# Eden

Eden

Written by Sean Catlett

Awake.

For… the first time…?

The air smells… sweet. Pretty. A yellow ball is almost blinding me, making me want to shut my eyes. Around me, plants grow. More than I can count. Blue liquid flows in the distance in a river. I am sitting on top of a green hill, looking down on miles of forest and different colored trees with birds flying above them. I can hear them chirping.

For the briefest of moments I wonder where I am.

And suddenly, I know. I know what everything is. Those red things on the tree above me… they’re apples. And that is water. And that is grass and I shouldn’t eat that.

I am filled with knowledge. I know so many things, instantly.

But I don’t know how I got here. I turn my head to the sky and ask the question:

“Where am I?”

I look down at myself for the first time. I am blue, save for a light colored stomach.

I go to find a stream of water. I look at myself in the reflection.

I am… a hedgehog.

Yes.

I notice the quills. I run my hands across them.

How did this happen? I remember nothing before this. One can’t just be here. One can’t just . . . become.

Yet… here I am.

I am.

Someone must have created me. Who?

And did he create all of this beauty around me as well?

Yes. Someone must have.

He must be powerful indeed.

I raise my head to the sky.

“Why am I here?” I ask.

I get no answer. Only the birds talk to me.

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This place is truly great.

I explore the closest places around the tree where I woke up. I find so many things… and I know the names of them already.

The question of how I got here still burns inside of me, but nobody answers. Not even the white on white birds flying lazily in the sky. All they do is fly. Maybe they land sometime, but I only see them fly.

And what do I do? I haven’t figured that out yet. I know I exist. I can move, affect things around me, but that isn’t so special.

I can only walk. But I can’t fly. Only the white birds can.

I wish I could fly. Then maybe I can see all of where I am. On top of the apple tree hill I can see many tree tops, lots of green. But then it gets blue in the distance. And that’s as far as I can see.

I sit down on the grass and ponder.

Ponder my existence.

But nothing comes to me.

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The sun is gone.

It’s been gone for a while.

The dark scares me. Why would my creator want to make something that scares me?

It’s lonely.

It’s very lonely.

I sit on top of a grassy hill, but not the same one that I woke up on. I did some exploring when the sun was still up.

I walked for the longest time, looking at the trees and the plants and the grass. And the apples. Looking at the apples made my stomach hurt, so I stayed away from them. I looked for others like me, more hedgehogs.

Then I noticed the sun was getting lower. It was in front of me instead of above.

And it went down.

And now I’m afraid. And shaking with cold. The sun provided my heart with warmth. And now it’s gone.

I must’ve done something to upset the creator. Why else would he take my warmth away from me?

I bring my knees up to my chest and shiver some more.

My stomach still hurts. It makes noises at me.

The birds have stopped chirping.

My eyes are growing heavy, but I need to stay awake. The dark scares me.

Then darkness reaches me, deeper than before. I am tired.

I am alone.

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Awake.

Again.

The sun is back.

I stand up. What happened?

… Sleep.

That’s what I did. And now I feel renewed. I feel like I can do anything.

I stare at the sun with a newfound appreciation. I thank the creator that it’s back.

I have to be careful today. Anything I touch must be thought out carefully before doing so. If not, I may upset him again and he’ll take away my beloved sun again. My warmth.

My stomach still hurts. But worse than before. Unbearable. I look around for an answer.

A glint…

Something shines in my eyes in the distance. It shines like a small sun. I walk towards it, slowly, cautiously, carefully…

It’s the apple tree.

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I eat for the first time. I finally get the hang of it after a couple of tries. I learn to take small bites,

or else I choke. Everything must be done carefully or I could hurt. And if I hurt too much…

I’m learning new things everyday. I want to learn more.

It was okay to do this. To eat the apples. The tree lit up like the sun. That’s a sign that

it’s okay to take it. Shining with a brilliance that only the sun can make.

It’s just after eating, and I feel a newfound energy. I get up, and I start walking.

Then faster.

And faster still.

And before I know it, I’m running. I run until everything is a blur around me, awash in a sea of green and blue. Perfect harmony between the sky and the trees. I run so fast that the birds race with me. The seem suspended in mid air. This must be what it is like to be a bird. But I fly along the ground. And it isn’t called flying, it’s called running.

