

Amethyst

I

Masking her face, she ran back down the alley and disappeared into the night, as though she had never been. I looked around for someone else to share in my confusion but the streets were empty, save the humming of the street lamps as they eerily lit the area. The man who had previously been the cause of my plight now lay motionless on the pavement, with the rising and falling of his chest absent. I had at once both the urge to chase after my saviour, and also to flee the scene altogether and return home. This dilemma, it seems, proved too much for me, and so I stood frozen to the spot, breathing in the cold night air. As I felt myself come to my senses I suddenly regained feeling in my body; my heart beat ecstatically and my hands were purple and shaking. I looked around again and found myself pacing near the body of the lifeless man, going over the events in my head. The man had surprised me whilst I was on my way home, and with a glimmer of a blade and a threat to my life I found myself giving over my wallet and was part the way through taking off my watch when it happened...a creature had pounced from the shadows of a nearby alleyway and latched its fangs around the assailant's throat, robbing him of the ability to scream for help and, without time for a struggle for freedom, he dropped to the ground in a heap. Struck with fear I dare not move, lest the creature attack me too should I run. It turned its head to face me and I found myself arrested by the beauty of its eyes, or rather, *her* eyes. Purple as the most spectacular, precious amethysts one could imagine. And before I could bring myself to some action, she was gone once more.

Interrupting my train of thought, I suddenly heard the rattling of carriage wheels and marching of horses' hooves. Broken away from my senselessness, I realised that upon arrival, a stranger may see the situation I found myself in and jump to the conclusion that I was the culprit. And so, worried I may fail to convince said stranger of my innocence – as a story containing a murderous she-devil would no doubt fall short of its goal – I decided it best to run. My first thought was to run home, but if for whatever reason I was followed, either by stranger or creature, I did not wish for my home address to be known. Picking up my wallet from the man on the ground, I began to run. I ran through this alley and that, avoiding the well-lit areas as much as the pitch-black in an effort to avoid both stranger and creature alike. Running through the dimly lit parts of the city I eventually found myself at the docks, although not visible, it was none-the-less made apparent by the strong scent of the sea and of the fish market. Exhausted, I leaned over, clutched my knees with my hands and made an effort to catch my breath. I then pulled myself forward, walking the few paces to the end of the passageway I was making my way through so as to gather my whereabouts. Not five blocks down was the east end of the fish market, which meant that I had come some distance away from my home and with my mind now much more at ease, I felt it safe enough to return home. Walking through the streets there was nary a person nor carriage in sight as it was now quite late, quarter to one in the morning in fact, which meant it was now the 26th of January, 1843. London was frightfully cold this time of night, especially around this time of year, and so I briskly walked myself back to the comfort of my chair by the fireplace, which of course, I lit right away.

I awoke the next morning to the burning of the last few embers of the fire, still in my chair and, as I'm sure is due to my bad sleeping posture, found that the dulling warmth of the fire I felt was accompanied by a slight pain in my back. I stood, stretched, and then made my way upstairs and to my bedroom where I then gathered some clean clothes and a towel, as I imagined my stench and general look of disarray might make for unpleasant glances at the very least, should I venture out in such a state. After my bath I wandered back downstairs and to the kitchen where I put on the kettle and, oddly enough, did not get out my favourite black and blue cup and saucer as I would usually, for

I instead found myself drawn to another; the one with the strikingly purple bellflowers on it. Purple. All of a sudden, hitting me like a speeding locomotive and causing my muscles to all tense up, was the memory of the events of the night prior. The attacker. The creature. And those eyes, which I again found myself struck by, even only in memory. Had I really seen what I thought I had? Surely some insidious creature of the night did not emerge suddenly from its home in the dark and save my life? No, I must have hallucinated. In any case, were it true what could I do about it? I had not the evidence of the encounter, for I picked up my wallet from next to the.... The man. The man! He was attacked with such ferocity and with such force that surely no officer of the law would think that a mere man could be the culprit. But what am I to do? It would be unwise, to say the least, to stroll aloofly into the station and give my account of what happened. I would be branded a mad man to be certain, and perhaps locked away never to be heard from again. No. I shall speak nothing of it and continue with life as though nothing had happened.

I suddenly became aware of the whistling of the kettle and with that was brought forthwith out of my thoughts and back into reality. I made my tea and went to sit back down in my chair, noticing also, that the pain in my back had now thankfully subsided. I re-kindled the fire and sat comfortably for a time, drinking in the warmth of both the tea and the fire, feeling the tension in my muscles begin to ease. Toward the end of my cup of tea I realised that work had completely slipped my mind and I was sure to be late. I was a daguerreotypist (a sort of photographer) and I was certain I'd lost the client by now, and so, with that in mind I decided to just take a day and give my mugging as the reasoning for having never showed, although I would of course leave out certain details. I made the decision that I would spend the next few hours wandering the park a few blocks down from my house, and so I set off, grabbing my coat, hat and book, should I feel like reading part-way through my stroll. I spent a decent amount of the day in the park just walking, reading, and trying to clear my head of the events of last night, feeling quite content when I eventually began to make my way home again. Upon my arrival I found a letter had been passed through the gap in my door: "You are invited to attend Mary and Winston Allens' Annual Dinner, this Saturday the 28th of January" it read, with a little hand-written note underneath, clearly in Mary's handwriting;

Winston, please do come along this year. I know it's not been easy since Lucy left but you really must come out at some point. Winston and I miss you. -Mary

I did not particularly feel like going but I knew there would be hell to pay should I not make an appearance, and anyhow, I thought it might be nice to get out and socialise a little; I had been rather reserved of late. I spent the rest of the night in and the next day went out to meet a client as per the usual. Saturday then arrived and, until a few hours before the dinner, I went about my normal business before getting dressed and heading out when the time to go came around. I walked down the quiet streets, weaving my way in and out of the backstreets I knew to be shortcuts and soon found myself on the Allens' doorstep, knocking on the door. I was greeted by Winston still having half a conversation with someone already inside, he turned and welcomed me inside. Joining the guests, I said hello to Mary and a few of the others I knew and ended up in conversation with my old friend John, whom I had met in my youth. As time went by the crowd grew, and whilst I knew most people who arrived there was one mysterious person who alluded me. A woman, specifically, with long, dark, slightly wavy hair and quite pale hands, however she always seemed to have her back turned to me and so I never thought much of it. Until later that is.

Finally, we were all beckoned to gather in the dining room and sit down for dinner, and so, one by one we all began to take our seats. At this point I had not thought much of the mystery woman and so was not even looking her way when Mary stood at one end of the table, tapped her glass and started to speak;

“Good evening everyone and thank you for joining us this evening. It is most pleasant to have you all here.”

She always did have a way of talking that seemed to indicate wealth, despite her being no wealthier than most people were around the area.

“Winston and I have prepared some food and there is plenty to drink,” she continued “so I hope you all enjoy yourselves. However, before we begin I’ve someone to introduce to you all.” She gestured toward the mystery woman, who was looking up towards her and away from me. “Some of you have already introduced yourselves but I’ll none-the-less take the liberty of formally introducing her. Ladies and gentlemen, I’d like you all to meet Anna Lorenz.” It was at this moment that she turned to face the rest of the table and as she shyly waved to everyone I caught them. Amethysts. Unmistakable. Unforgettable. Amethysts.

