

# **The Final Remedy**

**A fresh translation of ancient hamscripts**

**by**

**Limood the hamster**

## Introduction

'Be part of the solution, not part of the problem' - Anonymous

I first arrived in Lee and Kath's household during the Spring when the first leaves of summer were beginning to push their way out from the branches of dormant trees. I was chosen from the pet shop specifically because of my writing ability and had to pass numerous written tests before either of my two new masters were convinced that I'd be able to handle the rigours of a life that would be word processor orientated.

My first task was to take the place of Lee's personal secretary in writing responses to emails that were taking an increasingly large amount time of my master's day as he worked relentlessly to put together teaching notes for a local group of people that he met with every Sunday evening.

I could sympathise with the workload - I've never before seen someone work so hard and such long hours as Lee (though I'm sure that there must be some) and for virtually no pay. At least I'd negotiated a fairly hefty food allowance, a fresh supply of bedding on a fortnightly basis and regular surprise treats on days which had a 'y' in them.

I became affectionately known as 'The Secretary Rodent' known in Latin as *Secretarius Limoodius* from which I took my name 'Limood' - not a new species of hamster, but a mimic of that African bird which goes by the same name.

I'd been struggling with the meaning of life for many years - and I was still trying to come to terms with the intricacies of the world when I moved from the pet shop to the palatial residence of the Smithhouse. It was here, though, that I unearthed manuscripts left behind by one of my rodent predecessors who'd stashed them away to work on at a later date, his untimely death preventing him from completing his intended work.

I've begun this series of stories with the problem - for this is where my thinking had led me - going on to observe the testimony from many ancient hamsters about a human that many of them encountered during a few short years a couple of millennia ago, before providing the reader with the chance to understand the solution to the ultimate problem and how *everything* seems to have been summated in this one individual.

These are things into which rodents long to look - and which we eagerly contemplate during the quiet hours of night - but which we don't always fully understand. However, as a colleague-in-fur once told me

'If there's a problem, there must also be a solution'

and, as another testified

'There's no problem that occurs without a solution being close at hand'

I can testify to the fact that the ultimate answer to the ultimate question has now been made known.

I trust that the rodent reader will perceive that such a solution should be celebrated not just by a handful of humans who have come to realise it, but by all rodents everywhere who have been perplexed for years at the things which they've witnessed around them.

May each of us not take anything for granted - but test all things, perceive all things and hold fast everything that's true.



Limood the hamster

## The Ultimate Problem

My name is Limood.

I'm from Russian origin though I can't say that I remember too much either about my parents or my early, formative days inside the nest. Some can, I admit, but I seem to have let life slip by at its own pace and seldom strayed from the nest until I was confident of my faculties.

I don't regret it - indeed, I positively delight in it. Had it not been for those hours of silent contemplation when my siblings were running madly about their new surroundings, I probably would never have been sent off to the great rodent academies in our nation and wouldn't have had the ability to think clearly and carefully on issues with no stray thoughts and activities which were competing for my time.

I entered the Academy of Moscow when I was five weeks old and studied under the greatest and latest philosophers - and thinkers that the world has yet to see. I could reel off names that vied for my cerebral attention for there weren't many who were teaching at the Academy or who were visiting that I didn't make great efforts to both see and listen to.

Most of the philosophical schools of learning were here and were given free reign to announce to everyone their particular brand of perception of the world around them - disciples of Freud and Jung both had their adherents though I tended to side with the more fur-based thinkers who related hamster life to a world view that seemed to bring a harmony to one's overall perception of the universe which seemed to be clearly perceivable at one's right paw and left.

Therefore, let the disciples of Freud speak about Libido - but where did that get the average hamster who had to find enough food to survive on frost covered highlands or the rodent of the plains who eked out an existence in a constant awareness of the threat of both flood and drought? For me, it was important to harmonise the simple life that every hamster knew by experience to the much larger picture of the universe and the fundamental questions about life such as

'Why does this sunflower seed smell funny?'

and

'Why does a soft, downy nest suddenly become lumpy when you lie in it?'

both questions which every hamster has thought about - even if only fleetingly. Perhaps the greatest puzzle for me was this: if man had truly evolved from a perfect world, why was he now so imperfect? And, if he really did stand as the conclusion of a series of random impulses which had generated complexity and organisation from simplicity and chaos, why didn't he reflect it by displaying an intelligence that refused to destroy the very resources that were both his home and from which he'd come?

After all, while a human might be horrified to burn their dead relative to heat their house, why did they do the very same thing when they used the resources which had been formed from those who they believed were their own ancestors? And why say the survival of the fittest was the prime motivator in the evolutionary process when they then made legislation to forbid one man's subjugation of another?

There were so many contradictions in my own mind in those years that I began to struggle with the burden of complexity which seemed, to me, to be irreconcilable. Even though others embraced all the 'truth' that they were being presented with, I found that 'facts' contradicted - and this only made me unhappy, discontented and downright depressed.

While fellow hamsters went out after college for a day on the floor coverings, I would lie quietly in my bed, contemplating the mysterious wonders of a universe which seemed to rebel at every opportunity against the hand of man and the paw of us rodents.

I can't be certain just how long it was before I came to a dead end in my contemplations for I always tried to 'begin afresh' after weeks of contradiction - but maybe a year went by before I finally hit on the idea of rejecting *everything* that I'd been told and to start as if I was a new-born hamlet with no preconceived ideas or beliefs that I was forcing to be the conclusion to which I was trying to arrive.

After all, if one knows the end of the journey, one is more than likely to interpret all the 'facts' as being relevant, applicable and justifying that ultimate premise. It's far better to allow the facts to guide you and to change your course mid-stream, than to force a conclusion upon what's clearly observable and

to arrive at a wrong end - or, perhaps better, to begin at a wrong end and to justify it by recourse to selective interpretation.

So, that's how I *re*began.

I abandoned my belief in whatever I held on to and allowed myself a fresh start - a bit like wiping a computer hard drive of all but its operating system so that nothing might be allowed to interfere with the newness of what needed to be installed. There are so many conflicts possible that a clean slate is what every being needs, to see things clearly for the first time.

I started by considering the concepts of both 'good' and 'evil' for this seemed to lie at the heart of every man and woman's life - hamsters are wholly different, of course, but if I was to understand this world, I needed to begin with what was being done to it. The more I'd listened to human media, the more I realised that life was intrinsically either 'good' or 'bad' and that a human normally lived by his own concept of goodness - which they called 'morality' - until some time came when what they *wanted* to do contradicted that standard.

At that point, it seemed to me that a human was faced with a dilemma - either he was sufficiently selfless to reject his own desires or extravagantly selfish to reconstitute his own moral code to allow for the conduct which he desired to carry through. That a human was the more likely to choose the latter made me realise that here I had something intrinsically truthful about them - namely, that a human tends to do what's wrong instead of what's right in his own eyes.

I was, perhaps, going a bit too fast in my thoughts for I hadn't, at that stage, even tried to define the concepts of both 'good' and 'evil' and to attempt a factual analysis of whether they were absolutes or merely abstract concepts that could be changed at will. But my first observation - which I've already noted above - actually led me on to a definition.

For I realised that, if man had a moral code, he must have been born with it - and, if it was injected into him at conception, it had to be something which had either evolved by pure chance or been put there by someone.

I considered my first option *very* carefully - simply because I was now asking myself about one of the greatest tenets of modern man's belief and challenging the very premises in which many had securely trusted. I challenged myself to think clearly and precisely and found fear and trepidation at every turn for, if I opted for random chance, I had to opt for an amoral world as being the only possible conclusion.

And that meant that no human had the right to tell any other human what was both 'right' and 'wrong'. Indeed, in a universe which had come about by chance, there could only be 'opportunities' which presented themselves to everything on the earth - and whether a being chose to kill, maim, build or destroy couldn't be condemned by recourse to any moral code.

Fact was, there couldn't be one - for what I saw around myself was about the survival of the fittest.

Who had any right to say that one being's behaviour was 'evil' if there was no absolute? If one person's 'evil' was another man's 'good', morals could only be defined by selfish criteria, by subjective phenomena which caused one to reproduce himself into another generation and to undermine the ability of another to do so. Indeed, the more a being put down another, the more he should be praised - not condemned as 'guilty'.

So I had to reject random chance and opt for an ordering of what I saw by some hand or other that, at that time, I had failed to define.

After all, when a human buys a new computer, no one in their right mind would claim that their operating system occurred by random impulses - that, somehow, the ability to operate within specific parameters has occurred by pure chance. Every human will tell you that they believe that *someone* put the information there - it's only as an operator uses the system that the perfection of that first state seems to degenerate into system crashes, hard drive failures and dropped Internet connections.

