

Death of Innocence (The Nanosecond War)

© Copyright 2000 - 2005 by silli_artie@hotmail.com

This work may not be reposted or redistributed without the prior express written permission of the author.

A work of fiction, meant for adults. Read something else if you are not an adult, or are offended by stories with sexual content. Then again, if all you're looking for is in-out, in-out, in-out, you should probably read something else. I welcome constructive comments. Enjoy.

This is not a happy tale. It is a tale of the death of innocence, of the day when Man learned he was not alone. It is also the tale of Celeste and Adam.

That Celeste and Adam should meet was inevitable. Both were the only children of Great Captains. Celeste was the daughter of Catherine of the Southern Cross, Captain of the Great Ship Fallingwater, and her husband David. Adam was the son of Captain Fred and the Siren Joy.

That Celeste and Adam should become Great Captains was no surprise. Both were born to the Void.

Wondrous stories are told of these children -- children who had made so many Great Jumps beneath the stars in their first year of life, children who wore Polycrystal flight crowns flickering with life and light before they could walk.

It is said that Celeste's earliest companions were the Other, those mystic beings living between the folds of spacetime. Some say she witnessed her mother daydreaming of a planet visited some decades before, and to please her mother, Celeste took their ship there, in one Jump. She was five at the time.

And Adam, the only male-child born to a Siren -- so great was Joy's love and devotion to Captain Fred -- some say that the Great Jump from the planet Wotan, the first Jump directly from a planet's surface, was not made by Captain Fred, but by his six year old son Adam, responding to his parent's unspoken desire to leave that overindustrialized world as soon as possible.

Adam and Celeste met on the University world Canticle, both following custom and the desires of their parents to study for a twenty. They met, as they were destined to meet, and from that moment were never apart. While they never formally wed, all knew them to be husband and wife.

She grew to be a beautiful woman, curved and owlsh in her appearance, her light chocolate skin a combination of her father's paleness and her mother's rich ebony, tall and with the grace and command one would expect of the daughter of a Great Leader and Great Captain.

Death of Innocence

And he -- it was he who either helped settle or rekindled the debate among scholars as to the nonhuman genetic component of the Sirens. Many had argued the component was the millennia extinct sea otter -- from that line the Sirens took their short fur, webbed feet, and gills. But to see Adam as a child of forty -- ah, the mystery component was surely *Felidae* - *Panthera*, a leopard. His grace and strength were overshadowed only by his love of Celeste.

To look into their eyes was to look into the Void, into vastness and strength unfathomable. To see them holding hands was to see that strength tempered by love. To watch them helping others was to see strength and love guided by compassion, and the understanding that the gifts they were given were to be used to help others.

In the custom of their age, they spent their first twenty years with their parents, and the next twenty at study.

Then in the custom of their age, they embarked on their Wanderjahre.

Great Captains and their Great Ships converged on Canticle. Just as Celeste and Adam never formally wed, yet are known to all as man and wife, they never formally joined the Spacer's Guild -- they were born to it. The Guild presented Celeste and Adam with a small Ship.

Some ceremonies are older than time. Man has christened ships through days immemorial. Celeste and Adam accepted the gift of the Guild and its combined members with joy, and with surprising sadness. They christened it by breaking the traditional container of water from Manhome over its bow.

We have no holos of this ceremony, only secondhand accounts. To the surprise of some attending, Celeste and Adam had looks of sorrow on their faces. With voices full of emotion, they raised the flask, and said together, "We christen thee 'Promise,' and we ..."

What they meant to say only they know. They broke the flask over the bow, and broke into tears, holding each other. Some of the Great Captains also cried -- Celeste's mother, Catherine; Adam's father, Fred; Dita, and others. Sometimes the Gift which makes the Great Captains does not bring happiness.

The Guild Master raised his glass, and pronounced the ceremonial toasts. Celeste and Adam exchanged embraces with friends and parents, and bid their leave.

They whispered away, for a year and a day, in a beautiful pea green boat.

After studying for a second twenty, they left once more, embarking on a life of exploration. They brought forth twins, a son and a daughter, Peter and Joan, both bearing the silky fur of their father and the complexion of their mother, another generation born to the Void.

Adam and Celeste were born to be great; that everyone knew. The same was expected of Peter and Joan.

Death of Innocence

But greatness calls out for great burdens.

It is sad-curious that finally in the Third Age of Space, Man evolved past his own self-directed violence. In the great explorations that had been the First and Second Ages, Man found no enemy in the starry Void -- so he brought his own -- himself. War had twice sundered the tenuous web of civilization which he had woven between stars.

Now in this Third Age, he had learned to live in peace at last. His inner demons had not been conquered, but embraced and forgiven.

The Invader came.

They struck first at Pentecost. Why Pentecost? We will never know. The best answer, perhaps, is that they had to start somewhere.

The attack on Pentecost left one survivor -- the captain of a singleship who had never made a Great Jump. In her terror she Jumped from orbit around Pentecost straight to Earth, Manhome itself, screaming in terror at the attack which had boiled out from under space to demolish a defenseless world.

When men and their ships returned to Pentecost, there was no sign of the Invader. Nor was there any sign of life on the planet, or on its neighboring worlds.

Adam, Celeste, Peter, and Joan were vacationing on New Haven.

The Invader appeared, thousands of ships boiling from beneath space into the outer atmosphere of New Haven without warning.

In the first instant of the Invader attack, tens of millions died. Even though Adam and Celeste were separated from their children by a third of the planet, they felt the loss of their son.

And in that instant, Celeste raised her hands to the sky, wielding the Weapon used by her mother, screaming, "NO!"

Over half the Invader perished in that instant, felled by the Weapon that is Love under Will. What remained of the Invader faltered and fell back.

In that instant, Adam saved what was left of his family the only way he could -- he Jumped. He Jumped the entire planet of New Haven on the force of his Will alone.

The Invader followed.

Celeste raised the Weapon again, smiting the Invader and calling on the Other, calling in the grief and rage that only a mother can feel.

Death of Innocence

The Other responded, attacking the Invader, flocking to them and shredding those who would cause a friend such anguish.

All but a few of the Invader perished; some managed to flee. With part of his Will, Adam followed them. He sensed the Universe in which they existed, and he grasped it. He cordoned it off, squeezed it, crushed it, and turned it in upon itself. With the force of his Will he collapsed that Universe to a speck smaller than one of the tears rolling down his face. With a final wave of grief, he denied that speck's very existence. The Invader was no more.

Adam carefully returned New Haven to its orbit. He turned to Celeste, and as they sobbed and held each other, they reached out and brought their daughter to them. Their daughter, and some hundreds of millions more, had been saved. Of their son, and tens of millions more, sons and daughters all, there was not a trace.

After holding each other and crying for a while, their daughter looked up and said, "He's gone, Mommy."

Celeste fell to her knees and hugged her daughter. Adam went to his knees and held them both.

"We can start again," he whispered to his wife, wiping her tears.

"They're gone baby, and they won't be back," Celeste told her daughter.

Adam and Celeste looked at their daughter. Joan's eyes were focused elsewhere, deep in the Void. Her small body flickered -- they felt her -- doing something, going somewhere, somewhere very far away. She solidified, and looked to her parents.

"I know," she said softly, "He is gone, and they are dead." Then with sadness far beyond her years, as she looked into the Void once again she whispered, "But there are more..."

FIN

Rev 2005/10/05

Death of Innocence

By silli_artie@hotmail.com

<http://www.asstr.org/~artie>