“She is new in town, all the way from Germany, and I would like you all to make her feel welcome.” Mary continued on with her introduction, but I heard no more after this as I tried to wrap my head around what I was seeing. Could it be? All of a sudden, she looked my way, straight into my eyes, my very *soul*. I felt my heart begin to pound and my palms begin to sweat, never had I been so nervous in my life. Her face was perfect. Beauty of the likes no man could ever dream of. This could not possibly be the same pair of eyes I had seen a few nights prior. Her gaze withdrew, releasing me from their spell, and although the dinner continued as normal I daren’t look her way again, lest she recognise me. Eventually, we all finished eating and drinking and the usual pleasant goodbyes were exchanged. I managed to compose myself enough so as to mask my uneasiness, and before I knew it I was outside again, walking through the dimly lit streets and breathing in the cold night air, eerily reminding me of the conditions of *that* night. Without warning, I found a hand around my arm and was turned unwillingly to find myself face to face with Anna. We were a few blocks from the Allens’ house, had she followed me?

“I don’t believe you introduced yourself at the party, did you, Mr.?”

She had a slight German accent.

“Oh, yes, apologies. I am William.”

“William who?”

“William Shaw.”

Was she going to butcher me, like she’d done by attacker?

“Well, William Shaw, it is nice to make your acquaintance.”

She smirked. “Formally, that is.”

“Well I, I’m not sure what you mean.” I replied, quite unconvincingly.

“I think you do Mr. Shaw, and I believe you and I need to have a little chat.”

She slipped something into my coat pocket, then straightened my hat on my head.

“I look forward to seeing you soon.”

And with that, she seemed to glide past me, almost making sure I was able to smell her perfume. Intoxicating. She then walked on and disappeared into the night. Shaken, I went all the way home without touching whatever it was she had placed in my pocket and found myself sitting by the fire in

my chair with a cup of tea before I pulled it out. It was a neatly folded piece of paper. I took a sip of tea from the cup with the bellflowers on it and worked up the nerve to open it.

Tomorrow night, 7 o'clock sharp, near the bridge in Hyde Park. -Anna

What had I gotten myself in to? I knew full-well that I should not meet her. I also knew full-well that I was most definitely going to. And so, I decided I would get some rest and begin to build up the nerve to see her again. Hopefully on our next meeting my heart would not feel the need to jump out of my chest, as had seem to have become the fashion any time I lay eyes upon her.

Again, once over the threshold, I made myself comfortable in my chair and sat by the fire. I must have gotten quite lost in thought, as I awoke the next morning in the same chair and in the same attire. Twice in one week I've fallen asleep in this blasted chair, perhaps it is *too* comfortable. I mustered the energy to get up and went to run the bath, picking up some clean clothes and a towel. I feel however, that this time the bath was less about getting clean and more about just taking a moment to enjoy it, for tonight I see her again and for all I know this may be the last time I ever get the chance to have one. I lay in the tub until my fingers wrinkled up and the water grew cold before I was able to pull myself out and get dressed, and as I did so I decided I would arm myself, whatever good that may or may not do against such a beauty. *Creature*. I mean creature. Damn her. Never have I felt so conflicted in all my years.

Hours passed and eventually it came time to leave. The note had said *7 o'clock sharp* and so I intended to be there exactly then, and, grabbing my coat and hat, making sure my hat was straight, I headed out. Before leaving I had planned my route so as to make sure I had ample time to arrive, giving me the ability to stroll at a rather leisurely pace. I passed only a few people, pleasantly greeting them as one does, and found myself in Hyde Park a short while later with, surprisingly, very small number of people. Perhaps the cold was too intense to allow for twilight strolls through the park today. I reached the bridge specified in Anna's note and at once felt a chill run down my spine and a hand once again wrapped around my arm and turned me around. Face to face again.

"You are early, Mr. Shaw" She smiled.

"I am." I replied. I must admit that although my route and a normal walking pace would have gotten me here at 7 on the dot, I found myself walking at quite a speed anyway.

"Good. Now before we have our little talk, would you mind walking me around the city a little? I am new here after all."

"Of course." I held out my arm and she linked hers through it, and so we began to walk.

"So, Mr. Shaw,"

"William, please." I said.

"Alright, William. How long have you lived in London?"

"Oh, my whole life really. I was born a little further North of where we are now but I've known these streets all my years." Not a very interesting life I've had, I realised.

"Ah well, you must know these streets like the back of your hand no?"

"I feel I do, yes." Must I always reply in such a short and abrupt fashion?

"That is good. Take me somewhere nearby where we can sit, won't you?"

The memory of a favourite spot of mine as a child entered my mind. "I know just the place."

We continued to walk for some time in silence, not an uncomfortable one however, instead a rather pleasant one, where I in fact felt myself enjoying even just her presence, and her arm linked with mine. We breathed in the cool night air passing many a buzzing street lamp. It was a quiet, peaceful night with clear skies, so clear, one could seemingly see all the stars of the sky, and thus the clustered streak through the middle that was the Milky Way and as we began to get to the edges of the city I found that the light did not seem to dull much, as the moon was beautifully bright.

"Here we are, Anna." We crossed a small bridge and had arrived at my spot. A seemingly innocuous bench near the River Thames with an old oak tree nearby. The bench was just as peculiar as I remembered; it was too far to be seen from the path, on a slight tilt, and a little smaller than most other benches.

"An unusual little bench is it not?"

I smiled, "It is indeed. Always has been. Its why I like it, I have since I was a child. Able to scare most people away but quite pleasant once you get used to it."

We sat down, her arm still linked in mine. She sighed and then began to speak once more;

"I like it. It's a beautiful spot William, thank you for bringing me here." She pulled her arm away from me. "To business then."

Oh no. I had all but forgotten why we were out here until now.

"Now William, I know you recognise me from the other night so let's skip the back and forth where we dally around the subject. You were being robbed and I saved you. Yes, I killed a man in the process, but a nasty one. I assume that your reasoning for not going to the police was the fear of being labelled a mad man, which I've no doubt you would have been, but I thank you never-the-less. The problem I have, then, is not with the law, but with my little secret."

"Little?" I burst out.

Her eyes became ferocious all of a sudden.

"Yes, William. Little."

She's going to kill me.

"I assume you haven't told anyone about what you saw?"

"No, no one."

"Good. And you never will, correct?"

"Of course not, but..." What am I doing?

"But what?" She replied.

"Well I, I mean no disrespect my lady, but what are you exactly?"

Seemingly surprised at my willingness to ask questions, for all I knew, at the peril of my life, she answered.

"I suppose I owe you that much of an answer. You did keep your mouth shut after all." She smirked, but only for a moment. "I am an alp, a kind of vampir. I imagine you know of the latter term?"

"I do, yes."

"Yes, well, there you go. What you saw the other night was an unpleasant but necessary part of my existence. I can go quite long periods without feeding but..."

I interrupted her, "Please don't call it feeding."

