

M. MEHMET ÜNVER

MAD

A FREE MAN

Translated by Dr. Mert Akcanbaş



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Foremost Press
Cedarburg, Wisconsin

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Published by Foremost Press

ISBN-10: 1-936154-04-8
ISBN-13: 978-1-936154-04-3

Originally published in Turkey as MAD Ozgur Insan
by Cinius Yayinlari, in May 2007

This is a work of fiction. Any similarity of characters or events to real persons or actual events is coincidental.

PREFACE

In this book, I have tried to record the experiences of five thousand years of humanity and their influence on the daily lives of people today. Traveling through time, from when humanity was a group of hunter-gatherers, to the time when agrarian society was the latest development, to the modern technological age in which we live today, is almost as difficult as moving through time and space in another dimension. Success in this process is my goal. However, I think keeping hope alive as a legacy for future generations is better than sitting stagnant only focused on the past. I decided to write this book.

What I say in this book is not the end result of any scientific research by any means. I am not telling a historically factual story either. This is just a fantasy novel of the effects of mythology, mysticism, philosophy and technology on our lives. Besides, I don't aim at influencing anyone's belief. But I confess that I'd like to introduce new approaches to free thought and possibly new ways for people to look at their lives. I believe that people sociologically adopt abstract dualities later in their lives without questioning what these are, such as black-white, good-bad, little-more and love-hate, which are abstract and flexible concepts. Once adopted, people transform these concepts into deep-seated habit.

People live without such social values until the end of their childhood period. During this time frame, human beings enjoy life as independent, carefree, happy individuals. Until they grow up! That's why we grown-ups always wish we could go back to our childhood days. Being different doesn't mean anything to a child.

Everything is accepted in the child's brain, because a child doesn't know selling-purchasing, goodness-sin, trust-betrayal, gratify-humiliate or die-kill dualities. Once they learn about these, they become integrated into the adult world. As the monster called life winds up to consume people, they start wishing to return to the security of childhood. It's like setting a fire, then complai-

ning about the heat. This is the deceiving face of life. Then what we live for is nothing but a big lie.

This book compares the contemporary woman's ways with those of an ancient woman. It also compares Eastern–Western approaches to life. In the East, men lost the war against technology, which empowered patriarchy and authoritarianism in the family, which in return enslaved women. On the other hand, the confident men of the West allowed women their independence, and to be proactive.

I have approached human history as if it were a living thing. Human history has matured from its childhood and is now an adolescent. During the childhood years of human history, everyone was more or less equal. Their main purpose in life was to survive and perpetuate humanity. There was no concern for social class or values. The common goal was, “protect and feed yourself.”

To reach today's level of “civilization,” thousands of years' worth of bloody struggles and millions of dead were needed.

I think that just as in the human childhood phase, mankind didn't have hate, evil and hostility in the early ages of civilization. I don't believe our written and verbal history is totally true or totally false. I strongly believe that we should reconsider the social values and personal habits that we acquire after childhood. Mankind should look at the sky and reconsider everything, as he sees how small and insignificant he is in the universe. The current moment in which we live, is the end result of a social value system and unrelenting taboos, which have been created and developed during the past several thousand years. I hope to maintain my objectivity throughout this novel, as I believe there is no escape from the past or the future and advise everyone to aim for peace, good will, and righteousness.

NOTE: I ask my readers, who believe in the Sumerian Gods and similar belief systems to note that this is only a novel.

Don't forget that we have inherited most of our fears and desires, which are invalid and useless, from the childhood period of human history....

*B*elief is the hardest magic to break.

Arge took its name from the colorful flowers around it. This village had a river on one side and a forest on the other. Hundreds of different kinds of birds, bears, foxes, deer and gazelle as well as wild boar lived in the forest.

Villagers, who hunted for food and clothing in the forest, considered it holy and blessed territory. They mined iron on the hills of the east bank of the river. The river drew the borders of the village as it ran north to south.

The villagers cultivated a few acres of land near the river as an orchard. The village fed itself by fishing during drought or cold winters. Perhaps because of the prosperity of the people, no one knew when the village had been established.

Twenty houses, which were built of stones coated with clay, were scattered randomly. Most houses had only one large room. The temple in the village square was built bigger than the houses. The temple's foundation was about as tall as a human and shaped somewhat like a pyramid. It was built on its foundation as a one-story building of adobe bricks. The double doors in the front had a figure of a fat woman with saggy breasts, on each side. The full view of the village and its surroundings was easy to see from the entrance of the temple.

Summers were always very hot in this town. During the summer, people either rested under the shade of the trees or swam in the river. Some also fished in the river with handmade fish traps.

Children's happy voices were always heard in the village as they freely ran around and played all day long.

The ovens built on the ground were used collectively by the village people for baking their hard loaves. One day, while a bunch

of women were baking and talking, a woman with a child in her arms ran to the temple. Most of the villagers followed them.

An old woman with wrinkled skin came out of the temple's door. Her long, white hair was tied behind her head, and she wore necklaces of stone and bones. She raised her baton to silence the crowd and asked, "What's the matter?"

The young woman carrying the child climbed the steps to the temple and beseechingly cried, "Ram! Mad is dying. He was bitten by a snake!"

The old woman took the child who looked to be about seven years old.

The mother felt so helpless that she said, "Please ask the goddess to cure him. If she does, I'll dedicate him to her."

The old woman took the child into the temple and closed the door. As no one except the old one could enter the temple, the young mother stayed behind crying and praying.

After a long wait, the doors of the temple opened and the old woman brought the child back. His mother cut short her prayers and ran to her son. She kissed the hands of the woman; her child was well. The mother raised the child over her head for the crowd to see.

The old woman started to tell the crowd what had happened inside:

"I went before the Goddess Ninhursag's sculpture with the child, and placed him in front of her. After my prayers in prostration, the stone sculpture started to move. As the goddess' eyes widened, the light shining out of them lit up the temple like the sun. I lost consciousness as the goddess flooded the temple with light. Her light took over the child's motionless body. The goddess ordered me to bring the child to her, so I did. As I shivered on the floor, the goddess moved her hand over his body. She held her hand on his heart for a spell. The skin over his heart opened, and his heart sparked like lightning and began to work again.

"Amazingly, the skin started to cover his body again as the goddess told him to open his eyes. She told me that he belongs to the temple. As she turned back into a sculpture, her light in the temple also vanished."

Old Ram continued, "As you can see, the Goddess Ninhursag cured the child and showered him with her power. Now it's his mother Tara's turn to give him to Ninhursag."

The crowd prostrated with shouts of, "Ninhursag." After the ritual, Ram went back into the temple and closed the doors behind her.

Tara took her son back to their cottage, which was one room with no windows. A sheet of leather was used as a door to the cottage, which had a little stove called a tifik.

She kissed her son several times before letting him go. She checked the clay pot for milk and forced him to drink some. Mad left the cottage after drinking the milk. His mother didn't try to stop him but warned him, "Stay away from the snakes and don't go far from the village square! I'm coming soon!"

Tara took her spindle and some sheep wool when Mad left. She wanted to forget her worries by spinning, but she soon left the cottage after Mad.

The women around the oven were still baking bread and grinding wheat and barley between two round stones. Fermented dough was baked in these clay stoves.

Tara looked around for Mad as she approached the ovens. Since she didn't see him, she went to Iber.

"Where is Mad?"

"He is in the stable playing with the other children," Iber replied.

Tara went to the large cottage, which was used collectively as a stable. The villagers kept a few sheep, goats and cows there. Although the wooden doors were closed, she could hear the voices of children. Once inside, she saw Mad running around the animals.

She called to him, "Baby, come! Let's eat when the bread is fresh."

"I'm not hungry, Mom. I'll eat after the game."

"I'll be around the ovens. Don't be late."

When Tara went back to the square, she didn't feel like baking. So she sat down and started spinning.

Iber, wanting to share her best friend's worries, said, "I was very afraid today."

“Don’t remind me! I was so scared of losing my baby,” Tara replied.

“Mad is very naughty! You should keep a close eye on him.”

“From now on I’ll watch him like a hawk. I can’t live without him!”

* * *

Three months later, the weather was brutally cold. The villagers constantly carried wood from the forest. They stacked it in their houses all the way to the roof. During the cold days and nights they kept fires in their clay braziers, and family members lay down next to each other on leather sheets on the floor.

Tara, who slept with Mad, got up to kindle the fire in the icy cottage. She rubbed her shoulders with her hands to try and warm up. She brought some wood from the stack and stirred the ashes, then put thin wood slivers into the brazier. The smoke burned her eyes, but she kept working as she coughed, and wiped the tears from her eyes. Finally, crimson flames were kindled.

She woke Mad up as the cottage began to warm. He came close to the fire with sleepy eyes and little cold hands. She caressed his head, and they started pushing each other in a playful mood.

Mad was her third child. She’d had a girl and a boy before him, but they had both died as infants. When they were dying, Goddess Ninhursag hadn’t been able to save them.