I run for I don’t know how long. I leave the apple tree far behind. I realize finally what I’m doing.

Then… I stop. I don’t know where I am.

Oh no.

I shouldn’t have done that.

I break down crying. I know the sun will go away again.

I might have made my precious creator mad again. The sun already looks lower.

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To pass the time before darkness, I once again start exploring. I name everything I see.

Bird, Tree, Apple, Leaf, Wood, Earth, Water, Mud…

Worm…?

Another living creature. Not like me, but long, fat, and slithery. It doesn’t notice me kneeling beside it or talking to it. I didn’t see one like this yesterday.

I turn my head to the sky. For the first time I see different color birds I didn’t notice before. There are more creatures. My creator is still creating.

I follow one of the blue birds along in the sky, being careful not to run. Maybe if I don’t run again he’ll leave the sun in the sky, where it belongs.

I shouldn’t have tried to be a bird. I am only a hedgehog. Blue.

The bird is blue too. He’s not white like the others. But he can fly. I still can’t.

Maybe I am meant to run. Maybe that’s what hedgehogs do.

Why don’t I know this already? I know the names of everything, so why not what they do?

I decide to run.

It’s the only way I can keep up with the birds.

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I follow the blue bird for a long time. It soars gracefully in the sky and dips and dives every once in awhile. Every time it comes too close to the ground, I speed up to catch it. But it would always be safe. It was his way of having fun, and in a way, I was having fun too. Playing with birds is fun.

Then I find something.

It’s warmer, like water, except red. Not blue.

All things beautiful are blue or green.

Brown and white things just are.

This is red.

I walk as close to it as I can, but it becomes too hot. It sits in the ground like a lake of water, next to a rock. A big rock.

The… lava flows from the bottom of the rock and into its own lake.

It’s too hot to touch.

It’s lava. If I get too close to it, I start to burn.

It feels like the sun.

The sky is getting darker.

The sun is still falling.

Lower.

Lower.

And soon, the lava is the only warmth left.

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I had no trouble sleeping last night.

I had no problem with the sun being gone. As long as it comes back in the morning.

And as long as the lava is always here.

I get up from the hot grass away from the lava and look around.

Movement.

I see movement.

Over there in the trees.

I stand still, not wanting to frighten whatever it is. I want to see it. Another ground creature that doesn’t fly. Besides the worms. The worms don’t talk to me.

It emerges.

A… dog.

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I’ve been marking in the sand on a beach I found how many times I’ve slept.

There’s… 300 marks. The sun has left me that many times. Each time I have to run back to the lava pit to sleep. I can’t sleep without warmth or light.

Each day, more and more animals showed up, until they just stopped coming about… 10 suns ago. I have written their names down in the sand to pass the time.

Dog, Cat, Pig, Bird, Worm, Beetle, Fish, Crab, Goat, Horse, Cow, Sheep, and so on.

The names are written on a slanted part of the sand, facing the horizon, facing the setting sun. Maybe someone will see them and realize that I’m here…

The dog was the first one that followed me around my home, when I explored. He swam with me and ran with me and slept with me, by the lava pit. He was my first… companion…

And now, there are so many names. So many companions… and yet I still ache for company.

They all talk to me in their own way, but I don’t understand them, and I’ll bet they don’t understand me. I speak hedgehog language. They don’t. I walk on two feet. They don’t. I can run faster than any of them.

So many names. And I’m still missing one.

My creator.

It never came to me. He hasn’t given it. Maybe it’s because I haven’t seen him, but… I’ve seen what he can do. What he has done.

That should be enough.

Why doesn’t he show himself to me? I’ve asked so many times, and he still doesn’t show himself.

I want to see him so much.

I stare at the names in the sand. The waves wash closer and closer to the edge of them, meaning that it’s time for the sun to go away.

I like the beach. It always tells me what I need to know.

To clean the sand off of me, I jump in the shallow, salty sea. It’s still warm from the sun shining during the day.

I remember trying to sleep on the beach, but I was too close… and the water rose and I almost drowned.

Almost died.

Dying.

I wonder what it’s like to die.

I think that one day, when I cannot bear being alone anymore, I will go to the ocean and just fall asleep in it.

And I will never wake up.

Should I do this now? Is being lonely a good enough reason?

… No. It’s too soon.

