

# ***THE HAMSTER GOSPELS***

incorporating

**The Final Remedy  
and  
A New Beginning**

by  
**Limood the Hamster**

# THE HAMSTER GOSPELS

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# **The Final Remedy**

**Part One  
of  
The Hamster Gospels**

## 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 hamscripts 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 thought 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 offered 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 they were obliged to pay, there was a friendly dialogue exchanged between many as Matthew sought to assess what was right to levy, even waving passed 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

in tow 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 as 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 manuscript 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 woman and the servant talked - all that was intended was for her daughter to be given some honour in burial before the day was up as she 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 the servant 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 seeking.

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

# **A New Beginning**

**Part Two  
of  
The Hamster Gospels**

## Introduction

In my first work , 'The Final Remedy', I recorded events from the world of hamsters living at the same time as the man who did strange things and in the same area in which he lived. I also went on to record - as faithfully as I could - the events surrounding his death from hamscripts that have been carefully copied in successive generations of rodents, eager to preserve some vestige of accuracy surrounding the facts that were eye-witnessed.

Here, I've devoted myself to deal with the events which took place in the years after my first work ended. There was such a wealth of information that, at times, I found it difficult to know which stories to include and which to omit, but those who wish to read a fuller record of the hamscripts available should consult 'Voices from Past Generations' by my colleague-in-fur Ersee Liagin who's put together a comprehensive source book for anyone seeking to gather together the extant hamscripts.

My studies have taken me, so far, to many colleges and libraries scattered throughout Eastern Europe where the hamscript tradition has been immaculately continued for centuries. I am in debt to so many scholars who've gone before and librarians and keepers of the scrolls in the present day that I trust each will accept a summated word of thanks here to save cluttering up this popular account with a list of names.

Unlike my previous work, there are very few different versions of the events which I'm now about to relate and I've declined to give the reader the same type of explanatory introductory notes about the hamscripts concerned. I've chosen, rather, to rely upon the collective work done on the handful of extant hamscripts in marrying the slight variations together and will be using the established text in all my translations.

I have given the reader some pointers where necessary to indicate where I obtained the hamscript and the significance of the story in the context of the New Beginning.

There were, however, a number of oral traditions which have been passed down through the hamster community over the millennia since this all happened and I've paid attention to these in a couple of places where their testimony seems to fill in a couple of gaps in the written testimonies.

Apart from this, the hamscripts have remained unaltered.

I also discovered the written hamscript of a story told to Kesef in his journey to Greece a couple of years ago. That the hamscript differs in only a few ways from the oral tradition is reassuring that hamsters have faithfully recounted the events of that century accurately, but I've preferred to use the written record which was committed to parchment at a much earlier date.

When the events of my previous work had taken place, Tsara endeavoured to commission recorders throughout the length and breadth of the land to accurately record those things which hamsters were beginning to witness. While some of these recorders had the skill to cross-question the witnesses and to order their report into a more professional report, others simply committed to parchment what their fellow hamster squeaked.

Some of the stories here contained, therefore, are somewhat personal and rough. I trust that the reader will forgive me if I feel that to radically transform them would be to undermine the sincerity of their testimony. I have left the text almost totally alone, therefore.



Limood the Hamster

## Nephele

*There are two versions of events which seem to have been compiled of this story. I write 'seem to' because the more modern (in relative terms only - the version is dated to as early as 65AD) strikes me as a hamster's attempt at simplification for a different type of audience.*

*This version is the earliest available to me and was needed to be emended in only two places by a text I discovered in one of the old libraries of the ancient world which has only recently been excavated, the findings being published in May 2000 in the pages of The Rodent Weekly.*

It's amazing what you can see on a busy thoroughfare. Humans are all too busy in their daily lives to stop and take stock of their surroundings that they often leave unnoticed the events which take place all around them that are both interesting and downright weird.

Take this road, for instance. If you'd care to stop by the wayside and watch the travellers, you'd see a wide variety of men and women going about tasks that remain almost hidden through lack of observation to others who may even share the same piece of road at the same time.

There! That's a woman on an errand for her family. You can see it in the haste with which she's walking and the money that jangles from her side. Probably off to buy some wheat or barley to grind at home and bake bread with. You see a lot of these types of people here. Sometimes they have jars on their heads which they take to the well a few hundred yards beyond that small summit in the distance, coming back full of water.

You see a lot of men here, too, but what their trades are is far more uncertain. Without a doubt they're headed for the great city to the west to buy or sell - or both - and to make some profit for their families.

Others you can see all around you in the fields that're laid out everywhere that the soil covers the bare rock. The fields are green at the moment, even though the first harvest has already come - there are still a great many times in the next few moons that other fruits and cereals will need to be gathered into the barns for the winter or sold in the markets for pieces of silver.

That's the great joy of living somewhere like here - the face of the landscape is always changing, fluid, unfixed. And the expressions on the faces of those travelling on this road where one of my burrow exits faces always gives me something to think about.

Why, just the other week, there were two rabbis on their way to the great city, discussing the uncleanness of rodents and whether their law forbade contact with the living rather than simply the consumption of the dead. It all sounded a little macabre to me but I was fascinated by their discussions as they journeyed on by, their faces set towards the place from which their law would be made and announced to the nation.

Yes, fascinating.

The kids are funny - so full of energy that they must walk twice the distance of the more direct adults who seem unconcerned that they insist on playing tag round the other travellers - and much to their consternation, it has to be said.

Then there was that group that lost someone.

Mmm...I remember that clearly. That was what you wanted me to relate, wasn't it?

I thought so.

Well, it was a fairly overcast day, I recall. Not a hundred per cent cloud for there were blue patches everywhere and occasionally the sun would shine through to cast shadows all around.

But it wasn't a typical summer's day, anyhow.

They captured my attention when their heads appeared over the tiny summit in the distance because of the speed with which they were walking - actually, it was the lack of speed. They seemed to dawdle as if the place they were travelling to was the place that none of them wanted to reach.

I ran through the burrow to the furthest exit hole I had and sniffed that the coast was clear before poking an ear above ground to listen to the conversation. Who was speaking I couldn't tell, for there's very little cover there to disguise a rodent head as there is above the main entrance, but I clearly heard one of them ask whether the time had come for something to be restored.

That was quite a unique question for this road - I'd never before heard questions like that. I'd heard discussions about possibilities and events which were likely, but it was the first time I'd heard a



statement which assumed that something had to happen.

I'm not saying that it *never* occurred on the road - only that I'd never before heard it. That got me listening intently to whatever answer was about to be given. The answer was more perplexing than illuminative and began 'It's not for any of you to know the fixed moment when my Father is to bring this to pass. But you will re...pow...whe...'

Rats! They were going out of earshot!

I scampered hurriedly to the main burrow entrance and poked my head above the ground in time to hear the concluding words '...Samaria and to the end of the earth' wondering what had happened in the middle.

Even though I tried to reconstruct what they *might have* said in the following period of night, I could come to nothing that I felt happy about. I guess it will have to remain a mystery - unless the humans who were with him that day heard the exact words and have written them down in the pages of their own history.

Anyway, that isn't the main point of my story. It was what happened next which was unusual - and the reason for me telling you what I saw. For, as far as I could tell, they were the only group of people who were on the road - a way in the distance, I could see another speeding from the scene, their back set to press on to their destination but with no concern for what was happening behind them.

The group who'd been talking seemed alone.

Suddenly, one of the men rose above the others - as if he'd jumped on top of a boulder - and the others stopped in their tracks as if something unexpected had happened. It took me a while to work out their surprise and it wasn't until I saw the man's feet clear the heads of the crowd that I realised he was rising up into the air with no strings attached.

Upwards he ascended as the group's eyes followed his shrinking form in the distance until, abruptly, he disappeared from view as a cloud rolled across the sky.

They must have stood - staring upwards - for a full five minutes. Time passed so quickly that it could have been longer, but all of us were expecting something else to happen.

A passer-by saw the crowd and, like humans do, looked casually into the heavens as he quickly journeyed away, glancing back once to wonder at the scene which had confronted him. The group seemed to be oblivious to his presence, however, so taken up were they with an expectation that some other event was about to take place.

Suddenly, there were two more figures standing beside them in white robes, catching their attention by asking them why they were standing in the middle of the road looking up into the sky. It was fair question, I had to admit, for I was beginning to wonder myself whether they might be here until nightfall - and, perhaps, forever - until something demonstrable occurred that they were expecting.

But the two men were unusual - almost strange. They didn't seem to come from anywhere but, even so, there they were, as large as life, asking them a fairly pertinent question. I guess that the question must've been rhetorical for they continued almost immediately by saying 'He who was taken up from you will come in the same way as you saw him go'

This seemed to answer any questions they might have been forming and their eyes drifted back to earth one by one - from those things which were purely above their comprehension to the reality of everyday life. Or was there little difference between the two? I'm not sure.

The crowd turned towards the great city from where they'd just come and began moving slowly down the path when one of them span round to face the two men in white and began 'What...' before realising that they'd disappeared from view in an instant.

