

# **The Greater Good**

t'Sade



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Curious Cabbit Press

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# The Greater Good

# 1

The bright and sunny day woke up early, with the stretching calls of birds and the ocean-drenched air that blew over the white and gray stone walls of the ancient city of Marasath. The songs of the birds run against the stone as they have for thousands of years and will for thousands more. Even in a world that just saw the fall of the Dark Lord, there was a sense of age and history in Marasath that outlived four generations of war, a few short ages of supposed peace and hope, and even the longer age that led from the destruction of almost every living being on the Nine Sisters, the world everyone called their home.

But, in Marasath, it was the same as it always was. People slithered out of their bed and sluggishly made their way to work. The excitement didn't start until the sun began to set in the sky, leaving way to the pitch night. Candles, lanterns, and bonfires exploded up from the city, illuminating it as bright as noon and the parties started. Desperate hope and a tired celebrations rocked the city from one end to the other, where everyone drove out the hauntings of their days and pretended, just for a moment, that there was only good in the world.

Except in one place.

The Mount of Illij was not a mountain but it was larger than a hill. Perched over the city, was a place of darkness, even in the brightest of celebrations. Hundreds, if not thousands, of ragged poles, spears, and crucifixes jutted out from its top, a geological porcupine that snarled endless at the city below. At the Mouth, there was no celebrations or even light. In fact, there were no creatures that visited at night.

At least not living creatures.

Illij remained silent and dark throughout the night, until the morning light started to ghost the horizon and the city finally grew silent for a few short hours. Then, the bells would ring out through the city near the first light and the ancient cycle restarted.

But, that day, it was different. In one part of the city, the celebrations continued well past the morning until the wine flowed thick into the gutters and the streets. The focus of the celebration was a woman just past her second decade. Bright blond hair sparkled underneath candles and sunlight as she looked around the hall with too-bright eyes. Holding a large goblet filled with blood-red wine with both hands, she still managed to slop some of it on her white shift as she gulped down the burning liquid. Around her, people laughed and congratulated each other, but none of them even glanced at her. Fuzzy from the drink, she still felt terribly alone even as she was the focus of everyone's attention. Sluggishly, she peered down at the shift, where the wine was soaking into the no-longer brilliant fabric. Other stains, from a night of hard drinking, covered the once virgin outfit until her breasts look bloody. With a deliberate effort, she set down the drink and ignored the servant who ran up and filled it back to the top.

One man, a portly man who was no longer a gentleman staggered up the stairs.

"Is there something wrong, my dear?"

His voice was slurred, but nothing compared to hers as she shook her head minutely.

"No, lord mayor, I'm... just full."

He reached out and patted her on the thigh, close to her hips. She could feel his fingers groping through the thin material and squeezing her leg. Wincing inside, she forced a smile on her face and bit down on her lip. For a brief moment, she could feel his desperate lust burning through his thoughts, but he tore himself away. He didn't move his hand, however. Squeezing her, pushing his fingers deeper into the chasm between her legs, he gave her a drunken smile.

"Don't worry, Semma. In another hour or so, it will be time for you to go."

Semma squeezed her thighs together, to prevent his fingers from gaining more on her body. Her shift felt tissue thin, transparent under his greedy eyes. The wine-soaked fabric clung to her breasts, following every sweeping curve and tenting from the twin points of her nipples. The mayor gave her a leering grin and staggered away, as some other important person called out for him.

She watched him go, shivering slightly at the greasy feel of his fingers. Trembling fingers reached down to pull the shift from between her legs. To one side, she heard laughter explode out and looked over. It was her own father, speaking with some diplomats from Belkim, a country to the far north. A blush started to rise as she found all three of them staring at her. At the sight of her discomfort, they burst into laughter again. Semma felt the heat burning at her cheeks and looked away, to another wave of amusement from her own father.

The last hour passed painfully. Many people walk around her, but no one else even took the two steps to reach her chair. Her bottom felt sore, from sitting on the elegant, but uncomfortable, throne she was perched on. Her eyes drifted from person to person, with a growing need to be spoken to, but backs were turned to her.

Except when they were leering or laughing.

She knew it was time when two armed guards, wearing nothing but a short armored skirt and holding gold-chased swords lightly in their hands. The crowds parted as they marched up, easily taking the stairs with practiced ease. Silence pooled out from the dais, spreading out and burning away the laughter, the speaking, even the chuckling. Eyes of powerful men and woman focused on her, their intent almost burning through the delicate fabric that did nothing to protect her.

Stopping to each side of her, the warriors spun around and held out a hand in military precision. At the sight of their hands, held out for her, Semma realized that she was long past the time point of no return. In fact, in their hands held her own death and there was nothing she could do. For a brief moment, she hesitated, trying to find some frantic way to escape. One of the guard's jaw tightened as the other dropped his hand to the hilt of the weapon. They were not there to protect her, they were there to make sure she didn't back out.

Blinking at a sudden tear in her eye, Semma reached out with shaking hands and pressed her fingers into their warm, calloused palms. Surprisingly gentle, the guards guided her to her feet and held her steady as the liquor rushed her head. Semma swayed for just a moment, then she was moving forward, guided and pulled by the two guards.

As she passed the people who celebrated her task, she felt their cheers and applause, but not a single person would meet her eyes. Instead, they quickly looked away as she gazed at them. Some of the more bold men would drop their eyes, to stare at her breasts or hips. She felt the blush growing across her body, but there was nothing she could do as she forced through a set of double doors and into the brilliant of a courtyard filled with morning. More tears streamed down her cheeks as she blinked at the brightness. Her vision slowly returned and she found herself staring at the sign of her death. The heat of the morning tore away, leaving a bone-chilling cold that seeped into her lungs. Air refused to enter her lungs and, for a brief moment, she wondered if she would pass out.

In front of her, resting against the well in the center of the courtyards was a crucifix. Tall, almost ten feet in height, it was made of a dark wood. High-quality silk rope wrapped around the junction of the two beams, holding in place with a macabre sense of style. Hanging from one arm was a heavy canvas bag. Inside, she knew, were the spikes and hammer that would affix her to the terrible device.

Whimpering, Semma's body froze in place as she stared down at the wood. It was black, blacker than when she was inspecting it before. The remains of her life, the bright and cheer that she known, ripped out of her body and was sucked into the blackness of the crucifix. For her, there would be no more future, no more hope. After a few days of pain, there would be nothing left for her.