She laughed, "Good lord man, you have no fear of me, do you?"

"Well I, yes, I most certainly do. But I also feel that if you were going to kill me you'd have done it by now. I hope I'm not wrong?"

"You are not, do not worry. I'm not going to hurt you. I have just been alive quite some time and yet have never met a man so quick to question me." She smiled for a moment, but not at me. I think at memories, perhaps memories she's once shared with someone dear to her. Someone she'd lost, as was evident by the sudden fade of the smile. "Anyhow, as I was saying. I can go quite some time without...sustenance?"

"A little better I suppose."

"I shall work on it." She smiled again. I realised that every time she did, my face could not help but follow. Not only were her amethyst eyes planted deep in my mind, but I now found that her smile was too. "There will come a time however, when I need to do what I did again. I won't need to for quite a while now though, the man wasn't exactly thin." She smiled again, looking over at me. This time her smile made me uneasy. She evidently saw this unease and decided it was funny, and so she laughed, "I'm only joking, I'm sorry. I know it must have been somewhat traumatic for you?" She asked this as if it were a genuine question, though she knew the answer all too well.

"Mm." I replied. "I'll get over it though." I smiled at her. She again seemed slightly taken aback.

"You really are an interesting fellow. I must say, I was dreading this night. After all, had you not been so cooperative I might have had to..."

I interrupted her again, "Yes yes, I know."

"I was going to say move country again."

"Oh."

"Mm."

"My apologies." What an idiot I am.

"It's alright, I know it probably did seem that way. I don't enjoy killing much though."

'Much' I thought.

She suddenly linked her arm back with mine. "Walk me home?"

"Of course."

A few days passed without hearing anything from Anna where I went about my work as I always had. I saw clients, met with Mary and Winston, who seemed to think I had become more chipper since the dinner, and I finished my book finally. It was only a short book, "The Pit and the Pendulum" by a fellow named Edgar something something, I can't quite remember. Whilst I hadn't heard from her, Anna never left my mind for a moment. Despite her being of a usually rather unpleasant ilk, I found myself drawn to her. I could forget neither her eyes nor her smile, and hoped, perhaps beyond reason, that I may get to know her better. Days, weeks passed however, and I heard nothing. I decided I would ask after her the next time I saw Mary. A few days later she and I met during her lunchbreak and, to her surprise, I asked about Anna's whereabouts.

"Oh? I did not even see you two talk at the party, I've not heard anything from her in some weeks now. Why do you wish to know?" She asked, seemingly quite baffled that I would ask after a seemingly random guest she'd introduced at a dinner over a month ago now.

"Well I, she returned my scarf after I left it at your house after the dinner you see," I lied, "And I had planned to maybe ask to see her again the next time we saw each other, as I assumed you would have her round from time to time to make her feel welcome."

"Oh William, you're certainly right, I would have had her round. She seems to have disappeared of the face of the planet though!" Her face changed to a rather unpleasant look of endearment, "Its so good you're finally moving on from Lucy though." She said, following it with a pleasant smile. I hate when she does that.

I fought the urge to roll my eyes. "Yes well, I suppose it had to happen at some point, didn't it?" I got up to leave, as we had been sitting for some time after finishing our drinks and I knew Mary's lunch break ended soon, and that she liked to read a little during it. "I must head off, I've a client waiting. You'll let me know if you hear anything from her though won't you?"

"Of course, dear." She pleasantly smiled. 'Dear', I thought. She means well, but that has always sounded condescending, especially when followed by such an unnecessarily pleasant smile.

After meeting with another client an hour or so later, I decided I would go back to that spot, to that little awkward bench, and just sit for a while. I set off toward the bench from my client's home where I'd been working, which was closer to it than Hyde Park was, so I wouldn't have a very long walk ahead of me. On the way there I ran into John, whom I'd not seen since the dinner. We talked for some time about books he'd been reading and what he'd been up to before he told me he had better head off, lest he be late for a meeting. I never did know what he did for a living, just that it sounded unbearably boring, he never seemed to mind though. John was always the type of person to see the good in all things and always seemed to be in the best mood possible. I wonder how he'd have reacted had he been the one to have seen Anna attack that man those weeks ago. He headed off one way and I the other, back on my way toward the bench. It didn't take long before I arrived and walked down the grass from the path to sit down noticing that the bench felt bigger today than it had a few weeks ago. One less person sitting on it I suppose.

All of a sudden a thundering crack filled the air and I nearly jumped out of my skin with fright. I looked frantically around for the source but could see nothing, looking up the sky was clear, not a cloud in sight, so it had nought to do with the weather. What on Earth? Under the bridge nearby, a faint glowing, pulsing almost, from beyond my line of vision. I knew I should probably not investigate, but how I never could resist my curiosity. I looked around for someone to join me in

venturing down below the bridge to see what the source of this mysterious glow was and made eye contact with a man nearby. He wore a dark coat and bowler hat like myself and had a scruffy beard and friendly brown eyes. He looked over to the bridge and back to me.

"You heard that?!" He asked.

"Yes."

"And, and you see that?" He pointed toward the glowing.

"I do, yes. Will you come down and investigate with me?" I asked.

"I, well, yes, of course. I'm not afraid."

He was.

And so down we both went, under the bridge, to our doom. No that's a bit dramatic. To our *possible* doom. As we got closer, the pulsating seemed to speed up and the light to grow brighter. The man, Stephen he told me his name was, walked just behind me as we turned the corner and the source of the mysterious lights and sounds became visible to us. Neither of us knew what to make of it, this shape, this abstraction, it looked a tear one might find in one's trousers should they get caught on something, but this, this was like a tear in, well a tear in reality itself. Inside it seems to be the physical embodiment of infinity. Stephen and I looked at one another and then back to the tear.

"Well?" Stephen asked me, as if I was supposed to know what it was.

"Well what?" I replied, rather impatiently.

"Well, what is it do you think?"

"I haven't the slightest idea man! I've never seen anything like it."

"Nor have I. What do you suppose we should do?" He asked, again as if I've any more idea than he.

"Well I don't bloody know. Should we go to the police?" I asked.

"The police?"

"Yes, the police."

"It's not broken the law." This man is an idiot.

"I know that. But they might have a better idea of what to do than..." I broke off mid-sentence as the tear began to violently shake before sending out another deafening crack. Stephen and I covered our ears, and before we could run for cover we were sucked inside and pulled through infinitely strange places. No longer were we on the outskirts of London. We flew past terrain after terrain, from deserts with dunes as tall as mountains to plains with grass that seemed to writhe and reach for us, through blizzards and hail storms, past ruins of dead civilisations and cities of silver and gold, all in an instant, before finally we were dumped in a kind of strange, gloomy swamp. It was night time, wherever we were. I looked up and could not believe my eyes. I did not recognise the stars. All the constellations seemed to have disappeared and in their place shone 2 moons. What on Earth was...well...perhaps what on Earth isn't really the correct thing to say anymore. As I stood up I became aware of some sort of panting or, no, not panting, hyperventilating. I looked over to find Stephen sitting in the mud, his head darting around the place trying to understand what had just happened. All of a sudden it struck me as strange that I too was not sitting in the mud hyperventilating. It seems that in situations

like this, well maybe not exactly like this, but in situations *similar* to this, one person's distress becomes the motivation for another's calm. I slapped Stephen.