It was like some conjurer's trick and I had to rub my eyes to make sure that I hadn't missed them disappearing into the distance. But, no - they weren't there. I was in no doubt that they'd appeared or that, just moments ago, they'd existed for all to see a handful of yards from the burrow entrance - I can take you to the spot if you like, I can remember the exact location - but they weren't there any longer.

Weren't 'what'? No - they just 'weren't'.

They'd ceased to be.

The crowd looked about but soon gave up the search, returning to their walk back towards the city.

Me? I wondered about the things I'd just witnessed. I didn't know if anyone would believe me until you spread the word everywhere that all the stories that seemed unusual needed to be recorded on parchment for future generations.

I wish I could give you a better explanation of what I saw but the event perplexed me. I guess that all we need to do is to record the facts, right? Let someone else bring an understanding of what these things mean.

Yes, absolutely.

## Kardia

*I would suggest that, if you intend reading this out to any young hamsters, you go through it first to consider whether it's suitable for them or not. The subjects which are dealt with here could send hamlets a little loopy. The hamscript comes from a thirteenth century copy but is substantiated by the oral testimony of the hamsters of Albania.*

There was a change in the city that could be felt, though just what it was seemed impossible to translate into words. It wasn't as if the walls had been daubed with bright decoration or that the rickety old stalls of the market traders had been replaced with solid and more acceptable structures - it wasn't that sort of change.

Neither was it that there was another building project which had captured the imagination of the inhabitants and which channelled their attentions off their problems and onto higher and more noble ideals. It was none of that sort of thing - and yet, perhaps, it was all of it.

Indeed, like I've just said, it wasn't easy to describe what had come about these past months - but there certainly was something tangible which could be felt, something that you saw in the faces of the people you sometimes met in the city.

Yes, I guess that was it - there were...people.

People make a difference - good or bad - you can't overcome the influence of humans whether they affect their world positively or negatively for it bleeds over into every situation around them. For now, though, it was all the former and it was good.

It wasn't a random group of them, however, that had made the difference - there was a certain people who'd been coming together who had that 'something' in common. Followers of the Way, they'd come together with a singleness of experience in those previous months to form themselves into one group, one people with all things shared where one would give another only to be supported by yet another who had the solution to obvious need.

It was all very strange, it was true. But the hamsters had perceived the change along with most of the other animals throughout the city, the birds being the first to bring tidings of the events that were being witnessed on nearly every street corner that you'd care to mention.

Kardia was one of those who lived in the meeting places of the Way, a large courtyard that'd been given over by the owner as and when needed. It wasn't that it was given over solely to their use for it still remained part of the owner's property at times when the gathering was dismissed but, when men and women began to gather, you knew that it was worth poking one's nose out from a hole in the floor or a crack in the wall to eavesdrop the goings-on.

That particular day, the owner was away on business and those of the Way who'd little business to perform in the city were gathered together in the courtyard, discussing matters as they impinged upon the people they knew and 'the Commission'.

Kardia wasn't altogether sure just what this 'Commission' was but she knew it had to be something important because it was what they seemed to talk about for a great part of that morning until they broke off their discussions to see to the preparation of some food around midday.

As they settled back down to their discussions, there was a shuffling of feet which heralded the approach of another who came in with haste into their meeting and placed a bag of money before them all.

'The proceeds from the sale of our field this morning' the offerer announced 'for the use of the people of the Way'

There was a movement from the shadows as two lifted the bag, moving it to the table where the coins were poured out to be counted while one amongst the number stepped forward to face him. There was a silence as he looked carefully into his eyes - Kardia imagined that he was trying to find words to express his gratitude, that such a gift to support those amongst their own shouldn't go ignored, but that didn't tie in with the words which followed.

'Why did you lie, Ananias?' the man began, which caused heads to be turned throughout the courtyard. Two or three silver coins rolled across the stone table and jangled onto the floor below as the counters forgot what they were doing and gazed at the two men standing eye to eye.

'You could have retained possession of the field' he continued 'and it wouldn't have been

counted against you. But to say that you sold the field for such a sum but to have kept back a portion to make yourself have the best of both worlds? Ananias! Why have you lied against the leader of those who follow in the Way?’

Kardia swallowed hard - this was unbelievable. Did the man *really* know this or was he just guessing? After all, hadn't this man been here throughout the morning with the others, discussing the matters about which they were continuing when Ananias made his arrival? How *could* he have known, then?

In that split second between comprehension and a possible response, the air went cold with anticipation. Then, as suddenly as the man had entered the courtyard, he fell down in a crumpled heap before his accuser.

Dead?

Two or three of the group rushed to check him over, putting their ears to his mouth and nose to test for life, touching his flesh to feel his fading warmth.

Yes, dead. Absolutely.

Now that was scary.

A group of young men emerged from behind the scene to gather up their fallen brother while a couple found a small room off the courtyard where a sheet was removed, bringing it to the corpse and wrapping the body within.

Kardia stood motionless, sniffing the air for any sign of life that she could detect. What puzzled her most was the speed with which this had all happened. Within the space of no more than a couple of minutes, Ananias had entered in glory and, as she sat there, was being carried out in ignominy.

As the group settled down once more to discuss matters, she had to pinch herself to wake up to the reality of what was being witnessed. For here, although these followers of the Way were committed to supporting one another in their need, there appeared to be an unseen hand that was protecting them from deceit and treachery.

That was real scary.

And then everything was normal again - for the next few hours, at least. As the sun began to sink in the sky, more people gathered with those already present while others left and Kardia could hear faint whispers recounting the events of the day.

Hushed tones were all she could make out, but the look of fear which fell upon all who were being told was a clear enough sign that what had happened was causing many to rethink their own sincerity of commitment.

Kardia couldn't take her eyes and ears off the scene - maybe because it seemed so unreal, maybe because she wondered what might follow - but within a few hours, the second half of the scene unfolded itself before her.

Enter, stage left, Sapphira - oblivious to what had taken place, pondering the whereabouts of her husband who'd been away from her side all that afternoon. The hair on the back of Kardia's neck stood to attention as if the apprehension of what might happen was pointing to only one possible outcome.

But these things weren't fixed as many might imagine - there was the choice of a response, the decision to conceal or reveal which was an integral part of human life. Try as a human might to say that reaction was forced upon them, most actions that a human participated in were the result of their own choice.

The same man who'd confronted Ananias stepped forward, attracting the widow's attention and asking 'Tell me...did you and your husband sell the field for the amount that we've counted?'

She turned her attention to the pile of coins stacked on the table on the far side of the courtyard and returned the man's gaze, affirming 'Yes, that's right. It's the full amount'

With no hesitation, the man asked her 'So why is it that both yourself and your husband have conspired to lie?'

Almost in mid-sentence, there was a shuffling near the entrance door as the man continued 'Listen! The footsteps of those who are returning from the burial of your husband! They will also carry you out!'

Suddenly, the woman fell to the ground, motionless. The young men, returning from the

previous burial, saw another corpse at the man's feet and stopped in their tracks, puzzling the scene which confronted them.

As if someone had pressed the 'pause' button, everyone stood motionless for what seemed like an eternity until one of the young men shrugged his shoulders and disappeared into a back room once more from where he retrieved another sheet, bringing it to the corpse and wrapping the body firmly before it was carried out of the courtyard as before.

Again, the scene settled into normality and Kardia remembered thinking 'How many more? Where's this going to end? How many sheets have they got in that back room?'

But she needn't have worried - the meeting resumed as it had done earlier in the morning but, as the sun fell, more followers of the Way entered the doorway to learn of the day's events and to share a meal before returning home to sleep.

It all seemed so...so...unnatural.

As if she'd been a witness of something surreal - almost supernatural - that day. As if there was a sharp dichotomy between sincere sacrifice and imminent judgment - as if there was grace being poured out upon all who followed in the Way but an expectation from its recipients that lifestyle would match receipt.

Kardia found it hard to explain but it gnawed at her brain for weeks as she watched, daily, the numbers grow and the strength of the movement develop. What was certain, however, was that those present never forgot the warning that the days' events had taught them.

## Hodos

*This is truly one of the most remarkable discoveries amongst hamster literature. That a hamster was present in this place at this time is remarkable in and of itself, but that travelling hamsters should have chanced upon Hodos in their endeavours to record the development of the New Beginning is equally fortuitous.*

When a force meets another, something has to give - somewhere. Especially if one's infinitely stronger than the other - and fatter.

I'd been explaining this concept to my brother only that previous evening as we met, face to face, down one of the burrows that served as a common routeway between our two complexes - but he seemed not to understand my point. He pushed and squeaked at me like some madman trying to compress some great width of material down a hole too small to receive it.

I have no idea why he didn't back off and try some other route - and, to be honest, it wasn't my intention to request that sort of information. I simply stood my ground and let him try his hardest to get past me. I knew he had to retreat cos there was no way round, over or under me - I knew because I'd constructed that particular tunnel myself and, sometimes, even I found it difficult to get through the gap when my pouches were full.

But he tried.

Now my brother is well-meaning but a little on the thick side - he has all the necessary faculties when it comes to survival but his IQ is such that the more complicated puzzles baffle him repeatedly until he shrugs his shoulders, lifts his paws into the air and goes off to contemplate the problem through a short nap which alleviates his frustration.

