

Egg

The Story of the Egg,
and of Oryx and Crake, and
how they made People and
Animals; and of the
Chaos; and of Snowman-
the-Jimmy; and of the
Smelly Bone and the
coming of the Two Bad Men

In the beginning, you lived inside the Egg. That is where Crake made you.

Yes, good, kind Crake. Please stop singing or I can't go on with the story.

The Egg was big and round and white, like half a bubble, and there were trees inside it with leaves and grass and berries. All the things you like to eat.

Yes, it rained inside the Egg.

No, there was not any thunder.

Because Crake did not want any thunder inside the Egg.

And all around the Egg was the chaos, with many, many people who were not like you.

Because they had an extra skin. That skin is called *clothes*. Yes, like mine.

And many of them were bad people who did cruel and hurtful things to one another, and also to the animals. Such as . . . We don't need to talk about those things right now.

And Oryx was very sad about that, because the animals were her Children. And Crake was sad because Oryx was sad.

And the chaos was everywhere outside the Egg. But inside the Egg there was no chaos. It was peaceful there.

And Oryx came every day to teach you. She taught you what to eat, she taught you to make fire, she taught you about the animals, her Children. She taught you to purr if a person is hurt. And Crake watched over you.

Yes, good, kind Crake. Please stop singing. You don't have to sing every time. I'm sure Crake likes it, but he also likes this story and he wants to hear the rest.

Then one day Crake got rid of the chaos and the hurtful people, to make Oryx happy, and to clear a safe place for you to live in.

Yes, that did make things smell very bad for a while.

And then Crake went to his own place, up in the sky, and Oryx went with him.

I don't know why they went. It must have been a good reason. And they left Snowman-the-Jimmy to take care of you, and he brought you to the seashore. And on Fish Days you caught a fish for him, and he ate it.

I know you would never eat a fish, but Snowman-the-Jimmy is different.

Because he has to eat a fish or he would get very sick.

Because that is the way he is made.

Then one day Snowman-the-Jimmy went to see Crake. And

when he came back, there was a hurt on his foot. And you purred on it, but it did not get better.

And then the two bad men came. They were left over from the chaos.

I don't know why Crake didn't clear them away. Maybe they were hiding under a bush, so he didn't see them. But they'd caught Amanda, and they were doing cruel and hurtful things to her.

We don't need to talk about those things right now.

And Snowman-the-Jimmy tried to stop them. And then I came, and Ren, and we caught the two bad men and tied them to a tree with a rope. Then we sat around the fire and ate soup. Snowman-the-Jimmy ate the soup, and Ren, and Amanda. Even the two bad men ate the soup.

Yes, there was a bone in the soup. Yes, it was a smelly bone.

I know you do not eat a smelly bone. But many of the Children of Oryx like to eat such bones. Bobkittens eat them, and rakunks, and pigeons, and liobams. They all eat smelly bones. And bears eat them.

I will tell you what a bear is later.

We don't need to talk any more about smelly bones right now.

And as they were all eating the soup, you came with your torches, because you wanted to help Snowman-the-Jimmy, because of his hurt foot. And because you could tell there were some women who were blue, so you wanted to mate with them.

You didn't understand about the bad men, and about why they had a rope on them. It is not your fault they ran away into the forest. Don't cry.

Yes, Crake must be very angry with the bad men. Perhaps he will send some thunder.

Yes, good, kind Crake.

Please stop singing.

Rope

Rope

About the events of that evening – the events that set human malice loose in the world again – Toby later made two stories. The first story was the one she told out loud, to the Children of Crake; it had a happy outcome, or as happy as she could manage. The second, for herself alone, was not so cheerful. It was partly about her own idiocy, her failure to pay attention, but also it was about speed. Everything had happened so quickly.

She'd been tired, of course; she must have been suffering from an adrenalin plunge. After all, she'd been going strong for two days with a lot of stress and not much to eat.

The day before, she and Ren had left the safety of the MaddAddam cobb-house enclave that sheltered the few survivors from the global pandemic that had wiped out humanity. They'd been tracking Ren's best friend, Amanda, and they'd found her just in time because the two Painballers who'd been using her had almost used her up. Toby was familiar with the ways of such men: she'd been almost killed by one of them before she'd become a God's Gardener. Anyone who'd survived Painball more than once had been reduced to the reptilian brain. Sex until you were worn to a fingernail was their mode; after that, you were dinner. They liked the kidneys.