I stand up in the shallow water and start walking out when I see a name in the water.

A reflection.

My own handwriting is being reflected from the inclined sand into the water. It’s ‘Dog’ that’s being reflected.

I see ‘God’ in the water.

How else could I take this? I don’t let it just slide off of me. It happened for a reason. Everything happens for a reason.

Like the words in the clouds.

I turn my head to the fading sun and say, just before it sets completely:

“God… I’m lonely.”

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It’s dark as I head back to the lava pit. I waited as long as I could stand for God’s answer. But nothing came. Only the splashing of the waves and the absence of the sun.

I’m almost used to the darkness, so I can walk in it without being afraid. I can’t run in it yet but soon… maybe.

I walk back to the lava pit, very close to unafraid. Most of my companions are asleep, save for a few night dwellers. I can see some of their eyes watching me.

I start to think that maybe God will never show himself. Maybe his power is over in this place. Maybe it’s only me that’s left. Maybe I was the only one that was ever here…

He didn’t answer me. Not this time.

Maybe God is dead. Maybe the message in the water was only coincidence. Maybe he stopped creating long ago…

His time is done. And I am still here.

Maybe it’s time to leave.

And for the first time ever, I am unafraid of the dark. Of anything. Even the message in the clouds, the one I saw days ago. Words written with the clouds in the sky. Symbols, and I knew what they had meant.

They seemed to spell out ‘Forbidden.’

This scared me. A single word scared me.

But it doesn’t anymore. I know everything here in this place. I have explored everything in my home. Nothing is forbidden.

It’s time to move on.

Briefly, the ‘Forbidden’ message flashes in my memory again. Long before I reach the lava pit I fall asleep.

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Something’s wrong.

Very. Very wrong.

I don’t feel whole.

I look around myself, afraid again. I get up and I run to the lava pit, to the beach, through the forest, to the lake, to the river…

Everything looks the same. Nothing is wrong with the world.

And yet… something is.

… It’s me.

Something’s wrong with me. I’m missing something. I can feel it.

I’m at the river, and I look into it, at my reflection.

My face looks troubled. Scared. Frightened. Exactly the way I feel.

My head lowers from the sight in the stream to my body. And then I see it…

A white mark. A thin, white line running from my middle to the side of my body. White like the birds, white like the stars…

I have to try to wipe it off.

At first, I use my dry hands, but nothing happens. It doesn’t smear. Then I use the stream’s water to try and wash it off. I’m shivering from the cold and almost crying as I’m rubbing as hard as I can, but to no avail. It still won’t come off.

Inhaling deeply, I jump in the water, knowing it will be freezing cold.

Every two days or so, I would take a swim in the water, mostly to make myself feel better, but sometimes to wash. I have to do it every two days or the animals won’t come near me. Something about the smell.

This time it is for neither. I want this white line off of me. Then everything can go back to normal.

For a long time, I am just scrubbing it. The area around it is turning a raw, reddish color, like the lava. It burns like the lava too, even though I’m in water. It’s starting to hurt me…

Maybe this is what God intended to happen. Maybe this is what I asked for. I’m being punished again. God is still alive…

I finally stop rubbing, since I figure that if I rub too much, my entire body will become red, and I will turn into a red pool of burning water. Being hot all the time is not something I want to be.

The white still isn’t off of me. It stares up at me from my stomach, laughing, glaring, burning…

I scream at the sky, startling the birds from their homes in the trees. An echo screams back at me and at first, it almost sounds like someone else…

And I start walking. Out of the water and into the forest. And I keep walking, staring at the spot on my body, hoping it will disappear. Hoping . . .

And before I know it, I make it back to the apple tree where I first woke up, where I first ate, where I first ran. Usually I would come here asking for comfort, but I hardly notice it this time. I keep walking and staring at the white streak below my chest, willing it to go away, please, please, please…

I fall down. I trip over something, something that wasn’t there before, something that I didn’t put there.

It’s something new.

A new creation. One like me.

…

… It’s not a hedgehog. Not a hedgehog!!!!

She wakes up to the sounds of me screaming.

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She is light brown, with thin arms and thin legs. Her hips are a little wider than mine. Lots of things are different between us. She is a ‘she’ and not a ‘he.’ I look stronger than her, she looks weaker. She is different, but not ugly.

I am unafraid of her.

