

Garden of Chara, Year 1, Shap, Day 6

On the sixth day of creation, Erimea stood poised for human hands to shape it; every good thing awaiting their tender touch.

The Lord God knelt in the dirt, scooped up a man-sized portion of soil, and molded it like clay. When the soil had the form the Lord God desired, he breathed into it. The form became a living soul.

Solis. The first. A model for all who would follow.

At the same time, the Lord God breathed life into Adam, Solis's twin brother on Earth.

The Lord God said to the animals, "This is your new master and ruler. He shall be called Solis, for he was taken from the soils of Erimea."

Creatures hopped, turned, and twisted, attuned to the voice of God. From towering trees and sprawling green shrubs to flowers bursting in blue, yellow, and red, all listened. Slippery river dwellers of silver, green, and black peeked from the rushing currents, while curious critters emerged from the tall grass, eager to behold their new master.

Yet, unseen enemies searched for the weakness of this new creation.

"Solis, you are human," Lord God said to the man, "and I am the Lord God who made you and everything you see. I made you in my image. Therefore, you are to abide by my every word so you can rule well over all I have made. I place Erimea into your care and protection."

"I am Solis." The man lifted his head and made eye contact with the Lord. "I will live by your word."

"You will be a great man and teacher to your children. This world will be blessed because of you, if you keep my words. I shall never abandon you; do not falter during hardship. I have given you a mind to remember, so you can lead your descendants."

Solis laughed to himself. “I am the ruler of everything.” He puffed out his chest. “I will be great.”

“What do you want to do right now?”

With steady dark eyes, Solis peered into God’s face as if to absorb his essence. “I wish to learn and understand.” Solis placed one hand on God’s cheek. The other hand, he wrapped around his own chin. “We are both warm. The Lord breathed into me, and I became a living soul. Are you me?”

The Lord took the man’s hands, gentle yet strong. “I am not you, and you are not me. But if you walk in my ways, you will become like me.”

“I will become like Lord God.” The man turned in a slow circle to gaze at God, the animals, and the surrounding garden, eyes wide with wonder. “Yes, and we will be one.”

“We may become one if you walk in my ways.”

“Am I not merely soil? Dirt? Is the dirt alive and aware?” Solis turned and knelt in the soil from which he had been taken. He scooped up some, and tiny creatures scurried to escape his hand. “Is this like me?” Solis showed it to the Lord God. “Do I have such things crawling through my body?” Solis released the soil and watched the remaining bits of dirt descend to the ground as he brushed his hands. “I know some things, but I perceive that you, Lord God, know all things. I want to be you.”

The Lord God laughed. “You are my beloved son, and you have so many questions. Did I not make you myself? When I breathed into you, I gave instructions to every part of your body. To your mind, I added memory.”

A small, fat, furry animal with a bushy tail pressed its soft paws on Solis’s feet as it crossed between him and the Lord. It stretched toward a nearby bush and munched on berries.

“What’s this?” Solis picked up the creature. “Is that good for eating, *pouchy cheeks*?”

The man sampled the berries and fed some to the hungry beast. “These are tasty. Thanks for letting me know.” Solis stroked pouchy cheeks and placed it on the ground. “I have a memory?”

“I’ve given your body and mind the information needed. Other things you must learn. If you love me, walk in my ways.”

“I love you, Lord. My heart burns when you speak. Let me be like you now.”

The Lord nodded and stroked Solis’s midnight-black hair, thick and silky. “It will take time. Though I took you from the soil, you are not the soil. You live. The soil is not alive.”

“I want to create.”

“You will build and create.”

“I want to take the soil and give it the breath of life, so it will be like me.”

“Some things only God can do.”

Solis lowered his head and frowned. “I want to create life, as you do.”

“You will take part in bringing new life into the world.”

“Yes, new life like me.” Solis clapped. “Let’s do it now.”

“Not now. You have much to learn.”

Solis grinned. “Learn to wait.” He looked around at the plants. “What else is there to eat? I’m hungry.”

The Lord God carried Solis through the garden and showed him every edible tree and plant. In the middle of the garden, the Lord God placed Solis before two trees. One was the tree of life. The other was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

“You may eat from any tree in the Garden,” the Lord God said, “except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you will

die.”

“What is the knowledge of good and evil?”

“Something you do not need to find out.”

Solis raised his chin and smiled. “Maybe it’s something I will learn on my own?”

“Remember my command. You may eat from any tree in the Garden except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

“Yes, Lord God.”

“What is it you want to do now?”

“To learn this place.” The man strode through the garden greenery and examined everything that caught his attention. “I am Solis. I am master, ruler, and caretaker of the Garden of Chara.”

The Lord God clapped Solis on the shoulder. “Yes, you are.” The Lord disappeared.

Only one creature objected to his new ruler and grumbled in his language, “No. Never. Never my master ... Return to dirt.” His forked tongue flicked in and out as he surveyed for food. Sometimes, he crawled on all fours, and other times, he walked on two legs. He wiggled his long, thin body and a triangle-shaped head on his way. This creature was more self-aware and craftier than the others. He called himself Sizraar.

Lucido, leader of the rebel spirits, observed the exchange between Solis and the Lord from a spiritual domain engulfed in billowing winds and the haze of a raging sea. His darkling insight allowed Lucido to see and hear what was happening wherever he focused his attention.

He turned and spat. “The creature wants to become like the Creator. Can dirt attain such a

lofty position? Foolishness.”

He towered above his chief lieutenants, Mactan and Vik. Lucido smiled as his worker angels constructed Aetherdon, City of the Air, a royal dwelling for his glory. Most fallen angels had mottled skin of green and gray laced with scars. Burn marks from the lake of fire. The rebels had mangled limbs and fingers that had become deformed while they struggled to break free from the chains that once held them. Lucido’s countenance still held remnants of its original luminescence, yet dimmed by the flames of hell. He remained a beacon of hope for his followers.

Mactan’s yellow eyes bulged. “What are we going to do about the man’s foolishness?”

“Observe until we find a point of attack. First on Erimea and then on Earth.”

“Look how God has misshapen us.” Mactan beat his breast with gnarled claws. “I want revenge now.”

“Patience, Mactan.” Lucido marched through the crowd of angry demons and growled. “I vow we will oppose the work of God and men at every turn. One day, God will regret his obsession with humanity. He will fall before me and worship me. The throne will be mine. The universe will be ordered as I suggested long ago. Do not fret. Payback is coming.”