

The Judges Chronicles: The Farmer Upon the Hill

Special Thanks To Angela “Gigi” Mills.

Introduction: God as Flesh

As I told you before, the Holy One created the world of Shavron and all the creation in it. And with the Holy One was his Son who was also played a hand in creating everything that was made in the world of Shavron. You may also remember that the Holy One’s Son appeared to Gabriel in the world of night as a precursor of His coming. Now His coming was of great importance; for Ivronel, or Dranus as he most commonly is called, tempted the world into sin and rebellion against the Holy One. Sin (or the sin of all creatures), which eventually brings death to all; and gives Dranus eternal possession of that soul, needed to be forgiven. Therefore with the prophecies of old and the parable of the world of night, God became flesh and his son was born into that world. He grew up in Shavron in the little town of Girgandale. He was given the name Kleos, which means Glory; for by His name and his work of righteousness the world would be saved from sin. Here the fourth chronicle begins.

Chapter 1: Girgandale

As time passes on, there are many things that change and for the land of Shavron it was no different. What was once a united country gradually became a land separated by one’s status in birth instead of ideals in one’s character and truth. The judges, who were chosen by the Holy One, were now elected by the citizens. It was an effort for independence, for the ways of the Lord seemed archaic to them, although religious ceremonies towards God were still considered in style.

With this new era came a new idea of casting the joy of serving the Holy One aside for embracing the shackles of serving the self will. The old ways of Gideon, Deborah, Samson, Gabriel, and many other names of great recognition were long forgotten. The judges, who were suppose to remind the citizens of their history and their relationship with the Holy One, turned out to be the most corrupt of all.

The country was divided into three territories, each distinguishing the class system. Lower Shavron was for the peasants of the land that were either forced into that way of life, or held fast by the strong hand of the upper class’s greed. Middle Shavron was for creatures that lived well or was born into such a circumstance, and finally there was Upper Shavron; and as you have guessed, it was for those creatures with money to spend, money to splurge, and money just to torment those who had little. The aristocrats, or the

jerk-o-crats as the lower class loved to say, cared very little of either God or their fellow creature. Yet that is not to say that all of them were jerks, but enough of them were to earn such a title. But let's leave this brief summary of current events in Shavron and focus on what God was doing.

It was a fresh and warm morning in the small town of *Girgandale*. It was the newest city in Shavron and the population was relatively small, only a hundred creatures since its beginnings of ten years lived there. Girgandale was an agricultural town where farmers would send their produce to the larger cities; and despite their importance, they were considered the least when it came to prestige and nobility. The small town rested snugly near the bottom of Lower Shavron; and although the venom of aristocracy had swept through most of the country, Girgandale, for the moment, was spared. Within this town was born the Holy One's Son.

Along the main road he came: a red panda pushing his small cart full of farming utensils and seed. He wore a large brimmed hat to keep his head cool from the summer heat, a red shirt, and a lightweight cloak positioned over him like a cape. He passed by a group of youngsters playing a game of tag. When they saw him, they ran to him with great joy calling his name as if he had returned from a victorious battle. One of the youngsters tagged the panda. Now Kleos, for that is his name if you already forgotten, was not hesitant to bless children when they came to him.

So he played tag, taking a break from his work.

A group of farmers were able to descry the scene from their work of toil, and couldn't help but to smile. From the playful scene; a door, from a home that sat by the road, opened. A plump female grizzle bear appeared. The bear came out to sweep the dirt and dust that had gathered over night on her porch step. With the sound of giggling and galumphing, the bear's attention quickly sought out this disturbing occurrence. She watched the frolicking of the panda with the children and her look was not pleasant at all. The bear took it upon herself to end the incessant play, caring not what happy emotions she would crush under her disdainful fit of the morning.

"Alright right that's enough, all of you come here this instance," she cried, "Hurry now don't linger!"

The children went over to the grizzle bear. She told them all to find another place to play. The children complied, sending Kleos back to his cart.

No time for playing," said the grizzle bear, "My husband needs to finish that field of yours---hop to it!"

He continued up the road that led to a small cottage on a hill overlooking a field ready to be prepped for the season. It was the home of the red panda and he was commonly known by the town as the "The Farmer Upon the Hill." The panda parked the cart near the fertile ground of his farm. He diligently worked with a hoe to break the soil to plant the seeds that rested by his side in a woolen sack. Whenever he finished with digging a row, he would spread the seeds carefully making sure that they fell on the good soil.

There were many days that Kleos stayed with his trade, but one day news spread that he

had given his farm to Amber's husband Aesop, the head farmer in Girgandale. No one knew why, and all were asking for what reason.

"Time to work the work that I have been given to do." replied Kleos.

He must be talking about farming was the common thought. Maybe he found better land to plant crops or maybe he had been called by one the upper class to work in their gardens. Nonetheless, this saying was not easily perceived. With minds still wondering over the farmer's actions, Kleos left the town.

