

Eternal Misfit

Roger Terry

*For some reason I can't explain,
I know Saint Peter won't call my name.
—Coldplay¹*

Some of the functions in the celestial body will not appear in the terrestrial body, neither in the telestial body, and the power of procreation will be removed. I take it that men and women will, in these kingdoms, be just what the so-called Christian world expects us all to be—neither man nor woman, merely immortal beings having received the resurrection —Joseph Fielding Smith²

Kim had been in the terrestrial kingdom for five thousand thirty-six years, two months, and seventeen days when it occurred to him that he³ was bored. He was in the library, perusing a treatise on monarchic democracy written by a senator on the fourth planet from the star Sigma Draconis, when he quite suddenly lost interest in, well, everything. He rolled up the parchment scroll, returned it to the retrieval system, and walked out into the perfect sunshine.

When Kim reached his home, he was surprised to realize he wanted to go into a bedroom and lie down; but since terrestrial beings do not need sleep, he did not have a bedroom. So he went to the sofa in the parlor and stretched out. He took a deep breath and sighed.

“What’s wrong with me?” he wondered aloud.

No answer came.

He lay there for a long time. How could anything be wrong? The terrestrial kingdom was like Utopia, Shangri-la, the Garden of Eden, and Camelot all wrapped into one. The weather was mostly sunny and warm, with a slight breeze to caress the nerve

endings and an occasional rain shower to refresh the plant life. Social order and perfect peace reigned. A hunger for learning permeated the very atmosphere, and the resources to facilitate learning were endless. There was no sickness; in fact, terrestrial bodies were not only incorruptible and indestructible, they were endowed with remarkable spiritual and physical senses. The geography of the terrestrial world was remarkable as well—rugged, snow-capped mountains; fertile valleys; lush, sprawling forests; pure, pristine lakes and streams; deep-blue oceans with white, sandy beaches; magnificent sandstone formations; but no wasteland. During his mortal probation, Kim had lived in Utah. He knew wasteland. On drives through Nevada, he had marveled at how dull and mind-numbing certain tracts of the Earth's surface could be. But there was no Nevada here, and certainly no Sin City, because there was no sin. The inhabitants of the terrestrial kingdom were not perfect, but there was no intentional evil, let alone gambling; in fact, there was no money. Who needed money when everything was free?

Kim wondered what was wrong. For over five thousand years he had been contentedly blissful. Oh, he knew that the terrestrial kingdom was technically a sort of damnation, but the terrestrial world was the degree of glory he had earned—it was where Kim belonged. The Lord's judgment, he knew, was merciful. When he had stood before Jesus at the end of his stay in the spirit world, he recognized that he wasn't fit for the celestial kingdom where he would have been miserable among all those who had lived a more consecrated life. The terrestrial world was the one he had sought out all the mediocre days of his mortal probation.

Kim's sole regret was that he had let Julie down. She had always lived for celestial glory and had cried tears of sorrow at their eternal separation. Though she had been given to another, she had visited him from time to time during the first thousand years. Eventually, however, her visits had ceased. They had precious little to talk about. Whatever they had shared in mortality had been silenced by their diverse resurrections—hers to a degree of feminine perfection unimagined to mere mortals, and his to a neutered, sexless physicality that left him without the passions that made marriage not only possible but intensely desirable. He was incapable of feeling for her now what he had felt in mortality, let

alone arousing in her those same feelings. Of course, in mortality he hadn't been all that successful at arousing feelings in her either. And the irony wasn't lost on him that back then she had been the one largely uninterested in intimacy. Go figure.

But this one regret had been mostly washed away by the pleasures and relative perfections of this terrestrial paradise. For over five thousand years, the Spirit had brought him peace and contentment, light and truth, and eternal learning. Here, memory was complete and perfect: so perfect, in fact, that Kim had taken it for granted for a long, long time. Why dwell on the past when it was there for perfect recall at any instant? But now he did turn his mind to the past, his past, and he wondered.

Kim had met Julie at the BYU Twenty-third Ward's opening social in September 1977. He was a newly minted RM, fresh off the plane from Copenhagen. She was a twenty-year-old English major struggling her way through Shakespeare and Dickens and Henry Adams. They somehow ended up together after the party, walking around the block again and again and again, talking and talking and talking. Finally they got tired of walking and stopped at the old Joaquin School, where they sat on the swings in the playground until three in the morning.

"Tell me about your family," Julie said.

