The Trojan Horse Sisters

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The two pregnant women had found safe haven in a "sustainable enclave." The tumultuous period of mass confusion and loss had actually wound down. It began with petrocollapse and continued with riots, mass starvation, and attempts at migration. It had all happened so fast. A few years before today, these sisters were housewives enjoying middle-class affluence and more leisure than most Americans.

Zelda said, "Do you still want to follow the plan?"

Esmeralda quickly replied, "Of course." But she was thinking how nice it would be just to retain their new-found comfort and make sure their babies would be okay. The community was beautiful, and well-functioning too. One would have to be crazy to risk being thrown out or facing something even worse.
They had been in New Eden two months. It was three months before their arrival that they prepared to leave their husbands and what was left of their neighborhood and town, to venture two days' journey by foot to the armed border of New Eden.

They had braved land mines across the No Man's Land in full view of the gate watchers and snipers in the trees. Walking in the soaked ditches by the sides of the road helped avoid the explosives believed to be buried mainly in the dirt road, and the white flags the sisters carried helped save their skins.

Their main protection was that they were females visibly pregnant, and did not seem threatening. Most of the guards, "Warriors," could tell from a distance they seemed to be attractive. Not surprisingly, "Hold your fire!" echoed about.

Today on this beautiful, quiet day in New Eden, Zelda and Esmeralda savored their herbal tea, but it was time to get back to work. They had been assigned elder-care; this gave them lodging and earned them their food. They had no other skills to offer besides cooking, because where they came from there was almost no such thing anymore as sewing, growing one's own food or making things out of used or scavenged materials. They had always bought new everything they desired, and threw out massive amounts of trash. Esmeralda had recycled somewhat, but Zelda was always "too busy."

New Eden needed a little new blood, so decided the tribal council. These two able-bodied women could help the community. The population was thought to be almost up to a good stable size. But the small gene pool was of some concern, and child mortality was on the high side – not because of lack of healthful conditions but because there were no cesareans performed and premature babies were allowed to die, as were any babies born with indeterminate sex due to such environmental factors as endocrine disrupters in the mothers' systems. At the Councils people had reached consensus that "our end of the human race needs to be strengthened."

Almost five years ago, in anticipation of a great collapse, and with hopes of self-sufficiency, survival and sustainability, about one dozen families and friends had created their enclave in a former wildlife preserve. It was almost one hundred and fifty acres that was like a peninsula. So it was more or less defensible due to the wild ocean surf on one side and a large lagoon on the other. At one end of the peninsula was the flow of the lagoon, where fishing was good. A seal was taken now and again, and the entire mammal made useful items. At the other end of the peninsula was the border and its defenses.

Just in time for the anticipated breakdown of the petroleum infrastructure and the social upheaval that was unleashed, New Eden was ready for its core members to start living there as a tribe. Some were already laying the groundwork for a community. The Lodge was built first, while people slept in tents and tree houses.

The sisters had told their interrogators that they had no family left and had used guns to defend themselves on the way to New Eden. That was true, except the sisters left out the fact that their husbands had accompanied them right up to the last turn in the road and relieved them of their guns there. With kisses, hugs and tears, the couples separated with vows of rejoining each other inside New Eden when The Town survivors could stage their take-over and liberate Zelda and Esmeralda.

"I really think this is a better life than any of us had," said Esmeralda. "People work hard but they're closer to each other, and there's no bosses. I love the way the open council works." She quickly added, "But these selfish people will pay for turning away their own people and killing them when we came starving from town."

Zelda was relieved that her sister was not softening. To her, the plan was her whole purpose in life, and she yearned for her husband who had always been proud to allow her to never have to work. He kept promising the same once again,

but she knew in the back of her mind that it was questionable. The couple was consumed with rage that their first-born son and his uncle were slaughtered in No Man's Land when they just wanted to visit Eden to try to trade bike parts for some food, even seaweed.

