



This is the story of *Verema Aleksiso* - but in the Empire they would be called *Truthful Alexander*. He lived many years ago in a city of those whose destiny was chained to false gods - as he himself was chained because his soul was placed into a form born to others who the powerful called slaves.

Alexander was more lucky than some - he was taught to be a mason, the finest mason of all those his master owned. This master was a cruel priest of the city of false gods.

One day, Alexander was being told what he was to build when, seeing an error that the master's false pride had made, he spoke and corrected them. The master's eyes flashed with rage.

They asked: ***"By what right would a slave dare correct their master?"***
Alexander replied: ***"The Truth."***

The master was filled with jealousy and terribly harmed what they believed was theirs to harm.



The next day the master came to Alexander as he lay wounded and again told him their design. With the master were other priests of the false god **Balu**. Alexander, despite his pain, said again that the design would not work. The priests then tied Alexander with ropes and took him to their temple.

The priests hanged Alexander from his bonds so he would not touch the sacred ground as they saw him as filthy.

They all asked him: ***"By what right would a slave defy the god Balu?"***
Alexander replied: ***"The Truth."***

The priests wished to make an example of him and show that their false god could not be questioned - so they asked many questions on matters of building and the things Balu claimed lordship over, challenging Alexander to lie or misspeak so that they might claim offence and kill him. Alexander answered each question with a plainness that angered the priests until dawn rose and they gave up.

The master seethed with anger at their embarrassment, and proclaimed that Alexander's blood would be given to the first god who could catch him in a lie.

Each night from thereafter the master would bind Alexander and have them carried along the winding road of gods from temple to temple to be questioned by each priest until dawn. These priests tried every underhanded scheme - from setting his feet above flames to promising blessings and power to make Alexander





hesitate or cringe from the truth. But Alexander - even as his feet were blackened, or his skin scarred, would not speak falsehood - no matter the harm. His courage infuriated the slavers. Alexander would make no claim that was not true, would not represent themselves falsely and refused duplicity or boastfulness.

On the one hundredth and first night, the master had lost much: not able to steal the prosperity of their prize slave they had become poor. Not able to take back their challenge they were shamed by other priests. They could not sleep for their rage and decided that Alexander should die - by a lie or otherwise.

On that night Alexander was taken to a dark place where only those gods worshipped in secret temples. There, before a priest of pain, Alexander was put to terrible harm.

The priest of pain would ask before each wound: **"Do you fear this?"** (for the slavers of Asavea could not imagine another would show fear towards their enemy.)

To which Alexander would reply: **"I do fear this."** (for courage is not the absence of fear) and he would be harmed.

As dawn approached, the priest of pain found Alexander unbroken and in desperation borne of greed, they asked: **"By what, in its removal, would your pride be most damned?"**

The priest believed that Alexander would surely say his tongue, or his legs or face, so that he would not lose that which gave him use to his master.

Alexander did not hesitate and replied: **"It is by my hands I am known."** and his hands were broken horribly.

His master, losing that which they coveted, ran screaming at their loss and was drowned in the sea.

With the first light of dawn creeping through the pane the priest tired of the game. They asked a question that they knew no other whom they had broken had truthfully answered:

The priest said: **"Are you afraid to die?"** Alexander answered, as the sun touched across his brow: **"No - for in death lies the final Truth."**

The priest rejoiced - surely at last Alexander had lied (Those chained to false gods are blind to the Labyrinth and spend their lives seeking to escape death) - so they raised a blade in triumph. But the light of dawn blinded them and their blade clattered upon the altar and when it had passed, **Alexander was gone**: only his rags and bindings remained.

For these things and his courage, Alexander's story spread to all whose freedom was denied to them and in his example they too learned courage.