"Oh," Kim answered, "there's not much to tell. My family's been in the Church since pioneer days, both sides. My parents are pretty ordinary Mormons. And I've got three sisters."

"Do they tease you?"

"Endlessly," Kim laughed. "But I can dish it out too."

"I'll remember that," Julie said, flashing her best smile. "But tell me, what do you want to do with your life?"

"Sheesh," Kim exclaimed, "you ask easy questions, don't you? To tell you the truth, I'm not sure. I mean, of course I want to get married and raise a family, but I don't even know what to major in. I've thought about accounting. My dad says it's a ticket to a good job."

"Sounds boring," Julie suggested.

"Well, yeah, I suppose it does. But I don't really have strong feelings about anything else. I guess the worst I could do is prepare for a decent job. Why did you choose English?"

"Because I love literature."

“So, do you want to teach?”

“Maybe.”

“I can’t imagine myself as a teacher,” Kim answered. “But I wouldn’t mind marrying one.”

They stared into each other’s eyes under the starlit Provo skies, and something ignited there that was never extinguished. Well, at least not until Judgment Day.

Kim had graduated from BYU in accounting the year after Julie earned her English degree and two years after they married in the Provo Temple. He landed a job with WordPerfect, made a decent salary, moved to Novell when it bought the carcass of WordPerfect, then bounced around from one high-tech startup to another after Novell laid him off. In the meantime, he fathered three kids, attended soccer and basketball games, track meets and tennis matches, piano recitals and parades. And somewhere along the way, the fire that had been kindled while he was knocking doors in Denmark burned low. He stayed active in the Church, but a certain spiritual urgency was gone. While Julie became more devout and spent countless hours fulfilling Church callings, Kim floated from one low-visibility position to another, making a negligible impact in people’s lives. But he didn’t mind. He didn’t have any need for either the emotional burden or the time commitment of leadership.

After the kids were gone, Kim came to the conclusion that accounting really was boring. He toyed with the dream of writing a novel, but it always remained a dream. Though he read a lot of fiction—not the light-weight stories most Mormons preferred, and also not the sort of novels one might call fine literature—he couldn’t find either his own voice or a story that simply had to be told.

And now, more than six thousand years later, he remembered that dream, and he no longer wondered what was wrong. He had his answer.

* * *

Later that day, Kim arranged a trip to the East Sea, where the weather was perfect and the ocean view from the dunes spectacular. He sat on the beach for hours watching the waves slap the shore, but the sound wasn’t as soothing as he’d hoped.

Back at his cottage, Kim pulled out a portable keyboard and

started typing. He tried to begin a novel about life in the terrestrial kingdom; but just as in mortality, he had writer's block. This time, however, it wasn't because of his own limitations: There simply was no story to tell.

He pushed the keyboard away, leaned back, and put his feet on the tabletop. He thought about the library in Caldora, his city. One whole floor was devoted to fiction. The greatest novels in the galaxy were collected there. But to his knowledge none of them had been written in the terrestrial kingdom. All were composed by mortal authors.

"So," Kim said to the wall, "what is it that makes a great novel?"

The wall didn't answer, so he did. "Lots of pages and a great plot?" He laughed grimly.

"Right, and what makes a great plot?"

"Suspense, adventure, conflict, good and evil, personal weakness, sin, violence, natural disasters, irony. And romance." He laughed again. "Guess what we don't have here?"

"No wonder nobody's writing great fiction."

It then occurred to him that no one was writing history in the terrestrial kingdom, either. Of course, with perfect memories, the inhabitants of the terrestrial world didn't need a record to remind them of what had happened. But events aren't history. History requires interpretation, the carving of meaning out of a series of events. And without the drama of power struggles, wars, natural catastrophes, or social upheavals, the events of the terrestrial world didn't seem worth interpreting at all.

"Nothing matters here," Kim muttered.

And there in the solitude of the cottage, he made a decision. He didn't know where it would lead him, but he knew he had to do it.

That night he packed up his things and returned to Caldora.

The next day, Kim went to the Caldora library and climbed the stairs to the music archives on the fifth floor. He had narrowed down his choices to three: Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*, *Claire de Lune* by Debussy, and a rock song his daughter had played back when Kim was in his fifties. He pulled all three music spheres from their respective shelves and stared at them in turn. They were primitive and unsophisticated compared with the com-

plex but emotionally sterile music of terrestrial composers, but all three had a yearning, aching passion that was missing from the music of Kim's world. Finally Kim decided on a sphere and carried it to the mammoth central hall of the library, where hundreds of tables and desks were scattered out among the bookshelves beneath a cavernous ceiling that glowed like the full moon.