Toby and Ren had crouched in the shrubbery while the Painballers argued over the rakunk they were eating, and whether to attack the Crakers, and what to do next with Amanda. Ren had been scared silly; Toby hoped she wouldn't faint, but she couldn't worry about that because she was nerv-ing herself to fire. Which to shoot first, the bearded one or the shorthair? Would the other have time to grab their spraygun? Amanda wouldn't be able to help, or even run: they had a rope around her neck, with the other end tied to the leg of the bearded one. A wrong move by Toby, and Amanda would be dead.

Then a strange man had shambled out of the bushes, sun-burnt and scabby and naked and clutching a spraygun, and had almost shot everyone in sight, Amanda included. But Ren had screamed and run into the clearing, and that had been enough of a distraction. Toby had stepped out, rifle aimed; Amanda had torn free; and the Painballers had been subdued with the aid of some groin kicks and a rock, and tied up with their own rope and with strips torn from the pink AnooYoo Spa top-to-toe sun coverup that Toby had been wearing.

Ren had then busied herself with Amanda, who was possibly in shock, and also with the scabby naked man, whom she called Jimmy. She'd wrapped him up in the rest of the top-to-toe, talking to him softly; it seemed he was a long-ago boyfriend of hers.

Now that things were tidier, Toby had felt she could relax. She'd steadied herself with a Gardener breathing exercise, timing it to the soothing rhythm of the nearby waves – *wish-wash, wish-wash* – until her heart had slowed to normal. Then she'd cooked a soup.

And then the moon had risen.

The rising moon signalled the beginning of the God's Gardeners Feast of Saint Julian and All Souls: a celebration of God's tenderness and compassion for all creatures. *The universe is held in the hollow of His hand, as Saint Julian of Norwich taught us in her mystic vision so long ago. Forgiveness must be offered, loving kindness must be practised, circles must be unbroken. All souls means all, no matter what they may have done. At least from moonrise to moonset.*

Once the Gardener Adams and Eves taught you something, you stayed taught. It would have been next to impossible for her to kill the Painballers on that particular night – butcher them in cold blood, since by that time the two of them were firmly roped to a tree.

Amanda and Ren had done the roping. They'd been to Gardener school together where they'd done a lot of crafts with recycled materials, so they were proficient at knotwork. Those guys looked like macramé.

On that blessed Saint Julian's evening, Toby had set the weaponry to one side – her own antiquated rifle and the Painballers' spraygun, and Jimmy's spraygun as well. Then she'd played the kindly godmother, ladling out the soup, dividing up the nutrients for all to share.

She must have been mesmerized by the spectacle of her own nobility and kindness. Getting everyone to sit in a circle around the cozy evening fire and drink soup together – even Amanda, who was so traumatized she was almost catatonic; even Jimmy, who was shivering with fever and talking to a dead woman who was standing in the flames. Even the two Painballers: did she really think they would have a conversion experience and start hugging bunnies? It's a wonder she didn't sermonize as she doled out the bone soup. *Some for you, and some for you, and some for you! Shed the hatred and viciousness! Come into the circle of light!*

But hatred and viciousness are addictive. You can get high on them. Once you've had a little, you start shaking if you don't get more.

As they were eating the soup, they'd heard voices approaching through the shoreline trees. It was the Children of Crake, the Crakers – the strange gene-spliced quasi-humans who lived by the sea. They were filing through the trees, carrying pitch-pine torches and singing their crystalline songs.

Toby had seen these people only briefly, and in daytime. Gleaming in the moonlight and the torchlight, they were even more beautiful. They were all colours – brown, yellow, black, white – and all heights, but each was perfect. The women were smiling serenely; the men were in full courtship mode, holding out bunches of flowers, their naked bodies like a fourteen-year-old's comic-book rendition of how bodies ought to be, each muscle and ripple defined and glistening. Their bright blue and unnaturally large penises were wagging from side to side like the tails of friendly dogs.

Afterwards, Toby could never quite remember the sequence of events, if you could call it a sequence. It had been more like a pleebland street brawl: rapid action, tangled bodies, a cacophony of voices.