When Mad was two years old, his father Saart had a hunting accident. A wild boar chased and attacked him. The animal’s sharp teeth took Saart’s leg off at the knee.

It was too late when the other hunters arrived. He only lived for a month after the accident. Tara took care of him and prayed in front of the temple every night for long hours. She tried to console herself by thinking the gods must know something, when Ninhursag again couldn’t help her.

She never had another man after her husband’s death, because she had loved him so much. She preferred to live with Mad and her memories.

After putting aside these sad memories, Tara asked, “Are you

hungry?"

Mad nodded. "Yes."

Tara pushed her long, black hair back and walked to the cottage door. She shivered in surprise when she opened the leather door. Although it was cold, Ram was standing silently in front of her.

Startled, she ran back inside. She took Mad in her arms as she covered them with the leather blanket on the floor. They were breathing heavily under the cover, but they could hear Ram's voice clearly.

Each time Ram shouted, "Tara," she answered a whispered, "No."

After a while, Tara was alarmed by the silence. She pulled the leather cover aside fearfully. To be sure Ram was gone, she listened carefully. She went to the cottage door with Mad in her arms, took a deep breath and opened the door timidly. She walked half way around the outside of the cottage. Ram wasn't there. When she looked at the temple, she saw Ram standing there with her baton, looking at them. Tara turned back angrily and went into the cottage.

She held her baby tightly and sat near the fire. As she stared at the flames with saddened eyes, her entire life passed through her mind. She couldn't take her eyes off Mad for the rest of the day, as she feared if she looked away he'd be gone.

Because of these fears it was almost a week before they left the cottage, and every time she took a step out, the first thing she did was check for Ram.

Days later, Tara was watching Mad scare the birds in front of the cottage. She was so pre-occupied that she didn't notice Ram approach. When Ram yelled at her, she hurried and picked up Mad. Because she knew why Ram had come, she told her to go away. Then she threatened her.

"You old witch! Go away or I'll kill you!"

Ram replied with her weak voice, as though she were talking from her stomach, "You offered Mad to the goddess when he was dying of snake bite, and the goddess accepted him. Why do you object now?"

Keenly aware of her helplessness, Tara said, "I thought he would die like the others." But no excuse could stop the necessity of the moment. The end result was important.

"But he didn't die."

"Let the goddess bring back my husband and my other children and keep them. But I don't want to give Mad to her. Go away! Or I'll kill you!"

Tara who no longer could harness her anger took a stone and threw it at Ram to scare her.

Ram barely protected herself from it. She turned around in astonishment and left. Tara watched her enter the temple.

Tara didn't sleep well that night because of the psychological warfare. She awoke often to check on Mad.

This pattern lasted for a month. Tara quit gathering and hunting. The villagers were aware of her worries. When they tried to share firewood and game from the forest with her, she refused them out of pride.

But they understood her behavior and started to secretly leave things she needed at her door.

Tara had another worry besides giving Mad to the temple. The goddess could kill Mad if she wished, and Tara couldn't do anything to stop it. Ninhursag had spared Mad's life because he was promised to the temple. Therefore, if Tara didn't hold her promise, Ninhursag would kill him. What could she do? Such worries and conflict made her angry. Instead of losing him forever, giving Mad to the temple seemed more rational.

As time passed, her tension increased.

Such thoughts inclined her to give Mad to the temple. But wasn't there another solution? Why did she feel so lonely and helpless? Perhaps surrendering Mad to the temple as soon as possible was a requirement of her love. But she had resisted this idea for so long that changing her mind now was something her pride couldn't tolerate. Also, what would she do without Mad? Who would she hug at night?

She murmured, "What if the Goddess kills him?" as she put another log on the brazier.

* * *

Tara was cooking fish she had caught in the river. She gave a piece of cooked fish to Mad and ate a piece herself, too. But her body was so tense with worry that she couldn't swallow her food. She angrily spat it out, as she heard Ram calling her.

She opened the leather door and fearfully challenged Ram, "What do you want, old witch? Would you give your own children? Tell Ninhursag to take someone else's child. They all have five, ten kids. What do you want with my only baby?"

Ram knew Tara was talking with a mother's instinct, but tried to persuade her that bad things could affect everyone if she didn't surrender the boy to the temple. "Nobody wanted your baby. He was dead. So you offered him to Ninhursag. And Ninhursag accepted him and gave him life. Now he belongs to her. Do you want her to regret giving him life? Do you want her to take it back?"

Tara looked down at Mad, who was clinging to her knees, without understanding anything. She pulled Mad inside and closed the door.

They sat silently around the fire. That night Tara didn't sleep.

In the silence of the early morning, Tara climbed the stairs of the temple with Mad bundled up in her arms. When she came to the temple door, it opened by Ram. She was waiting for them.

"Finally," Ram said.

Tara carefully placed the boy in Ram's arms without uttering a word and quickly left the temple.

Later, when Tara walked out of her cottage again, the sun was high and the hunters had already left for the forest. She thought of leaving the village for a while, so Mad could adjust to his new life.

The villagers generally stayed three or four days in the forest when they went hunting. It was dangerous in the forest. They were often attacked by wild animals. Some had died and some had been seriously wounded. That was why they hunted in groups.

Tara caught up with the hunting group. Everyone was happy to see that she seemed to have come to terms with the situation. This

was her first time back on a hunting party since Mad was bitten by a snake. Some of the villagers couldn't refrain from shedding tears. Except for one man, Caf, everybody tried to support her morale.

Caf had a loose mouth. He always said things he didn't mean. He blurted out, "Because of you and your baby, Ninhursag has almost punished us!"

Iber, a masculine-looking woman, put her spear against Caf's chest and yelled, "Coward! If we had known you were such a pussy, we would have taken your wife hunting instead."

Caf walked away silently. Everyone laughed at him. Even Tara, after all she had been through, laughed.

She pointed at Caf and said, "Let's hunt Caf instead of the animals!" This triggered a roar of laughter in the hunting group, as they disappeared into the depths of the forest.

* * *

The temple was lit by light beams streaming in from holes cut out of the roof. Mad noticed his strange environment and started to explore his surroundings.

Ram was cleaning ashes out of the burner when Mad quietly approached her. "You woke up!" she said. Pointing at a seat, she added, "Come and sit."

Mad felt lonely as he didn't see his mother and asked, "Where is my mother?"

As Ram sensed the shyness of the child, she answered in a tone full of understanding. "Your mother left but will be back. Until then, you'll stay with me."

With a heart full of sudden fear, Mad went to the door crying, "Mom, Mom ..." He couldn't open the door no matter how hard he tried.

Attempting to divert his attention, Ram showed him her colorful necklace made of beads and bones. "Come to me; I'll give you my necklace." As she held his hand and tried to pull the child near the fire, Ram realized he was stubborn. She decided to try another method and said, "Well then. Let's go out and look for

your mother.”

Before she had completely lifted the first crossbar of the door, Mad dashed out. Ram couldn't catch up with him as he ran from the temple's steps to his cottage in the village square.

He searched everywhere in the cottage but couldn't find his mother. He checked under every leather sheet. His mother wasn't there, and he started crying.

As far back as he could remember, his mother had never left him alone without telling him. But this time was different, and he felt the strangeness of the situation. “Where did she go? Will I ever see her again?”

To stop his cries, Ram put her hands on his shoulders and said, “Don't worry, baby. She will come back in a few days.”

She put one of her necklaces around his neck and wiped his tears with the edge of her leather garment. She decided to take him back to the temple. Although he was still crying, he didn't resist her anymore.

When they reached the steps of the temple, his mood changed again. He started crying frantically and wanted her to carry him. Old and weak as she was, Ram knew she could hardly climb the steps by herself, let alone with a child in her arms. She begged Ninhursag to give her strength as she tried to carry the child. She was amazed she finally made it without falling. Feeling self-confident, she continued carrying the child into the temple. She put Mad on a seat near the fire and told him to wait as she left to get some food for him. Finally, Mad calmed down and stopped crying.

When Ram came back with a piece of meat, she looked around, but Mad was gone.

She was terrified when she finally found him on the lap of the Goddess Ninhursag in a dark corner of the temple. She ran to Ninhursag and pulled Mad down.

“Hey you, Tara's son! How did you get up there? Be thankful that Ninhursag didn't kill you!” she scolded him.

Mad didn't understand her anger. Back by the fire he thought, Grown-ups don't like playing like children.

Ram picked up the pieces of meat she had dropped on the floor

and tried her best to clean them with her hands. After cutting smaller pieces, she put them on the iron skewers and started to cook them.

Mad thought about his mother again. She cooked this way also. He took one of the skewers as he had with his mother. His childish efforts at cooking made Ram smile; she forgot her anger and shook her head. Mad smiled back as he imitated the way she shook her head. Finally they made up. Ram stroked his hair and he seemed happy. After eating the meal Ram worshiped while Mad played with the necklace. They didn't leave the temple again that day.

At every chance Ram kept an eye on Mad. Watching him started to make her feel happy. After so many long years, there was someone in the temple besides herself.