If only he'd the perception to see matters the way they really are, he'd immediately find the solution to his problem. It's just that, to date, he's never once been confronted with a solution that's made much sense to him and his brutish efforts to make something occur has more the effect of prohibiting it.

Still, he did have the wits about him to desist after a very short space of time, to turn his back on my presence there in the tunnel and to try an alternative route away from where I'd started grooming. It would have been quicker, though, if he'd listened to my initial remonstrations.

That's the problem with humans, too, no doubt - at least it seemed to be the problem in the incident that I'm about to relate. And you thought that my opening remarks had no purpose to them? Really! You should pay particular attention to what I've just told you for, in those words, you'll find an interpretation of what unfolded before me during that midday scene.

It was warm - really hot, I mean - and the sun was high overhead when I poked my nose out from the hillside overlooking the valley floor below. It was a sort of 'pass' in the rocks - natural, though, and easily navigable - along which travellers neared the city at the conclusion of their journey.

And this band of travellers weren't anything special - they weren't typical, either. They were just going about their business as other men like them do.

I was already squinting as a result of the light of midday - not just because of the direct light which was overhead but through the reflections on the rocks which caught the sun and the metal buckles and tools on the travellers which flashed into my eyes.

Then, suddenly, there was more light - or, should I say, a different light - on the road in front of where this band were walking and it seemed to knock the entire group over like some bowling ball in a clean strike. They fell to the floor like blossom does in the Spring - well, no. Actually, it was much quicker than blossom for that tends to cascade gently to the floor - these men fell violently to the floor.

I don't think anything had hit them, knocked them over - I think it was just the fear which the presence of the light had brought with it that made their ankles weak. Then there was a voice - I remember it clearly but I didn't see anyone speaking.

What I mean is that the band who were now outstretched on the ground were clearly in no fit state to say anything - neither could I tell that their mouths were moving - the voice seemed to come directly out from the white light that was opposing them in their journey, but, as to a human shape or form, my eyes were unable to be sure.

The voice was calm, too. Not weak, you understand, but peaceful. It was as if it had a knowledge of its own authority but that it didn't need to use demonstrable force to make it known. I'll never forget those words - not because they were so earth-shattering as to be unforgettable - but because they weren't what I was expecting at all.

All the voice said was 'Why are you persecuting me?'

Well, okay, there might have been a name or something which preceded it - it took me a couple of seconds to come to my senses when at last I heard. But that's hardly important, is it? I clearly remember the substance of the message.

The next few words I heard were strange, too. One of the men who'd been staring directly into the light asked 'Who are you?' as if he could see someone in the blazing light. I strained and squinted my eyes as hard as I could but it was just impossible to see anything - the brilliance seemed to merge all figures - if indeed there were any - into one.

I would have thought that the question '*What* are you?' would have been more accurate - but who am I to doubt what the man saw? I guess he must have seen *someone* there in the light or else he wouldn't have asked him the question directly. Or was he supposing there was a figure there because of the voice?

I know, I know - I was a little confused. And I've become even more so since thinking about it these past few days. I remember what I saw clearly - it's just that I don't fully understand it.

Then there was another voice, almost immediately following the man's question. It was the same voice as had begun the conversation - I could tell. It had that same air of authority but was level and consistent. It began by answering the question and stating that he was the one that the man was persecuting.

That made me smile.

'Bad choice' I thought 'Very bad choice'

If an enemy could demonstrate that sort of spectacular display before you, personally I'd want to know how to become their friend, how to ameliorate their anger. Wouldn't you? Humans can get very noble with belief in their own cause but, if your enemy holds all the weapons, what good's a peashooter?

It couldn't have occurred to the man that he was opposing a power that was so awesome that it could snuff his life out with the click of its fingers - his fingers. Well, I didn't see another form - as you know. I guess he must have suddenly realised in that instant that the force which he'd been opposing was actually far greater and more powerful than he'd previously imagined.

I couldn't tell whether the man had a change of heart or not - those things are internal and impossible to observe - but I know that *I* would have done.

The voice continued speaking, instructing him to enter the city from which he was just a few miles distant and to wait for instructions. This was getting to be like a spy thriller, the more I watched. You know what I mean?

The light disappeared with the speed with which it had first burst onto the senses and those who'd been on the ground around the man gathered about him, lifting him from the ground as he stumbled for a short while and was steadied by their outstretched arms.

There was something not quite right here - something I was missing. Surely the man was capable of walking alone with no helper? Ah yes! Then I realised. The man was blind...

...Blind?

How had he seen the figure in the light? Then I realised what I'd witnessed *before* it'd all happened. The man was most definitely walking alone, unaided - he must have gone blind by looking into the light. But the others had looked, why hadn't they had it happen to them?

That was strange - but it was the fact of the matter. I certainly can't explain it but I'm making sure that I report what I actually saw with no embellishments. Well, not many. The bit about my brother and the tunnel wasn't embellished, I just thought it would...never mind.

What happened to that small band of men as they disappeared from view, I have no idea. Someone else told me that they'd seen a man with the same description in the city walking around the streets and declaring positive messages about the one who'd spoken to him on the road.

Well, I guess that's possible - but they didn't say he was blind so I have my doubts. But who am

I to judge these things? There've certainly been some strange goings-on in these parts for the last few years and this is only one which scratches the surface of them all.



## Koinos

*This is one of the classic stories of the New Beginning, which has been told around food dishes across the world by hamsters and mice alike. The significance of what took place is difficult to adequately describe in our own understanding but, believe it or not, the people who followed after the Creator actually believed that they were to put down those who weren't from their own people.*

*Yes, I know - curious, isn't it? This was the event that sealed an understanding in the people of the New Beginning to realise that the Way was for all humans everywhere.*

The first Koinos knew that something unusual was happening in the house, was when the centurion began pacing to and fro in the small room waiting for the arrival of some men. He hadn't seen this happen very often but, when it had done in times passed, there was always something unusual or important which occurred immediately afterwards.

This, though, was different - somehow.

Koinos wasn't exactly sure how that could be but the urgency in the man's pacing, the look of concern on his face and his frequent looking out from the doorway to see whether those summoned were coming in haste, all contributed to his realisation that something must be about to take place which was unique in all his dealings with this family.

When I say 'dealings', the reader shouldn't misconstrue my meaning. For Koinos wasn't generally known by the household - they only saw a shadow on occasions as he flitted from one piece of furniture to another or ran into a hole with pouches stuffed full of food that had been gleaned from the floor where they prepared it.

But, in his own unique way, he 'dealt' with the family and, when Koinos thought about his involvement, his mind wandered into a consideration that he was providing the family with the service of keeping the house clean and spotless by his continued Hoovering up of discarded and waste products that gave him a bounteous meal most nights.

He'd seen important events before and always with the same type of procedure - the centurion would pace to and fro in his favourite room. Some people were later to define the rooms by certain labels but, as history records for us, not once is a room ever referred to as a 'Pacing Room' even though this was what was very often done in this household in particular.

Even today, archaeologists give labels to rooms by the type of discovery which they unearth within the walls of the enclosure but, unless they were to find a small, shallow strip of floor that they could accurately determine had been worn away due to the pacing of a human millennia ago, they'd probably never give such a name to the room.

But, that's incidental. Koinos certainly knew this room to be the pacing room - the place where the evidence of important events that were about to happen took place, sometimes days prior. This was one such occasion.

Koinos waited with some anticipation from his vantage point high up above the action as, eventually, two servants and a soldier greeted their master and entered the room to hear his instructions. These people were always around and their presence, in and of itself, meant very little - but they certainly seemed to have come there in some haste.

'I'm sending you to Joppa' the centurion began 'first light in the morning. And you're to find a Jew there called Peter who's lodging with a man called Simon who's...' the centurion thought carefully before finishing his sentence '...who's a tanner'

That certainly came as somewhat of a shock to the three stood before him but it prepared the way for the next piece of information which was shortly to be disclosed.

'I've seen an angel' the centurion continued 'and I've been instructed that this man can give us all the answers to our questions'

Koinos could testify that this was something *big*. After all, angels might well be talked about amongst the family during their times alone together but, as far as he could remember, this was the first time any of them had actually claimed to see one.

Yes, definitely.

Koinos began to puzzle it through and was immediately struck by the very strange character of

this entire play that was unfolding before his own eyes. A Jew who was living with a tanner? Wasn't that illegal? Didn't their law say something about that that would make Peter's lodging there somewhat of a contradiction in itself?

And yet he was the one who was to give the centurion the answer he was looking for...this was weird. But, there again, ever since that other man had been killed, there'd been some very peculiar reports of goings-on in this part amongst a small group of people who'd been scattered here a few years back.

The hamster community was also buzzing with the stories that were repeatedly being told wherever two or three hamsters gathered together. For now, however, Koinos accepted what he heard even though his mind remained acutely aware that all didn't appear to be what it seemed.

The three men departed as soon as the centurion dismissed them, presumably to make ready for first light and their departure south to the city to which they'd been sent. Koinos wished he could've gone with them but knew that such a risk was tantamount to suicide. Especially in those days when hamsters weren't as accepted amongst humans as they are today. And the men were to be travelling light, no doubt, to hasten their journey to the place.

