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## **Gods of Invention**

I remember the death of Jackie O. I remember the time someone suggested it might be easier and safer to grow our own food rather than wander strange countrysides searching for it. I remember the deaths of Anne Boleyn, Genghis Khan, Joe DiMaggio, Jesus and the elusive Greta Garbo. I remember the very first time we closed the gap between galaxies and danced circles around the once mystifying stars. I remember the death of Alexander, and I think it is the deaths I remember so vividly, above so many other things, because I am so alone now. I suppose because the memory of each death looks directly back at me and says, “And then there is *you*.”

It was always *we* accomplishing, experiencing, fighting. Now the planet is empty and it is just “Me.” She doesn’t count because she remembers nothing, not even the death of Charles Darwin. Then again, she might count for everything; but I don’t know how to begin thinking that way. I’ve seen myself as the key for so long.

She stirs in her sleep and in response to whatever phantom skims across her mind, I hear a far-off rumbling in the mountains. I wake her up just long enough for the nightmare to lose its hold on her, and the shuddering noise within the earth ceases.

That’s the way it is now. The Earth is ours. We never sleep at the same time anymore. The last time we did, one of us had a nightmare and we awoke to flames closing around us. When we’re awake and conscious it rarely happens, but we have to be careful.

She must be having some lovely, exquisite dream now; a lush rose bush has begun growing around her sleeping body.

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I know there were once hordes of us. There are vast gaps in my memory of Them and I, but I *sense* a past, stretching aeons behind me. And once in awhile a specific memory, in startling detail, rises complete and clear from my unconscious for my consideration. I'm not sure why they come, the same way I'm so unsure of why we're alone now. It could be very easy to convince myself that it's always been like this – just we two, sole inhabitants of a planet that conforms perfectly and sometimes disastrously to our souls; and that my memories of Them are not “memories” at all, but only oddly vibrant dreams and imaginings. But I won't let myself believe this. Something changed and then They were gone. Maybe They live within us now. They were a race of geniuses, I see signs of this everywhere.

And their planet is ours.

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She wants to wander today. I see that she's in a wistful and restless mood (odd for her) and this bothers me. When one of us is like this, it is easy to become suddenly, dangerously emotional. Anger causes earthquake. Sorrow brings landslide and cold. Desperation and fear can bring forth both flood and storm. The apprehension that I'm feeling now causes a slight but menacing darkening of the sky.

We head toward the openness to the west. We can see, far off, some elongated, smooth edged structure rising piercingly into the sky. From here it's only a thin needle of a shadow on the horizon, but we can see that it is too concrete, too perfectly honed, to be anything but one of Their creations. It is always me who wants to go investigate these artifacts. They disturb and confuse me and I study them for hours, *reading* them for clues that will help me remember their makers more clearly. She, on the other hand, is only remotely curious. Their unexplained presence neither intrigues nor threatens her.

I don't understand her complacency. She seems to feel no need to understand any of this; if she shares my sense of past then it hardly plagues her as it does me, but rather drifts unobtrusive and without malice around her blond head and thin shoulders. When she *is* curious, she is still rarely led far from the boundaries of that self-sufficient, calm serenity. While I agonize over each stray clue and mystery, trying futilely to grasp and read them, she watches with a quiet imperturbability that I both envy and despise. It would seem to me sometimes that she knows things, understands things that are beyond my ken. Then I tell myself that her tranquil sphinx smile is actually as empty as the face of the watchful moon.

Then I look at the shadowed moon itself and say again, with age-old obstinacy, *she* is no link in this pattern, it is *me*. And the past looms over me again, engulfing, as though to challenge this assertion with its very fact of being.

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Once I pressed her to tell me what her ideas were concerning the different structures we find scattered across the planet. Because it's always me who wants to investigate them. She follows without complaint when I spy one in the distance and invariably desire to get closer (we rarely go our separate ways). She follows but doesn't share my fascination. We see raging oceans, turbulent clouds, blindingly vast deserts, endless forests. But that's what the Earth left us and I want to study what *They* left us. I asked her what she thought, because I couldn't believe she merely accepted the presence of these buildings left for us.