A tear dripped down her face, elegant and uncalled for. It splashed down in the wine-soaked shift even as she felt the drunkenness burning away through her veins. A soft jab in the side stirred her and she looked up at the guard. His eyes were hard and reminded her that he was there to make sure she stepped forward. Still crying, she took the first step; her bare feet caressed the sun-warmed step gentle. Moving down, she stretched her shoulder



slightly, which left a mummer to ripple through the crowd. Her outfit, dramatic and plain at the same time, stretched and pulled along her breasts and hips, an erotic sight of death. Closer, the wood ceases to be the black void calling her. Instead, it resolved into the black oak device that she saw before. The wood was only lightly sanded and a few places had splinters sticking out in spite of her efforts. In memory, her hands shook as she remembered sanding the crucifix for hours at a time, ever since she was forced to build it on her own.

Tears splashed down on the stone as she crouched down, her hands wrapping around the heavy wood. With a grunt, she stood back up and balanced herself back into a standing position, positioning the wood across her shoulder where it would strain her the less. Even with her practice, it was still heavy, heavier than she expected. Slowly, her eyes trailed down the street filled with people, following it as it turned into a rock-strewn path up to Mount Illij. An explosion of cheers rocked her, but she barely heard them. They already proved that they didn't care for her, they just wanted her sacrifice.

One foot stepped forward, then another. Soon, her feet were slapping against the warm stone as she moved down the street. For a moment, no one moved, but then the mayor and the others hurried after her, muttering to themselves. Semma didn't care anymore, at least not for them. They didn't care.

She took the route many times, ever since her father and her agreed to this. Sacrifice for the greater good. It seemed to bright and cheery then. People paying for her dinner, giving her pretty clothes. It was only a few weeks, but it was the most attention she ever got that wasn't trying to get into her pants. Not that a few didn't try, but they needed a virgin for the sacrifice and a virgin she still was.

Fierce tears of determination continued to roll down her cheeks when her feet hit the last of the paving stones. In front of her was the broken trail leading up the cold light of Illij. She barely hesitated before stepping forward again. No one stopped her as they trailed behind, talking among themselves. As she worked the heavy cross around a sharp series of rocks, she could hear political deals and talks about tomorrow behind her.

They didn't care.

They just didn't care anymore, did they?

Semma continued forward, the energy of her determination slowly seeping out of her with each step. The cross weighed down on her shoulders, wearing her out even more than the heavy bags she thoughtfully practiced with before. For a moment, she tried to remember if any of the others practiced, but she was only ten when the last one happened. Every ten years. For a brief bitter moment, she wondered if they treated the last one the same, if she was different than the others.

It still held her down, but Semma managed to walk most of the way. At one point, her bare feet caught on some gravel and she stumbled. Her knee cracked hard against the unyielding rock and she felt the pain snap through her legs, ripping a path through her nerves as she cried out.

No one stopped talking, but the procession stopped for a moment. Sobbing from the sudden pain, she struggled to her feet. One of the guards came, but not to help. Instead, he lifted his foot back and kicked her hard in the side.

“Get up.”

Serious and dark, the voice was almost enough. With pleading eyes, she looked up at him and so no compassion, no hope. He kicked her again, this time his steel-tipped boot caught her in the ribs, right underneath her left breast. The pain exploded from it and Semma cried out in pain. The guard pulled back his foot again and stared at her pointedly. Gasping for breath, Semma pushed back the tears and the pain and struggled to her feet. Behind her, the mayor called out in a voice filled with the excitement she heard in the arenas.

“Get going girl, I have somewhere to be.”

A ripple of laughter rolled down the path. Semma could not find the energy to get moving. Swaying on her feet, she shifted the cross into a less uncomfortable position and looked up at the trail. It was only a few hundred meters left until the top. The guard who kicked her did so again, his foot catching her right above the ankle.

“Get going!”

Semma staggered sideways, then almost threw herself up the path. Gravel cut her feet, slicing it open as she strained to lift the

heavy cross up the last of the trail. The air was hot around her, sweat dripping from every part of her body as she gasped for air. The guards trailed behind her, followed by the rest of the bystanders.

Semma finally reached the top, but there was no relief for her. The top of the Mount was cold, even in the sun. Heat poured down against her skin, but the sweat she soaked her shift did nothing to cool her. Instead, the damp fabric clung to her almost naked body and offered no protection against the heat. Her side still ached from the pain of being kicked, but there was nothing.

The other guard shoved her forward, along the path. On each side, crosses and spikes rose up in mute testimony. Some of them still had rotted corpses hanging from them, others were bare for centuries. The nauseating reek of shit and death filled the air, where thousands upon thousands had found their end in torture. Even though the last one to die on the Mount was centuries ago. The stench still remained, even after all that time.

Nothing changed in Marasath.

Talking quieted as people followed her along the beaten trail. Thankfully, there was no gravel or rocks on this path, but her feet still left bloody footprints on the ground. Mutely she continued forward, trusting the guards would guide her. In the end, it wasn't needed as she found herself walking toward a man, an old man with wild hair. He was leaning on a shovel. At his feet was a hole, a deep hole just wide enough for the base of her cross.

For a moment, she saw some compassion in the grave digger's eyes, but she looked away, suddenly unable to match his eyes. Memories of what the others did rushed into her and she forced her head back, to look into the warm brown gaze looking back. A sad smile filled his face and she felt a little strength come from that first sight of compassion. He motioned to a cleared out spot on the ground.

“Right here, Lighted One.”

Semma hesitated at the phrase “lighted one” since everyone else called her the “chosen one” or the “sacrifice” when she wasn't looking. The guard who kicked her growled at the man as he grabbed the cross and almost threw it toward the spot.

“Shut up, Gaul.”

Semma shrieked as the cross twisted on her back and she fell to the ground, the cross bouncing toward the cleared spot. Her hands twisted on the ground as they impacted the hard, unyielding earth. Cold even in the sun, it sent a shiver through her as her shoulder cracked against the ground. Whimpering, she struggled to her feet before the guard could kick her, but he was kicking the cross into position.

Wiping at the tears and dirt on her face, she watched as the guards yanked off the canvas bag and spilled its contents on the ground. Three iron spikes and a iron hammer thudded on the ground. Each spike was huge, almost half a meter in length, with rough parts where she couldn't smooth it off. The spike head was a miniature cross itself, with a wide arm to hold the victim in.

There was no escape for her.

Semma shivered in the heat and cold, unable to tear her eyes away from the wood and iron. The dull throbbing in her side and ankle and shoulder only barely drew her attention away from the growing dread that filled her stomach with molten lead. Trembling, she started to step back slightly, but the second guard, the silent one, shoved her roughly forward. Stumbling, she caught herself right before the cross. The wood rested at a very slight angle, the ground was beaten flat by a shovel so it wouldn't shift as she was being...

