

## - Unfit Soul -

*by Kirsi Salonen 2012*

So..here we go again, he thought. The wounds would be ripped open and blood would spill on the pavement like waterfall. Then he'd taste it, the iron, the sap, the disgusting stench that only torn out bowls can smell like. He couldn't control it once it started, the horns would play, the masses of people would run screaming out from the gate, towards the desert, the endless, hopeless desert, here at the End of Ends. He was the Keeper, the Slayer, one of the Judges to hunt them down and bring back, beaten, bruised or broken, but those who obeyed were given the chance to live, no - to struggle - one more day.

Inside the Gates was the Metropolis, the last remaining place of Order in the world. Order meant work, pain and relief, around the clock. People's only hope of change was given on each Red Moon that if they managed to escape, they would be free of all Rule. Many thought that if they would stay healthy and sharp, they'd have the will and stamina to cross the desert being faster than the Keepers. So they thought..everyone who tried once, were too afraid to try it again. But hope lived on in their children, it shone in them like inner stars. All their children knew always much more than grown-ups.

But they couldn't run fast enough with their little feet..

Hordes of people were brought back like cattle. When they resisted, they were cut down, and they threw themselves against Keeper's blades, horns and axes, just to avoid the upcoming torturous punishment.

One boy walked slowly at the back of the crowd. He watched the Keepers, those human-body beasts with huge animal skulls and empty hollow eyes who knew nothing more than this everlasting reality, what they had to do, all for the balance, all for the Order. Forever more. The boy watched closely as he passed them, none of the Keepers looked down, they just stared forward, like they knew everything what happened around them without moving their heads.

Then he took a courageous step to the side and grabbed one of the Keeper's hand and shouted: "It's a dream! Our life's a dream that never ends. YOU are immortal, so why do you continue this? Free yourself, think about what you could do, now, right now! I'd want to wake up but I'm only a human, what are *you*?"

The Keeper's hand twitched as he felt the strong pulse of the boy's hand, coming out of his open wounds on his palm. One of the other Keepers had ripped them open with barbwire and pulled him on the ground during the hunt. The Keeper grunted and was about to throw the boy back into the group, but his grip tightened.

The boy continued: "I'm not resentful. You just do your job. We all have been ripped out of souls here. I hope you find yours someday. Goodbye.. bloodbrother. My name was Avian."

Then the boy let his hand go and disappeared into the crowd...

--

Something woke him up suddenly, a cracking sound from the window. Tristan rubbed his eyes and breathed heavily, his body covered in sweat. The crackling sound continued. He rose up and went to open the curtains, hands trembling. The dream still flickered vividly in his mind as he pulled away the curtain.

"Holy shit! Get the fuck away from my window!" he screamed, and a huge white barn owl spread its wings and flew away screeching.

"Whatta hell.. where was I? it was so..out of this world. Really really out of this fucking world."

As he made his way downstairs and put the coffee machine on he had a desperate thought to stay home from school, call somebody, anybody who could listen him about that dream. But as he sipped his coffee and rewinded it over and over the crazier it all seemed. He packed his bag and headed out the door. Wind was blowing hard and autumnal leaves swirled across the avenues. It would rain any minute now, he realized, and hurried his pace. He kept his eyes on the ground and was uncertain how he could

get his act together in school. It was this horrible sensation that he had just been witnessing a small genocide. It had been so real, that he could still smell the odours of that place; the iron..the blood, ill breaths of the tormented people.. Dreams shouldn't have smells, that's what he had heard.

He should have arrived to school by now, did he took a wrong turn? no, impossible. The road seemed a lot longer than before. He looked behind and saw the same view as it was in front of him! His heart started beating faster, panic rose up from his stomach. People walked in the distance on the other side of the road, as he tried to cross the street it got suddenly wider and cars didn't do any attempts to slow down and let him pass. They roared like wild animal herds going too fast like on a freeway, in the middle of the city! Tristan backed down to the sidewalk, nervous and terrified. The noise kept growing louder and louder until slowly turned to a motorized symphony, cars kept on coming like continuous waves, humming, honking and engines growling like giant beasts playing drums, horns and trumpets of hell.