Chapter 2: Crazy Magee

Also in that land there was a creature known as Crazy Magee. He was a mutt as many of the pure breeds of dogs called him, yet he carried himself with a better attitude than some of the pedigrees in Shavron. The half Spitz and half Doberman made his way around the divided land speaking of the coming of the Holy One's Son. He was that voice; that forerunner, calling all Shavronites to repentance of sins. He knew the prophesies of old well, and it was appointed for him to prepare the way for the Son's cause. His fur was wild and offensive; some saying it would do him good to groom it. His cloak were tatters held together by patches upon patches, and in his hand he carried a long walking stick. Insults were common for him, yet Magee was not one to take offense to the heart: for he received more ridicule than most creatures would receive in a lifetime. As a crowd gathered around him, he continued to proclaim the redemption of this fallen world with a fervor unmatched by anyone that had come before him.

"Come one, come all and heed my words," said Magee, "The time is now to serve the Holy One, for his mercy never dies. You have worship your idols, killed your children, and even now hold on to what you know is wrong. Just bend you knee,"— Magee dropped to one—"and give your life to God. He won't bite! He won't crush you! But your sin will. The day is coming when life ends and the Maker meets the created,"— he returns to both feet—"So who will be first to walk with the Holy One for there is no hope without him."

One from the group spoke up saying that they didn't have to repent. All they had to do was to trust in the righteousness of the past judges and the first king of Shavron, Gabriel. "Naughty, naughty, naughty," said Magee wagging his finger, "Say not that we have Gideon, Deborah, and the other judges to trust, for their righteousness cannot be given to you."

Another from the group came forward.

"Magee, are you the Son? Are you the one the prophets spoke off?"

The dog swooned and fell into the arms of bystander. Quickly recovering to let all know he was well, he answered the question.

"Dare not to place such a title on me. I come to call you away from your sins, but there is one, whose cloak I am unfit to even wash, who will endow you with His Spirit; and also," said Magee sternly, "He will endow those with judgment who refuse Him."

All began to ask, “Where is he?” and “How can we find him?” Magee was about to speak, but something held his mouth fast.

“Behold the Son---My Lord.” Magee said, as his eyes left the direction of the group and focused on an approaching creature. Crazy Magee stood up tall; the crowd took a few steps back as Kleos passed through. He knelt to both knees. Again, the dog, swooned, but no one wanted to catch him this time around. Seeing the risk of hitting the ground, Magee brushed himself off and regain his composure.

“You?” Magee said confused, “Myself and the others here need to give our lives to the Holy One, but why you? What treachery have you committed? There is none. What evil have you done in your heart and mind? It does not exist. Have you sinned against the Holy One-- we both know you have not and never will! You don’t need me to tap you on the shoulders. You don’t need this.”

Kleos looked up at Magee.

“I have come to do My father’s will.”

“Indeed” he said smiling, “Indeed.”

Taking his walking stick, as was his custom, he tapped Kleos on the shoulders. After the second tap something miraculous happened. The old, crusty walking stick began to bud with flowers and with the greenest foliage anyone had ever seen. Magee bobbled the stick in his hand as the flowers and leaves appeared. Such a marvel was not quickly forgotten and the crowd took that story to their friends and family. The sky parted and the sun seemed to intensify. From the sky there came the Spirit of the Holy One, descending like a dove. The Holy One spoke.

“You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

The fame of that very day was on the lips of all attending and they spread the news to every citizen from Upper Shavron to the small town of Girgandale.

Chapter 3: Ivronel

Kleos was lead into the wilderness of the Cinnamount woods. He carried no money or items of value, nor any substance to appease his hunger. The cover of night was his shelter during that time; and once he entered a remote area of the wood, he began to pray. This place was not only a spot for prayer, but also for a meeting. Forty days went by and the pain of thirst and hunger came upon Kleos, but it did not overtake him. It was at this time that a certain visitor arrived, allowed to tempt without restraint, yet would fail in his attempt as you will see.

A bitter, cold freeze swept over the area where Kleos knelt. His fur was instantly frozen along with the grass and the trees. The ground crunched under the weight of an invisible behemoth. With every step the beast became visible like an artist’s brush stoke bringing him to light. The beast stopped a few feet away from the panda. Dranus looked down on the kneeling figure with all malice and fearful reprisal, knowing Glory, the same who had defeated him in the world of night, was in his midst.

Dranus's breath was a frosty mist. The unicorn flapped his wings to cause a great gale. Kleos never moved despite the unicorn's efforts; and after seeing that his actions were futile, the unicorn quietly laughed and tucked his wings against his sides, yet his laughter conveyed his knowing of his final end: to be crushed and conquered; to be chained forever for casting sin upon God's creation. But he had no purpose but to kill, steal, and destroy; and so he did what his nature drove him to do.

"A month and ten days you have fasted and prayed," said the unicorn. "You look famished, it's a shame there is no food around. It's not very nice for your Father to leave you starving—very undignified I must say."

With his hoof the unicorn kicked a stone, rolling it near the Kleos.