It was certainly going to be a long journey.

For the next few days, Koinos busied himself with observing and gathering.

The first because he was curious. There didn't seem to be much unusual about the household that he could tell, even though the women were busying themselves about the house in a manner which was more frenzied and intense than he could ever before remember.

Special food was prepared in the kitchen area on the third day towards evening but there seemed to be something wrong in the house that forbade most of it being eaten. Still, that wasn't as much of a concern to him as it was important to gather as much of it as was possible into his store for the coming days when food could be scarce.

And he fairly filled every space that was available, too.

On one of his last journeys, he overheard the centurion muttering something in the room below and he peered out to see him, once more, pacing to and fro.

'Where are they?' he said under his breath 'They should've been here by now'

His wife sat close by, working with some thread and cotton on what looked to be a tambourine - or was that something else? Koinos wasn't sure - replying 'You don't know how hard it may be to find him, my dear, or in what state the man is'

Then, as an afterthought, she added 'Suppose he's old? How long would it take them to journey back?'

The centurion seemed to see sense and stopped his movement with a suddenness at the end of one of his courses. 'You're right' he began 'but I shall wait only until tomorrow. Then I must send others to see what's become of them'

Koinos struggled with human time - there was no getting away from the illogical character of it all. For, to him, the event that he was about to see occurred on the third day after he'd first seen the centurion pace to and fro in the room. To the humans, however, it was the fourth day - perhaps they counted the day on which the event began as the first? - and Koinos had to check all his calculations to make sure that he hadn't missed a day somewhere, a very easy thing to do when one's prone to sleep right the way through both day and night.

But, no, it was purely down to the way that humans counted time.

Koinos had slept peacefully during the day but with one ear open for the sound of anything which would bring to a conclusion what he'd seen begun a few days' previous.

Sometime in the afternoon, there was a stirring below that jumped him awake with a start. He peered over the parapet into the room below, to discover a large gathering of men, women and children, all gathering together and facing the doorway as if some great king was about to burst upon them.

The centurion hushed them down and announced 'This man is very special. He will show us the right way to serve God. We must listen to him carefully and take careful note of all that he tells us'

The words were barely out from his mouth when the three men were heard entering the building and the centurion rushed out to meet them, leaving behind the bewildered crowd. Koinos quickly ran along the hollowed top of the wall to witness the greeting in the ante-room...

...and yes! There was an old guy standing at the back of the group who must've been responsible for the long journey.

The soldier pointed to the one that his master had summoned, the centurion rushing forward and falling down at his feet. Koinos had seen this type of behaviour before and had always wondered at how it was possible for a human's ankles to give way so easily in these sorts of situations. It surely must be a genetic weakness for there were many to whom it seemed a regular occurrence.

But Peter was having none of it.

He lifted the centurion to his feet, confessed that he was just a man - he certainly didn't look like anything else, it was true - and was brought in to where the crowd had gathered, the children already peering round the doorway to see what was so special in their newly arrived visitors.

To Koinos, there was nothing unusual that he could make out in their approach. True, they wore beards as most of the Jews did but that didn't make them look anything special - just different. Their clothes were what you'd see when you looked out into the streets most days and there was no glow of light radiating out from them, sticker attached to them that said 'I'm special' and none of them were wearing a printed garment that announced some deep and meaningful purpose behind their arrival - something that Koinos thought would have been along the lines of 'Peter kicks butt'.

It all seemed very plain and ordinary.

Koinos wondered at it all and began to think that nothing much was going to happen. But those stories he'd heard made him realise that the outward appearance of men and women was of little consequence and, not being able to see what lay beneath the hair and skin, he took up his position once more, overlooking the crowd and waiting for the fireworks.

There *had to be* fireworks - there just had to be.

If an angel had appeared to this guy as he made out, something unusual just had to take place very soon. Koinos braced himself for the building to fall down around them or for everyone to begin dancing on the ceiling but, as he was soon to find out, what was to happen was much more significant than anything he could've imagined.

As Koinos continued to contemplate what might suddenly happen, the centurion's guest acknowledged that it was an offence for him to be here - that he found it an affront to be standing in a foreigner's house talking and conversing with them.

Koinos' jaw gaped wide - and this was the man that the centurion had declared was 'special'? Thankfully, he noticed that there wasn't a sword strapped to his side, for he could clearly perceive that Peter's head might suddenly have parted company with his shoulders and neck.

Asking for an explanation of why he'd been sent for, the centurion explained briefly about the angel, keeping his words as concise as he could without omitting any of the poignant details. As he drew his words to a close, Peter seemed to accept whatever he'd just heard, as if this sort of thing happened to him on a regular basis and that it was no surprise.

Koinos sincerely doubted whether everything was under control and what was about to happen convinced him that it wasn't. The guest opened his mouth to speak and began by explaining the Way - he'd never before heard this message directly from a human but had heard many a hamster squeak about it in conversation.

So this was what all the fuss was about? Koinos began to see its significance in a way that, until that moment, he'd only found perplexing.

Suddenly, there was the sound of a rushing wind blowing through the house, which made Koinos dart his eyes through the opened window to see how the weather had changed but, no, it was as beautiful a day as it had been for the past week. Before Peter had the chance to finish his message, those in the room began shouting loudly in a language which he didn't recognise but which those who'd followed the three servants of the centurion began to look shocked at.

Their eyes darted from one to another as each of the household began announcing words which a few said they half-recognised from other places of the known-world. That was strange, indeed.

In fact, the entire scene was unique. As the crowd of men and women exited into the daylight, following after Peter in search of water, Koinos began to wonder at what he'd seen.

Was this a regular event?

Was this something that had taken the visitors by surprise?

Koinos didn't know the answer to these questions immediately but he did sense in the twinkling of an eye that something had happened that day that had changed the course of the Way for good.

## Phos and Kai

*While I was working on a translation of the testimony of Phos, I discovered a small fragment of a parchment - complete and unedited - which seemed to relate to the initial incident recorded by Phos, but written by a hamster called Kai. Despite my most stringent efforts to make sure that the two stories interrelated, I was unable to do so.*

*However, I've placed them together here as each seems incomplete without the other.*

## Phos

You smell them, sometimes - their character, I mean.

It isn't a sure fire way to tell one from another but I've had more than my fair share of positive identifications using that piece of essential equipment that goes by the name of 'nose'.

Dogs can smell fear, you know. That's what they say, anyway.

Who's 'they'? Not quite sure but that's what the hamster community say. In fact, they begin a lot of sentences with those words. Like 'They say that winter is just around the corner' and 'They say that a peanut is better for putting on weight than a pecan'

I've never been sure just who 'they' are myself but I guess they must be some group or other who meet regularly to decide on such matters as are important to all of us. So, yes, they say that dogs can smell fear.

I haven't the first idea why I told you that because it's not important to the story I'm about to relate - I just threw it in as an aside. After all, it seemed to parallel my opening statement that us hamsters can sometimes smell them.

Oh. Who's 'them'?

Sorry, I thought you said 'they' which was why I was explaining. 'Them' is criminals...are criminals. Which sounds better? No worries - I've put both down so you can make up your own mind. Committing stories into hamscript has never been one of my strong points and I'm only doing this now because I was asked to by the community.

Yes, criminals.

I mean, just because a man's a prisoner of someone or other, it doesn't follow that he's even guilty - let alone a criminal. I guess that most humans would say that they were, that there's no fire without smoke - or something - but just because a man gets arrested and chained to a wall, it doesn't mean that they're guilty of the charges levelled at them. Or that the charges, if true, are what's wrong at all.

Men have some funny ideas.

Where was I?

Ah yes. I was saying that you can tell a criminal by his smell - sometimes. This new prisoner, though, he didn't smell right. Not for a criminal. He had that same human odour that a hamster can detect from each and every one, but there didn't seem to be much 'criminal' about him.

He didn't appear to be afraid, either. I've already stated that dogs can smell fear and, to a lesser extent, hamsters can as well. But we rely more on what we observe with the eye than the witness of the emotions and what I saw in that cell in those few short days was enough to tell me that he seemed to be trusting in something other than his own innocence.

Very peculiar that. I've never before seen it in any other man - though I've heard the stories about that man they killed a few years back and how calm and serene he remained in the face of what he knew was soon to take place. This prisoner in front of me, though, *wasn't* that man - he didn't bear the right description at all. Not from the reports I'd heard.

The first couple of days passed smoothly enough. He was given a small portion of food a few times during the day though he seemed not to be too hungry judging from the amount he used to leave. That was the great thing about him - the other prisoners who'd been detained here used to eat every crumb that fell from the crusts they were offered, so ravenous did their appetite seem to be, but this guy left most of it.

I've never known a more bountiful time for gathering food as I did those couple of days. I was

sad to see him go - when he eventually did. But I'm rushing ahead of myself and you've probably lost the plot of the story I'm trying to relate.

That's the problem when I start to speak about food - I get carried away. You must excuse me but, being a hamster living in a prison cell, food is one of those items that's high on the agenda.

So, anyway, the prisoner had been there a couple of days.

