

Archived thesis/research paper/faculty publication from the University of North Carolina
Asheville's NC Docks Institutional Repository: <http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/unca/>

The Fall of Eden

Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For a Degree Bachelor of Arts with
A Major in Literature at
The University of North Carolina at Asheville
Fall 2020

By Andrew Stevens

Thesis Director
Lori Horvitz

Thesis Advisor
Wiley Cash

The Fall of Eden

A Short Story by

Andrew Stevens

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Part 1: Apocrypha	6
Part 2: The Book of Eden	18

Introduction

The first time I ever heard Rush's *2112* I was thirteen years old and struggling through the recent divorce of my parents. I instantly fell in love with the album, and credit love of music to its discovery. Up until that point I had always considered myself a fantasy kid. I would spend my days mindlessly clicking away at games like *Runescape* or reading the works of J. R. R. Tolkien and imagining myself going on crazy adventures with a sword by my side. Fantasy, in my mind, was free of modern anxieties. Dragons took the place of fascist governments, bows and arrows took the place of guns. I was happy there.

2112 introduced me to my first piece of science fiction literature, Ayn Rand's *Anthem*, on which the album is heavily based. I began to find myself fantasizing about towering worlds and advanced technologies taking the place of stone castles and trebuchets. By this age I was becoming more attuned to politics and current events. Massive leaps in technology were being made at this time, and I had recently created my first Facebook account. It seemed as though I were constantly being bombarded with information, most of which I did not want. With this information came struggles with anxiety, identity, and social philosophy. In high school I would discover the works of Bradbury, Orwell, and Huxley, and soon began to fear that our own society was heading in the direction of works such as *1984* or *Brave New World*.

Now, it is my most humble opinion that science fiction does not have to be bleak and depressing to be impactful. Ray Bradbury, for instance, in his collection *The Illustrated Man*, creates beautifully colored worlds and imaginative technologies while asking philosophical questions about humanity, society, and the problems of progress. I believe the genre is often categorized into two extremes: fun, childish space westerns like *Star Wars* and dismal depression-fuelers such as *1984*. I don't believe that to be the case.

Over the past few years at UNCA two things have developed: me and *The Fall of Eden*. *The Fall of Eden* can be traced back to a story draft written for my first creative writing workshop with Wiley Cash, during which it was torn to shreds by my peers. I left the classroom with tears in my eyes and a vow to never to write science fiction again. Yet as I grew as both a writer and a person, I kept coming back to that draft, slowly tweaking it and editing it before restarting it entirely for my senior project. Yet the inherent ideas remain.

The original draft was written in the style of a Biblical story, with the religious themes and Adam-and-Eve-narrative in the forefront. I never thought to build the world in any great detail, or reference the technology, or even expand upon the characters. The questions I was asking were too large, and I inadvertently ripped-off a scene from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. To this day, that draft remains my biggest sin as a writer.

I believe that inspiration can be found in a number of places, many often unexpected. For me, inspiration was found in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which I cite as my biggest influence for this story. Throughout *Paradise Lost*, Milton asks questions about God, humanity, and free will while building a breathtaking world and creating some of the most intriguing and complex characters literature has ever known. I knew I wanted to keep themes of religion in my story while putting the characters and setting in the forefront, so in the same way that Milton built his Eden around Eve, I built mine around my main character, Lylith.

One of the biggest challenges faced when writing this story relates to the science fiction dichotomy touched upon earlier. I wanted to ask big questions about human individuality in a technological world while still retaining the wonders of the future, and how these wonders coexist with nature. I built the city of Eden with *The Jetsons* in mind. I wanted flying ships, towering chromatic buildings, fantastical technologies, things that the reader can interpret in their

own way. All of this placed within Eden, which I wrote to be the only city in the world. Everything else had to be natural, and there had to be a relationship between the two. I wanted to put an emphasis on the population's (the "Edenites") relationship with both worlds, and how this relationship influences their philosophy. The story begins with Lylith walking through Eden, taking stock of the city's technologies and her own mental state before deciding to impulsively leave the city and experience nature. This excerpt is from page four, where Lylith, and the reader, experience the world beyond Eden's outer wall:

Lylith stepped off the ship and onto the cool dirt, wiggling her bare toes to acclimate them to a new terrain. Though only a mile beyond the wall, the climate of the wilderness was different than that of Eden. The air was more cool and light, weaving itself through Lylith's lungs as she closed her eyes and took a deep, natural breath. And then she began walking north. The forest was filled with trees and birdsong, with barely any underbrush. She could walk for miles in any direction she liked without becoming ensnared.

