

The temple

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I found myself once more on the outlook of the main temple, looking out over the grand stairs leading from our mountain sanctuary, down to the vast step below. From my vantage point I was able to see miles out in the wilds, and any invader or visitor would be visible for hours in advance. Today the step was still and calm, the sun's first rays having just begun to grace the earth with its warmth and light.

I had awoken before dawn, before any of my sisters and brothers, spending a few moments offering prayers and incense to the many lesser deities in the smaller shrines. There are still many figures here alien to me, gods from far off lands, or forgotten empires of old. The matriarch insists that we must honour all of divinity, not just our own. Many of the gods we do not know the name of, or even where they came from. Collected and preserved by earlier matrons of the temple, most of them bought, but some donated to us in ages past. We knew as little about the gods, as we do about the people that once worshipped them. Who were these others, why do their gods seem so foreign, yet similar to mine? Was this the fate of all things, even the gods, to be forgotten or

abandoned?



Others we knew more about, names, rituals and stories and people and places. These we try to preserve as best as we can, copying texts, repairing old statues and tablets, and reincorporating old stories into new tales and narratives. I often find myself wondering, which stories are to be retold, and which are to become forgotten, who decides their fair, pure chance, or perhaps something more.

Here I sat in silent contemplation, until the songs of the garden birds alerted me to the rising of the sun. Stopping by the temple gardens I grabbed a ripe peach, its sweet juices waking me from my sombre contemplations of the lesser shrines. The temple garden was full of exotic plants and trees, a testament to the far reaching connections the temple has had throughout the decades of its existence.

Many of these plants no longer exist anywhere else, as their homelands have been lost to wars, or disaster. I am told that some of these survivors were gathered by pilgrims coming here to join our temple, others were given as gifts by

rulers and traders visiting our humble sanctuary for guidance or rest.

Other plants are bred here by the monks and mystics of the temple. Just as the tales and myths in our libraries and archive mix and cross pollinate, so do the rare plants and herbs in our gardens. Many things at the temple are rare, some of them unique, if we were to disappear, so would they. This knowledge fills me with pride, but also dread and apprehension, of what the future might hold.

Leaving the gardens behind I wandered towards the entrance to the temple. Being able to witness the rising sun from the great steps in front of the great hall is one of my favourite parts of my day. It helps me get ready for a day full of prayer, teaching and copying sacred texts.

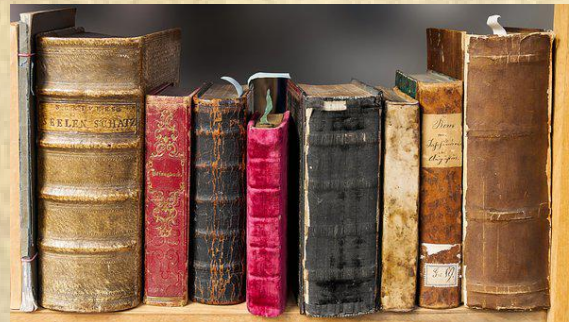


The step is seemingly barren and empty compared to the protected and well watered gardens of the temple. The wide spaces are cold and unforgiving, compared to the warm embrace of the libraries and shrines.

This was my first year taking on students of my own, and I was still getting used to being a voice of authority and truth. I have spent my life reflecting, interpreting and preserving the words and actions of those that came before us. For the first time I was expected to add my voice to the many that have come before, to prove that I was also someone to be listened to.

As I stood there, looking over the step being slowly embraced the warmth and

light of a new day, a horribly sensation crept up my spine. I was struck with rising fear and despair as the empty cold faces of the rows of dead or dying gods flashed before my eyes. Was this to be my fate as well, for my teachings and legacy to be forgotten, and my deeds to be swept away with the winds of time? How was I expected to create, to teach and guide, when all I created was as likely to stand the test of time, as it was to dissipate into the void, lost forever.



So preoccupied was I with my despair that I did not notice the gentle steps of my Matron, as she joined me by solitary lookout point. Not until she spoke did I register her presence right next to me. Her familiar voice woke me from a sea of despair of my own making.

“Dear sister, I am glad to see that you are enjoying the grand views this peaceful morning, but I fear that your students will soon begin to miss your presence.”

The sudden sound breaking the absolute silence of the front steps made me jump in place. Turning, I found the kind and wise eyes of my mentor, the Matron of the temple. She too had recently gained a new vocation, as she had taken over for the old Matron just two short years ago. She had aged considerably more than those two years would have you believe.

“Matron!” I did not hear you approach” I stammered, reeling to gather my thoughts.

“What seems to bother you so, dear sister” she asked, smiling warily at me, her eyes betraying her genuine worry and concern.

"I apologise Matron, I was" I hesitated, struggling to find ways to describe the complexities of the worries that were darkening this otherwise beautiful day.

The Matron patiently awaited my response, so after some moments of deliberation, I decided to be honest with her, fully and truly. I told her of my visit to the temple of the lesser gods, of my vision of being forgotten, and my fears of not being worthy of being a teacher. Last, I told of my fear of not being enough, of being lost in the endless sea of history.

Silently she waited for me to finish speaking, looking upon me with those tired, wise eyes of hers. Sighing lightly, she put her hand on my shoulder.

"Dearest sister, it is true, that one day will this temple fall into ruin, as all things must. There will come a time, where we are no longer wanted, or needed. I can not tell you what that day will look like, or what will be left, for we only have today".

Seeing my worried face, she continued. "It is not for us to decide what the future deems worthy of saving, and what will be discarded. We can only do our best to preserve as much of the past as we can, and pray that we are not lacking in our own judgments."

"But what of the things we create today, what of the new flowers we grow, the texts we write, the tales we tell our students, what will happen to them?" I interjected, still shaking slightly from my unexpected awakening from my wandering in the dark recess of my mind.

"That is not for us to decide either. The only thing we can do, is to do our best, and hope that we too, will be worthy of preservation." Her expression softened, as she offered me a reassuring smile.

"Just as a flower can not decide if it gets plucked or spared by future gardeners, can you not decide what wisdom is

deemed to be worthy by future generations. But just as the flowers in our garden, can you endeavour to grow as strong, and radiant as you possibly can. With effort, and a fair bit of luck, will you find that not only will your teachings blossom, but its seeds will also spread far afield, enriching lands you yourself may never see, with its brilliant splendour."

Nodding one last time, the matron bid her goodbyes and left me to my thoughts. Looking out over the fields of the step, I saw it. as for the first time. Not barren and empty as I first thought, but full of life, and vividness. Many of the plants had grown here for generations, yes, moss, shrubs and small trees, but in between these vast lands I saw flowers, flowers from our gardens. It must have taken decades, if not centuries, but from the base of our temple, had the flowers spread, as far as the eyes could see.



Filled with new purpose, I strode in the lecture hall where my students patiently awaited me. I was determined, now more than ever, to create something that would grow, something that would be worthy of the care of future generations.