

The Inexorable Day of the Revolution

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I woke up with itching claws on my upper forelimbs, always a sign of unease among my particular caste.

I attempted to return to sleep, flexing the muscles that retracted my claws several times and exhaling through my upper carapace, a technique my father taught me that supposedly helped him through difficult times in the past. It did not work. Restless, I retracted the armor plating that covered my lower eyes and looked upon my life-mate, Syvy, sprawled out in the dim morning light of the sleeping chamber.

Syvy was as beautiful as always. Her body appeared to me impossibly graceful even in repose. Being a Ryyip, a caste defined by doctrine as two tiers lower my own, I should by rights have found her form repulsive. Certainly my traditionally minded father, to say nothing of my departed fundamentalist mother, would have never deemed to speak to a Ryyip directly. Doctrine would have it that, if they were forced to occupy the same space, both my father and mother would look away rather than behold her inferiority. Needless to say, I had taken a rather different approach. Our love had been like our first coupling: quick, tender, and at its core deeply personal. Doctrine would have us believe that our union was doomed, that

our castes were so socially incompatible that even biology itself would damn us like some ancient morality parable. Sixteen years in and I am delighted to report that this sort of thinking is resoundingly false.

Syvy's lithe serpentine body curled around my lower segments as she slept. All six of her multi-jointed arms were wrapped around my layers of chitin in a fashion that had become so familiar it was hard to imagine sleep in any other configuration. She held me tightly, just like always, while each scale of her smooth form was seemingly arranged for aesthetic sensibility. I liked to joke, on occasion, that even her tail remained composed as she slept, a proper lady to the very last micrometer. The only exception to this was her upper mouth, which sprawled open ludicrously just as her lower mouth remained prim and properly closed. It was clownish, really, undignified and easily the sort of thing that a less caring lover could tease her over. I had never once mentioned it to her, and if her venom sacks stained our sleeping cushion on occasion, well, love costs all kinds of things- as my departed mother used to remind me.

Love did not begin to describe the feeling that I felt when I looked at Syvy.

I reminded myself, as I did every morning, that it was for *her* that we did all this. Had she been awake, she would have corrected me: "*for US*" she would have said, a slightly chiding tone to her words as they slid out between her fangs. I smiled as I thought of this, her beautifully scaled face playfully reproachful even in my mind. I was awake now, and there would be no more easy sleep. To a Fenfaygr- one of my caste- sleep does not come easy or often. My father would sometimes stay awake for six to seven days at a time, toiling endlessly until his mind was too frazzled to maintain consciousness any longer. I hadn't quite gotten that bad, but part of that was the comforting presence of my mate. Still, even Syvy had her limits, and most days I awoke long before her.

I slid from her embrace, carefully extracting my form from her grasp. Doing so involved a careful process of flexing my armored plates and shimmying razor sharp spines away from my beloved so as not to risk damaging her. Her scales, by comparison to my own body, were so very fragile. Part of her supposed inferiority, as my father would have been quick to point out. I was as careful as always, my motions smooth and controlled to within mere molecules, the inevitable result of controlled biological improvement to say nothing of evolution. Syvy still let out a

disgruntled sigh as I removed the last of myself from her grasp, her lower jaws frowning silently as if she were aware even in sleep that she had lost some closeness to me.

I slid from the sleeping room, quiet as I could be. I kept my clawed limbs lifted so as not to leave scratches in the flooring, sliding instead upon my belly as Syvy did. Like so many little things, eccentricities you could say, it helped me in some way to understand the unity that existed between all castes of our species. Why *should* I gouge out my flooring with razor-tipped claws, as my mother and father before me had, when my belly allowed me to move freely and without damage upon that same surface? Was it truly a *moral* imperative to move strictly according to caste, and not simply a social structure created through dogmatic tradition? Somehow, even as I mused this, I could still hear the phantom voice of my beloved in my head: “*for US*” it reminded me. My claws still itched.