"Horns.. horns just like in that place.. stop..please make it stop!!"

He couldn't run away, the sounds froze his muscles still, the surreality of the event grabbed his guts and twisted them with such intensity that he stopped breathing for a minute. Slowly his knees bent and he dropped on the ground and he remembered how to breathe again. Then he noticed that something blocked out the sun over him. Air became cold in an instant. He just knew it somehow..he knew what it was without looking. Through the noise he heard something more..the sound of darkness, of void, the End. he just knew, somehow he had always heard it.

The Void stood behind him, the thing that shouldn't exist, but against all reason, it had found him.

"Have you seen my son, Tristan?" the Void spoke. "No, don't look at me, or you will lose your sight. Just tell me."

It had been a mere whisper of a sound, but it was the clearest, deepest voice he'd ever heard.

"Uhm..well. Not sure if I know what you mean, s-sir." he replied frantically and tried to warm himself up by rubbing his arms, shaking like a leaf.

"You know exactly what I mean. I need your help now, Tristan. You see.. only you know how he looks like and you must point him out to me."

"Wait..what?"

"My kingdom is Darkness, the Night and Shadow, faces are obsolete. There is only order,

peace and closure, the sound of movement, the warmth and cold, only senses and experience defines existence there. My son left me, all of us in the dark.. and told me no reason why he did so."

"How..how old is your son? Does he have a name?" Tristan asked a few moments later.

"I.. don't know. He's simply one of my many children. Only humans give each other names to separate each other."

A cold shiver ran across the spine of Tristan, who kept on thinking how this all must be another crazy, over-realistic dream, nothing more! The noise of the cars made his head ache. He knew the answer to Void's question, but was afraid to say it.

"Speak up, our time's almost run out! I have to find him before.." Void said anxiously.

"What's going to happen if you don't find him?"

"Mad gravitation boy. My other children might do the same, and the unborn wouldn't have any protection."

"You call that horrible hunting, torturing and killing of people 'protection'? I know what you are, devil! That's what you are, you sick FUCK!"

"You don't know what you're talking about Tristan. It's not your place to judge things you have no understanding of. You've simply had a dream. A very, very live dream."

"Ok, ok.. maybe I have, but I still know what is plain wrong when I see it."

"If I promise to give my people more happiness then you'll tell me about my son's whereabouts?"

"Sounds fair, I guess.." depending how you measure the sense of the word, he thought. If killing less people is an increase of happiness then that must be.. I give up. It's the God of Darkness, or Death himself for christ sakes! Don't push it, Tristan.

"Your son has gone off to find his soul back. A kid named Avian talked to him and said some powerful stuff about dreams, meaning, non resentment and such. I remember the words clearly." And Tristan repeated them to Void.

"Avian... A human child, how particular. Unfortunately in my world he suffers the consequences of shaking the Order. It would have been a privilege to be slain by my Keepers. That Avian would have been born in your world then. Born like a beautiful flower, perhaps, a bird maybe living at the top of a mountain.. Or as a gifted soul who nourishes the minds of your world."

This was too much for Tristan. Way too much. People without souls..unborn people in another reality connected to our world. Then he remembered the barn owl who woke him up. Even the name Avian means 'like a bird'. Where's all this shit coming from?! I must be crazy, I've gone bonkers. This is all in my head.

"I leave you thinking about this. Now I must go. Farewell, Tristan, may you have good dreams from now on. You have my gratitude."

Tristan realized he had been sleeping in class. The teacher was talking about the laws of gravity.