Kim found a table near the middle of the hall and set down the sphere. He touched a light spot on one side, and a line appeared. He slid his finger along the line from left to right, then touched a black arrow that appeared beneath the line. Suddenly staccato strings filled the air, joined by vocals harsher than any terrestrial voice could produce. In a place that had known only hushed, studied silence for more than five thousand years, the singer's aching lament about ruling the world, only to end up sweeping streets and sleeping alone, was shocking. Patrons stood up from their tables and desks and craned their necks to see what was happening. Kim leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and let their scrutiny wash over him. A hint of passion stirred inside, something he hadn't felt since mortality.

The music ended, and still all the eyes in the hall were staring. Kim left the sphere sitting on the table, stood up, smiled to himself, and walked out of the library. As he reached the exit, the rapt silence was broken by a rush of whispered exclamations. He kept walking.

* * *

The next day Kim received a visit from three officials: Kay, the director of the library; Marn, city administrator of Caldora; and Alma, high priest of the local synagogue.

"Kim," Marn began, "may we ask you what you were trying to achieve yesterday?"

"Yes," Kim answered. "You may ask." He smiled disarmingly.

"Well, we are asking."

"What do you think?" Kim asked in return.

"We have no idea," Kay answered. "Nothing like this has ever happened in the long existence of the library."

"No, I don't suppose it has."

"We don't understand," said Alma. "Could you enlighten us?"

“Probably not.”

“We’re concerned,” said Marn. “There are rules of appropriate behavior, as you know.”

“I’m not acquainted with a specific rule that prohibits music in the Great Hall of the library.”

“These rules are understood,” Marn answered.

“Maybe I don’t understand them.”

“Well,” said Kay, attempting to be kind and stern at the same time, “you will not do this again.”

“You’re right,” said Kim.

“We’re glad you understand,” Kay nodded.

“I’ll probably do something different next time.”

His three visitors sat in stunned consternation for several seconds. Finally Alma spoke. “Such as?”

“I have no idea.” Kim held his hands out, palms up. “It depends on what I wish to learn.”

Alma opened his mouth as if to speak but then changed his mind.

“Can I be of further assistance?” Kim asked.

His three visitors looked at each other silently. Finally they stood and excused themselves. Kim saw them to the door and invited them to return whenever they wished.

After they had gone, he walked back inside and sat down on the sofa. He had never had any sort of official dealings with the authorities. He knew they were there behind the scenes, but he had never really spoken with any of them. He figured he was in trouble, but he also figured the authorities weren’t quite sure what kind of trouble he was in. This was virgin territory, and he himself wasn’t sure where he was headed.

After a half hour, Kim walked outside and wandered into town with no particular destination in mind. He felt different somehow, but nobody else seemed to notice. Several friends passed and greeted him as usual. Just when Kim was wondering if the visit by the authorities had been a gross overreaction, a citizen he didn’t know stopped him on the street.

“You’re the one who played ‘Viva la Vida’ yesterday in the library.”

“I suppose I am.”

"I'm sorry. I don't believe we know each other," he said. "My name is Cory."

"I'm Kim."

"I don't know why you did it," Cory continued, "but I'm glad you did."

"You are?" Kim was genuinely pleased.

"Yes. It reminded me of something."

"What?" Kim asked.

"I don't know. Maybe a purpose."

"Passion?"

"Yes, that's it."

They stood in silence for a time. Finally Kim spoke.

"Cory, I live in Woodland Court. Please come visit me sometime, if you'd like."

"Maybe tomorrow?"

"Why not? I'll be home in the afternoon."

Kim walked on but was stopped again soon by an acquaintance named Leslie. By the time he returned home, he had been stopped twenty times and had issued that many invitations for the following day. He had an unusual feeling, which he recognized as satisfaction over his newfound fame. Of course he knew the dangers, but he liked the feeling anyway.

The next afternoon Kim had a houseful of guests, including Tracy, a good friend he had invited simply because he felt he needed someone there who would give him an honest assessment of the meeting after it ended. He wasn't quite sure what to do, but a rousing discussion started more or less spontaneously. It kicked off with someone mentioning the music in the Great Hall, but the conversation ranged far and wide. The participants hadn't had a discussion like this in five thousand years.