After the sun set, Mad kept looking at the doorway waiting for his mother, as he felt tired and sad. From time to time he asked, "Will my mother come?"

"Of course, she will."

"When?"

"In two or three days!"

"Two or three?"

"I don't know."

Mad changed the subject and said, "I'll show my new necklace to my friends tomorrow."

Ram thought all children are the same. "Okay, come to sleep now," she said.

"Will my mother come when I wake up?" Perhaps he was different from other children.

"Be patient, my child."

Mad's eyes closed before she had finished her sentence. All children are the same, she thought.

Ram watched him as she covered him snugly. He was a charming and beautiful child. He had a round face, pale skin and long, black hair like Tara. Tara took care of him well. Ram felt tired, too, so she lay next to Mad. After a deep sigh, she put her head on her arm and slept.

Ram felt some weight and pressure on her neck when she awo-

ke. She noticed that Mad had wrapped his arms around her in his sleep. He must sleep with Tara this way, she thought.

She liked that thought. She didn't want to wake him up as she knew he would start asking about Tara. Therefore, she lay motionless with her eyes open next to him.

When Mad awoke, he jumped up and asked, "Has my mother come?"

"No, not yet." Ram said.

He closed his eyes and started to cry. But this time it was a reluctant cry.

When Ram cleared his tears with her old fingers, he stopped crying. She took him by the hand, and they walked to the temple's door. They went outside to watch the people.

Mad shouted, "Dawi," when he saw the children playing tag and ran to play with them, but the children stopped playing when he approached. He showed them his new necklace and tried to tell them something exciting about the temple. After a brief break, the children started to play again. This time Mad joined them, chasing the others and running away from them.

After a while Ram came and told him, "Let's go to the temple."

He wasn't ready. It wasn't easy to be in a house for hours with an old woman, especially for a child. So he said: "I'm not coming. I want to play with Dawi."

When Ram forcefully tried to take him to the temple, Mad broke away as the children watched.

As old as she was, Ram had to chase him around amongst the other children. She scolded him, "Don't be so hard-headed! Come here."

Mad was right from his own standpoint because his game was interrupted. But being stubborn was useless. Ram wasn't an easy quitter. He knew how stubborn she was. "Let me go! My mother will be upset with you! I want to play. I want my mother," he shouted.

Ram also had someone she leaned on in this small village. "And you will see Ninhursag's anger! If Ninhursag had wanted you to play like other kids, she wouldn't have invited you to the temple."

Mad thought of Ninhursag as older and more stubborn than

even Ram. To measure the danger, he asked, “Who is Ninhursag?” with childish curiosity.

“The goddess you played with yesterday in the temple.”

“That fat woman?”

“She is not a woman. She is a goddess.”

“Would she do anything bad to me?”

“No, she wouldn’t. I just said that to scare you. She protects us.”

“Can she protect me from snakes?”

“Of course!”

Mad was persuaded so he followed her to the temple. They entered and walked around the fireplace. Ram tossed in a few logs and blew into the fire to ignite the wood. Her eyes were shrunken and narrow as she blew into the fire. She touched Mad’s hands and told him to warm them by the blazing fire. She was afraid he might get sick.

“I’ll go get something to eat,” she said.

“I’ll come with you,” the child insisted.

“No, you stay here.”

Ram left the temple and went to one of the cottages in the village square. In a short time, a man with a piece of meat came out and handed it to Ram.

She raised the piece of meat and her baton to the sky and started to pray. The man turned his face to the temple and prayed as well.

Leaving the cottage, Ram saw Mad watching her at the temple’s steps. She scolded him, “Why are you outside in the cold?”

Instead of answering her, he asked, “Did he give you meat?”

“Yes.”

“Why? Are you also pregnant?”

She thought she knew why he had asked that question. Perhaps he had learned that pregnant women received some meat from hunters in the village.

They didn’t go out again that day as the meat was enough for them. Most of the villagers also stayed in their cottages on that cold winter day. Beside worship, Ram had the arduous challenge of answering hundreds of Mad’s questions.

“Why do you prostrate yourself in front of a sculpture?”

“I worship that way.”

“What is worship?”

“I pray to Ninhursag to protect us and feed us.”

“Does Ninhursag have a spear?”

“No.”

“How does she protect us?”

“She has magic. She protects us with magic.”

“What is magic?”

“Magic is believing. Believing in her protects us.”

“Why do people call you a witch?”

Mad’s questions never ended. Ram answered them, because she liked his childish curiosity. The purpose of the child’s being in the temple was to teach him anyway.

“I’m not a witch. I’m a servant to the temple.”

“Do you have a mother?”

“Yes, I did, but she died.”

“Does Ninhursag have a mother?”

“No.”

“Does she have children?”

“No. She doesn’t have anyone.”

Instead of answering individual questions, Ram decided to tell him a short story. She stared at the fire and started:

“The servant before me said that a long time ago, a fireball fell into the forest from the sky. The hunters went to see the fallen fireball. A big rock had made a huge hole on the forest floor. It’s still there. The hunters broke the rock and considered the colorful smoke that came out of the rock as a sign.

“Some nights later, someone had a dream in which a fat woman entered into the rock they had broken into pieces. She was very relaxed as she went inside the rock.

“The hunters who heard this dream brought the rock into the village. They made a sculpture out of it and built a temple to make her happy. They named her Ninhursag. That year the harvest was very good, nobody died in the village, and there were no miscarried babies. The villagers discovered the iron mine in the hills.”

Ram noticed Mad had fallen asleep. Perhaps he hadn’t heard

any of the story. She lay next to him in deep thought until she finally drifted off to sleep.

Early in the morning, they awoke and gathered near the fire. Mad's voice was shaky on this the third day without Tara.

"Is my mother coming today?"

"Maybe today or tomorrow."

"I miss my mother so much."

Ram pulled Mad close and hugged him. He wrapped his arms around her skinny body, too.

* * *

A group of hunters crawled toward the wild horse herd trying not to scare them. They were right behind the trees at the pointed end of the forest. They charged the horses after they had gotten as close as they possibly could. The horses started to run wildly, afraid of the hunters. The hunters threw their long, narrow leather lassos at the stampeding horses.

The black horse trying to escape Tara slowed because of the trees in its way. The beast was looking for an escape route. Tara used the horse's moment of hesitation to throw her lasso. She got the lasso around the horse's neck, but the animal was nervous and very strong. He reared, neighed and dragged Tara around on the forest floor.

The other hunters ran to help her when they saw her struggling with the horse. In a short time, three lassos were around the horse's neck. Tara finally stood up, wounded and bleeding from cuts and abrasions all over her body.

The relentless beast kicked the air with his back legs as the hunters tried to control him. The animal calmed down from sheer exhaustion. Tara, who thought the horse was in control, handed her lasso to Iber and walked toward the wild beast. The animal moved back and forth as if leery of her approach. She jumped on his back quickly as she grabbed at his mane. The animal went crazy. But she held on tight, just as stubborn as the wild beast himself.

The second time he reared, Tara found herself on the ground.

The hunters let out a delighted guffaw. She was aggravated but determined. After eight attempts she still hadn't been successful, and the laughter of the hunters had become very irritating. Her wounds were bleeding, and her bones were painful. In fact, if it hadn't been for Iber, she wouldn't have been able to stand up after the last fall. Iber led her to a log to sit down and rest. The hunters tied the horse to a sturdy tree.

They used their flintstones to start a fire and cook as everyone was very hungry. They cooked for lunch the meat of their prey. Iber passed a large slice of well-cooked meat to Tara, who stretched before the fire. She thought she didn't deserve a meal and refused to eat. After Iber's insistence, she chewed the meat slowly.

The hunters sat around the fire, with full stomachs, debating what to do with the captured horse. Tara kept cleaning her wounds as she looked angrily at the hunters. They usually spent the night around the warmth of the fire, before returning to the village in the morning.

Tara could see the horse from where she lay. She got up slowly and went close to the animal. She checked on the sleeping hunters once more and then patted the animal's hair. She asked, "Why? Why?" She tiptoed back to her place in the camp and took something from her leather bag. She went back and fed the chestnuts to the horse and stroked him gently. The animal finished off the chestnuts and an initial trust developed between them.

A pair of bright eyes was watching Tara sadly. Iber went to sleep shortly after Tara did.

* * *

After five days, the hunters still hadn't returned to the village. The worried villagers went to the temple and called to Ram, "Witch, where are you?"

Ram answered, "What do you want?" as she stood holding Mad's hand at the temple's door.

"What has happened to the hunters? When will they come back?"

"I have to ask Ninhursag. I'll let you know," promised Ram.

She left Mad at the door and went into the temple. In front of Ninhursag, she raised her baton three times and placed it on the floor. She started her prayers with her hands extended in the air as she prostrated herself. She didn't receive any sign from Ninhursag, although she prayed long.

Mad ran into the temple and shouted, "Mother is coming! Mother is coming!"

