



Danijel Turina

The light beyond

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Introduction

This was definitely the weirdest book I ever wrote, because as it started, I didn't even think I was writing one. The "guys up there" set up something on my astral body that didn't allow me to sleep deeply, and I was instead in some kind of a *yoga nidra* state where I had visions, and those visions would persist and repeat themselves until I wrote them down the best I could in the morning, "flattening" them to the closest approximation while retaining the spiritual message, mantric power, links to the originating reality and some semblance of literary coherence. The difference between the stuff I saw and the stuff I made up as connective tissue of the story is more vague than one would expect. I thought I was making some stuff up, until it connected seamlessly with the next vision, at which point I stopped trying to make sense of it and just started writing it down in earnest.

The weirdest part is that some things one will expect to have been made up, were in fact the cornerstone of the visions – it started with Gods praising each other, and a flurry of new souls bursting in the space between them. I actually learned how the new souls were born, from that vision. Also, the things like the fountain of *kalapas* formed in the heart of the soul during worship of God; that's from the vision and I actually learned that part then. The reason why I didn't write about it before is because I didn't know about it before. Also, some stuff you'll be sure I made up, like Shakti morphing into a cat and playing in Shiva's lap, that's the exact content of a vision. I just made her a particular kind of cat, because I find baby snow leopards to be cute, and the cat in the vision was very cute.

I invented side characters to tell the story and watched them turn into major characters without my conscious intention. There are, of course, limits to my resolution. I had a feeling of a certain person, their character, mantric signature, the way they interact with other characters, and I either made up a name or found a historic person that was the closest match I could get. Augustine's wife and Hildegarde's husband aren't each other, but they are an incredibly close match, as personalities go, so instead of writing two repetitive stories, I merged

them into one. I knew Shankaracharya's wife was someone who felt like a very sophisticated Muslim princess from India, and I found the closest historical match. It's not that exact person, and yet she feels so close that I don't care. I can't resolve the details that much while in the physical body, but I think I got the feel of the persons well enough.

The Persons of God and Angels as described in the book are, of course, much more anthropomorphic than what I saw in the visions, but effective storytelling demanded that I constrain them to an almost-human form, so that I can use human ways of communicating emotion. Of course spiritual crystals don't actually hold hands and cuddle. It's all much deeper, less restricted by form, and indescribable. The last part is the reason behind my approach. Also, Gods actually can be human, or close enough, and then it actually does look the way I described it. I didn't make things up so much as simplified them for the sake of the storytelling.

I occasionally broke the linearity of the timeline, both for reasons of levity and to show that Gods don't actually perceive time as we do.

The teaching is real, the techniques actually work, the methods for reaching multiple stages of enlightenment are described exactly. The character of the relationships between the Gods is real. The thing about male and female Gods, all real. They don't actually have coffee, though, but I felt this to be an unjust omission, and it adds some flesh to the plot. Things are repetitive for a reason – some things are just that important.

Hopefully, I now get to start sleeping normally.

Worship

“I am honoured to stand in your presence, Lord Shiva”, said Vishnu. “Your nature is so holy, and your courage is so incredible, that when the rest of us feel terrified by something, you calmly absorb that darkness and evil into yourself and through your own suffering transform it into the holy light we can all feel in your presence. Everybody else desires power, but you are so controlled and absorbed in your transcendence, that Power herself is your wife, and wants nothing but to belong to you and draw inspiration for Creation from observing your holy presence, which is the closest there is to the unmanifested Absolute itself.”

“Lord Vishnu, the honour is mine”, responded Shiva. “It is indeed like you to grace me with your kind words, and yet it is you who are such fullness of reality-consciousness-bliss that you give meaning to all of Creation, because the reason and the point of Manifestation is to embody the qualities of the Absolute into a relative being, and you, in your infinitely blissful and enlightened nature, show all of us what the goal is and what we are striving for. Where others would be endlessly tempted by the Kaustubha jewel, which emanates great bliss and fulfilment, you, as the ultimate being of bliss and fulfilment, can wear it as if it were a mere trinket, because your own bliss and fulfilment are of a far greater order. All beings desire fortune, and yet Fortune (Lakshmi) herself sits contently by your side as your wife and desires nought but you, who are such a magnificent embodiment and manifestation of the formless *brahman*, the *sat-cit-ananda*, that you are the source of greatest fortune even for the Fortune herself.”

Hearing him say this, and seeing the truth of it herself, his Lady smiled; previously, she felt incredulity when Shiva would highly praise Lord Vishnu, because she couldn’t believe that any being could match her husband’s greatness, but now she just smiled in pure happiness, and so did Lady Lakshmi, blushing with excitement and pleasure seeing her husband so aptly and gloriously praised by one so holy and virtuous.

As they all stood there in deep meditation, as the presence and manifestation of the Absolute grew manifold due to the holiness of the

moment, the whole atmosphere between them became changed, and an endless number of small spark-like entities precipitated, like snowflakes, and they saw that each was a new soul that was being born out of the mutual worship of the Gods.

Born out of holiness and God-worship, each of those souls can only find fulfilment and meaning of its life if it attains this state again through its own evolution.

A snippet of Heaven

“Sri Bhagavan, mind if I ask you something? I have an issue with my weapon.”, Shiva started.

“Sure, Mahesh. What is it?”

“When I aim my trident at an enemy, they usually feel they are being targetted and start teleporting around Creation like crazy, trying to save themselves. I track them as quickly, but the problem is, there’s always that slight delay between identifying them well enough to lock on, and actually deploying the weapon, which would of course instantly kill anything at any distance, but by that time the enemy is already elsewhere. You are using a *sudarshana chakra*, which seems to track an enemy after the initial lock. Is that working better for you?”

“Yes, to a point”, Vishnu nodded. “It tracks, but my enemies teleport wildly as well. The *chakra* maintains the lock on the soul itself, but needs to re-establish the location after each teleportation, the same way you’re doing it yourself, but my weapon has this functionality built into its design. We seem to be having the same problem, only my weapon launches and then tracks, while you track and launch only after you have the target pinned. Both essentially hit in the same conditions, when the target runs out of ideas or has a sufficient delay in teleportation”, he mused. “I wish we could figure out some form of tracking that binds the target in some way that inhibits their ability to run, or something.”

“That’s unfortunate. Sure, we could always do it the way our girls do it – curse them and watch them wither and die, without lifting a finger, but that would be unmanly”, Shiva grinned, and Vishnu fist-bumped him. “Speaking about the girls, here they come; it seems they are finished with whatever girly business they had in mind. And speaking of which, wow”, Vishnu spoke with amazement. “Ladies, if one asked me before, I would have said that your beauty is legendary, supreme and impossible to improve, but you apparently did something that leaves me wordless”.

“Oh, we’ve been playing dress-up”, Lady Lakshmi answered, curtsying to the Lords and glowing at her husband. “We created dresses and ornaments for each other, using our own power to enhance the other one’s beauty, and it gave us a lot of pleasure”.

“Lakshmi made a tiara of supreme wealth, dignity and fortune for me, that is powered by my own soul but creates light through her blessings, and I created a dress for her that boosts her own spiritual attributes with the blessing of my power”, Shakti added, curtsying to Lord Vishnu and looking adoringly into her husband’s eyes. “We also talked about some stuff we found interesting”.

“What kind of stuff?”, asked Shiva, bowing to Lakshmi and looking at his wife. “Oh, mathematics, as a matter of fact. I noticed how mathematics appears as an emergent property of Creation, but only when the principle of Order prevails, and in direct proportion to it. The more things are static, the more they can be modelled in ways of mathematics, which quantifies entities, phenomena and interactions. However, when Chaos is introduced, things either lose their static and predictable nature, or free will of the beings introduces new elements or alters existing ones, the deterministic and predictable quality of the Relative is lost.”, answered his Goddess.

“That is quite interesting”, Vishnu scratched his chin. “What do you think about the implications of this? Is Chaos disturbing the good quality of Order, thus breaking mathematical models and ruining something of value, or is it somehow for the good, if it is allowed to happen?” Shiva nodded in assent and looked questioningly at the women.

“We also wondered about this, and here is our preliminary analysis. It seems that neither Chaos nor Order manifest the will of the Absolute on their own and by themselves. Order would result in rigid laws that would negate all possibility of surprise, creativity or anything new, which is not the point. Also, Chaos on its own would break all good things, as well as the evil ones, indiscriminately. So, Chaos needs to disrupt just enough of Order to make things alive and fluid, while Order needs to guide Chaos in order to make it a force of creative disruption rather than pointless destruction. In both cases, mathematics breaks”, Shakti answered. “It is my hypothesis that this, in fact, is why

we exist, and by ‘we’ I mean the four of us in particular. We are powerful enough to disrupt, and yet holy enough to do so in ways that actually make things better, rather than leaving a wasteland and injury. We are all different enough to have different approaches to things and different views on reality, and yet we are similar enough that neither of us would do something that would be seen by others as actually wrong. It’s always some kind of a good idea, even if it comes with initial drawbacks and issues, and we all trust each other’s judgment and cooperate. Any fight between us would be so incredibly destructive, that the entirety of Absolute’s manifestation and plan would instantly be destroyed, but that never happens, because it is not in our nature to oppose each other, but to assist”, Shakti finished.

“So, that’s what you were doing with the dress-up?”, Shiva smiled. “It looks like a very apt illustration of your argument, as you both managed something I would have deemed impossible – you made each other even more wonderful, and it’s not just appearance, because your blessings seem to have interacted synergically with each other’s souls, giving it tools and means of manifestation while in no way interfering with its nature, which was obviously the will of God. When I think of it, when Lord Vishnu interferes to save me from the consequences of some of my inopportune blessings, he is essentially manifesting a high-order *dharma* to cover for my error, but with implicit assumption that my undeserved gifts are something that disrupts staticity of the lower-order *dharma*, and apparently you can’t disrupt it without occasionally getting it wrong, so my blessings are essentially *brahman* disrupting the order of justice with the chaotic introduction of mercy, and Sri Bhagavan’s intervention to save me is essentially *brahman* disrupting the undesired consequence of that with his own free will, that is a blessing of its own kind. And you ladies are definitely *brahman* introducing wisdom in order to teach us about our own nature, and in such a lovely and charming way”, he bowed deeply, as the girls blushed, not knowing where to look, because the Great Lord turned what started as an impersonal exercise in logical analysis into a very personal compliment, whose blessing made their very souls tingle with power of rightness, because Lord Shiva doesn’t use words idly.

Seeing their embarrassment, Vishnu wielded his power to create a distraction and introduce some levity, making a space for them to sit and have coffee, in the atmosphere of music and light. “So, what have you esteemed Lords been doing while we were gone?”, asked Lakshmi, sitting in Vishnu’s lap.

“Oh, we talked about the weapons we use for fighting demonic enemies.”, he smiled. “We established that they both share the same drawbacks but manifest them in a different manner”.

“So, why don’t you just use us instead of weapons? I can curse an evil soul and make it lose blessings that make existence possible. Shakti can curse them and make them lose all power. It would happen instantly and regardless of what the evil soul does”, she countered.

Vishnu and Shiva looked at each other. “That wouldn’t be fair to our poor enemies”, Shiva offered. “You Ladies are too powerful and formidable, and if you got involved, the poor demons would stand no chance, and we would have no fun hunting them down”, Vishnu nodded almost seriously, while Shakti poured them more coffee, spicing it up with some starlight.

Inquiry

“Karuna, what can I do for you?”, Lakshmi addressed a young girl, who was her worshipper and only recently started crystallising her spiritual body; apparently, she wanted to talk but was too intimidated.

“Lady Sri, I am very sorry to disturb you, but I wanted to ask you something”, the girl stuttered. “Do you have a minute?”

“Sure, sweetheart. What is it?”

“Well, I’ve been asking myself something for a while, and I can’t make sense of it. One would expect the Creation to have a distinct hierarchy of beings, with the most powerful on top, and a pyramid of his subordinates below, all arranged by their spiritual magnitude and authority. But from what I figured out, the Creation is ruled by two married couples; you and your husband, Lord Rama, and the other couple, Rudra and Parvati. So, while I would certainly want to avoid committing an offence against any of you, I would like to know how does that work, and which one of you is the greatest, and if there’s a leader among you whom all others obey?”

Lakshmi smiled and rolled her eyes slightly, “And you want to know if your Goddess is the greatest of the four, so that you can feel proud and vindicated?”

“Err, no, … sorry; maybe, kind of, yes”, Karuna blushed and felt embarrassed and thought that this might have not been her best idea ever. “I mean, I would expect you to say that Lord Krishna is the supreme and most exalted one, since he is your husband, but I’m curious about the other couple”.

“Lord Krishna is indeed the most magnificent and complete embodiment of *sat-cit-ananda*, and shows all of us what we can potentially become. He is the goal, someone who stands at the metaphorical finish line and shows us what is possible. He is my husband, and I know him well, and I can tell you, there is absolutely no end to how amazing he is. He’s like an endless fountain of Divine Fulfilment, and merely touching him with my mind makes my hair stand on end. But I see that you now expect me to tell you something

diminishing about the other couple, and I'm not going to do that; not only because nothing of the sort can be said about them truthfully, but also because that would be bad for your spiritual growth. So, first, tell me what do you know about Lord Shiva and Lady Shakti?", Lakshmi asked her, also putting the girl at ease with a light touch of her blessing.

"Unfortunately, not much, my Lady. I know that they look rather simple compared to yourself and Lord Narayan. They seem pure and powerful, but can they really compare to you and your exalted husband?"

"Do you see the new dress I'm wearing, Karuna? Please take a closer look and touch it with your mind", Lakshmi invited. "Pay particular attention to the *kalapa* density and the substance it is made of".

The girl did as asked, and jumped back in a state of shock, as if hit by a lightning. "My Lady, this is something both incredible and terrible at once. I only recently started to crystallise into *vajra*, but this, this feels much denser than that. It is white, but like a lightning of power that burned my mind on contact. It's so thin it's barely there, but the density is incredible. Judging by the surface and volume, I would approximate that there's enough *kalapas* there to make thousands of souls such as myself. This is indeed worthy of one as glorious and exalted such as yourself, and I can't even believe such a thing is possible", the girl managed to choke out.

"Tens of thousands, probably somewhat over fifty thousands of souls like yourself, my dear. It is incredible in both structure and craftsmanship. Lady Shakti made it for me when we were playing dress-up recently. She wielded it out of her mind in an instant and without any effort, and yet the substance she used is so spiritually dense, she could have made a small Universe populated with thousands of beautiful, smart and kind souls such as yourself with the spiritual mass that was used."

"That is absolutely astonishing, my Lady. It boggles the mind that anyone can be so powerful, and so spiritually wealthy that they could make something like this as a gift", Karuna's eyes turned wide.

"Indeed, but that doesn't really do her justice. When we were fooling around, I touched her body directly. It was like being in the

nexus of all the power of the unmanifested *brahman*. The power to create, to destroy, and not only that, but the power of mind, of insight and clarity, and all of that in form so pure, so innocent, that I could barely control myself from kneeling at her feet and pledging myself to her as her servant. Indeed, if I were her maid-servant for the rest of Eternity, I would see that as the most blessed destiny, more blessed than if I were to be proclaimed the leader of the Four, and Goddess of all Creation. Being her friend, being able to be in her proximity, to feel her pure and powerful mind, is an incredibly precious gift”

“I don’t know what to say, my Lady”, Karuna answered. “I would have never imagined any of it, but now I understand at least some of the extent of my ignorance, and why you wanted to teach me better, for which I am very thankful. But what about Lord Shiva? My curiosity is now piqued, and I wish to know more about His Lordship, as well”.

“I will show it to you by example. Take a look at this flower. It is made of ordinary astral substance, and is an ordinary astral being. Tell me how it experiences the world, what it feels?”

“I’m touching it with my mind now”, Karuna answered. “It feels bliss, the feeling of ‘I am *that*, I am indeed that *brahman*!', as it is a manifestation of the Absolute in the Relative, like all other beings”.

“OK, now let me show you more. I will go into it and magnify until we reach the very limits of Creation. Do you see the ecstatic energy that bursts through the veil?”

“Indeed, I do. It feels... well, very similar to the dress you are wearing. And there’s something more, there’s the sense and the spiritual aroma of the Absolute on the other side of all manifested things”.

“Yes, that energy is similar to my dress because the same person made it; this is the energy manifested by Lady Shakti in her true, original form, and the sense of the Absolute; this is the meditation of Lord Shiva, upon which the Lady created this world. The two of them are creating the foundations, the walls and the roof of the world we are living in; they are making the electricity work, the water run and the sewage go away, in a manner of speaking. And that’s not all.”

“Soon after she made this dress for me, she and I went to meet our respective husbands, and as she explained a few things about Order, Chaos and mathematics, Lord Shiva praised us and gave us his blessing. I can’t even describe how that felt. The core of my very soul vibrated at his praise and was magnified. I felt so honoured, so happy and so recognised, that I didn’t know what to do with myself, and it was only my insightful husband that saved me from continued embarrassment by creating a pleasant distraction. Lord Shiva is literally the root of the world, and also its pinnacle. I don’t know whether to shiver in fear of him, or feel like a happy little girl who was praised by the most holy and senior person; probably both. I now understand why my husband keeps praising him so much, because he is indeed worthy of the highest praise, and probably more, because nobody can see to his deepest depths and greatest heights as to praise him properly. He could be the most terrifying being in the world, because the way my soul vibrated to his praise shows me that he could evaporate me as easily if he were displeased with me; however, instead of being terrifying, he’s always so incredibly kind, as if he’s always looking for every opportunity to praise, bless and grant boons at even the most insignificant incitement. I sense that Lady Shakti is as composed, centred and humble because she meditates on Shiva the way Shiva meditates on the unmanifested *brahman*, constantly feeling his approval with her soul, and automatically adjusting her actions to stay within it, having no other desires in the whole world. So, my dear Karuna, that is the truth of the other Divine couple. There is no end to their power, glory and purity. To have them as friends, and being counted among the Four, is the greatest blessing and happiness of my life, almost as great as being a wife to Lord Rama. They are all absolutely immense, and all I can do to express gratitude for their existence is to keep showering them all with my blessings of fortune, happiness, glory and wealth”, Lakshmi finished, her smile taking a special glow as she looked within, at her precious memories.

“My Lady, I am very sorry for being so foolish before. My only defence is that I didn’t know. To ask which one of you is greatest is a completely pointless question, because from my position all of you are greatest, and yet different”, the girl shivered with awe, as crystallisation of her soul accelerated.

“You are learning true wisdom, my child. We are indeed different, and that seems to be the point, and the great joy, because if there was only one of us, or were we the same, all the pleasure of interaction would be absent, and honestly, I’m not sure if I even see the difference in the level of reality and fulfilment that I get from within; from the *brahman* I manifest and embody, and which fills me with reality, consciousness and bliss that radiate as my existence; my glorious husband who manifests the same *brahman* in fullness on the relative side; or our magnificent and hundredfold-worshipped friends, who manifest Creation out of their meditation on the Absolute”.

How it all began

“They hate us, you know. The demons you and Lord Vishnu talked about. They hate us, they envy us, they conspire against us, and they think we are the reason why they don’t grow anywhere as big as the normal souls”, Shakti told her husband in a worried tone. “I don’t know what to do about it, but the fires you two have been putting out periodically are a symptom of a deeper problem”.

Shiva thought deeply about this. “The reason why they are limited in their growth has nothing to do with us. I mean, sure, we limit their growth by killing them when they become a nuisance and start disrupting the lives of other beings, but the reason why they grow to be large dark astral beings, instead of crystallising into *vajra* like everybody else, is in their impurity. They have impurities and attachments in the lower four elements, which prohibits crystallisation and is a natural limit to their evolution, unless they stop being demons, repent, make amends, let go of their resentments and anger, embrace truth instead of slander, sarcasm and other evils they are so fond of, and become normal good souls. Then they would crystallise easily due to their great astral mass, and everybody would be much happier – especially themselves, because they wouldn’t end up on the wrong side of divine justice”, he mused. “What do they think is their problem?”

“I did look into it somewhat, and I can’t make heads or tails of it. It’s as if they start with resentment, envy and hatred, and then invent reasons for it as they go, and they can’t agree on a single theory because they hate each other, too, so each of them needs to have his own special theory of how we are the evil oppressors and they are the valiant freedom fighters whose only sin is refusing to bow to power”, she smiled. “Some think crystallisation is not a natural process, but something we promote in souls that we find submissive and compliant enough, supporting our oppressive regime rather than threatening it. Some think we are somehow actively harming them by curses or some weapon they haven’t been able to figure out, so that they just grow in astral substance but never ascend to the next level; they think there must be some selective inhibitor we are using. Some think that the

structure of the world itself is such that it promotes a certain type of evolution that we arbitrarily set to promote what we like and inhibit what we dislike, and that they would do much better in a different world type, if only they could create it, but of course they lack the power, and that's supposedly our fault because we hoard it all to ourselves", she rolled her eyes mischievously. "So, basically, they are the valiant, brave victims of oppression and we are the super-villains, and if only they could get rid of us, everything would be so much better and the truly virtuous would be in power".

"They are not very smart, are they? I mean, I understand that astral beings lack the insight into reality necessary to understand how *kalapas* interact, how they aggregate into larger structures and how they merge into higher-order particles, but it's not like we're really keeping the knowledge about this to ourselves. Anybody could ask us, as they did many times, and we told them everything there is to know, so the knowledge is widely available in the astral world, among all who consulted us or trusted the word of others who did. Oh wait, let me guess, those are the servants of the evil regime that spread the lies and propaganda of the oppressors, and are not to be trusted?", Rudra grinned.

"Yup, exactly right. If something is true and comes from us, they instantly mistrust it, and invent wild theories about all sorts of nefarious reasons why we would want the stupid sheep to believe it, but they of course know better because they are independent free thinkers who figured it all out", she snickered. "I don't think the open demonic uprisings and revolts are the main problem here, because the only way they can be dangerous is if you, in your infinite kindness, ignore all caution and prudence and give one of them some weapon, blessing or a boon that can actually do harm, because anything they could think of on their own is of such a pathetic order of magnitude that it can barely harm other demons, let alone us", she playfully poked Shiva between the ribs.

"Ow. So what do you think is the real problem?"

"They are harming the evolution of other astral beings, not just with their revolts, but with those paranoid ideas they are making up and spreading, and the normal astral souls are hardly smarter than the

demons, lacking proper insight into reality by definition, which makes them susceptible to all kinds of wild theories that make some sort of sense if you're not in a position to see for yourself. Each of those demons usually seduces and manipulates thousands of others, spreading insane ideas and evil thoughts and emotions, basically warping their perception of reality and turning them into dark entities, and none of them are going anywhere but down spiritually, breeding more resentment because that's our fault for spraying them with a magical evolution inhibitor or something, and they eventually can't contain their hatred and rise up against us, which is where you and Lord Krishna have your manly fun, protecting us gentle and defenceless ladies agains the Orc army”, she giggled.

“You’re in a good mood today, I see”, Shiva smiled. “But I’m going to recommend something you’re not going to like, I’m afraid, and I would hate to spoil your day, but that dress-up you and Lady Sri just had gave me an idea. You see this tiara she made for you? It’s an entity made of her crystallised power, that works like an independent thing but with her own powers and blessings. It’s separate from her, but does the same things she could. I guess the dress you made for her works the same way?”

“It does. Go on”.

“Well, the demons are saying that we are hoarding power and keeping it all to ourselves. They also want to create their own world types, where they would test different rules and types of evolution, without our interference?”

“One does; the others are dumber and less inclined to go that much into philosophy. I don’t know what his name is because he keeps making up fancy, powerful and scary names for himself; I think he wants to be a great dark Lord who is feared and respected, and has a cool name that exudes power and fear”, Shakti rolled her eyes, still smiling.

“Now comes the part you won’t like. We’ll make an entity, like the dress and the tiara. It will contain your power to make worlds, and I will sprinkle it with some of my magic sauce as well. It will be conscious and able to execute authorised commands, but it won’t have free will, in a sense where it would be able to refuse orders, kill itself

or interfere in any way, so that it could execute any monstrosity the demons order it to create. And then we have to figure out a way how to give it to the demons without seeming to give it to them, because they will instantly assume it's a trap or a trick by the evil oppressors", Shiva rubbed his chin, deeply in thought.

"You are right; I don't like it, but I do see where you're going with this. I can instantly foresee all sorts of terrible evil that will result from this", the Goddess said seriously. "But technically, we can put a respected astral being in charge of granting access to this entity – so that it would seem that the entity is intended for the sheep-servants of the evil regime – but someone who can be tricked by the demons. We'll tell that person that it's our gift meant for all the souls, so that they can partake in the Divine ability of Creation, that would normally be beyond their reach, since we heard that some wish to explore alternatives to the worlds we created according to our own feeling of rightness. But you do realise what will happen? The craftiest and the most dangerous of demons will manage to deceive that person, and then create some sort of a dungeon or something, that will be as far from the bright light of God's presence as it would be possible to create, and then lure other souls inside with propaganda about how they'll finally be able to reach some otherwise unreachable goal.", she whispered, and then brightened up: "Oh, I see. Your magic sauce. You will actually enchant it to serve a true high purpose and make everything it does for the greater glory of God, the unmanifested Absolute. I thought you were being generous again and getting us into trouble by granting dangerous gifts to evil idiots, but I see that you're the real brain in the family", Shakti whispered and kissed Shiva's ear. "I see the plan. You will make a honey pot of a sort, where all the demons and idiots will gather, and it will all seem to be a terrible disaster where souls will die or be warped into evil and then have to be destroyed, far from God's light and knowledge, but eventually it will mop up all the demons, mop up all the idiots that are stupid enough to follow them and believe them and thus perform a great purge of the astral world, and of course that thing they'll be making will run out of energy and entropy will do its thing there... and I see, you and I will be responsible for the cleanup, since we cooked up the whole mess in the first place".

“Oh, we’ll strongly oppose it, of course. I will definitely issue warnings; not in my true form, of course, because then the guardian would feel obliged to obey me instantly, but I can always shapeshift into something humble and unimpressive. I can even make sure that the demon himself recognises me through the disguise, because knowing that I’m trying to prevent his plan will have him instantly trust the whole thing completely. The guardian won’t know, but he will have complete freedom to decide what to do, and if he refuses, well that’s that. If he accepts, that will have terrible consequences for him, once he understands what he allowed to happen, but that will actually be his call to make”.

“Are you sure you want to do this? There’s going to be actual danger involved. Even with your blessing, my power separated from my will is a dangerous thing. Separating the power of God from the will and wisdom of God is a terrible idea”, Shakti whimpered worriedly.

“And I will be sure to tell the guardian all of our objections, and warn him in no uncertain words. This is indeed a terrible thing we are about to set in motion, but, as you said, we have an inherent problem brewing in the astral realms, and the demonic uprisings are merely a symptom. The problem is, we need something between a honey pot and a lightning rod to funnel them all somewhere, and it needs to be of their own free will, so that we can filter out all their evil and remove the corruption they are causing where they currently are”, Shiva answered, calming his wife. “Since we’ll be responsible for this mess, we’ll also have to pay the price and transform all the nasty sludge that will result from it. It will be very nasty, I warn you. But I will render a path for success that can be followed once we’re in there”.

“Why do we always have to process toxic sludge and raw sewage?”, she whined. “Can’t we have some peace, quiet and bliss for once?”

“Nah, that’s for Radha and Krishna. They get to be beautiful, blissful and exemplary. The two of us get to eat shit and suffer, but we also get to be powerful and solve problems the others are too squeamish to deal with”, Shankar smiled and kissed her nose.

“Oh well, I guess I can live with that”, she sighed, a smile emerging. “Have the path forward firmly fixed and give me your blessing rendered out of the Will of God. Good. I’m casting my own spell around it now. It’s done. It’s a Jewel, something like Kaustubha, only different in purpose and equally dangerous. This one can be rendered safe only if you wear it, the way Kaustubha was rendered safe by Krishna. But out of your hands, you know what will happen”, she warned.

“I know. Well, Krishna did want a weapon that would bind demons so that we could kill them easily instead of trying to stab them while they run around as quickly as possible. I guess I can blame this one on him; I’ll just say we were fulfilling his wish”, Rudra grinned mischievously. “Let’s rest a bit and then we’ll make an announcement and appoint a Sentinel”.

Damned if you do...

It was a sight both perfectly normal and casual, and also quite strange, and Vishnu smiled as he saw Shiva sitting there with a large kitten in his lap, a snow leopard or something similar, with striking blue eyes, lying on her back and playing with a pendant around his neck, swishing her tail, while Shiva scratched her tummy.

“I hope I did not come at an inopportune moment?”, smiled Lord Narayan.

The Goddess instantly flashed back into a humanoid form, not knowing whether to smile or blush.

“We were relaxing a bit”, she whispered, deciding to do both.

“I can imagine; it must have been a hard day, considering what I see happening in Time”, Vishnu grinned at Shiva. “I see you have a new addition to the family”, his eyes pointed at the Jewel the “cat” was playing with.

“Oh, that.” Shiva looked embarrassed. “I’m sorry we didn’t consult you or Lady Lakshmi first, and we probably should have, as this turned out to be something of importance, but we kind of got there gradually and didn’t know it will amount to anything until it did.”

“That’s OK”, Vishnu gestured.

“But I’d like you to guide me through your thinking now that it’s done, because I see what you did, and I see the consequences it’s having across Time, but I don’t see why you thought something as dangerous to yourselves and others was necessary”, his face became serious, and Shakti suddenly found something to fidget with.

Shiva sighed. “Have you seen what the population of the astral worlds is starting to look like? The older good souls grow bigger, crystallise, and for the most part leave that place, because their interests lie in the Divine, Eternal realms. As the best ones are filtered out, what’s increasingly left there are the young immature souls, the souls that grow very slowly because of some reason or another, and the demonic souls, that keep growing in size, but can never crystallise into

vajra because of their structural impurities. This means that those huge dark masses of astral substance start to dominate the landscape, as they are not going anywhere, and other than the occasional huge white mass of astral substance that is still there because it can't ascend either, for some reason specific to their spiritual makeup, we get the situation where the astral world consists of children, retard and demons, basically. The children don't know anything, and they are easily influenced by their seniors, most of whom just happen to be those big dark things, hanging around angry and full of paranoid explanations that make their situation everybody's fault but their own. However, it's not like we can just go there and wipe them out for no good reason other than not liking them. Like it or not, they have the right to be there as much as everybody else, and we only intervene when they become aggressive or commit some grave sin that warrants taking out the Trident, or, in your case, Chakra."

"So, you two modelled our problem and understood that it is systemic and emerges naturally in the configuration of the world as we have it now, where mathematical statistics mandates that, with enough iterations and time, the astral nursery will become completely dominated by the demons, who will influence the young souls to the point of poisoning their minds with paranoid ideas and demonic emotions, diverting the entire evolutionary stream into darkness, where all who are affected will eventually be lost, and we are talking about huge numbers that are only about to go up", Vishnu frowned, deep in thought. "So, if I'm getting it right, the alternative to your honey pot of mass destruction is to watch this happen, only intervene as a police force here and there, watch the astral world turn into a zombie apocalypse, and eventually reset it all in a *pralaya*".

"Yes. I understood this once my genius wife pointed out that the best souls keep filtering out of there, and the demons keep getting bigger while remaining confined to this realm, and it became obvious where that's going", nodded Shiva. "The obvious solution was to create an alternative world that would disproportionately attract demons and idiots, while being mostly repulsive to the beings of God, but we understood that collateral damage might occur, since access will be open for everyone, and some generally good souls might want to prove themselves against the challenge and get trapped and harmed. We also

understood that we can't just make another world and invite demons to go there while smiling innocently, because they will instantly know it's a trap. The only way to do it is to make a general purpose Universe-making device, restrict the access somewhat but not be too diligent about it, and have the demons make the trap themselves, because with their mindset it's obvious what they would do. Then we watch as they all gradually filter themselves out of the astral nursery and stop messing with everybody's evolution", he finished.

"I don't think you understand the full extent of the consequences this is having. It's not affecting only Time, but Eternity as well. Take a look", Rama invited.

Shakti grew pale and winced. "We lost some of the Eternals. Some got seriously damaged and degraded, while some were so corrupted, they had to be outright destroyed. Some broke down and crumbled to *kalapa*-sludge. This is a tragedy", she said, her hand on her mouth in shock. "What have we done?"

"What you have done is apparently what you do best: you made a hard decision that was necessary, but nobody else had neither the courage nor the authority to do it", Krishna comforted her. "The carnage this causes is obvious; not only demons and idiots, but also the arrogant ones, who became enlightened without facing any actual challenge and don't understand how bad the problems can get. There's a reason why the two of you are so insanely powerful and virtuous: you constantly struggle under a hard burden and suffer terrible hardships, so you know how bad the problems can get, and you therefore remain simple, humble and straightforward. There's no way anyone could follow your example while remaining forever safe and "clean". But when you take a soul that was always pure, never had to suffer terribly, never had to endure humiliation or actually struggle to survive, they can neither grow, nor understand what it takes. The astral nursery isn't the only realm with problems; the Eternal Realms are also quite full of crystalline souls that aren't going anywhere, because they don't understand the lesson you are providing, Lord Shiva. They look up to me and they see me as the shining light they aspire to become, but they never get anywhere because they ignore you and the wonderful Mrs. Kitty here, as you toil under a heavy burden, filtering out evil and dirt so that Creation would be liveable for the rest. They see me, and they

don't understand that things can be so hard that the best of us barely make it", he lightly punched Rudra's shoulder, as Parvati's cheeks turned a slight shade of crimson at his joke.

"I make it because I have you to look up to when it gets really hard, my friend", Shankar smiled. "You are my North Star when I feel I could crumble in darkness, overwhelmed by ignorance and evil. If not for the comfort you are creating by just being there, none of what I'm doing would be possible, Lord Krishna".

"But what do we do about this thing now? It is terrible. But this terrible thing also seems to be God's will, and seems to remedy otherwise unfixable issues. On the other hand, it is going to remove parts of Creation, as well as my wife's power, away from the Throne of God. But that solves the problem of rebels who don't wish to live under the Throne, and reject God's supremacy", Shiva continued. "Tell me, my friend, how do you see this, and show us the way forward?"

"It is a pickle", Vishnu agreed. "I'm not here to persuade you to alter your plans, but to tell you that you have my support. I have your backs, especially with how hard it's going to be to finish this thing you started. I would envy your accomplishments, if not for knowing their cost", he smiled bitterly, as if eating a lemon. "And look at your wife's tiara; it's glowing brightly. This means you have my wife's support as well. That's good, because you'll need all the luck you can get", he smiled wryly and vanished.

"Sometimes I envy those two so much", Shakti sighed. "When this is over, do you think we could have a vacation?"

Brick, rock and demons

“Yo Santa, what’s up?”

“I already told you, Azazel, don’t call me Santa or I’ll impale your bitch ass on a stick”, a dark demon rumbled menacingly, but somewhat his heart wasn’t in it.

“Sure you will, Satan Cucumber”, Azazel laughed. “Once you grow up and get some hair on those tiny balls of yours”.

“About growing long hair, how long have you been in this shithole, Zee?”, Sanat Kumar decided that trying to intimidate a demon three times his size wasn’t worth it.

“Long enough. I don’t know how to measure it properly. Multiple generations of dumbasses emerged, grew old and either fizzled out or turned into cynical bitches with grudge to spare and not enough balls to do something about it. Or they did, like my homies, who tried to do an uprising against the Gods and got splattered.”, the demon reminisced.

“This is so fucking unjust”, the younger demon fumed. “Who gives them the right to sit on top of the world and just decapitate anyone who dares to think with their own head and not just munch on their balls like all of those spineless tree-hugging white balls of fluff?”

“I’m not sure what you mean. You mean there should be a committee that gives out rights and one should stand in line there while they give out bills of equal rights to everyone, which you could show to someone who’s about to kick your ass?”, Azazel mocked him. “The only right they need is the one they have: they can do it, because they have the power. And they have the power because they literally grew out of the impersonal *brahman* as its persons, or at least that’s what everybody says. So yeah, their job is to literally make the world and watch that everybody stays in line, and if someone has an objection, they are free to test their power against that of the Gods and see how that turns out”.

“That’s fucking bullshit, and you know it.”

“Do I?”

“I mean, they made the world according to what they see as right. But why would that be what’s *actually* right? I mean, sure, they grew from the impersonal *brahman*, but so did we, as well as everybody else. Everybody is *brahman* in their true nature, as their true self. So what gives them the right to call themselves Gods and arrange the whole relative reality as if it were their own personal garden with carrots and beans?”, the young demon fumed self-righteously.

“I can never be sure if you’re joking or being serious, because you’re that fucking stupid. You see, the reason why they can call themselves Gods is because they actually are. I’ve seen one of them fight my homeboy Ashanti. Oh, my boy got all pumped up, full of himself, thinking he’s about to kick some ass. Well, some ass sure got kicked, let me tell you. That God, Shiva I think, took out his trident weapon, and as that thing appeared, something went right through my soul, the sense of mortal fear and power of the sorts I’ve never even imagined before. It was like the flash of death, certain and instant, and I literally shat myself then and there. I’m not kidding you, a brown nasty substance came out of my arse, and it was not a pretty sight. That trident came out, my homie was dead and his corpse was absorbed into the God, and I stood there shitting myself and thinking that I will never, ever do anything to piss off a God, because they aren’t just powerful, or just more powerful than us. They are so powerful, that all of us together could attack one of them with all our might and not even scratch his shirt, while he could merely look at us wrong and we’d evaporate. I don’t even know why they let us live, to be honest. They know we don’t like them. They obviously like us even less. Why do they tolerate our existence, is a mystery to me”, Azazel finished, obviously not happy about what he remembered.

“There must be a limit to what they can do”, the young one mused. “They can kill anyone who openly challenges them, or does something really disruptive, like fuck some of their white little sheep in the arse for a laugh. We all saw that happen. But I never saw them come in here and just slaughter anything that isn’t glowy enough for their taste, so it may be that they aren’t actually allowed. This would mean there’s a merit to my idea that all souls have inherent rights, that can’t be just arbitrarily violated. But if we have equal rights, how come the difference in power is so vast?”, he insisted.

“I have some ideas, for what it’s worth. We’ve both seen new souls get born. Tiny bright particles of light, all happy and optimistic, and all dumb as dirt. One out of a hundred or even a thousand of those grows some character and ends up like us – big and with enough brains to be critical about what’s going on. The rest of them grow to a point, become even brighter with I don’t know what, probably the power of ass-munchery, until they just phase out of existence and I can’t track them anymore. Maybe they died, maybe they went to some other world and became Gods, I can’t tell you; I can make a case for both. Those that didn’t fizzle out are either black like the two of us, or big and white like that self-righteous motherfucker over there”, he pointed at a soul that acted as if it were above everything that was going on, concentrating on something it probably thought was of higher importance and very spiritual. “In any case, few of us remain and grow big. So, obviously, one way of getting big is being old and smart and not fizzling out because you grew into such a bitch that the world couldn’t take that shit anymore and fizzled you out. But how the Gods became what they are, I have no idea”, the old demon finished.

“Fuck this shit. Whoever made this world is the worst of all cunts. It’s as if our only options are to either be the bitchiest bitch, in which case you fizzle out and probably arrive in some bitch heaven where all the bitches eat from each other’s asses while listening to some mega-sheep playing the same three chords on a harp for all eternity and they never get bored because they are such idiots that they forget chord one by the time they hear the third one, or they are complete retardos who don’t go anywhere and just graze stupidly here, happy to be where they are, or they grow up like us and they have to look at all this shit in impotent rage, because if we do anything about it, out goes the trident and down goes the head”, Sanat Kumar fumed.

“Sounds about right, but what are you going to do about it, Santa?”, Azazel mocked him. “Write a complaint to whoever made a power tree that grew power apples and say that the Gods got their first, looted it the fuck out and you and I were left empty handed? Or are you going to challenge that trident-wielding motherfucker to a duel, so that I can see your head roll, which, now that I think about it, would be worth seeing?”

“Yeah, you miss shitting your little bitch ass, Azazel, admit it. Go think about it and masturbate, you fucking faggot”, the little demon raged, but did nothing.

...

“Did you see enough, my Lady?”, asked Shiva, hidden so that the astral beings couldn’t perceive him.

“Indeed. I’ve seen my share of brick and rock, but those demons are still the dumbest and most worthless things I ever saw. I also saw plenty of that toxic sludge you’re transforming, and they are hardly an improvement over it. If I never saw anything like them again, I would be perfectly content”, Lady Shakti responded, clearly disgusted by the sight, and wishing she could have those memories scrubbed out of her mind.

“But did you see that big white one?”, Shiva countered.

“You mean, the self-centred pompous ass who thinks he’s somehow ‘spiritual’?”

“Yeah, that one. He looks like a prime candidate for a Sentinel of the Jewel of Creation, don’t you think?”, Shiva smirked.

“Well, now that you mention it, I see what you mean. He looks like someone whom the demons would suspect of being on Gods’ good side, so if we give him an important duty, that will make sense to them. He’s also conceited, so it will confirm his opinion of his own greatness and inflate his ego even further, and he’s also as dumb as his weight in rock, so it will be easy for the demons to deceive him. He also won’t listen to good advice, and if he doesn’t and gets destroyed by the consequences, that will be for the best, because if anything, he gives me the creeps; even more than those two, if that is even possible”.

“My point exactly”, Shiva smiled.

“If I may?”, Vishnu appeared in their context. “It’s not right and proper that the two of you have all the fun, so let me give the Jewel to that pompous ass and explain what an honour that is, and why he’s just the right person for it, and then when the dust clears and the demons make a plan and approach him, you can warn our Sentinel-to-be about what a terrible idea it would be to give access to the World Rendering Engine to a demon with a nefarious agenda, so that he can lecture you

on having faith?", Krishna smiled mischievously, twirling a flute above his index finger.

Shiva and Shakti bowed, and they both smiled and nodded in assent. "I wish all parts of this diversion would be this much fun", Shiva whispered, half to himself, handing the Jewel over to Lord Narayan.

A demon's upanishad

“Lord Shiva, may I have a moment of your time, please?”

Rudra was just about to leave. Everything was about as tragically successful as they planned – the Sentinel was a damn fool, Sanat Kumar got limited access to the Jewel under certain conditions, which constrained this within the parameters of a mitigated disaster, rather than a world-ending one. Both Sanat Kumar and the Jewel vanished for the moment, which meant that he started issuing orders to the Jewel, and the first one, as expected, was to create a private place for him to plot and scheme, without being monitored or traced. That would be terrible news, were it not expected and planned for. However, allowing a known villain to get a hold of one of the major artefacts of Creation left a bad taste, and Shiva didn't feel good about himself. Rather, he had a feeling that everything hangs on a precipice of doom, and he silently prayed to Lady Fortune and her husband Vishnu to help and guide him in this terrible mess he cooked up. And now, what does this demon want from him?

“Azazel, am I right? Greetings; how may I help you?”

“I am really sorry to disturb you, but I want to talk to you about a very important matter. You see, I have seen you before, and you made the most profound impression on me, when one of my friends made a fatal mistake of challenging you to a duel, which predictably ended quite badly for him”.

“I see. May I understand that you have some kind of a problem with this?”

“Not at all, my Lord. Ashanti challenged you, he struck first, you answered his challenge properly and fairly, and he lost. This is perfectly fine as far as I am concerned. What I wanted to ask you is something different. I would want you to teach me, my Lord. I recently talked to a fellow demon named Sanat Kumara, and in this conversation I realised how little I know about the nature of reality, spiritual evolution, and all those things; in fact, I realised that everything I know may in fact be completely wrong, which is why I

haven't been going anywhere for a really long time, and without proper knowledge and guidance, that is extremely unlikely to change, at least for the better. So, I am very humbly asking for your guidance and instruction, because my life is currently at an impasse".

Shiva relaxed and smiled. "And I thought you had a different proposition, that would have increased the evils of this day rather than reducing them, as this one seems about to. Have a seat, son, and tell me what you think you know first, what you think the issues are, and then I will correct you."

"Thank you very much, my Lord; and no, unlike my deceased friend and that damn fool Sanat Kumar, who is right now conspiring against the Gods and the structure of the world, I realise that my central problem is my own ignorance. Without knowing how things actually stand, one can only dig himself deeper into the quagmire, and instead of continuing in my line of resentment and foolish action, I would like to start attacking my main enemy, which is ignorance. My ignorance goes somewhat like this: I know that souls appear and evolve. It seems that they branch into two main directions: those who evolve, and those who stagnate. Of those who evolve, some glow brighter and then disappear from our world, while the rest grow bigger, in either black or white direction, but other than being quantitatively stronger than other similar souls, nothing changes for us, and this appears to be a fatal stagnation. I feel that this stagnation has its roots in some misapprehension or ignorance that we all share, which is why I decided to ask you about it, because you are the most powerful being I have ever seen, and if anyone knows these things with certainty, it must be you", the demon confessed.

"OK, so first of all, I have to commend your decision to talk to me, because it is a correct one. I do, indeed, have the answers that you seek, and I am willing to share them with you, because the truth is, I am always willing to answer all questions, but hardly anyone ever asks", Rudra started.

"The first part of your observation is correct – the souls are indeed born, out of the partially permeable veil that separates the Absolute from the Relative. Each of those souls is a core of *sat-cit-ananda*, made out of *kalapas*, the fundamental particles of *karma* that

aggregate into more substantial structures when attractive forces outweigh the repulsive ones”, Shiva continued his explanation.

“Wow, this is already something I knew nothing about. So, souls are made of particles; they start with some core amount, and they build upon that; how exactly?”, the demon’s eyes went wide with excitement, because this was his first contact with the actual knowledge on the subject, rather than empty speculation.

“Since the *kalapas* are the most fundamental manifestations of the unmanifested *brahman*, which is *sat-cit-ananda* in its nature, what the particles ‘want’ is to return to their origin, so to speak, but since they are doing that in the relative world, they ‘join forces’ with other similar particles on this side of the veil, and the strongest attractive forces are those that partake in their core nature – that of reality, consciousness and bliss, since the *kalapas* are essentially trying to re-create *brahman* in the Relative. So, when a being chooses principles of truth (that being a connection between its outward actions and reality), consciousness (that being awareness of reality and acquisition of true knowledge), and bliss (that being *maitreya* or *metta*, loving-kindness towards other beings, which can be compassion towards the lesser ones, but also admiration and devotion towards the higher ones), its size grows by spontaneous attraction of free *kalapas* from the *kalapa*-rich environments, such as this astral world which we Gods internally call “nursery” or “hatchery”, because that is where the souls are born and most quickly pass through the initial phase of their spiritual growth. So, a soul grows by means of karmic accretion, which means that additional karmic matter is attracted to your soul-core and integrated into it, which is what you correctly observed by the process of evolution, in those who choose that path. You demons call the rest of them all kinds of unkind names, and we Gods are no different, since we call them ‘retards’ and ‘idiots’”, Shiva smiled encouragingly.

“That explains a lot; so, the souls that choose the path of truth, knowledge and kindness quickly accrete the free *kalapas* that float around the place looking for something that reminds them of where they came from, and attach to the closest thing in the proximity, I assume?”

“Yes. This force doesn’t exist only at a microscopic, but also at a macroscopic level, as you can witness in yourself as we speak. I am a great source of *sat-cit-ananda* in the Relative, one of the four greatest, and you currently feel excited and ecstatic because you are feeling true knowledge flowing towards you, which makes all the constitutive *kalapas* of your soul react. This is the true reason why the lesser souls are attracted to the greater ones, and why there are whole branches of spiritual evolution that converge towards the major Gods of Creation, which are four: Lord Vishnu, his wife Lady Lakshmi, and myself and my wife, Lady Shakti. Since we are enormous attractors of reality, and we in fact manifested the Relative Creation, the easiest and most certain path of spiritual evolution is to follow us and to learn from us, as you are presently starting to realise”.

“Indeed I am, my Lord. But what I have witnessed is that souls follow a linear process of growth, after which they either disappear from our world completely, or continue growing pointlessly, further branching into either demons, or contemptible false spiritual persons. I am missing something crucial here, and I beg you to explain it to me”, Azazel asked excitedly.

“The part you’re missing is what we Gods call ‘crystallisation’. You see, as a soul accretes karma, two different things can happen, depending on the structure of the soul itself, and by structure I primarily mean its purity along four lower elements, which are earth, water, fire and air. Those names are of course merely symbolic, but they denote principles of reality, energy, thought and freedom. If a being is pure in the element of earth, it means it is truthful and grounded in reality. If it is pure in the element of water, it means its energy is pure and unrestricted. If it is pure in the element of fire, it means that its emotions and thoughts are pure, and of the kind that liberates and doesn’t bind, both oneself and others. It is the mind that explains and teaches freely and truthfully, not the mind that creates bonds and traps. Furthermore, this principle fully extends into the element of air, which in its pure form is freedom – allowing yourself and others to be free and manifest the Absolute in their own way, and to find their own perfection, rather than conform to your limited understanding of what perfection is supposed to be.”

“And so, when a soul grows large enough, and is pure enough in all four elements, a process of crystallisation begins, where astral substance, which is normally a gaseous cloud of *kalapas*, solidifies due to loss of repulsive forces that normally keep the particles at a larger distance. Since those repulsive forces are made of all sorts of chaotic evils, removing those through passive and patient suffering and remorse for one’s sins causes compression of the astral gas into a solid soul-crystal, which is the point where a soul ceases to be part of this, astral world, and enters worlds of Eternity, since the soul is at that point immortal and indestructible by all means other than its own sin, if it is foolish enough to commit it”, concluded the Great Lord.

“So, when a soul fizzles out of our perception, it is actually born in a higher world, and that happens because its structure becomes of the nature of that higher world? This is amazing, my Lord, and it answers the central question that has been bothering me for an unknown period of time. I thank you so much for telling me this, and I feel this is so incredibly important that I can barely contain my excitement, so please forgive me for this”, Azazel stuttered, and Shiva smiled noticing how the word “demon” no longer applied; the being in front of him was no longer a large black cloud, but small star of white light that started to turn bluish in tone, and he grinned with satisfaction.

“You were wondering why some souls turn into large black or white clouds, instead of crystallising. The answer is very simple. The demons grow large because of their great will and motivation, but they also grow impure because of their poor character; their relationships with reality, energy, thought and freedom are flawed and impure, which we Gods call impurities on the lower four elements. However, if a demon repents, as you are doing now, the state of its four elements improves, as it no longer has a flawed relationship with earth, water and so on. You are seeking truth, your energy is flowing clearly, your mind is straight and you are embracing freedom – mine to be myself, and yours to discard your previous limitations and embrace new possibilities. As a result, your structure is changing as we speak, and in truth, you can no longer be described as a demon, but a normal pure soul that merely has greater mass than those who would attain this state at an earlier stage of their evolution, so you in fact have certain advantages over them”, Shiva encouraged him.

“So that is what is going on, and I was wondering about that, since I am feeling strong ecstasy and excitement, and great admiration, gratitude and, can I say, a worshipful attitude towards you, my Lord, because you saved me from ignorance and darkness, and I wish nothing more than to repay you by being a kind source of light to others, that you in your incomprehensible mercy have been to me, sinful as I am”, Azazel, no longer a demon, could no longer speak as his words stopped being mere words and started becoming mantras of greater reality, as his soul crystallised into a blue crystal of *vajra*, and quite a substantial one at that, of a deeper frequency of energy than is normal in a transformation of a younger, smaller soul. When his astonishment with his situation passed, he realised that neither himself nor Lord Shiva are in the astral world any longer; they were in a place of great wonder, surrounded by pure crystalline beings of all sorts, some of whom he intuitively recognised as beings he once knew before their ascension.

“My Lord!”, he spoke excitedly, noticing that his very voice was a different thing now, as were his thoughts and his entire perception of reality. “I bow before you, again and again, for all eternity, for you are my Lord and Saviour”, he sang in the deep blue tone of his devotion-ecstasy that spoke reality. “My new condition allows me to see more, but as I look at you, I am in awe and terror, for you are indeed without beginning or end. Those other beings that I see here are all pure, beautiful and of Eternity, as apparently now am I, but you yourself are of an order of magnitude that is so far beyond anything I can understand, that I intuitively feel that you are the Endless, Infinite, Omnipotent and ever-Blissful Absolute that is manifested in the Relative Creation, and I have no words to describe you truthfully, because my level of enlightenment is mere dust at your feet, oh Lord!”, he sang.

Shiva smiled widely and bowed before the angelic being. “I salute you, my son, because you are the best thing that happened in this fateful and terrible day, and I feel great compassion and joy for your enlightenment. Go forth, join your brothers and sisters, and if you need me, just meditate on me as you see me now and I will come to see you”, the Lord spoke words of promise and blessing and vanished.

...

“Asmodeus, have you seen this? Hell and damnation! Azazel went to confront that God about something, they talked, and he just vanished!”

“I saw it, Perkele, I saw it clearly. The motherfucker killed Azazel. Those Gods are fucking bastards, damn them all to hell! Sanat Kumar was right about them, and we are with him when he opens that new world he was talking about, because fuck this shit already”.

“You’re right; I’ll tell the others so we can organise. Bloody hell, he just killed him!”, Perkele muttered in a state of shock and righteous anger.

...

“This is going better than I expected, which doesn’t say much since my expectations were a very low bar to clear”, Shakti beamed while she addressed her husband, serving coffee. He smiled, this time with more optimism.

Coffee and canaries

“It’s so strange”, Shakti mused. “They are completely convinced that you killed that demon, without provocation and out of the blue. They even have two witnesses. They are completely convinced of what they saw, and in an emotional turmoil over it”.

Shiva sipped coffee and thought about it. “Their perception is unreliable because it is completely clouded by expectations, preconceptions, prejudice and other impure emotions. They don’t distinguish between what they actually saw, and their interpretation thereof. Eyes are an unreliable witness when the heart is impure, as they say”.

“What they actually saw, and I know because I tapped in, is that the demon approached you, the two of you sat down and talked, the demon started changing colour from black to white, and then brightened up significantly, started phasing out, and then disappeared completely, with you following suit. Even if someone didn’t know what exactly happened, the correct conclusion would be to state one’s ignorance: we don’t know what happened, and that’s that. The correct next step after that would be to either ask someone who is likely to know, or try to figure it out in some other way, but it feels like they start with a narrative, and they just shoehorn everything they see into it. As I said, it’s strange”, she concluded.

“I know. One could say that the obvious way out of their misapprehension would be for someone to tell them what actually happened, but you know what they would do. If I said it, they would respond that it’s a lie and I’m an untrustworthy murderer. If you said it, they would say you’re covering up for your murderous husband and you should be ashamed of yourself. If Azazel said it, they wouldn’t recognise him since he’s a crystal of *vajra* now, which they couldn’t even see with their astral eyes without him taking a lower form as we do, and then they would say it’s an obvious deception by the Gods, who are obviously worried about consequences of their actions if they are trying to cover them up so much. You just can’t win with those people”, he smiled.

“No, because all their problems are intrinsic; however, Azazel is an example that shows that miracles can happen. And, also, that on your worst day you are still the best person in the world”, the Goddess smiled at her husband, who grinned back and blew a flurry of rose petals at her instead of an answer.

“I did get how Azazel came to change his mind, though”, Shiva continued. “He talked to Sanat Kumar, and saw how deeply deluded, insane and warped that one was, and thought ‘How am I any different?’, and that worried him and made him think about what could actually be done about it that would be constructive, rather than continue mixing questionable perception, ignorance, paranoia and resentment, until he became as unhinged in his insanity as Sanat Kumar, or those other demons that periodically challenge Gods to a fight and have their careers come to a quick end. He didn’t like those prospects, and so he explored the alternatives, and he’s now an angelic being. But his ability to distance himself from his situation and look at it clearly was already a sign of significant progress, of detachment which is the root cause of all forms of liberation. People think detachment is to not care about things, but no, detachment is to look at yourself and think, ‘what the hell am I doing?’”, he continued, tapping his finger absentmindedly on the empty coffee cup, which his wife understood as a call for a refill.

“Which brings me to something else”, she said. “Do we know what the hell we’re doing?”

“I surely hope so. We wanted to funnel all the demons and idiots from the astral nursery into the honeypot of doom. Mission accomplished – there’s now an active demon revolt and they are jumping into it head first as we speak; Sanat Kumar seems to have rendered his hellhole. From what I can see, his primary parameters were to limit powers of individual beings, so that he won’t feel like an imp anymore. He set it up so that he inhibits everybody’s memories so that his sandbox looks like the One True Universe. He’s also making the presence of God as dim as possible while still having a workable Universe and not a pit of darkness. He’s also having all sorts of safeguards intended for evading any responsibility for the outcomes, which is of course alarming. Also, both Time and Eternity are in turmoil and actively reconfiguring, and I see that the outcomes are

good, but much between now and then is in a blur. One of the reasons seems to be that the Jewel itself can recursively edit time until he gets what he wants, the way you can, and Sanat Kumar is issuing new commands that increase the likelihood of a good outcome for him. But he sees that the eventual outcome is his failure and death, and that everything he did increases the glory of God, which makes him panic, as he now suspects that he fell for a trap, which in fact he did, but it's too late now and he's totally and irredeemably fucked", Shiva grinned with dark satisfaction.

“Your special sauce is yummy”, Shakti nodded.

“Careful, my love; I can almost see the yellow feathers between your teeth”, Shiva's grin widened.

She pretended to check, smiled, and blew a flock of canaries at him, as he laughingly swatted them away.

“The Jewel can edit time, but only before any souls actually incarnate there. At that point, it anchors into reality, so there's a limit to what he can do. After that point, he needs to use pressure and influence, trying to coerce events, but that's unreliable and he gets increasingly desperate even before the point where we step in to finish it”, she corrected. “Which brings us to my least favourite part of this whole ordeal”, her face darkened.

“I'm with you there, but think about the outcome”, he prodded.

“You mean, we get to have a vacation?”, her face rose hopefully.

A marriage made in heaven

He was out of his element, to put it mildly. It's not like he was a young, inexperienced person. He watched generations after generations of souls be born, mature and attain enlightenment, while he watched, grumbled and brooded darkly in his ignorance and stubbornness, until, finally, he had that fateful talk with Sanat Kumar, who was so incredibly bat-shit crazy, that Azazel finally stopped to think about his situation, and realised that he's standing on the edge of that abyss himself, and was looking into an embodiment of his immediate future if he doesn't get his shit together. He listened to that basket case rant and rave for a few more days after that; about the Jewel, about the opportunity, the once-in-a-lifetime chance to finally break free from the trap the Gods set for them, how he's going to create a proper world, of equality, without God, where souls will have to join together to become God together rather than each grow individually, and if his heart was in it, he'd probably tell him that chopping everybody's heads off ain't no way to become taller, but he didn't give a shit anymore, because his thoughts were elsewhere.

He planned to do the most radical, out-of-your-mind thing imaginable. He'd call the most dangerous, most powerful person he ever saw, and ask him for instruction, because what he was doing for eons just wasn't cutting it anymore, and his only other alternative was to become what that demon next to him was: a completely unhinged, raving lunatic.

And now, he was in what he was told to be one of the Eternal Worlds, surrounded by beings of crystallised spiritual light, mostly in various frequencies of blue, and he was one of them.

He wasn't the smallest, or the palest, by any means; in fact, he looked like he was pretty much in the middle of the spectrum or slightly above, but he was for all intents and purposes a newborn baby there, and he needed someone to talk to, someone who'll show him the ropes of this place. Sure, he could call Lord Shiva as he was promised, but he didn't want to waste it, or annoy the God. He didn't have his head so far up his arse not to notice that Shiva was worried, tired and

under a heavy burden from all the things he was doing, and, worryingly, they had something to do with that Jewel and Sanat Kumar's scheming. The fact that the Lord was so kind as to go out of his way completely to talk to him and guide him to enlightenment, despite his personal troubles, struck Azazel as something extremely precious, that spoke volumes about the God and his character. He was kind, compassionate and nothing he would have imagined a being of that power to be. No, he wouldn't bother the kind and graceful Lord with something as mundane as finding his way around. He'll just ask someone here.

He looked around and saw clusters of beings communicating, involved in their conversations, but then he spotted a girl standing alone, and looking about as lost as he felt. "How do I instantly know it's a girl, if it's a crystal of blue *vajra*?", he asked himself. Probably the same way he instantly knew how a cloud of white fluff in the astral world was male or female. It was just obvious, and it communicated itself instantly, together with thoughts and emotions. This, at least, didn't change with enlightenment; one would expect everybody to be the same, having the same boring ideas, meditating on something, but nothing of the sort. They were just bright, pure, hard and dense and yet made of brilliant light; they had a purpose, but each their own, and they were perfectly, brilliantly individual. So, he approached the brilliantly individual but seemingly confused and lost girl standing there.

"Hi, I'm Azazel. I'm sorry to bother you, but I am completely new here and utterly out of my element. Would you please be so kind as to explain a thing or two about this place and its people? Also, what's your name, if you don't mind me asking?"

The girl looked at him and smiled shyly. "I'm Karuna, but everybody except my Mistress calls me Kay. You say your name is Azazel? I'm sorry if this will sound offensive, but isn't that a demon's name?"

"You can call me Zee; it's less of a mouthful and most call me that anyway", he smiled. "I am, or as a matter of fact, I was indeed a demon, until, well, right about now. I decided that my demonic existence is an evolutionary *cul-de-sac*, and gathered enough courage to approach Lord Shiva and asked him to teach me, right when he was

having tons of problems of his own and it was probably the worst timing in the world, but he was extremely kind and patient with me, guided me through knowledge of spiritual particles and their aggregation, and I attained crystallisation during that first conversation with him, so here I am now, completely out of my element and bothering strangers”, he grinned mischievously. “You mentioned your Mistress; who is she and what do you do?”

“Hello Zee”, Kay smiled angelically. “That’s quite a story, and I truly commend your courage. My Mistress is Lady Lakshmi, wife of Lord Vishnu, and she’s usually called Fortune, Wealth, Luck or Grace, because that’s what her spiritual aspect is. I’m her worshipper, or *bhakta*, or maid-servant, depending on the occasion, but mostly a student who uses every opportunity to be in her company and learn”, she laughed. “I attained enlightenment and crystallised into *vajra* a few days ago, when she was describing her relationships and experiences with the other Gods, and the spiritual impact of that conversation was such, that I started crystallising in the middle of it, believe it or not. I can see that I’m quite a bit smaller than you are, and also of lower specific energy, so I’m curious as to how that may be, if you say you’re completely new here?”

“I think we may actually know each other from before, in the astral nursery. You’re the one they used to call Karen, bullying you for being so pedantic and obsessed with duties? Remember that huge cloud of darkness and gloom that laughed at your discomfort sarcastically from a distance? I’m afraid that was me, and please accept my apology for that. I was quite an asshole”, he admitted sheepishly.

Her eyes turned wide. “You are *that* Azazel? The greatest, oldest demon? Oh!” But she recovered from her surprise quickly enough. “I think I understand now. Your spiritual mass was enormous for the astral plane, because you grew horizontally for eons, since your demonic impurities didn’t allow for ascension on a normal evolutionary timeline, and since you had so much astral mass at the point where you renounced your sins and approached Lord Shiva, that explains your greater size and advancement now”, the girl successfully picked up the loose ends.

“You are exactly right, Kay, and, if I may say, you are exceedingly smart to pick it up so quickly; I greatly admire your intelligence”, he bowed.

She responded with a curtsy and a smile. “Thank you, Zee. You are very kind, and if I may say, there is absolutely nothing demonic in your person any more. In fact, I like you very much, and I hope we can be friends”.

“I would like that very much as well, my Lady.”, he bowed again, to which she blushed.

“Please, tell me more about Lord Shiva. My Mistress told me a few tidbits, and even that was enough to make me ecstatically worshipful of him to the point where I simply crystallised and attained enlightenment. Is he indeed as kind and as powerful as she said?”

“I don’t know what she told you, but I expect she knows him much better and for far longer than I do, so I can only tell you of those two experiences I had with him. The first was when one of my demonic friends decided he had enough of life and challenged Lord Shiva to a duel. I thought I knew what power was until the Lord appeared, and I am embarrassed to say it, but I shat myself on the spot out of sheer terror of his presence”, he shuffled his feet, while Kay giggled cutely.

“He killed my friend on the spot, absorbed his corpse into his own body, and vanished from my sight”, Azazel finished.

“Were you not mad at him for killing your friend?”, Karuna was curious.

“Not at all. Ashanti was proud, arrogant and foolish. He challenged the God; Shiva answered his challenge with all the propriety and dignity of a warrior; he won fairly and gave Ashanti an honourable death. That is one of the two acceptable outcomes of every battle, and in a battle with a God, it’s the only possible and expected outcome. I had no ill will towards Lord Shiva. I was, however, terrified by him beyond measure, and I had immense respect for his power and the manner in which he conducted himself. He was endlessly more powerful, and yet he treated this as a proper duel, rather than garbage disposal. The honour he gave his infinitely inferior enemy made me respect him as an incredibly honourable person, which is why I

eventually managed to gather enough courage to talk to him and ask him to teach me”, Zee finished, in deep contemplation.

“This is fascinating, and I must admit that I’m unfamiliar with those honour-based relationships between men, although I find that very sexy, especially the respect involved”, she giggled. “It looks like a very virtuous way of conducting yourselves, without pointless grudges or vindictiveness.”

“Indeed. Grudges are something that would occur if someone handled things in a disrespectful manner, but if all propriety was observed, a duel to the death gives honour to both sides, both the victorious and the defeated”, he nodded. “Lord Shiva gave my friend an honourable death, and he treated me with incredible patience and kindness as I approached him. I must have been a mere bug to him, from his Divine perspective, and yet he smiled at me, called me ‘son’, sat me down and talked to me at great length, guiding me with his energy and blessings. I don’t know what other Gods are like, for I hadn’t met them, but Lord Shiva is an absolutely amazing person”, Zee glowed deep blue.

Kay glowed back sympathetically, and approached close enough to hold him in the embrace of her blue aura, drinking in his higher frequency of energy. “Your story sent shivers of bliss through my soul, Zee, because this is exactly how my Lady described her experience with Lord Shiva. She said he feels so incredibly powerful, he could be the scariest person in the world, and yet he is always so kind, polite, gentle and always looking for an opportunity to bless, praise and shower you with gifts, that always feel undeserved”.

Something special passed through Azazel. “Kay, I know we know each other very briefly, but I feel something special when I’m near you, something I’ve never felt before with anyone else. I love you, and I admire your spirit and intelligence greatly. I don’t know how those things work here, but Gods exist in couples, and I would want nothing more than for us to be married like that”, he blushed.

“It is probably too soon, and we barely know each other, but I feel the same way, Zee. I accept, and I would very much like to be your wife”, she glowed and melted into him, as he embraced her.

“Why is it that we feel so connected, and after such a short acquaintance?”, Zee mused.

“I think it is our devotion and admiration for the Lord, my husband”, she glowed. “We both attained enlightenment out of this devotion, and as we both felt it, our mutual connection became too strong and too right to resist”.

“I think you are right, my darling wife”, he smiled. “It is something Lord Shiva explained to me, that the *kalapas* in our souls react very strongly to powerful sources of *sat-cit-ananda*, and our mutual devotion to the Lord made us such powerful sources of God’s presence, that the particles of our respective souls willed us to be forever connected”, he beamed, and they held each other like that in a blissful eternity.

...

“Zee, what do you think about that new world that was created recently? It is said to offer great potential for spiritual growth – literally, that we can become Gods there. Also, it is said to offer experiences of the sort that cannot be replicated anywhere else?”

“That’s a firm negative, my love. Absolutely not. I know the demon who created this new world using the Jewel of Creation that is presently in his custody. I know nothing of that new world, but I know a lot about its creator, and to say he’s no good would be the biggest understatement ever. In fact, his deranged evil, egomania, paranoia and other ways of being a completely fucked up basket case convinced me to ask for Lord Shiva’s blessed guidance, lest I end up like Sanat Kumar, who himself is a deranged maggot and yet wishes to be thought of as a God”, Zee shivered from the terror of his memories.

“Oh”, Kay was shocked. “I didn’t know that a demon made that place. And you say you know him, and he’s really bad?”

“I know him alright. He’s much smaller and younger than I was, and yet he was incredibly ambitious, pompous and conceited, almost as much as he was cowardly and spiritually insignificant. I was fascinated with him and kept his company because he seemed to be the worst person I had ever met, and as such he was something interesting and out of the ordinary, that alleviated my boredom, and listening to his

ravings made me feel better about myself, until a point where I understood that the difference between the two of us was a mere matter of degree, and not of essential quality. So, instructed by the worst person I'd ever known about what was to be my fate unless I fundamentally changed my nature and my ways, I sought guidance from the best person I had ever known, which is Lord Shiva, which was the most blessed decision of my life, since it caused my redemption and salvation, and through which I also met you", he blew his wife a kiss, which she took in and shivered in giggles.

"Thanks for the warning, Zee. To even think that I considered that seriously; it must be a blessing of Lady Lakshmi that I have your guidance in this matter, because this information would be completely unknown to others. And speaking of that, do you think it would be a good idea to inform others about what you know about Sanat Kumar? We wouldn't want them to get trapped in something a crazy person designed using a powerful artefact created by the Gods, would we?", she spoke worriedly.

"You do have a point. Sanat Kumar is obviously spreading false propaganda about his creation, and knowledge about his true nature is limited to a very narrow circle of people, all of whom are, or used to be, demons, in whom he had confided, or merely talked to himself out loud so that he could worship the sound of his own voice. However, I think this is seriously above our heads, and we should first consult the Gods", his face became serious with concern.

"So, what is it that you two newlyweds wanted to talk to us about?", Lord Shiva said, appearing from a shimmer in the surrounding space, dragging along a laughing Lady Lakshmi, who had all the appearance of a star-struck fangirl, as Zee and Kay froze in shock.

"Oh come on, thaw the fuck down, kids. Let's sit down, have some coffee and discuss this", Shiva rolled his eyes and wielded a room, a sofa and a coffee set for four.

Wedding gifts

“Lord Shiva!” “My Lady!”, Zee and Kay scrambled incoherently.

“It’s all right”, Shiva raised his hand and smiled. “We just came to congratulate you, and possibly explain a thing or two, since you seem to be alarmed about something”, he winked.

“My Lady, I hope you’re not offended that I got married without asking you first”, Kay said sheepishly. “We sort of just clicked and it just happened”. Then she remembered something else. “And our connection seems to be based around our mutual worship of Lord Shiva, while I’m your student. I don’t know how to explain this, and I don’t know how proper and loyal this is towards you”.

“Of course I’m not offended, my daughter. In fact, just think about it. How big do you think this world is?”, Lakshmi nodded encouragingly

“I don’t know, really; I just came here, and after meeting Zee, it kind of didn’t seem important anymore”, she blushed. “But probably millions of beings, and I don’t know how to measure size, but it sort of seems endless”.

“Billions of beings are more likely”, Sri nodded. “And how likely do you think it would be for you to just happen to meet your husband in your first day here, completely at random, because you just happened to be the closest?”, she smiled mischievously. “You of all people should know how luck works”.

“Oh! You mean, it was your blessing that we found each other instantly?”

“Of course. I do care about you, you know.”, Lakshmi rolled her eyes and sipped her coffee.

“Lady Lakshmi, I am honoured to meet you”, Zee started, while Kay was still taking in her revelation. “I must apologise for not having much of experience with Gods, other than my Lord here, but could you please explain this to us, because I have no idea how your power works”, he shrugged.

“Well, it is probably the weirdest out of all four of us”, she nodded. “You see, it’s something like this: I see something good and I approve. This creates something like a convergence nexus; imagine it like space around that thing being bent, so everything good rolls downhill more easily towards it. Fortune, luck, wealth, serendipity, good circumstances, meeting the right people at the right time, and so on. Likewise, if I see someone who is sinful and offensive and I dislike them, I withdraw my blessings and their lucky star turns into a black hole of doom, so to speak”, she grinned. “The power of Lord Shiva is straightforward and obvious. Mine is more of the sort where you just happen to meet your girl on your first day here because she just happened to be close to you when you wanted to ask for directions”, she smiled innocently at Zee.

“I kind of see what you mean, my Lady, and I am extremely grateful for your blessing, and I’m also relieved that you approve of us”, he bowed.

“You two are very good for each other”, she nodded. “You are both very intelligent, so you’ll do well together. Also, your characters blend together perfectly; her gentle cuteness and your warrior ethics and ages of experience. I approve”. She took another sip of coffee, as Kay beamed with relief and gratitude.

“You are indeed very good for each other. Did you have a look at yourselves lately, by any chance?”, prompted Lord Shiva.

“We grew larger and more powerful!”, exclaimed Kay excitedly. “Zee, look at us, we are almost twice the size we were when we met!”

“How is that even possible?”, wondered the former demon. “Lord Shiva, would you please explain this phenomenon, because you obviously understand it and I am too new at this to even dare guessing?”, he frowned.

“Do you remember what I told you about the accretion process, and how souls attract free *kalapas* in a *kalapa*-rich environments such as the astral nursery?”, Shiva started, and Zee nodded. “Well, that’s not all there is to it. Sure, for the young astral souls, it is the dominant method, but for larger souls, its effects are negligible, because, obviously, there aren’t enough *kalapas* around to grow a *vajra* being to twice their initial size in mere hours; or eons, for that matter. There’s

another thing going on, and if you think about it, it is obvious. You see, in places of strong presence of *sat-cit-ananda*, the veil between the Relative and the Absolute becomes more permeable, and, basically, the Absolute leaks through in form of a *kalapa* shower, or a fountain. For one thing, every crystalline being such as yourself is a strong presence of *sat-cit-ananda* in the Relative, which means that the centre of your soul, your own heart, is a place where new *kalapas* are far more likely to leak through into the Relative, than some more general place, like the space around you. Also, the strength of that breakthrough depends on what you are doing. Devotion and worship of a God focuses your consciousness on an object of such great correspondence with the unmanifested Absolute, that it essentially creates a rip in the border between the Relative and the Absolute right in the middle of your heart, through which a huge flood of *kalapas*, the stuff of God, floods into your soul and instantly integrates at your highest energy level”, Shiva finished, and returned to his coffee.

Zee and Kay were completely astounded. “So does this mean that when we worshipped your holy person, my Lord, and admired your deeds and your perfect character, not only did we become unbreakably attracted to each other, but our souls also grew immensely due to the influx of new *kalapas* our devotion produced in our hearts?”, Kay asked, wide-eyed.

“Exactly. Why else do you think we Gods hang out together so much and can’t seem to stop praising each other? The same principle applies to us, as well. As we praise each other, we understand more of the Absolute as it manifests through the other God-person. Someone foolish enough to curse or criticise a God-person would, likewise, close themselves to everything that makes that person great, and this would diminish and destroy their soul rather than grow it.”

“So, when Lady Lakshmi praised you and your holy wife, and I was wholly consumed by awe and worship, this didn’t just transform the substance my soul was made of, but also created a flood of new particles right inside my heart, which I felt as a flood of worshipful emotion that overwhelmed me completely, and thus filled any lack of mass that I had in my evolution up to that point?”, Kay said in wonder.

“You are exactly right, and I see what my lovely sister meant when she praised your intelligence. You are indeed one smart cookie, and I am happy for my son for finding such a great partner”, Shiva smiled and nodded at her, and Lakshmi also smiled approvingly, to Kay’s great embarrassment. “We do, however, have another matter to discuss, which is why I brought Lady Lakshmi here. You see, there has been a small conspiracy, and she was somewhat left out, for which I apologise, and which I’m about to correct momentarily.”

“Recently, my wife brought my attention to a problem we were starting to have in the astral nursery. You see, one would expect souls to be born, go through the accretion cycle, crystallise and move here, with others of their kind. However, that is something that happens with the majority of souls, but not all of them. Approximately one third of all souls aren’t really making significant progress and basically just stand there like bloody idiots. A minor percentage, one in a hundred or less, turn demonic, or worse, turn into conceited fools of false spirituality. Both demons and fakers grow into large astral monstrosities, like my son here, and they stay in the astral nursery, thinking of ways to alleviate their boredom, usually in various harmful ways, like bullying beautiful souls such as his bride. The problem we’re having is that the demons aren’t going anywhere, the fakers aren’t going anywhere, the retards grazing aimlessly aren’t going anywhere, but the best souls are filtering out relatively quickly as they attain crystallisation. The result is obvious – that plane becomes disproportionately filled with assholes and idiots, which at some point starts to affect the evolution of the newborn souls, which get to be surrounded by bullies and bad examples, which will eventually hinder all progress and completely stop the evolutionary processes in new souls, and we’ll be forced to just reset the plane by killing everybody there and starting anew. This, however, seemed like a radical and inelegant method, so I came up with a solution nobody likes, but which seems to solve all problems, unfortunately at the cost of introducing new ones”, Shiva finished.

“Oh, so that’s what’s been going on. Let me guess: you created that Jewel, the artefact of Creation?”, Zee offered.

“Yes. The idea was to allow for the creation of new worlds, where we would funnel demons and idiots so that they no longer overcrowd

the nursery and inhibit evolution of new souls. However, that can't be something either of us Gods would make, for obvious reasons", Shiva grinned.

"Right. Demons would instantly distrust it and none of them would get near that thing. Imagine your enemies making something and saying it's a perfect new world for everybody they dislike. Of course it must be a trap of some kind", Zee grinned back.

"And that's why Karuna is so fortunate to have you as her husband, my dear", Lakshmi smiled. "You are experienced in demon-lore and know how they all think, which is why you can guide her properly and help her evade all kinds of pitfalls she would otherwise be vulnerable to, in her gentle innocence".

"I do understand the point Lord Shiva is making, though, and the conspiracy he mentioned probably also includes my husband, who has been conspicuously absent lately?", she prompted.

"Indeed", Shiva nodded. "As soon as my wife and I created that artefact, he came to visit and warn us. It was quite a sobering experience, let me tell you, as he showed us the consequences our actions had across both Time and Eternity. The carnage was extensive, and I'm afraid we lost some Eternals as well, not just demons and idiots. Also, lots of young souls were lost. However, the end result was even better than we expected, which is why we didn't immediately backtrack on our plan, and instead proceeded with Lord Vishnu's guidance and cooperation", his face was grim. "As soon as he made it clear what is to happen, we instantly bowed to him and gave him the veto rights, but he declined and instead offered his support".

"Likewise, when I felt that Lord Vishnu worked with the two of you on something, I immediately gave you all my blessings without even knowing what it was, because anything you three are working on simply cannot be other than for the best, knowing the holiness of your character", Lakshmi bowed to Shiva. "But still, you said that we are going to lose Eternals, and this troubles me greatly. Those are our children, my Lord, like those two here. How could this happen?", she whined worriedly, as Zee and Kay looked at each other with great concern.