And then, like a bolt from the past, a tune came back to me and I racked my brains to remember. Something some human or other had written a very long time ago began to replay in my head and I saw - as if it had been for the very first time - what I'd failed to perceive all those weeks ago. That random chance undermined society rather than supported it.

### **Praise to the Random Chance**

(Sung to the tune of 'Praise to the Lord, the Almighty' - Tune Stralsund Gesangbuch)

Praise to the Ran-dom Chance  
That brought us from sim-ple com-pounds.  
For out of no-thing and  
for no-one is ev-ry-thing a-round.  
Phil-os-o-phy  
Facts ev-er so scan-ti-ly  
Praise to the great Evolution.

Praise to E-ter-nal Luck  
From Big Bang we have ar-rived here.  
Born from Prim-ev-al soup  
From dirt we've come, we'll re-turn there.  
The Spe-cies tree  
Hu-man-ist The-ol-o-gy  
(we're) Accidents of Evolution.

Praise to the Cos-mic Fate  
Des-ti-ny is our own ma-king.  
No mo-rals here (no fear)  
Your wel-fare I am for-sa-king  
Fit-test sur-vive  
Weak-est are sim-ply to die  
My in-t'rests I'll be pro-mo-ting.

Now, although I'd arrived at the conclusion that there was a 'programmer' who ordered that which I saw around me, and though I perceived that absolutes were a part of a person's being because they were simply a reflection of the programmer - and that chaos and chance couldn't produce such a thing - I was still no nearer (or so I thought) to discovering who this programmer was.

So, I set about trying to discover who it was who could have done such a thing and I let my mind, once more, reject what my contemporaries were telling me so that I might be able to perceive clearly those things that were all about me. It was plain that the world must reflect the one who'd made it - in the same way as the computer program reflects the will of the programmer. If it says 'Microsoft' on the box, it's pretty certain that it's 'Microsoft' inside (unless it was a pirated copy, of course).

I asked myself

'What does the program tell me about the programmer?'

and realised immediately that if the existence of a moral code implied order or 'rule', the program should also be controlled by them. In that case, the program had been given specific boundaries within which it could operate - if a corruption of the program took place, this wouldn't override the necessity of limits but it would, plainly, mean that the behaviour of the program might begin to contradict some of the predefined operating parameters.

And that's what I was seeing.

I was seeing humans cut against their own moral code, of undermining absolute statements which would cause them to interrelate with one another more favourably and of generally ruining the perfection of the program wherever they put their hand to work. Instead of the construction of great monuments and buildings that they prided themselves in, I saw the destruction of rain forests, the consumption of natural resources and the laying waste of tracts of land that had once contained a complexity of the programmed natural order.

Truly, whatever humans were doing was leaving destruction in its wake - *somewhere*. Even though order might be brought to bear in one small piece of their rule, for every inch a mile was being devastated.

And I realised at that instant that the problem wasn't with the original program - neither was it with the programmer. But that nothing short of a virus had been introduced into the program which was causing the order to turn to chaos and for the plainly visible corruption to promote and duplicate itself throughout the programmer's affairs.

I can't begin to tell you just how liberating I found it all. I started to see the fallacy of those two statements which humans use where they'll happily say that something

'...restores my faith in human nature'

when perceived good happens, but that it's

'...human nature'

when something morally wrong occurs. Either human nature was good or evil - either it was generating itself into new levels of perfection or it was degenerating itself into new lows of corruption. I was of the opinion that the latter was the most accurate and I saw the evidence for it all around me which, until that moment, I'd refused to interpret correctly.

The problem, then, was the virus - neither the program nor the programmer - and the inability of those programmed to heal themselves.

And I saw just the two options - either the programmer was standing back, waiting for the program to crash completely to bring it to an end (perhaps he might even turn the program off?) or else the programmer was, even now, thinking about a solution to the ultimate problem - an anti-viral program that could rectify it.

Perhaps it had already been achieved - perhaps it was yet to come.

But there had to be *some* hope - there just *had* to be.

## Tsara

*A new translation from Codex Nutticanus, a fourth century manuscript. Although recorded in a now extinct language, Nutticanus is regarded by many as among the world's foremost records of the times in which the story comes from and is attested to by other fragments which are several hundreds of miles apart.*

The first that Tsara knew about it, there was a flood of sound that jumped her out of her dreaminess. It certainly wasn't unusual - not nowadays - for it was happening with uneasy regularity, but she remembered a time when a honest hamster such as she could lie all day on soft, warm bedding and drift through the quietness of the day without being disturbed even the once.

She lived at the foot of a small mountain which opened into a plain before the large expanse of water which nestled in the valley below and, when she first chose the site, she thought that the setting was both visually idyllic and practically wise, for a small community of humans lived a short run from the burrow entrance where she could retrieve ample food from the scraps which lay discarded on the ground.

It was just that - well - a hamster's peace was dependant upon more than just a sufficient food supply and all this trampling to and fro was really beginning to grate. She rubbed the sleepiness from her eyes, carefully plodded up towards the shaft of light which marked one of the exits to her complex and watched as the shadows flickered their way past.

She waited a couple of seconds once the light remained constant before she tentatively poked her head out above the level of the ground and witnessed the crowd which had caused the commotion. It puzzled Tsara as to what this was all about but it was happening, as I've previously said, with increasing regularity - early in the morning crowds would stream passed her burrow, making for the summit and, some time during the afternoon, they'd stream back down again, making for the village which was her feeding ground.

Were they on some hiking expedition? What was it all about?!

She eyed the crowd carefully and noticed - for the first time - that they all seemed to be reaching for the centre, hustling one another to get closer to whatever held their interest within the multitudes that were moving slowly away. Very few people left the throng - indeed, more seemed to be joining them to increase the numbers.

As the crowds' noise began to fade and the echo of their voices ricocheted off the stones which lay all around, Tsara heard the shuffling and rustling of a human immediately behind her, growing increasingly loud and bursting into her consciousness with a start that had her spinning round to see the individual's approach.

Running at a fair pace, the man seemed oblivious to anything other than catching the crowd - but he wasn't like the others. Tsara knew from his appearance that this no ordinary man - she'd seen them a few times before on the outskirts of the village and even then she'd wondered at their appearance.

The human wore torn clothes which hung loosely, the hair of his head flowing down his back as the breeze caught and tossed it away, his beard bushy and ragged where it poked out from under the covering which hid his mouth from everyone's vision. His forehead was about the only part of the man one could see and Tsara recognised the unmistakable whiteness that marked this 'breed apart'.

These men and women - as she all too well knew - were outcasts from the more 'normal' people who lived in the cities and towns.

Or was it the other way round? Tsara couldn't rightly remember but she associated houses with the 'normal' people and that meant that these others must be the 'abnormals'. At least, that's the way they were viewed by the others.

As he darted passed the opening where her head poked above ground, he let out the most desperate and heart-rending shout of 'Unclean!' as the crowd in the distance turned to see what they didn't *want* to see. The festive procession which had been continuing joyously to this point suddenly took on itself the appearance of panic, fear coming upon every soul that couldn't just be seen on the faces but could almost be felt.

Another 'Unclean!' pierced the scene, cutting the crowd in two and scrambling the humans over rocks and through thorn bushes to flee the approach of the human. It always made Tsara wonder just what danger such a person must represent to his fellows for the individuals carried with them no weapons and, to date, she'd never seen even one of them go after another to rob them of their possessions.

But Tsara accepted that there must be danger otherwise they wouldn't be scattering with the speed they were. It was as if water had been dropped on an elevated ridge and had been divided suddenly to the left and right, for the crowd eddied quickly away to allow this man to run through them.

Except...

Except there was one soul who'd apparently not heard the shout and, seeing the crowds dissipate about him, turned to look at the source of the commotion. Surely he'd move now!

But he didn't - he stood in the middle of the runner's path and awaited his approach as he slowed to a walk and the crowd stood at a distance, away from the scene.

'This is most unusual' thought Tsara and she dived quickly underground, scurried along the burrow tunnels to exit a few yards away from the scene which was now developing. That was the great thing about having numerous exits - not only could one flee from an approaching predator, but you could eavesdrop on a conversation that took place over a wide area.

She poked her head above the ground in time to see the man who'd caused all the commotion kneel before the other, the crowd shouting their distress in the distance and bidding the other to come to them immediately. One or two ventured closer but they still kept their distance as if their presence at the scene was enough to kill them outright.