"If you are God's Son, turn that stone into bread and make the dew of the grass into sweet nectar to quench your thirst: for a son shares his father's power. If you are the Son, surely you can do this."

Kleos spoke.

"This is truth: no creature lives by bread alone, but by every word of God."

The unicorn walked slowly to the right of Kleos. His gaze was fixed on the red panda, never blinking. Suddenly with the subtle wave of his wings, the Cinnamount woods faded away and both creatures were standing on the roof of the tallest building in Shavron.

Many citizens were below.

"Jump," said the unicorn, "For this is truth: the Holy One will never see you to harm and will aid you so that you do not fall or dash your foot against a stone. So jump and prove this truth.

But what Dranus said was not the complete truth, but Kleos did.

"This is truth: Do not tempt the Lord God."

With the sooth in its proper place, Dranus had no foundation to stand on. Finally, in a third attempt, Dranus roared like a ragging lion, and the scenery of the buildings in Shavron disappeared. He brought Kleos on a mountaintop showing all the land below: rivers, trees, hills, and more.

"Look around you," said Dranus, "All that you see is under me; for my power is evident, but," he said pausing, "I will surely give all to you, if you would just bow and worship me."

But Kleos said,

"This is truth: Worship God and Him only."

Like the turning of a dial, the Cinnamount Woods returned. The unicorn, always an underling, fled in a cowardly gallop disappearing in the wood. The sunlight beamed down on the red panda, the coldness of the evil one was removed, and the sweet smell of the forest filled his nostrils. The panda fixed his eyes back on the gates of Shavron and went to get something to eat.

Chapter 4: The Exodus Fair

As Kleos drew nearer to the country gates, he heard cheering and a abundance of laughter. This meant only one thing: that the Exodus Fair was starting. It was a tradition to celebrate the freedom of the Shavronites from the Tajirians; a well known adventure in Shavron history. Every year for the past two hundred years, a few citizens would dye their fur orange and paint black stripes on themselves to reenact the time of slavery long ago. The performance was held at Eldos Square. Everyone was looking forward to this year's performance: for a real tiger (a good one) would play the part of Aznar. After the play, the actors were given a round of applause and the fair officially began.

There was a good spread of food that was made throughout the entire marketplace so anyone could sample the rich puddings or the sweet cakes that were baked. The savory smell of the food brought many to the tables, and it was said that this was always the most popular spot during the fair. Puppet plays were presented for children, a minstrel was singing hymns , and hundreds of festival stands (mostly stagecoaches) were ready to entertain anyone who stood to watch. At one of these stands stood a tall jack-rabbit, named Jaq. The rabbit was dress modestly: a gray shirt, a gray cape sown with patches, and a top hat with a hole in it. Jaq removed his hat, revealing that his left ear was cut in half. Although this was startling to some, it did not deter him from giving the crowd a gracious welcome.

"My fellow Shavronites. I thank you for your time. If your wanting entertainment, you have come to the right place, let me begin by—"

Suddenly another rabbit came from behind the stages curtain. She was shorter than Jaq, but not by much. She took the time to interrupt him to the audience's surprise.

"What are you doing?" she said looking around.

"Excuse my wife, Priscilla, " said Jaq, " sometimes she can be quiet bothersome."

"Bothersome?" she said, "I'm amazed you haven't bored the crowd with running the big yap of yours: your mouth runs more the river on the eastside."

The crowd went to laughter as they began to understand the playful skit. Jaq, took the time to straighten his hat, returning a cunning retort.

"It seems my wife has forgotten her manners. She forgets anything and everything."

"Are calling me stupid?" Priscilla said rolling her neck.

Jaq turned his head slowly and replied,

"Only during the working hours, my dear."

There was even a big outburst of laughter, the comic bickering went on to the crowds delight. Afterwards Jaq performed a series of magic tricks, and Priscilla finished off with a routine called "Sing and Catch" by juggling a ball, two oranges, and a plate while reciting a popular poem known by most of the Shavronites:

*During the summer time when all is well and free,
We eat heartily and sing merrily like the buzzing of the bee.*

*Yet summer ends as the cold winds pass by.
And because of our sorrow we let out a great sigh.
But soon winter will pass and spring will enter in.
And once again we will know that summer...is about to begin.*

As she finished the poem, she threw the objects in the air, took a knee, and caught the plate with the ball landing on it. In the other hand, she caught one orange, and the other landed on top of her head in perfect balance. The crowd was already large and when the hare had finish a grand round of applause was given. Jaq came beside his wife, both taking a few bows with the continuing praise.

"Ah, our adoring fans," said Jaq, how we love you all."

"We also would love your money." said Priscilla in jest, "Please be kind as to reward our entertaining efforts."

The crowd, well entertained, deposited plenty of currency in the basket nearby. After the crowd left, Priscilla retrieved the crate, taking it behind the stage curtain.

"Wow, we made a heap of cash this time!"