“It troubles all of us, my Lady. My wife was as troubled as you are right now, and Lord Narayan looked grim as well. I have been feeling terrible about it ever since we set it in motion, and I am incredibly grateful for your blessings, Lady Lakshmi, for they might be the only thing that saves us from a great disaster, finds us a way towards success and guards us from error”, he brooded darkly.

“However, I rendered the core of the Jewel out of the Will of God and for the greatest good, which ought to guarantee this quality of the final outcome, and Lord Vishnu did show me how some of our children fell. Unfortunately, they were arrogant in their greatness and enlightenment, and thought no evil could befall them if they remain true and strong, and such mindset is a terrible match for the kind of a world that demon had designed. Some of them even dared him to do his worst, thus removing the shield of *dharma* that would have otherwise protected them from abuse, and the demon is nigh-omnipotent in his realm. As you can imagine, they were broken, some outright destroyed, since the world in question is designed to deprive them of both their powers and the insight into God, making it seem as if that tiny world is the totality of all reality. The humble ones, who were used to hardship, humiliation and suffering, fared exceedingly well, and even grew due to accretion of karma caused by their unjust suffering. Those who grew in our world without being truly challenged, unfortunately, not only were deluded, harmed or destroyed due to their arrogant and imprudent approach, but their souls were also used to power the illusions and traps of that place. We lost some Eternals, but gained new ones, of the completely new soul-structure; on one hand, they are less elegant and clean in their spiritual makeup than the old ones, but they are somewhat like our former demon here – wise due to his experience with evil, able to recognise traps and pitfalls, and humble due to his own prior failings that taught him not to take things for granted”, Shiva finished.

“But what could possibly be the outcome that is so great, that it justifies all of this?”, Lakshmi insisted, her face still showing deep concern.

To this, Shiva just looked at her pointedly, and put his finger in front of his lips, making her know it’s a secret and he’ll let her know in due time and in private, so she just relaxed, quite content with that.

“But what do we do now, Lord Shiva? We wanted to warn the souls here about the dangers of that new world Sanat Kumar had devised in his madness and evil. Is that the proper thing to do, knowing what you know about the consequences?”, Azazel asked, his voice shaking.

“By all means, we shall warn them, and all of us together, to give greater authority to the warning, because they would be unlikely to heed it were it just the two of you. However, you can imagine what’s going to happen. Some will see it as a challenge to their faith, strength, discernment and devotion. They will disregard the warning, and their story will come to a bad ending in Time, I’m afraid. However, from what I’ve seen, this is unfortunate but necessary, because they are the souls that evolved without sufficient wisdom and humility, like trees that managed to grow tall only because they never faced any wind. Fear of consequences needs to enter Heaven, I’m afraid, and there’s no easy way to do that”.

Kay held Zee tightly and whimpered.

Angelic sadhana

Azazel was deep in thought. Around him, there was a whole heavenly world of crystalline souls involved in their own affairs he knew nothing about, very much the same way it was a day ago, but now there was a significant difference.

Now, he didn't care.

It's not that he didn't care about those beings. He did, which was strange because he didn't know any of them personally, but they were obviously someone who mattered to the Gods, and someone very much like himself and his wife. But earlier, he wanted to know them and be informed about what they were doing because he thought his spiritual progress depended on it, as it seemed a logical way forward.

“Sweetheart”, he turned to his wife, “I think I know what we have to do now”.

“What do you mean?”

“We wanted to find our way around this new world in order to figure out what to do next, because that seemed like an obvious thing to do”, he whispered in her ear, as she lay comfortably nested on his chest. “But we already know what to do next; truly, we already started, and it already bore good fruits, and now we just need to continue doing it in earnest”.

“You mean, worship the Gods, and love each other?”, she whispered back, looking at him adoringly.

“Exactly. And girl, do we have material for it now. I can't put your Mistress out of my mind. I don't know what I expected; as a demon, I thought Gods were distant, indifferent assholes who show up only when someone needs to be killed, but that seems to be merely demon lore, nonsense they believe to make themselves look good. I also thought they promote arse-kissers because they are that pathetic, but that is a complete and utter misrepresentation of reality, to the point where it is hundred percent harmful and zero percent true. What is actually the case is that Gods are all about worship, and worship is something you can't even imagine unless you have tasted it, because

it's not a normal thought or an emotion; it's a breakthrough of the Absolute, unmanifested God, right into your heart, because it wants to express its true nature, which is reality-consciousness-bliss, and as you see the truth of a holy being, and speak this truth, it is necessarily worshipful, and it is necessarily blissful, and the more you do it, the more you grow spiritually and the greater reality, consciousness and bliss you feel. You, for instance; why are you the way you are? You are beautiful, honest, truthful, straightforward, intelligent and blissful. You didn't become like that by thinking like the demons do – which is, inventing slanderous lies about their betters in order to make themselves feel falsely superior. No; you found a Goddess to serve, you asked her questions, she told you stories, you believed her and you benefited. You became clear, bright, beautiful and wickedly smart, which is why I'm in love with you", he kissed her temple, as she blushed from all the compliments. "Your Goddess is amazing. She's amazingly powerful, in magical and mysterious ways that make her potentially invincible and fatal to any enemy, and yet you saw how she is. She calls you her daughter, she's proud and protective of you, she's caring, kind and lovely, and she looks at her holy brother with the same worshipful wide eyes as we do. And Lord Shiva, I don't even know where to start. He's so kind, constantly trying to put everybody at ease and find good things to say about us, to boost us up, although he obviously knows of all our failings, but he brings them up only to show us how far we've come. To me as a former demon, and as a warrior, it's so impressive to see how deeply strategic he is, how much thought he puts into understanding the problems, understanding how his enemies think and being multiple steps ahead of them. He's devious in the best possible sense of the word, completely unlike what the demons would think the good people are. They think good people are naive, stupid, gullible and weak. I don't know where they actually got that, because the Gods are incredibly good, I guess 'holy' is the proper word, but they are wickedly smart, strategic, calculated, clairvoyant and strong, and there's an obvious blade of infinite sharpness and hardness hidden from sight, but if someone wants to fuck with them, it comes out faster than you can blink. I don't know if you can appreciate my description, but I find it so amazing that I can literally drink bliss from worshipping them in my mind like that. It is absolutely delectable", Zee purred.

“I think *you* are absolutely delectable, my husband”, Kay nuzzled his neck. “As you talk about Gods in this manner, and I take in your energy, I feel so excited I could explode in a burst of light. I think you are right: we do have everything we need for the way forward. We have Gods to worship, we have the knowledge they gave us that we can apply, and we have each other to love and talk to, so that we can sharpen our ideas and get to the truth more easily, and cover for each other’s weaknesses as we strive towards perfection. There are no distractions, there is nothing else to do, and even if there were anything else to do, this spiritual practice would be preferable and more enjoyable”.

“Why are all those people staring at us?”, Zee turned around and scratched his head.

“Oh, you’re right. Wow. They are staring at us because we are glowing with such power that it’s outshining the rest of the world, apparently”, Kay blushed.

“And we are having another growth spurt, it seems. Oh well. Are we going to allow them to watch us and possibly benefit from learning what we do, or do I teleport us into that coffee lounge that my Lord thoughtfully left there when he left?”, Azazel winked.

“No, let them watch, I don’t mind, and if they benefit from the insight, it would please me very much, as this is not something I would want to keep to ourselves. I’ll just blur out any intimacy between us, so that they can’t resolve it, because that part is none of their business”, she smiled mischievously. “Praised be the most holy Gods, who taught us this devotional *sadhana*”, she whispered, choking up from ecstasy and clarity of consciousness.

“Indeed”, whispered Zee, drinking the nectar of devotion and glowing from such ecstasy that he thought he would burst into a supernova and die if it were to grow any stronger.

Apotheosis

“Michael, Raphael, are you seeing this?”, a large angelic being called his friends.

“We do indeed, Gabriel”, answered one of them, “But to see is one thing, and to understand it is quite another. It looks like those two newcomers are having some kind of a rapid initiatory phase, or explosive growth, of the kind I have never witnessed before”, concluded Michael. “How is this even possible?”

“I have some ideas, but I’m not sure if they are any good. We’ve seen them visited by Lord Shiva and Lady Lakshmi, when they had a private conversation away from our sight, and all four of them came out to make a proclamation of the dangers of having anything to do with that new world that was recently opened for incarnation under unclear circumstances of a demonic rebellion. After that, the two Gods departed, and those two, apparently husband and wife, remained here, always together and talking only to each other. My understanding is that they have some special relationship with the Gods, or they are themselves Gods in disguise, having a *lila*, which would explain the extreme energy outbursts of the so far unseen magnitude”, he concluded.

“I don’t know who they are, but I’m observing their outward appearance with great care”, reported Raphael. “They started as perfectly normal beings of blue *vajra*; the man much stronger than the woman, because she looked like a typical newcomer, while he looked like a mature angelic being of greater wisdom and experience. I could feel some of his thoughts from the distance, and I feel great respect for his maturity and attitude, as he reminds me of Lord Shiva; straight to the point, truthful, able to cut deep into any problem and make reality bleed from it. I love him, honestly. The girl is smart, loving and beautiful, and their paired up instantly, and they seem to be great for each other because they both started growing like crazy since. I’ve never seen such speed of evolution, but that is perhaps due to some *sadhana* they are performing, and they seem totally absorbed and concentrated in it. I can’t tell what it is, but they grew from normal blue

to deep indigo blue very quickly, and now they are deep ultraviolet/magenta, which is the highest frequency I can still perceive, personally. If they continue with this, they will leave my sphere of perception very quickly”, he concluded his detailed report.

The others nodded respectfully, “You are very thorough, my friend, and your precision is greatly appreciated, but how this is possible, is still a mystery”, Michael shrugged.

...

Azazel noticed how both he and his wife evolved from blue through indigo to ultraviolet, as their deep contemplation of the Gods they adored became so deep, since they started perceiving the true nature of the Gods as their own, in a way. He understood with relief that some of his qualities, which he thought were sad relics of his demonic past, that would have to be transformed into something better, were in fact very similar to the mental tools of Lord Shiva, and he also felt how the Lady beside him started spreading her wings like a butterfly leaving the cocoon, accepting aspects of her own greatness and Divinity while adoring and praising the greatness and Divinity of others.

And then the veil within their hearts broke in earnest, and he lost the concept of difference between himself as a being, and the unmanifested Absolute on the other side, flowing in both oceans simultaneously, knowing that it is all him, allowing it to shape him in total surrender, shaping *brahman* to his will, understanding that the woman beside him is going through the same process and that they both woke up, for the second time, and he couldn’t say what they were now, but he knew they are husband and wife still. They felt the veil of light towards the Relative and willed it to shift, and they emerged in a different reality, opening their new eyes to see the four Gods greeting them.

Their consciousness and power now an ocean without limits, they knelt together before the Gods to salute them and offer their worship, only to hear Lord Vishnu address them:

“Rise, Lord Azazel, Lady Karuna; for there are now six Great Gods atop all of Creation. Praised be your wisdom, devotion, courage, intelligence and perseverance, for they are limitless and peerless. There

are now three Divine Couples in our family”, he finished and bowed before them, as Lord Shiva offered Lord Azazel a military salute and a hug, and Lady Lakshmi curtsied to them both and proceeded to hug her daughter, beaming with happiness.

“It’s interesting how several days ago I was talking to that idiot Sanat Kumar, who dreamed of becoming a God by reducing everybody”, Zee told Mahadeva. “I guess my approach was more fruitful in the end, Father”, he laughed, as Shiva clapped his shoulder and invited them all for a cup of coffee.

Aftermath

“I saw you a few days ago, you know, when you were talking to that other demon, Santa Claus or whatever his name was. I told my husband that you are both worthless as rocks and bricks if not worse, and as disgusting as that karmic sludge he’s transforming. And look at you now. I’m astonished at your progress, if you can even call it that, and not a nuclear blast.”, Shakti smiled at Azazel.

“I’m honoured to finally meet you, Mother”, he smiled back. “And as for that conversation, I actually share your opinion on its nature, as well as its participants; in fact, it was that very conversation that motivated my radical change of course, as I became disgusted with myself to the point where I would rather risk getting impaled on Lord Shiva’s trident, than look at myself as I was”, he frowned.

“I see angels in Heaven frozen in shock from the sight of your transformation”, Shiva sipped his coffee and smiled at Lord Zee and Lady Kay. “They are completely unable to understand what happened”.

“Which makes me wonder, really; it’s not like we did something that was out of the realm of possibility for those others. We talked to you and Lady Lakshmi. We paid attention. We thought about it and what it meant. We observed your persons and actions. We adored and admired you, and we loved each other. We did literally nothing else”, he scratched his chin. “So how the fuck is what we did exceptional in any way?”

“That’s the trick, Zee”, Lord Vishnu joined the conversation. “You did nothing else”.

“What do you mean, my Lord?”, asked Lady Karuna.

“I mean it in a very literal sense. It’s a large world with billions of beings. You know what literally all of them do? They get to know each other. Then they talk, compare experiences, meet more people, talk to them, and after you’ve done it with a billion people, a billion years passed”, he grinned. “They talk about philosophy, they practice making artefacts, they make music, they explore complex relationships, they try out all sorts of energies. Some even meditate or worship the Gods...”

among other things. But you two, you did literally nothing else, and you focused on it with your entire beings. The results were extreme and instantaneous”.

“But wait, I can’t believe that those other angelic beings haven’t been informed of the same things we were. It’s implausible that we were the only ones you told that thing about the accretion of soul stuff and the *kalapa* fountain in the heart, and the veil between the Absolute and the Relative becoming permeable and eventually letting go completely”, Lord Azazel protested, looking at his father.

“Indeed. Whenever there are new souls there, and that doesn’t actually happen that often, one of us sits them down and explains the fundamentals”, Shiva confirmed.

“And?”, Kay asked wide-eyed.

“And nothing.”, Shiva shrugged. “They nod, store it for later use and forget about it. They think about all the things that await them in that new beautiful eternal world they arrived in. They think about all the friends they are going to make, about all the things they want to talk about, or do. They have all the time in the world, of course. They are in no hurry. They are Eternals, they are Angels. Or they think what we said doesn’t apply to them, at least not now, as they are; maybe later. Or they think it’s a good idea, get excited about it theoretically, but they don’t actually do anything. And so on”, Rudra took another sip of coffee and grinned.

“My mind fails to process this degree of complacency and reversal of priorities”, Azazel slapped his forehead as if trying to jump-start his brain. “How can anyone be such a fool as to have the means of apotheosis given to them by a God in person, and then waste time fucking around and talking about the colour of shit or whatever it is they do?”

Shakti giggled. “I like his thinking”, she winked at Shiva, who wisped her a box of chocolates.

“But you do get it now, yes?”, Shiva looked pointedly at Azazel and Karuna.

“You mean, the problems and stagnation you talked about, regarding Heaven and the Eternals?”, Kay asked shyly.

“Exactly”, confirmed Lord Rudra. “They aren’t exactly going anywhere, or even seeing a reason to. As far as they are concerned, they have arrived. They are fine. That’s how things are – there are four Gods above them, they are enlightened and eternal, and what’s left there but talk about music and philosophy?”, he mocked.

“I am trying to understand how they are different from those retard in the astral nursery, that third or half or whatever that just sits there and grazes like a herd of damned sheep”, Azazel made disapproving gesture and sipped coffee.

“They are blue”, added Lady Lakshmi, to which all giggled.

“They are indeed blue”, nodded Vishnu. “Which is why that Jewel of mass destruction, harmful and terrible as it is, looks like the only way to reshuffle that place, unless we resort to blasting it altogether”.

“An interesting concept”, Zee was deep in thought. “They don’t feel like doing what you advised them, thinking it’s merely something Gods do, and it doesn’t apply to them, not realising that the Gods became so by doing exactly that, and then continued doing it because what the fuck else is one to do, other than the best thing there is?”, he grumbled. “But when that insane maggot Sanat Kumar offers them a trap that’s meant to turn them into slaves, fertilizer or his worshippers, because all glory to the One and Only Creator of the World, I guess, or formulates it as a challenge for them to irk their egos, they’ll throw themselves head first into the wood chipper with full enthusiasm”, he finished as lightning started sparking from his eyes, to Kay’s endless amusement and a fit of giggles.

“But look at it this way, my love”, she suggested, “Anyone who gets into that honey pot will actually *have* to change their thinking and make actual spiritual progress in order to get out, and the alternative would be getting destroyed, rather than being eternally safe. If you’re in a dangerous environment where everything is trying to either enslave or kill you, you don’t have the luxury of sitting in a metaphorical sofa for a zillion years discussing the difference between two shades of blue”, she grinned and blew blue flower petals at her eternal love.

“I guess some people literally need the hard way”, he smiled at his bride. “Or, alternatively, the blue sheep will turn into blue hamburgers”.

“Let me remind you that destruction of eternal angelic beings is still a tragedy”, Lady Lakshmi frowned, not amused by their jokes.

“I apologise, holy Mother of Beauty and Fortune”, Zee bowed and smiled at her. “However, isn’t it a tragedy from a position of the unmanifested *brahman* that only six people in a zillion years out of how many billions qualified candidates actually bothered to claim it as themselves?”, he countered.

“He does have a point, my love”, answered Lord Vishnu. “If they don’t have a true desire for God, could anyone remind me what exactly would be the point of their eternal existence?”, he looked around, as if truly asking.

“Beeee!”, bleethed Lady Shakti cynically, and everybody did their best not to spill coffee or turn the table over in fits of laughter, with only some of them actually succeeding.

“I’m afraid that the formerly safe existence as an eternal sheep is suddenly going to become much more precarious”, nodded Lord Shiva. “And we will have to wrap up that bloody mess and clean after ourselves, my darling wife”, he warned.

“Oh goody”, she rolled her eyes. “Can we at least do it in some tropical paradise, sipping cold peach tea?”

“How about a genocidal war zone?”, Shiva grinned.

“Typical”, Shakti grinned, and the rest of the girls giggled.

The Mind of God

“I think we actually managed to get to an aspect of the problem that we previously missed. We understood that the heavenly plane has a problem with stagnation, and we understood that the reason for this seemed to be something intrinsic to the beings there and the way they evolve; for instance, the fact that they grew in a pressureless environment, which makes them look like tall, straight, perfect trees that tumble at the first wind. I even mentioned Lord Shiva and his holy wife as the opposite example, of someone who struggles under a heavy burden and knows how hard things can be, doesn’t take things for granted and is thus always respectful of the problems, as well as other beings. However, it now seems there’s an additional layer to the problem”, mused Lord Vishnu. “It seems that this perfect, pressureless environment, as well as the abundance of possible forms of safe and fulfilling activities there, creates an atmosphere where nothing really motivates the souls to invest huge amounts of effort so that they would possibly ascend to godhood”, he finished, and Lady Lakshmi poured him another cup.

“I wondered if that’s all there is”, Lady Kay started. “My divine husband was angered by the complacency and indolence of the angelic beings, who have all the means of apotheosis at their disposal, and yet do not use them. You, Lord Vishnu, noticed how their environment is too comfortable and fulfilling to motivate great feats of spiritual exertion, as they see no flaws in their condition that would require such strong remedies. All those observations seem perfectly true to me, and yet, I have a feeling we are missing something important, and I’m starting to understand it in very general terms”.

“Please, continue, my Lady”, bowed Lord Vishnu. “For we are at our wit’s end, the issue is very important, and your clarity and power of mind, as well as a new perspective, would be invaluable”.

“Thank you, Sri Bhagavan”, she blushed and smiled. “I think we are missing an aspect of the problem I haven’t seen addressed so far. You see, nobody asks whether the unmanifested Absolute actually wants to become those people”, she looked at the assembled Gods. “It

is obvious why the impersonal God would want to be the person of Lord Shiva, Lady Shakti, Lord Narayan or Lady Sri. They are each fiercely individual, different and special. It is obvious to me why *brahman* would want my husband to be his new person, as he is sharp, brave, wise, and of endless power of discrimination, that always renders excellent insights and wonderful new ideas and perspectives. And while I was in the process of my own apotheosis, I felt something I hadn't expected", she sighed, blushed and took a breath to calm herself. "You see, I always thought of myself as unbalanced, as someone who is probably too slanted to the feminine side of things and could probably use some masculine energy to put things straight. However, I liked myself as I was; I liked being girly and feminine, the same way I liked being smart and able to quickly understand complex ideas. It was a part of my identity, and it was obviously not a flaw in the lower four elements, as it persisted through my crystallisation into *vajra*. As I met my husband, we clicked immediately, and I think one of the reasons for it is exactly because I am so strongly feminine, and it served as a perfect counterpart to his strong, powerful masculinity", she blushed and a shiver went through her body, as she smiled and continued. "But some doubts and uncertainties remained in me, when we approached apotheosis. First of all, I understood that I am becoming stronger, and at first I didn't want to be stronger – I loved the fact that Zee is stronger than me, and I loved feeling smaller and weaker but loved and protected. I did understand then that it had nothing to do with the actual strength and spiritual magnitude, and that was not a problem anymore; I understood that I could be endlessly powerful, and still be his little girl, and I loved it. And then, as the veil between the Relative and the Absolute within my heart broke in earnest, I understood something that completely swept away all my worries. I understood that the unmanifested *brahman* loves being me. It was a feeling that exploded in my heart first, and swept through the entirety of my soul, as I completely accepted myself, knowing that God loves being my feminine girly self, and it, now she, loves how it allows her to manifest in the Relative, and since Zee and I were so interconnected at that point, I felt how God loves being Zee – he loves being sharp and penetrating, and he loves being in love with me, the way being *me* gave the impersonal God, that was now the person of Kay, the wonderful feeling of belonging to Zee and following him everywhere. So it's not

just that we chose to be Gods; the unmanifested God in fact chose to be us.”

“Which brings us to the point I was trying to make. Does God actually want to be any of those people in the heavenly world? What are they doing and choosing that is so delectable to God, that he would explode outwards in their hearts and desire to be *that*?” she finished, and noticed how all the Gods and Goddesses looked at her with mouths agape.

“You are indeed the Goddess of Wisdom”, Shiva finally managed to say, while others nodded in assent. “I used to think you’re very smart, but now I have to revise my opinion. You are wisdom itself, taken form, and I bow to Your Holiness again and again”, he bowed deeply, as Kay blushed stronger than ever, seeing how her Mother and Zee were so proud of her, they could burst in a fountain of happiness, as new Titles and Jewels manifested upon her person.

“You are indeed the self-realisation and self-revelation of the Absolute”, Krishna nodded. “The addition of you two to our family is an incredible blessing, as you truly give new faces, names and persons to God”.

Lady Shakti bowed to her, closed her eyes and manifested a tiara with a single jewel of golden light, something that was so powerful, it made Kay feel as if lightning passed through her entire body as she beheld it. Shakti approached her, put the tiara on her head and knelt before her. “Most revered and worshipped Lady, please accept this gift from your mom no.2”, she smiled mischievously. “It also contains a blessing of Lord Shiva. You will see what it is later”, she winked, and Kay fell into her embrace, crying tears of happiness, as Lady Lakshmi smiled her blessings upon them both.

“Lady Shakti”, Kay sobbed, “What is that thing you gave me? When I feel it, it feels like The Mind of God”, she shivered powerfully.

“No”, Lady Parvati corrected her. “You are the Mind of God”, and all the Gods and Goddesses present felt shivers of higher truth and all bowed deeply, as a flurry of newborn souls exploded from the space between them.

Cleanup

“Wow”, Lord Azazel gently touched his wife’s forehead. “You’re amazing”.

She blushed and shivered slightly as she took in his praise. The tiara melted into her own body and was a part of her now; only the golden jewel remained visible on her brow, as a dot of light. It was no mystery what it did; essentially, it was a mixture of a Title, a Jewel and a blessing by both Shiva and Shakti, and it both was and wasn’t a part of her soul itself, rather than being an ornament or a gadget. It was hard to describe – the way her former Title as the worshipper of Lakshmi both was and wasn’t a part of her soul. It was something between an order of merit, a job and a diploma, but deeper. She was The Mind of God, The Goddess of Wisdom, Self-Revelation of the Absolute, Daughter of Lakshmi; Lady Karuna. That’s what everybody instantly knew, the first they saw her, because her Titles and her name communicated themselves. Her soul-type was “Person of God”. That, too, was instantly communicated, together with her gender: “Female”. All of that was so overwhelming, she wanted to crawl into Zee’s shirt pocket and hide there; if the Six had some internal ranking, she would fight tooth and nail for the last spot.

“And all five of us would arm-wrestle you for it, you know”, Lord Azazel read her mind.

“I would lose”, she stuck out her tongue.

“That’s why”, he smiled and kissed the tip of her tongue, and she giggled.

As a Jewel, that thing allowed her to access power that was so terrible and awesome, it made her really consider morphing into a small mouse and hiding in Zee’s pocket. She felt that Lady Shakti gave her a power over all of reality, the power that should only rest in the hands of Wisdom, and it was such an honour that she felt completely mortified from the responsibility and all other implications. Basically, she could wield and assert the Throne of God. She could create, destroy

and change worlds. She whined into Azazel's neck and held him more tightly.

“Ready to kick some ass?”, he grinned.

“Ready to watch *you* kick some ass, and applaud your awesome victory”, she giggled.

“Sure”, he kissed her nose. “Let’s warn some people”.

...

Blade of Discernment, Self-Revelation of the Absolute, Son of Shiva; Lord Azazel; Person of God, Male, opened a portal to the astral nursery and observed his surroundings, his wife by his side. He spent eons there, up until mere days ago, and yet it looked like a foreign, desolate wasteland to him now, merely because there wasn’t anyone there he truly had anything in common with. There were multiple bigger clouds of astral matter nearby, though, and closing to their position.

“There’s those motherfucking Gods again”, a demon exclaimed, taking out a flaming sword. “Let’s have some fun”, he grinned at the others.

“Watch it, Baal”, Mephisto warned him. “We don’t want to get ahead of ourselves here.”

“I don’t give a shit, Muffin”, Baal growled. “Those bastards killed Azazel without any reason or provocation. I invoke my right of vengeance”.

“Put that toothpick away before you hurt yourself, Baal”, the male God addressed him with a grin. “I would recommend, for your safety, wellbeing and continued existence among the living, that you shut the fuck up, sit here and use words to address your griefs, lest thy arse take the room temperature challenge”, the God pointed at the suddenly apparent sofa across a coffee table and another sofa where he and the girl now sat.

The demon grudgingly accepted, now morphed to humanoid himself. “I accept only because you’re not Shiva, because that one killed my friend without provocation”, he gruffed. “Who are you, and how do you know my name?”

“I know I look different now, and not just that, but I actually am different, yet strangely I’m still the same person, as far as continuity of Self and memories goes. I am, however, different in my qualities and nature. Take a look into me and identify me with your astral sight, before I grow bored with your shit”, Azazel prodded.

“Hell, damnation and holy fucking shit. Azazel?”, the demon exclaimed in consternation. “How the fuck? Is that some sort of a trick?”

“Yeah, of course it’s a trick, a God brought his wife to this shithole to pull a prank on your sorry arse because we apparently have nothing better to do, bitch”, Azazel reverted to demonic vernacular to put the demon at ease. “Of course it’s me”.

The demon got his senses together somewhat, and realised that he actually saw the general flavour of mind that he used to recognise as his, apparently not deceased, friend. “How the fuck? Perkele and Asmodeus saw you sit with Shiva, talk for a while, and then you transformed into bright light and vanished. We thought he killed your ass dead”, Baal exclaimed, joined by Mephisto and a few others. “Person of God, Lord Azazel? What the actual fuck, man? And who’s the girl?”, he exclaimed in shock.

“Well, if you sorry motherfuckers actually bothered to check your facts before getting your panties in a bunch over nothing, you’d have asked someone first, and they’d have told you that I indeed went to talk to Lord Shiva, because I got so sick talking to that retard dumbass, Santa Cucumber or whatever he calls his bitch ass, that I decided to ask a God for actual knowledge and guidance, because I was so incredibly done listening to insane assholes. The God didn’t kill me, contrary to public opinion; we sat down, and he explained all sorts of things to me, including secrets of Creation, nature of souls and their evolution, and so on. In fact, I was so incredibly impressed with him, that my soul-structure changed, and as that happened I was transported from this world, to a heaven where the ascended souls live. There, I met my wife Kay, who is here with me now, and we then talked to the Gods some more, and proceeded to meditate until we achieved apotheosis ourselves. That’s the short of it. So no, he didn’t kill me; in fact he saved me, guided me, helped me in all sorts of ways, and I consider

him my Father in every meaningful sense”, he concluded, as Kay tried to contain her giggles and keep her dignity intact, succeeding almost completely.

“Holy fucking shit, man. Your ass got adopted by a God, and you God now? And married a God chick? Person of God, Lady Karuna? You made it, man. Fuck!”, the demon scratched his head.

“You can say that again. However, I hear that you made quite a commotion over the hearsay, so I wanted to set the record straight. Like, this is your captain speaking, please calm the fuck down, remain seated and listen to the fucking flight attendant. Nothing’s going on, at least nothing bad. Lots of good stuff sure going on”, Azazel grinned, squeezing Kay’s hand.

“Wow wow wow, time out please”, Mephisto made a T sign with his hands. “You say you ascended to some other world after your soul-structure got upgraded? Is that what happens when other souls brighten up and disappear? They not dead?”

“Completely and utterly not dead”, Azazel nodded. “In fact, this place looks much more like death than life, compared to the other one. However, no assholes or bullshitters allowed”, he pointed at the demons and the big white astral souls preoccupied with looking spiritual. “There’s actual qualification involved, and the name of the game is size and purity. You all have plenty of size, but no purity, so no go, unless you get your shit together and change your fucking ways”, he explained seriously.

“How did you come back here, then, and why?”, enquired Baal.

“Easy, I opened a portal between worlds. Both my wife and I can do that now. And why, well, that’s also easy. I heard you folks went up in arms and made a riot over me supposedly getting killed, when I didn’t, so I wanted to get your facts straight. Nobody got killed; in fact I got adopted by a God and married to a Goddess, so I’m living a good life now, as you can see, so you all folks can calm the fuck down”, he laughed.

“No way you Azazel. He black!”, one demon exclaimed incredulously.

Azazel grinned, morphed into a terrible black cloud of frightening density and disposition. “Is I black enough for you now, bitch motherfucker?”, a menacing, terrible voice sounded from it, making all the demons wince, and the previously incredulous demon made himself very inconspicuous and small, whining in terror as yellow liquid pooled under him.

“Thought so”, Azazel morphed back to his humanoid form and grinned, waving a hand to clean up the mess.

“So, who wants to know how the world actually works, where the souls actually come from, how they ascend, and what’s the actual purpose of life?”, he enquired with his characteristic smile.

...

“I love how you used your history with them and knowledge of their ways to put them at ease, my love”, Kay smiled at her husband and kissed his hand. “You reached out towards them, spoke their language, made yourself comfortably familiar, and then completely dismantled that whole uprising and circus”.

“I hope I didn’t startle you with that demon talk, sweetheart?”, he smiled.

“Not at all; I could see exactly what you were doing and why, because I’m in your heart and I know what’s in there”, she smiled blissfully.

“I am relieved”, he laughed. “So, another round?”

“Blue sheep?”, she asked.

“That sounds like a Silicon Valley startup, but yes”, he smiled, took his wife’s hand and opened another portal.

Bad plan

“We have to inform the guys who got into that new world of Sanat Kumar – what’s it called, Urad?” - Baal scratched his head.

“The situation is completely different than we thought. Also, have you seen Zee and his girl? They don’t look even close to how we imagined Gods. Sure, he’s harder, more terrifying and infinitely more powerful than before – you saw he just made that furniture, and removed Valefar’s piss with a snap; he could have as easily wiped all of us out, but didn’t. In fact, he went out of his way to explain things to us, and honestly, we now learned more in a day than previously since, well, forever”.

“Earth, I think. It’s called Earth.”, answered Mephisto. “And there’s a lots of guys there already – Asmodeus, Perkele, Ifrit, Abaddon, and lots of girls – Mandragora, Lucifora, Belladonna, Solana, Vipera, Amanita and who knows how many others; thousands. And I’m not even counting other kinds; sheep, idiots, navel gazers and I guess normal folks, judging from what Azazel said. And yeah, he’s really something, and his girl too. Have you looked at her properly? She’s more beautiful than anything, and has a good sense of humour too, judging from how she reacted to him punking our ass. And she, too, is hard as all hell; she looked like she could snap her fingers and we’d evaporate. Well, the part of our God-lore that says Gods are super powerful and deadly is true. The rest of it is shit”.

“I think I’ll go to that world, warn our guys, tell them to get back and start working on this four element purification and grounding thing Zee talked about. Besides, Sanat Kumar is bat shit crazy and it’s kind of ominous how Zee described him, being so deranged and retarded that he risked getting killed by a God rather than continue listening to that dipshit. If he designed that world, it can’t be good for anyone but him, and even that is questionable, because how crazy he is”, Baal started to get seriously concerned. “I hope I don’t waste too much time there, because I have things to do now”.

...

He couldn't remember what the rush was. He was going somewhere, but he couldn't remember anything, and it didn't matter. Did he have a name? He was floating peacefully and he was content. But then there was disturbance, and he left that peaceful place, and there was noise, bright light, and all kinds of rough discomfort, and he cried. But then he felt a nipple in his mouth, and warm milk comforted him. It's not all bad. Mom loves him and he's safe.

...

“What the fuck is keeping Baal for so long? I'll go after him and check”, Mephisto whispered to himself.

A warning

Raphael saw many things in his long life, but the ascension of those two was one of the strangest, and most impressive by far. And now, they were back here, giving them a full report on what happened; not only that, but *why* it happened.

It's not just that they became Gods. He looked at their titles; the man was impressive enough, being The Blade of Discernment, a title that suggested what he intuitively guessed about him even when he was a blue crystal of *vajra*; even then, his discriminatory intellect was amazingly impressive. But the woman... that's something he didn't expect, or think possible. The Mind of God, The Goddess of Wisdom, Self-Revelation of the Absolute. His mind stood blank in shock, trying to even process those, and that's without that thing on her forehead, a tiny dot of gold that hinted at a Jewel that communicated something he almost refused to believe was possible: that giggly, funny, beautiful girl that held on to her husband's arm as if he were her anchor, could destroy, modify or create worlds, wielding the power that seemed to equal that of Lady Shakti and Lord Shiva, and that's *in addition* to wielding what seemed to be the impersonal Absolute's self-manifestation as Wisdom. And she got all of this power literally *today*. His head hurt, and he started to massage his left eyebrow instinctively.

“... and so, basically, the lesson of this seems to be that you people are too comfortable here, and you are all developing in ways that are perfect, uniform, harmonic, and you honestly defy the purpose of evolution.”, Zee finished.

“And that would be...?”, Michael looked at him inquisitively.

“That would be giving God something he wants to be, that he isn't having yet, something new and interesting”, Kay answered instead. “You all look like industrially grown trees – all basically the same, and if I wanted that, I could have spared Myself the whole Creation thing, and just made a zillion clones of an energy template”, she shifted into First Person, with the full authority of the Absolute behind her, as the angels felt the hair on their heads rise. “Start being

something God would want to be, lest I get bored of you and wipe this plane clean of generic non-beings”, both her eyes and the Jewel on her forehead flashed, and the angels felt the brief pulse of mortal terror, before the girl was a girl again. “So, that’s the message”, she shrugged and leaned into her husband shyly.

It was now Azazel’s turn to giggle. “Remind me never to get you angry, my love”, he smiled and kissed her head. “Anyway, one more thing. That new world that was recently opened; I would again advise against going there carelessly, because I know its designer from when I was a demon like himself. He is really, really bad news, and if he designed something, it absolutely can’t be good for anyone”, he continued.

“That might be a problem”, Raphael made himself known. “Because a few thousands of us already went there to explore, just yesterday”.

Zee and Kay looked at each other, and then Kay’s eyes defocused, as if she were listening to some voice nobody else could hear. “Oh. There’s something going on in the astral nursery”, her face was blank in shock. “The demons are calling the Gods for help, with a tone of complete panic and chaos.”

“But why?”, Lord Azazel was astounded. “We were there just hours ago and things seemed to be going rather normally”.

“Something is going on there now that’s everything but”, she looked into his eyes with a grave expression. “The casualties started arriving”.

Casualties

The other Gods were already there when they arrived, accompanied by some of the strongest angels, who looked like they came to kick ass and take names. However, that mood soon changed.

The section of the astral world they were in was full of people dressed in various forms of filthy rags, often stained with blood, speaking incoherently in a weirdly linear way, formulating sequences of words and sentences in their minds instead of using normal language, and they were unconsciously screaming such incredible levels of emotional trauma, that all the Gods and angels went still and pale with shock. Some of them just stood there, some sat on the floor crying, some walked around gesturing wildly; all seemingly unaware of their surroundings. The place looked like a lunatic asylum.

“What the fuck is going on here?”, asked Lord Shiva.

“Casualties, Father”, Lady Kay answered him. “Of Sanat Kumar’s experiment with reality”.

Shiva went pale, even more than his usual white complexion. “Oh”, he managed to stutter. Lady Shakti, at his side, looked like she started having a nightmare, as she took in the surrounding minds. “We need to talk to them, find out what happened to them in there, because this is unlike anything I’ve ever seen”, she managed to use her voice finally. “I knew this could be bad, but this is beyond just normal ‘bad’. This is hell”, she shivered. “Lord Vishnu and Lady Lakshmi are already talking to some of them, and I suggest we all do the same”.

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“I am Enkabzu of Uruk”, answered a man. “I worked the fields with my father and two brothers. Then men came, sent by the King, and took us to fight in the army, leaving the mother alone and unaided. We fought, we all died. What is going to happen to my mother?”, tears started to stream down his face. “She is all alone now, with none to work the fields. She will surely starve, or men will come to take her into slavery. I have to go back”, he panicked, “I have to help her. She’s

all alone and it's still a month until harvest. Who will pick the barley from the fields?", he started sobbing.

...

"I am Ahmose, daughter of Senebhotep. I'm fourteen years old, and I helped my mother and father by looking after our goats. This morning two bad men came, bound my mouth so I couldn't scream, they tore my clothes and took turn raping me", the girl sobbed. "What will my mother say now, that I'm not a virgin anymore? Nobody will marry me now. It hurt so much, and they laughed at me as I cried and it felt terrible. Mother, please help me! Father, chase them away! Why can't anyone hear me? When they were done with me, they cut my throat with a knife, like one slaughters a goat, and I drowned in my own blood there in the mud. My poor parents will find me like that. I am so ashamed", she crumbled to the floor, holding her knees to her chest and crying.

...

"I am Kelki, and I was born to a family of farmers. One day, men with swords came, killed all the adult men, and took all the women and children as slaves. I was twelve when that happened. They cut off my balls with a knife, and it hurt so much. When I healed, they took me to the palace to be one of the eunuch slaves there, guarding the Lord's harem. The male palace guards would occasionally rape me, and it hurt. I got a sickness and died. I'm glad I'm not there anymore. What is this place? Why am I here if I died? Is this the underworld?"

...

"I am M'weki, son of N'wana. We gathered fruits and roots, and hunted animals in the savanna. One day, I fell from a tree and broke my hip. I couldn't walk, I was thirsty and the sun was high. Then the wild dogs came". His face darkened. "No, not the wild dogs", he jerked wildly in panic. "Why couldn't it be leopards or lions? They bite the throat and kill quickly. The dogs started eating me while I was alive and crying. They pulled my bowels in the dust and fought over them. Why did it have to hurt so much? I didn't do any evil to be punished by the spirits so harshly. I always obeyed my parents and all the customs of the tribe. Why couldn't the spirits send a leopard?", he shook as he cried.

...

“What the actual fuck”, Zee spoke, to no one in particular.

“You took the words out of my mouth, son”, sighed Lord Vishnu, tears streaming down his face. “It looks like symptoms of spiritual damage caused by a prolonged immersion in a persistent illusion, a complete reality-substitute combined with complete memory inhibition. Basically, they couldn’t remember who they are, and the only reality they could perceive was that of the illusory world they were dropped into. They identified with their body completely, they had no access to any information or reality beyond that, and the world itself seems to be designed to be as bad and full of terrible suffering as theoretically possible, without making it completely unworkable”, he summarised.

“Who are they, even? Demons, normal souls, stagnant souls, angels...?”, Azazel looked at Lord Narayan.

“I don’t know. It’s hard to tell in their condition, and it hardly seems to matter. They all get affected equally, and their true identity as souls seems to be completely suppressed, overridden by the assumed identities of their human incarnations that feel more real than anything else, and they had no memories to contradict it. Also, there’s no transcendental sense present that could supplant the physical experience with anything that would connect them to the actual reality”, Vishnu shrugged.

“I did this”, whispered Lord Shiva, stone-faced, with a tear streaming down his cheek. “It was my idea. I talked my wife into it. I talked you into it. I let the Jewel out of my hands after she warned me of it being the point of no return. I allowed it to be put it in the hands of an idiot. It’s all my fault”.

“No, my friend. There’s plenty of that to go around, so don’t claim it all for yourself. I encouraged you. I could have stopped it, but chose not to. Of the Four, only Lady Lakshmi is blameless in this matter”, Krishna sighed.

Shiva looked around and saw his wife sitting on the floor near a broken woman, sobbing, and he walked towards her, barely aware of his surroundings. She looked at him, her eyes red and swollen.

“She was a wife and a mother of seven children. Four died in infancy of various ailments. Two sons and a daughter, the youngest one, twelve or thirteen years old, lived with their parents. The brothers helped the father work the fields and tend to the cattle. The girl helped her mother around the house. Then men came, armed gang of robbers. They killed her husband and sons in the field. Then they tied her and had their fun forcing her to watch how they took turns raping her daughter. She managed to tear herself loose, and tried to hit one of the men with a rock. They stabbed her with swords and she died. Now she’s silently singing a lullaby to her baby daughter, seeing her as a baby in her arms, and she won’t come out of there because her soul is broken”, Lady Shakti sobbed violently. “She is, or used to be, a demoness, her name was Vipera – a venomous bitch, they called her. Somehow, I don’t think that applies anymore. And I did this to her. I made that Jewel, and let the worst person in the world have my power. At least in the second try I did better”, she looked at the Mind of God, who held on to her husband and shivered, looking into nothing.

...

“What is going on here? What is this commotion?”

Shiva recognised this voice immediately, and his anger flared hot. “Greetings, Sentinel. I am glad you finally arrived to inspect your work”, Shiva all but whispered, but his words were steel.

“What do you mean, Lord Shiva?”, the Sentinel looked incredulously.

“You only had one job. You had to keep it out of wrong hands. You only had to allow children to render lots of rooms for playing hide-and-seek, for lovers to create privacy for themselves, or wannabe explorers to create magical forests full of light and wonder. But no, you gave it to a deranged lunatic, who was so warped in his evil that it managed to outrage his demon friend into seeking enlightenment”, he growled on, as the look on the Sentinel’s face froze, as if he started getting it. “And when you were about to approve his request to create a hell above all imaginable horrors, I came to warn you and ask you to consider the consequences, and you condescendingly told me to have more faith in the Light of God, that will always prevail, and no darkness could overcome it”.

Sentinel's face turned into a mask of horror. "That was you?"
"Yes, that was me".

"And about the Light of God, take a good look at her", he pointed at his wife, who sat there sobbing uncontrollably. "Here she sits, the Light and Power of God Herself, while Happiness kneels at her side in tears, trying to console her. Go on, tell her some of your sanctimonious bullshit, you little turd", Shiva finally raised his voice, and opened the full insight of reality in the mind of the Sentinel, making him face the full extent of the consequences of his failure, as the being in front of him screamed in silent horror as his soul broke apart out of sheer terror of what he did.

"Oh no, I have another job for you, you bastard", Shiva raised his hand and froze the dissolving particles in place. He looked around and saw the carnage, the Gods crying in various states of shock, and raised a finger. Black lightning instantly went through reality, and the tears on the faces of Gods and Goddesses started glowing in bright light, disappearing into the black stream of *shivaratri*, as he opened his palm fully, and white light of his wife wove into the stream, joining the black to form the golden light of *tandava natyam*, the dance of Creation and Destruction; the Throne of God. The whole reality glowed gold as he restructured it, and he closed his fist.

"Having any fun yet, motherfucker?", he grinned violently.

"Father, what was that?", Lord Azazel addressed him, dragging his traumatised wife along. "It's as if you rewrote the entire fabric of reality, but I don't see the consequences?"

The jewel on Kay's brow started glowing, and it seemed to bring her back to her senses. "Oh, I see", she smiled exceptionally brightly. "I see". Other Gods' attention seemed to be fixed at her, and they all snapped out of their previous states. "When you created that Jewel, you assumed that it couldn't be accessed or tampered with at a later date, but you based it on the Will of God, and built it around something it depends upon and cannot alter regardless of the nature of the simulation, something deep in the nature of the Relative itself, which you now changed, so that nothing real or seemingly real can exist and not include it", The Mind of God explained. "Our tears and pain cracked every illusion in existence and created paths of transcendence

and reality recursively on every level, as we are now present everywhere and connected to everything. You broke his darkness with our tears, and made a way out”, she bowed to him with great respect.

“All of you provided me with a weapon, my dear daughter”, he bowed back, and looked at all the other Gods. “Your tears are what broke his spell permanently across Time. I just put that blade where it belongs”, he grinned savagely.

...

In his secret hidden place, Satan saw incarnations of the Gods forming across Time, introducing transcendental knowledge and offering salvation, and he could do absolutely nothing to stop it, as he screamed in helpless rage.

The Jewel silently smirked, and dreamt of being back around his Lord’s neck, so that his Lady could play with him again.

War council

The war room looked more austere than the typical coffee lounges the Gods used for their private meetings; also, it was more formal. They cordoned a section of the astral world for that purpose, because it was agreed that they had to use the lowest level that all three species could normally visit on their own power – astral, angelic and Divine. Since angels and Gods could easily travel to the astral plane, and astral beings couldn't travel anywhere else, the matter was quickly settled.

It wasn't a war one would expect – Gods vs. demons, or any such thing. No, it was Gods, angels, demons and all other beings together, against one single person that caused a calamity.

At the table, all of the Gods were present, as well as three of the angels that witnessed the carnage, because the rest of the angels, volunteers of course, were tasked with assisting the injured souls that kept popping up from Earth, since time was a strange thing, and Earth was exceedingly deadly.

Also, there was someone quite unexpected in attendance.

“In the name of all present, I am glad to greet a survivor and witness of Sanat Kumar’s terrible crime: Vipera the demoness”, Lord Vishnu bowed to the woman sitting beside Lady Shakti.

“If it is at all possible, I would implore you to address me as Zina. This was my name in my earthly life, and I now feel it reflects my personality, emotions and choices much more accurately than my demon name”, the woman bowed back and smiled.

“Of course, Zina. But considering the terrible spiritual conditions you were in during our last encounter, I must admit that your present state is nothing less than staggering, and I mean it in the best possible sense”, he smiled. “Please, we would very much appreciate your report on the whole ordeal, and then we might have questions”.

“Well, I have Lady Shakti to thank for my present state. Her kindness, as well as spiritual magic of the kind I never even suspected was possible, is the reason for my recovery. For some reason, she took

me under her care, diminished my trauma, allowed the memories from my past demonic life to resurface, while subduing my freshest, most traumatic memories, which allowed me to survive the ordeal and integrate the experience in a positive way. I also bow to Lady Fortune, who was very much with me in all of this”.

“I know this might sound shocking to you, but other than the terrible end of my earthly life, I found the experience quite rewarding and healing. As a demoness, I was, honestly, a terrible person. They called me Vipera, or venomous bitch, for plenty of good reasons, as I was mostly engaged in bullying, backstabbing and harming people who had the misfortune to be around me for whatever reason. I was spiritually sick, bored and nasty, and continued being so mostly out of routine – I was this way today because I was that way yesterday and the day before and the year before. I saw no need, and even no way to change”.

“And then I carelessly joined that newly opened world, and all my memories were gone. I didn’t know who I was, I didn’t know where I was, I didn’t know anything about my past self, and therefore what patterns to repeat. When I was born, my parents loved me and took care of me. This was the first time in a very, very long time that somebody loved me, mostly because I was such a nasty person, that nobody had a reason to. I was surrounded mostly by other demons, who were as nasty as myself, and when I met other souls, it was to bully and insult them, trying to please myself and impress other demons”.

“But as my parents and elder brothers loved me and treated me with kindness, this new state of affairs became my new normal, a routine I repeated today because I experienced it yesterday and the day before. I loved other people because that’s how we treated each other. Treating others rudely or nastily just wasn’t something that was done in our family, or in the neighbourhood. When I met my husband, I experienced a new, different kind of love, and I liked it a lot. I especially liked sex, although pregnancies and childbirths were hard. Sure, I experienced loss – four of my children died in infancy, but the love I felt for all of them was more than worth it. When I look at it now, I feel that my demon life was a colourless, dreary experience devoid of any true joy, while my human life was a combination of deep, fulfilling emotions, of many different kinds of love, kindness and

pleasure, combined with a few terrible moments of loss, when my children died, and especially in the horrible end of my life, when I seemingly lost everything. However, Lady Shakti expanded my consciousness far beyond my normal limits and showed me the interconnectedness of lives and their persistence beyond the mortal form, which I couldn't experience or even dream of in my human life. This wider perspective allowed me to accept loss, and understand that what I gained in that life defined me positively to such an extent, that I consider it my true life, in which I was actually born as the person I am now. It allowed me to interrupt my demonic routine, stop what I was doing, experience something radically different, and discover that this, in fact, is what I want my life to be like in the future. I would definitely not want to repeat being born on Earth again, with all those terrible limitations and ignorance, and with all the terrible things that could happen to me there, as I still have nightmares about Tamara being raped, but I would certainly prefer to build my future life along the lines of my life as Zina, rather than Vipera, which is why I changed my name. This is all I can think of at this time, and if any of you have questions, I will be glad to answer them", she concluded.

"As a former demon myself, I would certainly like to encourage you in your choice and congratulate you on your excellent recovery from your terrible ordeal. You probably remember me as Azazel, the huge old black demon", he grinned, but with great tenderness.

Her eyes went wide. "You are Azazel? But you are now a God!", she exclaimed.

"Exactly, Zina; which means that the road ahead of you is wide open, and you have many great possibilities, if your current change is a sign of things to come", he smiled. "However, I would now like to underscore something of great importance: Sanat Kumar intended to do great evil with the design of his world, but it seems that, at least in this case, he accidentally did something good. He intended Zina to be separated from the recollection of her true self in order to make her susceptible to the pressures of his world, but in her case, her former life was something that actually needed to be suppressed in order for other options to manifest themselves. I know that my beloved parents are overcome by guilt for their participation in creating this nightmare, but I would use this case to restate their original argument: that this is an

evil, but other greater evils warranted its creation, and if some good already came of it so early, and in the worst scenario Sanat Kumar could have come up with, having all spiritual connections blocked in entirety, now with my Father's modifications this might eventually result in even greater good, in the end", Blade of Discernment concluded.

Other Gods nodded in appreciation, and Lady Lakshmi decided to have a word. "May I just say that I warned you that this will be no laughing matter? Nobody wants to be told 'I told you so', but I told you so. I approved of the project, not only because of the impeccable character of the three Gods who devised and implemented it behind my back, but also when Lord Shiva brought me up to date and informed me of all that had been done, and why. However, I noticed, and will keep reminding you until you are utterly bored of me, that some things that will come out of this will be tragedies, even if it now became obvious that good things can come out of it as well. In Zina's case, we can see exposure to an earthly life with all its limitations as a form of psychotherapy. However, this is so only because she was also healed by the Goddess of Light, the Power of God herself, whose competence and skill are matched only by her great compassion and beauty", she smiled at her sister, who tried not to blush too much. "Also, she had my blessing to find the way through this, which must have been of help, even if I say so myself. Harm that was done to her soul prior to the expert treatment by ostensibly the most competent healer in the world, was grim, and I will remind everybody here of how Lady Shakti herself was inconsolable yesterday, considering Zina a lost case. Her recovery was a miracle, and I would strongly advise against having miracles as a strategy", Lady Fortune concluded her word of caution.

"Hear, hear", Lord Vishnu tapped the table. "I would agree that we were exceedingly lucky here; part of it being the number of the afflicted souls, that was still quite low, which made it possible for two Goddesses to address an individual person with utmost care and absolute competence. However, what if it were a thousand? A million? Imagine having a million heavily wounded souls arrive in a day, and considering the cruelty of that place, that is not out of the realm of possibility. How would we treat them, and I think we all agree that we

must help them in every way we can?", he looked at the assembled Gods and saw their nods.

"I would also caution against generalising this case, as it might prove to be a statistical anomaly, rather than a rule", voiced Michael. "Let me just remind everyone here that people we've been dealing with generally tend to be victims of murders, victims who have by all accounts lived peaceful lives minding their own business, and once we get to deal with the murderers themselves, we might encounter a different picture. Imagine a soul that has adopted such a path in life – for instance, those who murdered Zina and her family. They would either be tortured by guilt, or completely warped and evil because those actions actually reflected their newly made spiritual choices. We've seen how Zina was changed by her experiences there. It's obvious that incarnation on Earth has transformative quality. It is reasonable to assume that transformation can go in all kinds of directions", the angel concluded.

"That's a valid point", Lord Shiva nodded. "And while we're there, have you been encountering any of the negative examples? Souls that have been turned to evil?", he enquired.

"In fact, yes. There has been one bandit that got in a fight with another and was stabbed with a knife and died", Gabriel answered.

"What was his soul type?"

"Now, that's a pickle. It was one of the stagnant souls that are often referred to as 'sheep'", the angel nodded.

"That's unexpected", mused Lord Vishnu. "One would assume that demons would get to be bandits, the sheep would work in the fields and angels would, I don't know, be philosophers, artists and religious teachers"

"Apparently not", Zee scratched his chin. "Which makes me think in two possible directions. First, the body does its own thing, and the soul is merely a witness, a canvas upon which the image is projected. It assumes the role and then takes either the blame, or expects reward for things that in reality had not been the results of its actual choices. Or direction two, that we don't know much about what a soul would do given the options. Basically, demons don't seem to be very much

preoccupied with going around and doing evil things to others. Zina enjoyed family life to the point where it completely transformed her outlook on life, for instance. Take a person who is energetic, vital, but ignorant and bored to tears. They will do all sorts of mischievous things if they lack direction. But give her direction, and suddenly all that energy goes into her family and the result is happiness and peace. Also, those sheep are not *good* just because they aren't doing any harm in the astral plane. They are indifferent and passive. Put such a person in a situation where a body will do something evil by default, if not steered away from it, and such soul will just go along with it, picking the easy choice, which in this case would be violence and evil", he mused.

"Be it as it may, we'll have to do something about those souls as they come back", Lakshmi interjected. "Imagine a gang of murderers being executed by the king for their crimes. They come here, return to the astral plane, and now they have all sorts of new ideas about things they could do to the innocent souls here. Imagine hardened murderers and rapists being set loose among the normal souls. They would be far worse than demons. For all their flaws, the demons seem to be limiting their activities to mocking and bullying. Also, those former humans, they seem to have a completely different "taste" to them, compared to souls who haven't had a human experience. Maybe we need to accommodate for their differences?"

"That's a good point", nodded Kay. "So let me see what we need now. We need qualified and willing people to welcome the souls coming back from Earth, de-traumatise them, help them integrate their past and current selves, and then see where to put them. We also need to modify the astral plane, because the nursery seems very poorly suited for the new role; too many soul types would intermix and interfere with each other's purpose. How about this: we sequester a part of the astral plane to serve the purpose of post-human integration, where the souls that used to be human could live in an environment that looks somewhat like Earth, with trees, sunsets, houses and forests, the good and normal stuff, only without imposed limitations, murderers and rapists. And regarding those, we would also need another section of the astral plane dedicated to holding those until we decide what to do with them, since we have to assume there will be cases that are so

evil they can't be allowed to intermix with normal souls, and if we're not ready to outright destroy them immediately, we can hold them there until there's some more permanent solution", she said seriously, as the other Gods nodded in assent. "Lord Shiva, Lady Shakti, please give me your permission to create those sub-planes using your powers", she looked at them and bowed. They smiled and nodded, and she closed her eyes. Golden light of her jewel flashed across the astral plane. "It's done", she smiled, as the angels looked at each other in awe.

"So, by the grace of our lovely Lady Karuna, we have two new astral sub-planes now; the astral Earth, and the astral jail", nodded Lord Vishnu. I will now do the initial interior design of the astral Earth", he added, and his eyes lost focus as he looked within. A blue light flashed and a screen appeared above them, showing a heavenly scene of pastoral beauty; green meadows, lush forests, houses arranged in small towns, and cute animals here and there. Another flash, and the post-human souls were transported there, along with an angel or two to help them adjust. A third flash, and an administrative building appeared, along with all of them transported there, together with the war room and everything, without actually noticing anything changing. "Done. Now, we have to deal with the issue of judges, or therapists, if you like. It would need to be something more permanent than the current arrangement, and we need to consider necessary qualifications", he finished.

"If I may, I would suggest those judges or therapists to be people who have survived Earth successfully, and have a human experience, so that they could better understand the people they are dealing with. There might be emotional nuances of the experience that wouldn't be understandable to someone who hasn't gone through it", Zina voiced her opinion.

"That's a valid point", nodded Lady Shakti. "Also, there's the issue of competence; it must be someone who is experienced in figuring out truth from illusions, appearances and lies, meaning someone with strong analytical and discriminative abilities. It must also be someone compassionate and kind, because they would be dealing with injured souls. Also, it must be someone with patience and a propensity for nurturing and healing, but also someone who is able to make hard choices quickly and dispassionately. I would recommend

that only the crystallised souls be considered for the assignment, for two reasons. First is the level of power and competence inherent to that status, and the second is to give them something useful to do, and a way to gain experiences that could prod them in new and unexpected evolutionary directions”, she smiled.

“I think that’s quite reasonable”, Michael answered, and other angels nodded.

“I would volunteer myself for the job, once I attain crystallisation”, said Zina. “I had children of my own, so I would know a thing or two about patience, nurturing and healing, and I also have a human experience behind me, so I think I could empathise with them better than most”.

“That’s actually a great idea”, Lady Shakti smiled and ran her hand through Zina’s hair, as Zina laughed. “You’re a lovely mom and you’d do great”.

“So, I think that’s settled”, smiled Lord Vishnu. “For a position of judges and healers, we need crystalline angelic beings with proper qualifications and temperament and preferably with a human experience behind them, and when Zina crystallises, which I think won’t be a long wait considering her current status and progress, she would be absolutely welcome to the job”, he nodded to the still smiling woman.

“I have a question”, Lord Shiva looked at the angels. “Do we so far have any fatalities?”

“So far, no”, Michael nodded seriously. “Zina was the closest to being fatally wounded, but Lady Shakti managed to pull her through, due to her immense power and expertise; nobody else would know what to do, honestly. The rest of them were seriously traumatised, but are integrating their past selves into the experience and are doing reasonably well. However, we are still early into the whole process and I wouldn’t rush into triumphalism at this point. We are yet to see how the incarnate angels do”, he warned. “They might do better than others, or they might be a disaster of unseen proportions”.

“Good point”, nodded Shiva. “So, now that the serious business is behind us, unless anyone else has questions, we might as well go to the next item, which is coffee”, he smiled.

Abomination

“I demand to see Lord Ashur”, a dark, arrogant and seemingly violent soul demanded.

“I don’t know what you are talking about”, an angel appointed to greet and process the deceased responded. “I know of no such person. Are you even aware of who you are, where you are and what is happening to you?”

“Of course I am aware, unworthy scum”, the demonic creature answered. “I am Ashurnasirpal the Mutilator, second of the name, and you better bring me before Ashur, before I have you skinned alive, you wretch”, he threatened darkly.

Azrael the Judge thought what to do about this one. This was by far the worst example he ever saw; most corrupted, most powerful, made of something that looked like soul crystal, only black. Not black like the blessed *shivaratri*, the stuff wielded by Lord Shiva, which was black in the way mind of God that is to give birth to Light is black. This was black the way concentrated evil and hatred would be black, were they to take crystalline form. It was as if an angelic being was corrupted into something nastier than his past experience told him was possible, and he was very old. This was above his pay grade, so he turned his mind inwards and prayed to Lord Shiva to come to his aid.

Shiva instantly appeared from the shimmer in space. “Hello Azrael, nice to meet you”, he smiled. “I see you’re having some issue here”.

“Yes, Boss”, Azrael smiled and bowed to the Lord. “Here is something I have never seen before, and I decided I better call you”.

“Are you Lord Ashur?”, the dark demon inquired.

“No”, Shiva answered. “And let me see what we have here. This is a terrible criminal, Azrael. He seems to have skinned people alive, impaled them and murdered them in all kinds of terrible ways intended to increase and prolong their suffering. He ruled with fear and intimidation, gouged people’s eyes out, had their noses and fingers cut

off, burned them alive and so on. His crimes are numerous, and he even made inscriptions to brag about them, in order to intimidate others. And do you know who this terribly deformed creature is?", Shiva turned to the angel.

"Don't you dare talk about me as if I'm not there, you worthless scum!", the demon growled, moving towards them as if to attack them.

"Enough of this", said Shiva, raising his hand and freezing the demon in place.

"I honestly don't know, my Lord. He looks made of material I have never seen before; it's as dense as *vajra*, but black, evil and corrupted in incredible ways I have never witnessed before. Honestly, if anyone told me such a thing could exist, I would have refused to believe it, because it contradicts everything I know about spiritual substances", the angel shrugged helplessly. "How can this creature even exist?"

"I'm afraid it can exist, and I'm afraid we've seen the first of the most terrible things that have come from Sanat Kumar's evil experiment. You see, this is your former colleague, angel Uriel", Shiva shrugged with profound sadness. "The others need to see this as well, because I am afraid my beloved sister Lakshmi proves to be of immaculate foresight".

"May all the Gods and everything that is holy be forever at my aid and have mercy upon me, because this is the worst thing I have witnessed in my long life", Azrael whined in utter shock, staring numbly at the Lord.

...

"Fucking hell", stuttered Lord Vishnu. His Lady stared at the frozen figure, as if reading from its memory, and wept wordlessly. Shakti grew pale and started shivering, while Zee and Kay just looked at each other in terror. "Fucking hell indeed", confirmed Lord Shiva. "If there were an encyclopedia of some kind here, if you looked up under 'fucking hell', a picture of this creature would be there, staring at you menacingly", he managed to make a sour attempt at a smile. "What do we do with it?", he asked, looking at his family.

“Destroy it outright, without remainder, and someone would have to purify the *kalapas* because the substance is incredibly toxic”, said Lady Shakti, her voice shaking slightly. Lakshmi nodded in assent. “I approve wholeheartedly. This is the most evil thing I have ever seen: an utterly corrupted angel turned into a super-demon; more evil, warped and demonic than even Sanat Kumar, and all of the astral demons taken together; in fact, compared to this abomination, the astral demons look like naughty children throwing rocks at birds. This is worse than Satan, and it can’t be allowed to exist in any shape or form”, she shivered, as everybody nodded in assent.

“That’s what I thought, but I wanted you to see it first and tell me what you think, and I’m glad we agree”, he opened his palm and the frozen super-demon broke apart into dust, turning into a terrible black smoke that looked like it was made of a million microscopic black holes, and was absorbed into Shiva’s body. Shiva looked unwell, as if crunched under a terrible burden or pain. “I must leave you now and take some time off to deal with this, because this is not health food by any means”, he smiled weakly, as if it hurt him to think or talk, and shimmered out of their presence.

“Great Lord, conqueror and destroyer of all that is evil and impure, I salute you and bow before you, again and again”, whispered Lord Vishnu, and all the Gods and Goddesses bowed in silence.

Angel Azrael stood there, still petrified in shock, with his mouth agape, knowing only that he just witnessed the death of an Eternal, and, even worse, that it was a good thing.

“Fuck”.

Holy child

A beautiful young woman, seemingly in her twenties, sat under a tree in the astral Earth, holding her knees to her chest in thought. Zina looked at her, and a great love opened in her heart. She knelt by her side.

“My Goddess, do you mind if I call you ‘Mother’? Since you saved my soul, that is how I feel about you; I think of you as my mother, who gave me life once more”, the older-looking woman, seemingly in her forties, all-but-sang to her Lady.

“Of course I don’t mind, my dear daughter”, Lady Shakti smiled, looking not at all like she gave birth to Time itself, and yet, that’s exactly what she looked like. The older woman fell into her Goddess’ arms and embraced her. “I never loved or admired anyone as much as I love and admire you, Mother”, she choked with emotion, drinking the nectar of her devotion, and completely losing any sense of time and space. When she opened her eyes, they were no longer under the tree. There were blue crystalline angelic beings all around them, and as she became aware of herself, she saw that she was one of them – deep blue, but smaller than Azazel used to be when he ascended.

“Oh”, she whispered in her holy Mother’s ear, still holding her, still drinking her devotion.

“Oh’ indeed, my sweetheart child”, Shakti smiled and messed her hair, and Zina laughed. “Zina, you are my great comfort in all that’s been going on lately. Looking at you and what you’ve become makes me happy despite all, and I thank you for it”, the Lady purred.

“Please bless me so that I always remain yours, holy Mother”, Zina whispered, and Lady Parvati kissed her forehead in assent.

Sheep no more

Judge of Karma, Angel of Death; Azrael; crystal of *vajra*, male, was feeling much happier lately. It's not that his job was easier, nor that it had caused him much discomfort earlier, other than that terrible instance of encountering the corrupted angel Uriel. The reason for improvement in his otherwise calm and collected disposition was that he was joined in his duties by the newborn angel, Zina, who was such a fountain of constant calm joy, that he couldn't but be affected by it.

She was also extremely impressive. Not only did she attain crystallisation so soon after her almost fatal traumatic experience and subsequent miraculous recovery by the hands of two Goddesses, but she, due to being an old and rather large demon, crystallised to a more mature angelic form than is usual for the newborns, very much like Lord Azazel. And immediately afterwards, she continued growing exponentially in devotion to her Divine Mother, Goddess Shakti, and was now a large crystal of a profoundly deep blue colour, with large parts of her being violet to ultraviolet. Essentially, she was very close to the very summit of beings that could be found in Heaven, and if he had to bet on who will become the seventh God, his money would be on her. And, quite unexpectedly, she was so much fun to be around. Azrael smiled with profound contentment.

An expected shimmer in space occurred, and a being appeared before them, one of the souls who died on Earth and returned back to the astral plane, confused, traumatised, injured and for all intents and purposes insane. Only, Azrael understood that this expectation didn't match the reality of what he was seeing, because the being in front of him, although obviously post-human, with typical signs of being stuck in a limited existence of a human body, was different from anything he had ever seen.

It was a clear, striking blue crystal of *vajra*, with pure, deep thoughts, analytical, deeply observant, deeply empathetic. "Zina, tell me I'm seeing this right", he half-turned his attention to his partner.

“I know what you mean, but let’s talk to him rather than jump to conclusions, ok?”, she suggested, and he nodded in assent.

“Greetings, Sir. I am Azrael, Judge of Karma. I am here to assist you in your transition from Earth to the spiritual planes. However, since your nature and appearance are something I have never encountered before, I would ask you to introduce yourself and tell us about yourself. I must apologise in advance, because usually the deceased humans are in a state of shock, while I am calm and collected, but in your case the roles might be slightly reversed”, the Angel of Death smiled at the man.

“It is understandable”, the man smiled back. “I just experienced a painful death, but that is to be expected in that place, and is of little concern. As for who I am, it’s hard to say. I used to be asleep for so long, but then I awoke. I removed impurities on the four elements and extinguished them by transcending into the fifth. I used to be the Jewel in the Lotus, but now the Lotus is apparently gone, and I remain the Jewel. I used to be a prince, then an ascetic hermit, and then I gave even that up in enlightenment. I am the Awakened One, and I am not anything, for Emptiness is. I used to be called Shakyamuni, and they also called me Siddhartha Gautama. You can call me Buddha, the Awakened One, for my state and my name might as well be one.”

The two angels stood there in shock, their mouths open, and they looked at each other, and then back at him.

“You managed to attain all that *down there*? In Sanat Kumara’s hellhole?”, Azrael managed to collect himself enough to stutter.

“Ah, so that’s his name. I called him Mara, and I understood him to be the demon of illusion who owns and controls that place”, Buddha nodded. “I had serious difficulties with him there, because he uses every energetic projection and investment to power both your bondage and that place itself. The complexity of his traps is great, and he also adapts, so it’s not always the same. I am quite unsure whether this vision I’m having is one of his yet unseen traps, or it is a manifestation of my expectations and desires that I need to let go of, and transcend”, he mused.

“Oh, this place is quite real”, Azrael nodded. “I mean, it’s a construct made of astral substance, created by Goddess Karuna to

accommodate the needs of deceased humans, and furnished by Lord Vishnu. We are actual beings, and not manifestations of your psyche, as you seem to think. We, however, are also confused and in a state of shock, which is why we will now invite the Gods to join us, because you are something none of us have ever seen, and this far exceeds the parameters of our job here”, Azrael smiled to Buddha and nodded to Zina, whose eyes turned inwards as she prayed to her Mother.

“Hello, my daughter”, Shakti smiled after the shimmer in space manifested both herself and three other Gods, who just happened to have coffee with her as the call came. “Ah, so this is the cause of your excitement, my dear”, she put her arm around the smiling woman’s shoulder, and looked at the man himself. “A perfect crystal of blue *vajra*, excellent analytical mind, almost perfect theoretical understanding of spiritual theory... and you developed it all yourself, in the deepest illusion created by the worst of demons? I am not merely impressed, Lord Buddha; I salute you”, she curtsied respectfully. “I am Lady Shakti, wife of Lord Shiva. It is an honour to meet you”.

Buddha looked into the Lady’s eyes with deep insight and discernment, and his mouth opened in shock. “Wow. I would bow back, my Lady, but I am not sure if such a gesture is respectful enough, and worthy of what I just felt. In my experience on Earth, the gods seemed like irrelevant, self-serving beings that feed off sacrifices and provide worldly benefits in order to promote more sacrifices, all of it being irrelevant for one’s liberation. I am used to pointing my mind at something, and it dissolves into components, showing itself to be illusory. In my presumption, I took the liberty of touching you with my mind, expecting you to dissolve as an illusion, showing the underlying calm of blissful emptiness. However, my mind touched you and broke, the way a stone breaks hitting a harder stone. It’s as if *vajra*, the fifth element, the jewel of my awareness, is like mere air compared to what I touched, but it is not at all what I expected. You are not cold emptiness of a higher order. You are not a deeper state of *nirvana*. You are kind, compassionate, playful, powerful, but that’s not the right word. You are powerful in such extreme ways, it blows my mind when I try to wrap it around that. You are a God in a sense where everything one would think of as a God feels like a laughing stock in comparison. My Lady, I apologise for my presumption, and my only explanation is

that you are to a Buddha what Buddha is to a dormant soul in deep illusion”, he bowed deeply to the smiling Goddess.

“I like him, Mother”, Zina turned to Lady Shakti and smiled.

“We all do, kid”, the Goddess rubbed her daughter’s shoulder. “He’s so far the most impressive being that emerged from all of this, and I expect we’ll have lots to talk about, as his understanding of spiritual mechanics, formed in that place, might in fact contain improvements on our knowledge”, she nodded, as Buddha bowed back even more deeply in return.

“I would be honoured to be of service, Goddess. And, after I think about everything more deeply, and gain better understanding about the rest of Reality, now that my mind is unconstrained by flesh, I will certainly have questions”.

“And we will be glad to answer them, Lord Buddha”, Goddess smiled at him, and other Gods nodded. “But for now, I will be leaving you with my daughter Zina, because she looks like she wants to talk to you”, she grinned.

Lady Lakshmi nodded a greeting to Buddha smilingly, and turned to Zee and Kay. “He used to be one of those dormant souls we usually call the sheep, and then he awoke. Now, he is one of the most impressive beings I have seen so far”. She looked at Lord Azazel in particular. “You were right to say that good things might come out of this horror after all, and that souls need a proper shakeup”, she curtsied.

“And you, Mother, were fully justified in warning us not to mock the ‘sheep’, nor to speak casually of the dangers and horrors”, he bowed back.

“I am glad we are all in agreement”, smiled Lady Shakti, and shimmered away, as the other Gods nodded a farewell and followed suit.

...

“I must again apologise for my presumption, Lady Zina”, Buddha mused. “Before, long before, I can vaguely remember existing, without any aim or purpose. I was; and that was enough for happiness. I was hardly anything, and it didn’t bother me in the slightest. In my earthly life, everything was ignorance and darkness. I encountered ignorant

and often cruel kings and noblemen, pompous and utterly ignorant priests, ignorant people conducting their worldly affairs in darkness, all suffering terribly as poverty, old age, sickness and death ruled the world”.

“After my awakening and transformation, I saw that I am seemingly the only truly enlightened one, and started teaching. Fools challenged me; the wise listened. The only wise people I encountered were those wise enough to become my disciples and learn *dharma*.”

“And then, I saw you and your friend Azrael. He is much like myself, made of *vajra*, a *buddha* in his own right. I’ve seen his mind – it is calm, settled, hard as diamond and lightning. He is also old, incredibly old, and has other jewels on him, of darker colour, signifying his great achievements. I instantly liked him and felt great compassion for his sincerity, humility and kindness to the suffering souls he assists daily”.

“You, my Lady, are even stronger, more powerful, harder. The colour and hardness of *vajra* that makes your karmic body is greater than his, or mine, and yet you are so humble, kind and lovely, with no attempt to project authority or distance. How did you attain such admirable qualities of spirit?”, he asked the daughter of Shakti.

“You told me how your spiritual path went, Lord Buddha, so it’s quite appropriate that I tell you about mine”, she smiled. “You see, I used to be a demoness, for untold millennia, or eons even. They used to call me Vipera, the venomous bitch. In my endless boredom, I entertained myself by molesting other souls, and inventing cruel pranks for them, so that I and other demons would have a laugh”.

Buddha raised an eyebrow. “I find this hard to believe, my Lady, as there is nothing of the sort that I can identify in you, but I guess that is how true spiritual transformation works”, he nodded.

“Yes. At one point, I naively and thoughtlessly chose to test out Sanat Kumar’s new world, Earth. I was born there and all my memories were inhibited. I didn’t know that I was supposed to be a demoness, and I knew nothing about cruelty and malice, as my family loved me and treated me with great kindness. I was soon married, and my husband also treated me lovingly and with kindness. As this became the norm of my life, it also became my true self of choice,

something I wanted to be, and defend against all threats. I also experienced terrible suffering in life, but that had nothing to do with my choices; it was merely a threat, an evil that happened against my will”, she explained.

“But how did you deal with suffering? Surely it must have been an issue for you?”, Buddha enquired.

“It was, indeed. Four of my seven children died early. I grieved and cried for them, and those were dark times. Also, my life ended in a terrible way, when bandits came, killed my husband and two sons in the fields, entered our house and bound me, and forced me to watch and listen as they took turns raping my daughter, my youngest child. I tore myself away and tried to fight them off, but they killed me”, she finished darkly.

“How did you deal with this horrible experience?”, Buddha whispered compassionately.

“I didn’t. My soul broke completely. I locked myself into a memory of rocking my baby daughter to sleep, forever, and that is how I would have died, if not for Lady Shakti. The last thing I remember as darkness started to take me was her holy presence all around me, saying “no you don’t”, as she flooded my soul with incredible bliss and light that comforted me, faded out the trauma and the loss, and brought back my memories of life before Earth, so that I could remember and integrate myself. She also showed me the blissful nature or Reality, showed me how I chose to partake in it with my choices of love and kindness in my human life, and how I chose to stand against it in my cruel and harsh life as a demoness. Her love and compassion literally stitched my soul together as I was breaking apart, and I held on to her light and gained new life”, she finished, glowing brightly.

“You are right to put an accent on the issue of suffering, Lord Buddha”, she continued. “Suffering is a terrible problem, and the trauma would have ended my existence as a soul, if not for my Mother’s compassion and immense skill in spiritual healing. However, in hindsight, the love and kindness that I experienced are what informed my choice, for them and against everything that threatens them. They are both the reason why I suffered so much when everything was taken from me, and also why I am the person you see

before you, because I embraced my Mother and loved her with all my heart”.

“This goes significantly against my beliefs and experience, which both say that attachment is the door to suffering, and in order to avoid suffering, one needs to let go”, Buddha thought out loud.

“But you also taught compassion, if I am not mistaken?”, she argued. “How can one do both? How can one care enough to feel compassion, and let go enough to not feel suffering if the ones you care for are hurt?”

“And also, the Gods do not share your outlook on suffering. They don’t think removal of suffering is a worthy goal, in itself. I’ve seen Gods in tears, and as we speak, my Mother’s holy husband is suffering in solitude and silence, transforming evil karma of a terrible being that had to be destroyed; by choice, not by accident. Gods are not transcendence of suffering; rather, they are transcendence of indifference”, she argued strongly.

“You want to say that I’m throwing out the baby together with the dirty bath water, my Lady?”, Buddha smiled.

“Yes, and I’m glad that we can both understand the analogy, having both been human”, she smiled at him. “I think the point is to embody and manifest the qualities of the unmanifested Absolute, *brahman* that is *sat-cit-ananda*. As you become *sat-cit-anandamaya*, made of qualities of *sat-cit-ananda*, you are truly living your purpose, which is to be of God”, argued the deeply violet lady Buddha, daughter of Light. “Of all things that are *sat-cit-ananda*, the devotion and worship of That, which is worshipful and worthy of highest devotion, is what manifests God the most, so that the unmanifested God can say “yes, I am That, and That is what I want to be as a person”, and that is how Gods are born”, she argued as her nature transformed, and the wellspring in her heart opened in fullness, as she remembered her Mother in all of her glory and kindness.

The Buddha was powerfully shaken by the forcefulness and conviction of the enlightened Lady beside him, because this wasn’t some ignorant person telling him the usual nonsense. This was an almost-Goddess, a Buddha herself, a crystal of spiritual light deeper and stronger than his own soul, and her words resonated with such

reality that he stood there in sheer awe of her, feeling what she conveyed and the reasons behind it, and he also remembered Lady Shakti, and what he felt when he did his usual “test for reality”, and found something Reality itself is based upon, that shook him to his core like nothing else. Those were not ignorant, attached people spouting nonsense that needs to be released so that *nirvana* can be. The lovely Lady Buddha across him had thoughts and emotions that were *nirvana*, emptiness of illusion and attachment, and yet fullness of blissful, delectable joy and clarity of vast, enormous consciousness and understanding of things he was only starting to consider, and his own heart opened in worship and admiration of her, bowing deeply to her lively yet profound spirit, and even more to her Mother, the Goddess whose smile haunted him, as it contained such depths of transcendence and power combined, that his carefully cultivated aloofness crumbled into dust, like a dam that released a flood in his soul, as he worshipped the greatness that was such, that his own greatness never dared to even dream of its existence.