As I left the sleeping room and headed through the tunnel towards our eating area my mind was filled with half formed musings. I thought a half dozen things at once, but most were still shaped by sleep or dream. It was with great effort that I was able to rouse my mind into something resembling coherence. Naturally, as with most mornings, I thought of my departed mother and the sacred teachings of the *Kymi-Kien*.

The *Kymi-Kien* teaches us that such distinctions as “*us*” or “*me*” do not aid in the pursuit of what is called the *Sacred Must*. The *Ky-Ki* expounds at great length on how our mental actions must be disciplined to the real, to what *is* instead of what might be. This is used by the superior castes as an excuse for stagnation, slogans and arguments repeated infinitely and in tones similar to how one would address a child. These tools may be only words, but they used to oppress just as certainly as any physical means. They keep us bound in our low places and traditional roles. Even my own caste, a mid-tier one higher than many, played its part in this form of oppression. It is my most fervent belief that the *Ky-Ki* did not mean for this interpretation, that it’s *Sacred Must* refers to the great wracking evolutionary fits and spurts that course through our people, and not some archaic social ordering system of exclusion.

The Castes are obsolete. The words came easily to my mind as I scrounged in the eating area for something to devour. These words are also a slogan, and nothing

more to most who say it. They have likewise become a talking point much discussed on psychic broadcast, the words obtaining power through repetition and discussion. If I tuned in to the channels, casting my mind about from stream to stream in the great flowing rivers of communicative Psy, I could almost certainly find someone saying this slogan. More than that, there would probably be a flavor of violence to the words, an immediate need and a sort of pain coloring them. *The Castes are Obsolete*, they would say, the connotations of moral superiority or belligerence staining the stream like paint.

The counterpoint speaker would then make a point for social order, inexorably bringing up a history worn smooth as a river stone. The castes have preserved peace, they would say, and have for untold generations. The castes have built the Psy, founded the hives, organized our people to conquer and colonize worlds across dozens of star-systems. The castes cause order, they would say, forging it out of the chaotic nature of our radical biology. The castes allow progress, and it always comes back to this point. Perhaps, if the speaker were feeling zealous, they would even use the term *inexorable*.

I paused as this thought occurred to me. The word had sprung twice to my waking mind in quick succession. An unusual word, and perhaps prescient. I flexed and cleaned claws and chitin as I thought further on this, my morning routine familiar enough to be accomplished mostly by rote.

The Kymi-Kien warns against such progress, actually. There is a passage, much disputed in its wisdom, in which it mentions that the *Sacred Must* can be thwarted by what is termed the *Stable Past Perspective*. The actual passage is far too poetic for me to remember, but the gist is that when an equilibrium is found that is sustainable by some at the expense of the suffering of others, the stability it generates is both alluring and inevitably toxic. To those for whom stability has come a certain prosperity is almost inevitable, and their very prosperity pushes them further from perceiving those for whom stability remains out of reach. Two worlds and two societies grow from this state, a glorious one and a miserable one. Neither can see the other without a form of disgust, the perspectives being incompatible at their cores. When the Ky-Ki was written was a time such as this. It was an era now regarded as terrible, unjust, and filled with pain. Yet, for a portion of those who lived in that era it was instead seen as a time of great prosperity, stability, and joy.

It is the belief of those like myself that my own era, when viewed in ages hence, shall likewise be regarded as just such a time. Those beings not yet born will look back at these days and wonder how such a state could be borne, how no one stopped the horrors of our day from becoming commonplace. They will think us fools or cowards, perhaps, and think themselves not so easily crushed. Such is the problem with all *Stable Past Perspectives*. They allure as much as their reassurance. The past is a place without progress, a backwards sensibility best forgotten, and all its peoples reduced to caricatures and dust.

The thought sat with me poorly. I drank some ChaHya to try and disperse it, but the bitter and scalding liquid just made me jittery without offering any clarity. I decided to tune into a few Psy streams at random, adding other thoughts to my own as I rooted about for a few small things to consume. Drinking ChaHya on an empty stomach always ruins my digestion anyhow, and I had a minor desire for a Jellied-Ape confection.