"I've been thinking about something," Kim said after a couple of hours. "In mortality our greatest works of art were often created not by the sensible and ordinary people, but by the disturbed and irrational ones. How many great artists were addicts? Depressed? Neurotic? Tormented? Violent?"

"Van Gogh?" Cory suggested.

"Hemingway?" said Ronny.

"Mozart?" Kelly added.

“Yes,” said Kim, “and thousands of others, millions probably, if you look at all the worlds in the galaxy.”

“So, what’s the connection to us?” asked Leslie.

“I’m not sure, but it may be that great art can only spring from great adversity and maybe great contradiction. How many great novels, for instance, were written by authors who spent their days as accountants or engineers and their evenings and weekends as model parents? Most of the truly creative geniuses in mortality were dysfunctional in some way.”

“Or in lots of ways,” Ronny added.

“And how many of those individuals ended up here in the terrestrial kingdom?” Cory observed.

“None,” Ronny nodded. “By definition, we’re the boring people. We weren’t ‘valiant,’ but we were good, decent people. No murderers or adulterers or liars ended up here. We’re the ones who weren’t very interesting in mortality. We weren’t passionate about anything, good or evil.”

“So, are there great works of art or music or literature coming from the telestial kingdom?” Kim asked.

“I’ve been there a few times to visit my kids,” said Leslie. “No, they’re pretty much like us now—content and peaceful and dull.”

“If you were going to write a history of our world,” Kim asked, “what would you write about?”

“Doesn’t matter,” Cory answered. “Nobody would want to read it.”

“Nothing ever happens here,” Ronny concluded. “Nothing interesting.”

“Not yet,” mused Kim. “Not yet.”

“What are you suggesting?” asked Cory.

“I don’t know. Yet.”

Eventually the conversation lulled, and people started filtering out a few at a time. At the end, Tracy was the only guest still there. She hadn’t said a word the whole time, which worried Kim a little.

“So,” he said when they were alone, “what did you think?”

Tracy scrunched her lips together for a few seconds. “It won’t work.”

“What won’t work?”

“Whatever it is you’re aiming to stir up.”

“What if I’m not aiming to ‘stir’ anything up?”

“You are.” She paused. “You’re bored, and so are they. But what can you do about it?”

“Create a little history worth writing about maybe?”

“Creating history has always been—shall we say—dangerous,” warned Tracy.

“I suppose you’re right. But what can they do to me, kill me?”

Tracy laughed. “We both know there are things worse than death.”

The group met again the next day, but this time they brought friends. Thirty friends.

After a few minutes, Leslie spoke up. “Ever since we met yesterday, I’ve been seeing things in a new way. I can’t get an image out of my mind: I feel like I’m in one of those funhouse mirror rooms. Everywhere I look, it seems like I see a reflection of myself. And there’s no way out.”

“I’ve noticed it too,” said Ronny. “We’re all just so much the same. Do any of the rest of you feel that way?”

“Yes, exactly,” Kim answered. “Do you remember the passage in the Book of Mormon about needing opposition in all things? That’s what’s missing here: opposition. No sin, so there’s really no righteousness. No sickness, so health has no meaning. No death, so life is rather flat. There are also no rich or poor, bond or free, male or female. What’s our purpose? What are we going to do about this?”

“Well,” said Leslie, “we can’t do much about death, or about sickness.”

“No,” said Kim, “but we can create a bit more opposition, make life a bit more meaningful.”

“Sin?” asked Ronny.

“No,” answered Kim, smiling. “Sports!”

“Sports?”

“Competition.”

There was a moment of silence, then someone yelled out, “Cool!”

Kim had wondered at times why there were no sports in the terrestrial world. Resurrected bodies were flawless and indestructible, of course, but they weren’t identical or equal. Some were taller, some shorter, some faster, some slower, some more coordi-

nated. He supposed it was because competition led to contention, and there was to be no contention in the terrestrial world.

“But what kind of sport?” asked Leslie.

“Well, we’ve got a little problem,” Kim stated. “We have no equipment, no balls, bats, hoops, goals, nothing.”

“I know where I can get a soccer ball made,” offered a newcomer named Mandy.

“And I know someone who could make us a couple of goals,” said Cory.

“I’ve read about soccer,” said Ronny, “but I’ve never played. I lived in the thirteenth century. We didn’t have much opportunity for sport.”