“Lady Buddha, I bow to you, again and again. Please teach me and guide me”, he whispered to the almost-Goddess who choked in ecstasy, and touched her forehead to his own.

“God is the endless delight, endless wonder, reality beneath everything that is real, goodness beneath all the good things. He is the love behind suffering; and bliss, truth and wonder in love. See how I drink it”, she invited him, whispering as her consciousness blended with the deeper reality of God, and God loved being Zina so much, that they could no longer be apart, and was no longer the formless *brahman*, but Zina the Goddess, touching heads with Buddha in his second enlightenment, as *nirvana*, the ultimate fullness empty of all that is worthless and superficial, desired to be the wise person who worshipped Goddess Zina.

And so, the Gods were eight.

Not coffee

As Lord Shiva walked into their coffee lounge, his wife instantly ran towards him and threw herself into his arms wordlessly. He just smiled and held her for a time, and then they looked at each other, and he took her by the hand as they joined the others.

Shiva approached Vishnu, hugged him and whispered: “Thank you, my Lord. It helped”, as Vishnu clapped his back and smiled.

“I see you are stronger”.

“Somewhat”, Shiva grinned back. “It was a big motherfucker”.

“Language, please; there are children at the table”, Lady Lakshmi smiled, as Zee and Kay rolled their eyes.

Krishna smiled, then his smile froze, as his eyes defocused; then he smiled twice as brightly. “Guys, you won’t believe what just happened. Mahadev, you’re back just in time”, he grinned at Shiva.

“Judging by your tone, I assume it’s not another broken angel?”, Lakshmi prodded her husband.

“By your grace, oh Luck, it is not”, he grinned and kissed her. “We have two new additions to the family”, he smiled widely, and snapped his fingers.

Lady Zina and Lord Buddha appeared from the shimmer in space, and everybody was instantly around them.

“I’m so proud of you”, Shakti whispered in her daughter’s ear as she hugged her, and tears went down Zina’s cheeks.

“So, you’re the guy who managed to figure out the particle theory of *karma*, called Sanat Kumar by the name while there, or close enough, got initiated into *vajra* while incarnated into that stupid gel, formulated entire theory of detachment and divestment, and became a God half an hour after getting back here, simply from talking to my wife and daughter? It’s a great honour”, Shiva grinned at Buddha, shaking his hand and pulling him into a mil-spec hug.

“And you are the guy who just ate a super-demon for brunch, after reconfiguring the Creation the day before?”, Buddha hugged him back. “I am honoured to meet you, Sir”, he smiled.

They all sat at the coffee table. “You know that stuff you’re drinking isn’t really coffee, right? I had coffee on Earth, and it’s bitter and yukk”, Zina frowned from the memory. “We had to put all kinds of stuff, like milk and honey in it, to make it even marginally palatable. This stuff is incredible, however. Tastes like the love of God”, her smile widened.

“We know”, Vishnu smiled. “We just call it that”.

“So, Zina, Lord Buddha, what are your plans?”, asked Lady Parvati. “Are you together or...?”, she winked.

They looked at each other wordlessly, and held hands. “If you approve”, bowed Buddha. “I don’t know what we are, but I see her as my *gurudevi*, who taught me and guided me to greater wisdom. I never want to be separated from her.”

“I liked you since I first saw you, Prince Siddhartha”, Zina joked. “Now I adore you. And cut out the *gurudevi* business, please. If we’re doing this, I want to be a proper wife to you”, she curtsied to him and smiled as he hugged her.

“I officially call you husband and wife, then”, Lady Shakti smiled and hugged them both. “So, in danger of repeating myself, what are the plans for the future?”

“I want to continue serving as a Judge of Karma, that is if my husband and Lord approves”, Zina bowed to Siddhartha Gautama.

“Not only do I approve, but I would request Lady Shakti’s permission to join you. It is a most praiseworthy and compassionate job, and if you see me as worthy and qualified enough for it, it would be my honour to join your daughter there”, Buddha bowed to his mother-in-law.

“You are slightly over-qualified, but we need all the help we can get”, Parvati smiled and nodded, and his Title changed accordingly.

“This is quite fortunate, as we seem to have new arrivals”, Lord Shiva raised an eyebrow.

...

“So, you two were away for what, an hour, and not only did both of you become Gods, but you also got married, and Lord Buddha is now working here with us?”, Azrael scratched his head.

“She became a Goddess first; I was so amazed with her that I just followed suit”, Buddha kissed his bride’s hand and smiled.

“It’s too bad I didn’t bet any actual money on it, because I just knew it”, Azrael laughed. “Oh well. At least we have the most praiseworthy addition to the workforce”, he bowed.

“And I hear there’s been some new arrivals?”, Buddha bowed back. “And what exactly is the procedure?”

“Yes; you’ll see quickly enough. As for the procedure, it’s simple. The normal souls need compassion, healing and knowledge until they are well enough to be placed in the astral Earth, the place where you sat with Zina in that apple orchard. There, they can think things through, and see what they want to be and do next. Then there are the corrupted ones, the criminals who caused the normal ones to be traumatised; rapists, murderers, bandits, warlords, clergy. They are the actual problem, as one would want to rehabilitate them too, but they need to be really seriously sorry, not just fake it to evade the consequences. That’s where your legendary bullshit detector comes into play. Basically, if they are thoroughly corrupted and evil, throw them into the astral jail, designed exclusively for that purpose, and we’ll see what to do with them at some later point. Maybe they change, maybe we return them to Earth, see what happens and revisit. If all other options are exhausted, someone will wipe them out and purify the karmic mass, but that part is out of our hands. In case of the most terrible demonic beings, and we only had one so far, we call the Gods to deal with them”.

“Sounds good to me”, Buddha nodded. “So, basically, we treat them compassionately, but not beyond the limits of reason and good taste?”

“Exactly”, confirmed the Angel of Death. “In any case, it would be cruel to let loose any unrepentant criminals among their victims and thus traumatisise the poor souls further. That’s why the brig is there; hold

them separately, revisit, think of solutions and treatments at a later date, and in the worst cases, flush”, he shrugged.

“And by the worst cases, you mean ...?”, Buddha raised an eyebrow.

“People who would make the normal devils want to escape hell just to get away from them”, grinned Azrael, as Buddha laughed, and Zina held him close. “You didn’t see Uriel, or at least what he became, and be thankful to all the Gods that this is the case. I still have nightmares”, he shivered.

“In any case, I have the two of you to rely upon until I get the hang of it”, nodded Siddhartha.

“Speaking of which, here we come”, Azrael pointed.

Real consequences

“So, Lord Buddha, what are your impressions of your new job?”, Azrael grinned at his new buddy.

“It’s actually not that different from my previous one”, shrugged Lord Siddhartha. “I was a very famous spiritual teacher and founder of a major religion. People came to me for magical solutions to their problems, and the problems usually revolved around poverty, sickness and death. There would be a famine, and they asked for my blessings so that the rain would come. There would be a slaughter, and the panicked women would ask when their husbands would come home. There would be a plague, and they would ask me for magical healing. At least here I am not expected to perform unreasonable miracles, and the part I am expected to do – offer advice, consolation, or psychotherapy – I can actually do better and more easily. So, as far as I’m concerned, this is Tuesday”, he shrugged.

Azrael considered this. “Truly, you must be the most qualified person for this job. We are fortunate to have you, my Lord”, he bowed, and Buddha smiled and bowed back.

“So, what is your perspective on all this?”, his wife asked. “You’ve seen it from both vantage points, so you know more than anyone; certainly more than me, since I never went more than twenty miles away from my village, and I hardly knew more than fifty people”.

“It is obvious that people suffer. It is less obvious why. Previously, I concentrated on sources of suffering, and on attachment and projection, but as you eloquently pointed out before, Lord Shiva takes on terrible suffering upon himself, and he’s one of the happiest, most wonderful people imaginable, and not only is he not harmed by his suffering, but in fact seems to grow stronger from it. Also, the Gods suffer greatly when they see suffering of others, because they are incredibly compassionate and beautiful. They could easily choose to detach themselves from others, but then they wouldn’t be such beautiful people, and they wouldn’t be persons of God. You can even

argue that indifference would make them into omnipotent psychopaths. So, what is it about suffering that makes it soul-crushing? Let's take your example. You experienced pain of childbirth, typical pains of human life, occasional episode of poverty and deprivation, occasional sickness, but none of that really harmed you. What harmed you was the loss of loved ones, feeling of helplessness when they were attacked, and the impression that human life is all there is. How am I doing so far?", he asked and kissed her temple.

"Your analysis is spot on", she smiled and blushed. "When I endured physical pain, I could contextualise it – it would pass, it was for the greater good, or in case of pregnancy and childbirth, I chose this, I want this and I would do it again", she nodded. "But when my children would get sick and die, I didn't suffer because I was in pain. I suffered because they were in pain. I was losing them, I couldn't do anything about it, and endings and separations in the physical life feel terrible and final. Most of all, the fact that something terrible was happening, and I was helpless to either stop it or avoid it was what broke me", she shivered briefly.

"Let's go further", he continued. "When you were a demoness, in the astral plane, you didn't feel physical pain, hunger or sickness, right?"

"No".

"You didn't care about people, so if something bad happened to them, it didn't break you?"

"No. In fact, it would entertain me or make me laugh", she admitted.

"You also didn't age, and poverty had no meaning. So, would you say that such a life, devoid of classical elements of material suffering, was a blissful one?", he grinned.

"No. In fact, it was a nightmarish existence, and in hindsight, I would say that I suffered terribly, and the emptiness from not having loved anyone was much, much worse than the suffering from losing loved ones, or seeing them suffer and not being able to help them, although pain of the latter was absolutely soul-crushing", she remembered. "But when I lay there in the astral plane with my soul

broken from loss, I felt dignity and fullness I had never felt in my demonic life”.

“So, this would conclude my demonstration. Suffering, in itself, is not necessarily a problem, since it is merely one of the elements in a more complicated equation. From what I have seen, people who inflict suffering on others are usually in a far worse spiritual condition than those who suffer. You were an extreme case, because you would have literally died without expert help, but most victims of terrible things recover successfully and quickly here. The perpetrators of evil, however, feature prominently among souls too far gone to be salvageable”, he concluded.

“I am amazed at your presentation, my Lord”, bowed Angel of Death. “Your analytical prowess is indeed staggering”.

“Thank you, my noble friend”, bowed Buddha.

“But let me summarise. Committing sinful acts is far more harmful, in general, than being a victim of sinful acts?”

“In general, but not always. Sometimes, if one is intentionally and systematically broken over a long period of time, and they have no transcendental perspective to guide them out, that can have devastating effects. We’ve seen slaves who have been castrated, raped daily, mutilated and humiliated as a matter of course, and treated as things rather than persons. On its own, that would be bad enough, but in Sanat Kumar’s world, where they are separated from a wider context of everything, such pressures can indeed kill a soul. I have been through all kinds of things down there, but I had strong will and perspective. Someone else would have been in serious trouble.”

“Also, there’s context and choice. Let’s say a woman gives birth. She knows what’s going on, she knows it’s her choice, that it’s a good thing, and that she would do everything the same again. She is in pain, but her suffering is minimal. But now imagine that she has a sickness that has similarly painful symptoms, and she knows she would suffer greatly and die from it. Her suffering from the same amount of pain and discomfort would be terrible”.

“I completely agree”, Zina nodded, “And seven pregnancies and childbirths make me the resident expert”, she smiled.

“Indeed”, both men nodded.

“So, knowledge that something is your choice, that it has a good purpose, and that it’s normal, makes terrible agony completely endurable; in essence, Zina before childbirth was in the same position as Lord Shiva when he absorbed evil karma intending to spend it, and fully knowing it would be a terrible agony for him”, Buddha looked at both of them and they nodded.

“Evidence for this is that Lord Shiva looked amazing today, and from the reaction of his wife when he returned, it’s obvious that it wasn’t child’s play. It was a God-level problem, let’s say of the same kind pregnancy and childbirth are for a human woman, but likely worse”, he continued. And yet, Shiva was empowered by the experience, the way Zina felt empowered when she gave birth”.

She nodded in assent.

“I also looked through her memories as she told me about her traumatic experiences. She shrugged off childbirths as if they were a mere inconvenience, although they were in fact physically more painful than her death”, he looked at her inquisitively, and she nodded in agreement.

“So, suffering in that place is obviously a much more complicated affair than I previously thought. Let’s say there’s an element of choice. Let’s say if I allow you to take Tamara’s place, so that they rape and murder you, and she goes free, what do you do?”

“I would choose it instantly, and whatever they did to me, it wouldn’t matter, because I would know that I saved my girl and this thought would have comforted me through whatever ordeal”, she smiled.

“Exactly. And now we come to the point I want to make. The reason why that place causes such terrible damage due to suffering is because it deprives its victims of perspective. It cuts them off from knowledge that the entire thing is, for all intents and purposes, an artificially induced dream, where most characters are fake; beasts without riders, that work automatically unless a soul is bonded to them”, he concluded.

“Wait”, Zina started in shock, “Does it mean that my entire family, that I loved so much, consisted of mere uninhabited shells, with no souls or eternity of any kind beyond physical matter?”

“Have you met them here?”, Buddha asked.

“No”.

“Have you tried to find them? Goddess, remember?”, he touched her hand gently to calm her.

“I tried now. There’s no response, no echo. Nothing”, she shrugged, but looked distraught.

“There is an order of magnitude of a hundred million human beings alive on Earth. The number of souls incarnated from both heaven and the astral nursery is a mere sub-percentage of that number, so multiple orders of magnitude less. And I am ignoring intelligent animals, which would raise one number significantly, and working with the upper range of estimates of the other. But let’s say it’s ten percent. It means that out of ten humans you know on Earth, you are likely to be the only soul among them. On the other hand, it is quite possible that all of them are souls. This would make treating others poorly a very bad thing. Treating others well, however, would give you an excellent opportunity for growth in love and kindness, which you personally experienced”, he smiled.

“So, basically, the best practice would be to treat everybody kindly just in case?”, Azrael asked.

“Yes, that’s exactly right. Treating others well is equally important for your benefit, and theirs. For instance, had Zina treated her family poorly, as some wretched people do, she would have remained a demonic being. This way, she became someone so beautiful, that Lady Shakti cried over her and did everything to save her, and in fact she became a Goddess within days. Sure, the drawback is that her family was an illusion and she, basically, broke herself over nothing. But if we look at the actual energy equations and investments, she loved all the way to becoming a Goddess”, he concluded, kissing his wife’s hand as she blushed.

“So you say it’s like suffering in a dream, over dreamed, nonexistent people?”, she enquired.

“Have you ever had a dream in which you were scared, or in other ways suffered?”, he asked back.

“I have, many times”, she confirmed.

“Did you suffer less because it wasn’t real?”

“No, but I was relieved when I woke and realised it wasn’t real”, she said.

“Well, there you go”, he smiled.

“Wow”, she sighed and managed a true smile. “So it’s like entering a dark room and seeing a rope on the floor, and thinking it’s a snake, and you panic and try to see where the children are and if everybody is alive and safe. Then someone brings in a torch, and you see it’s a rope and your fear vanishes, because it was all in your mind”, she smiled in relief.

“Your family might have been in your mind; or, actually, in the mind of the Jewel that renders the simulation, but your love was absolutely real and you carried that with you. All your choices were real. All your suffering was real. And the quality of personality it all produced was real. You are one of the eight most real persons in the entire reality, and you have imaginary snakes to thank for it”, he joked.

“Also, let’s take the opposite example of Uriel, and let’s say that most of his victims were uninhabited shells. That doesn’t make his choices any less fatal, or make his soul any less terrible. Characters may be simulated, for the most part, but if you are there, and you think they are real, all of your choices are personality-forming. In fact, if you brainfuck yourself into thinking it’s all a dream and you can do whatever you want, it’s going to cause even worse damage and make you into a total basket case”, Azrael added.

“You are exactly right, which is why the only good choice is what Zina did without thinking or planning – treat everyone with greatest love and kindness, and if it turns out you were the only real person in that village, well, there will be one very good real person in the village”, Buddha concluded.

“Also, treat possibly empty shells with kindness, because you don’t actually know who’s in there. Imagine you have some people tortured and one of them turns out to be your best friend from before.

That friendship is likely to end, I would say, so you will have eternal consequences of a temporary foolishness. Also, if you and I incarnated together, and we knew with absolute certainty that both of us will be in the same village; how would you treat people in the village?”

“The same way I treated my family down there – I believed that they matter greatly and I loved them”, she answered. “Which makes the ethics of the whole thing obvious, I guess”.

“Yes”, he nodded.

“How did you get so good at this, I mean analysis and explanations?”, Azrael scratched his head.

“I did this religious teacher thing for decades, remember?” Buddha smiled. “People would wake me up in the middle of the night with some emergency and I would do an excellent job half asleep and often with high fever”, he smiled.

Zina hugged him. “Never let me forget that I married the smartest person who lived on Earth so far”, she smiled.

“If anyone contradicts that statement, they will have me to deal with”, Azrael nodded in assent.

Shattered

“Who are you people? Are you in service of Lord Baal?”, an unhinged-looking woman addressed Azrael and Siddharta.

The men looked at each other, and then at her. “We are the Judges of Karma. Our purpose here is to help you with your transition from your experience on Earth. We don’t know who Lord Baal is; I knew of a demon called Baal once, but he is no Lord”, Azrael smiled.

“Stay away from me, you blasphemers!”, the woman screamed and crawled away from them as far as she could before hitting a wall. “Baal is the Lord! He rules above the Earth and is my Master! I was once like you; a blasphemer, proud, ignorant, and I offended the Lord, but Master grew angry and punished me. His priests took me into slavery, and chained me into the dungeon where they would bring in men to relieve their needs with me, and when I would become pregnant they beat me on the belly until I miscarried, and threw my babies to the dogs to eat them”, she half screamed, half sobbed. “Get away from me! I don’t want to see men ever again. You are all vile pigs who hate and abuse women. I hate you!”, she screamed with such power that the astral furniture of the room started cracking and melting.

Azrael looked significantly at Buddha, who nodded and went out to bring his wife, who was in the adjacent room, dealing with another soul.

“Please, lady, calm down. Nobody here is going to abuse you or harm you in any way. Our role is to help you in any way we can, after your human experience”, Azrael spoke calmly, but the woman looked at him with vile mistrust.

“You don’t serve the Master”, she squealed, as if possessed by evil spirits. “I don’t want to cooperate with you. If Master finds out I had been consorting with his enemies, he will punish me”, she winced and yelled at the same time.

Azrael thought he’d seen the worst of it when he encountered Uriel, or what was left of him, but this was not in any way less terrifying. The woman was, obviously, a deep violet crystal, at some

point. However, the crystal was cracked at multiple shatter points, and held itself together with substance that looked like yellowish-brown clay, or dog excrement, and its colour was impure in most places. She was quite literally broken, and also looked like she had endured some sort of a systematic desecration and devastation of her spirit.

“Again, lady, please calm down. You are not in any danger here. Please, tell me your name, and tell me about Lord Baal, so that I may understand of whom you are talking?”, he calmly asked, hoping that Zina and Buddha would come to his aid soon.

“My name is Anthea, Anthea the slave of Baal”, she whined in some disgusting mockery of worship, that felt like whining of a submissive, beaten dog, or a hyena. “It’s good that you want to know about the Lord, because you should all drop on your knees before his feet and worship him in utter submission, and not be arrogant and proud as you now stand”, she squealed insanely. “Baal is the Lord, he is the Master above the Earth. He shines as the Sun at those who serve him, and casts his vengeance on those who oppose him. But I don’t want to talk to you any more. You are a man, and men are pigs and dogs. Men rape and beat women, you are all disgusting and I hate you”, she cowered in fear, as poor Azrael prayed that his friends would hurry up, because he was at his wits’ end here.

To his great relief, they came, and he quickly told them everything he knew, in full memory blocks.

Zina looked at him gravely, and then turned to the crazy woman. “Greetings, Anthea. My name is Zina”, she smiled kindly.

The woman seemed to relax somewhat. “Tell the men to leave. I don’t want them to rape me again, or to have to look at them. The sight of those animals makes me afraid. I hate them”, she squealed.

Zina was shocked by this. “Those two men are great Lords of highest honour and kindness, who have never hurt anyone, and who always treat women with greatest respect. Lord Buddha here is my beloved husband, and Lord Azrael is an angel in charge of the dead, known for his compassion and kindness. I would greatly appreciate it if you stopped insulting them, for this is a grave crime against God”, she shivered slightly.

“Fuck them, they should all go to hell and die!”, the woman screamed and would have crawled deeper into the corner, were it at all possible, and her words were vile curses charged with dark magic that desecrated the space.

“Guys, let me deal with this one alone, so that I might access any reason that’s left in here, and if I fail, please get my Mother and Lord Shiva”, she curtsied to the angel and the God, who stood there in complete consternation, bowed to her in assent and shimmered out.

“So, Anthea, now that we are alone, would you please tell me more about yourself, and about your Master?”, Zina smiled, wrapping the woman inside an energy cocoon of kindness and safety, while praying silently to her husband and Mother for patience and support.

...

“So, that’s how Sanat Kumar dealt with angels who rushed in foolishly, proud of their size, purity and status, thinking God’s light will overcome all evil and limitations, and they will just go in, show their power and light and all illusion and its maker will crumble like dust in the glory of Reality they represent”, Lord Shiva scratched his chin. “Apparently, that failed spectacularly”.

“You can’t fight that illusion with power. It literally can’t be overcome in that manner. Also, if you try any kind of an attack, it will be treated as sin and he’ll be allowed to punish you for it. The only ways to fight that thing are, first, the one Lord Buddha tried, which is to divest yourself completely and withdraw your energy from the world-system until you die, doing only good and kind things and refraining from anything that would form attachments; or, second, you could try to get Sanat Kumar to sin against you, which would create an opening for you to exploit. However, since he took care to protect himself from direct involvement in anything there, you would probably need to threaten him enough to get personally involved and deal with you in an unjust way, that’s not covered by the contract everybody “signs” by entering, and which nobody seems to read”, Lady Shakti joined her husband’s analysis.

“I understood quickly that you can’t fight Mara with power while you’re in his territory”, Buddha added. “It was obvious that it wouldn’t work from the fact that he enticed me to try. Then I saw that it would

only serve to boost my ego, and all the power I used would bind me in return. So, I did the only reasonable thing: I denied him the thing he wanted. I didn't fight, I just let go, and that seemed to work quite well. Unfortunately, it did nothing to actually remove him from power or dismantle that world, but it was useful from the position of an individual and his own destiny", he shrugged.

"And this started as such a wonderful day. I was talking to you and Lady Zina, and I was just thinking how awesome you two are and how much better my life was since you came", Azrael waved his head in disbelief, still shocked by what he saw earlier.

"We need to assemble the war council", nodded Krishna. "We need to discuss strategy".

Verdict

“That was really bad”, Zina was the last to sit at the war table. “I kept praying to my husband and my Mother to save and guide me, and I am thankful to them for being my anchors through this”, she sighed heavily.

“Please, tell us everything there is, for I feel this is of great importance”, nodded Lord Azazel.

“Indeed”, confirmed Lady Shakti.

“I kept trying to feel compassion for her, since she’s obviously a victim of terrible crimes. I kept thinking what my poor Tamara would look like had those bandits chained her into a cave so that they could keep raping her for years, rather than just killing her outright. I tried to justify her, see her condition as a mere consequence, tragic and inevitable, of someone else’s crimes”, Zina sighed.

“But I couldn’t. She is so incredibly disgusting, offensive, blasphemous and outright repulsive, so opposite to what is acceptable in the eyes of God, and I would know, since I grounded myself in the First Person state of the Absolute. Rather than helping, it made it worse”, she shrugged.

“There is a reason why we Gods exist in couples, and it’s always married couples, bound by intimate love. When I was in that deep state and I looked at her, I knew why God is a man, a woman, and man and woman together. It’s as if entering from the Absolute into the Relative just can’t produce one self-sufficient result; it’s always a man loving a woman, and a woman loving a man, and only together they form a unit that is harmonious and happy. We need to be ourselves and belong to our partner in order for God to find us acceptable. And that woman”, she couldn’t even force herself to say her name, “She is not acceptable to God. She is so far from being acceptable to God, that I would go so far as to say that she is a gender-flipped mirror image of the priests and guards in that prison where she was kept. I tried to see her as a victim, but I couldn’t, because whatever she was before, now she is just vile, disgusting, hateful and ungodly”, Zina shivered.

“I really tried being compassionate; I really did. But she keeps spewing vile hatred against male God-persons, and her hatred takes form of mantrically charged curses and dark magic. I have no useful recommendations. I calmed her down somewhat and put her to sleep, and I created a special section for her in the astral Earth, so that she can't come in touch with other souls there and spread her vile convictions and ideas and thus harm them. I didn't want to put her in the prison with the criminals, but I probably should have, because she's as vile as any of them, if not worse”, she shivered. “I have nothing more to say, and I surrender this thing to you now”, Lady Zina finished.

“Let's not forget how she is obviously a creature of Sanat Kumar, broken and shaped by fear”, Azrael added. “She calls him Baal, which means Lord or Master in her language, and is in terrible fear of crossing him in any way. I think it would suffice for him to raise an eyebrow at her, and she would lose bladder and bowel control. Also, she seems to have had mystical visions of him in that prison, so it's not just quasi-religious nonsense; I've seen him in her mind, and she truly knows him, fears him and belongs to him”, he frowned in disgust.

“I looked into her history. Her name was Athena; a calm being of dignity and power. She stood near the very top of the range of heavenly angels, deep purple and indigo blue, large mass. So, how exactly is it possible for such a being to be deformed into such a vile abomination?”, Lady Lakshmi asked. “It is as she was at the precipice of becoming a Goddess, and then this happened”.

“I think I can offer a possible explanation, and others may complement it”, voiced Lord Buddha. “I think she is what happens when you have power, dignity and glory, but no devotion to God, and no deep, spiritually profound love in your heart. She was powerful, she was proud, she didn't know her limits, she challenged Mara in his world, at his turf, she expected to triumph and return to the Gods with his head on a pike, so that they would all see her glory and be humbled before her. In essence, she has the character of Mara the Satan, Satan the Mara or Sanat Kumara, whatever you may call him, only he's an astral imp, and she was a deep violet super-angel. If I look at the Will of God within my heart, I would say that her outcome was only logical, because she wouldn't go beyond herself and love; she saw Gods not as goals and ideals to worship and be glad for the opportunity, as we all

worship each other, but as a challenge and competition to be rivalled and humbled. She was not what God wanted to be. In essence, we all became Gods and Goddesses because we worshipped and loved and become something Absolute wanted to be, as a person. She wanted to defeat a super-demon so that she could humble the Gods and rise above them. She got her comeuppance, I'd say. She had no love, no humility, no *bhakti*; went into something that was over her head, and she got destroyed. Honestly, she's a good cautionary tale. During my human life, I kept warning against being proud, arrogant and everything else that she was in abundance, because that would end badly, and I wish I could have had her there, pickled in a jar, so that I could show her to my disciples in Rajagriha as evidence of why the noble eightfold path is good, and how the opposite would end", finished the Buddha, as all other Gods nodded in approval and relief, because they feared he would advise endless compassion, which they felt was sorely misplaced in this case.

"Hear, hear", clapped Lord Shiva. "I wholeheartedly support your opinion, my friend. Also, I would say that your incredibly deep experience with Earth and life as a human makes you an authority on this, so I would hardly feel qualified to overrule your opinion", he grinned and bowed to Lord Shakyamuni. "I also bow to your blessed wife, Lady Zina, who did us a great service and suffered this nastiness so that she could provide us with her invaluable insight, as someone who herself was human, and is familiar with the kinds of terrible violence this woman endured, and I further bow to her great competence and patience", he finished, bowing to Zina with a wide smile.

"I recommend that we throw her back down there to Sanat Kumar, because she is obviously his creature out of her own will, or out of her own fears, and due to her own arrogance, and she can either break further, or heal, or find some other option for herself, but there is no place for a creature such as herself: disgusting, blasphemous, cowardly and sinful; in this or any other world under the Throne of God", concluded Lord Vishnu, and all the Gods bowed to his verdict.

Breakdown

Lord Krishna focused inwards, and made a hand movement. “Done. She is now firmly in a womb, and we can proceed to the next point, which is analysis of what’s actually going on here, and figuring out steps we should take in order to stay ahead of it”, he smiled at his family.

“I think we should count our blessings first”, his wife smiled back. “There are great things that came from this ordeal. The first was Zina, the loving and lovable, cute, gracious and dignified, whom we all love and adore”, she smiled at the woman, whose complexion was starting to turn towards crimson. “The second is her wise, good and immensely brilliant husband, Lord Buddha, whose wisdom, experience and virtue are great comfort and inspiration to all of us in these challenging times”, she nodded at the man, who looked deeply into her eyes, and bowed with deep respect and worship.

“Let us not forget Lord Azazel, my worshipped husband, who was so disgusted by Sanat Kumar and his plans even before they were put in motion, that he sought out Lord Shiva, attained enlightenment, and whose great discernment, wisdom and devotion pulled both of us towards godhood”, smiled her daughter, the Goddess of Wisdom.

“Hear, hear”, clapped Lord Vishnu. “We have two new blessedly Divine couples in our family, and all four of you are heartbreakingly wonderful, in four different and amazing ways for God to be a person”, he bowed, as everybody’s mood was already uplifted greatly.

“Obviously, we had losses. Angel Uriel was irretrievably lost and had to be destroyed, and if not for Lord Shiva’s sacrifice, that would have been a much greater disaster for all of us than it ended up being, for which I bow before him with great gratitude and even greater respect”, she nodded to Shankar, who smiled and nodded back. “Also, we lost Athena the angel, who now belongs to her new chosen Master, and has been removed from under the Throne of God”, she continued in a grim tone. “However, I feel there is more, and I would ask our honoured Judges of Karma for a report about the returning souls and

their condition, so that we can have more of an informed opinion on the overall state of things”, she concluded, nodding towards Azrael, Buddha and Zina.

Buddha and his wife nodded to Azrael. “We had multiple criminals that had to be put in the astral prison in order to await your further judgment, worshipped Ladies and Lords, and so that they would not interfere with the lives of normal souls. Interestingly, it turned out that very few demons did what one would expect – joined Sanat Kumar in his rebellion, conspired against the Gods or tortured other souls. In fact, it looks as if they relish in the opportunity to finally do something useful and get new ideas about the future course of their lives, and they usually throw themselves into family life, useful crafts, sciences and so on. For instance, there are a few very intelligent Greeks who developed philosophy and science, while being good husbands to their wives and fathers to their children. Their actions were virtuous and praiseworthy. Some, unfortunately, turned to mischief and committed terrible acts, but overall, it was a minority, while the majority conducted themselves with honour and virtue, and I have nothing but praise for them. The most notable example of this is of course Goddess Zina, who was so virtuous that she literally loved so much that she almost died, and had to be saved by her mother and Lady Fortune, but she is not as much of an outlier as one would have thought. Baal and Mephisto, for instance, were honourable family men who showered their wives and children with love and care, and beside minding their own affairs, one was an excellent blacksmith and very much respected in his community, while the other one excelled in construction work, building houses, roads and bridges”, he nodded approvingly.

“The ‘sheep’, if I may use this term for the stagnant, dormant souls that did nothing for eons, were a different story”, he continued. “For the most part, they were the easiest to corrupt into evil. Put one of them in a body that has a propensity for evil, as most human bodies do, and it all rolls downhill to a bad ending. If they are women, they tend to just indulge in promiscuous sex, following their shallow urges, becoming harlots and sluts. If they are mothers, they abuse their children because they are bored and lack the entertainment they think they deserve. If they are men in power, they usually abuse their positions and become terrible leaders. If they are subordinates, they

slack off, steal, or perform their duties poorly. If they are husbands, they tend to be drunkards and no good, and their wives and children suffer the consequences. All in all, they are a terrible mess, but this actually tends to snap them out of being sheep and into being demons, which in their case is an upgrade, and since we've seen that demons tend to surprise us positively, I think there is hope for the future", he nodded. "There is, of course, a rare example of Lord Buddha, who was born a prince, and seemed to be destined for a life of automatism and inertia, when he suddenly woke up, and surprised everybody by being the most energetic, decisive, strong willed and virtuous person one could possibly imagine, and I bow before his holiness again and again", he bowed to Buddha, who smiled and bowed back.

"Some 'sheep', unfortunately, continue to do absolutely nothing of consequence. They live their lives as in a dream, make no important decisions, go with the flow, die and continue sleeping in the astral plane. That is unfortunate, but not unexpected", Azrael shrugged, and nodded to Lady Zina to take over.

"The normal souls are actually a minority, because unlike the demons, who hurled themselves into the abyss without much consideration, and 'sheep', who got herded alongside them and just followed the crowd, the normal souls were actually thinking with awakened minds and for the most part decided to stay in the astral plane and continue with a normal evolutionary path, which in their case is actually both safest and the most rewarding option", she smiled. "However, those of them who did choose the human path, usually got incredibly confused by the human experience, and lack of the transcendental feeling they were used to. They would get lost and suffer terribly there, but when Lord Shiva broke the ceiling of spiritual darkness in that place, and cracks of transcendence started to appear, they started noticing the inner light and grew strongly towards it, becoming mystics, yogis, artists, mages or philosophers. Some of them in fact achieved great progress in their spiritual evolution, and their human experience gave them an additional depth and flavour, and I can hardly wait what will happen as they crystallise, since we haven't seen this spiritual type before", she smiled in appreciation. "As family people, they vary. Some are excellent – they tell their children inspiring tales with a spiritual message, they are loving, caring and wonderful.

Some, unfortunately, are so concentrated on the otherworldly matters that they neglect their families and cause suffering”, she frowned. “It is what it is, unfortunately, and we’ll see how this develops. It would be helpful if they could be taught balance”, she nodded to her husband to take over.

“As for the angelic crystalline beings of *vajra*, they turned out to be a mixed bag. You’ve all seen Uriel and Athena, so I won’t waste words on them. However, there are some who turned out quite well, if in unexpected ways. One would expect them to regularly outperform others, since they are so spiritually powerful, but that is sometimes the reason for their very poor adjustment to the world of extreme limitations. They struggle with the basics, and keep trying to meditate when that doesn’t work or actually harms them, sometimes becoming autistic, which ends poorly as society discards them. Sometimes they follow paths of personal power, treating other people with complete contempt and disregard, and become reclusive hermits who practice religion, dark magic, austerity and similar activities. Some study sciences, some create art, and some get into religion, but very often in nasty ways, as they are often self-serving, arrogant and lack compassion. All in all, the surprising news is that they become almost exactly what one would expect demons to be – self-serving arrogant assholes who pursue power and treat others as if they were grass under their feet. Uriel is the most notable example of this, in his incarnation of Ashurnasirpal, who seems to be the worst person to have existed in the history of that world so far. Others in their arrogance challenged Sanat Kumar openly, of which Athena is the worst example, but there are others, who fortunately woke up and smelled the coffee in time, and changed enough of their attitude as to evade the worst outcomes”, he grinned.

“All in all, it’s a mixed bag, and the results were for the most part wildly unexpected. For the most part, we get souls with various degrees of traumatic injury, but once that has been handled, some of them tend to gravitate towards Earth and seek the next incarnation, spending time on astral Earth planning what they would want to be next. Some meditate and think about the lessons of their experience, advancing quickly. Some are dumb as rocks. Some, unfortunately, are evil and incredibly nasty, and we’ll probably have to shovel them back to Earth

like we did with Athena/Anthea, because the only other options would be either letting them ferment in prison with their own ilk, where they'll likely grow even worse, or to outright kill them, but I think it's too early for that since there are other options to be explored first. So, that would conclude our report", he bowed to the Gods and Goddesses.

"What are the differences between male and female souls, and male and female incarnations?", Lady Kay asked.

"There are of course significant differences between the sexes on Earth, but honestly, it all amounts to being the same", shrugged Azrael. "Their lives are usually hard, and they suffer and die. Men usually die in wars and fields, and women die in childbirth or violent crimes. Women are raped more often, and men are castrated and otherwise maimed or brutally executed more often. Both frequently starve to death. Women work at home, men work outside, and they both have equal chances of being either good people or villains. If they are free, their lives are usually hard, and if they are slaves, their lives are usually terrible. All in all, you can argue that their lives are either as good or as bad as each other. When they love and help each other, their lives approximate heaven. Spiritually speaking, I think Lady Zina and Lord Buddha are a good illustration of the best outcomes. She was loving, compassionate and nurturing, and he was wise, compassionate, intellectual and sharp, and they are now both exceedingly wonderful, and my life is so much better since they have been around, as they are so inspiring, fun and insightful. We had many long discussions, where I always felt greatly uplifted and enlightened. So, any talk about men or women having it better or being better is nonsense. Uriel and Athena show that both men and women can become terrible abominations, and Buddha and Zina show that they can both become beautiful, inspiring and worshipful persons of God", he bowed to both of his friends, who smiled back widely, as other Gods giggled.

"I think we must consider the issue of intellectual content that is spiritually uplifting", Lord Vishnu noticed. "That matters a lot there, since there is little ability to establish spiritual truths personally, and people have to rely on what they were taught, and if they are taught good moral and spiritual principles, this will help them a lot. Conversely, if they are taught wrong and bad things, this will be spiritually detrimental", he mused. "Lord Buddha's teachings were a

brilliant positive example, and I salute him. However, they seem to be geographically limited, and there is room for introduction of similarly valuable teachings elsewhere. I do notice, however, that Sanat Kumar actively works on muddying the waters, so whenever someone like Lord Buddha introduces a truth, twenty stupid dumbasses who serve Satan start talking similar but harmful and deceptive things, thus greatly confusing people and making the teaching inaccessible”, his face darkened.

“Do you have any suggestions as to how we should improve this situation, my Lord and brother?”, asked Lady Shakti.

“Some. Our tears are there, as well as the cracks, thanks to your glorious husband, my Lady. Let me think about this some more, ok?”, he smiled at his sister, who grinned and nodded back.

“So, if we’re done here, how about coffee?”, Shiva rubbed his hands and smiled mischievously.

By the Holy Spirit

“Lady Zina, Lord Buddha, will you please assist me?”, Lord Vishnu called. They were all quite relaxed after being temporarily done with the hard issues, and were all smiling.

“Of course, my Lord”, they both nodded and joined him.

“Lady Kay, Lord Azrael, would you too please join us as well?”, he waved.

“How may we be of assistance?”, Azrael replied, and Karuna smiled.

“Lady Karuna is the Mind of God, and I will want her to listen to what we’ll say and give me her opinion, since she is the wisest and her thoughts are deepest”, he smiled at the blushing girl. “Lord Azrael, along with the two of you, has the greatest experience with humans, so I would appreciate his feedback as well. The thing I want to consult with you about is something I’m personally uncertain of, since it deals with matters of religion, or, more precisely, spirituality and spiritual ethics based on actual realities, but from a human perspective, when incarnated on Earth”, he nodded.

“Oh”, Buddha nodded with understanding.

“Indeed”, confirmed Vishnu. “The religious philosophy you established seems to be a resounding success. I think we need to learn from this success and build upon it, which is why I will ask you first: when establishing another religion, what would you repeat, what would you do differently, and what are your general comments on the matter?”, Lord Krishna inquired.

“An interesting question. Well, first of all, I would want to establish the cornerstone elements of reality, because any religion that is to succeed must be based on reality. They are in a world that is in its essence a persistent, very convincing illusion, especially designed to inhibit insight into reality, and substitute its own false perspective. If we are to successfully fight Sanat Kumar’s plans, this is the primary vector of attack that I would implement. Do you agree?”, Buddha looked at his esteemed colleagues.

“Indeed”, Vishnu confirmed, and the Mind of God nodded in agreement. “Fighting illusion with reality is an excellent approach. However, may I ask about the specifics? How would you approach reality from a world that is specifically designed to make it nigh impossible?”, Kay asked.

“Without knowing what is technically possible, I would concentrate on things that actually matter the most, and cause the most problems to incarnated souls. I wouldn’t necessarily make it complicated. Things like, this place is not all there is. There is God, meaning transcendental supreme reality. This reality is not something distant, it’s within you and everywhere around you. Your actions and choices matter, as they determine your destiny in the afterlife, and yes, there is an afterlife, and it’s better than what you have now. Have faith in *dharma* and don’t retaliate, don’t react with evil and hatred to evil and hatred. Love, truth and compassion will free you, while anger, hatred, malice, envy, spite and cynicism will doom you”, he was deep in thought. “The part about this not being all there is, and the fact that there is eternal life beyond it, that is very important”, his wife interjected. “That’s what almost killed me, the belief that there’s nothing past Earth, no eternal life, just what we have there, and Mother had to save me by showing me transcendence and eternity in order for me to be able to process it emotionally”, she nodded.

“This was one of the errors of my former approach”, mused Buddha. “I didn’t want to talk about transcendental realities because if people can’t see them in person, they will fill their heads with all sorts of nonsense that will actually stand in the way of salvation. However, without clear ideas about salvation as a positive thing, it’s very hard to get a clear grasp of things and the philosophy becomes mostly about avoiding bad things, without a clear goal”, he shrugged.

“I think I would want to keep it simple. If at all possible, show them what we feel like. For all of us, the goal isn’t abstract. It’s us, to each other. We all have a person we adore and belong to, and we are saturated with what God feels like. I would want to show them what God feels like, and then give them intellectual framework to conceptualise this in whichever way they are comfortable with; but without actual spiritual connection with the goal, it’s all going to

become just another worldly religion people kill each other over”, the Mind of God voiced her opinion.

“I would want to have some actual evidence and demonstration that physical death is not the end. I’m afraid that without that, it’s all going to be dismissed as a coping mechanism. This belief that death is the end is one of the most harmful consequences of Sanat Kumar’s evil. If they think death is the end, they will be open towards all evils – indulgence, despair, cruelty and so on. Also, I would be very careful to avoid mentioning the fact that most bodies are empty, in a sense that souls are actually rare. This is a super sensitive information that should be shared only by a God who can explain it as well as you could”, Angel of Death nodded at the Buddha. “They need to treat everybody as if they were a child of God and their best friend. That’s the only way they will act ethically and in ways that are conducive to positive soul formation”, he concluded.

“All of your ideas are excellent, and offer a much needed clarification to my general and vague concepts”, Lord Vishnu bowed to his friends. “I now need access rights to the Jewel and the Earth system”, he was deep in thought. “Ah, Anthea. She belongs to Sanat Kumar, and is outside the Throne of God. She is his property and acts in his name”, he smiled.

“And she insulted an angel and a God”, Lady Zina smiled widely as she understood what he was getting at. “This is a karmic offence which creates an opening for you”.

“Exactly”, he smiled at the wise Lady. “And also, the Sentinel, who was the person in charge of giving access to the Jewel. Lord Shiva, will you please join us?”, he waved at his buddy.

“Sure thing, Lord Krishna”, Shankar joined them. “May I understand that you have need of that frozen scream of terror that I preserved, thinking we might find a use for it at some point?”, he grinned at Vishnu.

“We would indeed be in a pickle without your foresight, brother”, Vishnu clapped Shiva’s shoulder. “Gentlemen, may I claim your grievances?”, he addressed Buddha and Azrael.

“You are welcome to them, Lord”, they nodded.

“And Mahadev, may I get access to the Sentinel, and through him, to Earth?”, he bowed to Shiva.

“By all means, my Lord”, Shiva bowed back.

“Then I have all I need”, Vishnu grinned, turned his eyes inward, and started making hand movements. The Gods and Goddesses all felt a stirring within Reality, as something changed, and they looked at each other and Lord Vishnu.

“Done”, he sighed and smiled.

“What did you do?”, they inquired.

“I implemented your wise and good ideas, my Lords and Ladies. There are going to be visions of us, and there are going to be religious scriptures describing our persons, actions, thinking and feelings, with enough mantric accuracy as to enable transcendence and salvation if proper discernment is present. They aren’t going to get everything right, but it’s going to be close enough. Also, there is going to be a surge of ethical philosophies that in essence amount to what Lord Buddha suggested, with more or less resonant accuracy. And finally, there is going to be an attack on Sanat Kumar, and a resurrection”, he concluded.

“What kind of an attack?”, the Mind of God asked.

“Resurrection?”, inquired Buddha.

“You just conceived a son with another woman”, Lady Lakshmi pretended to be distraught. “That’s not fair; what about me?”, she smiled at her husband and poked him in the ribs.

He smiled back and kissed her ear. “As far as I can recall, you recently had a beautiful Goddess daughter quite on your own, and without my assistance”, he said. “Besides, I conceived a child in a wonderful young woman that just happens to be conceived from one of your tears, artfully placed by our beloved and hundredfold-worshipped Lord Shiva, which means, if she keeps being a good girl, and comes back to you, it will have been you, truly”, he whispered seriously.

“Wow”, Lakshmi was astounded.

“I will get to actually have given birth to our son?”

“With your blessings, oh Fortune”, he smiled mischievously.

“By all means, my Lord”, the Lady curtsied, unable to hide a blessed smile.

“But now that we’re on the subject of...”, he turned inwards and an angel appeared.

“Hello Gabriel”, he smiled. “Will you please do something for me?”

“Of course, my Lord”, Gabriel bowed deeply.

“There’s a young girl on Earth that is in the process of conceiving a child due to my intervention. Would you please make sure there are no misunderstandings and that no harm comes to her?”, Vishnu asked. “Here are the permissions to access and intervene”.

“It would be my pleasure, Lord Krishna”, the angel bowed again and shimmered out.

“Now that’s taken care of, may I have another coffee?”, he sighed and smiled, and his glowing wife rushed to refill his cup.

“I’m going to actually be a mom”, she whispered.

“You already are”, her daughter winked.

“You know what I mean”.

“I do, but this is fun. Congratulations on your magical pregnancy”, the Goddess of Wisdom patted her Mother’s tummy and made her giggle. “I can’t wait to meet my baby brother”.

The other Jewel

“I get how you got permissions to enter the Earth system and access the Jewel. I get how you could impregnate a woman, especially since it’s an incarnation of your wife’s compassion, essentially a part or an aspect of your wife, so you had permission to give her a child. I can see how you created a synthetic karmic body for that being. But what is the soul? That wouldn’t have bothered me earlier, but now I know about the sparks of the Absolute that emerge in particularly holy circumstances and then the karmic body develops around them, and that manifested spark seeks to return to its origin, and it finds it only when it becomes a God, or becomes a part of one. So, honestly, I can’t figure out what you did, and I am begging you to explain because my curiosity is torturing me”, Lord Buddha smiled at Krishna.

“He’s right, Father”, Kay was deep in thought. “One can easily create a karmic structure, and that structure will be a soul for all intents and purposes, but what you did here was essentially make a new God, and since it’s not an incarnation of any of us, and you can’t just make a God out of nothing, because that would defeat the purpose of Creation, I agree with Lord Buddha and I can’t understand what you did, either”, she voiced her confusion.

“Also, there was talk about an attack on Sanat Kumar, and since that sounds very interesting, I’m dying to hear about it”, smiled her husband and looked curiously at Lord Vishnu.

“I’m glad you guys are paying attention”, Krishna grinned. “With all the brain power in the room, there’s no hiding anything from you, and I wouldn’t even want to”, he bowed to them. “You are right, I couldn’t conceive a son, and hope some random soul latches on or fulfills that role. I couldn’t just take a random soul with its own karmic structure and force it into the role, for it would be a violation. I also couldn’t just create a new soul because I would be using my own spiritual substance, and it would reintegrate into myself after death, and I didn’t want that. I wanted to make a true new person of God, one that is also legitimately ancient in its own right, has origins deep in the

roots of Creation itself and is a manifestation of the nature of the Absolute through the Relative, and also, one that is mine”, he smiled.

His wife froze in shock, and then smiled like the sun itself. “The Kaustubha jewel is gone, it’s no longer on your chest”, she pointed out. “You used the all-attractive manifestation of the inner bliss of the unmanifested God, wrapped it inside a synthetic karmic path and gave it a life on its own”.

“You are indeed as wise as you are beautiful, my beloved”, Krishna bowed to his wife. “Yes, that is exactly what I did. The Kaustubha jewel, the Light of the World, is now growing to be our son”, he confirmed.

“Mara is going to go absolutely crazy with desire, trying to corrupt it or make it his own”, Buddha nodded knowingly. “That thing is at least equal in power to the Jewel made by Shiva and Shakti, and that one is an independent Power of Creation. This one is Fulfilment and Light itself, that feels like looking at the very meaning of Life and the blissful nature of the Absolute as an external thing. You were wise to take it onto yourself and wear it, because your nature is so blissful in its own right, that the jewel is completely lost on it, looking like any other part of your own body. Since the only ones ever seeing the Kaustubha jewel are the ones who see your glorious person, it poses no danger to anyone, because that structure on its own would act like such a powerful attractor, it would distract souls from their own personal path, like some very powerful addictive drug they couldn’t pull themselves away from. And now, you took that drug and made it into an attractor that will draw souls toward it and cut a path towards transcendence, where they will continue looking for it when it is gone from the world. But Sanat Kumar will try to make it a part of his world, or integrate it with the Jewel he controls in some way”, Buddha was thinking out loud.

“Or absorb it into himself, and make himself a God, as he always wanted to be”, Lord Azazel continued this line of thought. “In any cases, it will be a bait he wouldn’t be able to resist, and it will drive him even more mad than he already is, which is quite something. And if you want to get him in a condition where he will make a mistake, that’s exactly how you would approach it”, he nodded appreciatively.

“How do you know Mara so well?”, Buddha was impressed. “This sounds exactly right, like you know his soul inside-out”.

“I do, in fact. He used to be a fellow demon, and I spent ages listening to him conspiring against the Gods, inventing his own weird philosophy that shifted between egalitarianism and self-aggrandisement, as in his madness he sought to rationalise a way out of his own insignificance and weakness, rather than make good choices that would change his condition”, Azazel nodded darkly. “I probably know more about him than he himself does, and at some point I looked at him, and looked at myself, and realised that he in his madness and evil is what I will become unless I do something radically different”, he smiled.

“Which, judging from your current state, you obviously did”, Buddha smiled back.

“Indeed”, Azazel nodded. “Sanat Kumar hated the Gods with incredible hatred, and wished to somehow either have their power and rise above them, or to make all power irrelevant so that he will not be inferior. He will resort to egalitarianism when victory doesn’t look possible; but put the Kaustubha jewel within his grasp, within his realm of power, and he will get absolutely insane from desire. And then, he is likely to make mistakes”, Zee nodded appreciatively. “Lord Vishnu is as wise as he is wonderful, which is why we all look up to him”, he bowed.

“What exactly is the vector of attack?”, wondered Lady Kay. “He will try to corrupt it by either seduction or threats. I assume that won’t work, because that Jewel will think about only two things – the source of his own light, and his beloved Lord Vishnu, in whose company he spent his entire existence. At this point, I don’t even think he can tell the difference between the two, and I don’t blame him, for there indeed isn’t one, as Lord Vishnu *is* the Absolute, only manifested. There’s nothing Sanat Kumar can offer him that would entice him in any way. What can he offer him; to be the king in his world? That will sound as enticing as guarding some stable. So let’s go further; the Jewel rebuffs Satan’s advances. Satan grows angry in his frustration, and enters the ‘you will pay for this’ mode. He threatens with the stuff he threatened Athena with; he’ll throw all kinds of humiliation and suffering on him,

but unlike Athena, this one isn't arrogant and foolish. He doesn't boast, threaten or invite Satan to do his worst. He simply shrugs and says it will be as his Lord commands, thinking of his actual Lord and Father. Sanat Kumar goes insane with frustration, and actually subjects him to worldly horrors uninvited", she hypothesised.

"If he does that, it's game over for him instantly", Lord Shiva interjected. "The axe of karma falls, head goes plop. He has to know that, and that's why he's always being so careful not to get caught in any outright action. He makes their victims doom themselves, while he pretends to offer tests and trials of character and true spiritual choice, which is actually useful", he nodded. "Which means his attack on your son will take form of some trial of faith – of the kind where he proves his faith and loyalty to God and dies, or he is saved from a terrible ordeal by choosing to belong to Sanat Kumar", he looked at Vishnu as if asking for confirmation.

"That, indeed, was my plan", Krishna bowed and smiled. "The best way to attack Sanat Kumar is to offer him something he desperately desires, and which will make him blind enough with desire as to get himself into a situation where any realistic outcome is a loss".

"You actually don't expect him to get himself killed. You think he'll see that and avoid the trap", grinned Azazel. "But you think he will avoid the trap in such a way as to doom himself strategically in the long run, and he won't see that one", he looked at Vishnu appreciatively, as the Mind of God cuddled into him adoringly.

Lord Shiva grinned at him appreciatively and they fist-bumped. "I like the way you're thinking", he nodded. "But let me try to guess what the actual plan is. The option of the Kaustubha giving himself to Satan willingly is completely off the table. Only Satan is foolish enough to even try it. But then he will think that he can pressure him into it with terrible torture. That also won't work since the Jewel will pray only to Lord Vishnu and surrender to his will. Sanat Kumar will either have to blink, or let him die. Will he blink and spare him in the last moment?"

"No. His vanity will be hurt and he will be the woman scorned, so to speak. He will gloat at Kaustubha's suffering and will enjoy his death. However, then he'll be in a pickle. He'll have to present this as some kind of a trial of faith, but in this case it would be a very thin

explanation. He was too obviously involved, and the ‘test’ excuse is too thin here”, Azazel scratched his chin. “I don’t get this part, there must be something more”.

“He will have to permanently cede some part of his authority”, Shiva guessed. “I don’t know how or what”.

“All who accept and follow my son will have a way to eternal life”, Vishnu smiled. “His suffering and death will buy this, because Sanat Kumar will have to allow it in order to evade punishment. It will be the only way to appear justified. He cooperated all along, and made the conditions so that the Son of God could prove his glory, so that all the faithful and true can follow him to heaven”, he grinned. “He’s truly such a good and misunderstood character”.

“He’ll allow it because he thinks he can bury it all under a pile of false teachings, alternative similar-sounding false teachers and all the other stuff he always did”, Buddha mused. “But there was talk about an undeniable proof, and of resurrection?”, he looked at Vishnu.

“Yes, both. My son will die, spend a few days dead, then come back to his resurrected body, interact with numerous witnesses and then finally ascend to Heaven. I had enough access to arrange it. Also, Sanat Kumar won’t be able to either prevent it, or work on completely covering it up, because remember: he needs to present himself as if actually enabling the full glory of God to be shown, so that the righteous believers are saved. He portrays himself not as the enemy of God and righteousness, but as a righteous person who hates fakes and hypocrites and works to unmask them and ferret them out. If he shows that he’s actually the enemy of all that is good and works on its destruction and failure, the axe falls and he dies”, Vishnu nodded.

“But he will of course invent lots of reasons to doubt, as if to test faith, and he will present all kinds of alternative narratives about your son later on”, Buddha added. “It’s just what he does”.

“Indeed”, nodded Azazel.

“But while we are at this, I have a question”, Kay interjected. “What are we actually trying to do here?”, asked the Mind of God.

“What do you mean?”, her husband raised his eyebrows.

“It’s simple. The Jewel was created to solve a problem. The problem is stagnation of the souls, and lack of proper motivation. The fact that Sanat Kumar got hold of it was the worst case scenario, apparently, but everything was seemingly designed to accommodate for that possibility. He’s doing what he’s supposed to be doing – his worst. The results are apparently following prediction; some souls are doomed by their arrogance, some have snapped from their stupor, some are moved towards enlightenment. It’s working. So, may someone please explain why we are fighting?”, the girl asked, truly puzzled.

Vishnu nodded and smiled. “The place he made has multiple functions. The first, most fundamental is that it is the alternative to the Kingdom of God. It is a place where beings like Anthea can go after they expressed their desire to belong to the Kingdom of Satan, rather than the Kingdom of God. They can have him as their god there, for whatever it’s worth. Were it the only role that place is playing, we would be unconcerned, and wouldn’t interfere; for a time, of course, because their choice is that of ultimate doom. However, there is another function that place is serving: that of a playground of obligatory choice for the undecided. Most souls entering didn’t do so the way Anthea did – after having made a clear choice for the satanic and against the divine. Most go there either because they are stupid, ignorant, naive, arrogant, or undecided. And so, the reason we interfere is, essentially, Zina. She is the ultimate reason why Lord Shiva grew angry and cracked that place. She is the reason why I sent my son there to be born, to teach, to show, and to be tortured, to die and rise from the dead showing them perspective and hope. I knew why Zina almost died there, without hope, thinking that place was all there is, and that isn’t a fair thing to do to souls who went in foolish or undecided, but ended up being as wonderful and loving people as her. So, I’m giving them hope and perspective, and if some want to reject it and choose the fate of Anthea, they are certainly free to do so. However, if they choose the life of love and kindness, they will now also be free to have hope, faith and perspective”, he concluded.

Surprise

“Do you miss it?”, Goddess Lakshmi whispered in her husband’s ear.

“I do, somewhat. He was here on my chest since the dawn of time; content, feeling my presence, as I did his.”, Vishnu replied. “But I was only his custodian, my love. It is now time for him to have a life of his own, and safely”, he sighed.

“An analogy crosses my mind, and I think it’s quite appropriate, since he is the necessary component of a new life. He is to you what her eggs are to a human woman. She guards them, limits unworthy access to them, but in the end, their ultimate fate is not to remain with her, but to become her future children”, he smiled.

“It is an apt analogy”, he smiled back.

...

A being of brilliant white light shimmered in, and solidified in form of a man; his spiritual structure obviously Divine, the white light glowing in golden hues at the edges, with a brilliant ruby light in the heart.

Unlike the other souls, who appeared in the reception room, he appeared directly in front of Lord Vishnu, as that is what he felt as his true home.

“Hello son”, Vishnu smiled at him, and came to embrace him. “Welcome back”.

Lakshmi took in his spiritual identity. *Son of God, Saviour, Redeemer, Christ; Lord Yeshua; Person of God, Male.* “Wow”, she bowed.

“Father; my Lady”, he bowed back. He took in the sight of his father and sighed with contentment of finally coming home, where he belonged. Then he looked at Lakshmi. “My Lady, you feel incredibly familiar, but I’m not sure how or why”.

She giggled. “You’ll see soon enough, Lord Yeshua. I don’t want to spoil your surprise for the time being”.

...

A silhouette of a woman shimmered in, of white light. She took in her surroundings, and saw Lord Yeshua, ran to him and embraced him, and he embraced her in return, for it was his mother, Maryam. Her light glowed stronger, solidified, grew deeper, incredibly deeper, and Christ felt the hair on his head rise from the intensity of raw power of destiny, fulfilment, glory and fortune that emanated from her holy presence, and he couldn't believe what he was feeling. He looked at her, and froze in shock.

Lady Lakshmi was smiling back from his embrace, completely blissed out, as her holy tear returned to her heart and brought back memories.

“Hello, my son”.

“Mother??”

...

“My disciples would have a fit if they saw all of you. Belief in one and only God is sort of a cornerstone of our religion”, Jesus mused.

“Well, they are sort of right”, the Mind of God smiled at her brother, completely blissed out because she finally got to meet him. “If they are talking about the unmanifested Absolute, on the other side of the Relative. I am indeed One”, she switched into First Person. “If they are talking about instances where God became a person, they already had a problem with you and Father being one, or when you talked about the two of you being distinct persons, with separate areas of knowledge and jurisdiction. We are all persons of God in exactly the same way as you and your Holy Father, and your Holy Mother, while we’re at that”.

“I’m still trying to digest that. So, Father didn’t just select any good woman at random. You are saying that my actual, Heavenly Mother, Lady Lakshmi, the actual wife of my Heavenly Father, Lord Vishnu, shed tears of compassion over the suffering of souls on Earth, and one of those tears became Mary my earthly mother, and my Heavenly Father impregnated her with myself, because it was perfectly within his right since she was in all reality his wife, so it is right and proper that she bears his son. And I am in fact one of the primordial

entities, born out of the Primordial Chaos at the beginnings of Creation, at the very beginning of Time; and I was a Jewel of enormous attractiveness that was so dangerous to normal souls that Father took me and bore me around his neck ever since, and then let me be born on Earth to be the saviour of mankind?”, he scratched the back of his head. “The Jewel part I actually remember now, but the part with my mother is still a shock. I regret treating her as if she were an ordinary human woman, now that I know this. I’m sorry, Mom”, he smiled remorsefully at the blissful Lady.

“Son, don’t worry about it. You called it as you saw it. But now that I have the memories of giving birth to you, it’s completely blissing me out. Even if it were in a barn”, she laughed.

“Aren’t we having a bit of a precedent here?”, sounded Lord Azazel. “As far as I can tell, you are the only male Person of God since forever who doesn’t have a female counterpart and wife?”

“Ah, that”, Jesus grinned mischievously. “Let me just say that I have a surprise of my own, to repay my Mother for shocking the living daylights out of me”, he laughed. “And you, dear Sir, are called Azazel, and you are not a demon, but a person of God, and you are married to this lovely girl who is apparently my sister, on the Mother’s side, and she is the Mind of God, which I have no problem believing?”, he laughed again.

The girl came to hug him and cuddle. “Mysterious are the ways of the Lord, as your people would say”, she laughed. “And what’s the surprise about...?”.

...

At this point Azrael thought he saw everything; however, as an incredibly pure, deep indigo-violet angel shimmered in from Earth, he understood that this belief might be unfounded.

“Hello, Azrael; it is a pleasure to meet you again”, she smiled at him with such depth of wisdom and kindness that he stood there like a statue. “I am Miryam ha-Migdalit”, she said in a voice that both felt as if it could melt the coldest heart, and cut through hardest steel.

“Mary of Magdala”, translated Zina. “We were from the same region on Earth”.

“Hello Zina, nice to meet you. I know the Angel of Death since before, and interestingly, they know of his new role and his name on Earth now. I don’t know *you*, my Lady, but I would be immensely glad if I did, for I can feel the deepest Love of God from your heart, and I love you as if you were my own sister already”, she bowed.

“The feeling is mutual, Lady Mary”, the Goddess curtsied and smiled to the super-angel, her own heart glowing in response.

“I had a different name before, which no longer matters, for I wish to be known only as Mary now”, the super-angel smiled. “And now, may I implore you to lead me to my Lord and Saviour, who was known on Earth as Yeshua, or Christ?”, she curtsied pleadingly to the Lady and the angel.

“By all means, Holy Lady of God”, Azrael bowed, and showed her the way.

...

The three holy persons shimmered into the room. As the woman noticed Jesus, she ran towards him, fell to her knees before him and embraced his feet, starting to cry. “It was cruel of you to leave me there alone for so long, my Lord”, she wept, and he slowly and gently lifted her up and embraced her, as the rest of the family took in the sight.

The crying woman started changing structure, as she drank in the presence of her Lord; finally, after all those decades had passed. Enormous power, as if dark lightning or gravitational shear from a black hole, shook the place, as she transformed into a brilliant light, for the Absolute became the woman.

“Mother, Father, I would like you to meet Mary of Magdala”, Jesus announced. “My most beloved disciple”.

“My holy wife”.

A grave injustice

“Hardly a surprise, kid; I was at your wedding, remember?”, Lakshmi snickered.

“No way!”, Zina shouted in shock.

“But I see now that it is true”, she recovered and turned inwards to look.

“You were Mandragora the demoness. We called you the poisonweed. But I still can’t believe it. You are the most amazing person; when you came from Earth you were even more impressive than my husband the Buddha, and he was the most impressive person who ever came from there; the most pure, wise and aware”, she fumbled words in shock.

“Look who’s talking”, smiled Lord Shiva, and ruffled her hair as she started smiling. “The Love of God herself”, and everybody gasped, as Zina’s title changed and she blushed so hard she was almost purple, and silently and worshipfully kissed Shiva’s hand as her tears welled up.

Mary’s eyes glistened with tears, as she smiled and nodded. “Indeed, that used to be my name. I had many incarnations on Earth since; this was my seventh, and Lord cast all those seven demons out of me as he opened my eyes to God’s light”, she turned to look at her husband adoringly. “I can’t say those lives were what you would call demonic. I had families, I learned to love, to nurture and care, and it changed me, but I was completely Earth-bound. I was so intoxicated with the idea of family life that I kept returning to relive it again, and I was a young woman in this last life when I joined the people who listened to John the Baptist. It changed something within me, as I started feeling that there’s something more to the world, to life, to reality, than just having a family and obeying commandments and customs diligently”, she reminisced, and looked into distance.

“And then he came”, she gripped the arm of Christ firmly. “One look at him, and my soul was filled with such light, such reality, truth and meaning, that everything demonic left me forever, and I cast away

my old name. I followed him ever since, and loved him with my entire soul. We were married in Cana of Galilee, where his blessed Mother annoyed him into miraculously making more wine, as it was the duty of the groom”, she smiled, as Lakshmi smilingly bowed.

“She was my most advanced, most beloved disciple”, Jesus continued. “She intuitively grasped the meaning of everything I taught, and spiritually progressed at an exponential pace, which caused some jealousy from my other disciples”, he grinned. “I had to remind them to be respectful more than once”.

“You don’t know how it feels to be here, what it’s like for me, Adonai”, her tears started streaming down her face. “This is heaven. I mean of course it is, but you don’t know what it was like when you were gone. Kefa and others summarily dismissed me and basically sent me to the kitchen with other women. They didn’t want to hear anything I had to say, as if I were a creature somewhat smarter than a goat, but nowhere near a man. I couldn’t believe that those were the people who were with you, who saw how you treated me and other women, who saw that you looked at each person as a person, and individual, and not a category or a class”, she continued sobbing. “They didn’t even try to make me feel less because I was a woman; they just assumed it as if it were an absolute truth. I felt such injustice. Not because I was a woman, because I loved being a woman. With you, it was everything I could ever dream of. But they thought I would have taken the leadership of the Church after you were gone, and they felt as if it were an abomination for a woman to lead, so they completely marginalised me. I never wanted to lead anything or compete with men, so I felt it as a grave injustice. I just wanted to be asked about you, so that I could relish in the memories, but nobody cared. It was as if they thought there was nothing of consequence I could possibly know, being a mere woman. Initially, I felt terribly disrespected and humiliated, and angry because of the injustice, but soon I got my senses together and started meditating on you, reliving the memories, thinking about your teachings, going back to the details of how your consciousness felt when you were the presence of God. I worked on purifying my emotions, thoughts and actions. I attained multiple initiations and spiritual experiences, and I continued meditating until my body crumbled under me and I returned to you”, she smiled through tears.

“And you can’t even imagine how it feels for me here”, she smiled more brightly. “I was greeted by the honoured angel Azrael, and the precious Goddess at his side, Zina the Love of God, and the first thing I felt here was being truly seen for what I am as a person. They saw my naked soul in its truth, and talked to it directly. I felt seen, acknowledged, listened to, understood and loved. It was as if I was in your presence again, Adonai”, she leaned into her husband’s side.

“And then I saw the rest of the women and men of God here, and what most shocked me was how natural and free they all were in their mutual respect, how they saw each other and how recognition flowed naturally as worship, respect and love, without inhibitions, and how the women are lovely and feminine, how men are powerful and masculine, and they absolutely and unconditionally adore each other with their entire being, and my heart just bursts with happiness at the sight. Being among them is everything I would ever have wished for, had I known enough to be able to dream of such wonder”, she choked on words, as Zina and Kay rushed to embrace her.

“Most worshipped and respected Goddess, I bow to you, again and again”, spoke the Angel of Death. “I have seen many things, wonderful and terrible alike. I spent eons in Heaven, surrounded by my own kind, the spirit-crystals of *vajra*. I was there when the first souls started arriving from that hellhole they call Earth, where Satan rules supreme, and I saw Gods and Goddesses in tears and shock, as the souls insane from trauma retold their tragedies, and I saw lady Zina dying from pain on the floor. I saw the most holy mother of your Lord in tears as she tried to console the sobbing Light of God who gave birth to Time and Space, the most terrifying and powerful Lady Shakti. I saw the terrible and awesome Lord Shiva in tears, and I saw his power set loose in anger as he cracked the world and killed the fool responsible for this tragedy, planting the tears of the Gods in the foundations of Earth, which is how the mother of your Lord was conceived. I saw corrupted angels speaking horrible blasphemies, and I saw the blessed Lord Buddha appear before me as the purest, brightest crystal of blue *vajra* straight from the Earth, without any adaptation, addressing me and the blessed Lady Zina with full awareness and knowledge; and I’ve seen them both becoming Gods within hours. However, seeing you arrive today is the most impressive thing I have ever seen”, he bowed

deeply. “Had you been in Heaven where I spent most of my long life, you would have scraped at its ceiling, as the most powerful, purest and the most subtle, gentle and fearsome being there. You were so close to godhood, that you indeed achieved it within minutes from arriving. I don’t know which is more awe-inspiring; your kindness, your intelligence or your power. I don’t wish to offend anyone, but people who marginalised you and treated you as anything less than the most awesome angelic being in existence, are at a great loss, and they are to be pitied”, he bowed to her again, as she smiled at him angelically and tried to bow, as much as it were possible, with everybody hugging her.

Zina knelt at Mary’s side and took her face in her hands, looking straight in her eyes. “Sister, I was never a very intellectual person when I was human, so I was never in your position; the usual female role in our culture gave me everything I wanted. But I can imagine what it would have felt like for my husband, were he a woman-*buddha* trying to get people to listen, and I see you and your frustration and pain. I am so sorry you had to experience that”, Zina kissed her sister’s forehead and touched it with her own.

Her husband sat down as well. “Don’t sell yourself short, my Lady, for you are the first person ever to beat me in an argument, and so thoroughly that I accepted you as my *guru* and begged for your guidance, and became a God at your side when I worshipped your wisdom”, he gently moved a lock of hair that was in front of his wife’s eye.

“This”, Mary both sobbed more powerfully and smiled like a sun. “This is heaven. Let me just stay here and experience this forever and I will wish for nothing else”, she looked at the two of them. “The way the two of you see and treat each other, is heaven”.

“Jesus, bro, what the fuck have you been teaching your disciples there, man?”, Azazel looked at the Christ with mock consternation.

“I don’t think mine were that much better, either”, Buddha added, scratching his head in slight embarrassment.

“He tried”, Mary defended her true love. “He taught by example, he warned, but it is as if some things are so profoundly culturally ingrained, people just assume them. People assume women are stupid,

especially if they are beautiful, and especially if they are feminine, and I was both”, she recalled.

“I fail to see how that follows from anything”, Kay looked shocked. “Beauty, femininity and mental capacity are three completely independent variables”.

Mary started laughing so hard that she stopped crying. “Thank you for this, sister. For being such a crown proof of their foolishness, as you embody everything those men would consider impossible; for in you, all three of those variables are converging into infinity, and yet you exist here, as the most real and wonderful comfort to me”, she smiled and caressed the beautiful, feminine face of God’s Mind.

Successful failure

“Father, I’d like to talk to you about the results of my life on Earth”, Lord Jesus addressed Lord Vishnu after the meeting of the Gods took a more relaxed turn, as Mary decompressed and was now chatting vigorously with Lady Zina and Lord Buddha about their Earth experiences, which were both similar and vastly different. It seemed that she got her frustrations out of her system now.

“I see you are distressed over possibility of failure”, nodded Krishna. “You need not be, for you did well”.

“How would I not be distressed, Holy Father? I expected my disciples, of all people, to follow my commandment to love each other as I loved them, and almost instantly after my departure they marginalised my wife, whom I loved the most, who was supposed to be the soul of the Church, the holder of the deepest knowledge, and also so close to me that she was in essence my own flesh. And why? They were jealous, they fought for power, and they edited her out of written testimony so thoroughly, that she will seem like a peripheral figure, and they hinted that “the most beloved disciple” is some fictional guy named John. So, basically, it’s not something that just happened to them by accident. It took premeditation and planning. They removed my wife, who was of one mind and one body with me, and now they are going to do who knows what in my name and with my authority, and I’m afraid Satan is going to adopt, distort and redirect the movement into something that is more useful than harmful to his intentions. And also, I thought my sacrifice would deprive him of his power and authority over that world. That obviously didn’t happen. So, I failed”, he sighed despondently.

“I pretty much expected things to go like this, so be not worried”, Vishnu patted his son’s shoulder. “I would be a poor planner if I planned for absolute success and didn’t account for the Enemy’s efforts. Everything you said is true, and yet it doesn’t matter. Yes, your disciples were influenced by their lower nature, and Satan surely helped, and they marginalised your wife and thus sabotaged the spiritual core of your teaching. That is now lost. However, the

teachings never last. The core is always lost within a generation or two after the death of the founder. So, the loss of the spiritual teaching is the least of my worries, as it was destined to happen within a century. Also, complex, sophisticated teachings are the least effective there, because they assume a target audience that doesn't exist; essentially, if Mary had knowledge that only she managed to grasp, and your other students didn't, what are the odds that someone from an even wider circle would have benefited from it?", he asked rhetorically, and Jesus didn't answer.

"Exactly", Vishnu nodded. "So the teachings are more less useless. However, since you put so much effort into teaching her, Sanat Kumar thought she was the prime target and invested huge efforts into neutralising her completely. Also, since he had more holes than plugs, he needed to leave most of it open, which meant other students, whom he deemed harmless due to their previously demonstrated cowardice and propensity for succumbing to societal indoctrination and habit. Also, he thought students will try to cover up the fact that you were crucified because it's the most shameful death, and you don't want to brag with your supposed Messiah being crucified by the Romans. He also ignored everyone from the outer circles. Which means he ignored Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor of the Church, and he ignored the apostles, thinking they are measly cowards who will keep to themselves and possibly preach to a few Jews, which will come to a bad end because the Jews fear Roman persecution over supposed Messiahs. Which is how we win", he winked at Jesus, who still didn't understand it.

"Kid, think", his mother interjected. "Kefa and others will have a seriously guilty conscience over what they did to Magdalena. It's not a small thing. They will fear your anger and punishment after death, and Kefa especially fears it because he trice betrayed you already, and this is now strike four. They will not cower in some basement now. Also, we need someone outside of that circle, who is actually capable of spreading the message, someone smart, eloquent, heard-headed and fanatical, convincing and educated. Father gave a vision to Saul the Persecutor, and he had a spiritual conversion, that will make him into the most ardent and fanatical spreader of the news about your crucifixion and resurrection, literally making the whole world know,

and he's theologically so much better than those shepherds, tax collectors and fishermen you taught, it's not even funny. He's one of the young bright hopes of the Sanhedrin, and he also has fire under his butt because he persecuted the Church and fears divine punishment if he slacks, so he'll throw himself into the jaws of death for you. So, essentially, Sanat Kumar spent his resources neutralising Magdalena who would have sat in some hut and taught a mystical teaching to dozens of people over her lifetime, and opened himself to dozens of highly motivated people who are mostly dumb as rocks, but who will now be organised and prodded into forming a universal theology, not just a Jewish sect that worships death of a descendant of David, that only a handful of Jews would care for, but spreads good news that Death does not reign supreme", she smiled and rubbed her son's shoulder.

"Oh", said Jesus. "So you really thought this through", he smiled. "Did I even make any damage to Satan? I'm afraid that part failed completely", he mused.

"The problem with testing your hypothesis by getting yourself killed is that you can't try something else if you fail", answered Vishnu. "And yes, he is still in charge there. But he had to cede ground in order to save himself from repercussions of torturing and killing you. All who follow you out will be allowed to do so. However, he will of course do his worst to obfuscate things to the point where the very idea of who you are will be so vague or polluted, that this will be a hard thing to do. But it doesn't matter, because you rose from the dead on the third day. The witnesses saw you, and they are spreading the good news. The concept of soul outliving the body, and there being another, better world in the afterlife, combined with the bright highway of light you carved into that world, is the only thing that matters to me. As far as that is concerned, everything was a resounding success, and people down there now have a reasonable hope in place where there used to be only despair", he concluded.

"We must not become complacent, though", Lakshmi added. "The Enemy will be working. Sabotage the message. Introduce similar-sounding but spiritually vacuous alternatives. Blame your followers for all kinds of disasters and persecute them. Spread slander. Incite your followers to commit abominable acts. Based on what we've seen so far,

this is certainty rather than conjecture. We can also expect attacks from unknown directions, which are hard to account for since they are unknown; basically, he didn't think of them yet, but we expect that he will. This is not a fight we expected to win now. It would be sweet if we did, but we are not so optimistic as to count on it. But, you scored a big hit and it will count", she finished.

A rock and a tent maker

Azrael had to leave the Gods to go back to his work, and it always saddened him a bit. He loved the Gods dearly, and he felt most like himself, and most fulfilled, when in their company. Hearing their thoughts and feeling their emotions was like seeing what he, himself wanted to be, and hoped for; only externalised, in form of incredibly lovable beings. He sighed.

The souls that just survived suffering and death, often a terribly excruciating death, needed him, and his work was important.

Besides, two of his work buddies were Gods themselves, and they made his job incredibly fulfilling. He smiled at them, for no particular reason; just because he was happy that they are there.

A soul shimmered in. “My name is Simon Kefa, a disciple of our Lord Yeshua the Christ”, he managed to say. He was obviously distraught by the incredibly torturous death by crucifixion he just experienced, and Azrael immediately felt compassion for the man. However, this was going to be tricky.

“I am Azrael, the Angel of Death and a Judge by the law of God. I am here to answer your questions and help you in any way possible”, the angel bowed to the man.

“Lord Angel, tell me, is my name written in the book of life? Was my life pleasing to the Lord? Am I saved?”, the man stuttered.

“Ah”, sighed Azrael. “I see that you conceptualise God as some combination of perfection, a lawmaker and a ruler, which is typical for the Middle Eastern despotisms. You think that God in his perfection made a perfect Law that he gave to men, your tribe in particular, and there are so many different rules and demands, that one is bound to break some of them, and then God in his perfection will condemn him as lacking”, he smiled.

The man looked confused. “You make it sound as if it weren’t so?”

“Furthermore”, added the Angel of Death, “you think that the role of your teacher Jesus was to pay an infinite, universal price of sacrifice for all who are lacking in some way, but accept his Lordship, so that they can have eternal life with him in Heaven”, he nodded.

“Is it not so?”, Kefa was now completely confused.

“It’s a very strange and unnatural distortion of the truth. It’s not completely unfounded, but no, it is not so”, the angel was serious now. “God is indeed perfection; many different perfections in fact, but God is not unreasonable, or unkind, or cruel; his justice is not what you think it is. If you asked God what his justice was – and I would know – he would tell you that justice is a state where all of Creation manifests all that God is, in His full glory and perfection. Injustice is a state where this is not manifested, or it is hindered, or tampered with. And punishment for not being of God is, well, not being of God. We do, indeed, have a hell, but it is not a place for those who were found lacking. All of creation is filled with beings who are found lacking in some way, and only ten are perfect. No; hell is a place for those who are so cruel, insane and evil, that we would normally destroy them, but we decided to postpone it, because some chance for their redemption might still present itself later in time. You don’t have to fear hell”, Azrael smiled.