Ram finished her worship quickly and followed Mad. They saw the hunters returning from the forest. Mad left Ram and joined the villagers going to greet the hunters.

Tara rode the horse proudly, jumped down and gave the bridle to someone in the crowd. "My Mad! My baby!" she screamed as she ran toward him. She kissed and hugged him as she snatched him up. She thought for a second, then took him to the hunters.

Tara and her horse were the big news of the day. The villagers were impressed by the animal. They knew about horses but had never before had one in their village. This was the first time and they were excited.

In a short time the villagers started to cook and eat the fruits of their labor around the big fire in the village square. A group of them insisted on Tara telling the story of the horse.

Tara proudly sat down near the fire and started her story: "It took exactly two days. The hunters named him Tar after me, because he is as stubborn as I am. I gave him all my chestnuts and Iber's, too."

Tara and the other hunters told their stories late into the night. From time to time they picked on Tara by imitating the way she fell from the horse, and the villagers laughed. Late at night, Mad slept in Tara's arms, while the others slowly made their way back to their own cottages. Ram watched them from the other side of the fire. Although their eyes had met, Tara took Mad to her cottage without consulting Ram.

After putting Mad into his bed, Tara went outside to get a piece of wood for the fire, and saw Ram's pleading expression as she turned to walk back into her cottage. Since she knew Ram's concern, she told her, "just for tonight," to show her good intention. Comforted by Tara's words, Ram headed for the temple.

Tara's domestication of the horse encouraged the other hunters as well as making them jealous. They started catching wild horses at every opportunity and rode them for hunting. The domestication of the horse was a blessing for them. They went hunting less often, but brought more food back as the horses gave them mobility. The villagers had never thought of horses in this way. Now their trips to the fields and carrying their harvest were easy.

* * *

Mad was seldom able to sleep with Tara, because she didn't want to take him from the temple and cause trouble. So every time Mad stayed with her, she always took him back to Ram early the next morning. Although Mad never wanted to leave Tara, she always told him he had to get used to temple life and Ninhursag.

"I'm always here and you can come to stay anytime," she told him. "But you have to love the temple. You'll be a priest one day and take it over. You'll protect us from black magic by serving Ninhursag," she explained.

It took almost a year for Mad to feel comfortable about this. At the beginning, he was relentless and angry. He was frustrated that he had to worship like Ram all the time instead of playing with his friends.

Any time Ram took him away from his friends, Mad envied the independence of the other children. Ram took him everywhere she went. She was eager to explain everything to him, although he wasn't able to understand it all.

One day Ram had to go to the mine at the end of the river. She wanted to leave Mad with Tara, because she thought the mine was dangerous for him. Tara and some villagers were working in the fields that day. The fields were located on the plain at the west end of the village. The villagers worked together in the fields, which were irrigated by canals from the river during harvest time.

Ram was explaining to Mad where they were going. "There should be division of work in the village. All the products of agriculture, mining and hunting should be divided among the villagers."

“What’s a mine?”

She loved teaching him and explained, “They are places where we get iron from under the ground around the river. Goddess Ninhursag showed the villagers the mine and what to do with the iron that comes from it. We make the knives that we cut meat with out of this iron. Spearheads and shovels are also made of it.”

“I want to see the mine. Why can’t I go there?”

“It’s a dangerous place for a little boy. There are other things you should learn first. For example, think about how to serve the goddess better.”

“What can I do?”

“Learn. Just learn!”

“Learn what?”

“Learn what I tell you.”

Mad didn’t understand what he was supposed to learn. He also didn’t understand most of the things Ram told him. He forgot about her words and ran to the villagers in the field.

Tara was waiting for him with open arms. She hugged him and lifed him in the air as usual. Mad took the shovel imitating the villagers. He looked funny with the big shovel in his little hands. The villagers laughed at his efforts.

Even Ram laughed at how hard he tried and murmured, “Who could he be but Tara’s boy?”

Mad reached the age of ten, while shuffling between Ram and Tara. It was the most active time of his life, but Ram never left him alone.

“Be careful! Ninhursag would be upset if something happens to you.”

He always got angry when she tried to restrain him.

“I hope you die!” he said.

Most of the time when Ram taught prayers and worship rules in the temple, Mad thought about riding his mother’s horse, swimming with other kids or even floating on the river aimlessly like a dried leaf.

Actually, Tara taught him to ride a horse, but Ram banned him from riding alone. Mad was little and could break his neck easily by falling from the horse. Tara took him secretly to the forest and

taught him how to sit on and ride the horse. Truly, he behaved like Tara's son, just as Ram always said. He was a competent horseman at an early age. This secret between him and Tara gave him self-confidence and the courage to resist Ram. Actually, following the rules or learning the prayers weren't important. The important thing to Mad was not being able to do the things he liked to do. That was the main reason for his defiance.

Since education and rules narrowed the area of freedom, he always felt under pressure. Why couldn't he live like a normal person? Why? They said he would be a servant in the temple!

That depressing mass of stones called the temple! He would be a servant to Ninhursag who was a fat and ugly female sculpture that nobody could hear but Ram.

The funny thing was that people took all this seriously. That's why he was angry at his mother for giving him to the temple. "You should have let me die!" he complained to her.

He wanted to go hunting, fight with animals, and work in the fields. He always heard the villagers talking about these things. They were good at exaggerating their stories. They made the story of catching a little snake into such a tale that the audience would think the snake was an enormous boa instead of a palmsized, harmless creature.

These stories always made audiences wonder. Perhaps weaving these fantastic tales helped to ease the boredom of their lives. Mad wondered about many things. He could discover many things if Ram wasn't around. She was imprisoning him. He wanted to be free, leave the village and go places.

One day he and Ram talked about serving in the temple. When Mad insisted on being free, Ram said, "No! They must have put a bad curse on you, child. Where and who did you play with? What did you eat?"

"I played with the snakes in the forest. They put a curse on me. They said they would bite me again and Ninhursag couldn't save me this time."

"What are you talking about, child?"

"I hope I die," he answered.

He was just a child! He wouldn't talk like this if he knew where

he would go after death, thought Ram.

“If you die, you go to Ninhursag.”

“Then I don’t want to die.”

“Stay away from the snakes and omens, child.”

Since dying didn’t seem like a solution anymore, Mad had only one other option. “I’ll run away from here.”

“To where?”

“I don’t know.”

“How could you get to a place that you don’t know? Who would protect you there?”

“I can take care of myself!”

Ram knew this talk was nonsense. He was just a child and the temple was boring for him. Because of his rebellious nature, he resisted her teachings.

Ram left him alone in the temple for a short time and went out. When she came back with a narrow, long stick, she found him watching the village from the temple’s steps. She went inside and got the sharp knife from near the stove and came back. He was watching her carefully. As she sat cross-legged, she measured the stick with her palm and cut a piece a little bigger than her palm. She carved the top and bottom of it and hollowed the inside.

She punched six holes on the hollow stick and made holes on the other side. She gave a concave shape to the mouthpiece. She started to blow through it as she moved her fingers over the holes.

Mad was amazed at the sounds. He drew nearer to observe the instrument. This was the first time he had seen anything like it. The soft sound of the music was relaxing. It was like the sound of magic, communicating some secret message to the listeners. He reached for the instrument. It was strange for such hard wood to make such soft sounds. He asked, “What’s this? It has a beautiful sound.”

Ram took the instrument away from her lips. “I have been keeping this a secret for years.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t want people to know about it. When I came to the temple a long time ago, I had to find things to keep myself busy. I didn’t play with snakes like you do.”

“Why didn’t you show it to anyone?”

“I didn’t want the temple’s silence to be broken. Quiet places are better for thinking. I prefer silence when I seek my innerself. Ninhursag also prefers silence. I refrain from disturbing her in her own temple. That’s why I kept it a secret.”

“I’ll tell you my secret, Ram. But promise not to get angry.”

“Okay, tell me.”

“My mother taught me how to ride a horse. I sometimes ride with her in the forest at night.”

Ram answered simply, “I know.”

Mad was surprised. “You knew? Aren’t you angry?”

“No, I’m not angry.”

“How did you learn about it?”

“You’re Tara’s son. That’s all I need to know.” They both laughed.

Mad took the flute and blew into it, but the sound didn’t make a melody. Ram knew he needed time to learn. She said, “I’ll teach you, but don’t play it often. You have to recite prayers.”

“Okay.”

Mad started to respect Ram more after this. He thought there were things he could learn from this old woman. First, he wanted to learn how to play the flute, then her other secrets.

“Ram! What’s the name of this?”

“I haven’t named it yet.”

“Shall we call it ‘magical tongue’?”

“Why magical tongue?” she asked.

“Because it seems magical and it talks.”

“Okay. Then we’ll call it the magical tongue. Now take it, and go away and play. I want to worship in peace.”

“I’ll take it to my mother and my friends. I’ll be back soon.”

Mad ran down the steps of the temple and to the village square. He showed the flute to every child in the square. In a short time, all children in the village were gathered around Mad wanting to touch the instrument. He didn’t refuse anyone. He let them touch and try the flute.