"Maybe *we* make them," she finally shrugged. "Maybe we create them in our dreams, the same way we create flowers and storms and darkness."

I couldn't believe this. Should our deepest consciousness tap our deepest resources, I still couldn't believe that our imaginations could be so prolific as to create such an incredible variety of buildings; it would take aeons of races to even conceive of such refined, often beautiful, always perfect, monuments.

“Look at the things we’ve invented,” she said, pointing to a cherry tree in full bloom. She was arguing to humor me, I could tell, knowing that I needed to argue back in order to sort out my thoughts. “That tree is as perfect and as beautiful as the buildings we’ve seen.”

“I recall, somehow, seeing cherry trees before,” I told her. “So even if I did create this one, I didn’t *invent* it.”

The tree had not been there earlier; she had watched it grow as I dreamed and I’d awakened in its shade.

“Maybe you’ve seen the buildings before,” she told me. “But you don’t remember it clearly.”

It was then that I grew angry and impatient because she was only confusing me further, and in response to this, there was a hideous convulsion within the earth beneath our feet. I grabbed her hand and we ran, barely escaping the spray of smoking, shattering rock that erupted from out of the ground, reaching far into the sky and scorching us with its heat. I saw, glancing behind me – refusing to be afraid because fear brought flood – that the cherry tree was buried now in the earthy lava. My inexplicable sorrow split a vast gulch in the ground and all was swallowed into the abyss.

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We are close enough now to realize that the tall, tapering structure in the distance is like nothing we’ve seen before. It is smooth and windowless, narrowing to a point we can barely discern far up in the clouds. It is as I imagined earlier: A huge stone needle pointing into the sky. In awhile we are standing in its shadow. It is a massive, blank-walled tower and, as sometimes happens, a sudden and totally clear memory asserts itself in my mind: This is a temple, a monument to some deity.

Curiosity tends to instill in the air a wet, pulsing quality. I feel that now and see that it comes from her as well as me. She is staring above us toward the narrow, endlessly peaking top of the building. Then she begins walking along its curving walls, running her hand lightly over

its smooth sides, staring all the while at the shadow of its height far above. She keeps walking and in minutes has disappeared from view. I think of following her, but I remember, somehow, that the structure remains blank and featureless all the way around; she'll discover nothing by exploring. Instead I sit down and suddenly feel comfortable and at ease. In fact, the surrounding fields, feeding from my contentment, are growing lush and green before my eyes. I think of Them, as I do so constantly, try to envision Them walking through the open spaces before me, try to remember Them immersed in the many activities at which they were so adept. I close my eyes and I can almost *see* Them and I know They were really here once.

I feel a slight trembling in the earth and my apprehension from earlier returns in a cold wave. I'm on my feet in a second to run to her, find out what has happened. The perpetual curve of the temple wall gives me the illusion that I'm running and not moving until I nearly stumble into her, just standing there, staring out into the fields to the west. The earth has ceased its shuddering.

“What was it?” I ask, and she points across the field.

There is a scattering of buildings there in the distance, perhaps a dozen, and even from here I can see the haphazardness of their arrangement; they seem to have been dropped and left there like a handful of candies to lure some child.

Naturally I want to go investigate. Because here is another sign of the ones who were here before.

It occurs to me that They have left the best of Themselves behind, like a tribute to their own genius. As always, as we draw near, I can see that all these buildings, though each unique in design, are perfect. Are beautiful. Are, of course, now ours.

I'm sure that it hasn't always been like this. There were times, and I believe this was when They were still here, that the earth was a separate thing; often ravaged by us, often restructured and used, tapped for its minerals and oils, yet still a separate thing. It followed,

despite our powers, its own inevitable patterns and courses. I have no memory, not even a vague one, of it having been like this, of the earth thriving on our inner balance, agonizing over our pains and trembling at our inconsistencies. It is as though the planet has become an actual extension of our souls.

We control the earth as we never could before when They were here. But we are not always able to control our own selves. We'll have to learn.