Jaq resting for his next performance, took the crate and began to count the money. He separated it into two piles, the first was for expenses, and the other half was used to appease Pricilla's and Jaq's habit of gambling. They loved money and did anything to get it. It was gambling that lost Jaq part of his left ear; for he got in a fight with badger who did not like Jaq's way of playing cards. Nevertheless both rabbits made plans go to a game of cards.

"We'll cash in big this time!," said Jaq rubbing his hands, "I'll buy you anything you want."

"Really?!!" she said happily.

Jaq kissed his wife on the cheek.

"I promise."

At the game, Jaq lost all his earnings and with Priscilla crying at his side, both rabbits left the card game broke as usual.

"I almost had him," said Jaq crossing his arms in agitation, "and then he pulled that ace!"

"What now?" Priscilla said wiping her eyes.

Jaq hunched his shoulders.

It was at this time that Kleos entered the fair. He stayed on the outskirts of the fair where most to the crowds did not mingle. The back alleys were dirty and the smell of trash filled the air. Kleos was looking or should I say following a sound that had caught his ear. It was the song of praise to God! It came from a old blind cat who wept as he leaned on a staff against the wall.

"**Why are you crying,**" said Kleos.

"I cry because God doesn't hear me. I asked to be healed of my blindness for years, I have praised him, and yet God has not come to me."

"**Lean over, cat.**" said Kleos.

Kleos pressed his fingers on his eyes and wiped them. The old cat began to shake as his blindness disappeared.

“Tell no one of this,” said Kleos commanding him sternly, **“but go to the judges of this land and show them what God has done for you.”**

But despite the command, the old cat quickly made his way into the crowds, proclaiming what had happened to him. Heads turned, creatures began to talk; Jaq and Priscilla listened carefully just as the rest of the crowd did. The old cat raised his voice praising God; but they asked who had healed him: for many in the crowd knew that he was blind and a beggar, he could give a name. The crowds searched the alleyway, but Kleos was not there. They looked in the buildings, but he was not seen there either. All day the crowds looked for him, but he did not reveal himself. Finally during the night and after the crowds had dispersed, Kleos sat by the stagecoach of Jaq and Priscilla. Both rabbits had come from a nightly card game--still broke as usual. When Kleos saw Jaq and Priscilla he said,

“I see the blind leading the blind.”

“What are you talking about?” said Jaq, “We are not blind like the old cat.”

But Kleos was not talking about physical sight, but their sin.

“Follow me,” said Kleos, **“Not only will I heal your blindness but give you life as well.”**

Priscilla caught on and said,

“Its him---the one that healed the old cat!”

“Let’s follow him,” said Jaq whispering in his wife’s ear, “We may come out on the better end of this, if you know what I mean.

Priscilla did, and as Kleos left the fair as the rabbits followed.

Chapter 5: The Cantankerous Cook

The owner of the Golden Seal Inn paced back and forth looking over his employees’ uniforms. They stood in line professionally dressed in white linen jackets with large cuffs. The owner, a stubby Asian bear named Poe, called his employees to attention. The Inn received a letter two weeks ago that Ping, the Judge of Commerce, and his twin brother Ming, would be arriving with nearly one hundred of their friends. The Golden Seal Inn prided itself on being the most prestigious living quarters in all of Shavron. The exterior of the building was painted a canary yellow and blue, a pathway made of red stones was laid across the entrance of the Inn; and just for show, two employees were posted out front to raise flags to welcome the guests.

"Now," said Poe, rubbing his hands together nervously, "This is the big day. One of our great leaders will be arriving at any moment. Now I want to make this clear, our judge will be bringing his brother, Ming, with him. They are twins and we must not get them confused, Ping is the judge. Remember, we must do our best to please our betters, isn't that right?"

"YES, SIR!" shouted the employees in a jubilant cry.

However, among them was a rambunctious little creature named Ricco. The ringtail was not paying attention to the owner's words; he was daydreaming of summer days away from work until he was interrupted.

"Ricco," called Poe, "did you hear what I said? Are you paying attention?"

"Yes I was." he said a little annoyed.

"Then, what did I say?"

"You said that we should do everything in our power to suck up to the two nincompoops and play nice until they leave."

"They're orangutans, orangutans!" said Poe, "If they hear you talking about them like that, it could be the gallows for you. By my word, Ricco, I don't know why I keep you around."

Ricco raised his head with a prideful grin.

"I know why you do: I'm the best cook you've got."

"Yeah, that's right," said Poe, getting in his face. "You better be very good today...and wipe that smirk off your face!"

The owner turned his attention back to the whole group. Orders were dictated that every silver fixture was to be shined to perfection, floors were to be scrubbed in every nook and cranny, and all tables were to receive a white linen cloth. With Poe's meticulous eye, his employees went to work.

Ricco with the help of his cooking team, prepared the lunch and dinner orders that were sent in advance. It wasn't more than an hour when they heard distinctive trumpet calls within the distance. The instruments signaled the arrival of the judge in the streets of Upper Shavron. Within moments there was a knock at the door; all work came to an abrupt halt.

"It's them, everyone to their places quickly," said Poe.