"Get a hold of yourself man!" I barked at him. He did not respond well to this and instead of pulling himself together as I had hoped, he began to cry. "Oh, for God's sake." I could not stop myself from rolling my eyes this time. "This is the last thing we need right now. Please, Stephen, we must hold ourselves together in order to figure out what the *hell* just happened. I *need* you Stephen." This approach worked better. Stephen picked himself up off the ground, wiped away his tears and began to look around less erratically.

"Okay." He said. "Okay. Lets just ignore the fact that we just got thrown through time and space and, and just try to find some shelter, because I've heard things about swamps and there are creatures here we do *not* want to be near."

"Good idea. I feel I should..." I cut myself off. I was going to tell him that I had noticed that the stars were not our own, however I deemed it unwise at this juncture. I might make him cry again. "Never mind. Yes, lets find some shelter and perhaps get a fire going. It is awfully cold."

We began to wade through the mud that covered the area. The trees had roots that sprawled over the mud and weaved in and out of each other, so large were they in number that we could go no more than a few steps at a time before having to pull our feet high out of the muck and step over a root that lay in our path. We saw odd little bugs here and there that I, and I imagine Stephen, did not recognise, both of us still in too much shock to say anything of it. Eventually we found ourselves in a small sort of clearing, we could not see very far through the murk of the swamp but it didn't seem like it could be any worse than where we'd been. Stephen, who had been walking ahead of me, looked back at me as if asking if we should continue. I gave a solemn nod and so forward we went, arms crossed and shivering so intensely that I imagine you could hear our teeth rattle a thousand paces away. After some time, we started to see figures in the distance, so tall you could not see the top, and as we got closer we realised they were trees, but of the likes that I had never seen. Their trunks were so wide you could fit my entire house in them twice over, and far, far above were branches half as thick, but clearly very strong and long enough that they were able to reach from tree to tree creating a beautiful kind of web in the sky. They were maybe 10 times the size of Big Ben, so huge were these trees that I imagine we may be able to use one for shelter, should it have an opening toward the bottom that we could reach. I said as much to Stephen, who agreed, and so we made our way into this gigantic forest and began our search for some kind of cover from the cold.

We had been walking for what seemed like hours before Stephen pointed out an opening a little ways up one of the tree trunks. "I reckon we can reach that if you give me a boost." He said gesturing to a section of roots that joined with the trunk and could possibly serve as a kind of path inside.

"Alright, lets give it a shot then."

And so over we went to the smallest part of the trunk we could find. I leaned my back up against it and clasped my hands together, then, boosting Stephen up he was able to grab hold of a small ridge in the root and pull himself up. He then lay down on his stomach and stretched out a hand so that I may join him, and, once up, we both began to walk over to the entrance to the inside of the giant tree's trunk. Inside was a sight to behold; it was as though the tree had veins running all the way up all sides of the walls and the 'ceiling' was covered with small lights that seemed to come from within the tree itself.

"Why, its beautiful." I exclaimed aloud, mostly to myself. Stephen commented anyway.

"Beautifully weird." He said, beginning to rip some of the 'veins' off the walls.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Well, wherever we are I'm sure this wood will still burn."

"Oh. Right you are." I said, joining him, although for some reason I did feel a sense of guilt ripping away this amazing tree's innards.

Eventually we were able to gather a pile large enough to light a fire to last some hours.

"Have you a lighter?" I asked, as I did not smoke and so did not carry one.

"I do in fact." He replied, kneeling down to try and light a smaller piece of wood. I sat down near the pile and watched as he struggled for a good 20 minutes, cursing it out every time he got it to flicker for a moment, only to have it go out once more only a second later. Credit where credit is due however, because after about the hundredth try he did indeed get it started, and finally we both breathed a sigh of relief as we sat there together, in a giant tree, in a foreign world, unsure of what to do next. Stephen pulled out his flask and offered it to me and I gladly accepted the offer. We then talked for some time, telling one another a little about ourselves and what we might do in the morning, and we soon fell asleep by the warmth of the fire.

I awoke the next morning to a sudden, loud humming, accompanied by immense vibrations that shook the entire tree. "Stephen!" I yelled, waking him. He jumped up as I had, looking around frantically.

"What's going on?" He asked. Again with this, as if I should know.

"I don't bloody know!" I replied, looking up.

The lights we had seen on the ceiling the night before were even brighter now and glowing a shade of blue. All of a sudden the ceiling opened up, as if tentacles had been entangled with one another so tightly as to seem as one and were now giving way and shrinking back into the tree alongside the things I had called 'veins' the night before. A sudden downward gust of air followed and something from high up in the tree began to come closer.

"What on Earth is that?" Stephen pointed up at the figure as it grew ever closer.

It looked humanoid, but somehow different, wearing strange robes and no shoes. It had not yet seen us as it was holding a book it was much too pre-occupied with, a book that was most definitely not written in English. He then landed next to us, and looked up to see, I imagine to him, 2 strange creatures standing opposite what I assume must be some kind of entrance. And so, there stood the 3 of us, each with a stupid look upon our faces. Each as amazed and unsure of what to do as the other. This being had a strange figure; his neck was skinny and long and he had slightly larger eyes than us. Only 4 fingers on each hand, with one acting as a thumb but was most definitely more finger-like. The most striking thing about him however, was that he stood at least 8 feet tall.

After the shock left him, he began to try to communicate with us in a foreign tongue. Obviously we could not understand him and so we stood there, both Stephen and I, still unsure of what to do. The being's eyes moved apart and then back together and he made a gesture that seemed to indicate for us to wait a moment, and so we did, though I was less amazed by him now and more a little annoyed, as I found myself assuming that whatever he had done with eyes had been the equivalent

of us rolling ours. A moment passed with him fiddling with some kind of root or vegetable looking object, which he proceeded to eat, before he handed one part each to Stephen and myself, indicating he wanted us to eat whatever it was as well. What were we to do? Refuse this 8-foot-tall flying being? Stephen and I looked at the food, to one another and then back again and began to eat. It took only a moment but we soon felt the effects, a strange dizziness fell over us both and then we started to hear a voice. The being was speaking English now. Or seeming to anyway.

"Can you understand me?" Said the being.

"I, yes, yes I can. But how?" I asked in reply.

"It isn't important right now. What are you doing here? Who are you?"

Stephen replied this time, "We did not mean to intrude, we were merely seeking shelter from the cold. We were...transported, in a way, from somewhere else. We do not know where we are or how to get home. Would you help us?"

The being considered this for a moment. "Very well, you seem harmless enough. Step forward."

We did so, and all of a sudden we felt the gust of air once more, this time however it was going in an upward motion, and we were pulled up off our feet and into the air. Fear filled my new friend and I but as we went further and further up my fear warped itself into a kind of wander. What an amazing way to get about! As we reached the top the being began to speak once more;

"My name is Ahmos. I am a Medorian and you are on a planet called Medoa, though I doubt either name means anything to you." He said, a little condescendingly.