The question I wanted to ask with this is, in a world where everything is provided for you, where there is no war, famine, poverty, and as a result, not individuality, how do you spend your days? What do you do? The answer seemed simple. You go outside. You get away from the technology. You interact with new sensory experiences.

The next problem I faced was the conflict. The original draft of *The Fall of Eden* concerned the city on the brink of apocalypse, with the population remaining largely neutral to the idea of death. But how do you justify that? My reasoning in the original story was that "a good captain never leaves his ship," but that wasn't good enough. In this draft, I opted to present the Edenites as not human, but some next evolution, and in their eyes, gods. They don't believe anything came before them. "Eden has always been." Yet, because their society has remained

unchanged for thousands of years, they have no concept of progression. They have nothing to really live for, and so they remain neutral to their impending doom through the mantras “Even gods must die,” and “If nature wills it.” This creates internal conflict for Lylith, who throughout the story experiences her own anxieties regarding the apocalypse, a hint at the remnants of human nature within her.

Above all, I wanted this story to be fun. I wanted to connect with Lylith as I wrote her. I wanted to marvel at the world I was building. I wanted to connect with my humanity through a society that is not human. Most of all, I want to give anyone who reads this the same feeling that listening to *2112* gave me all those years ago.

Part 1: Apocrypha

“Ashes and diamonds, foe and friend, we were all equal in the end.”

-Pink Floyd, Two Suns in the Sunset

There was never so much as a whisper about the fall of Eden. Soft electrical hums rippled over metallic streets as automated airships flew overhead. They carried droves of citizens throughout the city, cycling in and out of Eden’s various air centers fluidly, like clockwork. It was as if nothing were going to change. Lylith wandered the streets alone, amused (as she often was) by the mechanical hummingbirds and squirrels that danced with the children. The geometric infrastructure of the chrome buildings around her resembled giant crystals in a cave. They towered above the roads and seemed to twist and turn in the glittering sun.

As she walked, a sudden, unfamiliar sensation washed over her. She doubled over as sweat poured down her face and the chrome world around her turned wine red. There were two of everything, and it all flickered in and out of existence, and then, as suddenly as it started, the sensation was gone. Lylith reached up to wipe her forehead but found it dry. She quickly brushed it off and composed herself to avoid making a public scene and continued her walk, yet a sliver

of the episode remained, somewhere deep down. In truth, nothing had felt the same since the Announcement.

In her mind, she heard the robotic voice that came over the city's com system three days prior. Lylith sat in her pod with Atlas, enjoying the sunset display over the city's skyline, when an unexpected, automated voice echoed through the speaker.

"Good evening Eden. It is with great regret that I must announce that in one month's time a meteor will collide with our planet, thirty-seven miles shy of the outer wall. This meteor, dubbed Harbinger, will most certainly end all life on our planet, including ours. Remember, Eden, even gods must die."

"If nature wills it," Atlas shrugged from beside her. "I think we did what we could in the time we were given."

"Yes... if nature wills it." Her eyes left the sunset and folded into her lap.

Lylith had always been captivated by the automated city, always finding something new to be impressed by despite taking daily walks for 143 years. Today it was the streets, whose chrome sheen collected sunlight and supplied power to every chrome building in the city. They were as smooth as a river stone, and when the world turned to night, Lylith would sometimes steal away to admire the puddles of stars reflected on them. It was like walking on the sky.

As she walked, she wondered what kept them from branching out to other planets, or even colonizing other cities on their own. Why did Eden have to be the only city? Why did Earth have to be the only world?

As she pondered this, the glint of a sign caught her eye.

Cypress Air Center

It had been months since she traveled beyond the outer wall, and while the enormity of Eden never had a dull moment, reconnecting with nature would do her some good. There were no announcements in nature. There was no Harbinger. There was no end. In truth, Lylith wanted to see everything she could before she could not see any more. Replacing skyscrapers with trees and mechanical animals for real ones might ease her mind, and while the Edenites were a social people, the ability and freedom to act and think in a pensive manner was a highly regarded trait. Maybe she just needed time alone.