“Where am I?” she asks me. Her voice is higher than mine.

I tell her. I tell her everything. The beach. The trees. The sun. The lava. The creator. MY creator.

Mine. All of these. And she just shows up. She wants to share these things that are mine. She just shows up, expecting me to give up everything for her. Well, I’m not doing it. You can’t just show up without warning. You can’t just become.

I tell her all of this.

She cries. Tears stream down her face. I press on, telling her that she is not even a hedgehog. She doesn’t deserve all of these things.

“What are you anyway?”

“I’m… a squirrel.”

Liar.

“Liar. How do you know that?”

“… I don’t know.”

My creator… is he giving her knowledge now? Has he abandoned me? Just like I abandoned him?

“It didn’t come to me this time.” I say to her. “I’m… sorry.”

Her tears have dried on her face.

“It’s okay. I understand.”

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And on it went. For the first day I gave her a tour of her new home. Our home. I showed her all that was mine that is now ours. She especially liked the beach. She says she likes the way the water stretched on forever, like a moving blanket of blue, alive, like a creature all its own.

I don’t understand her. She doesn’t make sense.

We both sat on the shores of the beach, watching the waves crash on the black rocks to the left. Watching the sun go lower, and lower… and lower.

She grew frightened when the sun went down, very much like I was. She held onto me tightly as I walked her towards the lava pit. She cringed at every little noise, squeezing my hands tighter every time, pressing herself closer and closer to me.

Halfway to the lake of lava I scoop her in my arms, one across her back and the other under her legs, and I run.

She lets out a startled cry, but then relaxes and wraps her arms around my neck. And together, we run, and eventually her body becomes completely at ease. She lets me carry the weight of her, trusting me, giving in.

We both knew she wasn’t like me. She’s a squirrel. I know things she doesn’t, but we don’t shy away from each other. She’s not like the other animals. She walks on two feet. I can understand what she says, even if I don’t understand what she says. But she can’t run like me. Only I can run.

I just hold her in my arms, carrying her towards our destination, away from her fear. She trusts me, burying her face into my neck. My chin touches the top of her hair lightly. Her scent wafts up to my nose. She smells… nice.

It’s almost too quick that we reach the lava. I regrettably lower her legs to the ground near the lava and let her go. She keeps her arms around my neck. We stare into each other’s eyes.

And I begin to see what she means by the ocean. Her eyes looked just like it, but frozen. Like the waves are in mid-roll. They swirl in a brilliance that astounds me, and I can’t look away.

I place my hands on her hips and tell her all of the things that I see in her eyes.

She hugs me and we wrap our arms around each other. She raises her mouth to my ear and whispers:

“Don’t leave me alone.”

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The next morning, we wake up on the grass, still in each other’s arms. She never let go of me.

I stare into her open eyes again. The blue is still there. All things beautiful are blue.

My eyes are green, like the grass, she tells me.

Today, she wants to name everything. I tell her that I already did that. She insists on doing so, though. Why she wants to name everything again I do not know.

She says, “Because they are ours.”

I show her the horses galloping across the plains, she names them. I show her the frogs in the swamp, she names them. I watch her walk through the trees, giving new names to every creature she sees. She knows God’s name for each, but gives it her own name anyway. They are strange to me, names like Bill, James, Jodie, and Sam. The names have a randomness to them, chaotic. I ask her where she gets the ideas for the names, and she just says that she’s good at it.

We get it done. All of the creatures have names. All but two.

My name is now Sonic. I hate it. Her name is Sally. I am fine with calling her that when she’s with me, but when I’m alone, I’ll call her what I want.

But I’m never alone. I promised I wouldn’t leave her. She needs me, she says. She might get hurt without me, or she’ll get lost when the sun goes away and she won’t be able to find the lava pit. She needs me, she says.

And… I need her. She is the missing part of me. The white streak on my stomach is gone, disappeared. She fulfills that missing part of me. Without her, I am not a whole person, and I can’t live without her.

We are one when we are together. Alone, we are nothing. Nothing but animals, lost…

… Sally.

I’m starting to like that name.

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It was tough teaching her to eat. Several times she almost choked on an apple, coming up coughing and sputtering. I told her to take small bites, and to chew before swallowing. After a couple of tries, she finally got the hang of it.