"Hold on just one moment, a planet called Medoa you say?" Asked Stephen. "You mean to tell me that this is *not* Earth?!" He had become quite frantic. "I thought...I mean I know the trees are much larger than anything in the known world but I just thought we had been transported to some exotic island or something, not another *planet*!" He looked at me in an almost pleading way; as if I could or would rebut Ahmos in this fact.

"I noticed the stars outside, Stephen. They are not our own." I said, "I noticed just after we arrived but I refrained from telling you lest you lose yourself further."

"But I..." Stephen started, before I interrupted.

"You were *quite* frantic, as is perfectly reasonable under the circumstances. And I imagine I would have been too had I not felt the need to stay centred for the both of us." I turned back to Ahmos.

"So, Ahmos, please tell us you have heard of a planet named Earth?"

Ahmos' face dropped, "I'm afraid not." He looked to Stephen, I suppose checking how he took this news. Stephen just stood there, caged by thoughts of never returning home I imagine, as that is what was beginning to fill my head. Ahmos turned back to me. "Before you both lose yourselves, I must add that me not knowing of Earth does not necessarily mean that no one on Medoa does. I will take you to a colleague of mine by the name of Myrin. He may know of it."

"Very well," I replied, "May I ask though, before we leave, you don't happen to have any food do you? Or even some water? We have been here some time now and have not had any of either."

"Oh, yes. Yes of course. I have plenty of water but you may have to wait to eat. This is my laboratory, I do not keep food here." Ahmos answered. He handed us some rather strange, glass tubes with water in them and we wasted no time in drinking our fill. We thanked him and then were led past

numerous tables with lab equipment on them – none of which I recognised of course – and came to a wall with glowing lights, the same kind we had seen on the ceiling the night before. As I had guessed, the wall functioned in much the same way the ceiling had, wherein the glowing lights grew brighter and changed from a pale white to a shade of blue before the wall seemed to split down the middle and the ‘veins’, or roots, began to tear elegantly away from one another and a hole in the wall was created, revealing a tunnel. I imagine this was the hollowed out inside of one of the huge branches Stephen and I had seen when we entered the forest. We then began to walk through the branch, lit by lines of pale white lights. I had gathered by this point that the inside of most, if not all the trees here were hollowed out and contained air... ‘lifts’, I suppose I shall call them, and the insides of the trees are then lit with pale white lights and the doors are marked by gatherings of these white lights. The branches then form bridges between these trees to create a network of ‘buildings’. A city, built *literally* within the trees.

III

At the other end of the tunnel yet another door opened, revealing a room with a similar set up to last one we had come from with lab equipment covering the tables, only this one had some cylinders here and there filled with some kind of liquid and...creatures. Had I been more familiar with Ahmos I might have asked about them, but I decided against it, as finding a way home was definitely the number one priority.

We didn't get far inside before we were met by 2 more of the beings, the Medorians, who were dressed in similar attire to that of Ahmos and were equally tall. Ahmos looked at us and spoke;

"These are my colleagues; Myrin" He gestured toward the person on the left, who's eyes I noticed were slightly smaller than those of the other 2. "And Eltaor." He said, gesturing toward the person on the right. Myrin and Eltaor made their way over to us with curious, investigative looks upon their faces. I imagine they, like Ahmos, were quite surprised to see us, aliens as we were. They began to speak but Ahmos stopped them and handed them some food, telling them to eat. It was the same thing we had ingested earlier, somehow allowing us to communicate though we spoke different languages. Myrin and Eltaor ate and then, after explaining our plight to them, we were able to finally ask for help.

"So," Ahmos began, "Do either of you know of Earth?"

Myrin replied, "Earth?" She glanced at Eltaor, then back to us. "Well I've heard of it, yes, but the last study anyone did of it found that the inhabitants were rather...." She looked to us before whispering to Ahmos, though she knew we could hear her. Politeness I suppose. "...primitive."

Stephen's face stiffened, clearly offended. Could he not see though, that compared to this species that has flying lifts we were indeed, primitive?

"Now Stephen," Ahmos began, "what Myrin says is not meant as an insult. I imagine that the last study was done some time ago, right Myrin?" He said, looking to her as if to say, 'just lie'. Eltaor stepped in however,

"Well no," He said, matter-of-factly, "It was only done 1, maybe 2 hundred years ago." He looked to us. "I'll concede that they have come some distance since then, but to *accidentally* get sucked into a tear? Why the chances of that happening are 1 in..."

He was cut off by Myrin, "Yes yes, there's a miniscule chance of it happening, but that doesn't mean that it didn't." She looked to Eltaor with a more stern face all of a sudden, "It *also* doesn't mean that they're lying. Okay?"

Eltaor let out a sigh, "This again. I've apologised alright?"

Myrin's eyes moved apart and then back together. Almost definitely the equivalent of eye rolling, as I had suspected when Ahmos did it not too long ago.

"Oh cut it out you two," Ahmos snapped, "these men need our help. Now can you get them home or not?"

"Of course we can, we're not called the greatest scientist to ever live for nothing." Eltaor said, moving one eye up and the other down. Winking perhaps? How strange.

"No one calls you that." Replied Ahmos exhaustedly. I imagine this was something Eltaor said quite often. "Just get them home."

After this, Stephen and I were told to go over to a small corner of the room to take a seat, where we sat waiting for what felt like hours. Myrin and Eltaor got to work with Ahmos watching closely, though not on some kind of machine as I had expected, but on drawings and writings of some kind that they laid out over a few of the tables. Eventually they came to us with an answer to our question on getting home,

“So, gentlemen, there is some good news and some bad news.” Ahmos began, “The good news is that you’ll be able to go home.”

Stephen’s face lit up, but I was more weary. “And the bad?” I asked.

“Well,” said Myrin, “the way we are able to get about dimensions is...”

“Now wait one moment.” Stephen interrupted, getting up from his seat. “Dimensions?” What on Earth do you mean by that?”

“Oh, right.” Myrin replied, realising we had never heard the term used in such a context. “Well your world, and your Moon and stars and everything else in your universe, are all within something we call a ‘dimension’. It is separate to our dimension and the near infinite other dimensions that exist, and the only way to travel between them is through a tear. Something with which you are familiar.”

Stephen sat back down. “I...” He fell silent. This was quite the revelation. A near infinite number of other ‘dimensions’ outside our own universe? How many other creatures? Worlds? Civilisations? All these thoughts and my mind came back to something that had been absent from my mind since our arrival in Medoa; amethysts. Could it be that Anna....?

My thoughts were interrupted. Myrin continued with her explanation,

“I know, it must be a lot to take in. And I am sorry for giving you so much information at once, but I feel that you should know what is going on.” She said empathetically. “Now, these tears are not something that can be controlled.”

“Yet.” Eltaor chimed in.

“We’ll see,” Myrin replied, turning back to us after glancing at Eltaor. “For now, the only way to use the tears is by predicting when and where one will appear.”

“Ah, like tracking moon cycles?” I asked, naively.

“Hah,” Eltaor smirked, “sure, if...” Ahmos cut him off,

“Yes, William. Its just rather a lot more complicated of course.”