Acting on a whim, she stepped into the tarmac and boarded one of the flat, turtle-like ships that she so commonly watched hover over her, bending and weaving between buildings on their self-governed yet predetermined paths. She loved the city's transport, and often wondered why she didn't use it more. Watching the people pass through the streets of her capital (and only) city proved an exercise in futility as the ship hummed upwards and deeper into the city than she could have ever traveled on foot. People carried on below her, traversing Eden like ants on a Hindu mandala.

Standing on the deck with the wind in her silver hair and her golden eyes beating down on Eden like small gems, she waved and smiled at other ships passing by, heading to the automarket or a pod complex or the central park. She felt like the sun. The ships, like the roads and buildings, were sleek, chromatic, and entirely solar powered. Every piece of technology that gave the city its life was connected to a central power grid hidden far underground. Nothing about the city had changed in its 2,000 years of existence, and in truth, no one remembered who built it. Everything had always been automated through natural resources. Records were not kept in Eden. Why concern yourself with the past when the future is a day away?

“Eden always has been and always will be,” Lylith whispered to herself, scratching away the empathetic voice of the Announcer.

The vessel carried her into the sun and beyond Eden’s outer wall to an air center. Air centers were the only structures allowed beyond the wall to allow for nature’s preservation, and while there existed fifteen in total, hidden beneath the trees like ancient treasures, they all remained only one mile deep. Cycling ships out automatically every fifteen minutes throughout the day, the centers allowed for any citizen of Eden to explore the world’s vast wilderness for as long as they wanted, or in many cases, needed. Lylith had never been more than three miles beyond any of the air centers yet yearned to see and experience the deep belongings of nature that constituted Atlas’ many paintings throughout their pod.

“Where did you find that,” Lylith once asked him in regard to a painting of a hidden grove. She knew the story of Atlas sleeping beneath his interpretation of a fallen tree, utilizing the grove for all it was worth before exploring someplace new the next day. She had heard the story a hundred times, yet never grew bored of it. All of Atlas’ paintings had stories. On most days he traveled beyond the outer wall and on most evenings painted the wonderful things he saw. This story had always been her favorite.

“About five miles east of Center 3,” he explained. “I had been that way before, yet the grove was new, created by what I believe to be a lightning storm.” She had always hoped of discovering her own grove.

Lylith stepped off the ship and onto the cool dirt, wiggling her bare toes to acclimate them to a new terrain. Though only a mile beyond the wall, the climate of the wilderness was different than that of Eden. The air was cool and light, weaving itself through Lylith’s lungs as she closed her eyes and took a deep, natural breath. And then she began walking north. The

forest was filled with trees and birdsong, with barely any underbrush. She could walk for miles in any direction she liked without becoming ensnared. She chose north to get as far away from the city as possible. Time away would do her good, and help her forget about the Announcement for a few days.

And so she walked. Across fields and rocks, great green streams that reflected the sky above them. Over the course of four hours, she stopped to admire every leaf that fell, every lizard that scampered by her, every snapping twig and branch. Eventually, she came to a small clearing in the forest that would provide a good shelter for the night. The sun had begun to set, setting the orange valley leaves ablaze.

“This spot looks as good as any,” she said, smiling to herself.

The night loomed as she gathered a bed of leaves, opting to sleep under the stars as opposed to building a shelter. The sky was dark and filled with stars when Lylith laid her head down, the moon reflecting in her golden eyes. She imagined that every star was the meteor, slowly descending towards the Earth. For all she knew, any one of them could be. Fireflies littered the trees, shimmering like the airships above Eden at night. As she was about to drift to sleep, one fluttered down to her breast, making its home in the nape of her neck. She looked down at it, then slowly returned her eyes to the moon.

“We could go there,” she said to the bug. “Just us, and get away from here. How does that sound.”

The firefly did not respond.

“Yeah, me too,” she whispered, and drifted to sleep.

In her dreams she saw figures run past her with fire and metal. They pushed each other into trenches, screaming in a language she didn't understand as the world exploded behind them.

She walked among them like a ghost, admiring their every detail. They looked like her —they had two arms and two legs, with a head in between two shoulders. Their skin varied in shades and colors, though none matched the hue of hers, a dull shade of copper. Their eyes were blue and brown and red (though that could have just been blood) as opposed to gold.