Ram was pleased as she watched him in his cheerful mood. That’s Tara’s kid, she thought, when she went back inside the

temple.

Since he was smart, Mad learned things quickly. He was very attentive to her lessons lately. She had explained to him how to play the magical tongue and what to imagine while playing it. In his spare time, he went to the riverside under his favorite tree and tried to play the magical tongue.

Mad, who had only been able to make distractive whistle sounds before, learned to play melodies when he reached puberty. At those times when he lost himself in his emotional melodies at the steps of the temple, people gathered around to listen. They thought the Goddess Ninhursag had inspired him. They took every melody as clear proof of the goddess' greatness.

Tara was proud of Mad. She thought she had done the right thing by giving him up to the temple.

* * *

Neither the river Arge nor time stopped flowing. Time carried everyone to different places just as the river did. Mad wasn't the same child he had been, when he came to the temple so long ago. Time had taken him and carried him to another point in his life. At the age of seventeen, he knew all his prayers and forms of worship. He had learned to interpret the stars when babies were born, shedding good omens on people wanting to marry, taking bad spirits out of the dead, and how to put meat and bread next to a deceased person when he was laid on a raft on the river. He also learned to beg Ninhursag not to give pain to the bodies that had to be burned on the rafts on the river, as well as prayers for the sick and for the success and safety of the huntsmen.

When Ram was in charge he only repeated after her, but Ram knew he could do this perfectly well alone. She had taught him everything she knew and afterwards tested him.

Murder was prohibited in the village. Ram had never witnessed a killing in her life. The villagers believed that murder would bring wrath on the whole village.

So, when they argued they consulted Ram as a mediator and obeyed her decisions. Women, as members of her own sex, were

under the special protection of the Goddess Ninhursag. Therefore, everyone had to respect and support women. Anything, without female involvement was considered bad luck in the village.

The hand maid to the temple was also female. Everyone knew women had privileges in Ninhursag's eyes.

Mad stored away every new piece of information he came across. In order for him to accept a rule, he needed to be persuaded first. Ram had a hard time persuading him. Any innocent exchange of ideas could become an argument. All she wanted was for Mad to be a good and loyal servant to Ninhursag, but he constantly questioned what it meant to be a servant.

He knew if he accepted the idea, then a chain of rules would follow. He didn't like rules, but Ram wanted him to obey them.

"If I have to obey and live with new rules, it's better not to know them. Not knowing is liberty!" Mad said.

"Who could be freer than the wild animals in the forest? But they can't get away from being hunted or domesticated in the end. Would it be bad if someone taught them to protect themselves?" Ram reasoned.

"I want to be free and leave this place. I don't want to live in fear and stay in this dull temple with you for the rest of my life."

"You're under the protection of Ninhursag here. You can't be free in other places. You didn't create your existence. Givers and takers of life will follow you anywhere you go."

Mad quit arguing. He felt that Ram, who wanted to imprison him in the temple, didn't want to understand him. He started staring at the sculpture of Ninhursag. He was lost in thought and forgot about Ram's remarks. When she noticed this, she got angry.

"You don't listen to me! You must be daydreaming about the kids in the village or your mother's horse."

"I was thinking about the fish in the river. I wonder where the current takes them."

"What about Ninhursag? You're killing me, child. Who cares where the current takes the fish? In the end, they have to live in the water. Can't you see they die when they are out?"

"Still, they are freer than me. At least they don't spend their

lives in the same spot. I want to go away. Just like the fish, I want a current to take me away. Is there a current for human beings?”

“It’s clear you are unfaithful. You don’t memorize your prayers, either. If you go on like this, you will never be a priest.”

“That’s not true; I have faith.”

“Faithful people surrender themselves, they don’t talk about leaving.”

“Wanting to leave has nothing to do with faith. I just want to see other things.”

“What do you want to see?”

“Anything and everything in the world!”

“Everywhere you can find is like Arge. Your only purpose is to leave. You’ll see if the Goddess Ninhursag will take your life if you leave. People who wondered about other places and left the village never came back. Nobody knew what happened to them or what kind of omen befell them. It scares me when you talk about other places. Let’s leave this subject here. We’ve wasted the whole day again. I have to repeat the lesson again. If you reject and refuse everything I teach, you will never be a priest. Let me start over with the creation story; listen to me carefully.

“Everything started with that question! People, who lived in the gardens of the gods in the sky, saw sprouts coming out of the barley seeds they had planted. They thought about the apple seeds. The fruit and the seed looked so different. One could never picture an apple by looking at its seed and vice versa. The trees had roots, branches and fruits. And these were all the end results of seeds, which looked so different.

“With this knowledge, people started to collect the seeds of each plant in the gardens of the gods. But the gods were concerned about the people’s new activity. What if people start wondering about the seed that made them and one day found it?

“The gods decided to hide this from the people. To keep this secret, they sent the people to earth and said, ‘This is the punishment for your curiosity. If you keep wondering, you’ll be punished with bad omens.’

“That’s how life started in the world. The gods left people alone on the earth and preferred not to help them against bad omens.

A long time later, only the Goddess Ninhursag had mercy on the people and chose to live with them. She hid in a rock and came to our world. Ninhursag loved people, protected them from evil and taught them to make tools from iron. Then life started in Arge."

"How old are you?"

"I don't know!"

"How long have you been in this temple?"

"I don't know!"

"Have you ever left this village?"

"No."

Mad thought for a moment, then said, "I'm going to see my mother," and left.

* * *

Tara was feeding Tar, her horse, in the corner of the cottage. She came and hugged Mad joyfully. He looked unhappy, so she asked, "Are you sick?"

"No."

"What's the matter then?"

"I'm bored with this place."

Tara didn't like to hear this. "Do you want to leave again?"

"Maybe."

"Where will you go? What will I do without you?"

"Don't do this, Mother. Do you want to bind me with your love? I don't feel content here. Do you want me to kill myself in the river?"

Tara was silent as she didn't know what to say. Mad sat cross-legged near the fire and started to play his magical tongue. She was listening to his comforting melodies. After he stopped, she asked, "Are you hungry?"

"No, I'm not. Will you join the hunters tomorrow?"

"Yes, why do you ask?"

"I want to go with you."

Tara was upset and explained, "This is impossible."

"Why?"

"The forest is dangerous and full of evil omens."

"I'm not scared of omens. Don't worry, I have bigger omens."

"Have you forgotten what happened to your father?"

"Ram says omens can't hurt you if you don't believe in them."

"Does Ram teach you to chase omens in the forest, rather than how to serve in the temple?"

"I'll go with you tomorrow morning or I'll run away from here."

Knowing how stubborn he was, she agreed.

"Okay, but you'll do whatever I tell you."

"I guess I'll have to live with rules in the forest, too. Okay. I'll go tell Ram and be back tomorrow morning."

That same night Ram said in her shaky voice as she pleaded with Mad, "This is impossible! Ninhursag will punish you for this."

"I don't think Ninhursag will mind."

"What do you mean?"

"Let's agree on something."

"What?"

"Well, if Ninhursag shows signs of discontentment, I won't go. But if she doesn't, it means she approves, so you'll not object and pray for me."

"You're crazy. Does your mother teach you this? I shouldn't let you visit her. I never visited my family after joining the temple."

Mad knew Ram was fuming out of despair as he lay down and covered himself with the leather covering. She was still talking in her old-woman voice, "You'll be sorry when the evil spirits attack you in the forest. I'll pray for everyone but you."

"Ninhursag keeps me alive; she'll protect me. I also know all the prayers. I don't need yours," he said deridingly.

* * *

The hunters were saying their farewells. Some were with their horses and Tara was walking in front of Tar. From time to time she looked at the temple and hoped that Mad was not coming. She felt relief as the group of hunters approached the forest.

But at the last minute, she heard Mad shouting, "Mother, Mo-

ther.” She stopped and waited for him.

“Where were you? I thought you weren’t coming.”

“Ram made me wait until the last moment for Ninhursag’s sign.”

“What sign?”

“Well, I’ll tell you all about it later. Let’s catch up with the hunters.”

All the hunters were surprised when they saw Mad. They felt better when they learned Ninhursag hadn’t shown any sign of discontent. Being in the company of someone Ninhursag liked made them feel secure.

* * *

It was the dead of winter and the hunters had to take breaks and set up fires. They traveled deep into the forest on the first day. They had a difficult time finding game. The scouts among them finally located their hunting area, and they camped for the night.

In the darkness, all they heard was the howls of wolves and jackals. Mad recited all his prayers and played his magical tongue on this, his first night, in the forest.

The hunters ate leftover meat in the morning. Mad was excited as he watched them and tried to learn things.

The hunters dug a large trap hole around a tree and camouflaged it with leaves and branches. Now they needed to find an animal to catch in the trap. Soon, they found a bear. They went behind the animal and chased him towards the trap. The bear wanted to escape but this was impossible with so many hunters surrounding him.