From where I poked my nose out from the hole in the wall, I could tell that they must've regarded him as a very dangerous felon for he was chained to the wall with shackles that seemed so thick as to weigh him down.

As if this wasn't enough, two soldiers stood beside him - one on his right, one on his left - to guard against the chains accidentally falling from his hands - fat chance! - and, outside the cell, two more stood guard at the door of entry.

I wasn't quite sure just what they were for - it puzzled me. Were they to stop the prisoner getting out or from friends trying to get in? Perhaps the latter - I certainly couldn't envisage the man getting free from those leaded chains, let alone being able to overpower the two soldiers which stood by his side. Whoever was holding him captive here must have thought that there was a very real danger that some sort of liberating act was possible.

As it happened, what they hadn't expected was about to take place.

I know - I saw it with my own eyes.

That evening, the two soldiers who stood beside the prisoner were relieved by others who looked bigger and more sinister than the previous. Perhaps it was just my imagination - in a darkened cell which has little natural light, the shadows from the burning torches can play tricks on one's eyes.

I remember the changing of the guard particularly because of what was said. Yes, I remember it as clearly as if it was happening this instant. The relieving couple had dismissed their counterparts with the words 'Get yourselves some sleep for the morning trial' to which they'd replied:

'Tomorrow?'

'Yes, the king has decided that now the festival is over, he'll bring the prisoner out to the nation for sentencing with first light'

I know I was really sad when I heard the tidings - the prisoner didn't seem to pay it much attention - not because I'd made friends with the captive or that I was necessarily enjoying the dialogue that I'd been overhearing, but because there simply couldn't be another person who'd leave as much food as this guy did. It was a veritable feast.

Still, I'd managed to store up some decent stock so it wasn't *too* bad, I guess. It was just a shame that they didn't offer him a 'final request' of a special meal or something, cos I just knew that it would be the best time I'd ever had - but the customs of the soldiers prohibited such a kindness.

And so, the prisoner settled down to sleep. Strangely enough, the soldiers seemed to find sleep a pressing necessity as well. I could understand their logic, however, cos there was no way that the prisoner could move in those chains - let alone sleep - and the guards on the door would surely raise the alarm if there was an advance of a liberating band of men.

So, yes, I understood. And they could rest assured that I wouldn't tell anyone. Not that they'd probably listen - after all, a hamster's word against a soldier's? No, they wouldn't listen.

I don't know precisely what time it was, but I remember that I'd already made three trips back to the nest carrying both food and bits of tunic from the soldiers' clothes for bedding when there suddenly blazed a brilliant white light in the cell, startling me to look round at a lone figure who seemed to have come from an entry point apart from the door.

Was there some secret panel in the rock wall?

I rubbed my eyes to peer in the direction from which the man came, but all I saw was a firm and solid barrier. Quickly, I took cover behind one of the two soldiers' bodies and raised my head above the general level of the torso to look out at the scene which was unfolding before me.

All three figures were sleeping as the man in white slapped the prisoner on the side and ordered him 'Quick! Get up!', the chains falling from his hands and feet as if they were wax that had just been exposed to a heat source.

The prisoner seemed to be still in some sort of daze - I could sympathise with him for I know

what I'm like when I'm woken in the middle of the day. It takes me ten minutes or so and a long groom to be able to concentrate on anything that needs my attention.

Humans don't groom, though - well, this one didn't. He rose to his feet and put on his discarded clothes at the command of the man in white which had been folded into a pile beside where he stood.

I began rubbing my eyes once more to try and make out whether this lone figure was some kind of Special Forces vigilante come to bring the prisoner out to the awaiting crowd. But wouldn't the soldiers have been woken up and relieved? This was a very strange way of taking the prisoner out to stand trial and one that I'd never before seen employed.

The angel moved towards the door and commanded the prisoner - well, ex-prisoner, I guess - 'Follow me' as he pushed the cell door open and walked out with the prisoner in tow, still trying to get his garments into a more comfortable fit, rubbing his neck to relieve some of the cramp that he felt from his unusual sleeping position.

I heard them shuffle down the hallway and, after another creak of a door, silence descended once more while the light dissipated, leaving behind the old familiar shadows that were part of my usual experience.

Everything seemed to have returned to normal - except that there was now an empty space where the prisoner had once been, while the two soldiers slept soundly guarding a vacuum.

Back inside the nest, I began to wonder at the events that had just unfolded before my eyes. I couldn't make much sense of them, it was true, but I remembered the story that I'd heard repeated from the hamster who'd been in the village synagogue in Nazareth that day a few years back when the man who'd been crucified attended one of the services there.

Yes, it all came flooding back to me now - but that's not what she'd said it had meant, had she?

'...to proclaim release to the captives' I quietly squeaked. Was it? Was that what the man had meant? I kinda thought I was seeing something that might point towards the reality of what I'd heard had been happening outside this prison but the more I struggled to apply those words, the more I realised that he hadn't meant that every literal prisoner was to be led out from the cell by a man in white.

No, that couldn't be.

But the literal event did give me the belief that what had been announced years before was possible - even more, that it was probable - in the lives of those who were following after him.

At daybreak, there was a commotion outside the nest in the cell, a movement of many people to and fro, with loud voices that seemed to proclaim innocence following accusation.

I wasn't interested in any of it, you understand.

They should have been here the night before.

## **Kai**

Sometimes, a hamster can't get a good day's rest. Even though she may be a good hamster, has never stolen from any fellow rodent and has always maintained a good relationship with the humans from whom she makes a living, events seem to conspire against her to wrest sleep from her body.

This was one such time - and it had continued for days. How many, I wasn't sure, but I knew that I'd been conscious for many hours over the past day periods and now, with another night, I was feeling just a little ratty.

It was those humans - they just wouldn't stop talking! Day and night it had continued unceasingly, with loud shouts and declarations that made little or no sense to me. For they were talking about some rock or other being imprisoned by an evil king - what had a rock got to do with anything?

I knew that humans regarded pieces of the earth with a great deal of favour even over and above the welfare of their fellow man and woman but, the way they were speaking, you'd've thought that this rock was human.

They spoke about the need for *his* release, that they couldn't do without *him*, that *he* was

fundamentally important to all the followers of the Way. Were these guys nuts or what? It certainly seemed that way.

Deep into the night, there was a loud banging at the front door and a maid came to the entrance to answer the call. There was something in the way the door was knocked that seemed urgent, desperate - as if the opening of the door shouldn't be delayed a moment longer.

'Who is it?' the maid asked, her hand hovering over the wooden beam which secured the entrance.

'It's me! The rock!' replied the voice.

'Yeah, right!' I remember squeaking indignantly 'And who wheeled you here on a barrow?'

But, no, I was wrong. That must've been his name. In that one split second, all the pieces of the jigsaw fell into place and I realised my misunderstanding. The rock was a person - a real live person. Arrested and held prisoner, no doubt, by the king.

This was exciting! He'd been released?! Perhaps that group that had been meeting had done the business like they were trying to.

'Just wait til they see him' I thought 'they'll be delighted to know it's all worked out'

I lifted my sleepy eyes into the dim light of the hallway, expecting the maid to lift the beam and allow the rock to enter but no - in her delight, she turned quickly and ran into the meeting, shouting excitedly 'He's here, he's outside the door'

The room grew silent as a couple emerged into the hallway with the maid, complaining 'You stupid girl! How can he be outside the door - he's in prison!'

'I tell you. It's him!'

'You're seriously unhinged, woman!' another insisted 'We might have been praying for his release for days, but this is impossible!'

The knocking continued - even more urgently than before - and, in curiosity, the wooden beam was removed from the door and, hastily, the rock came in, motioning with his hand for the others to be silent and to contain themselves.

From that moment on, there were hushed whispers - at last! peace! - and my soft nest seemed to call to me from the wall cavity. I was torn between sleep and intrigue, between listening to the call of my tired body or of earwiggling in the other room.

It wasn't a hard choice to make - though, had I known the importance of what was going on in that room, I may have decided to fight the sleep and stay awake.

I regret that now.

But, at the time, it seemed like the best option.



## **Cholos**

*The teaching of Cholos is a timely one and, to all humans who may be reading this, I want to make it quite clear that the generation amongst whom I currently live still suffers from the same misunderstanding now as it did then.*

*If Cholos were allowed to speak into human society, there would be many who'd forsake putting men and women on pedestals, of deifying past followers of the Way and of elevating one great man over the heads of all - rather, men and women would rely upon the Creator who gave these individuals to them all.*

*On a textual note - this hamscript isn't found as part of the compilation of stories concerning the New Beginning in many of the libraries of learning in the East. But this may be due to human influences which have not yet been fully studied and reported on.*

They were just ordinary men, I was sure of it. I'd watched them at close quarters and there was no doubt at all in my mind that they lived and breathed - and ate and slept - just like every other man, woman or child on the face of the earth.

If you got near them - and there was plenty of opportunity to do just that when they slept - they smelt like any other human I'd ever got close to. Their faces didn't radiate with light and they didn't float about the place instead of walk with their feet making contact with the muck of the earth.

Yes, they were most ordinary - extremely most ordinary.