Once the employees took their places, the owner swung the door open to greet the royalty that was there.

"Welcome to the Golden Seal--"

"What's wrong with you, got wax in your ears? How come you took so long with the door. Get out of my way!" said Ming.

The bear was taken aback by the orangutan's hostile attitude. He was dressed elegantly with a cloak made of blue silk and he had gold studded wrist and ankle braces to match. The ape hobbled in on his long arms to inspect the main floor. A dissatisfied sneer swept across his face.

"Ugh, you call this luxury! All the fixtures are shined all wrong! I don't like silver at all! Brother, I want to stay somewhere else! This is suited for peasants and the meager creatures. I hate it!"

The owner stood by nervously, abashed from his guest's brutal criticism. He felt an episode of faint coming upon him, but one of his employees pulled his shirt and suggested trying to show Ming to his room to change the subject. The owner's confidence returned and he proceeded to address the orangutan.

"Ming, let us show you to your room. We have the best rooms in all of Shavron, none can rival us."

Ming looked at the bear with a look of indignation.

"Room? The gutter would be a step above this. My room better look good, from what I've seen already I'm staying in a rundown shack!"

The owner was gravely insulted, he stood as erect as a pole. A deep burning rage began to germinate in him. If it was anyone else, he would have taken him outback and beat some manners into him, but the brother of a judge demanded respect; no matter how insulting he was. The owner controlled his temper the best he could.

"You three help Ming to his room," he said with a pause, " I'm sure he will find the accommodations to his liking despite his peculiar taste in luxury."

Ming darted up the stairs as some of the employees took his bags. The ape continued to scrutinize, pointing out the most trivial of matters. It wasn't long after that that Ping arrived. He was carried on a litter that came through the double doors of the Inn. The litter came in slowly as four other orangutans struggled to walk under the weight of the judge. Each step was uncertain and it didn't help that Ping shouted insults at them when the litter dipped. The girth of the judge of commerce proved that he looked as if he had eaten most of the commerce himself. The litter was lowered easily to the floor. The carriers stood erect, panting to catch their breath, and the fat ape rolled off the litter. "Weaklings, have you no strength!"

The fat ape was wearing a colorful turban of green and orange. A ring was on every finger; and frequently he would hold out his hand so that some poor soul would kiss one of them, to further his ingrained pride. Around his neck hung the crest of commerce and a silk shirt was his cloak, but from the looks of it the garment was too small : for his chunky belly would stick out and jiggle whenever he moved. The Inn's employees did their best to keep a straight face; even the owner was nearly moved to hilarity.

"Who's the owner here?"

"I- I am," Poe said catching himself before he laughed, " welcome to--"

"First of all," Ping said interrupting, "I want my dinner by six, my clothes washed and dried within the day, and a midnight snack of toasted bread and jam; my brother will take the same. My friends," he said pointing behind him to the large crowd, "will have those orders too, they better be done or I will be very displeased."

The owner shouted the orders to Ricco; the ringtail rolled his eyes.

"Dinner won't be ready until seven. Tell the ninny—uh— our judge to give me more time."

The request put Ping in a raging fit, he walked up to the owner and pressed his finger at his chest.

"You tell that cook that dinner will be ready by six or I'll put all of you out of work!"

"We will try," Poe said humbly.

"You won't try, it will be done."

The owner nodded his head in submission. The ape went upstairs and the employees took his baggage.

"Only ninety eight guests to go," Poe said wiping his brow.

The Asian bear made his way into the kitchen. Knives were slicing through fruits and vegetables. The fragrance of butter, sugar, fruits, cream, and salt filled the air. Ricco went

to and fro inspecting each dish like a detective, making sure that every ingredient worked together to create a masterpiece.

"This dish needs more sugar, one cup will do, and you, " he said running over to a novice chief, " Whip the cream; don't stir—ah, out of the way, tend to the vegetables, I'll handle this!"

"Dinner must be ready by six," implored Poe.

"SIX!" cried the ringtail, displeased that his request was not granted, "I'm cooking for one hundred I need that extra hour! Get some backbone and tell that fatso to wait!" Ricco said slamming his fist on the table.

"Don't argue me, just make it happen."

Poe left the kitchen as he heard Ping taking on his brother's practice of vicious analysis of anything and everything.

The meal, to Ping's dismay, was served at six fifteen. The other guests had already arrived and were waiting for the main courses. Immediately a line of covered silver platters came from the kitchen. Ricco lead the way, with a pep in his step, as his team came to attention in front of the crowd. The platter tops were removed in unison and the guests were delighted, except for Ming and Ping: they were never impressed with anything, even if it was done perfectly. When the two orangutans received their plates, they snatched them and greedily shoveled the food into their mouths. It wasn't long before everyone's attention was directed at Ming and Ping: both apes spat out the food on the floor and were making a scene.

"Who made this slop?" cried Ming.

"Where's the cook?" said Ping.

Ricco made his way through the tables.

"What's the problem?"

