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Genesis Amidst Revelation

When did it all go wrong? A pertinent question to ask as the world crumbles around you. To repeat over and over as millennia of human history buckles at the seams and topples limply into oblivion. To scream into the uncaring breeze as atom bombs detonate on the other side of the world.

It was a Sunday when the first mushroom cloud bloomed on the evening news. It stretched up towards the sky, a glowing tree of heat, light, and ash. By Monday morning forty more had sprouted up, blighted tumours on the Earth shooting soot into the firmament and striking the sun itself from the sky. Cities fell like dominoes, the greatest testaments to human ingenuity blown away. Made barren. Graveyards with melted skyscrapers for headstones. It was Sunday now, and who could say which places still existed and which ones were heaps of burning slag. Insofar as she could tell, the Beast had taken a day to rest. A fatal silence had settled over the world. Greying skies marked the onset of a man made winter. A nuclear winter.

Once upon a time Lily had loved the breeze that blew up from the river, bringing every manner of wonderful thing up the hill to her bedroom window. The warm earthy smell of freshly tilled soil, the aroma of fresh baked bread from the Tomlinsons' oven, the heady scent of tulips from Father's garden. Now the breeze brought only foulness. Sick, rotting, rancid smells. Dead smells. The river was grey and poisonous, the fields lay fallow, there was no grain to bake bread, and Father was buried amongst the withering remains of his tulips.

He was sick before the world ended and no matter what he said about the well water, Lily knew it wasn't safe. Why else would he keep her from drinking it? Why else would he set aside their last reserves of clean water for her? Now he was gone, and the Tomlinsons with him. She was the only living thing for miles around. It was hard to remember a time when she had ever felt so lonely.

When did it all go wrong? Surely it couldn't have been her fault. She was a girl. What could she have possibly done to deserve this? She'd hardly had a chance to see the world, much less ruin it. If it was something Father had done, she hardly believed it could've been something so awful to warrant depriving her of him. A young girl ought to have a father. Someone to hold her, to guide her, to stand tall when she shrank.

As deeply as his absence pained Lily, she regretted the loss of the garden even more. He had loved the garden as he had loved her. She had been named for his favourite flower. Every morning from first thaw to first snow, he could be found nestled amid his prized patch. Planting and pruning, watering and watching, diligent but gracious. He could draw beauty out of the soil like a painter filled a canvas. Coaxing it, ever so subtly from the Earth, not rushing it, giving it all the time it needed. Until the moment was just right for it to spring forth.

That didn't matter now. The garden was a ruin, like everywhere else. Flowers had wilted and died. Shrubs had shed their leaves, clinging faintly to life with thin limbs and peeling bark. The apple tree, which had once towered over all the others, was now crooked and bare. A single fruit, red and faintly lustrous, hung drearily from a low branch. Just within Lily's reach. Searching for one last reminder of the way things had been, she plucked it and took a cautious bite. It was soft and bitter as wormwood. It tasted like well water.

Mere feet away, a tiny body started to twist against the binds of swaddling clothes. Not *all* of the Tomlinsons were gone. She tossed the fruit away, did her best not to choke, shuffled over to her ward and plucked her basket off the ground. She took a moment to peer down at the baby, a tiny pink thing, worryingly light, but no less animated. As Lily crossed the threshold of the garden, she turned back for a moment, briefly reconsidering her decision. But there was nothing to consider. As she set off down the hill she reminded herself, no matter what, a young girl ought to have a mother.