I'd been gleaning on the far side of that part of the city which was more rural than anywhere else when sunrise surprised me. I really should've been watching the signs of the lightening of the horizon but, to be honest, the time sped by so quickly that I forgot all about the need to get to ground before the sun's rays hit the cold earth.

But that was why I'd made a temporary burrow here - as I'd done in a few other places I could mention - because I tended to forget about safety when there was food that could be collected.

As chance would have it, it was exactly where my acquaintances were headed that very morning and their voices awoke me from a fairly heavy sleep during the early part of the morning.

Curious as to what they were doing here - I'd only encountered them in the house below which I had my main burrow before this moment - I poked my head out from the hole and witnessed a large gathering of men and women, nestling down before them while they began declaring to them the news about the Way.

That was the first time I'd heard that particular message - I had no idea what it was all about even though there'd been itinerant recorders travelling through the city on their way to other reported incidents in towns around here. But, being the kind of hamster who likes to keep himself informed of human affairs, I decided to forego a little sleep and to pay close attention to what was being declared.

It was all straightforward, I recall, but don't ask me to repeat what they said because my mind isn't built for the word for word recollection of human speeches. I could tell you with some accuracy the discussions I had with the other hamsters in these parts, but human words are two a penny and I usually pay them no heed.

You couldn't get away from what took place at the end, though. No, that was more memorable than anything I've ever seen or heard before or since - it impressed itself upon my memory to an even greater extent than the time I found a hoard of sunflower seeds at the entrance to my burrow at the house.

I remember that moment of discovery, that exhilaration of my body, that...what? You don't want me to tell you about that? Okay, okay. I'll stick to the story.

As I looked around those present, I could tell that there was a great mixture of people from all walks of life - the rich and poor sat close together, those with authority over men's affairs and those who were the object of their legislation.

I noticed one man in particular - sat not too far distant - who I'd seen being carried back and forth in the city on repeated occasions. Sometimes I'd see him sat at street corners - though what he was doing there I have no idea. He didn't seem to go hungry, though, and he at least made enough

of a living to put clothes on his back and feed himself.

What intrigued me the most was that the speaker kept looking at him - he'd run his eyes over those gathered, picking out very few individuals on which his eyes would stop, but his gaze always returned to this man for - what? - three or four seconds, before he moved on once more to look about those present.

Then something very alarming happened - and it was this which seemed to cause all the subsequent confusion. The speaker stopped speaking almost mid-sentence as his eyes once more fell upon the man in the crowd and, with a loud shout, he ordered him 'Stand upright on your feet!'

I slapped my paw across my eyes in disbelief - hadn't someone best tell the speaker that he couldn't conform to the request? That was the problem with outsiders, they tended not to pay much attention to the situations that the locals lived in, let alone the physical state of many. And this scene outworking itself before me was certainly no exception.

If only the visitor had taken the time to learn about the locals, he wouldn't have made the same crass mistake.

But that's my problem, you see. I tend to assume things about people. I know that's how I felt when I heard the command - what I wasn't expecting was for the man to jump up on his feet and to start dancing and leaping about the place like some young hart.

I looked once again at the man to make sure it was the one I remembered - yep, sure was. This was the lame man - the one who couldn't walk about the city cos his legs didn't function as ordinary people's did. And here he was, restored, running around the place as if he'd just...er...just been given a fresh pair of legs.

Well, yes. That's exactly what'd happened, hadn't it?

The crowd rose to its feet. Initially in shock, it began to realise the enormity of what had just taken place and, faint at first, they began to chant 'The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!' falling down before the speaker in some attribution of divinity.

Yeah, right.

As I said at the very beginning, these were ordinary men - they were no different than the hundreds and thousands of the city's inhabitants that I encountered each and every day as I sought to get enough to feed myself. They talked in the same language, they ate the same food, they were needful of sleep like anyone else and their body odour marked them out as identical.

Did this crowd realise what they were saying?

The speaker at the front of the crowd turned to his colleague in absolute horror, wondering at how an action had turned a passive crowd into one that had so misinterpreted the event that they were bringing the priest of the local temple out into the street to conduct their offering of sacrifice to them.

They retreated from the scene as fast as their feet would carry them but I managed to catch up with them an hour or so later as I made it back to my regular burrow in time to see crowds standing outside their lodgings.

'Zeus' one shouted from the back 'we've always served you!'

And chants of 'Hermes! Hermes!' echoed off the vertical stone walls that abutted the area where they'd gathered to encourage the speakers to come back out to them.

As both speakers exited out into the street to confront the crowd, one motioned with his hand and shouted 'Please!' above the noise of crowd. Then, again 'Please!'

They began to settle down, aware that their gods were now about to speak once more to them. The crowds cowered before them like some child before the master who's to reveal their transgression. He motioned with his hand and began:

'Men, why are you doing this? We are men just like yourselves - but we've come today to bring the good news that you should turn away from these empty and foolish things which you do to serve the one who created everything which you see around you'

A silence fell over the crowd as he concluded by repeating 'We're men - we're just men. Don't worship us - worship the One who sent us'

'Yes! I squeaked 'I can vouch for their words!' but my voice was lost in the stirring of the crowd who reluctantly turned their backs on the building and wandered off into the distance, kicking at the

dust and pebbles which lay along the path.

'I don't think I convinced them' one speaker said to another.

'You did all you could' the other replied 'but they seem intent on making us out to be something we're not'

At least these men were under no illusions. Some would have accepted the declarations about themselves, would have ever-so-humbly acknowledged that they were that type of man that others considered to be great. Some might even have accepted the sacrifice that was to be offered to them.

Not these men.

They seem focused on their purpose for being here and there was no one - absolutely no one - who was going to sway them from what they knew they had to do.

But, as I've previously said, they were just men.

## Agora

*This is by far the most obscure manuscript that I found and the reader is called upon to read between the lines to understand what it is that Agora saw. Kesef, a previous hamster of literary fame, brought this manuscript to the world's attention from an oral record passed on to him by a local hamster living on the summit of Philippi. I here reproduce the documented scroll.*

Something strange was going on in the city that day, something that never seemed to be duplicated afterwards. Of course, Philippi was a Roman town at that time - very important she was too - and we supplemented our diet with the crumbs and morsels that were dropped by the centurions up here on the hill.

From where we lived, we could see it laid out before us like a playing card propped up against a mountain. The forum always glistened in the sun because of the slabs that reflected the light and the streams of water that flowed round the four boundaries, fed by the two pools on opposite sides of the bema.

There were colonnaded walkways and tiled houses then, but I know that we always used to be drawn back to the forum where crowds milled about seemingly aimless and where the magistrates decided on issues for the sake of the town - yes, it all seemed to turn on the bema seat.

As I've said, something strange was happening that day, but it'd started a few days previous.

I think there were four of them - but it's not always easy to distinguish between forms - who set out west on the road. No, that wasn't particularly strange in itself, but they stopped shortly after leaving the city and seemed to be milling about by the river that flowed in the valley.

Then there was all manner of splashing in the water - it was so bad that we thought someone must have been drowning. But, as quickly as it began, it ended - and then they walked back into the city, a number greater than those who had marched out.

Next day - I seem to remember it was the first day of the week - it happened all over again. Only this time, there were more than four that left the city.

Was it ten? Twelve?

But the same fun and games seemed to be going on in the river just like the day previous, so much so that our hamlets wanted to go down and do the same. We barely managed it but our insistence that hamsters sink like stones rather than float like wood constrained their exuberance.

Then they returned to the city.

Next day, more went out, they splashed about in the river, they returned.

The following day, even more.

And even more after that.

And after that.

Now it seemed as if the entire city was going out to the water each day - it wasn't the entire city, you understand, but the numbers were growing daily so that it appeared that way.

I guess it could have gone on forever had it not been for that day, that very strange day...

It'd become a daily event for us - partially of amusement but mainly of intrigue - so we lined the Acropolis from the eldest to the least to witness the march, the splashing, the return.

This day, however, it was different.

We had heard a loud voice for about a week - a woman's voice, it was - accompanying the procession. I remember it was something about 'salvation' and 'servants' - or was it 'starvation' and 'croissants'? I can't remember. It was loud, anyhow, and the voice reverberated from the valley floor, echoing against the hard rock faces.

That was normal - or so it had come to be - but what followed next was unexpected. A man's voice pierced through the other noise like a trumpet sound announcing some important event. Now, let me see, what was it about? For the life of me I can't remember but I know it was something resembling a command.

Suddenly, there was a commotion and a human form fell to the ground - seemingly of their own choice. No one pushed or touched them (but it's a long way down from here) and they lay on the ground almost motionless while the crowd resumed its march to the stream, splashed about a bit and

then began to return.

The human form by this time had risen to their feet and returned into the forum - and beyond - followed by numerous people emerging from one part of the square, looking about them at the people who passed by, stopping some and seemingly engaging them in conversation.

As the crowd re-entered the city from the stream, the rabble in the forum massed together and walked quickly up onto the main road to confront them. Two tides of people met and the air was filled with shouting, hands raised and gesturing which, I'm quite sure, was far from pleasant.