Where is the blue? We can smell the blue! Look, there is Snowman! He is thin! He is very sick!

Ren: *Oh shit, it's the Crakers. What if they want . . . Look at their . . . Crap!*

The Craker women, spotting Jimmy: *Let us help Snowman! He needs us to purr!*

The Craker men, sniffing Amanda: *She is the blue one! She*

smells blue! She wants to mate with us! Give her the flowers! She will be happy!

Amanda, scared: *Stay away! I don't . . . Ren, help me! Four large, beautiful, flower-toting naked men close in on her. Toby! Get them away from me! Shoot them!*

The Craker women: *She is sick. First we have to purr on her. To make her better. And give her a fish?*

The Craker men: *She is blue! She is blue! We are happy! Sing to her!*

The other one is blue also.

That fish is for Snowman. We must keep that fish.

Ren: *Amanda, maybe just take the flowers, or they might get mad or something . . .*

Toby, her voice thin and ineffectual: *Please, listen, stand back, you're frightening . . .*

What is this? Is this a bone? Several of the women, peering into the soup pot: Are you eating this bone? It smells bad.

We do not eat bones. Snowman does not eat bones, he eats a fish. Why do you eat a smelly bone?

It is Snowman's foot that is smelling like a bone. A bone left by vultures. Oh Snowman, we must purr on your foot!

Jimmy, feverish: *Who are you? Oryx? But you're dead. Everyone's dead. Everyone in the whole world, they're all dead . . .* He starts crying.

Do not be sad, Oh Snowman. We have come to help.

Toby: *Maybe you shouldn't touch . . . that's infected . . . he needs . . .*

Jimmy: *Ow! Fuck!*

Oh Snowman, do not kick. It will hurt your foot. Several of them begin to purr, making a noise like a kitchen mixer.

Ren, calling for help: *Toby! Toby! Hey! Let go of her!*

Toby looks over, across the fire: Amanda has disappeared in a flickering thicket of naked male limbs and backs. Ren throws herself into the sprawl and is quickly submerged.

Toby: *Wait! Don't . . . Stop that!* What should she do? This is a major cultural misunderstanding. If only she had a pail of cold water!

Muffled cries. Toby rushes to help, but then:

One of the Painballers: *Hey you! Over here!*

These ones smell very bad. They smell like dirty blood. Where is the blood?

What is this? This is a rope. Why are they tied up with a rope?

Snowman showed us rope before, when he lived in a tree. Rope is for making his house. Oh Snowman, why is the rope tied to these men?

This rope is hurting these ones. We must take it away.

A Painballer: *Yeah, that's right. We're in fucking agony.* (Groans.)

Toby: *Don't touch them, they'll . . .*

The second Painballer: *Fucking hurry up, Blueballs, before that old bitch . . .*

Toby: *No! Don't untie . . . Those men will . . .*

But it was already too late. Who knew the Crakers could be so quick with knots?

Procession

The two men were gone into the darkness, leaving behind them a snarl of rope and a scattering of embers. Idiot, Toby thought. You should have been merciless. Bashed their heads in with a rock, slit their throats with your knife, not even wasted any bullets on them. You were a dimwit, and your failure to act verges on criminal negligence.

It was hard to see – the fire was fading – but she made a quick inventory: at least her rifle was still there, a small mercy. But the Painballer spraygun was missing. Pinhead, she told herself. So much for your Saint Julian and the loving kindness of the universe.

Amanda and Ren were clinging to each other and crying, with several of the beautiful Craker women stroking them anxiously. Jimmy had toppled over and was talking to a bed of coals. The sooner they could all get back to the MaddAddam cobb house, the better, because they were sitting ducks out here in the dark. The Painballers might come back for the remaining weapons, and if that happened it was already clear to Toby that these Crakers would be no help. *Why did you hit me? Crake will be angry! He will send a thunder!* If she downed a Painballer, the Crakers would throw themselves between her and the finishing

shot. *Oh, you have made bang, a man fell down, there is a hole in him, blood is coming out! He is hurt, we must help him!*

But even if the Painballers held off for the moment, there were other predators in the forest. The bobkittens, the wolvogs, the liobams; worse, the enormous feral pigs. And now, with the people gone from the cities and roads, who knew how soon the bears would begin to come down from the north?