“Don’t worry,” Leslie assured him. “You’ll pick it up easily.”

“Can I ask something?” said another newcomer named Pat. “We’ve been taught that we’re not supposed to try to excel one above another. How do you reconcile sports with that commandment?”

“Sometimes two worthy goals find themselves in conflict,” Kim answered. “We have to decide which is more important. Is creating meaning in our lives through opposition more important than the risk that we’ll try to excel?”

Heads started nodding, although no one spoke.

Two weeks later the group met at Kolob Park where there was enough grass to play soccer. They set out some markers, and several of them set up the collapsible goals. Mandy had brought a fair replica of a twentieth-century Earth soccer ball. For his part, Kim had brought a pair of scissors.

“I guess if we’re going to play soccer,” he said, “we’ll have to have to modify our robes a bit.”

He cut the skirts of his robe off at the knee. “There,” he said, “our world’s first fashion statement. And it only took five thousand years.” Everybody laughed, then took the scissors one after another and made their own modifications.

They reviewed the rules and divided up into two teams. Scoring a goal was about as infrequent as in a mortal soccer match. Their bodies were quicker and more coordinated than mortal bodies, but that gave the defense just as much advantage as the offense. The biggest difference was that none of them got tired. After four hours, they called it a day. Kim’s team lost 6–5.

As they sat around afterward in the shade of a spreading mulberry, Kim came to a startling realization.

“You know, everybody,” he said, “I’m having a very strange feeling right now.”

“I know,” said Cory, “it’s the exhilaration of competing. I haven’t competed at anything since I died.”

“No,” answered Kim, “it’s more than that. And I don’t think you *can* understand, Cory, because your team won. What I’m feeling is this intense disappointment about losing. Do you realize that I haven’t lost at anything in several millennia? It’s incredible. I wouldn’t trade this feeling for anything.”

Several other players on Kim’s team were nodding. A peculiar light was in their eyes.

“When should we play again?” Kim asked everyone.

“A week from today?” Leslie suggested.

“Yeah,” said Cory, “and maybe my team can lose next week.” He laughed, then added, “But I doubt it.”

“We’ll see,” said Kim. “Now that I’ve become reacquainted with what it feels like to lose, I’d like to try winning.”

“What about getting together to talk some more?” asked Logan, rolling over and propping herself up on her elbows. They had met three times since the first two get-togethers.

“How about two days from now, at my house?” suggested Cory.

The group met twice before they gathered at the park again. The second soccer game was even more intense; at one point, Ronny got in Logan’s face and they stared each other down. Leslie laughed at them and broke it up. A couple of hours into the game, Kim looked over to the side of the field and noticed two people watching: Marn and Alma. They were not smiling. After another hour, the players decided to take a break. As they lounged around in the shade, Marn and Alma approached.

“This activity is not permitted,” Marn announced.

“What, soccer?” Kim asked. “Why?”

“Competition is not spiritually healthy,” Alma offered in a quiet voice.

“It’s harmless,” said Ronny.

“Actually, it’s a lot better than harmless,” Cory exclaimed. “It’s

invigorating, spiritually and physically. Really. You ought to try it.”

“No, thank you,” replied Marn with a grim face.

“And your robes are immodest,” added Alma.

Kim laughed. “How is that possible? We have terrestrial bodies, Alma. There’s not much to hide anymore. And besides, you can’t expect us to play soccer in long robes.”

“I can expect you to not play soccer.” He folded his arms and cocked his head to one side.

“What are you going to do to stop us?” asked Kim. “Lock us up?”

“You know there are no jails in the terrestrial world,” answered Marn.

“No,” said Kim with sudden earnestness, “there aren’t. And that’s part of the problem.”

“The lack of jails is a problem?” Alma’s eyebrows rose a notch.

“A couple of weeks ago,” Kim replied, “we discussed a verse in the Book of Mormon that talks about the need for opposition in all things. If there aren’t opposites, then ‘it must needs have been created for a thing of naught; wherefore there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation.’”

Alma just stared at him but didn’t respond.

“You’re a thing of naught, Alma. And so am I.” The truth of his own words almost took Kim’s breath away.

“I am striving with all my heart to live a life of joy,” Alma replied softly.

“But you’re failing. And so am I. Or at least I was until we started playing soccer.”

Alma shook his head slowly. “But soccer isn’t enough, is it?”

Kim’s eyes narrowed. “It’s just a game,” he admitted.