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The first building we come across is nearly as tall as the one we left earlier. It is much wider at the base, four sided and, again, smooth and unbroken all around. *Pyramid* shaped, I remember. I find it awesome. She gazes at it somewhat respectfully, but wants to move on.

Another temple, I'm sure. A thousand steps it seems, wide and curved around the structure lead to a vast row of pillars, behind which is a heavily enclosed, shadowed emptiness. It is more colorful than the other, painted with dancing figures and spiraling stars and planets around its sides. We hesitate, deciding whether or not to climb its steps to look inside. But in the end we agree that this could be dangerous. Should one of us fall into a particularly disruptive mood while inside, we'd never escape in time from the falling columns and massive stone roof. So we leave it and begin walking again.

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I remember we found the cure for cancer: It led to incredible and immediate breakthroughs that culminated in the virtual eradication of disease. I remember we discovered the New World and the Missing Link and how both resulted in a universal shifting in how we viewed our own existence. I remember we destroyed the Mid-East and spent a generation putting it back together in a way that suited all parties.

Even human life, extinguished, could often be recreated if enough of Them were interested.

They're all gone now. We learned to create and destroy with equal efficiency and now all but myself are gone. I don't remember how or why.

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I fall asleep, troubled and moody. This is not a good state in which to sleep and dream, but all I can do is trust her to wake me should something begin to happen.

She's been quiet today, thoughtful. I'd been afraid of her mood at first, but she is better even than I at guarding emotion.

We've never slept together, we've never made love. The act of love involves too much conflict and unfathomable passion. I don't like to wonder what turmoil we'd arouse in the earth if we aroused one another.

During the times that I watch her smooth, alert face and her supple body and want her, the air becomes very still and electric, like before a storm, and the sky grows more vivid in an unnatural way, as though receiving light from some source other than the sun. There is a sense in the air of expectancy, waiting and tension, as though something in the heavens, something great and inevitable were preparing to be born.

She understands this, when it happens, she knows what it means and avoids my stare. It is dark now, fortunately, so we don't have to turn our backs on one another. Instead I lie down, close my eyes. I know she watches me. She always does.

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In my dream I am trying to pray in one of the temples. I brought green branches, full with foliage, as I remember having done before when They were here. I left them on the altar and now I speak to an emptiness which I refuse to admit faces me. I kneel in the cool darkness here and ask the questions which have followed me into my dreamscape. I ask, Where have They gone, Those who once lived with me, who helped to build and invent and learn? I ask where this power has come from, ask why the earth now obeys and responds to the turning and flexing of my soul. I ask, as I have thousands of times before, What should I do? But no one answers. I know that the temple is empty; whoever lived here has vanished like They have, and for the first time in millennia, I am truly alone. I feel the gray hollowness of sorrow begin

descending and even in my dream I quickly sweep it away before it can bring disaster. I stand again and walk through the shadows toward the blurred rectangle of sunlight. I hesitate on the threshold of the temple between cavernous gloom and the open spaces and I stare out at the ochre fields with the deep green of forest bordering them.

And standing here, something for only a moment slides into place in my mind. I *know* what I am, I know what I have *become*. Though soon I will understand fully and forever, for just this moment I realize this: I am standing where I am now meant to stand, no longer seeking but being sought -- the calm, omnipotent presence that waits at the temple's door, which waits for Them.

A movement far off in the field catches my attention and with a sense of grave ceremony I pull myself up to full height thinking, *Someone is coming to me*. I feel an enormous pressure welling up within me and I recognize it as power.

It is her, having lost interest in the buildings, apparently, and walking off toward the forest. I try to call to her to come back to me so that I can explain it all to her. But as is the way in dreams, the sky and forest, the temple itself and my own voice begin slowly dissolving, their colors running together and fading as I watch her. We alone, she and I, remain solid. Before helplessness can possess me and with a strange resolve and confidence, I reach down into myself to take the power there, between my hands. I *feel* it pulsing and electric, a real thing that is pliant to my molding fingers. I pause, wondering what my first command will be.

It is her hand on my arm that wakens me, her hand, light but urgent. I open my eyes but she's not looking at me; she is staring into the night sky with such an arresting look of mingled fear and awe and joy that immediately I am fully awake and following her gaze.