--

At the End of Ends there is indeed a desert. If a human would cross it it would take hundreds of years to reach to the other side. And very close to the other side there was the Keeper. After Tristan had had his dream in Void's domain years passed on like ripples over water. The Keeper had walked on without rest, the burning black sun behind his back, feet bleeding against the sharp rocky surface. His armour had been desintegrated long ago, he had dropped his weapons behind, he was naked and battered, but he didn't care. He could still go on another hundred years if he had to.

He had completely shut his mind from his Father as he had left. No more commands, no more the stench of blood, he wanted to see.. His soul would tell him his purpose, his real self. The other side is the answer, that is why it's so hard to reach.

He arrived to a wide gorge, that had a drop of several of miles down. He touched his skull head, his broken jaw and long curved horn that was severed in his latest fall. It will grow back again.. if i jump now, I won't perish. I'm immortal, I can take on anything.

So without further hesitation he jumped into the fog below...and got almost instantly hit by a pointed rock that crushed his chest. He bounced from the rock and fell until he was pinned between two sharper rocks that sliced his leg as he struggled to free himself. Blood squirted from his thigh as he ripped it apart masochistically, then he fell again. Down, down, down..

Ground tremored when he finally hit a cliff filled with razor sharp rock spikes. They pierced his torso, back and legs and nailed him still. His dark eyes inside the hollowness of the skull looked at the sky above and then slowly tilted backwards, gazing into the distance.

He really couldn't move anymore. It was like trying to move a mountain.

Then he saw the clouds breaking above. Then a serpent appeared from the clouds, then

another, and third, those white ghostly creatures made of the lost spirits in the void.

A storm was coming. Father.

Then Erebos, the Void, the End was hovering above him, blocking the sun.

"There you are.. took a long time to find you. There's a reason why you can't speak, there's a reason why you have not been given a face. So humans would fear you, would make everything possible to stay away from you. My poor boy.. why on earth you let that child touch you? Why couldn't you just come to me.. now I know what's been vexing you all this time."

The Keeper tried to move, but more blood sprayed out of his wounds and cracked his bones.

Father! Don't send me back! Destroy me if you like but don't take away my will! These thoughts are all I have! Please don't send me back! He screamed in his mind and tried everything in his powers to tell Erebos that.

"Oh..I know what goes in your mind right now. You've been discovering yourself for these last few hundred years. I've even been to the human-world to look for you, a boy called Tristan had been dreaming about you. You don't know what your actions have caused in fabric of reality."

The Keeper stopped squirming and breathed heavily, looking bewildered at his Father.

"Many humans spend their life cycles in a much deeper sense of emptiness than you ever felt, my son. I will make you feel better again.."

Then Erebos put his hands on both sides of his skull and kissed softly the bare bony tips of his nose. He raised his hands up..and slowly started to pull. The air began to hiss and glow. The light began to form a face..a body and a voice. As soon as it became flesh it started to scream like a baby, but as he pulled it out further, it grew older and mature, until it was the shape of an old man. Erebos put his hand over its mouth to smother it.

"Don't worry about it, my son. Father knows what's best for you. This soul was unfit for you from the start.. look how it's afraid. It's bare and weak and pathetic, so not like you at all."

The Keeper's soul found his voice under Erebos's hand and coughed: "You may take me out, but You made a mistake, Great Father of Nothing.." Then its neck cracked like a twig and the soul vanished into thin air.

"Much better," said Erebos with satisfaction. "Now..where were we? Let's put you back

together and head home where you belong with your brothers."

He touched the Keeper's head. And it desintegrated to ashes. A sudden low voice was heard somewhere in the distance. The Keeper was standing on the other side of the gorge. Erebos frowned and sneered like an irritated wolf to a sudden fearless enemy. Erebos had no enemies.

"Our life's a dream that never ends," the Keeper spoke for the first time. If skulls could show a smile it would certainly have been the happiest smile a skull could ever have.

"Tristan! My name is Tristan and I have defeated the Void."

The End.