‘We need to go now,’ she told the Crakers. Several heads turned, several sets of green eyes were looking at her. ‘Snowman must come with us.’

The Crakers all started talking at once. ‘Snowman must stay with us! We must put Snowman back into his tree.’ ‘That is what he likes, he likes a tree.’ ‘Yes, only he can talk with Crake.’ ‘Only he can tell the words of Crake, about the Egg.’ ‘About the chaos.’ ‘About Oryx, who made the animals.’ ‘About how Crake made the chaos go away.’ ‘Good, kind Crake.’ They began singing.

‘We need to get medicine,’ said Toby desperately. ‘Otherwise, Jimmy – otherwise, Snowman might die.’ Blank stares. Did they even understand what dying was?

‘What is a *Jimmy*?’ Puzzled frowns.

She’d made an error: wrong name. ‘Jimmy is another name for Snowman.’

‘Why?’ ‘Why is it another name?’ ‘What does a *Jimmy* mean?’ This seemed to interest them much more than death. ‘Is it the pink skin on Snowman?’ ‘I want a Jimmy too!’ This last from a small boy.

How to explain? ‘Jimmy is a name. Snowman has two names.’

‘His name is Snowman-the-Jimmy?’

‘Yes,’ said Toby, because it was now.

‘Snowman-the-Jimmy, Snowman-the-Jimmy,’ they repeated to one another.

‘Why are there two?’ one asked, but the others had switched their attention to the next bewildering word. ‘What is *medicine*?’

‘Medicine is something to help Snowman-the-Jimmy get better,’ she ventured. Smiles: they liked that idea.

‘Then we will come too,’ said the one who seemed in charge – a tall, brownish-yellow man with a Roman nose. ‘We will carry Snowman-the-Jimmy.’

Two of the Craker men lifted Jimmy easily. Toby was alarmed by his eyes: by the thin slits of white shining between his lids. ‘Flying,’ he said as the Crakers swung him into the air.

Toby found Jimmy’s spraygun and gave it to Ren to carry, clicking the safety on first: the girl didn’t know how to use the thing – why would she? – but it would be sure to come in handy later on.

She’d assumed that only the two Craker volunteers would come back to the cobb house, but the whole crowd tagged along, children included. They all wished to be close to Snowman. The men took turns carrying him; the rest held their torches high, singing from time to time in their eerie waterglass voices.

Four of the women walked with Ren and Amanda, patting them and touching their arms or hands. ‘Oryx will take care of you,’ they said to Amanda.

‘Don’t let any of those blue dicks fucking touch her again,’ said Ren to them fiercely.

‘What is *blue dicks*?’ they asked, bewildered. ‘What is *fucking touch*?’

‘Just don’t, or else,’ said Ren. ‘Or it’s trouble!’

‘Oryx will make her happy,’ said the women, though they sounded unsure. ‘What is *trouble*?’

‘I’m okay,’ said Amanda faintly to Ren. ‘What about you?’

'You are not fucking okay! Let's just get you back to where the MaddAddams are,' said Ren. 'They've got beds, and a water pump, and everything. We can clean you up. Jimmy too.'

'Jimmy?' said Amanda. 'That's Jimmy? I thought he'd be dead, like everyone else.'

'Yeah, so did I. But a lot of people aren't. Well, some people. Zeb's not, and Rebecca, and you and me, and Toby, and . . .'

'Where did those two guys go?' said Amanda. 'The Painballers. I should've brained them when I had the chance.' She laughed a little, blowing off pain in her old pleebat way. 'How far is it?' she said.

'They can carry you,' said Ren.

'No. I'm fine.'

Moths fluttered around the torches, overhead leaves riffled in the night breeze. How long did they walk? To Toby it seemed like hours, but time is unclear in moonlight. They were heading west, through the Heritage Park; behind them the sound of the waves receded. Though there was a path, she was unsure of the way, but the Crakers appeared to know where they were going.

She listened for sounds, off among the trees – a footfall, a stick cracking, a grunt – keeping herself to the rear of the procession, her rifle at the ready. There was a croaking, a chirp or two: some amphibian, a night bird stirring. She was conscious of the darkness at her back: her shadow stretched huge, blending with the deeper shadows behind.