The sky is on fire. That is my first thought, but the incredible colors that are shifting, exploding and churning in the heavens are not only the colors of fire. There are vibrant blue currents coursing through the stars. Indigo and violet bloom like immense flowers to shatter then reshape themselves again. Greens and yellows swirl majestically, spiraling upward then

dropping in flaming trails. I see, beyond this sublime spectacle, the stars themselves shuddering and sparking and I can hear their fires hissing.

When at last she can look away from the unimaginable blaze she turns to me with the question we always ask one another when we waken to phenomenon, disaster or unnatural beauty.

“What did you dream?” she asks.

“That I was God,” I tell her, and watch the tide of the Universe rushing in.

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The next day I expect her either to question me more on my dream or to fall into brooding silence. But she is, as always, quiet and only vaguely interested in the sights and oddities we come across. It is as though during the long night she pondered the mystery and came to a conclusion satisfying to her. If there is any difference at all in her it is that the almost indiscernible smile that touches her lips from time to time has grown constant, never seems to leave her face.

In the next several days I grow yet more fascinated with the temples and churches. I cannot forget my dream and that simultaneously crushing and elevating tide that pulled me as I stared out across the fields from a place which I had fleetingly recognized as my home. Since then I have been unable to stay away for long. I sense that the temples can provide a more tangible link to my past than the other buildings we’ve seen; they’re undeniably familiar to me and I know, I *remember* now, as I study them, that I helped to build them, have been in them, have sought... something in them.

But my dream has told me that there is nothing waiting for me there anymore.

I begin to study the temples exclusively. There are those made of gleaming metal and glass, exquisite in their unadorned, functional simplicity. There are those that are massive,

pillared, austere; uninviting yet demanding supplicants. Some reach spiraling heights, each line shooting upward.

And the idea is forming. I've been here before as a visitor. Now they are empty with no presence residing and waiting within. I am haunted and fascinated by the growing certainty that the fact of their being here asks for an inhabitant, asks that they be made into homes, as they were before. Their emptiness tells me that the visitor is to become the visited, that the offerer will now take offering. But I shy away from a full realization, fear halts my logic from taking a final step. Something massive and absolute waits for me and I waver before it.

After her brief curiosity in the temples faded she now shows a slight disdain, even a mild contempt for these buildings. She doesn't explain why. Lately she has seemed to feel less of a need than ever to share her thoughts. We're growing away from one another. She has, recently, shown an interest in forest groves and small, secluded spaces where she lingers contentedly. I don't believe we should be apart for any length of time, so when she does this, I sit with her.

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I remember the merging of the Eastern and Western Confederacies, the ensuing outbreak of short-lived political uprisings and the creation, shortly thereafter, of the World Confederacy. I remember before all that the transition from stone to bronze and bronze to iron, atomic to quark, with many other transitions in between. I remember receiving knowledge which led to technical and medical breakthroughs and how, for a long time, we lost communication with our teachers. I recall looking up from our work to see fire-tailed ships streaking through the stars and idly wondering if they were stopping here or simply passing through.

I sense that I somehow possess both Them and the past. It is all embodied somewhere within me. I wonder if it is Their presence that has instilled this massive power in me, the power that first caresses and then ravages the planet, depending on my own shifting state of mind. It occurs to me that I am not 'I' at all, but still 'We' despite my distinctly singular form. I feel that I'm no more than a vessel for all the terrors and beauties man and the world have created together. The question remains, What step do I take now?

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I can no longer interest her in my memories or my ever-shifting theories. She spends more and more time contemplating her own thoughts in the forests and when I follow her in, she looks up with surprise and I think again that we are growing so far apart.

The other day when I followed her and found her gazing peacefully into a pond, we had an exchange that puzzled me.

“Do you want to come look at the buildings with me?” I asked her -- respectfully, because her grave stillness called for respect.

“It’s always been you who were interested in the buildings,” she told me. Before I could answer she added, “Buildings confine power. They don’t let it grow.”

She smiled, perhaps to show she was not confronting or challenging me, simply stating a truth.