“People were not made to bleed,” she whispered to herself, captivated by the creatures who huddled together in their trench, each gripping long stick with bone white fingers.

“What are you doing?” Lylith shouted, but her words were muffled by a nearby explosion. She doubted they would have heard them anyway. The situation began to set in for her as she realized there were more creatures on the other side of the field, huddled in their own trenches, and that the two groups were responsible for the explosions. She stared, horrified, as images of dismembered body parts became more apparent through the dust.

“Stop! Please stop,” she begged, attempting to grab the closest creature to her, but her fingers drifted through his green uniform. Suddenly all was quiet. Lylith watched as the creature she attempted to touch put his stick in his mouth. He closed his, which were filled with tears, and his head exploded, raining brown hair and blood on Lylith and everyone else in the trench.

The next day she walked silently through the world, noting each blade of grass that scraped her foot. The memory of the moon and the fireflies faded into dust and fire as Lylith pondered on the visions she had the night before. The anxiety she had felt in the city had returned, or maybe it had never left at all. She had never lived while asleep before and had never heard of anyone doing such a thing. In the past few days it felt as though she were getting more questions than answers, and yet she couldn't help but feel that the anxiety and the vision were related.

“One mystery at a time,” she whispered to herself, and continued on. For the first time in years, the mountains loomed before her, though slightly obscured by trees. She decided that her goal for the trip would be to climb a mountain then return home. Though she had seen mountains before, she had never actually climbed one, though from Atlas’ paintings, she knew the view would be beautiful. The goal of her trip was to experience, and she wanted to see the natural world from above more than anything. She wanted to be above it all.

For the next two days she traveled, uninterrupted by rain or visions, until she reached the foot of the mountain. There was no trail, she would have to do it all on her own. She grabbed a stick from a nearby bush and tested its integrity.

“This will do just fine.”

Pushing her way through thorns and weeds, Lylith began her ascent. Using the stick to forge a trail, she zig-zagged up the monolith, gently ducking, jumping, and pushing over anything that stood in her way. After two hours, storm clouds covered the sky and small droplets of water soon followed. As she struggled to make her way up the mountain through the increasing rain, Lylith found a path seemingly leading up through the brush. From the path she was able to get her first good look at the sky unobstructed by trees. The clouds were like blankets mimicking the night, and Lylith realized she would have to make shelter soon. She followed the trail for ten minutes before coming to the mountain’s bald peak.

Lightning riddled the sky as rain saturated her silver hair. Wandering around the wide bald looking for anything that could be used for structure, she found a stone path that led to a grove of trees.

“Someone’s been here before,” she whispered to herself. “But long ago.” Her head buzzed as the sensation returned. Something inside told her not to explore the grove, but a streak

of lightning across the sky and the consequential roar of thunder convinced her that tree cover was better than no cover. She followed the path, subconsciously avoiding the cracks dividing the stones.

The first thing she noticed was the sweet smell of wet pine emanating from the grove. The second was a stone structure, almost like a singular pod, that made its home in the center. The structure was rustic and old, and the wooden roof had long since caved in. Upon further inspection, she found weeds and flowers growing through the floor and vines entangling the walls. Questions about the nature of the building circled her head before a sudden feeling of exhaustion overcame her. The day's hike seemed to pale in comparison to this discovery, but to further interact with it, she needed a clear mind and a rested body.

Creating a lean-to against the building's wall with ancient wooden planks, Lylith rested her head on the damp stone floor and eventually fell asleep. There were no stars or fireflies for her that night.

She woke up in a single-roomed building devoid of rain and rot. The room was filled with the same strange creatures, all sitting in rows and silently listening to a figure at the front who was clad in purple robes and shouting in the same unintelligible language. The creature held a tablet in his left hand, repeatedly and vigorously pointing to it. It stood behind a table with several candles, a cup, and a shallow bowl strategically placed on top. Sunlight poured in through the building's painted windows, illuminating the nodding heads and grim expressions of the creatures sitting in the room. In the corner lay Lylith's body, fast asleep.

"Are you the ones who built this place?" She asked. No one answered. The eyes of everyone in the room were fixated on the creature and his tablet. As the man's shouts got more enthusiastic, several creatures in the room responded with enthusiastic exclamations.