For Zelda as well as her sister, New Eden was better than The Town had been since the Great Collapse, but Zelda hadn't formed attachments here. This was deliberate, but her sister explained to others that Zelda was a quiet, shy and traumatized woman who had been sheltered.

The Town had stabilized after a die-off that lasted two months. But diseases then knocked off another twenty percent of the population. At least by then some food growing had commenced in parks, lawns, and former parking lots. A lot of rats were eaten, cooked over fires fueled by extra furniture from empty houses.

With only about ten percent of the original population left after the Great Collapse, there was finally quiet, if not peace. But the knack of working together and making community decisions was coming slowly. Many people attached to their old lives – gone forever – of driving to the shopping mall and the supermarket felt that the only way to survive was to have more things, food and property than others. Hence, the ugliness of the ruined town and its losses was hard to overcome with enthusiasm and enjoyment of new ways.

Esmeralda saw Greenwood approaching up the path with his usual big smile. "Is that wood gonna burn, Green?" she called. Zelda put on a semblance of a smile and got up to go take care of the old widows Iris and Violet. Zelda could understand her sister's attraction to this man, who had everything going for him including extra firewood beyond the rationed amount. Zelda did not permit herself jealousy, but was concerned about the growing closeness between Greenwood and her sister.

Esmeralda told the strong woodsman to place the wood at the wood stove and she gave him a light kiss to send him on his way. He carried a bow and arrows that he had fashioned since running out of bullets several months ago.

Zelda had made no attachments except amongst the grandchildren of Iris and Violet, who filled a bit of the void left by the loss of her son. Some in New Eden were a little concerned about her isolation, because the new baby Zelda was carrying would need a father.

The women were expecting to give birth near the same time, and it was only a matter of days perhaps until the big day. They were getting lots of kind attention, especially as some men hoped to make them their mates. It was a given that a quick sexual liaison was not likely. Nowadays one could assume that hoped-for relationships were for the long-term instead of one-night stands, because people needed reliable partners. The age of finding sexual fulfillment out of boredom or confusion was a part of the past:-- driving to bars and parties, going to Las Vegas, affairs. Disconnecting sex from sacred bonding and procreation was the opposite of New Eden's ways and rules. Yet, here people had freedom to love others and make whatever arrangements that worked, as long as there was honesty and responsibility. Every spring the Fertility Night Rite made sure there were extra conceptions, and this rite served to honor Mother Earth.

Iris called out, "Esmeralda, could you please help me to the outhouse?" "Be right there," she said. "Zelda, can you help me? Between the two of us we won't strain our bellies much."

The council circle was to take place in the community lodge in three days. At that time the sisters' position would be secured and a decision would be made on a home for the two mothers and children. It would be big enough for Green and another man to live there; possibly Green would be the only man of the house. Zelda decided to let people think that maybe she would even play second wife in order to strengthen the household and family.

Some members of the community seemed to be exhibiting a bit more tension than usual. Zelda thought it might be due to them, the sisters, or was their something else in the air? Nevertheless, as the main collective tasks were complete for the month, there was time for individual pursuits and relaxation. A dance was to take place tomorrow, and the idea of passionate music took Zelda's mind off the pressurizing build-up of the raid just perhaps days away.

Meanwhile, she could envy the groups of people practicing yoga, martial arts, doing workshops, and courting each other for the bonding. Those that had bonded as couples, and married couples as well, did not need to participate in the spring equinox fertility rite. But all were welcome and encouraged to the point of near obligation unless there was a good reason. It was certainly good fun, running around in the light of the first full moon of spring and making love with whomever you ran into that you fancied right there in the beautiful forest or soft meadow. If it was raining the Fertility Night Rite would be rescheduled to take place a week later.

