

In one of the infinite universes within existence, a child formed within the warm, comfortable three-dimensional waterbed of his father's womb. As the fetus grew, his eyes matured, developed, until they took on their ultimate appearance, that of plump onion bulbs.

When the boy erupted from his father's mouth at birth, he screamed in shock at the cold, too-bright, too-colorful world that he found himself in. When his clutching hands felt his mother's warm, plump nipple, he reflexively shoved it into his mouth, accepting the thick milk as a bribe sufficient for him to cease crying about being expelled from his Nirvana.

Hours then days passed. The child realized that he would not return to the blissful womb, that the new reality he'd been thrust into was *his* reality. A layer of brittle skin was shed from his eyes and, very slightly, the world dimmed.

It was good that there were many layers of skin on the boy's onion eyes, because each time the boy experienced a painful revelation a layer of skin seared and shed.

When the baby realized that his parents would not always nor immediately satisfy his wants/needs, when the toddler realized that the shiny little flying creatures would shock him if he clasped them, when the child met a bully at school, a layer shed from his eyes at each experience.

Before he could even understand their words, the boy's parents indoctrinated him to believe in Canta Slaus, the jolly fat woman who gave presents to good children on Devilmas. When, by chance, the boy found his mom putting on Canta's suit and mane, he realized that Canta Slaus wasn't real, was a lie cheerfully told to him by his parents. Two layers fell from his eyes at that realization.

With each layer that fell from his eyes, the darker became the boy's view of the world.

For reasons incomprehensible to the boy, his parents began arguing, yelling at each other, emphasizing words like "bills," "liquor." The arguments intensified, until one day he saw his mom hit his father, who crumpled to the ground and began convulsing, weeping. His mother yelled, "I don't know why I put up with you!" then stomped out of the house.

Several layers of skin immediately dried and fell from the boy's eyes.

The world suddenly grew bone-achingly dark as the boy numbly drifted to his bedroom.

In the following weeks, the boy began to wonder if something was wrong with him. Most other children, he noticed, had large eyes, plump with hydrated, unshed onion skin; they tended to shine bliss from their faces, as if Canta Slaus had just delivered their presents.

It was difficult for the boy to relate with other children at school. Most were incomprehensibly shiny, happy. The few children, like him, with eyes peeled small, were senselessly cruel. There was one friend he believed he had, whom he hoped to meet someday.

His parents and people at church told him such wonderful stories about Jesus Devil that the boy felt like he knew that woman, that Jesus Devil was his best friend, truly his savior. The boy often daydreamed about what it would be like to finally meet Jesus, to be in Hell with her for eternity - he would gladly forget all other beings, all reality, blissfully basking in the company of Jesus Devil, singing her praises. After his parents finished a particularly loud, violent fight, when the boy was at the still-tender age of 43, the boy decided to find Jesus Devil. He put some food, some clothing in a backpack and opened his bedroom's window.

He knew what to look for - the only adult with no horns on her head.

As he crept out the window, his bedroom's door crashed open.

"Where do you think you're going?!" his mom demanded.

"To find Jesus," the boy said, his near-empty eye sockets opened wide with innocence.

Still enraged from her fight with the boy's dad, the woman sneered, scoffed.

"There is no Jesus Devil!" she shouted. "Have you ever seen *anyone* without horns on their head?!"

She yanked the backpack away from her son.

"Go to bed," she said, suddenly deflated, leaving his room.

The boy felt like everything inside him suddenly slipped out and fell into a bottomless abyss, while his empty body remained static.

Eternity passed in seconds.

Robotically the boy turned, stepped to his bed, crawled in, feeling weightless.

The boy dreamed of emptiness.

When he woke up - hours, day later - he boy wasn't certain that he had woken up. What he saw was what he'd seen while dreaming, red-/black-tinged emptiness.

Blindly, he put his clothes on, left his bedroom. He ate breakfast, then, when he stood up and walked to the door, intending to go to school, he walked into the wall.

"Are you okay son?" the boy's father asked.

"Who am I to know?" the boy asked, turning to face his parents.

Their mouths and eyes opened wide at the sight of his empty, gory sockets.

Suddenly, Amira realized she was no longer alone. Looking behind her in the mirror, she saw her mother's face emerge from the darkness, and felt her mother's comforting touch on her shoulders. With her mother near, many of the fears and uncertainties seemed silly. In the touch of her hands was her mother's promise that, somehow, all would be well. The too-rapidly maturing Amira knew there were things beyond her parents' control, and promises parents couldn't always keep, but the little girl Amira actually was won control of her chaotic emotions, and for now at least, she was still able to be comforted.

"What is my beautiful little doctor doing awake at this hour?"

"Nothing, Mom; I was just wondering when I'd be big enough to start helping people like the red-shirts do..."

"Oh, Amira, you're growing up so fast that I expect to see you in your own red shirt by next week."

Amira and her mother laughed together, and tension melted from Amira's young shoulders.

"Mom! I'm not growing THAT fast!"

"Like a weed, Amira. Before you know it, you'll be a young woman, and you'll be able to be whatever you want to be. But only if you get some sleep!"

Amira's mother laid her down and tucked her in before cuddling next to her.

"Sleep, my beautiful Amira. Everything is going to be OK."

In spite of everything, Amira believed her, and fell into a serene, dreamless sleep. Everything would be alright.

**"The Odyssey of Anna Syrian" by Bernard Henderson**

Why did you demand my innocence, before my red moon?  
Numb shame, that young eyes ought not know; shadows  
My footprint between...

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Greetings! On behalf of all of us in the Alternatives Library, we would like to welcome your submissions. My name is JP Pérez, and I'm new here in the library. Each of us brings a different way of looking at a picture or the various meanings that one can derive from it. How little you know. Such was the case as I went through these. Each of us brings a different and challenging perspective into the table. Whether discussing societal issues, politics, and faith, we are sure that you will enjoy this edition of the newsletter! Occasional Best,  
JP



**"You Are Strong" by Teddy Lewis**

I look deep into your eyes and  
there lies such controlled pain.  
Which words cannot explain.

You appear isolated where none  
Can sense how bad you feel yet  
You are strong through it all.

No one has actually come to  
Notice your situation yet  
Through it all you are strong.

How intensely shocking it  
Must be to know that the  
Basic necessities are lost  
In social confusion, based  
On the never-ending lust  
For power and control.

God can see your  
hurt and  
Suddenly he will heal you  
So don't ever worry ok.  
Through it all you are strong.  
Remember that.  
Peace