



quiet, head just barely raised, tasting the air for messages its eyes are too old and weak to detect. Waiting. Waiting.

"Geez, it's a big 'un, alright. Don't get too close, JayCee!"

"Aw, it can't move fast - cold slows them right down, you know. Anyway, it looks sick or something - look how it can't even lift its head."

"Sick my ass - that's just a trick! The sonofabitch'll just wait till you get close then whammo! Poison all through you and you're history, mac. Only one way to deal with shit like this, man."

Small feet stepping away from the circle; small hands reaching down and gathering three large stones. Small feet returning. Arm raised high. The bloodlust of the hunter mingled with the fear of the prey.

Thunk!

"Geez! You missed him, Maggie! How useless can you be? Gimme one of them rocks!"

"Get your own, fuckface! And I didn't miss - I threw it there on purpose, to see if he'd move! Look

..”

Thud! There is a different sound when a thrown rock encounters living flesh than dead dirt. A different sound altogether being flung into the ether. Three pairs of sneakers leap back from the flailing body.

“Geez! Watch out! He’ll get you!”

“Where’s some more rocks? Don’t let him away!”

But the being was not going anywhere.

*It is the time of a thousand deaths,
Effendi. It is the moment that lasts
forever. It is the torture of body,
and the eternal pain of mind. It is
the final denial, the final disbelief,
the moment that would never
happen. It is here, Effendi. And I
... / ..*

Thud. Thud.

“Good one, Maggie! Got the sonofabitch right in the head! Here - let me closer!”

Thunk. Thud. Belly up and squirming, writhing. Thin trickles of blood soak into the grey dirt.

“Christ, George, get out the way! You’ll let him

away!"

Eager sneakers dart back for more stones, and return to the slaughter.

Thud. Thud. There is a different sound when stones strike living flesh and dead flesh.

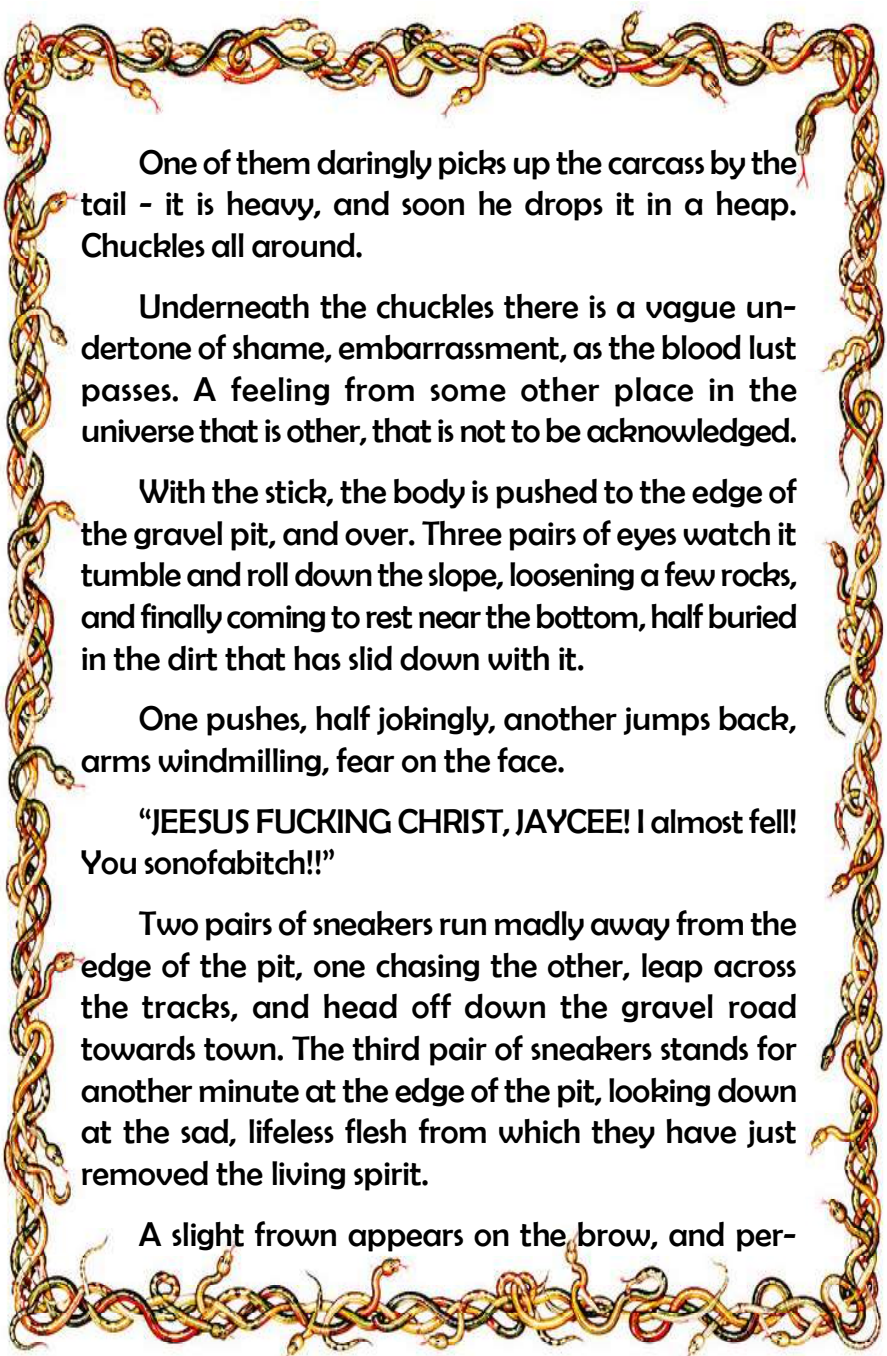
An ethereal cry from the spirit of the universe that life has ended muffles the sound of the stones.