For the entire day, we lay under the apple tree, watching the world pass us by, watching the clouds making shapes for us. Some animals came earlier and joined us, sitting and eating apples, but soon, they went back to their homes in the forest or trees or wherever. Sally and I sat alone again, pondering, enjoying each other’s company. Thanking God for bringing us together.

“I don’t know how I got along without you.”

She has her arms wrapped around my chest and we’re leaning under and against the shade of the

apple tree.

And all is perfect.

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The next day.

It’s time for her to go into the river. I promised myself I would teach her to swim, like I teach her all things.

We both go in at the same time, but as we enter, she tells me that she wants to go in the ocean.

“It’s still too cold. The river gets warmer faster.”

She seems very hesitant to go in the river, like she’s afraid of something, just like she was of the dark. I jump in. I feel the water envelope me, drowning out all sound. I come back to the surface, wiping the water from my eyes.

“Come on in.”

She hesitates, then slowly walks into the water. She continues until she is right next to me, keeping her arms close to her body, shivering in fear.

“Now, put your head under the water.”

She shakes her head side to side.

“It’s okay. See?”

I go under, and come back up.

“You try.”

She tries it, and comes up choking.

Despite myself, I laugh. But she is really scared. She starts to cry, and I feel so bad that I take her into my arms.

“It’s okay. It’s okay,” I reassure her. She hugs me tightly and I pat her on her back.

I keep reassuring her, while, without thinking, I lower my head in front of her face, and I put my lips on hers.

It’s surprising for both of us. I don’t know what came over me. It seemed right to do this. Like the apples and the running, I learn it instantly. We learn it instantly. The first thing we learn together at the same time.

We stand there, in the river, our lips locked, and then we close our eyes. All of a sudden, home wasn’t home anymore. We were the only ones that mattered. The world seemed to go away . . . I didn’t even feel the water anymore. Closer and closer, our bodies made contact. And instead of kissing, we were drinking each other in. Like water, but she was better…

She was better than anything. Even God.

The ‘Forbidden’ message written in the clouds flashes briefly in my mind, but I ignore it. I don’t tell her to stop. We keep going. There’s no space between us anymore.

We are one.

She stops kissing me and smiles.

“What now?”

She lowers her eyes. “I don’t know.”

“I love you.” I tell her.

She raises her eyes back to mine. She repeats the words back to me.

“I love you.”

And we both just stand there. Staring at each other.

I always felt strange whenever I was with her. My heart would beat faster when she hugged me, like when we ran together that first night, and she told me to never leave her. We embraced, and we slept in each other’s arms. I was tired, we were both tired and were falling asleep, and my heart was racing, right along with hers. This must be what love feels like.

But we’re awake this time. Fully. The most awake we’ve ever been in our lives. And I feel love for her. More than that, I am in love with her, and I want to share everything with her.

My love grows for her and we embrace again. Our mouths touch, open, and we drink each other.

This is expressing love physically. And that’s what we’re doing. Sally loves me in the same way I love her, or else we wouldn’t be doing this.

We’re kissing, and I don’t realize what is happening. We’re just flowing with it, not questioning. Performing the physical act of love. I struggle to remember when I learned this. It seems like I’ve always known how to do this, even before she was here.

She lets out small cries when I jerk too hard, but most of the time she’s mumbling because her mouth almost never leaves mine. Every muscle in my body is flexed tight. Her fingers are digging into my back. Her legs are wrapped around my waist. Who cares if the animals are watching. All that matters is her. Us, together. Heating up the lake.

And God and his creations are forgotten. Lost.

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We’re both sitting under the apple tree, eating. She chews thoughtfully, watching the sun come up over the trees. I look at her.

“Is God dead?”

The questions startles her, and at first she looks like she’s going to answer a definite no, but then she stops to think. “I… don’t think so…”

“But there is doubt.”

“There is always doubt. But… why would God be dead?”

“I guess I’m just… kind of hoping he is dead.”

“Why?”

“Because I want this place to be ours only. And no one else’s.”

“But the animals, this is theirs too.”

I raise my eyes to the blue and white birds flying, the horses galloping in the lower valley, and the worms crawling out of the apples on the ground.

“Well, I was here first.”

She looks back at me. “And I was last,” she says.

I didn’t mean to… that’s not what I meant. I didn’t mean to compare her to the animals…

I lean over, put my hands on her shoulders, and kiss her.