“And nobody wants to spend an eternity in which the most meaningful thing in life is a soccer game.”

Now Kim regarded Alma silently.

“This will lead to evil,” Alma declared.

“Or great good.”

“What good do you think you can accomplish with this competition?”

“I’m making it possible for you to acquire new virtues,” Kim answered.

“*New virtues?*” Alma looked genuinely surprised.

“Patience, for one,” said Kim. “And how about mercy? Or what about forgiveness? We’re commanded to be forgiving, but how can we be forgiving if nobody does us any wrong? Or maybe you can learn to be a peacemaker. You can’t be a peacemaker if there is no conflict. We’re creating some conflict. Maybe next week we’ll figure out a way to help you develop generosity. You’re not generous, Alma, because nobody in this world needs anything.”

The high priest merely shook his head disapprovingly.

Kim stood up. “Halftime’s over,” he shouted to the group. “Will you join us, Alma?”

Alma looked at Marn, who in turn looked bewildered. “Not today,” he answered. “Not today.”

“Your loss,” Kim said as he ran back onto the field.

* * *

The next day fifty people gathered at Kim’s house. A few new faces were there simply out of curiosity, but others had heard about the soccer and the discussions and wanted to learn about Kim’s changes.

After giving the group a few minutes to visit, Kim tapped a crystal goblet with a spoon to get their attention.

“Let me get to the point,” he said. “Alma was right yesterday. Soccer isn’t enough. If we want our lives to be meaningful, if we want a purpose that can sustain us for an eternity, we need more opposition, more conflict.”

“What are you thinking of?” asked Leslie.

“We can’t do much to cause physical pain or illness or even poverty, and we don’t have any natural disasters here. I’ve thought recently that what we need in the terrestrial world is a massive forest fire. We need a little Nevada here to help us appreciate all the beauty. Unfortunately, our trees are as eternal and indestructible as we are. And we can’t cause a drought or an earthquake or a hurricane. So what we’re left with is what we *can* control.”

“What would that be?” asked Ronny.

“We can create inequality.”

Kim looked around and saw puzzled expressions. Everyone in the room could remember inequality, of course, but none of them had experienced it since the resurrection.

“Inequality creates tension,” Kim explained, “and tension creates conflict, and conflict gives people opportunities to rise or fall, to conquer or surrender. In all of mortal history, the goal was always to overcome conflict and create a peaceful, prosperous society. Mortals achieved this ideal state only a handful of times; but when they did, they tended to stagnate. That’s why Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden of Eden. It was nice, but it was a sort of damnation for them. As it is for us. There’s something about inequality and conflict and adversity that pushes people to improve. If there is no conflict, there can be no victory. And Alma was right—soccer is just a surrogate conflict, so it can’t produce a genuine victory. Or a meaningful defeat.”

“Just how do you propose we create this inequality?” asked Cory. “We all have everything we need.”

“Maybe we’ll create money,” Kim answered. “Money is the seedbed of inequality.”

“But what could we buy or sell? And who would buy it?”

“We start accumulating things we don’t need.”

“Such as?” Leslie asked.

“For starters, I’m going to take a surname. Nobody in this entire world uses a surname. So from now on I want you all to call me Kim Contra.”

Cory laughed. “People will just think you’re vain.”

“Good. That’s a start. And next, we’ll start charging people to watch our soccer games and listen to us speak about our plans for a more unequal society.”

“But what will we use for money?” asked Ronny.

“Jewelry, polished stones, bottles of colored sand, whatever. Money is just a symbol. On Earth we used paper, which was only worth something because of what it symbolized. Or maybe we can have our spectators pay with a contract to serve us in some way.”

“But why would anyone want to watch us play soccer, let alone pay for the privilege?” asked Leslie.

“Because it is forbidden.” Kim flashed a devious grin.

After everyone left, Kim was lying on the sofa when a strange thing happened: He fell asleep. And he dreamed. He was standing in a field of rocky soil and tiny corn plants, holding a crude hoe made of a carved wooden shaft and a flat rock. He was trying to keep the weeds from strangling his corn crop. Kim marveled.

He hadn't seen a weed in over six thousand years. A cow was lowing softly in the distance, and the clucking of nearby chickens almost drowned out the cow's complaints. A wooden fence separated the corn from several squat buildings made of rough wood and adobe with thatched roofs.

"Sam," a voice called from somewhere near the buildings. "Sam!"

"Over here," he yelled, not even wondering why he answered to the name Sam.