The man lifted his eyes into the other's and asked him 'Lord, if you will, you can make me clean'

Without a moment's hesitation he moved his arm forward and laid it on the other's head, the crowd gasping at the action while some women screamed before passing out. This was no fleeting touch as if a bird had flown passed and brushed the face with the outermost tips of its feathers - there was a deliberate act of the will that grasped the man firmly in his hand as if he was trying to associate himself with the one knelt before him.

Tsara listened carefully for some great speech from the individual but all he said was 'I will. Be clean' as if the words were sufficient for what was about to happen. Suddenly, the whiteness on the forehead disappeared and Tsara rubbed her eyes to make sure she was seeing right - could this really be? How was that possible?

Then the healer said something *very* strange - something that Tsara couldn't imagine anyone ever saying had they done such a thing as her own eyes had witnessed. Instead of encouraging the man to go out and loudly proclaim what'd just happened, he told the man strictly to tell no one but to go to some city or other that she'd heard many men and women went to a few times in the year and to do what was required of him.

Without a moment's hesitation, the man turned and disappeared into the distance, the crowds flowing back towards the healer but keeping their distance to see what fate might befall the one who'd barely moved throughout the entire scene.

As if oblivious to what had just taken place, the man turned and continued on his journey, the crowds looking towards the disappearing individual before they fixed their gaze once more on the object of their attention and gradually formed a bustling crowd around him as they approached the village.

Not only had the scene made a deep impression on Tsara, but she'd finally realised what it was that the crowds were finding so significant that they pressed in from all sides - it wasn't an object of human construction as she'd originally thought but it was a man.

Yes, just a man.

That was what was *really* weird. It was *just* a man in ordinary clothes who looked like just about anybody else. If you'd met him in the street, you'd've wondered what was so special about him. But what Tsara had just witnessed him do *was* special - the first time she'd ever seen a 'normal' make contact with an 'abnormal'.

Willingly, too!

This she knew was unusual - but she still didn't fully perceive the significance. But human affairs are difficult for us to comprehend for, although we live beside human communities, we don't live as active participants and the ways and means often go misunderstood.

Tsara, however, knew something. She knew that a new day had come, that something unique had just happened that was pointing towards a time that was dawning in the land where she lived that would change it to never be the same again.

If someone could now love the unlovely, that threw a totally different complexion on the way that humanity was going.

Even if it was only one man amongst many - it was a start.

A small one - it was true - but it could still be the beginning of something big.

If man had now learnt to love those it despised, where could it all end?

That evening, she passed the word on to as many as she could - and they passed it on further - and further still until every rodent eye and ear was alerted to the presence of this new man, this healer that had appeared on the scene suddenly as if from nowhere.

Very soon, reports of events were being spread everywhere that two hamsters gathered together for a squeak and a feed. That something special was happening in their midst, in their time, was exciting - and they didn't want to be the generation that missed the change.

## Steggy

*Taken from the Celeriac Version of the sixth century. That this manuscript survived is a testimony in itself to the painstaking care with which the hamsters of the north-eastern highlands regarded all the manuscripts passed down to them from previous generations. The text bears all the hallmarks of being early.*

A roof may not be the best place to build a nest - that's true - but it's certainly not the worst.

Indeed, when you think about the mechanics of a house, it has a great many advantages for, as most of you are aware, hot air rises and there's never a moment when the floor area below could be at any greater temperature than the roof above.

Why humans ever decided to live below and not construct themselves habitations that were predominantly 'roof', I can't imagine. But mine's not the place to contemplate the way humankind developed and I 'd be out of place if I ever considered that it was my duty to do so.

All I'm here for is to record this story and then move on.

So, Steggy had made his nest in the roof space from where he descended the walls to the eating areas where humans dropped discarded pieces of bone, half-chewed, and where the crumbs that went unnoticed were sufficient feast for many a night's hunt.

A roof was quiet, too - very quiet - in a way that a floor could never be.

For the trampling of leather sandals across the dirt of the interior reverberated the nest compartment with its deep bass that made only the heaviest of sleepers oblivious to their surroundings.

Having given you the low down on the siting of hamster nests - and all this is pure incidental - let me move back to the story at hand.

It was the daytime and Steggy lay fast asleep in his nest, way up in the roof, with the sun beating down upon the flat tiled upper floor, causing the space to become as cosy as cosy could be. That previous night had seen a good recovery of food that would see him through for a few days before he'd need once more to descend the walls and collect more stock.

He could hear faint voices in the room below but that wasn't of any concern - not now, not immediately. They could shout for all Steggy cared for all they'd be was faint whispers in the distance on a beautiful carefree day.

Peazzeful.

Szzerene.

Gorgeouzzzz...

The grating sound overhead was only heard in his subconscious somewhere, lost amid dreams of perfect walnuts and fields full of ripe sunflowers dropping their seeds earthward. The clang of metal was more disconcerting but, being buffeted by the thick layer above, it did little to disturb him. What woke him with a start was the loud thud as a piece of metal shot through the upper roof, sending dust into the space that bumped him wide awake and made him sneeze loudly.

'What...?' he squeaked with fear, scampering to the other side of the cavity as the first shaft of daylight penetrated the perfect darkness.

Another thud and a clang pierced the roof, sliced through the bedding where he'd been laid only seconds before and exploded through the ceiling below, with screams of terror from those sat underneath. Steggy pictured the dust settling all around whoever was gathered and remembered those times of snow that occurred from time to time.

'Nearly there' a human above observed 'Just a little wider and we can lower him down'

A few more clangs and the work seemed complete, while there was scuffling and dragging on what was left of a solid surface overhead. Then two poles cut across the void, followed by something resembling a stretcher on which a man was fastened securely with ropes, descending into the room below.

It seemed obvious to Steggy at that moment that the digging must've stopped and that, even if it continued, the scene which was unfolding in the house below him must be worth a look. Without any

though of personal safety, he ran to the edge of the hole and peered over the lip, startling himself as he saw almost a hundred human eyes staring directly back at him.

No! Wait!

They were looking at the man on the stretcher - all was well, they hadn't spotted him after all.

The scene laid out before him was unusual to say the least. A man stood at one end of the room, facing those gathered about him - like he was a teacher of something or other and the crowds there had come to hear him.

But what was with the man on the stretcher?

Then Steggy saw the door - or, rather, he saw what was blocking it. For the problem wasn't just the room that was crammed with humans, but there were perhaps six heads poking through the narrow entrance way, each trying to listen to whatever was being said - only now they'd given up listening and were looking roofward.

Obviously, the man being lowered couldn't be brought in to the room but - hey! - did action this drastic *really* needed to be taken? Couldn't he just have waited until the meeting was ended? Or had he booked the use of the house while the last group were over-running?

The man who stood at the end of the room smiled broadly, lifted his hand and addressed the man who's head had now cleared the roof space and was clearly visible to all.

'My son' he began 'Your sins are forgiven'

'Well that was something else' Steggy thought 'this guy must be the owner and he's letting him off the mess he's made of the roof!'

But, no. That wasn't it.

Or, at least, it didn't appear to be.

There was a general unease which displayed itself in murmuring the length and breadth of the room while the man removed his stare from the one being lowered and looked out over those present.

'Which is easier?' he asked them 'Would you rather me say that he takes up his stretcher and walk out of here? Or that his sins are forgiven?'

No one said anything.

They stared at the man as if puzzled as to the connection between the two statements - but there had to be a connection, hadn't there? Some darted their gaze upwards once more as his friends on the roof let out more rope to bring him gently to earth.

The man took up his speech again and answered them 'But you must realise that the Son of man has been given authority to forgive the things men do wrong'

Returning his gaze to the invalid, he said - as if the crowd would have required it in the first instance and with a touch of resignation in his voice - 'Take it up and go home'

There was a gasp and mutterings as the man threw off the strappings that had held him securely onto the stretcher, lifted up the contraption and walked out of the house in the sight of all.

The crowd continued to buzz with a cross between excitement and concern - though Steggy couldn't understand why that should be.

The facts were as plain as anyone could see - it was the implications of them that were so problematical. Not from a hamster's perspective, of course, for we're simple creatures. Present us with a fresh grape in front of our noses and we have no problem either scoffing the lot or pouching it for later - we accept what we find and take what we're given.

But these humans in the room were another breed apart and their questions seemed to undermine the very simplicity of what had just transpired. For, if this man was being truthful, there was something new that had taken place in their midst - instead of trying to achieve there was a release to accept, in the place of a struggle to reach a pinnacle of worth, there was now freedom of acceptability.

And all based on something which the humans below me had seemed to have overlooked - something which us rodents had taken for granted for as long as I could remember.

Steggy surveyed the scene once more before scampering away into the shadows of the roof space, descending the wall to nestle in a warm cavity to drift sleepily away until the approach of another night.