She tore herself away from that thought and looked at the grave digger's shovel, then at him. He nodded slightly and hefted it. Semma bit her lip as she looked down at the crucifix. No tears came, but she could feel them hovering just behind her eyes, a nameless terror growing inside her.

"Go on, girl."

The first guard, the kicker, curtly gestured to the wooden cross. When she didn't immediately respond, he dropped his hand down to his sword and started to pull it out. The sound of metal scraping against metal bolted her into action and she slowly knelt down next to the cross. Holding her breath, she positioned herself on it, her back balancing on the hard wood. Her legs pressed tightly together as she held the ground for balance. Another shiver rippled up her spine. The guards knelt down next to her and the first guard grabbed on hand, pulling it painfully along the arm of the cross. The

other picked up one of the spikes and the hammer and pressed the sharp tip against her wrist. At the first caress of the cold metal, Semma whimpered and closed her eyes tightly.

“Please... please don’t.”

“Too late, girl.”

Even with her eyes closed, Semma could imagine them holding the spike, ready to pound it in. It didn’t happen immediately but just as she was about to release her breath, there was a loud ringing sound and the metal pierced her wrist. Screaming out in the sudden agony, Semma felt as they slammed the metal spike again and again, driving it into her flesh and into the wood. Screams turned into a wail as the pain cut through her shoulder, a razor-tight suffering that refused to release her.

She was still screaming shrilly as she felt her other arm being yanked out. She struggled, trying to pull it away from the pain about to impale her, but the hands were cruel and efficient. She felt the back of her palm and arm being pressed against the warm wood, then the spike against her wrist. Her eyes snapped open as the spike ripped into her, impaling itself into the wood with the first blow. Seeing nothing but sparks of pain, she felt as they slammed the hammer hard into the spike, digging it deeper. The rough metal tore into her flesh, scraping against the bone for a few moments, then it stopped.

Sobbing loudly, Semma tried to do something, but the agony was too much. She watched as the guards positioned themselves at her feet. She tried to pull them up, but they yanked her legs down, pressing one ankle against the other and then against the wood. Lining up, she could barely see the tip of the spike as it was positioned near the joint of her ankle. She felt the spiked tip pressing against the flesh and begged for mercy.

They gave her none. With horribly clarity, she watched as the head of the hammer rose up into her vision, then slammed down. Her scream could be heard all the way into town as it punched through her ankle, cracked the bone and impaled her other ankle. The hammer rose up and slammed down again, after only a second of lining up. The metal punctured into the wood, pinning her to her cross. Semma screamed out again, begging wordless as pain

exploded from her affixed joints and filled her body with an agony so intense it felt like it would tear her heart out.

She was not given even a moment to try adjusting to the pain when the guards walked around her torture device and picked up the tip. She could hear them grunting she was lifted into the air and her full weight resisted on the metal spikes. She didn't think the pain could get worse, but the new pain slashed through her senses. Semma began to sob uncontrollably, tears pouring down her cheeks and splashing against her shift. The guards lifted her and her cross. Everything shook as she felt their hands pressing against the back of her skull, their effort to lift her and the cross up. As she was raised into the air, she could see everyone who came with.

There wasn't many of them. There was the mayor and maybe half a dozen people. The crowds that cheered her on were long gone. She looked at each one, the image of them waiting burned into the back of her mind.

And not a single one would look into her eyes.

That single fact brought a sob to her throat as she continued to be raised into the air. Grunting, the guards positioned her crucifix into the right place. She felt the weight settle on her heart and lungs.

Then they dropped the cross. It plunged into the hole properly, slamming down with a short, but powerful drop. At the bottom, the crack of wood against earth slammed up the cross and she felt her weight slam against the spikes. Semma screamed out in agony, a shrill sound that would shatter glass, if there was any nearby. Every part of her body rippled with pain as her body settled on the cross.

With brutal efficiency, the guards went to work. With the hammer, they finished pounding in each spike. It hurt more than she could comprehend, with the agony refusing the relent. Instead, each pain, each jab of the rough metal into her bloody holes just layered more suffering on top of agony. When they finished the last, stapling her ankles tightly against the wood, Semma's throat was raw and words refused to escape. Instead, it was just a long wail of pain with no end in sight.

Closing her eyes tightly, Semma tried to pray for the end to come, but it didn't. She tried to open her eyes, but there was no energy left in her body. She couldn't even find the energy to test her bounds.

She continued to try, however, and slowly she managed to crack open her eyes.

Sunset had come to her world, the brilliant reds stretching across the sky in a watercolor of nature and life. The ocean, which she saw for her entire life, was a sea of fire stretching out as far as she could see. Around her, the spikes and crosses littered the dark ground, a mute audience to her suffering. Slowly, she lifted her head more, looking around for anyone watching her.

There was no one.

Her raw throat spasmed as she tried to call out, but only a rasping wheeze filled the air around her.

“Hush, don’t strain yourself.”

The grave digger’s voice surprised her and she looked down. He looked up from the base of a spike he was sitting underneath, the shovel resting against his shoulder. Above him, the rotted corpse looked at her with black spaces for eyes. Shuddering, she found herself unable to look into the skeletal gaze and dropped her eyes to the ground, staring at his shovel.

Semma tried to speak, but the burning pain in her throat was almost too much to bear, even with the throbbing pain that pierced her wrists and ankles.

“W... Whe... ‘re they?”

Gaul shook his head, “They left.”

Semma gasped, the pain in her right wrist suddenly spiking, “Left...?”

She tried to speak more, but the words refused to come. Gaul nodded his head slowly, his bare head red from exposure.

“They always leave.”

“But...”

He shook his head, “Don’t speak yet, Semma. Your body is still in shock. Give it a few hours, it will pass.”

Semma tried to speak anyways, to ask about the others and their promise to watch over her. Gaul looked at her as she tried, then sluggishly pushed himself to his feet. Using the shovel as a brace, he straightened up.

“They lied, Semma. They always lie. Or, at least for the last three hundred and some years.”

“H... h-how?”

Gaul smiled, a face of someone who still had a thread of compassion in him. He stepped over to her and straightened her shift, pulling it down over her knee, but making no effort to touch the spikes or the wood. He didn't answer her though.

Semma felt the pain growing, and a cold shiver filling her body. It rose up into her, leaving the feeling of ice spreading out through her limbs. Ice fought with the inferno of pain and neither gave and neither won. Instead, they warred across her body, refusing to give in. And she could only suffer as the ice-cold wave finally broke against the pain and she was filled once again with the burning agony from her crucifixion. A long wail of pain ripped out of her as she felt her body shifting slightly, a strain growing across her shoulders and chest. For a moment, she wondered if she was dying, but her body tightened up and the tightness passed.