"This is garbage! What kind of a cook are you anyway? There's too much salt in this dish! I gave you a list. Can't you read, you moron!"

Ricco lost his temper and shouted back at the orangutan. It was a three way back and forth bickering: for Ming jumped in to defend his brother. The owner ran over to stop the arguing.

"All right, Ricco, that's enough. I'm sorry, Ping, we'll fix you order very soon, it will take only a few minutes."

The owner and Ricco turned their backs to head to the kitchen when they were splattered with food. Most of it hit Ricco in the back. The ringtail turned around in ire as the bear held him back from attacking Ping. The orangutan placed the empty plate on the table.

"You can wear your mistake for all I care; something for you to think about. Get our order right this time!"

Ricco was trying to break Poe's hold, but it did little to help.

"Let me go, let me go! I'll kill him, I'll kill him!" he shouted as he was pulled into the back room.

The crowd showered praises upon the orangutan. It was always a delight to see the upper class get the better of subordinates.

"Good jog, Ping," said one guest, " that's the way to keep the commoners in their place."

"I try, but it's so demanding," he said placing the back of his hand to his brow playfully. The crowd laughed and continued with their meal. The owner took Ricco, kicking and fighting, out the back door into the street.

"Calm down, Ricco, calm down you little hot head!"

Ricco broke from Poe's grip. There was a brief stare down, and then Ricco darted towards him. It was a short scuffle between the two until Ricco was pushed on his back. "Don't ever get in my way!" said Ricco shouting, "What do you think you're doing?!!" "I'm helping you out," said Poe, "that judge could have your head on a platter by tomorrow if he wanted to. What's the matter with you challenging him like that?"

The owner came over and extended his hand, Ricco took it reluctantly and was helped to his feet.

"I hate their guts— all of those snobby wretches!"

"Not all of them are bad, you know that," said Poe, "I wouldn't have been able to start this inn without one of them."

"That's beside the point," said Ricco, "Just keep that ape away from me."

The rest of the night went smoothly, to everyone's expectations. During the week the aristocrats continued to make the lives of the employees a living nightmare. Insults were given constantly, guests would complain over the most trivial of mistakes and demanded either a flogging or termination of employment to remedy the error. On the last day most off the guests had already left, except for Ping and Ming. Of all the creatures, the employees were glad to see the orangutans leave; but before they did, Ping wanted to have all the employees in the main lobby. The judge held out his hand so that his ring finger was up. At first no one clearly understood why he was doing this; but then, the thought came to light. One by one, the employees kissed Ping's ring; even the owner was reduced to the demoralizing practice. There was one employee left that was not about to give in to the ape's arrogance. Ricco stood with his arms crossed as he looked on. Ping looked at him and called him out.

"Get over here and follow suit, cook."

Ricco did not move. Poe came over to counsel him.

"Listen to me very carefully," he said in a whisper, "We can all get back to a normal way of life when he leaves. Just kiss the ring and he'll go away. Don't make things difficult, Ricco."

Ricco lowered his arms and slowly walked over to Ping. A prideful grin came over the orangutan's face.

"That's right, not so tough now are you?"

The ringtail stood in front of the judge. Both eyed each other; a deep hatred between them.

"Kiss!" Ping said raising his hand to Ricco's mouth, "You better do it."

Everyone looked on at the silent battle ahead. Some, deep inside, wanted Ricco to punch the judge right in the face; others silently pleaded for the ringtail to comply to the orangutan's wishes so their lives could return to normal.

"I said kiss my ring!"

With a flick of his head the ringtail said,

"Kiss your own ring, you fat chimp. Leave us and take your knuckle headed brother with you!"

Ping's eyes widen and his hand shook as he pointed at Ricco.

"Y- you- you---common trash!"

"R-I-C-C-O!!" Poe yelled in frustration.

Ming jumped to strike Ricco, but the ringtail ran for his life as Ming gave chase. Tables were thrown over and the chase went out into the streets. Ricco had a speed advantage over the orangutan. He left Ming in the dust as insults were hurled at him from behind. The cook finally got his dream of summer days without work, even if it running for his life to attain it. But his flight would take him to Eldos lake, where his real life would begin.

Chapter 6: The Sermon at Eldos Lake

After the Exodus Fair, the fame of the red panda began to spread rapidly. His name quickly came from the lips of all---Kleos!---Glory! The crowds sought for him and found him. When they brought the sick of all types of diseases he healed them, and many believed on Him. Ricco walked along a beaten path whistling a merry tune to keep himself entertained. He took the opportunity to get himself acquainted with a soft knoll of grass, and placed a blade of long grass in his mouth to chew upon. Suddenly Ricco's right he saw a group of creatures running in great haste to Eldos Lake. Ricco paid no attention at first, assuming it was a group out for a morning swim, but then more creatures hurried by him until it was apparent that something was going on. Finally there was one last straggler. Ricco called to him to inquire of the event.

"Excuse me, what's with all the running? I know the water at Eldos lake isn't that refreshing."