## Kesed

*From Codex Nutticanus - see under 'Tsara'*

I liked Matthew the tax collector - he was a real pleasure to be with. And an outcast, too - we both were. His law said something about hamsters which I didn't fully understand, but I knew that it forbade him to eat me so I was always confident that I wouldn't satisfy any pangs of hunger.

I don't know much about his background but I know how I met him. I was in the small woodland close to where he lived that day that he came by himself to be alone for a few hours, when he sat down beside the great oak that must have been growing there for a great many years - probably even before Matthew was born.

You could tell a tax collector apart from everyone else, you know. They had an air of desperation about them that made them easily distinguishable and, had this been a scene from everyday life, most of those about would have turned to look the other way or even crossed to the other side of the street to avoid him.

It was quite true that they had friends - but only of their own kind, for their society treated them as outcasts and refugees, of enemies of the 'children of God' (whatever that label might mean) and friends of those who were ruling over the land. I think they called them the Rome-ones, but I'm not too sure - the word was seldom used in my hearing and, besides, I didn't feel it was all too important to remember.

But I digress.

Matthew came into the woods to be alone and he sat by the great oak. I was in the branches overhead, having climbed there to see what fruit I might find that I could store for the coming months, when the twig I was balancing on gave way and I fell with a thud and a crack that brought pain to my consciousness. As I lay there with a fractured paw, Matthew turned his attention towards me and gave me an intrigued stare.

Had he been any other Jew, he may have turned his back and walked away - as I've previously said, hamsters are shunned in their law (I must find out why, I really can't imagine - we're so cute) - but, instead, Matthew crawled on his hands and knees towards me and inspected the damage.

'You poor thing' he said, scooping me up into his hands and clasping me firmly against his breast so that I didn't fall as he made his journey back towards the house. I decided *not* to bite him at that time even though all my instincts were telling me that I should - I just got this impression from his actions that I wasn't in any danger and, besides, I could use my teeth at a moment's notice.

Back inside the house, he found a small piece of wood and a piece of cloth and strapped my paw into a make-do splint that brought a fair degree of comfort. His children also gathered round me and cooed and ahhed as I sat there on my rear feet feeling my paw throb alarmingly.

Somewhere from behind the crowd, I saw a small human push herself through to where I was sitting and offer me some fresh vegetables and fruit. When everything was considered, I had to admit that I was being gently coerced into staying - not that I wasn't convinced that I'd have to escape when my fracture was healed (for a hamster guards his freedom jealously), but I could see that a time of rest and recuperation was the best thing to do right then.

That evening, Matthew had some friends round - men just like him who seemed to be tax collectors themselves. If they weren't, then they must have been outcasts for whatever reason men had liked to make them so, but I was drawn to their conversation and the things which they were telling Matthew they'd seen. And very recently, too.

'I tell you' said one 'I ran too. I ran as fast as my legs would carry me when that leper approached us. But all he did was turn to look directly at him as if he was waiting for him to come closer. I tell you, it was weird - it was like another world had come down to us and we were experiencing at first hand the new law'

'So, what did he do?' my friend asked.

The other paused to add some drama to the tale.

'He reached out with his hand and grabbed hold of the guy and told him he was cleansed. Honestly, I was standing a short distance away and I heard *every* word'

'He touched a leper?' Matthew sounded perplexed 'One of society's outcasts? He actually... *touched* him?'

'I'm telling you, Matthew, a new day has dawned in the land. And, believe me, if he can accept the leper, he'll accept you'

I could see from Matthew's reaction that he wasn't convinced - that he wasn't at all convinced, not even in the slightest. Long after his friends had gone, my new friend sat down quietly in the centre of the room, rubbing his forehead and staring off into space as the fire began to fade.

Suddenly, he got up and went across to where a tied up scroll lay hidden inside its protective box and brought it back. He shuffled the scroll to a particular spot that he seemed to know well and began moving his fingers along the words, his mouth moving in time with the sounds that were playing in his head.

Eventually, he leaned back and, staring at the ceiling, he said 'I wonder. Streams in the desert - I wonder'

And with that, he lay down on a pillow and went to sleep.

With morning came another bowl of fresh food, brought lovingly to me by the smallest of the household, who watched with delight as I ate some, pouched some more and gave her finger a friendly lick when she went to remove the bowl from me.

Matthew had work to be done and, seeing that I was gathering the attention of all the members of the household, announced to everyone that I needed some peace and quiet and so was taking me to sit at the booth where he made his living.

I was grateful for small mercies for, though I was enjoying the family's attentions, I could see that it wouldn't be long before they'd start grating on my patience and I'd be forced - as all good hamsters would be - to bite someone to make them desist. A peaceful kip at the tax office was what I preferred - and we didn't have far to go.

Matthew made his living by taxing both people and goods as they passed by his small make-do hut at the side of one of the routes into the city and he went about his business with unusual endeavour. You see, having bought the right to tax, he had to gather enough money both to pay back what he owed and to provide a living for those who were under his charge - he would've needed to tax *less*, it seemed to me, had society at large accepted him as one of their own for now, exiled away from the main centres, he had to live as self-sufficiently as possible, employing slaves and servants to buy those things that they wouldn't sell directly to him - and probably at a much higher price as well.

Even though you could tell that those being taxed regretted every penny that were obliged to pay, there was a friendly dialogue exchanged between many as Matthew sought to assess what was right to levy, even waving past numerous of the more wizened looking humans (the ones that resembled raisins) who he must have considered as having scant resources to be able to afford a contribution.

Mid-morning, it went eerily quiet as if the way was being prepared for what was about to take place. Looking back now, I can see that it was the time that my friend needed to begin to think once more on the proceedings the night before and the events that had been related to him by those friends.

The phrase 'streams in the desert' came back to haunt my own waking consciousness as I looked at Matthew, a man sat hunched over a table, counting out the revenues that had been collected earlier that morning. There must have been enough here for a few days' living, it seemed to me, but not knowing what each coin represented, I had no way of knowing whether it was a large pile of worthless coins or whether each one was a living in itself.

Metal, as you're aware, means very little to a hamster - had they been cabbages, I could have assessed their worth.

Then there was the faint gurgling of noise from somewhere down the road which grew louder, until I was fairly certain that a crowd was approaching - boy, oh boy, that meant a *lot* of money.

But, no, it wasn't that type of crowd.

As the multitude rounded the bend of the road into the straight where Matthew's collection point sat, I could see one man leading the way down the narrow path, with a group of about ten or so men behind trying to keep the crowds behind - that the man in front could walk more easily.

This was some procession - such as occurred on some great festival day - but Matthew froze to the spot as I turned to look at him and I could see that, instead of delight forming on his face, there was only a reticence that I remained bewildered at. Perhaps I even saw fear, for it seemed to me that the tax collector had suddenly come face to face with a situation which he would have gladly run away from for the rest of his life.

Then something strange happened.

The man in the lead stopped and looked over at Matthew. Matthew looked back intently, motionless, but he made no attempt to rise as he had at other times and ask for the toll payment. Instead, he just sat quietly, staring at the man like his life depended on it.

The man broke the silence, asking 'Matthew?'

My friend didn't know what to say. He still was at frozen to the spot as if he was trying to avoid the gaze of a predator that was threatening his very safety. In a split second, the man continued 'Follow me'

Without a moment's hesitation, the tax collector jumped to his feet and ran to join the procession as the crowd continued on its journey down the road. The pieces of metal were left on the table where he'd been counting them upto a few moments ago and I wondered whether Matthew had suddenly seen the foolishness of treating with value those pieces of metal.

I followed at a distance once the crowd had passed by but they went only a short distance before they turned aside into Matthew's own house. I hobbled after them - for, in all the excitement, Matthew had forgotten all about me - and was greeted by the youngster who'd obviously been sent to collect. I was brought in and placed safely in a small corner of the room as I witnessed the scene laid out before me.

The house was a frantic and endless sea of movement. Women and servants ran to and fro from the kitchen bringing dishes of food and drink for the swelling number of guests. Tax collectors and others unacceptable to society came in and greeted Matthew with delight and fondness while those who didn't want anything to do with 'that sort of person' stood huddled in the doorway watching the man who'd called Matthew share food with him and those he'd brought in.

My position, close by the door, gave me a unique opportunity to hear both the harsh conversations of those who stood without and the friendly discussions which occurred within.

'He accepts the unacceptable!' one complained while another turned to walk away.

'What kind of man is this who eats with those we hate?!' another voiced.

I could see very plainly that this man wasn't everyone's cup of tea. Indeed, even though he'd come from the world of those outside the door, his presence within was what was causing all the consternation.