She found tears in her eyes when she looked down again, at the old man who watched with warm brown eyes. He smiled sadly.

"That will happen a lot. I'm sorry, but that is how it is suppose to be."

Behind him, she could see the sunset growing darker, a bruise of the world stretching out as far as she could see through the tears. Around her, a cold wind rose up, brushing against her skin. Her nipples hardened despite the pain, but there was nothing she could do. With a hesitate strain, she tested her bounds but the intense pain stopped her with a brutal slash of pain. Semma whimpered and trembled on her cross, trying to fight against the pain.

Gaul watched her, but did nothing. When the wave of pain ended, he walked around her, to the other side. Sitting down on the ground in front of a cross, he leaned the shovel back against his shoulder.

"There isn't much I can do for you, Semma, except keep you company."

She whimpered, trying to ask how long she would survive. No words came out, but somehow he understood her.

"Three, maybe for days. You are a fit girl and the strength that brought you up here is also the curse you will bear."

"... no."

Sad-filled eyes looked up at her, "I'm sorry. But, from sunset to sunrise, I will be here. Except for one day every ten years, I do not come here during the day."



Semma tried to speak, but a movement caught her attention. With a strange sluggishness, she turned her head to look down. A little distance away, inside a rusted cage hanging from a metal pole, she thought she saw a flickering of motion. As she peered, she saw it again as something wispy, ghost-like paced from one end of the tiny cage to the other.

“That is Raitlin, he was a murderer and a thief.”

Gaul’s voice drifted past her, speaking softly. She looked down, but he was looking at her, not at the Raitlin thing. Confusion filled her, knowing that no one has been executed on the Mount for centuries. Gaul sighed.

“I know, but that is why you are here. You know the stories that the dead walk at night here? Of course you do, that is why you are here to sacrifice yourself.”

Tears formed in her eyes as Semma realized her purpose on the cross. Hundreds of years ago, Illij was used as an execution ground for untold number of criminals. After centuries of this, the dead began to rise at night, slaying any and all who entered the grounds at night. After consoling with oracles and gods and even the occasional prophet, the city of Marasath learned that they needed to find one who would sacrifice themselves for the greater good, to find solace for those long-since dead. She was the thirty-fourth of the sacrifices since it started, and Illij still rose up at night to kill those who enter. Sobbing raspily, she closed her eyes tightly and tried not to look at the world around her.

Gaul cleared his throat, “Close, but not quite.”

Semma gasped and looked down at Gaul. He shrugged, “Call it mind reading or call it memory. I know the lives of those who will die in these forsaken lands.”

She tried to mouth the words, “How?” Nothing came out, but Gaul answered it.

“It is who I am. I am the grave digger on Illij. I know everyone who died here as if I was sitting next to them like I am doing for you.”

He gestured to the cage of Raitlin, “He raped and murdered a girl of thirteen who did nothing other than give him flowers. She suffered for almost two days before dying of infections and wounds.

He... never regretted his actions, so they killed him here on a cold day about nine hundred years ago.”

She stared at the cage blearily, watching as the creature came more into focus, a strange mix between monkey and reptile with improbable claws. She wondered if he was human or something else, like the humanoid animals that populated Marasath with the humans and other inhabitants, the silfae and the thriban.

“He was human... once. Years of rage and anger twisted his spirit into what you see. In death, he just became what he was inside.”

Behind Raitlin, she saw another figure rising up through the ground, a trick of sight that formed into a human with burning red eyes. A large head rolled around, peering across the ground, then the gaze focused on her. Semma felt a shiver of fear fill her as the ghost-like creature stepped toward her. To the side, more... things were rising up from the ground, forming in the air, or pulling themselves off ghostly crosses. They all stared at her, then moved closer. The lead creature stepped heavily and she could feel the ground tremble as it stopped only a meter away from her, the cold fetid breath twisting the fabric of her shift. Whimpering, she tried to move away, but the pain pinned her to the cross, held her helpless in front of the terrible creature.

Gaul stood up and padded over to the creature, his bare feet crunching lightly on the ground. “This is Garith. He was a serial killer in the ancient city of Carum, long before your grandparents were even a thought.”

Garith glanced down at Gaul and then back up at her, a long snake-like tongue reached out to lick his lips. Semma shivered again as she felt his hungry, angry eyes boring into her skin. Goosebumps prickled her skin as she felt the cold wind blowing even harder. More creatures rose up from the ground, to shuffle to her. Not a single one was completely human, but some almost had a passing resemblance. Gaul quietly named each one as she looked at them: rapist, murder, and thief. Some had more horrible crimes, like the young girl who killed six dozen people in a single night while others were just brutal in their single crime. Gaul did not list a single innocent person. By the time midnight came, Illij was covered in them, a solid carpet of ghosts and dead. And each one was staring at her with mute obsession.

“W... W...” The words wouldn’t come from her. Semma tried to think them, hoping Gaul would hear her.

(What are they doing?)

“They are waiting.”

Surprised that just thinking was enough for the grave dinner, she thought carefully again.

(Why?)

“For you? Your sacrifice. You are here in the hopes that your spirit will finally quiet their theirs.”

(Are there no innocent ones?)

Gaul’s voice was sad as he spoke up, “Yes, but they won’t come until the night of your death. They are with the Lighted Ones.”

(Lighted One?) She tried to picture it, but no image came. (You called me a Lighted One.)

“Yes, a Lighted One. One with the light, one that has a chance. Twenty-two Lighted Ones have come before you, to sacrifice their lives. And not a single one succeeded in silencing even a single spirit.”

Helpless fear crushed her and she sagged against her bounds. The painful tightness in her chest spasmed for a moment until she forced herself to pull herself up, to breath once again in a long rasping breath.

(Not a single one?)

“No.”

Semma thought for a moment, (But, there were thirty-four sacrifices.)

Gaul snorted bitterly, “No, thirty-four came up, but only twenty-two died here on the Mount. The rest were rescued, replaced, or somehow taken down before they died.”

Shocked, Semma tried to remember the stories of the past, of someone escaping their fate. Gaul shook his head as he stepped around a gruesome tentacled creature, “They don’t tell those stories. No one important comes up here, except for the occasional family to rescue their daughter. But, that only happened twice in centuries. Mostly it is the brutal ones, the ones who toy with the sacrifices because it amuses them. But, those who escape are taken away, to other cities, other countries. One girl even gave up everything she had to be rescued by one of the slaves in Yulim.”