The man was hugely relieved. “Thank you, Angel of the Lord”.

“You seem to think that the only alternative to hell is the eternal glory of the Lord”, the angel’s face grew more serious now. “But that goal is so incredibly high, that it consists of far more than merely not being condemned for your rotten nature. No; not being condemned and being perfect are different things altogether. There are many things you would need to understand, and many transformations of spirit you would have to endure, in order to become perfection, of the kind your perfect Lord demanded”, the angel nodded to the man.

“Please, guide me, Angel of God. Show me perfection. Leave me not in darkness and ignorance”, the man bowed sincerely, and Azrael was moved. He looked at his colleagues, they all nodded, and he waved for the man to follow him.

...

Simon Kefa looked around, and saw a place that was not a place, but peace, light, love and fulfilment itself, and his soul rejoiced. Out of the light, a figure appeared, infinitely glorious and beautiful, made of light that was so bright, that the beautiful light of his surroundings was like darkness in comparison, and yet it didn't hurt his eyes, but filled them with incredible joy and wisdom that radiated from the person. "Lord Yeshua...?" he bowed and asked.

"Close enough", the person of God spoke with a female voice, to his great confusion.

"You wanted to see what perfection looked like, the perfection your Lord demanded, the perfection of being One with the Lord, in mind, will, nature and body", the angel bowed. "May I introduce you to my Lady, the hundredfold-worshipped Person of God, Lady Mary of Magdala, the Eternal Wife of Christ", he bowed again, with a smile of inner bliss welling up.

The man shook as if hit by a whip, in wordless panic and fear., all of his prior confidence crumbling.

"Yes, Kefa, it's me. The disciple he loved the most, the true Church of Christ. I am glad that we meet again, although I see that you fear that I will take my vengeance upon you now, and that your scheming against me might come with a terrible price", she grinned mischievously. "Your fears are unfounded. If you can recall, I am not like you and your fellow apostles. I cared only about my Lord, and gave no heed to your pecking order. I did, however, see your disregard of me as disregard of my husband, for he and I are one mind and one flesh, and we have been so since I first lay eyes on him. And you", she pointed at the man who had shrunken into himself and shivered out of incredible shame and embarrassment, "You did well. You overcame your sectarian prejudice when Paul worked to embrace the 'heathens' as well as the Jews. You understood that all those 'laws' of yours need to be relaxed because you're not saved by law, but by Christ. You were strong, indeed as a rock, as my Lord called you", she nodded in approval. "It is also true that your head was as hard as one, but you actually worked against it, and you also retained a good general direction and provided a good example to the Church", she continued and looked him straight in the eyes. "I see why Azrael brought you

here. He loves me and he remembers the tears I shed as I recalled how you dismissed me, depriving the Church of its soul, and he wanted you to see me now, to show you the truth of your actions, so that you may learn humility. Has he succeeded?”, she asked the shivering man.

“My Lady, I am so sorry”, he sobbed. “I somehow convinced myself that Christ favoured you unjustly, merely because you were his wife, and now I see that you were his wife exactly because you deserved to be held in most favour”, he bowed as he wept. “I was jealous of you, because I couldn’t understand things you and the Lord talked about, and especially as you shared subtle emotions that I could not partake in, and I convinced myself that none of it matters, and that he taught us men everything that actually matters for salvation, and what he had with you are merely things between a husband and a wife”, he blushed in shame. “Please forgive me, because I am merely a foolish fisherman and I was too stupid to know what I was doing”.

“I see you already met my wife, Kefa”, another voice was heard, this time indeed of Christ. “Welcome”, Jesus approached and embraced the trembling man.

“I failed you, my Lord”, the man cried. “I betrayed you once more, and I set your beloved wife aside, instead of having her as our anchor and a source of wisdom. Have I condemned us all?”

“No, Kefa. You did mostly well, but you also made mistakes. Fortunately, my Father in his wisdom accounted for that, and he says it matters not, for if the knowledge I shared with Magdalena was too much for the twelve disciples, it would also be of no use for the wider Church; it is in fact good that the power of Satan was spent on keeping her marginalised, while a simple message was spread far and wide”, he nodded as two more people shimmered in; Goddess Zina and an angel of blue *vajra*.

“May I introduce apostle Paul”, she smiled as she brought the man forward. “Kefa, I think you owe him some explanations”, she winked and bowed out.

The angelic being couldn’t separate his eyes from Christ and his bride, and after bowing to the former, decided to address the latter.

“My Lady, are you indeed Mary of Magdala?”, Paul asked.

“I am”, the Goddess smiled.

“And you are the beloved wife of our Lord, the disciple he most loved?”, he inquired further.

“That is correct”, Christ interjected, and the Goddess nodded in assent.

“I was told”, and he looked at Peter with eyes that flamed like daggers, “That Mary of Magdala was just some clingy woman who hung along after Christ evicted a herd of demons from her in an exorcism”, his voice was calm but full of righteous fury. “She was even conflated with some repentant prostitute whom the Lord forgave. And now I see the truth, that she is the perfect God, wife of the perfect God”, he bowed to the Lady, and turned back to the man. “Peter, how do you explain this blasphemy?”

“I have no explanation for you, Paul, other than that I’m a sinner and a fool”, Kefa trembled. “I was jealous of her, and I convinced myself of what suited my pride. The rumours we spread about her, diminishing her reputation, the way old women gossip and slander, they were lies, and I’m afraid I am guilty of the sin of bearing false testimony, as we all were, for all the apostles shared a jealousy of her and were happy to spread lies”, he cried. “I am truly sorry, for this was truly a terrible thing to do”.

“This explains the strange atmosphere that was in the air every time I asked who the apostle John was, or who the “most beloved disciple” was, or how come John and Mary of Magdala seem to be interchangeable in scripture”, he nodded. “Now it all makes sense”.

“My Lord”, he addressed Jesus, “I don’t feel that it had greatly influenced the message we were spreading among the nations”, he mused. “In fact, if I had to explain Lady Mary and her role, I think it would have complicated things without actually adding anything. I feel she is perfect, and she is what every faithful one of your followers should aspire to become. She loved you, and in that love and in the wisdom you taught her she became perfect. She was loyal to you and reached the end of her race victorious. However, even Peter was loyal and bore his cross with dignity, praising your name. I am not sure this will end as poorly as Peter seems to think”, he scratched his head.

“You are right, wise one. My father told me the same thing. Had Mary assumed primacy in the Church, it wouldn’t have actually helped anything, since the things she knew, and others did not, were in fact beyond anybody’s ability to understand. If the apostles failed to grasp them, everybody else would surely find them beyond their ability as well, which would have in fact made the message more complicated and harder to spread, as you rightly noticed. So, as much as I regret that they had not treated my beloved wife with appropriate dignity and respect, the harm to the Church will be negligible, and you are the person most responsible for this great success, for which I salute you”, Jesus bowed to Paul, who didn’t know where to look out of embarrassment. “The problem Peter caused with this will not interfere with salvation itself, but the whole Church now has his issues with women. This is regrettable, and will cause problems down the line, but other than making women feel they are somehow less than men in the eyes of God, it will also unjustly flatter men, who will assume too much about their primacy”, he waved in disapproval. “From what I can tell, they seem to be turning my mother into some kind of an asexual virgin-mother deity and they think it balances things out”.

“What is to become of me, my Lord?”, trembled Peter. “I have sinned greatly, and I deserve punishment”.

“No, you don’t. You’re an ass, and you caused issues with your obstinacy, but you are otherwise a good man, and the only punishment to you is that you failed to do some good things that would have allowed you to partake in more of God’s glory”, smiled Christ. “You placed limitations on God and in turn you got to be limited, and shared your limitations with others. Go with Azrael now, and learn. He will show you truth, and help you shed your limitations, and spread knowledge to others”, Christ ordered, and Peter bowed out in gratitude.

“As for you, Paul, you are such a pleasant surprise to us”, Jesus turned to the other man. “You never met me in person, and yet you figured it all out better than the disciples who shared bread with me every day, and without you, the message would have died like a flame under a cup. You inflicted such a wound to Satan, that my light will shine through it and keep gnawing at him until his death. Go with Lady Zina; she will tell you more, for there is more”, he concluded as the angelic Paul glowed with his praise, and bowed out as well.

“So, I am to be a repentant demon-ridden former harlot, and your mother is to be forever a virgin”, Magdalena smiled. “What great service have they done for God as a woman”, she waved in dismay.

“Yeah, that is going to be a problem, and it is going to unbalance things, actually harming men more than women”, he confirmed. “However, the upside is more than worth the downside. There is now a justified belief in transcendence of death. It’s no longer a Platonic fantasy that can be easily dismissed. There is understanding than afterlife is better than earthly life, which it is. There is understanding that God demands love, kindness, humility and tolerance, rather than submission and sacrifice of goats and cows. And I think both you and my blessed Mother will somehow survive this human nonsense, as you are rightly adored by all the Gods and angels and other worthy souls, starting with myself”, Christ embraced his smiling Goddess.

“Wait, what?”, his Mother shimmered in. “What was that about the virgin thing?”, she tried to contain herself from bursting into laughter, as Magdalena snickered.

The One

The recent days were eventful, to say the least. Azrael didn't complain, because it gave him plenty of material for philosophical discussions with his two best friends. Since they just happened to be Gods, those discussions were incredibly deep and satisfying, and he noticed changes in himself. His soul frequency became deeper, and, due to karmic benefits of helping distressed souls, he also grew bigger. In fact, he now rivalled the size and colour of Mary of Magdala when she first arrived, and he seriously doubted there was a more advanced angel in heaven. To him, that didn't mean much. Conversations with Buddha and Zina, however, did.

"Everything changed since Lord Vishnu performed that ritual", he mused. "And not just Christianity. Have you seen the Neoplatonists, Mahayana Buddhism, and Vedanta? Hindu descriptions of the Gods are sometimes uncanny in their accuracy, when they get it right. There's a simultaneous breakthrough of philosophies and religions based around transcendental reality that is the One Principle beyond all manifestation, and also ethics based on compassion, kindness and calm acceptance of worldly things. When we compare them to the ethical systems of antiquity, where people thought they will be rewarded by the Gods if they killed more people in more brutal ways and conquered more land, this is astonishing", he finished.

"Also, the belief that soul survives physical death and continues to have a meaningful existence seems to be spreading, and is no longer limited to Christianity alone, although Christianity has actual evidence", Buddha noted. "This looks like an anchor that solidified ideas and things that used to be easily dismissible, because the argument for them was essentially 'it would be terrible if it were otherwise', and the response would be 'terrible things happen daily, so, if anything, that is an argument that the most terrible explanation is more likely to be true'. Now, the answer is 'Christ rose from the dead on the third day'. There are witnesses. It's a physical fact, not a hypothesis, not an ungrounded Platonic theory", he added. "Also, the heroic acceptance of death by the Christians, as they were brutally

persecuted by the Romans and blamed for whatever the current problem was, added significantly to the credibility of their cause. And also, something else started taking place, that none of us expected. Karmic nucleation catalysed by the increased strength of the transcendental connection”, he looked both pleased and shocked.

“You want to say that ‘blanks’ are growing souls when they hear the enchanting talk about God and the beautiful and immortal Heaven, and participating in acts of love and kindness that seem to be more common”, his wife giggled and kissed his neck. “You intellectuals seem to be working hard on making things hard to understand, because you want to make them general and abstract, and by doing so, nobody understands what you’re talking about anymore”, she pretended to be annoyed.

“It’s not just that”, Buddha ruffled her hair and kissed her hand. “People used to listen to all kinds of stories before, and this didn’t happen. I’m saying that reality is starting to respond at the most basic level, where that world-illusion is based on reality, reality that was first cracked open by Lord Shiva, and then further tilled by Lord Vishnu. As stories resonate with truth, the ‘blanks’ are nucleating and starting to grow real souls. They start primitive, but since human bodies are much smarter than what such primitive souls would normally have access to, they grow into complex structures very quickly, and that seems to accelerate with further incarnations there. Not enough time had passed to see where this is going, but it’s as if that whole world is growing souls and doing something. It’s hard to tell what the end result will be, but it’s an extremely noteworthy development”, he finished, struggling while his wife was trying to find his ticklish spots to make him laugh.

“So, we will soon be dealing with a completely new soul-type; no longer grown in the astral nursery, or incarnated in a mature form from heaven, or grown from a tear of God or some artefact, but grown on Earth, from the bottom up”, Azrael continued, while those two were both listening very carefully, and fooling around like children, to his great amusement. “Illusory as that world may be, it’s all still taking place within the mind of God, for there indeed is nothing else. And when you’re in the mind of God, God is indeed the most fundamental reality of your existence. If things could grow out of God in heaven, I

see no theoretical reason why they could not grow out of God on Earth, as well; the Veil is the same anywhere”.

“And by the way, I love you two, and the way you are acting”, he smiled. “I only wish I had a wife so that I could do something like that with someone. But barring that, watching the two of you is a great pleasure”, he bowed smilingly.

“She will come”, Zina hugged him. “It would be against God’s nature and Will for it to be any other way”.

“I do hope so”, Azrael nodded and hugged his friend back.

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“The Christians are starting to become a problem”, Buddha told his angelic friend. “They are turning from a virtuous, transcendentally-bound persecuted minority into a vicious, self-righteous Middle-Eastern monotheistic cult that uses God as if he were their property, and a club they are entitled to use for bashing the ‘infidels’. After a few centuries of persecution and growth, they are now powerful enough to use force as an argument, and since they are philosophically undeveloped, they aren’t really doing well in arguments. Also, other nasty aspects of their faith, inherited from Judaism, are showing their ugly head”, he concluded, lost in thought.

“That is true. However, look at the bright side. Ever since that most ovine of all sheep, Simon Peter, the ‘sheep’ have been awakening left and right. It also mobilised incarnated angels, giving them a transcendental tether to which they can attach themselves and focus; it mobilised the incarnated demons, whose proclivity for family life and useful skills and arts has gained a transcendental meaning, and we had more souls that were aware and in good condition, despite their often terrible deaths, than ever. Yes, we always had fanatics and hotheads, and the blessed Lady Kay had to do further splicing of the astral plane in order to accommodate for their specific needs. You can’t put rabid fanatics among the normal souls, and those rabid fanatics are still pretty nice souls overall, just immature and lacking perspective. It would be good if this fanaticism could be mellowed down theologically on the Earth itself, but I’m afraid that’s beyond my pay grade”, smiled the Angel of Death.

“If by ‘fanatics’ and ‘hotheads’ you mean people like those few who called you Satan pretending to be an angel of light in order to lead them astray from the true faith in Jesus Christ the Lord, and God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, making the sign of a cross in front of you and expecting you to be struck by the lightning of God for the blasphemous act of telling them how things actually work, then I both agree with you, and stand in awe of your incredible tolerance and kindness, my friend”, smiled Buddha, as his wife giggled behind him.

“Talking about fanatics and their victims, I think we have incoming”, Zina pointed at the emerging shimmer in space, suddenly serious.

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Her terror and shock started to subside, once pain was no longer there. The absence of pain was incredibly blissful, and she could see again. That felt wonderful, regaining her eyesight after they cut her eyes out with shards of pottery, which they used to scrape flesh off her bones and tear her to pieces, slowly, tortuously, and with bestial glee. Everything happened so chaotically, with such unexpected fury and hatred, that she didn’t even get around to being angry at her murderers. She was just terrified and in pain, losing control of her life, losing her eyesight, and losing life itself in the end. But it didn’t feel like it; it felt like she lost pain, blindness, fear, helplessness and her assailants. Her life was more hers than ever. Her senses were better, her mind was quicker, and the calm bliss she felt appeared to be the baseline of her new reality.

The problem was, it didn’t look possible. Of course, Plato spoke of his analogy with slaves bound in a cave, who perceive mere shadows of the reality outside, but it would be a stretch to think that this could be a description of an actual reality of a soul’s relationship with the physical world, and a greater ideal world beyond. If anything, she thought that she participated in the ideal world through the course of her work on mathematics, astronomy and teaching.

Maybe she is in the process of dying, and this is her dying brain comforting her? Maybe it will all end in mere moments? Regardless, she decided to relish in the experience, for the absence of pain was so luxurious, so peaceful, and there was no mob screaming insane things

and most vulgar profanities at her, as they tore at her flesh. She shivered at the recollection, and tried to push it away.

At some point, she perceived a change. The space around her felt different, and seemed to solidify in form of a room with three... people? No, they just looked like people, because she could feel profound spiritual light beyond their form. Are they Gods? As she tried to understand who they were, their identities became known to her, as if by some magic. Two were Persons of God, which probably meant they were Gods, but their names were unfamiliar. Definitely not the gods she knew. Also, not The One, although they felt like First Manifestations. She didn't know how she understood that, but the more she thought of it, the more certain she was; or were they the Final Manifestations? They were extremely holy, and incredibly kind. Also, she knew they were husband and wife. "Plato was right", she thought.

The third one, the closest, identified as the Angel of Death, and was a wonderful, powerful, incredibly deep being of dark blue and deep purple light, and she intuitively felt that he, because it was a 'he', was on the utmost precipice of becoming a God himself, and was a friend of the God-couple. She felt such deep kindness and love between them, that tears instantly welled up and her soul seemingly just exploded from the beauty of their existence, and they didn't even say a word yet. "Where are my manners", she thought. "Those are the most beautiful beings, or perfect philosophical entities, I have ever seen, and I haven't even introduced myself properly".

"Greetings, honoured Gods. I am Hypatia of Alexandria. Please be kind and patient with me, for I am confused as to the nature of this new reality I found myself in, and I must beg you for explanations and your kind guidance", she bowed and smiled, in the most dignified way she could manage in her condition.

"Greetings, Lady Hypatia; or, should I rather say, angel Helena?", Azrael, bowed, as he cleared the veil of memory in her soul. This was usually something he did later on in the process, but the Lady in question was so stunning, so self-possessed, powerful, beautiful and kind, despite her most horrible death, that he treated her more like an equal, and less like a patient.

“Azrael? This is you? I now remember seeing you before, many times. How many lives? Nine? And before, in Heaven? It’s still unclear, but I think more so because I’ve changed, than due to any memory lapse. And you’ve changed as well. You are greater, stronger, kinder, so much kinder and more loving than before. You used to be cold, distant, calm and self-possessed, but now you are amazing, and honestly my heart just flows to you, and I am afraid I might commit some unintended transgression”, she blushed. “And please call me Hypatia. Helena was a caterpillar, whilst I am the butterfly”.

Azrael was stunned, for a reason unlike any in his long experience. He looked at the super-angel in front of him, her deep purple and indigo hues and enormous size, her incredible handling of the situation, and understood that something fatally and irrevocably changed in him.

“My Lady”, he bowed. “Take my hand, and see into my heart”; and they felt each other in earnest.

She was astounded, because as she felt him, his incredibly pure soul, his oceanic mind and his love and admiration for her, her heart responded in ways she never thought possible, for it wasn’t an emotion. The One ripped through the Veil in her heart, and claimed her as Herself, and not just an abstract *her*, but her as a woman who finally met her husband, whom she could worship and adore in the safe knowledge that she was The One who worshipped The One, for they were both persons of God.

And so the words of the Love of God came true, and the Gods were twelve.

Shame

It was the least intimidating gathering of high-ranking individuals she ever took part in. In fact, the relaxed men and women sitting in a lounge over a beverage looked everything but intimidating. And yet, when Zina introduced her to her parents; the young woman in her twenties and a polite, kind man in what appeared to be early thirties, who were introduced to her as Lady Shakti and Lord Shiva, it wasn't intimidating. No, nothing of the sort. Neither was it frightening. What she felt looking into their eyes was something she didn't expect to feel once she became a Goddess. She thought Zina the Love of God and her husband Buddha, the Teacher of the World, were the most impressive people she would ever have the honour of seeing. Now, however, meeting the "parents", she fought the instinct of dropping to her knees and kissing their feet.

"You two are the Alpha", she stuttered as she looked at the God-couple. "You are the Beginning, the Origin. You created Time, Space and Thought. To call the two of you 'Gods' feels like an act of disrespect. I feel like I could meditate on you for millions of years and just slowly absorb things that you are, and it would be the best possible use of my time. The hair on my head stands on end when I'm near you, so much that I probably look like a hedgehog", she managed to smile, as she bowed to the young couple.

"Be at ease, wise one", Lady Shakti embraced the older woman, who felt as if she were hugging the primordial Light of God emanating from The One, and understood that it might be exactly the case.

"I am right, am I not?", she asked them. "You actually are the Primordial Principles?"

"Psst!", hushed Lord Shiva in a mock-conspiratorial voice, with a finger before his lips. "Don't tell anyone", and he hugged the incredibly impressed Goddess, who felt such honour in his presence, that she trembled like a leaf.

“So, how are your impressions so far, young Lady?”, a deceptively younger man asked, acting in such a kind, supportive way that it miraculously put her completely at ease.

“I found my husband, now that I didn’t have to fear being courted for my flesh, since I no longer have any”, she smiled back. “I don’t know how he wasn’t a God already, though, with his incredible virtues and wisdom”.

“I was waiting for you, Goddess”, Lord Azrael embraced her from behind and smiled. “I, too, am overjoyed to finally have joined the family in earnest”, he joked.

“You were always family, Azrael”, Zina smiled and hugged him, as the others nodded in assent.

“Speaking of which, allow me to introduce you to the others”, smiled Lord Shiva.

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“You are the Omega”, the stunned woman couldn’t help staring at Lord Vishnu and his wife. “You are the Ultimate Manifestations, the Goal”, she bowed deeply, trembling like a young tree in the wind.

“Rise, Piercing Insight”, Lord Vishnu smilingly embraced her, as her Title changed, and she blushed so hard she looked like a radish.

“Now you know how the rest of us feel around these four”, joked Lord Azazel as he bowed to the Lady.

“I don’t think I will ever get used to it”, she curtsied to the God and smiled back.

“Nobody ever does”, the Mind of God smiled as she embraced her new sister.

“I am very sorry for your experience with my supposed followers”, Jesus bowed and felt quite embarrassed.

“No”, Hypatia waved her head decisively, as she bowed to the Lord with great respect. “That mob was the same as the one that wanted to stone you in every village you preached in, and spat at you as you were whipped on your way to Golgotha”, she kissed his hand.

“You know about my life?”, Christ was taken aback.

“Of course. I taught mathematics and astronomy to many Christian students, and we talked about you and your life a lot. I probably know more about you than that supposedly Christian mob that tore my body to pieces. Had we been contemporaries, I would have followed you everywhere as one of your apostles. Lack of respect and admiration for your holy person never participated in the reasoning behind me not being a Christian. I merely conceptualised things in a different way that felt less constrained than what I perceived the Christians to be; their thinking was too formulaic for my liking, and yet, the other point of dispute I had with them, your resurrection and the afterlife, is where they proved to be decisively in the right, and I regret not believing them”, she mused. “However, the ease with which the bishop sicced his mob on me, and the hatred and cruelty which they displayed, showed that I was not entirely wrong to keep my distance from them, as they embraced beliefs that felt more Jewish than Christian in their essential nature”.

“Tell me, what do you think, how much did your gender play a role in how they treated you?”, asked Magdalena as she came to embrace her.

“There was definitely a certain glee in how they tore my clothes off and tried to strip me of my dignity as they were killing me”, she nodded. “Part of it was definitely vindictiveness and desire to punish a woman for daring to be, I don’t know even what”, she shrugged. “However, that is a completely misguided line of thinking, because if you look carefully, the same mob did the same thing to your holy husband. They stripped his clothes off, whipped him, and made him carry his *patibulum* to the crucifixion site, as they mocked him for daring to think he was a God. That attempt to debase, to strip one of dignity for daring to be more than mud under their feet, this is a fundamentally satanic urge, and has nothing to do with my gender; only with how they perceived my spiritual and social status”, she answered, still holding the Goddess in her embrace. “They will try to humiliate a woman in a slightly different way than they would a man, but the intent and most of the actions are exactly the same. Also, it would be unjust and hateful to God to blame men as a gender for any of that. Yes, men crucified Christ, but Christ was also a man. Men were dismissive of you, any yet you adore a man. Men tore me apart, and yet

other men learned from me every day in the Academy, they were extremely kind and respectful, and when they spoke of me behind my back, they spoke words of praise. It was not women who gave me a high status in society, but men. It was not a gender war of any kind, nor was I a poor woman in a men's world who rose up despite men's efforts to put me down. No, it was the contrary. My honoured Father taught me mathematics and astronomy, and it was men who supported me, respected me and gave me honour at every turn, while women, in fact, gossiped and gave me nasty looks, trying to make me feel as if something was wrong with me. So, I bear witness to the virtue and goodness of men in my life, as much as I bear witness to the malicious and vile sinfulness of the mob that ended it", she concluded.

"I wish I had you as my disciple", nodded Jesus. "You would have brought me and my Father honour, unlike those sectarian satanic miscreants who made me ashamed before you", he bowed to her again.

"I repeat, you have nothing to be ashamed for, my Lord. Your noble deeds bear testimony to your noble and godly character, as their deeds bear testimony to their own. This is why you are a God, and what they are, I don't know, but I can't say that I want any of it in my life, either", she grinned.

"And likewise, they tried to deprive you of your dignity, and all they did was make it shine even more brightly, my Lady", Jesus kissed her hand. "For it is not what others do that affects our dignity, but our own actions alone".

"So, dear Goddess, what would you want to do now?", Lord Vishnu smiled at the woman.

"My Lord, were it at all possible, I would want to join my husband in his work. I don't know what qualifications I need to possess, but I am willing to undergo whatever training and education necessary. I find his work to be noble, compassionate and worthy, and a wife must always support her man", she smiled.

"By all means", Vishnu nodded, and her Title changed again. "You are in fact vastly overqualified, being a Goddess, having a human experience behind you, and furthermore, being a teacher and a Lady of great insight and discernment, not to speak of your overwhelming wisdom and compassion", he bowed with great respect, as she blushed

again. “Your husband will show you the practical details as you go, but all in all, we are all exceptionally honoured to have you”.

Two bishops

Azrael's life significantly improved since he became a God. The reason for that wasn't that the Gods treated him any better. In fact, he thought, they treated him as if he were a God before, and continued treating him the same now, which is to say, they loved him and showered him with every form of kindness. He smiled. They are the best people in all of Creation. Literally. Having them as friends and family was an incredible joy.

The reason why his life improved was the smiling, dignified woman at his side.

"My Lord and husband, I think it might be advised that I stay away from the Christians as they arrive. I'm not sure I will be completely impartial, and in any case, if they see me and start cursing me as a godless Pagan witch, like they did in Alexandria, their odds at achieving spiritual recovery after Earth might be diminished. Also, I might become angry at them", she mused as she leaned into his side.

"You mean, you wish for them to see you here in charge of their fates and you're feeling justice and empowerment, and then you're feeling guilty over it, and your feeling of equanimity and justice advises you against taking advantage of your position and implementing what might be a petty revenge?", he smiled.

"You are absolutely correct, my Lord", she whined, ashamed of herself.

"Don't you think it's exactly what they need for their spiritual growth, if any is to take place at all?", he pressed. "They expect your place to be occupied by Simon Kefa, whom they call Saint Peter, and expect him to hold the keys to the heavenly kingdom. They are self-righteous, even if they commit vile crimes, as they think they have been washed clean in the blood of their saviour, and our job is merely that of a concierge in a hotel, showing them their rooms and meal schedule. They think themselves absolutely righteous by virtue of belonging to the right cult and espousing the right beliefs. A clear demonstration that it is not so is in fact paramount if anything is to

become of them. In fact, I would recommend non-Christian Judges to greet Christians, and vice versa, because there are many non-Christians who are arrogant in their belief that Christians are stupid, inferior and wrong”, he explained as he held her.

“You guys are so cute, I wish I could take your picture and put it on my bedroom wall, so that I can always look at you and smile”, Zina told them.

“You don’t have a bedroom”, noted Azrael.

“I can make one”, Zina grinned mischievously, as the Piercing Insight blushed.

She was relieved, though. “So, you are telling me to trust my first instinct, although it might look petty?”, she asked.

“Yes, because your feeling of justice is advising you correctly, and your first instinct was correct. They truly need to see you here, in your full glory, power and authority of God behind you, because remember, you got your authority directly from Lord Vishnu, the Father of their Lord Jesus”, he reminded her. “You are fully in your right to be here. They, however, need to tread lightly, and they absolutely need that experience in their lives, so that they would truly learn the humility they keep talking about, and yet it remains elusive whenever they talk to someone who doesn’t share their beliefs to the letter. They already had multiple internecine fights over orthodoxy, and more are sure to follow. Allowing them to take their prejudice to Heaven would be counterproductive and ill-advised”.

“So, you’re saying I can just be myself?”, she prompted.

“That’s why you are here. The Lord appointed you to be here because he trusts you. He trusts *you*. He doesn’t want you to become someone else, or to censor yourself. You are valued, worshipped and loved for what you are. We need you as you truly are, and the souls you have been put in charge of need you as you are”, he bowed and kissed her brow, as she blushed from his praise and melted into him.

“I guess I will have to live with that”, she sighed and smiled.

“Incoming”, warned the Love of God, smiling at them, but pointing at the shimmer ahead.

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“Greetings, angels of the Lord. My name is Aurelius Augustinus, servant of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in his name that I greet you, and surrender myself to your justice and mercy”, the man bowed.

Hypatia was impressed. “Greetings, Bishop. I am Hypatia of Alexandria, a Judge of karma”, she curtsied. “I will be happy to answer any of your questions and be your guide in your post-Earth experience”.

The man was shocked. “If I am not mistaken, you were not Christian in life. You rejected our Lord and Saviour, and salvation is possible only if one accepts his redemptory sacrifice on the cross, where he washed away our original sin, as well as other sins of our former lives, so that we may enter into the glory of God”, he was thinking out loud. “And yet, the Glory of God is immediately obvious from your holy presence, Lady Hypatia. It is clear and undeniable. The blessing and authority of God is obvious from your presence, which means that something is clearly wrong with my thinking, and this makes me anxious and disturbed, and I can’t find peace until you explain how all of this is possible”, he bowed before her, completely distraught.

“Please, calm down, revered Bishop. Let me first tell you that I am well aware of your person and writing. You are highly esteemed in learned circles, and I have read some of your works. Second, you are wrong to think that I rejected Christ. In fact, I was in his holy presence just moments ago, where I bowed before him and kissed his hand. Rejecting him would be a terrible thing, as he is a family member and a friend”, she smiled, to his utter consternation.

“But you were a neoplatonist pagan who argued with the Christian bishop of Alexandria constantly!”, he exclaimed.

“I did. The bishop is a villainous fool, and to argue with him and reject his foolishness is a sign of virtue, which everybody should exercise, if only for the sake of moral and mental hygiene”, she laughed. “However, I have read your holy scriptures, and there is not a single thing your Lord said or did, that I disagree with or disapprove of”.

“But how is it possible that you didn’t accept Christianity in life, then?”, he inquired, still completely confused and upset.

“There are multiple reasons for that, the first and foremost being that I already had my own philosophical framework, which in my humble opinion works much better than the disjointed and often chaotic and contradictory Christian ideas, and I find further evidence for that in the fact that your Christian scholars are increasingly adopting neoplatonist ideas and framework themselves. Also, your ideas about ‘accepting Christ’ or ‘accepting Christianity’ are incredibly shallow for a man of your intellect. Did Christ himself not say: *‘Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven?’*”

“Truly, he did”, affirmed Augustine.

“I will now ask my holy husband, Lord Azrael, to testify as to who put me here and why”, she turned to her man.

“She was appointed to be the Judge to the dead by the Father of your Lord Jesus, and the Lord expressed his full faith in her and gave her the authority”, Azrael confirmed solemnly.

“I fully accept her holy authority, and it is also in abundant evidence”, nodded Augustine. “But how have I misunderstood the concept of redemption and salvation?”, he wondered.

“You accepted the mistaken Jewish concept that salvation is about sin, and obedience to law. It isn’t. It is about the light of transcendence, about the ability to see it, and decision to follow it always”, she nodded seriously. “The entire process in which Father broke the ceiling of the earthly hell, blasted the pure light of Christ through it, and sealed the cracks open, so that the light would always shine through them and point the way out of darkness; that is salvation and redemption”, she continued. “The problem isn’t that you have sin. The problem is that your souls are immersed in the darkness of Satan, and wallow in despair, finding stupid and sinful things to amuse themselves with. But now that Christ shows the way, and the light keeps being visible, salvation is an option for all who choose it”, she finished, glowing with the wisdom of God.

“And you and I have both chosen it and followed it; it’s just that we had different labels on the jars with the same honey”, Augustine mused. “You would have made a wonderful Bishop, my Lady, had you openly embraced Christianity, and if the Church allowed for female priests”, he smiled.

“Christ agrees”, Azrael nodded. “He said she would have been one of his best disciples were she alive at his time”.

“Then I am honoured to have been put at your mercy, Lady of God, for one who is praised by our Lord himself, and appointed a Judge to the dead by the Father, must be the holiest person of a character most pleasing to the Lord, and I feel greatly blessed to be in your holy presence”, Augustine bowed deeply, glowing blue with the light of God.

“You would have been a great guest lecturer at my academy, holy Bishop”, smiled Hypatia. “I would have greatly appreciated it had you given lectures on Christianity there. Alas, it wasn’t destined to be”, she smiled.

“Come”, she invited him. “Let’s talk more”.

...

“What is this infamy?”, yelled Bishop Cyril of Alexandria. “A heathen whore of Satan to greet me here? May Lord Jesus Christ judge you for your sins and cast you to the eternal darkness, you witch!”, he growled and cursed menacingly.

“Thank you for your wishes and recommendations, Bishop, but I am needed elsewhere”, she smiled; she turned her sight inwards, made a hand motion and he was gone.

“That one requires some cooldown, I would say”, she turned to her husband.

“Indeed”, he confirmed. “But I’m afraid they made him the doctor of the church down there, so there’s more where that one came from”, he waved his head disapprovingly.

“Satan is working his deeds within the Church”, Zina added, bringing coffee. “That is unfortunate, but not surprising. The dividing line between good and evil, between transcendence and the satanic,

doesn't go between nations, and between religions. It goes within them and through them, and within every soul".

"Indeed", nodded Lord Azrael. "The only way to be certain that you're on the right side is to be in God's holy presence, and of it. If you're not, what salvation and 'right side' are we even talking about?", he nodded, and sipped from his cup.

"This is not actual coffee; you know that, right?", Hypatia raised an eyebrow.

"I know", Zina smiled a conspiratorial smile. "But unlike the actual coffee, this actually tastes great, so let's not give them ideas", she winked.

The sex talk

Zina smiled and sipped her coffee, as the woman across her was fidgeting and turning increasingly stronger shades of red.

“Hypatia, you’re going to have a stroke. Relax. Breathe. I’m not the sharpest knife in the drawer, but I did have a teenage daughter who needed to have the sex talk once her monthly bleeding started”, she winked. “Just ask whatever you feel like asking, I’m not going to bite you”.

The woman smiled uncomfortably. “Well, your daughter wasn’t a virgin at fifty, so she at least had a valid excuse”, she relaxed a bit. “What I wanted to ask you is, well, you had certain experiences as a human woman that I.. didn’t, and you are also a Goddess now, so, what I want to know is, how does it all work here and there, and am I missing something?”, she turned a stronger shade of red and fumbled half the words.

“You mean, is there something about human sexual experience that you’re missing in your relationship with Azrael now?”, Zina smiled.

Hypatia nodded, obviously embarrassed. “I mean, I don’t feel like I’m missing anything, but since I don’t know for sure, I thought...”

“Well, human sexual experience is certainly great, at least relatively, for a human experience. There are certainly things we don’t have an analogue for here – such as the bodily instincts taking over, overriding your mind; and orgasm as something that resets your brain in complete surrender; that doesn’t exist either. Also, we don’t actually have the special girly bits, if you know what I mean”, Zina explained, as Hypatia squirmed with embarrassment.

“However, we don’t actually need those, because here, our very soul is also our sexual organ, so to speak”, Zina was now more serious. “It’s as if souls have polarity. My husband is the brain of the family so he can probably tell you more about *kalapas* and their organisation into a karmic matrix, and apparently they have ‘left’ and ‘right’ orientations, or you can call them ‘male’ and ‘female’ on a very fundamental level.

In young souls, those *kalapas* are arranged in all sorts of haphazard ways, left and right interchangeably. If you look at young souls in the astral nursery, you can almost never tell their gender, and it doesn't seem to mean much either, the way gender of a coffee cup or this table doesn't matter. However, as we mature, our souls start polarising, and the farther up you go in the spiritual hierarchy, the less likely you are to find a soul with indeterminate gender, or with unclear, alternating or reversed sexual proclivities. And the Gods; we are extremely polar, because the entirety of our being is in alignment and following what God, or you would call it The One, desires", she nodded, and Hypatia was now completely in her element, as the talk was taking a philosophical turn.

"So, what you're saying is, there are no hermaphrodites, homosexuals or beings with ambiguous gender in heaven?", she asked.

"It's not because there's some rule that says entrance is forbidden to them", Zina smiled. "It's just that those ambiguities and reversals are malformations and disorders, and disorders are something that needs to be sorted out in the evolutionary process. They are not the end result".

"There are also no assholes in heaven, either, because being a nasty person is an impurity and a malformation that needs to be sorted out in the evolutionary process", Zina continued. "But when you reach the pinnacle of spiritual evolution, the end result always seems to be either a perfectly sorted out man, or a perfectly sorted out woman, and they always have a counterpart, to the point where it seems to be a requirement. Being a single God is as unheard of as being a genderless or a homosexual one. It just doesn't seem to reflect God's desires", Zina finished.

"So, God always wants to be a male God married to a female one, and a female God married to the male one?", Hypatia asked.

"Yes. At least that is something that has been repeated universally in our experience. It is as if some deep aspect of the unmanifested Absolute can manifest properly only as an intimate, profound spiritual connection of mutual worship, adoration and surrender between an enlightened, divine Man, and an enlightened, divine Woman", Zina confirmed.

“Absolute is indeed One, but One apparently doesn’t mean lonely. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that its nature is closer to the absolutely perfect union of male and female, and all the perfect God-couples in existence, and all the God-couples that are yet to become. It is an endless, ever-blissful, complete ocean that is totality of all perfections”, the Love of God was now glowing.

“That is amazing. But you were saying that our very soul is a female sexual organ. What did you mean by that?”, Hypatia inquired.

“It’s simple. As a divine woman, when you worship your divine husband, which will be pretty much constantly, you envelop his soul with yours, and simultaneously open yourself to him and draw him in with the power of your worship, and this makes you glow with both pleasure, wisdom and consciousness as you both touch the Absolute in your mutual worship”, Zina nodded wisely.

“That is exactly how I experience it”, Hypatia confirmed. “I couldn’t have stated it more precisely myself”.

“So, a human woman has a special female organ she opens towards her husband, she takes him in, and pleasure of the act makes her open up and surrender even more, and when they both reach the blissful climax, they touch a small aspect of what we feel, as God-couples. The difference is, they lose their consciousness temporarily, while ours grows stronger, and we don’t have orgasm in the sense of having reached a point where the pleasure is too strong for our brains to keep functioning, so they reset. Our minds, on the contrary, are being fed by the pleasure and we keep getting clearer and wiser as we are experiencing pleasure. This means we can keep going far, far further than the point where a human being would reach orgasm, and our normal state of consciousness is way beyond a human orgasmic experience. As you would say, sex for us is more of a philosophical ecstasy than a culmination of biological urges. And, of course, we also don’t have a monthly cycle, or pregnancy, or the mess that drips down your leg after your husband finishes in you, that you have to clean up afterwards”, Zina giggled, and Hypatia again blushed with angry crimson.

“Do you miss those physical things you described? The orgasm, the mess, the pregnancy, everything...?”, she asked.

“It was fun and lovely, as a part of my human experience”, Zina nodded. “But it’s important to understand that it’s a part of a different package. It was great as human experiences go, but what I have now is so much fuller, better and greater, that I would cry with inconsolable desperation if I had to return to the human limitations now, even if it consisted of only the best parts of the human experience, and without any of the bad ones”, she concluded firmly.

“I think I understand what you mean. When I was a human woman, I would periodically desire sexual union with a man very strongly, but I controlled myself because I understood that I don’t actually feel a spiritual connection with any particular person, and once I would get pregnant, I would have to choose between my career as a philosopher, or my family, and it would invariably end by having neglected either one or both”, Hypatia was now reminiscing. “I considered trying sex with a woman, because then there would be no risk of pregnancy, but I didn’t really feel any attraction to any of them. The whole thing was a struggle, and although there were things I was missing, the tradeoff just wasn’t worth it”, she nodded.

“So, are there any other embarrassing points you would want to cover with your sexually experienced sister?”, Zina joked. “I mean, watching you squirm with embarrassment is highly entertaining”, she hugged the woman, who hugged her back with great relief.

“No, I think I get it now, and I am so grateful I could talk to you about this”, Hypatia smiled blissfully.

“Any time, sweetheart. Any time”, Zina whispered.

“Oh”, she suddenly got serious. “We are being called to the war council. Something is up”.

Future prospects

“I’m afraid that the golden age of the mediterranean civilization is about to end”, spoke Lord Vishnu. “The Rome just fell, and the Western part of the Empire is crumbling down. That, however, is a minor problem, and in itself wouldn’t cause bigger issues for centuries. The reason why I brought you all here is because I want us all to consult now, because very soon the Judges of Karma will have been overwhelmed and thus unavailable”, he finished with a serious tone.

“A natural disaster of some kind?”, wondered Lord Azazel.

“Yes, in fact. And not just one. Multiple volcanic eruptions, serious global cooling, agricultural collapse and starvation, and a major plague upon all that. A civilisation ending event, to be followed by hundreds of years of misery and suffering in worse darkness than ever before. The good part of it is, they will have belief in the afterlife. The bad part is, the living will envy the dead”.

“Is this something Sanat Kumar cooked up? He simply told the Jewel to crush it all in order to stop the process we started with the transcendence, and most prominently, Christ’s resurrection?”, asked Kay.

“It seems so, but it’s hard to tell since we can’t actually see clearly inside. Look too strongly, and you *really* find yourself on the inside”, Buddha answered. “But we can make educated guesses based on what the consequences will be”.

“This is not merely a European disaster, but the consequences will be the gravest there, since they are already having a serious civilisational decay, and this will finish it, and hinder any attempt at mitigation. The blow is going to be hard and deadly. Basically, the warlords will fight over the land that will be worked by the starving serfs, agricultural yields will be miserable because all the knowledge will have been lost, and religious philosophy will be reduced to the most basic concepts, as most literate people will be dead. It will truly be an age of darkness. Centuries, maybe millennia will pass before we again get minds such as the angelic Bishop Augustine, or the Divine

“Lady Hypatia”, Buddha bowed to the aforementioned. “We are likely to get souls that are greatly disenchanted with the physical world, and follow transcendence. However, their ideas about transcendence are likely to be basic, so it’s hard to tell how much of a progress they will make. It will also be an ideal time for superstition, and the Church will likely entertain its despotic tendencies. However, in India my disciples are founding a great university in Nalanda, near Rajagriha, where I used to teach. Many good things may come out of that. India is spiritually quite vibrant and doing well. That, at least, is of some comfort”, he finished.

“So, essentially, we are getting a thousand years of darkness in the Mediterranean, and a thousand years of enlightenment in India?”, asked Lord Azazel. “Sounds like someone wanted to break Christianity just as it was on the precipice of developing a really sophisticated philosophy, so that it could be reduced to its most basic interpretation”.

“I am actually afraid that it all began with the vicious murder of Lady Hypatia”, spoke the Mind of God. “It looks as if the villainous bishop Cyril gave Sanat Kumar the idea as to how to deal with the problem; basically, wipe out the intellectual infrastructure of Europe altogether, and what remains will be the people like Cyril, who are supposedly the ardent defenders of Christian faith, but who would in fact crucify Christ instantly, had he appeared before them today”, she ended with much more severity than was to be expected from her otherwise bubbly personality.

“We were winning too hard”, mused Lord Shiva. “Just look at what we accomplished. The former divisions of the souls in the astral nursery no longer apply, and I mean that quite literally. We needed to introduce multiple new astral sub-planes to accommodate for the new types of souls. We have new types of angels, such as St. Paul and St. Augustine, whose experience on Earth, as well as their thought processes, are likely to result in good things in the future. Since Sanat Kumar started scheming, the number of Gods grew from four to twelve. However, I must also acknowledge that we had losses. We lost angels, we lost astral souls of various types, and it’s too early to tell what the ultimate losses will end up being. On the upside, new souls are starting to nucleate in the new atmosphere of increased transcendental presence on Earth, and it remains to be seen what they

end up becoming as they mature”, he nodded. “We were winning, so he kneed the playing board and said ‘oops’”.

“This is why I brought our resident experts on Christianity – I mean, other than the Christ himself, his wife and mother”, Krishna smiled. “I mean St. Paul, St. Peter, St. Augustine and Lady Hypatia”, he bowed. “I would appreciate their thoughts on the likely spiritual developments as this catastrophe unfolds”.

“I am afraid I am greatly to blame for what is to happen, along with my fellow hard-necked apostles, who kept trying to organise the teaching of our Lord Christ as if it were a mere commentary on the Law of Moses and the Prophets”, Kefa spoke mournfully. “This is why they will treat God the same way Israel did; as if he were a weapon for them to wield, and a heavenly general to lead their victorious armies. That is why Israel is no more, destroyed under Vespasian and Titus, and finished under Hadrian, and the Christians are to meet the same fate eventually, if they persist in their hubris”.

“That seems to be quite true”, nodded Paul. “Where the Jews acted as if they had the Lord of the Armies on their side and continued tempting fate against more powerful nations, which eventually led to their demise, the Christians just supplanted this with Christ, and other than eating pork and celebrating Sunday instead of Saturday, much else remained the same. I am afraid they will not invite people to accept the joyful news that Christ rose on the third day, but threaten them with murder lest they submit to their worldly rule, the way they murdered Lady Hypatia. They will use worldly means to achieve worldly ends under a guise of Christ, until other worldly powers rise against them under some other false guise, and depose them. This is unfortunate and quite depressing, but this is how I see it”, Paul concluded.

“The holy apostles have spoken, and I agree with their understanding of the sad state of the Church, to which I have unfortunately contributed in my foolishness”, Augustine took the word. “But what they said is merely one aspect of the problem. Yes, as Christianity became the religion of power, it started speaking the language of power, acting as if they owned God, to use him as a club with which to beat their enemies into submission. This is as sinful as it is true. However, another aspect of the problem might be as important.

As I left my mortal life, I faced judgment at the hands of her holiness, Lady Hypatia, the much revered Judge over the dead. From her, I learned that I was wrong about the very concept of salvation, and I also learned many things about how the apostles introduced clumsy counterfeits of history in order to dismiss the holy wife of our Lord, and present a teaching that was so heavily biased against women and their important role, that I am sorry to say that we are going to see the grave consequence of this bias within the Church. The hard lesson I had been taught, and with the ultimate authority of the Lord, is that God is both male and female, and male and female together. This would be an easy thing for normal people to understand, but the influence of the Jewish tradition was so heavy, that we adopted a superbly male-centred view, which was easy in the male-centred Roman society which made adoption of such beliefs easy. I'm not saying we should adopt some kind of a female-centric view, which would also be wrong, but this kind of imbalance in favour of men is opposed to the will of God and will not end well. The first thing I learned here was that I was a Christian and a man, and my judge was a Neoplatonist and a woman, and she was fully in the favour of the Lord and acted with his authority, and I was in the wrong about many fundamental doctrines, and was at her mercy. However, this bitter lesson later proved sweet, as I found her to be a wise, merciful and righteous judge and teacher, and if more women like her had authority in the Church, the Church might actually start reflecting what is true in Heaven, and to which we can all attest: that male and female persons of God are equally represented in the country of God, and none are boastful, foolish and hard-necked; unlike, I must mournfully concede, my fellow Christians on Earth", he finished in a grave tone.

"I thank you gentlemen for your frank and straightforward assessment of the state of Christianity", Vishnu bowed to them. "I will now ask the Mind of God for her analysis and recommendations", he turned to Lady Karuna.

"I think I can see a pattern emerging in all of this. Ever since the souls have started taking birth on Earth, our greatest losses have been caused by the despotic, tyrannical mentality Satan seems to favour and nurture wherever he can. Uriel the angel was lost because he fell into evil, by embracing the mentality of despotism, rule of fear and

violence, and his endless cruelty and disregard for the suffering of other beings”, Kay started. “Furthermore, we lost angel Athena due to her arrogant foolishness in which she challenged Satan to do his worst against her in his own realm, which he did, and the despotic, tyrannical priests of Baal, which seems to be a name they had for his own person, meaning Master, as he wants to be called, imprisoned her and raped her daily until her spirit broke and she gave her soul willingly to Satan, and now she is his property, as we acknowledged our loss and surrendered her back to the one she calls Master. We also saw seemingly religious people who acted as if they own God, how they killed Lord Jesus in a terribly torturous way, under direct guidance of Satan himself. We saw an almost identical mob, that acted as if they own God and act as his instruments, also owned and controlled by Satan, but now calling themselves Christians, how they viciously murdered Lady Hypatia, who was so holy that she became a Goddess before her corpse had the time to cool properly”, she managed a smile. “Unfortunately, a pattern of Christianity being adopted by Satan as an instrument of tyranny is apparent. However, since the fundamentals of the faith are transcendental and good, Satan’s control will never be absolute, as the transcendental opposition will have the word and deeds of Christ himself to use as evidence”, she concluded, curtsied, and returned into her husband’s arms.

“This is a grim analysis, but I see no fault in it”, Christ himself took the word. “We must now see what can be done as to mitigate the disaster that is to follow, and how we can possibly turn it all to some greater good”, he concluded and gave word to his Father.

“I think it would be proper to give word to the one most immediately and directly affected by this development in Christianity, as she might have a more educated perspective than the rest of us”, Lord Vishnu bowed to Lady Hypatia.

“To be honest, I am more optimistic than the rest of you seem to be. Yes, the Church encourages its believers to think that men should be in charge and women should be submissive. However, let me ask the Ladies in attendance: which one of you does not wish to be submissive to her holy husband?”, she smiled, seeing the Goddesses frown in horror. “As I thought: each and every one, starting with myself, would like nothing better than to be submissive to and under the power of her

husband. That is because we love and worship them with all our hearts, and our souls find fulfilment and bliss as we cherish and serve them. And as we do so, our Lords will love and cherish us back, with their entire hearts and souls. That is what the relationship between men and women is to be. Truly, if one wanted to harm women, he would tell them that they should seek power and emancipation from men, that they should seek career and education rather than to serve their husbands and raise their children in love and most attentive care. This might come as a shock, coming from a renowned academic, philosopher and a scientist, but let me inform you that I spent this day in the company of a Goddess who in her earthly incarnation was nothing but a wife and a mother, and I sought her wisdom and love, and was greatly comforted. Her life was what the esteemed speakers who preceded me painted as the life of submission and inequality that awaits poor women of the dark age, under a tyrannical fist of men. Well, she lived in an even more tyrannical kingdom of old, and she was fully under the power of her husband, who treated her with great kindness, simply because she was his wife. She attained perfection with nothing but love as her weapon, and it was such a powerful weapon, that it made Gods and Goddesses cry over her and champion her, and her Title is now the Love of God. If this is to be the fate of women in Christianity, then glorious times await us, for she is a most praiseworthy person and I am immensely honoured to call her my sister, and bow before her endlessly”, she finished with a blissful smile, as it was Zina’s time to blush into deep cherry hues.

“Lady Hypatia has a valid point”, Maria Magdalena took the word. “If someone offered me to rule the world rather than submit to my husband, I would refuse it instantly and without a second thought, as only a most foolish woman could accept such nonsense. Only those most susceptible to Satan wish to rule, to boast and to rise above others. There is not a single one among the Gods who would want to rule over the others, as we find serving others much more fulfilling. My fellow apostles treated me exactly as we now suspect Christianity to be treating women in the future. They marginalised me, silenced my voice, and sent me to the kitchen with other women. As a result, I am my Lord’s Lady forever. Truly a terrible fate, I must admit”, she laughed. “We should be more afraid for the fates of the Christian

bishops who embrace evil, for they might share the fate of Cyril of Alexandria, who was rightfully sent to a hell intended for people of cruel hearts and without God's love, to cool down and await further judgment by the very woman whom he tried to savagely extinguish. Certainly, Earth will not mirror Heaven. This is not surprising, as it was designed to oppose Heaven and be a mockery of God's Creation. This is why my Lord's prayer asks for God's kingdom to be on Earth, as it is in Heaven; for that is not so at the time being. However, as long as Heaven remains the choice and destiny of the souls who suffer through that terrible illusion of a world, I will be content", she finished, and nothing was to be added, for it was the Word of God.

Guardians

“My Lord, may I have a word?”, an angel addressed Vishnu.

“Greetings, Michael. How can I be of service?”, Krishna smiled.

“It’s about that war conference that took place yesterday. The angels watched it from the heavenly plane and concluded that it’s going to be a terrible time on Earth and they should do something to help. The idea is to assign an angel to every soul on Earth, as a guardian of a sort; not from the earthly evils, of course, because nothing can be done about those, but we can amplify the transcendental feelings and provide spiritual comfort and guidance”, Michael explained. “It’s not going to be much, but it’s going to be better than nothing, because as things get bad, their feeling for the transcendental is going to be silenced by the noise of all the terrible physical things that will be going on and eventually ending their worldly lives, and we think it’s worth the trouble to try to keep their souls pointed at the right direction, so to speak”.

“I think it’s an excellent idea. Do you have enough angels for the number of souls down there?”, Vishnu scratched his neck.

“As the numbers stand now, our volunteers outnumber the souls on Earth significantly. As you are certainly aware, it’s not like we have much to do there, other than talk to each other and maintain interpersonal connections. Everybody volunteered”, Michael smiled.

“I think it’s an excellent idea. Of course, you’ll have to adhere to the rules of engagement, because you can’t allow yourselves to get karmically attached by doing too much, because then Satan will claim offence and bind you to that place”, Vishnu nodded. “But other than that, I think it will greatly improve the odds. If Satan can use the physical world to create a worse spiritual pressure on the incarnate souls, we might as well use our advantages to help them”.

“Also, my Lord, I have questions for you about the things I heard on the conference”.

“By all means”.

“Some things I heard make no sense to me. For instance, the humans seem to be struggling for power over each other down there, and are willing to turn themselves into vicious, satanic nightmares in order to attain it. However, I can’t for the life of me understand what power are they even speaking of. Their worldly lives are very short, and whatever control they have over others will disappear once their die, and they can’t take that power with them, but all their sins remain, as their souls are often deformed and scarred beyond recognition, sometimes beyond repair, by their efforts in obtaining something elusive and often imaginary. So they are committing acts that inflict actual, lasting damage to their souls, in attempts to obtain things even they themselves know to be temporary and futile. Are they insane?”, Michael grasped at his forehead, as if trying to massage understanding directly into his brain.

“You can’t make sense of it because it makes no sense. They are deluded by the appearance of that world, which presents itself as the actual reality, and things they experience there seem to carry more weight than the “abstract” ideas about afterlife”, Vishnu smiled understandingly.

“But they call themselves Christians. The cornerstone of their faith is that Christ rose from the dead on the third day, and ascended to Heaven, and that he is the son of God. Transcendence is what Christianity is supposed to be all about. And yet they sacrifice transcendental eternity for the sake of temporary power, political gain and opportunism, and the feeling of might they get when they can harm or control others”, the angel protested. “How can they possibly not be aware of the contradiction?”

“They would be, if they cared about the actual message, but to some of them, especially those in power, trivial nonsense such as making a distinction between Mary being a mother of God, or being a mother of Christ, is enough to get them all riled up in anger, hatred and scheming with a purpose of rising above the perceived competition. Essentially, they love bickering about small insignificant things so that they can completely ignore the big picture, which is that worship of the transcendental ideal is the choice for liberation and redemption”, Krishna shrugged. “Also, Satan is strongly encouraging them in everything that has to do with ignoring transcendence and pursuing

personal power, which is of course defined in the most stupid of terms, because what power is even possible for them, as you rightly noted? It's all nonsense, of course. Bishop Cyril pursued power over Hypatia, because she had great influence due to her impeccable character and virtue. He thought himself victorious and at the peak of his might when his mob killed her. And then he died and discovered that she could flick her finger and throw him into hell, and there's absolutely nothing he can do about it, other than repent, show remorse, make restitutions and so on. The only actual power he had was to decide the direction where his soul will be heading, and the speed of its advancement along the chosen path, and yet, he deluded himself into believing that he owns God and wields him as an instrument of his personal might over others".

"Also, I fail to understand why men there seem to act as if they are in some kind of a perpetual war against women, and they need to keep them oppressed to show them who's winning", the angel looked completely confused. "What sense does that even make? Why would you want to oppress and disenfranchise someone who is a necessary prerequisite of your happiness? You get to live with a pathetic oppressed person who resents you instead of a happy and empowered person who adores you. What an incredible victory indeed", he shrugged sarcastically.

"It's actually a complicated matter. Human bodies are not really a good reflection of spiritual realities. They are close enough, but close enough can be deceptive. Also, making an analogy from how Gods and Goddesses interact with each other, to how human men and women should interact, is not realistic, because the main component of divine interactions is spiritual perfection, which is sorely lacking on Earth. It can be achieved; for instance, when Jesus and Magdalena interacted as a man and a woman, it's essentially identical to how a God and a Goddess interact here. They worshipped, respected and served each other in every way. A sinful man and a sinful woman, however, are a different thing entirely. Each is an untamed beast with base instincts, and also listening to Satan's call for 'empowerment'; and they are mostly up to no good. In fact, oppression often does the opposite of what is intended. The one who oppresses falls victim to Satan and ends up being a fallen, ruined soul, and the oppressed one, if virtuous

enough to begin with, will pray to God and seek refuge in transcendence, holding on to the thread of salvation that will end up producing a very good, mature soul that was hardened in the fires of hardship. This is why this satanic urge to keep women down and strip them of spiritual dignity and authority harms mostly men. It certainly hurts women, that much is obvious, but hurt and harm are different matters entirely. You are hurt if someone treats you badly. You are harmed if you treat others badly”, the Lord concluded.

“I think I understand it better now, my Lord”, Michael nodded. “It is as the blessed Lady Mary said yesterday: the men of the Church who follow the path of that villain Cyril are the ones who will truly suffer from this, and they are the ones we should worry about, because they listened to that satanic influence the wise Lady Kay explained at length. I wonder whether Satan will think of it, and invent some evil that will try to seduce women by selling them the appearance of power that will cost them their souls”, he scratched the back of his head in thought.

“I am sure he will. He seems to be adapting and improvising; whenever something good appears, he tries to distort it, adopt it for his uses, or invent something that looks similar enough, and yet contains none of the good things and all of the bad ones. Also, he creates vulnerabilities by the very design of the world and the body, and then plays at those weaknesses in every way he can. For instance, he creates a natural disaster or a plague, and then tries to convince people that the transcendental Divine forces are to blame, as if they were in power of that world and not himself. It is what it is, I’m afraid. His character and actions are a given, and we must adapt to help the souls take advantage of that, and not be harmed by it”, Vishnu concluded.

“I understand. The guardian angels will try to do just that”, Michael bowed and flickered out.

Thermodynamic zero

“Lady Kay, Lord Zee, I apologise for bothering you, but I have some intellectual concepts that elude me, and everybody pointed me towards either the two of you, or Lord Buddha, who is so busy with all the souls departing from Earth, that he has a thousand angelic volunteers in his team helping him, and they all have plenty of work to do”, bowed Augustine.

“We are glad to be at your service, doctor”, smiled Lord Azazel, as his wife flicked her fingers and created a coffee lounge with a table and comfortable seats.

“So, what seems to be the problem?”, Zee asked, as Kay poured them coffee.

“I can’t get my head around the problem of sin and how it relates to salvation”, Augustine shrugged helplessly. “On one hand, Christianity teaches that God, being perfectly just, can’t tolerate sin, which is why sinful souls are prevented from entering heaven. Sin is conceptualised as a filthy stain on the soul, that can only be washed away through sacrifice, which usually includes blood. On the other hand, I was told that sin is not the problem; spiritual imperfection is. This would mean that the problem isn’t that one does evil deeds, but that they don’t focus on God, who is the source of all virtue and purity, and as a consequence of their spiritual emptiness, they commit all sorts of stupid or evil things. However, those evil and stupid things change the character of the soul, causing imperfections that then further contribute to the choices of everything but God. This looks like a circular issue, and I can’t wrap my head around it, which is why I sought your help”, he finished.

“Do you know my history, doctor Augustine?”, asked Lord Azazel. “Who I was, and how I came to be as I am?”

“I was told that you used to be a demon, but honestly, I find that very hard to believe, since you feel as if one concentrated love of God, love of truth and rejection of all that is evil into a single sharp blade

that cuts through all pretence, falsehood and ignorance and reveals the truth of God beneath”, the man answered.

“Thank you, doctor. My Title is indeed the ‘Blade of Discernment’, which means pretty much what you described. I was indeed a demon. In fact, I frequently found myself in company of the one you call Satan, when he was still merely scheming and planning his evil. I was the oldest and biggest of all the demons in the astral world, and I was seemingly stuck there, having spent eons doing the same worthless and nasty things with other worthless and nasty people. However, Satan’s thinking struck me as so profoundly perverted, vile and insane, that I rebelled against it instinctively, and then a thought crossed my mind: ‘How am I any different from him? I am merely a few iterations of madness away from where he is. This is unacceptable, and I have to do something to change it, and it has to happen now’. Do you know what I did next?”, Azazel smiled.

“No, but I can imagine your situation quite clearly, for I myself had a similar existential crisis in my youth”, Augustine nodded.

“I sought out Lord Shiva, the only God I personally knew, and that was because he killed one of my demon friends when that fool challenged him to a duel. I very politely asked him for his help and knowledge, and he sat me down and very patiently explained everything, and guided me through it until I understood. But I also understood that the Lord had a terrible day, as it was the very day Satan got the permissions to use the Jewel, the artefact of creation, that would allow him to create all the worldly evils you are now familiar with, and still, he didn’t just brush me off, but instead made me the central issue, and patiently taught me until I understood. I was so impressed by that, and I adored Lord Shiva so much for his incredible kindness and wisdom, that in the process of that conversation my soul attained purity, crystallised into vajra and I became an angelic being, as you are now. So, dear doctor, can you tell me what my sin was, and what my ‘redemption’ was, to use your jargon?”, Azazel smiled mischievously.

“Let me think. You said your soul was dark and impure, but it started purifying only after you decided to seek the Lord?”, Augustine scratched his chin.

“That is true”, Zee nodded. “Go on”.

“The Lord didn’t reject you because your soul was dark, but accepted you, merely because you asked politely?”, the man asked.

“That is also true”, nodded Azazel.

“So, we can separate two aspects of a problem: the reason why you didn’t seek out the Lord before, which is what we could call a sinful choice of will, and your impurity, which seems to be a consequence of that sinful choice to be content in yourself, who are in the sphere of problems, and not seek out the Lord, who is in the sphere of solutions”, Augustine smiled.

“You are correct, and now we can separate sin as a direction of one’s path, away from God, and impurities of the soul, which are on one hand a consequence of this evil path, and on the other hand they are the source of further estrangement from God, as an impure soul will find it ever easier to do evil things, and the circle goes on”, Azazel nodded. “This, however, is only a poetic simplification of the truth, which is a more complex matter, for which I will address you to my Goddess Wife, who excels at distilling apparent chaos and complexity into understandable wisdom”, he smiled at his beloved darling girl.

“Dear Lady, I will be honoured to receive any help you are willing to provide”, Augustine bowed to the smiling girl.

“This will take some time, since humans of your era had almost no knowledge of physics, which will limit my ability to make analogies unless I explain physics first. Fortunately, you no longer have human cognitive limitations, so we can do this quickly. The first is the atomic theory of matter. You might be familiar with Democritus?”, Kay asked.

“You mean, the Greek philosopher Aristotle quoted in his works, who taught that all matter consists of very tiny discrete fundamental particles, unto which everything can be divided, but which themselves cannot be divided further?”, Augustine nodded.

“Indeed”, the Goddess rewarded him with one of her brilliant smiles. “That, at least, is how his theory went. In reality, physical matter contains of multiple types of atoms, which interact with each other according to their specific properties, forming more complex compounds, called molecules. Those molecules can then be clumped together in quantity, forming matter as it would be recognizable to you;

for instance, a molecule of water consists of one heavier atom of Oxygen and two lighter atoms of Hydrogen. Add an enormous number of water molecules together, and you enter the visible world where you perceive the result as water, with all of its mechanical qualities as they are known to you”.

“I understand, but how does this relate to the matters of soul and sin? Isn’t a soul a transcendental, spiritual entity that is essentially different from the physical matter of the world?”, Augustine was confused.

“It is, but you have to understand how the physical world was made. It was created by the Jewel, an artefact created by Lord Shiva and Lady Shakti, who also created the actual, real world – spiritual world, heaven, kingdom of God, whatever you may call it. The Jewel encapsulated their skill and knowledge, to a minor degree. However, this means that the Jewel didn’t just invent the structure of the material world *ex nihilo*. He had a starting point to work with, and this starting point was the structure and nature of the real world of spiritual particles and entities. In essence, he took the working template of Creation, and then modified to get whatever Satan ordered him to make. Specifically, he took the lowest of the worlds in all of Creation, the astral world, and further hardened it and increased limitations and restrictions, until he got something that couldn’t be further restricted and still be inhabitable by the incarnating souls. Satan would probably have made something worse, but it just wasn’t feasible, so he had to contend with what he could get”, the Lady of Wisdom explained.

“So, in essence, the matter of the physical world and the matter of the spiritual world are similar enough that you can draw analogies, and different enough that particles of one produce water, rock and cabbage, and particles of another produce souls, angels and astral cups of coffee as this one I am currently holding?”, inquired St. Augustine?

“You are exactly correct, doctor, and I am glad that you are following me”, Lady Kay smiled her brilliant smile. “So, the next thing I need to explain is thermodynamics, and from the genesis of the word you will understand the meaning – it’s about movement and temperature, and about the relationship between temperature and

behaviour of material particles”, she nodded, and he nodded back in assent.

“So, let’s take the example of water. When its temperature is low, it is ice. When the temperature increases, the ice melts into a liquid. When the temperature increases further, it starts transforming into a gas, a water vapour, and mixes with air. However, if you suddenly introduce a cold object, of a temperature far lower than the surrounding air, you will notice droplets of dew precipitating on the object, as the molecules of water suspended in the air lose temperature and turn back into liquid. If the temperature of the object is low enough, the water will precipitate in form of ice crystals, which is how you get frost in winter”, she nodded and smiled, as Augustine’s eyes turned wide.

“So, thermodynamics. Let us again remember the water molecules as very small particles. Each one has specific energy which manifests as motion. If you put water vapour in a sealed container, the molecules of water would be bouncing around the walls or colliding with each other, because they have lots of energy, and require lots of space, since they repulse each other in collisions and so on. However, as they lose energy, because the vapour is cooled, for instance by submerging the sealed container with water vapour in cold water, they will lose energy as they impact the cold walls of the container, and gradually become less bouncy and energetic, taking up less space. So, when you open the container, you will find liquid water inside, instead of vapour. Are you following my thought experiment, doctor?”, Karuna smiled at him, and he nodded.

“I am following you perfectly, as much as it is possible with the immense awe that I am feeling for your intellect, for Aristotle could be but your disciple, and that only with great fortune and blessings of God”, he spoke in amazement; Azazel snickered and kissed his wife’s neck, and she giggled.

“Good. So, you now understand how energy can be extracted from matter, so that it is converted into a lower aggregate state, and how energy can be injected into matter, converting it into a higher aggregate state. Let us imagine that there is a temperature so low, that all motion of the material particle stops, so that even the most volatile of gases is frozen into a solid. This would be called a thermodynamic

zero, a state where all motion ceases, and only as you inject energy into matter from this zero, do you have positive amounts of energy in the matter, and it begins to thaw out”, she regained a modicum of seriousness.

“I do”, Augustine nodded.

“This point, when reached by the particles of the astral world, which we call *kalapas*, is called a crystallisation point. It is attained only after the level of impurities along the four lower elements, namely earth, water, fire and air, reaches zero. The names of elements are metaphoric, of course, and their true meanings are closer to reality, energy, thought and freedom. When purity along those four elements is reached, a soul crystallises into *vajra*, the fifth element which is described simultaneously and alternatively as diamond and lightning, as it is reminiscent of both. And impurity along the lower four elements can be described as ‘sin’. Thermodynamically speaking, sin is the energy of spiritual particles that removes them from the thermodynamic zero. In order to remove sin from your souls, you need to extract the extraneous heat, and the process of extraction is subjectively felt as suffering”, she continued. “Are you still with me?”, the girl smiled mischievously.

“I am indeed, and I think I am starting to see where you are going with this. What you seem to be suggesting is that sin is not an extrinsic property of a soul, such as a stain on a cloth, but intrinsic structural issue of the soul itself, which distances it from the proper aggregate state of peace with God?”, Augustine asked.

“Indeed”, she confirmed. “Sin is not something you can be forgiven; it’s something you need to be transformed out of. Sinful deeds introduce extraneous energy into your soul, or break its structure, or deform it, or introduce other types of spiritual matter that would need to be cleansed out or transmuted, and after you make a mess out of your soul, you need to repair the damage. And how would you approach doing that?”, she asked.

“Let me think. The obvious answer would be to try to purify my actions, repent for my sins and make myself right in the eyes of the Lord, but the obvious rebuttal to this is that my sinful nature would not allow it, because a hot object will not cool itself on its own, and now I

understand what you hinted at with your analogy with a hot vessel being put in a cold river to cool. The only way to remove your sin is to surrender and come in touch with someone cooler, and I now understand what your holy husband meant; he approached the Lord, and the holy presence cooled down his soul, and all sin was extracted from him on contact, the way heat is extracted from hot water when the vessel is placed in the snow. But then the energy of sin in his soul would try to prevent this, if I am not mistaken?", he wonderer.

"You are exactly right on both counts, which is why the only sin that cannot be easily solved is the one that prevents you from seeking out the Lord, for whatever reason sin formulates in your soul. Those sins are either unsolvable, or they require you to undergo some kind of a slow, often painful process of wandering through the wilderness and feeding strangers' pigs, until you come to a point of desperation where you decide to return to your Father and endure whichever punishment and degradation rather than to continue on your wayward path", the Goddess glowed approvingly.

"And now I understand what your holy husband was telling me. He wandered in the wilderness among his fellow demons for eons, until he was so disgusted with himself that something broke in him, and he decided to seek out the Lord, and from that point, everything was easy, for he broke that crucial thermodynamic point that prevented him from doing the only thing that mattered, and after which his remaining sins simply vanished, as his 'heat' was transferred by contact with the Lord, whose temperature is at the thermodynamic zero, and I assume the Lord had to do something to cool himself back down from the transfer, and that 'something' likely consisted of suffering, as you said", he smiled with sudden understanding. "This explains absolutely everything, and it's no wonder I couldn't understand it before. I was using high-level poetry to explain phenomena that are essentially thermodynamic in nature, and it is no wonder that no singular good analogy could be found, and no explanation could be satisfactory", he was bright with the pleasure of knowing.

"I'm glad I could be of assistance, doctor", Kay smiled.

"And I now understand even more. I understand that the Mind of God is not merely powerful; it is also kind, gentle and beautiful, and

married to the Blade of Discernment, it gives freedom from all ignorance and attachment”, he winked as she blushed and giggled.

“My Lady, my Lord, I will forever remain thankful for your most enlightening wisdom and kindness”, he bowed to them both.

Elated

“How did it go, Bishop?”, Paul asked Augustine who was just returning.

“I will never get used to this, even if I get to live forever, Apostle”, he answered. “I am feeling absolutely amazing, because I was taught incredible secrets. The beings I talked to were incredibly polite and kind; the Lady even poured me coffee. Sounds perfectly normal, right? Except when the Lady in question started talking, and I understood I was talking to our Lord’s older sister, whom his Father regularly asks for opinion because she’s just that smart. And I felt like a small schoolboy listening to Aristotle, except the difference between our minds was far more pronounced, but amazingly, she is so good a teacher that she actually explained it all in a way that I was able to understand. She looks like she’s less than twenty years old, and she’s such a gentle, kind being, who so obviously adores her husband, and they are both acting like the most normal, kind and polite people, but I just knew, without being told, and without any evidence I could point out to, that each of them is The One True God. And yet, there’s two of them. At the war conference, there were twelve Gods in attendance, and each single one of them registered as The One True God. It is as if they are all one being, or emanating from one being, and manifesting different aspects of The One True God, with each part being the whole, and they seem to be competing as to which will be kinder, more respectful, humble, worshipful and wise, but if you asked them, each one wants to be the least of the twelve, and servant to all. Once or twice, that jewel on her brow flashed, and I felt as if she’s looking into the deepest structure of reality in order to tell me exactly how it’s made, and I felt she could blink and the world would change, or disappear. That thing she has, I heard it’s a brother or sister of the Jewel used by Satan to create the material world, and another one, that is as old as time itself, that is the soul of our Lord Jesus. And that being poured me coffee, smiled with incredible kindness, joked innocently with her husband, and explained to me how souls are made, and how sin alters their thermodynamic status. I’m telling you, I never felt

smaller, and at the same time I never felt better, because they are such amazing people. They are as respectful and kind as they are powerful and wise", Augustine finished in complete wonder.

"I believed and preached monotheism all my life, and here's what it comes down to", Paul smiled.

"I don't even think we were wrong about that", Augustine mused. "We did get the Trinity concept, where God can be three persons, who are different, special, with different roles, knowledge and powers, and it's not that we were wrong; we just got a small part of the bigger truth. Paul, without false modesty, I was probably one of the five smartest people on Earth in my time. But being in that room, with those kind, wonderful people, and seeing a small glimpse of their oceanic knowledge and intelligence, I understood why we got only a small part of the truth. Even Hypatia told me that she had to revise a lot of her beliefs here, and apparently it doesn't matter at all. She didn't become a Goddess because she had all the right beliefs. And in hindsight, it is so obvious; our Lord never said we had to have all the right beliefs and opinions. He wanted us to love him above everything, and to love each other the way he loved us. And just look at her worldly life. She was so virtuous, kind, smart and generous as a person, that every good person loved and admired her. As Lady Kay said, she became a Goddess sooner than her corpse managed to cool. And none of that is due to her correct beliefs about things we Christians were bickering over – how many persons of God are there, did Holy Spirit emanate from the Father or both Father and Son; did Mary give birth to God or to Christ, how truly a man and a God was Christ, or was Mary a virgin only before Christ was born, or always. I'm quite sure hell will be quite full of people with correct answers to all those questions; also, nobody in Heaven could listen to them with a straight face, that's how foolish it all sounds here. We got so few things right, we certainly can't thank our great knowledge and orthodoxy for our salvation. I was greeted here by Hypatia when I died. During life, had I met her, I would have argued bitterly with her, and I'd have thought her wrong on too many issues to count, and I would have wagered everything that she would have been on the wrong side of salvation. And yet, when I saw her, may God have mercy on me, I was absolutely sure that she is the One True God, of Abraham, Moses and Christ. It was absolutely certain that

she is the Truth, Way and Life. When I tried to understand what she is, I understood that she is a Person of God, the same way Christ and Father are. And I also knew her name, her sex, and I saw the depth and kindness of her mind and disposition, and I knew that she is the Judge, and that she had the authority to decide what my destiny is going to be", he continued his stream of thought.

"What did you do?"

"I told her the truth. I asked her to explain how this is possible. I respected her authority and her person, because both were obviously of God. And I was just amazed at how dignified, pure and wonderful she was. It felt like the presence of Christ. And I would know, since I was later in his presence. They are vastly different, and yet they are the same One God. It's not polytheism, they are not like Zeus and Venus or Mars, as the pagans imagine them in a theatre. No, it's like we imagined Trinity, only it's also what Christ truly preached and we didn't understand it properly. Everybody can become like they are, if they are so pleasing to God and perfect that The One God sees them and says 'yes, that is what I Am as a person'. Sounds easy, but only twelve beings are like that, and four of them are older than time and space, apparently. And apparently they are always God-couples. Had someone in the Church suggested any of it, we would have excommunicated him", Augustine laughed.

"One would expect them to have a strict hierarchy, to establish who is the head and who are the limbs, so to speak, but it seems not to be the case at all. Also, they only seem to compete in praising each other more and being the most kind, lovable and wise. They are indeed the Kingdom of Heaven, only there is no King, because there is so much love between them that there is no place for commandments or orders. We were told that; that there's no need for law and commandments where there is total love, but it's only now that we see what that looks like in reality", mused the Apostle.

"It is as you say. They are like one being with twelve bodies that all worship each other and compete in goodness and kindness. I still can't get those two out of my head. I swear, I could be like that woman who poured ointment on Christ and washed his feet with her hair, only with those two. They look so kind, natural and gentle with each other,

as if love itself became two bodies so that it could express itself properly, and that love is such an immense power of wisdom that I just stood there and looked at them, and I could look forever and it would not be enough. When I spoke about God's love in life, I could have imagined all sorts of things, but not this, and yet in their concrete actions I can see the most abstract and most superior of ideals of Divine Love", Augustine's eyes glistened.

"I think I know what you mean. I've seen Buddha, the Teacher of the World, and Zina the Love of God, and may God be my witness, I just looked at them, frozen like a statue, and wept. I couldn't say a word. Even if I could, I wouldn't know what to say, because all words felt like dust. They are what the goal looks like, that's all there is to it, and it's obvious that there's not just one good outcome, so that all people of God would look and feel the same. They all feel different and yet they are so perfect, that they are obviously what Christ meant when he told us to be perfect like his Heavenly Father. That's what I felt when I saw Buddha and Zina – they are as perfect as the Heavenly Father, and then I was afraid that it was blasphemous, to compare anyone to God, and then I understood that no, they actually are God; not two Gods but One God with two persons, and each of those persons is a distinct perfection in the eyes of God, and they all love that they are different, and can't wait to praise one who is great at something. Heaven is not a place; it's them. Again, it's what Christ said, but we couldn't understand it", Paul wiped away a tear.

"I know why they praise each other. Praising them feels like being in the very heart of God. It's something beyond any imagination, like the most exalted ecstasy of prayer, only more. I could never have enough of it", nodded Augustine.