But why?

Then I remembered that Matthew had accepted *me* - that's right, me. Even though his law had said to reject me, he'd taken me into his home and paid attention to my present need. Hadn't this other man also done the same? Hadn't he seen the need in Matthew and paid close attention to meeting it?

The man turned from the table to address the multitudes which stood without and cried with a loud voice 'Mercy! My Father requires mercy!'

before returning to the celebrations which were taking place within.

Streams in the desert? The phrase came back to echo round my head.

Streams?

Mmm...I wonder.

## Mawveth

*From a hamscript of uncertain origin (given the scholarly demarcation 'Omega 4') but found in the vaults of the Furs National during a general clearout of the collection of valuable items which had been placed there for safe-keeping. No one's quite sure who put it there or when, but experts were able to discern a fifth century date due to the pawwriting with which it was compiled.*

I won't eat a dead human - even though there're many scavengers who would stoop to such a level, hamsters tend to avoid such a situation. We recoil at the horror of ever sinking the teeth into the cadaverous flesh of a human and, while we might nibble the odd fish or piece of cooked meat that drops from the table of mankind, putting our teeth to work on their skin - except in self-defence - is definitely a 'no-no'.

Oh - we might also nip the odd corpse which we discover in a room just to see if they're really dead but don't label us as carnivorous, will you? We'd certainly never swallow - No! Absolutely never!

The corpse was safe with me, then.

I could be trusted.

Not that I'd been given charge over it, to guard it from would be kidnappers - or that there was some purpose given for it other than a quick burial.

As far as I knew - and I'd been listening carefully as the man and woman talked - all that was intended was for their daughter to be given some honour in burial before the day was up as they said farewell to the vessel which had once contained the soul.

I did inspect the corpse - just to make sure.

I mean, I had to.

If I'd've taken it for granted that she was dead and paced around the room for food and she'd sat up in bed or coughed or something, I would've probably died with fright.

No, I had to make sure.

I do hope that she doesn't wonder how that scar came about on her thumb, I really do. I mean, it seemed like the best thing to do - a quick, fierce bite to make sure she was dead. I had to do it. You do understand, don't you?

There was no bleeding, no pulling away from the pain - nothing.

She was dead alright.

I don't know what actually happened when the mother and father left the room but it certainly went quiet for a time - then there was the most awful noise of flutes and the wailing of women who were crying loudly and lamenting at the sad loss of the girl. I don't know whether any of this was real grief for she had but few friends in her short life - but they certainly seemed to be making up for lost time.

'What a ghastly sound!' I thought. But at least it covered the sound of my scratching around the floor for food. I don't know how long the wailing continued, but the first thing I remember was that it abruptly ended and I froze to the spot so as not to be discovered.

It started up again almost instantly but, this time, instead of there being weeping, there was laughter. I may not be too knowledgeable about human affairs - I tend to avoid their company whenever I get the opportunity - but I couldn't help but wonder at the change.

Had someone told a joke? I couldn't believe so - these types of occasions seemed to be part and parcel of living - or dying. Or, perhaps, both.

But why the change, why the sudden transformation from sorrow to mirth? Beat me - I still don't know to this day but maybe someone, somewhere will have recorded that detail.

The next thing I knew, though, the curtain was drawn back from the doorway and in walked a succession of six people. The first two, I recognised - they were most definitely the mother and father, that much was certain, dressed in rich clothing but with a sorrow in their faces that was there for anyone to read.

The other four puzzled me, though - initially, at least.

The first man was very quiet - the last three were the sort of men that you wouldn't want to meet down a dark alley - that you wouldn't want to meet down a fully lit alley, let alone a dark one. They had that certain wild, unkempt look about them, with rough faces and hands.

But they were quiet, too.

Perhaps they were the embalmers?

Possibly.

I could picture them as such - someone has to do the work, after all, and I couldn't imagine the faint-hearted performing such a service. But this other guy - well, he was strange. You may call me foolish, I know, but it certainly seemed as if hope entered the room with him. I wasn't sure just what 'hope' there could be in the situation that was obviously laid out before them, but it was something that I just...er...felt.

Is that the right word?

It was as if what was in the room left upon his entrance - I don't remember ever having experienced that before - and, since that day, I never have again. Nor probably ever will. But I knew then that there was something that'd changed.

I had no idea what was about to happen, though.

I don't think anyone did...except that man.

He walked gently across to where she lay as if trying not to wake her up by the noise of his approach and lifted her hand into his - I just hoped that he didn't see that bite, I really did. That was the last thing I needed to be found out at this sorrowful time!

But, no - he was staring directly into her face as he held her hand in an embrace that was tender yet firm. He opened his mouth and said, very simply 'Little girl? Wake up now!'

I was about to squeak my indignation and loudly announce that I'd tested her for life and it was very much departed when the young girl sat up on the bed on which she was lying and opened her eyes.

Well, I guess everyone must've been dumbfounded - myself included - for I had to tell myself that this was all real and not some vision being played out on the consciousness of my mind.

No, this was *very* real.

The mother and father burst into tears as the three 'embalmers' gasped for breath from the shock. The man still stood by the girl's side but he was smiling - a smile that was so full of joy that I thought he was in danger of exploding with laughter.

'Don't tell anyone about these matters' he informed them 'but make sure you give your daughter something to eat - she'll be very hungry'

Well, I had questions! Like how death could become life and how he'd managed to do it - the parents, also, must've been bursting with puzzlement. Well, no, perhaps they were just so overwhelmed that words failed them? I don't know - I *do* know, however, that they said nothing - not a word - and the man indicated to his three associates that they should leave immediately for elsewhere.

As they exited the doorway and returned the curtain to its position of barring entry to any and all, I returned my gaze one final time to the scene before me.

The mother and father clasped their daughter in their arms as firmly as anyone had ever done since the beginning of time. For death had become life - not in some abstract concept which was distant from their own personal experience, but in a tangible way when they most needed it.

And if death had become life - if what was certain had now become uncertain - then...well, what else could happen?

Where was the limit anymore to anything that prevented humans from continuing forever?

## Kuma

*The bulk of this text is from a hitherto unknown fragment which many believe to be original. If it is, there are surely more manuscripts lying ready for the explorer to discover. I have had to supplement the text where there are obviously gaps by the use of Codex Nutticanus, but it would appear that there was little or no variation between the two at these points.*

A fishing boat is a good place to find food and the moored boats on the eastern seashore were an ideal opportunity for Kuma to supplement his meagre diet with some invaluable protein. Even if there wasn't any discarded fish there, he could always suck at the wood to retrieve any oils that had been absorbed from the fishermen's recent catch.

The boats which had come here during the early morning showed no signs of being used that night, so Kuma made swiftly for their shape as dusk began to fall and slipped over the edge of the first to see what could be found.

It wasn't long before Kuma's valiant assault on the lower reaches of the hull were rewarded.

'A fish!' he squeaked and began rubbing his paws with glee at the find.

This was more than he could've hoped for. Perhaps a few small discarded tails or even a head, yes - but a whole fish? Wow! This really was his lucky night!

Just as he was about to tuck in to this unexpected feast, his peace was disturbed by the sudden trembling of the boat and the splash of the hull as it entered the water, numerous men jumping in to the vessel as the sail was raised and caught the wind.

Kuma cursed his luck.

The last thing he wanted was to be adrift on the sea with no hope of land - and the stories that he'd heard from other rodents in the area was that these fishermen of Tiberias were some of the meanest and cruellest that had ever plied their trade on this lake.

But this appeared to be no fishing trip even though the nets were ready to be let down. Kuma could tell - as only a hamster can - that the nets had been washed only hours previously in preparation for another night's work amongst the shoal of this inland lake. But, even though the signs pointed in that direction, the fishermen made absolutely no attempt to lift the net into the water.

That was one blessing, at least - being hidden under the mass of rope and knots which comprised the nets, its removal would naturally have been a problem when there was little or no other shelter that could be easily found. Even so, some of these fishermen were known to be fanatical and, had they found him, he couldn't envisage anything else than being thrown overboard - how he wished in that one instant that he'd enrolled for swimming lessons when he'd been younger.

The hunger that had forced Kuma into the boat also compelled him to sniff his own catch with anticipation and he risked a few small mouthfuls as his ears sat erect on his head like two radar dishes listening for trouble.

But nothing seemed to happen.

The men were more concerned to chat about the events of the day than they were to do anything else. Listening, Kuma gleaned the information that some 'great man' - so they reckoned - had put on an enormous banquet for thousands of guests close to the shore and that they called it a 'miracle'. Certainly, in the place from which they were now travelling, Kuma could testify to the lack of food that was his own experience, but he failed to fully comprehend the words which he heard at that time.