“Of course.” I said back.

“So,” Continued Myrin, “The bad news is that the next one we might be able to utilise doesn’t happen for some time.”

“How long?” Asked Stephen, seeming to recover himself from the shock of learning of the existence of dimensions.

“14 moon cycles. Which, from memory, is about 2 and a half months in your time.”

“I see.” Replied Stephen, rather stoically. “I just need a moment.” And with that, he got up and walked back down the tunnel from which we had come, followed by Ahmos, who I’m sure just didn’t want to have anything broken. Both Eltaor and Myrin then turned to me as I stood.

"2 and a half months." I repeated. They nodded. "Well, I think the initial shock has nearly left me now, but I must say, I am curious."

"About what?" Asked Myrin.

"Everything." I said dramatically.

Myrin and Eltaor just looked at each other.

"I mean your species, your way of life, your science." They looked back at me. "Okay. Maybe not the science. But I would certainly like to learn about your culture, if that's alright of course?"

"Oh I'd love to show you everything," Myrin said, before Eltaor continued for her,

"Yes, love to, but we have a lot of work to do. We'll find someone to take you and Stephen around though, don't worry. You'll have a place to rest your heads, food to eat..." I was the interrupter this time,

"Food!" I yelled, much louder than intended. "Sorry, but we haven't eaten a proper meal in some time. We would really love some food."

"Oh of course, our apologies!" Replied Myrin, "You go and get Stephen and we'll see about getting you a tour guide of sorts and some food." She said, smiling. Although it was a kind of smile one might expect to see a mother give to her child when promising ice-cream, it did still comfort me. I suppose to these beings Stephen and I were rather like children; small and ignorant of the world and beyond.

I did as Myrin asked and when we got back they had indeed found us a guide.

"This is Frorla," Eltaor said, gesturing to another medorian.

"Why hello there, little ones." She said, smiling. Stephen was clearly not pleased with being called 'little' however and decided he would make that clear.

"Please, we are not little, you are big." He said sternly.

"It's all relative, my friend." She said, continuing to smile. "But I won't call you little ones again." She said laughing. "Promise."

Stephen was still not happy, but he decided that he would just let it go. "Thank you."

We were then escorted through another door and into another branch tunnel, leaving Myrin and Eltaor behind, who, when I looked back, wasted no time in getting back to work. Through the other side of the tunnel we came into yet another similar room but walked straight through this one and into yet another branch tunnel, this one, however, felt longer than the others. We then came out the other side into a smaller room where some strange fungus looking things poked out of the walls at about waste height. They seemed to cover nearly the entire walls, and have seats near them, similar to the ones Stephen and I had sat down on earlier.

"Please, take a seat." Frorla said, gesturing to the 'tables'. We did. "Food won't be long. We had a look at some of the records we have of Earth and found some entries on food. I hope it's alright." And with that, she left the room and went into an adjoining one.

"Well." Said Stephen turning to me. "What do you make of all this?"

"I'm as stunned as you are my friend, I'm sure. Though I am rather fascinated by these people and their culture." I replied, looking around.

"Yes well, I would quite like to go home. But I suppose you're right in your fascination; they certainly are...different." He smiled, for the first time since coming here I believe. "With so much time on our hands, I imagine we'll be able to learn a decent amount about the..." he paused, "the...?"

"Medorians," I laughed, "They are called medorians and we are guests on the planet Medoa."

"Well you've certainly been paying more attention than I. I have been rather too surprised and stunned at everything to let much of anything sink in I'm afraid."

"It's alright. As you say, we've plenty of time to learn."

"Indeed we do." He replied, just as Frorla came out with some food.

"Some cooked meat and vegetables, gentleman." She said, again smiling. "I admit, it will not be the same meat and vegetables that you are used to, but I assure you they are edible all the same." She laughed. "I'll leave you to it." She then left once again.

And so Stephen and I sat and ate this strange meal, which was indeed comprised of food the likes neither of us had ever seen; the meat was tough and still had strange, long ears attached to it (which Stephen and I both cut off and left to one side) and the vegetables came in all shapes, sizes and colours, and all were completely foreign, bearing no resemblance to anything on Earth. All, that is, except one vegetable that resembled broccoli. If broccoli was blue and had small, soft thorns all over it, that is.

We were then shown to a smaller room where there were large, circular discs with covers drawn over them. There were also some chairs and a kind of 'chest' where we could keep our belongings. This was to be our room, with the discs being the equivalent of beds, though they were too large for us it certainly gave us plenty of space to move around in.

Tomorrow, we would finally wake up from a decent night's sleep and, despite our plight, I was quite looking forward to exploring this new and amazing civilisation.

We awoke to the sound of music the next morning. Gorgeous whistling of all timbres and harmonies to give even the greatest composer food for thought. After having quite a serene moment to myself as I sat up in bed and listened, I was beckoned by Stephen. It appeared that I had slept in and Stephen was already up and eating breakfast, no doubt another strange take on a breakfast one would find back in London. Before sitting, Frorla approached me with a kind of syringe, explaining that it would not hurt, it would just allow for us to understand and be understood by everyone, however this did not include the reading of foreign writings. She explained that the food we had eaten earlier had been a temporary measure, as it was not known how long we would be staying for. After injecting me with some kind of serum we sat and ate for a time, discussing with Frorla what we would be doing for the day, considering we still had to wait for the tear to open. We decided that today would be a tour of some of the bigger parts of the city. As it turned out, all of the rooms we had so far seen had been science labs and temporary lodgings for researchers who stayed late whilst working, and so hardly reflected the rest of the city.

We began our tour by following Frorla through another tunnel, or bridge as we began to call them upon learning that not all were so enclosed. Exiting this tunnel we were led through one more before finally coming into a huge room, bigger than all the others by far. This room's ceiling stood perhaps 4 stories tall and had a version of chandeliers hanging from it, illuminating the room in a beautiful white with hints of cyan. There were multiple air lifts here, with bridges branching out in various places around the room and many, many medorians walking around. We were told this was one of the many hubs of the city, where people travelled to and from work and home and were able to make their way to markets and the like as well. I was quite surprised by how similar their society seemed to run to ours, even if it did take place on the inside of giant trees. This similarity brought me onto the point of politics and of government, which I then asked Frorla about,

"Hang on, hang on." Interrupted Stephen, "I'm not all that interested in sitting around talking about politics." He turned to Frorla, "Do you think I could have a look around?"

"Well, not without an escort, but yes, I don't see why not." She smiled, "I'll be right back William, don't move." And with that, she and Stephen left to find him an escort, or 'tour guide' I suppose you could say. So engrossed was I in the phenomenal room in which I stood that when Frorla came back some time later apologising for taking so long, I knew not of what she was talking.

"So William," She began, "It seems you've got me all to yourself. What is it you would like to know?"

"Well, I would also like to explore, so perhaps we could walk and talk?"