Then the crowds moved in unison into the forum, a man being dragged forcibly in their midst and released in front of the bema where the magistrates sat. There was more shouting - fingers were pointed - the crowds pushed and pulled at the man. And then he was grabbed, beaten and thrown into a small stone building that we'd never seen him enter or depart from previously.

That could have been the last of it, had it not been for our curiosity.

When darkness fell, the sound of singing floated up the hill. This wasn't unusual - it was normal for song and dance to fill the air - but it was unusual for it to continue long into the night and for it to emanate from the building that the man had entered.

We were about to send a group of hamsters down to investigate when the mountain began to shake and rocks cascaded down its side into the valley below. It was by no means unusual for such a thing to happen but it also wasn't an everyday occurrence.

We abandoned our reconnaissance mission and sat tight, repairing the damage done to our burrow complex and endeavouring to settle the minds of our tiny hamlets.

Morning came soon enough and a crowd gathered around the small building where the singing had been heard.

Well, what can I say? Nothing that happened seemed to make much sense to us. What hamster can honestly say that he understands all the affairs of men and women?

But there was one final paragraph to be written.

That same day, a crowd - just like days' previous - walked out the gate and across the stream.

But this time there was no splashing, no water games.

The crowd stopped briefly by the stream, milling around together - then six (or eight? It was very difficult to see) separated themselves from the crowd and walked into the distance, the others returning within the walls and dispersing quickly to its four corners.

And that was the end of the daily spectacle.

I'm still not sure what it was all about.

But they said it was important that we record it - for posterity, they said. After all, since that man died, there've been some very unusual things take place throughout the places we live.

I don't see the significance now, you understand, but we might one day.

## Thuris

*I've never been too sure what to make of this story but that's not to say that there are great differences between the manuscripts which have come down to us. I've no doubt as to the authenticity of the event but I've found it hard to place it in its correct chronological position.*

*I've followed the traditional citing of it, however, for lack of any internal evidence which may indicate otherwise. It's always been accepted that this event took place late on in the life of the man in question.*

A hamster has to be careful when he goes on his nightly missions to hunt for food for he never knows where danger might spring from. After all, one might presume that most of the potential assaults on his life would be from the horizontal plane such as foxes and weasels - or even from fellow hamsters - but, in truth, the most sinister of all areas from which an attack arises is the air.

No doubt you've heard the humans' expression that 'It's raining cats and dogs' which, although non-literal, is the sort of thing that we rodents have to concern ourselves with. It's very common for a moggy to have ascended the branch of some tree or other, awaiting the approach of a victim, before mewing some word of attack and throwing themselves off the branch to surprise us from the skies.

Owls are equally a problem for they sit in trees and, with their acute sense of hearing, can pinpoint the faintest of movements as we scurry about the place. Their presence is virtually imperceptible - and their sound in flight is almost a reflection of the silence of the night - so we've learnt that the safest place to walk are the edges of buildings where an attack from the skies is increasingly unlikely - especially from birds who'd crash into the solid stone walls if they attempted such a difficult manoeuvre.

Rain is also problematical - though it's seldom fatal - and can actually help disguise the sound of our movements from predators, for they aren't clever enough to distinguish between the pat-pat-pat of the raindrops on the ground and the similar sound of our paws. But water makes the fur become matted and waterlogged - it makes a pleasant summer's excursion into a damp drudge through mud - and we don't enjoy the nights as much.

One also has to be careful of the odd falling human which plummet out of the night sky with no apparent warning.

What? You've never experienced it?

Then you're the lucky one, indeed - when it happened to me, it scared me half to death.

Whether it was someone who was trying to mimic the great Icharus, I doubt. For I carefully inspected the body for residual odours of wax when it landed a foot away and there were certainly no feathers which cascaded down behind him. Neither was it a particularly warm evening when one would've expected the wax to melt and the human to fall earthward.

But what the man was actually doing 'above', I have no idea. I couldn't even explain his presence there by recourse to an overhanging branch or some structure built into the wall of the building. All I could see was the vertical side which seemed to rise forever into the night sky and a small opening a great way into the distance.

My first feeling was one of flight but I quickly stifled that urge and turned, instead, to the crumpled pile of flesh and bones which lay motionless beside me. The thought struck me that, perhaps, the lad might have some food in his hand and, even though I knew this wasn't the most noble of thoughts, a hamster is forced to be practical when food's scarce.

But, examining each hand assured me that there was nothing useful. Then, my instinct turned to curiosity and I pressed my paws onto the lad's wrist to see if I could detect a pulse. There was little - if anything - I could do, but I was intrigued by the scene that had played out before me and was eager to know whether there was any life in him.

Nothing. Not so much as the faintest throb of life. His chest was motionless, too, which wasn't a good sign but, before I had the chance to listen at his half-opened mouth for the movement of air, I was disturbed by footsteps on stone which echoed round the courtyard.

I quickly backed myself up to the edges of the wall - I was fortunate that the moon was casting its shadow into the recesses of the corners - and waited for a group of men to appear, running with haste to where the young lad lay.

They bent over, shaking him in a vain attempt to rouse him from what they seemed to take to be sleep. A couple of others lifted him into their arms, his hands flopping lifelessly behind his body and his head rolling about on his shoulders.

There was no doubt about it - the kid was dead.

I'd been right in my first assessment of the situation and turned to re-embark on my hunting expedition when I heard the voice of one who was pushing his way through the crowd, instructing them 'Move aside there. Move aside'

An older man approached the body and reassured them 'Don't worry - the boy's soul hasn't departed yet' and lifted him into his arms, hugging him close.

In a split second, the lad breathed deeply, his ribcage filling with air for the first time in a few minutes and a couple took him from the arms of the man to carry him away elsewhere.

The crowd were astounded - and well they might be - I, certainly, had never seen anything like it before. Neither have I ever witnessed anything from that time on to match what I saw that night.

The older man turned to enter the building once more and, as he did so, he looked back at the crowd that was following and said 'Well, I haven't lost anyone *yet* while I've been speaking'

And, with that, he disappeared from view.

## Ploion

*I must note here that the significance of the story only came to light within the past hundred generations of hamsters or so. It wasn't collected as Tsara's original command to hamsters everywhere but was found by myself as I was examining ancient hamscripts in Eastern libraries for my previous work 'The Final Remedy'.*

*I'm indebted to the Curator of St Petersburg University Library for allowing me to take a copy of the hamscript for inclusion in this work.*

My family hail from Myra in Lycia, an important port by all accounts and certainly one in which both small and large vessels weigh anchor to take on fresh supplies and to trade with the buyers and sellers. I'm the fourth hamlet in a litter of seven - or eight, I'm not sure - and had enjoyed my adolescence along with most other rodents when the responsibilities of adulthood began to burst onto one's awareness - but all with a fair degree of youthful exuberance.

How I ever managed to get onto that ship, I have no idea. Well, I do have *some* idea, I confess - but the actual mechanics of it all is beyond me.

I sought a living on the docklands of Myra where fish could easily be spilt and bags of grain torn open accidentally by the metal fixtures that were nailed into the oak beams. But that Summer hadn't been the best of times and I remember that my store seemed to indicate that, unless I increased the quantities of food I was finding, I'd be a couple of weeks' short when Spring came.

Although I could've retrieved food all the year round - so fruitful were the supplies here - the winter is such that I tended not to want to venture out into the night much after the shortest day of the year until the warming winds blow once more.

You could call it carelessness, I guess, for I was too eager, too desperate in my attempts to store up food, that I let my heart get the better of my mind. I remember finding a small hole at the corner of a wooden container and the smell of fresh nuts was too great a temptation to pass up. Entering the box, I found a fair treasure of supply and I quickly set about eating one, pouching another, eating one...well, I needn't tell you that this all took time.

I didn't pay much attention to the thumping noise on the wooden sides, nor the shaking with which I was being rolled about the floor - my one concern was to eat and pouch, eat and pouch as quickly as I could.

That was my mistake. When I exited the container, I found that the place I thought I was, I wasn't. The scenery was totally different and my scent routes were all gone. Besides this, the floor beneath my paws was unnervingly unstable. It wasn't that the wooden beams weren't solid under me, it was just that the entire floor seemed to be swaying from side to side, up and down - gently, it has to be said, but, nevertheless, I could still detect movement.

It was dark, too - even though my internal clock was telling me that sunrise should be imminent, if not already taken place. I sniffed skyward and detected shafts of light in the ceiling. Ceiling? There wasn't a ceiling here when I came in.

I heard someone above shout 'Away!' and the sound of water rushing against wood began to increase in my ears til I came to the horrible realisation that my container was now aboard ship, afloat on the seas and bound for who knew where.

I began grooming out of sheer panic - it's a common trait amongst us hamsters as you're aware and, in the circumstances, I couldn't think of anything else that was worth doing. The one thing I *did* know was that I wouldn't starve, but that didn't seem like too much of a consolation when, unless I was very careful, I could be thrown overboard by the rough sailors who plied their trade on the open sea and drown in the depths of the ocean.

I'd always known of the dangers of life in the docks but, until then, I'd laughed at the possibility that this could ever happen to me. Me? No, I was too clever, too sharp to ever be caught on board a ship when its time had come to sail.

