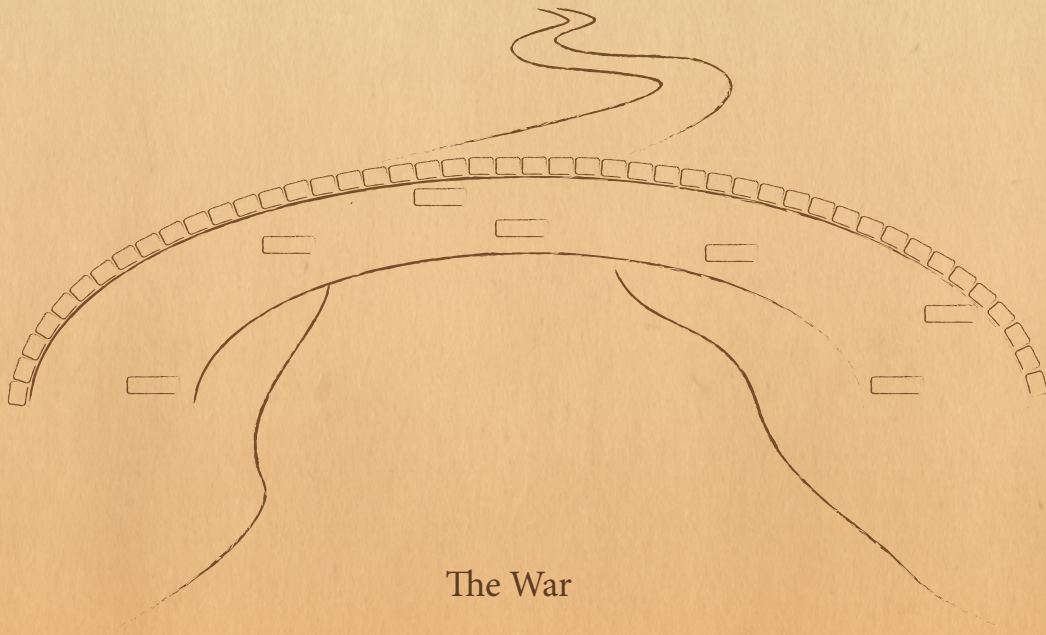


The Master Builder



The War

On the fifth day, the four travellers came across a feud between two families on either side of a river. Both sides were angrily hurling bricks at one another, intent on destroying their opponents and all they had built before the quarrel began. "Hello", called out the small band of four over the battle cries. Silence descended and all heads turned to look at the strangers. "Who are you, and which side are you on?", came the distrustful reply from both sides as they eyed the foursome with caution, bricks ready to hurl in their direction should they prove to be enemies. "We are four friends and we are on your side", came the response, equally directed to all on the battlefield. "Now we have a question for you". Of course, it was that same simple question that had opened their own eyes and so, they asked it as one, "How are you?"

"How am I?". Once again, this question carried the power of self-reflection and the families answered with honesty. "We are suffering, and we are vengeful. We will hurt them so that they understand our pain. Then we will rid them from this world, to make it a safer and better place for all. Though we no longer remember why we started, we will continue to fight to the end. Only then may our misery cease." Both factions spoke the same words, believing their cause was just, but the return of awareness allowed them to see the futility of their war. When one hurt, all hurt, and they then accepted what they had always known deep inside. Despite all their efforts, they had only created nothing but pain.

"We will build a bridge with you, if you are willing to work with us", offered the four. "Two of us on each side of the river, although we choose neither family". "We will stand at the front-line at all times to show our trust in you, stepping aside only when you are ready to embrace one another." Inspired by the courage of the four, and tired of the struggle, they agreed to put their grievances aside and work with the strangers for peace. As they built the bridge from both sides and came closer together, they began to recognise one another. They remembered that they were once the same family, separated initially by a small disagreement that fuelled more fighting. It was their own tears that grew into the raging river, distancing them to the point where they could no longer see each other's humanity and value.

When the last brick was placed, the four stepped aside and the families embraced with hearts that, in truth, had always longed for unity. Once they had reconnected and it was time for the four to move on, they spoke to the families that were now one, "We are creating a path to somewhere better and you are all most welcome to join us". Seeing the destruction around them, on both sides of the bridge and knowing that such reminders could reignite old wars, they understood that a fresh start would allow them to truly leave their troubled times behind them and so, they all agreed to join the four.