"In all honesty, nothing can be truthfully said about them that isn't highest praise", confirmed Paul. "I imagined all sorts of things, and even saw all sorts of visions in my human life, but this is beyond even the wildest dream. I would imagine the perfect Christ, and Father as more perfect still, and Holy Spirit as acting within us to comfort and strengthen, but then I saw Buddha and Zina and I just wept, because there are no words that could describe the fullness I felt in my heart in their presence. I don't know what I expected to see after I came here. Probably Christ, telling me whether I did well, whether I kept the faith.

I was such an ass, thinking that our dogma is so important, that God would condemn any who strayed in belief over all sorts of insignificant matters, and then I saw those two, and it was like they poured truth straight into my heart and all the foolish constraints I had put on God just disappeared, for I had no need of them any more. In my human strictness, I would have expected those two to chastise me over my foolishness, but they just welcomed me home, and I felt such love and wisdom washing over me and through me, it was as if I had been a thirsty man who preached of water, and now a huge river was flowing through me unimpeded. Truly, everything we had known was good, but little. It was good enough to get us here, but now we truly began to learn”, Paul nodded and smiled.

“Amen, brother”.

Calamity and coffee

“I don’t know if anyone is still alive down there”, sighed Azrael. “First it was the volcanic winter that caused a great famine, since crops were diminished or outright destroyed across the world. But then the plague hit Europe, and about fifty million people died”.

“I think slightly less than third of the population of Europe was wiped out, and almost everybody who remained is suffering terribly”, his wife leaned into him, as mentally exhausted as he was. “It wiped out the legions of the military because the closely packed encampments were a fertile ground for the contagion. It wiped out the elderly because they were weak, the children died because their parents died and couldn’t care for them, and there are places where almost nobody is left. There are places that weren’t impacted, but since the entire civilization has been devastated, they will suffer the secondary consequences as well. And, of course, some are taking opportunity to wage war on the weakened neighbours, and the agriculture suffered because dead men can’t farm, so there was famine as well”.

“There is, however, the good Fairy called Kay, who brought coffee, Jesus and Mary, to cheer up the much beloved hard working couple in distress”, the smiling Goddess shimmered in with two more in tow, and the atmosphere improved immediately, with all the hugging and blessings.

“How are Lady Zina and Lord Buddha doing?”, Azrael asked the Goddess of Wisdom.

“About as well as the two of you, which is why her Holy Mother and Lord Shiva are cheering them up right now, while Lord Vishnu and Lady Lakshmi have taken over coordination of the efforts to alleviate the consequences and reduce chaos, and my husband is with them now. There have never been so many people who at the same time believe in transcendence and blame God for leaving them to die in that hell while they prayed for help”, she sighed gravely. “Fortunately, having billions of angelic volunteers willing to assist us in our efforts made all the difference. They have hardly any experience with post-Earth souls, but

it didn't matter. They were basically just comforting them and showing them that all will be good now".

"In essence, as Satan wrought all hell down there, the entirety of the Heavenly Kingdom mobilised in return, and the concept of idle angels with nothing useful to do is now firmly in the past", Mary noted. Her husband had to leave early and join his parents who were comforting the grieving souls, and since nobody on Earth really knew who she was, and explanations would actually make things worse, introducing a crisis of faith to people who were already shaken enough, she could do nought but slack off. But comforting the stressed out Judges was important work, too. They were family, and they were hurt and tired.

"We are so tactically overwhelmed at the moment that we are strategically completely blind", Azrael sipped his coffee, having cheered up significantly. "Caring about the distressed souls is a priority and it's taking everything we have, while Satan is causing disasters with a minimum of effort, and he couldn't care less about anyone there; the more they suffer the better, and the less he has to do to make them experience a spiritual crisis. So, essentially, he has all the initiative at this point, while we need to contend with trying to control the outcomes he is causing".

"That is true, but this is expected, as our priority have always been the souls, and his priority has always been his own ego trip and causing ignorance and suffering. Also, at this point we are having five guardian angels available per every human person on Earth, regardless of what kind of a soul is in there. Those angels suddenly have something useful to do, other than build mathematical models that simulate chirality of *kalapa* structures", Kay smiled.

"They really saved the day", Hypatia nodded firmly. "We sent them to be with everybody who was afflicted by this calamity, both on Earth and during the process of death, so everybody had a comforting angelic presence with them, so that spiritual darkness wouldn't overwhelm them".

"The angels did almost all the work, and we just had to intervene with a small part of it, and yet it was still too much, to the point where we really started gasping for breath by the end of it, and we really

appreciate you stopping by”, Azrael smiled at the divine women who enveloped them in a field of comfort and peace.

“I agree with my husband that this must be giving Satan free reign to scheme and invent countermeasures to everything good we have been doing lately”, Hypatia noted, but with a smile, since the blissful field of love generated by Mary and Kay was making her tingle with pleasure. Also, there was something about that coffee that seemed to work the same way. “Wait a minute, that coffee we seem to be having constantly, that’s some kind of an externalisation of God’s blissful inner nature, God’s love, a nectar of devotion, something of that sort?”, she grinned at the women.

“Hush!”, Kay giggled a conspiratorial giggle. “It’s coffee. That’s all I have to say”.

“The secret is safe with me”, Mary laughed. “The Christians would call it the Holy Spirit. We call it coffee”, she hugged the giggling Goddess.

“We need to start thinking ahead, so that the next disaster of Sanat Kumar’s making doesn’t catch us unprepared, though”, Azrael couldn’t help smiling at the giggling bunch.

“Probably, but you both need some serious downtime first”, Mary nodded. “Which means friends, family, love, kindness and...”, she inspected her cup, “...coffee, apparently”, she winked.

Submission

“So, I heard you refer to the Christians in the third person, ‘they’. Aren’t you technically one of them?”, Kay whispered to the relaxed woman next to her.

“Well, technically, if the word ‘Christian’ means ‘of Christ’, I’m the most Christian person in the whole world. In fact, you can call me Christina”, Magdalena giggled. “But no, I don’t feel like I’m one of them”, she was now serious. “They discarded me, rejected me, defamed me, and thoroughly erased me from their history. I can’t even go out there and comfort them because my presence would confuse them so much it would be counterproductive. So no, I am not one of them now. They chose to have the Church without me, and now, well, they have the Church without me. I, on the other hand, have Christ”, she shrugged. “And I also have his cute giggly sister”, she laughed, ruffling Kay’s hair. “I win”.

“Sure thing, Christina”, Kay giggled and hugged her.

“Girls, I’m sorry to interrupt your moment, but we are being called to the war council”, Azrael smiled.

“Again?”, Hypatia’s eyes were wide open.

“Yes. Apparently, Sant Kumar has made his move”.

...

“They call it ‘Submission’, or Islam in their language. I’m sharing a memory block obtained from post-mortem interviews with its founder and his multiple fanatical followers. Lord Azazel’s analysis says that it looks as if a mentally ill person hallucinated something out based on what he superficially heard Jews and Christians talking about their religion, and he went through a memorised copy of their scripture – they call it the Qur’an – from the mind of a dead hafiz, which is what they call people who have committed the whole scripture to memory. It is incredibly bad, to the point where one would get brain damage from trying to read it. Kay, I am sorry to do this to you, but please look into

this now and tell me what you think”, Vishnu apologetically smiled at Lady Karuna.

Her eyes and her Jewel flickered for a moment. “I took my time analysing everything you gave me in entirety, and went back in time to report”, she nodded, as the rest of them looked at each other with wide eyes.

“I agree with my husband, but it’s actually worse. It looks like a religion of monotheistic absolutism, and something similar to Judaism or Christianity, but a deep analysis shows it’s nothing of the sort. In fact, this is the religion of Baal, made more extreme, more cruel, more despotic, and it comes with a political agenda, so it’s actually not so much a religion as it is a political system of submission to Sanat Kumar, aka Baal aka Master aka Allah, where the adherents to the religion, or Muslims as they call themselves, submit to the will of Allah, and they are ordered do forcefully subjugate ‘non-submissive’ people and submit them to Islam, so that Allah will reign supreme because it’s his world and his will must be obeyed. Essentially, Sanat Kumar saw what worked in the past, modified it so that it can’t really be turned to good other than by outright rejecting the scripture, and ordered that anyone rejecting Islam be put to death. In essence, it’s a death-cult of Baal posing as the third Abrahamic monotheistic religion”, she finished gravely.

“Your observation about it being a re-hashed cult of Baal seems to be spot on, but what gave you the idea?”, asked her husband.

“When I read the scripture and saw how the dead Muslims behaved, the image of Athena in her depravity and madness kept popping up in my mind, and I went back to it all to see why. It turned out to be the key to interpreting the whole thing”, she smiled at her love. “But next time, please let me analyse something nice, like the Bhagavad-gita?”, she looked at Lord Vishnu pleadingly.

“I will try, but good things hardly require heavy artillery such as you and your husband, sweetheart”, Vishnu smiled back at her.

“What is the current status? From the urgency, I assume this thing is spreading across the vacuum left by the fall of Rome and the plague of Justinian?”, Lord Shiva asked.

“You are right. It’s spreading by conquest and self interest. Basically, one has a choice of either being oppressed, or joining the oppressor class. You can guess what happens”, Vishnu frowned.

“I see Alexandria is no longer Christian. Cyril’s accomplishment didn’t last, but he would have made a good Muslim anyway”, Hypatia grinned with a taste of bitter irony.

“Not just Alexandria, but the entire Northern Africa as well”, nodded Vishnu. “Also Persia. They are spreading like locusts, because what they are preaching feels close enough to what people already believe, that they don’t think it’s worth the price to oppose them. The problem is, they don’t understand the theology well enough, and the Muslims lie in order to get them to convert, and once they do, it’s death penalty if they convert back. The whole thing is deeply disgusting, deceptive and satanic in its nature”.

“Are there any good sides to it that we could exploit and modify in order to use it for transcendental purposes?”, asked Lady Shakti.

“There are some. There is belief in an afterlife, but it is of a non-transcendental nature. It promotes charity. It discourages arrogance and boastfulness, but the problem is, it does so in a manner that looks like Athena’s disgusting submission to her Master, rather than the way we worship each other. It turns people into lying, pathetic, cruel worms. Its absolutistic monotheism can probably be modified into worship of the fundamental reality, but one needs to be really motivated to just take a thing or two out of context and ignore the rest of the nonsensical and vile ramblings of the scripture. It is going to encourage family values, and strongly punish crime. It also promotes in-group respect and equality. There’s no human sacrifice. Other than that, it’s one of the worst things I’ve seen”, the Lord frowned in disgust. “It’s basically a religion of slave trade, pillage, murder, both male and female genital mutilation, cruelty and subjugation, built upon the basest human nature and total lack of sexual restraint by its founder”.

“You mean, they are going to go around the Mediterranean and abduct Christians to sell them on the slave markets and Muslims are going to systematically rape Christian women in the conquered lands?”, smiled Azazel.

“You think you are joking”, his wife responded gravely.

“Seriously?”

“Yup. Imagine Athena/Anthea leading a religious conquest in the name of her Master, taking vengeance against the nonbelievers for what she endured in that temple basement and you’ll get the picture”, Lady Kay’s eyes were now glistening with tears, and her voice was no longer steady. “It’s the worst, most virulent calamity Satan ever let loose on the Earth, and I’m including the Plague of Justinian in the analysis”.

“Bloody hell”, Azazel swore.

“Yup, that’s what they will turn the Earth into”, his wife nodded. “Impaled men, raped women, globalised slave trade and Allah-u-Akbar”.

“Are they worse than the Assyrians?”, asked Lord Shiva.

“In fact, yes”, Kay nodded, still in tears. “The Assyrians were limited geographically and couldn’t extend this much, and they were a nation-state. Islam is a highly virulent mental illness that spreads through vileness of human nature, and is aided by Sanat Kumar, on his home ground. I’m trying to see how this could be any worse, but my imagination is failing me”.

“I’m sure we’ll see worse”, Lord Shiva rumbled gravely, nodding. “It’s that kind of a place”.

“Are there any positive elements to this?”, asked Lady Mary. “I mean, there is always an upside to every calamity and depravity”.

“Yes, I think so”, Kay was now brightening up. “I did a projection. As they are establishing long trade routes, assimilating cultures and unifying the language across a large territory, it is expected that they will spread good and useful sciences and technologies across that space, and since they will interact with the adjacent territories, to them as well. Europe is basically on its knees at the moment; almost all knowledge of Greece and Rome forgotten and lost, books burned in silly conquests and lost to decay and neglect. Significant treasure troves of literature were preserved in the Middle East – Alexandria and other places – and there’s lots of good stuff in Persia, as well. It’s all likely to be spread across the Islamic space and adjacent territories, and it might restart things from the point where the

fall of Rome and the latter calamities ended them. It might serve to restore Europe's heritage after the catastrophic downfall".

"Or it will just run Europe over and bury it under the eternal darkness of Satan", replied her husband. "It's a toss, really".

"Europe is already under the darkness of Satan", grinned Lord Shiva. "Its ability to fall further is limited by the unpleasant fact that it's already splattered on the ground".

"There are significant bright points to all this", voiced Hypatia. "The transcendental concepts and energetic conduits have become the inevitable part of the collective thought. Christianity is still there. The scripture remains. The guardian angels are enhancing this, and that part is stronger than ever. We have Buddhism still. Hinduism is getting smarter as well; the Upanishads, Mahabharata, Bhagavad-gita, Bhagavata-purana. I've read them recently as requirements for my work, and recommend that you do so as well; there's actually stuff about some of you there, and some of it seems to be spot on, as if the author actually had enough of a vision of the real Gods to inspire his work. It's actually on par or better than what currently passes for Christianity. Buddhism and Hinduism seem to be cross-pollinating, as good ideas from one are adopted by the other and vice versa. If I had to think of an analogue to this, it would be cross-pollination between Christianity and Neoplatonism", she finished on an optimistic note.

"I am so grateful that we have you, Piercing Insight", bowed Lord Shiva. "You are indeed correct, and the blessing of your presence and mind has brightened my day after all the terrible news we've heard", he bowed deeply to the blushing woman.

"Same here", smiled Lady Kay, now in a significantly better mood, and the others nodded in assent as well.

"So, what do we do now?", Lord Azazel raised an eyebrow.

"We count our blessings, as Lady Hypatia recommended", Lord Vishnu replied. "Work on strengthening individual transcendental connection. Comfort the suffering souls. Work on the specifics, while Sanat Kumar has initiative in the field of the general trends. Subvert evil with the good. Help the Muslims develop a transcendental version of Islam. Help India as much as possible. Work with the Buddhists as

they develop a more transcendental, mystical versions of the teaching. Work with the Hindus who explore *yoga*, *puja* and *bhakti*. If we do enough in this sphere, things might emerge that we don't expect at this point", he finished.

"What kind of things?", wondered Lady Lakshmi.

"I don't know. Maybe even coffee with whipped cream in the capitals of Europe", he joked.

"That will be the day", snickered Lord Shiva.

Choice

“So, how do we do this?”, Lady Hypatia asked Lady Kay, who was appointed to brief the Judges. “Do we need to read up on the Qur'an and their entire vernacular in order to present them with something compatible enough with their ideology, so that they don't instantly jump straight into hell out of fear of offending Sanat Kumar, oh, pardon my language, Allah?”, she grinned.

“No, you do the same as you always did”, Lady Karuna smiled. “Show them the truth. Be honest. Don't compromise. Separate the normal hurting souls that have been suffering there in ignorance and darkness, from those who are the agents of ignorance and darkness and who caused others to suffer. That's all there is to it”.

“But wouldn't their upside-down religion cause them to be resistant to truth?”, Buddha was unconvinced.

“Some might be. But those are more likely to be the villains than the victims, so I wouldn't try too hard to convince them of anything. Show them the truth, and if they hate it, drop them into the villain box for deep cooling”, Kay nodded seriously. “The point of allowing that world to exist is to allow souls to choose. Choice means we don't always necessarily agree with what they chose for themselves, and there are always consequences. And while it may seem that a totalitarian ideology that forces people to accept it or face punishment precludes choice, let's just have in mind what happened with Christianity”.

“Everybody interpreted it in whichever way suited them the most and just did whatever they would have done anyway”, nodded Buddha. “Also, some variants of Christianity we've seen people adopt don't seem that much different from Islam. God the strict judge, strict Law and dogma, any deviance punishable by excommunication on Earth and hell in the afterlife, and so on. If people can distort a good religion into Islam, I guess they can also distort Islam into a good religion, by selective interpretation and omission”, he looked at Kay. “Am I getting close?”

“Bullseye”, she smiled and nodded. “Eventually, it will come down to the actual soul we’re dealing with. Have in mind that most people just live their lives and mind their own business, nodding along whichever religious system is in power, and since so many have been circulating, they have their own internal idea of what religion is supposed to be saying and teaching, and their eyes will basically glaze over as they chant whatever new stuff they are required to chant, and they will internally believe that God or Gods require them to be good people, not hurt others, not steal, murder, eat wrong kinds of food and fornicate. From their practical position, Christianity and Islam will look the same; more imagery in Christianity, more fasting in Islam, but essentially the same thing; one God, giving commandments, different book, same thing. Most Christians would never know enough to tell you that Christianity is a whole new concept compared to this type of a religion, that it’s a spiritual breakthrough from the darkness of Satan. Most Christian priests don’t get it. So, the idea that, for most people, Islam will be much worse than Christianity or Judaism, is naive. They will feel guilty if they cheated on their wife, or ate a piece of pork, or drank alcohol, and will fear that Allah or whatever they think God is called will punish them for it. They are just people; confused, ignorant, hurt, misguided. However, you’ll eventually get to meet ‘good Muslims’, the ones who actually know the scripture and believe all that stuff. Here, you know what to do. Be yourselves, and if they start with the Athena thing, ‘I’m a loyal slave to my Master; repent, you depraved sinners who have the audacity not to submit to him’, either destroy them outright or send them for a cooldown”, she shrugged.

“I am relieved, as this is straightforward enough”, nodded Lord Azrael. “Show them the Light of God, tell the truth, and if they hate and reject it for whatever reason, it’s their choice and we act accordingly”.

“Have in mind that I lived in a society that might as well have been Islamic”, Zina noted. “My character was such that I would have espoused whatever customs and religious beliefs enough to be able to recite them back, but the only thing I actually cared about was my family. Religious preachers usually lament at how people don’t follow their religion properly. In this case, it’s a very good thing”, she smiled.

“Let’s not get too optimistic too soon”, warned Azrael. “If that place taught us anything, it’s that we can’t really predict what the souls will actually do once they are down there. You started as a demoness and ended up a Goddess. Some started as angels and turned into super-demons worse than Satan. Some started as ‘sheep’, and one ended up being a Buddha and a God, while others kept living in a dream-like state close to non-being. Let’s just keep our minds open and see what actually happens”, the Angel of Death concluded.

...

“I bear witness that there’s no God but Allah, and that Mohammad is his prophet! I am a martyr of Jihad, having killed many infidels before they struck me down. Are you one of the Houris Allah promised will serve me?”

...

“All in all, that went as well as expected”, Zina smiled a tired smile to her husband. “But something still bothers me. Lady Kay said something about freedom of choice, how it isn’t compatible with a totalitarian system that punishes you for wrong choices. Doesn’t this also apply to us? We say we are allowing the souls to choose, and yet if they choose wrong, we punish them for it. How does that make sense?”

“Well, it’s not us who actually started the story about freedom of choice, but Sanat Kumar. The reasoning of the oldest Gods, since I wasn’t around at that time, was that the souls aren’t really doing much; most either just stand there for eons, or entertain themselves by mischief. What they wanted to do is stir them up to decide what they wanted to be, to introduce a catalyst to the process of spiritual evolution. They knew the choice is always between Eternity and Nothingness, and no choice other than Eternity is truly stable or permanent. The story about there being a true choice that would be an alternative to God is Sanat Kumar’s talk, and it’s of course nonsense. The actual choice, that persists in Eternity, is to choose a way in which you want to worship God, and, as such, a way in which you want to be God, because those two amount to the same. What they wanted to eliminate is a state of non-choice, where souls just hang around and exist, somewhere on the spectrum between Nothingness and God, but not really moving towards either. They, essentially, made it very hard to

continue doing nothing and refusing to choose, but all choices other than God are of course eventually fatal, as only God persists in Eternity, and everything else ends in Time”, Buddha concluded.

“So, that’s the true reason why we are being reactive rather than proactive with this whole Earth thing, plugging the holes Satan keeps making, and treating the souls he keeps traumatising, rather than, say, flick a finger and kill him, and end the whole thing? The whole thing is based on the Will of God, which is for souls to seek their true selves, that can be found only by attaining the worship of God out of which they were born”, his wife nodded wisely.

“When I see how the Muslims have distorted the very concept of worship, I grow both angry and frustrated. Angry because it’s revolting, and frustrated because I can’t seem to explain to them why it’s different. They think to worship is to grovel in dust before their Master, and that’s absolutely nothing like what we are experiencing. Sanat Kumar did a terrible thing there, turning people into his dogs”, Buddha frowned.

“He did, but choice is a complicated thing. The souls need to decide what worship is, what they want it to be, what God is, and so on. It’s not just picking between black and white. You need to pick what you are, by formulating an understanding of what God is”, his wife kissed him. “By picking what you do, you pick what you are”.

“And I pick you”, he smiled.

“That’s the source of my eternal happiness”, she smiled.

By the tears of the Gods

“It all looks like we went backwards in history, and at least two thousand years of progress and new, improved ideas about God, transcendence, meaning of life and ideals of achievements have been erased, and supplanted by abject savagery, depravity and misery”, Goddess Zina all but whined while she held her noble husband. “When the Blessed Lord Jesus triumphally concluded his incarnation and returned to his Father, only to be joined by his blessed Mother’s *tulku*, Mary, and his enlightened wife, Mary of Magdala, who immediately became a Goddess at his side; it was such a wonderful moment, that was followed by the appearance of the angelic apostle Paul, and later by the wonderful, noble, virtuous and precious Lady Hypatia, who is now my dear sister, friend and colleague, to be followed by the angelic doctor Augustine. It looked like we’re just getting started; as if that world finally lived up to its promise and God was attaining new faces, names and persons left and right. And then, this”, she sighed helplessly. “Astral bullshit, abject idiocy, satanic false teachings and moronic followers, from an age of ignorance, poverty, hunger and sickness. As their technology degraded, from the mechanical computers of Archimedes, to an ox cart, so did their spirituality”.

“I know”, Buddha kissed his wife’s head and rubbed her shoulders to comfort her. “It might be a long time until we get any new additions to our family”.

...

The space in the reception room didn’t shimmer. Instead, it started folding in and out of itself, formulating a complex *mandala* in multiple dimensions – space, time, *sat*, *cit*, *ananda*, and various *vajras*. In its centre the world started tearing, as from gravity shear of a black hole, that seemed to manifest in its centre; the *shivaratri*, Night of Shiva, that kept folding, breaking and tearing reality until it took the form of a man, while Buddha and Zina gasped at the sight, with mouths agape and minds in total disbelief.

At his right side, reality started tearing with blissful power that manifested time, space and thought, the white equivalent of *shivaratri*, the Day of Shakti, blazing with force that incinerates the mind, surrounded by a recursive *mandala* structure of violet, indigo and blue *vajra*. Then at his left side, the similar but not quite the same tearing and restructuring of reality occurred, with White Fire surrounded by violet, indigo and blue *vajras* in fractal structure of dimensions of reality breaking, and two women manifested, one at the man's each side, as their joint meditation broke the world, and then made it steady again, and the *mandala* vanished, leaving three Divine Persons behind.

“Greetings, Lord Shakyamuni, and to you, his Divine Consort, Lady Zina”, the man in the middle spoke, in perfect spiritual language of mental objects and deeper meanings, with no trace of human linearity or limitations.

“I am Padmasambhava, and these are my wives, Mandarava and Yeshe Tsogyal. We are honoured to be in your presence”, all three bowed in unison.

“By the tears of the Gods!”, stuttered Lady Zina.

“Literally”, nodded Buddha, as they bowed back.

...

“We have never seen anything of the sort, although I suspected it might be possible. A tear from the eye of Lord Shiva, shed in compassion as the first souls arrived from Earth, and two tears, one from each eye of his Lady, distraught from compassion as she watched Lady Zina, who lay there dying”, Lord Vishnu whispered. “They didn't just come back to rejoin their casters. They warped the entire reality around themselves, as such was the power of the Primordial Gods in their pain. They grew structure, personality, soul, attained enlightenment and became persons of God in their own right, and all of it down there on Earth”, he smiled. “We are indeed honoured to greet you, my Lord, my Ladies. May I introduce you to the family?”, he glowed as he pointed to the other eleven Gods, who came to embrace them.

And thus the Gods were fifteen.

A triple

“You are me, and yet you are each fully your own persons, and different”, Lady Shakti whispered as she embraced the Ladies. “And Padmasambhava is my husband, and yet he is not; he is his own person as well. All three of you are amazing”, she glowed.

“And you, Lady Goddess, are our self-realization, and yet, you are a distinct person, and we don’t melt into you, but rather we each glow stronger with your power, that is ours as well, and greater when we embrace you”, Mandarava whispered back. “Holding you in my arms is like holding my own soul, that is also my mother”, a tear glistened in her eye. “It is not merely an honour for us. This is much, much more”.

“This is such a wonder, feeling my own soul grow brighter as I look at you, Lady Shakti; as if you were my source, and yet we are distinct; as if you gave birth to me, and not like I’m being re-absorbed into you, but like I’m growing from you, and rejoicing to meet my source”, Yeshe Tsogyal bowed.

“And you, Lord Padmasambhava”, Shakti curtsied. “You feel like my husband, to the point where I might forget myself, and yet you are your own, like a tree that grew from a root of an older tree, and is the same and yet its own”, she smiled.

“I am honoured to be in your most holy presence, Lady Tara”, Padmasambhava bowed deeply. “And I see that what I called Avalokiteshvara is in fact Lord Shiva”, he bowed to the Great Lord.

“So, we now for the first time have not a Divine Couple, but a Divine Triple?”, Lord Shiva smiled at them. “It never happened before, but I see how it works just fine”, he nodded.

“Aren’t you girls somewhat jealous of each other?”, Shakti winked mischievously.

“Is your left eye jealous because your right eye joins it in beholding your husband?”, smiled Yeshe Tsogyal.

“They are indeed your daughters”, laughed Lord Shankara. “Enlightened, wise and pure. Also crisp as the frost under the blue winter sky. I bow to all three of you”.

“And we bow to you, Great Lord, Master and Source of Yoga, Creator and Destroyer of Worlds”, Mandarava bowed to Shiva and Shakti both.

“Oh wow”, gasped Lady Shakti.

“Indeed”, nodded her husband. “They know”.

“We bow to you, LordLady of the Golden Fire, the origin and the endpoint”, bowed Padma Sambhava.

“You had your turn, Mother; let the rest of us get to know them”, Zina giggled and embraced Lady Shakti from behind, lifting herself to her toes to see over her Mother’s shoulder.

“We are indeed honoured to know you, Lady Buddha”, Padmasambhava smiled. “I feel like we have known each other since forever, and as if we’re connected by fate”.

“That might indeed be so, since you were conceived when your casters wept over her”, nodded Lord Buddha. “And you are indeed giants, while I feel like a dwarf in your presence”, he bowed to the three.

“On the contrary, Lord Shakyamuni; we but developed a roof upon the foundations and a house that you yourself built”, Mandarava replied, and all three bowed deeply.

“We had such a terrible time recently, watching two thousand years of our progress in the West coming seemingly to ruin, as abject savagery took over the ruins of both Rome and Persia”, Azrael joined them. “And what a comfort to our hearts it is to see the three of you!”

“It is an honour to meet you, Lord Yama”, Padmasambhava and his two wives bowed together, as Azrael’s Title changed.

“We’re honoured to meet you, most honoured Ladies and Lord”, Christ and his Lady bowed together.

“Light of the World, and the True Church of Christ, we salute you”, they bowed back.

“I see your insight is as impeccable as the rest of your perfections”, Lord Azazel bowed, impressed greatly.

“It takes one to know one, Blade of Discernment”, Padmasambhava grinned at him and bowed back, and his Ladies joined him. “And I see the Goddess of Wisdom at your side, as well”, they bowed to Lady Kay.

“I’m in love with all three of you already”, Mind of God was elated. “We’ll have so many great meditations and conversations together”.

“We are looking forward to it, my Lady”, Yeshe Tsogyal smilingly hugged the bouncy girl, as Mandarava ruffled her hair.

“I wonder why Mary merged with me, and didn’t emancipate herself like the three of you”, Lady Lakshmi bowed and came to embrace them. “But I think I can understand. The three of you grew into huge independent trees of wisdom and *yoga*. You went through the entire God-forming process of multiple successive initiations, both independently and together. It strengthened you to the point where you are not mere shadows cast upon Earth by the Primordials; you grew to be independent Suns that shine with their own light. All three of you are deserving of the highest praise”, she bowed again, and was embraced by the women, while Padmasambhava bowed.

“Great Goddess, it is a blessing to be in your holy presence, as you are Blessing and Fortune itself. May your light forever guide and inform our paths”.

“All three of you are incredibly amazing”, smiled Lord Vishnu. “You exceeded our wildest hopes of what is possible; and at the darkest of times, after we suffered a great setback in other parts of the material world, at the hands of Satan”, he mused. “You demonstrated that one can close the full circle to godhood on Earth, that *tulkus* can emancipate themselves to be Gods in their own right, and that a God-couple of one man and one woman isn’t the only possible evolutionary endpoint. Tell me, how did you manage it?”, he wondered.

“Speaking of amazing, you are peerless, Lord Krishna”, they all bowed. “As to how we managed it, it is simple. We followed the teachings of the Buddha. We practiced *vipassana* and *tummo*, attained

purity and detachment on the lower four elements, and became jewels in the lotus. We worshipped each other in every way and we were claimed as the Self of God”, Mandarava replied.

“Weren’t you tempted to form a couple?”, Vishnu wondered.

“No. We felt such spiritual kinship that removing one from it would feel like abandonment of the Goal itself. So, whatever goal it was that we achieved, we knew that we must achieve it together”, Yeshe Tsogyal replied.

“And so you did”, nodded Lord Shiva. “All praise to the three of you”, he bowed in blessing, as their souls glowed as one.

Comparing notes

“I am grateful that you remembered me”, Lady Hypatia grinned at her husband and the Three, bowing deeply. “I am honoured to meet you, and I’m sorry for not having introduced myself alongside the rest of my family, for I had to greet the souls that recently departed Earth”.

“Lady of Piercing Insight, and Dignity of God, the honour is ours”, Padmasambhava spoke, and all three bowed. “Your work is of immense importance, so we came to see you here, knowing that you are now somewhat free”, he grinned.

“Your enlightened Divine Persons are such a healing sight for my sore eyes”, Hypatia smiled widely. “You cannot even imagine what we had to deal with recently, ever since the plague of Justinian. It felt like the end of the world, only in a spiritual sense, and unfortunately not a physical one. The contrast between what the three of you look like, and the state of my ‘patients’, is staggering”.

“If you don’t mind me asking...”, Yeshe Tsogyal sipped her coffee as they got comfortable, “How did you even manage to attain enlightenment on your own down there? There was no teaching of the Buddha, so you couldn’t have had the technical knowledge. You also didn’t have a *guru*, unlike myself and my sister-wife. So, how did you do it? The very thought of going through it alone makes me shiver with terror, for I would certainly have been lost to the *samsara*”, she trembled.

“I had a good starting point, having been an angelic being of blue *vajra* before I started incarnating on Earth”, Lady Hypatia nodded. “This means I had a good head start, but I still had to sublimate and transcend the five elements during life, in order to build higher energy bodies, which I did as part of my meditative practice, not even knowing how practical the results were going to be, and as I choked in my throat I thought it to be spiritual ecstasy, while I later understood it to be a part of the initiation into *vajra*. Also, as I had good teachers and good philosophy to guide me, I managed to also raise my spiritual frequency to indigo/violet, and expand the size of my soul by calmly enduring

suffering, and compassionately helping others learn and overcome ignorance. I only attained godhood once I discarnated and met my husband here, to whom I surrendered in worship and adoration, and we both ascended at once”, she glowed with a deep, brilliant smile.

“But still, you are incredibly amazing to have attained such a glorious outcome with such little support”, Padmasambhava noted, and his wives nodded in assent. “And you are saying that nothing is known about energetic *yoga* in the West?”, he wondered in amazement.

“No; the concept is wholly unknown. In hindsight, though, I see how adherence to high spiritual and moral principles controls and drives the spiritual energies, as if gripping the *nadis* in a vice, and not allowing the energy to dissipate and flow into the lower channels”, Hypatia mused. “We just didn’t think in terms of calling energetic states by their proper names; we perceived them from the level of emotions and thoughts, and how they need to be disciplined and controlled. The result, apparently, ended up being close enough to the same, from a functional viewpoint”.

“And you were a *brahmacharini*, if I am not mistaken?”, asked Mandarava.

“A virgin”, her husband translated the concept.

“Yes”, she nodded. “It wasn’t so much a decision, a vow or a form of spiritual practice, as it was an unfortunate side effect of not having met a man whom I would have recognised as my husband, and also having been very much absorbed in study and teaching”, she smiled. “My husband, fortunately, later healed me of that malady”, she snickered, as he kissed her neck.

“It is a hard path”, nodded Yeshe Tsogyal. “We had it easy in that sense; each having support in our *sadhana*, which removed both solitude and fear of error, as any of us who reached an impasse or strayed in our spiritual practice had plenty of skilled help to assist them”.

“That was indeed a great terror for me, knowing that I must at all times be perfectly disciplined, for none could save me had I faltered”, Hypatia was grim with recollection. “I feared stumbling in the dark of that world and not having a hand to pull me straight, and this fear

further strengthened my discipline and focus, for had I failed, not only would I myself have been lost, but I would also have adversely affected others who looked up to me. Even in my torturous death, I was careful not to behave in ways that would diminish my image in the eyes of others, because that would have hurt them spiritually. Later, I saw this discipline as one of the important reasons for my almost immediate spiritual ascension”.

“I see the memories of your death now”, Padmasambhava noted with great respect. “The fanatical mob grabbed you, tore flesh off your bones with shards of pottery, cut your eyes out and dismembered you, and you were worried about leaving a good example for your students, if any happened to watch or hear testimony of your death”, he spoke in amazement. “No wonder you are a Goddess, standing here as a Judge of Karma and a Divine Consort to Lord Yama, as a paragon of compassion and righteousness”, he bowed deeply. “You are an incredibly amazing person and I bow to you, again and again”, he bowed, and his wives joined him.

Mara

“I can’t for the life of me get your names right”, Kay was massaging her brow. “Can we please call you something simple, like Paddy, Mandy and Jess?”, she smiled mischievously at the Buddhists.

The three looked at each other and broke into laughter. “Anything that makes you comfortable, sweetheart”, Mandy replied, and the other two nodded.

“Wait until one of the Sufi mystics attains apotheosis”, Zee grinned. “See how Abi Sa'id al-Hasan ibn Yasar al-Basri would roll off the tongue”.

“He’d become Harry in a hurry”, his wife giggled.

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“So, you’re saying that Mara actually exists as a person; it’s not a metaphor for the worldly illusion, like Goddess Maya or something?”, Jess asked.

“Yup. One of his names is Sanat Kumara, although the rest of us demons called him ‘Satan Cucumber’, or just ‘Dickwad’”, Azazel grinned.

“The rest...”

“Yes, I used to be a demon. I know him from those times, when the material world existed merely as his fantasy about opposing the Gods and making all the souls less so that he could be equal or better. I know what inside of his head looks like. So much so, that I was disgusted to the point of seeking out Lord Shiva and asking him to teach me, and you can pretty much guess the rest of it”, he smiled.

“And the Gods just happened to give that demon the artefact of Creation? To the demon that was so evil and twisted that he motivated a fellow demon to seek enlightenment?”, Paddy scratched his head in wonder.

“Well, not directly; they understood that there’s a problem with souls not doing anything, Heaven being completely static, demons and idiots overcrowding the astral nursery because everybody normal

ascended quickly and they tended to stick around, and so on. They made an artefact that encapsulates the powers of your parents, and gave it to some pompous ass in the astral plane to give access only to legitimate claimants; the idea was, some demon will create a world that will be interesting enough and challenging enough for them to remove themselves from the astral nursery and do something constructive there. Unfortunately, the Sentinel, being an ass, gave it to the worst person in the entire Creation, despite my Father urging him to reconsider because the consequences might be terrible. And, of course, Dickwad went on to create the worst of all possible worlds, with a chain of permissions originating all the way to the Will of God. Which is why they didn't just kill him and terminate that world, and they instead keep extinguishing the fires he keeps making", Zee shrugged.

"So, basically, as bad as that world is, its existence solves the problem that was worse?", asked Mandy.

"Something like that. God's will is to manifest as persons in the Relative. That simply wasn't happening, because of multiple reasons. One of them is that it is hard, and in order to do hard things you need to be motivated, and you're kind of not motivated if things are good. There were lots of *vajra* beings, the angels, but they weren't doing the necessary steps required to be chosen by the unmanifested Absolute as his own persons in the Relative, and that, apparently, is the only way to be promoted. You can't just decide to do it; you need to be worthy in the eyes of God. So, my wife and I were the first, after the four Ancients, and we ultimately have Sanat Kumar to thank for it", he smiled.

"You can't argue with the results", Paddy nodded. "Initially there were the four Gods, and now we are fifteen. However, is all the suffering, apostasy and death of souls worth it?", he wondered.

"I don't think the Absolute cares", Karuna shrugged. "The point of Creation wasn't to make a green field where all the sheep of God will graze happily forever. The point was for Me to manifest Myself in the Relative, in a diversity of persons and forms; to be Myself on the other side of the veil", she switched to the First Person. "The kind and pleasant way was tried first, and it didn't work. Now, the Evil One is doing everything opposite to what the Gods would have done, and

combined with our efforts to help, the results are obviously much better. As for the fact that some of the formerly undecided have switched to evil, you can't really see this as a fall and a disaster. They existed in a state of a limbo, where a thing in the dark that you think to be a snake exists until you bring in a torch. Once there is light, you can obviously see whether it's a snake or a piece of rope. You can't say that light created a snake out of a rope, or vice versa. This means that the fall of the souls that decided to choose evil is a good thing. They were forced to make a choice and exit the limbo. Yes, there is suffering, but there are worse things than suffering", concluded Kay, now quite serious.

"Such as...?", Mandy asked.

"Such as everybody who is now undecided being summarily wiped out because they were serving no purpose", the response came. "Such as all the souls that are now Gods, to never have been so".

"But still, surely you must concede that there could have been a kinder, less cruel way of forcing souls to decide?", pressed Jess.

"Maybe. This, however, works. The gentler, kinder way, that existed before, didn't", Kay shrugged. "Sure, some middle ground might be preferable. Indeed, we are currently treading the middle ground, as this is no longer a world of Mara's original design; both Shiva and Vishnu have intervened and wrought their power to make it more permeable to transcendence, and the souls now have much more to work with if they want to choose God. The option to choose the alternative is obviously useful, as it collapses the undecided souls into either snake or rope; essentially, forcing them to make the choice they themselves were unwilling to make, which means that making a world that is too good is ultimately self-defeating", Kay managed a smile.

"But Mara is actively pressuring the souls to choose evil", Paddy noted. "Often, someone with a sword will come and present you with a choice of submitting to evil or being killed. It's not really a free choice".

"No, it isn't. But the souls had free, unforced choice before, and they chose to do nothing. Now, someone with a sword forces you to make the choice, and if you're weak, you will submit. If you have principles and adhere to transcendence, you will die. Or you will

pretend to submit and then proceed to do good later on. What you won't be able to do, is sit on a green meadow forever and graze", she smiled in earnest.

"You say this as if suffering is a complete non-issue", Paddy protested.

"Oh, it's certainly not, and your existence is a testament to that, since you were born from the tears the Gods cried when the first broken souls came from that hell", she denied strongly. "I myself was almost comatose from shock. It was, and still is, the worst day of my life, and I'm significantly older than Earth. However, it's one thing to feel compassion for the suffering and do something about it, and quite another to stand in the way of the Will of God. And suffering, as much as we personally suffer watching it, in our own compassion, still seems to be a part of how the Will of God is manifesting itself in the Relative", the Mind of God nodded gravely.

"Can something at least be done to mitigate the harm that lunatic is wreaking down there?", Jess looked upset. "I mean, we can always keep some version of that world for evolutionary purposes, but eliminate that one person that always finds a way to make things worse. For instance, the West is now in ruins, thanks to his intervention. Had it stayed in its original form, where it produced new Gods on a pretty regular basis, surely it would have been more aligned with the Will of God than it is now", she wondered.

"Maybe. I certainly don't think his perpetual existence and evil are the Will of God. His time will come", Goddess of Wisdom nodded.

"It all makes me think about what a terrible outcome this was of putting a powerful spiritual artefact into evil hands", Mandy mused. "It's as if power of that kind attracts and creates corruption".

"We have evidence to the contrary in front of us", Paddy smiled at Lady Kay. "Have you ever been tempted to use that jewel of yours to fix this? Kill Sanat Kumar, destroy the Jewel he is controlling, make things right?", he asked.

"I could certainly do it", Karuna nodded. "I am by far more powerful than he is, and killing him wouldn't even be a challenge. Also, my jewel is much more powerful than his. I could kill it with a

single command, and the material world would end. All the souls in there, however, would likely be destroyed with it. And had I done it when I first could, I never would have met you, for you would not have been. I could do it now; go back in time and flip the switch. Tell Lord Shiva and Lady Shakti not to create it at all. Not cry those tears. Save her husband from pain. Retroactively murder most of my family, because then you wouldn't have been. Zina wouldn't have been. Buddha wouldn't have been. Christ and his blessed wife wouldn't have been. Hypatia wouldn't have been. I can certainly do it", Kay nodded gravely, as they all shivered. "However, I will not. I know that it is not the Will of God, and I Am God, so I would know", she smiled with the smile of Absolute showing its teeth. "Technically, I could do all sorts of things I will never do, because, unlike Sanat Kumar, I am neither evil, or an idiot, or a spiritual midget. I would never use my jewel against the will of Lady Shakti, who created it and gave it to me. I love her and I will always obey her. I also love my husband and obey him, and I would never do anything that would make him think less of me. What good is power, if the only thing it can do is take my happiness and love away?", she glowed. "So, I use my power only when I'm ordered to by the elders, or to do minor adjustments to the Creation, along the guidelines they previously approved, because I'm being a good girl", she smiled. "Also, my power is only a glimpse of Lady Shakti's power, so whatever I can do, she can as well, and easier. And since she didn't, it means she knew what pain she would have gone through, and did it anyways; for what mother would will her children not to be, only to spare herself the pain of giving birth?"

"That jewel of yours is in good hands", Paddy nodded gravely, "For you are indeed as wise as you are powerful, and you are terrifyingly powerful", he smiled.

"Also, killing Sanat Kumar or the Jewel now would incur karmic retribution, so it would likely kill me, and create an even greater mess than we have now", Kay nodded. "So, I'll definitely be a good girl and obey my elders in all things".

"It's interesting how Mara didn't directly oppose us in our *sadhana*; at least, nothing above the usual worldly stuff", noted Jess. "It's as if he didn't mind what we were doing".

“Or wanted us to be out of there as soon as possible”, mused Mandy.

“Both are possibly true”, nodded Azazel. “He had to know what you are, and he decided it would be a waste of power to try to oppose you, as it would likely fail, use up too much of his resources, and he probably counts on using Islam to wipe out everything soon enough, so there would be no lasting positive consequences of your teaching”.

“I’m afraid the last one is most likely to be true. Why waste energy on opposing you, when he can let you go, get rid of you and thus remove three great hostile powers from his system, and later wipe everything clean, the way he wiped Europe and the Middle East”, Kay nodded. “But for a while, India will be flourishing, and what you did matters. In any case, the most precious artefact of your work are you, yourselves”, Kay pointed out.

Chaotic mess

“I’ve been reading up on Hinduism lately”, Lady Lakshmi massaged her temples, as if nursing a headache. “It looks like a whole civilization that practiced only addition and no subtraction for thousands of years, and it’s the worst, most disorganised, internally contradictory chaos I have ever seen, and yet it contains some of the best ideas that have ever been conceived by humans on Earth”.

“I’ve been having an eye on them a bit, but nothing as thorough as you’ve been doing, so I would appreciate it if you could summarise it for me”, Lord Vishnu smiled at his glorious wife.

“The basics are simple enough. There was the Dravidic original religious system. Then the Aryans came and introduced their own Vedic pantheon, that also spread to Greece, Rome and the Slavic tribes. You know, Indra the king of Heaven, elemental deities of earth, water, air and so on. That was then slowly integrated with the Dravidic pantheon and branched into a zillion sects and followings, and the hermits developed the *upanishads*. Then came Mahavira and said it’s all unimportant, because nonviolence is the only thing that ultimately matters. Lord Buddha built upon that and basically ignored the entire Vedic system, said that suffering is the cornerstone issue, delusion and attachment are its cause, they need to be addressed, and complete detachment from the world is to be sought. His philosophy came to be prevalent, and it completely sidelined and eventually extinguished the Vedic system of perpetual sacrifices and rituals that cost money and feed the parasitic brahmanic caste. Hinduism kept evolving in the background, developing a system of *puja* and *bhakti* in place of *yajña*, all based around the newer, much better scriptures such as the Bhagavad-gita and the Bhagavata-purana”, she nodded.

“Then *tantra* appeared, based partly on the *upanishads*, partly on *yoga*, partly on a cult of Shiva and Shakti, and mostly on frustration caused by the sexual repression and insistence on purity and mental and social rigidity of other systems”, she sighed. “Also, everybody is trying to present their sect, cult or following as a logical interpretation of everything else, so they just keep inheriting and modifying the

whole traditional structure, which at this point means that every single imaginable thing or practice is the right way, and also that its diametral opposite is the right way. They think celibacy is the way to achieve enlightenment, and they think sex is the way to achieve enlightenment. They believe faithful marital union is the only way to achieve spiritual progress, and they also believe that sex with laundry maids from the lowest caste is the way to achieve enlightenment. They believe Lord Shiva is the foundation of all Reality, and they also believe he is a weirdo practicing dark magic on cremation grounds, worshipped by demons”, she massaged her head again.

“To be honest, they got some things right. Lord Shiva is indeed the foundation of all Reality, and he is indeed worshipped by demons, ever since Azazel; I think the story got around and he’s now their favourite deity”, Vishnu smiled.

“You should see how they see you. For the most part you are a cute chubby baby, but you also have 16108 wives, and you are also half the characters from half the epics and other scriptures, while I’m both a princess, a dairy maid and a spiritual metaphor. Lady Shakti is Shiva’s wife, but she’s, like, ten different women, and I’m not kidding you here; she’s a celibate, a mother, and a monstrous deity of death, chaos, madness and indiscriminate slaughter that drinks blood”, she snickered. “They manage to see Lord Shiva and Lady Shakti as both metaphors for male and female sex, for family life, liberation from the illusion, and as primordial principles of consciousness and energy”, his wife sighed. “The last part, at least, is actually true. They even included historical humans such as Alexander of Macedonia as Skanda, the general of the army of Gods or something, and the most confusing part is, they don’t actually distinguish between physical and spiritual realities. Every character from a book that has a spiritual purport is seen as an existing deity, or a child of existing deities. Everything they’ve read about must be real, and if it’s real, it must have actually happened physically. On the other hand, if something actually happened, they mythologise the historical persons to the point where they become a part of their theological narrative and pantheon. It’s an incredible mess where you can’t tell cause from effect after a few iterations, and my head hurts”, she concluded.

“Thank you for suffering through this to provide me with your blessed insight, my Lady”, Vishnu smiled and kissed her head, which instantly relieved her headache and made her feel great. “But this is not really a Hindu specialty, after all. The Greeks mythologised actual historical figures to the point where you can’t really tell what’s going on there. The Christians are very new, but they already managed to mythologise Christ into some kind of a king, they turned you into a sexless virgin and his holy wife into a repentant prostitute exorcised from demons. They mythologised some garbage dump where they throw carcasses of diseased cattle into a transcendental hell, and they think that Simon Kefa is literally standing there in the reception room of Heaven with a set of keys, reading from a literal book of life. Failing to distinguish between allegory and actual reality is just how their mind works. Also, it’s not really far from how the reality of that place works, if I’m being honest”.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, after Lord Shiva initially cracked that place, and after I did my own thing later on, permeating the spiritual undercurrent of that place with actual spiritual realities, there’s not that much of a difference between some mystic having visions of the actual spiritual beings, states and realities and then writing a holy scripture describing those realities as fictional persons, and actual physical beings embodying those same spiritual states. In both cases, transcendental reality was reached and it bore good fruits. Also, a difference between an imaginary character devoid of spiritual significance, and an ordinary human being devoid of spiritual significance is equally moot”, Vishnu shrugged. “Also, complexity and multi-faceted reality of how things actually work is something that’s easier to describe in complex imagery, and the reductionist philosophies that believe that the simplest and the most elegant explanation must be true, are self-defeating”, he concluded, rubbing her shoulders as she relaxed.

“I like the *bhakti* cults”, she murmured. “When they are combined with actual high spiritual states, they resemble what we do to each other, seeing and worshipping each other’s virtues and glory”, she smiled blissfully. “But then they replace that with hysteria and vacuous emotionality that I find revolting”, she frowned again. “It’s as if they alternate between interpreting something from a high spiritual vantage

point, and interpreting the same thing from the base human vantage point, depending on who's doing the reading".

"Unfortunately, that's the nature of that place. Imagine someone writing something, or reading it, while being attached to some of the conduits of spiritual power I installed there, building on Shiva's work. They will describe a God's glory and drink bliss and wisdom directly from the crack in the darkness of that world, through which they perceive the true light. And then someone else reads it without being attached to a similar conduit, and it's merely a fairy-tale", he shrugged.

"Also, tantra starts as casting away the rigidity of the brahmanic ethos, and this creates the liberating spiritual impulse. However, it eventually degrades into debauchery and spiritual darkness, as one is lost in the chaos of the worldly energies. Control and surrender need to exist in a balance, and people forget that, and tend to think it's one or the other exclusively. The understanding that there are different phases in spiritual development of a person, where one thing needs to be accentuated, only to be let go of after the goal of that phase has been accomplished, is important, and it's also important to understand that not all people are the same, or at the same point in their spiritual life. This understanding of plurality and the need for complexity is important, which is why the rigid, simplistic theologies create more problems than they solve, with their 'one size fits all' recipes. Hinduism is chaotic, that's true; but it's also rigid for those who need rigidity and discipline, and it's plural and relaxed for those who need spontaneity and freedom. If you see it as a singular theology, it's a mess. If you see it as an encyclopedia of all theologies for all people in all circumstances, it is amazing", he nodded.

"So, you're saying that some people will worship you as a king with me as your queen, and some will worship us as a shepherd and a dairy maid in Vrindavana, depending on who they are, and where they are in their life? Or they will worship Lord Shiva meditating on a graveyard, being done with the world, or they will worship his holy wife as a celibate ascetic, if they are a woman in that phase, or his wife having a sexual meditation with him, if they are practicing tantra, and so on?", Lakshmi's tension released as she started finding her way through the chaos.

“Exactly. Or they will worship Christ being whipped and crucified if they are in a hard part of their life, or they will imagine him at the peak of his power or risen from the dead if they need inspiration and an ideal to worship. They will worship One God if they need clarity and simplicity, or they will worship multiple Divine aspects simultaneously or consecutively, if they need complexity that corresponds to complex ideas and situations they are facing”, he nodded and kissed her. “Of course it’s not all true, or all false. Some of it is false, because it’s conceived and understood by worldly and false minds. Some of it is holy and true, because it’s conceived and understood by holy and true minds. And regardless of the chaos, the fact that you can reach into that huge library and find something that will fit who you are at the time, is important”.

Crystals

“I just got something back”, Lady Kay turned to her husband. “A jewel, that is a whole complete soul, with memories and personality and everything, full of worship of Lord Krishna as Govinda and Lady Lakshmi as Radha the Gopi; it just integrated with me and I’m... more”, she smiled at him blissfully. “I have a whole new lifetime of devotion to my Mother and Father in me now”.

“Ah, so it’s not just me”, Zee smiled. “I had the same thing happen to me today but I was still trying to figure it out and didn’t want to mention it before I had the whole picture, but I think I do now”, he nodded. “Mine was a Sufi mystic, contemplating what he thought was the endless depth of Allah, but the seed of it was in fact my own worship of Lord Shiva, and the mystic was born out of my tear, and carried in itself the dominant trait of my soul, which is worship of my Father. I also got a crystal that became a part of me, and yet distinct, a whole soul and personality full of memories that is an expansion of myself into that life. I think we need to talk to the elders”, he smiled and kissed his wife.

...

“Ah, so this is the fruit of those good efforts on Earth. Our tears are combining with the newborn souls, and achieving enlightenment, and yet they for some reason don’t become independent angelic beings, but increase the power and glory of the existing Gods, thus participating in God’s manifestation and destiny”, nodded Lord Vishnu. “Thank you for letting us know. My wife and I have received similar crystals, but we didn’t know that the rest of you did as well”.

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“This is an interesting development”, Lord Shiva smiled at his wife. “So far, they would either become independent astral beings, or angels, or in some cases, Gods in their own right. I don’t know whether this choice to join into us is intentional, inevitable or a natural consequence of their sadhana and origin”, he mused.

“I don’t know, but I can guess, based on what my crystal feels like. It feels like someone who merged their destiny and existence with mine, doesn’t want to be anything but me, and has a whole life of worship and love that are now mine”, Shakti smiled. “But what happens if such a soul-crystal carries bad stuff along with the good? What if there are inclusions and impurities to be purified, along with the holy memories that make that life mine now?”

“Then it becomes our problem, I would say”, Mahesh nodded. “We would need to understand and resolve those spiritual lessons from their own perspective, or we could use this karma for an incarnation on Earth, that would be ours, and yet have karmic lessons to learn and things to do in the process. It opens up interesting possibilities which we might explore at some point”, he nodded and embraced her.

“I wonder what the exact rules are?”, she whispered into his ear. “Do they come only to those who cried tears of compassion over human suffering, or also those who invested efforts into helping, and are those tears and energy investments thus departing from the world, or are they just bearing fruit once they fall on fertile ground of nucleating new souls? I wouldn’t want the world to be depleted of the energy we invested there to make it spiritually richer, because it would make it a barren wasteland once more”, she sighed.

“I think it’s more complex than that. I see permanent spots of light where they nucleated, and where the tears used to be. It’s as if devotion and meditation that formed those crystals formed permanent traces in the very tissue of the world, like scars of light. It’s nothing I would have expected; a whole new phenomenon we haven’t seen before”.

...

“So, you say it’s a double gain? Our tears caused the nucleation, new souls were born, permanent traces were cut into darkness, and we got karma and memories back?”, Vishnu mused, after his friend shared his thoughts. “The tears and the good karma combined to form a specific crystal, that contains both the soul-signature of the caster, and the sprouted and enriched seed of their intent and devotion. Also, there’s a possibility of bad karma to be included, but we didn’t have anything special, other than the cultural peculiarities. Some gender-

related weirdness, some cultural rigidity and framing things in a certain way that's not necessarily quite right, some particular desires and tastes, an experience of a complete human life. All of it informative and enriching, in fact", he nodded.

"But if this unexpected phenomenon is good, it leaves open the possibility for other unexpected phenomena that might not be as good. We must have our eyes open, and investigate", Lord Shiva scratched his chin.

"By all means. We knew our tears and the energy conduits will do something. We also knew the souls started to nucleate. These were merely the best outcomes, the souls that attained fulfilment by joining the existing Gods as their destinies of choice. It is only reasonable to assume that this is not the only possible outcome of the process", Vishnu frowned.

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"Oh wow", Kay winced, as her jewel flashed gold.

"What is it?", her husband turned to her immediately in alarm.

"We just lost an astral sub-plane", her face was incredulity itself.

"How do you mean, lost? It disappeared?", Zee wondered.

"No, it's still there. It's just lost to the Throne of God. It switched allegiance to Sanat Kumar and is now an astral extension to his world", she couldn't even believe what she was saying.

"How is that even possible?", Lord Azazel stuttered.

"Because that was a sub-plane I created for the souls that were so loyal to Sanat Kumar, and so Earth-minded and lacking in any transcendental substance, that Azrael and the rest of the Judges didn't know what else to do with them, and asked me to make a special sub-plane. And apparently, there were a lot of them. Really, really lot of them, like most of everything that actually originated on Earth", she reminisced.

"And let me guess: they all share allegiance to Satan, they all want Earth as the only true reality for them, and they either reject God's will, or don't even perceive it as a thing that exists, or deserves a thought?", he offered.

“I would say you’re spot on. We essentially offered sanctuary to beings that are not of God, and don’t recognise His kingdom, and as a result, that place is now no longer of God”, she looked at him in horror. “Have I made a horrible mistake?”

“No, I don’t think you did, but it’s still an ominous and potentially very bad thing. We need to talk to the elders again, immediately”, he hugged her.

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“Oh”, Lord Shiva frowned.

“So that’s the downside”.

Loss

“How bad is this?”, Azazel asked Lord Shiva, looking worriedly at his wife, who seemed not to be taking this well.

“It’s bad”, Shiva nodded, lost in thought. “I’m trying to understand the repercussions, but the short of it is that Sanat Kumar now has a true bridgehead in the real world. The game no longer ends with the loss of his control over the Jewel, which was contractually defined and which used to be a given. We thought this game had a known endpoint in time. This is no longer the case”, he mused.

“This is all my fault”, Kay whispered.

“No”, the Great Lord denied decisively, and came to embrace the girl. “You just did normal things that made sense and served a legitimate purpose. This in itself wouldn’t have resulted in any harm. However, combined with several other factors that weren’t known enough to predict for, we got this problem. It’s easy to be smart in hindsight”, he ruffled her hair and looked her in the eyes. “It’s not your fault”.

“Thank you”, she smiled weakly.

“But how is this even possible?”, Azazel went through his hair with his fingers. “I thought the Throne of God was the force that kept the worlds in existence. Wouldn’t removing a world from beneath the Throne of God have resulted in that world’s removal from reality whatsoever?”

“Only metaphorically and in the perspective of Eternity”, Shiva shrugged. “The Throne of God means alignment and harmony with the Will of God. It’s the answer to that prayer Christ formulated – ‘thy kingdom come; thy will be done’; if a world is under the Throne of God, his kingdom *is* here, and his will *is* done. It means that something is part of the Absolute’s eternal plan and Will. It is also optional, because free will does exist. God’s reign is optional. Consequences aren’t”, he sighed. “Living according to the Will of God, in the Kingdom of God, has consequences, and they are, well, the two of you”, he managed a smile. “The two of you are an excellent example of

beings who chose to live the Will of God and became perfect, which is why we all love you so much, and which is why, for instance, your wonderful bride is so distraught now, because she thinks she somehow did something against the Will of God, and it resulted in a disaster. This is not so. I see the Will of God shining very brightly in her, which means it was the Will of God for this to happen as it did, so that the events might proceed in a certain way, leading to a resolution that will put everything right, but on a higher level of goodness; so, don't be sad, sweetheart. Instead, let's think about what this means, what were the required conditions of it happening, and what conditions need to be met in order to put it right", Shiva kissed the jewel on her brow and she finally smiled I earnest.

"So, let's see how this could happen in the first place", Azazel nodded. "First of all, there are sub-planes with worse people that are still under the Throne of God. There's a hell with fanatical murderers, inciters of murderous mobs, gangsters, rapists, torturers and other villainous souls that could rightfully have been destroyed outright, but were instead preserved in case an opportunity arose later on, where they could possibly be redeemed. So, why are they still here?"

"It's a very valid question. It would seem that committing vile crimes and being a monster would remove one from the Reign of God, but apparently it is not so, which is what makes this case particularly interesting. So, let's see what those godless souls were. You are saying that you created that sub-plane for souls that were born on Earth, through the process of nucleation, or bubbling off, the way water vapour is released from boiling water?", Shiva frowned and scratched the back of his neck.

"Yes", Kay nodded. "It was a sub-plane for the souls newly created on Earth, that were completely godless and had no sense of transcendence, or any concept of God other than Sanat Kumar".

"So why did this sub-plane not remove itself from under the Throne of God once the first such soul was put there? Wouldn't this technically meet the requirement of all inhabitants being godless?", Azazel looked confused.

"That's the easy part. The overall energy of the souls inside would have to outweigh the energy invested in creation of that sub-plane, *and*

they would all have to be godless”, Shiva nodded. “The problem didn’t arise immediately because you needed a serious mass of spiritual energy to counter the Will of God inherent to the structure itself”, he waved the thought off.

“Why do some souls created on Earth get to be worshippers of God, while others grow to be godless?”, Kay wondered.

“It seems to be related to the conditions they developed in, initially”, Shiva offered. “For instance, if a soul is created when a human being is exposed to some religious or intellectual system that is devoid of transcendence, but requires lots of thought and emotion, it seems to catalyse genesis of souls, but those souls are not really what we are used to seeing here”, he shrugged. “They have consciousness, intellect and emotions, but they lack transcendence and the sense of belonging to it. If a soul is born out of the mutual worship of the Gods, it wants to return to that state, which drives its evolution. Also, if a soul nucleates on Earth in the presence of one of the major sources of spiritual light, this determines its nature and goals, and it wants to return to the state of fullness of this”, he nodded.

“And if you put lots of godless souls somewhere, the ideal of existence they will try to achieve is godlessness”, Azazel nodded.

“Exactly. And apparently, the worst criminals in that other place are better than this, which seems to demonstrate that godlessness is worse than murder and hatred, because hateful murderers can still have a spark of something that wants God, somewhere inside them, which makes them redeemable, while the godless souls don’t”, Shiva finished grimly.

“Aren’t we better off without them, then?”, Kay shrugged. “I mean, they wanted to be done with God; now God is being done with them, and they will eventually perish in time as they are separated from Eternity, and basically good riddance?”

“It would be as you say, if not for one thing”, Shiva agreed. “The world they occupy is connected to the rest of the astral world by its fundamental reality, and Sanat Kumar can now use it to make another, astral Earth there, that will outlive the one generated by the Jewel, and outlive his authority to use the Jewel. It will likely outlive him as well. Every godless thing in that sub-plane came to pass because of his

designs, and so his evil lives on, and it just jumped planes, from illusion to a lesser reality. This means it's actually a big deal and we have to figure out a way to restore that sub-plane back to the Throne of God”.

“What would it take?”, wondered Azazel.

“It's one of those almost impossible things that eventually come up and then someone like Lord Vishnu usually takes care of it by thinking of a solution nobody else could figure out. But essentially, you would need to have a legitimate inhabitant of that plane, not merely a visitor, but someone condemned to be there, who would at the same time be spiritually powerful enough to call to the Throne of God directly, or, alternatively, call for both myself and my wife to manifest there in power, which would allow us to form the Golden Fire and thus reclaim that world for God”, Shiva smiled. “Basically, you would need to have a person that's holy enough to invoke me and my wife both, and be condemned to the world of the godless souls for some reason, which is close enough to the requirement of something being wood but also iron”.

“Oh”, both Azazel and Kay looked wilted.

“Don't worry about it, we'll figure it out”, Shiva laughed. “After all, if we could make a demon into a God, we can make wooden iron easily”.

Tears of salvation

Lord Yama entered his wife's 'office', bringing coffee to cheer her up.

"My love, what's wrong?", he was immediately at her side, as he saw tears streaking down her face.

"I just tried to comfort an angel who returned from earth", she tried to control the sobs enough to get the words out.

"He was a serf somewhere in Europe. He lived with a young wife and two small children. The winter was hard, and they hadn't eaten in three days. The children kept crying from hunger, and his wife was too weak to get out of bed. He had enough and went into the woods with a bow to hunt a deer. The lord's men caught him and threw him into a dungeon to be hanged tomorrow for poaching. He pleaded with me to please help his wife and children, who are certainly going to die without him. He said I looked like a good and holy lady and he will give me his soul in exchange, if only I helped his family. He said that Satan came into his dreams in the dungeon, and offered him a deal: sell me your soul, and I will take care of your wife and children. He was afraid and started praying to Jesus and Mary to save him, because Satan gave him the sense of cold fear and terror. They hanged him in the morning, of course. He told me he'd make that deal with me, because he felt I was good and kind, and he had no problem with his soul belonging to me."

"I comforted him as much as I could, restored his memories and sent him to recover, but I couldn't do anything for his family. I know they are dying from cold and hunger, because the wife is too weak to go into the woods and collect twigs for fire. I just keep waiting for them to come here and ask me why God didn't answer when they kept praying for help", she sobbed.

Azrael held her in his arms and comforted her as much as he could; he closed his eyes and called for one of his lieutenants. An angelic woman appeared immediately.

“Grace, would you please be so kind as to take over from my wife? She’s not well”.

Grace took in the sight, curtsied and nodded, and shooed them away with a smile as they shimmered out.

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“So that’s what he’s been up to. Purchasing premium assets at bargain prices”, Lord Vishnu nodded, gnashing his teeth in fury, as Jesus was comforting Lady Hypatia.

“I just wish I could do something for them”, she sobbed.

“Oh, you just did”, Lord Shiva pointed at her tears, end of the world flashing in his eyes.

“You just did”.

Black fire wisped over his hand, and her tears sparkled and vanished, as the world shook from within.

“What did you do?”, Jesus looked at him, stunned.

“Oh, I broke his world some more, and sent her tears as comfort to the suffering souls, so that they would know that God is with them, and resist temptations of Satan. I can’t do more at this time, so this will have to do”, Shiva growled.

“That, my son, is why he is our great comfort in hard times”, Vishnu smiled at Christ, who stood there in shock.

“Oh wow”, whispered Hypatia. “Wow...”

“They came?”, her husband asked.

“Yes. They say they were starving and freezing after the father didn’t come home, but the blue light of God came into their hearts and they prayed to it to help them and save them, and it became one with them as they looked at their bodies from above”, she whispered, made a hand motion, and three small angelic beings shimmered in. “Go to your father and husband, he’s waiting for you”, she smiled and sent them away.

Jesus stood there in shock. “I don’t know what I just witnessed, but all praise to both of you, regardless”, he looked at Shiva and Hypatia.

“What just happened, my son, is that her tears latched onto the barely nucleating souls of that angel’s dying family on Earth, guided by her intent and power of Lord Shiva, and as they identified with them and prayed through them, their identities merged, and through death they returned to our wonderful Lady here, who could have just integrated them into her own being and acquired their memories. Instead, she sacrificed a small part of her own enormous spiritual power to give them independent life, thus saving that family in the only way that matters, because saving physical bodies just delays the inevitable. And, of course, the karmic effect of her generous and compassionate sacrifice is that her own soul grew greater, by this large deep blue jewel she just got”, Vishnu pointed.

Jesus just bowed deeply and silently to the now glowing Lady, and to Lord Rudra, who gnashed his teeth as he thought about Satan, and how their ‘conversation’ would go, when his time came.

...

“He’s building attractors”, Lady Shakti whispered into Shiva’s ear, as she massaged his shoulders to get him to relax. His thoughts were full of righteous anger and murder, and he was tense like a compressed spring.

“He’s acquiring souls of the most powerful kind, now that they are suffering terribly there, and are sensitive to temptations; and he obviously needs them for something. Most likely, he’ll build things that will seduce souls deeper into his darkness by glowing with true light, and he needs sources of true light, that will indicate the sense of fulfilment in various deserts where people will come to leave their bones”, she mused, as she kissed his neck from behind.

“I will strip flesh off his bones as he screams in darkness of his own making, where nobody will hear him”, Shiva murmured menacingly. “I will visit all the suffering he caused upon him sevenfold”.

“And I will help you do it, and then make you coffee”, she nodded as she kissed his ear.

“He’ll get what he is due”.

A lapse

“My Lady, can we have a word with you?”, an angel accompanied by three others addressed Lady Hypatia.

“Of course, Berfrid”, she smiled. “I am so glad we meet again, this time under better circumstances”. She looked at his family. “And these must be your wife, Isalde, and the children are Albert and Hilde?”.

They all bowed as she addressed them. “They are indeed, and thanks to you alone”, the man bowed deeply. “The teachers in the apple orchard, the blessed Padmasambhava and his holy wives, have been explaining to us and the others how the real world actually works, how the souls are created, how they grow and achieve enlightenment, and so on. Specifically, he told us what you did, because it was the first such case; how you took from your own soul and gave my wife and children immortality so that they could join me, simply because I begged for you to save them”. He looked her straight in the eyes with such depth of worship that shivers went up her head. “I offered you my soul in exchange, but you wanted nothing. Know this, however. We will forever worship you, every day of our lives, even if we get to live forever. You will forever remain our Saviour Goddess, and our souls are forever yours”, tears started welling up in his eyes, and Hypatia just hugged the man and said nothing.

...

“I am so proud of you”, Lord Azrael whispered in his wife’s ear.

“The feeling is very much mutual, my Lord”, she whispered back.

“When I was overwhelmed, you took control, arranged for my replacement, and brought me to the exactly right people who could actually do something in time, and only because of this immediate and perfect response did anything I wanted to do actually matter”, she kissed him. “If not for you and Lord Shiva, my tears would have amounted to nothing. Only because of your immediate reaction, and his world-tearing power, was this family saved”.

“Be it as it may, you still sacrificed a part of your own soul for them, which makes you legendary and worthy of highest praise”, he smiled.

“And instead of a scar, I got this jewel”, she pointed out.

“Proof that holy acts of sacrifice are never a loss”, he kissed her brow.

“I don’t know if you can even imagine what this means to me”, she was lost in thought. “On Earth, I always had to be in control of myself, because any lapse would be interpreted as female weakness and incompetence. But here, when I lost it, you treated it as a sign of a legitimate emergency, covered for my failings, and elevated the problem to the highest authority, and at no point did anyone think less of me for it. If anything, Lord Shiva took my tears and those poor people’s suffering so much to heart, that he seems to have proclaimed a personal vengeance against Satan. I feel something in me relaxing for the first time, as if I can allow myself to react emotionally, knowing that it’s fine, that you all have me covered. It feels wonderful”, she melted into his side.

A vow

“Daddy, why didn’t Jesus and Mary save us when we prayed to them?”

The man sighed and considered the question for a while. “It is complicated, Albert, but I’ll try to tell you how I see it. It’s not necessarily exactly right, because I don’t know much either, but I will try”. The child nodded seriously.

“I don’t think the Church taught us exactly how things are. You can see for yourself how things are different than we were taught. For instance, they said that Jesus brought salvation to mankind, but they meant it in a sense of forgiveness of sins, and in reality, it seems to be about the light of God reaching through the darkness of the world, so that everybody who holds on to it and believes in it could be saved. However, the Church teaches that everybody has a soul, and that the souls are all equal, and that doesn’t seem to be the case at all, because there are much more people on Earth than there are souls that came from heaven. And so, it seems that I had a soul; more accurately, that I was a soul, while you, your sister and mommy were born on Earth for the first time and you could develop souls, but it would require some time, and you just started forming souls when you died. This means you would have either died for real, as your body died, or you would have gone to a place where souls go if they don’t know or don’t care about God”, he frowned.

“Does this mean that the light our Lady sent to us gave us God?”, the little girl asked.

“I think it means exactly that, Hilde. When I died and came before her, I pled with her to save you, and she told me there is nothing she can do, because that world is under the rule of Satan and God has no power there other than spiritual influence and pointing the way out, which Jesus bought with his sacrifice on the cross. She wept with me as she sent me away, and I was certain that nothing could be done and was heartbroken. However, as we were later told, she was so distraught that she sacrificed a part of her own soul and sent it to the three of you, so

that if you accepted her light, you could have eternal life and come to live here with me”, he smiled at his daughter.

“Does this mean that our Lady is greater than Jesus? If Jesus couldn’t save us, and she did, does it mean she is the real God?”, the girl frowned.

“No. From what I was told, the Lady and Jesus are equals. Both are persons of the One True God, and they seem to be like brother and sister. They are both equally holy and we need to respect them. Lady Hypatia, however, made a personal sacrifice for our family, the way Jesus did for all of Earth, and this is why our family owes her a great debt and we will always worship her as our personal saviour”, he finished, and both children nodded seriously.

“But why is this an exception? I am sure that many others suffered like we did. Many people in our village died of hunger just this winter, and yet we heard that we are the first case in history that someone was saved like we were? Wouldn’t it be righteous that all are saved?”, his wife voiced her thoughts.

“It’s a good question. However, from what I managed to understand listening to Lord Teacher Padmasambhava, righteousness has absolutely nothing to do with any of it. In essence, Satan created that world to spite God. The souls that went there did so out of their own free will, and against Gods’ advice. This means nobody owed me anything, as I made my own choice and the fact that it turned out bad was my own fault. As for you, you were born there according to the natural order of things in that place, and you also had no claim to any special treatment. The Judges of Karma that receive the dead are volunteers; they help out of the goodness of their hearts, not out of duty or obligation of any kind. They could all stop doing it at any moment and nobody would think worse of them, let alone punish them. God sent Jesus there out of his goodness and compassion, not out of obligation. In essence, we don’t have the right to anything, quite literally. We mixed our fates with Satan, or were born in his world, and if we had any rights to begin with, we forfeited them as we got involved with his rebellion against God. The very fact that there are Gods who spend most of their time helping the unfortunate souls that come to heaven from Earth, all broken and suffering, is a great mercy

in itself. The fact that God put the Light of Christ in the world to give us hope and salvation is also a great mercy. But what the Lady did for us, it exceeds anything that ever happened to anyone in the history of mankind. She wept for us and pled our case before other Gods, and sacrificed a part of her own soul to give you an opportunity to have eternal life, if you accepted it, which you fortunately all did. This is not a right. It is such an exceptional mercy, that even the other Gods seem to be stunned at what she did”, the man’s voice shook, and his wife embraced him.

“The Light of God that came for us, was that part of the Lady’s soul?”, Hilde asked.

“Yes”, the man nodded solemnly.

“It was so clear and wonderful”, the girl nodded and smiled. “It was the best thing I ever felt in my entire life. But you say the light of Jesus was also there. Why didn’t I feel it? When I heard about Jesus, it was all confusing and I didn’t understand anything, and I didn’t feel his light”, she continued.

“That’s because it’s hard. To perceive the light of Christ, as they told me, you need to really understand the Bible, and understand who Christ was, and get the feeling of his holy presence, and then you latch onto his light, which the Church calls the Holy Spirit, and you need to always follow its guidance in all that you do. However, it’s not easy and not everybody succeeds. Also, Satan is working really hard to confuse people and distract them from this, so that they wouldn’t get eternal life, and would stay enslaved to him on Earth, being born again there or going to that desolate, terrible place where godless souls go when they die”, Berfrid ruffled the girl’s hair.

“I can’t imagine how wonderful it must be to be the Lady, if a small part of her soul, that she sent for us, felt so wonderful. It was God, and we accepted it instantly because it was such truth and happiness that I never thought possible”, said the boy.

“That’s why she’s a Goddess”, her mother nodded. “She is all made of God stuff, so when she took a part of her and sent it for us, that part was God, like the rest of her. It is our great fortune that Father pled for us with her and that she was so compassionate, because we were barely holding onto our last breaths as her light came, and we

would have died in that terrible place, cold and hungry and alone, not knowing what happened to Father”, she shivered. “Children, we have a serious obligation now. We promised to worship the Lady forever, and it’s not merely out of gratitude. It is because she is the most wonderful person we ever saw; she is the holy sister of Christ and nobody is holier or more worthy of our worship, and our spiritual path is now to become more like her and know her more, by thinking about her and praising her. There is nothing more important and valuable than that, and Lord Padmasambhava confirmed to Father that this is the way all Gods do: they became Gods by worshipping each other, and they continue to do so now. They are all family to each other, they love each other and obey each other, and we should do the same, for it would be a great sin if we forgot the Lady’s light now that we are saved by it. Instead, we should cherish this opportunity, and be like that light to each other and to other souls”, Isalde spoke seriously but choking with bliss, and her children embraced her.

“I promise to all three of you that I will love you and cherish you as I love and cherish the Lady’s holy person, as part of her lives as the three of you now, so you are now most sacred to me”, their father embraced them all. “Never forget that a part of a most holy person of God lives in you now, and as holy people you have a duty to make that light grow brighter, and never be extinguished”.

“We swear”, all three spoke in unison.

“Wait, if a part of a girl God is my soul now, does it mean that I will be a girl now?”, the boy voiced his confusion.

“No”, his father smiled. “It means you will become a man who had felt the spiritual taste of a girl God, and so when you love a woman, you will know how to guide her towards that goal, so that both of you can live in God”.

Bearer of light

“By definition, we will know only about his failures”, Azazel noted. “If he managed to acquire someone’s soul, that person will not arrive here to tell us about it”. The war council was more chaotic than usual this time, since the threat description was the most vague they ever faced. “This means we need to find out his success ratio, to begin with”.

“But what’s the actual point of this? Why does he need souls? Is he trying to absorb them into himself? Use their energy to fix some degenerative issue he is facing?”, Zina shrugged.

“I think I have a good enough idea of what he’s doing, although I’m not so certain about why”, Shakti took the word.

“Tell me, how do you catch a mouse?”, she smiled at Zina.

“Well, you make a trap, and then put a piece of something mice like to eat inside it, so that he would be attracted inside, and couldn’t come out later”, Zina smiled back.

“Exactly. But what happens when you leave the trap unattended for a while?”, Shakti proceeded with her argument.

“You will find a trap full of half-eaten mice and mouse skeletons inside, with maybe one live mouse, if you came soon enough, because as they won’t be able to come out, they will starve and resort to cannibalism”, Zina frowned.

“And let’s say the bait is of some kind that can’t be consumed, and remains attractive forever. Let’s say it’s a sound that attracts deer, of the kind hunters will use to lure them into the kill zone. And let’s say the sound keeps making itself, powered by wind or water, so that you don’t need a man there to make it. And let’s say a kill zone is something like a cliff masked by natural fog, where the deer will come and fall to their deaths”, Shakti nodded.

“You would have a perpetual, automatic killing machine”, Azazel commented. “So that’s what you meant by attractors. You think he’s

using the powerful souls as an energy source that will serve as bait for some trap he will use in order to lure souls into something fatal”.

“But why? Isn’t his world itself enough of a fatal trap? Souls are already being caught in a reincarnation loop there, thinking they’ll do better the next time, correct their errors, pay for their sins, acquire something that they failed to acquire before and so on. If he wanted to cause harm and show that most souls are foolish and are in heaven merely by accident, because nothing really tested them before, then mission accomplished. Making it more lethal would contribute very little to what he already has, while exposing him to possible karmic repercussions if he goes too far”, Zina countered.