“How do you know anything about power?” I asked her, wondering if she, too, could have experienced here in the forest the same rending sensations which had overwhelmed me first in my dreams and later in the temples. And if so, how had her small body withstood it?

“It lives in different places,” she said. “We’re two separate beings and we each find it in the places we like to visit. It’s always there, waiting.”

“Yes,” I said, but felt uneasy. I wondered if she had quietly found an answer while I struggled and battled with my thoughts.

“I’m a woman,” she said, “And you’re a man. The whole universe was created by and is structured upon that difference.”

Before I had even turned away she seemed to have forgotten me again.

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The earthquake was my fault. My confusion over her cryptic remarks added to the barely controlled turmoil of my mind caused an eruption even our unguarded dreams had rarely instigated.

Staring out over the wasted rubble and scorched fields, the ruined temples, I remembered now how easy it had become for us to destroy. And I wonder what it will be like never seeing her again.

All that morning I'd felt tired and impatient, both with the questions I couldn't answer and with her; her quiet smile and distant, occasionally indifferent way of looking at me irritated me, because they seemed to allude to a kind of superiority, a wisdom I couldn't hope to obtain. Still, as we'd learned to do, I numbed myself to this abrasive petulance within me and the only hint of it was manifest as a foreboding smudge of gray off on the horizon.

She was dangling her fingers in a running stream, watching the rippling patterns her hand created. I coaxed her away, though I should have let her alone, and she followed me finally, so that I could show her the inside of one of the temples I'd found; the smooth walls within were painted in vibrant blues, yellows and reds. The haunting discontentment dissolved as we ascended the wide shallow steps leading to the arched entryway. As I had begun doing, I paused in the doorway, awaiting the now familiar flood of energy and excitement, and that still untested invitation to use it, instill in it my instructions, let it intermingle with the desires and whims of my soul.

I stood there, eyes half closed, letting it sweep through me and I was dimly aware of her brushing past me into the high ceilinged, spacious but faintly lit rooms. I watched her roaming through wide corridors, pausing here and there to look at a particularly detailed etching or carvings. I caught up to her as she wandered, waiting for her to speak, sure that she must feel what I did or, if not, would see the power of the place reflected in me and be attracted to it... to *me*. I wanted her to see me here where I was powerful, to enrapture her, mesmerize her. We were hidden inside, so I could not see the sky, but I knew it must have that tense, strangely

glowing radiance as when a beam of sunlight floods down to the ocean, catching all within its confines and tinting it with a blurred, distorted brilliance.

“They were wonderful creators,” I venture at last, and finally she looks at me. I had wanted to see pleasure there, perhaps even awe, such as when we watched the skies churning with color from my dream. Instead there is the ever-present calm serenity that inexplicably angers me.

“The temples are beautiful,” she says. “But they’re sterile. Nothing grows here.”

It is hard for me to check my anger, even harder to understand it at all. She sees this.

“Why does it bother you for us to be different?”

It is because her apparent knowledge of things beyond me and her complacency with this knowledge gives her power over me. And I have become obsessed with the idea of power. But I don’t tell her this.

“You don’t seem interested in anything,” I accuse her. “You don’t seem to care about anything that went on... before.”

She stares at me, then says, “We *are* everything that went on before.”

And my anger at not understanding and the threadbare frustration flood over me; and even as the walls of the temple begin trembling and falling there is a moment when I simply stare at her face relishing, to my shame, the confusion and fear disrupting its serenity. When I find myself fallen in the open field, I realize that I have left her inside and I am, at last, alone.

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For days I wander through the dusty ruins, through the mingled shards of clay, glass and concrete, iron and wood. The world had been empty except for myself and her and the temples.

Now there is just me. I've destroyed the rest. When I sleep I don't bother to wonder what I will waken to with no one here to guard my dreams, and I don't care. My soul has been numbed by the horrors I've brought about and the earth remains likewise, bland and uncolored, frozen in sterile indifference.

