

Shoolin picked up a handful of the golden sand and watched it slip from his clenched fingers. ~~his~~ His life was like that, wasn't it? ~~sand~~ Sand, which his hands could never possess, however ~~hard~~ they clenched ~~it~~ hard.

~~gold~~ Gold was more plentiful than dust in Treta in 17,600 AD. A ~~cataclysmice~~ earthquake ~~ataeylsmie~~ earthquake before the modern epoch, 9000 years ago, had wiped out human life in one savage ~~and~~ pitiless sweep. ~~It~~ had also pushed earth's gold reserves out of its core onto the surface. ~~P~~planets are formed when molten iron, gold and platinum sink down after cooling and ~~solidifications~~ solidification to create its core.

This happens in cycles, a cataclysm always follows another epoch. ~~always~~ The rhythm of ages marches on, unrelenting, up and down. Man evolves and devolves. A wheel spins, as if urging to move, but it moves nowhere.

~~H~~he looked up into the warm, blue sky and felt pain evaporate ~~ed~~ from his skin. Treta was getting cooler every year, and he was grateful for the warmer season now, ~~which~~ soothed him. ~~I~~n the mythical golden age there had been only one season, the spring, ~~the~~ and the elders often said. ~~S~~hoolin wished it could have been true. ~~the~~ The cold exacerbated the sting of his inflamed, burnt skin. ~~his~~ His inflamed skin being scorched, ~~which~~ wrapped his embittered, ~~scorched~~ being.

~~life~~ Life was like sitting under a shower of hot molten metal, day and night.

~~he~~ He had just walked out of father's cloth emporium ~~and~~ after ~~having turned away~~ he had turned away, the customer who wanted to look at something more novel than spun gold fabrics. ~~spun~~ Spun gold was commonplace, and lacklustere, traders were demanding innovation now. Treta was the supreme fountainhead of innovation in the world today and the thrill of novelty suffused every Tretan heart.

~~it was puzzling then, and paradoxical,~~ ~~the~~ The way he had turned the customer away, was puzzling them and was paradoxical. One moment he effused charm, and the next, a sinister hollowness had entered his voice. His life force had fled the conversation, ~~got~~ vanished in a beat. His mouth was making words he did not speak. ~~T~~he pit of his stomach to his head had frozen. Sluggish and thick! Unmoving! A deep fatigue gripped ~~him~~, and then words had refused to come.

The customer was staring at him, urging to be charmed, but Shoolin had been speechless. He could ~~not~~ engage ~~not engage~~. He ~~had~~ apologized and left the cloth counter.

"Trust me. Trust me to be hopeless," ~~he~~ had sworn at himself. Hopeless in the land of hope.



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