There is a time when consciousness finally retreats to a place where the stones and the pain cannot reach it anymore.

*Effendi! Uh! Uh! I am glad we
had this time - uh! - together.
Please, Effendi - I beg of you
one last time - uh! - I beg of you -
uh! - I beg - I - uh! uhl - I - I - you -*

The bloodied brown body moves no more, lying in stillness. One of them has found a stick, and pokes mercilessly into the eyes and mouth of the body. There is nothing to indicate any form of living spirit once inhabited the dead flesh.

"Yuck! Gross, Maggie!"



One of them daringly picks up the carcass by the tail - it is heavy, and soon he drops it in a heap. Chuckles all around.

Underneath the chuckles there is a vague undertone of shame, embarrassment, as the blood lust passes. A feeling from some other place in the universe that is other, that is not to be acknowledged.

With the stick, the body is pushed to the edge of the gravel pit, and over. Three pairs of eyes watch it tumble and roll down the slope, loosening a few rocks, and finally coming to rest near the bottom, half buried in the dirt that has slid down with it.

One pushes, half jokingly, another jumps back, arms windmilling, fear on the face.

“JEESSUS FUCKING CHRIST, JAYCEE! I almost fell! You sonofabitch!!”

Two pairs of sneakers run madly away from the edge of the pit, one chasing the other, leap across the tracks, and head off down the gravel road towards town. The third pair of sneakers stands for another minute at the edge of the pit, looking down at the sad, lifeless flesh from which they have just removed the living spirit.

A slight frown appears on the brow, and per-

haps one tear slides from the corner of the eye as the mouth purses just a bit in response to some unacknowledged feeling or emotion inside. There is not a sound all around. No birds sing in the air, no foxes bark in the woods that touch the far side of the quarry, no fish breach the surface of the river. A chill breeze brings a tremor to the small body, a tremor that does not stop when the coat is pulled tight.

Ah, Effendi. What have we done?

What have we done?







It is sweet here, Effendi. Very sweet.

Know that after despair comes hope. You recall the boy, Effendi, the boy who dreamed? The boy who drew?

He is now grown, Effendi, and while he still dreams he also strives with each part of his being to make my story come untrue.

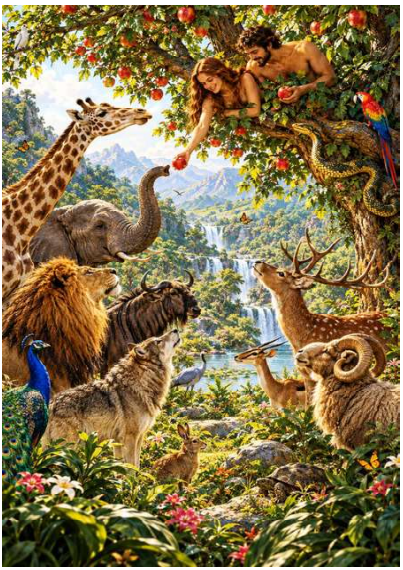
Mayhap he shall succeed.