The huge bear finally fell into the trap. The experienced hunters had built the trap deep enough so that he couldn’t get out. They cheerfully gathered around the trap and attacked the animal with their spears. The animal’s coat was quickly dyed red with its own blood.

Mad felt awful watching the hunters and the helpless animal. He couldn’t speak, and he sat down under a tree. Tara noticed his expression and put her arm on his shoulder.

"What's the matter?"

"I don't know. What I saw disturbed me."

"I told you that. I wish you hadn't come."

"I put myself in the bear's place. People are so helpless without freedom."

"That's how we hunt in the forest. That's how the meat comes. We don't go from door to door begging for meat as Ram does."

"You hunters! Is that how you kill animals? I have prayed to Ninhursag to protect you in the forest for a long time, but I won't anymore."

"You're silly. We must kill to eat. We can't live if we don't eat."

Tara left to help the others as Mad silently stared at the forest floor.

That night, he didn't say a word when hunters talked about the events of the day around the fire. He felt he was very different. When the hunters asked, "What's wrong?" Tara intervened. She didn't want Mad to say something confusing. She said, "Mad is sick. Being in the forest has made him ill."

The next morning the hunters continued to scout and Mad followed them reluctantly a distance behind. Everyone showed signs of shock when an alarmed scout ran back and started waving his arms.

Mad drew closer to hear the story. All the hunters were arguing.

"Who could it be but us? The traces were fresh."

"Let's go back."

"Bad luck. Let's go back!"

"It could be a sign from the goddess. Mad got sick, too."

"What can we tell the people back home if we don't know who he is?"

"He's right. Also, we can't survive without meat."

Another scout came running back screaming, "Hurry! Come see!"

Upon reaching the spot, the hunters saw a dead man. At his side was a long, bloody knife. He wore an outer garment with metal plates mounted on a thick, woolen material, and an iron helmet. Everyone had an opinion about this strange person.

"I told you, this is a sign from the goddess. Let's go back!"

"The gods must have thrown him from the skies!"

"Maybe he is a god!"

"But he looks like us."

"He's dead. This is an omen!"

Iber asked, "How did he die?"

"The animals killed him. Maybe bears," Tara said.

"His outfit looks strange."

"What's that round thing on his head?"

"His knife has blood on it. He must have wounded an animal."

"Should we leave him here?"

"Let's take his knife and clothes and leave him here."

Tara said, "We should respect the dead. Let's cremate him."

Mad wanted to point out something, and said, "There must be other people we don't know about on the earth."

Everyone was quiet. They were afraid Mad was right. If he was, what would they do? They burned the dead person with his belongings, after agreeing unanimously. Mad recited prayers for the dead.

The hunters were glad Mad was with them, because in case of a death he could perform the appropriate rituals. They believed that since they were loyal to the temple and supported the servants there, the Goddess Ninhursag would welcome them and give them meat if they cremated their dead and said prayers for them.

After the funeral, the hunters returned to the village. The people gathered around the temple to hear the hunters' story.

Ram searched for Mad in the crowd. Mad found her and communicated something to her using gestures. She turned to the crowd and raised her baton.

"Don't be afraid," she said. "Ninhursag will protect us. I'll ask her what happened. I'll let you know when I receive an answer."

Mad followed her to the temple. She showed the anger she had hidden from the villagers to Mad behind the closed doors of the temple.

"You are an imbecile. I told you not to go, but you wouldn't listen to me. You asked for a sign from Ninhursag. Do you see it now? You should be happy she didn't take your life."

Mad, who was used to Ram's anger, waited for answers to his own questions. "Ram, are there other people on the earth?"

"Gracious Ninhursag! What does this child talk about?"

"Are there other people outside of Arge?"

Ram, who avoided answering, shook her head, then turned around and began to worship Ninhursag. After a long prayer before Ninhursag, she came back to the fireplace to rest as if nothing had happened.

Mad was thinking, searching deeply for answers. His first thought was about the bear, then the dead man they had found. Maybe Ram was right and these were signs of Ninhursag; perhaps she didn't want Mad to go into the forest so she warned him with these signs. Since the villagers felt the same way, that could be the explanation.

Ram and Mad left the temple, and he called the villagers together to hear what Ram had to say. She interpreted the event according to the signs from Ninhursag to the villagers around the temple:

"The Goddess Ninhursag appointed a man to work on her garden in the sky after his death. But this man revolted against her orders one day. So the goddess sent him back to Arge to punish him. She threw him out from her garden in the sky. To help him protect himself, she gave him a big knife. But this man couldn't get away from the bear. The goddess showed us that she would punish any one disobeying her orders on the earth or in the sky."

Some people, who were persuaded by this explanation, started to discuss and interpret the event among themselves.

"So we will wear nice clothes and iron bowls on our heads after we die."

"Our knives there will be longer and better than they are here."

Mad was worried about his own problems. Staring into Ram's eyes, he said, "So there will be rules and prohibitions in the gardens of the gods."

Ram answered immediately, "Do you think a priest will just waste his time there?"

The villagers forgot about all this after a short time and kept hunting in the forest as usual.

* * *

In two years' time, Mad had become a handsome young man of nineteen years. Since, he didn't have to fight and struggle to survive like the others; he was healthy and robust. Besides everything else, he owed this to Ram. He had never had to work like his friends just to survive. But this meant nothing to Mad, who still wondered about the event in the forest two years ago. Although Ram avoided his questions, Mad believed other people also lived in this world. He tried hard to persuade Ram of this. Verily, these were signs from Ninhursag, that she did not ban him from going into the forest. On the contrary, these signs may even have meant that she wanted them to go out and find other people. But how was he to persuade his mother, who didn't want to lose her only child, and Ram, who was afraid of the temple being without a servant? They didn't see or understand his predicament: Mad was leaving them because they restricted his freedom.

He wanted to run away from everyone and didn't want to surrender to love or magic.

Mad was fighting with such inner conflict that he didn't enjoy being with his mother or praying anymore. He only played sad melodies on his magical tongue. He felt he couldn't explain himself to anyone, but his melodies carried the cries of a slave who wanted to be free. He felt like the trapped bear in the forest. He became an introverted and thoughtful young man, who avoided people.

Sometimes he ate once a day, but only if Ram forced him. Since he felt he was different from other people, being with them and living amongst them was painful. He loved walking alone in the rain and snow. While everyone sheltered from the inclement weather, he went out. While everyone slept at night, he stayed up all night long. He preferred silence when everyone else was talking. He couldn't even smile when everyone laughed. When they cried, he only pitied them. Everyone was afraid of death, but he wanted to die, because he wasn't like them and couldn't behave like them. People, including Ram and his mother, didn't understand him.

Aside from playing the magical tongue, he didn't enjoy anything.

* * *

The snow-covered village was bereft of grass and flowers. The people who named this village Arge must have settled here in the summer or spring, thought Mad, leaving the temple, aggravated as usual.

Since the hunters couldn't go to the forest often during the snows, they made fishing holes on the frozen river. The children also came onto the river to play.

Tara waved at Mad and headed to the river. She liked to walk near the river when she felt melancholic. Mad's cold gaze followed her from the steps of the temple. The children, who had gone to play on the ice, were jumping up and down, checking the strength of the layer of ice, when she heard a terrible scream. She saw a child slip under the ice as it broke away.

She ran to save him without a second thought. She tore off her clothes as she ran. The ice beneath her broke away as she bent down to catch the child's arm, and she found herself in the icy water. She looked around for the child but when she didn't find him, she took a big breath and dove under the surface. The current had already taken the child. Tara's nearly frozen limbs were helpless in the icy water.

Mad and others who heard her cries ran to the river. Mad, flat on his stomach, managed to crawl out to the hole in the ice, reach his mother and drag her back to the bank.

He carried her to her cottage where he put all the leather coverings on her shivering body. He built up a roaring fire, but Tara continued to violently shiver. Her body was purple and her jaw locked. She struggled with death throughout the night.

The family of the missing child kept vigil at her cottage, as they felt responsible. Mad couldn't take his eyes off of his mother and kept praying and begging for help from Ninhursag.

"I promise I won't go anywhere. I'll serve you forever, just save her."

The next day Tara could partially open her eyes. She called Mad, who was overcome with relief. She didn't have the strength to speak, so she gently smiled.

"Don't tire yourself. Try to sleep, Mother."

After two days, Tara began to recover, but she had trouble breathing and coughed a lot.

After a week, she tried to walk, but she was very weak. When the coughing started, she couldn't stand. Her coughing spells increased after seven weeks, exhausting her until she thought she couldn't stand it anymore. She painfully awaited death. Mad didn't even want to think about this.

"No, Mother. You won't die! Ninhursag will cure you, don't worry."

"I'm not scared of death, I just don't want to be away from you," she whispered.

"You won't die! And we won't be separated."

Tara lasted only one more week. When she finally quit coughing, she couldn't move her eyes anymore. When Mad talked to her, there was no answer.

The leather door of the cottage opened. Ram walked in, and asked, "How is she?"

"Not good."

"Take her to the temple."