But this was a pleasant trip - the sea was calm, the breeze brought with it smells from the other side of the lake and the fishermen seemed to be in no rush to do anything. Well, it wasn't *absolutely* calm, there were a few feelings of movement now and then...

...actually, quite often.

And more often. That breeze on the face was beginning to take the warmth away and Kuma had to blow into his paws and rub his face to keep warm. Sheesh! What was happening to this weather?! It was growing positively treacherous out on the lake!

The band of men began grasping at pulleys and ropes, tacking the vessel from side to side in a vain attempt to make the destination they were aiming for. But the wind was plainly against them as they

shouted to one another to pull - then push - then haul a line in and move from one side of the boat to the other.

Kuma began to worry - and he now felt that a watery grave was something worse than being found by these mad fishermen. The one thought that went through his mind was as brilliant as it was irrational: 'Perhaps, if we're a short distance from land, I could swim for it?'

He scrambled up into the top pile of netting and grabbed the side of the boat, leaning over the edge to be greeted by a billowing sea that'd taken on the appearance of a veritable monster. Sensibility won the day and Kuma realised that his own fate was tied up with that of the fishermen.

Being a full moon, the sea was illuminated clearly, but the lights of the shoreline were hidden behind the swell of the water which crashed against the bow like a writhing monster trying to overturn its victim. Kuma clung for his life on to a metal hook attached to the side and was about to descend into the hull once more when a fisherman let out a scream of fear that made the fur on the back of his head stand on end.

He spun round in time to see a hand outstretched pointing towards the midst of the sea as the fishermen as one man turned to look at a figure walking on the water beside the boat. Then Kuma saw him, too - a lone figure, calmly pacing past the boat, making for shore but turning to approach them.

'No!' he squeaked with fear 'Go away from us you spectre of the night!' for the tales which humans tell of what takes place alone in the midst of a raging sea are enough to make anyone fear that such a situation will come upon themselves. But the figure called to the men with a loud voice 'Take heart, my friends, it is I; have no fear'

'I?' thought Kuma 'Who's "I"? What type of man can walk in the midst of a storm? And on water at that!'

The wind still raged, buffeting the small craft with unceasing ferocity, the waves audibly crashing against the sides and making it difficult for anyone to stand. Suddenly, a man ran forward to the edge of the boat and shouted back 'If it *is* you, tell me to come to you on the water!'

There was a moment's hesitation as if the words hung on the air, as if the crashing waves and howling gale hesitated to allow their voice to be heard, while the others turned to stare at their comrade's audacity and cheek.

'Yes' said the lone figure 'Come!'

Immediately, the fisherman jumped over the side of the boat as the others gasped and muttered words under their breath. And then there were two men walking in the midst of the sea! But, just as the fisherman approached the other's side, there was a sudden gust of wind and the waves seemed to rise higher than they'd ever been before. Paying attention to the storm, the man began to sink, crying out 'Save me!'

I could picture it in my mind's eye as a wave took the men from view but, as the water rushed past, I saw two men again - this time walking towards the boat and being helped in over the side.

If I'd've been one of those who'd stayed in the boat, I might have ridiculed the one who'd got out. Or I might've been jealous that it wasn't me who was the one who'd had the courage to ask to be commanded to walk on the water. I might even have curled up in a ball and wished that the experience would just go away - being a hamster, I would probably have opted for the third.

But the men - as one man, yet again - fell down before the one I'd first seen on the water and began to say things about him which were difficult to believe.

I mean, *really* difficult.

I'd heard the reports about 'a certain man' but I thought he was supposed to come from west of the lake - I hadn't anticipated seeing him first hand because I lived on the east.

But see him I did.

At least, I think it was him - he certainly matched the description.

Almost immediately, the boat came ashore and the crew jumped onto land to be greeted by crowds which gathered about him. Two of the men stayed in the boat, however, to lower the sail and see to the water that had been taken aboard - I darted back under the covering of the nets as one turned to the other and asked 'Did that really happen?'

The other stared back and raised his hands in wonder, finally answering 'Don't doubt the testimony of your eyes - we both saw him walking on the water, however difficult it is for our minds to come to terms with it'

As they disappeared over the side of the boat, I heard one whisper 'Then what type of man is this?!' and they were off. I turned my attention back to the matter at hand - and took a large bite out of the fish.

## Sozo

*From the Celeriac Version - see under 'Steggy'*

Light doesn't often have much bearing on when a wild hamster wakes up - it does, however, have quite some import as to when he or she will exit their burrow into the terrain where they need to find food and water for, if they exit into the brilliant sunlight of a spring day, it'll only be a matter of minutes before they're snatched by a predator to feed their young.

We may wake hours before the sun finally goes down - or wake at repeated intervals during the day if we suffer from insomnia and rearrange our nests in a haze of tiredness - but poke our noses above ground to sniff for food would be foolhardy.

That day, my body clock was all out of flunter - humans can probably tell you that they experience the same when they go to bed wide awake thinking that it's time to party or when they get up in the morning and all their body wants to do is sleep. These are difficult concepts to understand, but we all get them from time to time - throughout the human and animal world - and we each have to master them the best we can.

This day was different, though.

I had been drifting in and out of sleep for most of the day but, for all that restlessness, I was quite at peace. I guess that it must've been about midday that I got up from the nest to relieve my bladder in a corner of my burrow complex that I'd hollowed out for just such a purpose, when I passed by one of the tunnels that led directly up to the surface and realised that the light that I'd have expected to have seen cascading down into my face was non-existent.

It genuinely appeared to me as if night had come.

Puzzling though this was, hamsters normally accept the observable even though it can sometimes get us into trouble - big trouble - and, being almost fully awake, I decided that I must have overlaid.

Although it was my normal practice to spend at least an hour or two grooming before being seen above ground, I realised that, if I'd really got my timings *that* wrong, it could be close on sunrise before I knew it. I decided that the best course of action would be to get up above as quickly as I could and find what food was lying around *first* before I did anything.

What I remember as I poked my head above ground was the presence of people - loads of them.

Some stood at a fair distance from my burrow entrance while others seemed to be almost standing on top of me. Those far off were gathered together in a huddle on a small hillock that stood in thick shadow and I could see their silhouetted forms pointing with their fingers at a structure which seemed to pierce the sky in front.

Five or so soldiers - it's difficult counting in the murkiness of blackness - seemed initially to be the object of their scorn but - wait a minute! - they were pointing much higher than where they sat, rolling dice and gambling the time away.

Then I saw - there was a man on that structure to which they were pointing, suspended between heaven and earth with his face touching the upright stake behind. He seemed to gasp for each breath as he raised himself up repeatedly in time with his inhalation and a steady stream of blood dripped from his torso onto the ground beneath.

This was gruesome - what had I stumbled upon?

I turned my eyes away from the scene only to find myself apparently in the midst of a group of women who were weeping with loud cries, huddled together trying to console one another at the scene which they tried not to keep their eyes from.

'So much grief' I thought 'yet so little hope'

For, as every animal knew who lived amongst men, they had some very sinister dealings with one another that seemed to undermine the very reason for which they'd come into existence.

But there was darkness.

Then I remembered my reason for ascending into the outside world and it hit me suddenly that this wasn't night.

It was darkness - true - but it was a darkness that had a strange 'feel' to it like the curtains of heaven itself had been drawn closed to prevent anyone from seeing what was taking place.

What I felt then is difficult to put into words - there seemed to be a compression of time in this one moment on that rocky outcrop as if everything that had ever been since the beginning and all that was to come somehow found meaning and purpose in this event - that everything was being fulfilled that needed to be - that past and future were uniting in the present.

I know you'll think me foolish - I did myself when I found myself trying to put into words the same ideas - but that's how it felt.

Everything that was going on around me seemed to pale into insignificance and the experience began to become so personal that I became scared - though of what, I have no idea.

These were only the impressions I got, you understand, but they were very tangible.

Though I could see hate in the group a way off and sorrow behind me - it was only momentary before I heard desolation in the cry of the man suspended above as he shouted with a loud voice:

'My God! My God! Why have You forsaken me?'

A frenzy of activity greeted the announcement as one ran towards the soldiers and begged them that they might offer the man something to drink. As if in obedience to an order, they raised a sponge on a long pole to the man's lips as he pushed himself to full stretch once more and cried loudly 'It is finished' his voice echoing from the bare rock into my ears two or three times before fading away to quietness. The man slumped over, his head now motionless on his chest and his tired frame still from any effort of struggling for breath.