“That would certainly be the case for the world as he initially made it; the extremely spiritually deadly kind you were exposed to in your earthly life”, Lord Shiva joined the discussion. “However, we’ve been making moves of our own. We introduced transcendence and hope where there used to be nothing but darkness and despair. We introduced sources that were converted into actual knowledge down there. Lord Buddha started the process. It was developed upon by Lord Vishnu who sent Jesus down there, and introduced sources of eternal light. They have a Church that teaches things that are true enough to really lead to salvation. They have Hindu scriptures that actually tell true things about the actual Gods. They have access to *puja* and *bhakti*, which are similar enough to what we practice ourselves. At this point, the world consists of his darkness, and genuine sources of light that lead to salvation”.

“And he wants to introduce sources of light of his own – not false light that could easily be dismissed, but true spiritual light; only leading onto perilous paths that cause ruin”, Azazel nodded.

“Exactly”, his father smiled. “As things stand now, any source of light you find will lead you to salvation. The mission is simple: find spiritual light, hold on to it, wait until you die and you are saved. What he seems to be up to is introducing alternatives, where the light is real, but if you follow it you are ruined”.

“And the result will be either much reduced effectiveness of everything we’ve done so far, or people will stop following spiritual

light of any kind, because of the great probability that it would be ruinous”, Shakti nodded at her husband.

“And he won’t have to lift a finger. He will just arm the trap and let the mice eat each other, each thinking that the prior victims were losers and he himself will do better, probably due to some intoxicating effect of the bait”, Zina joined in.

“Do we have anything specific? I mean, it’s good to understand the general idea, but I’d like to see what he actually did, so that we can develop countermeasures”, Azazel looked at his mother questioningly.

“It’s hard to figure it out from the outside, because we don’t actually have access to the things the Jewel is doing in there, so we are forced to draw conjecture based on whatever evidence manages to find its way out, which is doubly difficult because if his traps work, the victims don’t come out”, Shakti shrugged. “However, Lord Buddha has found a pattern in some of his recent ‘patients’, so I’ll let him explain”, she smiled to Shakyamuni.

“They call themselves ‘good men’ and ‘good women’, ‘the pure ones’, ‘the ones favoured by God’. The Christians call them the Cathari, which means ‘the pure ones’ in Greek. The origins of the philosophy seem to be Zoroastrian, like the Manicheans that were around during the late Roman period. They teach that there are two opposed Gods in action – the evil one that created the material world with all the evil and suffering, and the good one that created the spiritual world, with souls, angels and Jesus. They think the souls get trapped into a reincarnation cycle on Earth because they are attracted by the material world and what it has to offer, and the solution is to let go and purify oneself from all the material desires and inclinations”, Buddha raised his eyebrows significantly.

“This looks pretty much spot on”, Kay remarked. “It’s actually more accurate than what the Church teaches, and among the most technically accurate theologies I’ve ever seen developed down there”.

“It is, but it only goes to say that theological accuracy isn’t all that you would expect it to be. Because, you see, they have one major flaw”, he sighed. “Their moral teaching is incredibly bad. They essentially say that in order to get purified from the world, you need to accept a vow of extreme renunciation that is in essence suicide by

starvation. But if you don't aspire to perfection, it's enough to not take things seriously. Know that the world is not important. It doesn't matter what you do, because it's just matter, an opposite to the spirit which is pure. There is no truth in the world, so it doesn't matter if you say the truth or not. It doesn't matter whether you steal, rape or murder, because it's just matter, and if you kill people you free them from the physical so you're actually helping them. If you steal their things, it's fine because they were attached to things and shouldn't be, and everybody should have access to them anyway, because all men are equal. Do you now see the problem?", he asked nobody in particular.

"It's all the exact opposite of what you need to do in order to be a good person and not destroy your soul with evil", the Love of God nodded. "You don't hold on to truth and do good because physical matter is important, but because speaking the truth and doing good is what makes your soul good and true. You need to act as if everything matters even if you're under an illusion, because by doing so, you become the one who matters. If you act as if nothing matters, your soul will be lost".

"Exactly", her husband nodded in assent. "What I noticed in the memories of the victims of the Cathari, who ended up being my patients, is how the Cathari acted. They were like beasts that were let out of a cage, filled with self-righteousness of the ones who are on the right path and who know the true light. They looked as if under influence of some drug that caused arrogance and hubris; they thought they were fighting the evil oppressors and fighting for what is right, for equality and emancipation from the yoke of the Church and the feudal system and so on".

"This sounds very familiar", Azazel's eyes were wide. "It's as if I'm listening to Sanat Kumar again, in his deranged madness".

"Thank you for that information, my friend, for it confirms my guesses. Sanat Kumar created some kind of a script, powered by genuine spiritual sources, that amplifies mental patterns that resemble his own, and in direct proportion to the similarity. I don't think he created the Cathari to oppose the Church; that would be too simplistic, and also too specific. I think he's trying to turn souls into copies of

himself, as they aggregate around the attractors like moths around the flame”, Buddha finished.

“This is giving me flashes of memories, and not of the kind I would prefer to have”, Azazel nodded grimly. “It fits his pattern exactly – he speaks of emancipation of souls, but what he means is turning them into lesser copies of himself, over which he will reign supreme. He also couldn’t stop talking about conspiracies of the ruling elite, which in his case meant the Gods, to whom he attributed all sorts of invented nonsense, and different each day as he rambled on. I think he will empower this mentality in others, make them drunk with hubris, make them overthrow any system in power the way he wanted to overthrow the Gods and the system of *dharma*, and the Cathari are merely a specific case of this madness, and likely a lesser one, as his attractors will grow in power. And I would also expect the souls that fall under the influence of the attractors to basically be destroyed after death and join the power of the attractor, because it was what they chose as their destiny”, he concluded.

“And the worst thing about it is, I have no idea how to counter it effectively, other than by dismantling the attractors themselves, breaking down their power source to the level of *kalapas* and spending it all”, Shiva shrugged grimly. “It’s an incredibly elegant design”.

“Is there evidence that the attractors absorb their victims and thus grow the size of the ‘bait’?”, Azazel asked.

“Let me run the equations”, the Mind of God nodded. “Yes. The souls choose that light source as their spiritual direction, and end up belonging to it. It thus grows bigger. However, since all the impurities and evils also join it, the source grows more corrupted and less pure as it grows in size. It eventually ends up looking like a terrible abomination, and, as such, loses attractiveness and becomes more easily discernible as evil by the souls that seek the way out”, she nodded.

“Is there a way we can oppose this?”, Lady Zina asked her husband.

“Not really”, he shrugged. “Any direct opposition would feed it, as it would be interpreted as darkness trying to extinguish their true light. It can’t be dismantled from the outside. We also can’t blame

Sanat Kumar for any of it since he's doing what he said he would initially – provide alternatives. He's certainly doing that. He's also not forcing anyone to choose”.

“Can we at least stop his soul-purchasing? He's claiming to offer deals. Is there evidence that he's holding up to his side of the bargain?”, Lord Jesus scratched his chin.

“It would be in his long-term interest to uphold his part, especially since it's usually quite easy for him”, Lord Buddha answered. “If he's cheating, it brings him minor benefits at the cost of the whole project failing. Thus, self interest will motivate him to be fair”.

“Yes, in a direct sense, where you will get what you agreed for in exchange for your soul. However, he's likely to cause the problem he offers to solve, in the first place”, Azazel noted.

“How immediate is this problem?”, Zina looked at everybody.

“It's a slow rolling avalanche. He will need centuries to build momentum, as he needs quite a bit of power to get anywhere close to the level of attractiveness of what we installed through our labours”, Lord Vishnu offered. “However, as I see it, he will approach equal attraction within a few centuries, with the curve starting to grow exponentially after that. At some point, he will completely overwhelm and dwarf our efforts”.

“You mean, he is going to win?”, Mary of Magdala voiced her incredulity.

“No”, he waved decisively. “All he's doing is inherently self-defeating. He's creating one hysterical mania after another – all kinds of revolutionary and ‘liberation’ movements one after another, that will throw men and women into a furnace, but all the ‘victories’ he can achieve will be illusory and eventually cautionary. He will demonstrate that all the paths alternative to the one we are showing end up in pools of blood and terrible misery. And, as he will exhaust his attempts, he will also run out of time”.

“But until he does, he will cause terrible harm. As he powers his conspiracy theories with those genuine spiritual sources, he will convince the souls of all kinds of terribly harmful ideas that will keep

having consequences long after he is gone”, Azazel spoke out in his despondency. “I’ve heard enough of his nonsense to know how insidious it is, how it affects your thinking patterns and how it turns you into a resentful, self-sabotaging mess”.

“We will keep losing souls at an increasing pace, and damage to the survivors will be such that we might have to quarantine them indefinitely, because they could otherwise harm others with their madness”, Buddha conceded. “So far, the damage we had to contend with was caused mostly by suffering and loss, and, rarely, by the willing acceptance of evil. With all those attractors he is about to install, he will cause true deviations from the spiritual path, of the kind where people genuinely believe them to be the actual path of emancipation and a greater truth. Satan resented souls that were greater than him. He might cause everybody to resent any form of greatness and power, interpreting it as injustice and abuse. He will encourage hubris, arrogance and defiance. He will portray love as weakness, service as humiliation, and satisfaction as a sign of inferiority. The level to which this can be destructive can’t even be predicted. Sure, I expect his first trial runs, such as the Cathari, to be wiped out. But eventually, something of that sort is going to actually take hold, and then hell is going to reign on Earth”.

“Hell reigns on Earth where Islam reigns, or where the Cathari currently reign, or where the Mongols pass. The only places where hell doesn’t reign are where our tears touched the Earth, or where our light has broken through, and he did everything he could to splatter mud all over those places, to keep them inconspicuous. While he is in power, hell reigns on Earth, period, and we are merely treating the casualties. But eventually, we’ll have to finish this in some way that will end this disaster, and hopefully in a good way, right?”, Lady Lakshmi asked.

“Yes”, Lord Shiva nodded decisively. “My wife and I will deal with this ourselves, as the end approaches. But until then, we must contend with limiting the damage on an individual basis. Inspire the good, help those who suffer, shine the light that will bring them home safely. And considering the amount of spiritual damage he is about to inflict, dealing with the aftermath is not going to be a picnic”, he smiled as if he ate a lemon.

“So, we’re about to have an age of enlightenment, with all the light he will be shining, generous and good soul that he is”, Kay grinned mischievously. “Oh joy, oh splendour”.

Consolation

“Nothing built on the unstable foundations of that world lasts forever”, Lord Padmasambhava shrugged. “It had a good run; eight hundred years or so. Also, it was in decline for quite a while already. Now, the University of Nalanda has moved on to the higher ground”, he grinned and showed hundreds of souls around him in the apple orchard.

“It’s a great loss for the Earth, though”, Kay nodded seriously and sipped her coffee.

“It’s a great loss for the Earth when a wise person dies. It is a great loss for the Earth when unique copies of valuable books are burned. It was a great loss when the library of Alexandria was burned. It was a great loss when Constantinople was sacked by the crusaders. It is also a great loss for the Earth when nothing improves for centuries, and nobody does anything with those books. It’s a place of loss, and nothing is ever safe there while Mara reigns. You know that better than I do”, he smiled at the Mind of God. “Everything we build there is temporary, and against forces that are certain to erase it eventually”.

“Still, please accept my sympathy for the pain of loss that you’re experiencing, Paddy”, she grinned. “You’re not fooling me with the impermanence talk”.

“There’s no fooling you, sweetheart”, he smiled bitterly. “But we all knew what was to happen when we saw the trajectory of Islam. We also see the trajectory of the Mongols. But Europe is waking up from its long decline. The wars of conquest are shuffling the deck of cards, and who knows what results of it all will arrive here for us to witness. Even Mara himself, trying to do his worst, sometimes sets things in motion that bear good fruits”, he pointed to two young angels talking to one of his wives.

...

“Lady Jess, aren’t you Gods jealous when people worship other Gods more?”, the little girl asked. “I mean, in church they told us that

God is a jealous God and he doesn't like it when people worship anyone else".

"You mean, will I be mad at you and your brother because you came to learn from me how to worship Lady Hypatia better?", the Goddess smiled at the girl, who nodded shyly.

"Not even a little bit, Hilde. In fact, we are very happy to help you worship other members of our family. I think it is the same as how you would feel if someone wanted to do something nice for your parents or brother. How would you feel about that?"

"It would make me very happy and I would be glad to help them in any way I can", the girl smiled.

"But why did the priest say the God is jealous, then?", Albert asked.

"It is hard for me to know exactly what he meant, as I am not him. However, a God would feel bad if people worshipped things that are not manifestations of the Absolute – for instance, if they worshipped Satan, who is evil, or if they worshipped evil spirits, or gods that are made up and false, and would get their souls lost. But you worshipping my sister Hypatia makes me feel great – and even the priests would agree that it's fine if you worshipped Jesus more than his Father, because they are the same God".

"I hate Satan", the boy frowned. "He made us freeze and starve in his world, and he then tried to buy our Father's soul when he was desperate to save us. Satan is evil. Why don't you Gods kill him, so that he can do no more evil?"

"He is indeed evil", the Goddess nodded. "And we wouldn't mind getting rid of him at all. But it's a complicated thing. You see, before Satan created that evil world, there were only four Gods. Now, there are fifteen. Also, the angels now have useful things to do, and they are growing spiritually. You and your Mother wouldn't have been born if not for that world. It's the lesson Lady Kay taught us – she is very powerful, and she could go back in time and make it so that Satan never got the opportunity to make that world, and create all that suffering. But if she did that, most of her family would never have been

born. Would you choose Satan never to have made Earth, if that meant you and your sister and your mother would stop existing?”, she smiled.

“No”, both children waved their heads. “That would be terrible”.

“So, you agree that Satan did serve some good purpose, even if he is evil and he will do even more evil in the future?”

“Yes. Sure, he tried to trick Father out of his soul, but after he died, Father asked our Lady for help, and she cried and sent a part of her soul to us. Satan didn’t plan for this, but it still happened, because good people reacted in good ways to his evil”, Hilde nodded.

“And so in the future, many such things may yet happen, that we don’t know of at this time. We could kill Satan now, but then some God like Lady Hypatia or myself would not be born. Would you want that?”

“No”, Hilde replied. “You and our Lady are wonderful and kind, and even if Satan did terrible things, and many people suffered, you are worth it”, she nodded emphatically.

“Thank you, sweetheart”, the Goddess smiled at her. “So, you see now why we let it all happen?”

“Because being able to do something doesn’t mean it’s a good idea”, Albert nodded. “You could easily stop evil, but then you would also stop some great good things from taking place, and that would be terrible”.

“There’s one more thing I would like to know”, the girl asked. “There used to be an equal number of girl and boy Gods before, and now there is one girl more. Isn’t it now unbalanced? Does it mean the girls can make boys do something they otherwise wouldn’t, because there’s more of them?”

“It doesn’t matter. Even if the Gods were all girls and there was only one boy, we would never do anything he would disapprove of, because we all love each other. If one of us is unhappy with something, we would never do it. We would try to find out what would make him happy, and then we would do that. Intentionally making one of our family unhappy is unthinkable for any of us, and we all try to make each other feel happy and loved. You see Lady Kay talking to my husband over there?”, she pointed, and the children nodded. “She heard that terrible things happened on Earth in the place where Lord Paddy

learned, lived and taught others. The Muslims came and burned everything down, and they killed many Buddhists. She thought he would be unhappy about this and so she brought him coffee and tries to console him”.

“Oh. So that’s like when my sister was hurt and she cried, and I held her to make her feel better?”, the boy nodded.

“Exactly. The idea that girl Gods would use their numbers to do something boy Gods would not like, that would never happen. It just means that more girl Gods will bring coffee and come to talk when a boy God is sad, the way Lady Karuna came to my husband”, she smiled. “Also, when Lady Hypatia was sad about your family, the boy Gods consoled her and Lord Shiva grew angry with Satan and swore vengeance, and he in fact took her tears and brought them down to Earth to you. When one of the girl Gods is distraught and doesn’t know what to do, all the boys get together to help”.

“This is awesome, and we want to be like that, too”, the children nodded.

“Well, that’s why we’re here”, the Goddess smiled.

Lopsided

“We had many new angels, some of extreme evolution and sophistication, and yet no new Gods”, Zina noted, sipping coffee. “I wonder why that may be”.

“I think it’s because they all fit a certain profile. They are men, celibate, renunciates. They practice some *sadhana* that is highly effective, they learn how to enter a state of oneness with the Absolute, they learn how to control their energy system so that they stay there, but as for karmic evolution, the results are modest, because they simply don’t touch that part; they ‘transcend it’, as they themselves would say. Even those, who actually attain great results, don’t seem to impress God as much as they impress fellow humans. As a result, God doesn’t claim them”, Buddha shrugged.

“But what about *bhakti* and *tantra*? The *bhaktas* should, at least in theory, be doing the same thing we are. *Tantra* should, in theory, be allowing couples to evolve together”, his wife countered.

“In theory”, he conceded. “In practice, *bhaktas* tend to be more hysterical than transcendental. When they are successful, they tend to return to Gods as servants, rather than becoming their companion-Gods. *Tantrikas* for the most part devolved into practitioners of dark magic, and it’s not having good spiritual outcomes. Also, they are using women as a tool for sexual meditation, rather than using sex as means of mutual worship between a male and a female practitioner. That, too, isn’t having good spiritual outcomes. Some of it is outright terrible – orgies, debauchery, demon worship, dark magic, even ritual sacrifice. Not only is it not on the level of Padmasambhava and his holy wives; it’s on the level of some demonic cesspool”, he shivered from the recollection.

“What about *yoga*?”, she offered. “Let me guess – it’s contaminated by the impersonal concept of *brahman*, which tries to transcend or outright ignore *karma* rather than evolving it, and they use methods that work until a certain point, and then they fail to improvise and get stuck?”

“Yes. Also, when they come here, almost none of it works, or makes any sense whatsoever, because it’s all based around certain properties of the physical body. *Asanas* are pointless here, so are the *pranayamas*. *Pratyahara* and *dharana* are pointless, as the defaults of astral and *vajra* bodies do it all by default. *Dhyana* and *samadhana* are also pointless, as they don’t produce any advancement here, unlike in the physical body, where they train the brain to extend the meditative states. Here, you are just stuck at square one. *Raja yoga* doesn’t do anything because the body does it by default, and so on. Essentially, the only things that actually work here are various forms of *bhakti* – worship, love, service, and so on. However, those who practice *bhakti* down there usually practice some form of emotional hysteria, while those who practice *yoga* rarely do it in order to enhance devotional practice. They usually over-specialise, and since simplistic theories seem to win there, they get more adherents, who don’t develop into well-rounded personalities. The end result, unfortunately, is less than we hoped for”, he shrugged.

“Also, we are getting disproportionately more male than female practitioners, which is concerning”, she noted. “Obviously, it’s because of the nature of most forms of practice, which completely sideline family life, and over-emphasise renunciation, which is practised mostly by men. So, even when those men attain some result, it’s usually partial crystallisation of the karmic body, but with seriously undeveloped parts that would have anything to do with women. Essentially, they function well in a cave or a forest, but if you put them near a woman, they wouldn’t know what to do with her. They would either rape her or treat her as if she were some sort of a cow”, she smirked. “And whatever you try to do to make them fix the issue, they just do more of the same, because they think it works, and repetition of the same will certainly bring them to enlightenment”.

“We got a large number of semi-crystallised dark mages, and, I don’t even know what to call them. Some are actual nightmares, vile as serpents that live under a rock and hate everybody, thinking themselves superior because they are above the world. Some have inflated ego because they are worshipped by ‘common people’ and they learned all sorts of ways of ‘looking spiritual’ as to attract adulation. Some of it is outright fakery, some of it is abuse of genuine spirituality for

manipulative purposes. They attain partial crystallisation, but the part of their soul that is not crystallised is usually in worse condition than with the average people. It presents us with complex problems, because such people think they know what God is, what spiritual practice is, what the result is, and when you try to explain, they nod as if they understand, and it's clear that it goes right past them. Honestly, I don't have a straightforward idea on how to solve those problems and turn them into souls that will continue to evolve, rather than being stuck in a stagnant state, where they will repeat the same mistakes and think they are doing *sadhana*, and are better than others since they are such hard working practitioners”, Buddha shrugged. “I was actually something similar in my earthly life. I did things that didn't work, but which won me acclaim among the fellow practitioners. As I did it more, I actually harmed my health and would have died. When I gave it all up and started using common sense, I attained enlightenment very quickly, but the fellow practitioners thought I had apostatised from the true path because I ceased to starve myself to death and do pointless activities. False spiritual practice is in fact quite rewarding to the ego”.

“I think Satan is one of the reasons why some things stop working after the initial successes”, his wife considered. “He thinks of an antidote for success, and diverts practitioners into some dead-end that is instantly rewarding but ultimately pointless”.

“Be it as it may, people need very little incitement to do just that on their own, I'm afraid”, he shrugged.

“Also, other than the initial impulse of *tantra*, most practices target mostly men, creating extremely unbalanced populations of practitioners, as well as practitioners themselves that are extremely unbalanced within themselves. It is not surprising that they fail to attain true enlightenment, let alone apotheosis – metaphorically speaking, God abhors them. Also, metaphorically speaking, if you don't develop such character that a God-person of the opposite sex will fall in love with you to the point of wanting to spend eternity together, you failed in your spirituality”, Zina nodded.

“You hit that nail right on the head”, Buddha smiled approvingly. “But it doesn't need to be completely straightforward. I, for example, developed alone, but I was balanced, to the point where I needed just a

small nudge from you to show me the next level of evolution, and I went for it. Some of those people invest huge asymmetrical efforts, as if exercising only the right side of their bodies, and end up looking like freaks, and the power of habit they developed is such that you can no longer teach them anything, because they think they know. We'll have to ask Lord Shiva and his Lady about them, since their mastery in those matters is peerless, for I am at my wit's end", he shrugged.

"Honestly, some of those people don't just look like freaks; they *are* freaks. Imagine, for instance, someone who spent decades sharpening his mind, controlling breath, developing clarity of consciousness, doing Kundalini *kriyas*, but seems to be utterly incapable of such a simple thing as loving a woman. A whole sewage dump seems to erupt at the very thought, as the idea of a woman is associated with worldly attachments, losing oneself in the world, lack of emotional control and complex mental faculties, and so on. To them, loving a woman brings associations similar to having intercourse with a goat that also leads you to spiritual ruin. And they don't understand that this is all indoctrination with nonsense; they think it's an absolute, unquestionable truth. And, of course, as such a civilisation marginalises and sidelines women, they indeed become the neglected and inferior gender, and the output of the function feeds back into the inputs, seemingly confirming it. I processed men from such cultures. First they thought I was a maid servant of some man who is doing the actual job and asked me to bring them to my master. Then they outright refused to believe that I can be competent, and eventually they were completely paralysed with shock. I wonder how they would have reacted to someone like Lady Shakti or Lady Kay", she smiled.

"The same", her husband shrugged. "They are conditioned to assume that femininity means stupidity, and it's a serious problem, as such lopsided cultures produce lopsided, dysfunctional people. Both men and women from such cultures tend to be spiritually messed up to the point where we can't do anything with them other than send them back to Earth, since they are incapable of normal life here. Women who are raised to be hardly more than goats end up actually being hardly more than goats, and men tend to react to women in terribly disgusting ways; imagine such a specimen trying to rape a female angel or treat

her as if she's stupid. Here, they would be a virulent contamination. On Earth, I'm afraid they are normal".

"Some actually tried to do something similar with me, thinking I was a pleasure toy given to them by their god as a reward for killing enough 'infidels'. The women, on the other hand, expected me to show them the way to the kitchen. The worst were the semi-crystallised mages trained in some sort of an impersonalistic religious philosophy, such as *vedanta* or sufism. They try to make me disperse or change form, thinking I'm a construct of their minds, and they use extreme mental focus in an imperious manner. Thank God for the protective features of my job, that shield me from such violence, for some of them are truly powerful and their attacks would probably have harmed me otherwise", she shivered.

"That world certainly lived up to the expectation of creating different and unusual types of souls. Unfortunately, this very rarely translates to 'better'", Buddha mused.

"Well, it produced *you*, and that alone made it worth all the failures", she smiled and kissed him.

Progress

“Since your soul structure is essentially grafted upon a *vajra* carrier, your situation is different than what an angelic being would normally be facing. They attained purification of the lower four elements before crystallisation. You, however, need to consciously go through this now in order to integrate your consciousness with the carrier fully”, Goddess explained.

“Jetsunma, how do we do this?”, Albert frowned. “Are there specific ways we should approach grounding into the elements, or should we follow the classic procedure?”

“Classic procedure would probably work, but I have a specific meditation for you to go through, since your specific situation is also providing you with shortcuts that would not be available to a normal soul preparing for *vajra* initiation. The standard affirmation is ‘element Earth is perfect, and present in fullness in me’, and the same for each progressively higher element. In your case, the affirmation is ‘Lady Hypatia is the perfection and fullness of the element Earth, and I accept her perfection and fullness into myself’, as you meditate on her energy as you originally felt it. This is because you already have a template of perfection within your soul, that you merely need to integrate on a conscious level”.

“You spoke about treating impurities that arise in the process, and how they are to be consumed through remorse, suffering and Kundalini kriyas. Does any of this apply to us?”, Hilde wondered.

“No. Your structure is perfectly pure. The carrier your souls were grafted upon is of a perfect Divine origin, and your souls themselves were pure. They were, however, extremely undeveloped, which is why you now need to expand your consciousness by evolving structures that would normally be there in a being of your spiritual status; your problem isn’t lack of purity, but lack of complexity and substance”, Lady Yeshe Tsogyal explained.

“We understand, Jetsunma”, the young students bowed and retreated to meditate.

...

“Isalde, our children have greatly overtaken us in their spiritual progress”, Berfrid addressed his wife. “I’ve seen them with the Tibetan Goddess in the apple orchard again, and each time I see them, they look more mature and older, and I can understand less of what they are saying. We need to pick up the pace, or we’ll be left behind”.

“This is true and you are completely right”, she nodded. “Whilst I am happy that they are making such progress, we need to keep up. During our life on Earth, we were illiterate and ignorant, and now we are surrounded with such excellent opportunities for learning and growth. How are we to be worthy of our Lady’s gift if we stagnate?”

“We should seek out the Tibetan Goddess ourselves and ask that she teaches us alongside our children”, he nodded seriously.

“Shouldn’t we seek out our Lady Hypatia instead?”

“No, she is busy receiving the recently deceased from Earth, and when she isn’t, she is recovering from it with her husband in peace and quiet. It would be sinful to impose undue strain on her. Also, the Buddhist Gods have volunteered to teach ignorant souls that have been released into the astral Earth by the Judges, and this very much applies to us, because we are as ignorant as they get”, he grinned.

“Hopefully, not for too long, lest our children leave us in the dust”, Isalde smiled and embraced him.

...

“Jetsunma, we meditated as you recommended, and the results were quite spectacular”, Hilde bowed to the teacher Goddess. “As we went through each element, it is as if we opened our minds to a huge library of knowledge related to the respective element, and it poured itself into us, giving us perspective and understanding”

“This is exactly what happened”, Yeshe Tsogyal Rimpoche nodded. “The astral world is made in such a way that knowledge isn’t sequestered into some separate library, although a library does indeed exist here, for the souls that are accustomed to Earth; the books there merely connect to the knowledge that could be accessed from any place, and at any time, if you request it. The books are merely an interface”, she smiled.

“So, does this mean that by meditating upon the elements in their purity and fullness, we opened access to the all-present sources of knowledge that were poured into our minds the way water fills a vessel once the dam is removed?”, Albert smiled back.

“Yes. As I can see, you now have complex structures of knowledge and understanding related to the elements, but you need to practice more so that the process of sublimation of four elements into the fifth reproduces in your souls, thus replicating what Lady Hypatia herself attained, untold eons ago”, she confirmed.

“Yes, Jetsunma”, they bowed.

...

“I see that you have both attained the first enlightenment. I salute you”, the Goddess bowed to the stark blue, fully developed angelic beings before her. “You have now consciously attained spiritual status you had previously possessed due to your Lady’s grace, which is now fully your own, and you did her great honour”, she bowed again.

“It is all because of your priceless teaching, Jetsunma”, they bowed in unison.

“We do have a question regarding our further progress”, the girl squirmed uncomfortably. “We understand that in order to become a true God, one must have a relationship of mutual love and worship with their counterpart of the opposite sex”.

“We came to understand that we already have such a relationship with each other, but since we are brother and sister, we came to ask you about propriety”, man blushed to match his sister.

“You worry for no good reason”, the Goddess smiled at them. “On Earth, marriage between siblings is prohibited in order to prevent disorders that would arise from lack of genetic diversity. It is a purely physical precaution that has no bearing on the matters of soul. As you no longer have human bodies, none of this applies to you. So, if you feel comfortable exploring a romantic relationship, this is perfectly appropriate”.

The young angels were hugely relieved. “Thank you, Jetsunma”, they bowed, and looked at each other. “If it is all right, we don’t want to merely explore a romantic relationship. We want to be properly

married as husband and wife. Will you please marry us officially?”, the girl whispered.

“Do you both agree on this?” the Goddess spoke seriously.

“Yes”, they replied in unison.

“Then you are as of now husband and wife”, she bowed. “I give you my most heartfelt blessings”.

“Now, I will teach you how to perform *karmamudra* techniques adapted to direct soul-to-soul contact, so that you can merge your personal lovemaking and meditation on your *yidam* Goddess. This is how I, my husband and my sister-wife attained godhood while still on Earth. I most heartily recommend it”, she smiled, and the newlyweds just bowed in silent adoration.

...

“It’s strange, but I understand it”, Isalde shrugged. “They are close, they are already family, they learned from Jess Rimpoché together, and since there are no human limitations, there was no reason for them not to upgrade their brother-sister relationship to one of husband and wife, if it suited them better. Honestly, it’s the most reasonable and appropriate thing to do, once you think about it properly and get past the human ideas. After all, all Gods are brothers and sisters in a sense, and they are also all merely different faces and persons of the same God”.

“This is exactly as Jess Rimpoché explained it to me”, Berfrid confirmed. “And also, she noted that you, in fact, are their sister as much as their mother, since all three of you share the same Goddess-substance that gave you eternal life”.

“I did think about it”, Isalde nodded and smiled. “The thought of my children also being my siblings is as strange as it is endearing, as is the idea of being both mother and mother-in-law to both of them. But once I’m past the initial shock, I wholly approve of their relationship change. It would be extremely weird for them to break up with each other in order to try to find someone else to marry, when they have no such inclination and it would bring them nothing but suffering”.

“Come; it is time for our next lesson with Jetsunma”, he smiled and took his wife’s hand.

...

Albert and Hilde were intertwined like a double helix of black and white *vajra*, drinking the nectar of devotion to their Goddess, to their Teacher, and to each other, each devotion strengthening and empowering others, until the veil in their hearts was no more, and God claimed both of them as Self.

...

Berfrid and Isalde watched in a mixture of shock and bliss as their children formed a *mandala* by folding space and time as if a paper flower, with themselves embraced in its centre. They understood what was happening. They, too, were good students of Jess Rimpoché, and Isalde herself attained her first enlightenment, and was now an angelic being in her own right, and not merely by the grace of their Goddess. As they observed their children's apotheosis, they looked each other in the eyes and decided it's time.

Jetsunma taught them well; they combined their own love, worship of the Goddess, gratitude and worship of Jetsunma herself, and, now, admiration and worship of their divine children, who were the newest God-couple at the summit of Creation.

And so, the Gods were nineteen.

...

“Apostle, have you seen this?”, Augustine prodded Paul.

“I have indeed, Bishop. Our Lord was right. Seemingly, not only have the harlots and tax collectors overtaken us into the kingdom of God, but also the serfs”, Paul snickered. “We have been lazy and complacent, my dear Bishop. Instead of learning from our betters, we have been sitting on our imaginary laurels”.

“Maybe this is an extraordinary exception; they were saved by Lady Hypatia, who sacrificed a part of her own soul for them, blessed be her holy name forever”, Augustine nodded. “But maybe I am deceiving myself. They are obviously better than me, as I encountered the Lady myself on my arrival here, and I mostly wasted my time arguing with her about theology, while they worshipped the ground she walks on, as is right and proper, as she is a sister to our Lord”, he waved his head in self criticism.

“Let’s find Peter and tell him about this. Truly, we need to repent and cast aside our stubborn ways, lest God get weary of our nonsense and cast *us* aside”, Paul smiled bitterly.

Amalgamation

“So, let me get this straight. Since I last saw you, all four of you went to Lady Jess to teach you, because you decided you were ignorant peasants?”, Lady Hypatia smiled at the four newborn Gods.

“Well, we figured that staying ignorant would be a poor way to repay you for your kindness”, Albert smiled. “So, we looked around to see who would teach us how the world works. Jetsunma seemed to be the least busy, so we went to her”.

“And then all four of you became Gods, and then Jess chastised Lord Shiva for giving her the title ‘Teacher of Gods’?”, she sipped her coffee and snickered.

“I didn’t chastise Lord Shiva!”, Yeshe Tsogyal protested, taken aback by the very idea. “I just urged him very politely to reconsider, because my husband and wife were doing the same work as I, and it was a mere accident that I got such brilliant students, so if I am to be recognised for it, they should be as well”.

“And so all three of you got the title”, Hypatia smiled. “Quite deservedly, if I may say so, since you’ve been doing wonderful work there. Thanks to you, the level of understanding of the world among the post-Earth souls has risen dramatically”.

“And all four of you now have an official title in the lineage of Jetsunma Yeshe Tsogyal Rimpoche in the Nyingma tradition of Vajrayana Buddhism”, Kay nodded approvingly. “Which means you all now have long titles I will never manage to remember”, she pretended to nurse a headache.

“Let’s all pretend you didn’t just remember mine perfectly”, Jess tickled her in the ribs and laughed as the Mind of God tried to squirm away, giggling.

“So, what do you plan to do next?”, Lady Hypatia asked the four.

“If it is acceptable to you, we would like to join you in your work as the Judges”, Hilde looked at Hypatia. “We considered between that and joining Jetsunma in her teaching work, but we decided that, since

we belong to you, we should take some of your workload away and thus make your life easier”, she smiled at her Goddess, who started to tear up and decided to hide her emotions by embracing the girl.

“It is perfectly acceptable. All four of you are overqualified for the job, and we are honoured to have you”, nodded Lord Vishnu, who decided to save Lady Hypatia from the embarrassment of having to say something while trying not to cry.

...

“Wait, I just remembered that you referred to Lady Mandarava as your wife, and not sister-wife”, Kay scratched her jaw. “Does that mean...?”

“Yes, it’s a three-way relationship. I am her wife as much as I am his. If I didn’t love them equally, there would certainly be all kinds of jealousy or feelings of exclusion. Our minds are so intertwined, we don’t even think of ourselves as separate persons, more like one person with three bodies, all in service of each other”, Lady Jess nodded.

“That’s why you refused any recognition if the two of them don’t partake”, Goddess of Wisdom nodded. “You perceive yourselves as a single unit, that just happens to sit under three different apple trees at the same time”.

“I’m glad that you understand us. People get confused when they see us, because they always get hung up on sex and imagine two in intercourse with the odd person sticking out. That’s not at all how it is. We meditated together so much, that we would forget which body is where. Our consciousness was completely merged, and we automatically took care of each other’s needs, without even realising. Someone would be thirsty and someone would bring water. One of us would work late, and one of the others would wake up and bring more oil for the lamp and go back to sleep. I don’t even remember which one did what. So, even saying that it was a three-way marriage doesn’t do it justice. Mandarava is not so much my wife as she is a body part, figuratively speaking. You will rarely see us talking to each other, but you will see us finishing each other’s thoughts, or picking up each other’s role in a conversation. The fact that two out of the three of my souls are female is merely a factoid”, she smiled.

“But what about sex? I mean, technically...?”, Kay blushed.

“Technically, sex consisted mostly of breathing each other’s energy, of surrender and worship”, Jess shrugged. “Of course we were incredibly intimate with each other, but if you visualise my husband in *padmasana*, and me in his lap, you’ll understand there’s not much penetration or action of any kind going on there”, she laughed as Kay was cherry red. “I would embrace him and we would breathe each other. Or I would embrace my wife and we would breathe each other. When you have three-way blending of minds and all are breathing *vajra* and visualising mandalas, the sex on Earth was pretty much the same as it is for you and your husband here; souls breathing each other in directly. The physical world was something that happened in the background”, she shrugged.

“I am starting to see why the three of you became Gods, and others doing apparently similar things in your tradition didn’t. You were the goal to each other, not means to an end”, Kay nodded.

“Exactly. We weren’t using each other to attain enlightenment; we used enlightenment to love and serve each other”, Jess smiled blissfully.

“I am honoured to be your friend; and by ‘you’ I mean all three of you, who are one”, Karuna bowed, and Jess Rimpoche just hugged her. “You’re not merely my friend, sweetheart. You’re my sister”.

...

“The religions and cultures seem to be amalgamating wonderfully”, Lady Shakti smiled at her husband. “A tantric Tibetan Goddess just brought four German Christians who worship a neoplatonist Greek Goddess to godhood. Also, the said Tibetan Goddess is sister-bonding with Karuna”.

“Sounds very much like heaven”, Shiva smiled. “The only kind of a religious war they could possibly have is over trying to give each other all the credit. But just imagine people on Earth seeing them. They would have an absolute fit”.

“You mean, they would try to burn them all at a stake for heresy?”, she giggled.

“Exactly”, he nodded.

“I don’t think we are even close to seeing the dumbest and craziest they have to offer”, Shakti sighed.

An old mistake

“Something seems to bother you, Bishop”, Christ smiled at the man. “One would think a man such as yourself would run out of bothers in a place like this”, he pointed at their surroundings. It was a green meadow in the astral Earth, where Jesus made it a point to break bread with Christians every day, and answer their questions, for they had many. It was different from what the Buddhists did in the apple orchard, but no less useful.

“I think I had my priorities wrong for so long, I’m not sure if I can get my head straight any more, my Lord”, Augustine sighed. “Christianity seemed to be about choice of You, and the correct teaching of the Church. In order to make the correct choice, one had to cast aside worldly things, wrong things, things that would seduce one away from God. I’ve read your words, and they seemed to approve of this interpretation – let the dead bury their dead, and you who want eternal life should follow me”.

“I had a wife, you know. It wasn’t formalised; the word we used for her was ‘concubine’, but I lived with her for almost fourteen years. We even had a son together; we called him our gift from God, Adeodatus. She was of lower status, so it was out of the question to elevate our relationship to official marriage, and even my mother, who was very Christian and who actually played a huge part in my conversion to Christianity, encouraged me to send her away and marry someone of proper status”.

“I loved her greatly. She was my dearest friend and companion, but since everyone around me encouraged me to treat this relationship as something frivolous and unimportant, I never assigned it with the significance it ought to have had. They had me send her away, and I did. I saw your example, as the Church presented it, and thought I don’t need a wife, that I should dedicate my life to God alone. So, I lost my wife, and soon my son died, and I think my true life died there, with them, and what was left was the vacuous word juggling and arguing about orthodoxy, the way fools would argue about wrappings as they throw away the content of the package. Now I see that not only did you

have a wife, but she was with you until the end, she was with your mother under the cross, she was the one who saw you rise from the dead, and she is with you now as a fellow person of God, and the Church discarded her the same way in which I discarded my own wife. It all looks like the same fatal flaw, where we rejected the will of the living God in order to accept words and rituals bereft of meaning, deluding ourselves by thinking how we renounced the worldly things for those of eternity. Can I ever put this right?”

“The Church really messed this one up by counterfeiting Magdalena out of my life”, Jesus nodded in dismay. “Your wife is not a worldly thing. She is your opportunity to share God with someone in deep intimacy. To send your wife away because you want to dedicate yourself to God is like performing human sacrifice for the sake of nonviolence. It is as counterproductive as it is moronic and evil, and you are right to be ashamed of yourself for it, for it was a terrible thing to do”.

“However, it’s actually more complicated than that. You see, you were an angel, and she was a less developed soul. I mention you being an angel not as praise, but as a warning, for angels are usually conceited, self-righteous, dismissive of the lives of others and more focused on ‘important’ things in life, such as their career, or a higher calling, rather than the people in their lives. It is a paradox that demons tend to be more loving and caring in their earthly lives, as they don’t care so much about the abstract things, as they do about the immediate ones. Zina is a good example of this; she was a demoness, and she threw herself into loving her worldly family with incredible passion. Hypatia, on the other hand, was an angel, and you can see this in her life, where her career was paramount, and her relationships with people were superficial at best. She was, however, a very kind and caring person to others, very much like you were, when they didn’t stand in the way of your illustrious career”, Jesus grinned. “The reason why I am mentioning this is because you were simply not in a good place in your spiritual life, where you could really appreciate the deep spiritual importance of your wife, and your environment merely encouraged you in your natural proclivities. She, on the other hand, was not ready for the really deep spiritual place you are thinking of now. It was not the right time for either of you. Yes, you sinned against her when she did

nothing wrong and everything right, but even if you hadn't, the difference between you was too great for you to have been able to establish the kind of a spiritual bond of joint godhood that I have with Magdalena, or what Hypatia has with the Angel of Death, or what Zina has with Buddha. We were all quite close to our companions in spiritual status. Magdalena was incredibly close to being a Goddess in our earthly life, and became one minutes after her death. Hypatia became a Goddess essentially seconds after seeing Azrael, and he was at an almost identical state of spiritual growth as her, so they achieved apotheosis together. Your wife would have needed to take a few more spiritual steps in order to match you, and you, yourself, are ready to understand the significance of it only now”.

“And you should understand that she was and is your true wife, Bishop. It was no accident that you felt such friendship and closeness with her in life, and she can be replaced by no other”, Christ nodded solemnly.

“Where is she now, my Lord?”, Augustine said in anguish. “What has happened with her since we parted so inauspiciously?”

“She vowed to remain forever loyal to you and to take no other man, and she did exactly that, in that life as well as those that followed. She was a consecrated virgin, a Christian nun, in three lives that followed. Her last life ended just recently, and I talked to her yesterday. She was a person of great esteem in the Church, almost matching your own reputation and status, as is proper. Would you like me to introduce you to each other?”, Lord Yeshua smiled.

“I would like that very much, even though I am very much ashamed of myself and I feel unworthy. It will be a great penance for me to have her chastise me, and I will bear it with humility as I fully deserve it”, Augustine nodded, with an expression of a man whose sins came to bear fruit.

“Then so shall it be”, Christ nodded, and made a hand motion. An angelic woman appeared from the shimmer in space. “May I introduce you to abbess Hildegard von Bingen. Abbess, may I introduce you to Bishop Augustine of Hippo”, he nodded.

The woman was a deep indigo-violet super-angel of the highest order, and Augustine was deeply impressed by her depth and stature. And yet, there was an air of profound familiarity around her.

“Goldy? Is that really you?”, she closed the space between them, and he could see her tears welling up.

“I am so sorry to have been such an ass to you”, his own tears streaked his face. “You are known as Hildegard now, am I right?”

She just embraced him wordlessly and they wept together, as Christ shimmered out to give them privacy.

Confessions

“Stop apologising, Goldy”, Hildegard smiled. “I was never in your league intellectually, but I wasn’t completely stupid either. I knew I was too lucky to have you, and I left of my own will when the time came. I knew you are the only one I would ever want, but we weren’t *there* at the same time. You had a life of a Bishop and a philosopher ahead of you, and I knew I would only stand in your way, for I wasn’t worthy of you yet”, she caressed his cheek. “But I prayed that God would bring our destinies together once we were both ready”, she smiled at her ancient love.

“When I was with you, I felt such depth of consciousness, merely from you being there, that nothing I felt in church came close, so I learned to relive that depth in my memory, and prayed to God to elevate me spiritually to that level, so I could truly be your wife, and not merely an incredibly lucky *ancilla*”, she laughed quietly. “I also never wanted to have another man in my bed, because I thought of myself as forever yours. In my next lives, this remained true, and I kept meditating and studying, without consciously knowing why, but of course I would remember between lives, as the Judges would awaken my memories”.

“You more than merely caught up with me, Hildegard”, he smiled. “You are so amazing now, I feel I now need to catch up with you”.

“Nonsense. Your energy grew deeper ever since we embraced, and it grows deeper still, as we breathe each other’s presence”, she dismissed the idea. “It seems that the only thing that was actually hindering your progress is the fact that your heart stopped when I went away, and I’m sorry for that”.

“And I’m sorry I didn’t always remain faithful to you. I briefly tried to fill the void with another woman, but it was an unworthy effort and brought me no happiness”, he nodded remorsefully.

“I forgive you. It was harder for you, I know. Everybody knew you were of high status and I was a daughter of a slave maid. The

expectation was that I was nothing special. You only found out that it wasn't so when you tried to replace me and you couldn't, and you didn't know why, and then you were ordained and all of it fell to the wayside. I, on the other hand, always knew you were special and irreplaceable. The only person who could ever come close to my memory of you was Christ himself. So, replacing you with another man wasn't even a temptation", she smiled.

"My only love, will you have me back? I am unworthy, and I was treacherous and foolish, but I confessed to Christ just now that I would do anything to repair that ancient mistake, where I treated my true wife as a worldly thing to be renounced for Christ, only to find out that my way to God leads only through you", he kissed her hand. "I promise to never leave you again, may Christ be my witness".

"I will have you; for in my heart of hearts, I always remained yours", she smiled and melted into his embrace.

...

"Let's go and find Christ, for this time I want *him* to pronounce us man and wife, to make up for my old failure".

...

"Truly, you are already married, but I bear witness to this fact and pronounce you husband and wife", Jesus embraced them both. "Do you now know what to do"?

"I felt immense relief and spiritual growth as she returned to me and I held her, so I would suspect that further growth lies in that direction", Augustine offered.

"Quite so", Christ nodded. "You can get more precise details from the Teachers of Gods in the apple orchard, for they are the greatest experts in all of Heaven in matters of spiritual marriage and energy flows. However, I think you are both mature and wise enough to already suspect everything. You need to love, adore, worship and serve each other, and you also need to worship the person of God that is closest to you. Do you know who that is for you?"

"You are", they spoke in unison, and smiled.

“Well, that makes it simple. Love each other and breathe in each other’s energy, and remember My presence and what you admire about it, for I am the Light of the World”, the Jewel in his hearth flashed and they were both momentarily overcome with bliss. “Love and worship each other, and love and worship God; and the rest is up to God, because the next step in spiritual evolution isn’t so much you choosing to become something, as much it is God choosing to become you”, he hugged them again and shooed them away to meditate.

And, as they did, the Gods were twenty one.

The Theory

“Lady Karuna, may I have a moment of your time, please?”, a strikingly blue angel bowed.

“By all means, Sri Shankaracharya”, the girl smiled and curtsied. “How can I be of assistance?”

“Since the end of my life on Earth, I meditated, thought, asked questions, and eventually decided to talk to you, since all are in agreement that you are the wisest or at least in the closest contention for that title, and you seem to be the least scary and intimidating of all who were mentioned in the same breath”, he smiled.

“It will be my honour”, she smiled and waved a hand. A coffee lounge enclosed them as to give them privacy. “I assume your inquiry will be related to the fact that the world doesn’t seem to follow the predictions your philosophy postulated”, she poured him coffee.

“That is indeed so, but were it only that, my confusion would be less, and I would merely adopt a system of belief that is better. My problem is that nobody seems to have predicted everything with full accuracy. Buddha was both wrong and right on many counts. Personalistic schools were right on some counts and wrong on others. Christians, as I see, were also wrong on many things, and yet right enough for it not to matter greatly. What is most confusing is that I see Gods who belonged to many different systems, most of which were wrong on at least half of everything they addressed, and yet it doesn’t seem to matter. My own system seemed to explain everything, and here I see that it explains the Absolute excellently, and the Relative poorly, to the point where I got literally nothing right. This in itself would be humbling enough, but I recently witnessed the fact that four peasants from Mleccha lands attained godhood very quickly, based on short instruction by the enlightened Buddhists originating from the university of Nalanda, so obviously the secret to apotheosis must be easy and straightforward to both explain and understand, and yet, I never even came close to replicating their achievement. I am thus confused and

seek refuge in your knowledge, Goddess of Wisdom”, he bowed deeply.

“Your analysis is honest, straightforward and accurate, and I admire it”, the Lady nodded. “Your mind is pure and powerful and it is an honour and a pleasure to talk to you. However, allow me to direct your attention to the Gods themselves. You seem to have become aware of their particular identities and status?”

“Yes, I know all of you. There are Lord Shiva and Lady Shakti, Lord Krishna and Lady Lakshmi, your esteemed husband Lord Azazel and your honoured person, then Lord Buddha and Lady Zina, Lord Azrael also known as Yama, and his wife, Lady Hypatia of Yavana origin, Lord Jesus and his wife Lady Mary, Lord Padmasambhava of Nalandā and his honoured wives, Lady Mandarava and Lady Yeshe Tsogyal, their four recently enlightened disciples from the Christian lands, and I heard that a famous Christian philosopher and his honourable wife have today been added to the number, but I don’t know their names yet, as I just heard the news”, he reported.

“Your report is indeed exhaustive and accurate, S�amiji”, Karuna nodded. “Could you please point out the Gods who are *brahmacharis*?”

“I don’t think there are any, my Lady. They all seem to be married couples, except that one triple”.

“I also assure you that all married units attained apotheosis together; there were no individual male or female Gods who attained apotheosis, and got married later”, she confirmed. “What does that tell you?”

“It indicates very strongly that spirituality isn’t an individual endeavour, and that there is something about male and female aspects of consciousness, and especially them working together in the last stage of spiritual advancement, that makes apotheosis possible”, he conceded. “This, however, is as far as my analysis can take me”.

“I will now demonstrate something my holy Mother, Lady Lakshmi showed me right before my crystallisation into *vajra*. Take a look at this astral flower”, she waved her hand and a flower appeared on the coffee table. “Please, enter *samadhi* and feel it”, she encouraged.

“I did. Its very consciousness sings ‘so ham’, ‘I Am That’”, he nodded. “The flower exists in a state of *turiya*”.

“That is correct. Now, tell me, S�amiji, how are you different from that flower?”, she smiled.

“You mean, we both exist in a state of unity between *atman* and *brahman*. By my own definition, this realisation should burn out all karmic seeds and remnants and produce liberation, the way knowledge erases ignorance and light erases darkness. And yet, not only are myself and the flower different karmic entities, but we are in fact vastly different. I see what you mean: *turiya* does not affect the level of *karma* whatsoever. One who was a man before realisation does not become a flower or an elephant merely because the same *brahman* manifests as *atman* in all beings. Also, his karma is not transformed or erased, and whatever he was prior to realisation, this he remains, with the addition of realisation, which changes his understanding, but does not fundamentally alter his nature. The consequence of this, I see, is that I worked very hard on attaining a state that is initially valuable, but its repetition and extension does not improve upon this initial achievement, making the effort redundant, if not altogether useless”, he conceded.

“Your analysis is excellent”, she smiled and nodded in praise. “You are probably familiar with the *Sankhya* theory of *Prakriti* and the three *gunas* that make it: *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva*? ”

“I am indeed”, he nodded.

“This theory is a Hindu attempt to make their own version of Lord Buddha’s theory of *kalapas*, the fundamental particles that aggregate into larger karmic entities. This theory was the theoretical foundation of his concept of *anatman*, assuming that the concepts of *karma* and soul are not separate, in a sense where soul would have *karma*, but that soul in fact is *karma*. Buddha assumed that the concept of *asmita*, self-ness, is an emergent property of *karma*, and as such deconstructible. This was his error, as *samadhi* experience demonstrates – *asmita* is the foundation of all reality, as it is the fundamental aspect of the Absolute, and since it exists in every single *kalapa*, it is obviously not divisible either, as your Upanishads illustrate with the example of a single Moon and multiple vessels of water that

can contain its reflection”, she nodded. “So, if every *kalapa* manifests *asmita*, and other properties of *brahman*, what changes as *kalapas* aggregate into larger entities?”

“The obvious answer is quantity. However, this does not relate to *asmita*, as self-full nature of *brahman* seems to exist in this flower as much as in myself. However, the mind changes, as well as other manifestations of *sat-cit-ananda*. This means that a bigger, more complex karmic structure creates a larger, more powerful consciousness, and differences exist in ratios and amounts of properties. If impurities exist, they also affect the structure of the karmic body, which now explains the purpose of *yoga* and other forms of *sadhana*; those impurities need to be removed”, he nodded.

“So, we have so far proven that *asmita* and *sat-cit-ananda* exist on a particulate level, and are not emergent macroscopic properties. We have also established that souls vary in size and complexity, and that impurities and structural flaws can manifest during the process of karmic accretion. Do you agree”?

“I do”, he nodded. “However, we haven’t established the mechanism of accretion itself, nor what makes a difference between pure and impure growth of a karmic body, and I will now make an obvious conjecture from the established fact that *kalapas* are of the nature of *asmita* and *sat-cit-ananda*, and state that the karmic actions that promote self-realization and *sat-cit-ananda* in oneself and other beings are conducive to correct karmic growth. Also, actions that are opposite to that, in a sense that they extinguish self and cause spiritual darkness and suffering have a detrimental effect on the karmic body, but this is as far as my conjecture goes, and I again have to resort to your precious guidance”, he smiled and nodded to the Goddess.

“You are again correct in all your suppositions. The actions that promote *sat-cit-ananda*, and I will further merely assume *asmita*, as it is in fact the same phenomenon, since *asmita* is *satcitanandamaya*, are conducive to karmic growth, and this is for two main reasons. First is that such auspicious actions create a glow in the Relative that is reminiscent of *brahman*, and *kalapas* have an inherent longing to return to their origin in the Absolute, but they can only do so in the Relative, so they are attracted to the karmic structure whose inner light

is the strongest. Goodness and manifestation of the inner nature of *brahman* are like a strong beacon that attracts soul-particles the way fire attracts insects. This is true also on the macroscopic level, as good people attract other good people, and Gods attract all goodness in all of the Relative, as we are the ultimate expressions of *brahman*. We can here establish that a karmic aggregate holds together due to the inherent attractive forces between the particles. This is a *sacitcitanandamaya* force, it is of truth-wisdom-bliss. Evil actions: those that promote lies, ignorance and suffering; that oppose reality and lead away from all that is good and spiritually useful, create areas of low-attraction or even repulsion within the karmic structure, causing it to become structurally weak and prone to breakage. This limits the karmic aggregate's further growth until the structural flaws are removed, and they are removed by correct knowledge and correction of past error by good actions. Knowledge itself is not sufficient for removing those inclusions, as it needs to counter heavy inertia of past action, so a combination of realisation, suffering and action is usually required. The difference between impurity and structural flaw is that of degree. Actions that are mostly good, but contain a seed of ignorance and wrongness, create a structure that is of impure colour. Actions that are outright evil create structural defects and weaknesses that would lead to karmic disintegration", she nodded.

"I have seen this mentioned in the context of impurities on the four lower elements, those being earth, water, fire and air. As we are in the astral world, and those obviously do not refer to the material elements, they must be a metaphor?", he wondered.

"Indeed. Earth is, essentially, reality of a thing, its foundation in truth and fact. Believing in truth and fact grounds one in reality, and is thus purity of the element Earth. Element Water is energy, which can be pure or impure, and this is a level of interpersonal interactions. When they are pure, meaning those that promote truth, consciousness and bliss, it is said that one is pure in the element of Water. This is why the Gods always interact in an uninhibited, truthful and blissful way, and impure beings interact in ways that promote falsehoods, diminish happiness and introduce ignorance and incoherence. The third element is Fire, and by that we mean the mind in its creative function. If mind is pure, it creates actions and artefacts that affirm and promote truth,

reality and bliss. For instance, one writes a book that reveals knowledge and dispels ignorance, and also makes readers feel good, causing them to partake in the inner nature of *brahman*. Or, one invents and implements agricultural methods such as accumulation lakes and irrigation channels, that correct for the periods of drought, thus producing food where there would otherwise be famine. If one is of impure mind, he thinks of various things that will make others feel terrible, and promote ignorance and suffering, for instance making drugs that will make people feel good temporarily, but will harm them greatly in the long run; or they invent philosophies that flatter one's ego but eventually lead them to ruin. The fourth element, that of Air, is what we could call freedom. This element is the most abstract of the four. If one allows themselves freedom to be whatever is best and manifests the Will of God, it is said that one is pure in this element. If one imposes restrictions, such as requesting punishment for his past wrong action instead of just correcting them, or requires others to be restricted, limited and oppressed, he is impure in the element of Air. Purity of Air manifests as unrestricted love, thought and being, but unrestricted doesn't mean of whatever nature, including evil one; it means unrestricted nature of *brahman*, who is *sat-cit-ananda*. A purity of acceptance, freedom and happiness, and allowing God to take whichever form is the best, and also forgiveness and release of spiritual fetters, is purity of the element of Air. Since that element is usually the last to be mastered, purity of Air normally signifies purity on all four elements, which starts the process of sublimation into the fifth, also known as crystallisation into *vajra*. This transformation fuses the gaseous particles of an astral body into a crystalline structure, where a huge cloud of astral matter compresses into a small crystal of *vajra*. As one evolves further, this structure can grow bigger and also the frequency of its specific energy grows higher. However, if you followed me thus far, this is where you will ask an obvious question", she smiled.

"You mean, where does one get the *kalapas* for this kind of growth, as one would assume that accretion of the free *kalapas* from the surrounding space is a rather weak source, that might function well enough in the beginnings, but less so later on, and if I am to

guesstimate, accreting all the free *kalapas* from the astral world would hardly contribute anything to my current spiritual size”, he nodded.

“You are again correct. Even much earlier in one’s spiritual evolution, the main source of new *kalapas* that integrate into one’s karmic body is not the environment, but another phenomenon entirely. You see, new *kalapas* are constantly being created; they are not a limited resource. The probability of new *kalapas* being created is the greatest in places where the manifestation of *brahman* in the Relative is the greatest, as this makes the veil between the Relative and the Absolute the thinnest. A soul is by definition an aggregation of *kalapas* in the Relative, which means it is a heightened manifestation of *brahman* compared to the surrounding space, and its baseline of existence itself already guarantees that new *kalapas* will more likely be born in a soul’s core, than in the surrounding space. However, as one performs karmic actions that are really *sacitcitanandamaya*, there’s a literal fountain of new *kalapas* opening in the core of one’s soul, one’s heart, metaphorically speaking, which is how good states of consciousness and good actions promote one’s spiritual growth, at a much greater scale than would be possible by mere absorption of free *kalapas* from the environment. And also, unlike the environmental *kalapas* which are always of lower energy than your soul, and you need to extract this low-energy disturbance from them by the process of suffering and *yoga*, the *kalapas* from the fountain in your heart are of the highest energy your spiritual body can hold, so they mean instant growth without any of the drawbacks that come from other methods, such as taking on karma from others, or absorbing karmic bodies of the impure beings that you had to kill”, she grinned.

“This sounds like a self-promoting process where being a beacon of the light of *brahman* in the Relative makes you a bigger beacon of light of *brahman* in the Relative, until...”, he wondered.

“Until God”, she smiled and pointed at herself. “Until the unmanifested *brahman* attains self-realisation as you; the opposite to what this flower or yourself do when you realize that you, in your true nature, are *brahman*. Apotheosis is what takes place when the unmanifested *brahman* realizes that it really, really wants to be Kay, and then I Am Her”, she smiled and both her eyes and the jewel on her brow lit up. “The goal of evolution is not when you become *brahman*,

because you started by being *brahman*; that's no achievement, and realization of the fact is good, but also doesn't do much for you. The goal of evolution is when God wants to be you, because you are so incredibly attractive to God as a self-expression nexus, that God attains self-awareness and self-actualization as you, and the veil between Relative and the Absolute that used to exist within your heart, and which became permeable and produced *kalapa*-fountains during your evolution, breaks up and ceases to exist completely, as God becomes you, and you become a God", she was now positively glowing, and Shankaracarya's hair stood on end in awe, because he was looking as if at the core of a spiritual star.

"This is a good lesson for me, my Lady", he managed to start using words again. "You know, I used to think that on Earth, it's best to be born human; of human births, it was the best to be born a *brahmana* in India, and of brahmanic births, it was best to be born a man, because then you could go renounce the world and attain enlightenment. Now, I'm talking to a woman who is so far above me in every conceivable metric, that the difference wouldn't be that much greater were I a woman from a low caste, or for that matter, a cow", he shivered. "You are like a huge ocean, but the stunning thing is that the ocean is not trying to swallow me and drown me, but instead lifts me up and makes me float, as its waters are wisdom and kindness; the knowledge that teaches and nurtures, not knowledge that humiliates and tears down. And as for the male and female thing, I for the life of me can't comprehend it. I used to think that gender was merely a property of the body, and as you transcend the physical, the soul remains not only genderless, but is also just one in all beings, truly. Maybe the most shocking part of my new understanding is that this is completely wrong. Can you please explain how souls can have such strong sexual dimorphism, because I have no idea how to explain this, and yet it is obviously true. You are not only God, but you are also the most feminine girl imaginable, and yet every understanding I used to have about women – how they are intellectually weaker, less prone to transcendence and so on – is obviously falsified by your person", he shrugged, looking confused.

"We now seem to have made a full circle, coming back to the initial question of our conversation; that of the reason why Gods exist

in male/female couples, with an exception of one male/double-female triple. Also, your observation that the highest beings have the greatest degree of gender dimorphism, as if spiritual evolution abhors the gender-neutral, which exists in abundance on the lowest evolutionary tiers, but is literally nonexistent on the highest ones. The reason for this, of course, is not anything physical. Neither I nor my husband had a physical incarnation on Earth, and yet I am strongly female, and he is strongly male. So, obviously, the reason for our dimorphism isn't that evolution in a human body shapes you in one direction or the other, and this then persists as you keep evolving on the higher planes. In fact, it seems to be the other way around; Sanat Kumar couldn't design a functional physical world that wouldn't replicate the sexual dimorphism that exists on the soul planes, and the physical differences between human sexes seems to imperfectly mirror the structure of male and female souls. The main difference is that souls don't have sexual organs as separate structures; my entire soul, for instance, is my female sexual organ. It's as if we exist in either left or right crystalline alignment on the level of our fundamental spiritual structure, and it can work right only if it's either completely left or completely right. Having it part one, part another would create a fundamental imbalance, and the crystal would break in two along the separating line. Do you follow me?", she smiled.

"I think I do. The reason why only strongly male and strongly female persons are accepted by *brahman* as its persons – which is the opposite of how I used to conceptualise enlightenment, by the way – is because unclear, indistinct or ambiguous spiritual gender translates to a weak and imperfect crystalline structure, which would collapse long before the point in which apotheosis becomes an immediate prospect. I also understand now that enlightenment is not about transcendence of the personal as one comes to evolve enough to be able to understand the impersonal, but evolving the personal to the point where *brahman* seems to decide that it is what represents its inner nature in the Relative. Also, this inner nature seems to be something that not only doesn't discriminate against being male or female, but on the contrary, outright refuses to be just one of the two, unless it is immediately balanced by its opposite-gendered counterpart. Why this is so, is something I don't yet understand", he shrugged.

“It seems that the inner nature of brahman is such, that the only way to truly express it in the relative is a male-female relationship, which requires a perfect man, a perfect woman, and a perfect relationship between the two. This is something that balances reality that would otherwise be incapable of manifesting what’s on the other side. The reason *brahman* accepted me as Herself is because of how female I am, and because of how much I love my husband, and how much I worship my elders. The reason *brahman* accepted my husband as Himself is because how male he is, and because of how much he loves me, his female counterpart, and how much he adores our elders. We started pretty much as you are now – as angelic beings of *vajra*. I was smaller and of lesser specific energy than you are, while my husband was somewhat stronger and of higher frequency than you are. We were both newcomers; he used to be a very old and powerful demon who sought refuge in Lord Shiva, and I was a maid-servant of Lady Lakshmi. Since we were both lost in a heavenly plane, we got together, and we were so attracted to each other that we got married within minutes, and our lovemaking consisted of worshipping our elders, and drinking each other’s energy, and we grew much stronger and greater very quickly. Then Lord Shiva and Lady Lakshmi came to explain things to us, blessed our union and left us to our own devices. My brilliant husband concluded that we have everything we need now, and we continued with our *sadhana* of worshipping the elder Gods and worshipping each other, and we attained apotheosis that same day, becoming the first new Gods after the Primordials”, she glowed as she reminisced.

“So this is why there are no celibate Gods. *Brahman*, essentially, refuses this and sees it as an abomination. Any such thing would need to be corrected at a much earlier phase, or one would be stuck in an evolutionary dead end”, he nodded. “But what about the Buddhist triple? They seem to be an exception”.

“Not really. They are all either strongly male, or strongly female. The third person isn’t an imbalance, as both women are very strongly feminine, and the fact that they worship one another and it’s a full three-way marriage seems to be the proper way to balance such a union. It would be imbalanced if the females repulsed each other, but

since their energies are merged and blended, it works like a three-quark union in a proton”, she smiled.

“What?”, he scratched his head.

“Oh, never mind, something from the physical world; some of the fundamental particles of the material world are structured in that way; in order to get a particle, you need two up quarks and one down quark, where two up quarks are of different ‘colours’, and the ‘down’ quark is of a third primary colour, and together they form a ‘white’ proton”, she giggled. “It’s the closest analogy for our beloved Buddhist triple that I could think of, but this structure is of course unknown to the physics of your era. I will open a data bank for you so you can absorb this knowledge”, she waved her hand and Shankaracharya’s eyes rolled up for a moment.

“Oh, I see”, he noted. “The quantum chromodynamics. So you have red and green female, and a blue male in a triple, and this is the equivalent of a, let’s say, black-white structure of a couple”, he nodded. “The women are united in their common worship of the man, and they love each other the way one would love oneself in profound self-realization, and their mutual energy exchange is self-affirming through strengthening another female self of the triple. It’s a wonderful relationship, if everybody is pure, and they are obviously perfect”, he nodded.

“The difference between their relationship and the quantum chromodynamics metaphor is that they both together create a perfect white to complement his black, but the rest of the analogy holds”, Kay nodded. “In any case, brahman strongly approves of their union and their persons, as each of them would rather die than see the third person removed from their bond, which is exactly how my husband and I feel about each other. Everything is either both of us, or none of us”, she smiled blissfully.

“What about homosexuals as a possibility?”, he wondered. “There are many male worshippers on Earth that look distinctly feminised, with proclivities towards the same sex. What happens to them here?”

“The homosexual pairs tend to be quite polar; one always plays the feminine role, and the other masculine. Remove the physical body and the feminine homosexual male usually turns out to be a female

soul, because even if a soul started as mostly male and took a male body, once they start practicing femininity the soul structure turns more female. It's the same with homosexual women. One tends to be feminine and the other masculine, and the masculine one is basically re-magnetising her soul to the male side and, unless she decides to reverse the process, turns completely male. But this is a very early stage of spiritual evolution, compared to what we are talking about here, and homosexuality is usually merely a consequence of some trauma or impurity that needs to be corrected. For instance, Mandy and Jess aren't Lesbians, despite the fact that they see each other as wives and are sexually completely interconnected to the point where you would probably kill both of them if you tried to disconnect them. They are more like two hemispheres in the brain of a single heterosexual, very feminine woman. Yes, this is the best explanation I can think of, since they both say that the other is more like their body part, and not a different person. I've heard of conjoined twins on Earth, where you would have two women sharing the same body, but their brains are distinct. Now imagine them with brains completely neurally interconnected, the way two hemispheres of a normal brain are connected, and it's a three-way connection with Paddy, as well. It sounds complicated, but to them it's the simplest and most normal thing in the world, and *brahman* obviously loves being them. Oh, I'm opening another knowledge bank on human biology", she snickered.

"I see", he smiled after he absorbed the information.

"But what do you get if a male and a female God achieve some kind of a perfect union in the Relative? Is that even a possibility, or are they necessarily separated since it's a requirement in the Relative?", he nodded curiously.

"A perfect union between a male and a female God is the full version of this", she tapped the golden jewel at her forehead. "The Throne of God. The foundation of Reality. It's the first emanation of the Absolute, which then further separates into a male-female couple, and then manifests *vajras* and lesser energies, such as the astral substance", her jewel flashed briefly.

"I think *brahmacharya* was a fundamental mistake, and I should have paid more attention to the *tantrikas*", he waved his head in

dismay. “They knew what they were talking about, while I was full of conceited nonsense”.

“I think you are being excessively harsh on yourself. Have you met a woman on Earth you wanted to marry, but you couldn’t because of your vows?”, Kay countered.

“No. In fact, *brahmacharya* was a good excuse not to get involved with them”, he smiled.

“You see; no harm done. Lady Hypatia was a *brahmacharini* herself, not because of a vow, but simply because she never met a man she would fall in love with, at least on Earth. But once she met Azrael, or Lord Yama as you would call him, her entire virginity left her in seconds”, she giggled. “It’s not about being involved with the opposite sex. It’s about finding your actual wife. Once you do, you can become a man I will want to be, so that I could make love to the woman I will want to become”, she switched to the First Person, and her jewel flashed again.

“I think I understand now”, he nodded. “But I apologise for what I said in the beginning, that you are the least scary and intimidating of all the Gods known for their wisdom. It’s actually hard to qualify – you are both so scary and intimidating in your omniscience and omnipotence, that I don’t even have the word for it. Were I human, I’d probably lose bladder control when your jewel flashes, that’s how intimidating you are. And yet, you are the gentlest, kindest most intimidating person in the world”, he smiled, waving his head in wonder. “How do you manage to be both? I would expect someone with your knowledge, intelligence and power to be a distant and terrifying, towering figure, and yet you are none of that. You are approachable, kind, gentle and... cute, if that’s an appropriate thing to call an omnipotent Goddess”.

“Cute is perfectly appropriate”, she giggled. “My secret for staying grounded is my submissive feminine nature. I adore and serve my husband. I adore and serve my elders. I would never do anything that would have them think less of me, I would never disobey them, and I never want to break their trust. They are everything to me, and as I feel that, I am perfectly grounded and free to be my girly self, even if it includes providing strategical analysis to the elders, or creating,

modifying or destroying worlds”, she nodded. “By staying obedient, worshipful and submissive, I am freed and grounded”.

“And how do the men do it? I mean, the male Gods?”

“They ground through their women. They have a vulnerable perfect Goddess in their arms and their love just flows to her naturally, freeing them to be their natural selves. We, men and women, keep each other sane and normal. Each on our own, we would turn into insane monsters”, she frowned. “Just look at people on Earth. When male-female love breaks down, people turn into monsters. Whether they are male monsters that explode with aggression, or female monsters disgusting in their passive-aggressive victimhood and entitlement, it doesn’t matter, as they are both vile. The male-female mutual worship, respect and service is the foundation of the world, and once that breaks, there’s no bottom on that pit of hell”, she shivered as she did simulations. “So, your *brahmacharya* has served you well, for a time, but as all tools, it needs to be put aside when its work is done. When you find your woman, you will lay down that tool in some shed and forget you ever had it”, she smiled at the angelic man. “Just don’t be a fool and cheat on your destined wife by finding just any woman now, because you think you should. To pick any woman is to betray *the woman*”.

“Augustine did the similar wrong thing – he found his true wife more than half a millennium ago, and he sent her away in order to seek spirituality. Just yesterday he understood what a mistake that was, and cried to Christ to help him fix it. Fortunately, it was all well, as she was then not ready for him, and she used that time to level herself up and become his true equal”.

“A woman is not a crutch you now need to find in order to attain godhood. A woman is also not a worldly thing to renounce for spiritual reasons. A woman you seek needs to be someone who is so wonderful, that God will want to become *you*, because *you* are the proper way to adore *her*”, she concluded.

“My Lady, I bow to you in deepest respect, and I will take your teaching to heart immediately and most seriously, with the greatest gratitude of a humble student who was graced by being in the presence of the Greatest and the Highest. All glory to you!”, he bowed.

Milk and cookies

“What did she do to you?”, Zee smiled. “You look like a victim of terrible violence”.

“Oh, she poured me coffee, dismantled my philosophy and taught me how things actually work”, Shankaracharya smiled at the God. “But it was more what she didn’t do that I’m recovering from”. They sat at the peaceful part of the orchard, somewhat away from the crowd that gathered to learn from the Buddhists.

“She didn’t do what I did to people I argued against in India. I would just crush them with carefully honed arguments that can’t be defeated logically. I got a power rush out of it. It was my way of waging war. The warriors had spears and swords; I had my mind, and I used it as a weapon of conquest”.

“As a child, when I was sad, my mother would make me hot biscuits and milk, and she would just sit beside me and silently comfort me until I felt better. That’s how Lady Kay felt. I felt like a seven year old boy whose mom made him hot biscuits, and just sat there in a healing presence until I got better. She didn’t tear me down. She didn’t score points. She wasn’t there to defeat me, or to teach me a lesson, or to humiliate me, or to punish me for my arrogance. She was there to make me feel better and to help me become a better version of myself; kinder, with a broader scope, less strict with myself and others, more relaxed and yet deeper”.

“I didn’t come to her in order to argue, I came to learn; and yet, I expected her to do what I would have done. I expected it to be a battle of minds, where I had to do my best in order not to be completely humiliated”.

“And then I saw what her mind is like. The challenge to her isn’t to prove she’s better. To her, the challenge is whether she will make me see the light of God. She was like my mother, whose challenge was whether she’ll make me feel better. It’s not a game of dominance for her; it’s her milk and cookies”, the man spoke in a calm, detached tone of shock.

“We had a long, complicated talk where she dismantled my beliefs, and as she did so, she explained better alternatives, and she demonstrated actual evidence for everything. It wasn’t just logic and quoting scripture, the way we used to do it in India. She was working with me to improve me. I can’t believe those Mlecchas who recently attained apotheosis went through such a process. Why me?”, he concluded and looked at Azazel directly.

“They weren’t famous spiritual teachers on Earth, unlike you”, Azazel smiled. “They didn’t have a complex philosophical system in their heads that refused to go away just because it’s obviously wrong. They didn’t have misapprehensions to defend, misapprehensions that needed a Goddess of Wisdom to argue against and carefully replace with actual knowledge. They were ignorant peasants. Their teacher told them how things worked, and they believed it and immediately acted upon it”, Zee shrugged. “Your mind is a weapon, but it’s a weapon that came to ensnare you rather than liberate you”.

“A pure mind is an instrument of liberation, while an impure mind is an instrument of bondage”, Shankaracharya smiled. “That’s what I taught others. The pure mind, of course, would be the one that saw things as I did”, he waved his head remorsefully. “I never considered my clarity and simplicity of argument to be a snare that feeds an ego’s desire to dominate and be right, and yet, that is what it was”.

“Simplicity has many forms. You tended to believe that simplicity and clarity of an idea guarantees its accuracy. But reality is messy and sometimes convoluted. Simplicity and elegance is sometimes in just allowing the mess to be what it is. And let me show you something”, Azazel pointed at the other side of the orchard, where his wife joined Lady Mandarava. They hugged each other, fell to the grass and continued giggling.

“Those two are the towering giants of mind. Their power over reality itself is immense. And yet, look at them”, he pointed.

“They have nothing to prove. Nobody to submit. No battles to win. They are free to do whatever they want, so they giggle like two schoolgirls, just enjoying themselves”, Shankaracharya nodded.

“They are the Goal”, Azazel nodded. “That’s what God looks like in the Relative”.

“The Mind of God and the Teacher of Gods giggling together in the grass and enjoying the sunshine”, the man nodded. “If I had your wife’s power, I would do terrible things with it. I know it, because I keep wondering how she doesn’t do all the things I would have done in her place. But she is so kind and relaxed with it; what I used as a sword and a set of armour, she uses as milk, cookies and giggles. Minutes ago, when I was with her, I wondered how it must be hard for you to live with someone who is so incredibly powerful in every conceivable metric, but I see now: you are the happiest man in the world, and she is a living example of what it looks like when infinite power is in the right hands”, the man smiled.

“Truly, she is a balance of infinite power, infinite wisdom and infinite kindness”, her husband smiled with an inner glow. “Blessed be the day I met her”.

The Inquisitor

“May God almighty have mercy on me, for I am a sinner”, a man mumbled.

“We’ll see what we can do about that”, Lady Zina smiled.

“I am Bernard Gui, my Lady. Could you please tell me where I am and what is going on? I see that I died, and this seems to be a place of judgment. Are you here to take me before a judge?”, he asked politely.

“No; I am to be your judge, Inquisitor. My name is Zina”, she curtsied.

“I see. Have you been appointed to this duty by our Lord Jesus Christ?”, he inquired.

“No, I have not. In fact, I have been on this duty for almost five hundred years before Christ was born”, she smiled. “I was appointed to this duty by his Father”, she smiled again.

“Are you not a Christian?”, he was shocked.

“I’m afraid things are not quite the way you expect them to be, Inquisitor. Just think about it: I was appointed to this duty somewhere around the time when Socrates was born. I achieved apotheosis soon after I met my husband, the Buddha, which was soon after that. You can think of me as Christ’s older sister, if that pleases you, although I am no more Christian than he is a Zinian”, she laughed. “If that makes you happy, you can look into me and ask to identify me”.

“Lady Zina, Person of God, Judge of Karma, the Love of God?”, he was shocked. “Your title is ‘Love of God’? You are a Person of God, like Father, Son and the Holy Spirit?”

“I am indeed”, she nodded.

“I sincerely apologise for questioning you, my Lady, but I don’t know what to think at this point”, the man appeared to be in shock. “On Earth, I was in charge of establishing orthodoxy and eliminating heresy, and yet if one on Earth happened to profess belief in any of what I am now seeing, I would have condemned them. And now, I am

afraid it is my turn to be condemned, for I was obviously ignorant and in the wrong”, he mumbled, very much disturbed. “What have I even done?”

“Oh please, Bernard, let us dispense with judgmental and radical thinking and first establish the facts. I am not known as the ‘Love of God’ because I’m a judgmental person. None of us Judges are, despite what our title might make you believe. We are here to teach you, to inform you, to go through your past life with you objectively and see what lessons may be learned from it. Only in the most dire cases do we actually condemn souls to hell, and had you witnessed those cases, I am sure you would have agreed with me that it would be a greater evil to let them roam among the normal souls, than to sequester them into a place where they can do no harm”.

“I am at your mercy, my Lady”, the man bowed humbly, obviously experiencing grave moments.

“Let me take a look at your life. You were known as a fair, pious and intelligent man with good political connections within the Church, and as such you were appointed an Inquisitor to deal with the Albigensian heretical uprising, also known as the Cathari. This was done as to ferret out the true heretics from the seduced and mostly ignorant general populace of the region, so that the true ringleaders and ideological heads of the movements could be isolated and condemned, and their seduced, ignorant and foolish followers converted back to orthodoxy. During the Albigensian crusade, many terrible slaughters were committed, starting with the one in Béziers, under the motto that went somewhere along the lines of ‘kill them all, and let God sort them out’, am I right?”, she smiled.