“Listen, you’re only last because of me. I didn’t ask for you until all of the animals were here. It’s my fault you didn’t get here sooner.”

She nods, and kisses me back.

We stay under the tree for the rest of the day until it’s time to go back to the lava pit.

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Sally wakes me up with a question.

“Where do you go when you die?”

“Heaven.” And I open my eyes and turn towards her. “In heaven, God is there, standing in the very center of all that is his. Everything. And heaven is even better than this place. It’s paradise. In heaven, we will be happy.”

“Does it hurt to die?”

If God is dead, then he is in heaven.

“. . . I don’t know.”

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Days later. It’s early one morning when I wake up before Sally. She is still tired from last night, after we stayed in the river the entire day. She was asleep when I carried her here.

I decide to take a walk. Down to the beach.

I get up and I walk, and I keep going until the grass becomes cooler and cooler, dropping lower and lower, becoming thinner and thinner, and then it becomes cold sand. I am at the shores.

My markings stay in the sand, too far from the tide to be erased by the water. The area where the markings sit are between two small rocks, going along in a straight line. I could only fit 365 marks in between them. By the 301mark is Sally’s handprint, marking the day she came into the world as my companion.

I started a second row of marks under the first row, each mark exactly underneath the one above it. Today is the mark under Sally’s first day.

One cycle. She’s been here 365 nights.

One… year.

If I still learn new things, then can that mean that God is dead? Or is it that I am learning these things on my own?

One year.

It makes me remember all that we’ve been through together. It makes me appreciate that she’s here. It’s special, and she deserves all that I can give her.

I smile.

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Light was shining in Sally’s eyes. That’s what woke her up initially, but what got her up quicker was that she didn’t feel Sonic next to her. She gasped, sitting up with one arm and frantically searching around her.

Sonic wasn’t there, but she did see what woke her up.

A diamond, sitting on top of a pile of apples. The sun shining off of it and into her eyes was what woke her up.

The diamond was beautiful, slightly bigger than her fist. It sat on top of the apples, standing alone, perfection atop imperfection. Sally was transfixed, not taking her eyes off of it as she walked towards it, forgetting for the moment that Sonic wasn’t with her. Keeping her eyes on the diamond, she picked it up and held it in her hands. Turning it over and over, she examined every edge of it.

Then she noticed a trail of apples leading away from the apple pile. Sally, slightly afraid of being alone, walked along the trail, clutching the diamond tightly to her chest.

The trail ended at the apple tree. There was Sonic, leaning against the tree, smiling. Sally let out a cry of joy and ran towards him, still clutching her diamond. When she reached him, she set it easily on the ground and jumped into Sonic’s arms.

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“I take it you like it,” I say to her, keeping my arms behind my back.

“Oh, Sonic, I LOVE it!” she says, tightening her hold on my neck.

When she notices I’m not hugging back, she steps away from me. I bring the flowers out from behind me and hold them out to her.

“Happy Anniversary.”

She stands there, staring at the flowers for a second, then takes them carefully in her hands. She looks back up at me.

“I love you, Sally, now more than ever. I want you to know that. I want to be together with you forever.”

She sets the flowers on the ground and we embrace, and kiss, and for once, we do our ritual under the tree instead of in the river.

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Afterwards, we decided that we would put the diamond up high, so she could look at it whenever she wanted. I climbed up the apple tree and set it on the tallest branch.

I came back down and we admired it from below. The setting sun reflected it in all directions, illuminating.

“Where did you find this?”

“Before you came here, I was the adventurous type, and God was still alive. He told me things every day, allowing me to find new things on the island. One day, I learned that there were diamonds, hidden in the rocks on the bottom of the river. I would test my breath and improve it, and finally, I was able to reach them.”

She nods, and says that some day I can show it to her.

And the days pass.

Then the weeks.

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One night, Sally and I are near the lava pit, and the animals are watching us moving over each other. With every spasm of ecstasy, with every moan of pleasure, with every movement, we repeat it. Again and again. We vary our techniques every five days or so, trying everything. Exploration. Discovery.

It’s my turn to explore her tonight.

Every time we do something new, the ‘Forbidden’ message in the sky flashes in my mind. It never fails. I have no idea as to why it hasn’t stopped. God is dead.