Rats! I was just like everyone else - too concerned about my own existence that I'd committed the fundamental error of letting my stomach rule sound judgment.



The voyage was taking forever. Or was this the normal length of journeys on the open sea? I'd spoken with many a rodent who'd disembarked at Myra and discussed with them what sort of kick they got out of travelling the world by human agency, but it was never that important to me to ask them how long a voyage might take.

The black rats were the most prolific of all migrating rodents - they'd conquered continents because of their sense of adventure, staying close to humans whenever they could and using all the means at their disposal to remain hidden deep below the deck when most of the humans went about making the boat sail.

They were a breed apart, you know. I envied them on occasions when my dockland life got boring because they seemed to have tails to tell that so put my own experience into a shadow that I wished I was like them - well, I was now, wasn't I? I know it hadn't been out of choice but, if I made it to the other side - wherever that might be - I, too, would have a story to tell.

Only, I'd have to change the start of my story to something more elaborate - like 'Bored with life on terra firma, I secreted myself aboard an ocean going ship and threw in my lot with the tempestuous lady of the deep'

Yes, that sounded good - no one was here to say otherwise and I could rehearse a few lines to paint even harsher pictures of self-sacrifice and heroism once I was on dry land. I'd heard the rats tell tails, you see, so it wouldn't be difficult.

That evening, I chanced a journey on deck and peered over the side of the boat to see, far away in the distance, lights. Stars? No, they were definitely lights - but we were sailing away from them and, within an hour, they were gone from the horizon.

There may still have been land out there but there was certainly nowhere to weigh anchor and to get one's paws back onto dry land. There was a shuffling of feet behind me and I dived into a circle of rope which lay close to the edge as two men walked by - or was it three? - one saying '...the master of the ship knows better the times and tides of this sea'

The other man seemed to be restating his position - yes! There was the clanking sound of a chain, I heard it plainly at that moment - when he said 'But I perceive that there'll be much injury and loss if we continue this...' and they were both gone in the night.

Shortly after that, I remember the sudden bump with which I awoke, as the ship reeled violently back and forth. I'd been lying at the foot of the nut store but found myself outside the hole, being rolled around the floor like a bean bag.

Although I struggled to regain some sort of pawhold and stability in the cargo, I found it almost impossible and the best I could managed was to claw myself across to the side of the hull and sink my nails into a beam, rising and falling with the ship as it raged in the midst of the tempest.

Humans were all about me, grabbing crates and boxes and lifting them high above on pulleys and ropes. I thought I occasionally heard a faint splash in the waters, but there was so much noise that it could've been my imagination. Whatever, I was sure that they must be throwing the cargo overboard to try and save not only the boat but their own lives.

And there went my nut store!

But I wasn't feeling in need of food right then - indeed, it seemed to be the furthest thing from my mind. I could also see that the hull appeared to be filling with no small quantity of water and I began fearing for my own safety. In a vain attempt to reach higher ground, I grabbed for a rope that hurtled passed but missed.

It was then I noticed the beam to which I was holding. It circumvented the hull to a place where a small opening existed in a funnel-shaped structure that seemed to pierce the deck. Carefully, I paced round to the opening, pushed my way into the void and climbed upwards into what turned out to be a cabin where many of the sailors and passengers were trying the best they could to remain stationary.

I found a small cavity at the back of a fixed container and pressed myself against the sides to secure myself while a man came forward and approached another wearing a sword at his side.

When he spoke I could tell it was one of the men who I'd heard a few days' before and the sound of iron grating on iron made me realise that it must have been this man who was the other's prisoner. Here I was, thinking that I'd only sailors to watch out for and there were criminals on board!

Sheesh! If I'd only known what fate would've befallen me, I would've been more careful at the quayside.

'You should have listened to me when I told you not to sail' he began. I could tell that he wasn't going for the tactful approach - this was most definitely 'plan B'. But he had a point - it *had been* him who'd been speaking about not continuing on their journey!

'But, have no fear for, this very night, an angel of the God I serve stood by me and has told me that I'll be brought safely to the destination to which I'm bound. And you also will be safe - I have it on good authority - but we may need to run the ship aground on some island or other'

Well, that was *some* speech, I can tell you. I was all for standing on my rear paws and giving him a round of applause but the others didn't seem to be too impressed. They waved their hands for him to be quiet - but they heard, nevertheless, and they would have remembered.

The ship had taken a fair pounding and, even though the wind had lost its strength, we were adrift on the sea with little control over the direction we were headed (the sailors had thrown the tackle from the boat earlier when they were trying to lighten the load - I may not know much about sailing a vessel on the high seas but even I know that that's the *last* thing you'd do - or perhaps it was the last thing?).

I found a supply of wheat in the meantime, incidentally - just thought I'd throw that in. It'd been reserved into a container in the cabin I was now in, taken from a supply below deck which had been saved in case needed.

At least I didn't go hungry - which was more than could be said for my fellow sailors. They looked haggard and exhausted, having been without sleep and food for numerous days, trying to conserve what they had for as long as possible.

Suddenly there was the sound of a man shouting 'Twenty fathoms!'

Then, after a little while longer 'Fifteen!'

The men rose as one man and rushed out into the pitch blackness of night. There was a commotion as men began panicking, ordering 'Anchors from the stern!', the deck sounding like the main street of some great city.

They were soon back in the cabin, resting and waiting for daybreak, while the man who'd been right about this voyage all along encouraged them all to eat. They didn't seem all that encouraged, it has to be said, but he announced to them all that none of them would come to harm.

I think some were cynical, I'm not sure. But you had to judge the man by his previous success rate, didn't you? After all, he'd warned them not to sail and said that this would happen if they did. I think they saw sense in the end and took large bites out of the bread they'd been saving before they grabbed my supply of wheat - along with all that stored below - and threw it overboard.

The cheek! Well, at least the man said we'd soon be all saved - I could look for something to eat when we got onto dry land.

I'm not quite sure just what happened - all I know is that the boat began to break up. I don't think it was the sailors who made it happen for they seemed to be as panic-stricken as everyone else.

Besides, the men seemed to be throwing themselves overboard as fast as they could and a sudden sense of panic gripped me firmly in its power. I hastily ran to the side of the ship and peered out over the sea to see wood, broken away from the hull, floating towards the beach in the distance.

Now wasn't a good time to remember that I couldn't swim but it came flooding back to me in an instant. Putting it aside, I clambered up onto the side of what was left of the boat and jumped with all my strength away from the listing ship.

I can't say it was skill but I managed to land with a splash beside a large piece of wood that a human was clinging fast to - except on the other side so that he saw the plume of water rise into the air but he failed to see me at all.

What else can I say? I simply waited while the human paddled his way to the shore and safety. That was it, journey over. I quickly lost their company when I saw bushes at the sand's edge and darted there for cover and protection.

What became of that man on the boat, I have no idea - but he *did* say that all those on board

would be saved and I have no doubt that he must have escaped. I didn't wait to make sure, though, I was more concerned to hunt out a few berries to alleviate my hunger.

Never again, though, would I sail the seven seas - or even one of them.

No way!

Leave that to the rats.

Besides, I found a thriving community of hamsters here which delighted me no end. It was they who recorded this story for posterity.

## Conclusion

The last verse of manuscript that I translated in my previous work, 'The Final Remedy', was one which was committed to parchment by Oros the hamster in which he perceptively noted that

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

and I felt inspired to take his last phrase and use it as the title of this short work on more translations of ancient manuscripts. Part of my reason was that, being such an old writing, I wouldn't be forced to pay copyright but, more than this, I felt it summarised quite accurately the development of the work which that one man had come to do.

I've faithfully translated the manuscripts to the best of my ability and been careful to ascertain the present meanings of some of the words I've used in order that the reader might have pictures formulated in his mind that are accurate representations of the events as described by those hamsters present.

I could have researched into archaeological excavations and made some of the statements here reflect current thinking, but I felt that an eyewitness account must necessarily be more accurate than any modern interpretation about scattered stones and layers of dust. I know that some would have wanted the stories altered but I've refused to undermine the accounts of the rodents who were there when it happened.

Finally, I note with some disappointment - and with encouragement - the continuation of the New Beginning after the close of the final story of this compilation. Almost two millennia have passed since that half century occurred in which the events of my two works transpired and subsequent history has not always given the researcher evidence of the continued successful establishing of the Way.

True, there must have been individuals in every generation of humans who were faithful adherents to the pure teaching which originated in the man but, as I turn over the pages of human history (and steel myself away from nibbling them), I'm faced with testimony that men and women soon forgot the ways they were taught, forsaking them for a manner of life which, at times, contradicted the plain and simple truth of those who immediately followed after.

I can't help feel - and most of the hamsters I've met agree with me on this - that those humans who confess the Way as being what they've given their lives over to follow, should return to the simplicity that was declared to those early followers.

A lot of what goes under the same present day label is so complex and confusing as to be self-contradictory. So, in concluding my two volume work, I would appeal to any human reading this to pay careful attention to the old ways that were at first delivered to people like yourself, the people who defined what it meant to be followers of the Way.



Limood the Hamster