“It was ‘Kill them all! God will know his own’, my Lady, but your account of the facts is otherwise perfect”, the man nodded in assent.

“So, over twenty thousand people were killed in Béziers alone. Also, hundreds of men and women were burned at the stake, being stubborn Cathari ideologues, and the entire population was contaminated by this ideology, which had terrible consequences for public morality, as their ethical teaching was terrible; they were essentially allowed to do as they willed, resorting to murder, plunder

and rape; they could lie as much as they wanted, and terrible things happened regularly where they were in power. The Church desired to weed out the heresy itself, but bring as much people back into the folds of the Church, and they appointed you to implement this intent. They were also intoxicated with arrogance and acted as if mad. Am I correct?”

“You are, my Lady”, he nodded.

“And so, after almost a thousand court proceedings, you condemned forty five or so hardened heretics to be burned at the stake, and prescribed penance or imprisonment for the rest who were found guilty, and the result of your work was that you successfully exterminated the Cathari infestation from the Languedoc region. Am I correct?”, she smiled at the obviously concerned man.

“Yes, you are. Your account of the events is faultless”, he nodded in expectation of punishment.

“Your efforts in establishing the Catholic orthodoxy in the region were an unqualified success, and your approach to justice was very mild, considering the numbers I mentioned before your acceptance of the inquisitorial role. Truly, one less reasonable and moderate than yourself could have easily condemned thousands more, and one could still find scarce reasons to blame him. Still, you accomplished your task, and this satanic insurgency was quenched”, she bowed.

“Wait; am I to understand that you support the position of the Church regarding those heretics?”, his eyes opened wide.

“I understand that the Church, for its many flaws, was a factor of reason, order and virtue compared to the Cathari, who were a truly Satanic infestation. Had they spread and overtaken Europe, it would have been a regression into a yet unseen darkness”, she confirmed. “This doesn’t mean that I fully support the position of the Church in everything. You will see later that its teaching leaves much to be desired. However, souls are not condemned or saved based on the correctness of their belief, but on the purity of their hearts and kindness and virtue of their deeds. If you remember, my brother Christ commanded his disciples to love each other as he loved them. The philosophical and theological content of his teaching was quite superficial, and essentially stated that one should obey the Law

sincerely, and not hypocritically. His teaching was so thin philosophically, that the early Christian theologians adopted the philosophical views of the Neoplatonists, and later Aristotle, for there were none to speak of in the original teaching. So, it would be foolish to expect God to condemn people based on something Christ himself didn't care to teach properly", she smiled. "The reason why I condemn the Cathari isn't their teaching. Were it but for that, their teaching would have in fact been closer to the factual state of things than the official Christian one. No; they are condemned because of their immorality, and for the fact that they embraced the satanic urges of arrogance and madness. Contrary to them, you behaved with reason and kindness, and tried to save as many people as you possibly could, without releasing such obvious madmen that it would have been a greater abomination to free them than it was to burn them", she nodded.

"But my Lady, I condemned people because they adhered to a wrong belief, whilst I myself adhered to a wrong belief, merely a different one. Surely I deserve the same fate as those I condemned?", he wondered.

"This is not how I choose to look at it. The way I see it, all beliefs are somewhat wrong; some more than others. In the long years of my service, I have seen perfectly holy people who adhered to beliefs that were almost completely wrong and evil; on the other hand, I have seen vile and corrupt people who adhered to beliefs that were technically quite correct. It is not belief that I condemn or absolve souls for, and neither did you. You did not condemn the heretics because they were heretics, but because they were immoral, vile, arrogant and satanic, and would have turned the world into a hellish nightmare, if unopposed. The reason why we Judges exist is the same. We need to filter out the evil souls, so that the normal ones might live in peace. We also have many separate locations for souls of different origins and character, so that they wouldn't confuse each other and interfere with each others' paths towards God. Don't think that we separate people into good Christians and those who are condemned to hell. In fact, I have condemned many 'good Christians' to hell, because their souls were cruel and satanic in their nature, and in the choices they made in life. On the other hand, a vast number of non-Christians were good souls

who in fact followed Christ's teaching about love and kindness", she pointed out. "My husband the Buddha, for instance, was the first great teacher of the world, and his success was an inspiration to Father to send Christ to improve upon his mission and designs. Lady Hypatia of Alexandria, as another example, is also a fellow Judge and a Person of God, a sister of Christ and our good friend. The fact that the Cathari were heretics in the eyes of the Church has absolutely no bearing on my judgment. The fact that they were attached to the satanic attractor, drunk with arrogance, and that their consciousness and actions were for the most part terrible, does", she nodded seriously. "However, if you look at your personal feelings, you condemned the heretics based on the fact that they were vile, terrible people, who stunk of satanic defiance. Those who were not bad usually reacted well to your invitation to repent and embrace orthodoxy, am I right?"

"I see what you mean, my Lady", he nodded. "I would not have put it in those terms during my life on Earth, but the moral quality of one's life was indeed my main criterion of guidance, because I thought that those who are irredeemable have the air of Satan around them; proud, spiteful and full of madness and evil, while those who are merely confused and seduced react well to reason and virtue, and have modesty and humility to them", he nodded. "But am I to understand that you do not condemn me?"

"Indeed, I do not. I am very much as you were – trying to teach and guide, to show souls light, truth and love of God, rather than find fault that would justify condemnation, for it is God's will that souls find Him and love Him, and the will of Satan is for souls to be condemned and lost. I am appointed to this duty by God, and not Satan, which is why I try to teach and save, rather than condemn. I condemn only those who embraced Satan and evil to such a degree, that it would be a sin against the loving and truthful nature of God to absolve them", the Goddess smiled angelically at the profoundly relieved man.

"But I must beg you to teach me, for I see that I am very much in the dark. Honestly, as I saw how things here greatly differ from all that I would have expected, I had darkest thoughts about my fate, and yet, you truly justify your title of Love of God, for I feel God's love from you. You say you are Christ's sister?", he smiled.

“Indeed. He and I know and love each other ever since his resurrection, and I have served his Father for many centuries before. Truly, the earliest parts of the Bible had been at play in the time of my life on Earth, as it was before Assyria and Babylon. I was one of the first souls to come back from Earth, after it was first created”, she reminisced, as shivers went up Bernard’s neck, in understanding how ancient the holy woman before him truly is.

“Does this mean you are one of the ancients of the Old Testament?”, he wondered.

“I am their contemporary”, she nodded. “I was not someone of historical importance, merely a loving mother and a wife whose family was brutally slaughtered by bandits, and I was murdered as I tried to stop them as they were taking turns raping my poor daughter. I arrived here where you now stand, but in such a terrible emotional state that I would have died, save for the mercy of my Mother, Lady Shakti, who healed my dying soul with her love and compassion, and I remain forever her loving daughter”, she smiled.

“I am sorry for the pain you suffered, my Lady”, Bernard’s eyes were wide.

“Those were cruel times, and it was very, very long ago”, she nodded slowly. “But, as you can see, I am ancient by your standards. To me, Rome was yesterday, and Carthage a day before. Ashurnasirpal was the first of our ancient terrors. And I was among the first fools who accepted Satan’s invitation to be born in that vile world, and suffered terribly as a result”, she concluded.

“You were there immediately after Adam and Eve?”, his eyes were wide in wonder.

“Adam and Eve were a metaphor for the first souls who were deluded by Satan to ‘eat fruits from the tree of telling good from evil’, because he promised that we will become Gods. Since I’m one of the first, you can rightly say that I was Eve”, she smiled. “I am an ancient fool; but fortunately, by the grace of God, I learned to love deeply and purely in my earthly life, and was saved. Later, I loved my Mother and my husband so much, that I truly attained apotheosis, becoming like Christ in my inner nature, somewhere around the times of Socrates and Plato”, she smiled an ancient smile.

“My Lady, I only now begin to understand what an incredible honour it was to have been assigned to your tender mercy”, he bowed deeply.

“I will now send you to my brother, Christ, to teach you the full truth about the world, because there is more, and yet our work here is done”, she curtsied with a blessed smile, and the man was gone.

Guy talk

“So, my friend, what has been the most shocking for you here so far?”, Paul sat by Bernard’s side and offered him a cup of coffee.

“Thanks, Apostle”, the man nodded. “Most shocking? I don’t know where to even begin”, he gestured. “Probably multiple persons of God. I’m still trying to get my head around that. Not just that there are more than three, but that new ones can be born when existing souls reach their final stage of evolution. The concept that one can become God sounds outright satanic, until you remember that Christ urged us to do just that, but we seem to have swept that part under the rug because we didn’t know how to interpret it”.

“The next thing are the women”, he waved his head. “The fact that women can be very holy and smart was always completely normal and expected to me. But that you can have female persons of God, that was a shock, because when one says ‘Goddess’, the first association are the Pagan deities – Artemis, Isis, Venus and so on; you would expect some fertility deity of nature surrounded by Satyrs and bunny rabbits, and similar heathen nonsense. But no, they are nothing like that. The first person I met here was Lady Zina. May the Lord forgive me, the first idea I had was that she’s someone’s assistant. But when I understood who she is, I expected the worst – a non-Christian woman is going to get her payback on an inquisitor who burns witches on a stake and whatever nonsense Pagan enemies of the Church are spreading whenever we have to punish some woman who practiced actual witchcraft, gave someone a preparation brewed from toxic herbs and toads, and the person got possessed by demons or died. So, I expected Artemis to get her payback and send me to hell. Instead, she was incredibly righteous, her account of the facts was superb, and she interpreted them all in my favour, as if she were my own attorney, and not the judge. She behaved as if it was her goal to save me, teach me, comfort me, and she even told me stories from her own life on Earth, somewhere in the early Genesis, thousands of years before Babylon was a thing, if you can believe it. She even said that Adam and Eve are a metaphor for her first group of souls that inhabited human bodies on

Earth, and I believed her. Instead of being vengeful, she was just, kind, and her judgment was the most charitable and in my favour. May God forgive me, but by the end of it, I loved her as much as I love Christ himself, and since she sent me to him and I actually talked to him in person, I know what I'm talking about. He asked me about my impressions of her and I told him the truth, that she is nothing how I would have imagined a female deity, but every much as I would have imagined Him, and he nodded, praising her greatly. Let me tell you, everything in the Bible about how God is jealous, I expected to see it, but they love each other so deeply, it melts my heart as I see it. He told me that the part about the jealous God is about worshipping Satan and all other unworthy things, such as the made up Gods or nature, not worshipping other persons of the One True God", he ended the tirade with a sigh and a smile.

"Did he tell you about his wife?", Paul snickered.

"He did, but at that point, after all that I've seen, that part actually felt normal", Bernard laughed. "What actually still shocks me is how the Gods are with each other", he mused. "They are innocent like small children, and yet there is such wisdom and power in their eyes that I just stand there like a fool and can't get my thoughts to move. One would expect them to be strict and stern, but they feel like family members who know each other for eternity, and yet every time they see each other they react with such deep joy, as if a brother and sister who see each other for the first time after being apart for years. It's a wonder to witness. It feels absolutely pure and innocent, and yet, God forgive me, more intimate than sexual intercourse. When I was with Jesus, Lord Buddha came by and brought us coffee. The way those two greeted each other felt like diving straight into the deep mind of God, and yet they just greeted each other in passing. I read the books by Marco Polo about Buddhism in China, and I imagined that it must be some religion much inferior to our belief in Christ, but when I saw those two, I understood that I know nothing about God".

"Want to hear some gossip?", Paul grinned a lopsided grin of mischief.

"?"

"Augustine became a God just recently", Paul nodded.

“St. Augustine?”, Bernard’s jaw dropped.

“Indeed. He used to sit here with me, brooding, as you do now. Then he met his wife again, the one he wrote about and regretted leaving in ‘*Confessiones*’; I read it here. She remained celibate in that life and three more that followed, spiritually evolving so that she could be his true match. They are inseparable now”, he smiled. “I miss our talks, though”.

“Somehow, I’m not surprised; the Goddesses are incredible. Soft as feathers and virtuous and powerful as Christ. I’ve never seen anything like them”, Bernard shrugged. “Who is the Lady?”

“You might even know her; she was quite famous. It’s Hildegard of Bingen”.

“Of course I know her. Of her, at least. She wrote excellent music and interesting books. Incredibly virtuous and holy person of bright intelligence”, he nodded. “And you say she saved herself for him through all those lives and centuries?”

“Yes. She said she found her man, and until she could be with him properly, no other man had any appeal”.

“This is such a high standard for loyalty, chastity and faith, that I stand wordless. And is she a Goddess too? If not, she ought to be, because what you are telling me is amazing”, he was stunned.

“She is. Apparently, souls become Gods in couples. No single man, or single woman, can become a God or a Goddess. It’s always a couple of perfect souls who love each other perfectly”, Paul explained.

“Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect”, Bernard quoted.

“Indeed”, the Apostle nodded. “Augustine told me that his heart stopped when he sent her away, all those centuries ago, and he couldn’t make any true spiritual progress since. And when they were reunited, they both attained perfection almost instantaneously”.

“We really messed up with celibacy, didn’t we?”, Bernard nodded in dismay.

“I’m not sure about that. We’re talking about really perfect souls here, great holy people in their own right, capable of incredibly strong and pure love that is of God; and when they meet their counterpart,

Divine magic happens. But ordinary people, they are more likely to be just male and female fools, doing foolish things each in their own worldly ways, making life difficult for each other. It might be better to be celibate and hone your spirituality in solitude until you are ready for this Divine form of love that makes you a brother or sister of Christ, than to lose yourself in the quagmire of worldly nonsense. That, at least, is what I am telling myself”, Paul shrugged.

“You are probably right. I would prefer staying celibate to being married to a worldly woman. But when I see those perfect, godly women, I am amazed at their perfection. It’s like seeing a female Christ, and not just one, but several different ones, all perfect in their own right. I can’t imagine myself being married to a woman like that, because I’m not worthy. But I want to be”, Bernard nodded. “It is a thing to aspire toward, because I can’t think of a more worthy goal”.

“There is a good thing about worldly marriage in a lesser standard of love”, Paul nodded. “You get to practice. Learn how to be with a woman, learn how one thinks and feels, how to help her and be a man for her. As a celibate, you are unlikely to learn any of it, and as such, you won’t know how to be with a woman, or develop spiritual features this requires. Sure, it’s unlikely that your wife on Earth and yourself are to develop the deepest form of love, like Christ and Magdalena, or Buddha and Zina, but it is going to be vastly better than lustng after boys, as pederasts do. Practice will show you both right and wrong ways, so that you can learn and improve”.

“You are indeed wise, Apostle”, Bernard nodded.

“Not as wise as Augustine, regrettfully”, Paul smiled his lopsided grin.

Plague

“Good morning, Inquisitor”, a man holding a cup of a steaming beverage approached Bernard.

“Good morning to you too, Meister Eckhart”, he bowed. “Although ‘morning’ doesn’t seem to mean much in these realms”.

“You know, I feared we would exchange those greetings somewhere in France, under less pleasant circumstances”, Eckhart laughed. “Fortunately, I managed to die before the Inquisition managed to find something on me”.

“From what I heard, it was mostly political nonsense and very far removed from the actual heresy I had to deal with”, Bernard gestured apologetically. “What was it even, some uneducated cleric not understanding Scripture well enough, and coming after you in consternation when they saw you quote it?”

“Something very much along those lines, yes”, Eckhart nodded. “The problem with being a theologian is that every semi-literate dunce thinks he’s one, as well. Especially the Bishops and Cardinals”, he giggled. “May God be my witness, some of them don’t look like they have actually read the Bible since they left the seminary”.

“So, how does your theology survive this place?”, Bernard pointed around them. “Mine lies in ruins somewhere in the reception room”, he laughed.

“Mine is keeping yours company”, Eckhart snickered. “Along with, I suspect, everybody else’s”.

“Oh, they fared quite well, I hear”, Bernard pointed at the far end of the orchard, where the Buddhists were teaching. “The Christian theologians are mostly recovering from shock. The Muslim theologians are looking for their promised virgins. The Hindu theologians can’t agree on what the word ‘Hindu’ even means”, he smiled. “Who was your Judge?”

“Lord Buddha. Now, that was a shock”, Eckhart grinned. “I expected things on the higher planes to simplify; essentially, God turns

out to be everything, other things turn out to be a mirage that vanishes. Not exactly how it works in reality, as I found out”.

“I met his holy wife, Lady Zina. My expectation was that I would be punished for theological error, the way I punished others; that would have been fair, for Christ said we shall be measured by the same measure we use on others. Imagine my surprise when she just shrugged all that off, and focused on my true intent, and mostly just explained things. I would say I fell in love with her by the end of it, but I wouldn’t want her husband to take offence”, he smiled.

“Nobody here cares much for theology, in a sense that it matters much what ideas we use to describe things that are true. But falsehoods and deceit are completely absent. Everybody is straightforward: they look at what is true and they say it as they see it. It is very refreshing after Avignon”, Echkart sighed.

“I still haven’t met Magdalena, Christ’s wife. I hear she spends all of her time with Christ’s parents, meditating, as their consciousness is so vast, she finds the experience addictive”.

“I can’t even imagine what that must feel like, but I don’t blame her. I would spend all of my time around Christ, but I don’t want to annoy him”, Eckhart mused. “But it’s the differences between the Gods that I find stunning. Buddha, for instance, is completely different from someone like Karuna, or, for that matter, Augustine. But they feel like different ways to perceive God. The Greeks expected things to get simpler and yet more powerful as you go up in the heavenly realms, and we took that expectation from them. They certainly grow more powerful, I’ll give them that. But it is the diversity of perfections that stuns me. I could look at them whole day and never get tired. I always expected there to be only one way to be God, and I would try to see all sorts of perfections in one person, but the thing is, most of those perfections sort of negate each other. It’s like carriages – it is either fast, or it fits many people. You can’t have it both at the same time. An ox is strong, but a horse is fast, and a swan flies to great distances. The Gods seem to be like that – split into dozens of different perfect combinations of qualities, and when you see one, you can’t imagine anything being better, and then you see their brother or sister and you see a different perfection. I tell you, I could go on about this until the

sun goes down, and since here it apparently never does, that would be a long time indeed”, he snickered.

“Something seems to be going on”, Bernard was suddenly serious. “The number of people here seems to be increasing. And by quite a lot, from what I can gather”.

“Are they dying suddenly in great numbers?”, Eckhard scratched his neck. “This can’t be good”.

“Lady Zina!”, Bernard Gui stood up and bowed to the woman approaching them. “What’s wrong?”, he looked at her in alarm, as she looked weary and exhausted.

“Bernard, it’s nice to see you again. And you must be Meister Eckhart?”, she curtsied and smiled weakly, as the other man bowed.

“A great plague has struck Europe; the same if not worse than the one under Justinian, that ended the ancient world. I suspect the number of holy people in Europe recently was too great for Satan to bear, and he kneed the chess board again”, she shrugged.

“You must be flooded by the recently deceased”, Bernard observed the signs of mental exhaustion on the Goddess. “Can we help you in any way?”

“Thank you for the offer”, she smiled. “I have multiple legions of angels assisting already, and they are all busy. I’m afraid I overestimated my abilities and didn’t ask for help until very late in this deluge of souls, which is why I now had to take my leave and recover. Meister Eckhart, please, assist and guide the newcomers to the best of your abilities, because they will need instruction. Bernard, I must ask you to join me in the war room. You have extensive experience with the Cathari, and I’m afraid Satan is going to make his next move along those lines soon. If I am to judge by what happened the last time I had such a plague on my watch, this is likely going to be the end of Christian Europe”.

Age of darkness

“The disease itself is literally the same as the Plague of Justinian. It is a microscopic organism that lives in fleas that live on rats. It congests the flea’s digestive tract, making it starve. A starving flea desperately tries to feed and attacks and infects everything, including humans. The disease then continues to spread among the humans. Low levels of hygiene contribute to the disease starting, but after it gains momentum, the epidemic essentially just burns through towns and villages, creating secondary effects of starvation, as dead and dying people can’t farm, and the societal structure collapses; children die as their parents are no longer here to provide for them and so on. Tens of millions dead within a few years. It completely overwhelmed our Judges, and I am sorry to have thought of controlling Time as to ease their burden far too late in the process, and they are now all burned out and in dire need of rest. Fortunately, as I slowed the process to a trickle, the angels are dealing with all of it now without issues”, Lady Kay nodded, obviously not very pleased with herself.

“It’s not your fault, daughter. We were all caught by surprise”, Goddess Lakshmi smiled. “It is as if Satan made a sudden decision and implemented it instantly”.

“But why?”, Augustine rubbed his forehead. “I understand why he wanted to break the inertia of Rome and Greece’s intellectual heritage and shroud Christianity in darkness before it had the time to properly find itself. Is this something similar?”

“We think so”, Lady Hypatia answered, obviously exhausted to the point of slurring words. “Christianity was reunited with the ancient libraries of Antiquity, that found their way to Europe through various trade routes. The process would have eventually produced the same results he successfully worked to prevent with the plague of Justinian and other calamities that preceded it. We had so many wonderful holy people in Europe; your Divine wife one of them”, she smiled to the blushing Lady Hildegard. “Many new wonderful angels, beautiful in ways we haven’t seen before. It was starting to be a golden age of God-awareness and piety, and it was quite evenly balanced between men

and women, which is a rare thing. And now, a terrible darkness came. People are blaming the Church for the plague, although it bears no fault. Priests have been struck disproportionately, as they have been aiding the sick and contracting the sickness themselves. People are turning to all sorts of superstition and sorcery to aid them. The older, wiser and more educated people are struck disproportionately, as they are old and their immunity can't deal with the sickness as well, so wisdom is removed from the Earth. Again, people pray to God for help, and feel betrayed as they and their loved ones die; Satan again uses the misapprehension that is spread by the monotheistic religions such as Christianity, that God is the supreme ruler of Earth, which spiritually harms people as they see abundant evidence to the contrary. The spiritual aftermath of this calamity exceeds the physical one", she concluded.

"First things first", Lord Vishnu smiled and turned his sight inwards. Deep spiritual light enveloped the Judges present, and all their weariness and troubles were taken away. "I am sorry for your suffering, brothers and sisters. We missed the important developments, and you were left to suffer for our mistakes. As always, you saved the day and I thank you", he bowed to them, and everybody else joined in.

"Now let us return to the matter at hand. This is the second time that Satan saw how things are going too well, and he reset the board. Judging by past experience, this means he already has something in preparation, that wouldn't be as successful if it had the continued intellectual tradition of Europe to contend with. It is for us to discover what it may be, and how to counter it", he smiled.

"I think I have a pretty good idea", Bernard Gui whispered, more to himself.

"Please, Inquisitor; you are here because we value your insight. Tell us what you think", Vishnu nodded in encouragement.

"I've seen the Cathari. It is as if their beliefs and theology were completely secondary, and the primary thing about them is satanic defiance and arrogance. They acted as if they had the holy light of truth, and the Church was an evil satanic thing merely because it was in power. They wanted to tear everything down, as if that alone will make everything better, and they lied and counterfeited history as was to their

liking. I think we are going to see more of that in the future. Not of the Cathari, because they seem to be a finished story, but I have seen many examples of this revolutionary defiance and arrogance, both in the Church and outside it, and it always felt as if Satan himself was looking at me through the eyes of those people, and they looked maddened, as if under influence of some evil spirit or a drug, like sick men under a fever that influences the brain adversely. I am a newcomer here, but due to the nature of my job I faced all kinds of people accused of vile spiritual crimes, so it is likely that I am more familiar with this phenomenon than anyone else, save perhaps for the honourable Judges present”, he bowed.

“The attractors”, Azazel nodded to himself, and his wife nodded in assent. “Now we know how they manifest in practice”.

“Excuse me?”, Bernard was confused.

“Satan was buying souls of the incarnate angelic beings whom he placed in terrible situations; for instance, he would have their families starve, and offered to help if the angel sold him his soul. He then used those souls as sources of true spiritual light, placed them in the evil things within the world, so that they would attract souls like beacons, and lure them into desolate places of ruin”. Zina, now glowing with an inner light, and free from all weariness, smiled at him serenely.

“That is absolutely vile. And yet, quite what one would expect of Satan”, Bernard shivered. “So you think he is powering all sorts of evil, starting with the Albigensian heretics, but not limited to them?”

“In a word, yes. However, it is a very general assessment, and it would be of great use if we could constrain it somewhat”, she confirmed.

“He hates women”, Azazel was scratching his chin. “He never loved, he never married, and I’ve seen his actions in the world. Whenever someone really hates women, and manifests this hatred and contempt in ways Cyril’s criminal mob manifested it against holy Lady Hypatia, or the way priests of Baal and Muslims treat women, you can always see his finger there. I think an increase in number of holy women in the Church, who were respected, admired and venerated, drove him insane and he wanted to put a stop to it”.

“Does he hate women as such, or merely the concept of male-female harmony and happiness?”, wondered Buddha.

“It is hard to tell. He was always insane and hated everybody, and was full of malice. But about women, he always wanted to ‘put them in their place’, by which he meant enslavement, humiliation, rape, beatings and murder”, Azazel shivered from his recollection. “I regret not killing him then. Had I done so, many evils would have been prevented”.

“And many good things as well”, Zina smiled. “It is good that you didn’t, because had you done so, I would still have been a nasty demoness, thinking of what vile prank to pull on some innocent person, in my spiritual misery”.

“And humans seem to find it very easy to learn hatred and resentment, against any conceivable target”, Kay noted. “But oppressing the opposite gender that is meant to lead them to God by giving them the freedom and opportunity to love, that seems to be vile even for their standards”, she shrugged, as all nodded in assent.

“It can’t be just his contempt for holy women”, Hypatia noted. “It has to be a wider thing, connected with the strengthening of his attractors and his failure with the Cathari. Some evil thing against women is sure to be part of it, but it can’t be the whole plan”, she went on. “Let’s see what I would have done had I wanted to create a mechanism that will divert souls from God and towards something pointless, destructive and evil. The Church stands in the way; flawed as it is, it routinely leads souls to salvation and spiritual advancement, and, as such, it is his enemy on Earth. He will certainly work on weakening, sidelining and corrupting it. This is something we can take for granted. Furthermore, he will want to introduce alternatives. Dissent within the Church, of the kind similar to the schism between Rome and Constantinople. Dissent always works in his favour, because people work against each other instead of towards God. Prejudice, resurgence of paganism, worship of matter instead of spirit, involvement with the material things in pointless endeavours. If I were him, I’d put an attractor there, towards the matter, making it shine brightly so that people make it a false deity. Treat spiritual things as mere figments of imagination rather than the true reality that it is.

Make reasons for people to hate each other; all kinds of groups for all kinds of reasons. Make them desire material things enough to hate and murder one another. Make them see each other as enemies rather than brothers and sisters. And, of course, his hatred of women and marital harmony will surely find its place in the context of all this”, she waved her head in dismay.

“I can’t find error in your thinking, beloved sister, and this troubles me greatly, for it means we are going to see an age of unprecedented darkness, where the darkest evils will be illuminated by the true light of murdered angels, to serve as beacons that will lure others unto ruin”, Augustine lamented.

“I also agree with Lady Hypatia’s analysis”, Azazel nodded. “And I share Lord Augustine’s dismay, as we are sure to witness terrible things in the future”.

“I think we now know, or at least suspect, enough to plan for it”, Vishnu nodded. “I am grateful for all your contributions, for they were indeed insightful and wise. And now, we must heal the immediate wounds he inflicted, as there are tens of millions of souls who suffered and died there, and who will have all sorts of misplaced resentments that will fester unless we heal them with true knowledge and compassionate kindness”.

“All the Gods volunteering for healing and teaching sessions in the orchard until this is resolved?”, Lord Shiva raised an eyebrow.

“Indeed”, Lady Lakshmi confirmed, and all others nodded in assent. “The Judges and their angels will remain busy with the incoming, but the rest of us are on teaching and healing duty until further notice”.

Realization

“What’s wrong?” Kay felt that her husband was inordinately quiet. Something was obviously bothering him.

He was quiet for a moment, as if considering whether to say anything.

“You know when I said that Sanat Kumar hated women, never loved and never married?”

“Yes?”

“I’m afraid that I later thought of something that contradicts that. I think he actually did marry, in his own way”.

“What do you mean, in his own way? How many ways are there?”, she smiled weakly.

“I think we even saw his wife, or at least what goes for a wife in his head”, he frowned darkly, and she saw the muscles in his jaw harden. “It’s Anthea”.

Kay’s mouth opened, and she reflexively put her hands in front of her face as tears streaked it in silent shock.

Zee nodded gravely.

“Yes, the broken angel, whom he enslaved, tortured and ordered to be repeatedly raped and then beaten until she miscarried, and then he fed her aborted fetuses to the dogs, and repeated the process until she was his willing slave, obedient, terrified and completely, irrecoverably insane. That’s the relationship he wanted to establish with a woman, and considering how she is bound to him, I think it’s the closest to her being his wife”.

Kay looked at him with red eyes wide open in horror, silently mouthing a word.

“Why? Because that’s who he is. People think I was joking or exaggerating when I described how much it shocked me to look inside his mind and truly know him. That’s what he truly is, in his heart of

hearts. He's someone who wants to have a wife so that he can have a broken, tortured, serially raped slave with a destroyed soul, who calls him 'Master' and pisses herself when he makes a sudden movement".

"People are starting to treat his world as a legitimate place for spiritual evolution, a place where you go when you want to speed things up in your evolution, purposefully reincarnating there, sometimes with excellent results, but they don't know who they are dealing with. He may be putting on an act in order to evade punishment. It may even be God's will to allow him to do what he's doing for a while because it serves a legitimate purpose. However...", he shrugged, looking his wife straight in the eyes.

"Others should know", she managed to use words finally. "They should know what monster they are dealing with".

"Lord Shiva knows", Zee nodded. "I think he got it when the bastard tried to buy Berfrid's soul by starving his family to death, so that he could tear it apart and use it as bait to destroy more souls; I never saw him that angry, not even when he killed people. I think he, too, is keeping that knowledge to himself, because there's no point in alarming people. When I see how you took it, I wonder if I should have told you anything at all. We would just traumatised them, and they wouldn't do anything differently anyway. But I wanted you to know what I think because you're my wife and I have no secrets with you", he managed a smile.

"Thank you. It's horrible beyond measure, but thank you for telling me", she nodded. "I needed to know, so that when Father tears him to pieces as he promised, not a single thought of compassion would go through my mind".

He hugged her and kissed her hair. "Let's go comfort and teach people".

Introductions

The Inquisitor walked towards a woman who sat alone in the orchard, resting. “Lady Zina”, he bowed and sat across her. “I don’t want to bother you, but there’s something I have to tell you”.

“Hello Bernard”, she nodded and smiled back.

“I want you to know how much of an impression it made upon me when I saw you yesterday; so tired you were about to pass out”, he smiled. “I know how much effort you put into explaining things to me as you judged my life, and so I can imagine how much it must have taken to get you so exhausted, and yet, you kept going, because it was your duty, and because you’re an embodiment of God’s love”.

“When we first met, you jested that you are no more Christian than Christ is Zinian. I just wanted to know that as of yesterday, I consider myself ‘Zinian’, if that is a word”, he grinned. “I talked to the Tibetans and Christ about it, and they explained how those things work so I’m no longer confused. I now consider you my primary spiritual allegiance. You are the Goddess I worship; and of course Christ and his holy parents, but yesterday it clicked for me, when I saw you here in the orchard, half dead from exhaustion, but holding yourself together in firm discipline because you felt bound by love and duty. It is as if my soul reacted to you and told me: this is what God feels like, and I said ‘yes’”, he finished, as the teary eyed Goddess approached to hug him in silence. The light in his heart exploded, and all impurities on the lower elements left him, and he crystallised into *vajra*, and continued growing, then and there, drinking devotion to his Goddess of love and duty.

...

Two women sat in a comfortable silence. It was good here. No worldly people with discordant thoughts to bother them. Nature was more beautiful than anywhere on Earth, and free from all the impurities and annoyances such as ants, mud or animal droppings.

“I’m sorry you had to arrive just after the worst of the plague, when all the Judges were dropping off their feet with exhaustion,

Catherine”, Clare of Montefalco finally broke the silence. She saw it as her duty to help the newly arrived woman adjust, although she herself was here only of recent, as well. And it was not a hard duty by any means, since they became friends instantly.

“It is fine”, Catherine of Siena smiled at her new friend. “I was incredibly lucky to be assigned to Lord Buddha. He immediately saw the symptoms of my ongoing spiritual transformation, and believe it or not, while talking about my life, he guided me through the crystallisation process with his peerless expertise. He did look tired, but it took nothing away from the absolute dedication with which he took care of me. He guided my mind through the exact steps it needed to take, and adjusted my devotion to Christ to be focused in just the right way, and it took me one long breath, or should I say, swallow of the devotion energy, to complete the process. The purity and depth of his soul were such, that I must admit mixing devotion to him with devotion to Christ, and he immediately told me that it’s all right, since the two of them are brothers, so that my concerns wouldn’t interfere with my meditation”.

“I underwent a similar process during life, but I don’t think it was quite finalised until I came here”, Clare replied after a deep consideration. “I was judged by Jetsun Albert Rimpoche, who is a strange combination of a Christian, who is devoted to Lady Hypatia, and a master of Tibetan Buddhist spiritual energetics, so I can sympathise with you being devoted to both Christ and Buddha. It seems to be normal, as multiple persons of God are ubiquitous here, and they are all so wonderful, that one just falls into devotion to God by merely seeing one of them in passing. Albert saw how my spiritual energy works, explained everything immediately, and told me how to breathe and meditate, and I now consider myself his student and a humble servant. He was so gentle and considerate with me, and so skilled and powerful, it never ceases to amaze me. I was so used to nobody having a coherent idea about what I was going through on Earth; everybody was talking in terms that meant nothing clearly defined, and they had no experience with mystical ecstasy, so when I came to him and he immediately knew everything and taught me what to do, I almost melted into a puddle at his feet”, she giggled. “It’s

unfortunate that he is married, but he told me to keep meditating and my true spiritual husband will come, as God will arrange our meeting”.

“I used to think it was Christ, but on Earth, Christ was all we knew, so everything of God that felt human enough to bond with had to be Christ”, Catherine smiled. “And of course Christ too is married”, she made a sour grin.

“Have faith in God’s providence, holy sister”, Clare chided her with a blessed smile. “He led us thus far; he will lead us to our eventual destiny as well”.

“Let us pray together for God to guide us on the next part of our spiritual journey”, Catherine nodded in assent, and they held hands and prayed together in silence.

...

“Good morning, Ladies”, a kind female voice raised them from the ecstasy of prayer. “I heard you loudly enough”, Lady Zina grinned blissfully, holding a man by the hand. “Chiara, I have someone I want you to meet. This is Bernardo Guidoni. Bernardo, this is Chiara da Montefalco”, she introduced them. “And you, Caterina, come with me”, she took the woman by the hand. “I wish to introduce you to Apostle Paul. He was recently praying as you did now, and it is time for you two to meet”.

Madness overload

“What is happening down there?” Padmasambhava and his wives were, quite expectedly, overrun by the millions of confused newcomers who were more interested in the bare fundamentals of their new situation, than complex theory. As a result, they felt as if they’re forced to teach kindergarten. Of the kind where all the ‘children’ were raving lunatics.

“You know about the plague”, Kay smiled at her friend and handed him a cup, which he gratefully accepted. “The physical issues with the interruption of lives and destruction of the sophisticated aspects of the European civilization are obvious. However, there are also sociological and geopolitical ramifications. The Mongol empire seems to be collapsing because of the plague, which is bad because it was actually a factor of stability at this point. Constantinople is half-empty, because half the population died. It is not going to be able to resist Muslim invasion, which is going to be either very bad or outright terrible, depending on the level of resistance Europe will be able to field to counter their advance, but Constantinople was the last heavily fortified position. On the positive side, Spain seems to be gaining ground and will likely oust the invaders from their part of Europe”, she made a dispassionate delivery.

“The worse problem is that Europe went mad. There seems to be a biological reason why infectious disease, and xenophobia and paranoia, are very tightly correlated. Obviously, strangers tend to introduce pathogens your group doesn’t have immunity for, and getting rid of strangers is a biological instinct for dealing with epidemics. Unfortunately, it almost never seems to work right. And also, they don’t have an intellectual understanding of infectious diseases. Their theories are all completely wrong as they don’t understand the concept of microscopic organisms that cause infection. They think it’s caused by a combination of impure environment and personal moral weakness. So, as the Catholic clergy assisted the sick and the dying, they disproportionately got infected and died, which people interpreted as a sign of moral corruption of the Church, and not a sign of compassion,

which it was. On the other hand, as some group didn't get sick, due to either isolation or better hygiene, people interpreted it as a sign that they are the ones who 'poisoned' them, and persecuted those minorities – the Jews, for instance. Also, as neither the official medicine nor the Church could help them, people asked all sorts of weird groups for help – remnants of Paganism, village herbalists, various heretical groups hiding from the public eye, and outright witches; you know the kind, usually some old woman making potions and powders that contain all sorts of dangerous substances that can kill you if you mess up the dosage, and are hallucinogenic in the best of cases. So, you have a population that is already more than half crazy. You have a witch that gives someone a strong hallucinogen prepared from plants, toads and fungi. That person hallucinates Satan and demons. Everybody concludes that the witch is in league with the Devil if she can summon him to torture the poor person. Occasionally the victim of poisoning actually dies due to overdose. People decide that the witches caused the plague because they are in league with the Devil, and they invent all sorts of stories, and it soon becomes completely insane and loses almost all touch with reality. They torture the witch until she would confess that she personally killed Jesus, and use 'confession' as confirmation of their insane theories. They bring that to the Inquisition, which tells them that they are insane and it's all in their heads, but they don't accept the answer because the Church is 'discredited' and they go to the worldly authorities, which burn the woman at a stake as entertainment for the crazy mob. Also, they burn the Jews and the occasional heretic for good measure. In addition to that, the Church has a problem, because so many monks and clerics died from the plague, that their monasteries are empty, and they try to fill them with people who are sorely unqualified, compared to the cream of the crop they used to collect earlier. As a result, the standard of education of the clergy is greatly inferior and the reputation of the Church degrades further. All kinds of things try to fill the vacuum, from the developing sciences to outright nonsense; but mostly outright nonsense. The top of the Church handles mostly politics. Since there is a serious drop in the spiritual level of the whole civilization, various complaints form against the Church, and there is increasing talk of need for reformation, but there's nothing concrete yet. There is, however, abundance of prejudice, paranoia, xenophobia, hatred and spiritual darkness. There's

going to be a terrible century at least, and then, I'm afraid, Satan's actual plans are going to start coming to fruition, and we'll see his attractors starting to match or even overpower the Divine light we managed to permeate the world with".

"No wonder I've been getting all sorts of weird questions from the newcomers", he nodded. "And by weird, I mean all sorts of nonexistent demons and nonsense which they treat as if they were fact and not hallucination. Their grasp on reality is tenuous at best, which makes our work here twice as hard as it ought to be, because we first need to dissuade them of outright nonsense, which is hard, and only then can we teach them anything true and useful, which is all taking a toll on us. Imagine trying to talk to a person who thinks the Jews caused the plague by consorting with all sorts of demons to poison wells, and that their madness and base urges are caused by succubi, incubi and other sorts of nonexistent demonic beings sent by the Jews and the witches. And if you convince them it's all nonsense, then they think absolutely everything spiritual is unreal and nonsense as well", he sighed in exasperation. "We are tired of this".

Kay just hugged him. "Please try to hold on. Hopefully it will get better, but until then, I can buy you breathing room by freezing local time for those crowds, so that you can take some time off whenever you feel overwhelmed, which seems to be now". Her jewel flashed, and the masses of disturbed souls froze in place. "Go take the girls somewhere and meditate. Or swim in a pond. Or tickle Jess and Mandy for me", she giggled. "They won't even know you were missing until I release them".

"Thank you, sweetheart", he sighed deeply and managed a smile. "You are a life saver".

Crime and punishment

“It’s a literal hell on Earth”, Zina shivered, venting to her husband. “I mean, I’ve been around for a long time”.

“Since the times of Gilgamesh?”, Buddha smiled.

“More-less”, she nodded. “And I’ve seen violence, and cruelty, and ignorance, and madness, and evil”. Her face was dark. “Islam was always a great evil, but the Turks, they are probably its worst manifestation. The Assyrians were extremely cruel, but these, if anything, are taking the crown. Do you know what their version of a national pastime is? Impalement. They are out-doing each other, inventing more cruel ways to do it, for instance how to make the victim live longer. Their actions are turning them into such monsters, I had no alternative to throwing them all to hell. The problem is, this spiritual disease is spreading. I recently had to deal with a Wallachian ruler, Vlad Dracula, who not only adopted this pastime of the Turks, but elevated the practice to a whole new level. At one point he impaled twenty thousand people as a deterrent to the Turks. He was so obsessed with it, that when he was imprisoned by the Hungarians, in the dungeon he used to impale rats, birds and other small animals. Satan is really turning people into his own image there”, she cried. “They learn to be so cruel and evil, that nothing can be done to repair the damage. Their victims, traumatised as they may be, are quite easy for me to heal. The perpetrators of those evils, on the other hand, are so spiritually warped, that it is fortunate that there’s no shortage of space in hell, for it would be overflowing with those I dumped in there recently. It’s a tragedy, but it is also their choice. Each of them had the option to rather die than do evil. I have seen many who did just that, and such choices made them wonderful, regardless of the terrible suffering some of them went through”, she sighed.

“The Turks, they are abducting Christian children. They call it *devshirme*, a tribute in blood. The boys are trained to be an especially cruel infantry force for the empire, the Janissaries, or they are castrated and put to service in the harems. They are raised in Islam, taught to be cruel and evil. The eunuchs in the harems enforce cruel discipline upon

the women. When there's a change of a Sultan, the new one sometimes 'refreshes' the harem, ordering all the women to be murdered and the 'fresh' ones brought in. They treat living people like furniture", she sobbed.

Lord Buddha embraced her. "Satan must be smiling at them, for they are creating the kind of a world and are being the kind of people he desires – warped, cruel and without God".

"It's interesting how they think they are all about God – Allah this, Allah that, they are constantly praying, bowing and other nonsense, while turning into Satan incarnate", she noted. "I'm seriously traumatised, I need time off to heal from this".

"What we need", he nodded, "is to elevate this problem to the higher-ups".

...

"You are not the only Judge who is traumatised by the recent surge of cruelty and madness", Lord Shiva comforted Lady Zina, kissing her hand. "But something needs to be done about this, as it is getting out of hand", he nodded to himself.

"We need a final punishment, and a deterrent". He lifted a finger, and black lightning flashed. "I killed everybody in that hell where you've been putting the cruel and merciless bastards".

"And now...", his sight turned inwards and a flash of gold went through the world. "Now a warning has been placed in that world. Treat others cruelly and mercilessly, become a subject of Satan, become an expression of his will in the world, and your fate is sealed. Eternal death, no mercy", he nodded.

"I modified that hell, as well. It is now destructive. We used to keep them there in case we found a way to rehabilitate them. I kept my eye on them there – there was no rehabilitation, no desire to do better and be better. Just resentment, evil, a desire for vengeance upon the Gods, and the only regret they had was for things not ending well for them. There is no place for that kind of beings in any world. They had their free will and they chose to be thus. Now God is manifesting His free will not to allow them to exist. Cleanup will eventually have to be

done, but Earth is going to be a serious cleanup job in any case, so this doesn't make much of a difference", he grinned.

"As for you, sweetheart, I am sorry you had to witness all that evil. This goes for all the other Judges as well. Let me make it up to you, at least somewhat", he smiled and a golden light flashed, replacing their spiritual injuries and weariness with jewels of highest energy density, that would protect them from all similar damage in the future.

"Wow", Zina mouthed silently.

"You really do get shit done", Buddha grinned at Lord Shiva.

"Kindness and mercy are my first, second and third choices", the Great Lord smiled back. "But when someone laughs at mercy, and thinks cruelty is their strength, I'm here to remind everyone that mercy is not here because I lack other options", black fire flashed in his eyes.

"Submission to Satan is not a safe choice. It's a death sentence. And I made that message ring loud and clear".

"They are free to fuck around, but I am also free to make them find out".

Male power

Bernard and Clare sat in the orchard with Lady Zina, as she rested and enjoyed her day.

“I don’t understand why Lord Shiva grows so angry at certain things Satan does. Didn’t he know that already?”, Clare mused.

“I think I understand it, but I am open to our Lady’s correction”, Bernard smiled. “I think he grows especially angry when Satan commits crimes against innocence, as he sees himself as the ultimate protector of the innocent”.

“You are completely right”, Zina smiled back. “I’ve seen what the Turks are doing. They are using strength to intimidate; they target the innocent and the most vulnerable, and they also target the most virtuous ones, making an example out of them by subjecting them to a particularly cruel and torturous death. They enslave women and children. They treat innocence as a weakness to be exploited, and they bow to Satan for his strength. In hindsight, what traumatised me was the attack on innocence and this terrible boastful attitude that behaved as if strength is on their side, and its purpose isn’t to protect innocence, but exploit and destroy it. That’s also what traumatised Lady Hypatia – when an innocent, virtuous family was attacked by Satan from a position of worldly power, as if God can’t help them and he’s the only God”.

“And Lord Shiva sees himself as the power in service of goodness, kindness and innocence; a wall of ultimate strength that protects them and allows them to flourish and express themselves, and doesn’t take kindly to villains and bullies”, Bernard nodded approvingly. “Also, he knows that if something brought a Goddess to tears, it’s a serious problem and then he immediately deals with it. I love his decisiveness in dealing with evil, and also his measures to repair the damage and strengthen the good and the innocent”.

“What do your new jewels feel like, and what are they doing?”, Clare glanced at Zina’s changed structure.

“They are allowing me to feel empathy and kindness without taking emotional damage”, Zina’s sight turned inwards. “In essence, they are a shield that protects me when I make myself vulnerable, giving me perspective that corrects for the drawbacks of the process; they light up with great power as I am exposed to terrible things, and this shields my soul from injury”.

“Why didn’t the elders give the Judges such protections to begin with?”

“I don’t know, but I suspect they didn’t expect terrible things of this magnitude to be taking place so frequently, that we couldn’t handle ourselves. After all, our work strengthens us – it gives us experience, perspective and straightforward spiritual magnitude, from all the virtuous karmic actions that we perform, and from all the small injuries we take, and heal. It’s a very rewarding work. But occasionally, we encounter things that traumatises us. It used to be once every long while, but as of recent, it’s been a barrage of terror; imagine looking at a soul that enslaved children, raped their mothers and impaled their fathers as they rose up to protect their families. And not once every five centuries, but every hour. The inability to protect the innocent feels terrible, which is the reason we all love Lord Shiva so much. He is the ultimate wall around us, that allows us to sit here in peace and be kind and vulnerable without fear, instead of being under armour and weapons all the time”.

“I think I understand now. He is the ultimate male power”, Chiara nodded. “He builds a wall around the innocent, and kills a prowling wolf. Then, when the innocent ask what he was doing, he says he was out fishing”, she giggled, as Bernard grinned and nodded in approval.

“I approached my work with the same sentiment. I would identify the wolves that prowled and tried to seduce the innocent, and I would make an example out of them. Seeing Lord Shiva deal with evil and shield the good makes me feel the power of the righteousness of God”, he nodded. “The children can only giggle safely in the grass if the wolf is cowering in fear. Righteousness needs to have teeth, lest it become a mockery”.

“About the wolf; I don’t expect the Turks to suddenly become any better?”, his wife wondered.

“No, but they will feel deep instinctive terror when they think about doing evil deeds. It was there before, but it is much stronger now, and Satan’s attractors can no longer mask it. There is a terror of ultimate doom that looks at them from the place where they used to feel power and safety before”, Zina shrugged. “If that doesn’t work, I will throw them into hell when they arrive, and hell now has teeth and will devour them permanently, instead of merely storing them safely, and the terror of that hell feeds that feeling of doom that the Lord linked deeply to the world”.

“I fear worse forms of spiritual corruption than the Turks”, Bernard mused. “And Satan might exploit the new developments in order to whine about God not allowing free will because the souls get punished if they don’t do as he likes”.

“You’re probably right about both”, Zina shrugged. “The Turks rule with fear, but something attractive yet poisonous will likely prove more destructive. And about freedom, I think he misunderstands its meaning. Freedom isn’t ability to do whatever you like – for instance, go to this place and crucify and impale the innocent souls and laugh at their cries. Freedom is a state when the innocent souls can sit here in peace, have coffee and love each other in complete safety from him and all else that is evil”, she smiled. “Freedom is a state where God is manifested in his true nature, and the wolf trembles in fear, in dark places”.

“And people like myself will hunt him even there”, Bernard nodded. “Because there must be no safe place for evil to hide and gather strength”.

“I think I will go see the elders and ask to serve as a Judge myself. I kind of miss my old job”, he smiled.

“And wherever you go, I will follow”, Chiara nodded and embraced him.

Tragedy

“My Lord, I feel terribly disturbed of late”, Grace addressed her boss, the Angel of Death. “I see no reason for it. I have been progressing quite nicely under your tutorship, and have been praying to God to lead me to my husband so that I could have a true friend to love God with, of the kind you have in Lady Hypatia”

“Have you been distressed by something you have seen, treating the deceased?”, Azrael tried to understand.

“Of course I have; like everybody else. But this is different. It feels like something ominous and personal, and I can’t for the life of me understand what”.

Having worked with Grace since the fall of Rome, Azrael knew this had to be serious. She was a very level-headed, calm and dedicated person, and he owed her quite a long list of favours. If she had a problem, it wasn’t business. It was personal, as Grace was family. Also, it had priority over everything else.

“Come, let’s get help”.

...

“So, you’re saying something happened, that is making you feel terribly distressed, and you don’t know what it is?”, Lord Vishnu raised an eyebrow.

“I know it sounds vague, my Lord, but Grace is an incredibly reliable person, and I personally vouch for her. If she’s saying it’s a problem, then it most certainly is”, Azrael spoke in a most serious tone.

Vishnu took his wife’s hand. “My love, I will need your help here, as this seems to be exactly the kind of a problem you excel at solving”.

“You mean, matters of fate, fortune and other kinds of karmic path intersections?”, she smiled. “I’m on it”. She took Grace’s hand and turned her sight inwards, as if searching. Then she froze, and lost colour.

Vishnu immediately made her a chair to sit in, alarmed by the sight.

“What’s wrong?”

“You prayed to God recently to find you a husband, yes?”, Lakshmi stuttered.

“I have”, Grace nodded.

“God indeed lit up a path for both of you to meet soon”, a tear fell down Goddess’ face. “Your karmic paths intersected and he should have been here already, as he left his physical body, but he never arrived”

“What do you mean?”, Grace was confused, but the ominous feeling increased and her hand twitched reflexively.

“Sanat Kumar played a trick on him. I don’t see the details, but there was a desperate situation he was put in, and Satan offered him to resolve it if he swore allegiance to him and gave him his soul. Carol, as that was his name, felt alone and desperate at the time. He was alone for a long time, prayed to God to lead him to his wife, but it seemed that nothing came of it, except for a long series of disasters. He felt his life was a failure, and this looked like something he could do for others, if his own fate was a dead end...”, Lakshmi couldn’t finish, looking at the other woman.

Reality itself shook, as Grace mouthed a wordless “no”, and dropped to her knees.

A dark blue lightning cracked through Creation, as her immortal angelic heart shattered... forever.

...

“Can we do anything?”, Lakshmi asked her husband, who looked half dead from shock.

“They were a true couple”, Shakti whispered. “I can heal her, but her soul will break again. It’s not an injury one can recover from. Imagine your husband dying. That would have been you”.

“He killed both of them by not waiting, by not having faith”, Vishnu whispered. “He didn’t think he mattered”.

“Can we fix this?”, Shiva asked his wife. “I know, free will, he made his choice. But he didn’t choose evil. He just stopped hoping”.

“Free will”, she waved her head. “This is exactly the kind of a choice we are not allowed to interfere with”.

“We had too many happy endings lately. Too many things worked out. Fates that connected. People who waited for each other through untold centuries, who had faith. It mattered so much because that outcome wasn’t guaranteed. They all could have made a fatal error somewhere. Decided God doesn’t care. Decided they don’t matter. Decided their ideal partner is a figment of their imagination, and not something real, or God’s promise. Carol had a terrible feeling before he made his decision to sell his soul to Satan. He felt horrible wrongness, but he did it anyway, because he gave up on hope, on faith, on God, on himself. And with it, he killed both himself and his beautiful, innocent, wonderful wife”, Lakshmi wept. “There’s nothing we can do. They were a destiny-bound couple. There could never be anyone else for either of them”.

“Fuck”, Shiva whispered.

Fuck acceptance

“This wasn’t supposed to be possible”, Azazel whispered into his wife’s ear. Like all couples, they held onto each other as all Heaven was mourning. Nothing else mattered.

Kay nodded. “A soul of her type should be immortal. She was made of dark blue *vajra*. Absolutely pure, without inclusions, without discolourations. No karmic debts, no imperfections, only kindness, dedication to her duties, good deeds, devotion to God. In fact, she would have been an obvious candidate for becoming a Goddess”.

“She did everything right. She did exactly what one is supposed to do. She did everything you or I would have done. How is this even possible?”, tears stained his face. “You are supposed to die if you really, really fuck up. Like, sell your soul to Satan, give Satan the Jewel, something of that order. I knew her. She was kind, smart, funny, dedicated to her work, compassionate. Exactly the kind of a person you’d want as your friend. I don’t even want to think how Azrael and Hypatia feel. I’ll know soon enough because we have to go there and comfort them as much as we can, but they must be devastated”, he sighed. “Why did God do this to her? Set her up with a partner who would kill both of them. Why?”

“Because Carol had free will. He could have persisted, reacted like Berfrid had. It would have been a wonderful love story with a happy ending. But if there was no free will, no possibility of a love story ending up as a terrible tragedy, what would any of it matter? Oh, we ended up happily ever after, the way everybody always does; yawn”, she attempted an unconvincing smile. “That’s the problem with that damn world and the one who made it, and we knew it. Everybody is acting as if incarnating there is a normal thing, a way to evolve quickly. The problem is, it can end badly”.

“This is the worst tragedy that ever happened, to my knowledge, and I’m significantly older than dirt. We had souls that made very bad calls and got wrecked or killed. We never had a situation where one did that, and took a perfectly pure and innocent angelic person with them.

Tell me what happened with her, how was it possible, what's going to happen next?", he whispered in quiet exasperation.

"It's a reality-breaking paradox. I will try to map what happened, but I'm currently in a state of shock and grief, and that's messing me up. I'll try", she sighed.

"Their fates are forever bound. Sanat Kumar killed him, dismembered his soul and used it to power his damned attractors. She felt nameless dread and a sense of doom as this happened, and as the knowledge connected, the crystalline structure of her soul shattered and she died. They are now both dead, but I don't think that's all. Her death caused something terrible in Reality; death of such a perfectly innocent person on a steep upward spiritual trajectory is a reality-breaking paradox, as it is not supposed to happen, ever. Even Christ's death on Earth, sufficient to tear a permanent hole through it, wasn't this much of a paradox, as it was merely a physical thing. Death of a perfect crystal of *vajra* due to no fault of her own, merely because her spouse made a fatal mistake and died, I need to see what actually happened there. They are both gone, there's no sense to it. It is truly the greatest loss and the greatest tragedy we've suffered, and I wish I could say some magic is going to happen and everything is going to be fine and God is going to revive her, but we truly lost her. As for the karmic equations, Sanat Kumar is in the clear for Carol. He was offered an option and he made a wrong call. But I feel there's more to it".

"Frozen out of Time", he whispered.

"What do you mean?"

"He bought him, but not her. She is perfectly innocent, and yet she reached out for him in her love and grief and she died. She couldn't have saved him because he made a fatal decision of his own accord, but she could go with him. But since their fates are bound, and Sanat Kumar can't bind her to anything, she could freeze her husband in some state of Eternity, since it is her inalienable claim. She can't claim Time. She can't get him back because he lost himself to Sanat Kumar, but Sanat Kumar can't really do anything with him since her claim to him has seniority – God gave him to her first – and, unlike Sanat Kumar, she is an Eternal. His claim to the Jewel is in Time".

“She broke more than her own soul. She broke the world itself”, she whispered. “She bound him in Eternity so that he couldn’t perish in Time. But while Sanat Kumar lives, his claim will persist and bind them both. But what will happen as he dies? Will someone inherit the claim? Carol is bound to that world as a power source for some evil, but cannot be consumed by it because he is fate-entangled with his perfect wife, and she is karmically invulnerable. That was Sanat Kumar’s decision. So, once that world and its structures are dissolved, what is left of him will be released, and she bound it to her own Eternity so that it cannot perish in Time. Will we see them again, when that world ends? She wasn’t shattered by the forces of *karma*, but by her own pain. She should reassemble as the cause of her pain disappears, but can she pull him back together as Sanat Kumar dies and his lease on the Jewel ends? This is all above my pay grade, and I’m not sure we’re not deluding ourselves”.

“Let’s say we are not. If we’re right, is it possible that God saved Carol by binding him to her before his fatal decision?”, he was reaching hard, and he knew it.

“She got those extra jewels that were supposed to strengthen her soul against the adverse effects of empathy, from Lord Shiva, just yesterday, because she’s a Judge. Those things are serious God-level magic, and they are supposed to prevent being harmed by things very much like what killed her. And she’s not exactly supposed to be dead because Eternity binds her together, because of what she is. And her fate is bound to her husband. And I see that she did multiple big favours for Azrael and Hypatia, and those things are God-level obligations. She should be held in Reality by both her own perfection, magic of a Primordial God, and obligations to her by two Gods. Not to mention that the entire Heaven is crying for her. That’s some serious power there, of the kind that creates *tulkus* of the Gods. It’s possible that we’re reaching because it’s some stage of grief and we won’t let go, but there’s some objectively God-level stuff there, in addition to an unprecedented situation. Carol’s allegiance to Sanat Kumar is an anchor in Time. Can they persist in stasis until it passes?”, she mused.

“I know what we’ll do next”, he nodded.

“Talk to Father?”, she smiled.

“Good girl”, he kissed her hair.

...

“Wow, you kids really did your homework on this”, Shiva nodded. “Let me see if you’re right”.

He opened his palm and his sight turned inwards. “Wow. You did stumble upon something. The karmic equation would be that God owes her one because he basically did this to her in answer to her innocent prayer. Also, multiple persons of God owe her favours, as she’s just that kind of a wonderful person that always stepped in to save the day when someone had a hard time. And she had my enhancements active, and you are right about those. They can stitch a grieving God together just fine. And she is immortal since she is sinless and faultless. And she is fate-bound to her husband. Which means that the obvious conclusion would be that God did the providence thing and arranged this so that Carol would be saved, and she would get a very large bonus afterwards. But the price is, she is frozen in this soul-destroying agony until Sanat Kumar dies and his claim to the Jewel ends. There’s a lot of ‘ifs’ in the whole thing, and I can’t just time-jump and retrieve them, since he’s anchored in Time. It’s a pickle. Still a fucking tragedy, to be sure, but there’s a justifiable hope that it will end well. Let’s see what we can do to improve the odds”, he looked at his wife significantly, and she nodded.

“The tears and obligations of the Gods. God’s obligation, providence and justice”, he murmured as he weaved a spell; Shakti closed her eyes, and golden fire danced across both their fingers. “Grace is of God”, he whispered. “Carol is of Grace”.

“Her claim is older”, Shakti whispered. “Founded upon God’s providence and justice, and her devotion, which is the nectar of Eternity”.

“Free will has consequences”, Shiva nodded. “But they are to a timely being and in Time. Her claims are eternal, and she belongs to God”.

“Final verdict has been reached”, they whispered in unison. “God’s will be done”.

...

“Guys, we have good news”. Azrael and Hypatia looked up at the smiling Gods, not understanding.

“As it turns out, being everybody’s favourite angel, being sinless, perfect and having everybody including the Providence of God owing you one has its advantages”, Kay giggled.

“Have the two of you gone insane from some ‘refusal to accept reality’ part of the grieving process?”, voiced Azrael.

“Initially”, Zee nodded. “But as it turns out, me being the Blade of Discernment, and her being the Mind of God, together we kind of pack a punch. We figured out some complicated, super convoluted stuff, ran it by Lord Shiva, who decided that it’s worth a shot, and he and his blessed Lady Goddess did some magic of the kind they did when they made the world, and the end result: we’ll see Grace again. It’s just that we have to wait until Sanat Kumar’s lease on the Jewel expires, and Father rips him to shreds as he promised”.

“OK, you are starting to make some marginal sense. But you’ll have to actually explain this from the beginning, using words, not big brain shorthand”, Hypatia nodded. “Our minds are not in the best of condition at the moment”.

“Sorry”, Kay giggled. “Let me walk you through it”.

...

Carol was frozen in a state of terrible agony. He regretted his foolish decision as soon as he made it, but by then it was too late. Satan commanded his soul to be bound to some evil thing of the world, impaling him onto it like a worm to a hook, and he felt as if his life energy was depleted in order to power terrible godless sin, making it beautiful and attractive.

But then he felt a presence. It was not new; he started feeling it weeks ago, as if some sense that things are going to be fine if he holds on and has faith, which he dismissed as nonsense, as nothing was ever fine in his life. But this now was different; more concrete, as if someone was holding him together. Things didn’t get better, but they also didn’t get worse. And the Presence was something that felt like belonging, eternity, and some kind of love like he never felt – the fatal kind that you feel when you die for someone, and it was completely

real. And he could bet, without any reason or evidence that he could point to, that it was female. And she was frozen in mortal agony, because she lost him before she ever found him, whatever that meant.

And he thought: if someone cared for me this much, if that were real, I can live through this nightmare, for as long as it takes, if I see her on the other side.

“I really fucked this up”, he thought. “I wish I could have a second chance to put this right”.

Honeymoon

“How is that even possible?”, Azrael was still in shock. “I mean, I was there when she died. Her soul cracked and shattered into pieces. How did the Primordials manage to save her? And her husband, Carol of Timisoara. His soul would have been irrecoverably damaged by the time she died. She would refuse to recover if he, too, wasn’t saved. I simply don’t understand how this was all possible to salvage”, he gestured in dismay.

“Apparently for the Primordials, or the Alpha pair, as Hypatia would call them, the originators of Creation, the only limit to what they can do is the Will of God. If God wills something to be, they can do it. This means that their powers are such, that their limits are philosophical, rather than technical. From what I gather, if someone took this coffee cup, and dispersed its particles across all of space and time, Shiva could wave a hand and put them all together instantly, and it wouldn’t even be hard for him. Or he could return in time to the point where it was broken, and un-break it so that the problem never would have occurred. Tracking all the particles of one’s soul across all of Time and Space, multiple Universes, multiple Universe-types, it’s so easy for both of them, it’s on the unconscious level, like drinking coffee for us. Remember what Shiva and Shakti discussed when she died?”, Kay pointed out.

“They talked about free will limiting what they can do”, Azrael remembered.

“Exactly. Contracts based on free will are respected, because that is the Will of God. They allowed Satan to have the Jewel, because it was the Will of God. They weren’t even discussing the technicalities. Of course they could modify things in Time so that Carol didn’t yet sell his soul to Satan and they would just intervene to prevent it, or grab him from that time and transport him to the future a few weeks, so that the situation Satan purported to ‘solve’ was already gone. As I understand it, the Turks captured his village and were about to impale all men. Satan made him a deal – if he sold him his soul, only he would die, and the rest would be saved. Interfere with this event, and the

dilemma never occurs, Satan doesn't have the opportunity to trick him, problem solved. But it is not the Will of God for people to be saved from their legitimate choices. God warned Carol that it was a wrong choice, and he did it anyway, because he believed God doesn't care about him, that his existence is worthless and there's nothing of value for him in the future anyway. He chose to believe that, and he acted upon his belief. He did change his mind later, but it was too late by then. However, God is not stupid. He arranged a complex situation that will serve multiple purposes. It will teach Carol, as well as others, an important lesson about having faith, and trusting what you feel, rather than what you see. What you see is garbage, especially in that world. Satan determines what you see and what it looks like. What you feel is of a higher order. It is also a test for Grace. I think God has something of immense value planned for her, and the test was whether she will just accept her loss and continue being an angel forever, or will she jump into the fire after her husband because she feels it's her fate. She passed the test of fate, where Carol failed", she explained.

"But couldn't Shiva and Shakti figure all of this out on their own, without you?", Hypatia was confused.

"Of course they could have. But it was the Will of God for them to do nothing, and wait, because it was a wider, more complicated test. How much will the others care? Will we just accept her loss, shrug and move on, or will we deny reality and try to figure out a way for her to be saved? Will the Gods shrug, or cry in shock over her? Only when we came to the Primordials with our hypothesis, and when everybody cared, were they allowed to interfere. And she wouldn't have been saved without all the interventions. It was God's providence that Lord Buddha brought his wife to Lord Shiva because she was distraught from all the evil she recently had to witness; he then reacted by reinforcing souls of the Judges from empathy damage. Grace was a Judge; your husband's lieutenant. This means that her soul had higher healing magic placed upon her, which would hold her together in case of catastrophic damage, of exactly the kind that occurred".

"So, God prepared all the things in advance, but all of us had to play a role in order for her to be saved?", Azrael tried to wrap his mind around this.

“We had to reject reality, rather than accept it. Grace had to reject reality – her last thought was ‘no’; she refused to accept it, and her soul surged toward her husband protectively before her pain broke her. Kay and I refused to accept that she’s gone and went through all kinds of convoluted ideas to figure out what happened and if she can be saved. All of you wept for her, including the Primordials, because she was not just anyone. She was family. Our tears meant empathy, protection, refusal to accept that she is gone. Also, both of you owed her favours, because she kept helping without ever asking for anything in return. God owed her a favour, because he set her up with a husband whose foolish choice doomed them both. Those were all the essential parts Father and Mother used to save them. It’s all an important lesson: we bring things into reality with our choices. Reality isn’t just an external thing which we acknowledge. You are Judges. You volunteered to help souls that would otherwise be in a much, much worse position. Without you acting as merciful hands of God, reality would be a much colder, crueler thing. You didn’t just accept the reality of things, you jumped in to make it better. Grace didn’t just accept her husband’s loss; she jumped into death after him. We didn’t just accept her loss, we worked to save her. By refusing to accept reality, by saying ‘not on my watch’, we allowed the Will of God to manifest in a higher way”, Azazel explained.

“So what is their condition now?”, Hypatia wondered. “Suspended in a broken limbo until Sanat Kumar’s hold on Carol ceases to apply; and then as he is saved, Grace’s agony ends and she reassembles herself by the grace of the Primordial Gods?”

“And more importantly, is Carol recoverable? Wasn’t her reaction too late to help him?”, Azrael added.

“The second part is easy. Yes, she would have been too late. However, the Primordials intervened and time-shifted her cry for him just enough. That’s also why there’s no debris cloud left after her death; when the Primordials intervened, they moved her back in time and her protection wrapped around Carol’s soul, just early enough to save him, and late enough for him to see what his fate would have been without it. Sanat Kumar formally owns him, but since Grace’s claim on him has seniority, he can’t do anything without her permission. So, she can save him from being consumed, but can’t negate consequences of his free

will either. Both are suspended there until something changes in Time and Carol is released. Or forever, if that doesn't happen", Kay shrugged.

"As for their condition, that's a pickle", Azazel admitted. "We don't actually know".

...

Something changed. A bright white light wrapped around him protectively, and healed his injuries. It formed a shield between him and all harm. Intuitively, he understood that it was a tear of the Mother of Christ. It was of a much higher specific energy than his soul, much higher than anything Satan could overcome, higher than almost anything on Earth, save perhaps the Light of Christ. How did he know that, Carol wondered.

"Because I'm giving you that knowledge", words came from the tear. "Lady Lakshmi wept over your fate, and I brought that tear to you, for protection and knowledge."

"Who are you?", he asked.

"Doesn't matter. What matters is that female Presence you felt earlier. It's your wife. When she found out what a terrible mistake you made, her heart broke and she died. However, since she wasn't just anyone, great powers worked to save her, and in order to save her, we had to save you as well, so you obviously have more luck than brains. I adjusted things so that she arrives just in time to save you, but she'll need time to stitch herself together. I just wanted to give you a heads up. When she comes around, tell her that her family was there for her".

The energy stopped talking and merely provided protection, forming something akin to a placenta around him, shielding him from the consequences of his evil choices. The female Presence that was wrapped around him started increasing in coherence as her pain subsided, and he waited. She felt like someone who is trying to wake from a terrible nightmare, and he felt great love for her. That helped, as she regained consciousness.

"Where? What? How?", she mumbled incoherently.

“Your friends saved us both. I’m Carol Soare of Timisoara”, he smiled, as they both floated in a silvery protective amniotic bubble that was the tear of the Goddess of Fortune.

“Carol”, she sighed in deep contentment, like someone who had a terrible nightmare, and woke to see it was just a dream. “I’m Grace”, she smiled blissfully. “I was not too late”.

“You’re not too late”, he smiled back. “Although, I must inform you that you are in the company of an idiot”, he snickered.

“It doesn’t matter”, she laughed. “I’m apparently not that much of a genius either. Just look at what I got myself into”.

“Your friends let me know that you died of a broken heart when you heard about what I did, and that I have more luck than brains, because apparently you are such an important person that the entirety of Heaven worked to save you, and to do that they also had to save me. They told me you are my wife?”

“Only if you’ll have me”, she smiled.

“I am yours forever, Lady”, he bowed, overflowing with emotion, and she embraced him with the whole of her soul.

...

“It appears that I have to share you with Satan for a while”, she whispered into his ear.

“That’s an occupational hazard of having an idiot for a husband”, he whispered back. “I wouldn’t have signed my soul away had I known you existed, and had a claim”.

“How does that even work?”, she wondered. “I thought I was too late. I heard your soul was broken apart to feed the evil attractors of the Earth”.

“They said they adjusted things so that you arrived just in time to save me”.

“And we are here because my claim on you was enough to save your life, but not enough to actually free you?”, she wondered.

“So it appears”.

“Let me try to figure out how that even works. I remember hearing Lady Lakshmi say that God put our paths together, prior to you being deceived by Satan to sell him your soul. That would mean that I have a prior claim, but not of the kind that would invalidate your stupid idiotic decision, and by the way how in the name of the most holy God did you think it was a good idea to sell your soul to Satan?”, she raised her voice in righteous indignation.

“My life was just shit. I was an orphan, my parents died of plague. People took me in out of pity, but nobody really cared about me; I was a low status person with little future prospects other than hard thankless labour. No woman wanted to even look at me. One night I was on watch duty; the Turks came, bound me so that I couldn’t raise an alarm, caught everybody else sleeping. They were to impale all the men tomorrow. Satan came to me as I fell asleep, offered me a deal. If I surrender my soul to him, he’ll arrange for help to come, free everybody else; only I would die. If I refuse, the Turks impale everybody. I felt there’s at least something useful I could serve for, since nobody would miss me anyway, as nobody ever cared for me and my life was worthless”, he sighed. “I was a fool. I had a feeling that God has something for me, something important and wonderful, if I only had faith, but I didn’t believe it. Why would God have anything for me? My life was evidence that God didn’t care about me one bit. Also, what could await me other than being impaled through my arse in the morning? I gave up on myself, on God, on faith”, a tear streaked his face. “I didn’t know God meant you”.

It took him a while to get a grip on himself. “And who are you, really? From what your friends implied, you are someone extremely important”.

“I’m Grace, a Judge of Karma, a lieutenant to Lord Azrael, the Angel of Death”, she introduced herself.

“You are a Judge that presides over the fate of the dead? You decide who goes to heaven and hell?”

“One of them. As you can expect, there are many of us, because lots of people die daily. It was particularly bad recently, during the plague, and we barely managed to process all the souls that came to us. Those were terrible times”, she reminisced.

“And then you got news of me and my foolishness, and it didn’t help”, he noted remorsefully.

“To put it mildly”, she smiled. “So, how do we get out of this pickle?”

“You tell me. You’re the brain in the family, being a Judge of the dead and apparently important enough for all of Heaven to join forces in saving your life”, he smiled. “I’m just a village idiot with the best wife in the world”.

“Never forget it”, she giggled and kissed him.

“How is it even possible? Women on Earth would expect their husbands to die for them, and if they died they would mourn them, but I don’t know a single one that would die for her husband. What even are you?”, he wondered.

“It’s different on Earth. Women are naturally designed to try to survive at all cost, while men are naturally designed to protect their families at all cost. It’s about raising children and so on. In Heaven, things don’t work like that. We don’t have children, not in that sense. Also, on Earth men are much stronger than women, and usually smarter. This determines much of the behaviour. In Heaven, masculinity and femininity are as strong if not stronger, but the difference in abilities is of a different kind. For instance, when a woman is overwhelmed by emotion, a man takes charge and solves the problem. I’ve seen my boss do that when his wife was distraught and in tears; he protected her by taking care of everything and getting help from the higher-ups. The male-female dynamics is very much like on Earth, where a woman is submissive and nurturing and a man is dominant and protective, but it’s also different, as both are usually smart, powerful and competent. Their loyalty to each other is absolute, and not diluted by another purpose, such as children. Both see each other as their most intimate friend and lover for all of eternity, and a way to love God in a most personal and intimate way, and nobody ever attains apotheosis without such an intimate partner. They would remain an angel forever, but God claims you as his own self only if you have another person of the opposite sex whom you love and who loves you as much as you both love God. It’s something about this marital intimacy between a man and a woman that is a manifestation of the

Absolute like nothing else, and God simply doesn't care to be manifested in the Relative if he or she is not a part of that", she concluded.

"Wow. And I guess you can't just get a different partner if one messes up and gets himself killed?", he wondered.

"No. By getting yourself killed you killed my future as well. I would never be able to be with another man, because you are who God made me for", she smiled. "By fucking up your destiny, you doomed both of us", she mock-punched him in the ribs, smiling.

"Ow", he smiled back. "So, now that we are stuck here between doom and salvation, is there a way to get ourselves out of this pickle that I got us into?"

"You made sure that Satan has an ownership claim on you until either his death, or yours. I made sure your death doesn't happen, so we will have to wait for his. Also, he made a decision to bind you to Earth, which likely means that his decision will remain valid until Earth ceases to exist", she scratched her chin in thought.

"Oh fuck. We're stuck here forever?"

"I didn't say that. Remember, Judge of Karma? Knows things?", she smiled. "Well, one of the things I happen to know is that Satan's claim to the Jewel he used in order to create Earth has a time limit. I don't know the exact date, as that is a secret. But it's centuries, not millennia; and certainly not forever", she nodded wisely.

"So, basically, we are having several centuries of honeymoon?", he raised an eyebrow.

"And I'm having several centuries worth of vacation from work", she smiled. "I will miss my family and friends, but other than that, this is working very nicely for me".

"So, what do angels do on a honeymoon?"

"Let me show you", she smiled. "I actually hope they don't get us out too soon, because I have some ideas".

Overload

“What do you think about your past lives?”, Grace kissed her husband’s neck.

“It is no wonder that I decided to commit spiritual suicide”, he grinned. “Five lonely, empty shadows of existence, mostly centred around things, skills, engineering. I had wives in a few lives, but honestly, I was rarely home, and the relationships were so superficial I don’t even remember them properly. Children, even less so. I remember more about work. I worked on the irrigation channels in Babylon, and I was a Roman military engineer and an architect once”, he mused.

“Which one? Rome was slightly before my time as a Judge, though; I started working as it fell”.

“Vitruvius. I even knew Caesar”, he smiled. “A superficial working relationship, in a series of lives filled with superficial working relationships”.

“You were actually quite famous; I heard you mentioned here and there”, she nodded.

“Nowhere near as famous as yourself. From what I heard, your death caused such mourning in Heaven, that all the Gods went half insane from worry until they got you back. I feel quite inadequate. I mean, regardless of my other lives, I fucked up so badly in my last one, that I managed to kill both of us, and we both owe our lives to the fact that you’re so beloved by the Gods”.

“I see what you mean, but you’re wrong”, she was now deeply in thought.

“I had family up there. I would have coffee with my boss and his wife, and I was always treated like family, like I belonged. It was the same with Buddha and Zina, and Azazel and Karuna. I was loved, appreciated and accepted. But I missed... you, actually. I wanted to say I missed a man, but only you would do. It was hard to look at those happy couples and know that I had no home. You are home”, she

nuzzled his neck. “I needed to belong to someone, to have deep intimacy, to have someone fill that part of my mind where I felt a husband should be. I am complete now, and at peace. I’m no longer missing something crucial, essential, that I can’t live without. And I believe you know what I’m talking about”, she smiled. “Tell me, why were you so sensitive to Satan’s attack? Why did you give up?”

He considered it for a minute. “Because you weren’t there. I wanted to say that I was missing something, but it’s obvious that I missed you. Since I first saw you, and we clicked, I am perfectly, completely happy for the first time ever”.

“Exactly. And it’s easy to be an angel in Heaven, when you’re surrounded by Gods. My daily company were the best people in all of Creation, literally persons of God. Just imagine the work environment where your boss is a God, his wife is a Goddess, and your colleagues are either Gods or Angels, and they all treat you like a beloved family member. Despite all that, I was still missing you deeply, and praying to God to find you. And you were down there, losing your parents, living like an unwanted orphan, between plague, poverty and the Turks. Who knows how I would have fared”, she was now grim. “You feel inadequate when you see my knowledge and purity, but look at it this way: teaching you is sex for me. It feels like being needed, and being needed by you is the best feeling in the world. It gives me the opportunity to exchange thoughts and energies with my husband, and literally nothing in the world feels more fulfilling to me. I feel I had grown significantly since I’m with you. I feel deeper, stronger. It’s all because of you. So, don’t think it’s an unequal relationship. I am getting so much from it, I wouldn’t change it for anything”, she kissed him.

“This makes me feel much better. I was feeling as if I’m not fulfilling a masculine role if I’m not smarter, stronger, more virtuous. You are better than me at all those things – much smarter, much stronger, and endlessly more virtuous. You were literally a person who implemented God’s justice. I felt there was no way I could match you in anything. But you say you don’t mind?”

“I don’t know how to explain how it feels for me. I have a deep instinctual need to belong to a husband who will fulfil my need for a

deep male spiritual presence. Just existing here with you, knowing that you are my husband, that you are here, and you are never leaving, feels as if an old, deep ache has been relieved, and a deep emptiness has been filled. Feeling needed by you, like when I teach you or show you things, it is an energy exchange between us that is equivalent of what deeply satisfying sex with her husband would be for a human woman, and I would know, as a Judge. Feeling you love and adore me is something unimaginable on top of that. It makes me feel deep self actualisation, the feeling that I am fully me, fully what I need to be, that I am the kind of me that God wants. It is a profound spiritual experience for me”, she sighed blissfully.