Me and Sally, we know a lot about one another. We know what we both like, what we enjoy.

I know nothing about God. I’ve never met him. He never told me anything about him. I don’t know him at all.

Nothing is wrong with doing this. In fact, now all of the animals do it too. To each other. If this was wrong then God would have never allowed it to happen. If he were alive, that is.

If he ever existed at all, that is . . .

Sally’s movement snaps me out of my intensive thought. I go back to work on her.

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We both wake up to the sound of screams.

Animal screams.

Last night, after our display of affection, the animals slept near us. One had slept too close to the lava pit, and rolled in its sleep into it.

And now it wouldn’t stop screaming.

At first, Sally and I just watch in horror, as its leg burns, then its arm, closer and closer to his head…

I snap out of it first, running towards the edge of the trees. I grab a thick, fallen tree branch and run back to the pit. Sally is jumping up and down in fright, whispering to herself that it will all be okay.

I use the tree branch to scoop the poor animal out of the fire and onto the grass. I throw the tree branch into the lava and turn back to look at the animal…

It’s dead.

I used to wonder what it would be like to die. And now I know. Dying is pain. Dying hurts.

You die screaming.

Sally is crying somewhere behind me. I guess dying also hurts the living.

I pick up the animal, in spite of the heat hurting my hands, and run towards the river. When I get there, I dip it in the water. Steam rises from the top. When I bring him out, he’s cool to the touch. Sally is at the shore, on her knees, crying. I walk over to her and kneel in front of her. I set the animal between us.

“It’s Jerry,” she says in between sobs. Jerry was a dog.

I take her head in my arms and hold her. I tell her to stop crying, because all things eventually die. It’s a matter of when and where. It’s a lesson of life.

She buries her head in my chest and sobs some more. For a long time, we sit there, the smoldering remains of Jerry the dog laying between us. Smoke rises from his body into the sky, joining the clouds.

Finally, she raises her head and I wipe her face with my hands. I follow the tears from her eyes, to her nose to her mouth… her lips touch the surface of my hand.

She starts to lick my hand. She looks at me, a strange look. I bring my hand to my face and smell it. I lick it.

Delicious.

We both look at the animal at the same time. The ‘Forbidden’ message flashes in my head, along with the piles of apples.

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After that, it was a matter of finding animals and throwing them into the lava pit, getting them out, and dipping them in the river.

The screams don’t bother us after awhile.

Apples fell from the trees untouched and rolled down the hill, uneaten and forgotten. Animals ran at the sight of us, because they knew. They knew what was coming.

Screaming death.

And they are right. We both know that what we are doing is wrong, but we can’t stop. It’s just more exploration anyway. Nothing wrong with it at all. God is dead, and we alone decide what we do. No consequence. No punishment.

“Where do we go when we die?” she asks every time we throw another one in.

“Shut up.”

And on it goes.

It doesn’t stop.

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“You’re getting bigger.”

She slaps me hard across my face.

She’s been acting strange for the last couple of months. She is getting fatter around the stomach area. It might be because of the meat, but I’ve been eating the same thing she has and I’m not fatter.

“I’m hungry,” she says.

“Again?!”

“Yes. Go out and get food.”

“It’ll take me awhile. There are almost no animals left. The fish are gone.” She gives me a look that scares me. I groan through grit teeth. “Fine.”

I wander around the forest for a long time, listening intently for any signs of life. For a blue or a white bird, chirping and flying, the kind I used to watch circle lazily in the sky…

Out of the corner of my eye I see a cat sleeping under a bush, unaware that I could see him.

These cats slept whenever they felt like it, having no regard for the sun at all. They’re lazy, but they can run fast when they want to, but not as fast as me…

Grinning from ear to ear, I pounce on the cat and I break its neck.

I cook it in the lava, pulling it out with a sharpened stick, and then cooling it in the river. And I start walking back to the beach when I hear Sally yelling. Immediately, I start running as fast as I can, racing to the source of the sounds…

The apple tree.

She comes into view and I see her throwing a fit under the tree, kicking the rotten apples down the hill. She sees me slowing down over the hill, holding the crispy cat and groaning at her fit. She takes a run at me, obviously angry. She grabs me by the shoulders and screams in my face:

“Where is it?!!!”

“What?”