Suddenly, the creature spread his arms and gave one final shout, knocking over the candles in the process. Screaming ensued throughout the building as the creature attempted to amend his mistake, but it was too late. The thin fabric covering the table quickly caught fire, spreading embers to the building's wooden roof. In a matter of moments, the blue and purple rays of painted sun were replaced with bright orange and billowing clouds of smoke. The creatures scrambled over each other, screamingly and frantically pushing against the building's single door, but it wouldn't budge.

Lylith, unable to bear what she was seeing, floated through the walls of the building and sat in the grass outside, surrounded by the grove. No amount of ear-covering could stop the screams coming from inside, and soon she found herself with tears in her eyes. She had never cried before, there had never been any need. The scent of smoke and meat penetrated her nose as she begged for it to stop. She watched in horror as the roof of the building collapsed, silencing the screams of the creatures within. Something stirred within her as she realized that her sleeping body had also died in the fire, but she was gladder than anything that it was over. She stood up and wiped the tears from her eyes and cast one last glance at the smoldering remains of the stone building.

"If nature wills it," she muttered to herself.

She awoke to the smell of ozone and the sunlight in her eyes. Birds chirped from the grove's trees, signaling the end of the storm. Lylith wiped her eye, but there was no sign of tears. She sat up in her lean-to and processed the previous night's vision.

"Who are you and what is this place?" She asked, as if anyone were there to answer. Once again she found herself overwhelmed with questions. She had never seen any person that resembled the creatures in the visions, and there were no buildings in Eden made of stone. They

considered it a primitive and therefore unworthy construction material. As far as she knew, there had never been anything before Eden, and after Harbinger, there would be nothing after. The city of Eden had always been. But then again, she wasn't in Eden anymore.

All prospects of viewing the valley from above faded into obscurity as Lylith searched the abandoned building. In the daylight she was able to make out the charred and rotted remains of the pews on which the creatures sat, though the table up front had long since been obliterated. She walked down the center of the building, making sure not to step on anything that may hurt her bare feet. She stood where the purple-cloaked figure had and imagined the building as it had been in her vision. The ghostly creatures sitting in the mentally-reconstructed pews stared back at her, seemingly waiting for her to say something

“Have you ever heard of Eden?” She asked them, but they didn't respond.

“No, of course you haven't,” she sighed, defeated. “I'm so sorry for what happened.”

Suddenly the orange sunlight faded to a metallic red like the blood that came from the trench-creature's head, or maybe it was the red of the fire. Lylith stumbled as the sensation returned and sweat seemingly poured down her face. She reached out to steady herself, but nothing offered support. She collapsed into the ancient rotted wood and weeds below, sending something metallic across the building's floor. She laid there motionless for several minutes, attempting to slow her heart rate. Blood dripped from a small wound on her hand, and she stared at it with wonder. She had never bled before. People were not meant to. When her eyesight returned and the sensation left, Lylith stood up to investigate what it was she knocked over. Beside her on the floor, hidden previously by rubble, was a small, rusted cup. The same one from the vision.

Suddenly, she had an idea. Ignoring her wound, she used her hands to dig through the weeds and debris around her. Eventually, she came across a small box, jagged and charred. She shook it softly, delighted by the sound of something bouncing around inside. Yet the door of the box had long since been rusted shut. Despite prying at the latch with dirty nails, it refused to open. She resolved to throw the box at the wall, both out of frustration and curiosity, obliterating it and sending its contents to the floor with a thud. There lay the tablet from her vision, seemingly untouched by fire and time. Lylith grabbed it carefully with her free hand. The tablet was bound in leather and contained hundreds of smaller, yellow tablets within, each inscribed with text she could not understand.

She flipped through it slowly, intrigued by its craftsmanship. How could creatures who built structures so primitively create something so beautiful? Eventually, she came to a page filled with a picture of a creature on a rock surrounded by other creatures. It reminded her of her vision in that this creature seemed to be professing to the group, yet the creature on the rock was less groomed. He had long, flowing hair. Lylith stroked her silver hair as she stared at the image, enthralled by the realism. Below the image was a small inscription that proved impossible to decipher. Eden had no written language, all communication was done orally. Lylith had no concept of writing. As she pondered what the tablet meant, the post-storm birds began to twitter, reminding her why she had come to this mountain in the first place.