With his death came a quietness and a change in the mood of the scene. The crowd way off began to be sorrowful as if the implications of their own actions had been demonstrably brought home to them - the women still cried but there was some comfort in their voice now that the object of their grief had slipped out of suffering.

But the air was different - I could swear I sensed it.

Instead of the darkness that I'd felt, I began to feel a dawning as natural light returned, but a freshness that I couldn't put into words. It was as if every burden and oppression that had ever existed had been taken away from the shoulders of the world - as if what weighed down had been dealt with that one could stand tall.

I didn't understand it - I admit.

I can't say that I'll ever fully understand what I saw that day.

All I know is that something changed - something fundamental.

And if you understand what darkness means, you'll understand if I simply conclude by saying that light had come.

## Nikos

*Despite the comparative early age of the Celtic illuminated manuscripts, I decided to translate directly from the 'Book of Peanut Shells' now housed in Dublin University. The carefully coloured pictures which accompany the text served only to bring to life the message of the writings and they helped me perceive much of the hitherto unrealised meaning in the story.*

The first I knew of their presence was when I felt the heat from their fire and the glow drew me to warm my chilling paws. I hadn't seen them in the moonlight which cascaded down from the skies, but they must have heard the rustle of the undergrowth for a couple turned their attention to where I scurried and their faces reflected both the fire and the celestial light from above.

Initially, I didn't know why they were there - I nearly always hunted out food on my own, save only for the little foxes which tried to sniff me out for a quick snack before running through the streets of the nearby city to rummage through the trash that had been thrown out of the residences there.

I knew that they weren't there the previous night for here - yes, just a few yards away - was the place I'd found a few grains of the new year's first ripe barley that must've either blown there or been dropped by a recent visitor. Not that it was that sort of place to attract many visitors, you understand - the place was dead - literally dead.

A couple of evenings ago, the latest resident in this city of the dead had arrived - not that I'd seen him but you can't help hear the trudging to and fro of relatives and friends who see to the humans' last concerns before the grating sound of stone upon stone sealed the small, hollowed out tomb.

That was what really got to a hamster - the grating sound.

It was like someone running their nails down the length of a blackboard that sent cold shivers down the spine and set the teeth on edge. Still, after it's completion, it was all over - just another human who'd arrived at the inescapable conclusion to his life.

These humans loved to try and cheat death, you know. They loved to think that they'd found the ultimate antidote to the disease that they called 'old age', but time always caught up on them and they all ended up the same way sooner or later.

Dead, deceased, stiff - call it what you will. There was no escape from the inevitable.

That's what puzzled me about this group of men - it didn't make sense. Well, not to me, anyhow. Perhaps to someone, but not to me. Never to me. I still don't fully understand it now that I know.

When they first heard me rustling through the undergrowth they seemed alert to put an end to whoever was approaching but, when the nearness of the sounds were understood, they turned back to the fire and continued warming themselves.

But what were they doing here? It made me wonder!

I'd never before seen a military presence here - on the city walls, yes. I'd regularly seen an armed guard and when the night was as bright as it was now, the glint of their spears regularly caught the eye as I wandered about the place.

But not here - not in a graveyard.

Intrigued by their presence, I allowed them to return to their warmth and quietly paced over to where a bush protected me from their immediate gaze. I knew there was a hollow here which I could dive down in a moment's notice had they spotted me - but they seemed more content in their gaming than they were with cataloguing the species of the land.

'First light' one said 'you two go into the praetorium and get fresh provisions'

Practicalities over, one of the others asked 'So what's with this duty? Why'd we get it?'

The heads turned towards the first speaker as he opened his mouth and sarcastically answered 'I just guess that we were born lucky'

There were sounds of mirth which soon settled while another asked 'Why a corpse? Why are we guarding a corpse?'

'I hear he was an insurrectionary - that's what the buzz is amongst the others' another suggested.

'Ours is not to reason' the leader began 'but let's just say that it's about the easiest assignment you're ever likely to get - guarding a corpse to stop him from getting away'

There were various sounds of cackling while one spoke over the noise 'Here, if the dead man tries to escape, can we kill him again?'

The soldiers laughed at the stupidity of it all but were drawn back to the apparent danger when the head reminded them 'You have nothing to worry from the corpse - just be careful that you remember that his followers could, even now, be planning a surprise attack to steal the body away. Just remember - and be on your guard'

This was rich! Guarding a corpse?

'This must be some corpse' I remember thinking 'that someone would want to steal him'

The night drifted along its usual course and I foraged around the camp in expectation of dropped bread and meat - my instincts weren't disappointed and I transported away a fair amount of food to the nest which would see me through the following excessive temperatures of sunlight.

It was now growing dusk - not light, you understand, but a hamster's awareness of dawn is a long way ahead of any human's - and I chanced one final reconnaissance to the camp before the day's rest. The soldiers still sat there - though the fire was being allowed to flicker and fade with the anticipation of the first warming rays of the sun - and a couple were reaching into their bags to retrieve some last remaining scraps of cheese that I'd gathered a couple of hours previous.

Perhaps it was unwise of me to try this close to dawn. I decided to quit while I was ahead and turned to make for the burrow before the first light alerted my presence not only to the soldiers but to any airborne predator.

As I turned to remove myself from the band of soldiers, I experienced the biggest shock of my life for, in the twinkling of an eye, the quickest sunrise I'd ever known took place, accompanied by the sound of the grating of the stone which shook the ground on which I trod and which I remembered hearing a couple of evenings previous.

I turned round towards the sun and realised that the first visible sign of its rising didn't have the capacity to do such a thing - besides, it was most definitely scarlet and this illumination was white, clear intense brilliance.

Where the fire once flickered its final throes of life, I could see the soldiers, knocked over like some bowling ball had been thrown and achieved a clean strike. They lay in various positions, trembling with what I took to be fear, their instinct to rise up and attack the aggressor totally removed with the perceived strength of the assailant.

But who was their attacker?

All I could see past the men was a someone dressed in white, sitting on top of the stone, rolled away from the entrance to one of the tombs close by. What had he done to dispel courage from these hardened warriors?

What on earth was going on?

It beat me - and I think it was the suddenness of it all that caused me not to comprehend what was being presented before my eyes. Hard as I might, nothing that was in my mind made any sense.

Then, suddenly, I heard footsteps.

Well, more like footscuffs - the ground was fairly soft and the soles of the approaching sandals were brushing against the grass with a swish that scattered the early morning dew in front of them.

Women - all women.

On seeing what was before them, they slowed to a crawl while one, near the back, turned in blind panic and sprinted away from the scene as fast as her legs would carry her.

Was she frightened? It didn't look like she was, but I'd understand it if that was the truth - it was just that everything that they must have seen with their eyes was so...er...unreal.

A man in brilliant white sitting atop the gravestone, lighting up the surrounding scene where soldiers lay like matchsticks on the floor. Not something you'd encounter most days of the week.

As they neared the now-open tomb, the man in white spoke serenely to them and assured them that he knew who they were seeking. He reassured them by informing them 'He's not here, for he has risen'.

Reassuring?

Perhaps I'd best reassess that comment. I don't know why I interpreted it that way for I can't think of anything *less* reassuring than the corpse that was buried a few days ago has since got up and walked off. The only positive thing to be said was that it was no longer night and the sun's rays were beginning to compete with the man's own radiance.

He continued 'Come and see the place where he lay' and he stretched out his hand to encourage them to enter the open tomb. As they neared the entrance, I ran full speed to be close by when they peered in - after all, I reasoned, if they were so puzzled by what they saw before them, they'd hardly be perplexed if they caught sight of me.

And it was empty!

Honestly! The tomb was empty!

I rubbed my eyes just to make sure and opened them once more to witness two more men in white apparel *inside* the small enclosure, lighting up the dinginess by their presence. I couldn't see any fiery torches in their hands and I know that it puzzled me a great deal but, perhaps, they were torches in themselves - I don't know, it was only a suggestion.

All I know is that there weren't any light sources that I could see but it was still illuminated inside that place.

On top of a stone slab was the form of a human - but covered with what looked like linen cloths and, where one would have expected his head to have been, a separate covering lying on the stone...

What? No head?

One of the women reached over to lift the face cloth and peered inside the neckpiece of the strips of linen, expecting to see the body of the one they'd been expecting.

She turned to the others and whispered 'It's empty - look!' as they gathered quickly to observe that what had once wrapped the body tightly in death was now a hollow frame of garments that held nothing more important than air. Some gently pressed on the wrappings which would have engulfed the chest and they let out mild surprise as the cloths gave under the light pressure.

The first lady folded the facecloth and laid it to one side, as if she was tidying a habitation of the living rather than the final resting place of the dead.