Mad was happy with that proposition. He had not thought of that before. There was a chance Ninhursag might cure her if he took her to the temple. The goddess had cured him before. He wrapped Tara in leather sheets and took her to the temple.

Tara was placed next to the fireplace. Ram quivered in front of Ninhursag's sculpture while worshipping as she had done when Mad was in danger. After a while, she approached Mad with concern.

"It is not working."

Mad saw this as a disastrous omen, and said, "Where is your magic? If my mother dies, I won't stay in this temple or this village one more day."

Already shaken, Ram was weak against this new threat. "Let me try it once more."

She prostrated in front of Ninhursag and remained very still. It was taking longer this time. Mad was losing faith in Ram's prayers. She'd already said it wasn't working.

Mad, wanting to blame Ram, said, "You don't want her to live. You have been praying for her death since you took me. Your prayers are coming true. You may be happy, but I promise you neither you nor Ninhursag can keep me here if she dies!"

"I'm not a bad person, Mad."

"Then cure her."

"I have tried hard. There are things that even I don't know."

"Where's Ninhursag's magic and power? I've been praying to her for years. Can't she hear me this once?"

He sat on the floor and played his magical tongue.

* * *

When they awoke in the morning, they found that they had fallen asleep while sitting up. Mad checked on Tara who had taken on a darker purplish hue. He started to cry when he realized she was dead. Ram left the temple, grief-stricken.

Mad was crying for his mother, while Ram was mourning the loss of Mad. She hadn't wanted Tara to die because she knew Tara was the reason Mad stayed. Despite his threat, the Goddess Ninhursag hadn't tried to stop this and hadn't saved Tara. Ram was as upset as Mad on this point.

Mad carried Tara's body to the cottage as the villagers watched him pass. Tara was laid out in a corner.

He came out and told the waiting villagers, "Bring all the wood you can find."

He carefully undressed Tara. He didn't feel comfortable with placing his beloved mother on a float in the river. He didn't want to send his mother alone to the places he hoped to see one day. In some cases, the Goddess Ninhursag accepted the souls of the dead without their being cremated on the river. Even if she didn't accept Tara, Mad was going to have things his way as a reaction to her silence.

When the villagers came with bundles of wood, he told them

to carry them inside and opened the door for them. After the villagers unloaded their wood, they tore the leather sheet from the doorframe and placed it on the wood. Then Mad placed his mother's naked body on the leather sheet.

He took the horse out and freed him from his bridle as he whispered, "You've waited for my mother's death to be free, but I can't wait for the temple to collapse." He slapped the horse's backside to make him run for the forest.

A villager brought a burning twig, and Mad lit the funeral pyre. As Tara's body was consumed, he closed his eyes and prayed. After the funeral, he burned the cottage.

He walked back to the temple where he found Ram crying. He sat down next to her and played sad melodies on his magical tongue until sunset.

* * *

A week after Tara's death, Ram finished the customary prayers for the dead and saw Mad's eyes when she turned around. She knew what he wanted to talk about and didn't want to hear it. When he put his hand on her shoulder, she turned and answered, "No," before he could ask.

"Why not?" He took her hands and kissed them. "I don't have anyone now except you, Ram. What would I do if you died? Should I sacrifice myself like you did to Ninhursag? I'm going, but I don't want to leave you upset. I won't feel free if I carry the burden of upsetting you."

"I know you'll leave. I don't want to see you leave."

"Please, Ram!"

"What will happen to the temple if you leave? Ninhursag will take your life before you reach the forest."

"I have to try. If you don't want anything to happen to me, then talk to Ninhursag. I don't feel I have a single friend here. I'm not content. People are scared of me because I know magic and live in the temple. They don't see me as a part of them. I don't feel like I belong here."

"You don't need them. Things you feel you need are only traps

to enslave you. See how free you are! You can talk about leaving. Could you talk like that if your mother was alive? Or if you had a cottage full of children or friends, could you talk like this? Everything you owned would enslave you. True freedom is here, but you don't see it. I don't want to argue any more. I need to visit a sick villager."

Mad fed the fire and sat in such deep thought that he didn't notice Ram's return.

She sat down across from Mad with a piece of meat in her hand, which she sliced and put on a skew. "When are you leaving?"

When Mad didn't reply, she continued, "You don't know either, because you're not ready or you're afraid."

Mad said, "No, I'm not scared."

"Where are you going?"

"Anywhere."

"What do you expect there?"

"I don't know."

"Then let me tell you. There are evil omens and death there," she said as she stared at him with her hollow eyes.

Mad knew that Ram's only secret wasn't the magical tongue. She had many other secrets she kept hidden. "So you know," he said.

"As a priest, you'll learn about reality one day. There is no need for me to hide it any more."

"What kind of reality?" asked Mad as his heart raced. He was so surprised because he wasn't sure about Ram's secrets. "Tell me about it."

"Which one?"

"Any one."

"Do you remember what happened when you went to the forest two years ago?"

"Yes, we found a dead man."

"Who did you think he was, and where do you think he came from?"

"It was Ninhursag's sign. He was a servant from her garden in the sky and was sent here to punish people."

"What kind of sign?"

“A sign banning me from going to the forest.”

Ram replied, “Actually, he was sent from Eridu,” as she looked at the meat in her hands.

“Where is Eridu?”

“The land of God Enki.”

“So I was right!” Mad stood up in excitement. “There are other people and gods in the world.”

“Yes, there are,” Ram answered calmly.

“Just like Ninhursag.”

“No, those gods are different. They do black magic and kill people. And they could kill you.”

“Why do they kill people? Why would they kill me? I don’t do black magic.”

“Those gods are proud of the number of people they kill and enslave. They would either kill or enslave you if you go there.”

“What’s a slave?”

“Think about the ox in the field or your mother’s horse.”

“No one can use me like that.”

“Believe me, Mad, you can’t find anywhere more free than here.”

Mad was hearing this for the first time, so the more Ram revealed, the more astonished he was. There must be many other things that were kept as secrets. Leaving this village without learning these would be a mistake.

“Why was that man in the forest sent?” he asked.

“The God Enki fights in wars to gain more slaves. He needs more soldiers and long knives for his wars. So he sends his men to find iron ore.”

“And we have iron mines.”

“Yes. That man learned that and would have told the God Enki, but bears and other magic in the forest stopped him.”

“So, Ninhursag also punishes.”

“But only to protect us.”

Mad stopped for a while to digest everything he had heard. Ram thought she had finally changed his mind and asked, “Do you still want to leave?”

He said, “Yes, and I’d like to take you as well as Ninhursag

with me.”

“Are you afraid of going alone?” Ram asked.

“No,” he replied. His reason for taking them wasn’t fear, but to have the Goddess Ninhursag protect the people there.

“I don’t have the strength to leave this temple.”

“What about Ninhursag?”

“Ninhursag is Arge’s goddess. In Eridu, the God Enki rules.”

“Will we wait for Enki to find us? What if he sends his soldiers again?”

“Don’t worry. Ninhursag always protects us.”

“I don’t want to wait. I want to see Enki’s magic,” said Mad, revealing his intention.

Ram changed her method as she saw the direction he was taking. “Ninhursag wouldn’t let you go. She chose you as a servant and won’t let you be Enki’s slave.”

“No one can enslave me, including Enki. I’ll break his black magic.”

“How?”

Mad couldn’t answer so he remained silent. Honestly, he didn’t know how to break the black magic of Enki; he just wanted to show her how much he wanted to go. He knew he had to go, but how was he to protect himself from Enki?

Ram saw that Mad was affected by her suggestions. She said, “The villagers are upset with you.”

“Why?”

“You told them you would leave.”

“So what?”

“If you leave, Ninhursag will be angered, Mad, and want to punish you. If she can’t find you, she will punish the villagers for letting you go. That’s why the villagers are scared of the calamity of your leaving.”

“Who says these things?”

“I told you, the villagers. And they’re not wrong.”

“Do you believe this, too?”

“I don’t know. All I know is I won’t let you go without a sign from Ninhursag.”

Ram took a leather sheet and settled herself next to the fire-

place. She felt relieved and relaxed. Since she had scared Mad, he wouldn't leave Arge. Before going to sleep she told him, "Don't tell anyone the things I told you. That is our secret."

"Why don't you want them to know these things?"

"Because the goddess wants it this way."

He was confused as he wondered more about Enki. Why did he enslave people? Did he get his magical strength from the slaves? Why did people agree to be slaves? Perhaps if there weren't any slaves, there wouldn't be any magic. Maybe all this was Ram's foolishness. Was she confusing him to keep him here? Why does Ninhursag protect people here but not in other places? What did Ninhursag think about this?

Something was strange, but he didn't know what was true and what was make-believe. Who could help him to find the truth? Ram was telling him things, but she had her own agenda. Maybe she was telling the truth. Maybe he shouldn't go away. Was it true that Eridu and other places had black magic? Or should he take the challenge and go see for himself? Being afraid meant staying in this temple forever.