Lylith left the building and wandered down the stone path. Sunlight peaked through the trees, illuminating the ground in front of her, guiding her out of the grove. From the mountain's bald she could see the entire valley, and in the distance, Eden. Gathering some berries from a nearby bush, she sat and nibbled on them, staring into the endless expanse of wilderness and contemplating her discoveries. Far in the distance, Eden's buildings reached into the sky like

hands, glimmering in the morning sun. In truth, the book would change everything. Eden had not always been, there had been others before them, and whether some in her city knew or if everyone was ignorant remained to be seen. Lylith ate the rest of the berries and prepared for the walk home. Book in hand, she began her trek down the mountain, determined to bring the truth to her world before it came to an end.

End of Part 1

Part 2: The Book of Eden

“The secrets of this earth are not for all men to see, only for those that will seek them.”

-Ayn Rand, Anthem

The walk home proved long and arduous. Fallen trees and debris had forced her to find a new route. Fortunately, the visions and waves of panic had stopped, and every night's sleep was more peaceful than the last. The entire journey lasted a week, giving her roughly three until the meteor's arrival. Three weeks to live. Three weeks to uncover the truth of their city. Though the walk through the woods seemed to last an eternity, she eventually found her way to Center 3.

After taking a flight to the Cypress Air Center, Lylith bobbed and weaved through the streets secretively towards her pod. Her dirty white shawl covered the book. She knew that if anyone saw they would curiously ask questions, and she had to tell Atlas first. He would know what to do. The sun was setting by the time she got home, and she found Atlas right where she expected: behind an easel.

“Lylith! I missed you. Did you explore beyond the wall?” He said with eyes firmly locked on his painting.

“I did, and I need to talk to you. I found something out there. Something important.”

Lylith brought the book out from her shawl and placed it in front of him. “I need you to look through this. I found it in a building on a mountain.”

Atlas put his brush down and stared at the tablet quizzically, flipping through its pages. “What is this? You said you found it in a building? That is impossible, we don’t build beyond the wall.”

“But what if we didn’t build it? I saw things while I slept out there. Visions. Visions of people that were not like you or me or anyone in Eden. They looked like us in stature, but their hair was various colors, and they were killing each other.” Lylith froze, tears forming in her eyes. “And themselves.”

Atlas stood up and hugged her, kissing her head as she cried into him. “I’m not saying I don’t believe you, but Lylith, Eden has always been. No one has ever seen anything in their sleep, it’s not natural. Maybe you were dehydrated, or maybe the forest just played tricks on you. Whatever this tablet is, it was made by us. It had to be. Everything that you’ve told me has a logical explanation behind it.”

Lylith pulled herself from his embrace and shook her head. “You’re wrong. I know what I saw. The visions are not unnatural. If they are, then everything I have felt since the Announcement is too. I’m afraid to die, but I’m more afraid of everyone’s indifference. I’ve been having these episodes. Sometimes I lose my breath and my vision. That cannot be unnatural.” She gestured to the sunset-painted city outside the window. “What do we really know about Eden? About where we came from? There are no records, and we accept that. Everything here was built to sustain everyone forever. But what if it wasn’t always like that? What if these people in my visions once called this world their home? What if this tablet holds some answers?”

Atlas sighed and returned to his easel, refusing to look at her. “I’m sorry, but I cannot agree with you. Everything you have told me does not happen to us. I am not afraid of death if it is what nature wills. I am perfect. We are perfect. We don’t have ‘episodes’ or ‘visions,’ we don’t ask questions with pointless answers, and we don’t lie about buildings beyond the wall and mystic tablets. I do not know what this thing is that you have brought in our pod, but I suggest you get rid of it.”

Without a word, Lylith took the book and returned to the street. The robotic hummingbirds were returning to their roosts, and with them, the families of Eden. For hours she walked aimlessly through the streets. She did not know where she was going, only that she had to find someone who believed her, but who? She opened the book in the light of the moon and searched for the picture of the man on the rock, hoping for some clue. The inscription stared back at her as if to mock. Lylith lay down on the street corner and wept, eventually letting her fatigue carry her to sleep.

She awoke the next morning to the sound of a child.

“Are you okay?”

The sun beat down on the child’s hair, illuminating it with rays of bronze and silver. Lylith sat up and let her eyes get attuned to the daylight. Anonymous figures passed up and down the street behind the child casting quizzical glances.

