

# Under the Bodhi Tree

*by Keppiehed*

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

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**Prompt:** "Nirvana"

**A/N:** Written for week #4 at Brigit's Flame. I must acknowledge the editing work that Semptra21 provided for me. In addition to the excellent technical advice, she was an enormous support for me, and I have to say thank you to her for the in-depth advice and encouragement she gave me. Rarely have I had the benefit of such thoughtful work on my behalf, and I know how lucky I am to have someone in my corner helping me make my work the best it can be.

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It was a far blue sky, blinding in its lucence. Mara hadn't expected that.

She blinked, surprised at having any expectation. She didn't know where she was, couldn't identify her location. How could she have any preconceived notions of what it would be like when she arrived here?

Mara gazed at the sky, still spellbound. She wasn't anywhere near home, but she wasn't afraid. It was unfamiliar, which ought to scare her, but there was calm.

A vast horizon of blue, unbroken save for ... Mara blinked, trying to identify what could be marring the landscape. A tree, perhaps. Some sort of tree.

Mara walked. The distance wasn't too great. The air shimmered with heat, but she was able to bear it. It was grass beneath her feet, not a desert landscape after all. As she approached the tree, she could see how green the leaves were. The trunk was a twisted marvel, a thing of beauty to behold. It was unlike the trees from Vermont, her home state. This was no oak or maple or ash. The trunk was split at the base and twined around itself in an elaborate, gnarled puzzle. *Is that a heart shape in the base?*

"It is." A laugh.

Mara turned, startled. She had missed the man standing just around the trunk.

"I didn't mean to disturb you. Please, continue your observation."

Mara craned her neck up to see the canopy. To have attained such growth, it must have been here for hundreds of years.

"Yes. Some say this is the tree where Siddhartha Gotama himself came to be awakened. Bodhisattvas ever since have revered it as a symbol of enlightenment." The man smiled. "Feel the bark. It is quite amazing."

Mara swallowed. "I don't understand. I'm a Christian. I didn't think I would be here."

The man inclined his head slightly. "Of course, the tree is merely a symbol. Enlightenment comes from within, as I am sure you know. The path you take is yours to

choose.”

Mara didn't know what to say. She looked around, but she didn't see any angels to help her decide what to do. She'd rather thought there might be angels. She reached out a hand and touched the bark.

“Oh!” The tree was warm from the sun, and a contentment hummed through her. She understood peace, then, and connectedness. There was nothing to fear. For the first time, she thought she could feel this thing, this enormous place in which everything and everyone was the same. It was the mere nebula of a notion, but it was there, like the fog in the morning before the sun burns it off for the day. This idea was the mist before her reality. Mara opened her eyes. “Where am I? Who are you?”

“Have you any regrets?” He stared at her, unblinking.

A rush of memories assaulted her; her daughter's faces, her son. Why didn't she pay attention? She did fine – they loved her and she loved them – but suddenly fine wasn't enough. She wished she would have done more, been more. She did regret that.

And she had always made it her goal to get through life as easily as possible. No fights, no hassles. She had always been good. What now did she have to show for it? A life half lived? What had she done? What could she claim? She had never really lived. Now that the option was before her to bow out, it felt a rather anticlimactic end to things.

“A few,” Mara admitted.

“Are you finished there?” he asked.

Mara had been waiting to go for so long. She didn't like the boredom of it, the sickness. It was too much of a struggle. This was such an easy way to let go of life, and she desperately wanted to.

“Will they be okay without me?” she asked.

“You cannot control the actions of others. You can only control yourself. Are you ready?” The man stepped forward.

Before she had even finished thinking it, the smallest hesitation bubbled up from somewhere in her gut. It screamed, *No, I haven't done everything yet. There is still time for me to be more than nothing. There is still time for me to show I care.*

“Then wake up.” The man touched her forehead.

“Wait! No!” Mara said. “I'm not—”

She opened her eyes to the rest of her life. She had a long one left to live.