

# the city

of hope

by Lisa M.

“Hope let out one last dying scream as all the lights went out of the city and the sound of the windchimes died.”

I reached the summit of the cloud and stood in awe at the sight of the City of Hope. It glimmered before me like a jewel in the clouds. The rose and amber and pale, shadowy, purple clouds over it were as if they had been done by water colors from Heaven. The city was a beautiful pristine white with ethereal shades of pink, green, and purple light streaming out from the buildings. A faint, euphonious wind blew that sounded like an angel's wind chimes. The warm air was gently laced with the scent of sweet vanilla and butterscotch.

I could see tiny dots, flecks of happy, bustling spirits moving among the buildings. I could see someone, a young child it seemed, in the top of a bell tower and with his small hands he pulled the gold tasseled rope and the enormous, glimmering gold bell swung with the lightness of a feather and chimed out over the timeless city.

The wondrous sight of it lifted my heart. I felt as if I could rise and soar above the clouds over the city and never stop. I could almost feel myself becoming lighter and lighter. The beauty overpowered me. A strange peace seized my heart quietly and I remained immobile in the magic, the majestic beauty.

Then I looked into the horizon. There I saw it, the City of Despair, which never lurked far from Hope, always just over the horizon. It loomed dark and ominous. The sky over it was raven black. Not a single light could be seen from that city. Through the ebon I could make out

disfigured shapes, moving in and out of dark alleyways. If I squinted I could see one empty space in the center of the city. I watched as thousands of dark disfigured shadows moved towards it. They knelt. I leaned closer. They were kneeling over stones. And I had heard the tales, I knew. Upon the tombstone that each one leaned over was his own name. The rank stench of burning and rotting flesh pervaded the stale air. It was as silent as the City of Hope, but with a very different kind of silence. This silence brooded in dark corners and slowly enveloped everything around it. It was the kind of silence that could smother you and pull you down into its depths forever. My heart began to sink as if under a heavy weight with a horrifying feeling of foreboding. I gasped.

Between the two cities I saw the mist, a strange mist. It began as a pale curtain just outside the gates to the City of Hope. Sunshine still filtered through easily and only one small shadow hung over the people there. The mist was evanescent. Gradually though, as one got further from the City of Hope, the mist got thicker and darker. In some towns, populated by a dismal people being brought ever closer to their nearby dark city, you could scarcely see color. I looked to one of the grayest towns, so near the City of Despair that I could remember smelling the foul odors it emitted. I could see my home there, a small, dreary house. Or it was my home, I should say.

The only glimmer of beauty that ever penetrated

our dark world were the babies. Each time a child was born a brilliant light flashed and a brilliant, warm glow would emanate from it. As the infant aged however, the light slowly

home. It was merely an entry chamber of sorts into the cold realm of the dead. I was the only one left around me who truly had life. I had heard of the sun, yet I had not seen it. I had

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began to fade and it became cooler. By the time the child was five, the cruel, dismal fog had extinguished its glow forever.

There was something I had always had and when I was about 12 years of age I began to notice something different about me, something that set me apart from others. Although I had lost the warm glow around my person that everyone else lost in early childhood, sometimes, especially when I was alone, I could feel something warm inside of me. Not the warmth of a fiery hearth but a different sort of warmth. Somehow I had kept some of the glow that everyone else had lost. It only hid within me.

I looked around my

heard of fluffy, fairytale clouds, but all I had ever seen was the dense fog. If I stayed, I too would turn cold. For a long time I did not let this frighten me. I did not want to leave my mother or my father or my brother. I began to notice though as I got a bit older, that my warmth seemed to be cooling. Some days I would feel sad and a strange feeling of loss would come over me and when I would go out by myself to feel the warmth in my heart, I could scarcely detect the faintest trace. It was then that I became frightened. And during winter, for it was always the season of dead things at my home, I fled. That was two years ago.



**Backyard** (photograph) - *Evan D.*

My journey was difficult and often times the only thing that kept me going was my warmth, which seemed to revive the further I got from the City of Despair. I climbed mountains, crossed blackened rivers, and trekked through towns of frigid people who would not help me in my passage. Now though, none of that matters. I have finally reached this place, the summit, looking upon the place I have longed to be.

*The City of Despair is so close to the City of Hope! What if something happens to the City of Hope?* I thought worriedly. Suddenly, I heard a slow drum beat begin from the City of Despair. 1...2...3...4... It beat with the slow, deliberate rhythm of a dying heart in its last beats. I felt nervous, frightened. What was the drum beat for?

*What if the City of Despair attacks the City of Hope and the City of Hope falls before it?* I thought with fear.

Suddenly, one lone black figure appeared outside the black, hideous gates of the city. It began to march. I was sick with dread.

*What if he tries to get into the City of Hope? There will be nothing I can do!* I cried out in anguish that the city of beauty should fall.

I felt frantic. I had to save the City of Hope.

*But what can I do? I have neither army nor weapons to conquer the army of Despair,* I thought with a sinking heart.

Then I heard the soft, rhythmic treading of many feet. Black figures began to pour out of the city in perfectly even rows and columns. With each new

row I became more afraid. It seemed as though the more of them that flooded out of that dank, miserable city, the more of them there were. The figures were faceless, smashed and mangled, grotesque and there were no variances among them. Their bodies were hunched over, broken, as if ragged and beaten. Yet they marched. There were no whites on their eyes, and their hair was an eternal, deep black.

The execrable, hideous army marched across the clouds toward the City of Hope, turning every cloud they walked on black. The Army of Despair trampled over a cloud, and it fell hopelessly and helplessly from the sky, leaving an enormous, gaping void in the airborne ground. They reached the glimmering gates of the City of Hope.

*The City of Hope has no army, I realized with horror. They have no weapons. They will lose. Despair will take them over. There is no hope.*

Suddenly, the army of Despair burst into Hope. Hope let out one last dying scream as all the lights went out of the city and the sound of the wind chimes died. I felt my soul collapse within me, and a horrible, wrenching pain stabbed my heart as something within me died in torment too. I shrieked, my own voice echoing and cracking inside my ears.

Then all went numb. My feeling, my thoughts were gone. It was as if I were no longer living. I had no reason to fight or struggle. Hope was gone. I felt my feet begin a slow measured tread, and my back felt as if there were a great burden

upon it. There were others in black with no faces and soulless eyes marching with me. For one brief moment one beside me looked into my dying eyes and nodded. The terrible crash of thunder roared inside my ears, and then everything faded into silence in the darkness. My spirit collapsed within itself like a shattering tower, and I marched to the City of Despair.

**“There were others in black with no faces and soulless eyes marching with me. For one brief moment one looked beside me and nodded.”**