“Look, Gyllusiam, no one is trying to destabilize anything here,” said a somewhat shrill voice over the Psy, “What we are *trying* to do is—”

“What you are *trying* to do is put an end to a way of life that has existed for *thousands* of generations!” interrupted the throaty bass voice of a Gyllusiam caste. “I don't understand how you can imagine that *isn't* essentially destabilizing!”

“If you will let me finish, Gyllusiam, I'm not saying that our reforms won't cause any problems. What I'm saying is—”

“—What you are saying is that you aren't satisfied with the role that *nature* and the *Sacred Must* has provided for you! What you are saying is that you would rather destroy our glorious—”

“—Gyllusiam! You aren't listening to me at all! I'm trying—”

“—How *can* I listen to a *child* who refuses to see wisdom?! The Kymi-Kien—”

I didn't listen to anymore, breaking from the stream as suddenly as I cut into it. It is better, I thought, to drink and eat in silence than to listen to such things. Especially on this, of all mornings. My claws still itched, and I looked at them forlornly as I munched on the Jellied-Ape confection. I do not believe I even tasted it, in truth.

I could not help but wonder: would my claws be covered in blood before the day was through? Would things become, as many had feared, a war of brother

against brother? Anarchy and chaos and horror filling the streets, with mothers wailing for their brood as others feasted openly upon them... What would become of our society? Was I the sort of evil that those, like the Gyllusiam, warned their kith and kin about? When it came down to it, when claw met stone— as the saying went— would the claw break... or the stone?

“Joy to you, my mate,” came the startling voice of Syvy from the doorway. I jumped a little, spines bristling and claws extending before I realized who it was. She didn't mind, however, and only smiled at me with both sets of jaws. Her long and serpentine body was coiled, leaning against the doorway with her arms folded as gracefully as always. She was almost achingly beautiful, and I could not resist smiling as I beheld her.

“Joy to you,” I responded. I made to move but she was already covering the ground to me. She slithered across in a flash. There was a quick peck of affection, scaled lips deliciously cold against my armored plates, and then she was wrapped around me again.

“You promised you would wake me,” she teased into my ear. “I'm mad at you now. Not a good state for a life-mate...”

I grinned stupidly at her, reduced temporarily in mental acuity by my affections and lust. Even after so long she had that effect on me, a sort of magic that reduces grown beings to bumbling fools. I turned slightly to respond and as I did so one of her hands snaked in and took my ChaHya from me. She took a long pull of the bitter liquid, and I let her. Our bonds were such that what was mine, was hers, though perhaps most life-mates did not take such things so literally. Eventually, she handed it back to me.

“Taxes,” she explained. “Life mates are expensive, you know.”

“Oh, woe is me,” I said. “How will I ever afford such cost?”

She giggled a little, the noise something like falling rain. She slithered over to the cabinets to find some small thing to consume. Neither of us ever felt much like cooking soon after waking, and so we usually subsisted on preserved food stuffs and the like before our mid-day meal. I watched her for a moment and could almost audibly hear when she tuned into a Psy stream. She always did so, you understand, and *when* she did there was a certain sudden stiffness to her posture, as if she had to stand up straight to properly receive the flow of psychic information. It was a silly

little quirk, but I loved her for it, just like all her other quirks. Call me a romantic if you must.

She came back to me with a few small salted and spiced rodents, enough for both of us to enjoy. I placed one in my jaws, absently tearing at the flesh without breaking into the bone. The reagents used to cure the creatures sweetened the blood into a sort of sugary paste, but today it tasted bitter in my mouth. I wondered absently at that.

Syvvy had that look on her face. I already knew what she was going to say before she spoke.

“There was another burning last night,” she said, her voice grave. “They don't know specifics yet. Two families. Castes are unknown.”

“Syvvy,” I said, as calm and gentle as I could. “There has been a burning every night for *moons* now. It is horrible, I know. The horror of it never ceases. But, at this stage, it is *not* unexpected. I...”