A woman came from behind one of the buildings, a genuine woman, leading a black and white spotted cow behind her on a braided rope.

"Sam, Melba has gotten into my garden again. You need to mend that fence."

"I'll get to it this afternoon, Nori," he said. Somehow he not only knew her name but knew that she was his wife.

"No, you'll get to it right now. I can't have Melba eating my peas. Your weeding will wait."

"Yes, dear," he said with just a hint of impatience, and yet inside he felt a zest for life and a bond to Nori that was as tangible as the hoe he held in his hands.

He was tired. He was always tired, and his body ached from hard work, but it felt good. He leaned the hoe against the fence and walked toward Nori with a broad grin on his face. He took her in his arms, and then suddenly he was awake.

His heart was pounding, a physical reaction even four hours of soccer had not produced.

* * *

Their next meeting was at Ronny's house. When the others found out about Kim's dream, they were both jealous and nervous.

"Why did it happen?" asked Leslie. "It's not normal."

"What we're doing is not normal," answered Kim. "I think it's a sign."

"Of what?" asked Ronny.

"That we're doing something right. We're changing things."

"What's next?" asked Cory.

"We need to create some real opposition in this world."

“What do you have in mind?” asked Pat, looking concerned.

“Well, without evil in this world, there is no real virtue. And because there is neither good nor evil, we have no stories here worth telling or history worth writing. If people here are to be virtuous or creative, there must be something for them to oppose, to rise up against. There must be evil. And if no one else will provide it, then I will.”

A collective gasp escaped the group.

“You can’t be serious,” said Ronny.

“Of course I am. Where do you think this little experiment has been heading all along, Ronny? An eternal soccer league? I’m bored. You’re all bored, too. We’re all stagnant here. Do you want that for eternity? Do you think anybody does—even Alma? Of course not. But nobody is willing to give us opposition, so I have to. I am willing to make that sacrifice for the good of all. You can join me if you like.”

“But no unclean thing can dwell in the kingdoms of God,” said Cory. “That’s an eternal truth. It’s the condition for our staying here. If we rebel, we’ll be cast out.”

“Then let them cast me out,” Kim stated defiantly. “Because I don’t want to live here if there is nothing to fight for, nothing worth losing everything over.”

He stared at the group, but only a handful dared look him in the eye. Everyone knew the meeting was over, and slowly, most of them slipped away. Eventually only five remained.

“Well, there goes our soccer league,” said Leslie with a wry grin.

Kim laughed. “There will be more. But we have work to do. Go home and think about this. If you’re committed, then come to my house tomorrow at noon. If not, I’ll understand.”

He turned away and walked home.

Later that evening Alma stopped by.

“Some of your former disciples came to see me, Kim *Contra*,” he said. Kim thought he heard a hint of sarcasm in Alma’s voice.

“They’re not my disciples. They’re my friends.”

“Not any more.”

“Maybe they don’t consider me their friend, but I consider them mine.”

“Whatever,” Alma shrugged. “They told me what you want to do.”

“Have to do,” Kim corrected him.

“This is unprecedented, you know,” Alma said. “Creating evil intentionally so that others can achieve genuine goodness. Admireable, but misguided.”

“I’m amazed it took me over five thousand years. And I’m amazed I was the first to reach this conclusion.”

“Don’t flatter yourself.”

“There have been others?” Kim asked, genuinely surprised.

Alma shrugged. “Not in Caldora.”

“Not anywhere else either, I’d wager.”

“The terrestrial world isn’t exactly a hotbed of former revolutionaries,” Alma conceded. “All the creative geniuses and real leaders from Earth ended up in either the celestial kingdom or the telestial. We’re the ones who were unwilling to pay the price.”

“Maybe we’re just slow,” Kim offered.

“Maybe.”

“So, have you come to try to talk me out of my heretical plans?”

“Oh no, not at all.”

“You want to join me?” Kim grinned.

Now Alma smiled too. “Not that either.”

“Then why are you here?”

“When your disappointed disciples left me, I made contact with the authorities.”

“I’m too big of a problem for you and Marn?”

“Quite frankly, yes,” replied Alma. “I told them what you’ve been doing and what you’re planning.”

“And?”

“You’ll be receiving a guest tomorrow.”

“From the capital?”

“No, from the celestial world.”

“Then I’d better clean the place up.”

“Good luck, Kim.”

Alma turned and walked out.