"Oh of course, of course. I've a few places in mind that I'm sure you'll love." She smiled, before leading me towards the first bridge I had seen that was not entirely enclosed, and over the barrier that lay on either side of the bridge I was able, for the first time, to see the majesty and immense scale of the city. Awesome, white trees with spectacular pinkish-blue leaves as far as the eye could see, with branches all interweaving to form a kind of network that connected everything with everything else. Some of the branches, like the one we stood in, had no top half and barriers on either side to keep people from falling, and on these one could see people moving around, going from one side to the other. From this distance however, you could barely make out some of the figures of the people further back, and so from all the way up here it looked as though the whole thing, the whole network, were alive. It was as though the trees were the giant limbs of the planet itself, and the medorians the bloodstream, pumping through the organism, giving the planet life.

We stood for a moment as Frorla began to explain some parts of their culture to me, beginning with their politics. "I did some research last night on your planet, and from what I can tell the majority of your world uses a governing system called democracy, yes?"

"In a way, yes. We are not quite a democracy yet. Not everyone can vote, for one, but essentially yes."

"I see. Well, here we have a similar sort of governing body, except for us it is comprised of multiple governments. Our society is divided into sections, and each section votes on issues concerning that section. We do not have a representative democracy you see, the government here consists of people who simply carry out the will of the people, it is the people who decide on all issues. It is therefore very much important that everyone be well versed in politics, and so it is a subject in our education system from very early ages, albeit simplified so as to make it understandable to the younglings." She chuckled a little before continuing, "They are so funny sometimes. Anyway, the sections include things like agriculture and the many branches of science, such as biology and cosmology. Ahmos is part of the biology section and Myrin and Eltaor are part of the cosmology sections."

"And you?"

"Well I'm a Protector, so I'm part of the security section. We vote on things like immigration policies. You may have noticed that not too many people are paying much attention to you, and that's because we passed laws many years ago allowing all immigration, with security checks and such of course. You are an exception due to your circumstances and, not to be rude, but lack of high level intellect or physicality."

"Oh."

"Sorry. I don't mean to be rude but I feel you should know the truth. And as for those that are staring a little, that is because you are not only in a part of the city that visitors rarely come to, but you are also of a species that has never been here before, so naturally, people are a little intrigued."

"I see. I've more questions on your governing though, if I may?"

"Of course."

"Well," I began, "If each section is set up to vote on things that correlate with that section's specialty, what of things that apply to everyone? Medicine availability and the like?"

"Oh, well we don't often have issues with that, but when we do we all vote to our governments, and then the governments convene to find the most voted solution. A lot of discussion is had and we go back and forth between voting and convening a lot, but eventually we get an answer. I must say though, we haven't had any such thing in a long time, because there aren't really any issues to iron out. We have 5 basic rights that we give to all living beings, medorian or otherwise. They are the right to food, the right to clean water, the right to shelter, the right to one's health and the right to freedom. If someone needs food, water, shelter or medical aid, it is provided for them. And all beings have freedom of speech and the freedom to travel almost anywhere. I say almost, because of course we can't have people just walking in and out of other people's homes or the like, now can we?" She chuckled, but I was bewildered. The things she was saying all made sense, and were so simple, and yet our society back home was nowhere near achieving such a utopian system.

"But...but. Okay. That...I mean that all sounds amazing, but how do you get the money to provide all these things? How do you not have people cheating the system to get more than they deserve?"

“People don’t feel the need to cheat the system William, why would they? They have everything they need.”

“What of greed?” I asked.

“Our education systems teach about these things obviously. We teach children all the way through school how our society works and why it works. Everything they need will always be provided to them and they will never need to cheat or steal or anything of the sort. If they feel that they deserve more or want more or have any problems with the way they are living, they are not only allowed, but encouraged to reach out and tell their governments. They are taught to invoke change if they see something worth changing.”

“Alright, and what of the money?”

“If I’m honest I’m not quite sure what you mean. The governments just provide people with what they need. I really don’t know how to answer that.” She asked, clearly confused.

“But where do the governments get the money?”

“What? What do you mean? Where do you think the money comes from?”

“Are you telling me that the governments here all have an infinite amount of money?” I asked, desperately trying to understand.

“I suppose you could say that. We don’t really think of it that way though. The governments are a separate entity to the rest of society, they are not part of the economy. They distribute resources as is necessary so people always have what they need. Why wouldn’t they have ‘infinite money’, as you say? Money isn’t really real. It’s just numbers that have a value assigned to them. As long as we don’t decide to change the value assigned, the value of money never needs to change, no matter how much is in circulation.”

“I...” I did not know what to say. This seemed so simple and seemed also to solve so many problems. Why is it that our governments had not thought of it? Or perhaps they had and wanted to keep a portion of the population poorer and less educated, making them easier to control and thus making it easier for them to remain in power and do as they please. “My God...we humans really aren’t a very intellectual race, are we?”

“Don’t be too hard on yourself, you are an infant species and so have plenty of time to learn. We’ve been at this a long time. We were almost definitely in a similar situation at some point in our history.” She smiled that comforting smile.

I laughed, “I suppose you’re right. It just seems so very simple.”

“Indeed it does.” She stood up, as we had been leaning on the barrier of the bridge looking over the city while we talked. “Shall we press on?”

“Yes, lets.”

Forla then led on, across the bridge and to smaller hub type area where there were 2 air lifts; 1 going up and 1 going down. We took the one going up, and though I had travelled this way before it still took me by surprise when my feet lifted off the ground and I was swept into a current that pulled me upwards. I wondered if I would ever get used to such a thing. When we arrived at the top only seconds later our feet gently touched the ground once more, this time however, the room we entered was not closed and was instead rather like the bridges; with small barriers around the

outside but open everywhere else. We were at the top of one of the trees, and from here the interweaving city below was almost completely invisible, shrouded by the dense leaves of the trees. The forest seemed to go on nearly forever in all directions but one. This one side is where Stephen and I must have come from. Just past the trees was a small barren piece of land that led into a swamp so large it covered the land right up to the horizon.

"That's where we came from." I said, gesturing to the swamp.

"Ah, I thought as much. Ahmos has his laboratory quite close to that end of the city. He goes to the swamp now and then to study." Replied Frorla.

"I see. I imagine that is where the tear will eventually appear again?"

"Oh, I don't know I'm afraid. You would need to ask Eltaor or Myrin."

"That's alright," I began, "I've plenty of time to ask after all."

We then stood in silence for some time before making our way back down the air lifts and heading to other places across the city. Frorla showed me gardens, with plants and leaves whose edges glowed and thorns that moved around along the stems, market places, with stalls selling all kinds of strange clothing, jewellery and other things that surpassed my knowledge so much that I could not even guess as to their use, and finally the centre of the city. The largest tree of them all, bustling with life of all kinds, not just medorians but so many other species that one could never hope to count them all. They all went about their business as if they did this daily, while I stood dumbstruck. I could not believe my eyes; so many species, working together and all living peacefully under a sound governing structure amongst giant trees and air lifts and.... how small our world had become in my eyes. London, with its tiny streets and horse drawn carriages, seemed a million years behind in comparison to this wonder of a planet. I wondered how Stephen was getting on, and if he too, had had this very thought.