“Would you have me ignore it?” she asked, a rattle in her throat as poison sacks inflated unconsciously. “Pretend it is normal that those others are dying in agony? *Roasted alive* for a state of dogma and ignorance? They don't even investigate properly anymore. They say they will, but the Blue Wardens are as immersed in it as anyone. They—”

“I'm not asking you to ignore it,” I said, keeping my voice calm and ordered. I could feel the tension in the air as well as she. Even not being tuned into the Psy, you could feel the pulse of anger and resentment filling the air. It was impossible not to.

“I'm asking you to not hurt yourself unnecessarily,” I continued. “We both understand that this is happening. We are both going to do our part in making it right. You know as well as I what comes next. They will not stop until those like us are utterly crushed once again, until the castes are as solid and unquestioning as they desire them to be. They will not stop until—”

She turned away suddenly, slithering across the room in a huff. She was opening cabinets, banging doors in a fury. I said nothing, letting her process things in her way. At times I have been accused of being callous, of accepting the horrors of the day more willingly. I do not believe this is the case. I am simply more restrained in my emotion, not less feeling. Were I to allow the news of another burning, another horrible crime gone unpunished to fill me as it did my mate—

“I do not know *why* they must be this way,” she said, eventually. Her words hissed through clenched fangs, her venom sacks inflated and constricting her throat. “*Why* the so-called superiors must resist something as simple, as *scientific*, as equality... Why does it hurt them so?”

I tried not to smile at this question. Though Syvy was in truth older than I, in some ways she could be so willfully naive. Or perhaps that wasn't it at all. Perhaps she wished so strongly to live in a world, in a society, that made *sense* at its most fundamental level that she became unwilling to see it for what it truly was.

“My mate,” I began.

She cut me off.

“I know what you will say,” she said. “Today, of all days...”

Her voice trailed off, and we both accepted the silence.

My claws still itched. Did they long for the feeling of blood, or did they dread it? When the next world is called to conquer, as it would be without fail, I would go. I would go as my father did before me, taking up claw and fang against some threat now unknown. We are a powerful caste, the Fenfaygr, and well suited to war. We would be called up, and I would heed the call without hesitation. Yet that was not the same. The expanding, consuming nature of our people was never a source of contention among us, and certainly never for me. When we destroyed each other, however, hurting and burning and turning our fury upon kin and creed... that simply seems wrong to the greatest of extents. Calling such a thing immoral seems as short-sided as calling a star “large”.

Yet, still, we were where we were.

Perhaps it really was *inexorable*, some part of me thought. Morality and order would crumble as time crumbles all, turning it and any attendant ideals into so much dust. Perhaps even anarchy, at least for a time, would be preferable to this slow madness rotting us away at our hearts. Another burning, another degradation, another indignity that future beings would gawk as evidence of archaic savagery well passed into the plethora of days best forgotten.

“The arguments have gone stale,” Syvy said, a bitter resignation in her voice. “The words have all been said. They hurt us now, kill us even, with impunity. The crime of breaking the caste is now death, if not in written law at least in the practice of it. The crime of associating with a superior caste is also death. Everywhere one

turns it is death, like in some ancient play from a more savage people. These are not *laws*, as a society would have laws, these are simply facts. I know this all, my mate. I know this as well as you. I simply react differently, seething outwardly where you turn inward... Here, let us touch, so that your calm may pour through my scales and cool my burning hearts.”

She approached me again. She folded her arms carefully, looking me in the eyes closely and without flinching. As she requested, I held her. My claws and spines were held carefully, my every armored and sharpened being kept from harming her. She continued, her voice taking on a softer aspect.

“*We* may be condemned to death, my mate. Any day now, at any time.” Her voice was soft but her words were bitter. “I know this, it need not be said. That we have not is simply the willing of luck, or of some almighty *Ktu* or another that you or I do not even believe in. I know this. It need not be said. Still, on today of all days... I wonder why it *must* be so. What *reason* compels the madness of our society, so poisoned by hate...”