Semma's eyes looked up, over the dark ocean at the name of Yulim. Somewhere over the water was an island, a country, of dark rumors that still scared her, even with the cast of thousands watching her own death only days away.

(Why?)

"For her, it was worth it."

The audience shifted silently around her, each one still staring at her with their monstrous gazes.

(Why are they silent?)

"Because you are still dying. You'll hear them enough, once your dead."

A thread of a thought pushed through her mind, of it not ending in a couple of days, but Gaul said nothing in response. Instead, he resumed naming the creatures, listing their crimes and their names. She watched, trying to focus on them instead of the incredible pain that gnawed at her senses and at her wounds. It helped... a little, but the burning was stretching across her body, tearing at her the entire night.

In the middle of it, exhaustion caught her and sucked her into nightmares of death and darkness.

Semma woke to the midday sun. Heat rolled down against her skin, setting it on fire even through the thin fabric of her shift. The air around her was silent, deathly silent. She tried to call out for Gaul, but her voice gave one before he responded. She tried to project her thoughts, but he didn't respond. Instead, she was forced to stay there, unable to escape the heat and sun. It bore down on her, soaking her shift until she could see her breasts heaving with every ragged breath. Not even a tiny breeze comforted her.

She turned to look at her wounds, at the ragged opening in her wrists and the dark iron that impaled them. The blood had stopped, but it quickly started up against if she strained too much against them. Whimpering, she focused on not moving, on trying to stay alive despite the obviousness of her situation.

Waiting for something was nothing compared to waiting for her death, or for the sunset. Hours passed in utter silence, with only her agony to keep her company. She tried to think of things, happy things, unhappy things, but the pain pushed all thoughts away. Even a new pain started up, the pain of hunger that began to scrape at

her stomach. Whimpering, she tried to suffer, but there was nothing she could do.

She was helpless.

The sunset took too long to come. She stared up at the sun until her eyes streamed with tears, but she refused to look away. She watched it as it oozed toward the surface, then then the reddish splay of color filled the air. Still too slow, the sunset stretched out across the land and ocean. When the last sparkle of sunlight disappeared behind the horizon, she felt the horror sinking into her. The creatures were already stirring, rising out of the ground with the ghostly movements and crowding close.

“G... Ga...” (Gaul?)

“I’m here, Semma.” He stepped out from behind one of the thicker crosses and padded over on his bare feet. His shovel was still in his hand, dripping black dirt on the ground with every movement. The ghostly creatures parted around him as he stopped in front of her. A sad smile on his lips, he spoke after a moment.

“How are you holding up?”

(Where were you?)

He looked away, “Somewhere. I only come up here at night.”

(Why don’t they hurt you? They kill everyone else.)

Gaul looked up, his brown eyes filled with some emotion, “It is my job. It is who I am.” He paused for a moment, “How are you doing?”

Semma sobbed, (It hurts.)

Gaul reached up and patted her leg, his hand arm against her skin. She sobbed again, wailing out from a heart-crushing depression that filled her. Fresh blood trickled down from her wrists, splashing on the ground. One of the creatures, Raitlin who was out of his cage, reached up and pawed at her foot. The ghostly claw went through, but she felt the cold shiver pass through her skin. More creatures reached up for her, their hands passing through her in ineffective attempts to slash her. Some were more violent than others, including Garith who reached back and slashed through her with a brutal swipe. It did no damage, but she still screamed as it passed through her. Gaul batted at Garith’s claw and the creature pulled them back with a snarl. Semma shuddered at the first sound

from the ghostly creature, at the horrible anger that vibrated through its chest.

“Down, Garith.”

Garith backed up, snarling again, but moved no further away. Semma watched with fear, but he didn't move closer. Other noises began to fill the area, of growls and wheezing. Soon, she could almost hear the voices, but the words didn't make sense. She trembled at the sounds, the unforgiving sounds and promises of tortures she could not imagine. Her chest hurt, her body ached, everything was in pain and even thinking was a strain. The hunger that gnawed at her stomach was a tight knot of pain, twisting and pulling just as she thought it was quieted.

(Gaul?)

Gaul looked up at her, “Yes, Semma?”

(Help me?)

There was a great sadness in his eyes, “How? Take you down?”

For a long moment, she was tempted. The fear of the creatures, the pain that hurt her, and bitter loneliness that tore at her was almost too much to bear. Then, she looked down at him, surprise and understanding rocking through her thoughts.

(You've done that?)

He nodded slowly, “Yes. Four of the ones who never died on the cross were taken down by me.”

(What happened to them?)

“I... don't know. I don't know the lives of those who don't die here.”

(Am I going to die here?)

He sighed, a soft sound that she could easily hear over the growls and noises of the creatures.

“I cannot answer that, Semma.”

She started to think another question, but didn't. Instead, she gasped as a sudden spike of pain tore through her. Wailing, she tried to fight back at that, but her body refused to obey. Instead, she slumped against her bounds, leaning forward even as she tried to force her body into action. The tightness in her chest grew as shuddering breaths came out from her raw throat. Her breasts heaved and pressed painfully against the shift wrapped around her.

For a brief moment, she wondered if she was going to die, but a voice held her.

“No, Semma, you won’t die tonight.”

His simple words were enough and she found the strength to pull herself back up, despite the pain. Her body was a single instance of pain, the burning heat stretching across her shoulders and wrapping around her chest and ribs. Everything hurt, even when she just tried to move her head.

(Gaul?)

“Yes, Semma?”

(Help me? Talk to me?)

He smiled, a sparkling of a tear in his eye, “I will.”

Gaul began to speak to her, telling her the stories of the criminals around her. Even the horrific stories of murder and torture were better than focusing on the pain that consumed her. She began to hear the creature’s voices, sometimes expanding on the stories in graphic detail but never correcting Gaul. Every word that came from his lips was true, even when the creatures denied it. Eventually, they all agreed with him as he told story after story. However, there was no joy, no compassion in the creatures. Just anger, unfulfilled anger and rage that was focused on her. In the middle of the stories, they would break into monologues. Detailed everything they would do to her: rape, torture, death. Only the knowledge they couldn’t touch her kept her from begging to be freed, but even the threat was enough to push her body into spasms of violent shaking. No more tears came, however, there was not left to cry. It was almost enough to push back the pain, but it didn’t. It was just enough to help her survive.

False dawn came slowly, even with the stories to distract her. As the horizon began to brighten, the creatures faded away. A few lingering threats hung in the air, graphic and detailed in ways that she could almost imagine being inflicted on her. Then, it was only her and Gaul. Gaul stood up, leaning his shoulder.

(Gaul?)

“I’m sorry, but I must leave myself.”