I sit over the ocean on a sloping hill, salt crusted boulders at my feet, sea grass bending over my head. But the ocean doesn't stir. For hours I watch a billowing wave hemmed in white foam poised darkly over the rocky sands. But it doesn't descend. Farther out, similar watery hillocks had been growing, surging toward the shore to break on the land but they, too, are still, numbed with my soul, the tide that moves them arrested in its flow.

It has remained evening since the coldness took me. The planet itself is pausing in its course, no living source to draw from and move it. The powers that I'd discovered and been on the verge of toying with may still be present. I don't know. They probably are; there is no god now to take them from me in punishment for my misuse of them.

Dispassionately, I observe a flurry of leaves that had been tossed by the wind; the leaves are motionless now, suspended in the air as they'd been about to sweep across the ground. A single beam of light from the setting sun holds dust motes that have ceased swirling and are unmoving. The sea grass remains bent as it was when the wind ceased causing it to sway.

And now, when I no longer care, I begin to understand. Staring down at that heavily rising wave which will never descend, watching the evening clouds frozen in their ponderous movements, the answers, as though puzzled at my sudden lack of interest, swarm around my head.

I think of my dream, when I stood at the entrance of the temple, looking out across the fields and sensing a power within me built over aeons by races of creators. It came to me then that although I had come there to pray, there was no longer anything left to pray to. Genius, inherent in a being, will inevitably evolve into its own object of worship. The race never died, as I'd thought, but rather it grew until it became equal to, overwhelmed and overpowered its own

gods. And then They Themselves became God and They are, as I'd imagined, Me. I feel Them within me, anxious to get on with the cycle. I feel their collective powers, their collective memories, experience, mistakes, flaws, talents and all else that took thousands of years to evolve into a God. I feel it all stirring within me, waiting.

And I understand what I am meant to do now, but I won't do it. I won't let the planet begin turning again, I won't let the tides move. I won't let the Universe follow its course, begin the next ascending cycle of the pattern. I fall asleep and I don't care if my dreams demolish the remainder of the planet.

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A breeze is trailing across my face and I squint my eyes more tightly against the morning light. I raise my arm to block out the sun, then suddenly I sit straight up, staring at the ocean. As I watch, there is a massive but gentle convulsion within the sea, sending watery ripples spreading across its surface. And then with a rushing sound the wave below my feet, which has hovered for days over the beach, crashes down across the rocks, sending foamy spray flying like the sparks of an explosion. And the clouds are racing across the sky and the breeze is strong. And I feel a God's annoyance, wondering how my decision has been challenged, and by whom? I stand and nearly cry out as I look over the fields. The temples have been restored; the lines and curves and colors are again perfect and unblemished, not a trace remains of the disaster, not a wall is scorched or marred. I think first that I have done this myself while sleeping, but then I look to the forest and I understand how vain, even in my paralyzing despair I have been, to have taken credit for destruction and creation alike. I understand that I was correct in believing that I embody the passions and aspirations of Man, but I made a mistake in forgetting Woman.

She is walking toward me, through the morning, as whole and perfect as the buildings she restored, as inevitable as the tides She set in motion again.

For once Her smile is for Me alone and when I want Her, and the fields, forest and ocean become drenched in that gauzy, blurred light, She doesn't look away from Me. And as Gods and Goddesses have done before Us, when the earth is empty and in need of a new race to begin again, We let Our powers mingle. Because, as She told Me, the Universe is created and

recreated by the fact of Our difference and grows thereof. Once every several millennia the sun and moon couple and a new race is born.

I will give Them the temples. Their ancestors achieved great things and the descendants deserve the homes of the old gods as their own. I would like My first act following the creation to be a generous one.

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It is best that We live among the stars. From there We will watch the new ones – who aeons from now will grow and overpower Us, become Gods themselves.

They will be haunted by Me, of course, by My moods and whims. It is fitting that they should, for in a way I am their past and the past, with all its mistakes and triumphs, is irreversible and relentless. But then, She will be here too. We will stare across the skies at one another, the steady, eternal gaze of the sun and the moon. When My passions play too fiercely upon the earth, She will be there to cool them with the nighttime.

Below Us I see the first stirrings of Our creation. I feel them opening their eyes and staring boldly into the heavens.