"Its not the lake but whose at it," replied the citizen itching to leave.

"Who's at the lake?" said Ricco.

"Who's at the lake?!!" he repeated stunned at the very question, "A great creature of God. Ricco raised an eyebrow as the citizen continued.

"A month ago he healed a blind wildcat and cured another creature who was paralyzed from the waist down and he healed him by just speaking!"

The citizen ran off, and Ricco followed behind him. At the lake the crowd was gathered around the shore. It was a great multitude and all were carefully listening to the potent words of this mere farmer. The panda walked into the crowd as he looking at them with a smile; for he had compassion on them. Ricco arrived and found a spot in the middle of the crowd. He happened to sit by Priscilla and Jaq. Kleos started to speak.

"I have watched the world fall into sin. And my heart yearns to save it---to save you. As it was with Gideon the judge of battle, so it is today. The hearts of the Shavronites in his day turned to idols and today it is the same, but I come to change

the heart to yearn for the Holy One, but not by the rules on Tribless hill, but by the covering of my blood I shall establish this.”

Kleos paused and then continued.

“I have watched the world fall into sin,” said Kleos again. “As it was in the day of Gabriel the first king of Shavron it is the same today. The wretchedness of sin is a disgrace to my Father, but I have come to give grace so that you will not be judged for the wretchedness of your sins. I will make the darkness in your souls and turn it into day. And as in the world of night, I have come to set all captives free from the bondage of Dranus.”

This was a hard saying and crowds were astonished, for he spoke as one with authority. After hours of teaching the crowds stayed. Priscilla and Jaq stood by Kleos as the crowd pressed upon him. But Kleos looked past all of them and with the point of his finger he called Ricco and said,

“Ricco, follow me.”

The crowd went quiet. It was as if time stopped itself as Ricco looked into the eyes of Glory.

“There are others here,” said Ricco reluctantly, “Call out to them.”

“I make no mistakes: I call whom I call and will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. Follow me.”

And from that day forward Ricco followed.

Chapter 7: The Keepers of the Book

A large book came ceremoniously into the streets of Middle Shavron. A horn bearer sounded his distinct tune as he walked in front of the society known as the *Keepers of the book*. The book rested on a golden litter, and was carried by creatures who had a lower rank in the society. Behind them were the higher ranked members, trailing the procession in single file: hands together, noses tilted in the air, and a sway in their walk. The march had the effect of a funeral with the book itself acting as the deceased; it was a perfect illustration of the society.

The Keepers of the Book wore elegant cloaks with gold tassels, a tall black hat with a jewel in the center of it, and on the tassels hung numbers ranging from one to one thousand. One of them wore the crest of instruction. This grey hound, named Paskalo, was the chief of the keepers. As the horn continued to call, many Shavronites came from their homes while others ceased from their work and followed the sound. It was a reigning tradition that if the horn of the keepers was ever heard any Shavronite, within earshot, must come to the sound immediately. In order to ensure a good crowd, the keepers of the book would always send out soldiers to round up any reluctant citizens who tried to avoid the call.

The procession came to an end at a public square and the four upper members took their spot behind the golden volume. The crowd stood nearby and waited for the ceremony to

begin.

The four keepers were given a bell. The first member, a hyena, shook his bell and gave a brief introduction to the ceremony.

"Every month we come to you to read the "Book of A Thousand Rules" to remind you to keep the rules to find favor with the Holy One. We, the keepers of the book, have kept the rules and remind you to do the same."

The second member, an otter, sounded his bell and picked up where the first left off.

"The book was made one hundred years ago today to keep Shavron from falling back into wickedness. The rules made by the first keepers are holy and true and must be followed."

The third member, a sloth, sounded his bell. This went on until the judge of instruction spoke. After the introduction, each member grabbed one of their tassels and read the number on it. The number represented one of the one thousand rules written in the book. The hyena stepped forward and recited the rule.

"Rule number eight-five: Every Shavronite must pray on the first day of the week. Prayer will be given all day and nothing else shall be done; no working, no leisure, no activities whatsoever. If this is not done the offender will be charged ten silver coins. So let it be heard and let it be done."

"Rule number two hundred thirty four," said the otter, continuing, "No idols will be worshiped, except in the privacy of the home, but if the Holy One comes to you and rebukes you then you must give it up and do it no more. So let it be heard and let it be done."

"Rule number five hundred and nine," said the sloth, "Every child upon their seventh birthday will memorize the first ten rules of the book. Upon committing them to memory, they are to recite them among the upper members. If the child cannot remember all ten, then the parents will be charged six silver coins for every rule forgotten. The payment will be given as an offering to God for lack of study. So let it heard and let it be done."

"Rule number three hundred and nineteen," said Paskalo, "Listen to the Keepers of the Book! So let it be heard and let it be done."