Kim didn’t bother cleaning. He sat alone and wondered what the authorities would do. No one had ever been imprisoned in the terrestrial world. And no one had ever been banished. It had

been a point of doctrinal discussion on Earth whether there was advancement from lower to higher kingdoms in the hereafter; but after the resurrection, no one needed to ask. The nature of resurrected bodies in the various kingdoms rendered all discussion moot. But now Kim pondered the opposite question. Was it possible for a person to regress, to be demoted from a higher kingdom to a lower one, or even to outer darkness? This last thought chilled his soul, but he knew he couldn't turn back.

Sometime in the middle of the night Kim heard, and ignored, a knock at the door. After a minute or so, Cory and Leslie walked in.

"We talked with Alma," said Cory. "He told us what's happening."

"You're here because you're curious? You want to see what happens to me?"

"No," Leslie replied. "We're here because we're your friends. And we support you."

"What if I'm no longer fit to stay in this world?"

"Then we'll leave with you."

"What if I'm sent to outer darkness?"

"They can't do that to you," said Cory

"How do you know?"

"Because you're not trying to do anything wrong."

"Sure I am. I'm rebelling. I want to create evil."

"No, you're trying to create opposition, which people need, even if they don't realize it."

"Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe people don't need it. Maybe it's just me. Maybe I don't belong here."

"Then we don't either."

"Thanks for your support," Kim said. "But I think I need to be alone until they come."

"We understand," Leslie offered. "We just wanted you to know we're with you."

Kim nodded, and his two friends left.

The next day at exactly noon the celestial visitor arrived.

Kim had limited experience with celestial beings, but the light streaming from this one was so intense he had to shield his eyes.

Kim motioned toward the sofa. "Please sit down." The being

did not sit, but planted himself squarely before Kim and looked down on him with both compassion and curiosity.

“Kim,” he said, “I am Raphael. Do you know why I am here?”

“I think so.”

“We have been aware of your little movement here. I’m afraid you have reached the point of no return. You cannot stay in the terrestrial world any longer.”

Kim’s head drooped. This is what he had feared.

“So, where are you sending me? The celestial world? Outer darkness? A planet where I will spend eternity all alone? How do you handle cases like mine?”

“Fortunately,” Raphael answered, “there are few cases like yours. But we have a special program that you might find interesting.”

“What do you do with eternal misfits like me? I don’t really belong anywhere, except maybe mortality.” Kim sighed. “I guess I’m trying to finish finding the purpose I couldn’t figure out on Earth.”

“Yes, you are right. So that is what we offer you.”

“Go back to mortality?”

“Yes.”

“But I’m immortal. The resurrection is permanent.”

“Maybe not as permanent as you think.”

Kim squinted into the bright celestial light and stared at his visitor.

“There is a fruit,” Raphael stated. “You know this, but you have never made the connection. It is a fruit with the power to change an immortal body back into a mortal one, but it does not grow in this world.”

“The tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” Kim whispered. “I don’t understand.”

“When we people a new world, we need two first parents who are immortal and are willing to fall.”

“But I have a terrestrial body. I can’t very well procreate, you know.”

“The fruit is very potent.” Raphael’s expression was serious, but his voice betrayed mild amusement. “What do you say?”

“Do I have a choice?” Kim asked.

“Not really. We know what you will choose.”

Suddenly a light went on in Kim's mind. "And where will Nori come from?"

Now Raphael smiled openly. "Her name at present is Leslie."

"And what will happen to Cory and the others?"

"If they follow in your footsteps, they will also partake of the fruit."

"And if I find a greater purpose than I did in my first try at mortality?"

"Then you will lead your posterity into a celestial world."

"And Julie?"

"You know the answer."

"Yes, I do. And I know it will be hard."

"Then shall we go?"

Kim nodded.

"Take my hand."

As Kim touched the celestial flesh, a calm came over him, and then a subtle breeze that shook him to the core, and suddenly he could remember nothing.

"Come, Sam," said Raphael. "There is much you need to learn before we place you in the Garden."

Notes

1. Coldplay, "Viva la Vida," *Viva la Vida or Death and All His Friends* (New York: Capitol Records, 2008).

2. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, compiled by Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954-56), 2:288.

3. Since inhabitants of the terrestrial kingdom are sexless, their language includes a pronoun to reflect this condition. Unfortunately, English does not include a gender-free pronoun, so I have chosen to describe the characters in this story according to the gender identities they possessed in mortality.