

In The Image Of Man - Louisa, Year 11, NSW

In the beginning, there was Eve and Mada, they were the first and last.

Their flesh, unbroken and plump in their innocence and savagery. Their bare feet lay free in the open air, the grass would climb over their toes, forming a cocoon over them as if to protect their innocence.

Mada and Eve were covered in nothing but soft skin, free from the constraints that the apple taught was right, was normal. Their heads held crowns of knitted flowers and grass. Their smiles clutched onto dirt, housing it in the small wrinkle lines that pittered their faces.

It was good. There was no shame in the wild, no sin in the soil.

Eve stood unruly, her hair frayed like the leaves of the trees around her, her shoulders stood straight as if carved from the very bark that held the forest upright. Mada was her perfect half; his face was rich like fertile soil, deep and full of life, his nose protruded out like the rocky cliff that hung over Eden.

One day, the pair felt a stirring deep within, a longing for a depth they had never known, as if their lives in Eden could no longer contain the restless pulse of their desire, as if a silent slither of a whisper was pulling them away.

So they left on a walk away from Eden. Eve held a stick. It extended from her arm as she swung it around. Almost melodically, she waved it, the air subverting around it. Mada wandered to a similar beat. As if they could hear something no one else could.

Their dance carried them up a hill, but something had shifted. The grass underfoot withered at their touch, slinking away, the further they strayed from Eden.

Eve's stick hung limp in her hand, now heavy. Mada's steps grew sluggish, dragging across the ground. In front of them, the forest began to fade. Leaves browned, bark peeled like skin, and the air lost its song. The birds no longer called, the brook no longer bubbled. It was as if something unseen was feeding on the edge of Eden, draining the freedom and life it offered.

Suddenly, the earth cracked open.

A path emerged, long and winding, paved not with soil but scales of stone, slick and wet. It slithered forward like a serpent shedding its skin, leading toward a distant grey glow that pulsed like a dying star. The trees near the edge twisted, their trunks curving inward as though recoiling from the city's breath. The dirt slid off the crevices, repulsed by the terrifying song that enveloped the city.

Still, Mada and Eve stepped forward, unable to control the irresistible pull.

The scent of flowers was gone; now the air carried metal, smoke, and something sweet and ripe that stung the nose. The walls were blistered with glass and chrome, everything scrubbed and flawless, empty of any character. Each brick sat in place like a censored thought. The air was sterile, humming with an off-key trumpet song.

A crooked sign greeted them:

“Welcome to the Big Apple.”

Mada and Eve, ignorant to the silent screech that assaulted their ears, stared at the jagged crevice that revealed New York, that spilled fluorescent lights of reds and greens like venom.

Eve wandered away from Mada, she looked at the fluorescent lights that assaulted her eyes, yelling at her to come closer, to see more. As Mada followed behind, he stared at the people around them. They were uniformed, straight and proper. They were... perfect. Unlike Eve's hair, which lay wavy and tree-like, the women's hair here was straight, sitting around their faces as if forced into straight rows, disciplined if they moved.

As they continued walking around the Big Apple, they wandered towards two women. They looked so alike. Their dark black hair lay seated on their shoulders. They grinned, soft musical grins that dripped with hope.

Immediately the two women greeted them. “Hi, I'm Msinodeh, and this is my sister Hedonism,” Msinodeh whispered, her soft voice leaking out a hushed harmony.

Msinodeh was alluring, she was bent over, poised in a way that made the graffiti behind her almost invisible, hidden behind her voracious presence. Her chest stood unnaturally proud, like soldiers saluting the sun. Her skirt sat obscurely short, its ripe, red fabric pointed like an arrow to her vagina, which she considered a forbidden fruit. She glided, every step an unholy hymn to indulgence. The city seemed to lean in, holding its breath around her as she strutted in search of more. More power. More attention. More.

Hedonism was different, she aimed to exude pure luxury. She had gold splintered along her neck like it had melted there in worship. Her nails were sharp, clawing at the bag that dripped over her shoulder like a trophy. Her skirt hung lower than her sister's, draping over her knees. Around her ears hung droplets of red, like pieces of fruit hanging from a vine. Similar to her sister she breathed in as if in hope that she could catch something on the edge of her breath. Anything.

Despite their pleasant appearances, their captivating, convicting bodies, their faces lacked substance, their eyes full of fruitless air. As if you got too close to them, you would see their rotten inside and smell their stale core.

The girls laughed, chemically, their feet bent inwards as Mada and Eve stepped around them to a glowing box of singing sin.

Mada and Eve entered the grocery store, their toes suddenly assaulted by the cold concrete. They inhaled the cold air, its synthetic odour protruding into their noses. Overwhelmed by the sight that surrounded them, they stalked the aisles, trapped by the invasion of thousands of screaming products.

The grocery store stood as a temple for the two, filled with polished shelves that stood in military precision.

Here was where Eden's beauty lay, enthralled in this box of lights and air conditioning. Here lay Eve's savage hair, her brute hands. Here lay Mada's fertile garden, his sun-scorched skin. All their work on the garden had been tamed, processed and shrink-wrapped.

Their feet adjusted to the now hard, resentful ground, their toes gripped by the stifling chill of cold air conditioning.

Still, nothing felt off about the grocery store. Not yet.

Continuing around the store, Eve stared at the plethora of items strewn across the shelves. Glancing at a carton of eggs, Eve watched as two girls walked by to a lip gloss stand not too far away. One called out, "Consumerism, look, it's apple flavoured lip gloss!"

Consumerism strutted over, her hands already clutching more than she could carry, but of course, it wasn't enough. Her fingers dipped into the red smear with the same ease Eve once used to dig for berries. The lipgloss gleamed cold, synthetic, catching the artificial light like sugar glass.

The girl's shirt clung to her ribs like bark peeled too early from a tree, her stomach bare, her body thin and stiff inside. Her clothes looked as though they had been borrowed from an escort agency. Her grin stretched wide, tugging against skin too young for creases, yet there they were, soft lines already filled with the weight of powdered dust.

The music that now caressed Eve's ears was empty, futile with its explicit words and forceful beats. Eve's hand hung tightly around her muscular body. The air around her compressed her Limbs.

Something else had caught Mada's eyes, and with heavy steps he lazed away. He was watching a tall man, stiff in a suit, hair slicked to his head with an enormous phone attached to his ear like some ostentatious ornament. The air itself seemed fearful of his gaze. The woman next to him looked like his prize. As if her slim figure, petite face and perfect stature was moulded in order to please him.

Mada watched as the woman glanced around the room, her gaze spilling with insecurity. She stood hollow next to the man beside her, biting her lips as if searching for something to chew, to bite. Before she could notice Mada looking at her, she glanced away, enthralled by someone calling out, "Obsession, come here".

As she slunk away, her teeth dragged along her lip once more, maybe she wasn't reminiscing a bite, but regretting it.

As Mada and Eve met again and slowly began their ascent to leave the shop their eyes balanced upon one small apple.

As the pair approached it, a small dent seemed to appear. The closer they got to it, the more they saw the yellow indent that exuded a promise of pure emptiness.