

The Other Side Of Paradise

by Luna Dasu

Rain, rain, rain-The rain fell like a shroud of misery, a coat of rhinestones above our heads. The crystallin pitter patter on the uneven ground made for a deafening din, yet it was a welcomed change from the customary, hollowing silence of the Synagogue.

"We should head inside" -Calumnia breathed out as she took my hand- "The lunatics might show up again."

"It's not like they'll find much to feast on anyways."

"Then they'll eat us."

My grimace of disgust met with a dismissive shrug on her end, but I knew my friend was right. What was there left to eat? It's been ten...No, eleven years now since the end of the war, leaving the world in shambles. We headed back into the building now secular of faith; it was dangerous to expose yourself to a nuclear rainout. The fact we even managed to hold out for so long was nothing short of a miracle.

Day 4678

We've invited Death to wreak havoc wherever a glimmer of life was sprouting. She doesn't frighten me anymore; I saw the face of demise thrice during my lifetime. I saw her when the ocean swallowed my father. I saw her when my mother burned away along the forests. I saw her when the countries decided to nuke each other over stupid disputes; for the *greater good*. The *greater good* resulted in the obliteration of half of humanity on the spot, and the plunging of the rest into a nuclear winter that decimated whatever crops and animals were left. That *greater good* welcomed Death with open arms; we children had to pay the price for it.

"There's only two cans and a bottle left, Leto."

"*It's the end, Leto.*" was what I heard instead beneath that crestfallen tone. I let myself lean on the wall, slowly sliding to the ground.

"Ugh! If those grotesque idiots would have only eaten what they needed daily instead of scarfing it down to their stomach's content, maybe we'd still be able to hold out for a little longer."

Only Calumnia and I remain; the war had damaged all global power grids. We figured there might be some survivalists out there who were still alive, in the confines of their bunkers. I suggested we should've gone out there and looked for said people, but Calumnia judged it would be futile. Traveling would mean depleting our food supplies much faster, and we couldn't risk facing the paltry odds of someone having the humanity to welcome us. Besides, I dare say we're alright in our Synagogue. It's nothing like the religious place its name may connote though, in our eyes, this tattered, somewhat shapeless grey building was like a saving grace when we laid eyes upon it. When we first arrived, it was a small group of all ages, tired sacks of flesh that desperately clung onto life as if tomorrow would be any

different from the past years. One by one, they had inevitably fallen prey to the curse. This affliction of humanity was an animalistic urge to consume, an agitated state arising in those struck by despair before their inevitable doom. These victims, we called "lunatics" because they would devour anything in front of them, people included. They would start eating out of indignation towards damnation, in denial of their stomach's anguish contra an earth that could no longer feed them. Lunatics, they became, so we had to dispose of them. It was rather convenient to have a quantity of food and water meant for a group of people at the disposal of only two. But it looks like these long years of agony are finally concluding.

"Ridiculous. Just ridiculous. More! Always more! If only their eyes could see as far as their stomachs. You're no different, are you? Pigs...disgusting pigs, unruly gluttons!"

The sound of hail blurred out in the background as Calumnia fiddled with the can opener. I remained silent, too scared to face the fate that awaited us, yet too tired to divert my gaze and pretend to enjoy my meal. A mournful lull settled back. We tamed our gurgling stomachs one small bite at a time, dragging our feet on the way to demise. At this point, we have grown accustomed to hunger, and the throbbing of our insides has become an inheritance. We did not eat because we were hungry; we ate because we had to survive. Oh, how I dreaded the second I'll hear my spoon rattling against the bottom of the can. Premature voidness, but I couldn't stop; my guts ached for more. I forced myself to eat slowly, quailing succumbing to the curse that earned the lunatics their infamous appellation.

"I'm telling you, these people who watched over everything, they witnessed without seeing. They covered their ears to the warnings, and now look where it brought us. But you don't care, do you? Go ahead, gobble it all down like the animal you are."

Before we knew it, the cans were empty. And so was my stomach. I licked the spoon. I nibbled some of it. But it was still not enough. And as Calumnia continued her incriminations, all I could hear was my stomach turning and churning with greed. But there was nothing, nothing...

"Finally, this circus is coming to an end. Finally, I no longer must go through this monumental joke. Good riddance, world!"

She was tired. She was frail. But she was still fresh, unlike the stale food we'd been eating for over a decade. She would still wriggle under my teeth.

"...You've finally gone mad, huh? Well, it's not like I can run very far..."

As my pearly whites sunk into her bony throat, her blood irrigated the floor before the still gaze of the marble idols, like the ichor of the gods. Through her sacrifice, I tasted life and felt warmth one last time.

"I'm sorry...I haven't always been...nice to you..."

The greatest profanity of all is voluntary blindness—the overrun of gluttony in the hoax of Paradise.