I took her hands in mine. My claws were retracted, my spines were carefully withdrawn. I was as meek and harmless as my caste can become, yet still it was almost as if I could already feel the hot blood covering every bit of me. Without ever experiencing it, I could already feel the lust of battle and warfare singing in my veins. Some part of me, perhaps, knew what would come this day and was preparing itself. My father spoke of such when he had been called upon to fight in years past.

Still, that was different. It *must* be different, for to think otherwise would be to condemn my entire people as hopelessly savage. To me, at least, the great dream of civilization itself rests upon that very difference. *It must.*

“Because that is the way of the *Sacred Must*,” I said. I smiled, jaws and teeth moving by force into an expression difficult for my caste. “It is not pleasant, perhaps, but it is... *inexorable*. That is the word that has haunted me since waking, my mate. Things *must* change, you see, they have no choice. By extension, my mate, *we* have no choice either. The march will happen today, exactly as it is planned. You, I, and a thousand others will take part in it. When they move to stop us, we will not be stopped. It has been planned, prepared for, as you well know. When they move to enclose us, to subdue us, we will only then show them our strength.”

She was scared. I could see it. She did not try to hide it. That was fine though. We all needed to be scared, this day, of all days. *The Day of the Revolution*. It would live on, and we both knew it. A day recorded in histories and spoken of in slogans and talking points. There was no stopping it now. It was, in a word, *inexorable*.

“We will win?” she asked, her voice quiet and respectful, reminding me in its hope and fear of a child's question. She was no child, but the hope and fear remained just the same.

I smiled further, the muscles arching as I forced the expression upon my jaws, broadening it.

“I do not know,” I said. “I only know that this can no longer be borne. We can no longer stand to live as things are. We enact this— this *revolution* because we must. There is no other reason. Either it is successful now, today of all days, or it is successful later after bitter struggle and bloodshed. There will be hardship either way. There will be blood, and pain, and we may well die.”

She kissed me again, the movement was darting and quick, as she did when it was morning, and she hadn't yet awoken enough to control the fine spines that lined her mouth.

“If we die,” she said. “We die together.”

I crushed her close to me at these words, spines and arms and claws and scales circling together.

“We die together,” I assured her. “But let us hope this is not the case.”

She extricated herself instantly, sliding from my grip faster than thought. She then drew herself up fully, extending to her full height and appearing as majestic as she was formidable.

“I'm going to clean myself with water,” she declared, “And when I am done, I wish to go out. Let us spend a little, attend an eatery, go to a ChaHya-Ito!”

I laughed, watching her beauty along with her temper flaring bright and bold in the soft light of the morning. Love did not begin to describe the feeling I had when looking upon her.

“But I have a cup of ChaHya right here?” I teased.

She snorted, making a dismissive motion with all six of her arms.

“Throw away that excrement!” she declared. “If we are going to *fight* today, if we are going to *kill* or *be killed*, as you say... then let us do it with a cup of premium ChaHya singing in our veins, a warm dish filling our bellies!”

I laughed at her, at her boldness, at her beauty, at the absurdity of all of life.

“Go and clean yourself,” I said, sipping at my ChaHya. “I will be ready when you are done.”

She posed brilliantly for a moment before disappearing. Her long and sinuous form was coiled so perfectly, her strength showing through every scale and razor-crest. Beautiful did not begin to describe her, just as the feeling I had for her was almost ludicrous to call “love”. Still, as the Kymi-Kien teaches us: we must use the limits of our language to bound our world, but only until those limits are pushed, expanded, and irrevocably changed. It is, in a word, *inexorable*.

“We *must*,” I said to myself, or perhaps to some omnipresent *Ktu* listening in to the portentous musings that precede every event of great importance.

Today, of all days, was the day of the revolution. My claws itched, my mind was disquiet, but these things were of little importance. These things *must* happen, I knew that as certainly as I knew myself. The arguments were over. The time for action was now. The castes would fall, either today or a thousand days from now.

It was, in a word, *inexorable*.

As were we.