While staring at the fire, he felt like he was falling into a dark abyss of indecision. He looked at Ninhursag's corner and went before her to worship.

He sat in front of Ninhursag, fixed his eyes on hers and started playing the magical tongue. He remembered Tar running toward the forest. He couldn't even be as brave as a horse. He wished he hadn't listened to Ram today. He was going to leave early in the morning. He kept looking at Ninhursag's eyes. Why was she doing this to him? He felt like he had to stay in the temple forever. Verily, Ninhursag had punished him by choosing him. He was the living dead servant of the temple.

He was crying for his dream of freedom. He stopped playing melodies as he buried his freedom in the temple. He looked at Ninhursag and said, "Enki's black magic couldn't upset me more than this. What's the difference between you and him?" He fell asleep next to the fire, exhausted.

The inside of the temple was well lit when Ram awoke. She was surprised when she didn't find Mad in his place, but was relieved

when she found him worshipping in front of Ninhursag. She touched him on his shoulder with her old hands.

“Let’s refresh the fire.”

Mad remained motionless, which forced her to say, “Go bring wood.”

Ram started feeling uneasy as he seemed to be in a trance, staring into Ninhursag’s eyes.

“What are you looking at? Are you crazy?”

When she shook him by the shoulders, he kept looking at Ninhursag and said, “I think so!”

“What’s the matter with you?”

“I saw Ninhursag.”

“What?”

“Yes, she talked to me.”

“What did she say?”

He turned his head slowly and said, “Ninhursag talked to me.”

Ram couldn’t believe his words.

“Why didn’t I hear it then?”

“I saw her in my dream. She wants me to leave.”

“What kind of a dream was this? Could it be Enki’s magic?”

“Ninhursag gave me a mission.”

“What mission? You’re not even a priest yet.”

“Ninhursag doesn’t want me to be a priest. She wants to send me to Eridu.”

“Why didn’t the goddess tell me this?”

“Because she wants it to be a secret.”

“Why a secret?”

“So that Enki won’t try to stop me!”

“Will you hide it from me, too?”

“No. I can tell you. You’re loyal to her.”

“Tell me about your mission.” Ram was wondering about the truth.

Mad started telling her about his dream:

“In my dream, the temple was dark. I was playing the magical tongue in front of Ninhursag and weeping. I kept staring at her. At that moment the sculpture started to move. As her eyes opened, light came into the temple like the sun rising behind the

hills. The stars in the goddess' eyes turned into sparks covering her body. I couldn't take my eyes away from hers. It was like I had become Ninhursag. I was seeing myself with her eyes."

He continued, "The sparks from her eyes were reflected in mine. I never wanted that moment to end. Her eyes had the most powerful magic. This was Ninhursag. This was my goddess. I couldn't say anything and lost myself in her eyes."

He stopped to breathe, and said, "I let myself into the river of dreams. I wanted to let my spirit enter those eyes and be free of my physical body. I was one of the shooting stars in those eyes and was falling down fast from the sky. That instant felt like eternity to me. Ninhursag spoke to me in a voice sweeter than the melody of my magical tongue. She told me she was giving me a powerful magic, and now I was to go to Eridu and tell Enki that I have come to save Innana, the Goddess of Uruk.

"She was talking so fast. I asked who Innana was. Ninhursag said, 'A long time ago the Goddess of Uruk, Innana, wanted to choose a spouse for herself. She was going to choose between the shepherd God Tammuz and Enki. Enki was the God of wisdom. The monks he had trained had created a big city in Eridu and they were very powerful. Innana wanted to bring this power and civilization to Uruk.

" 'So, she thought about choosing Enki. But her emotions led her to marry Tammuz instead. Enki was able to read the hearts of the gods. He offered many presents to Tammuz to reject Innana. Tammuz finally ceased to resist Enki and refused Innana.

" 'But Enki blamed Tammuz for stealing gifts and imprisoned him seven levels below the surface of the earth, in accordance with the Divine council. Goddess Innana couldn't believe Enki had done such a thing, so she came to Eridu to bargain with Enki.

" 'In accordance with their agreement, Innana gave up her divine powers and took off her clothing and jewelry. She surrendered to Enki like any other human being. Enki let Tammuz go, but imprisoned Innana instead. Tammuz went back to Uruk but didn't do anything to save Innana. In addition, he was unfaithful to her. Innana was a prisoner of her love in Eridu.'

"I asked her where Eridu was. She said, 'I'll lead you there. Be

careful and patient, because the god's have many tricks.'

"Ninhursag continued, 'Don't ever take Enki for granted. He has sea dragons and soldiers with horses. He lives in his temple behind high walls. He has knowledgeable priests, who know how to write and calculate. They have laws and they know about the skies. They use all of these in magic. They make decisions to occupy other people's land in their counsel. They fight and kill people to occupy their land. They need iron for their weapons. They get drunk with the date wine they make in the temple and entertain themselves by using women as sexual objects.'

"Where do these monks get their power from?" I asked.

"From Enki! Enki taught them wisdom. The monks regulate people's lives with laws. People don't have any freedom except as the law allows. The monks redistributed the jobs in the city. Everyone has to serve in the temple. People have to obey the laws in order to live, have shelter and earn silver.'

"Why didn't you tell me this before?" I questioned her.

"It wasn't the right time.'

"Is it the right time now?" I asked.

"I'm telling you, don't take Enki and his monks for granted!' concluded the goddess.

"After Ninhursag had finished talking, the light disappeared and she became a sculpture again. The temple was dark once more. I awoke and came here to look into those magical eyes. I couldn't straighten myself out. While still dreaming about her eyes, you woke me."

Ram was composed even after the wondrous things Mad had told her. "What is the strongest magic Ninhursag has given you?"

"I don't know. I didn't ask."

"Really?" Ram seemed not to believe Mad, but he needed her support.

"Believe me, Ram!"

Actually, Ram had reasons for not believing Mad. She said, "It was just a dream."

He told her, "Don't forget. This is our secret."

Mad sat in the same place without moving for the rest of the day. He kept trying to recapture the feelings he had felt as he sta-

red into Ninhursag's eyes in his dream.

Ram forced him to come nearer the fire that night. He fell asleep hungry. Ram's disbelief had upset him.

He had promised himself before going to sleep, "I'll go to Enki and save Goddess Innana. Then I'll come home free."

* * *

Three days later, Mad watched a log float down the river until it disappeared. He was happy with what he had figured out. He ran to the vineyard and climbed over the fence. Then he stopped; he didn't want to reveal anything to the others. He assumed his usual dismal expression and went to the temple.

Ram's and his arguments resumed as usual by the fireside that night. "I know you don't believe me."

"I believe you, but I don't believe this is a sign for you to leave."

"So? What Ninhursag told me is important. How could I know about Uruk and the others without Ninhursag telling me?"

"I won't be persuaded unless I see the signs with my own eyes. I've been the servant in this temple my whole life. Why would she talk to you instead?"

"Maybe Ninhursag brought me to the temple for this mission."

"Why would she send a mortal like you against Enki?"

"She told me she has given me the greatest magic. I have the strength to beat Enki."

"What's that magic, then?"

"I told you, I forgot to ask. The important thing is that I have the magic."

"How can magic you don't know anything about help you?"

"Ninhursag told me she would guide me."

"I'm afraid of your dream," admitted Ram. "Perhaps this is one of Enki's tricks. You don't have any witnesses." Mad answered, "You didn't have any either when you cured me."

"But I cured you. Isn't it enough?"

"Wasn't Ninhursag brought here because of a dream?"

“That was different.” Mad stood up in anger. “This is different; that’s different. I

see you won’t believe me. I’m going out for some fresh air.”

As he walked through the village square, he saw Ram watching him from the steps of the temple. He stared back at her. Ram felt ashamed and went back inside.

After she closed the temple door, Mad walked among the cottages. After a short time, a villager brought Mad the long rope he had asked for. The villager asked him what he was going to do with so much rope.

“I don’t know. Ram will try some new magic. It’s a secret. She didn’t tell even me.”

“I’m sick and only want it to go away.”

“Ram is good at magic, don’t worry! Before morning you will be cured, but you must hurry and seek her assistance.”

“Thanks. Good bye.”

A group of concerned villagers gathered in front of the temple as Ram raged, “If you don’t find Mad, Ninhursag will be angry! We will suffer every sort of disaster, and she will punish whoever helped him escape.”

* * *

Mad could see Ram standing there and looking at him when his eyes had only half-opened from what seemed like a deep sleep. Ram rubbed his body and prayed. Seeing Mad open his eyes relieved her. She fed the fire after covering him with leather sheets. That night the temple was quiet.

Mad woke up again the next evening.

“So the hunters found me on the shore?”

“Yes, I’m glad they found you. Otherwise, you would have died. I have warned you so many times.”

Mad confessed slowly like a criminal. “I made a raft out of the fence in the garden, but it fell apart as the ropes came untied. The current was too strong; I didn’t have the strength to swim. I recited all the prayers I knew since I thought I was going to die. The last thing I remember is being pulled from the water.”