Me? I'd seen enough.

I ran out of the place as fast as my paws would carry me, realising that the sun had now blown the cover of darkness. The soldiers were long gone but I had no idea where - I didn't even see them disappearing over the small tussock of earth that the path wound round, but I could see that they'd obviously left in a hurry for their spears and sacks were piled together around the smoking fire.

As I descended into my burrow, I couldn't help wondering - indeed, my mind was working overtime and I got little sleep that morning and afternoon. I couldn't help but be puzzled about the goings-on - about the tomb and the empty shell of linen that had lain there.

The most logical explanation for it all just didn't appear to be the most obvious - that death no longer had the final word. But the alternatives seemed implausible at best.

It was suddenly that it hit me, though, and then I woke up to reality as if someone had turned on a light in my darkened mind. If death had now been conquered then surely I was living in the days of the final remedy - if man could no longer be restricted by the inevitability of death, that meant a future for *all* men.

The final enemy really did lie dead.

Nothing any longer could stop life.

## Oros

*Many don't realise that there exists a Masoretic Text in the Hamster Archives. I decided upon using it here because some of the words employed give slightly deeper shades of meaning than either the Celeriac Version or Codex Nutticanus.*

A mountain is not the ideal place on which to eke out an existence amongst the wild vegetation but it has its advantages for less predators come here than do the lower plains near the lake which retain a fair degree of warmth even in winter.

But Oros had never known life in the valley where many of his descendants had migrated a decade or so ago and was content with the way things were. Had he known what happened 'below' by experience, he may have greeted it eagerly with outstretched paws or shrunk back from the dangers which lurked there.

For Oros, life on the mountain was good and he could even risk daily reconnaissance outings from the burrow to creep along the cover of the bushes which grew here to discover freshly discarded berries and nuts.

The time was Spring, however, and much of nature's harvest was still being produced, but the fresh shoots of edible plants were particularly succulent at this time and gave Oros a particularly good supply of liquid that supplemented the pools of rainwater that collected close to his burrow entrance.

It was on one such forage that Oros became aware of a strange event that caught his attention - for the most that he'd ever seen of a human was, perhaps, one or at most two who'd climb here for some peace and quiet from the hustle and bustle of their own way of living to sit and stare off into the distance 'somewhere' and do...well...whatever humans did. Oros wasn't quite sure what that was but they didn't seem to be competing for food, so he never invaded their privacy to drive them off the mountain.

But, today, there was a steady stream of them - in twos and threes, families and individuals, all talking about what they were coming to see. Truth was, no one seemed sure.

As he eavesdropped on their conversation, he got the impression that there was some great sight to be seen there today but that *exactly* what was to happen was difficult to describe. One thing these people did seem to hold in common, though, was that they appeared to know the man - the one that the hamster community had been spreading the news about but who, as far as Oros knew, was now dead and buried in the great city to the south.

Still, he was sure that the general request - to report back by word of mouth to the main group of hamsters who'd spread the word - covered such an incident as this, a sort of epilogue to the man and his ways that could be committed to the hamscripts as a sort of 'ps'.

Oros ran across a group of bare rocks to reposition himself to overlook the small flat area on which the humans gathered and was amazed to discover that there was more than one route here and that, even though he'd been watching a substantial number ascend, their number was swelled by multitudes of people who'd found another path.

It was impossible for him to count the number because his paws only let him reach ten - he could start again and see how many 'tens' there were but, even then, he realised that there were well over ten 'tens' - perhaps even ten ten 'tens'? It was difficult to say - all he could do was report that there were 'lots', a technical description that hamsters knew to be far too many to count.

As the humans continued to arrive, a cloud descended at the far end of the plain but few of those gathered paid much attention to it. It caught the hamster's eye, however, because it obscured the old tree he'd been squinting at to see if it was putting out buds - it'd always been a good source of fresh roughage at this time of the year - but it was late and recent journeys there had given him nothing to show for his efforts.

Suddenly, a man walked out from the cloud into the daylight which shone all around. The crowds stopped their discussion and turned to greet him. Him? Oros wiped his eyes as if the sleepiness was making him hallucinate.

No, he saw clearly. The man who'd stepped out from the cloud matched the description that the community had sent out of the one on the plain - the one who Tsara had seen at first and which had caused her to spread the news quickly throughout the land.

But it couldn't be...could it?

Moving towards him, many knelt and grabbed hold of the man's hands and held fast to his feet, while others pushed their way to his side only to be replaced by others. Some stood at a distance, however, as if what their eyes were telling them was being rejected as impossible.

Oros wasn't sure just what to make of it - even days afterwards, he still questioned in his own mind what he'd witnessed that day.

What he *knew* was that, if he hadn't known that the man was dead, he'd've believed it was him. Fact seemed to conflict with the rationality of his own eyes that caused him to question what was being played out before him.

Oros wanted to get closer, to see for himself what was happening, but he could tell that the crowds would pay no attention to what was beneath them and that he'd get crushed by their excited feet - so he reluctantly stayed away, crouching behind a rock and puzzling over the events below.

The man motioned with his hand for the crowd to be still and quiet and Oros heard the hubbub gently reduce to silence as he opened his mouth and began:

'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations...'

Yes, it *was* him! It *had* to be!

But...how?

Oros had never been one to be able to explain the inexplicable - how one night a tree might be stripped bear of fruit but, come next evening, more berries might be found around its base. These things are difficult to explain - and this was even more perplexing.

But a dead man living again? He doubted it.

He knew that that was what they said - and he had it on good authority, for they'd seen him breathe his last with their own eyes - but to *accept* it stepped over the mark of possibility.

'And yet' Oros began to question himself carefully 'there *was* a certain logic to it all'

For death had always been the limit on life since before he could remember - not only the expiration of a life but the attitudes he'd heard were displayed by humans who lived in the valley below. If there was ever to be a solution to one, it implied a solution to the other - where one is a shadow of the more extreme problem.

That was it!

Oros realised it in a moment - finally he saw it all!

The man had come to solve the ultimate problem and, far from this being the end, it was simply a new beginning.

## Conclusion

When I first starting facing up to the problem with mankind, I wondered at whether there would ever be a solution found but, as I began comparing the ancient hamscripts, one with another, I discovered that there was already a testimony which pointed towards the final remedy.

What amazes me now as much as it did back then is the apparent disregard with which men and women the world over have towards it. A solution which chips away at the very foundation of their lives is certainly how many of them see it - actually, it's a solution which destroys the foundation completely and replaces it with one of its own.

For the personal radicalism that I've witnessed in the sons of the remedy has been clear evidence that a move away from a selfish lifestyle to one which bears the hallmarks of being as much selfless as can be attained must necessarily start by a complete overhaul of the basis of living.

The remedy doesn't expect to change a few, unwanted characteristics but it demands an absolute change within of the will to follow after a lifestyle outworked through an individual rather than simply resting upon free, initial acceptance.

I guess that's why only a few humans in each and every generation have embraced the solution with the commitment needed from the One who brought it into being.

But the previous testimony of the hamsters - carefully translated from the original hamscripts - is a clear indication that, if one man should give up everything to found the final remedy, then there must also be a commitment from those who wish to follow after him, a total repudiation of everything that everything might be granted them.

I'm not saying this is easy - and, for many, a lot of what's given to the One who provided the way is given back to them to use for the advancement of the remedy - but the evidence of the hamscripts bears no testimony to there being any other path down which a man may tread.



Limood

## Notes

01/02/11 - Limood - Strongs Hebrew number 3928 - 'learned'

03 - Tsara - Strongs Hebrew number 6879 - 'leper'  
Mtw 8:1-4, Mark 1:40-44, Luke 5:12-14

04 - Steggy - Strongs Greek number 4721 - 'roof'  
Mtw 9:1-8, Mark 2:1-12, Luke 5:17-26

05 - Kesed - Strongs Hebrew number 2617 - 'mercy' from Hos 6:6  
Mtw 9:9-13, Mark 2:13-17, Luke 5:27-32

06 - Mawveth - Strongs Hebrew number 4194 - 'death'  
Mtw 9:18-26, Mark 5:22-43, Luke 8:41-56

07 - Kuma - Strongs Greek number 2949 - 'waves'  
Mtw 14:22-33, Mark 6:45-52, John 6:15-21

08 - Sozo - Strongs Greek number 4982 - 'to save'  
Mtw 27:32-56, Mark 15:21-41, Luke 23:32-49, John 19:17-30

09 - Nikos - Strongs Greek number 3534 - 'victory'  
Mtw 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-11

10 - Oros - Strongs Greek number 3735 - 'mountain'  
Mtw 28:16-20