Zelda and Esmeralda would have babes in their arms and wouldn't have to do the Rite. Esmeralda might already be bonded to Green. This wasn't so surprising to either sister, as Esmeralda's marriage back in The Town was not so strong. Perhaps, Zelda was beginning to think, her sister's choosing to come to New Eden was more of an escape than anyone realized. As for the baby's father… Zelda knew her sister was not thrilled with this pregnancy. Zelda said to herself, "What about me? I have a husband, but it's as if he's in a different time and world." The Fertility Night Rite sounded wild and

erotic to her. But she stopped herself and realized that the Rite would never happen, once The Town took over. For the first time, she found herself wondering what she really wanted. New Eden had its great points, but she didn't admit them to Esmeralda. The plan had to be stuck to; if not, she could even be killed out of vengeance by her Town family if the raid had to take place without her aiding it.

She decided it would not hurt to relax a day or two before the council meeting. She happened upon an outdoor Tai Chi class, and she proceeded to enjoy the serenity of the disciplined movement. The young man named Zach, who had engaged her in conversation several times of late, was there. He looking very nice indeed, she thought.

When the session was over she left quickly and decided to walk by the garden and pick some greens. As she was admiring the healthy, enticing plants amidst good mulch, a "Hello Zelda" surprised her. She turned around and saw it was Ryan and his sister Cedar. Can't be rude to him again, Zelda said to herself, especially in front of Cedar who was very kind to Esmeralda and her.

"Hi Ryan, Hi Cedar. What have you got there?"

"Leeched acorns. Do you want to trade anything for them? Would you and Esmeralda and Iris and Violet like to make some soup?" Cedar said. Ryan just stood there and smiled, stealing a look up and down Zelda's figure.

"Sure, come back with me. I'll bring some kale and we'll see what we have to offer you. Maybe some canned pickles or sauerkraut, or a knitted cap? Maybe it could go over Ryan's eyes and you can lead him around!" They all laughed and walked toward the widows' house.

The Dance

Esmeralda and Zelda decided to go to the Dance the next night, although they couldn't imagine themselves dancing. The music promised to be extra good with Old Smokie rumored to turn up with his armful of instruments. In his earlier days he toured with a reggae group that had performed in The Town long ago. Zelda and Esmeralda had gone to that concert.

In the Lodge's entrance where the shoes were left, the two sisters noticed that the other two noticeably pregnant women of New Eden were there too. Everyone was smiling and the warm-up act was wailing away with guitars and elevated voices. There was no electric sound system, so singers had to project. Fortunately, the acoustics of the Lodge were great in the main room. The tables and chairs were mostly gone, and the party was starting.

The music was excellent even if one didn't dance, thought Zelda, but she was aching to dance by the time Old Smokie and his jamming partners really got into it. Being heavily pregnant, though, it just wouldn't do. And who would she dance with? She started to get self-conscious and thought she should just leave. But the atmosphere began to relax as some of the musicians switched around. Zach joined the band with his flute in a slow improvisation.

People were just milling around, some talking, some dancing slowly with their eyes closed. Some of them might have been smoking or drinking out on the porch and had just returned, looking quite relaxed. Where was Esmeralda? Then Zelda saw her in the middle of the dance floor with the other pregnant women – what were their names, Amina and Rosa? Esmeralda was imitating the other two women who were not only swaying but gyrating to the music. Zelda liked what she saw, and couldn't help but be moved by Zach's flute and the drums, stand-up bass and guitar. Before she knew it, she and the other three women were alone on the floor as they gently moved with their feet planted on the floor, shimmying their bodies. They went from crouching to stretching tall as their knees bent and straightened, with hands held aloft while joined together and pointed upward. The effect was like snakes bending, swaying and occasionally wiggling. To some folks they looked like snakes with bulges from having swallowed rodents.

It was too late to just walk off, so Zelda just closed her eyes and danced in place, aware of the whoops of pleasure from the crowd on all sides. The four big-bellied women looked at each other and smiled. They joined their hands and walked around in a circle to the beat of the slow jam. They sang various harmonies and became the leaders of the band for that eternal moment. Soon the crowd sensed that the pregnant women could not entertain much more, certainly not vigorously, so folks returned to the dance floor in small groups and emulated the four mothers-to-be with the circle-dancing and singing.

End of Part 1. Next: The Council (Part 2, the final part of The Trojan Horse Sisters, is at

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