Mayhap not.

And you, Effendi?

And you?



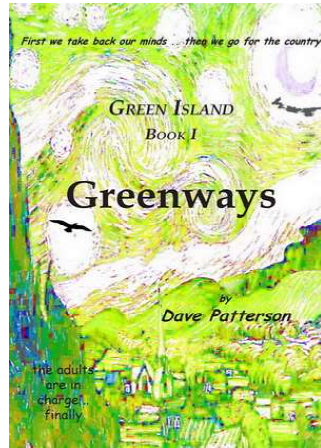


Other books by Dave Patterson

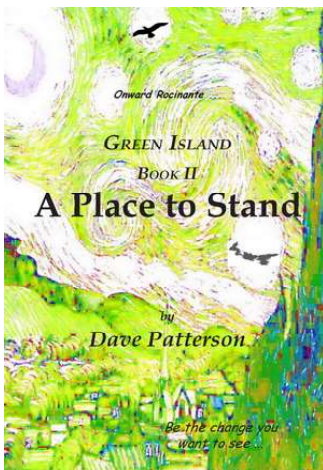


Green Island Book I
Greenways
by Dave Patterson

If you found this short parable a good read, you'd probably enjoy Green Island, a longer story of a modern social democracy where We the People have finally displaced the ruling money-controlling elite from our government and established a true democracy, and things work much better, for We the People. We follow a couple of old Utopians around Green Island as they see how things are done in a truly democratic society - and then follow the excitement as, predictably, the old rulers are not about to sit idly by and allow the work of centuries to be un-



done by a band of hippies, and attempt a regime change with their military arm, the US hegemon. The regime changers get a bit of a shock, however. Green Island too has something a little harder under the green glove.



More information at
www.rudemacedon.ca/greenisland.html



Mr Patterson
understands that bit
about 'be the change
you want to see ...'



Green Island,
Finally,



viva le
revolution!
Green Island
liberation!



that abortion
bastard,
suggesting 'my'
John Galt would
move to Green
Island and 'see
the light'

First we take back our minds ... then we go for the country

GREEN ISLAND
BOOK I

Greenways

by
Dave Patterson



blasphemy, old
hippies dream, tell
him to eat his hair
and get a job and he'll
be happy ...



can't I just go to
Green Island,
Father??



MOST MEN LEAD LIVES OF
QUEST DEFECTION AND GO
TO THE GRAVE WITH THE
SING STILL IN THEM. GREEN
ISLAND, NOW - A MAN
DANCING TO HIS OWN
SOULMATE, BEATING A
RECKLESSLY SONG...