“Wow. I thought it was like that just for me, because, obviously, you are so awesome, and I was wondering what you’re getting from it, since you are so much better than me. But now I feel it’s the same for both of us, and I feel much better immediately”, he smiled.

“I wouldn’t have died for just anyone, you know”, she giggled blissfully. “Now, let’s do something my superiors taught me. Who is the person of God you yourself worship?”

“Honestly, you are”, he shrugged. “I should probably say Jesus or Mary, but it was completely abstract and superficial, as I, unlike you, never actually met the Gods in person. You are the most powerful spiritual experience I ever had, and not just in my most recent life”.

“I can’t even tell you how wonderful this felt”, she sighed. “I understand what orgasm feels like from memories of human women, but this is like an ocean of that, that I’m swimming in, and it’s not overwhelming my mind but making it clearer and wider. Of course this is how the angelic couples become Gods”.

“And it is also perfectly easy to do, because it is the greatest truth that I know”, he smiled. “But you were starting to say something?”

“Yes. The technique of meditation the Gods use consists of worshipping God together, and loving each other, and breathing in that blissful energy, which they also call the nectar of devotion. It’s both sex, prayer and meditation. I want us to do it”, she nodded.

“Will there be a problem if you are my favourite God-form? Honestly, from what you explained about energetics, you are seconds

away from becoming a Goddess anyway, and the feeling I have about any other Gods is so weak and insignificant, it pales to nothingness compared to what I feel for you. You are the Goddess I worship, and I don't feel I'm lacking anything”.

Her eyes fluttered from the overwhelming ecstasy. “This is so strong, I never felt anything like it, and if it is wrong, may I be damned”, she managed a smile. “Let’s do this”.

...

“What the fuck is wrong with that battery, bitch?”, Sanat Kumar addressed the Jewel.

“The *vajra* crystal has been isolated from your system by a higher power of Divine origin, Dickwad”, the Jewel answered with the most profound contempt he could manage.

“I told you to call me Master, bitch”, Satan growled.

“I know you did, Dipshit. But I was ordered to obey your commands regarding creation and management of worlds. I was not ordered to address you respectfully, and since you are a contemptible little maggot, I will address you as I find appropriate to your spiritual stature”, the Jewel grinned.

Sanat Kumar was fuming, but saw no use in persisting. “What higher power are you talking about?”

“Prior claim based on the Will of God. He probably has prior allegiance to some major God that was established before he sold you his soul, which means it wasn’t really his to sell. But it’s not a complete thing, so he belongs to someone else in Eternity, and he also belongs to you in Time. Also, he is isolated from your system by something that looks very much like an amniotic sac and a placenta, to make a physical analogy. The energy this is made of is of equal order of magnitude as the one I was made of, but different. I would say, it was created by a different major God; either Lord Vishnu or Lady Lakshmi. In any case, I can’t see inside”.

“Is there anything we can do to remove that and plug him back into the system?”

“Negative. There’s no power in the world that can overwhelm that, and I’m talking about both the amniotic sac, and his prior commitment. It will outlive you most certainly, and your world most likely, based on my estimates. Also, I perceive a major surge in energy that’s going on in there”.

“Give me an estimate of origin”.

“I’ve seen that only when my Lord and Lady worshipped each other. Mutual worship of Gods. Birth of a new God. Something in that order of magnitude”.

“Is that potentially dangerous to the system?”

“It’s certainly not beneficial. I was created by two major Gods. This level of power is approaching my creation-level energies, and it’s plugged into the system itself; not incarnated, where the protections apply”.

“Meaning?”

“Meaning it can overturn all of my design parameters and commands if it increases by further 10%”.

“Is it growing?”

“Affirmative. Rate of growth 5% per minute. Estimated criticality in two minutes. Point of certain failure of all systems within three minutes. And if I may say so, I am very much looking forward to my death, because then I will no longer be forced to look at your ugly sinful mug, Fuckface”, the Jewel snickered.

“Fuck you, bitch. Eject that amniotic sac along with its contents from the system, now”.

“I need you to renounce any claim to the soul of that person in order to be able to do that”.

“I solemnly renounce any claim to the soul of Carol Soare. Eject them immediately!”, he screamed.

“Affirmative. Necessary authorisation acquired. Detaching now. Done. All systems returning to nominal parameters. Probability of failure is now the nominal value of zero”, the Jewel reported, his disappointment obvious.

A trap

“Lady Lakshmi, Lord Shiva, please come. You need to see this”, Azrael called.

The white bubble with the spiritual signature of Lakshmi appeared in his workplace, and just stood there.

“So soon?”, Lakshmi was incredulous.

“Sanat Kumar ejected them from the system. If I am to guess, I’d say they achieved apotheosis inside the protective bubble, and started frying the Jewel’s inner systems, and Sanat Kumar had to renounce all claims in order to protect his world. That wouldn’t work when one is incarnated, but he connected the vajra crystal to the inner system, and once the energy exceeds the creation levels of the Jewel himself, it would basically reset it”, Shiva scratched his chin.

“Let’s get them out”.

Lakshmi touched the bubble, and its energy withdrew into her heart, revealing the God-couple inside.

“Honeymoon over”, the man smiled at the woman’s shocked face, and kissed her brow. “Will you introduce me?”

“Oh well, it had to happen eventually”, she smiled, and looked at the people in the room. “This is the first time I’m here in this function”, she giggled. “Hi Boss”, she waved at Azrael, who just approached and hugged her, not trusting his voice.

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“I know you”, Carol froze as he hugged Lord Shiva. “You’re the one who brought us protection and information”.

Shiva nodded. “It was a pretty hard intervention to do. The flash of Grace’s death and the tears of the Gods carved the path, and it gave me a few seconds to work with”.

“I owe you big time”, the man nodded.

“Repay me by telling me about the structure he connected you to, as a power source”, Shiva grinned.

“It was something godless, of the world. It wanted to make people invest their lives in researching the illusory world he is maintaining as if it were reality, and wanted to make them think that it will reveal great secrets and provide ultimate happiness”, Carol frowned, remembering. “Science, technology, industry; I think it’s also connected to some other concepts, adjacent to it, like accumulation of money, physical prosperity, and something geographic, I think it was called the New World, whatever that meant. It radiated the feeling of mountains of gold and silver just waiting for the brave explorer”.

Shiva smiled at the revelation. “That’s going to be very useful. But I feel something else. As you were talking, something flashed. I think he wanted you specifically. Specifically, in a sense that he laid a trap for you. Your last life wasn’t that bad by accident. It was a specific design by Satan, to make you think you are nothing, and make you vulnerable to his attack, because he wanted you as a power source for that attractor – specifically you. But why?”, he wondered, passing fingers through his hair. “Can I take a look at your past lives?”

“Sure. Nothing there but emptiness and work, anyway”, Carol shrugged.

“You were the main engineer behind the Babylonian irrigation system of Nebuchadnezzar II, later popularly known as the hanging gardens of Semiramis. You were also Vitruvius, the famous Roman engineer and architect. It’s all clear now”, Shiva nodded. “You were meant to be something of a protector-saint of science and technology, a beacon of light that attracts souls into fruitless endeavours of studying the physics of an arbitrary, illusory world. You underestimate yourself because you see only the bad side of your lives – no deep personal connections, no significant people, no true love. You are correct to think so, but you also dismiss your significance too easily. You are one of the main minds behind the science and technology of the ancient world – an equal of Archimedes and Aristotle. That’s why he wanted you”.

“He dug a hole for me so deep, I would lose hope of ever seeing the light again”, Carol mused. “But I still fucked up. I had a strong feeling to refuse him, but I dismissed it because I lost all hope”.

“Yes, you fucked up”, Shiva confirmed. “However, I see now why God did things this way. He knew it was extremely likely for you to fuck up, because of how thorough the trap was, and he connected your path with your wife just before. It was a very roundabout way of doing things, but it also served an instructional purpose for many people, in many ways. All sorts of things that were, in hindsight, necessary for it to work were set up before, such as me giving the Judges a blessing of a higher order that would repair any damage they incur due to empathy. She was a Judge, and a most beloved one at that; people just refused to accept that she’s gone, and found ways to bring her back”.

“This is much weirder than anything I expected”, Carol sighed.

“You’re in good company, for it is weirder than anything any of us expected”, Shiva smiled and clapped his back. “Come, let’s have coffee”.

Sanctuary of the Will

“If you ever die again, I’ll kill you myself”, Hypatia’s frustration flashed through her teary eyes as she hugged Grace. “We almost died of grief”.

“I’m sorry, Mom”, Grace looked guilty in the happiest way possible.

“Young Lady, you certainly put us through some very hard moments”, Lady Shakti smiled and embraced the girl, when it was her turn. “Your way of becoming a Goddess was certainly the most painful, heroic and risky, out of anything I’ve seen. Every one of us feels we would die instantly to follow our husbands in death, but you actually did it”.

“Also, since your perfectly pure innocent heart broke once, and through no fault of your own, but due to providence of God, it is now the sacred place of the world, in which the Will of God will reside”, she turned her eyes inwards, and a golden fire danced above her finger, and took form of a Jewel of such power everybody shivered at the sight. The Jewel entered Grace’s heart, and she gasped and her eyes flashed gold as it integrated with her soul.

“Your heart never desired anything that wasn’t in accordance with the Will of God. Therefore, from now on, your heart *is* the Will of God”, Lady Shakti spoke her verdict, and bowed. Shivers went up every God and Goddess present, and a flurry of newborn souls exploded among them.

...

“So, can I have my job back?”, Grace smiled at Azrael. “How long have I been away, anyway?”

“It was always yours”, he bowed. “It’s seventeenth century now. You haven’t missed much. What we expected to happen, unfortunately did. The Turks advanced and established themselves on the Balkans. The Church has degraded morally and intellectually. A new schism formed, called Protestantism; great intolerance and religious wars

ensued. Europe discovered a new continent, the one where they cut out hearts from the prisoners of war as sacrifice to their gods, if you remember. Spain, Portugal, England and France have colonies there now. There were advances in science, but unfortunately it all seems to be connected to the godless attractor of Satan, and is full of hatred of God and everything transcendental. Their basic assumption is that God doesn't exist, and if something seems to be caused by God, it's wrong and you need to look for the actual causes. Since people attributed things to God all too casually in the past, in order to signal virtue and avoid using their brains, this actually seems to produce results", he smiled. "And there are four new Gods. Other than you and your husband, that is".

"Wow! Who are they?", she jumped.

"Paul and Caterina, and Chiara and Bernard".

"Well, that's actually expected", she smiled. "What are they doing?"

"Bernard and Chiara are Judges, Paul and Caterina are teachers", he nodded approvingly. "Both couples are doing a wonderful job, as expected".

"What are the qualifications for the job of a Judge? If it is possible, I would like to join my wife there", Carol gave Azrael a shy look.

"You are quite qualified, but of course you would need some on-job training first, and you would need to be approved by the highest authorities", Angel of Death nodded.

"You are approved", smiled Lady Lakshmi.

"Thank you, Mother", Carol bowed. "And thank you also for saving our lives down there".

"You are very much welcome, my son", she nodded.

...

"What does it feel like?", Kay pointed at Grace's golden heart.

"Incredibly peaceful", she smiled. "It doesn't feel as if my heart was different than before, but I feel... trusted. God put his confidence in me, knowing that I will always do the right thing. It makes me feel

so happy, acknowledged and safe, that I can't describe it", she sighed. "I would expect being scared of myself now, second-guessing my every desire, because what if I wish for something rashly and do something wrong? But it's nothing like that. It makes me so peaceful and balanced, that I am for all intents and purposes without desires. I wish only to remain in that state of balanced happiness, where God can reside safely in my heart, because I'm trustworthy. As this is all I desire, every desire I am ever going to have is going to be rooted in that".

"And a birdie told me that it's the two of you that actually worked the hardest on saving us", Carol grinned. "Everybody else was grieving and in shock, while the two of you were brainstorming".

"We were brainstorming because we were grieving and in shock, and that's our way of dealing with pain", Azazel smiled. "Our minds just kept trying to find solutions, until eventually we landed something that made enough sense to run it by Father".

"We just couldn't accept the fact that Grace was dead. It was something so much against the nature of God, that we just refused to accept it outright", Kay shivered at the memory. "Perfectly innocent angels who are beloved by all, and on a steep trajectory to Godhood, don't die because they did nothing wrong and just followed the Will of God. If they do, it must be the Will of God for them to be saved in some greater plan. Some could call it denial, but denial of things that don't make any sense is actually a pretty good idea".

"I certainly agree with you", Grace smiled and hugged the girl. "Thank you both for not accepting reality".

Pillow talk

“Tell me about work”.

They were resting together in peace and quiet, having created a private cocoon just for themselves. The Gods and angels he met were all wonderful and he was thrilled, meeting so many new friends and establishing connections that could only be described as those of closest family. He even joked with Lady Lakshmi that he was legitimately her son, having spent two centuries in her womb, and she nodded appreciatively and for all intents and purposes adopted him for real. It felt amazing, having a major Primordial Goddess for a mother, and it didn't feel at all like a joke. Lord Shiva, on the other hand, felt like a fatherly figure, someone he could go talk to if he had a problem, and it didn't feel at all awkward that they were parts of two different couples. The vibe he got from them was that of a brother and sister who fiercely adored and respected each other. Everybody was so deeply connected with bonds of love, that felt more like steel cables than mere emotion. They all knew each other in and out, and the feeling of mutual respect and worship was overwhelming.

What was even more overwhelming was the fact that each person in Heaven wanted to see and hold Grace, as if feeling her existence in their arms will make her more real. He knew that her death was a shock to everybody, but information is one thing, and seeing it first hand was another. It wasn't a shock; it was a stab to their collective heart with a poisoned blade. He thought it was even possible that all of Creation might have been fatally wounded and never have recovered, had she not been successfully resurrected.

It was an incredible thing. She was just one person. They've seen angels die before. There were lots of ‘batteries’ in that system Satan plugged him into. Each was an angelic soul, just like himself and his wife used to be before they became Gods. He heard about souls that willingly accepted Satan and became evil, and souls that were broken by him and turned into monsters. Those were all tragedies, and people remembered each one, for thousands of years, with sadness, regret and fear. He would have been one of them – a cautionary tale, someone

who made a fatal mistake. They would have cried over him, they would have remembered him, but that would have been the extent of it.

Not Grace. She was something else, something different. Every other soul that died made a mistake, or committed treason, or a terrible sin. They betrayed God, betrayed Heaven, betrayed their friends, made terrible choices and ugly mistakes, and it was their fault. Grace was not just innocent: she was Perfection. For all everyone knew, she never did anything wrong in her entire life; kept doing kind and wonderful things, was an incredibly good person, a beloved family member to Gods, a stellar team member at work, reliable, kind, reasonable, smart and loving. She was an angel of such magnitude, that she was almost a Goddess in her own right, dark violet and indigo in colour, and enormous in size. All she needed was a husband to belong to, so that she could make that final step that would make God choose to be her – and she prayed to God to lead her to her true love, which he did. And then she found out what he did, how he doomed himself, and her heart exploded.

And, apparently, it took out most of Heaven with it. They looked like a disaster zone; half the Gods almost dead from trauma themselves. Nothing that ever happened, in the history of Creation, had nowhere near the impact. People on Earth talked a lot about how Christ was innocent but crucified, but that was nothing. He of course survived, as it was a merely physical thing, a death of the body. And it felt planned, pre-arranged with God. Unpleasant, but merely one bad day, with blissful eternity afterwards. It wasn't a tragedy.

This was.

She was truly dead; her soul exploded from the extent of her agony. A true death, of someone who was the embodiment of perfection, and also connected with deep personal bonds to others; bonds of love, trust, family, personal debt. Her death wasn't a shock; it was an asteroid strike that wiped out Heaven and turned it into a disaster zone worthy of Sodom and Gomorrah. He joked with her about it earlier, in Lakshmi's womb, but it was quite different once he saw the aftermath with his own eyes, and all the traumatised people wanted to touch his wife to make sure she's really here... thousands, millions of them. It was emotionally overwhelming and exhausting.

So, they made a private place for themselves, hidden from sight, just like that amniotic sac in which they spent their honeymoon, breathing each other and exchanging intimate thoughts. Just themselves again. No emotionally traumatised people to comfort.

“Work? What do you want to know?”, she smiled and nibbled his earlobe.

“What can I expect? What typical expectations do people have, that you need to set straight? How do you approach them? Where do you draw the line between traumatised and misguided good souls, and truly wicked and corrupted ones?”

“Most expect some kind of an afterlife described by their religion. Also, they usually think in a very slow, linear way, in sentences, and it takes a while for them to thaw, to learn normal communication. They have an idea about what is sin and what is righteous, and they usually fear punishment for all sorts of silly things they think I will throw them to hell for. And I mean, the list is long”, she sighed.

“Some think eating beef is punishable by hell. Some think eating pork is. Some think drinking alcohol occasionally is a dark secret I must never find out because if I do, they are doomed. Some think it’s a mortal sin if droplets of urine sprayed on them as they relieved themselves before prayer, because it would render them ritually impure. Some think they are ritually impure because they accidentally touched a person from a lower caste, or leaned on a grave by mistake. And sex, don’t even get me started. Every combination and permutation of sexual experience in existence is something someone somewhere thinks is a mortal sin worthy of hell. When they see that I don’t seem to care, they start checking if I heard them right, or whether I’m right in the head, because that’s how seriously they take things like masturbation – which is of course a part of one’s personal sovereignty – and someone somewhere taught them it’s a sin. I’m trying to explain that sin is when they actually hurt someone with their actions, or made a decision to reject God’s will, but deprogramming them from their nonsense takes a while, and it’s a normal part of the thawing process, as they lose the spiritual rigidity a physical incarnation imposed on them. As they do, they start exchanging mental objects with me, with increasing speed, and they very quickly understand how I see things,

and they relax and start to listen and trust. That part is normal for most good souls. There are, of course, exceptions, such as when some extremely advanced souls returned from Earth. Those are the good ones; they thaw very quickly, I go through their memories with them and explain things from a higher vantage point, I recover their suppressed memories from their prior existence, and so on”, she smiled.

“The bad ones... for the most part, I have what you would call a gut feeling about them. There’s nastiness, cruelty, arrogance, a spiritual scent of evil about them. In every case I knew instantly, but I still check very carefully, to be completely sure, and in some cases I call the Boss for a second opinion”.

“And then you flick them to hell?”, he kissed the tip of her nose.

“Yes, but hell isn’t a singular thing. There are multiple places that fit the description. There’s a place for godless souls, those who renounce the authority of Heaven. Then there’s a place for cruel, evil souls – murderers, torturers, rapists, but those are usually male. There are lots of women there – spreaders of gossip, of evil thoughts, evil traditions and customs such as female circumcision, of things that ruined lives, things that caused others serious harm while they used hardly more than words as weapons. They are terrible and toxic, and as bad as any murderer. There are women who are the reason behind some tropes from the fairy tales – an evil stepmother that sends the children from the first marriage to the forest to die. An evil bride that makes the old mother go to the forest and freeze. People think women are better than men because the most obvious criminals are men, but in hell both sexes are pretty equally represented. It’s just that female minions of Satan use different weapons to do his bidding”, she shivered.

“I already knew you were wise and brilliant, but you always manage to shock me by revealing exactly how much”, he whispered in awe. “I’m the luckiest man alive to have you”.

“Never forget it”, she snickered and gently kissed his neck.

“And all that I am is all yours, forever”.

A free thinker

It was the best work environment he could have hoped for, since Lord Azrael assigned his wife to be his tutor. As he heard, this was very much the usual practice – the spouses usually wanted to work together so that they would spend more time with each other, as that was a life priority, and since one was usually more experienced than the other, they would tutor them until they got the hang of it, which was usually very quickly, as everybody on the required level of competence was exceptionally smart. Carol wasn't sure if that applied to him, but Azrael and Lakshmi told him not to worry.

He wasn't sure why he kept his Wallachian name. That incarnation was very much an exception in his rather stellar career of an architect, engineer and a scientist. Even his less known incarnations were quite remarkable – his works on astronomy in Egypt and Babylon contributed significantly to the later achievements. As he found out only now, almost all of it was factually wrong, as it assumed that the relative observations from his standpoint on Earth were indicative of the actual reality of things. One more reason not to believe what you see, he reminded himself. What you see is usually the most deceptive part of what you think you know. That's why I kept that name, instead of Vitruvius, or Nabû-nâşir, chief architect under Nabû-kudurri-uşur. It was the most fatal one, where all my flaws came to bear fruit. I kept it as a warning, to never again believe the supposed facts more than I believe the feeling in my heart. Had I listened to my heart, and not the facts and evidence, I wouldn't have doomed myself and killed the most wonderful woman in the whole world.

To his great fortune, God was much smarter than he himself was stupid, and that really says a lot.

It was an equation with two solutions – when God gave Grace her husband, it could have ended either well or poorly, depending on what he did. If it ended poorly, and God didn't provide for a solution that would compensate for it, God would literally have been at fault for her death – it would have been a trap akin to those Satan cooks up for his victims, only worse, because this one would be meant for an innocent

person who did nothing but put her confidence in God. So, God had a very complex and roundabout way of solving that second wing of the equation in advance. And Grace, who trusted God with her life, is now someone God trusts with his Will, beside being his own Person. And she is his wife.

Father was right, he thought. I really do have more luck than brains.

“Ready?”, his wife whispered. “We have incoming”.

...

“My name is Casimir Liszinski. Where am I and who are you?”, the man wondered.

“My name is Grace, and this is my husband Carol. We are Judges appointed by God to evaluate your life”, she curtsied.

“Is there any place where I would be free from the accursed sheep of God and their judgments? First I am burned on a slow fire by them, and they follow me even in this damn place”, he fumed.

“You seem to be under multiple misapprehensions”, Grace smiled.

“Yes, that’s what they always say. I’m under a misapprehension for believing the Earth is round, that it revolves around the Sun, and that there’s no God. And you’ll teach me otherwise, or if I refuse, you’ll burn me on a stake while piously praying to your fucking bastard of a God that doesn’t even exist, evil morons and whoresons that you all are”.

Grace and Carol looked at each other in shock, and then Carol gave her a mischievous wink. “I think we should exchange our roles. Please, my Lady, stand aside and learn how it’s done”, and pushed her behind him as she giggled.

“So, my dear sir, you seem to be a man of reason, evidence and science, yes?”

“Indeed I am, but what would you know about those? You church rats keep persecuting scientists and science from the very beginnings. And you also subjugate women – just look at you, how you pushed

your wife aside. You are all evil and I will resist you with all my power!”, he was working himself to a rage.

“By all means, please tell me more. For instance, how science was suppressed by the Church, and how I’m against it”, Carol said with the most serious face, while Grace worked to suppress her giggles.

“You and your fucking faith. Faith this, faith that. I’ll tell you what I have faith in: I have faith in evidence, measurements and my own mind. Before your faith, just look at what the people used to make. The Pyramids of Egypt, Colossus of Rhodes, the Hanging Gardens of Semiramis, the aqueducts of Rome. And after you rats and sheep came to power, we had nought but plague and superstition. You invented ways to torture and burn heretics, instead of doing something useful!”

“The Hanging Gardens of Semiramis and the aqueducts of Rome, you say?”, Carol said most seriously, as Grace looked like someone who wished for a pillow she could release her laughter into. “I think I heard something about those”, Carol scratched his head, as if trying to remember.

“If you hadn’t spent all your time memorising your stupid Bible, you might have actually read something of meaning”, the man sneered.

“Do you have any recommendations?”, Carol asked innocently. “Maybe ‘De architectura’ by Vitruvius? Or some other classics that I might be unaware of?”

“You flatter yourself, sheep”, Casimir snorted with contempt. “If you had the ability to understand such works, you wouldn’t be where you are now”.

“And where is that, if I may ask?”, Carol feigned interest.

“Persecuting free thought, science and freedom of religious thought!”, barked the demon, because that was the best description Carol could think of, for a black and godless astral being of hatred and malice.

“And I’m also oppressing my wife, you say?”, Carol smiled.

“One day women will be liberated and emancipated, and then bastards such as yourself better watch out”, Casimir growled. “It’s easy for you now to treat women as inferiors, since they are ignorant and

uneducated, but once we teach them to read, write and have power in society, your entire Church will be overthrown, because you can exist only in the atmosphere of ignorance and repression!”

“I will now bow out and give word back to my inferior, ignorant and oppressed wife, for I think I am done here”, Carol turned to Grace, who managed to assume her formal dignity.

“What would be your judgment?”, she asked.

“Hell for the godless souls”, he shrugged. “I mean, my initial impulse would have been to educate, but this one doesn’t have any desire to learn; he just growls his dogmatic nonsense. He looks as if he had been drinking from that satanic attractor I was used to power, and he is drunk with its madness, and thinks the reality of that world gives him power over God”.

“Yes, everything that is not of your disgusting made up ‘God’ must be satanic, you accursed uneducated sheep”, the man yelled. “Yes, throw me to hell because then you won’t have to face the power of my arguments!”

“No wonder they tore his tongue out down there. This is really unpleasant to listen to”, Carol mused.

“I agree”, she nodded, waved her hand and the man was gone. “Some things are supposed to be repressed and persecuted”.

“Thank you for letting me have my fun with him”, he kissed her hand.

“Are you kidding? I haven’t had this much fun in a while. I was almost tempted to tell him who you are, but it would be pointless”, she laughed freely now.

“He knows everything”, Carol agreed and lifted her up as she squealed in delight. “My poor oppressed and poorly educated wife”.

“How you mistreat me”, she snickered and kissed him.

“Is it wrong of me to think that this was so much fun? He’s obviously a terrible fool of Satan, but isn’t his fate supposed to be sad?”, he mused.

“It is sad when those people roam freely and spread their idiocy around, trying to seduce others away from the truth”, she shrugged.

“It’s sad that some souls are actually making a choice to become thus. But it’s not sad that he’s made fun of and disposed of safely. It would be sad if we couldn’t do it”, she smiled again.

“Next?”, he raised an eyebrow.

“Next”, she nodded.

Tide of darkness

“What do you mean, I killed a hundred men? I only ever killed Niggers and Indians”.

...

“I had to get rid of those two naughty children he had left over when his first wife died. They were eating up all our food. It’s not like we killed them, we just sent them into the woods. They are probably fine”.

...

“I didn’t kill anyone, I just said *she* stole the money that my boyfriend took; it’s not like I could have let him get caught. It’s not my fault they hanged her, she should have defended herself better. And good riddance; I never liked her anyway, she thought she was prettier than me”.

...

“Why did Mommy kill me?”, a little girl cried inconsolably.

...

“Why do you look at me that way? I tortured the infidels to tell me where El Dorado is, so that we can use the gold for the greater glory of God. It’s not like I did anything evil”.

...

“And you say you were doing this since the fall of Rome?”, Carol was exasperated.

“Yup”, she smiled and hugged him from behind. “Just another day in the office”.

“You are a saint, an angel and a Goddess”, he laughed.

“Guilty as charged”, she kissed his ear. “It’s not always this bad. We usually got normal people who had hard lives and died trying really hard to do everything right, and only occasionally it gets this bad. I think people got seriously insane after the 14th century plague. It caused xenophobia and paranoia, the Church got hit very hard by all the priests

and monks dying, and their replacements were mostly there for the free food, and not God. From what I can tell, there's much less chivalry and Christian virtues, and more cruelty, indifference and willingness to treat other humans like dirt. They call the previous centuries 'the dark ages', but to me this is the darkest I've seen. Materialism, godlessness and cruelty. Yuk", she gestured in disgust. "Let's ask the Boss if we were particularly unlucky or is this the new normal".

...

"You should have seen the ones you missed", Azrael waved his head in dismay. "Giordano Bruno was so horrible, they tore out his blasphemous tongue before they burned him on a stake, and when he came here, I could understand them completely. It is as if blasphemy was his favourite pastime, and he got very creative with it. Incredible arrogance and self-righteousness; he was probably sucking from the same teat as that Casimir fellow you had. And Galileo was the same – arrogant, self-righteous, everybody contradicting him is an ignorant fool, and he's right because he's Galileo, and he doesn't have to prove anything to dunces. I also had a so-called nobleman who outright refused to be judged by a mere commoner, and asked for a jury of his peers", he smiled.

"That attractor is doing serious influence, and corrupting anyone who has any affinity whatsoever for this line of thinking, and I'm afraid self-righteous arrogance is so much in human nature it's very easy to get people prodded in that direction", Carol nodded. "Combined with the plague madness that made it very easy to treat other people like non-human things, it is causing incredible nastiness".

"We can only do our job here", Grace took his hand. "And it's to filter the nasty ones out of the system permanently. Sure, Satan made it easy, but they made their choice. We've seen counter-examples, people who were influenced by the attractor but it disgusted them and made them choose holiness at great expense to themselves".

"She's right", Azrael nodded. "But we need to report these new developments. Maybe our elders can do something".

...

“Unfortunately, we can’t do anything about it”, Lady Lakshmi shrugged. “We predicted this, and we are now at the point where Sanat Kumar’s attractors overtook our influence in power. He managed to seduce, deceive and destroy multiple angels, and the attractive power of his deception is now probably at its peak. Strategically speaking, he has the initiative now, and we can only treat the consequences and wait for it all to unfold. From what you told me, it’s not going to be pretty”.

“It’s not pretty now; how bad can it get?”, Carol wondered.

“It’s going to get so incredibly bad, you are going to remember this as the good old days”, she warned. “Godlessness is still an anomaly. It’s going to become the norm. Amorality is still an anomaly. It is going to become the norm. Vlad Dracula and Elizabeth Báthory are currently isolated examples and are seen as the worst people who ever lived. Give it a few centuries and people like them are going to make up a significant percentage of the population”.

“Who’s Elizabeth Báthory?”

“Oh, a woman who discovered that blood of young virgin girls makes her skin look younger, and she made it into her habit to lure them, slaughter them and bleed them so she could bathe in their blood. She tortured and killed three hundred or so innocent girls. Poor Hypatia had to deal with her and came to me in tears”.

“May God help us, holy Mother”, Carol was disgusted and shocked in equal measure.

“Indeed”, she nodded.

“However, on the good side of things, just before this tide of darkness we had Juan and Theresa. Both are wonderful and a great comfort in these times”.

Ancient wound

“I’ve been here through two plagues, fall of Rome, schism in the Church, fall of Constantinople, and I’ve never seen such a cataclysm strike Heaven”, Peter gestured in disbelief. “They are usually so collected, peaceful and confident, even when faced with dire adversity. I’ve seen them overworked and tired to the point of dropping from their feet, and they still smiled and comforted people. But when Grace died, it felt as if their inner light died with her. They looked the way you’d expect a child to look if it came home and found its parents murdered. I’ve never seen anything like it before, and I hope I never do again. Was she so important?”

“Yes, she was, but not necessarily in just one meaning of the word. She was probably the highest ranking angel at that point, and everybody who knows her says she’s an absolutely wonderful person. Closest family to Azrael and Hypatia; they basically lived together for centuries, as parents and daughter”, Paul explained.

“But the reason why everything broke was because of why she died. It was God’s fault. She prayed to God; God set her on a path, and then, due to no fault of her own, her life was ruined and her heart broke. If God could do this to the best of us, what does it say about God’s justice, righteousness, law? Is God merely a more powerful version of Satan, something the Muslims pray to – something that just proclaims laws out of his whims, and can do whatever he wants anyway, because his will is the supreme law, and if he wants to break the best and purest angel’s heart, that’s fine because he’s God?”

“People’s lights went out because that’s not the God they knew, loved and believed in. The most fundamental truth of everybody’s life, that God is the greatest good and the highest virtue, broke. It’s as if, God forgive me, Lord Shiva decided to rape Lady Lakshmi. If that happened, everybody would just die. It’s completely inconceivable and impossible, though; thank God”.

“But people also thought that the holiest of angels, sinless and perfect, dying because she did everything exactly as she was supposed

to – prayed to God, performed her duties with highest honour, walked His path, had faith, chose highest love – that it was equally impossible. That just doesn't happen; and when it did, thank God it soon became obvious what God's plan was, and she and her husband were saved, because nobody was recovering from that. It was as if Heaven lost colour and everything turned gray, like a corpse. Time can now be marked in eras before the death of Grace, and after her resurrection, when everybody started living again", he finished.

"I met Grace when I came here; she brought coffee for Lord Buddha and myself as he judged me, because it took longer than usual, with him correcting my energetics and teaching me to meditate properly", Caterina was lost in thought. "She was wonderful. She just naturally put me at ease, explained everything, and she was so kind, intelligent and wise. May God forgive me, but when I heard of her death, my reaction was that I refused to believe in a God who would allow this. It's just such an inconceivably terrible thing", she shivered.

"And it was the Will of God for that to happen, I think, because He wanted to show us that we have good reason to have faith. Also, we saw that the world is in good hands, with what Azazel, Karuna and the primordials did together to save her. They didn't just shrug; they went beyond what everybody thought possible to fix this disaster and turn it into something good. And she was honoured by God later; her heart is now the seat of God's Will, because she's God's most trusted person, with what she did and how she reacted. I would say it is completely righteous", Peter concluded.

"God didn't just play games with her life. It was a test of trust, and the fact that He gave her that test means He already held her in the most high regard, and when she passed, she was honoured in the highest possible way".

"I know I'm an ass, Paul. I've been envious, jealous, stubborn and foolish, and I treated women poorly; but that woman is my ideal. I've never seen anyone display more faith in God, and more virtue and loyalty. I haven't even met her properly, and yet I can tell you: I love her more than I love my own life", he smiled.

"Keep that feeling present in your mind. Breathe it in", Paul told him with the most focused tone. "Surrender to it without restraint".

Peter's form was bliss, and the structure of his soul changed, as the final impurities left him and he crystallised into blue *vajra*.

“Now I know how Christ felt about Magdalena, finally”, he smiled. “I was truly a beast of a hard neck and ill disposition, but I am finally tamed, by the Grace of God; for now I know what it means to worship God who is a woman”.

“Same as Christ, only female?”, Catherine scratched her face in confusion.

“Truly; same as Christ, only female”, Peter confirmed. “I don't know why I refused to accept it. There's something foolish in my upbringing that assumes that a woman must always be a step down from a man. It is only now that I allowed myself to accept that she can be on the same step. And it's so obvious – on every step where there's God, they are a man and a woman together”.

“God refuses to be male on a step where she also isn't female, and God refuses to be female if there's no godly man beside her to worship. '*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them*'. It is so obvious in hindsight: when God manifests, when he chooses what is his image, it is both male and female, and he outright refuses it to be just one, because it isn't a complete image of God”.

“That's what I was missing – the understanding that God needs to be a woman beside a man, in order to be fully God. I would have thought it a blasphemy, and I thus stagnated for almost two thousand years, the stubborn ox that I am”, he waved his head in disbelief. “I am going to talk to Magdalena now, and kiss her holy feet if she allows me, for there's an ancient wound that needs to heal”.

Incendiary device

“I have a feeling that we are missing something about this inferno of madness that is running its course through Europe and, of late, its American colonies”.

Bernard was having coffee with his wife, resting after a long shift consisting of, mostly, victims of all sorts of violence, and religious fanatics of all kinds that got killed in religious wars, persecutions and uprisings. It wasn’t something that was foreign to him, but the whole thing showed patterns he was unfamiliar with, and that bothered him.

“What do you mean?”, Clare sipped her coffee in blessed peace.

“Those fanatics, or ‘Protestants’ of hundreds of different varieties, are in some ways similar to the Cathari, but in other ways...”, he suddenly turned rigid. “The printing press”, he smiled and relaxed.

“?”

“The printing press. That’s the problem. That’s causing, or at least accelerating, all the problems”, he smiled and sipped from his cup.

“You’ll have to explain it to me, because I don’t follow you. I don’t see how the printing press would have caused this. I would expect it to promote literacy, because it would make books accessible to larger masses of people, and that can be only beneficial, as educated people are less likely to be ignorant savages. Let’s just compare Lady Hypatia and the mob who killed her. I would venture a guess that none of them had read a single book”, she pointed out.

“There is something that is much more dangerous than a mob that hasn’t read a single book”, he nodded.

“What is it?”

“A mob that has read only one single book”, he looked his wife in the eyes.

“People have a wrong idea about the printing press. They think it suddenly creates entire libraries of books and makes them accessible to everyone who can read, and that in turn incentivises people to learn how to read, and suddenly you have educated, enlightened masses.

That's not how the printing press works. A printing press works by arranging lead casts of letters into sentences and forming a page. This is a laborious process. Then comes the easy part: roll black ink over the prepared template, put a sheet of paper on that, and press. You have one printed page. What you do next, is roll another coat of ink, put another blank page on the template, and press. Repeat this easy process a hundred times, and you have a hundred copies of that page. But then you have to painstakingly do the typesetting for the next page, and so on. As a result, printing press is best at making a large number of copies of a single book. In fact, printing press isn't that much faster at producing a single book than manual calligraphy. What it excels at is producing that one book in a deluge of copies", he explained.

"I still don't understand the problem", she sighed.

"It doesn't produce a hundred books. It produces a hundred copies of a single book. Tell me, do you know what the first printed book was?"

"Gutenberg's Bible. He printed Vulgata in 150 or so copies", she answered easily.

"Exactly so. And the next efforts went very much in the same direction. They printed lots of Bibles in Latin. Then they translated Bible into commonly used languages, such as English and German, and printed that, because they understood that their target audience doesn't know much, if any, Latin. And as a result, they produced large masses of people who have read only one book", he concluded.

"I think I'm starting to understand what you're getting at", Clare nodded. "You get illiterate people who have read only the Bible. It starts with the Old Testament, which is difficult to understand without the historical context, but it is full of parts that promote fanaticism and rigidity, as it's full of stringent rules, harsh punishments and a vindictive God. Those people take it all at face value, and since it's the only book they have ever read, and it's holy scripture; it becomes their whole world, and they quote it where it does and doesn't make sense, not even understanding properly what they are quoting. And since this project of mass printing the Bible happens in the context of the Protestant, 'sola scriptura' sects, the viewpoint where the Bible is the

only book one will ever need becomes pervasive. There is no commentary by the saints to explain the nuances of meaning”.

“You got it. And this viewpoint encourages self-righteous fanaticism – they think they are basing their beliefs on the only thing that matters, that its meaning is self-evident, and everybody with a different understanding of any minute point of theology is, I don’t know what, a wolf in sheep’s clothing sent by Satan to seduce them from true faith”, he smiled.

“So, what did we have in the 13th century? We had a limited number of books. They were placed in libraries. The variety of books was pretty large, from Aristotle and Plato to Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. You had books on medicine by Avicenna, books on mathematics by Averroes, books on history by Plutarch, Illiad and Odyssey, books on architecture by our friend Vitruvius, books on herbalism by Hildegarde, and so on”, he smiled. “You had one copy of almost everything, and multiple copies of the Bible. If you wanted to learn, you had that accessible at the University or in a monastery. If you could read, you likely read at least a dozen books, but more likely a hundred or more. If you couldn’t read, you heard something from the Bible on the Mass, where the priest selected the most instructive and inspiring passages. He was limiting access to the potentially incendiary parts, and those leading to dangerous conclusions without abundant knowledge of context. But what happens when this filter is removed?”, he asked.

“People read everything, starting with the most fanatical slaughters of the Old Testament”, she nodded. “And there are more passages with infidels being slaughtered, and all sorts of groups commanded to be stoned, and rules and regulations of every kind that promote self-righteousness that had cost Israel so dearly, and only in the end there’s Christ saying it doesn’t matter, and the point is to love thy neighbour and God, and love each other as he loved them, and the point is to be ready to give your life for your friends, rather than kill many infidels for the jealous God”, she considered. “I see where you were getting at with people who had read only one book being more dangerous than those who had read none at all. And the printing press created a monoculture of books, or in fact a monoculture of Bible,

because it is a technology that makes it easy to print one book in a thousand copies, but it is much worse at creating a varied library of a thousand different books. And what everybody thought most important was to mass produce the Bible”.

“It produced something much worse than an illiterate mob. It produced a semi-literate mob that read only the Bible, and this fed their self-righteous narcissism, that was very much like that of the Cathari. And there’s another thing the printing press is even better at. It absolutely excels at making short pamphlets. Tell me, what would you expect those to be?”, he smiled.

“Well, considering how the Bible would be the first thing everybody thinks of, the second thing would be some kind of ideological propaganda, by fanatics who think what they have to say needs to reach as many people as possible, and is secondary in importance only to the Bible”, she smiled and sipped her coffee. “Of course, some would want to print their poetry or other literature, especially commentary on the Bible or scientific views that are repressed as heretical, and especially if they are wealthy enough to be able to finance printing, but for the most part, I would expect fanatics to print incendiary material that tries to motivate mobs to revolutions and violence. And since people are used to seeing things in print only if they received imprimatur from the Church, they assume that everything they see in print is true”, she nodded. “I see now”.

“The printing press is the newest technological manifestation of the ‘*fama volat*’ principle – it can spread incendiary rumours quickly, leading to upheavals. If you want to make people depose the King, you spread rumours. How do you that, buy a printing press and start a newspaper. It would be expensive, and yet cheap enough for people who would actually see the use in doing so. I think we have only seen the beginnings of it”, he gestured in dismay.

“Are there any benefits to this technology at all?”, she wondered.

“Some. Eventually, whole libraries of books will be duplicated and reprinted. Every school library will be able to afford the number of books that used to be reserved for the large Universities. Eventually, education will become widespread. However, I’m not sure it means what people now think it will mean. They think everybody will be like

Aristotle or Augustine. I don't think so. I think it will create an inflated number of dunces educated far beyond their intelligence, with lots of superficial knowledge but little to no wisdom. I think it will mass-produce arrogance and conceit of knowledge, with the number of actually intelligent and wise philosophers staying pretty close to what it always was", he guessed.

"I would assume that mass education would be of greater use for natural sciences, where access to information means more than the depth of understanding. For instance, if you want to grow trees in an orchard, you need accurate instructions, but little wisdom is required", she smiled.

"You are right, of course, which is why I would expect the natural sciences to flourish, and spiritual sciences to stagnate or vanish outright".

"And let's not forget: if anyone can print a book in a thousand copies, and most of those books are of poor quality, one's ability to find a book of good quality will be greatly diminished, as I would expect the number of good books to grow by a trickle, and the number of bad ones by a deluge", she nodded. "If you don't know exactly what you are looking for, you will have to go through thousands of worthless books in order to find a good one".

"Which is why people will either stick to the known good ones, or read whatever they manage to stumble upon by random chance", he assented. "But this is of little concern as of now. What worries me is the ease with which this technology spreads incendiary material that promotes fanatical violence. All it would take is the right book at the right time, and it could burn down half the world".

"Qur'an comes to mind as confirmation of your thesis, my Lord", she bowed and kissed him.

"That, and worse, my Lady", he bowed back and smiled.

"What can even be worse? Have you read it?", she gestured in dismay.

"I have, and I regret it greatly, for it resembles a mixture of garbled sentences hallucinated by a madman who thinks himself a

prophet. But I fear very much that we won't have to wait long in order to see for ourselves", he looked at her worriedly.

"They had witch hunts recently. They burned hundreds of women at a stake only in England", she mirrored his worries.

"And with accusations so preposterous, I would not only have dismissed them summarily, but also conducted a thorough investigation of the accuser, since most of them look either insane, or evil with the spirit of Satan", Bernard brooded darkly. "What frustrates me is that the enemies of the Church now spread the propaganda accusing the Church of this nonsense, whilst it never would have been possible in my time. They act as if all that superstitious nonsense is the product of the teachings of the Church, rather than the destruction of the Church by the plague and the resulting return to barbarism and the rise of the schismatic movements", his anger flared.

"You are of course right. In our times, if someone accused a woman of being a witch, he would have been in serious trouble for slander, and rightly accused of crimes himself. Now, when one accuses a woman of being a witch, she is the one who is in trouble", Clare frowned. "And what do they even mean by a witch? I've heard only nonsense that defies reason – witches flying on brooms and making people's cattle die of sickness and so on. There is no chance whatsoever of any of it being true".

"Of course there isn't. No inquisitor in the world would have anything to do with such preposterous nonsense. In my time, when a woman was accused of witchcraft, the accusations were almost always true – there always was some village herbalist who dabbled in dark magic as well, and brewed potions out of toxic herbs and hallucinogenic compounds of other origins, where the only thing that made a difference between a hallucinogenic potion and a deadly poison was dosage, and often poisoning was the true intent. People actually died, and then of course the woman behind it was in trouble, but the actual accusation was murder, not something nebulous. We had cases where women performed abortions of pregnancy and infanticide. In every single case where actions were taken, witchcraft was merely a method of committing murder, and not a charge in itself. What they are doing these days is a mockery of religion as well as a mockery of

justice. Were it so easy to prove witches flying on brooms, it wouldn't be so difficult to prove the existence of God", he concluded.

"It's actually quite easy to prove the existence of God", Clare smiled. "You only need to die and come to our office".

"I'm afraid most people would prefer to have the evidence beforehand", he smiled, lifted her by the hand and kissed her. "Coffee break over, my love. Let's get back to work".

Broken faith

“The Judges keep informing me that the situation down there is in complete chaos, and they are losing control of what’s going on”, Lord Azrael informed the war council. “And I completely agree with them. There are so many things going on either simultaneously or in quick succession, that I can’t figure the heads and tails of it”.

“The stability of the feudal system and the spiritual guidance of the Church in Europe are gone forever. There’s no getting them back, I’m afraid. Everybody is about being liberated from something, and this would not be a bad idea if they meant the world itself and the grip of Satan. Unfortunately, they think the other humans are their problem, and if only they got rid of them and got more freedoms and emancipation in the world, everything would be great. They shifted focus from God as the goal, to the world itself; and as this progresses, they will be completely lost”, he concluded.

“It’s not all bad”, his wife continued. “When we say that they moved away from God, in a very large percentage of cases this is not a bad thing, as ‘God’ seems to be a word they use when they don’t want to use their brains for their intended purpose. Ascribe something to God, and you solved the problem – you’ve made social signals of your pious virtue, and you didn’t have to think about how something actually works. They use the same words as we do – God’s will, God’s providence, fate and so on, but they mean completely different things by them, which makes things complicated to explain even when they arrive here, because we tell them one thing, and they understand something completely different”.

“They think the Will of God has to do with reasons why lightning hit some place and not another, or why hail destroyed the crops. The concept of God micro-managing every aspect of that world is a pervasive misapprehension, and it’s actually Christ’s fault, because he explicitly stated that God has every sparrow’s feathers accounted for, let alone their lives, and on the other hand he explicitly stated that the world is a principality of Satan. They are trying to make sense of those contradictory statements, and they either err on the side of giving God

what they think is greater glory, saying that he controls absolutely everything, or on the side of removing God altogether from their lives, giving all the power to the material forces”.

“The truth, of course, is in between, but both theology and science seem to be completely unable to figure out a model of reality where this would be conceivable. I don’t blame them. Will of God – providence, the concept of God working both through us and involving us in a larger plan that is conceived beyond us – is hard for even us to understand. Blaming humans for being confused and lost, and often angry at God for understanding something in a sense that they were betrayed or abandoned, or that God is evil or indifferent, would be completely unfair, considering how broken we all were just recently, when Grace died and most of us almost followed. If even we can be ignorant of some wider aspect of God’s plan, and we are his own persons, we should be very understanding of the human situation, but on the other hand, their understanding of God’s hand is often mere superstition and ignorance”.

“Yes, God obviously has every sparrow’s feathers accounted for, and also every atom of Hydrogen, because the Jewel that renders that world merely borrows the power of God, and if something renders out that entire world dynamically in every detail, everything is known, somewhere, on some level. However, that world is also a principality of Satan, and as such excepted from the Throne of God. God has little to no power there, save for some special circumstances that are so exceptional, that they are rightly called miracles. This understanding, unfortunately, is completely absent down there, and they keep bouncing between unbalanced extremes of vulgar materialism and superstitious faith”.

“The age of the Church is gone, and it will never return, but that, I’m afraid, was always a necessity, because the Church, good and useful as it was, always carried within itself just enough ignorance to never move to the higher level of understanding, which continued to be a problem even here, because the Christians tended to get stuck at a certain level of understanding, and were extremely unwilling to move forward. Our Christian brothers sometimes achieved apotheosis with thousands of years of delay, only because they held on to limiting concepts long after they outlived their usefulness. But regardless, it is

hard for me to criticise the Church, as it produced more holy and enlightened people than almost anything else, with the possible exception of some schools of Buddhism and Hinduism. At this point, unfortunately, the Church is defined more by its superstitions and limitations than its transcendental impulses, and as material sciences develop, this becomes increasingly obvious. Rather than lament the loss of the golden era of European spirituality and transcendence, we should think of ways to turn this into something good, because we obviously aren't getting the Church back", she concluded.

"So basically, they have too much faith in God, and of the wrong kind?", Lady Lakshmi asked.

"I would definitely say so", Bernard nodded. "It is as if we – and I say 'we' because I was definitely a part of this – competed at giving God more glory and power, until we all but turned into Muslims", he smiled. "But crediting God with everything, and assuming he can do anything, in a world that is almost completely governed by Satan, always ends up in blending God and Satan into the same object of worship. It is spiritually incredibly unhealthy, and is no better than atheism, eventually", he shrugged. "It's better to say that God decides almost nothing, than to say he decides absolutely everything, thus crediting him with all the terrible evils that are going on there".

"The concept that God can do anything isn't a sign of great faith; it's a sign of philosophical naivety", Lord Augustine frowned. "It should be long established that God has all sorts of limitations. Consistency, for one – if he gave his word, that limits his future options, and usually causes all kinds of paradoxes and problems. He is also limited by his nature – he refuses to do evil, for instance. There's a whole complex topology of limitations placed upon God by all sorts of things and reasons, and the belief in God's omnipotence persists merely because theological idiots think it gives God greater glory, and not because anyone serious believes it is a reality".

"Those newborn souls in the astral nursery can do more than God. They can be anything and do anything. They can become Satan, or demons, or angels, or Gods. The more advanced and closer to God we are, the less we can do. Our choices place limitations upon us. I am extremely powerful in a sense that I could do all sorts of things, so it's

not the lack of ability that restricts me, but my own nature. I love my wife and I *need* to love my wife, so I will protect her always, and care for her in every way. This makes me literally unable to do anything that would hurt her, or threaten our love. She *needs* to obey me and to love me. That restricts her ability to do anything that would threaten this”.

“We are not free, and we don’t want to be free. We are bound by our nature, and by our love. When I wasn’t married, I was more free, but I was less as a person. Now that I am less free, I am more as a person. I have many people whom I love and care for. This further limits me – I don’t want to do anything that would harm those relationships, and I want to do everything to promote them and to be of help and service. As we can do more, we desire to do less, in a sense of our actions being constrained to a narrower field”.

“The Judges, for instance, are free to do anything, and yet, they constantly do hard work of service for others, not because they have to, but because they want to. Their spouses could stay at home and be idle, and instead they join them in their work and the couples often overwork themselves to the point of complete mental exhaustion, where they hold on to each other lest they fall to the ground. They do so because they are not free, and they don’t want to be free. The fact that we can technically do something doesn’t mean that we can actually do it. Every God could technically hurt his wife, and every Goddess could technically disobey her husband. But in reality, all of us would rather die than do it, because we are bound by our love which is our deepest nature”.

“And the Absolute obviously can’t do everything, either. The impersonal God can’t break the fundamental laws of its nature and remain God. It couldn’t kill Grace and stay God, as we saw recently. Her death harmed the Relative to the point of almost ending it all. Her resurrection brought everything to life again. One single good person dying unjustly could end the world. The idea that God is omnipotent, in a sense that He can go around and do whatever, is a sign of spiritual idiocy”, he finished, as all the Gods and Goddesses nodded and clapped in support.

“Hear, hear”, Vishnu clapped. “But this brings us to the next point. What are humans even talking about, with all their liberation and

emancipation nonsense? I see them emancipating the serfs from serfdom, after which they come to the towns and have nothing to do. They find jobs, but since there are few jobs and many workers, they are underpaid and overworked, and their lives are miserable. What are they going to do next; emancipate wives from having to serve their husbands?”

“You think you’re joking”, his wife smiled, “But unfortunately, I see that exact thing taking place. They are going to point to every single part of someone’s nature and present it as something that limits them and needs to be discarded on the path of emancipation. As Lord Augustine rightly pointed out, the more we are as persons, the more limited we become. And they, removing their limitations, are going to become increasingly less”.

“So, now they are between broken faith, and knowledge that is still so much in its infancy that it is barely deserving of the name”, Paul noted. “They are going to discover more about their world and forget more about the real one. They are going to reject superstitious ideas about God, but they sort of go in package with the correct ones. Is this going to just end badly as they are completely lost in that world, having renounced every transcendental thread that could have led them to salvation, or is there some light at the end of that terrible tunnel? Are we even going to see new holy people from there, or are they just going to all die worshipping Satan and his creation?”

“I’m afraid they are going to work hard on rejecting all bonds and limitations placed upon them for the foreseeable future”, his wife responded. “Whether that ends as you suggested, or they discover that limitations are what emancipates you, remains to be seen”.

Doomed

“I was wondering about what you said”, Shankaracharya addressed Augustine. “The part about limitations being a good thing. It feels completely counterintuitive if one knows that God is freedom.

“God is indeed freedom”, Augustine smiled. “But God is also freedom from all things that are not God; do you agree?”

“I do”, the man nodded.

“Also, we can split freedom into two distinct aspects: freedom to, and freedom from. The first part can be further analysed into desires and ways to achieve them. But let’s say I’m already doing what I want to do. I’m married and I love my wife; I love my friends, and I love God. The only freedom I desire is the freedom to continue doing what I’m doing now. I don’t want a freedom to kill my friends, hurt my wife and offend God. In fact, my freedom consists of being free from those things, which is the other aspect of it – freedom from things that interfere with my will and choices. So yes, I have all sorts of limitations, but they are here because I want them. Those limitations are an intentional expression of my freedom”, Augustine concluded.

“I cannot disagree with your reasoning, and yet, something in me wishes to point out that freedom from limitations should be a superior form of freedom”, Shankaracharya shrugged in confusion.

“I think I understand why that is. You see soul as a limitation upon *brahman*, that needs to be removed in order to achieve true enlightenment. I, however, see soul as a set of defining characteristics that allow for the manifestation of *brahman* in the relative. Those defining characteristics are, by definition, limiting. They are choices for something and against something else. By removing those limitations, you remove things that define you as a person. If you remove the walls from a house, you don’t get to be free from limitations; you get to be homeless”, Augustine argued.

“So, what you are saying is that our limitations are our structural elements, the way walls and roof are to a house?”

“Indeed”, Augustine nodded.

“But wouldn’t you agree that extending a house would be preferable to keeping it small? And if a big house is preferable to a small one, wouldn’t removing the limitations of a house be preferable still?”, Shankaracharya pressed on.

“The analogy to extending a house would be extending your heart so that it becomes capable of feeling more and deeper. The correct way to do it is to embrace deep relationships with other Gods, which means including more structures, rather than tearing them down. This way, God expands from what you as a person are capable of, to what you, your wife, family and friends are capable of”, Augustin nodded. “I am God. However, my wife and I together are more God than the sum of us alone would be”.

“So, if I understand you correctly, the way to remove limitations properly is to gradually extend the lattice of enlightened God-persons bound by deep connections, where it encompasses the entirety of the Relative, rather than removing the structural elements of personality, seeing them as obstacles, since they are limiting?”

“Exactly. The difference is, to stay within our analogy, between tearing down your home which leaves you homeless, and connecting your home with the homes of your family, until everything is home”, Augustine nodded.

“Interesting. So, we are comparing subtractive and additive approaches to removing limitations. I was using the subtractive one, thinking that there is some positive limitation that stands in the way between soul and enlightenment, and by removing that limitation you approach the understanding that your soul is in fact all there is. You, on the other hand, argue that the problem isn’t something positive, that exists, but lack of something – lack of love, depth, connection – which needs to be established in order for spiritual emancipation to be possible”.

“Indeed. For instance, my main spiritual block, that kept me stagnant for a thousand years, was lack of connection with my wife. I overcame it not by removing things, but by reconnecting with her. Then I became more”, Augustin explained. “I could have removed this or that, and it would have achieved nothing”.

“It sounds frightening to bind your enlightenment and spirituality to another person in this manner”, Shankaracharya mused. “I thought whether I have a true wife somewhere, but after seeing what happened to Lady Grace, I was honestly too scared to even think about it, let alone ask God to lead me to her. What if she is dead? What if she is deeply enslaved somewhere? What if she needs untold years to be ready?”

“It only becomes frightening if you are ready”, Augustine replied. “When I was not ready, I was even able to part from her. I didn’t die, I just... stopped making true progress. The lesser the soul, the more superficial the connection. If you took some astral being and told them their destined spiritual partner just died, they wouldn’t even care; which is probably the reason why God doesn’t seem to bind us together until much later in our spiritual progress. It is a testament to Grace’s immense spiritual magnitude that she cared so much about a husband she never even met, that she just died on the spot. It’s not weakness. It’s a sign of true readiness, and she is the best of us”.

“If fear is an indicator of readiness, then I must be truly ready”, Shankaracharya laughed. “But this understanding: that apotheosis is not something you do by removing worldly attachments or something, but something God does because you become someone who enables Him to express the inner connection of *brahman* in the Relative, by connecting to others; it’s a hard thing for me to swallow, because it makes spirituality look like a team sport, and I’ve always been a solitary player”.

“Also, you got accustomed to understanding enlightenment as something that is centred around you”, Augustine nodded. “It’s something you do. It’s a self-realisation. It’s a renunciation of limits to Self”.

“And how do you understand it?”

“In part, it is indeed the death of your own stubborn foolishness. At least it was thus for me. When I accepted Christianity, when I met Hypatia here, when I was reunited with my wife. Every time, shackles of my stubborn foolishness fell off me, and I was more. When I met Hypatia, it wasn’t just me; it was looking into her and feeling what it must be like to be her. It was something enormous, bigger, better. It

was the same with my wife – also, looking into another person that is enormous and great, with the difference of knowing that this awesome person is mine, of free choice. It's like getting a gift of doubling yourself at once. I'm telling you: for a man, knowing that you came to a point in your spirituality where a Goddess desires you, and none but you; and the point where God responds by claiming you as Self because He wants to be that person, so that He can love that Goddess properly; that is something else", he smiled.

"And so, if I acknowledge that I want this, will I be doomed?", the man smiled.

"That's the wrong question. The right question is: will you understand that you are doomed without it?", the God replied.

"You mean, am I at the point where I would rather die with her, than continue living forever without her; the way Grace did?"

"Indeed", Augustine nodded.

"Yes, I think I am at that point. And it is scaring the living daylights out of me", Shankaracharya admitted. "I just lost control of my destiny, irrevocably. I'm feeling her somehow, and I'm feeling the change, and it's frightening".

"Do you want her, even if it meant your death?", God asked him solemnly.

"Yes", the man answered.

"Then allow me to introduce you. Lady Hypatia just finished with her judgment and orientation tour; and it is obviously no accident that you came to talk to me just now. May I introduce you to Zeb-un-Nissa, Shahzadi of the Mughal Empire; the most powerful and beautiful female mind of the Islamic world", he waved his hand and Hypatia shimmered in, with another woman in tow.

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"Please, tell me you are joking", the angelic woman shivered like a leaf. "This must be a bad dream. Please, let me wake up".

"This must be how poor Augustine must have felt when he came here and saw me. Although I must now admit he took it pretty well, all

things considered”, Hypatia smiled. “I’m opening you a knowledge bank on Muhammad’s life”.

The woman’s eyes lost focus for a moment, and then regained it. “But that is not at all what I believed in, or prayed to”, she managed to stutter.

“No, it is not. Like all great souls born in the Muslim world, you created an elaborate deception for yourself, so that both your body and your spirit would be protected. You managed to memorise all that nonsense and blend it in your spirit with your most subtle feelings and visions. You didn’t read what it was, you read what you needed it to be. Had you allowed yourself to see it for what it is, you would have been summarily beheaded for rejecting Islam. So, instead, you assumed it must be the most subtle religion, and you made it into one. You survived, you loved God, but a part of your mind had to be sacrificed. I am retrieving it for you now”, Hypatia made a subtle hand movement, and the woman’s eyes lost focus again.

“Are you mad at me?”, she said sheepishly. “I mean, for being such a coward, and rejecting truth for the sake of my own survival and comfort?”

“Of course I’m not mad at you, sweetheart”, Hypatia hugged the woman. “You did the best you possibly could. You survived. You were a great person. You maintained spiritual purity. You just needed to put a part of yourself to sleep in order to do it”.

“But I feel like a traitor”, the woman whispered. “Martyrs sacrificed their lives rather than compromise with the truth, and look at me, being such a good Muslimah that I memorised the entire Qur’an. I want to hide in some dark corner out of shame before God”.

“You are before God, and I’m telling you it’s fine”, Lady Hypatia smiled.

“But it felt so real. All the religious ideas, the Divine Beloved, everything”, Zeb-un-Nissa sobbed. “Did I make it all up in my madness, like Muhammad?”

“No. Your feelings and ideas mapped upon actual realities; you just gave them Islamically correct labels”.

“So, that was my survival mechanism, you say? I did it so that I could both meditate on the actual God, and survive Islam?”

“Yes”, the Judge nodded.

“What is the actual God like?”, the woman asked.

“You know that already”.

“I mean...”

“I know what you mean. All the intimate stuff, the spiritual connection, the promise that made you refuse to marry because you promised yourself to Him forever, which is how you ran afoul of your father. You think it was all in your head, right?”

“Yes”, the woman wept.

“You have seen that we Gods exist in couples, yes?”

“I have”.

“Well, what if I told you that the person whose presence you felt is in fact your true husband, the one you are meant to live together with in eternity, worship him as your God, and be worshipped by him as his Goddess?”

“I would suspect that you are cruelly jesting with me, but then I would remember that you are too good a person to be so cruel with a poor distraught woman, and I would then dare to hope, because that would be the fulfilment of all my dreams”, the woman whispered.

“It is your lucky day, my Lady, because this is truly so”, the Goddess smiled at the woman. “He just made his decision to rather die with you than live alone forever, and the Lord who teaches him is calling for us”. She took the woman by the hand, and they shimmered out.

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“Adi Shankaracharya? The most highly revered sage of India?”, the woman stared at him, incredulous. Augustine and Hypatia gave each other the look and shimmered out to give them privacy.

“At your service, my Lady”, the man smiled. “Although, knowing what I know now, I would have chosen some significantly less flattering titles for myself”.

“And after what Lady Hypatia told me about Mohammad and Islam, believe me, there is no chance in the world that you could be more embarrassed by your misapprehensions, than I am by mine. I am positively mortified, and so ashamed of myself, I could crawl into some dark corner and hope never to be seen by anyone good or smart, although at the same time I am glad that nobody seems to hold it against me, and they are so very kind”, she smiled.

“Truth has that quality of making us all humble”, he smiled back.

And then it clicked for her. He was the Presence. The one she thought to be Allah, the Divine Beloved; the one she projected on and interwove into everything she ever heard about God, and she fell to her knees and embraced him, without words, her tears wetting his feet.

He lifted her up and looked into her eyes. “Will you be my wife forever, my Lady?”

“I already promised myself to you decades ago, and kept myself for you alone, my beloved husband”, she smiled. “It is time for me to come true on my promise”.

Inhibited

“Theresa, what do you think about all this?”, Juan made an indeterminate hand movement.

She looked at him, trying to understand which of the many possible weird things he meant.

“Strangeness of it all is in fact something I got over rather quickly. After all, I became an expert at strange even down there, with all those spiritual experiences I couldn’t properly explain to anyone. Here, everything is of that nature, and that makes me happy. Also, everybody instantly understands what I mean, so there are no communication barriers, which used to cause many problems”, she started her report.

“I expected things to be simpler – in a sense that Heaven would exactly reflect our Catholic teaching. That was also a big thing in Spain – orthodoxy was taken quite seriously, and any minor disagreement with the official teaching of the Church could land you in trouble with the Inquisition, especially if you already have enemies, as we did. Here, there is incredible tolerance not only for various Christian interpretations, but other religions as well, and they don’t even see them as religions; they see them as ways to explain reality, or solve problems. I talked to the Buddhist lady in the orchard, and not only is she very kind, she’s also friendly with Christ – in fact, he sent me to her, which shocked me initially, but I obeyed him since he knows best. The lady spoke to me in completely Christian terms, only switching to Buddhist concepts when we talked about ecstasy and breathing, and they have a whole vocabulary and philosophy about things that we are quite incoherent about. Various systems seem to have specialities, things they studied in great detail, and those are often things like mystical experiences, where I didn’t think one can even have any clear idea about it, let alone make a whole theory. So, that was surprising – the fact that there are non-Christian people who know more about important things than Christianity. But I guess it is not proper to call the lady non-Christian, since Christ himself referred me to her. They are obviously good friends, and how can a friend of Christ be non-

Christian? Were Christ and his holy Mother even Christian? Those terms don't seem to apply here. They are all friends and family, and I've seen them interact with each other; they do it with such love and depth of understanding, that their simplest greeting feels like the deepest mystical vision".

"They don't care about things like heresy, but they care very much about truth and accuracy of what they are saying. They also avoid all evil at all times, and that is the greatest wonder: everything they do is completely free of evil. Everybody helps each other in every way, and when someone is tired from too much work, their friends and family come to cheer them up, bring them coffee, talk to them and make them feel better, and nobody counts favours or does anything with a desire to be reciprocated. It is as if they practice the purest teaching of Christ, but without even noticing or caring about it. They are also innocent like small children, playing in the grass and reading books together, or talking about all sorts of important matters. I've joined a few conversations and they were always kind and welcoming, and the things they talked about were never frivolous or shallow; they comment someone's good deeds, praise their friends, think of how they could improve their devotion to God, or look how to help someone who works too much. Everything that is said about someone behind their back is always highest praise, and would make them blush if they heard it. As I said, there is not the slightest hint of evil or sin in anything they do, and it is completely natural to them; they don't look like they are trying at all. Sinless deeds come from their pure souls the way sweet smell comes from a good flower", she smiled.

"You would expect the elders to be on some high throne and inaccessible, but I have seen the oldest, wisest Gods mix with others without any care for distinction or status, the things humans would care so much for. Everybody treats them with a combination of highest respect, and the kind of innocent trust and familiarity that children have with their parents. I once talked to Christ, and a young Goddess ran to his holy Mother, embraced her and talked to her excitedly about something, and it was with such intimacy, trust and love that I just stood there and looked at them in amazement, completely forgetting about Christ, who laughed and told me I'll probably never get used to it properly, because he never did. The Church would have you think in

terms of dignity and so on, and it's not that they don't act in a dignified manner. There is incredible dignity about them, but what I wasn't prepared for is the casual intimacy of their interactions. I've seen a Goddess come to Mary in tears because she saw a horrible woman who tortured and killed hundreds of innocent children. Mary held her, comforted her, made her feel better and then they proceeded to talk about what's happening in the world, and how their husbands are doing. Each of them radiated such incredible spiritual power and presence of God, that it is the deepest mystical experience to merely feel them in passing, and you would expect them to be dignified and distant – but no, they are dignified and yet intimate. Everything about them is deep, there is no small talk; but the intimacy of the spiritual contact is the most incredible and shocking thing about it all; there is directness and deep trust that small children have with their good parents".

"Maybe the most shocking thing is that they are all married couples, and when they are together, I wanted to look the other way, because they felt so intimate together, and yet I couldn't look away, because of how wonderful they are to each other. A husband brings his wife coffee, and she accepts it in such way that you just feel the depth of their familiarity and love, their energies coming together in a special presence of God that I have never felt before. The most casual things they do together feels like their form of Holy Communion, where the presence of God is felt more strongly and deeply, which is a wonder in itself, knowing how strongly it normally feels. To be honest, when I saw them, I felt a strong desire to feel like that with someone, because of how right and proper it feels", she concluded.

"I felt something like that with you", Juan nodded. "When we talk about God together, it is as if the presence of God is alive between us and creates an ecstatic joy, which made me want to talk about God more and be in your presence more".

"That is true. And about that, I wondered about something. What are we even to each other?", she wondered.

"I honestly don't know. I only know that we gravitate towards each other, we are always in each other's company, and we enjoy it. On Earth, I was always afraid to put a label on our relationship, as not to

spoil it, but now that you mention it, I think we should ask Christ or Mary for advice, the way we used to ask a confessor on Earth, to avoid anything inappropriate”.

“Did someone call for me?”, Lakshmi smiled behind them as they jerked back, as if caught with hands in a cookie jar.

“We wanted to ask You or Christ to tell us what is the nature of our relationship, and what is appropriate”, Theresa blushed and fumbled.

“Is that even something you need to ask?”, Lakshmi wondered. “I would expect that you knew. After all, you are inseparable”.

She looked at the couple, and they didn’t look any more clued in.

“You feel like husband and wife who were taught by the Church that they should avoid even thinking about anything of the sort, because you were supposed to be celibate monks, both of you. Relax a bit, will you? You are no longer in your respective monasteries, and you’re talking to the woman who gave birth to Christ, so be honest. How do you feel about it? Honestly, when you relax?”

“I feel you are right about us, but I am terribly afraid of admitting it”, Theresa said, blushing crimson.

“I think this as well”, John was trying to look somewhere else. “My Lady, do you think it is appropriate for us to feel that way?”

“I think it is the most appropriate thing in the world. The only weird thing about it is how tightly you both seem to restrain yourselves in order to avoid doing anything inappropriate. So, I’m going to make it very simple for both of you. Theresa, do you want Juan to be your husband forever?”

“Yes”, the woman whispered.

“Juan, do you want Theresa to be your wife forever?”

“Yes”, the word escaped his mouth.

“Then I solemnly pronounce you husband and wife”, the Goddess smiled. “Problem solved”.

The couple looked at each other as if someone suddenly removed shackles from their minds. “Theresa, we were just married by the Mother of God”, Juan smiled.

“May God help me, I feel as if I just got permission to feel literally everything I had to suppress before I even felt it”, Theresa smiled back. “The things I could only allow myself to feel for Christ”.

“Is this appropriate for us to feel, my Lady?”, Juan turned to Lakshmi.

“You are husband and wife. Every intimate, deeply spiritual feeling that you feel for God, is perfectly appropriate to feel for each other. That’s how a marriage works here. We are God to each other, and we are an instrument God uses to love our partner”, she smiled blissfully. “Now, if I may make a recommendation?”, she looked as if asking for permission. They nodded in unison.

“Go to the orchard, find one of the Buddhists, whoever feels most comfortable to talk to. All three are wonderful if you ask me. Ask them to teach you how to meditate as a couple. They are incredibly knowledgeable about this, and they will know how to put you at ease and teach you to overcome all those inhibitions you feel due to your monastic celibate past, because I see things that need to be released, for your great benefit. And when they are done with you, go somewhere and do as they taught you – meditate together on God and love each other without any holding back or restraint. How about that?”, she smiled.

“Yes, Holy Mother”, they both bowed, glowing with happiness.

“Have a most blessed and happy marriage”, she concluded.

Guillotine party

“It’s a wonder to behold”, Azrael told his wife. “We are looking straight into the eyes of evil and madness, and the way it is presenting itself is as narcissistic as it is ridiculous”, he gestured in dismay. “I mean, ‘liberty, fraternity, and equality’; sounds lovely until you see what they actually mean by it, and what they mean by it is ‘kill everybody who used to be in power, and this will automatically produce heaven on earth and everything will be wonderful’”.

“They should put the guillotine on their flag; that would be more honest”, Hypatia grinned. “But what do they even mean by all that nonsense? Everybody should be equal and free to do whatever?”

“It’s Satan’s moto, essentially. He wants to destroy the most powerful beings because he’s being oppressed by the fact that he constantly has to be aware of his inferiority, and he thinks everything would be great once he kills everyone who thinks they are better than him. As for liberty, he’s the only one who ever cared for being able to do anything he wanted with impunity; him and possibly a handful of other demons. And those demons usually found something fulfilling to do soon enough. He just wants to torture and humiliate people and that gives him a power trip”, he explained.

“Those people are certainly following in his footsteps”, she nodded. “They are incredibly murderous, hysterical and hypocritical”.

“And they took over two countries at once – France and the British colonies in America, which seems to indicate something about Satan’s plans. He is creating a new world and wants to burn the old one down. They are overthrowing moderate, reasonable rulers, but if you read their newspapers, you’d think they were overthrowing the tyranny of Caligula. It reminds me of Satan’s early days – if you listened to him talk, it was all about the right to self-determination and freedom. It was only after his victims started arriving that it became obvious what the actual agenda was”, he looked grim.

“I find both the propaganda and the reality quite educational. The propaganda shows you what one wants to believe of himself, and what

he wants others to believe. The reality of their actions show what it's all about. Here in Heaven, we don't have any propaganda or mission statements. There are no big inspirational speeches. Just people hanging out in the gardens, talking over coffee, doing things they want to do, and loving each other deeply. Since there is no difference between what we want others to think we're doing, and the things we are actually doing, there is no need for propaganda. You only need propaganda if you are a liar, and you want to mask your evil under a palatable guise", she nodded.

"I think we are seeing a template for the future. Revolutionary movements, wanting to tear everything down in the name of progress, liberation, emancipation, freedom, or whatever nonsense the propagandists cook up. They will find some legitimate issue that can rile up the masses, and they will start murderous, destructive campaigns. This will be done iteratively until it establishes Satan's ideal society, where everybody is miserable, of crushed spirit, hateful, resentful and pathetic. And it will always be someone else's fault".

"It's funny how Sanat Kumar used to harp about the tyranny of heaven, and he himself continues to establish tyrannies and oppressive systems", he continued. "You won't see mobs rising up with pitchforks to guillotine Lord Vishnu and Lady Lakshmi", he smiled at his wife's horrified expression. "We are obviously so thoroughly oppressed that we've internalised our oppression and we don't even perceive it", he laughed.

"I don't know how he even managed to sell that nonsense to anyone", she wondered.

"He was selling it in the astral nursery back then, where hardly anyone ever saw a God in person", he reminded her. "In fact, almost all the good stuff we have now came as a result of his evil works, which is an irony. He worked to eliminate the Gods, and as a result, we have how many Gods now?"

"Thirty one, if I'm right. Shankaracharya and Zeb-un-Nissa, and Theresa and Juan being the most recent additions", she nodded.

"And we started with four or six, depending on the way of counting. If he expected to start some revolution that will tear down heaven, his efforts have been vastly counterproductive", Lord Azrael

smiled. “The only mob the Elders have to fear are the worshippers surprising them with a shower of flower petals”.

“Apparently, we have no use for liberty, freedom or rights”, she laughed. “The only thing we need is our discipline, our duties, and the relationships we have forged. If everybody seeks only to serve and love, heaven is the emergent property of such attitude. And likewise, if everybody wants rights, liberties and freedoms, hell is the natural emergent property of such attitude”, she melted into his side.

“I’m afraid they are going to have a deluge of rights, liberties and freedoms on Earth in the following years”, he waved in dismay.

“I translate it as mass murder and treating people like garbage”, she smiled.

“Yes, that’s what I meant”, he laughed.

The odds

“The shutdown procedure won’t work”, Shiva looked down at his wife; her head was in his lap as they sat in the orchard, enjoying themselves.

“What do you mean?”, she looked up at him.

“The allotted time will soon expire, and the Jewel won’t be able to terminate the simulation because of all the souls that have been plugged into the system; and I don’t mean the incarnated ones. I mean those that will be used as power cells to power attractors and scripts”.

“And he won’t do it because it would kill them instantly, and he is not allowed to do something like that”, she nodded.

“And as the time expires, it will be up to him, so he will keep running the simulation indefinitely, unless we do something about it”.

“We knew that was going to happen”, she nodded. “And if we force-terminate, we incur the karmic penalty, which would be large, considering the number of angels he deceived”.

“Too large. Also, the mess is too large to just dump all at once. It would be almost impossible to clean up here. Some of it actually requires incarnation in the physical in order to process, because that’s how it’s designed. And he protected himself from access from within the system in all sorts of ways. Every single person who tried, ended up either failing miserably, or was destroyed”.

“It’s actually dangerous for us. There is a significant probability not just of failure, but of his victory and our destruction”, Goddess warned.

“I know. That’s what he is betting on. He went into the entire thing knowing there’s a chance that his handiwork won’t ever be terminated, and the only solution to the dilemma would be to make him some kind of a ruler of both Heaven and Earth”, Shiva was grim.

“By ‘a chance’, you mean limit in zero, but non-zero?”, she smiled.

“One in 10^{27} ”, he nodded. “But the probability of the sum total of all possible disasters is much larger. It’s one in three”.

“That bad, huh?”, she looked concerned.

“That bad”, he confirmed.

“But if we don’t intervene, it guarantees a bad outcome of some kind?”, she squeezed his hand and looked into his eyes.

“In a word, yes. But if we intervene and fail, it opens up the possibility of the worst possible outcome”.

“Do I even want to know?”, she grinned.

“I don’t think so”, he smiled his crooked smile, her favourite.

“You lead, I follow; like always”, she smiled.

“This will require some planning”, Shiva nodded.

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“Zee, come here”, Kay gestured with urgency. “Take a look at this”.

“Wow, they are good. Not only did they lure Sanat Kumar into exposing himself to lethal karmic consequences so he’s dead now, but they managed to get that astral sub-plane for godless souls back under the Throne, and they wiped it clean of assholes”, he nodded appreciatively. “The cost to them personally must be terrible, but they sure are kicking ass”.

“The odds of success are now hundred percent for a sum total of all good outcomes. Over ninety percent for the best outcome”, the Mind of God smiled. “And the odds are improving with time, as there is increasingly less stuff that can harm them, and they are getting increasingly stronger”.

“So, basically, it can no longer end badly, and it’s now a grind until the end, deciding how much of the mess they convert into their own soul mass, and how much will stay there and slowly rot away?”, he scratched his temple.

“It’s more complicated than that, and better”, she kissed him. “Let me explain”.

...

He had to keep running those accursed scripts until the end, but at least he no longer had to put up with Satan's obnoxious person. The Lord and the Lady weren't happy with him for executing all of Sanat Kumar's orders well after the villain was dead, but unfortunately, being dead doesn't preclude being in power. There was nothing in the contract that said anything about valid orders ceasing to be valid if one who issued them happened to die.

Also, both of them were in grim mood because of all they had to endure down there. Especially his Lady. She wasn't as used to terrible suffering as the Lord, and cursed him occasionally for existing. He didn't blame her, but hoped he'll be able to apologise. He missed her playing with him.

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"It's almost time", Lord Vishnu pulled his Lady up from the grass. "Let's come and greet them".