The rules, as foolish as they are, were well enforced in Shavron. Even Shavronite, rich or poor, hated them. There were ten tassels on each cloak; each one was read without pause and the crowd listened on. Some daydreamed to avoid the incessant monologue, others silently rebuked the four, but once the ceremony was finished the keepers of the book left and life returned to normal to the citizens' great pleasure. The book was taken back to the keepers' temple. The temple itself was built with marble and a large courtyard for public gatherings was positioned in the front. Once inside, the volume was placed in a vault until it was needed in the near future. The four ranking members took their leave to the main hall where a host of other keepers waited for their presence. The great crowd was talking about the happenings of the day, but all talking ceased once the four chief keepers came in. The crowd separated to both sides of the room, like the parting of the sea, and the four keepers walked leisurely to their thrones. The otter, tree sloth (who was quiet

slow at moving), the hyena, and the grey hound took their seats. There was a brief silence, and then the otter spoke.

"I hereby open our daily meeting, what are the happenings in Shavron?"

Most of the talk was about finding citizens breaking most of the rules in the book; at which names were given and fees would be demanded, however, the subject of the farmer brought silence over the whole congregation. Kleos fame was growing quickly and with the massive crowds that came to be healed and taught by him. The keepers were nervous.

"What should we make of this farmer?" asked one of the lower keepers, "Just a few days ago he gave a teaching by the lake, which is breaking rule ninety seven, and now his words are being written down to be dispersed to all of Shavron."

The hyena, named Naasson, rose from his throne to speak.

"Think nothing of him at all. Now, that's the end of the meeting. Return to your religious exercises, we must keep the rules to keep our good standing with the Holy One."

The crowd commenced with their exercises; some praying with rambling, which was quiet annoying despite it being a mandatory practice; others were memorizing the rules to show themselves worthy to the ranking members for advancement in the society.

Meanwhile, the four leaders slipped away into a hall and met privately in a room. The notion of the farmer did worry them, however, they did not want the lower keepers to see their unnerved emotions. In the room, the otter poured the sloth, and hyena a goblet of wine; and although one of the rules in the book was not to consume any wine, the four decided to overlook that rule for a moment of secretive pleasure.

The grey hound stood stiff looking out the window that gave a view of the courtyard.

The otter noticed his friend's posture and invited him to engage in a toast.

"Paskalo, what wrong?" said the otter, "Don't let the day wear you down. Come over and have some wine."

"Keep it, Reiach." said Paskalo, "This farmer makes me uneasy. Many of Shavronites are beginning to believe in him."

The words of the chief keeper, had such gravity that the other three began to cogitate over the prophecies they had committed to memory from Samson the wolf to Yohan the little cat from Tajir.

"Believe in him?" said the Sloth. "The commoners need something to distract their weak minds---who cares?"

"Word is that he forgives sins." said Paskalo.

"Impossible," said the Sloth. "Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

"Can we please talk about something else," said Reiach, "Seth, recite one of those silly rhymes you have. It always makes me laugh."

The sloth stood up, spilling a few drops of wine as he did, and gave the rhyme.

I once saw a flower, quite pretty to see
and then I saw that it contain a bee.

I told the bee to leave the scene
Then to me he said something utterly mean.

So I swatted that devil, thinking the better
But then he came with a sting and left in a blur.
So away flew that pesky little imp
Now I walk with a shaky limp!

Rieach fell back in his chair in laughter, as his companions joined him in jovial praise. Nonetheless the sanguine mood was soon overshadowed by a large crowd, past the courtyard gates, racing in pursuit of Kleos. Reiach, Naasson, and Seth came over to the window, scouting the crowd along with the Paskalo trying to fix his eyes on the thorn that was agitating him. Kleos himself was not seen by their eyes, so Paskalo closed the curtains.

“I want to finish this and finish now.”

“How, Paskalo?” said Naasson, “You saw the crowd, we just can’t go and grab him.”

“The Shavronites revere him as a prophet,” said Seth, “others more than a prophet from what I heard----”

“No one cares what you heard,” said Reiach, “We need to figure out how to corner him; trick him in his words. Once we get through with him, the Shavronites will only regard him as a mere magician. Healings---miracles---hah!---I don’t believe it!”

Again there was silence. Wicked schemes and wiles were being born in their minds.

“We’ll challenge him face to face.” said Paskalo.

“Good,” said Reiach, “We’ll wait for the right moment.”

"I will be the first to try him,“ Paskalo said with a smile, “When I get done with him, he'll beg me to send him back to his school books and lesson plans."

The three leaders made a toast in Paskalo's honor and enjoyed the rest of the day.

Chapter 8: I am the Door

The crowds were endless as the three walked with Kleos. The multitude brought their families and friends to be healed of all types of diseases. From that time they called him Glory, for they said that Glory had come among them. Among the crowd was a rich shop owner. He made it his duty to get to Kleos.

“Good teacher, Good teacher,” said the miller coming to Kleos, “How can I go to Heaven?”

“The road to heaven is narrow---there is only one way.”

“One?” said the rich owner confused, “And what way would that be?”

Kleos responded.

“Truly, Truly I say to you. Wide is the way to Hell, but narrow I the way to Heaven.

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