...the cause of
Colonialist
misadventure
is ultimately
cause of all
misadventure

Green Island

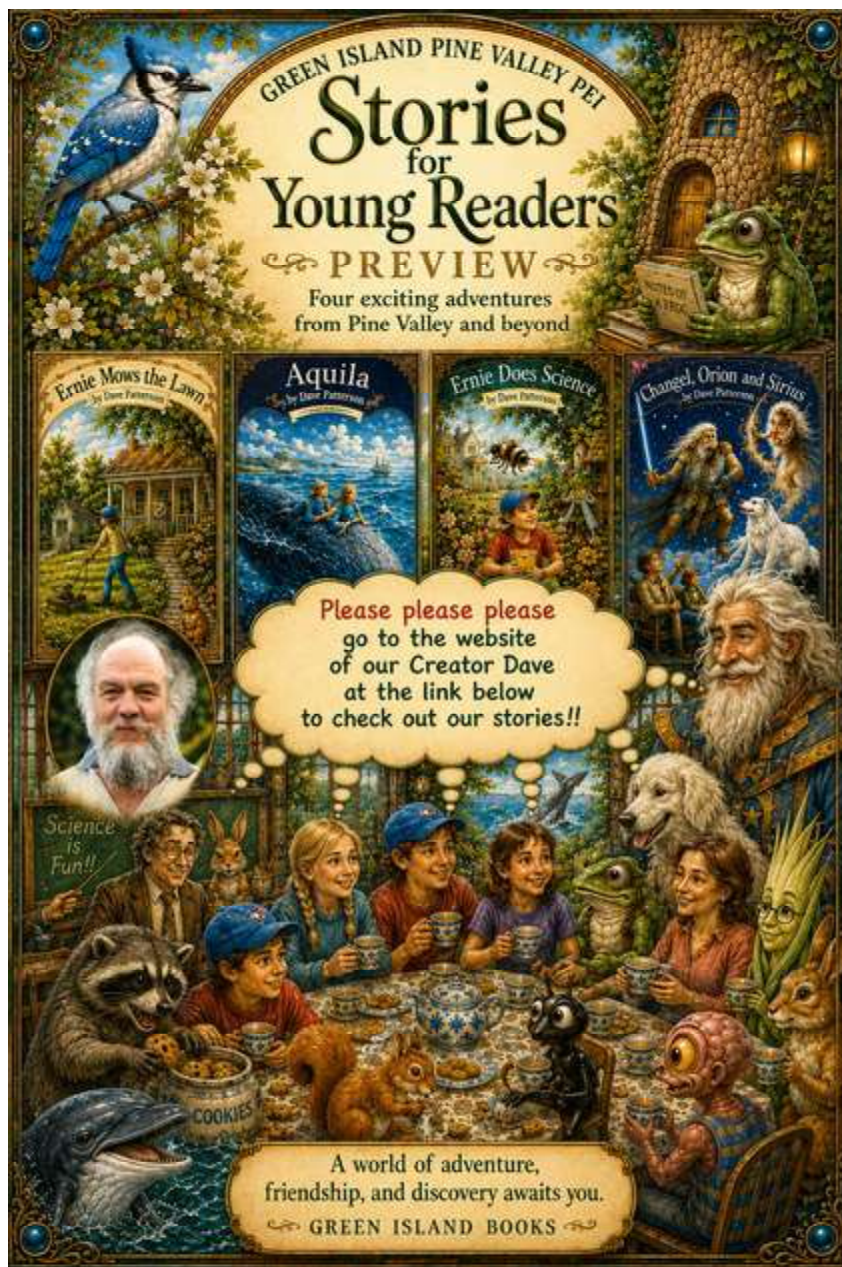
Big story: The Liberal and Conservative parties have received a huge surprise from the voters of Prince Edward Island - after one too many years of blatant cronyism and corruption and incompetence, they get turfed in favor of a group of Independents. Together this non-corporate coalition undertakes to fulfill their election promises and turn PEI into a modern Green Island - a government actually of, by and for the people, rather than one dominated by and run for the benefit of corporate lobbyists and bankers.

Second story: But the corporate lobbyists and bankers are not happy with this turn of events, and undertake, with the help of the American government and RCMP, a little regime change operation. But then the regime changers get a bit of a surprise themselves this time - an unexpected show of unexpectedly vigorous support for Green Island from the new Nordic Union, who decree that they will no longer accept the 'right' of the Americans to interfere with sovereign governments they don't like, just because they can and they want to.

Third thread: During this conflict, our protagonist is showing some old 'utopians' around Green Island, exploring the actuality of how a real, for-the-people democracy would function, politically and socially, and sustainably - Thoreau finds his new Walden Pond a pleasant place to reflect, Thomas Paine is as fiery as you would expect as he directs the Island Voice newspaper against the Colonialist Times, John Galt is pleasantly surprised at how well a social democracy works, and others pop in from time to time.

Fourth storyline: And somewhere in there, things get really interesting - when the US threatens to nuke Green Island to stop the spread of the deadly contagion of Democracy, yet once again, the Universal Incorporate decides this would be a good time to put all of humanity on trial for their overall barbarism throughout their time of dominance on this planet, and their endless attacks on Truth and Beauty and Justice. A certain G Bush gets barbecued not Texas style for lies. And then - well, it all plays out on

Green Island <http://www.rudemacedon.ca/greenisland.html>



<https://www.rudemacedon.ca/26/YR/DLP-YR.html>





<https://www.rudemacedon.ca/my%20songs/000-mysongs-home.html>

Democracy Study Guide

Democracy? - a nice idea, you ought to try it sometime



Dave's most recent attempt to deconstruct the pretend democracy in Canada and suggest ways to make it more real.

<https://www.rudemacedon.ca/DSG/0000-summary.html>