(Will I survive the day?)

He looked at her and nodded, “Yes, but it will be the most terrible day of your life.”

She sniffed, straining against the pain in her shoulders. Her limbs were already shaking, threatening to release, to refuse to bring her away from the suffocating death. Gaul watched for a moment, then padded away.

Gaul's body reached Raitlin's cage as a moment of clarity burst through the pain, (This isn't going to end, is it?)

She watched carefully. He turned around and she saw a single tear dripped from his eyes, rolling down the wrinkles in his face. It struck the ground and she shuddered as she felt a shiver rip through her spine. He said only a single word.

"No."

The first ray of sun speared up from the horizon. It struck Raitlin's cage and she watched Gaul disappear. The shovel hung in the air for a moment, then clattered to the ground. A sob came, a dry and painful sob that scoured her throat as she began to cry. It all came out, terror, fear, and dismay. She continue to sob, crying out dried tears. The sun rose up into the air and she felt it burning down against her skin.

She was alone.

Semma continued to sob until blood flecked her lips from a bleeding throat. Her voice was gone, no words, no sounds. Nothing came out but ragged breathing and blood. She strained against her spikes, desperately trying to pull them out. Fresh streamers of blood sluggishly dripped out from the wounds, intensifying the pain but never freeing her. The wood dug into her back, splinters digging in and her helpless to stop it. Every breath rasped through her bleeding lips, but all she could do was sob again.

It was only midmorning when she heard the first sound of movement. Lifting her head wearily, she looked out over the field of victims, seeing their ghostly bodies in her mind, and saw nothing. Something dripped from her lips, blood, and she lapped at it, caressing her tongue across cracked and bleeding lips. The sound of someone walking came closer and for a brief moment, she wondered if someone was going to save her.

Then laughter told her otherwise. It was a group of men she grew up with. Their leader, Umar, had spent most of their time in school trying to seduce her. He even offered to married her, but she had no



intent of spending her life with such shallow man. And now he was coming with two of his friends.

He stopped in front of her, the smirk on his face holding no hope for her. The amusement on the other's faces told her that Gaul was right, this will be the most terrible day of her life.

"Well, well, well. I guess you should have married me, Sem."

She tried to speak, but nothing came out. Her lips cracked again and she winced from the pain. Umar was a tall man, but on her cross, she towered over him. Her breasts were even with his eyes, and that seemed to bring some amusement to him. Reaching up, he stroked her breasts through the shift. His fingers found her nipple and he squeeze it, twisting hard. Semma tried to whimper or make any noise, but only a wheezing rasp came out.

One of Umar's friends spoke up, "A woman who doesn't scream out? How did we get so lucky?"

Umar grunted, "Yeah, a bitch who won't speak up."

His fingers grabbed tightly on her breast, twisting the entire thing until she felt his fingers bruising her. Everything hurt, but compared to the searing pain of gravity on her spikes, it was only a dull ache. He frowned when she didn't try to call out and grabbed with both hands, twisting and squeezing in an attempt to tear it off. She felt the pain, but could do nothing. His fingers slipped off her sweat-soaked breast, but it tore her shift.

"Hey! Good idea!"

All three of them began to tear the shift from her body, squeezing and poking her body as they did so. The ragged remains of her outfit fluttered to the ground, pooling in the caked earth. Umar stared up at her breasts; the mounds were flatted by her position, but it didn't stop him from trying to yank at them again. His fingers slipped again, but not until huge bruises began to form on both of them.

Semma pressed her lips tightly together, unable to call out with a torn throat. Instead, she cringed inside as he poked and pushed her. His fingers trailed down to the juncture of her legs, where the thin curls of hair protected the opening of her sex.

"You really a virgin?"

She tried to shake her head, but couldn't find the energy. Everything hurt, even when he jammed his fingers cruelly up into her dry opening. The pain was intense, but no sound came out of

her cracked lips. Umar chuckled and jammed two fingers up hard into her. Deep inside, something tore and she felt a pain, a new pain, spread out from inside her hips. A surprised look ghosted across his face and he pulled out his fingers. Fresh blood glistened off the finger tips and he looked up at her smiled.

“Not anymore.”

Despair filled her. She tried to deny it, but he just jammed his fingers back into her, using the blood as lubricate to rape her on his fingers. His friends, inspired by him, reached out and grabbed her, forcing their fingers into her ass and anywhere else they could reach. They pinched and poked and hurt her as much as they could. One of them even fingered the hole in her ankle, breaking off the crusted blood and letting fresh blood flow free. Semma tried to scream out, but no sounds came out from her suffering.

Umar took his time, tearing into her with his fingernails and forcing her despoiled opening around his fingers. He grew bored of it and let the others do the same, abusing her even worse with every passing moment. Semma's body was screaming in terror as she felt them force open the dried wounds in her wrists, forcing their fingers into the gaping wounds and opening them up. One of Umar's friends started to peel back the skin from her ankle, but grew bored when his fingers grew too slick with blood.

To her horror, Umar pulled out a dagger with a jagged blade. Semma's eyes widened as he showed it to her. Lowering the point, he pressed it against her heaving breasts. With deliberate cruelty, he pushed the point into the soft flesh. Semma screamed out, blood oozing from her throat as she felt a new terrible pain tear into her body. Umar laughed out loud and cut her again, slashing across her other breast. The blade continued to slash into her slowly, covering her entire body in bleeding lines of torture. When he grew tired, he handed the blade over to his friend who started over. One of them slashed off her nipple, toying with it for almost an hour before tossing it to the ground. Semma's tears came fresh as she was tortured, but soon she was crying blood instead of tears. Her body was failing on her and there was nothing she could do. Every movement, from her or their tortures, sent fresh agony through her body until she was shaking with the need to do anything.

It was hours later and her voice was gone again, torn and broken from the fresh screams. Umar had his knife again and looked up at her. His friends were sitting on the ground, sharing a wineskin between them. Umar spoke softly, his voice hard and filled with amusement.

“Well, it is almost sunset and I think I need to give you... one...” as he spoke, he dropped the tip of his knife down across her bleeding wounds, to the junction between her legs. Semma shook her head, mouthing the words “no” over and over again.

“... more thing to remind you of me.”

He worked the tip of the blade up between her legs and she felt the sharp tip cutting into her delicate insides. Stretching up, he kissed her on the lips as he rammed the blade up into her sex in one powerful stroke. Semma screamed, her body spasming on the pain as she felt the jagged blade cut up into her, slicing through her sex and deep into her insides. A hot wind picked up, howling through the murder grounds. Umar ignored it as he yanked the blade half out and rammed it back in, cutting her even more from the insides. Semma felt the blood pouring out of her wound, out of her body as he rammed it in again and again. The look in his eyes was as terrible as the ones from the creatures at night.