“Who are you?” Lylith asked, shielding her eyes from the sunlight.

“I’m Michael,” the child said, pointing at the tablet. “What’s that?”

“Do you want to hear a story?”

“Yes, please.”

“Long ago, before Eden ever existed, there lived another group of people. These people were not like us, only in physical appearance. Their hair and skin and eyes varied in color and they carried fire, which they used on each other.” Lylith sat up and smiled at Michael as tears welled in her eyes. “This belonged to them. They kept documents on tablets like this in another language. But you can’t tell anyone, it’s a secret.”

Michael shuffled his feet and looked down. “I don’t like that story. Where did you hear it?”

“They showed me. I sometimes see them when I sleep.”

“Oh. Well I should probably go. Therez says I have been acting unnaturally and shouldn’t leave my pod. But that’s a secret too, so please don’t tell her.”

Lylith stared at Michael intently, gauging his uneasy expression. “Unnaturally how, Michael?”

“My head gets funny and it feels like I’m drowning,” Michael whispered, pointing to his chest. “It feels like I’m drowning in here.”

Lylith took his hand in hers and smiled. “That doesn’t sound unnatural to me. If you want the truth, I’ve been feeling the same way since the Announcement. Don’t worry, Michael, you’re not alone.”

“Thank you,” Michael said, smiling back with the bright optimism only a child could possess before running off without another word.

Lylith watched the child as he jumped and skipped through the streets, almost certainly forgetting their conversation. Soon, he would be dead, and he would die as an unnatural. Therez’s last thoughts of her son would be disbelief, maybe disappointment, just as Atlas’ would be of her. The thought that she was not the only one having episodes was brought both comfort

and sorrow. On one hand, it was nice to know she was not alone. Maybe there were others. Maybe it was everyone. On the other, it hurt knowing a young child was experiencing things he would never the chance to understand.

It took Lylith an hour to find her pod. Walking through the streets, wondering what to do next, she realized that she had to try again to make Atlas believe. It's possible, she thought, that he could have changed his mind overnight, or that her story of Michael might change it.

She found Atlas where she left him: sitting at his easel, moving nothing but his arm, a stern expression on his face.

"I was wondering when you'd come home," he said, refusing to acknowledge her with his eyes.

"We have to talk. I know you don't believe me, and that's okay. I met a boy this morning. His name is Michael. He's been having episodes as well. His mother won't let him leave their pod. I'm not the only one, Atlas. Maybe it *is* unnatural, but I'm not the only one feeling this way. Does it not keep you up? Knowing that this was never built to last? That everything is going to come to an end? That children will die?"

"No Lylith, it does not. We could continue forever, but what would be the point? We're bound to the city. The city is life. It gives us everything. Why continue without it? You heard what the Announcer said. 'Even gods must die.' Eden has always been. We have always been. Why ask pointless questions? If you truly are afraid, why not enjoy these weeks?"

"Because that, to me, seems unnatural."

Atlas sighed and stood from his chair. He slowly advanced towards her, still refusing to make eye contact. Lylith backed away cautiously.

"Atlas, what are you doing?"

“Maybe Michael isn’t the only one who should be confined. I’m sorry Lylith, but this has gone on too long. I will not have you spouting things that are not true to anyone else.”

“Wait, no... Atlas, I can prove it. I can show you where I found the ta—” the chrome walls and crystal windows melted into blood around her as Atlas’ looming figure seemingly turned to shadow and grew to fit the pod. Soon there were two of him. Then three. He multiplied all around her, covering the room in the room in darkness. Lylith’s knees buckled and she fell to the floor, letting the shadows consume her.

When she awoke it was night. The orange glow of a fire from the corner hearth illuminated the pod, casting a dim light on Atlas. For the first time Lylith could see what he was painting: a sketch of Eden, entirely in flames. She stood up to take in her surroundings and discovered she was inside the pod’s central closet. She pressed her hand to the closet’s magnetic glass door in an attempt to open it, but it was no use. She was locked in.

“Atlas let me out,” she begged. “I don’t want to be here anymore.”

“Why not?” He asked, refusing to meet her gaze. “You’ve spent the last week in there.”