Gradually I brought myself back to reality, as I had been standing, mouth agape, for some time now. Frorla and I were standing at the main bridge to the centre, or 'Medoa's Heart' as they called it. We were still quite high above the ground, though I could still barely make out the top of the tree. In front of us lay the main entryway; a huge arch carved out of the tree with gorgeous engraving carved throughout it's border. Frorla told me that the top few symbols spelled out 'Medoa's Heart', and that the others were passages of text that explained how all species are welcome, among other things of a similar nature. We then ventured inside, where the entire cities and all its parts seemed to culminate to form a city in and of itself. There were gardens in between market places and bridges and air lifts littered throughout with people bickering over prices or sipping strange drinks at tables outside of food stalls, and there, at the centre of it all, stood a huge stone that was wrapped in thick, intertwining roots.

"That is 'the Heart of Hearts', and symbolises our great city, and the peaceful union of the many species you see before you. It is the largest amethyst in our universe. To our collective knowledge, anyway." Frorla explained, before smiling, "It always brings me peace to look upon it."

"An amethyst."

"Hm?"

"Oh, nothing. It just reminds me of someone." I said.

"I see. You'll be home before you know it, don't worry."

We stayed in Medoa's Heart for the rest of the day, looking through shops and exploring some of the gardens, before heading back to where Stephen and I were staying at dusk. Upon arrival, we were met by Stephen, who was sitting at the table reading something.

"Oh hello," He said, turning around. "You made it back, my friend. How was your day? I imagine you found many things of interest, as I did?"

"Oh my, yes." I replied. Frorla and I joined him at the table and we then traded stories for some time. Stephen told me about his trip to some of the bigger gardens, where he was able to pet some of the local wildlife, and about his encounter with a larger species that he bumped into by accident, and how he had to be hurried away as this species was known for its temper. We sat and laughed for a while, before Frorla said she had some duties to take care of but would be back a little later with some food. Upon her leaving, Stephen told me about what he had been reading. It was a book, freshly printed in English just for us, which contained the basic rules for the city and some important places one should know about; a sort of guide book for the city. He explained to me how much of it was just common sense, and that the laws did not differ too far one way or another from our own, back home. We sat and read together, learning some of the names of places we had been during the day, and trying to remember some of the places that might be useful or interesting to visit while we waited for the next tear to open. In the end, we came up with a list of things to do and places to go.

"You know what I've just realised?" Began Stephen. "For all our looking shops and things today, we've no actual money to pay for anything."

"Indeed, you're quite right. Not only that, but we are also getting all of this food and general hospitality free of charge." I said, "Perhaps we should ask if there is something we can do to help, to earn our stay here a little bit?"

"Yes, yes of course. They must have something around for us to help with."

"Right, its settled then. When Frorla comes back we shall ask her."

"Indeed." Said Stephen, matter-of-factly.

All of a sudden a loud noise pierced our ears, a loud cry, which was followed by a roar of some kind that shook us both to the core. We sprung to our feet, looking around, before a siren began to sound and we began to hear yelling a distance away. Myrin then burst into the room, eyes wide and full of fear. She held something in her hands, not unlike a rifle. It was a dark brown and black colour and looked as though it was made out of wood from the very trees in which we stood mixed with some kind of metal, it had 2 sections that were attached in the middle, which seemed to be made out of just metal. The front had 3 spikes going backward on the bottom and roots that reached forward in 4 prongs that surrounded the barrel, the middle had a glowing white circle and a small opening where you could see a small amethyst inside, perhaps powering it? And at the back there was a handle, carved out of the wood.

"We..." She began but paused, clearly out of breath, "We need to go."

"What? What's going..."

"NOW."

So we did, following her out of our room and into Eltaor and Myrin's lab and then over a bridge and into another room, filled with things similar to that which Myrin held. An armoury.

"Please tell me that one or both of you is somewhat combat trained?" She said, frantically looking through the weapons.

"I am. A little." Stephen said.

"Yes, me too. Though not with any weapon of this sort." My father had made me go to military camp for a few years when I was younger, 'to teach you discipline' he would say.

"Good enough." Myrin replied, handing us both a knife and a rifle, "The knife you know how to use of course, and the rifle is simple enough. Just squeeze here with your thumb," She gestured to the small, glowing white circle. "Just please be careful." She looked us both in the eyes for a moment, "Okay. Follow me." And with that, she made her way quickly to an open door, crossed the bridge, and then went down the air lift, with us right behind her. When we reached the bottom we arrived at a junction that led into a large hub area where the yelling became louder and more clear. There were people screaming for loved ones and others barking orders. We saw some of the smaller species running and hiding but most were either running toward us, and I assume the armoury, or toward 2 bridges on the far-left side of the hub, the latter people all being armed already. As we joined the groups rallying toward the bridges Myrin finally began an explanation,

"This never happens. This *never* happens. I mean...I mean we've been told about it before but only as a hypothetical, none of us ever really thought that..." She took a deep breath and shook her head to compose herself, "Okay look, we're under attack, in a way. Only shoot at what everyone else is shooting at, got it? There are a lot of different peoples here and you're not familiar with them, and whilst I imagine it won't be difficult to tell what you should be shooting at, don't guess." We made it to the edge of one of the bridges where temporary barricades were set up and someone began beckoning for us. Eltaor.

"Hey, over here!" He yelled, waving his arm at us. The 3 of us ran over to him and he began to explain to us in more detail what was going on. "Okay. Long story short, that tear you guys were waiting for? Its here. And, obviously, it didn't lead to Earth." He looked toward Myrin, "Our calculations were *way* off on this one."

"But how? We checked and..." Myrin was cut off by Eltaor,

"Doesn't matter now. The tear is open and will stay open for who knows how long, so we need to get this thing contained. Some of the others have already set up perimeters in other parts of the city and the Heart is well protected, as per protocol. I really can't believe this is happening." He digressed, before continuing. "Obviously the tear didn't open on a friendly dimension so we've got to hold these lines, no matter what."

"I know the plan, are you alright to explain it to them if I go and help?" Myrin asked, gesturing to Stephen and me.

"Yes, of course. Go!" He then turned to us. "Okay, so the tear didn't even appear where we thought it would, it appeared *within* the city, which has never happened before. We've already lost 2 hubs and part of one of the agriculture sections but we've now got a perimeter around it that we will hopefully be able to hold. Both of these bridges lead to where the tear is which is why we're here so all we need you two to do is stay put at the barriers and shoot at what everyone.."

"At what everyone else is shooting at. We've got it, now go and do whatever it is you need to do." Stephen interrupted. "We'll be fine."

“Okay, good. Myrin, myself and a few other cosmologists and the like are going to see about shutting this damn tear as soon as possible so hopefully you won’t be here long.” And with that, he got up and ran in the same direction Myrin had gone moments earlier.

The screaming had now died down into a murmur amongst the anxious lines of people setup, sitting and waiting to defend their city. The people who had been hiding had been told where to go and the safest places to hide, as I had seen in the background whilst listening to Eltaor, and those who had gone to the armoury were now coming back fully armed and taking their places amongst us. All of a sudden the murmuring died down as we heard a distant scream from across the bridge, and then.... silence. We all sat, anxiously awaiting whatever might turn the corner, guns at the ready and hearts beating as never before.