

Chapter 1. Walk with Kings.

"If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,

Or walk with kings nor lose the common touch,

Steam rolled across the chassis of the up turned car. It danced and whispered its way indiscriminately across the twisted steel and wounded hedge way; off, deep into the pasture. The sparse road illuminations threw just enough light for Him to see the letters on the side of the still slow spinning wheel. As His world pulsed with a shock, His numb senses exploded all at once overwhelming Him with life. Breathe deep, ache in His stomach; He tastes the road and the stinging iron of gravel. First His eyes move, then His toes.

Were they moving? Silent and still, He could see their silhouettes ragged within the vehicle.

Check hands, check arms, check legs, move head, get up. Get, up. Was this real?

As He staggered to His feet it was not relief but confusion that washed across Him. He did not believe He would reach here. Act fast, assess. Driver down: no movement. Front passenger down: no movement. Rear passenger down: waiting, trapped. He looked around to see what He had. The road was an eerie quiet, wreathing guilty with remorse from the eruption that had minutes ago occurred. The radio of the twisted car flickered in and out imploring its dying salute to 'the jungle massive'. He could smell both the petroleum and the oil, but it was the sweet yet dank scent

of dew and manure that can only be found in middle England that completely hijacked His senses. Who knew death would smell so...familiar?

Be fast, His mind moved but His body was dragging, no time now. As He approached the car the passenger in the back seat could see Him, he was pleading for help. The roof of the old Mercedes had collapsed around him while the tree trunk had folded the car around it, like salt water taffy. He looked through the crushed rear window for the passenger's hands; they seemed to be trapped beneath him.

"That man was in a lot of pain." He later told me. As He did, His faced washed over with a dark abandon. He stared not quite through me, but not at me either. "He begged me. He sobbed and pleaded for help." As He recounted the tale, His voice was calm and measured.

Moving to the front of the car now, He cleared away a space of broken glass and forced open the old contorted steel door: the lifeless body of the driver slumped out of the car. It hung with deadweight, its neck, broken with a face a torn, slung to the side even further. As He leaned into the vehicle to unlatch the belt buckle He was greeted by the smell of hashish and spirits. His stomach turned and again He felt a dull ache ruminate from the pit of His gut. Not now. When freed, the belt whipped back out of place and the lifeless body inelegantly slouched to the floor. The years would later teach Him that it was cruel to climb over the body as He did, but in that moment, the front seat passenger was all He could think of.

He lifted the arm rest into the seat and tried to feel for the belt latch. He found it, but He could not free it because it had too

much weight on it. Reluctantly He completely climbed into the car, so He could use His hips to lift the body. A branch from the tree had pierced both the passenger door and the passengers shoulder; blood was pooling onto the headliner and He was struggling to find a footing. Then, just as He gave one final push He felt a wet hand squeeze His thumb as the latch freed. This guy was also alive.

Driver: down, dead. Front passenger: down, alive, heavily injured. Rear passenger: down, alive and very aloud.

The passenger's nearly lifeless body dropped onto Him. He told me with the slightest smile that it made Him jump. Instinct made Him wriggle back out into the cool night air. Taking stock of the situation, He could see that the man was being held up by the tree branch, He was alive but barely. He had to think fast.

He circled back around to the trunk and tried to open it. If He could it would be a very small gap; the soggy bank and the collapsed roof looked as though they were working together to clamp the boot shut. The latch clicked open surprisingly easily and the heavy steel door dropped about 6 inches. It was enough to glare inside; He could just make out the metal shafted shovel and an open spool of rope. He reached in and grabbed the rope.

"I am trapped, you must help me. My leg, my leg is stuck under the seat, please." The man in the back was in shock, his dark complexion had drained, He looked scared.

"I'm coming." He calmly said. He knew it would not be through the back, the structural damage was so severe that a body would not fit through any of the car's rear openings. He made His way back to the driver's side door.

The passenger was hanging where He left him, pinned by the shoulder; he was losing a lot of blood. He was slightly more animated, not coherent but, aware. Damn it, He had to get him out. He crawled back into the vehicle, over the dead driver and placed His hands firmly on each shoulder. With a heavy sigh and a violent pull, He dragged the man, screaming now, free from the wreckage. There were the beginnings of a pile; the bloody whimpering passenger now slumped over the driver's lifeless corpse.

The guy trapped in the back pleaded; "you have to help me, you have to free my leg, as Salah, please, please help me."

It was not going to be easy getting him out of there like that, the dangers were very apparent lest not He forget. After a moment to think, He gathered a quiet resolve and walked back around to the opened trunk. He could just fit His arm in, lying face down in the dirt, He palmed around inside the a-jarred space. Finally, His little finger banged against the cold steel of the shovel.

Pulling Himself off His knees, He brushed the mud and gravel from the front of His shirt. He noticed that it was wet; it was the first time He noticed He was bleeding.

"Now, now, I need help now," the man's desperate cries pierced through the pressured silence; like nails on a chalkboard He could ignore it no longer. He aligned the point of the shovel with the small gap that was once the rear windshield. From inside He could hear the pleas turn into a whimper turn into panic. Screams began to cut through the sweet country air, out of the blackness of the witching hour, there was no one awake or near to hear them. Except Him, those screams would become seared into His mind. Grasping the shovel with both hands He lunged forward, and again, and again, with the might of all His bodyweight and

will. The cries stopped. He walked back around to His pile of bodies. His work had just begun.

Some men are fed by the ageless notion of something bigger than themselves. They see the challenge to either defend or to change as a path to imprint their will upon the annuals of legend. To affect so much of the human experience that your deeds are passed down and used to season and knead the folklore of the future is surely the greatest use of one's short and finite time on the mortal plane.

If one wishes to walk with kings, then eternal nobility is surely found through humility. There is no room in legend for the self-braggadocios. The path would be lonely, and through the stains of time finding glory would be a lot harder than it would seem. It will wear thin that He will search, will rise to the occasion and will continually fail to achieve any form of peaceful satisfaction. When one excels in a field, they can be so far ahead; to onlookers it may look as if they do nothing. Allies and followers are not made this way and unfortunately, investments of loyalty only cash dividends if all parties live to tell the tale. Legends are not recounted through silence.

After all these years His opportunities were shrinking. He would not let the chance to tell the accounts of His escapades slip through His fingers. As His faith wavered and His Valhalla faded He would seize the moment and would for once steer His own fate. Although I should not know them, these are the stories that He told me.