“My diamond! Where is it?!!”

I look at the top of the tree. The diamond is gone. “I dunno. It must have fallen off,” I say indifferently. Getting angry.

“Get me another one!”

I don’t have time for this.

Fuck her.

“No, I’m hungry too. I haven’t eaten in three days because of you!” I throw the cat down the hill, making it roll with the apples. Tears start forming in Sally’s eyes.

“I’m… I’m sorry.”

I’m so sick of this. I always have to do what she says. And she just sits there, getting fatter and fatter. I have to do all of the work and I get nothing for it.

And she keeps saying she’s sorry. And cries. And hugs me, begs me to go get another one. Another diamond. Another animal to cook.

But I can’t take it anymore.

I storm off.

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We’ve been separated for months, seeing no sign of one another. I have no problem with sleeping with no warmth, but she needs the lava. I can understand that. I’m fine with sleeping on the beach.

For food, I’ve been eating the plants along the bottom of the ocean floor. They aren’t good, but at least I don’t have a craving for meat anymore. I wonder if Sally has lost her craving too…

I can’t go ten seconds without thinking about her. It was a stupid fight that we had. That was all. A simple fight. I miss her so much. She was the missing part of me. And now that she’s gone, the white streak is back. I feel pangs for her every night that I’m without her. I stare at the ocean and think about what she said about it. I think about how beautiful it is. I think about her eyes, her blue eyes. All things blue on the island are beautiful.

I’m not mad at her. Not anymore. And even if she doesn’t love me, I love her. That’s all that matters.

I broke my promise to her. I left her. I left her all alone . . .

And now it’s too late.

Night time. I fall asleep, and my thoughts go out to her, like the flying blue birds that don’t exist anymore. Flying in the way that I couldn’t.

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Awake.

Again.

To the sounds of screams.

Again.

This time, it’s Sally who’s screaming.

And the rest seems like a dream. I see myself run to the lava pit. I see the entire of our home, dying and unrecognizable. No eyes of night creatures stare out at me because they’re all dead. It’s so quiet in between Sally’s screams.

She comes into view, bathed in red beneath the burning of the lava. I can hardly recognize her. Her stomach has grown huge, towering and swollen, and she is sweating.

She’s in pain!

I grab her in my arms and race down to the lake. Her moans of pain are all that I hear. Not my breathing, not my heart beating. Nothing but her.

I get her to the lake and walk with her into the water. The cold of it surrounds us and sooths us.

I stay with her the entire time. I keep her on her back, floating.

“Don’t leave me,” she whispers between spasms of pain. “Don’t leave me, don’t leave me.”

Again.

For hours we stay there, waiting for the pain to pass, and it doesn’t stop until the sun comes up.

And finally… nothing. She stops breathing heavily. Her sweating subsides.

It’s over.

I stare into her eyes, those beautiful, blue eyes that resemble the ocean so much. “Hi.”

“Hi,” she says weakly.

And no other words are spoken. We embrace.

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She’s been spending the week recuperating, getting better. She told me that she no longer had any craving for meat, since she couldn’t catch any of the animals. They were too fast for her. She had to go back to eating the apples, but they tasted so different to her.

I still loved our home, even after all that’s happened to it, but as soon as she is ready, it will be time for us to leave. We are no longer welcome here.

I’ve been noticing the lava pit getting bigger, reaching the very edges of the forest, about to set them on fire. How else would I take this? Nothing happens by accident. Everything happens for a reason, even if God isn’t involved. Even if he doesn’t exist.

I tell her all of this. She nods, understanding. I kiss her affectionately on the forehead. “Do you love me?”

“… Yes. I love you.”

“Good,” I say.

I’m sorry I broke my promise to you. I shouldn’t have. Through thick and thin, that’s us. Together forever.

I sit next to her, keeping her company for awhile. She asks me to get her some water. I’ll gladly do it. Anything for her…

I walk to the river, and in the water, I see two things I don’t want to tell Sally about. One is the missing diamond that fell from the tree.

The other is our drowned child.

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We left paradise that day. We were outside, and looked back at it. It was burning. Burning brilliance. Burning like the sun.

The real world outside of paradise isn’t as good, but it’ll have to do. Maybe one day Sally and I will have another child. Maybe.

For now, at least we have each other. And that’s all that matters. Right?

… Right?