And this was a friend.

Umar raped her on his knife seven or eight times before jamming it in as far as he could and leaving it there. Panting, he stepped back and rubbed his crotch. A growing wetness, from him orgasming, soaked through the fabric. He was smiling as he looked down at the blade. Semma tried to sob, but only bloody tears came out, as she felt more liquid dripping down her inner thighs.

Around her, she could feel the hot wind picking up. Umar’s friends were already standing, backing away from her crucifix, but Umar didn’t move. He watched her for a long moment, then reached down for the dagger.

“Umar, look at the sun.”

He froze, centimeters away from the blade hilt buried between her legs. Turning around, he saw the first touches of red spreading out across the sky. With a snarl, he glared up at Semma.

“Survive the night, bitch. I’ll finish tomorrow.”

Semma could only cry blood as she watched him turn around and walk away. He moved quickly and she saw the sunset almost racing him for the edge of the murder ground. His friends sprinted forward, racing as fast as they could, but Umar strolled down the path. He reached Raitlin's cage and kicked the shovel hard. It spun away, bouncing off the pole of the cage. Semma was shocked as it bounced back, the edge of the shovel catching Umar right below the knee. With a yelp, he collapsed to the ground. His friends stopped and for a moment hesitated. Then one sprinted away as the other turned back to help Umar.

"Umar! We have to get moving!"

"I know that, idiot. Help me!"

There was a desperate tone in both of their voices as his friend knelt down and helped Umar to his feet. Fresh blood dripped on the ground as they started to limp down, away from Semma. A fierce joy rose up in her, knowing that at least he would suffer from his crimes. Then, she had to strain against her failing body and felt the dagger buried in her most private of places cut even deeper into her organs.

A sob ripped through her and she watched blood splash down on her naked breasts. It dripped for a moment before it joined the other bloody cuts. Slowly, she looked down to see the blood-soaked earth below her. The thought of dying before Gaul returned was too much and she let loose with a wail of pain that sucked the breath out of her.

Then voices.

Looking up, she saw Gaul speaking with Umar and his friend. Even though they were near the edge of the execution grounds, ten or so meters away, she could hear their voices clearly over her ragged breathing.

Gaul's voice was tense, "Umar, you should not have come here."

"Out of my way, old man."

Umar's friend pulled back a hand to punch Gaul. Semma tried to call out, but the fist plunged forward. Gaul's hand almost slowly reached up and grabbed the wrist. A cracking noise filled the air as the grave digger stared at Umar's friend.

"I do not know your name, which means you will live. But, I would suggest you leave Umar here, otherwise I will learn it."

Umar's friend yelled out, pulling back his broken wrist. Umar clutched to him tightly, "Don't leave me."

Gaul gestured for the edge, "Leave. Now."

Umar friend practically threw Umar to the ground and sprinted for the edge even as white mist rose up from the ground. Gaul looked down at Semma's torturer and gestured again for the edge.

"Go ahead, try it Umar."

Without waiting for a response, Gaul stepped around him and padded toward Semma. She watched as Umar started to crawl toward the edge, the clear line where death ended and life would resume. Around him, the mist grew bright and white, a different color from before. Forms grew out of the shape, beautiful woman glowing with an intense light. They reached down for him, wrapping their fingers around his ankles and legs and pulling him back. Umar's scream cut through the air as the woman surrounded him, blocking him from Semma's bleeding gaze.

"The Lighted Ones, Semma."

She tried to work her mouth, but only a dribble of blood came out.

(You... knew his name.)

Gaul nodded slowly, "Yes, he will die here."

(And my name?)

Tears sparkled in the grave digger's eyes, "I've always known it."  
(Tonight?)

He nodded, "The Lighted Ones are here for you."

The screams had faded into gurgling noises. Semma watched as the white mist parted into twenty-two woman made of pure light. Blood dripped from their hands and mouths as the stared at her. Behind them, ghost-like lanterns formed behind him, hundreds, then thousands of them spreading out over the execution grounds. As she watched, some of the lights turned red, blood red, and spread out even further.

"The innocent ones. They will follow the Lighted Ones until the very end."

There was a sadness in Gaul's voice, a despair that she felt in her very heart.

(What happened? I thought they were suppose to end this?)

Gaul started to speak, but one of the ghostly woman swirled up next to her.

“Don’t bother, digger. She is ours now.” Her voice was seductive, smooth, filled with a power that pushed back the pain. Up close, Semma could feel the naked body pressing against her own, the sensations pushing back at the pain until it almost felt like before she was crucified. Gaul looked away and Semma saw tears dripping from his face. With the movements of an old man, he reached down and picked up the shovel. Semma tried to remember how it moved from Raitlin’s cage to there, but the woman’s words interrupted her own thoughts.

“Join us, Semma. Join the Lighted Ones.”

(How?)

“Die. Release yourself. Become one of us.”

Soft hands pressed against her skin and she felt a strange heat growing inside her. Looking down, she watched at the cuts across her stomach begin to seal up, healing before her eyes.

“We can make the pain go away, to never return. Join us and never hurt again.”

(What about-?)

The spirit interrupted her thoughts, “Ignore the digger, Semma. It won’t end. If you don’t join us, you will be thrown to those... creatures. They will torture you and rape you, taking your flesh until the very end of time.”

Semma remembered the stories, the threats. Each one sent a shiver down her spine as she realized that they were just promising the future, not threatening. The woman stroked her body, fingers sliding along the ruined nipple. Semma watched as it heal, the pink flesh returning just as smooth and firm as the day she was first placed on the cross. Thoughts of being ravaged by the monsters filled her with ice-cold fear. Knowing that the Umar’s knife would only be a hint of what she would suffer.

(What... what about the sacrifice?)

“Ignore it. If you join us, you will never hurt again. There will be no pain ever again.”

Temptation burned inside her. She felt the dagger still cutting her insides, slicing through delicate organs and letting her life fluids drip out through her destroyed sex. The pain in her wrists, her

ankles, and chest was intense, cutting away her breath. She could feel her heart pounding in her chest, the final beats of her life.

Crying bloody tears, she looked around. Interspersed with the lanterns of all colors were the creatures of evil that waited. Many of them were stroking immense demonic cocks or brandishing bloody claws of their own. The woman, the Lighted Ones, were untouched, beautiful for the end of time. Then, in the shadow of a cross, she saw Gaul watching her. He was crying, bright tears of his own that dripped against the handle of the shovel. They rolled down to splash into the dirt.