Lylith looked around the closet for something she could use to pry the magnetic door open, but apart from several shawls and pants, the room offered nothing of use. Lylith realized she no longer had the tablet.

“Where is it?” She asked coldly.

Atlas pulled the book from his displayed it to her. “I wanted to show you that pursuing things like this, asking questions with no answers, they all lead to nothing.” Suddenly, in a frenzy, Atlas leapt from his chair and threw the book into the hearth, letting it succumb to the fire.

“Why would you that?” Lylith screamed, beating her hands against the glass frantically. “You *know* I didn’t make that! You know that I’m telling the truth!” But it was too late. The tablet was destroyed. Lylith hit the glass one final time, letting the blood from her hands soak into it before collapsing to the floor in tears

For days Lylith sat in the closet watching the sun and moon pass from her glass prison, eating the food rations and drinking the water that was so generously provided to her by her once-companion. Every tear had been expended and every plea had fallen on deaf ears. Atlas had left the pod six days prior to spend his final week beyond the wall.

“Goodbye, Lylith. I hope you find peace in this,” he had said.

“Climb the mountain and search for the grove if you want to know the truth. I hope you find it,” she muttered before watching him leave.

She would likely never see him again. She had given up hope of breaking or opening the door. She was not strong enough to destroy the crystal-lined glass, and nothing at her disposal could crack the electromagnetic lock. For the past four nights the visions had returned, cycling in and out of her mind like airships from their centers. Images of children playing with flowers, adults accompanied by small furry creatures, people of the past carrying out their own routines that were completely unfamiliar to her. Lylith had stopped questioning what they meant; she had simply resolved to die in the closet.

“Good evening, Eden. In approximately two hours, Harbinger will enter our atmosphere and bring about a final sunset. In one hour, the air centers will shut down forever, so if you wish

to witness the fall of Eden from beyond the wall, your chance is limited. Remember Eden, your final sight will be one of beauty.”

Lylith had grown to hate the cold, emotionless voice of the Announcer, who took it upon his programming to chime in every morning during Eden’s final week with updates of Harbinger. Now, their time had come, and all she could do was wait. From the closet she watched as the final rounds of airships took flights, buzzing around the city, so far from her, like houseflies. She would have given anything to be on one of them. She would have given anything to still be on the mountain, or maybe to never have found it in the first place. She would have given anything to be what so many labeled as “natural.”

As the skies rendered empty and the final airship entered its center, the world paused. The humming of the roads died down as the luminescent streetlights turned off. Every piece of technology in Eden was shutting down in unison. Lylith heard the click of the magnetic lock and stared at the door in disbelief.

“That’s not possible,” she whispered to herself. “Only the air centers should have powered down.”

Lylith slid the door open and fled the pod and made her way into the city. She found the streets littered with people who made small talk about the blackout and the state of the city as they waited for the meteor to appear in the sky.

“What happened?” Lylith frantically asked a man whose eyes were glued to the dim sky.

“Everything is connected to the central power grid. When one piece of technology shuts down, they all do. The city thinks it’s night.”

“Thank you,” she whispered.

Slowly making her way back to the pod, Lylith felt her chest tighten. She braced for an episode, but none came. In that moment she realized she would rather let the world slip away into darkness than watch it become consumed in light. She silently entered the dark pod, admiring how quiet the world sounded. She walked around it, taking everything in, reliving every memory. She caressed the crystal table centerpiece with a smile. Dust had accumulated in a thin blanket over it while she was trapped in the closet. She had never seen dust before.

Lylith grabbed a heavy vase from the table which housed no flowers and walked to the window. With a sigh, she heaved the vase with all her strength at the window, sending it and a cloud of crystal fragments over the side of the chrome building. She sat on the ledge letting her legs dangle to the world below.

As she stared out into Eden, a bright red flash consumed the sky as the meteor entered the atmosphere. From the window she heard a chorus of sudden shrieks from the city. They were afraid. For the first time in the history of Eden, her people were afraid. She wondered if Atlas was too. Lylith smirked at the thought as she watched the meteor descend through the sky as if in slow motion. The sky crackled with heat lightening as red light bounced throughout the dying city. Lylith closed her eyes as she slowly let herself slip from the windowsill.

“Is this what they would have done?” She whispered before dropping to the world below, watching with tears in her eyes as her pod faded into the sky, and then into nothing.

End of The Fall of Eden