Semma gasped, feeling her heart shuddering with the last motes of life. She inhaled, wincing at the terrible pain that ripped through her. Then, with a destroyed throat and broken body, she managed the last word of her life.

“No.”

A howl rose up from the execution grounds as the monsters and creatures rose up. The Lighted One shook her head and faded away into white mist. Semma saw a brief moment of the lanterns and other Lighted Ones fading away before a wave of creatures slammed into her. She felt their claws plunge into her stomach, her breasts, even her throat. Hot blood splashed across her body as they ripped her off the cross, tearing off her limbs. Teeth tore into her flesh and she screamed, a loud scream that didn't need a throat. But, it hurt as she felt the muzzle of Raitlin plunge into her throat, snapping her spine and tearing out a bloody chunk. Semma watched as he chewed and swallowed it, before dipping down for another bite.

A massive hand reached down and threw the smaller creature aside. She looked up to see a horse-like monster, with terrible claws for hooves. Between its legs, an immense cock filled with barbs stretched out. With powerful strength, it reached down and picked her up. Semma tried to cover her throat, but instead of a bloody wound, it was healed again. Her fingers caressed against the smooth flesh just as the horse creature rammed his cock between her legs, tearing her apart. Pain beyond anything a mortal body could handle ripped through her, tearing into her organs. The knife blade was nothing compared to the pain of being raped on the horse's cock. The human face on the creature leered as he raped her hard and fast, cracking bone. When he came, he threw her broken body aside.

Semma tried to scream out as she felt her body healing, growing whole again as more creatures rushed up to her.

She felt her spine crack again as she was violated in endless ways. Then, it cracked as it healed up again, to start the pain all over again. Her scream rose up in a long wail that would never end. It only paused as something ripped her throat and lungs out again. More creatures rushed in, tearing her apart even as her spirit body frantically healed itself.

Gaul watched, tears still in his eyes. He watched the mass of ghostly creatures raping and killing and tearing apart the poor girl. Her ghostly body healed as fast as they could hurt her. Slowly, his eyes looked up to the corpse hanging off the crucifix. Semma's real body was dead, leaking the last few drops of blood on the ground. There was no smile on her face, just the terror of death. Slowly, he turned his back away from her and went to the remains of Umar's corpse. Hefting his shovel, he started to dig a grave.

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Time, as a river, was endless for Marasath. Despite the short lives of its inhabitants, it continued to survive for centuries afterwards. But, ever since that night, Illij was silent. No more deaths, no more executions. Even the brave wandering who visited the execution lands at night came home safe, but shaken with the sounds they heard.

It was the youth of Carium, the city state that ruled the continent. Rising up from the Fourth Imperium and going well into the sixth age, it stood against the trials of war and famine. The city of Marasath was no more, it was just a district in the massive city-state that covered the southern part of the continent. The city itself stretched entirely round Mount Illij, but refused to climb up the forbidden cliffs. At the top, the crosses and poles still stood strong, petrified with age. The Mount was still a porcupine, but it was quiet, tamed.

A young boy sprinted up the path. Panting loudly, he carried a bag with him as he crested the top and stopped at the first cross. In the center, he could see an old man, a grave digger with no more graves to dig, moving around. He would touch one cross, then a cage. The boy took a deep breath and stepped into the death field,



feeling the cool air brushing across him. Taking another, he sprinted to the old man.

“Gaul! Gaul!”

Gaul smiled warmly at him, “Hello, how are you doing?”

“Do you remember my name?”

The old man shook his head, “Sorry, I forgot.”

“How can you forget? I come up here every night. My name is Habre.”

“Well, Habre, I will struggle to remember your name.”

The boy pouted, “You’ll forget tomorrow.”

Gaul smiled, “You’re right.”

He patted the ground next to a petrified spike. The skeleton on it had long since disappeared with age. Habre plopped down on the ground and Gaul sunk down, using the shovel for balance.

“What did you bring me?”

“Just some chicken. Mom says we are a little short this month.”

Gaul took the offered meat and ate it slowly. Habre joined him, wolfing down his own. When he finished, he watched the old man eating.

“Why do you come up here? Grandma says there are no graves up here.”

The old man looked up at the crucifix in the center of the grounds, the only one still standing straight and showing no age or signs of decay.

“I told her I would stay. To keep her company.”

“The girl you keep talking about... uh...” the boy frowned in concentration, “Samma?”

“Semma.”

“Yeah, Semma!” The boy was quiet for a moment, “How long have you been waiting?”

Gaul chuckled, “That is the first time you have ever asked that.”

Habre waited for a moment, “So... how long?”

“A long time.”

“How long?”

Shaking his head in amusement, Gaul looked down at the ancient shovel, “A little over a thousand years. If you listen, you can still hear her.”

Habre cocked his head, listening. Around him, the last spears of sunlight slowly faded behind the horizon. Straining, Habre began to hear the sounds of screaming, terrible screaming filled with pain and agony.

He shivered violently, "It doesn't sound good."

Gaul shook his head, his eyes locked on the cross, "It isn't, but so much good has come from it. People can safely come here at night and the spirits of the dead no longer walk in this world."

Both of them listen to Semma's screams for a long time. Gaul looked down at the boy he knew would never come back again, they never came back once they heard. Habre looked up with tears in his eyes.

"Why... why am I crying?"

Gaul patted him on the shoulder, "Because you can hear it."

"H-How long will she scream?"

"Thousands of years, until the memory of you and this city fade away into dust."

"But, mom says Carium will last forever."

"And so will her screams."

A cold, haunted shiver rippled through the young boy. Gaul felt a great sadness and patted him on the shoulder again.

"Go on, your mother is calling you."

Habre scrambled to his face, tears still streaming down his cheeks.

"I-I'll be back."

"No, you won't."

The boy didn't answer, but he turned on his heels and walked through the field. Every high-pitched scream of terror sent a bolt through his frail frame. At the edge, he called out to the grave digger he has known all his life. The man who could never remember his name.

"Why do you wait for her?"

"It's my job."

# About the Author

t'Sade has been happily using third-person singular since the late eighties. Besides that strange quirk, they enjoy writing a brutal combination of sex and violence for decades. Most of their stories explore the fringe edges of sexuality in the epic quest of trying to write a story for every fetish and turn-on known to the human libido.

It's going to take a long time.

Their writing can be found on their website, [tsade.com](http://tsade.com). Most of it is free to read and enjoy.

*t'Sade*

# About the Publisher

Curious Cabbit Press is a small erotic press located in the heart of the United States. They can be found at [curiouscabbit.com](http://curiouscabbit.com) or possibly at your favorite retailer.